

# ***NOVITIATE***

By:  
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OVER BLACK.

Held for a beat in the darkness and silence, a series of written TEXT appears upon the screen.

In 1959, Pope John the XXIII assembled the Second Vatican Council. The Catholic Church had not assembled an ecumenical council in nearly 100 years.

Between 1962 and 1965, the Council, also referred to as Vatican II, issued 16 documents.

The aim of these documents was a broad relaxation of the Church, with an eye towards projecting a more welcoming image.

The words then fade leaving only a hollow empty space. Before piercing through the void, we begin to hear a VOICE. A young girl, no more than 19 years old, whispering so softly and intimately.

SISTER CATHLEEN (V.O.)

So many people settle for a love that doesn't ask much of them, that they don't have to make any real sacrifices for... I didn't want that. I wanted an ideal love, that asked everything of me. That I would have to sacrifice everything for.....

Her voice too fades, just as an echo of distant MUSIC begins to fill in - *Requiem, Pie Jesu/ Gabriel Fauré* - gradually rising, encircling and imbuing the atmosphere with a quality as solemn as soaring.

FADE UP:

EXT. COURTYARD. COLONNADE - DAWN

Rays of light and sunshine pierce in little pockets, through the courtyard of this 20th Century version of an ancient monastery. A BELL begins to chime in the distance, awakening the day.

We are now moving down a long exterior walkway, following a massive expanse of big black billowing fabric, that seems float along the floor as soft as waves in water.

PULLING BACK, we realize we're actually following behind a faceless NUN from this particular monastery of women, THE SISTERS OF BELOVED ROSE. She seems to move with a strange sense of urgency, the hem of her habit dancing behind her.

REVEREND MOTHER (O.S.)

Our father, who art in Heaven, hallowed  
be thy name.... Where are you?

INT. CHAPEL - MORNING

Now inside the order's sacred chapel, we drift through the space on our own- Revealing a panoramic resplendence of vaulted MURALS, the immaculate ALTAR OF CHRIST, silk-like streams of soft and hazy light that drip in through windows above.

At the same time and all alone within the shadows, the same NUN has moved to the floor in the middle of the chapel, lost herself in prayer. She whispers.

REVEREND MOTHER

Where are you? Where are you? Where are  
you?...Why are you doing this to us?...  
Now when I need you most?

\*

But we're suddenly jolted by the abrupt and jarring SOUND of a...

INT. NOVITIATE DORMITORY. HALLWAY - MORNING

ANGLE ON an OLD WOODEN CLAPPER.

As we now find ourselves inside the long central hallway of a small dormitory for girls, known as the "Novitiate".

We follow behind as another NUN, SISTER GENEVIEVE, 47- Gradually makes her way down the hall, clapper in hand. It's 5 am and she is loudly 'clacking' beside the door of each and every girl that is housed here. It's her job to awaken them all, make sure they're never late for Mass.

INT. NOVITIATE DORMITORY. VARIOUS CELLS - MORNING

Moving one by one into a number of the private rooms, called "Cells", that make up the dorm. A variety of YOUNG WOMEN- Sisters CHARLOTTE, EMILY, CANDACE - Are suddenly JOLTED awake once the clapper lands at their door! They all quickly bolt from their beds, shake off the drowsiness and hurry to the floor to pray.

\*

INT. SISTER CATHLEEN'S NOVICE CELL - MORNING

Before in one room in particular, containing no more than a simple metal frame BED and an ICON OF CHRIST along the wall, we find SISTER CATHLEEN - A stunning and ethereal young novice of only 19. Cathleen's also already wide awake, eyes wide open and staring straight at the door.

As the sound of the clapper then reaches Cathleen, she too hurries from her bed to the floor.

A gentle call then emanates in from the hall.

SISTER GENEVIEVE (O.S.)  
Benedicamus Domino...

With Cathleen and all her fellow novices calling back.

NOVICES IN UNISON  
Deo Gratsias....

MOMENTS LATER, Cathleen begins to undress out of her nightgown and into her WHITE VEIL NOVICE HABIT. For the brief moment that she's also left NAKED and unclothed, we notice how awkwardly she holds her nightgown to her body, struggling to climb into one garment while still clutching the other. Clearly the shame of her nudity makes her so uncomfortable, even when she's all alone.

CLOSE ON Cathleen's face as she at last pins on her VEIL, so effortlessly without the benefit of a mirror. Right before our eyes, she's transformed from a girl to a nun.

INT. NOVITIATE DORMITORY. STAIRCASE - MORNING

Now the entirety of the NOVITIATE, some 15 young women in total, all rapidly descend the dormitory staircase one by one: No more than a flurry of passing feet and floating veils.

EXT. CONVENT - MORNING

The sound of the BELL chimes even louder, as the same group of novices now wordlessly walk in two tight lines through the hazy morning light of the courtyard. They are moreover such an exquisite looking procession, almost military-like in their lock and step unison. They seem to all move together like a balletic flock of birds.

Somewhere tucked into the line we also observe Cathleen, demonstrating such composure in her 'Custody of the eyes': With arms softly crossed along her stomach and each hand hidden in the opposite sleeve. With eyes perpetually lowered and locked, in a blink-less downward gaze.

Beat.

SISTER CATHLEEN (V.O.)

I was 17 years old when I first came to the convent. 18, when I entered the Novitiate.

INT. CHAPEL - MORNING

Back within the chapel, the ENTIRE COMMUNITY OF ROSES have now gathered for the daily ritual of MASS. As a PRIEST stands at the altar, back to the congregation, we watch his HANDS begin to carefully lay out his ACCESSORIES for the service.

At the same time as we also peer through the pews to see the room packed to the gills with over 200 nuns, all ranging in ages from 16-100. Moving all around and through them, from one pew to the next, we look deeply into so many of their still and solemn faces. The collective sense of reverence and rapture, so palpable you can almost taste it.

PRIEST (O.S.)

Mea Culpa, mea culpa, mea maxima culpa...Baptístam, sanctos Apóstolos Petrum et Paulum, omnes sanctons.... Oremus.

And suddenly all is silent, dead silent. A silence so rich, deep and voluptuous, it creates its' own presence in the room. Such a powerful silence that is broken only by the occasional COUGH or BREATHE, before...

SISTER CATHLEEN (V.O.)

And I'm sure a lot of people could probably never understand it. Never understand why someone so young, with their whole life in front of them, would want to give it all away to God.

We then slowly begin to PAN across the faces of all the Novices, all knelt together in a line before altar- Noticing how shockingly young and innocent they all are. Most of these girls, all now in their final stages of training to be nuns, are barely even out of high school.

CATHLEEN (V.O.)

They think of nuns today, and all they see is a bunch of old women... Women who couldn't find husbands. Women who, for whatever reason, just couldn't make it in the outside world. So ran off to a monastery to escape everything...

We then finally land on Cathleen, just as her eyes glance up with such longing at the altar. She just stares straight up at it, while all other heads around her are bowed.

CATHLEEN (V.O.)

What they don't understand though, is beneath everything else... We were women in love.

Cathleen then finally closes her eyes, giving herself over to prayer. She whispers.

SISTER CATHLEEN

Oh Lord, I adore you. You're all I could ever want.

FADE OUT

OVER BLACK.

A new TITLE now appears on the screen.

10 YEARS EARLIER

Just as the sound of some iconic feeling 1950's POP SONG begins to drift in, together with that of a far off, distant TRAIN HORN.

FADE UP:

RURAL TENNESSEE. VARIOUS - DAY

Music from a local Tennessee radio station plays through the background, as we come to a quaint series of tableaux of the rural South as it once was, the lost and forgotten feeling of a great American heartland. We see great wide open farms, the quietude of suburban streets, church steeples towering high above.

At the same time, we begin to hear the echo of a CHURCH BELL.

EXT. LOCAL CATHOLIC CHURCH - DAY

It's Sunday morning with the church bell ringing, calling this small Tennessee town to Mass. An exterior of the local clapboard CHURCH reveals a small stream of arriving locals, smiling and greeting each other along the way.

Before A CAR pulls up, and....

NORA HARRIS (35)- Cathleen's somewhat hard scrabbled, though deeply loving and devoted mother. Together with a much younger, CATHLEEN (7)- Both step out into the parking lot.

Nora looks around for a moment, checks the car mirror for any lipstick in her teeth, before she finally glances up at the church with a noticeable air of skepticism and anxiety.

NORA

Come on honey, let's give this a whirl...

At the entrance, Nora and Cathleen are then suddenly stopped by some husky, wide-grinning MAN in his 50s. Already seeming a bit "over friendly" for Nora's taste.

CHURCH USHER

Why Nora Harris, I don't believe it! Is that really you?

Nora turns, feigns surprise.

NORA

Oh yeah. Hey Rob, how you been? You been good?

CHURCH USHER

(turning to Cathleen)

Yes Ma'am, I most certainly have. But wait a minute now, please don't tell me- Is this really Cathleen?

NORA

Yeah can you believe it, growin' up so fast.

He then bends down to Cathleen, squeezing her cheeks.

CHURCH USHER

Hey pretty lady, now you know you're not allowed to grow up that fast! Soon you'll be taller than me!

He turns back to Nora.

CHURCH USHER (CONT'D)

Gotta say, I'm a little surprised to see you here... Long as I've known you, I don't think I've ever seen you within 500 yards of Sunday worship.

NORA

Yeah well, don't get your hopes up. I'm not here to be saved or nothing.... Just figured it was about time Cathleen had a chance to see for herself, what religion's all about- Or '*supposed*' to be about... Besides, we were a little bored.

CHURCH USHER

All right, good enough for me. Why don't you come on in, we'll find you a seat.

Nora and Cathleen then follow the man inside.

LOCAL PRIEST (O.S.)

Blessed be God and the Father...

INT. LOCAL CATHOLIC CHURCH - DAY

Entering mid-sermon, a LOCAL PRIEST stands addressing a small but packed house, Nora and Cathleen squeezed into the crowd.

LOCAL PRIEST

Because although you have not seen him, you still love him. Although you don't know him, you still believe in him. You feel his presence all around you without knowing his name, and you rejoice with an indescribable ecstasy... For if there's one thing we know, it's that God's love is unconditional...

Seemingly woefully unimpressed, Nora glances at her watch. She then glances at Cathleen, surprised by how riveted and attentive her daughter seems. Young Cathleen just stares in wonder, in much the same way we saw her stare before.

EXT. HARRIS HOUSEHOLD - DUSK

A hush of evening falls over this quiet rural street, somewhere along the poorer more neglected part of town. No bigger than a trailer, sits the Harris' little house.

INT. HARRIS HOUSEHOLD - NIGHT

Inside their cramped little home, Nora and Cathleen sit together at the kitchen table. A cigarette dangling from Nora's mouth, as she spoons out veggies on their plates.

NORA

Really wish you'd eat more honey, you know I worry about you sometimes...

Nora reaches to push away the hair from Cathleen's face.

NORA (CONT'D)

So, did you like going to that church today?

CATHLEEN

Yeah, I did.

NORA

Really? What'd you like about it most?

CATHLEEN

I don't know? I guess I just thought it was peaceful.

NORA

Peaceful? Huh? Yeah, I guess it was kind of peaceful.

CATHLEEN

What kind of Church was it again?

NORA

Catholic.

CATHLEEN

Are we Catholic?

NORA

No, we're not really anything I suppose. Truth is, I don't particularly believe in religion myself, think it's a waste of time... But once you get older, you can make up your own mind.

A sudden GLARE of HEADLIGHTS then floods the kitchen windows, together with the SOUND of a CAR pulling up. Nora's eyes quickly turn and we notice the change of expression.

EXT. HARRIS HOUSEHOLD - NIGHT

Just outside the house, the figure of a youngish MAN hops out of an old PICK-UP TRUCK, starts heading for the front door with a bit of a wobbly step.

INT. HARRIS HOUSEHOLD - NIGHT

And now CHUCK HARRIS, 35 - Nora's deadbeat husband and Cathleen's barely present father - Finally comes through the door. Not only that but right from the moment he enters, we can already tell there's no place this guy less enjoys being than home.

Chuck heads straight for Cathleen, hugging and kissing her. It's unclear if he's drunk or not.

CHUCK

Hey, hey! Hey baby, how's my girl, how's daddy's little girl?... What did you do today baby, huh?. Did you have a good day today?

CATHLEEN

Daddy! Where were you! We were waiting for you for so long! Where were you!

All while Nora just stares with daggers in her eyes..

NORA

A fair question. Where you been Chuck?

Chuck just looks at her and shrugs his shoulders. It's not a question he cares to answer.

CHUCK

Huh? What do you mean by that? Nowhere in particular. Just out, that's all.

NORA

Oh? Cause we've been sitting here all day waiting on you. You never heard of a phone, or...

CHUCK

Nora please, I'm home. And yes, I've heard of a phone.

NORA

(under her breath)  
Great, you've heard of a phone Chuck.  
Great Chuck, that's just great...

Chuck heads to the fridge to grab a beer. Then finally turns back to Nora, it's clear things are about to get unpleasant.

CHUCK

What do you want me to say? Something in particular you'd like to hear me say? Tell me what it is, I don't give a fuck, I'll say it.

NORA

I don't know, I guess I just want you to be a man, that's all. Be a fucking father- Maybe learn how to sacrifice a little....

CHUCK

Oh gimme a break, you serious with that!? I am a man! Christ'sake, I was out, now I'm home! Look at me, here I am, HOME!.. So just drop it, leave me alone!

NORA

Drop it!? Seriously!?!?... You know what just, Fuck you Chuck!

CHUCK

Fuck me? No, fuck you Nora! You know how tired I am of this shit! Every single time, I gotta hear this all this shit!.. Well I'm sorry I'm not the person you want me to be. I'm fucking HOME!

NORA

Not the person I want you to be!? Not the person I want you to be!? No, cause you're not even CLOSE!!... You're the WORST, you hear me!! THE WORST!

CHUCK

I was out! THAT'S ALL!! You know what forget it, I can't fucking stay here!

Chuck then SMASHES his plate down on the floor, heading back for the door. While Nora herself jumps from the table, suddenly SCREAMING and wildly chasing after him.

NORA

Where do you think you're going! You're leaving again!? You can't do that! You can't keep leaving us, whenever you want! You have a daughter for Christ'sake! I hate you, you hear me.....

Finally the door SLAMS leaving Cathleen all alone. The little girl just sits in utter silence, as her parents yell, cry and scream at each other outside. Beat.

EXT. ABANDONED ROAD - AFTERNOON

It's now 5 years later, 1957, as we hold on an old and dusty road deep in the middle of Tennessee farmland. Far in the distance we also just make out the sight of TWO FIGURES moving toward us. Too hazy to see their faces, all we really see is their BIG BILLOWING BLACK CLOTHING.

EXT. HARRIS HOUSEHOLD - DAY

The late summer sun blazes as a now older Cathleen - 12 years old - Stands beside Nora, helping her mom as they hang a load of laundry together.

Fussing with a clothes pin, Nora's eyes then slowly do a double take noticing the bizarre sight of these two ELDERLY NUNS- Sisters GLORIA AND ELEANOR, both 50's - Making their way straight up to her house.

NORA

Excuse me? Hey there! Can I help you, Sisters?

One of the sisters turns and smiles. The other just nods.

SISTER GLORIA

Are you Mrs. Harris?

NORA

Yes.

SISTER GLORIA

My name is Sister Gloria, this is Sister Eleanor. We're from Our Lady of Blessed Sorrows, the Parochial School just up the road... You know it?

Bewildered, Nora just looks at Cathleen then back at the nuns.

NORA

Uh, yeah?.... Yeah, I think I know the one you mean?

INT. HARRIS HOUSEHOLD. LIVING ROOM - LATER

A LITTLE LATER in their family living room, Nora scrambles to lay out her best tea seat for the Sisters. While Cathleen sits quietly beside her mother, just staring at the nuns in awe.

SISTER ELEANOR

We're very proud to say that it's the nuns, sisters like us, that built the Catholic school system in this country. Brick by brick.

Nora smiles as she pours them both tea.

NORA

That's nice.

SISTER GLORIA

Your little one is so lovely by the way. May I ask how old?

NORA

Huh? Oh, Cathleen's 12. Just getting ready to start middle school actually.

Nora finally sits down, glancing quietly at a small PAMPHLET on the table. A brochure for the Sisters' school.

NORA (CONT'D)

Look I appreciate your coming by Sisters, I do. But truth is, we're just not that religious... I mean we try to go to church when we can, you know like everybody else.... But the truth is my husband, Cathleen's father, he left us awhile back. So it's just me taking care of the two of us and...

SISTER GLORIA

I'm so sorry to hear that Mrs. Harris, God cherishes your strength...

SISTER ELEANOR

Of course, that can't be easy... One thing you should know though, our doors are open to everyone, practicing and non-practicing alike.

SISTER GLORIA

Our first priority is just to provide an exceptional education. Doesn't every child deserve that?

Nora looks at the brochure again. She then turns to Cathleen still staring mesmerized at these strange women.

NORA

Well how much does it cost? I don't know if we can really afford a fancy school like this....

The two sisters just look at each other and smile.

SISTER ELEANOR

That's just it, right now we're offering full scholarships! On a first come basis.

EXT. BLESSED SORROWS - DAY

The first day of school has arrived. Along the well groomed grounds, tons of excitable young TEEN and PRETEEN GIRLS bound about the campus in their BLESSED SORROWS uniforms.

INT. BLESSED SORROWS. CLASSROOM - DAY

Inside a small, traditional 1950s classroom- A billow of fabric then comes drifting along the floor, winding through a row of school desks.

Two girls in the back giggle and pass notes, at the same time as an OLDER NUN TEACHER in full habit stops dead center, glances around at them all.

NUN TEACHER

Silence girls, silence. So I have a question for all of you- How many in this room were baptized Catholic?

As the majority of girls then immediately shoot up their hands, Cathleen just looks at the ground.

NUN TEACHER (CONT'D)

Don't worry, this isn't a judgement on anyone's background... The reason I ask, is because I'm wondering if any of you know what the difference is- Between the Catholic religion and all other religions? Protestants, Baptists, Jews?

