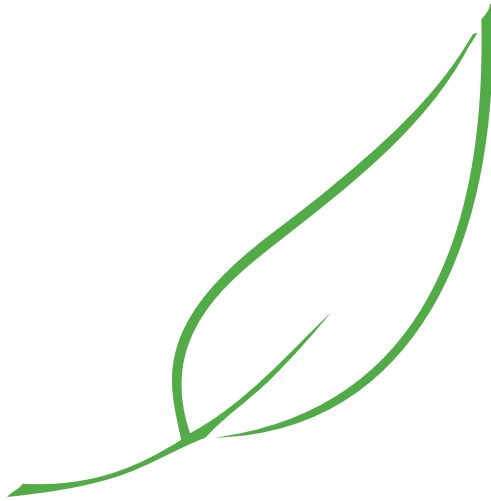


Homecomings

By Frank V. Priore



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HOMECOMINGS

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SYNOPSIS: Meet Tony “Big Pop” Della Rosa, head of the powerful Della Rosa crime family ...*in his dreams!* In reality, the only family Tony is part of is his own small suburban family unit: himself, his wife, Sophie, and their three grown children. And he is *far* from being the head of that family! There’s no question about who the boss is in the Della Rosa household. Sophie rules the roost with an iron hand. The only decision Tony, who actually shines shoes for a living, gets to make at home is which broom to use when Sophie orders him to sweep out the droppings in her chicken coop.

Tony’s only escape from Sophie is his gangster fantasies. Sophie has her own fantasies, but they are closer to the truth. She brags constantly about her younger son, Michael, who is a “holy priest of God,” the greatest vocation an Italian Catholic mother could hope for. She brags less about her other two married children: Theresa and Anthony Jr., who happens to be married to a girl Sophie refers to merely as: “The Protestant.”

Sophie’s fantasy world collapses all on the same day. Anthony Jr. and Theresa arrive back home to live because they are both in the middle of messy divorces, and Michael, the pride of Sophie’s life, the “holy priest of God,” shows up on her doorstep in the process of leaving the priesthood because he has fallen in love with a nun!

To make matters worse, a lawyer is after Anthony Jr., to squeeze the last drop of money from him for his greedy ex, and also to collect a diamond ring given to Theresa by her ex, a ring she was hoping to hock to pay for her upcoming remarriage. Without the ring, her ex will not sign the final divorce papers.

It’s a laugh-a-minute as Tony steps up to the plate for his children in his gangster persona, and makes the lawyer a series of offers he “cannot refuse,” while Sophie, who has gone to meet up with Michael’s fiancée, in an effort to convince her that they will both go to Hell for what they are doing find out that Michael’s intended has an even stronger constitution than Sophie she tells *her* to “go to Hell!”

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This one-set, easy-to-produce comedy will leave audiences rolling in the aisles! *Badda-bing!*

Approximate running time: 110 minutes.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(3 female, 4 male)

TONY DELLA ROSA (m).....(169 lines)
SOPHIE DELLA ROSA (f).....(158 lines)
MRS. TUCKER (f).....(54 lines)
THERESA *NEE* DELLA ROSA (f)(60 lines)
ANTHONY DELLA ROSA (m)(92 lines)
MICHAEL DELLA ROSA (m).....(120 lines)
A LAWYER (m).....(33 lines)

TIME: The Present

PLACE: The backyard of TONY and SOPHIE Della Rosa in a lower-middle class section of the suburbs of a large American city.

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

ACT ONE:

Scene 1: A Summer Day

Scene 2: The Following Day

ACT TWO:

Scene 1: The Following Day

Scene 2: Several Weeks Later

ACT ONE, SCENE 1**SETTING:**

The backyard of TONY and SOPHIE Della Rosa in a lower-middle class section of the suburbs of a large American city. The back corner of their home, which is covered with shingling that is inexpensive, but is clean and not damaged or missing any pieces, juts out slightly on an angle from the left side. A window is located near the upstage end of the house, and a door to the yard is located further downstage on the house. Two steps lead down from this door to the yard. There is a small bench located Down Left, near the corner of the house. A paper grocery bag with the sides rolled down a bit, which is filled with fresh picked string beans, and a large stoneware bowl are on this bench.

Right, the corner of a wooden pigeon coop juts out onto the stage. There is a door to the coop on the side of the corner facing Center, and two large nails, which serve as clothing hooks are driven into the downstage side of the corner. Upon one of these nails, a dirty set of coveralls is hanging.

Further downstage, near center, can be found an old, battered leather upholstered chair, now permanently consigned to the back yard. There is a small table right of the chair, and both chair and table are surrounded by a trellis from which grape vines hang. This trellis is about six to seven feet off the stage. It starts at the downstage edge of the chair, extends about four feet to the left and right and goes back about six feet.

A wooden picket fence that clearly could use repair to some of the pickets and a new paint job runs along the back of the stage about three feet from the upstage wall. There is a gate on this fence, left of center. The upstage wall itself is a large drop which shows a typical lower-middle class neighborhood.

AT RISE:

The stage is blacked out. A spotlight comes on focused, from the waist up, on TONY, who is sitting on the leather upholstered chair. He is a man in his early fifties. He is wearing a pin-striped, double-breasted suit jacket and tie. His hair is slicked down. He speaks as if he is at the head of a table addressing a meeting of mobsters.

