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# Miracle at Saint Mary Juana Abbey



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# Miracle at Saint Mary Juana Abbey

**Jean-Pierre Martinez**

*Translation by the author*

*The abbey's gift shop, which funds the nuns' charity work, is seeing a decline in sales: the abbey's famous Saint Mary Juana's Holy Elixir, a concoction claiming to cure all ailments, is no longer a best seller. That is, until an enterprising nun decides to improve the recipe with a mysterious plant. The potion's renewed success is incredible. Could it be Saint Mary Juana's latest miracle?*

## **Characters**

Beatrice: Mother Superior  
Teresa: Sister Treasurer  
Margaret: Sister Herbalist  
Agnes: Novice  
Mildred: Volunteer  
Harold: Volunteer  
Edward: Parishioner  
Victoria: Parishioner  
Fred and/or Sam: High school student (s)  
Ben and/or Jo: Dealer(s)  
Ramirez and/or Sanchez: Police officer(s)

The gender of the high school students, dealers, and police officers can be either male or female. Each of these pairs can be reduced to a single character.

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*The shop of Saint Mary Juana's abbey offering various monastic products (liqueurs, biscuits, jams) and other religious items (candles, statues, books) displayed on shelves or stands. The famous "Elixir of Saint Mary Juana" is prominently featured. Sister Teresa handles the bookkeeping while Mildred, the volunteer assisting her, reviews the aisles.*

**Mildred** – Ah... We'll need to reorder bookmarks with the image of Saint Mary Juana. They're selling like hotcakes at the moment.

**Teresa** – Even if we managed to multiply these hotcakes as Jesus-Christ multiplied loaves... at 50 pence each, it's not with these bookmarks that we're going to make any money.

**Mildred** – Come on, Sister Teresa, let's at least keep the faith! *(Pause)* Unfortunately, you're not entirely wrong... Besides, we haven't seen many people since this morning.

**Teresa** – Even our most faithful parishioners prefer to go to the shopping centre for their Christmas gifts.

**Mildred** – All that to buy products made in China or who knows where... While all our items are made here by the sisters. Short supply chains, as they say nowadays.

**Teresa** – Yes, Mildred... We are the only intermediaries between the Creator and the consumer.

**Mildred** – Alas, the organic monastic suffers from a deficit of image.

**Teresa** – And our bank account suffers from a deficit, period.

**Mildred** – Is the situation really that serious?

**Teresa** – We're not here to make profits, of course, but if sales continue to decline, unless a miracle happens, we'll end up having to close the shop.

*Sister Margaret and Harold arrive. He is pushing a crate of liquor bottles on a handcart.*

**Mildred** – Ah, Harold! Hello, Sister Margaret.

*Margaret responds with a timid smile.*

**Harold** – Mildred, my regards. Hello, Sister Teresa.

**Mildred** – Oh my... But that crate looks very heavy.

**Margaret** – Fortunately, we have a handcart to help us.

**Mildred** – A handcart? I didn't know we had a handcart at the abbey...

**Harold** – Well, you can't stop progress...

**Margaret** – It's a gift from one of our parishioners, Edward. He used to be a grocer and just retired.

**Harold** – As far as my back is concerned, it's a godsend. I would have gladly given you a hand. But with my sciatica...

**Margaret** – Would you mind helping me, Mildred?

**Mildred** – Certainly, Sister.

*Sister Margaret and Mildred grab the crate and, with visible effort but great determination, lift it off the handcart and place it on the ground.*

**Mildred** – Phew... It's as heavy as a dead horse. What is it?

**Margaret** – My production for the week...

*Mildred takes a bottle and admires the label.*

**Mildred** – Ah yes, the famous "Elixir of Saint Mary Juana." Supposed to cure us of just about every ailment...

**Harold** – And make us regain the vigour of our twenties...

**Margaret** – Do you doubt it?

**Mildred** – I'm sure this concoction has some therapeutic virtues, but... while my faith is unwavering, I must admit I don't really believe in the Elixir of Youth. Especially when that elixir is a 90-proof liqueur...

**Harold** – If only it could cure my sciatica...

**Teresa** – Let's not joke about it, Mildred. This Holy Liqueur remains the emblematic product of our abbey. And in the old days, this elixir used to be our best-seller...

**Mildred** – It's true that we haven't sold many since the last delivery. I'm not sure where we're going to put all this...

**Teresa** – A few years ago, at least two bottles a day were being shipped.

**Harold** – We need to find something to boost sales, but well, it's still a medicinal beverage. It's not something you drink every day as an aperitif.

**Mildred** – No... Unless we find something to rejuvenate this old-fashioned product.

**Harold** – An elixir of youth that needs a shock treatment to regain its second youth. You have to admit, it's a bit paradoxical...

**Mildred** – That's what I call the paradox of mothballs, Harold. You put the mothballs in your clothes to prevent them from being eaten by little bugs, and the result is, when you wear them, you're the one who smells like death.

**Harold** – Well, Mildred, you don't smell like mothballs at all. And if I may say so, you even smell very nice.

**Mildred** – Thank you, Harold. At least you know how to talk to women...

**Margaret** (*timidly*) – I may have an idea...

**Harold** – About mothballs?

**Margaret** – About our elixir...

**Teresa** – An idea?

**Margaret** – It's still too early to talk about it, Sister, but I'm working on it.

**Harold** – Sister Margaret... You've managed to arouse my curiosity...

**Margaret** (*embarrassed*) – For now, if you don't mind, I'm off to gather herbs in the mountains.

*Margaret exits.*

**Mildred** – So many mysteries...

**Harold** – Yes, when she goes out like that, roaming the countryside to gather ingredients for her elixir, I feel like I'm seeing the Asterix's druid. One day, we should follow her to discover the secret of her magic potion...

**Mildred** – Come on, Harold... Sister Margaret doesn't resemble our dear Getafix at all.

**Harold** – I wasn't saying that because of the beard...

**Teresa** – Alright, my children, let's not blaspheme. I remind you that we owe the recipe for this liqueur to the founder of our order...

**Mildred** – It is said that she had a revelation while hearing voices... One could almost say that the formula for this cordial was whispered in her ear by God himself.

**Teresa** – And it is the sales of this divine elixir that have allowed our abbey to continue its mission until today.

*Mildred looks toward the door.*

**Mildred** – Ah, here comes the Mother Superior. I don't know she's with...

*Beatrice, the Mother Superior, enters followed by the young Sister Agnes.*

**Beatrice** – Good morning, my children.

**Teresa** – Good morning, Mother.

**Beatrice** – My children, may I introduce Sister Agnes, who will begin her noviciate in our abbey.

**Teresa** – Welcome to the abbey of Saint Mary Juana, Sister.

**Mildred** – We are delighted to see that despite the current crisis of vocations, there are still young candidates for monastic life.

**Harold** – A family tradition, perhaps?

**Beatrice** – Sister Agnes has just finished her studies at HBS.

**Teresa** – HBS?

**Agnes** – Harvard Business School.

**Harold** – Oh yes, that's quite extraordinary, as far as education goes. I mean, for a nun. Even with the mass unemployment that affects young people today, graduates from business schools rarely choose to enter an abbey.

**Mildred** – It just goes to show that all paths can lead to our Lord Jesus Christ.

**Agnes** – I decided to take the veil after seeing the Virgin Mary.

**Harold** – Well, well...

**Teresa** – During a pilgrimage to Lourdes, perhaps? In the depths of the cave, like our dear Bernadette?

**Agnes** – Actually, it was in the depths of a lecture hall, during an innovation management class.

**Harold** – You mean... in the light of a projector or something like that?

**Beatrice** – When she decides to reveal herself to us, the Holy Virgin doesn't give us the choice of place or time.

**Teresa** – After all, God is everywhere. So why not in the lecture hall of the Harvard Business School?

**Beatrice** – Let's consider the arrival of this child as a sign from God, encouraging us to persist in our mission...

**Mildred** – Of course...

**Beatrice** – Given her commercial skills, I asked Sister Agnes to relaunch sales of our monastic products...

**Harold** – Excellent idea.

**Beatrice** – Sister Agnes will therefore work with you. Please be kind enough to tell her a little about the remarkable work you're all doing here. And if she has any ideas for improvement...

**Teresa** – You can count on us, Mother. If it is God's will, we have nothing against Innovation Management.

**Beatrice** – Then I entrust her to you... Christmas is coming, and I'm going back to arrange the nativity scene...

*Beatrice exits.*

**Teresa** – Well, then... Shall I explain a little about all this?

**Agnes** – Let's go... In any case, it's a very lovely shop... Perhaps a bit traditional...

**Teresa** – As Mother Superior said, you know, before being a business, it's first and foremost a mission.

**Agnes** – Of course, Sister. But to fulfil our mission, we need resources, don't we?

**Teresa** – Indeed. The sales of our monastic products allow us to pay the abbey's expenses. But also to finance our social works.

**Agnes** – Mother Superior told me about it. You are fighting drug cartels in Colombia, is that right?

**Teresa** – Yes, well... On our modest level.

**Harold** – Without weapons, hatred, or violence, of course.

**Mildred** – We finance fair trade agriculture development programs in Latin America, so that farmers can give up growing poppies.

