

SISTER CALLING MY NAME

a play in two acts

by

Buzz McLaughlin

Copyright © by Buzz McLaughlin
488 Aten Road, Munsonville, NH 03457 (603) 313-4872
buzzmclaughlin@gmail.com

SISTER CALLING MY NAME

© copyright by Buzz McLaughlin

All rights reserved. This work is fully protected under the copyright laws of the United States of America. No part of this playscript may be photocopied, reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, digital, mechanical, recording, or otherwise, without the prior permission of the author.

Written permission is required for live performance of any sort. This includes readings, cuttings, scenes, and excerpts as well as productions of the play. For production/performance rights and all other rights please contact Buzz McLaughlin (the author), 488 Aten Road, Munsonville, NH 03457, 603-313-4872.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Buzz McLaughlin has written many plays and screenplays, including *Sister Calling My Name* that won the National Play Award. He is the author of the best-selling book *The Playwright's Process* and has spent over three decades as a dramaturg/teacher/consultant working with hundreds of emerging and established writers in theatre and film. He is also an independent feature film producer and partner in Either/Or Films (www.eitherorfilms.com) along with Aaron J. Wiederspahn and produced the award-winning *The Sensation of Sight* (www.thesensationofsight.com) starring Academy Award nominee David Strathairn. He founded in 1986 the Playwrights Theatre of New Jersey (www.ptnj.org), an on-going professional Equity theatre dedicated to the development of new plays. Currently he is the Program Director of the MFA program in Writing for Stage and Screen offered by the New Hampshire Institute of Art and for many years taught script writing as Playwright-in-Residence at Drew University. He holds a Ph.D in dramatic literature and maintains a script consulting service (www.buzzmclaughlinscripts.com) and a popular blog on scriptwriting (www.buzzmclaughlinscripts.blogspot.com).

CHARACTERS

LINDSEY STOUFFER, 36

MICHAEL STOUFFER, 35, her brother

SISTER ANNE FRANCES, 34

TIME

Various times in the past and out of time altogether.

PLACE

Sisters of Mercy's Home for Women, a private institution for the developmentally disabled in Fairmont, Minnesota, and various other places in the minds of the characters.

AUTHOR'S NOTES:

This is a memory play, a story told through the filter of the heart and mind. Accordingly, the changes in time and place throughout are to be executed with fluidity and with no interruption in the action. They are realized by the same actors playing various ages and by shifts in lighting. The scenes from the more distant past have no scenic elements. The water color paintings seen throughout are blank pieces of white water color paper which have been wetted with clear water and dried, to indicate that brush has been put to paper. When Lindsey paints as part of the action, she dips her brushes into clear water and never uses actual pigments of any kind, although within the story itself she is executing real paintings. The actual images, shapes, and colors used in the paintings seen by the audience are left to the imagination.

More than in any demonstrable exterior traits, Lindsey's disability manifests itself in the lack of subtlety in her thinking process. She has difficulty focusing on more than one thing at a time or holding two or more thoughts in her head simultaneously. Her mind simply locks into an idea and she goes with it until another takes its place. What needs to be avoided is having the vocal and physical manifestations of her condition overworked for the sake of someone's idea of clinical accuracy. A light touch is essential. At the same time, although her neutral demeanor by "normal" standards should appear somewhat subdued, even flattened off, she is also capable of operating on a wide and rich emotional playing field when the story calls for it. Her grief, fright, and anger must be played full tilt, as well as her radiant sense of joy, especially when expressing her love for God and for her brother.

ACT I

(A shaft of golden light reveals LINDSEY STOUFFER stage center standing with her eyes closed, her face upturned in a radiant smile, as if being showered by a powerful energy. Beautiful in her rapture, she lets out a laugh of pure joy.)

Lights come up stage right as MICHAEL STOUFFER enters and looks over at LINDSEY, who continues basking in her light)

MICHAEL

(to the audience)

Her name is Lindsey. My only sibling. Slightly more than a year older than me.

(The light on LINDSEY shifts to reveal the unadorned art room in the Sisters of Mercy's Home for Women. LINDSEY sits at the single wooden table)

MICHAEL (Cont'd)

Born with a mind unloosed from its moorings, set free to drift forever beyond sanity's reach. Clinical diagnosis: severe mental retardation and schizophrenia.

