

Act 1
Scene 1

The set is the yard behind St. Michael's Academy in Galveston, Texas. Downstage right, there is a fifteen-foot high chain-link fence partitioning off the school grounds. The gate in the fence has a loose chain with an unlocked padlock. Further downstage, there is a sidewalk and curb. Upstage and to the right of the fence is a grassy stretch leading to a trailer. Steps lead up to the door, and the inside of the trailer can be seen, but is currently dark. Sister Mary Barbara, an older nun with red hair and a seductive air, runs from the back of the school. When she reaches the gate, she immediately touches the chain and locks the padlock. She takes a deep breath and look at the grounds. Bending down to the lawn, Sister Mary Barbara picks at some weeds that grow under the fence. After a moment she looks upstage, seeing someone approach in the distance. She quickly walks up the steps to the trailer, raps on the door twice and enters into the darkened room. Terry appears from behind the trailer. Terry is a mother, perfectly put together in a smart outfit with heels—her roughness of manner can be switched in an instant to pure Southern charm. She has a cell phone in her hand. At some point in the speech, she walks to the fence and touches the locked gate.

Terry

Hey... Hey. You need to either pick up the damn phone or call me back. I don't want to have to call you again—you hear me? It's about your goddamned son—so stop whatever it is you're doing and call me back—you son-of-a-bitch. *(She hangs up the phone. Paces towards the trailer and dials again.)* I swear I'm so fucking sick you—this is your fucking son—don't make me call your father 'cause I will. *(She hangs up. After a beat, she dials again. She listens. She hangs up. She dials again. She listens. She hangs up. She dials again.)* Listen you motherfucker—

Father Nicholas *opening his door to find her.*

Mrs. Tennassie?

Terry hangs up the phone and smiles winningly at Father Nicholas. Father Nicholas is a young priest in his thirties, tall and masculine. He wears Franciscan robes.

Terry

Hello Father.

Father Nicholas

...

Terry

The Gulf wind today is so rough—all this hot air blowin' around—makes you not want to leave the house—

Father Nicholas

I'm sorry about—

Terry

No—no—

Father Nicholas

Thank you for—

Terry

I didn't think I had much of a choice—

Father Nicholas

...

Terry

Oh, it's fine—just fine Father.

Father Nicholas

Please...

They enter the trailer. It looks like a music-room—complete with a piano, random music stands and the odd instrument. Another door leads to a back office that cannot be seen.

Terry

Oh, Lord it's a sauna in here.

Father Nicholas

Well—

Terry

They really do throw you to the wolves in this little old trailer. One of the kids pointed you out. I didn't know I was going to be walking through the field.

Father Nicholas

Just the track.

Terry

Track *and* Field—yes—they could at least give you a real classroom.

Father Nicholas

This was supposed to be a temporary, but—

Terry

Oh?

Father Nicholas

The music wing was destroyed in the Hurricane last year.

Terry

Oh yes. Yes...well—

Father Nicholas

Well...nothing to do but wait until the board gets around to approving repairs.

Terry

Yes.

Father Nicholas

Music is always the first thing sacrificed at any school—but being on the board yourself—

Terry

Well, you know... About—

Father Nicholas

Yes. Again I'm sorry to—

Terry

I heard about Billy Parker, Father.

Father Nicholas

Oh.

Terry

No need to shuffle around it.

Father Nicholas

No.

Terry

About a dozen people called me before I was even able to leave the house.

Father Nicholas

We've kept it from the students.

Terry

Yes.

Father Nicholas

And have been calling parents.

Terry

Tragic. He was in school this morning?

Father Nicholas

He skipped out around lunch is what we're thinking. We're hoping Matthew can shed some light on the situation.

Terry

Oh. I see.

Father Nicholas

More as a help to us. *(Beat)* Well...you know how it can be... The sheriff was hoping he could talk to Matthew in here with you.

Terry

Oh.

Father Nicholas

Just to—

Terry

Are the nuns involved with this?