**Agnes** – A noble mission, indeed.

**Teresa** – Mildred and Harold are among the few volunteers who help us fulfil our task.

**Mildred** – I'm just trying to be a little useful... And since I'm still single...

**Teresa** – By the way, I'll let Mildred give you an overview of the products available in our store, she knows them much better than I do.

**Mildred** – So... As you can see, our product range is quite diverse. However, our flagship items are the candles, inspired by Saint Mary Juana, and our famous elixir of youth, made, as you know, with local herbs.

**Agnes** – Ah yes, Mother Superior mentioned it to me as well... And what is this liqueur made of, exactly?

**Teresa** – Only Sister Margaret knows the recipe, which has been passed down from sister to sister for generations.

**Mildred** – When the Herbalist Sister feels the end coming, just before receiving the last sacraments, she entrusts her secret to the sister who will succeed her.

**Harold** – Fortunately, violent deaths are rare in abbeys.

**Agnes** – I see... A secret as well kept as that of Coca-Cola, then...

**Teresa** – Unfortunately, the Elixir of Saint Mary Juana sells much less. It's a very traditional product, you know... And traditions are lost, unfortunately.

**Harold** – Perhaps it could be used in cocktails.

**Mildred** – Ah, in cocktails... Well, that's an idea, isn't it, Sister Agnes?

*Agnes examines the bottle.*

**Agnes** – Yeah... It's true that the vintage touch has its charm, but well...

**Harold** – I'll let you taste it. You'll get an idea.

*(He takes a bottle from behind the counter and pours a small glass, handing it to Agnes. She takes it and drinks it in one gulp, with a slight grimace.)*

**Mildred** – So?

**Agnes** – Oh yes, it's... It's interesting. And... does it sell?

**Teresa** – Less and less, unfortunately...

**Agnes** – I have to admit, it doesn't surprise me entirely... The recipe should be modernised.. Give the label a makeover... Do you have a website?

**Teresa** – You mean... for the abbey?

**Agnes** – Anyway for the shop...

**Teresa** – Well... It didn't seem necessary until now.

**Agnes** – You should have at least a Facebook page... We could call it... Fans of Saint Mary Juana, what do you think?

*Sister Teresa seems a little taken aback by these revolutionary ideas. Victoria, an elegant and dignified old lady, but somewhat diminished, enters.*

**Victoria** – Good morning.

**Mildred** – Good morning, Victoria. How are you this morning?

**Victoria** – Oh, you know, at my age... I was at the confessional, like every Thursday, after my hair appointment... I thought I'd come by to say hello.

**Harold** – Every Thursday? You have so many things to confess, Victoria?

**Teresa** – Come on, Harold...

**Victoria** – I could go only once a month, of course...

**Harold** – To confession?

**Victoria** – To the hairdresser! But what more can I say, it keeps me busy...

**Mildred** – Perhaps you wanted to do some Christmas shopping, Victoria?

**Victoria** – Well...

**Mildred** *(aside)* – I think this is a good opportunity for you to get involved, Sister Agnes. I'll leave her to you...

**Agnes** – Good morning, madam. Can I help you? Is there something specific you needed?

**Victoria** – Well, I don't know this charming young lady...

**Teresa** – This is Sister Agnes, Victoria. She will be doing her noviciate with us.



**Victoria** – Oh my God... My poor child. But why come here to bury yourself at your age? The abbey should be reserved for those who no longer have the opportunity to sin.

**Mildred** – Come on, Victoria...

**Victoria** – And what led you to take the veil, my little Agnes? A love affair?

**Agnes** – A vision of the Virgin.

**Victoria** – Oh my, even so... My poor child... But at your age, you should be seeing naughty boys, not the Virgin...

**Agnes** – You mentioned that you weren't feeling very well, I believe. A little pick-me-up might do you good. You're familiar, I imagine, with our famous elixir of youth?

**Victoria** – She's quite adorable, though...

*Agnes takes a bottle and shows it to her.*

**Agnes** – Here, they say it's good for everything.

**Victoria** – Ah yes... The liqueur of Saint Mary Juana... I remember... My grandmother always had a bottle of it in her cupboard.

**Agnes** – According to our many customers, the effect is extraordinary.

**Mildred** – Let's not exaggerate, though. We shouldn't resort to false advertising either.

**Harold** – It won't restore your youth, but it will help you bear the ailments of old age, Victoria.

**Agnes** – Shall I get you a bottle?

**Victoria** – Well... I still have the one my grandmother left me when she died. You know, nowadays, no one drinks this kind of stuff anymore.

**Agnes** – I'm not sure if your ancestor's bottle is still good, Victoria. It's a miraculous elixir, indeed, but it has an expiration date, after all.

**Victoria** – I'll rather take a bookmark for my missal. I've lost mine again... Well, it's mostly to support your good works...

**Mildred** – Yes, and it's also cheaper, isn't it?

*Edward, an elderly gentleman well-dressed but showing the weight of the years, enters.*

**Edward** – Ladies and gentlemen. My sisters.

**Harold** – Hello, Edward. Did you come from confession as well?

**Edward** – Oh no, I came from the pub. And I played the lottery, like every Thursday.

**Harold** – You're right, Edward. A little place in heaven is good. A little place in the sun here on earth is not bad either. Fortune favours the bold! Isn't that right, Mildred?

**Mildred** – I don't understand anything about gambling. But I wonder if it's truly Christian. Doesn't the Bible say, "You shall earn your bread by the sweat of your brow"?

**Edward** – Don't worry, if I ever win the lottery, I won't forget to make a donation to your charities, my sisters.

**Agnes** – In that case, we will pray to the Lord for fortune to smile upon you...

**Harold** – Anyway, thank you for the handcart you have already donated to the abbey. It saved my back while waiting for the miracle that will rid me of my sciatica.

**Edward** – Hello, Victoria. You look very elegant today.

*Victoria, pretending to ignore him while stealing glances, smiled upon hearing the compliment and flirted a little.*

**Victoria** – I've just come from the hairdresser's...

**Edward** – And if I may say so, this new colour suits you marvellously.

**Victoria** – Flatterer... But thank you anyway, Edward.

**Edward** – Yes, it's... it's very spring-like... With those... orange highlights.

**Victoria** (*shocked*) – Orange, you think?

**Edward** – No, it's not really orange. I was just saying...

**Victoria** (*to Agnes*) – Do you think I have orange hair, my dear Agnes?

**Agnes** – I don't know, there are some... petrol blue reflections, right?

**Victoria** (*horrified*) – Petrol blue?

**Agnes** – Well... More like metallic blue...

**Victoria** (*to Harold*) – What do you think, then?

**Harold** – Metallic blue? Yes, I quite like it... It's the colour of my car.

**Victoria** – I'll go back to my hairdresser, she's going to hear about this...

**Agnes** – And this bottle, Victoria? Shall I set it aside for you?

**Edward** – What's that? Ah, the famous Liqueur of Saint Mary Juana... I didn't even know it still existed...

**Agnes** – The classics never die...

**Victoria** – Oh, you know, miraculous elixirs... I've been taking them all my life, and look at me.

**Edward** – But I find the result spectacular, my dear Victoria!

**Victoria** – You're going to make me blush, Edward...

**Edward** – Here, I'll offer you this bottle.

**Victoria** – Thank you, but... I'm not sure if...

**Edward** – You'll invite me to have a little drink with you...

**Victoria** – Why not?

**Mildred** – And there you have it. Your first sale.

*Sister Teresa hands the bottle to Victoria in a small bag. Edward gives a note to Mildred.*

**Mildred** – Let me know how it goes...

**Edward** (*taking the bag*) – Leave it to me, I'll carry it. Shall I walk you home?

**Victoria** – Certainly, Edward...

**Edward** – You've got great hair, I assure you...

**Victoria** – Do you really think so?

*They exit. Victoria, excited, forgets her handbag.*

**Mildred** – It seems that this elixir at least has the power to bring lonely hearts closer together...

**Harold** – Unfortunately, I fear they'll both be dead before finishing the bottle...

*Teresa gives him a reproachful look.*

**Teresa** – Oh, Harold...

**Harold** – Oh no, I didn't mean that the side effects of this cordial would shorten their lives. It's just that one little glass a month probably won't be enough to boost your sales...

**Agnes** – Hence the need for a change in our sales methods.

**Teresa** – Change... It's a word that sounds a bit strange within the walls of an abbey, sister.

**Agnes** – Indeed, traditions are important... But if the monastery were to remain without resources, its social works would be at risk.

**Teresa** – That is only too true, unfortunately.

**Agnes** – By the way... Could you tell me more about these charitable works, Sister?

**Teresa** – Well... First, there's our aid program to assist Colombian farmers, to combat the drug economy that plagues their country.

**Mildred** – Not to mention our tutoring classes for underprivileged high school students in our charming community.

**Teresa** – We award a few scholarships each year to the best among them, so they can receive proper education in a Catholic school.

**Harold** – Private education is so expensive these days...

**Teresa** – Unfortunately... I'm afraid that this year, we won't have the resources to continue our mission. Unless a miracle happens...