(LINDSEY picks up a brush and begins working on a water color painting that's taped to the table top. Looking perfectly normal, she works diligently and carefully, applying paint to paper with control and confidence)

LINDSEY

(to herself as she works--the voice only hinting at her disability, never labored or slowing the pace of the play)

Yes. Yes. Paint beautiful picture. Lindsey paint beautiful picture.

(She stops, looks up)

Lindsey paint beautiful picture for Michael. Yes.

(She continues painting)

MICHAEL

My life can be measured in two equal parts--the years spent with her and those spent a vast distance away. She was there and then she was gone, like a dangerous growth one lives with until, for reasons of survival, it must be surgically removed.

LINDSEY

Paint beautiful picture.

(her face breaks into a smile)

I love you.

MICHAEL

Growing up with Lindsey was like living each day in the depths of a carnival spook house, the kind that once inside you wish you'd never walked into. Moving with bated breath around every corner, never ready for the distorted face, the missile hurled for no reason or the scream breaking through your sleep.

LINDSEY

(to herself, as she paints)

Michael...

MICHAEL

Our house was always full of surprises. Like finding her sitting calmly on her bed, every hair in her head pulled out, laying in a neat pile in front of her.

LINDSEY

Paint beautiful picture...

MICHAEL

Or discovering on a happy summer afternoon an index finger meticulously picked half off with a safety pin.

LINDSEY

Michael...

MICHAEL

Or, after a frantic search, stumbling across her naked and huddled frozen in terror in the root cellar smeared with her own defecation.

LINDSEY

Lindsey love Michael.

MICHAEL

Hey. We're talking severely retarded here. And we were a brother and a sister living together in close quarters with a mother and father who couldn't bring themselves to sending her away for safe keeping. At least not until there was no longer a choice in the matter.

LINDSEY

(starting to laugh)

Paint beautiful picture for Michael.

MICHAEL

As a child I had no exit so I learned to survive within those walls. She was attached to me and I to her and I did my best. I would look into those tormented eyes and search for

the real sister locked away somewhere inside that disjointed mind. The sister I imagined she might have been. I kept searching, but I never found her.

(LINDSEY stops painting and rocks back and forth in her chair holding her paint brush)

LINDSEY

(still laughing)

Paint beautiful pictures. Lindsey love Michael.

(the laughter turns to weeping as she continues rocking herself back and forth)

Big dolly, long brown hair. Lindsey want big dolly, long brown hair. Present. Big dolly, long brown hair.

(more agitated)

Michael bring Lindsey big dolly, long brown hair.

(standing now, she throws her paint brush with force to the floor. Shouting with urgency)

Big dolly! Lindsey want big dolly, long brown hair!

(She grabs from the table a set of keys on a key ring and clutches them to her)

MICHAEL

This is the story of how it came to pass that the two of us were reunited after a self-willed separation of nearly eighteen years.

(MICHAEL watches as SISTER ANNE, dressed in civilian clothes, rushes into the art room. She is a beautiful, sensuous woman with a vivacious spirit and a keen intelligence. A silver cross hangs from a delicate silver chain around her neck)

LINDSEY

Big dolly! Michael bring big dolly, long brown hair!

SISTER ANNE

(taking LINDSEY by the shoulders firmly, with tenderness, but never patronizing)

No, Lindsey. We are not going to talk about dollies today, remember? You are a big girl and you do not need a dolly.

(Sitting LINDSEY down in her chair)

Now finish your painting.

LINDSEY

(still clutching the key ring)

Big dolly...

SISTER ANNE

No, Lindsey. We are not going to talk--

LINDSEY

--Michael. Lindsey want Michael. Bring dolly.

SISTER ANNE

No.

LINDSEY

(calming down, but pleading)

Michael come bring present. Big dolly, long brown hair.

SISTER ANNE

You're a grown up woman and grown up women don't play with dolls.

LINDSEY

Grown up woman.

SISTER ANNE

That's right. And you also know that Michael can't come.

LINDSEY

Far away.

SISTER ANNE

Yes. And what does that mean?

LINDSEY

Michael not come. Michael live far away. Michael not come.

SISTER ANNE

That's right.

(retrieving LINDSEY's brush from the floor)

So put your keys down.

LINDSEY

(setting the keys on the table)

Put keys down.

SISTER ANNE

(putting the brush in her hand)

Now you can finish your beautiful painting.

(LINDSEY looks at her painting)

LINDSEY

Finish beautiful painting. Lindsey finish beautiful painting.

SISTER ANNE

Yes.

(looking at the painting for the first time, more to herself
than to LINDSEY, totally sincere)

Oh, Lindsey, this is amazing. You are amazing.