TONY: *(To an unseen audience)* I am truly grateful that we have all been able to come together like this . . . in friendship. The presence of each one of you here today does me, personally, a great honor. With that said, please allow me to address the very serious nature of this meeting. I am sure you are all aware of the recent. . . shall we say unpleasantness within *La Cosa Nostra*. But as you all know, changes seldom occur without some unpleasant consequences. And changes have been made; make no mistake about this. I am here to announce this information to you. Changes, gentlemen, changes. And these changes bring to our organization a new broom, and a new broom must sweep clean. . .

The lights suddenly come up on the full stage. The lights reveal SOPHIE standing on the top step of the house. She is holding open the door with her upstage hand. In her downstage hand is a straw broom. SOPHIE is about the same age as TONY, and is dressed in a green housedress with white polka dots on it. Around her head is a red bandana. She moves to TONY. As she lets go of the door, it quietly slams shut.

SOPHIE: *(As she moves to TONY, she holds the broom out to him.)* And here's the broom. Now, get off your behind and sweep out the pigeon coop!

TONY: *(The spell broken)* Sophie, is it really necessary to bring up the subject of pigeon coops at this particular time?

SOPHIE: Of course it is. When I go in there to feed my pigeons tomorrow, I don't want to walk through half-an-inch of. . .

TONY: Sophie! *(Again addressing his invisible audience)* Gentlemen, my sincere apologies for this rude interruption by my wife. . .

SOPHIE: Who are you talking to?

TONY: (*Defensive*) Nobody. I'm just practicing a speech I'm going to give to my business associates.

SOPHIE: Business associates? You mean the other shoe-shine boys at Louie's?

TONY: Maybe. . . maybe, shining shoes isn't all I do for a living.

SOPHIE: Yeah. I know, Tony. Sometimes, you sweep out the pigeon coop for me. (*Puts the broom in his hand.*)

TONY: (*Grumbling, accepts the broom.*) There might be other things, you know -- things a man does not speak about to his wife.

SOPHIE: (*With her hands on her hips*) Giddoutahere! And stop it with this Mafioso crap, will you? Get this through your thick head: you're not a big-shot gangster; you're a little-shot shoe shine boy. The closest you've ever come to *La Cosa Nostra* is the balcony at the Bijou when *The Godfather* was playing.

TONY: Such disrespect! You should not talk like that to your husband. For all you know, I may already be a made man. What do you think about that?

SOPHIE: Made men don't shine shoes, not even their own. (*This shoots TONY down. Grumbling, he turns toward the pigeon coop*) You know, Tony, sometimes I wish you actually were a gangster.

TONY: You do?

SOPHIE: Yes. For two very good reasons. The first is this: If you were in the mob, I wouldn't have to watch every dime I spent. I'd have enough money to buy some of the things I've always wanted. . . a nice car, some fancy clothes, a new colander for the spaghetti.

TONY: (*Suddenly, getting very fatherly*) Yes, yes. These things would be very nice. But it is, of course, a very dangerous business. You might wake up one morning to find out that you were a widow.

SOPHIE: That's the second good reason. Now, get that pigeon coop clean! Oh, and take off that suit jacket and tie. It's the only good ones you have. You don't want to get pigeon droppings all over them.

TONY moves to pigeon coop, leans the broom against the wall, takes off suit jacket and tie, hangs them over one nail, takes the coveralls from the other nail and steps into them. He then picks up the broom, opens the door to the pigeon coop and EXITS through it. A beat later, pigeon noises and the flutter of many wings is heard from the pigeon coop.

TONY: *(Offstage)* Gavonne pigeons! Giddoutta the way!

SOPHIE moves to the bench Down Left. With a large exhalation of disgust, she reaches into the bag, comes up with some string beans, snaps the ends of them, putting the ends back into the bag and the beans into the bowl. After a few beats, MRS. TUCKER ENTERS from Up Left, above the fence. She is about the same age as SOPHIE, appears to also be Italian, and is dressed in a fairly nondescript housedress, and she carries a cloth shopping bag, which contains freshly picked heads of escarole. She moves to the gate.

MRS. TUCKER: *(At the gate, calling)* Yoo, hoo, Mrs. Della Rosa!

SOPHIE: *(Aside)* Yoo Hoo! Like I was chocolate milk or something!
(To MRS TUCKER, without looking back) Over here, Mrs. Tucker.

MRS. TUCKER: *(As she opens gate and moves to SOPHIE)* I'm so glad I caught you at home.

SOPHIE: Where else would I be. . . in my palazzo in Venice?

MRS. TUCKER: *(Sitting next to SOPHIE, she pulls out a few of the heads of escarole and holds them up for her.)* I brought you some nice escarole from my garden.

SOPHIE: *(Glancing at them)* Kinda small. Not like the nice big escarole I grew last year. You should use some fertilizer. Tony's sweeping out the pigeon coop. I'll have him put it in a bag for you.

MRS. TUCKER: *(Quickly)* Thank you, no. *(She puts down the escarole on the bench)*

SOPHIE: Why not? When you want to grow nice, juicy vegetables, there's nothing like it. You just take a few handfuls and work it into the dirt. *(She uses her empty hands to demonstrate.)*

MRS. TUCKER: (*Nauseated, she holds up her hand for SOPHIE to stop*) Please, Mrs. Della Rosa. (*With an apologetic smile*) I have to take a bus home. I can't be carrying a bag of pigeon...fertilizer on the bus.

SOPHIE: You take the Number 22 bus. That's the one that goes right down the middle of the Eighth Street Fish Market. Believe me, no one will notice.