*Sister Margaret arrives, enthusiastic, holding a vial.*

**Margaret** – A miracle? Well, I propose to perform one!

**Teresa** – Sister Margaret? Is everything alright? You seem a bit excited...

**Margaret** – I've found the solution, Sister!

**Teresa** – The solution?

**Margaret** – To boost sales of our elixir!

**Teresa** – By the way, let me introduce you Sister Agnes. She just graduated from Harvard Business School and joined the abbey.

**Margaret** – God bless you, Sister.

**Teresa** – We're listening, Sister Margaret.

**Margaret** – I found a herb in the mountains.

**Mildred** – A herb? There's no shortage of those around here, is there?

**Margaret** – Yes, but this one is a plant I don't recognise It's not listed in any of the botanical books we have in the abbey library.

**Harold** – Be careful. Herbs are like mushrooms. Some can be toxic too.

**Margaret** – I tried it in a new recipe for the liqueur. And the result is mind-blowing, I assure you.

**Agnes** – What do you mean, mind-blowing?

**Margaret** – The taste is much better, and the effects of the elixir seem to be multiplied.

**Harold** – Truly, it's becoming more and more like a recipe for a magic potion.

**Teresa** – Let's not rush into things, though. The formula for this elixir is centuries old... Modifying it would be a very significant decision.

**Agnes** – Nevertheless, I suggest a tasting session with the Mother Superior.

**Teresa** – Do you really think we can disturb her for this?

**Harold** – She herself encourages us to reform our methods!

**Agnes** – You can be in favour of the Latin mass without being an enemy of new ideas.

**Harold** – When they're good ideas...

**Teresa** – Well... Mildred, please go fetch the Mother Superior. She's in the chapel setting up the nativity scene...

**Mildred** – Very well, Sister.

*Mildred exits.*

**Teresa** – How should we proceed?

**Margaret** – I've prepared a small vial of my new elixir.

**Harold** – A vial... We're already delving into sorcery... Well, rest assured. These days, we no longer burn witches.

**Teresa** – When I said traditions are fading...

**Agnes** – We could do a blind test.

**Teresa** – Well, Sister Agnes... We're not going to ask the Mother Superior to play blind man's bluff...

**Agnes** – No, of course not... It's simply about putting the old and the new elixir in two unlabelled glasses, so that everyone can decide their preference objectively.

**Harold** – Excellent idea, isn't it? May the best one win!

*They set everything up for the tasting session.*

**Teresa** – Still... I'm not sure if all of this is very Catholic...

*Edward and Victoria return.*

**Victoria** – I don't know what I was thinking, I forgot my handbag...

**Edward** – The elixir hasn't had time to take effect yet. I also lose my memory sometimes.

**Margaret** – Ah, Edward, Victoria... You've come at the right time. We were looking for guinea pigs.

**Edward** – Guinea pigs?

**Teresa** (to Margaret) – Are you sure it's completely harmless?

**Margaret** – Rest assured. I've tested it on myself, and look at the result!

*Teresa looks at her, appearing moderately reassured. The Mother Superior arrives with Mildred.*

**Beatrice** – Well, let's see it, my children...

**Margaret** – I will have each of you taste a first sample without telling you if it's the new or the old formula.

**Mildred** – Alright...

*Margaret serves a first round, discreetly, and gives a small glass to each person. After a moment of hesitation, everyone present tastes the liqueur in reverent silence.*

**Harold** – Yes...

**Teresa** – This is the traditional recipe, isn't it?

**Mildred** – It's not bad, but...

**Victoria** – It's a cordial.

**Edward** – It still has a slight medicinal quality...

**Beatrice** – Yes... It's the Elixir of Saint Mary Juana, after all.

*Without a word, Margaret serves them a second round. Same procedure, but the faces become more appreciative.*

**Mildred** – Ah, yes...

**Harold** – It feels less like drinking medicine.

**Beatrice** – Yes, it's curious.

**Edward** – It's not bad...

**Teresa** – I taste a hint of apple.

**Margaret** – There's some in there...

**Beatrice** – But it also needs to be as beneficial as the previous one.

**Margaret** – I just added this little touch of...

**Victoria** – I'd like to taste it again, just to be sure.

**Margaret** – I only have enough left to fill one glass.

**Beatrice** – Oh yes, it's...

*She passes the glass to Teresa.*

**Teresa** – It's good.

*She passes the glass to Harold.*

**Harold** – Yes, you immediately feel a sense of well-being...

*He keeps the glass in his hand with a dazed expression.*

**Mildred** – Pass it around, Arnold.

**Harold** – My name is Harold. But it's true, I feel a bit upside down...

*The atmosphere relaxes.*

**Agnes** – Yes... Stupendous, that's the word... I feel like I've seen the Virgin Mary again...

**Teresa** – Again?

**Margaret** – But where?

**Agnes** – There, at the bottom of my glass.

**Edward** – Ah yes... I also sometimes see the Virgin Mary at the bottom of a glass...

**Victoria** – At the bar?

**Edward** – More like at the Chinese restaurant. When it's time for a glass of sake...

**Mildred** – Anyway, Edward.

*Everyone except the sisters can't help but laugh.*

**Beatrice** – We should probably stop this tasting session now...

**Teresa** – Yes, I don't know what's happening... I feel like I'm having visions too.

*Victoria takes out a mirror from her handbag and looks at herself.*

**Victoria** – What colour is my hair now?

**Edward** – I would say... pink.

**Victoria** – That's what I thought.

**Beatrice** – It's true, it's very relaxing... I've never felt so good since... I was about to say something silly...

**Mildred** – I think we've had a bit too much of this wonderful elixir.

**Margaret** – It's 90-proof, after all.

**Edward** – Do you still have any more of this magic potion, sister?

**Margaret** – No, not a drop left.

**Teresa** – In that case, I believe we should go to bed.

**Agnes** – Before Vespers, sister?

**Beatrice** – You didn't expect to go dancing, I imagine?

**Teresa** – You'll learn that in an abbey, we go to bed with the chickens.

**Agnes** – And what about the test, then? What do we decide?

**Beatrice** – I'm not sure... My thoughts are not very clear anymore...

**Margaret** – Maybe we could vote?

**Teresa** – It seems more reasonable to take a little time to reflect.

**Mildred** – We should sleep on it.

**Beatrice** – You're right... Let's postpone this decision. We'll see things more clearly tomorrow.

**Harold** – Shall I take you home, Millicent?

**Mildred** – My name is Mildred...

*They laugh like idiots. Everyone moves towards the exit with an unsteady gait. Beatrice stumbles.*

**Teresa** – Mind the step, Mother...

**Margaret** – There's a step?

**Mildred** – Until now, there haven't been any...

**Beatrice** – What is this new prodigy?

*They exit.*

**Blackout.**



*Mildred enters the shop, accompanied by Harold. She turns around to look at the threshold of the door.*

**Mildred** – Oh no, there's no step...

*Harold glances at the empty room.*

**Harold** – It's strange, usually Sister Teresa is already here.

**Mildred** – Apparently, our dear sisters overslept... I didn't hear the Matins bell.

**Harold** – Well, you were sleeping very deeply...

**Mildred** – But... how do you know that, Harold?

**Harold** – You do remember that I brought you home last night.

**Mildred** – Oh yes, maybe... There was such fog... It's strange at this time of year... There was fog inside the house too... So you walked me home. *(A bit worried)* And then?

**Harold** – You looked very tired. I took you to your room. You couldn't climb the stairs on your own...

**Mildred** – Don't tell me that...

**Harold** – I'm a gentleman, Mildred... And believe me, as for last night, we can almost speak of heroism. You didn't want to let me go. Do you remember that?

**Mildred** – No...

**Harold** – You seemed a bit foggy indeed. I didn't want to take advantage of the situation. However, may I still hope?

**Mildred** – My God...

*Sister Teresa arrives, slightly disheveled and with a guilty look.*

**Teresa** – Sorry, it's the first time it happened to me. I didn't hear the bell...

**Mildred** – I think we all got a bit carried away last night, didn't we?

**Harold** – Yes, it's strange. I feel like I have a hangover, minus the headache. So there's something miraculous about this elixir...

*Sister Agnes and Sister Margaret arrive with a crate of bottles.*

**Margaret** – During the night, I made a few extra bottles with the help of Sister Agnes.

**Agnes** – I'm sure it's going to be a big hit. We're going to explode in sales!

**Teresa** – Let me remind you, Sister, that the Mother Superior has not yet issued the Marketing Authorisation

*The Mother Superior arrives.*

**Beatrice** – Good morning, my children. Forgive me for not waking up to ring the bells.

**Margaret** – In any case, the new formula of this elixir undeniably has soporific virtues.

**Beatrice** – It's true, I slept like a log... But, well... The side effects of this cordial do seem a bit out of control.

**Margaret** – Maybe the dosage was a bit strong...

**Teresa** – What do you think, Mother?

**Beatrice** – I'm not sure...

**Teresa** – However, a decision must be made.

**Beatrice** – Mildred? What's your opinion?

**Mildred** – One cannot deny that this new elixir has mind-blowing properties. But a calming power combined with an disinhibiting effect. It can create an explosive cocktail...