A few girls giggle, others roll their eyes and yawn. Before the Teacher finally goes to the board and slowly writes out: **"LOVE AND SACRIFICE"**

## NUN TEACHER (CONT'D)

Love and Sacrifice. Of course there are many different ways, that people choose to show gratitude to their Lord ... But I believe what differentiates the Catholic religion, from so many other religions, is the full extent we're willing to go to demonstrate our passion... Because if there's one thing we all know for sure, there's just no such thing as true love without sacrifice.

Seated in back, Cathleen looks up intrigued. As if something about this strange notion appeals to her.

## EXT. BLESSED SORROWS - DAY

It's recess hour on another day. Though as all the other girls run and play, Cathleen just sits by herself against a tree. Somewhat of a loner.

Another teacher, a rather attractive young nun of roughly 30, then gradually approaches. SISTER MARGARET- Not only one of the 'cooler' teachers at school, but a woman whose very presence exudes an ocean of understanding.

## SISTER MARGARET

Hey there. How come you're sitting all alone? You don't want to join the others?

Cathleen suddenly looks up.

## CATHLEEN

(shyly)

Huh? They're all talking about their boyfriends. I don't have a boyfriend...

## SISTER MARGARET

Oh no? Me neither. I'm told they're overrated.

Cathleen laughs. Sister Margaret winks sweetly and sits down beside her.

## SISTER MARGARET (CONT'D)

I'm Sister Margaret by the way. You're Cathleen, right? I haven't had you in my class yet, but I've noticed you...

## CATHLEEN

(surprised)

You have?

SISTER MARGARET

Sure, I noticed you because you're shy like me. You seem to like to be by yourself a lot? To think a lot?

CATHLEEN

(self-conscious)

I guess so...

SISTER MARGARET

It's okay, I like to be by myself and think a lot too.

Cathleen just stares at her for a moment.

CATHLEEN

You do? About what?

SISTER MARGARET

(thoughtfully)

Probably seems stupid, but mostly about God. Whenever I'm alone, I like to sit by myself and just contemplate him, wonder about him, even love him inside my mind... I know a lot of girls at this school find that quite silly.

Cathleen looks at Sister Margaret so captivated.

CATHLEEN

I don't think it's silly.

SISTER MARGARET

You don't? Well thank you for that.

They both laugh. Sister Margaret then quickly stands back up, reaches a hand down to Cathleen.

SISTER MARGARET (CONT'D)

Come here, I want to show you something. Can I show you something...

INT. BLESSED SORROWS. GENERAL CHAPEL - DAY

Now inside the school's tiny chapel, votive candles illumine the altar, highlighting a tiny WOODEN HOUSE and a HALO of GOLD LIGHT. A TALL STATUE OF CHRIST looms proudly in the corner.

The door to the chapel then opens, with Sister Margaret quietly leading Cathleen inside and into a pew. Sister Margaret stares at the altar in a strange sort of reverential silence, then whispers to Cathleen.

SISTER MARGARET

You see that little light in there.  
That's his light, God's light... And the  
statue behind, that's the savior of  
course, Jesus Christ.

Cathleen just takes it all in.

CATHLEEN

I know who they are. But why are you  
showing this to me?

SISTER MARGARET

Just because someone likes to be alone,  
doesn't mean they don't sometimes still  
crave intimacy.

CATHLEEN

But you really think God and Jesus are  
real? Like real the way other things are  
real?

SISTER MARGARET

Of course I do. More than do. Because I'm  
married to them silly. Didn't you know  
that, all nuns are Brides of Christ.

Cathleen now looks at her, so confused.

CATHLEEN

Huh? What do you mean? But why, I bet you  
could've married anyone you wanted to?

SISTER MARGARET

(blushing a little)

Oh, I'm not so sure about that. And  
either way, I doubt any other  
relationship would've been quite as  
fulfilling... It's twice as hard to love  
God as anybody else. Which for me, means  
my love is twice as worthy.

Another SCHOOL BELL chimes in the distance.

SISTER MARGARET (CONT'D)

Ooops, I gotta go. Got class.

Sister Margaret then gets up, looks down at Cathleen.

SISTER MARGARET (CONT'D)

Well come on, you coming?

Cathleen thinks it over, turns back to Margaret sweetly.

CATHLEEN

If it's okay by you Sister, maybe I'll stay a bit. If that's okay?

Margaret nods, then quietly heads out. Cathleen waits, turns again towards the statue and the flame.

INT. BLESSED SORROWS. GENERAL CHAPEL - EVENING

MUCH LATER now, the chapel is completely dark and seemingly empty. That is except for Cathleen, who continues to just sit all alone in the pews, unable to take her eyes off the altar.

She pauses a moment, then puts her hands together and starts to pray. It's clear she's never done this before, but it seems to come naturally.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. BLESSED SORROWS. GENERAL CHAPEL - EVENING

Before in the exact same position and as if the prayer itself had never ended, we see a much OLDER Cathleen- Sitting in the same very pew with the very same rapt look on her face. Though now it's 1962, and Cathleen 17.

An OLD WOMAN seated in a front then starts to walk out of the Chapel, nodding and smiling at Cathleen as she passes, who nods and smiles back.

OLD WOMAN

'Night Cathleen.

CATHLEEN

See you later Miss Williams.

INT. HARRIS HOUSEHOLD. LIVING ROOM - EARLY MORNING

It's well before the crack of dawn as Cathleen wanders through her house, trying not to wake Nora. She's then suddenly startled to discover a STRANGE MAN by himself in their living room, in the middle of pulling up his pants.

Shocked, Cathleen just lowers her eyes, tries not to look at the man as she passes.

CATHLEEN

Hi.

Clearly startled, this guy can't wait to get out of there.

NORA'S ONE NIGHT STAND

Oh hey, how are you?

INT. HARRIS HOUSEHOLD. KITCHEN - EARLY MORNING

We hear the sound of the front door SLAM, as Cathleen then enters the kitchen, surprised to discover Nora there, just staring out the window smoking a cigarette as she watches him go.

CATHLEEN

Who was he?

Nora turns, startled.

NORA

Huh? Oh just a friend of mine, that's all.

CATHLEEN

(under her breath)

Another one?

Nora just looks at Cathleen and frowns. Beat.

NORA

What are you doing up so early anyway?

CATHLEEN

I set my alarm early, so I could go to Mass before school.

Slightly taken aback, Nora tries not to show judgement.

NORA

Oh?... Oh, okay... You need a ride?

CATHLEEN

No, it's okay. Thanks though.

Cathleen then starts to head back down the hall, before Nora thinks it over and calls out to her again.

NORA (O.C)

Hey Cathleen...

She comes back, stopping in the threshold.

CATHLEEN

Yeah?

NORA

You're not, ummmm.... Getting too into God and all that, are you?

CATHLEEN

Huh? What do you mean?

NORA

I don't know? I guess I just mean there's more to life than, you know, praying and going to church and all that... You do know that, right honey?

CATHLEEN

(unconvincing)

Yeah, of course, I know.

INT. BLESSED SORROWS. GENERAL CHAPEL - DAY

In the Chapel again, Cathleen returns to her daily practice of just sitting in church, meditating in the pews. We hold on her like this for a LONG moment. Before gradually a feeling comes over her, and she slowly turns almost as if called by something, to look toward the STATUE OF CHRIST.

Barely even blinking, Cathleen then rises from the pews and begins to walk straight to the statue.

Moments later as she now stands face to face with it, she looks straight into Christ's eyes, while his seem to look back at hers, and almost as if she and the statue are sharing their own secret conversation. Cathleen takes a deep breath, tears begin to well in her eyes.

INT. BLESSED SORROWS. TEACHER'S OFFICE - DAY

Sitting across the desk from Sister Margaret in her office, Cathleen seems almost breathless as she tries to explain.

CATHLEEN

I decided something today Sister. I decided I want to give myself to God. I want to be married to God like you. I want to be a nun.

Sister Margaret looks shocked for a minute, then smiles.

SISTER MARGARET

Really? You're serious?... I didn't realize you'd even been thinking about it so seriously Cathleen?

CATHLEEN

I was in the chapel the other day, praying like I always do, when suddenly this feeling came over me. Something I've never felt before. Like this presence all around me, telling me, telling me...

Sister Margaret continues looking at her, searching her eyes.

SISTER MARGARET

Telling you to be a nun...?

CATHLEEN

I think so...

Sister Margaret smiles.

SISTER MARGARET

So many girls your age pray and pray for a vocation that never comes. If it really was His voice calling you, consider yourself very lucky.

Cathleen just smiles, starting to blush.

SISTER MARGARET (CONT'D)

You're such a passionate girl, you remind me of myself at your age.... I'm happy for you Cathleen. I think you're making the right decision.

INT. HARRIS HOUSEHOLD. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Later in the night Nora and Cathleen are now alone in their living room. Cathleen just watches as Nora paces back and forth, seeming about to explode.

NORA

A nun!? What are you talking about, a nun!? That's just fucking crazy Cathleen, where is this even coming from!?

CATHLEEN

I knew you wouldn't understand! It's fine if you don't understand...

NORA

It's not that I don't understand, it's just that it's the stupidest thing I've ever heard!! You're telling me you want to go throw your life away in some convent and you expect me to understand!?

CATHLEEN

But it's not throwing my life away! It's not throwing my life away!

NORA

You think I wanted this!? You think I wanted to be a single mother like this!? I did the best I could! I tried!?

CATHLEEN

What does that have anything to do with it! This decision doesn't have anything to do with that! It just has to do...

NORA

With what!? Jesus Christ, what the fuck Cathleen!? What does it have to do with!? What is this all about!?

Cathleen suddenly looks like she's about to cry.

CATHLEEN

I'm in love, okay, I'm in love!!! And I really don't care if you understand it or not!

NORA

In love!? With who, with what!? I don't get it!?

Now Cathleen just stares at the ground in silence, before it all suddenly dawns on Nora.

NORA (CONT'D)

With God? Oh my God, you're in love with God!? But I don't get it, that doesn't even make any sense!?

CATHLEEN

Mom I'm sorry, but I was called and I'm going to be a nun and there's nothing you can do to stop me! I wish you could just be happy for me!

But Nora just stares at Cathleen, baffled. Before her voice then suddenly gets much, much, much quieter.

NORA

Cathleen, you're a 17 year old girl...  
 You don't know anything about religion,  
 and you for sure don't know anything  
 about love... You want to know what I  
 think? I think you're about to make the  
 biggest mistake of your life.

Still barely holding back the tears, Cathleen just stares  
 at Nora for a long time. She then turns and walks  
 straight out of the room. Feeling completely lost from  
 her daughter, Nora shakes her head. Beat.

FADE OUT.

OVER BLACK.

Returning to the black, we again hear the sound of a far  
 off and tolling BELL. As if calling us somewhere.

INT. CHAPEL - DAWN

Before back within the hushed confines of the chapel of  
 the Sisters of Beloved Rose, the same faceless Nun sits  
 knelt before the altar, consumed again in her intimate  
 secret prayers.

REVEREND MOTHER

Why are you doing this? Why are you doing  
 this? I don't understand it?.... Someone  
 gives you their whole life, makes every  
 kind of conceivable kind of sacrifice....  
 And this is what I get?

EXT. CONVENT GROUNDS - DAWN

Along the lush and manicured grounds of the convent, a  
 set-up that looks a lot more like a posh boarding school  
 than some cold isolated monastery - A whole community of  
 NUNS wander all throughout, busying themselves about  
 their day. And it really does feel like a whole world in  
 and of itself. A secret society of women on their own,  
 that couldn't be more self-sufficient or self-contained.

INT. CONVENT MEETING ROOM - DAY

At the same time inside the convent's large and well  
 appointed meeting room, a group of about 20 YOUNG GIRLS,  
 most of them fresh out of school, all sit around  
 whispering and waiting.

As a matter of fact these are all the order's new POSTULANTS, including Cathleen, who've just arrived to begin the first stage of their training as nuns.

Lingering around the front keeping an eye on them all, are also 3 older sisters- SISTER MARY GRACE, 30. SISTERS ANNE and KATE, 27 - They try and keep the room quiet, giving an occasional "Shhhhh"....

Before all out of nowhere the room falls silent. And just as none other than REVEREND MOTHER MARIE SAINT CLARE, 56- A frank, tough as nails clergy woman of the old style, who occasionally lets her under developed emotions get the better of her- Finally enters. Reverend Mother quietly makes her way to the front of the room, flanked by her most loyal lieutenant, Sister Genevieve. Her mere presence so halting and domineering, as to already put the fear of God in these girls.

Now Reverend Mother just stands at the head of the room, looking over all the girls. She remains DEAD SILENT for such a strangely long time, no one quite sure why....

Before finally another BELL chimes, at which point Reverend Mother immediately relaxes and smiles.

REVEREND MOTHER

Good afternoon all of you. My name is Reverend Mother Marie St. Clare. You can call me Reverend Mother, or simply Mother if you prefer that instead.... I'm also the Mother Superior, or Abbess, of this particular Order of Sisters of Beloved Rose. I myself have been a Rose nearly 40 years now. Meaning some 40 years ago, I first walked through those gates as a Postulant- same as all of you- Now 40 years later, I've not once set foot outside those gates since...

She pauses looking around at all the girls. We watch Cathleen's eyes lower, trying to avoid her gaze.

REVEREND MOTHER (CONT'D)

So what is my role, my job here exactly?.... Well as far as all of you are concerned- You might consider me like the voice of God around here... Meaning that unfortunately, since God can't be here to run this convent Himself- My voice will serve as a stand in for His. And whenever you hear this very voice speak from my mouth- You can expect it's on behalf of his wishes.

She pauses again, making sure they all heard it.

REVEREND MOTHER (CONT'D)

Now during the next 2 and a half years of your training to become nuns here, I *personally* will be separating the wheat from the chafe, determining which of you actually belong. As opposed to which are simply the victims of a childish imagination.... And that's because here in this room, in this monastery- God is not a fantasy to us. Not a daydream, not a fantasy. And he's certainly not your invisible best friend either.... To the contrary, God is work. Hard work. The work of a very special kind of love, you're all going to be trained in.

Turning to look at all the girls, we see a multitude of intimidated faces.

REVEREND MOTHER (CONT'D)

So you'll be spending your first 6 months as postulants. After that, and for those of you who make it- You'll be invited to take your very first vows, in your first temporary marriage to Christ- And enter the Novitiate... However and as a rule, we make a point never to discuss the Novitiate until we've been through it ourselves. So for now, you'll just have to wait.

Cathleen looks up, so curious by the notion of the Novitiate. As all the girls are.

REVEREND MOTHER (CONT'D)

Finally, let's talk about silence for a moment. Because we observe two types of silence here: Regular Silence and Grand Silence... Now during regular silence, if you find you need to speak for whatever reason. That's permissible... However and starting at 9pm each night, when you hear that last bell signifying the start of Grande Silence. That means you - Don't. Talk. Period.

We hear a general nervous MURMUR throughout the room.

REVEREND MOTHER (CONT'D)

Are there any questions?

The room is then deadened, nobody daring to speak. Before some brave young girl in the back raises her hand.

However and instead of calling on her, Reverend Mother just looks at the girl blankly for an extremely long time. Beat. It's awkward.

REVEREND MOTHER (CONT'D)

Put your hand down sister, postulants don't have questions. And you are free to go home.

She then turns backs to the group as a whole.

REVEREND MOTHER (CONT'D)

Now, when you return to your cells later this evening...

INT. POSTULANT DORMITORY. MAIN HALL - DAWN

Gazing down the empty hallway in the Postulant dormitory, all is quiet- Before suddenly SISTER ANNE together with SISTER KATE, take the same wooden CLAPPER and start clapping and rattling all the way down the hall.

INT. POSTULANT'S CELLS - MORNING

A couple of the new POSTULANTS- Sisters SISSY and EVELYN- immediately jolt from sleep, practically falling out of bed and straight onto the floor. They then fumble through their prayers, fighting back the intermittent slew of sighs and yawns.

INT. CATHLEEN'S CELL - MORNING

Meanwhile in Cathleen's cell, she herself is already wide awake, fully dressed in her new POSTULANT UNIFORM, and waiting on the edge of her bed. As if so determined to not be late, she literally stayed up all night.

Cathleen adjusts and readjusts herself a couple times, before the clapper then finally makes its way to her door. Now she too drops and heads for the floor.

## INT. NOVITIATE DORMITORY. STAIRCASE - MORNING

Almost afraid to look back at them, Sister Mary Grace now leads a sleepy, clumsy, confused and out of step procession of all these girls down the staircase in the postulant dorm. They all keep tripping and stumbling over each other, while Mary Grace just shakes her head.

## INT. CHAPEL ANTEROOM - MORNING

\*

As the procession at last reaches the entrance to the chapel, Mary Grace pauses them all, silently indicating that it's time to put on their veils. All the girls then start digging in their pockets at once, hurrying to get the veils out fast, struggling to figure out how to tie them.

## INT. CHAPEL - MORNING

With the entire community of Roses there and waiting, the full Postulant procession finally enters the chapel, every head turning and looking at them curiously.

Mary Grace leads them all to their assigned pews, each girl stopping to genuflect before the altar before taking their seat. All while Reverend Mother sits in her own pew, watching each girl carefully.

MOMENTS LATER Mass has begun, with the Priest softly whispering.

PRIEST

Oreta... Glory be to the Father, to the  
Son, the Holy Spirit...

The entire congregation then lowers heads to pray. Except for Cathleen who can't help but steal a glance toward the altar, where all the Novices are now receiving communion. Cathleen watches in awe, then returns to prayer.

## EXT. REFECTORY - DAY

An endless line of NUNS stand outside the convent's refectory (dining hall), with the entire community waiting to enter for lunch single file.

As each woman then steps to the front of the line, we see Reverend Mother herself perched beside the door, so formally and perfunctorily greeting every sister as they pass.

## NUN IN LINE

Good afternoon Reverend Mother. Praise the Lord.

## REVEREND MOTHER

Now and forever. God Bless Sister.

And so on and so forth. We then slowly PAN back to the far end of the line, to see Cathleen just waiting her turn.

## INT. REFECTORY - DAY

A little LATER inside the dining hall, rows upon rows of old wooden tables trace the room's perimeter, where each group of sisters all sit according to rank.

At the same time, the entire room stands waiting in silence. While Sister Genevieve provides the community a reading before the meal.

## SISTER GENEVIEVE

Totally love Him. Him, who gave Himself totally for your love. He Christ is the splendor of eternal glory. The brightness of eternal light. The mirror without cloud.