MRS. TUCKER: Thanks, but no thanks. Besides, I really didn't come here to talk about fertilizer. I wanted to show you these pictures. (*She takes photos from her bag and gives them to SOPHIE. Now, bubbly...*) I just got them back from the drugstore.

SOPHIE: (*Stops working on green beans, wipes her hands on her dress, takes the photos. As she flips through them.*) Uh huh, uh huh, uh huh.. (*Stops to look at one photo closely*) This is your son, Georgie, isn't it?

MRS. TUCKER: (*Proudly*) Yes, that's my Georgie.

SOPHIE: Why's he wearing a dress?

MRS. TUCKER: That's not a dress! It's a cassock. You know that very well. Your son, Michael wears a cassock all the time.

SOPHIE: That's different. Michael's a holy priest of God. He's allowed to wear a dress.

MRS. TUCKER: Georgie's allowed to wear a cassock, too. He's now officially a Brother.

SOPHIE: Of course he's a brother; you've got three other kids.

MRS. TUCKER: No, I mean a religious Brother, part of the clergy. You know, like a nun is called a Sister.

SOPHIE: Your son's a nun?

MRS. TUCKER: A Brother! He joined the Brotherhood of Saint Anthony.

SOPHIE: All right, all right. A Brother.

She goes back to snapping ends off green beans. MRS. TUCKER puts the photos back into her bag, and then helps her with the beans.

SOPHIE: Saint Anthony's a good saint.

MRS. TUCKER: I'm glad you approve.

SOPHIE: Of course, Georgie's not a real priest, like my Michael.

MRS. TUCKER: He's not a priest at all, real or otherwise! But he's just as much a Religious as your son is!

SOPHIE: If he's not a priest, he really shouldn't dress up like a priest. That's a sin, I think.

MRS. TUCKER: Georgie is completely entitled to wear clerical garb! *(A beat as she decides whether or not to go on. Finally, she does.)* Mrs. Della Rosa, we've been friends for over thirty years, and I'm sorry to have to be the one to tell you this, but you have a, well. . . an extremely annoying habit. It's this "yours is good, but mine is better" attitude you have about everything. No matter what somebody has, you have one that's better. Like the escarole. I bring you some nice heads, and do you think you could say: "Thank you, Mrs. Tucker, they're very nice." No. You have to tell me how you grew bigger ones.

SOPHIE: I was just trying to point out that if you had fertilized your garden with a little pigeon...

MRS. TUCKER: I know what you were trying to point out: My garden is good, but your garden is better! And it's nice that my son is a Brother, but, of course your son is so much better because he's a priest.

SOPHIE: I never said my Michael was better than your Georgie.

MRS. TUCKER: Well, I'm very glad to hear that.

SOPHIE: I mean, so what if Georgie's fingers weren't anointed with the holy oil so he could make the host into Communion like Michael can.

MRS. TUCKER: *(Throwing her hands up in disgust.)* You're doing it again!

SOPHIE: Doing what?

MRS. TUCKER: My son is good, but your son is better! Mine is a prince, but yours is a king!

SOPHIE: King? What are you talking about? My son's not a king, believe me. Or even a prince. In the Church, you gotta be a Cardinal to be called a Prince. Michael's just a priest. He's not even a Bishop.

MRS. TUCKER: Well. . .

SOPHIE: Yet.

MRS. TUCKER: But he will be someday. That's your point, isn't it?

SOPHIE: (*Shrugging her shoulders*) Someday. Who knows? Hey, look, the day may come when your Georgie might be made. . . what do they call it -- the Head Brother.

MRS. TUCKER: The Abbot.

SOPHIE: Yeah! Exactly! Abbott, Costello – whatever. Hey, let's not go on about our sons like this. We're old friends, right?

MRS. TUCKER: The oldest.

SOPHIE: Exactly. So, we shouldn't be arguing like this.

MRS. TUCKER: I suppose you're right.

SOPHIE: I mean, who cares whose son is best?

MRS. TUCKER: (*Sing-song, a warning*) Mrs. Della Rosa. . .

SOPHIE: (*Waves her hand to dismiss the idea.*) Yeah, yeah. So, how long is Georgie going to do this Brotherhood thing.

MRS. TUCKER: How long? For all his life; what did you think? Just like your Michael is going to be a priest all his life.

SOPHIE: Well, yeah, I know. But I mean, sometimes these Brothers -- they meet a cute nun, and hey, they both run away together.

MRS. TUCKER: Priests do that, too, Mrs. Della Rosa. Lots of priests!

SOPHIE: Hmm, I guess so. But not my Michael, of course.

MRS. TUCKER: (*Rolling her eyes*) Of course.

SOPHIE: Georgie was your last kid at home, right?

MRS. TUCKER: That's right. The nest is empty now.

SOPHIE: Mine's been empty for a few years now. Michael left for the seminary the day after he turned eighteen. Theresa's married. And Anthony's married, too -- almost three years now

MRS. TUCKER: Such a lovely girl, Anthony's wife. What is her name? I forget.

SOPHIE: Who?

MRS. TUCKER: Anthony Jr's wife.

SOPHIE: Oh. *The Protestant*. Sherrie. Typical Protestant name, Sherrie. No good Catholic would name her kid Sherrie.

MRS. TUCKER: What makes you say that?

SOPHIE: You never heard of a Saint Sherrie, did you? I mean, there's a wine, Sherry, but not a saint.

MRS. TUCKER: She's a very pretty girl, though.

SOPHIE: Who?