**Teresa** – What if it was the devil himself who placed this malevolent herb on our path?

**Beatrice** – You mean... like the serpent in the Garden of Eden seducing Eve with the forbidden fruit?

**Teresa** – Personally, I find it has a taste of apple...

*Moment of reflection.*

**Beatrice** – You're right... Sisters, the best is the enemy of the good. And hell is paved with good intentions. It's better to forget these dangerous reforming ambitions and stick to the traditional formula of our elixir, revealed to Saint Mary Juana by the Virgin herself.

**Margaret** (*barely concealing her disappointment*) – Very well, Mother...

*Beatrice notices the crate brought by Margaret.*

**Beatrice** – What's all this?

**Margaret** – Just in case, I prepared a few bottles, but I will burn them, I swear.

**Beatrice** – Well, then the matter is closed.

*Beatrice prepares to leave.*

**Agnes** – Still, it's a pity not to give the product a chance...

**Beatrice** – I beg your pardon, Sister?

**Agnes** – It's just that... we're only talking about a monastic cordial. Not the cocaine from the Medellin cartel.

**Beatrice** – Are you questioning my decision?

**Agnes** – I'm simply saying that... for any institution, it is a weakness to be incapable of reforming itself.

**Beatrice** – My dear child, learn that it is the nature of the Church to be incapable of reforming itself...

**Teresa** – This aversion to reform sometimes leads us to excesses, like the Massacre of Saint Bartholomew's Day, but it has also allowed us to preserve our cherished traditions until today.

**Harold** – Traditions that the whole world envies us for.

*The phone rings.*

**Agnes** – Do you have the phone?

**Teresa** – Well, of course...

*Teresa answers.*

**Teresa** – This is Saint Mary Juana, I'm listening. No, I say Saint Mary Juana to indicate that you've reached the abbey of the same name, but my name is not Mary Juana, and I haven't been beatified yet... The treasurer? Yes, that's me. Oh, I see... No... That's very unfortunate indeed. I understand. Yes, it must be a little misunderstanding. Alright, I'll take care of it immediately. Thank you for calling. Yes, yes, I promise. God bless the Mutual Credit.

**Beatrice** – Is there any problem?

**Teresa** – It was the bank... One of our checks was declined for deposit...

**Beatrice** – Which check?

**Teresa** – The check we had made to pay for the education of young Zinedine. So that he'll be able to attend a catholic high school and receive a decent education.

**Mildred** – He's very talented, but he's been expelled from all the public schools in the county.

**Agnes** – If he definitely leaves school, he'll end up as a drug dealer.

**Harold** – Or worse, a footballer.

**Beatrice** – Well, then... We need to put money into the account.

**Teresa** – But with what money, Mother Beatrice?

**Beatrice** – Couldn't we... take out a small loan?

**Teresa** – Mother, it goes completely against the principles of our order. Moreover, we have already withdrawn two, and I'm afraid the Mutual Credit won't approve a third...

**Agnes** – You can see that it's urgent to straighten out the shop's finances.

**Teresa** – Unfortunately, our dear sister is not entirely wrong...

*Edward and Victoria enter, much more lively than the previous day.*

**Edward** – Good morning!

**Victoria** – Is everyone doing well?

**Mildred** – Well, you certainly seem to be...

**Edward** – Oh yes, we're in great shape, aren't we, Victoria?

**Victoria** – It's been years since I felt this good. And you know what?

**Teresa** – What?

**Victoria** – I have a feeling that your miraculous elixir has something to do with it.

**Edward** – Yes, I am absolutely convinced of that too.

**Victoria** – I slept like a log, and I don't have any aches anywhere. Well, almost...

**Edward** – And I think it's good for the spirits too! We're as cheerful as can be! Isn't that right, Victoria?

**Victoria** – Whatever the case, we'll take a few more bottles from you.

**Mildred** – Very well...

*She takes two bottles from a shelf.*

**Victoria** – Oh no, not that one. The new one!

**Teresa** – Well, you see... *(In an advertising tone)* What if I gave you two bottles of your usual liqueur for the price of one?

**Victoria** – No way! We prefer the new formula.

**Agnes** – See for yourself, Mother... It seems to me that it would be worth...

*Beatrice seems hesitant but then decides.*

**Beatrice** – Give them a bottle of your new elixir... Since you've distilled a few... It would be a waste to throw them away...

**Margaret** – Fine, Mother.

**Edward** – Just one? Can't we have two?

*Agnes hands them a bottle.*

**Margaret** – We've just started production. For now, it's one bottle for two people, until further notice.

**Victoria** – It reminds me of rationing tickets during the war...

**Edward** – You experienced rationing tickets, Victoria?

**Victoria** – No, of course not, I'm too young for that. My mother told me about it...

**Agnes** – For now, it's the same price as the old formula. But I warn you, it will probably increase a bit.

**Edward** – As the poet said "It matters little what bottle we have and its price, as long as we get drunk". We'll take this bottle for now... And you can set aside a case for us when you have more.

*He hands over a banknote.*

**Victoria** – Thank you, and... Merry Christmas to you all!

**Mildred** – Enjoy it in moderation though...

*Edward and Victoria leave, laughing like schoolchildren. Beatrice turns to Margaret and Agnes, who have radiant smiles.*

**Beatrice** – But it's only a trial...

**Margaret** (*regaining her seriousness*) – Yes, Mother...

*Beatrice leaves.*

**Margaret** – I'm going to make a few more bottles anyways, just to ensure we don't run out of stock in case this trial is successful.

**Teresa** – Don't get ahead of yourself. For now, we only have two customers.

*Margaret and Agnes place the new bottles on the shelves.*

**Mildred** – Sister Margaret?

**Margaret** – Yes?

**Mildred** – I know that the recipe for this new liqueur must also remain a secret, but is it legal, at least?

**Margaret** – Legal? I'm more concerned about whether I'll find enough plants to continue production.

**Harold** – Perhaps you should consider growing them yourself...

**Margaret** – Yes, why not...

**Agnes** – Edward and Victoria make a good pair. Are they married?

**Harold** – Not yet. But they're both widowed already. It's a good start.

*Fred and Sam, two young individuals with a rapper look, arrive. They can be either male or female as required for the performance. Depending on the needs of the production, Fred and Sam can also be portrayed by a single character (with one actor handling all their dialogues). Everyone present is rather surprised, as they are not accustomed to this type of clientele.*

**Mildred** – Welcome, my children (*or child*)! This is your home here. This is the house of God...

**Fred** – Thank you...

*Fred and Sam browse the shelves.*

**Mildred** – Are you looking for something specific?

**Harold** – You know, it's not unusual at your age to have questions about the meaning of life. About love. Sexuality.

*Sam and Fred give him an incredulous look.*

**Mildred** – Religion, especially the Catholic religion, can be one among many answers to your natural questions.

**Harold** – If you wish, I can recommend one or two books. We have a specialised section.

**Fred** – Actually, it's my grandmother who...

**Teresa** – Your grandmother?

**Fred** – Victoria.

**Mildred** – Ah, yes!

**Sam** – She told me about a syrup you sell here.

**Harold** – Really?

**Fred** – Well, it's more like a kind of potion. She described the effects to me, and...

**Agnes** – Can you believe it? Word of mouth is already working!

**Teresa** – But I don't understand. Your grandmother just left, and she already bought a bottle. So there's no point in buying her another...

**Fred** – Actually, it's for me. I have a slight cold and...

**Mildred** – A cold? Well, well...

**Sam** – I'm coughing a bit too. I don't know who passed this on to me.

*Sam forces a cough.*

**Harold** – A sexually transmitted disease, maybe.

**Fred** – It seems that your liqueur there is good for everything.

**Mildred** – Well, um...

**Teresa** – Oh no, but it's alcoholic, after all...

*Sister Margaret takes a bottle from the crate.*

**Margaret** – I have prepared a non-alcoholic version for the children...

**Teresa** – Well... You really think of everything...

**Fred** – Thank you, Sister, you're saving my life...

**Agnes** – Shall I wrap it up for you?

**Fred** – Uh, no, thank you, it's not necessary.

**Agnes** – Here's your bottle.

*Fred hands a note to Agnes.*

**Fred** – Thank you... I'm sure it will do me good...

**Agnes** – You're always welcome here.

**Fred** – I already feel much better...

**Sam** – Well then... Thank you and... see you soon, perhaps...

**Mildred** – That's right... Have a good day...

*Fred and Sam leave with their bottle.*

**Harold** – In the absence of scientifically proven therapeutic virtues, if this non-alcoholic liqueur can bring the new generation back to faith...

**Mildred** – It's another miracle of Saint Mary Juana.

*Ramirez and Sanchez enter, appearing as plainclothes police officers. Like the young individuals who just left, Ramirez and Sanchez can be male or female. They can also be portrayed as a single character.*

**Teresa** – Business is picking up, it seems.

*Ramirez and Sanchez browse the shelves.*

**Sanchez** – These candles are nice. They would make good Christmas gifts...

**Teresa** – They are votive candles featuring the likeness of our abbey's founder, Saint Mary Juana.

**Ramirez** – Saint Mary Juana? Well, well...

**Mildred** – Are they for gifting?

*Ramirez presents her with a police badge.*

**Ramirez** – Commissioner Ramirez.

**Teresa** – Everyone is welcome in the House of the Lord, even police officers...

**Sanchez** – Hello, Sisters.

**Harold** – I imagine that in your line of work too, you greatly need the support of faith, especially in the troubled times we are currently living in.