We again hold on Cathleen, as she continues to listen and pray.

## INT. CONVENT MEETING ROOM - DAY

All together in a tight circle, the entire group of new postulants surround SISTER MARY GRACE- Whom we ourselves now recognize to be an incredibly warm, kind, almost progressive feeling young woman. To such a point in fact, it's hard to reconcile how her personality conforms to that of a nun.

Mary Grace just smiles at all the girls, trying to make each one feel welcome. All while her two main subordinates, Sisters Anne and Kate who themselves seem a lot less welcoming, stand behind and watch.

## SISTER MARY GRACE

I haven't really had a chance to formally introduce myself yet. But I'm Sister Mary Grace and I will be your Postulant Mistress for the next 6 months. Perhaps even your Novice Mistress after that...

(MORE)

SISTER MARY GRACE (CONT'D)

Oh, and these are Sisters Anne and Sister Catherine, Kate. Both first year professed, both just took their final vows...

(she smiles toward the girls)

We're so very proud of them....

Anyway all of us, all 3 of us, are really just here to help guide you, as you start to adapt to our way of life here... And I'm sure it's all going to feel very different at first. That's okay, that's normal... I know when I first came here, everything seemed so strange, I didn't think I'd ever truly make it as a nun... But please don't worry. Just do the best you can. I'm sure you're all going to do great...

We notice reactions of all the girls, they all seem so comforted by her, even a bit enamored.

SISTER MARY GRACE (CONT'D)

So the first thing we should go over is the schedule... Postulants usually have the same schedule everyday. And really the most important thing, is you pay close attention to the bell. Because really everything we do here, all day long, all comes down to the bell...

Mary Grace smiles once more as the sound of another BELL is heard. At the same time as music drifts in...

MONTAGE UP:

EXT. COURTYARD - MORNING

Following behind a faceless nun, we pick up Sister Anne as she crosses, quickly looking up toward the steeple as the bell continues.

SISTER MARY GRACE (O.S.)

So the first bell you'll hear each morning is the 5am bell.

INT. SISTER CANDACE'S ROOM - MORNING

Alone in her cell, Sister Candace so intensely and passionately whispers her morning prayer to Christ.

SISTER CANDACE

Oh Lord, through the immaculate heart of Mary, I offer you my prayers, works and sufferings throughout this day.

SISTER MARY GRACE (O.S.)

That's the bell that let's us all know it's time to get up, get dressed, get ready for morning Mass....

INT. SISTER CHARLOTTE'S ROOM - MORNING

As Charlotte too, kneels by the side of her bed saying the same prayer, soon the two sisters' voices are joined. Followed by more and more voices, creating an ongoing chorus of collective whispered prayer.

EXT. COURTYARD - MORNING

A single line of NOVICES march together through the morning light, and all in such perfect military precision, towards the chapel.

INT. CHAPEL - MORNING

As the whole community is gathered again for Mass, the priest, FATHER LUCA, begins to recite the service in LATIN....

SISTER MARY GRACE (O.S.)

Mass begins once Father Luca arrives. Father always keeps his back to us the whole time, and he always reads the liturgy in Latin...

Turning into the pews, we then see sisters Emily, Evelyn and Candace all sharing the same Latin/English TRANSLATION BIBLE - The poor girls are desperately trying to figure out what Father Luca is actually saying.

EXT. REFECTORY - AFTERNOON

A small group of NUNS stand completely silent and staring up towards the steeple and bell. Once the bell finally rings again, they all turn to each other and start laughing and chatting away.

SISTER MARY GRACE (O.S.)  
 After daily chores, you'll hear the third  
 bell of the morning. That's how you'll  
 know that Grand Silence is over...

EXT. REFECTORY - AFTERNOON

The same long line of nuns stand single file outside the dining hall. Each sister stopping to formally greet Reverend Mother, before entering inside for lunch.

INT. REFECTORY - AFTERNOON

Again in the refectory, all the sisters stand before their plates, silently listening to the morning reading.

SISTER MARY GRACE (O.S.)  
 As you probably noticed, all our meals  
 begin with a reading. And even though  
 it's after Grand Silence, we do try and  
 remain as quiet as possible during  
 meals...

At the same time and as the reading continues, we notice one young NOVICE strangely step away from her table, slowly walk to the center of the room and lay herself prostrate on the floor.

SISTER MARY GRACE (O.S.)  
 (CONT'D)  
 Oh and sometimes, you might see some of  
 the novices doing their own penances in  
 the refectory. Probably best to just  
 ignore it, at least until you're novices  
 yourselves.

EXT. CONVENT GROUNDS - AFTERNOON

Somewhere along the convent grounds, another group of NOVICES all struggle together to carry an enormous SIX FOOT WOODEN CROSS, all lunging, one leg in front of the other, across the courtyard. It is an unbearably arduous looking task.

SISTER MARY GRACE (O.S.)  
 Everyday after the 3pm bell, is when we  
 have our lessons together...

INT. CLASSROOM - AFTERNOON

As all the postulant sit behind small wooden desks in the convent classroom, Mary Grace wanders through all the desks, teaching them all SIGN LANGUAGE.

SISTER MARY GRACE

As you probably remember, Reverend Mother made it very clear that we are not to speak during Grand Silence... So let's practice a little of our sign language, shall we....

The girls then all quickly open the little SIGN LANGUAGE BOOKLETS on their desks, with Mary Grace looking over all their shoulders, helping them all.

EXT. COURTYARD - DAY

Another BELL, before we look out to the courtyard and see all the postulant girls take off in flight!! Running like kids, laughing and chasing each other in a game of tag.

At the same time Cathleen, somewhere off from the others, sits alone in the colonnade and reading the bible. She hears the joyful SHRIEK of all her postulant mates playing, turns and looks for a moment, then immediately goes back to her studying. \*

INT. SISTER CANDACE'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

We then return once more to Sister Candace, and her ceaseless, repetitious, but deeply passionate praying. We hold on her like this, as the music gradually fades...

HARD TO BLACK.

FADE UP:

INT. REV. MOTHER'S HOUSE. HALLWAY - MORNING

Inside a long hallway within the Motherhouse, we follow the billowing habit of another faceless NUN.

INT. REVEREND MOTHER'S OFFICE - SAME TIME

Alone in her private office, Reverend Mother sits at her desk reading scripture to herself. Before suddenly there's a knock at the door and Sister Genevieve peeks her head in, a small PACKAGE in her hands.

SISTER GENEVIEVE (O.S.)

Excuse me Reverend Mother, sorry to bother you. But you just received another package from the Archdiocese...

Reverend Mother then looks up a bit surprised.

REVEREND MOTHER

May I have it please, Sister.

Genevieve hands her the package, as Reverend Mother carefully unpacks a large stack of DOCUMENTS from a small ENVELOPE.

As she then slowly starts glancing over all the papers, it becomes clear that there's something rather sensitive about the content of these documents. Reverend Mother looks back up at Genevieve.

REVEREND MOTHER (CONT'D)

That'll be all, thank you Sister.

Waiting for Genevieve to leave, she starts flipping through the papers again- Clearly unnerved by whatever it is she's reading. This package is a problem.

EXT. RURAL GROUNDS - DAY

\*

A beautiful sunny afternoon as all the postulants lay together in a field of grass, surrounding Sister Mary Grace. Sister Evelyn also in the midst of explaining...

SISTER EVELYN

My mother always said at least one child should be sacrificed. Even though I come from a big family I'm still the only girl of 5 brothers, so I guess it was pretty obvious which one of us was gonna end up becoming a nun... I'm happy about it though. I'm just so proud to be here, showing all my devotion. I don't care how hard it's supposed to be, I just can't wait til' we all get into the Novitiate and get to wear those white veils.

Some of the other girls smile and nod, as Mary Grace turns back to the group.

SISTER MARY GRACE

Thank you sister. Okay, who's next...

Sister Emily then immediately raises her hand.

SISTER EMILY

Well as for me, I had two cousins, and one older sister that all chose the Sisterhood. So in a way, I guess you could say it's kind of in my blood... Matter of fact my great aunt was even once named Mother General for the whole entire state of Texas...

Emily smiles proudly, as many of the other girls look impressed.

SISTER EMILY (CONT'D)

Pretty much as far back as I can remember, all I wanted was just to follow in all their footsteps...

(somewhat in jest)

Who knows, maybe even one day die young and become a saint!

There's a bit of laughter through the crowd, even Mary Grace can't help but laugh. She glances around again, before her eyes land on Cathleen.

SISTER MARY GRACE

And what about you Sister Cathleen? Did you always know you wanted to be a nun?

Cathleen looks self-conscious.

SISTER CATHLEEN

Me? No. I mean.... I wasn't actually raised in the church, so...

Now all eyes turn and everybody stares at Cathleen.

SISTER CANDACE

What? What do you mean you weren't raised in the church? Aren't you Catholic?

SISTER CATHLEEN

I don't know? No, I guess not in the same way everyone else is...

SISTER CHARLOTTE

Well what are you even doing here then?

A bunch of the other girls start giggling.

SISTER MARY GRACE

(scolding)

Shhh, Sister Candace, please... Ladies, come on....

SISTER CATHLEEN

(so shyly)

No, it's okay, it's okay... I went to Catholic school, so that's where I first learned about the sisterhood... I never planned on being a nun. I just... I just thought it seemed like such a beautiful idea, to be able to spend my whole entire life devoted to love... I just thought a life like that, seemed worth every sacrifice.

A few girls continue to snicker, while others seems quite taken if not admiring of Cathleen's sincerity.

INT. REVEREND MOTHER'S OFFICE - MORNING

Seated across from Reverend Mother in her office, Mary Grace waits awkwardly in silence- All while Reverend Mother's attention is completely buried in the same stack of DOCUMENTS we saw before. In fact Reverend Mother barely even looks up, as she asks her.

REVEREND MOTHER

(under her breath)

So how are the new postulants? Any I should be thinking about sending home?

SISTER MARY GRACE

Huh? No, it's the opposite actually....

She pauses to see if Reverend Mother might give up some of her attention. Not finding it, she continues.

SISTER MARY GRACE (CONT'D)

I've really been so impressed with them as a group. They all seem so excited and full of energy. So passionate about really discovering their relationships with Christ... I'd be lying if I were to say their enthusiasm didn't make me a bit jealous.

At this Reverend Mother seems to glance up, but only briefly.

REVEREND MOTHER

Well, that's good.

SISTER MARY GRACE

Sorry, what is that you're reading?

Reverend Mother finally slides the documents to the side, turning more directly to Mary Grace.

REVEREND MOTHER

This? It's a memorandum. Sent over by the Archdiocese the other day. Regarding something called, Vatican II.

All while Mary Grace just looks at her confused.

SISTER MARY GRACE

Vatican what? What is that?

REVEREND MOTHER

From what I understand, our Pope's suddenly gotten it in his head to try and turn himself into some sort of "reformer"... He's organized some new council in Rome- Bishops, Cardinals, Theologians- To discuss how the church needs to change, be more in step with the new era of the 1960s....

SISTER MARY GRACE

Really? Meaning what exactly?

REVEREND MOTHER

Meaning, I guess he thinks we've all grown a bit *outmoded*.

Mary Grace suddenly looks a bit excited by this.

SISTER MARY GRACE

Really, wow... But that's a good thing though, don't you think? The church hasn't reviewed any of its practices in over a 100 years, maybe longer... Isn't it a good thing?

All while Reverend Mother just looks at her so steely.

REVEREND MOTHER

Really? You think the church needs to change? Are you questioning me?

SISTER MARY GRACE

(caught off guard)

You? No, of course not Mother. I just...

REVEREND MOTHER

I guess I disagree. I happen to think the church is perfect exactly the way it is.

Mary Grace looks towards the papers again.

SISTER MARY GRACE

Well what kind of reforms are they talking about exactly? Is that what's in the memo? Can I see?

Reverend Mother quickly slides the documents out of reach.

REVEREND MOTHER

It's really not important. I guarantee you this will all blow over very soon... Certainly, nothing for you to concern yourself over, Mary Grace.

She then finally shoves the documents in a drawer, smiles.

REVEREND MOTHER (CONT'D)

You were saying, about the new postulants....

INT. POSTULANT CLASSROOM - DAY

The Postulants all stand gathered around Sister Anne, in the midst of demonstrating "how to walk" to them. As she speaks, we also notice that Sister Anne, like Sister Kate, is a bit meaner and less tolerant than Mary Grace.

SISTER ANNE

Everybody pay attention! I'm going to show you how we walk. It's called, 'Custody of the eyes'...

Sister Anne then begins to walk in a straight line, demonstrating the specific posture to perfection.

SISTER ANNE (CONT'D)

You put your hands inside your sleeve like this. Always go slowly, gracefully, never ever in a hurry... Most important is you keep your eyes down. Make sure you're always looking straight ahead at the floor in front of you.

SISTER CANDACE

Why?

Sister Anne then stops dead in her tracks, turns and glares at Candace.

SISTER ANNE

Excuse me?

SISTER CANDACE

Why do we have to walk like that? I mean,  
what if we can't see where we're going?

A few GIGGLES erupt from the group.

SISTER ANNE

Shhh! Not that it's your place to  
question anything sister... But it's a  
part of our discipline. We keep our eyes  
down to show God how focused we are on  
always giving him our full attention.

Anne then looks around, motioning to Sisters Emily and  
Charlotte.

SISTER KATE

You two, come here...

The two girls look at each other, then immediately hurry  
over.

SISTER KATE (CONT'D)

And stand face to face...

Emily and Charlotte then stand face to face.

SISTER KATE (CONT'D)

Now both of you, look each other in the  
eyes.

Reluctant at first the girls do as their told. At first  
just looking, then gradually staring more directly and  
intimately into each other's eyes. It's tense and  
uncomfortable.

SISTER KATE (CONT'D)

What just happened?

SISTER CHARLOTTE

I started thinking about her.

SISTER EMILY

Yeah, I started thinking about her too...

SISTER KATE

Exactly. We're not supposed to think  
about each other. We're only supposed to  
be think about God. Because even though  
this is a community, we're not here for  
each other... We are here only for God.

We hold on Cathleen, quietly taking it all in.

EXT. REFECTORY COLONNADE - DUSK

The sun begins to set over the convent, as we find Cathleen alone in the courtyard, so diligently, attentively, practicing her Custody of the Eyes. Her concentration is almost spooky, as we hear her voice whisper in...

SISTER CATHLEEN (O.S)

I love you God. I love you so much more than I ever thought I could love anything in my life. I love you so much more than myself even...

INT. SISTER CATHLEEN'S CELL - EVENING

Before we find Cathleen all alone in her cell, knelt on the floor beside her bed so intimately praying out loud.

SISTER CATHLEEN

Thank you Lord for letting me be here.  
Thank you for letting me love you like this. Thank you for letting me feel you so close to me....

As she continues to whisper, we notice her breathing become heavier and heavier. A strange intensity to it.

INT. FAMILY RECEPTION AREA - AFTERNOON

Inside the convent's family waiting area, Nora sits beside a number of other PARENTS, all very wholesome looking married couples. She seems nervous already, her first visit since Cathleen left home. Not too mention being the only single parent doesn't help.

A DOOR at the back of the room then opens, as another set of PARENTS step out. A NUN on duty then motions to Nora that it's her turn to enter.

INT. PRIVATE ONE ON ONE ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

As she's now brought into the adjoining room, Nora looks up surprised to see a large METAL GRATE running down the center of the room, with Cathleen there waiting on the other side. It's an eerie sort of set up, not unlike what you might expect to find in a prison.

Cathleen and Nora smile awkwardly between the grate, it's a strange sort of reunion, both of them having missed each other so much, neither of them knowing quite what to say. They sit down.

NORA

Wow, this is the first time I've seen you in your 'outfit'...

SISTER CATHLEEN

I know... Do you like it?

NORA

(hesitantly)

You look like a real nun.

SISTER CATHLEEN

I do, thanks.... But I'm not a real nun yet. Not yet.

NORA

(indicating the grate)

What's with this by the way? This thing here... It's like a prison or something?

SISTER CATHLEEN

Nothing. It's just the way they do it. A symbol of our enclosure.

NORA

Enclosure? What's that supposed to mean?

SISTER CATHLEEN

Nothing. Never mind.

Beat.

NORA

So how are you? You like it here? How is it, are you happy?

Cathleen smiles.

SISTER CATHLEEN

I am, yeah... I don't know how to describe it, but I am happy. I feel like I really belong here.

Now Nora looks disappointed, this is clearly not the answer she was hoping for.

NORA

I guess that means you're planning on staying then?

(MORE)

NORA (CONT'D)

You plan on staying on to take those vows--  
What's it called again, the nova, novi--  
??

SISTER CATHLEEN

Novitiate. It's just a temporary vow we  
take for two years, to find out if we  
really ready to be married to God for...  
forever... But Mom, I'm pretty sure I'm  
going to be here my whole life.

Now Nora just can't take it anymore.

NORA

Jesus Christ Cathleen, what the hell did  
I do wrong?

SISTER CATHLEEN

Mom, please.... You promised.

NORA

Sorry, I'm sorry, sorry.... I just still  
don't understand what you're doing here?

SISTER CATHLEEN

It's okay, you don't have to. I'm just  
happy to see you.

NORA

I'm happy to see you too.

Beat.

SISTER CATHLEEN

Anyway, how have you been?

NORA

Fine, good. I picked up a couple extra  
shifts at work recently, just trying to  
keep busy I guess. I don't really know  
what else to do with myself, you know. I  
mostly just miss you so much.

Cathleen suddenly looks a bit struck by this, like she  
didn't quite realize it would hurt so much.

Beat.

SISTER CATHLEEN

And what about Dad? You heard anything  
from Dad?

NORA

(surprised)

You're father? Not really... Your grandma called. Said he'd been sick or something? Maybe that's why you probably haven't heard from him.... You want me to track him down, see if he'll come visit? I'm sure he wants to see you.

Cathleen thinks about it, then shakes her head.

SISTER CATHLEEN

It's okay, don't bother. I'll just pray for him, it's fine... Anyway, I kind of have to go now.

NORA

(instantly heartbroken)

What, what do you mean you have to go? We have ten more minutes.

SISTER CATHLEEN

I know but it's kind of a busy day, so... Maybe we can spend more time together next time...

Cathleen then begins to get up.