MRS. TUCKER: Sherrie!

SOPHIE: Oh. *The Protestant*.

MRS. TUCKER: How can you be so bigoted?

SOPHIE: Bigoted? Me? I don't have a bigoted bone in my body. I let my son marry her, didn't I?

MRS. TUCKER: You had no choice. He was twenty-four. He didn't need your permission.

SOPHIE: Besides, some of my best friends are Protestants.

MRS. TUCKER: You just don't like your children marrying them.

SOPHIE: It's not necessary, that's all. It's not like there isn't a whole bunch of good Catholic kids around to marry. My Theresa found herself a nice Catholic boy, didn't she. I mean, yeah -- he's a *mic* and all, but he's still Catholic.

MRS. TUCKER: The entire world isn't limited to people who are Catholic and Italian, you know. I might remind you that my own husband is of mixed European descent.

SOPHIE: Oh, yeah. I forgot your husband was a mutt.

MRS. TUCKER: Mrs. Della Rosa!

THERESA, a girl in her mid twenties, appears at the gate. She is happy and effervescent.

THERESA: Hi, Mama!

SOPHIE: Theresa! What a nice surprise. You drove all the way here to visit.

THERESA: (*Moving downstage to them.*) Well, not just to visit. (*To MRS. TUCKER*) Hello, Mrs. Tucker.

MRS. TUCKER: Hello, Theresa.

THERESA: (*To SOPHIE*) Mama, I wanted you and Papa to be the first to know the good news.

SOPHIE: (*Rising*) Omigod! You're pregnant! I'm going to be a grandmother!

THERESA: No, Mama. I am not pregnant. I said I had good news. . . I'm getting married.

SOPHIE: Excuse me, but unless my memory of paying \$10,000 for a gown, reception hall and six-piece band is faulty, you're already married.

THERESA: Oh, Mama, Sean and I are history. The final divorce papers will be coming through tomorrow..

SOPHIE: Just like that? Wham, bam, you go down to a court and come back with a divorce? Like going down to the store and coming back with a loaf of bread?

THERESA: Not quite. Sean and I have been on the outs for some time now. I started the action for divorce four months ago.

SOPHIE: And not a word to me?

THERESA: I didn't want to worry you, Mama.

MRS. TUCKER: (*Rising. To THERESA*) Oh, my, you poor thing.

THERESA: It's all right, Mrs. Tucker. It's for the best, believe me.

SOPHIE: Your parents have a right to know these things, Theresa.

THERESA: Oh, I told Papa. I asked him not to say anything to you, though.

SOPHIE: Your father knew, and he didn't tell me? Oh, is he in for it!

THERESA: I made him promise not to tell you.

SOPHIE: And what did your father have to say about the breakup of your marriage?

THERESA: He offered to have a contract taken out on Sean.

MRS. TUCKER: Er, I have to be running along. I don't want to get involved in any family business.

SOPHIE: Mrs. Tucker, the only family my husband belongs to is our own. How many times have I told you to pay no attention to his stupid talk about gangsters.

MRS. TUCKER: Still and all, it is getting late. I've got to get supper going. (*To THERESA*) Goodbye, dear. I hope everything works out okay for you.

THERESA: Things are working out just fine, Mrs. Tucker. My new fiancée is a very wonderful man.

MRS. TUCKER: That's nice, dear. Bye now. (*She gathers up her bag and quickly EXITS via the gate.*)

SOPHIE: Now, what's all this nonsense about getting married again. You know you can't do that. The Church doesn't allow it.

THERESA: Er, why don't we go in and discuss this over a nice cup of tea.

SOPHIE: (*After a beat, with her hands on her hips.*) He's not Catholic, is he.

THERESA: Well, not exactly.

SOPHIE: Not exactly. This is great -- *two* Protestants in the family!

THERESA: (*Hesitant*) Mama, Morty isn't Protestant.

SOPHIE: Morty? (*Sighs*) I guess we'd *better* talk about this over a cup of tea. Maybe, two or three cups of tea!

They move toward door to house. THERESA EXITS through door. SOPHIE hesitates at door, looks up to sky.

SOPHIE: (*Addressing God.*) I just want you to know something -- this is *not* why I say the rosary every night!

She EXITS. After a few beats, the door to the pigeon coop opens. TONY ENTERS, backing up. Pigeon noises are again heard from the pigeon coop. He pushes back unseen pigeons with a broom.

TONY: Shaddup, you stupid pigeons!

He shuts the door to the coop, moves to the hooks, leans broom against wall, removes coveralls, and proceeds to put his jacket and tie back on. As he does, ANTHONY ENTERS from the gate He is carrying a small suitcase and has a zippered pouch around his waist.

TONY: Anthony!

ANTHONY: Hi, Pop. (*He moves downstage.*)

TONY: (*Seeing suitcase*) You, er. . .going somewhere, boy?

ANTHONY: Actually, coming. Coming home, that is. Just for a while. While I get myself together. Sherrie and I. . .well, Pop, we're breaking up.

TONY: Breaking up? Wassamatta, you have a fight or something?

ANTHONY: Yeah. One big fight. It's been going on for a while.

TONY: How long?

ANTHONY: Since about the second day of our honeymoon.

TONY: Ouch! That's not good. So, your wife, she became a big pain in your neck.

ANTHONY: Even lower, Pop.

TONY: You tell your mother yet?

ANTHONY: No. It was kind of sudden. What do you think she'll say?