**Teresa** – We are here to listen to you, Commissioner.

**Ramirez** – Actually, it is you that I would have come to confess.

**Mildred** – Well, well...

**Sanchez** – We suspect the existence of a wild marijuana plantation in the surrounding mountains.

**Teresa** – Marijuana?

**Agnes** – That's what they call hashish, sister...

**Teresa** – Good heavens...

**Ramirez** – It's turning into Colombia around here, you know. Everyone's starting their own little organic plantation. If it continues, we'll have to bomb the whole place with napalm, like the Americans do over there.

**Harold** – But first, you need to know where the field is. Because I imagine these amateur gardeners are trying to remain discreet.

**Sanchez** – And that's precisely the purpose of my visit. Since the sisters are familiar with the mountains, we thought you might be able to help us.

**Teresa** – Help you?

**Ramirez** – Perhaps you have seen something unusual nearby.

**Teresa** – Well... Drugs? We don't even know what it looks like.

*Sanchez shows Teresa a photo.*

**Sanchez** – This is a photo of a marijuana plant. Let me tell you that it's not a plant that grows wild in this region.

*Teresa looks at the photo skeptically.*

**Teresa** – If anyone can provide you with information, it would be Sister Margaret. She spends a lot of time in the mountains collecting herbs.

*Ramirez approaches Sister Margaret. She looks at the photo and her face freezes.*

**Ramirez** – Well, sister? Do you recognise this composite sketch? Take your time and look carefully. I remind you that this is a plant sought after by the police.

*Margaret remains speechless. Beatrice returns.*

**Sanchez** – Is everything all right, Sister?



**Teresa** – Yes, yes, she's fine... It's just that... I completely forgot... Sister Margaret is mute...

**Sanchez** – Mute? Well, well...

**Beatrice** – She has taken a vow of silence.

**Teresa** – That's right...

**Ramirez** – I understand... We often deal with clients who have taken a vow of silence as well... Can we leave the photo with you, just in case she manages to speak again?

*Sister Beatrice takes the photo.*

**Beatrice** – I am the Mother Superior of this abbey. We will ask Sister Margaret to respond to your question in writing.

**Ramirez** – Very well, Mother... And if you have any useful information to share, please call the police station, won't you?

**Beatrice** – We will not fail to do so. The Church has always been a friend of the police, under every government.

*Sanchez grabs a bottle of the new liqueur.*

**Sanchez** – What is this liqueur made of?

**Teresa** – Various medicinal plants from the region. The recipe is a secret that has been kept for centuries by the nuns of our abbey, entrusted with distilling this precious elixir.

**Mildred** – That's also the reason why Sister Margaret took a vow of silence. She's the only one who knows the formula for the Elixir of Saint Mary Juana.

**Ramirez** – I see... In our jargon, we call that omerta...

*Sanchez takes a bottle from the crate.*

**Sanchez** – I'll take a bottle. After all, it can't hurt.

*Beatrice promptly takes the bottle from him.*

**Beatrice** – I'm sorry, these bottles are already reserved.

**Sanchez** – All of them?

**Agnes** – Christmas is coming... And our loyal customers are very fond of our products...

**Mildred** – Take a candle instead.

*She places a candle in his hand.*

**Sanchez** – A candle will do... How much do I owe you?

**Mildred** – It's a gift from the house.

**Beatrice** – May God bless the police.

**Ramirez** – Thank you, Mother. And forgive me for momentarily disturbing the serenity of this abbey. It's truly calming in this place. The truth is, I envy you.

**Beatrice** – Really?

**Ramirez** – You know, we see so much in our line of work... I could picture myself spending my remaining days in a monastery, away from all this violence and trafficking. Surrounded by friendly, honest, and reassuring faces...

**Beatrice** – In that case, you would first have to renounce all the temptations of the world that surrounds us, Commissioner.

**Ramirez** – Yes, that's probably what would ultimately make me give up the monastic life.

**Teresa** – Merry Christmas, Commissioner.

**Sanchez** – See you soon, Sister.

*Ramirez and Sanchez leave. Awkward silence.*

**Beatrice** – Sister Margaret... Please don't tell me you put marijuana in the Saint Mary Juana liqueur?

**Margaret** – I swear to you in the name of God, Mother, I had no idea it was drugs.

**Teresa** – It's an abomination. We even had to lie to the police.

**Agnes** – By omission, Sister. Only by omission...

**Mildred** – Now I understand the mind-blowing effects of this elixir... Last night, I was possessed by the devil myself.

**Harold** – Possessed by the devil? I hope you're not saying that about me...

**Agnes** – So, what do we do?

**Beatrice** – What do you mean, what do we do? We stop everything, obviously!

**Harold** – That's one thing Jesus didn't say: Take and smoke it all!

**Agnes** – Well, he did say: Take and drink it all... And this is indeed a liqueur.

**Mildred** – It's true that we do drink wine at Mass, but well... It's only made from grapes. Not cannabis resin.

**Teresa** – Sacrilege... What do you say, Mother?

**Beatrice** – Let's destroy this diabolical elixir by fire.

**Margaret** – Of course...

**Teresa** – We're not going to turn this sacred abbey into a clandestine laboratory.

**Agnes** – Of course... On the other hand...

**Beatrice** – What now?

**Agnes** – We could consider it as a sign that God is sending us.

**Beatrice** – Don't tell me you've seen the Virgin Mary again? You have to stop the liqueur, Sister...

**Margaret** – A sign, you say?

**Agnes** – Saint Mary Juana, marijuana... Admit that the coincidence is troubling.

**Beatrice** – What do you mean?

**Agnes** – The abbey is in financial trouble...

**Beatrice** – It's drugs!

**Agnes** – A soft drug, Mother. Didn't Marx say: "Religion is the opium of the people"?

**Beatrice** – I'm not sure that he meant it as an encouragement to go to church more often.

**Teresa** – You should also know, Sister, that in the House of God, we quote the Bible more often than "Capital."

**Agnes** – I think Saint Mary Juana wanted to help us.

**Teresa** – Fighting poppy cultivation in Colombia by growing marijuana here at home? That would be ironic, to say the least...

**Agnes** – Unless we consider it as relocation.

**Teresa** – We await your decision, Mother Beatrice.

**Beatrice** – I must admit, I don't know what to think anymore. Ever since you made me drink this concoction, my thoughts haven't been very clear...

**Margaret** (*crossing herself*) – Jesus, Mary, Joseph...

**Beatrice** – Mildred, you always give good advice...

**Mildred** – At this point, I think it's unnecessary to act hastily... Let's at least take time to reflect... while waiting for the effects of this satanic liqueur to dissipate...

**Beatrice** – I will go and pray to the Lord. Hoping that He will shed some light on me...

*Beatrice leaves. Edward and Victoria return. They have changed their outfits and are now dressed in a much more casual, spring-like style, as if going on vacation.*

**Edward** – I have some great news to announce.

**Harold** – Did you win the lottery?

**Edward** – Better than that. We're getting married!

**Mildred** – That's wonderful...

**Victoria** – Yes. I don't know what's happening to us. In the past few hours, I feel like I'm starting a new life.

**Edward** – I think it's the effect of this miraculous elixir. By the way, if you have some in stock, I'll take two or three cases.

**Teresa** – Two or three cases?

**Victoria** – We let our friends at the Senior Center taste it, and it's crazy.

**Edward** – A mind-blowing thing. Everyone wants their bottle for Christmas.

**Margaret** – Well... We've stopped production.

**Edward** – Stopped production? But why?

**Margaret** – Well... It seems that this liqueur doesn't meet all the sanitary standards...

**Victoria** – Sanitary standards?

**Edward** – Look at us! We're bursting with energy!

**Margaret** – We're not entirely sure yet, but...

**Mildred** – We need to be cautious. There could be harmful long-term effects.

**Edward** – You know, the long term for us... is inevitably harmful.

**Victoria** – What we know is that right now, it makes us feel good.

**Edward** – At the senior centre, they call it the laughing liqueur!

*Margaret laughs loudly, but stops when she realises that everyone is looking at her.*

**Harold** – Don't worry, she fell into it when she was little...

**Victoria** – Oh no, they're going to be very disappointed. Very disappointed.

**Edward** – We were all looking forward to having a little drink together to celebrate the New Year.

**Victoria** – Why deny these poor, elderly people in the twilight of their lives this modest consolation?

**Edward** – Poor old folks who, when they celebrate the New Year, are never sure if they'll make it through.

*All eyes turn to Teresa.*

**Teresa** – Give them a bottle to make them stop their fuss. But it's the last one. And not a word to the Mother Superior...