LINDSEY

Lindsey amazing.

SISTER ANNE

Yes, you are amazing.

LINDSEY

Finish beautiful, amazing painting.

SISTER ANNE

Yes. That's right. You finish your painting.

LINDSEY

Beautiful, amazing painting.

SISTER ANNE

That's right.

LINDSEY

Best one yet.

SISTER ANNE

Yes, I think it is. It is very powerful.

LINDSEY

Powerful. Beautiful, amazing, powerful painting.

SISTER ANNE

My words exactly.

(She gives her a quick hug)

LINDSEY

(smiling)

My words exactly.

SISTER ANNE

So get back to it, okay?

LINDSEY

Lindsey get back to it.

SISTER ANNE

Good. I'll be working in my office.

(LINDSEY resumes painting. SISTER ANNE starts out)

LINDSEY

Anne?

SISTER ANNE

Yes?

LINDSEY

Lindsey not talk about big dolly, long brown hair.

SISTER ANNE

(amused)

That's right. Bye.

(SISTER ANNE exits and moves to her office stage left.
LINDSEY continues painting. After a few strokes she
stops, looks up)

LINDSEY

(softly)

Michael. Brother Michael.

(She touches her keys on the table.

MICHAEL picks up an envelope from a small phone table
near him)

MICHAEL

(taking a letter out of the envelope)

First there were the letters...

(He reads it silently)

LINDSEY

(withdrawing her hand from the keys)

Lindsey get back to it.

(She resumes painting. The lights dim but don't go out on her as the lights come up on SISTER ANNE at her desk in her office. Her phone rings, she picks up)

SISTER ANNE

Sister Anne Frances... Yes, hello Darlene... That's right... Yes, of course she'll be coming... With me, yes... No, think of me as her assistant... Good... The reserves are at the framers... Yes, fourteen... Tomorrow. We're bringing them when we come up... How much?... I thought that's what you said. But isn't that a bit--...

(laughs)

All right. I just can't believe people would ever pay that much for--...Well, it's all very exciting... Yes, she is. Right now, in fact...Fine, thanks. Bye.

(She hangs up, thinks for a moment, then dials a number and makes the sign of the cross)

MICHAEL

(looking down at his phone)

Then the calls started...

(His phone rings. Immediately an answering machine activates and we hear MICHAEL's recorded voice, clipped and fast: "I'm not in. Leave a message. Thanks." A beep)

SISTER ANNE

(leaving a message)

Hello. Yes. This is Sister Frances Emmanuel calling again about Lindsey.

(MICHAEL makes no move to answer, looks at the letter still in his hands)

SISTER ANNE (Cont'd)

I don't know if you're receiving these messages or not, but on the chance that you are, I would still like to make contact with you as soon as possible. If you could please give me a call at 507-665-2547 at your earliest convenience I'd appreciate it.

As I've said in my letters...

(MICHAEL crumples up the letter, lets it fall to the floor)

SISTER ANNE (Cont'd)

...and on this machine, it concerns your sister's upcoming art show in Minneapolis. It's very important that her family be consulted.

(She thinks for a brief moment)

From all indications a considerable sum of money will be involved. We'd very much like to have your input. Thank you.

(She hangs up quickly.)

MICHAEL looks over at LINDSEY as she continues painting)

MICHAEL

At first I think it's some kind of sick joke. My retarded sister a successful artist? Please. Leave me alone. I've just spent the last twelve years of my life--at the expense of a marriage and the last shreds of my self esteem--trying to pry open the door to the academic promised land in English Literature and--tah-dah--last month was denied tenure. For those who may not be aware, that's up there when it comes to high-speed collisions on the career track. Years are spent building the momentum, pressing the foot to the floor, staring straight ahead, never blinking, never sleeping. Then suddenly, one day, one moment, with no warning, a brick wall falls right out of the sky in front of you and you explode into it. The ego is instantaneously pulverized and forced down your throat and up your ass at the same time, and your heart and soul are left ripped apart and bloodied along the side of the road.

(looking over at LINDSEY)

So I wasn't exactly in the mood for dredging up this particular torment from my family history. I had new wounds to heal and the pieces of a life to pick up and try to put back together.

(Suddenly lights up on LINDSEY as she stands and, looking up, stretches her arms high above her head. She is in a sort of ecstasy. MICHAEL watches)

LINDSEY

(focused, with great joy)

Glory be to God in the highest! I have been created in His image! Fearfully and wonderfully made. I am loved by my God!