TONY: She'll probably throw a party. She never liked your wife. All I've been hearing for years now is how our son married a good-for-nothing Protestant.

ANTHONY: Well, she was wrong about that. Sherrie is good for something. Believe me, she is! That's what attracted me to her. Unfortunately, that's what attracting a whole lot of other men to her, too!

TONY: I see. You, er. . . want me to put a contract out on these other guys or something?

ANTHONY: *(With a smile)* Still at it, eh, Pop? No. I'm not bitter. They're welcome to her. Sooner or later, one of those jerks will end up marrying her. And in a year or so, she'll get bored with him, too. *(As he unzips the pouch and removes an official-looking letter from it.)* One morning, the poor slob will wake up, and instead of her smiling face on the pillow next to his, he'll find one of these. A letter from Sherrie's lawyer. *(He hands the letter to TONY,)*

TONY: But you're not bitter. *(He quickly reads the letter)* The house and the car and the bank accounts?

ANTHONY: And the stocks, and the bonds, and anything else she could think of that might be worth something. Between Sherrie and that shyster she hired, all I was left with were my clothes, my stamp album, and all the credit card bills.

TONY: Geez, they're better gangsters than I am!

ANTHONY: Yeah, right, Pop. Except she's not quite as smart as she thinks she is. The stamp album she thought was worthless is actually a highly specialized collection of old Greek stamps.

TONY: Greek stamps? You didn't collect American stamps, or at least Italian stamps?

ANTHONY: I didn't collect stamps at all. You remember Spiro Stanopoulos? He used to live down the block?.

TONY: Yeah, yeah. Skinny little kid. Afraid of his own shadow. You said: "Boo!" to him and he ran home crying.

ANTHONY: That's him. He was still like that when we were teenagers. He was too embarrassed to go into the drugstore to buy. . .well, to buy the things every teenage boy needs to carry with him in his wallet.

TONY: Uh huh.

ANTHONY: Well, he had this collection of Greek stamps his grandfather gave him when he was a kid. Spiro wasn't too interested in stamps, but he was interested in girls. He offered to give me the whole collection if I would go into the drugstore and buy him what he needed.

TONY: And, of course, you did.

ANTHONY: Yep.

TONY: So. . .

ANTHONY: So, I got the Greeks and he got the Trojans. I had that album stashed away in my closet for years. I never thought too much about it. That's why Sherrie didn't even know I had it.. Then, one day I had a stamp dealer look at them, just for the hell of it. Was I surprised! They were worth money – a lot of money! I never told Sherrie, of course. When she kicked me out, I needed cash in a hurry, so I went to the same dealer. He gave me \$20,000 on the spot for them.

TONY: Twenty large! *Madonna mia!*

ANTHONY: *(He takes out two banded stacks of currency. He flips through them.)* Got it right here.

TONY: You shouldn't be walking around with that much money! Someone could steal it from you. Why don't you put it in the bank or something, for Chrisakes!

ANTHONY: Because then someone would steal it from me – Sherrie. If her lawyer got wind that I had that much cash in the bank, he find a way to slap a lien on it faster than you could say *habeas corpus*. Besides, I don't want Mama to know about this money. She'd make me turn it over to her – for *safekeeping*. And her idea of safekeeping would be giving half of it to the church and spending the other half for a new roof or new furniture or something.

TONY: I see what you mean. But still and all, Anthony, that's a lot of money to keep on you.

ANTHONY: I know. That's why I want you to keep it for me.

TONY: Me?

ANTHONY: Sure. *(Playing him like a fiddle)* After all, you are a very important and respected man, aren't you, Pop.

TONY: (*Falling for it*) Well, yeah. Of course. (*Dusts off lapels of his jacket.*) Okay, boy, I'll keep it for you. And I got just the place to put it. (*He moves to the leather chair, looks around furtively.*) Make sure your mother doesn't see me, Anthony.

ANTHONY: (*Looking around quickly*) She's not even in the yard, Pop.

TONY: Good. Good. (*Removes the chair cushion.*) Many years ago, I made this little hidey-hole under the cushion. (*He reaches down and lifts a wooden cover, hinged on one side, that had been under the cushion. He reaches deep down and retrieves a locked cash box, and shows it to ANTHONY.*) I keep the key hidden in the pocket of my coveralls, as an extra precaution. (*He moves to coveralls, ANTHONY follows him. He removes key from pocket of the coveralls and opens the box.*) Put 'em in there, boy.

ANTHONY: You sure this is safe, Pop?

TONY: Are you kidding? It's been here over twenty years. And your mother has never found out about it. Any place that's safe from your mother for twenty years is as good as Fort Knox! (*ANTHONY puts the money in the box. TONY locks the box, puts key back into the pocket of his coverall, and returns the box to the hole in the chair. He closes the wooden cover and puts the cushion back in place. He pats the cushion.*) There, safer than in the bank!

ANTHONY: I hope so. That's my nest egg for starting over.

TONY: Okay, if that's your nest egg, watch me. (*He sits down on chair.*) I'll stay up here and keep it warm until it hatches into a million bucks!

They laugh. MICHAEL appears at the gate. He is dressed in a tee shirt [any color but black], blue jeans and sneakers. Like ANTHONY, he is carrying a small suitcase.

ANTHONY: (*Spotting MICHAEL*) Michael! What are you doing here? All the way from your church in. . .where is it - San Francisco?

MICHAEL: (*Moves down toward ANTHONY*) San Diego, actually. I'm on a kind of . . .vacation.