*Margaret gives them a bottle. Edward and Victoria are overjoyed.*

**Victoria** – Thank you, Sister.

**Edward** – God will reward you.

**Agnes** – While waiting for God's reward, I'll take the payment.

*Edward slips a note into Agnes's hand.*

**Agnes** – But it's far too much!

**Edward** – Consider it for your good deeds.

**Victoria** – Merry Christmas!

*Edward and Victoria leave. Awkward silence.*

**Harold** – On the other hand, the toxicity of this liqueur hasn't been proven yet.

**Mildred** – So if it can do them good...

**Agnes** – There are even therapeutic uses, you know.

**Margaret** – What uses?

**Agnes** – For terminal cancer patients, for example.

**Teresa** – But Edward and Victoria are not in the terminal stage! They want to get married...

**Mildred** – Maybe under the influence of this drug, by the way. Imagine if, once the effects wear off, they realise they've made a mistake!

**Harold** – Not everyone who gets married does it under the influence of drugs. Although, personally, I think an alcohol test should be mandatory before such ceremonies.

**Teresa** – Well... Let's say we sell the stock that Sister Margaret has already made. If it can at least temporarily replenish our bank account.

**Agnes** – That's the voice of reason, Sister...

**Teresa** – I'm not so sure about that... But afterwards, we'll go back to the old formula.

**Margaret** – I promise.

**Mildred** – There's still one question.

**Harold** – What is it?

**Mildred** – Someone must have planted that field.

**Teresa** – Yes, that's what those police officers were saying, actually.

**Mildred** – Those illegal growers probably won't be thrilled to find out that their harvest has been stolen...

**Agnes** – On the other hand, it is drugs.

**Harold** – So what?

**Agnes** – Stealing drugs from dealers... Isn't that a good deed?

**Mildred** – Not when you steal it with the intention of it them for your own benefit.

**Agnes** – But we're selling it for God's benefit.

**Margaret** – So, we would be like Robin Hood, who stole from the poor to give to the rich. (*They all look at her skeptically.*) I'm going back to the distillery, I need to keep an eye on my still...

*Margaret exits. Ben and Jo enter, two small-time dealers, male or female, who can also be portrayed by a single character.*

**Mildred** – It's certainly busy today...

**Agnes** – Is there anything I can do for you?

*Ben waves a strand of supposed cannabis under her nose.*

**Ben** – What do you think this is? Herbs from Provence?

**Teresa** – Ah, you're from the police too... Your colleagues were here a moment ago.

**Jo** – I'm not a cop, no.

**Agnes** – So what are you doing with that strand of weed? You know it's illegal...

**Ben** – I cultivate artificial paradises, and I don't particularly like unsolicited harvesters...

**Mildred** – Oh, I see...

**Ben** – By any chance, do you happen to know anything about this?

**Teresa** – But what makes you think that...?

*Ben waves the strand of weed in front of her.*

**Jo** – Because we found this strand of weed right in front of the chapel, where your still is set up...

**Teresa** – But you're not allowed! This abbey is a sacred place.

**Ben** – Sacred? You distill stolen marijuana from honest growers and you lecture me about morals?

**Mildred** – It's just a little misunderstanding...

**Teresa** – Sister Margaret has mistaken this weed for dandelions.

**Jo** – Is that so? And what about pushing up daisies...?

**Harold** – We're truly sorry, I assure you. But among people of quality like us, we can surely find a satisfactory arrangement for everyone, right? We're not savages, after all...

**Agnes** – And we didn't know that this field belonged to someone.

**Teresa** – Nevertheless, the police are trying to locate this clandestine plantation, and they will eventually find it.

**Jo** – Did you tell them where it is?

**Teresa** – Not yet...

*Ben softens a bit.*

**Ben** – There might be a way to work this out, indeed. After all, we're in a similar line of work...

**Teresa** – The same line of work?

**Jo** – We're also trying to spread happiness around us...

**Mildred** – And what do you propose?

**Ben** – A shared garden?

**Harold** – And I imagine that when you say shared garden... you don't mean a vegetable garden, do you?

**Jo** – You take a vow of silence, we take care of the cultivation, and we let you have a portion of the harvest.

**Agnes** – How much?

**Ben** – Ten percent.

**Agnes** – That seems reasonable, right? Ten percent. That's what serfs owed to the Church in the Middle Ages, to finance their good deeds.

**Teresa** – But peasants in the Middle Ages didn't grow hashish.

**Agnes** – It's not genetically modified, is it?

**Jo** – It's Lebanese. One hundred percent organic.

**Teresa** (*crossing herself*) – Lord God...

**Ben** – Of course, if you could find us a more discreet location.

**Mildred** – For what purpose?

**Jo** – To cultivate our little artificial paradise! Like a monastery garden... or a priest's garden.

**Agnes** – How about a cloister?

**Ben** – Not too shady, though. These plants need a lot of sunlight.

**Teresa** (*overwhelmed*) – We'll consider it... You understand that such a decision...

**Jo** – And don't even think about calling the police.

**Agnes** – Don't worry, we are bound by the seal of confession.

**Ben** – I still have a question to ask you.

**Teresa** – Yes?

**Ben** – What the hell are you doing with all this weed?

**Teresa** – It's a mistake, I tell you...

**Agnes** – Liqueur. We're making liqueur.

*Jo takes a bottle and looks at it.*

**Jo** – Elixir of Saint Mary Juana...

**Ben** – Well, hats off to you...

**Jo** – You know, this could actually work for exports?

**Agnes** – That's not a bad idea... Not only could our abbey cover its small deficit at the bank, but we could also contribute to improving the country's trade balance!

**Teresa** – I know you graduated from Harvard Business School, Sister Agnes, but our abbey is neither a start-up nor a coffee shop.

**Mildred** – And let me remind you that the cultivation, sale, and consumption of marijuana are strictly prohibited by law.

**Harold** – At least for now...

*Edward and Victoria return.*

**Ben** – Well, I'll leave you to it... I see you have customers... Think about our proposal.

*Ben and Jo leave.*

**Teresa** – Not a word to the Mother Superior, it would kill her... Nor to the police, of course. (*In a menacing tone*) We'll handle this ourselves, in our own way...

**Harold** – You're scaring me, Sister Teresa... I hope you're not considering resorting to violence? Like voluntary homicide with express burial under the cloister slabs.

**Teresa** – Not if we can avoid it, I assure you. Meanwhile, I'll stop by the bank to take care of this little overdraft problem...

**Agnes** – I'll come with you, Sister. At Harvard Business School, they also teach us how to whisper in bankers' ears.



*Teresa and Agnes leave.*

**Edward** – Mildred, your liqueur is truly mind-blowing.

**Mildred** – You haven't already drunk it all, have you?

**Edward** – No, but in our retirement home, they've become really addicted to it.

**Victoria** – A real drug, I tell you. So we came to see if the production was keeping up.

**Edward** – We've even received orders, you know?

**Victoria** – But mind you, we resell without profit! We're not traffickers...

**Edward** – It's incredible, they can't live without it. Most of them have already given up their usual sedatives.

**Harold** – If this continues, not only will we refill the abbey's coffers, but we'll also help cover the healthcare deficit.

**Mildred** – Here, one last bottle, and get lost.

*Edward puts a bill in Mildred's hand and takes the bottle.*

**Edward** – Thank you, Sister!

**Mildred** – It's Mildred.

**Edward** – Thank you, Sister Mildred!

*Edward and Victoria leave.*

**Mildred** – I think we also deserve a little drink to cheer ourselves up...

*She pours two small glasses.*

**Harold** – Not too much though. We have to take it slowly if we want to avoid an overdose.

**Mildred** – Don't worry, it's a mild drug. Otherwise, it wouldn't be available over the counter in an abbey.

**Harold** – You're right, God wouldn't allow it.

*They quickly empty the glasses.*

**Mildred** – It feels good where it goes.

**Harold** – Yes.

**Mildred** – This stays between us, of course.

**Harold** – Of course.

**Mildred** – Another little drink?

**Harold** – Cheers! There's no harm in doing yourself good.

*She pours two more glasses, which they once again empty quickly.*

**Mildred** – It reminds me of the Prohibition...

**Harold** – Did you live through the Prohibition?

**Mildred** – I'm joking!

**Harold** – Of course... The Prohibition was even before rationing coupons. I knew you were younger than Victoria, after all.