NORA

Wait! Wait! Cathleen, can you just, wait...

Cathleen pauses, just looking at her.

NORA (CONT'D)

Can I... Can I just touch your hand for a minute... Just for a minute, if that's okay...

Nora then moves her hand up along the grate, holding it out for Cathleen. Cathleen thinks about it a moment, just looks at her sadly.

SISTER CATHLEEN

I'm sorry mom, but we're really not supposed to touch like that... I'm sorry. I really have to go now though.

NORA

Okay, but, Cathleen... Listen I love you, okay?

Cathleen barely pauses before heading out the door.

SISTER CATHLEEN

It's good to see you. Thanks for coming.

She then walks straight out, leaving Nora completely crestfallen by the encounter.

EXT. CONVENT GRAVEYARD - AFTERNOON

Far off along the convent grounds, Sisters Sissy and Candace race around through a CEMETERY, laughing and chasing each other like overactive schoolgirls.

MOMENTS LATER they wander together, Sissy pausing to read some of the grave stones.

SISTER SISSY

Can't believe all the sisters that died here. You think we're going to die here too?

SISTER CANDACE

That's the point, isn't it. I want to die here. I want to die here, cause I know it's the closest place on earth to get to Heaven.

Beat.

SISTER SISSY

I guess I just didn't realize it was really going to be like this.

SISTER CANDACE

Like what?

SISTER SISSY

That we'd really be spending our whole entire lives here, never ever going home again. We won't even be able to go to our parents' funerals.

SISTER CANDACE

Who cares, they'll be dead already, so it's not like they'll notice... Don't you think just knowing he knows we're here for him, knowing we're so much more special to him, than anybody else- Don't you think that makes it worth it?

SISTER SISSY

(unsure)

I guess.

SISTER CANDACE

Well, why'd you want to come here then?

Sissy suddenly looks a bit embarrassed.

SISTER SISSY

Audrey Hepburn.

SISTER CANDACE

Huh? What are you talking about?

SISTER SISSY

Audrey Hepburn. I wanted to be a nun because of Sister Gabrielle, in The Nun's Story... She was just so perfect and holy and beautiful and everything... I just wanted to be like her.

INT. CHAPEL - EVENING

All alone in the back of the darkened chapel, we find Sister Mary Grace lost in thought. Looking more closely she seems a bit stressed, if not silently stricken by something. She tries to pray, but for some reason just can't. Tries to pray again, but still can't. Finally she just stares off into space, searching for the answer to something.

INT. POSTULANT HALLWAY - EVENING

Along the floor of the Postulant hallway, Cathleen and Sister Sissy now sit together whispering.

SISTER SISSY

I guess i'm just not sure if I really feel it, you know?

SISTER CATHLEEN

Feel what?

SISTER SISSY

My relationship with him, whatever we're supposed to feel? Like I can't tell if he's really there and I'm really communicating with him, or if it's all just all in my head....

Cathleen stares into Sissy's eyes so compassionately.

SISTER SISSY (CONT'D)

You feel him, right? What does he feel like to you?

SISTER CATHLEEN

I don't know? Just like a presence,  
that's all. Like a really warm and  
comforting presence. Like falling asleep  
in a parents' arms.

SISTER SISSY

RM says we can't fake our relationship  
with him, because even if no one else  
does, he'll still know and he'll shun us  
for it... But what if I'm faking and I  
don't even realize?

SISTER CATHLEEN

Don't worry, I don't think you are.

SISTER SISSY

How come?

SISTER CATHLEEN

Because if I can feel him here with me  
right now, that means he must be here  
with you too.

INT. CHAPEL - MORNING

The entire community of Roses is once again gathered for  
Mass. The priest beckons all the sisters to pray, as we  
watch a sea of black heads all bow at once.

INT. SISTER MARY GRACE'S CELL - NIGHT

Later in the evening, Mary Grace returns to her cell.

Carefully removing her veil, she shakes loose all her  
tangled hair, then plops down on a chair, staring  
vacantly into space.

She remains frozen for a long moment, before she then  
slowly reaches a hand down to pull up the bottom of her  
habit, moves her hand between her legs and begins to  
masturbate. She does it all very rapidly, mechanically,  
almost as if all she wants is to get it over with as soon  
as possible. As if the shame of the act is something she  
can actually out race by doing it fast enough.

Finally reaching a climax she drops her head down,  
breathing heavily. Her eyes drift off and stare at the  
floor and for a second, it almost looks like she might  
cry. This is a woman in a lot more secret pain and  
confusion than even she herself realizes.

INT. REVEREND MOTHER'S OFFICE - DAY

All alone in her office, Reverend Mother sits talking on the phone in what appears to be a very tense call.

REVEREND MOTHER  
 (into the phone)  
 Yes, thank you for calling.... Yes, I understand... Right, well.... It's not that I wasn't going to respond...

We then notice her eyes glance angrily across the desk toward that same stack of Vatican II documents. She shakes her head.

REVEREND MOTHER (CONT'D)  
 Of course, I understand the historic nature... Right.... Peace be with you.

Reverend Mother then slams down the phone, clearly not happy with the result of the conversation.

EXT. CONVENT WALKWAY - DAY

It is sometime early afternoon as we again hear the SOUND of a BELL, although now it seems to have taken a somewhat ominous slightly foreboding tone.

As Reverend Mother then walks alone through the courtyard, she passes by one of the Postulants, walking in the opposite direction, who softly whispers to her in passing.

SISTER SISSY  
 Morning Reverend Mother. Praise the Lord.

Reverend Mother just routinely replies as she continues on.

REVEREND MOTHER  
 Now and forever. God bless...

But then Reverend Mother suddenly stops. Just halts on a dime, turns right back around and looks at the girl dead on. Beat.

REVEREND MOTHER (CONT'D)  
 I'm sorry, did you just speak? Did I just hear you speak? What's your name?

As we now turn we see that the girl in question is in fact Sister Sissy, just looking up at Reverend Mother totally bewildered and shocked.

REVEREND MOTHER (CONT'D)  
 (in sign language)  
 What's your name?

Sissy is speechless.

REVEREND MOTHER (CONT'D)  
 What.... Is... Your name?

SISTER SISSY  
 I'm... I'm Sister Sissy.

REVEREND MOTHER  
 Sister Sissy?

SISTER SISSY  
 Right, Sissy.

REVEREND MOTHER  
 Well tell me something Sister Sissy,  
 you're a postulant correct? - What have  
 you been doing lately? Besides getting  
 fat, showing up late to Mass, and running  
 your mouth during Grand Silence?

SISTER SISSY  
 (terrified)  
 I... I didn't realize it was Grand  
 Silence... They told us to count all the  
 bells before noon. I counted 3 bells.

REVEREND MOTHER  
 Do you understand what silence means? Was  
 it not properly explained to you?... When  
 you hear the bell for Grand Silence, that  
 means silence. And silence means you-  
 Don't. Talk. It means you - Shut. Your.  
 Mouth.

SISTER SISSY  
 (utterly terrified)  
 But, Reverend Mother... You're  
 talking....?

Now suddenly Reverend Mother's anger level jumps two  
 fold.

REVEREND MOTHER  
 That's because I'm reprimanding you  
 Sissy! I am reprimanding you right now!

All while Sissy is now on the verge of tears.

REVEREND MOTHER (CONT'D)  
Listen to me Jenny...

SISTER SISSY  
It's Sissy...

REVEREND MOTHER  
What?

SISTER SISSY  
My name is Sissy, not Jenny.

REVEREND MOTHER  
(in rapid sign language)  
I don't care. I don't care what your name  
is....

(speaking out loud)  
It doesn't make the least bit of  
difference to me. Listen. I want you to  
get down on your hands and knees...  
(in sign language again)  
Start crawling from here all the way to  
the end of this corridor. Say as many  
Hail Mary's as you can 'til you reach the  
end...

SISTER SISSY  
Huh?...I...

REVEREND MOTHER  
(in sign language)  
Now! Right now!  
(out loud)  
Get on your hands and knees Sister!

Sissy then gets down on her hands and knees, starts to  
crawl along the floor while reciting softly.

SISTER SISSY  
Hail Mary full of... Hail Mary of...

REVEREND MOTHER  
Wait a minute are you talking? Why are  
you still talking! Why are you still  
talking!!

Sissy looks up terrified as Reverend Mother bends down,  
starts signing like crazy right in front of her face!

REVEREND MOTHER (CONT'D)  
(in sign language)  
Why are you still talking!

Sissy just looks at her.

REVEREND MOTHER (CONT'D)  
 (in sign language)  
 Then say the prayer in silence! Say the  
 prayer in silence!! In...  
 (speaking out loud)  
 SILENCE!! SILENCE! SILENCE!!

We watch Sissy continue to crawl across the ground,  
 saying the prayer in silence, tears streaming down her  
 face.

INT. CHAPEL - EVENING

It is early evening as we again find Mary Grace alone in  
 the chapel again, not praying but just staring vacantly.

Suddenly the doors open, Cathleen enters as Mary Grace  
 immediately turns, somewhat startled.

SISTER CATHLEEN  
 Oh sorry Sister, I didn't realize you  
 were in here...

SISTER MARY GRACE  
 That's okay. How are you Sister Cathleen?  
 You can come sit down if you like?

Hesitant at first, Cathleen then goes and sits in the pew  
 behind Mary Grace. Mary Grace turns and smiles at her.

SISTER MARY GRACE (CONT'D)  
 How's everything been going for you  
 sister?

SISTER CATHLEEN  
 Good thank you Sister.

SISTER MARY GRACE  
 And what about the others? Are the others  
 still upset about Sister Sissy being sent  
 home?

SISTER CATHLEEN  
 I think they mostly understand. Even  
 though everybody misses her. I really  
 miss her.

Mary Grace just nods empathetically.

SISTER MARY GRACE  
 Do you often come to the chapel to pray  
 by yourself?

SISTER CATHLEEN

Sometimes. I guess now that first vows are coming up, I wanted just to spend more time communicating with him, making sure he's okay with me being a Novice.

Sister Mary Grace laughs sweetly.

SISTER MARY GRACE

I'm pretty sure he's okay with it.

SISTER CATHLEEN

You really think so?

SISTER MARY GRACE

I have a feeling he really wants you here Cathleen. His light shines all around you. I think you'll make a great nun.

Cathleen smiles so brightly at this, nearly blushing.

SISTER CATHLEEN

Thank you Sister. That means so much.

Mary Grace tries to accept the compliment, but looks a bit guilt ridden. There's a subtle pause as she then gets up from the pew, looks down at Cathleen so tenderly.

SISTER MARY GRACE

Do me a favor though, just make sure it's what *you* want too. Because *your* wants matter too. Do you know what I mean by that?

Cathleen just looks at her and nods, even though it's clear she has no idea what it means. Mary Grace then walks out, leaving Cathleen so helplessly confused.

INT. SISTER EMILY'S ROOM - DAY

All alone in her cell, Sister Emily is knelt on the floor praying.

SISTER EMILY

Lord please forgive for all the mistakes I've made so far as a postulant. I didn't focus enough on my prayers this morning and I rushed straight to Mass.... Because I just wanted to be with my friends. And I'm sorry sometimes if it seems like I pay more attention to my friends, than I do you. I'm hoping to change that....

INT. CHAPEL - AFTERNOON

It is Choir practice as Sister Mary Grace sits in the pews, watching all the postulants go through their chanting of the DIVINE OFFICE.

POSTULANTS IN UNISON

You shall speak to him and put the words  
in his mouth, and I will be with your  
mouth and with his mouth and will teach  
you both what to do.

Before suddenly Sister's Anne, Kate and Genevieve come bursting into the chapel, everybody immediately stopping and turning. They then each go and whisper into the ears of two of the Postulants, Marianna and Theresa. Both girls seem so frightened, so confused, before they quietly and obediently follow Anne, Kate and Genevieve out.

All the while Mary Grace just watches the whole thing confused, trying to figure out what the hell is going on. She finally gets up and walks out of the chapel herself.

INT. MOTHERHOUSE. HALLWAY - AFTERNOON

Outside the door to Reverend Mother's office, Mary Grace waits and paces unsure if she should enter.

The door to the office then opens, with the same two girls, Theresa and Marianna both racing out, both hysterically crying.

Mary Grace moves to comfort them, but then thinks the better of it as Reverend Mother also emerges. The girls disappear down the hall, leaving the two older nuns alone.

SISTER MARY GRACE

What was that all about? What just happened?

REVEREND MOTHER

Nothing. I'm sending those girls home.

SISTER MARY GRACE

Who? Theresa and Marianna? But why?

REVEREND MOTHER

Is that their names? Frankly I was told their relationship was veering toward something inappropriate.

(MORE)

\*

REVEREND MOTHER (CONT'D)

That they were starting to become a bit too intimate with each other?

SISTER MARY GRACE

"Too intimate"? By who?

Reverend Mother just stares at Mary Grace, not exactly pleased with the sudden line of questioning.

REVEREND MOTHER

It doesn't matter who. The point is they clearly don't belong here, and they needed to be sent home.

Beat. We see Mary Grace, slowly become more defiant.

SISTER MARY GRACE

But they're just young girls, away from home for the first time. They're probably just friends, seeking comfort in each other...

REVEREND MOTHER

Seeking comfort in each other, is that what we all do around here now?... By the way, are you questioning me again?

SISTER MARY GRACE

Questioning you?.... No, I...

REVEREND MOTHER

Are you questioning my judgement?

SISTER MARY GRACE

No, Mother... I'm just...

REVEREND MOTHER

So why don't you tell me Mary Grace- How exactly are those girls supposed to make it their whole lives, deprived of any form of physical affection - When they can't even make it 6 months?

Mary Grace just stares at her, wondering how defiant she can really be.

SISTER MARY GRACE

(under her breath)

Honestly, I don't know. Because I don't know how anybody does that...

Now Reverend Mother suddenly looks shocked, and PISSED.

REVEREND MOTHER

Excuse me?

SISTER MARY GRACE

What I mean is it's only natural to want to... Because you can't just cut it off. You can't pretend it's not there...

REVEREND MOTHER

Cut what off? Pretend what's not there?

SISTER MARY GRACE

Forget it.

Reverend Mother is silent for a long moment, weighing her words carefully. She then moves closer to Mary Grace.

REVEREND MOTHER

You know, there have been moments recently, here and there, when I've started to get the feeling you just don't want to be here anymore. As if everything we do requires some sort of interrogation from you.

Mary Grace just stares at the floor, shaking her head.

SISTER MARY GRACE

Maybe. I don't know? Maybe that's true?

Before suddenly Reverend Mother's anger level jumps big.

REVEREND MOTHER

Seriously! What is your problem exactly!

SISTER MARY GRACE

I don't know! I don't know what my problem is! Maybe a part of my problem is you!

REVEREND MOTHER

Me!

SISTER MARY GRACE

Because I just don't understand what you're doing anymore- I don't understand your motivations!

REVEREND MOTHER

Don't you!? God is my motivation! God is my reason and motivation for everything I do! I do everything for him! Everything!!

SISTER MARY GRACE

But that doesn't necessarily mean you're really doing what he wants! Honestly, do you really think any of us know for sure what he wants from us...

REVEREND MOTHER

Oh, I believe I do!

SISTER MARY GRACE

Well I think it's wrong for you to keep us in the dark about Vatican II! Whatever changes are happening, whatever's in all those documents you keep hiding! If it's really going to effect us, then we *all* deserve to know!

REVEREND MOTHER

No you don't! And it's not going to effect us! Nothing is going to effect us!

SISTER MARY GRACE

Then why can't you just tell us what's really going on!

REVEREND MOTHER

Because I don't WANT to! And I don't have to! I don't have to and I don't want to!

SISTER MARY GRACE

Oh you know what, okay, FINE!... FINE! FINE! FINE MOTHER!

REVEREND MOTHER

THAT'S RIGHT!! FINE IS RIGHT!! FINE IS ABSOLUTELY RIGHT MARY GRACE!! FINE!!

Now suddenly they're both silent. Both so shocked by what has just occurred.

Beat.

REVEREND MOTHER (CONT'D)

(in sign language)

I think I'm going to go pray now. I'm going to go to the chapel and pray.

Mary Grace looks at her one more time, then just turns and walks away.

INT. SISTER MARY GRACE'S CELL - DAY

Later in the night Mary Grace is curled up on the floor of her cell, crying hysterically. It's such a deep and guttural weeping that goes on and on, painful to listen to. Beat.

SISTER MARY GRACE (O.S.)

I know this isn't our normal hour together, but I just wanted to call you all in here, to let you know something...

INT. POSTULANT CLASSROOM - DAY

All the Postulants are now gathered in the study room staring up at Mary Grace, who stands at the head of the room looking back at them all so sadly and tenderly.

SISTER MARY GRACE

I wanted to let you all know that I've decided I'm going to be leaving the convent... I'm so sorry I won't be here to see you all take your first vows.

The room falls silent. All the girls look so shocked.

SISTER EMILY

What? But what do you mean? Where are you going?

SISTER CHARLOTTE

It's because of Reverend Mother isn't it. She wants to take you away from us.

Mary Grace just looks at them, overwhelmed by their devotion.

SISTER MARY GRACE

No, it's not because of her. It's not because of anything... I'm just not sure this life is for me anymore? I've been a Rose since I was 16 years old, I'll always love this place. The place where I grew up ... But I'm not meant to be here anymore.

They all look so sad, a few begin to cry.

SISTER MARY GRACE (CONT'D)

As for Reverend Mother, I know it's hard to understand... But I promise, all she really wants is for you to be the best nuns possible.

(MORE)

SISTER MARY GRACE (CONT'D)

To serve God in the best way possible,  
with the most dignity... I know it may  
not seem like it, but she does care.

SISTER EVELYN

Are you still going to be a member of the  
church? After you leave I mean?

Mary Grace pauses for a long beat, unsure how to answer.

SISTER MARY GRACE

Yes. I'll always be a member of the  
church, the church is my family. And you,  
all my sisters, that I've lived here with  
day in and day out- You're my family  
too...

She now looks at them so tenderly.

SISTER MARY GRACE (CONT'D)

I want each and every one of you to know,  
that I love you with everything in my  
heart.

We hold for a beat on Mary Grace's face, then slowly....

FADE OUT.