TONY: (*Rising, sees how MICHAEL is dressed.*) How come you're out of uniform, boy? Where's your black clothes and your collar?

MICHAEL: Pop, I'm on a sort of vacation from the priesthood, too.

TONY: Eee, *madonne!* Are you out of your mind, Michael?

MICHAEL: Pop, I'm a big boy. I'm entitled to make decisions about my own life.

TONY: (*Dismissing this with a wave of his hand.*) You can do whatever you want. I don't care. What I meant was: are you out of your mind coming home to your mother without being a priest anymore?

MICHAEL: She's going to find out sooner or later.

TONY: Later is better.

MICHAEL: Besides, I'm still a priest. Once you're ordained, you're a priest for life. I'm just not allowed to do priest things, you know – say Mass, hear confession. That sort of thing. Right now, it's temporary. I can still go back to the active priesthood. In a month, I have to decide one way or the other. (*To ANTHONY*) Well, now you know why I'm home. What are you doing here, Anthony?

ANTHONY: I'm on a vacation, too - a permanent vacation - from Sherrie. But I don't have to worry about deciding anything. She made the decision for me.

MICHAEL: That's too bad. There's no chance for a reconciliation?

ANTHONY: I'm reconciled to being a pauper. She got everything (*With a look at TONY*) well, almost everything. No, there's no going back. Sherrie's already moved on to someone else – several someone else's, for that matter.

MICHAEL: Look at the bright side. You're young. I'm sure you'll find love again. Maybe you'll get lucky the second time around.

ANTHONY: No, thank you! Once through the ringer is enough for me.

MICHAEL: (*With an uncharacteristic glow*) Ah, don't discount love, Anthony. It's a powerful force in the universe, a very powerful force.

ANTHONY: Hmmm.

TONY: Michael, what's all of this "second time around" business? He can't get married again. He's Catholic like you – remember? Or did you quit being Catholic, too?

MICHAEL: That's not fair, Pop! Look, I haven't abandoned my religion or the priesthood. I'm just going through what's called "a crisis of faith."

TONY: It'll become a real crisis when your mother finds out. Well, you boys stay out here. I'd better go in and tell her. *(He moves toward house door.)*

ANTHONY: You sure you want to do that? You know what happens to the bearer of bad news, especially around Mom.

TONY: What is she going to do – scream, yell, throw a few pots and pans at me?

MICHAEL: More than a few, I'll bet.

TONY: Don't worry. I'm used to it. She's been throwing pots and pans at me since we were married. By now, I know all her moves. I know just when to duck. She hasn't been able to hit me with one for years. You boys have been out of the house for too long. You're out of practice. She'll clobber you for sure.

ANTHONY: Maybe we should tell her ourselves, Pop. Why should you bear the brunt of it.

TONY: That's all right. I'm your father. It's my job to put my life on the line for you. *(He opens the door and calls in.)* Sophie? Sophie? You in there?

SOPHIE: *(Offstage)* Git outta here! I'm busy. Go water the tomatoes!

TONY: I'm sorry, but you're not too busy for this. *(To ANTHONY and MICHAEL)* Wish me luck, boys.

He tucks his chin against his chest, bends slightly, and puts his arms up like a football defenseman, as he EXITS through the door. There is an awkward silence between the brothers for a few beats. Finally. .

ANTHONY: A crisis of faith, eh?

MICHAEL: Something like that.

ANTHONY: What's her name?

MICHAEL: Sister Marguerite.

BLACKOUT.

ACT ONE, SCENE 2

SETTING:

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Same as Scene One. It is the following day. MICHAEL and ANTHONY are seated on the bench DL. There is a large pot half-filled with water between them on the bench. There is a small burlap bag with potatoes in on the ground between them. In front of each, on the ground, there is a few sheets of newspaper. Over the following dialog, they are peeling potatoes. The peels fall onto the newspaper. Finished potatoes are put into the pot of water.

ANTHONY: So, tell me. How did my little brother Michael, Mama's golden boy, come to be a fallen priest?

MICHAEL: You're watching too many soap operas, Anthony. Priests don't "fall." What happens is that some priests, myself included, discover that not all the stirrings in their bodies are caused by fervor for the lord.

ANTHONY: All right I can understand that. But, with a nun?

MICHAEL: It happens all the time. Women have the same stirrings, you know.

ANTHONY: And what they stir up are priests?

MICHAEL: Who else? Priests are the men they work the closest with.

ANTHONY: Yeah, but aren't they supposed to take vows about that stuff? I mean, they've got to know what they're getting into when they sign up. The very name tells them what to expect . . . *none!* (After a beat) So, how much of this have you told Mama?

MICHAEL: I told her everything . . . she needs to know

ANTHONY: All about your non-ecclesiastical *stirrings*?

MICHAEL: Absolutely

ANTHONY: And that they involved a woman?

MICHAEL: What do you think I told they involve - a donkey? Of course I told her a woman.

ANTHONY: Of the opposite sex and all?

MICHAEL: That is the usual kind of woman, I believe.

ANTHONY: Um Hmm. (After a beat) (A statement, not a question)
You didn't tell her it was a nun, did you.

MICHAEL: I'm . . . I'm not sure the conversation got around to *specifics*.

ANTHONY: I'll just bet it didn't.. That'd put the icing on the cake.

MICHAEL: What do you mean?