Father Nicholas

Well, yes—

Terry

I thought I was brought here as a member of the board.

Father Nicholas

Do to Matthew's friendship with Billy—

Terry

Is Pete here?

Father Nicholas

He is. He and the Sisters are in my office just now. I wanted to—

Terry *winningly*

Aren't you shifty, Father? Ready to swing open a door for the police to enter.

Father Nicholas

That's not—no—

Terry *joking*

Hopefully this is not how you run your confessional.

Father Nicholas

If you feel uncomfortable—

Terry

Oh no—just playin' with you, Father. Just playin'. Pete and I are old friends.

Father Nicholas

Well...

Terry nodding to the door

Please.

Father Nicholas goes into his office—only to return with Sheriff Pete, Sister Mary Paul and Sister Mary Barbara. Sister Mary Paul is agitated—with a stern demeanor, little black curls and eyewear from the sixties.

Sister Mary Paul

Mrs. Tennassie.

Terry

Sister—this is such a tragedy.

Sister Mary Barbara

Oh it is—it truly is. Yes—yes.

Terry

I want you to know—it is my intent—my truest intent to host the memorial service at my house.

Sister Mary Barbara

Extremely—yes—of course—yes. We—We are all beside ourselves. Awful—awful.

Sister Mary Paul

I will let the Parkers know. Thank you, Terry.

Terry

It should be a comfort to them to have another home—

Sister Mary Paul crossing to the window and looking out

Yes.

Terry

And you didn't tell me Sister that we had poor Father Nicholas stashed away in this hot little trailer like a vagabond.

Father Nicholas

If I so much as crack a window all my papers get blown around.

Terry *a roaring laugh*
We'll get you a paperweight for Christmas. Hello Pete.

Sheriff Pete
Hey, Terry. Sorry about all this.

Terry
Oh, Pete it's fine—just fine.

Sister Mary Barbara
We're hoping it won't take too long.

Terry *(to the Sheriff)*
How's Lynn and the kids?

Sheriff Pete
You know. Buggin' me to get a Christmas tree and it ain't even Halloween yet.

Terry
Well, that's Lynn—always first in line.

Sheriff Pete
Even if it means stayin' up all night.

Father Nicholas
Sheriff, have you heard anything—any more news?

Sheriff Pete
Naw. Ain't found the body yet. We will though.

Sister Mary Paul
All of my prayers over the last hour have been to St. Anthony that we find his body soon.

Terry
Lord, Pete—reminds me of the Clark boy from when we were kids. You remember?

Sheriff Pete
Aw yeah.

Terry
All I kept thinkin' on the drive down is how rough the surf is.

Sheriff Pete
Yep.

Father Nicholas

Why any child would go in the water today is beyond me.

Sister Mary Barbara pulls out a nail file and quietly begins filing her nails while listening.

Sheriff Pete

Best swimmin'.

Terry

Well...simply awful.

Sheriff Pete

There's a jetty of black rock every fifty feet of this damn island—and on every damn one it has a sign bold as brass—in red—sayin' do not swim here. And still every damn year we get one. Hate it when it's a St. Michael's kid. Worse when it's one of ours.

Sister Mary Barbara

Lord yes.

Sheriff Pete

Does Matt know anything yet?

Father Nicholas

The counselor, Mrs. Patel is telling him.

Sheriff Pete

I don't know her.

Sister Mary Paul

Ah—They're crossing the lawn now. She's new this year. Patel is her married name. Her husband's a med student at UTMB. *(Terry and Pete exchange a look.)* Hopefully this won't take long Pete.

Sheriff Pete

This'll be short Terry.

Terry

You do your thing now. Don't you worry about me.

Sheriff Pete

How're things?

Terry *charming*

We're fine. He's fine. Everybody's fine. Just do your job 'n shut up.

Kay Patel and Matthew walk from behind the trailer. She opens the door. They enter. Matthew is in shock.

Father Nicholas

Matthew. Have a seat here.

Terry

You all right, hon?

Matthew

Yes, ma'am.