FADE UP:

INT. REFECTORY - AFTERNOON

As another reading is taking place, we go to a CLOSE UP  
on Reverend Mother, staring off into space, seeming more  
consumed and distracted than ever in her own thoughts.

SISTER GENEVIEVE

(at the pulpit)

We become what we love and who we love  
shapes what we become. Imitation is not a  
literal mimicking of Christ, rather it  
means becoming an image of the beloved.  
An image disclosed through  
transformation.

MOMENTS LATER the room has fallen silent, with everybody  
sitting down to eat, including Reverend Mother.

Before suddenly, there is the sound of a loud and strange  
sort of COMMOTION.

VOICE (O.S.)

Clear the way, please! Please clear the way... Clear the way...

At first not quite sure what's going on, suddenly everyone in the room turns to look at once- Just as a much OLDER NUN, roughly 70, charges into the dining hall completely NAKED and seeming like she's on some sort of mission. She is also wildly waving her hands in the air, ranting and raving and trying to get everyone's attention.

NAKED NUN

There's a new era coming sisters. Oh yes, a new era and a new wind is about to start blowing in here.... You hear me!

Moving to the postulants table, ALL the girls try and hold it in, before they instantly break out in laughter. While all the older nuns just stare in shock, crossing themselves and shaking their heads.

All the while Reverend Mother just watches the whole thing with an oddly restrained, quietly infuriated expression.

NAKED NUN (CONT'D)

Listen to me!... Because there will come a time very soon... VERY SOON SISTERS... When all your cathedrals will suddenly come crumbling to the ground.... And these trappings and clothing, too, will go falling away to the ground... And it'll be just us sisters. Just us and Him. All of us, once again, naked before God...

As the old naked nun then finally finishes her rant, starting to head back out, as Genevieve and Kate immediately bolt after her, trying to cover her.

Turning back to the postulants, still all so amused- We hold on Cathleen, just watching and half smiling. Before gradually her smile begins to shift into something else. Far more perplexed, pensive, disturbed.

Beat. At the same time as music begins to fill in...

EXT. CHAPEL ENTRANCE - AFTERNOON

Along a separate entrance to the chapel, a large CROWD of about 40 PEOPLE stand waiting to go inside.

These are all the PARENTS of the various postulants as well as various seculars and locals, come to witness the postulants very first CLOTHING CEREMONY.

INT. CHAPEL - SAME TIME

An even larger crowd starts to overflow into the chapel, before sooner or later we see Nora there too. She is all dressed up, though perhaps a tad inappropriately, not too mention wearing a bit too much make up.

As Nora then wanders to find a seat, moving in and out of more people- She accidentally bumps into none other than Reverend Mother.

NORA  
Excuse me, sorry...

\*  
\*

The two woman exchange a quick glance, Reverend Mother looking Nora up and down. Nora continues on.

INT. CHAPEL CHANGING ROOM - AFTERNOON

\*

Inside a hidden atrium to the Chapel, is a scene of utter PANDEMONIUM and CHAOS. The entire group of our now some 17 postulants, hurry to change into their official and formal WHITE WEDDING DRESSES, assisted by a small trio of OLDER NUNS. And these girls couldn't be more excited!

INT. CHAPEL. ANTE ROOM - LATER

Again in the Chapel Ante Room, we see all the girls clothed in their WEDDING DRESSES, scurrying to quickly get into line.

INT. CHAPEL - MOMENTS LATER

The music then begins to grow louder, harkening the feeling of something so divine and exalted.

Somewhere amidst the pews, Nora pushes up on her toes, leaning her head over shoulders, then turns her head to see....

The entire immaculate procession of new brides, Cathleen and her fellow postulants, all dressed in gowns and veils, so slowly and deliberately to make their way down the aisle. Such a stunning and beautiful procession.

We also hold on the face of each girl as they pass, peering into each of their eyes through the veil, as they all maintain their Custody so regally and exquisitely.

MOMENTS LATER all these budding brides are finally knelt together in a line at the altar. A celestial light outlining and silhouetting them, bathing them almost.

The back turned Priest then recites;

PRIEST

Virginum custos et pater, sancte Ioseph,  
cuius fideli custodiae ipsa Innocentia  
Christus Iesus et Virgo virginum Maria  
commisa fuit; te per hoc utrumque  
carissimum pignus Iesum et Mariam obsecro  
et obtestor, ut me, ab omni immunditia  
praeservatum, mente incontaminata, puro  
corde et casto corpore Iesu et Mariae  
semper facias castissime famulari. Amen.

Somewhere in the Nuns' pews, Reverend Mother lowers her head to pray as does everybody else. Nora doesn't realize what's going on at first, but then sees everyone praying and finally does the same.

Cathleen, kneeling in the line beside the others, makes the sign of the cross along her chest.

Before the entire congregation is suddenly hushed, as Sister Emily stands alone with the Priest upon the altar. Emily gently genuflects down to kneel before him, gracefully bowing her head as he lifts her veil. Emily and the Priest then look straight into each others eyes.

PRIEST (CONT'D)

Sister Emily, what is it you desire?

SISTER EMILY

With the help of God, I have come to know  
in this community....

CUT TO:

Sister Charlotte now knelt before the Priest.

SISTER CHARLOTTE

Both the difficulty and the joy of a life  
completely devoted to him...

CUT TO:

Sister Candace knelt before the Priest.

SISTER CANDACE,  
My desire is to be allowed to make  
perpetual profession within this  
community....

CUT TO:

And finally, Sister Cathleen.

SISTER CATHLEEN  
I seek to become a temporary Bride of  
Christ for a year and a half, and to  
persevere in all my undying love...

The traditional WHITE VEIL NOVICE HABIT, so precisely  
folded in a large cloth square, is then handed by young  
ALTAR BOYS into each girl's arms. *(The final symbol of  
their transference from Postulant to Novice.)*

Moments later, all the brides lay on the floor in a row  
together, as a large BLACK CLOTH, baring a single GOLD  
CROSS in its center, is rolled over them and all their  
bodies. *(Symbolizing their now death to the outside  
world)*

INT. CHAPEL CHANGING ROOM - AFTERNOON

Back in the atrium, the group of new Novices still in  
wedding dresses are now all lined up, anxiously awaiting  
something.

As we move slowly down the line, from one girl to the  
next, we then discover that what they're all waiting for  
is to have all their hair shorn off by an older, SCISSOR-  
WIELDING NUN.

Many girls also can't help but tremble and shake, as they  
lower their heads to be met by the blunt scissor.

Finally Cathleen comes to the front on the line, bends  
down before the scissors.

HAIR CUTTING NUN  
Ready...

SISTER CATHLEEN  
Yes, thank you Sister...

Just as CHUNKS AND CHUNKS of Cathleen's own HAIR fall in  
SLOW MOTION to the floor.

INT. CHAPEL - AFTERNOON

A sudden shift in music, as the entire crowd in the chapel rise again and look toward the aisle, to see..

The new group of Novices changed out of their wedding dresses and re-clothed in their NEW NOVICE HABITS. Coming down the center aisle in procession again.

As we look into Nora's eyes we also see a tinge of deep sadness, realizing her daughter has now turned a corner she may never turn back from.

MOMENTS LATER the Novices all kneel again before the altar.

PRIEST

Ora pro nobis, Sancta Dei Genetrix....

NOVICES IN UNISON

May we be worthy of Christ's love.

Finally, they begin to make their procession back out. We hold on Cathleen as she momentarily breaks custody of the eyes, looking everywhere in the crowd for Nora.

Once she finally finds her, Cathleen and Nora then sweetly lock eyes. Cathleen shyly smiles at her mom, who immediately smiles back. Nora doing her very best to make her daughter believe she's happy for her.

EXT. RURAL CONVENT GROUNDS - DUSK

We hear a shrill sound of LAUGHING, before looking over a field to see the entire group of new Novices dancing around a BONFIRE. They are redressed back into their WEDDING GOWNS, euphoric with laughter, dancing and singing, having the time of their life.

SISTER EVELYN

I LOVE YOU SO MUCH RIGHT NOW GOD!!

SISTER EMILY

I'M MARRIED TO JESUS CHRIST!!

They all continue to laugh and twirl around the fire like little girls, reminding us again how ridiculously young they still are.

INT. NOVITIATE DORMITORY. HALLWAY - AFTERNOON

Looking down the long hall in the Novitiate dorm, we see all of the Novices just standing outside their rooms and watching in total shock. At the same time as Sisters Anne and Kate go in and out of each room, so violently removing and then SMASHING all the girls' MIRRORS.

We see all these pieces of broken mirrors thrown down into PILE ON THE FLOOR.

SISTER CANDACE

Why are they taking our mirrors away?

The others just keep watching and shrug. Beat.

REVEREND MOTHER (O.S.)

The Novitiate, as I am sure you've all heard many times....

EXT. COURTYARD - DAY

In the courtyard, the new Novices walk toward the chapel in perfect unison, moving as one like some elite and highly trained unit of an army.

REVEREND MOTHER (O.S.)

Is commonly understood to be the most grueling and demanding period in any nun's life... And let me assure you, you're experience won't be any different.

At the same time as a couple of 'new' Postulants who happen to be walking in the Novices path, jump to move out of the way.

INT. NOVICE ASSEMBLY ROOM - EVENING

Inside a dimly lit and chillingly silent room, all the novices are now all crouched on their knees, facing each other in one large circle.

Reverend Mother is also there walking through and amongst all the girls, looking down at them so intimidatingly.

REVEREND MOTHER

It is now when all your so called vocations, will be tested to their limits... It is also about learning to be perfect.

(MORE)

REVEREND MOTHER (CONT'D)

Because, and I hope you'd all agree, our Savior deserves no less from each of you - Than the gift of a perfect wife.

Reverend Mother finally moves to a chair at the head of the room, sits down and stares at them all.

REVEREND MOTHER (CONT'D)

So each week we'll be meeting in this room for an exercise called, '*Chapter of Faults*'. I myself will also always be here with you during every '*Chapter*'... And one thing I can assure you, we don't ever leave this room until the Chapter is finished.

Peering around at all the girls, we see how completely terrified they all already are.

REVEREND MOTHER (CONT'D)

Let's get started...

Reverend Mother then looks around for a moment, before she finally turns and looks directly at Sister Evelyn.

REVEREND MOTHER (CONT'D)

You. Sister.....?

SISTER EVELYN

Me? Evelyn, I'm Sister Evelyn....

REVEREND MOTHER

Evelyn, can you come here to the center of the room here please.

Without raising her eyes, Evelyn shuffles across the floor on her knees, stops dead center in the middle of the circle.

REVEREND MOTHER (CONT'D)

Now if you wouldn't mind Sister- I want you to think about it for a moment, and then I want you to carefully list out every single fault you're aware in yourself, in front of all your sisters.

Evelyn is clearly completely baffled and confused by these instructions.

SISTER EVELYN

I'm sorry, what...? I don't understand?

REVEREND MOTHER

You don't understand? What don't you understand? Are you perfect?

SISTER EVELYN

No. I don't know?... What do you mean?

REVEREND MOTHER

I mean are you a perfect person? A perfect human being? A perfect nun?

SISTER EVELYN

No, I'm not perfect.

REVEREND MOTHER

Well wouldn't you like to be perfect? Don't you think it's important to always at least try to be perfect?

SISTER EVELYN

Yes... I mean yes, if I could...

REVEREND MOTHER

Okay so what do you think it is Sister Evelyn, that most stands in the way between you and perfection?

SISTER EVELYN

My... My... My faults, I guess?

REVEREND MOTHER

Correct. Because there's really no way for any of us to achieve perfection in ourselves, is there? Without getting rid of all our faults first?

SISTER EVELYN

I guess so?

REVEREND MOTHER

You guess what, sister?

SISTER EVELYN

Yes. I mean yes Mother, I agree.

REVEREND MOTHER

So let's hear it. Tell us your faults.

More closely on Evelyn, her body begins to tremble a bit.

SISTER EVELYN

I'm untidy. What I mean is, I'm messy. Like sometimes when I look around my cell, with all my clothes all over the floor, I feel like I'm such a slob, and I need to do better... I space out a lot too, they used to call me 'space cadet' in school because I spaced out so much...

REVEREND MOTHER

Woah, woah, woah! Hold up, hold up...

Evelyn pauses, just halts mid sentence.

REVEREND MOTHER (CONT'D)

Leaving clothes on the floor. Lack of concentration, or 'spacing out' as you call it- While I agree these are all points of weakness in you- As far as faults go, they're also quite superficial, and not going to get us very far in this process.... Let's start again and this time I want you to fully examine your conscience, tell us everything you do on a daily basis to fail our Lord Christ.

We peer again at all the others, from one face to the next, as all of them grow more frightened and disturbed.

Beat.

SISTER EVELYN

The ways I fail.. I fail Christ....

A long, silent pause as Evelyn slowly begins to cry.

SISTER EVELYN (CONT'D)

There's part of me that wonders if I'm good enough to be here? If I deserve to be here or deserve anything good that happens to me... I want to be good, to be pure, and good. But I don't know if that's who I really am on the inside. And sometimes my thoughts inside don't always match how I act on the outside. And sometimes I feel like I'm ugly and bad inside.... And I know I've let people down before too. I've let my parents down before, my ma and my dad... But I don't want to let *him* down Mother, I don't want to let Jesus down. I don't want to fail him, ever... And I just hope he knows that I can do better, if he lets me...

Evelyn then stops, shaking uncontrollably and crying.

REVEREND MOTHER

(more softly)

Okay, okay,... Thank you Evelyn. That was very brave of you, thank you.

SISTER EVELYN

(almost inaudible)

Thank you Mother.

As Evelyn's body finally relaxes, we see the tiniest hint of a smile on her face, more relief than anything else.

REVEREND MOTHER

Now for your penance I'm going to assign you 10 Hail Mary's this week. And I'd like you to fast all day Friday.

SISTER EVELYN

Yes Mother, thank you Mother...

Evelyn then starts to shuffle back to her place in line.

REVEREND MOTHER

Wait a minute, where are you going?

Evelyn stops, freezes, completely confused.

SISTER EVELYN

I'm sorry... I thought I was done?

REVEREND MOTHER

Done? No, you're not done. Did you hear me say you were done? Come back here.

Still halted, Evelyn finally shuffles back to the center, just Reverend Mother turns to the group at large.

REVEREND MOTHER (CONT'D)

Now that Evelyn's been brave enough to share some these faults in herself with all of us- I'd like to open it up to the rest of you. Can I have a volunteer please, to help point out any additional flaws they too have observed in Evelyn?

Longer Beat. Everybody is dead silent, completely caught off guard, unsure what to do.

REVEREND MOTHER (CONT'D)

Someone please speak, we've already established she's not perfect.

Continued silence, no one wants to talk.

Beat.

SISTER CANDACE  
I saw her smile.

REVEREND MOTHER  
(turning to Candace)  
What?

SISTER CANDACE  
Just now, when you said she did a good job... I saw her smile... Like she was pleased with herself, like it was all a joke to her.

Reverend Mother turns again to Evelyn,

REVEREND MOTHER  
Evelyn, is that true?

Evelyn just continues to stare at the floor trembling.

SISTER EVELYN  
No... I mean how would she even know what I did, if she hadn't broken Custody of the Eyes to look at me?

Before suddenly Candace yells at her!

SISTER CANDACE  
I didn't!! You're vain!!

With Evelyn yelling back!

SISTER EVELYN  
You did! You're a liar! That's a fault too!

REVEREND MOTHER  
Quiet! Evelyn your turn is over, you don't speak anymore.... More importantly, if you really had the nerve to mock this process- That's pathetic. What kind of nun do you plan on being, if you can't even get through a moment of self-examination without gloating... This is called the sin of pride, and I'm going to correct it in each of you, starting with you Sister Evelyn... In addition to your other penance, I want you to use the Discipline on yourself.

There's a long, silent, overwhelmingly tense pause. Moving from face to face, we see how traumatized the girls are. Terrified to speak again, Evelyn then finally asks...

SISTER EVELYN

The what?

INT. NOVITIATE DORMITORY. STAIRCASE - DAY

A quiet empty stairwell, as Evelyn, Charlotte and Candace all sit together on the stairs. Evelyn is also hysterically crying, both girls just looking at her.

SISTER CHARLOTTE

Was it really that bad?

Evelyn just shakes her head.

SISTER EVELYN

What do you think?

SISTER CHARLOTTE

You don't have to stay here you know, none of us do, you could leave anytime you wanted...

SISTER EVELYN

And do what? Tell my parents and everyone back home that I failed at being a nun.

Clearly guilt ridden by her prior accusations, Candace then turns to Evelyn so empathetically.

SISTER CANDACE

Sister, I'm so sorry... I'm so sorry for the things I said... I don't think you're vain at all.

Evelyn herself turns to Candace sweetly.

SISTER EVELYN

It's okay Sister, I know... I don't think you're a liar. I'm sorry too.

INT. REFECTORY - DAY

With the entire community once again gathered for the afternoon meal, suddenly Sister Genevieve stands and begins clinking her fork on a glass, addressing the room.

## REVEREND MOTHER

Sisters, may I have your attention please. As of today we have a new member, Sister Emanuel, joining our community. Sister Emanuel was previously a member of the Sisters of Christ in New Hampshire. But as she felt the culture of the Roses was more suited to her religious needs, she's decided to transfer here. She'll be joining as a second year Novice.

At the Novice table, all the girls immediately turn and look towards the podium, a mutual air of shock.

Following their gaze, we then see a very beautiful, devout looking young woman of 24, standing beside Sister Genevieve - SISTER EMANUEL. \*

Cathleen too then casually steals a glance at the new sister, although doesn't seem to show much interest. \*

## INT. CHAPEL - AFTERNOON

Inside the dead silence of the Chapel, all the new novices are lined up at the foot of the Altar, given a special communion by Father Luca. And as we slowly PAN across, moving from one girl to the next, one open mouth to the next- a strange sort of tension begins to build.

## EXT. RURAL CONVENT GROUNDS - AFTERNOON

On a sunny afternoon, Sister Cathleen and Sister Emily sit alone together, in a tall field of swaying grass.

## SISTER EMILY

It just gets to me you know. Like I just think of how young we still are. All the things we could be doing, if we weren't stuck in here, in the Novitiate. All my friends back home, they're all just doing normal teenage stuff- Going to drive-in movies, going roller skating, watching the fireworks on the 4th of July, going on dates with boys. Even.... \*

## SISTER CATHLEEN

Even what?