ANTHONY: Don't you get it, Michael? Mama never seemed to care too much if I screwed up. In fact, I'm pretty sure she half expected me to. But, you . . .you were always the one she was able to brag about to her friends - her son, the holy priest of God. But, now . . .little brother, you've shot that all down in flames. And when she finds out that you've dragged one of the Church's "holy nuns" down with you . . . Whoowie! I want to make sure I'm not in swinging range.

MICHAEL: Anthony, I really don't think . . .

The door to the pigeon coop open. Pigeon noises come from the coop, catching both boys attention. TONY ENTERS from the door, backing up, pushing unseen pigeons back into the coop with his broom. He has a large white bandage on one side of his forehead.

TONY: *Stunada* pigeons! *(He rests the broom on the side of the coop, brushes himself off and moves downstage.)* I see your mother has put you two to work already.

ANTHONY: That's the curse of men in the Della Rosa family.

TONY: You've got to rub it in? At least you boys managed to get yourselves away from here. Why the hell you came back; that I can't figure.

MICHAEL: What happened to your head, Pop? Mama get you with one of the pots and pans?

TONY: Yeah. *(sighs)* You're married to a woman for thirty-five years, you think you know all her moves. *(He mimics throwing something.)* I always knew she had a good curve and a slider with the pots. But she surprised me with a change-up! *(He touches the bandage and winces.)* You two all settled in?

ANTHONY: Yup. Mama's got us back in our old room.

TONY: Just like when you were kids.

MICHAEL: Except that now he snores.

ANTHONY: I do not snore . . . unless I'm trying to.

MICHAEL: Why would you try to snore?

ANTHONY: *(With a snicker)* Because it annoyed the hell out of Sherrie.

MICHAEL: Well, try *not* to snore. Try real hard. I like to get some sleep now and then.

ANTHONY: Oh? And what about you? You were up half the night reading a book. Did you know that when you read, you move your lips?

MICHAEL: That wasn't just any book. That's my breviary. And I move my lips because what I'm reading is prayers. A priest has to recite the prayers in the breviary every day. If you had paid attention to the sisters in St. Catherine's School when we had Religion class, you might have remembered that.

ANTHONY: So, what you're telling me is that even when you were a kid, you were paying close attention to nuns, eh?

MICHAEL: Anthony!

ANTHONY: Hey, hey. It's okay to pay attention to nuns . . . as long as you don't get into the habit!

MICHAEL and ANTHONY rise, start to go at each other. TONY steps between them.

TONY: Boys, boys. Don't fight. You're not kids anymore. There's no reason two grown up people should fight . . . unless they're married. (*Looks at his watch.*) Uh oh, look at the time. If you'll excuse me, I've got to get to . . . er, an important meeting with my business associates, (*He winks at them*) if you know what I mean.

MICHAEL: Sure, Pop. Go ahead. We understand.

TONY: Thank you. Thank you. (*EXITS through gate.*)

ANTHONY: I hope he remembered to bring his shoeshine box. (*Laughs.*)

MICHAEL: Don't be cruel, Anthony. You know that this gangster fantasy he has is just a defense mechanism against a life of humiliation being married to Mama. Pop's really a good guy. And when you think about it, he's put himself on the line for us more than once when Mama was on the warpath.

ANTHONY: Yeah. But he was always such an easy target for a gag.

MICHAEL: Oh, God, was he! All the tricks we played on the old man when we were growing up! Hey, hey. Remember when we put pencil shavings into his tobacco pouch?

ANTHONY: Yeah. And the funny thing was, he always bought such cheap tobacco, he didn't know the difference! *(They are laughing heartily, practically in tears.)* And how about the time we got that trick bottle of beer, the one that had a seal inside so nothing would come out.

MICHAEL: I remember! We hid behind the pigeon coop and watched him out here in his chair as he tried to drink it!

ANTHONY: I almost peed my pants!

MICHAEL: He'd try to take a swig, and then when nothing came out he'd hold it up trying to see if anything was leaking out the bottom.

As he says this, he holds up the potato he had in his hand over his head. He uses both hands as he mimics the way TONY had looked at the bottom of the bottle. SOPHIE opens the door to the house and ENTERS as he does this. She sees MICHAEL holding up the potato over his head.

SOPHIE: *(In a panic)* Michael! *Madonna Mia!* What's the matter with you? You can't consecrate a potato like it was Holy Communion!

MICHAEL: Relax, Mama. I'm just showing the potato to Anthony.

SOPHIE: Whatsamatta – he never saw a potato before? He can look at his own potato. He's supposed to be peeling them with you!

ANTHONY: *(Showing her the potato he has just peeled in his hand.)* I am. I am. See?

SOPHIE: *(Taking the potato from him.)* You call this a peeled potato? You left three eyes in it! *(Takes the potato from MICHAEL.)* And you, there's bits of skin all over this one. This is not the way I taught you boys to peel a potato when you were kids!

She gives MICHAEL back the potato. He takes off the remaining skin while dialog continues.

MICHAEL: It's been a long time since we were kids, Mama.

SOPHIE: You didn't peel them so hot back then either. You two can't do anything right, can you?

MICHAEL: What's that supposed to mean?

ANTHONY: Oh, boy! Here it comes!

SOPHIE: It means just what I said! Both of you screw up everything you do! I raise you up to be good Catholic boys, and what do you do? *(To ANTHONY)* You go marry some Protestant who doesn't even bother to stay married to you! Not that I blame her for that. *(To MICHAEL)* And look what we got here – a priest who can't seem to keep the zipper of his cassock closed!

MICHAEL: Mama, you're not being fair.