*They both laugh.*

**Harold** – What if we got married too, the two of us?

**Mildred** – Are you serious, or are you talking under the influence of drugs?

**Harold** – You, Mildred, are my drug...

*He tries to kiss her. She weakly resists.*

**Mildred** – Come on, Harold... Big fool...

*They are surprised by the return of Fred and Sam (possibly one character). Mildred adjusts her appearance a bit.*

**Mildred** – Excuse us, we were just tidying up a bit...

**Harold** – Hello, hello... So, feeling better?

**Fred** – Much better. It seems like my cold is going away.

**Sam** – A true miracle... It's probably thanks to your elixir...

**Fred** – Would it be possible to have a bottle or two?

**Sam** – Since it's alcohol-free.

**Fred** – It's for my friends at school...

**Mildred** – Your friends?

**Harold** – Are they sick too?

**Sam** – You know how it is. Orally transmitted diseases. I think I've passed my cold on to the whole class.

*Teresa returns.*

**Teresa** – Is everything alright?

**Harold** – Yes, yes...

*Mildred discreetly puts a bottle in Fred's hands.*

**Mildred** (*whispering to Fred*) – Take this and disappear...

**Fred** – God will repay you, Sister.

**Mildred** – I'm not a nun, and I doubt God will credit me for all this...

**Harold** – That'll be thirty dollars, though.

**Sam** – Thirty dollars?

**Mildred** – What can you do? Everything's getting more expensive. It's the law of supply and demand.

**Harold** – Now, get out of here, you bunch of drug addicts.

*Fred and Sam leave. Harold puts the money in the cash register.*

**Mildred** – So, how is the Mutual Credit doing?

**Teresa** – Agnes managed to get an overdraft authorisation by explaining our business plan to them.

**Mildred** – I didn't know we had one.

**Teresa** – I have to admit that I don't either. Besides, I didn't really understand what it was.

**Mildred** – Anyway, just with today's sales, we can already cover part of our deficit.

**Teresa** – Thank God.

**Harold** – And Saint Mary Juana...

*Ben and Jo return.*

**Ben** – I just ran into our high school dealers. They don't want to buy our cannabis anymore.

**Harold** – If the young people are turning away from drugs, we can only be glad.

**Jo** – What they want now is syrup.

**Mildred** – Ah... I see...

**Ben** – If we lose the high school market, we might as well close up shop, you know? We have expenses too.

**Harold** – I understand. I used to be in business.

**Jo** – Not to mention the retirement homes.

**Mildred** – Don't tell me you also have customers in retirement homes?

**Jo** – What do you think? Today's elderly are not like those of the past. Now it's the hippies generation...

**Mildred** – And in their retirement homes, the staff just let all these elderly people use drugs without saying anything?

**Ben** – Cannabis is like religion, you know. Many people come back to it later in life. We know it's not really good for them, but if it can bring them some consolation...

**Jo** – But now, nothing!

**Ben** – Yet usually, Christmas is our peak season.

**Harold** – This period is so depressing...

**Jo** – It's when our elders need a little euphoria, legal or not. Since doctors still can't prescribe a joint morning, noon, and night... We don't ask them for a prescription, you understand?

**Harold** – We have to admit that a little joint from time to time is no worse for them than antidepressants. And hardly more addictive.

**Ben** – Yeah... But it seems that since this morning, our seniors have been giving up smoking in favour of a certain monastic elixir.

**Mildred** – I'm really sorry about that. But rest assured, we're stopping production for good...

**Ben** – What if we formed a partnership instead?

**Teresa** – Are you proposing we become a gang of criminals?

**Jo** – Let's not use such strong words right away.

**Harold** – What kind of partnership?

**Ben** – Well... Not just for growing, but also for processing the product.

**Mildred** – Processing?

**Jo** – Anything that can be smoked nowadays doesn't have a good reputation. Anti-smoking campaigns and bans on smoking in public places have caused us a lot of harm.

**Ben** – Today, in retirement homes, the elderly have to hide to smoke, like children.

**Jo** – And we also have to think about non-smoking drug users.

**Ben** – Together, we could develop a whole line of new products. Safe for the lungs and enjoyable for the palate. The idea is to be to cannabis cultivation what oenology is to grape cultivation.

**Harold** – The smooth cannabis, in a way. And a whole range of appetiser space-cakes to go with it.

**Jo** – All under the high protection of Saint Mary Juana, of course.

**Ben** – Imagine if cannabis is legalised in a year or two. We'll have a head start to flood the market.

**Jo** – I bet my money that with this, your little abbey can generate more royalties than the Vatican.

**Ben** – Within five years, the branch acquires the parent company. In ten years, you sell the company like Bill Gates and create your own foundation like him.

**Jo** – And then, in six months, you permanently solve the problem of world hunger. Believe me, it will have a bigger impact than Mother Teresa. Or multiplying the loaves of bread like Jesus.

**Ben** – It's quite simple, Sisters, I think you've helped me find faith again!

**Jo** – And with all that, I wouldn't be surprised if you end up beatified. What's your name, Sister?

**Teresa** – Teresa.

**Ben** – How about we call you Saint Teresa?

**Teresa** – I think I'm going to faint...

*Ramirez and Sanchez return. Ben and Jo take refuge at the other end of the shop.*

**Ramirez** – Ladies and gentlemen... Is the Mother Superior here?

**Mildred** – What do you want with her?

**Sanchez** – Our police dogs eventually led us to this marijuana plantation.

**Mildred** – Really?

**Ramirez** – The field has already been harvested, but we managed to identify the roots.

**Sanchez** – Now we just have to find our budding cultivators... and the harvest.

**Harold** – Surely, you're not accusing nuns of drug trafficking?

**Ramirez** – No, of course not. However... Take a look at this. These are photos taken by the hidden surveillance cameras we installed... It's very troubling, don't you think?

**Sanchez** – Apparently, these traffickers disguised themselves as nuns to avoid recognition...

**Mildred** – Oh my God...

**Sanchez** – Nevertheless, we have managed to create a composite sketch.

*He shows her the sketch.*

**Ramirez** – Does this ring a bell?

**Mildred** – Not at all...

**Ramirez** – Warn the sisters that our patience has its limits. I could also bring everyone in for questioning at the police station.

**Sanchez** – Having nuns in handcuffs wouldn't make a good impression with the Almighty...

*Beatrice arrives.*

**Beatrice** – We are not afraid of your laws, gentlemen. During the war, this abbey participated to the war effort...

**Ramirez** – Um... we are looking for drug dealers who were cultivating marijuana in the mountains. We're far from heroic nuns providing medical care to wounded soldiers.

**Beatrice** – Get out of here immediately. This abbey is a sacred place and a place of asylum.

**Ramirez** – We will be back, Mother. I'm just waiting for authorisation from the judge, which I should receive any moment now.

*Ramirez and Sanchez leave.*

**Ben** – Thank you for not saying anything...

**Beatrice** – That doesn't mean we approve of what you're doing.

**Jo** – Just between us, you're doing the same thing.

**Beatrice** – But we're doing it for a good cause... *(She hands them two nun outfits)* For now, so the police won't recognise you, go over there and put these on. And if you're questioned, say you've taken a vow of silence.

*A moment of hesitation after her last remark.*

**Jo** – What do you mean, we'll say we've taken a vow of silence...?

**Ben** – If we've taken a vow of silence, we can't say we've taken a vow of silence.

*Beatrice remains momentarily perplexed before responding.*

**Beatrice** – Get out.

*Ben and Jo leave.*

**Mildred** – Is it true that our abbey provided medical care to wounded soldiers during the war? I didn't know that...

**Beatrice** – Okay, I embellished the truth a bit, but anyway... This abbey remains a place of asylum!

*Margaret and Agnes return.*

**Beatrice** – Ah, there you are! The police just left. Miraculously, we escaped the worst.

**Margaret** – I know, I mowed everything down to avoid trouble with the police.

**Mildred** – And where is the harvest?

**Agnes** – It's in the barn, where Sister Margaret is preparing her elixir...

**Harold** – But that's madness! These policemen can come back at any moment with a search warrant!

*Ben and Jo return wearing nun outfits.*

**Margaret** – Good day, sisters. Welcome to our abbey.

**Ben** – Hey! I don't want to end up in an abbey...

**Teresa** – If I were you, I would lay low for a while, until the storm passes...

**Harold** – In any case, you wear the robe very well.

**Beatrice** – And the abbey always needs volunteers.

**Mildred** – I'm willing to give up my place in the shop, but it wouldn't be very discreet...

**Beatrice** – They could take care of the herb garden in our abbey. Since apparently, they have a green thumb...

**Teresa** – Why not...?

**Beatrice** – In the meantime, Sister Margaret, give them a cell. They can't stay here.

**Jo** – A cell, you say?

**Margaret** – Don't worry, in the one I'll give you, the key will be in the door.

*Ben and Jo leave with Sister Margaret.*

**Teresa** – Do you really intend to have them cultivate drugs in the cloister garden?

**Beatrice** (*surprised*) – Is that what I said?

*Sanchez and Ramirez return. Ramirez puts a paper under Beatrice's nose.*

**Ramirez** – There you go, this time we have a search warrant.

**Beatrice** – We are more than willing to cooperate with the police. But first, Sister Agnes, please serve a welcome drink.

**Agnes** – Yes, Mother.

**Beatrice** – I'll leave you. I will pray for you.

*Beatrice exits.*

**Agnes** – I insist that you taste our specialty, the famous Elixir of Saint Mary Juana.

**Ramirez** – That's kind of you, but we have work to do.

**Mildred** – It's a welcoming tradition, Commissioner. It would seriously offend the sisters if you refused...

**Ramirez** – Fine, alright, but make it quick then...

*Sister Agnes serves them a large glass of liqueur. They drink first with some suspicion, then with an appreciative expression.*

**Sanchez** – Oh yes... It's good stuff.

**Ramirez** – It's strange... It has a taste of...

**Agnes** – I know...

**Teresa** – It's a miraculous elixir, the secret of which was revealed to the founder of our order by the Virgin Mary herself.