Emily pauses for a moment, afraid to even say the word.

SISTER EMILY  
(she whispers it)  
You know... Sex.

Cathleen just looks at her, shocked then immediately starts blushing.

SISTER EMILY (CONT'D)  
You can't tell me you've never thought about it. Everybody does, even nuns, they just never talk about it.

SISTER CATHLEEN  
But how do you know that? How do you know nuns think about it?

SISTER EMILY  
Because everybody does. It's normal. More normal than you think.

SISTER CATHLEEN  
But, I don't think about it.

Emily just looks at her.

SISTER EMILY  
You never kissed a boy before you came here, nothing like that...

Cathleen shakes her head.

SISTER CATHLEEN  
Did you?

SISTER EMILY  
Once. It was nice actually. I bet you'd like it too.

\*

Cathleen suddenly blushes even harder.

SISTER CATHLEEN  
I don't know? It's like Reverend Mother says, our bodies are just a distraction.

They're both silent again. Emily stares off, seeming suddenly ashamed.

INT. REFECTORY - DAY

Music begins to drift in, as held alone in a single frame, Sister Candace gives a reading before the meal.

SISTER CANDACE

Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth. For your love is better than wine; your anointing oils are fragrant; your name is oil poured out on me; therefore virgins love you. Draw me after you; let us run...

INT. NOVICE ASSEMBLY ROOM - EVENING

Returning to another Chapter of Faults, the room is dead silent as Reverend Mother just looks around at all the girls, her eyes moving from girl to girl. Her eyes then finally land on Cathleen.

REVEREND MOTHER

Sister Cathleen...

Stunned, Cathleen is momentarily frozen. Before she finally shuffles across the floor to the center of the room.

REVEREND MOTHER (CONT'D)

What faults would you like to share with us this evening Cathleen?

Cathleen pauses. It takes her a long time.

SISTER CATHLEEN

Sometimes... Sometimes wish that I could be more loved back... What I mean is, I wish I knew for sure, that we all knew for sure, that he really loves us back as much as we love him... I wish I could feel it more.

There's a long pause, everyone waiting on Reverend Mother's reaction to this. But this time Reverend Mother seems softer, more tolerant.

REVEREND MOTHER

(consolingly)

Don't wish for things you shouldn't sister. Because that means you're questioning God's will.

INT. SISTER CATHLEEN'S NOVICE CELL - NIGHT

Alone and in her cell at night, Cathleen is now knelt on the floor in her nightgown and praying.

\*

SISTER CATHLEEN

Thank you so much for everything today  
Lord, for showing me how to be a better  
Novice. I'm so sorry for ever questioning  
or doubting you.

MOMENTS LATER Cathleen undresses out of her habit and  
into her nightgown. And again for the brief moment that  
she finds herself nude, she struggles to hide her own  
body from herself. \*

INT. SISTER CATHLEEN'S NOVICE CELL - NIGHT \*

MUCH LATER, the room is now shrouded in darkness.

As Cathleen is also deep asleep, she gradually begins to  
toss and turn in bed, somewhat restless, until it  
gradually mutates into something else entirely. \*

Still deep in sleep, Cathleen unconsciously begins to  
breathe somewhat heavily, then slowly moves her hand  
between legs beneath the blanket, clearly aroused,  
masturbating without knowing. It goes on for a minute or  
two as she remains asleep the whole time.

Before Cathleen then suddenly jolts up and awake,  
completely startled! Breathing so heavily and desperately  
she just looks down at her hands. We then move in on her  
face and eyes, her terrified expression. It's literally  
as if she has no idea what just happened, but only knows  
it's bad.

EXT. CONVENT GROUNDS - MORNING

Gazing at the cloister from a distance, the first MORNING  
BELL begins to chime.

INT. SISTER CATHLEEN'S NOVICE CELL - MORNING

Seeming as if she has been up all night, and so wracked  
with guilt and worry- Cathleen is knelt beside her bed,  
struggling to pray.

SISTER CATHLEEN

(whispering)

I'm so sorry Lord. I'm so sorry, I'm so  
sorry, I'm so sorry.....

## INT. CHAPEL - MORNING

In the midst of morning Mass, the novices are all seated together in their pews. As the Priest then beckons the entire congregation to pray, we focus on Cathleen who's still so distracted she forgets to lower her head. Seated beside her, Sister Charlotte notices and gently nudges her. Cathleen looks up confused. Charlotte then shoots her a look like, "Everyone's praying."

\*  
\*

## INT. REFECTORY - DAY

Inside the refectory, the entire community all eat in silence. Except for Cathleen, who simply stares down at her plate of food as if it disgusts her. As if not eating might somehow absolve her secret, crippling guilt.

Across the table, Sister Emanuel happens to glance at Cathleen and then down at her plate. She seems to be the only one who notices.

As a Postulant then finally comes around to collect everyone's plate, Cathleen hands hers over, full and untouched.

## INT. REVEREND MOTHER'S PRIVATE CHAPEL - AFTERNOON

Inside Reverend Mother's small private chapel, she kneels on the floor, deeply praying. There's then a KNOCK at the door, with Sister Genevieve peeking her head.

Reverend Mother turns, confused.

SISTER GENEVIEVE

Excuse me Mother, sorry to bother you...

REVEREND MOTHER

What is it?

SISTER GENEVIEVE

The Archbishop is here to see you.

Now Reverend Mother's face suddenly looks a bit panicked, she clearly wasn't expecting this.

REVEREND MOTHER

What? What do you mean, he's here? He's here now?

SISTER GENEVIEVE

Yes, I'm afraid so.

INT. MOTHERHOUSE. RECEPTION ROOM - AFTERNOON

A WIDE SHOT from across the enormous room, as we see the silhouette of a man waiting by himself. Reverend Mother then hurries into the room to greet him.

MOMENTS LATER they are seated across a small table from one and other, a tea set placed between them. ARCHBISHOP McCARTHY is also so exquisitely powerful and composed, while Reverend Mother actually seems a bit nervous and fidgety. \*

ARCHBISHOP

So how are you Marie? You well? You seem a bit on edge...

REVEREND MOTHER

Do I? Maybe it's just because I haven't been in the presence of a man in awhile. It's unusual for me.

The Archbishop laughs out loud at this. While Reverend Mother just looks confused, she doesn't know what's funny.

ARCHBISHOP

Do you know why I'm here?

REVEREND MOTHER

No, I do not.

ARCHBISHOP

You have no idea why I'm here?

REVEREND MOTHER

I don't, no.

ARCHBISHOP

Let's put it like this- I've been hearing a lot recently, about how this order in particular, is having difficulty embracing some of the changes put forth by the Second Vatican Council, Vatican II?... Now you tell me, is that accurate?

Suddenly Reverend Mother seems even more fidgety.

REVEREND MOTHER

Right, Vatican II. Accurate to a point. Some changes we've adopted. Others we haven't.

ARCHBISHOP

And would you care to elaborate on that?

REVEREND MOTHER

(growing defiant)

Not really. To be perfectly honest, most of the memos I've received from your office only used the word "suggestion". In regards to all these ridiculous reforms we're suddenly supposed to...

ARCHBISHOP

How amusing. I think you're the only one who missed the subtext there. For most of us, the word "suggestion" is understood as synonymous with "obligation".

\*

REVEREND MOTHER

Maybe I'm just not that attuned to subtext. My apologies. Are we done here?

Reverend Mother begins to get up, but he makes it clear she better sit back down.

ARCHBISHOP

No, we're not done.... What exactly are you having the most difficulty with? Why don't you lay it out for me.

REVEREND MOTHER

I have no *difficulty* with it. I just happen to disagree with it. All of it... Not to mention it's a bit of a slap in the face that the sisters weren't given any voice in the matter.

The Archbishop laughs again, and she again doesn't know what's so funny.

ARCHBISHOP

You really expected them to have a voice, the sisters?

REVEREND MOTHER

We're a part of this church too...

ARCHBISHOP

Marie, come on....

REVEREND MOTHER

With all due respect, I just don't think you really understand what this is going to do to us... Because it's going to *ruin* us.... If we were really to embrace all these changes- I guarantee you it'll destroy the very institution of Catholic nuns as we know it.

Beat. The Archbishop is still not moved.

ARCHBISHOP

Now are you still encouraging all your Postulants and Novices to perform extreme penances on themselves? All that old medieval stuff?.. Because that's gotta stop.

Reverend Mother just shakes her head.

REVEREND MOTHER

I never asked any of my girls to do anything for God, that I wouldn't do myself.

ARCHBISHOP

Like I said, it's gotta stop... And as for the rest of Rome's recommendations- I just hope you'll keep an open mind, try to see them all together as part of a larger theme. The theme is change, adaptation, spiritual evolution.... Do me a favor, just try and open your mind to this. Otherwise, I may "suggest" we find a replacement for you.

The Archbishop then slowly rises and starts to head for the door. But just as he reaches it, he turns back.

ARCHBISHOP (CONT'D)

You know you really should smile more...

REVEREND MOTHER

Excuse me?

ARCHBISHOP

You should smile more, women are so much prettier when they smile.

Reverend Mother just glares.

REVEREND MOTHER

I'm not a woman, I'm a nun.

ARCHBISHOP

Is there a difference?

And now she glares at him even harder.

REVEREND MOTHER

There used to be.

INT. NOVITIATE ASSEMBLY ROOM - NIGHT

Yet another "Chapter of Faults", as all the Novices kneel in silence, with Sister Emily in the center.

SISTER EMILY

I never thought I'd say this, but there are times when I question if God is real?... It's so horrible, I know. But what scares me to think is, what if he doesn't really exist?

Turning to Reverend Mother, we see how completely checked out she seems, as if her thoughts are literally miles away.

SISTER EMILY (CONT'D)

What if he's just something we all made up one day, then everybody started believing it... All the things we do for him, everything we all put ourselves through, how we push ourselves and push ourselves to live only in his image... If it ever turned out that God didn't really exist- Then who would we all be doing it for?

Turning back to Reverend Mother, it takes a moment for her to even realize Emily has finished. Everybody waiting on her word, she finally checks back into the present.

REVEREND MOTHER

Sister Emily, you seem to like to come in here week after week, making the same pathetic confessions of your wavering faith. Again and again and again... Frankly I think we've all grown tired of having to listen to this ongoing saga of your complete and utter spiritual wretchedness.... For your penance, I'm assigning you no penance at all. Why bother, it's a complete waste of my time.

At which point Reverend Mother just gets up and walks straight out of the room, leaving all the girls in shock.

Beat. Everybody just looks around.

EXT. CONVENT GROUNDS - AFTERNOON

A large clothes line is hung, with a small group of Novices busying themselves doing laundry.

Glancing across the courtyard, Sister Emily then happens to notice Sister Emanuel walking by herself, head down, minding her own business.

Emily shoots a look over to Sister Candace, as the girls start whispering.

SISTER EMILY

I just don't understand who she is or what she's even doing here?

SISTER CANDACE

Apparently the S.O.C's weren't strict enough for her. I guess she came here for all the extra self punishment.

SISTER EMILY

Are you serious? Does she really think she's that holy?

They both giggle out loud, then stop themselves.

INT. REFECTORY - AFTERNOON

Back in the dining hall and while everyone around her eats, Cathleen just stares down poking and picking at another PLATE OF FOOD. Emanuel again, seems to be the only one that notices.

Cathleen then happens to catch Emanuel looking at her, who quickly turns away. It's awkward.

INT. REV. MOTHER'S HALLWAY - AFTERNOON

Looking down the long hallway, Cathleen sits alone on the bench outside Reverend Mother's office, waiting.

We move in CLOSER on her clearly anxious expression.

Then to her HANDS, fussing and fidgeting in her lap.

Finally the door to Reverend Mother's office opens with Reverend Mother peeking out. She turns to Cathleen.

REVEREND MOTHER

You can come in.

INT. REVEREND MOTHER'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Cathleen and Reverend Mother now sit across the desk from each other. Reverend Mother stares at her curiously.

REVEREND MOTHER

What did you want to see me about,  
sister?

Cathleen can barely even get the words out,

SISTER CATHLEEN

I was just wondering if... If I could use  
the Discipline, just for the night?

Caught off guard, Reverend Mother then slowly looks up  
and much more directly at Cathleen.

REVEREND MOTHER

The Discipline? Why?

SISTER CATHLEEN

If it's okay with you, I'd rather not  
say.

REVEREND MOTHER

It's not okay. I can't just give it to  
you, without knowing what you want it for  
first.

A long pause, Cathleen struggles so hard to think of what  
to say.

CATHLEEN

No, I know... I broke Grande Silence  
twice this week.... I was also  
uncharitable to one of my sisters when I  
didn't mean to be.

Now Reverend Mother looks at Cathleen with more interest,  
as if actually noticing her for the very first time.

REVEREND MOTHER

*That's* what you want to punish yourself  
for?

Cathleen nods. Reverend Mother continues to look at her. \*

REVEREND MOTHER (CONT'D)

Honestly?

Cathleen nods again. Reverend Mother then opens a drawer  
removing the small knotted WHIP from her desk. She slides  
it across to Cathleen.

REVEREND MOTHER (CONT'D)

Be careful, it's not a toy.

Cathleen slowly takes it, begins to get up.

SISTER CATHLEEN

Thank you Mother.

Keeping her eyes on Cathleen, Reverend Mother watches her leave with intensified curiosity. \*

INT. SISTER CATHLEEN'S NOVICE CELL - NIGHT

Knelt by herself on the floor, Cathleen slowly and meticulously begins to pull her habit over her head. She stares at the floor for a long beat, clearly so utterly terrified about what she's about to do.

Finally she reaches down and grabs the Discipline off the floor, takes a deep breath and begins to whip herself.

She hits herself very, very hard. CRACK! CRACK! CRACK! And with each and every crack, we can hear her muffled yelps and moans of pain. And yet she keeps going, just gritting her teeth and trying to get through it.

Cathleen whips herself about 10 times, then finally stops.

HARD TO BLACK.

FADE UP:

EXT. CONVENT GARDEN - AFTERNOON

On a beautiful sunny afternoon, Cathleen sits on a bench by herself reading the Bible. Suddenly Sister Genevieve then walks across the courtyard to her.

SISTER GENEVIEVE

Excuse me Sister, but your Mother's here to see you.

Cathleen then looks up, staring at Genevieve confused.

SISTER CATHLEEN

What? What do you mean? Why would my mother be here, it's not visiting day?

Sister Genevieve looks around to see if anyone's watching. She whispers something into Cathleen's ear.

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

Following behind Genevieve, Cathleen starts towards the main nun's door of the Family Room, but then Genevieve stops her, motioning elsewhere.

SISTER GENEVIEVE

It's okay, Reverend Mother said you're allowed to use the other door today.

Cathleen then follows her through the alternate door.

INT. FAMILY RECEPTION ROOM - DAY

As Cathleen enters, she immediately sees Nora standing there and waiting, wearing an odd expression. And we can tell Cathleen's not happy about it.

She slowly walks to her mom, with Nora at once trying to hug her. But instead Cathleen freezes.

NORA

Is there somewhere can we talk. I got something I gotta tell you...

SISTER CATHLEEN

(motioning to Genevieve)

It's okay, she already told me....

Confused for a moment, Nora then turns and glares at Genevieve. She takes another step toward Cathleen.

NORA

No one knew he had it. Guess it had been a few years now and he just kept it to himself... And I know he wasn't ever much a father to you honey, but it's probably still kind of a shock. That's why I came, I didn't want you to be alone...

SISTER CATHLEEN

But I'm not alone. And you really didn't have to come.

Taken aback, Nora looks at Cathleen like she barely recognizes her.

NORA

What is that supposed to mean? I came here for you. It doesn't upset you to hear your dad passed away...

Cathleen just shrugs her shoulders.

NORA (CONT'D)  
 (searching Cathleen's eyes)  
 Wait a minute, what's going on here? What  
 the hell is going on? I'm serious  
 Cathleen? What is this...

SISTER CATHLEEN  
 Nothing's going on, Mom. I'm sorry you're  
 upset, okay...

Nora then gradually begins to get angry, but it's an  
 anger masking a much deeper concern.

NORA  
 Well I'm sorry you're not. What the hell  
 is going on? And why have you lost a  
 bunch of weight?

Cathleen just looks at the floor, averting Nora's gaze.

NORA (CONT'D)  
 You look really thin. How much weight  
 have you lost? Why are you so thin?

CATHLEEN  
 Mom, I'm fine.... Please, I haven't lost  
 that much weight...

NORA  
 How much weight have you lost! What's  
 going on, they don't feed you in here?  
 Let me see your hands, show me your arms.

Nora then reaches to grab Cathleen's arm, at the same  
 time as Cathleen immediately and violently jerks it back.

CATHLEEN  
 I'm fine, okay. I have to go now... I'm  
 sorry about Dad, I really am. I'll pray  
 that God meets him in grace, okay...

NORA  
 What?!?! You have to go now!?

Cathleen stares at her hard.

CATHLEEN  
 I'm sorry, I have to go okay.

She then immediately turns and leaves, not looking back  
 for a second.

NORA  
 Cathleen!... What, Cathleen! Cathleen!!

But she's gone, once again leaving Nora in a complete state of shock and feeling more distanced than ever from her daughter

Nora then turns again to Sister Genevieve, who's been standing there the whole time.

NORA (CONT'D)

Excuse me, what's the name of that Mother Superior lady, woman who runs this place...

SISTER GENEVIEVE

Reverend Mother? You mean Reverend Mother?

NORA

Yeah her. Can you take me to her please.

INT. REVEREND MOTHER'S OFFICE - DAY

Reverend Mother sits behind with Nora across from her. All while Nora wears an almost explosive expression.

REVEREND MOTHER

How are you Mrs. Harris, I don't think we've met...

NORA

(not skipping a beat)  
I'm fine. Just want to know what's going on with my daughter, that's all....

REVEREND MOTHER

I'm sorry, what do you mean by that?

NORA

Look, Miss...

REVEREND MOTHER

Mother...

NORA

Excuse me?

REVEREND MOTHER

It's Mother, Reverend Mother. I'm not a Miss, or a Mrs. for that matter.

Nora just glares.

NORA

Lady, I'm not calling you Mother.

Beat.

REVEREND MOTHER

Mrs. Harris I understand you've had a loss in the family, and I just want to express...