SOPHIE: *I'm* not being fair! What about you? God entrusts you with one of the parishes of His Holy Church, and what do you do – you betray that trust! And for what, for what, Michael? Cheap, sleazy sex!

MICHAEL: It was not cheap, sleazy sex; . . . It was nice, tasteful sex.

SOPHIE: You ain't supposed to have any kind of sex – tasty or not! You took a vow!

MICHAEL: Vows can be broken.

SOPHIE: Your behind can be broken, too, if I give it a good hard kick! *(ANTHONY slides to the end of the bench to get farther away from SOPHIE)* So, who is it, Michael? Who is this slut who is driving my son away from the Holy priesthood? I certainly hope it's not one of your parishioners.

MICHAEL: It isn't . . . not exactly.

SOPHIE: Not exactly – the same words your sister said to me yesterday. All of a sudden, my children can't give their mother a straight answer. So, Michael, I'm wondering here – what does “not exactly” one of your parishioners mean? Does it mean the wife of one of your parishioners? The mother . . . ?”

ANTHONY: *(Who can't resist.)* The . . . sister. *(MICHAEL gives him a dirty look.)* . . . or maybe none of the above!

MICHAEL, now angry, rises with balled fists.

SOPHIE: *(To MICHAEL)* You sit down! *(To ANTHONY)* And you shut up! Unlike you, Anthony, at least your brother chose a Catholic girl! *(To MICHAEL)* This girl, she is Catholic, isn't she?

MICHAEL: Oh, very Catholic.

SOPHIE: Well, thank God for small favors. Now, Michael, I still don't understand what has gotten into you. Priests hear confessions. People come to you to forgive their sins, not to cause their sins.

ANTHONY: (*Ever the cut-up.*) I don't know, Mama. Maybe things were slow in the confessional. So, Michael felt he should go out and drum up a little business.

MICHAEL: (*Rising, angry*) Priest or not, I am going to ram this potato

...

SOPHIE: Sit down! You're not going to ram anything! You did enough ramming already.

ANTHONY: (*Rises, puts down peeler.*) Er, Mama, maybe I should go take a walk for a while. The potatoes are almost done anyhow.

SOPHIE: Fine. Take a walk over to the tomato patch and water the plants. (*He starts to protest. She stops him with a pointed finger.*) And make sure you do a good job! Don't just sprinkle with the watering can. Get the hose out and soak them down. (*He hesitates.*) Now!

ANTHONY: (*Meekly*) Yes, Mama. (*EXITS Right.*)

SOPHIE: Now, Michael, no more games. I want to know who this girl is.

MICHAEL: (*Puts down potato & peeler, rises and moves DR.*) Why?

SOPHIE: (*Following him*) What do you mean – why? I'm your mother. I've got a right to know who is trying to lead my son, the priest away from his holy vocation.

MICHAEL: It's touching that you're so concerned about my vocation.

SOPHIE: And this is supposed to mean. . . ?

MICHAEL: I think what really bothers you is that you're no longer going to be able to brag about "your son, the priest." Although, nowadays mothers are not so anxious to brag about their sons being priests, with all those scandals.

SOPHIE: That is a terrible thing to say, Michael. Sure, I brag about you. I don't care what any other priests did. You've always been a good priest, and I'm proud of you. Is that such a crime?

MICHAEL: Pride doth come before a fall, Mama. Although in your case, it probably comes before Summer, Winter and Spring, too. But you know what - you can continue to be proud of me. Only, instead of being proud of me as a priest, you can be proud of me as a husband and father.

SOPHIE: Father! You've got this girl knocked up?

MICHAEL: Of course not!

SOPHIE: I'm only asking. All right, I'll be proud. But proud of who, Michael? Who is this potential. . . (*spitting it out*) daughter-in-law of mine? Don't you think your mother should meet her?

MICHAEL: Oh, yeah. That'd be a scene – Mama Della Rosa meets the Whore of Babylon!

SOPHIE: She's from Babylon?

MICHAEL: (*Sighs*) For someone who is so religious, you really ought to read the Bible a little more. At any rate, you'll have to wait at least thirty days. We're not supposed to have any contact for that long.

SOPHIE: Says who?

MICHAEL: The Church. They want us to use that time to think things out before we take what will be an irrevocable step.

SOPHIE: This girl, she agreed to that?

MICHAEL: She had no choice.

SOPHIE: I don't understand. . .

Before she can continue, THERESA ENTERS suddenly from the house door. She is furious and slams the door behind her. She is carrying an opened letter. She moves downstage.

THERESA: That fink! That absolute rat fink!

SOPHIE: (*Putting her hands over MICHAEL's ears.*) Theresa, you should shouldn't use such language in front of a priest!

MICHAEL: (*Taking her hands off his ears.*) It's all right. I've heard much worse. I'm a big boy, Mama. I no longer have virgin ears.

SOPHIE: Hmmp! Or anything else, for that matter.

THERESA: (*Still fuming*) I'll kill him. I swear, I'll kill him!

MICHAEL: Oh, I'm sure things can't be all that bad, sister dear. Come, tell me all about it.

SOPHIE: Never mind him. Tell me! I'm your mother.

THERESA: There's nothing to tell. I am simply going to rip out his guts!

MICHAEL: Now, now, Theresa. Vengeance is mine saith the Lord.

THERESA: Yeah, well He can have him after I'm finished with the rat fink!

MICHAEL: I assume the aforementioned "rat fink" is one of the men in your life. So, are we talking about you fiancée or your ex?



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