**Harold** – It's good for everything.

**Agnes** – Let me pour you another glass.

*Ramirez is about to protest, but the glasses are already full.*

**Ramirez** – Fine...

**Sanchez** – Thank you, Sister.

*They drink again.*

**Ramirez** – It's true that it relaxes you.

**Teresa** – That's why, as you may have noticed, there is such serenity within the walls of this abbey.

**Sanchez** – Oh yes... I feel much more at peace.

**Ramirez** – Alright, now if you'll excuse me, I have a search to conduct...

*They head towards the exit, walking unsteadily.*

**Teresa** – I'll accompany you.

**Agnes** – I'll come with you, Sister.

*Ramirez and Sanchez leave, followed by Teresa and Agnes.*

**Mildred** – All is lost. We're all going to end up in prison, I'm afraid.

**Harold** – All we can do now is pray.

**Mildred** – I suppose prisons are not co-ed.

**Harold** – Neither are abbeys, I'm afraid.

**Mildred** – So there's no chance for us to end up in the same cell.

**Harold** – None at all.

**Mildred** – Then kiss me, Harold!



*They kiss. And they wouldn't stop if it weren't for the return of Ben and Jo, still dressed as nuns.*

**Ben** – We just ran into the police. I think we're done for this time.

**Mildred** – With a bit of luck, they won't find anything. Sister Agnes drugged the commissioner.

**Jo** – Still, there's a huge stash of weed right next to the still! Even if they're completely high, they can't miss it.

**Mildred** – In that case, all we can do is pray. Hoping for a miracle...

*Mildred and Harold start praying. Initially hesitant, Ben and Jo imitate them. Sacred music plays and the lighting changes, indicating a temporal ellipsis. Ramirez and Sanchez return.*

**Ramirez (to Ben and Jo)** – Good day, Sisters. Sorry to disturb you in the middle of prayer.

*Ben and Jo hide behind their veils and remain silent.*

**Mildred** – They took a vow of silence too...

**Ramirez** – I see... In any case, please accept our apologies. We searched the abbey from top to bottom and found nothing.

**Sanchez** – However, your Nativity scene in the chapel is truly magnificent.

**Ramirez** – Here's a composite sketch of the suspects. If you happen to see them around here, let us know.

**Sanchez** – Merry Christmas. And once again, our apologies.

*Ramirez and Sanchez leave. Beatrice arrives with Teresa, Margaret, and Agnes.*

**Agnes** – It's a miracle!

**Margaret** – When we arrived at the distillery...

**Mildred** – What happened?

**Teresa** – The marijuana was transformed into bay leaves.

**Margaret** – Let us give thanks to Saint Mary Juana!

**Agnes** – It's the sign we've been waiting for, proof that the Saint is not opposed to our endeavour.

**Beatrice** – Don't get carried away too quickly. I'm the one who performed the miracle.

**Harold** – Then it is you who deserves beatification, Mother.

**Beatrice** – The Nativity scene was decorated with laurel branches. And there was a large stash of weed in the distillery. I simply swapped the two.

**Agnes** – Oh yes... That's... That's also good...

**Teresa** – A Nativity scene decorated with marijuana...

**Beatrice** – It's temporary, Sister... And now, I hope everything will return to normal.

**Margaret** – Are you saying that...

**Beatrice** – You heard me right, Sister. No more cannabis in the liqueur. We're going back to the old recipe.

**Agnes** – Even if this abbey ends up in financial trouble?

**Beatrice** – I'm not very worried, my child. The Catholic religion will survive, it has seen worse. If necessary, we'll turn our cells into guest rooms for tourists.

*Margaret and Agnes seem disappointed but resigned.*

**Ben** – I apologise, Mother, for putting you in such a trouble.

**Jo** – I've learned a lot since I put on this habit, you know...

**Beatrice** – I forgive you, my son. Besides, it reminded me of my youth when I fought against the riot police to prevent the destruction of a squat occupied by homeless people.

**Ben** – Thank you for not turning me over to the police. Without you, I would probably be in prison by now. So if I can be of any help to you in any way...

**Beatrice** – We'll think about it, my son... In the meantime, go back to your cell.

*Fade out.*

*The shop is calm again. Teresa is counting the money behind the counter when the phone rings.*

**Teresa** – Saint Mary Juana, I'm listening... Mutual Credit? Oh yes, hello, Mr. Director. Don't tell me we're overdrawn again... On the contrary? Well, I'm delighted to hear that. No, we hadn't thought about investing our surplus funds... Very well... I understand... Perfect... I'll discuss it with the Mother Superior, and we'll make an appointment with your financial advisor to take advantage of your latest investment opportunities... Thank you for calling... God bless Mutual Credit.

*She hangs up as Margaret and Agnes arrive with a crate of candles.*

**Teresa** – It's strange, we've gone back to the old recipe, yet our elixir continues to sell much better than before.

**Agnes** – It's because we changed the label. Our customers believe the bottle still contains the new formula.

**Margaret** – And that seems to be enough to make them happy.

**Agnes** – It's what they call the placebo effect, I think.

**Margaret** – Faith moves mountains

**Agnes** – I've come to bid you farewell, Sister Teresa...

**Teresa** – So, you're leaving us already?

**Agnes** – Yes, I've decided to give up the monastic life...

**Teresa** – Another apparition of the Virgin?

**Agnes** – It's more like the opposite. When my Harvard Business School classmates found out that I had joined an abbey, they confessed that they had played a prank on me just before that famous Innovation Management class where the Virgin appeared to me. They had secretly served me a pizza with hallucinogenic mushrooms.

**Teresa** – Hallucinogenic mushrooms?

**Agnes** – Hence the miraculous apparition of the Virgin, most likely...

**Teresa** – Good heavens... Well, in any case, we owe you a great debt. Thanks to you, our abbey's finances are flourishing.

**Margaret** – We will miss you, Sister Agnes. Although I believe your place wasn't in an abbey...

**Agnes** – I will miss you all too. But I'll come by to say hello from time to time!

*Mildred and Harold enter, dressed much more casually than before.*

**Teresa** – Hello, Mildred. Hello, Harold. So, when is the wedding?

**Harold** – Well... we have decided to postpone it for now. So, we'll continue to live in sin, right, darling?

**Mildred** – Marriage can be risky, that's for sure.

**Harold** – Look at poor Victoria. Barely married, and already a widow. We can say that marriage didn't work out well for Edward.

**Mildred** – Perhaps it was an overdose of happiness.

**Harold** – In any case, I don't want to end up like him.

**Teresa** – But, Harold, you're much younger than Edward...

*General laughter.*

**Mildred** – So? It seems that business is picking up, Sister Teresa.

**Teresa** – Indeed. It's absolutely mind-blowing. Not only are our elixir sales soaring again, but now candle sales are also exploding!

**Margaret** – Here's more to replenish the shelves. I made them this morning with Sister Agnes and our two new volunteers...

**Teresa** – We don't see them outside very often. They certainly have their reasons to be discreet.

**Agnes** – At least they're better off here than in prison.

**Margaret** – It's them who make these scented candles with mushrooms they secretly cultivate in the catacombs of the abbey.

**Agnes** – You'll see, they're explosive!

**Mildred** – It's true, they have a truly intoxicating scent.

**Harold** – I'll light one right away.

*Harold lights a candle, and they all inhale with delight.*

**Teresa** – What a lovely scent.

**Mildred** – A scent of holiness.

**Harold** – Well, ever since we started burning these candles during mass, the church has been packed.

*Beatrice arrives and overhears the last line.*

**Beatrice** – Another miracle of Saint Mary Juana...

*Beatrice crosses herself. Everyone freezes with an ecstatic look. Sacred music.*

*Blackout.*

**The End.**

## *About the author*

Born in 1955 in Auvers-sur-Oise (France), Jean-Pierre Martinez was first a drummer for several rock bands before becoming a semiologist in advertising. He then began a career writing television scripts before turning to theatre and writing plays. He has written close to a hundred scripts for television and as many plays, some of which have already become classics (*Friday the 13th*, *Strip Poker*). He is one of the most produced contemporary playwrights in France and in other francophone countries. Several of his plays are also available in Spanish and English, and are regularly produced in the United States and Latin America.

Amateur and professional theatre groups looking for plays to perform can download Jean-Pierre Martinez's plays for free from his website La Comédiathèque (<https://comediatheque.net/>). However, public productions are subject to SACD filing.

For those who prefer reading or working from books, printed versions of his plays can be purchased from Amazon for a price similar to that of photocopying this document.

***Other plays by the same author translated in English:***

*A Cuckoo's nest*

*A simple business dinner*

*An innocent little murder*

*Casket for two*

*Cheaters*

*Crisis and Punishment*

*Critical but stable*

*Four stars*

*Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>*

*Heads or Tails*

*Him and Her*

*Is there a pilot in the audience?*

*Is there an author in the audience?*

*Chris a moment before the end of the world*

*Lovestruck at Swindlemore Hall*

*New Year's Eve at the Morgue*

*One marriage out of two*

*Preliminaries*

*Quarantine*

*Running on Empty*

*Strip Poker*

*Surviving Mankind*

*The Ideal Son-in-Law*

*The Smell of Money*

*The Window across the courtyard*

*The Worst Village in England*

*Welcome aboard!*

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