Terry

You know Pete, right?

Matthew

Hey.

Sheriff Pete

Hey Matt.

Terry

Pete needs to ask you a few things. You just answer him. Answer him like you should.

Matthew

Yes, ma'am.

Sheriff Pete

We'll get this done soon. All right?

Matthew

Yes, sir.

Sheriff Pete.

Then you can go play ball. You play ball?

Father Nicholas

Matthew sings.

Matthew

I play baseball. Not football, though.

Sheriff Pete

Well it's football season, but that don't stop you from throwin' the ball around.

Matthew

No sir.

Sheriff Pete

Everybody's tellin' me you and Billy Parker were good friends Matt.

Sister Mary Barbara drops her nail file.

Sister Mary Barbara

Damn.

She tries to pick it up quietly.

Sheriff Pete

Were you friends?

Matthew

I guess.

Terry touching his shoulder firmly

Hey—

Matthew

Yes, sir.

Sheriff Pete

's all right. We just need to know if he said anything to you? 'Bout skippin' out a school today? Where his head was at?

Matthew

No, sir. He didn't.

Sheriff Pete

Not a word?

Matthew

No, sir.

Sheriff Pete

Well that's rough Matt. And I know especially 'cause this is your buddy it must be hard for ya.

Matthew

Billy didn't say anything, sir.

Sheriff Pete

'Cause we need to know what made him jump out so close to the jetty.

Matthew

He jumped off the jetty?

Sheriff Pete *looking at Kay*

I thought your teacher told you? *(Beat)* Well... Yes. Right close—just next to it. That's what some witnesses say anyway.

Matthew

People saw?

Terry *hand firm on her son*

He'd tell ya if somthin' was wrong Pete.

Sheriff Pete

I know now—

Father Nicholas

Do you think, Matthew...was he trying to swim? Or learn how to dive or something?

Sister Mary Barbara chuckles.

Sheriff Pete *grinning*

Lord, Father Nick—don't go doin' that. That's how tourists die. No island boy would just jump off a damn jetty for no reason. Damn rip tide 'll suck you in every time. Specially in the Fall. Gulf wind roughin' up those waves.

Sister Mary Paul

Sheriff, is there anything else?

Sheriff Pete

I dunno. Matt, did Billy ever say anything 'bout his folks? Things at home?

Matthew

Things were fine with him, Sheriff.

Terry

There you go.

Sheriff Pete

Yeah. He couldn't have jumped. Don't believe it.

Sister Mary Barbara

Oh good. Thank you, Pete. Very—yes—and you saw our gates were locked.

Sheriff Pete

I'll check as I go—but it looks fine—Don't you worry, Sister.

Sister Mary Barbara

Locked and—chain locked.

Sister Mary Paul

He knows they were, Sister.

Sheriff Pete

Accident from start to finish. Must've just swam too close to that jetty and didn't see. The witnesses were from Boliver, so ya take it for what it's worth. But I had to ask. Just swam too close. That's what the damn signs are for.

Terry

Swam too close. School did what they could but...

Sheriff Pete

Thanks Matt. Father, Sisters. I'd better head back. See if they've found him yet.

Sister Mary Paul

Please let us know, Sheriff.

Sheriff Pete

He'll pop up before long. *(Sister Mary Barbara drops her file.)* Terry, good to see ya.

Terry

It's been too long, Pete.

Sheriff Pete

I'll tell Lynn you said hello, and tell that son of a bitch husband of yours to give me a call.

Terry

I will sweetheart.

Sheriff Pete

I got a problem with my sill plate. Think it's rotten.

Terry

Oh Lord.

Sheriff Pete

Maybe he could give me an estimate. Hate to rip up the whole foundation.

Terry

Just throw him a Bud.

Sheriff Pete.

Sounds good darlin'.

Terry

All right now.

Sheriff Pete walks outside—goes to the fence—pulls on the chain seeing it's locked—he gives the nuns a thumb's up and exits. The nuns are relieved.