NORA

Save it. You do know I haven't seen my daughter in nearly 6 months- I came here today to tell her about her Dad, and I barely even recognize her. She looks completely different, like she's lost 20 pounds... I want to know what you're doing to her in here?

REVEREND MOTHER

Me? What *I'm* doing? This is about her weight, her body, isn't that a bit of a superficial topic...

NORA

Are you blind! Have you seen her lately! She looks like she's dying!

REVEREND MOTHER

Please calm down.

NORA

Like she's dying!! I said, I want to know what's going on in here!

Reverend Mother just looks at Nora, takes a long beat.

REVEREND MOTHER

Honestly with all due respect Mrs. Harris, in a sense you did bring your daughter here to die. You brought her here to die to the outside world, be reborn again in Christ's love... She's just going through a process, that's all... For whatever it's worth, I do understand how hard it is for any parent to give their child to God.

NORA

Oh really, do you? And that's because you have children your own?

Calm and cool as ever, Reverend Mother then looks Nora straight in the eyes.

REVEREND MOTHER

No, I'm afraid I do not. But neither do you anymore either.

Reverend Mother stares and Nora stares back, both so enraged it's like they could almost get in a fist fight. Nora then slowly rises, not taking her eyes off her.

NORA

Okay well just so you know, and with all due respect to you, Miss Whatever-the-fuck you want to be called by ...I didn't 'bring' my daughter here. I didn't 'bring' her here at all... But if I ever come back and see her like this again- I will take her out of here.

Nora heads for the door, but turns back once more.

NORA (CONT'D)

You got that- *Mother!*

She SLAMS the door behind her. We hold on Reverend Mother in a complete state of shock. The pressure starting to get to her.

INT. REFECTORY - EVENING

As Cathleen looks down to her plate to see a large hunk of highly unappetizing meatloaf staring back at her, we can tell how incredibly difficult this is for her.

We then notice Sister Genevieve across the room staring straight at her, watching her like a hawk. Cathleen fully aware she's being watched.

Ever so slowly, Cathleen then finally begins to eat. She does so deliberately, one bite after another. One bite after another. One bite after...

Before all out of nowhere, Cathleen suddenly starts gagging and grabbing at her stomach, literally doubling over! She gets up to try and excuse herself but immediately falls to the floor, coughing and dry heaving, as her stomach tries to force her food back up. All the other novices instantly rush over to try and help.

HARD TO BLACK.

FADE UP:

EXT. CONVENT - EVENING

We watch a small group of Professed Sisters suddenly run for cover, as a heavy rain falls over the convent.

INT. INFIRMARY - NIGHT

Inside a small infirmary room we come to a CLOSE UP on Cathleen fast asleep, little sheets of rain from the window outside, reflecting over her face.

After a moment, a vague shadow then passes over her face.

Now Cathleen suddenly jolts awake, shocked to see none other than Sister Emanuel standing over her. She stares at Emanuel for a long moment, unsure if she's dreaming.

\*  
\*  
\*

SISTER CATHLEEN  
(in sign language)  
What are you doing here?

SISTER EMANUEL  
(in sign language)  
I didn't mean to wake you. Reverend Mother asked me to check on you.

\*  
\*  
\*

Cathleen just looks at her. Slowly propping herself up in the bed.

SISTER CATHLEEN  
(in sign language)  
*Reverend Mother?*

\*

SISTER EMANUEL  
Yes. And it's okay, we don't have to sign, it's not Grande Silence yet.

\*  
\*

Cathleen tries to roll over a bit but winces, clearly her stomach is still hurting her.

\*

SISTER EMANUEL (CONT'D)  
Are you hungry? Maybe you should eat something.... They asked me to bring you soup from the dining hall. Hold on...

\*  
\*

Emanuel then walks across the room, grabbing a small bowl of soup she left by the door and hands it to Cathleen.

SISTER CATHLEEN  
Thank you Sister.

\*  
\*

Cathleen sits up further and they look at each other. Cathleen then closes her eyes to pray and Emanuel waits.

\*  
\*

SISTER CATHLEEN (CONT'D) \*

So you're from the S.O.C.'s, right? What happened you didn't like it there?

Emanuel suddenly looks a bit self-conscious, as if she doesn't particularly like answering this question.

SISTER EMANUEL

It's not that I didn't like it. I just thought it would be better for me to be a Rose. Thought it would be easier.

SISTER CATHLEEN

Easier? But aren't Roses so much stricter?

SISTER EMANUEL

Sometimes when things are stricter that makes it easier. I mean, for me I guess.

SISTER CATHLEEN

I wouldn't know. All I ever wanted was to be a Rose.

SISTER EMANUEL

You're really good at it, aren't you?

SISTER CATHLEEN

At what?

SISTER EMANUEL

Being a nun. What I mean is, it just seems to come so naturally to you.

Cathleen pauses, as if she's never given it much thought.

SISTER CATHLEEN

Not always. But I know I want God's love, and if being a good nun is what it takes for me to deserve God's love, then...

Beat. Emanuel thinks about it for a moment.

SISTER EMANUEL

I admire you.

SISTER CATHLEEN \*

What? Me?

SISTER EMANUEL \*

I admire your devotion. How much you seem to feel. What you're willing to go through. All the passion you feel, it seems so real with you. \*

SISTER CATHLEEN  
Isn't it with you too?

\*  
\*

Emanuel is about to answer, before suddenly another BELL begins to chime. This one indicating the actual start of Grande Silence.

SISTER EMANUEL  
(in sign language)  
That's Grande Silence, I better go.

\*  
\*  
\*

Cathleen looks a bit disappointed but doesn't show it, now watching her leave.

\*

SISTER CATHLEEN  
Sister Emanuel...

\*  
\*

Emanuel turns.

\*

SISTER CATHLEEN (CONT'D)  
(in sign language)  
Thank you for coming.

\*  
\*  
\*

SISTER EMANUEL  
(in sign language)  
You're welcome.

\*  
\*  
\*

INT. CONVENT GROUNDS - MORNING

Yet again we watch all the novices, in their silent, exquisite, and disturbingly precise procession, make their way through the convent grounds towards morning Mass.

INT. REVEREND MOTHER'S OFFICE - MORNING

Alone in her office, Reverend Mother stares silently out the window, just watching the Novices with an oddly sad expression. We then look down to the window to another mysterious and ominous ENVELOPE placed in front of her.

INT. CATHLEEN'S INFIRMARY ROOM - AFTERNOON

\*

With her head resting sideways on the pillow, Cathleen slowly opens her eyes and looks across the room to see Emanuel on the floor praying. Cathleen just watches for a moment, oddly fascinated. Before Emanuel turns and Cathleen pretends she wasn't watching.

\*  
\*  
\*  
\*

SISTER CATHLEEN  
How long was I asleep for?

SISTER EMANUEL \*  
Not long. You look better today. Are you \*  
feeling better? \*

SISTER CATHLEEN \*  
I think so. A little. \*

SISTER EMANUEL \*  
Did you sleep well? \*

Beat.

SISTER EMANUEL (CONT'D) \*  
Do you want me to help you change out of \*  
your nightgown? You've been wearing that \*  
one for a few days now.

Cathleen suddenly looks panicked, it's an awkward \*  
question that she's not quite sure how to respond to. \*

SISTER CATHLEEN \*  
Oh umm, that's okay, I can do it myself. \*

Understanding what she means, now Emanuel looks \*  
embarrassed. \*

Emanuel then goes to the closet to find a nightgown. She \*  
hands it to Cathleen as Cathleen turns her body around so \*  
she's not facing her as she changes.

Beat.

SISTER EMANUEL \*  
Maybe it's a weird question- But why did \*  
you do it? Why did you starve yourself \*  
like that, make yourself sick? Did you do \*  
it for Christ? \*

Cathleen looks caught off guard, embarrassed. She's also \*  
still partially unclothed. \*

SISTER EMANUEL (CONT'D) \*  
Sorry, it's none of my business... \*

Cathleen finishes putting the nightgown on.

SISTER CATHLEEN \*  
You can turn around now, it's okay... \*

Emanuel turns then goes and sits on the edge of the bed.

SISTER CATHLEEN (CONT'D) \*  
I thought I was doing it for Christ and \*  
to be a better nun.... \*

(MORE)

SISTER CATHLEEN (CONT'D)

But maybe I also thought if I made myself  
starve on the outside, somehow I wouldn't  
feel myself as much starving on the  
inside....

\*  
\*  
\*  
\*

Emanuel just looks at her, curiously.

\*

SISTER EMANUEL

But what are you starving for, on the  
inside I mean?

\*  
\*  
\*

Cathleen is speechless for a moment.

SISTER CATHLEEN

I don't know?

\*  
\*

SISTER EMANUEL

It really isn't any of my business...

\*  
\*

SISTER CATHLEEN

It's okay. I'm just not used to talking  
to other sisters this way.

SISTER EMANUEL

What way?

SISTER CATHLEEN

Just... This way.

SISTER EMANUEL

I know what you mean, it's kind of the  
hardest thing about being a nun for me.

SISTER CATHLEEN

What is?

Emanuel looks at the ground for a moment, then back up at  
Cathleen.

SISTER EMANUEL

Friendship.

INT. REVEREND MOTHER'S OFFICE - MORNING

Back in Reverend Mother's office, she finally reaches for  
the envelope and opens it. Inside is a small TWO PAGE  
LETTER, which she then begins to read.

Watching her eyes read over the letter, line by line,  
it's as if each line makes her more and more upset, even  
devastated by whatever the letter is telling her.

Reverend Mother then puts the letter back in the envelope and just stares out the window, before she at last begins to pray.

INT. INFIRMARY - AFTERNOON

Back in the infirmary, we hold a tight CLOSE UP on Emanuel as she reads out loud to Cathleen.

\*  
\*

SISTER EMANUEL

Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you...

At the same time, we begin to PUSH IN on Cathleen, her face and eyes, as she listens. Expressionless for a long time, all out of nowhere Cathleen begins to cry - Completely confusing Emanuel.

\*

SISTER EMANUEL (CONT'D)

What's wrong? What happened? Did I do something wrong?

\*

Cathleen just stares at her through her tears, barely able to communicate. Emanuel looks so confused, not knowing what to say.

SISTER EMANUEL (CONT'D)

I don't understand? I don't understand? I don't mean to upset you...

A beat passes with Emanuel totally frozen, before Cathleen gradually seems to regain herself.

We then happen to notice Cathleen's HAND fall along the top of the bed, with Emanuel's eyes accidentally looking toward it.

They are silent for a beat, Cathleen sniffing, before Emanuel looks at her so compassionately then almost involuntarily reaches her hand over to gently hold Cathleen's.

But then in an almost knee jerk and spontaneous reaction, Cathleen immediately YANKS her hand away.

Silence. It's so awkward, both of them so shocked, speechless and deeply uncomfortable.

\*

But then Cathleen gradually lays her hand back down. Before slowly, tentatively, exploringly inching her fingers back across the fabric to touch the edges of Emanuel's fingers. With each of their eyes turned completely away, Emanuel too gradually allows her fingers to intertwine with Cathleen's. Until finally they are fully holding hands. Beat.

Now all out of nowhere it's Emanuel who suddenly jumps up off the bed, violently yanking her hand away, panicked!

SISTER EMANUEL (CONT'D)

Sorry! That was a mistake! I'm sorry! I'm really sorry! Don't tell anyone, please! That was a mistake!

Cathleen tries to hide her shock and shame.

SISTER CATHLEEN

No, it's my fault. I'm sorry!

SISTER EMANUEL

It's okay. I'm sorry. I have to go now, okay.

SISTER CATHLEEN

Okay, I'm really sorry Sister.

Emanuel then immediately rushes out of the room, leaving Cathleen alone and in shock.

INT. INFIRMARY. HALLWAY - NIGHT

In the hall just outside the infirmary, we watch Emanuel start to hurry away. Crying, she at first walks, then suddenly picks up the pace to a run.

INT. REVEREND MOTHER'S OFFICE - DAY

Returning to Reverend Mother, she sits alone at her desk with the huge STACK OF VATICAN II DOCUMENTS in front of her, just staring at them and staring at them.

Then suddenly, in a fit of wild emotion, she begins to grab all the papers and wildly throw them across the room. It's as if she doesn't even know what's come over her, but can't stop herself. She's so hurt and so angry.

## INT. COURTYARD - DAY

As a heavy rain begins to fall, we turn to find Sister Emanuel now crawling by herself against the cold stone ground. She is literally soaked to the bone, praying out loud as she enacts her own penance, desperate to punish herself as much as possible.

## SISTER EMANUEL

Lord, make me an instrument of Thy peace;  
 where there is hatred, let me sow love;  
 where there is injury, pardon; where  
 there is doubt, faith; where there is  
 despair, hope; where there is darkness,  
 light; where there is sadness, joy. O  
 Divine Master, grant that I may not so  
 much seek to be consoled as to console;  
 to be understood, as to understand; to be  
 loved, as to love.... Love, love, love,  
 love, love, love...

FADE OUT.

FADE UP:

## INT. REFECTORY - DAY

In the middle of the afternoon, we find ALL OF THE ROSES  
 oddly gathered and waiting for something. They all  
 whisper to each other, looking around, seeming as if they  
 have no idea what's going on or why they're there.

At last, Reverend Mother then enters from the front. She  
 looks around for a beat, slowly heads to the podium.

As we watch Reverend Mother now standing there in front  
 of the entire group of Roses, essentially her whole world  
 for so many years upon years, we see how truly pained and  
 conflicted she is about what she's about to do. She takes  
 a deep sigh, then looks up at them all so tenderly.

## REVEREND MOTHER

Sisters, I have an announcement. I  
 apologize this has taken me so long. But  
 there is something very important I've  
 been meaning to discuss with all of  
 you.... I imagine by now, at least a few  
 of you have heard of something called  
 Vatican II. In a nutshell, there have  
 been an ongoing series of meetings taking  
 place in Rome over the past 3 years.

(MORE)

REVEREND MOTHER (CONT'D)

Meetings which have been principally concerned with the current state of our church. And with... certain revisions the Pope and others felt necessary, in order to insure the survival of the church ...

We pan around to see the reactions of the utterly confused community.

REVEREND MOTHER (CONT'D)

For myself, I could not be more pleased with the results of Vatican II. Or even with the brave new direction in which the church is now going. Pope John XXIII was nothing but visionary, in terms of... Umm.... Ummm.....

Everybody still just looks around, not quite sure where any of this is going. Reverend Mother just shakes her head.

REVEREND MOTHER (CONT'D)

Well, let's not belabor this... I'm just going to read you this memo from the Archdiocese, regarding a number of new reforms that we will all be adopting as of immediately...

Reverend Mother then clears her throat, pulling out the same LETTER we saw her holding before. She slowly, deliberately begins to read straight off the page.

REVEREND MOTHER (CONT'D)

"From now on, please be advised that Priests are no longer required to read the liturgy in Latin, and should face the congregation during Holy Mass.... All Catholics are further encouraged to embrace the idea of full and complete religious tolerance. While we may not share the same beliefs as others, we will honor and respect each and every individual's belief as their own, not persecute others on the basis of their beliefs ... Please be advised also that all nuns and women religious, cloistered and non cloistered, are no longer required to wear the traditional religious habit as a symbol of their lifelong matrimony to Christ. In fact, they're now free to wear what they want...."

At this, many of the sisters look around at each other, a mutual air of shock. *"What did she just say?"* \*

REVEREND MOTHER (CONT'D) \*

Regarding the culture of more extreme abnegation and self-punishment, still prevalent in many of our communities today- Please be advised that according to the council, this is no longer understood to be the appropriate path to follow, for all those seeking greater union with Christ... It is no longer acceptable to view any acts of *suffering, self-punishment, or extreme sacrifice* - as an act of love, or way to gain favor with our Lord. We, as Catholics, need to learn to understand love in a different way... Finally, from here forward and in the eyes of both the church and God alike, the status of all nuns will be reduced as equal to that of any regular practicing Catholic. While the choice to enter the convent remains one's own, this does not necessarily make nuns any more 'beloved' or 'special' in God's eyes. \*

We hear a few GASPS through the room, before everyone is suddenly silent. Total devastation. A few sisters then begin to cry. \*

All while Reverend Mother just looks at them all so sadly, compassionately. Perhaps more than anything else, maternally. Like a Mother that feels she's failed and let her children down. \*

REVEREND MOTHER (CONT'D) \*

I'm so very sorry sisters. Enjoy the rest of your day. \*

INT. INFIRMARY - NIGHT

Back in the infirmary it is now very late at night. Cathleen tosses and turns in bed for a moment, then sits up, staring pensively off into the darkness.

INT. CHAPEL - NIGHT

With the world hushed and the entire convent gone to sleep, suddenly the doors to the chapel are PUSHED RIGHT OPEN, Reverend Mother charging inside and heading straight for the altar.

MOMENTS LATER, Reverend Mother now lays herself across the foot of the altar, staring up so desperately at the ICON OF CHRIST that looms above. Seeming like a woman who's lost all footing in the world. She begins to whisper to God, to herself, to whatever's out there that might still hear her....

## REVEREND MOTHER

Where are you? Where are you? What happened to us?... You were always there, for so long, right there next to me. I could feel you with me, together with me, all the time. My darling husband... Then one day, you start leaving me!... Leaving me and leaving me all alone, to face this on my own...

Reverend Mother gradually begins to cry, perhaps for the first time in 40 years.

## REVEREND MOTHER (CONT'D)

I bet you think that means I've lost faith in you too? Because that's what you want. You want me to lose faith, to stop believing in you, so I'm the one who leaves you first. And then you don't have to worry about my pain..... Well guess what, I'm not doing it... I made a commitment to you 40 years ago, and whatever else happens, even if you don't want me anymore, even if you decide to turn your back on me and leave me forever... I'm still not losing faith... Because you're all I have, and I need you. Everything is just so much harder to face without you... My Darling husband.

She then rolls over on her back, laying prostrated and staring up at the ceiling, looking everywhere for him. Hoping whatever she said might somehow bring him back.

## INT. EMANUEL'S CELL - LATER

\*

In the darkness of her tiny cell, Emanuel lays fast asleep, before there's a knock on her door and she wakes up.

Emanuel then walks half asleep to the door, only to find Cathleen standing there in the doorway staring right back at her.

They just stand there like that for a long time. Breathing so heavily, Cathleen whispers in a shaky voice.

SISTER CATHLEEN

Is it okay?

\*

SISTER EMANUEL

You're not supposed to be here.

\*

But Cathleen doesn't move, just stays where she is.

Emanuel goes back to her bed and sits, with Cathleen following and sitting on the other end of the bed from her. They are dead silent for a long beat.

\*

SISTER EMANUEL (CONT'D)

What do you want from me?

\*

\*

Tears well in Cathleen's eyes, so confused by her own emotions she doesn't know how to express it. Long pause.

SISTER CATHLEEN

Do you remember... Do remember before, when you asked what I was starving for?

Emanuel turns away and looks at the floor.

SISTER CATHLEEN (CONT'D)

I just want you to comfort me, that's all. I just want you to comfort me. Please. Will you please comfort me, sister.

\*

\*

Emanuel looks at her again, tears welling in her own eyes.

\*

SISTER EMANUEL

I can't...do that.

SISTER CATHLEEN

Please, please. Please just comfort me. Please, just comfort me...

They turn to face it each other fully now.

SISTER CATHLEEN (CONT'D)

Just comfort me, please comfort me. Comfort me. Comfort me. Comfort me.

Unable to stop herself, Cathleen then slides across the bed so that her face is only inches away from Emanuel's. She is fully crying now. Emanuel quietly panic stricken.

SISTER EMANUEL

Shhhh, don't cry.... Okay, okay. I will. I'll comfort you, okay, please just stop talking, stop crying.

\*

SISTER CATHLEEN  
Please, please, please....

\*

Emanuel reaches her hand up and into Cathleen's mouth, gently pushing her fingers all around and in between her lips. Cathleen let's her forehead fall to rest against Emanuel's, now breathing even more heavily.

\*

\*

SISTER CATHLEEN (CONT'D)  
(barely audible)  
Please just comfort me. Please just  
comfort me. Please just comfort me.  
Please just comfort me.

\*

\*

They then gradually begin to kiss. At first so timidly, as if it is possibly the first time for both of them. Then a little more freely. Then more intensely. Then more passionately. Then more and more passionately, Cathleen unable to stop crying as it happens.

\*

\*

\*

\*

SISTER CATHLEEN (CONT'D)  
I just want you to comfort me... Please,  
please, please.... Just comfort me...  
Please just comfort me....

INT. REVEREND MOTHER'S OFFICE - DAY

Before we again find ourselves back in Reverend Mother's office, with she and Cathleen sitting directly opposite each other.

Cathleen is clearly very nervous, silent for a long time, unable to look at Reverend Mother for fear of being found out. Beat.

REVEREND MOTHER  
I take it you're feeling better?

SISTER CATHLEEN  
I am, yes, thank you.

REVEREND MOTHER  
Even though I wouldn't recommend it- I appreciate the devotion you showed, starving yourself for Christ.

Cathleen just looks at the ground.

SISTER CATHLEEN  
Thank you, Mother.

REVEREND MOTHER

Well, there aren't going to be any surprises. A few bumps here and there, but you've mostly been exceptional in your training here.... I really believe you belong here with us Sister, doesn't that make you happy?

Oddly expressionless, Cathleen just nods.

REVEREND MOTHER (CONT'D)

You don't seem happy?

SISTER CATHLEEN

(unsure)

No, of course I am. I'm happy.

Reverend Mother stares at her, almost compassionately. Almost as if longing for some connection with her.

REVEREND MOTHER

I don't know how much you've heard about Vatican II?

Cathleen looks up surprised.

SISTER CATHLEEN

Not much. Just some things I've heard here and there from some of the others.

Reverend Mother tries to think of how to say it, growing even more emotional and confessional.

REVEREND MOTHER

You know, when I first came here, when I first came to this convent all those years ago now... I had nothing.

Cathleen looks again. Unsure how to handle her sudden candor and intimacy.

REVEREND MOTHER (CONT'D)

Nothing. No home, no family, no one to look after me... Nothing.... And the church, the church was the only thing to ever hold me. The only thing to ever embrace me... The church gave me my life, my work, my community, even my identity...

Cathleen just stares at her, a strange moment of connection as if they both understand each other more deeply than they thought.

REVEREND MOTHER (CONT'D)

Don't you see? Now Vatican II wants to take all that away. Vatican II wants to invalidate all that, for all of us, saying none of it matters. That nothing we do matters anymore... But then my question is - What is it that really does still matter.

Reverend Mother just stares at Cathleen, who stares back at her. We hold on them looking at each other like this.

EXT. CONVENT. COLONNADE - AFTERNOON

We hear the sound of the mid afternoon bell, as Cathleen is now walking by herself back through the colonnade. At the same time and coming in the opposite direction, is Sister Emanuel.

Cathleen and Emanuel then cross in the middle, all while both maintain such rigidity in their 'Custody of the Eyes', it's hard to tell if they even see each other.

Then suddenly Cathleen stops, turns and looks at Emanuel.

SISTER CATHLEEN

Sister...

Emanuel turns and looks at her too, but with such vacancy in her eyes, such total absence, it's hard to tell if she even recognizes her.

SISTER EMANUEL

Yes Sister....?

They continue to look at each other. As it's gradually clear Emanuel has no plans to knowledge her. Emanuel then turns and walks away. Beat.

SISTER CHARLOTTE (O.S.)

So many things have changed since we were postulants... I know that when I first had my vocation, that it was *real*, it was a *real vocation*.

INT. NOVITIATE ASSEMBLY ROOM - EVENING

We again find ourselves in another Chapter of Faults. Sister Charlotte on the floor, confessing before the group.

SISTER CHARLOTTE

That it was really, truly his voice speaking to me... I just don't know anymore if this is really what he was calling me for? Maybe he doesn't need me here anymore? Maybe he wants something else for me? Maybe he never meant for me to be a nun in the first place, and doesn't care what I do. He just wants me to live my life, and be a good person and be happy.... Or, maybe not?

Reverend Mother is oddly calm. She just stares at Charlotte for a moment, then shrugs.

REVEREND MOTHER

Okay fine, thank you sister. For your penance, say 3 extra Hail Marys before bed each night. Do it quickly if you like.

Still staring at the ground, Charlotte waits a beat, then shuffles back to her place. Reverend Mother looks around the room.

REVEREND MOTHER (CONT'D)

Sister Cathleen, come forward please.

Cathleen looks up, before she too shuffles to the center of the room.

REVEREND MOTHER (CONT'D)

Sister Cathleen, do you have any accusations you'd like to make against yourself? Any new faults you want to share with us?

Beat. Cathleen is silent.

REVEREND MOTHER (CONT'D)

Cathleen, did you hear what I said?  
Faults - Do you have faults for us?

SISTER CATHLEEN

Yes, sorry ...I do... I want to accuse myself... to accuse myself of... of...

But Cathleen seems so conflicted, barely able to get any words out. Nearby, Emanuel looks mortified.

SISTER CATHLEEN (CONT'D)

I want to accuse myself of... Accuse myself of... Having feelings...

REVEREND MOTHER

Feelings? What kind of feelings?

SISTER CATHLEEN

Feelings I'm not sure I was supposed to have... Like, wanting to be with another person.... In a way that made me feel...

REVEREND MOTHER

Feel what?

SISTER CATHLEEN

Wanted. Comforted. Loved and... I wanted someone to touch me and to make me feel something. Something more than God can give me....

The whole room is silenced. We again hold on Emanuel's face. Reverend Mother looks angry.

REVEREND MOTHER

More than God can give you, what is that supposed to mean!

SISTER CATHLEEN

I don't know?

REVEREND MOTHER

(genuine shock)

What does that mean!? Explain yourself Sister!

Emanuel starts to tremble. Cathleen just shakes her head.

Silence.

REVEREND MOTHER (CONT'D)

Explain it!

SISTER CATHLEEN

But I don't know how to explain it ...I'm accusing myself of being intimate with someone, another sister, and of feeling love for her....

A state of mutual shock then falls over the room.

SISTER CATHLEEN (CONT'D)

And it I don't think it was a sin, because it didn't feel like a sin. It didn't feel like a sin. It felt more like the way we're supposed to feel...

Cathleen seems like she's about to cry, her body shaking and trembling, yet somehow she won't allow herself.

REVEREND MOTHER

I don't understand! Were you intimate with someone in this room? Who? Call her out! Call her out right now!

We turn to Emanuel again, she can barely take it.

SISTER CATHLEEN

No Mother, I'm not going to do that... I made my accusation, like you asked. Just want my penance. I just want my penance.

REVEREND MOTHER

Cathleen, what EXACTLY did you do!? And with WHOM did you do it!!

Emanuel continues to remain stone faced.

SISTER CATHLEEN

I'm not saying who Mother! I just want to do my penance! Give me my penance!

REVEREND MOTHER

I want to know who!

Cathleen is still on the verge of tears, but still won't cry.

SISTER CATHLEEN

I just want to do my penance! I just want my penance! I want to do my... PENANCE!

REVEREND MOTHER

You want your penance Cathleen!!

SISTER CATHLEEN

Yes, Mother, I do!

REVEREND MOTHER

YOU WANT YOUR PENANCE CATHLEEN!!

SISTER CATHLEEN

YES, MOTHER, I DOOOOOOOOO!!!

REVEREND MOTHER

OKAY THEN I WANT YOU TO CRAWL ACROSS THE FLOOR, TO EVERY SISTER HEAR, AND BEG US ALL FOR YOUR PENANCE!

Cathleen is frozen. Now she all at once begins to cry hysterically.

REVEREND MOTHER (CONT'D)  
 IF YOU REALLY WANT YOUR PENANCE THAT BAD,  
 BEG FOR IT!

Her body shaking like a leaf, Cathleen then throws herself onto her knees. Weeping and crying she starts to crawl along the floor, stopping at the feet of each of her sisters, begging them all so desperately.

SISTER CATHLEEN  
 I just want my penance! Please give me my penance. I just want my penance! I beg you for my penance. I just want my penance! I beg you! I'm begging you!! Please, I beg you for it!

All while Reverend Mother just watches along with the others, everyone in a mutual state of shock. Some of the girls are now crying, others trembling and shaking, others just hoping it will all to be over soon.

Before eventually Cathleen seems to totally collapse, literally imploding into herself, like no more than a frightened, trembling ball on the floor.

We then HOLD on Sister Emanuel one last time, before she at last begins to cry too.

EXT. REFECTORY - AFTERNOON

Looking at the line of sisters now waiting to enter the dining hall, we see how utterly emptied and diminished the community has become. As if nearly half the community has disappeared in the blink of an eye.

We hold briefly on Reverend Mother's expression, still standing at the door, still formally greeting each sister as they pass - She tries to put on a brave face, but it's clearly she's broken inside.

At the back of the line, Sisters Emily and Evelyn also whisper to each other.

SISTER EMILY  
 Where is everyone?

SISTER EVELYN  
 Gone.

SISTER EMILY  
 Gone? What did you mean gone?

SISTER EVELYN

Didn't you hear, they all left. Because of Vatican II.

INT. CHAPEL SIDE ROOM - DAY

With the now only few remaining NOVICES all gathered in the chapel atrium beside a small RACK OF AWAITING WEDDING DRESSES, suddenly Cathleen, Evelyn and Candace hurry in.

Fussing with the dresses, Sister Anne looks up and glares at them.

SISTER ANNE

You 3 are late. Is everyone here now? Who wants to be fitted first...

Sister Anne hands Cathleen her dress as Sister Emily randomly goes over to the rack, starts looking over all the dresses and counting to herself. \*

SISTER EMILY

Why are there only 5 dresses? Where's Sister Emanuel's? \*

SISTER ANNE

(nonchalant)

Sister Emanuel's dress won't be needed anymore, because Sister Emanuel has left. She's not going to be taking vows with the rest of you anymore. \*

Suddenly they all turn, just staring at Anne in shock.

SISTER CHARLOTTE

Left? What do you mean, she left? Where did she go? \*

Anne just looks annoyed.

SISTER ANNE

I have no idea. She just left, that's all I know. My guess is she just didn't want to be a nun anymore.

As the others all look around at each other in disbelief. We turn to Cathleen, who's already off-kilter state of confusion has just amplified tenfold.

EXT. CONVENT GROUNDS - DUSK

Night falls over the Convent, as we hear the sound of the Grande Silence BELL ring out over the landscape.

INT. SISTER CATHLEEN'S NOVICE CELL - EVENING

Alone in her room, Cathleen is knelt down upon her floor, softly and intimately praying. A halo of light outlines her face.

SISTER CATHLEEN

Lord, dear Lord. I wish I knew what... I don't know if this is something I need to figure out on my own? Or if I should be waiting for some kind of sign from you?... If you want me to stay, I'll stay. But I can't figure it out... I can't hear you anymore, and I don't know if it's because you stopped speaking, or I somehow stopped knowing how to listen... Or maybe the voice I heard all this time, wasn't ever even yours...??

She then pauses, trying so hard to listen for him. Just trying and trying and trying, to no avail.

MOMENTS LATER Cathleen again begins to carefully undress out of her habit, preparing to change into her nightgown. All in the same meticulous and ritualistic fashion we've seen before.

Reaching down for her nightgown however, suddenly the small CROSS that has hung on her wall all this time, falls onto the floor. Almost like magic, or perhaps this is the sign she asked for.

Cathleen just looks at the cross with a vacant expression. Before she drops all of her clothes, suddenly standing stark naked.

Cathleen walks naked across the room to pick up the cross, lays it on her dresser, then walks out of frame.

Music drifts in.....

INT. CHAPEL - DAY

We hold tightly on Nora just as her eyes look all around, clearly anxious and uneasy about something. PULLING BACK we see Nora is also wedged in amidst a SMALL CROWD of people inside the church.

All dressed in Sunday best, moving and bumping into each other, trying to find seats. As Nora again moves down the center aisle, she notices Reverend Mother somewhere across the chapel, just as Reverend Mother notices her too. They both avoid eye contact.

INT. CHAPEL ANTE ROOM - SAME TIME

The remaining group of second year novices, a mere 5 in total, are all lined up and clothed in their wedding dresses. They wait to have their veils attached.

Cathleen makes her way to the head of the line, as an elder sister reaches up to attach her veil too.

INT. CHAPEL - DAY

Music fills in even louder, as the ceremony has finally begun.

With the doors to the chapel opening, all the novices make their way toward the altar, all in perfect single file, keeping such exquisite custody of the eyes, just as we've seen them before. Nora turns to look at Cathleen, a somewhat sad yet resigned expression in her eyes.

The procession then all kneel together before the altar, softly bathed in a radiant sort of light that outlines their bodies like a halo.

For the very first time with his faced turned and looking directly at the congregation, the Priest then begins:

PRIEST

Guardian of virgins and father, Saint  
Joseph, to whose faithful custody  
Innocence itself, Christ Jesus, and Mary,  
Virgin of virgins, was committed....

We hear someone whisper in the audience,

CONGREGATION (O.S.)

Is he speaking English?

Before we turn to Reverend Mother, sitting near the front, staring at the altar as if the very sight of the Priest facing her is like a stab in the heart.

PRIEST

I pray and beseech thee by each of these dear pledges, Jesus and Mary, that, being preserved from all uncleanness, I may with spotless mind, pure heart, and a chaste body, ever serve Jesus and Mary most chastely all the days of my life. Amen.

Eventually we discover Cathleen, knelt down amongst her sisters, eyes hidden from beneath her veil.

PRIEST (CONT'D)

Let us begin the ceremony...

The entire room falls silently as the first in line, Sister Evelyn, then moves to genuflect down and kneel before the Priest. He reaches down to her veil.

PRIEST (CONT'D)

Sister Evelyn, what is your desire?

Looking into the pews, we also see EVELYN'S PARENTS anxiously craning to see their daughter on the altar. And from the expression they hold, even we can feel the intense pressure on this child.

Evelyn waits a long beat, then...

SISTER EVELYN

With the help of God, I've come to know in this community both the difficulty and joy of a life completely devoted to him. My desire is to make permanent profession within this community, and to wear the holy habit of the Clare.

PRIEST

And what is it you seek?

SISTER EVELYN

(shaky)

I seek to take the vows of chastity, poverty and obedience. To give my life to God for all eternity, to be married forever to our Lord, Jesus Christ.

The Priest makes the sign of the cross over her forehead.

PRIEST

Bride of Christ, you are now professed.

But Sister Evelyn remains completely frozen. She looks so terrified. Before she finally returns to her place.

Once Evelyn is gone, the Priest motions to Cathleen and she too moves forward, taking Evelyn's place.

The Priest lifts Cathleen's veil, stares into her eyes.

PRIEST (CONT'D)

Sister, what is your desire?

Beat. Cathleen then pauses for a very long time before speaking. She wears an almost unreadable expression.

SISTER CATHLEEN

With the help of God, I've come to know in this community both the difficulty and joy of a life completely devoted to him. My desire is to make permanent profession in this community, and to wear the holy habit of the Rose.

Nora shakes her head, defeated. Reverend Mother just lowers her eyes and begins to pray.

PRIEST

And what do you seek?

Cathleen again pauses. Staring at the ground, so lost in thought, consumed in emotion, trying to figure it all out. She looks up again, trying to answer the question.

SISTER CATHLEEN

What do I seek?.... What do I seek?... I seek...

She then suddenly stops, just staring straight at the ground, paralyzed, the entire room left in silence.

Long Beat. Enduring silence.

SISTER CATHLEEN (CONT'D)

What do I seek?... What do I seek?

Long Beat. Enduring silence. The Priest stares at her so confused.

SISTER CATHLEEN (CONT'D)

I seek... I seek...

Everybody continues to just wait, the whole room held on a pin.

Cathleen then finally looks up again, staring at the Priest as he stares right back at her.

Before a strange new aura, a new sense of self, of conviction, of peace and understanding gradually awakens in her eyes. Cathleen smiles, she understands it now.

HARD TO BLACK.

A long silence is held in the vacuum, before we hear Cathleen's final whisper.

SISTER CATHLEEN (O.S.)  
(CONT'D)

I seek something more.

The faithful BELL then chimes once more. At the same time as one last series of TEXT appears on the screen.

In the years that followed Vatican II, the Church witnessed a mass exodus of nuns on a scale it have never seen before.

90,000 nuns renounced their vocations and left their convents.

THE END.