(She continues looking up as if seeing some magnificent, wondrous thing)

MICHAEL

Besides, I knew I wasn't capable of a reconnection with this creature who drove my father to escape into an alcoholic stupor and my mother into such anguish...

(this isn't easy)

...that her actual body took on grotesque physical manifestations of the pain she bore in her heart. I watched them both self-destruct before my eyes as this miserable, damaged child was cared for and held close, as if somehow that would make right a condition that couldn't be made right.

LINDSEY

(in awe)

I am loved and held close! Wonderful are your works! Blessed be his holy name! I am made whole by the light from his throne!

MICHAEL

So I sealed myself off. And I grew to hate a God who would permit that kind of distortion and misery in a family.

(LINDSEY sits back down and resumes painting)

LINDSEY

Paint beautiful, amazing picture.

MICHAEL

She'd been a ward of the state of Minnesota long before our father's death. He had arranged that himself. So when they both died, first my mother and then my father, I thought I was free of ever having to think about, let alone deal with, that part of my life again.

LINDSEY

For Michael. Paint beautiful picture for Michael...

MICHAEL

There was no reason for my input. I had no legal say in the matter or anything else having to do with her. I was totally out of the loop.

(SISTER ANNE picks up the phone and dials, crossing herself)

MICHAEL (Cont'd)

So it made no sense and could serve no real purpose.

(MICHAEL's phone rings once and the answering machine clicks on: "I'm not in. Leave a message. Thanks." The beep)

SISTER ANNE

Hello. This is Sister Frances Emmanuel again. I know I'm being a pest, but I neglected to mention that your sister continues to ask for you on a regular basis. I believe she--

LINDSEY

(suddenly looking up, forcefully)

--Michael!--

(On impulse, MICHAEL picks up the phone)

MICHAEL

--Yes, you are being a pest. What do you want from me?

SISTER ANNE

Heavens, you're alive. I was beginning to think of you as a continuous loop tape on a micro cassette.

MICHAEL

I'm not amused.

SISTER ANNE

Neither am I. I need to talk to you about your sister.

(LINDSEY resumes painting)

MICHAEL

I don't want to talk about her. Please don't call me again--

SISTER ANNE

(with all the authority she can muster)

--It involves setting up a trust fund in her name to handle the money from the sale of her art work. As Lindsey's only immediate blood relative you will be asked to be a part of the arrangement as a trustee. It's a federal mandate and involves a legal proceeding here in Faribault [*pronounced "Fair-a-bow"*] county. The court will request an appearance, travel to be paid for by the trust. I thought you might like to be informed so you have some control over the court date.

MICHAEL

Wait a minute. Who's setting up a trust fund?

SISTER ANNE

Lindsey's legal guardian.

MICHAEL

And who's that?

SISTER ANNE

Me.

MICHAEL

And who are you?

(She hesitates a moment)

SISTER ANNE

My name is Sister Frances Emmanuel--Sister Anne Frances Emmanuel--of the Sisters of Mercy.

(taking the plunge)

I've known Lindsey since all of us were children. My last name is Therien. I lived on North Fifth Street.

(Incredulous, MICHAEL looks at the phone a moment, then hangs it up and crosses over to SISTER ANNE's office. SISTER ANNE hangs up her phone and stands facing him as he enters. There's an awkward, yet electric moment)

SISTER ANNE (Cont'd)

Hello, Michael.

MICHAEL

Hello, Anne. Or should it be Sister Frances Emmanuel?

SISTER ANNE

Anne is fine. Especially for you.

(indicating a chair near her desk)

Won't you sit down?

(He just looks at her)

SISTER ANNE (Cont'd)

How was the trip? That commuter flight can be--

MICHAEL

--It was fine. But this is strange.

SISTER ANNE

I appreciate your flying out.

MICHAEL

I wasn't left much choice.

SISTER ANNE

So soon, I mean.

MICHAEL

I like to get unpleasant things behind me as quickly as possible.

SISTER ANNE

I won't take that personally.

MICHAEL

Actually, seeing you is the one part of this that interested me. Once I knew.

(A moment. SISTER ANNE sits at her desk)

SISTER ANNE

I haven't told Lindsey.

MICHAEL

Thank you.

SISTER ANNE

Although she'd be very excited to see you.

MICHAEL

We've settled that, remember? You told me you wouldn't push.

SISTER ANNE

I know.

MICHAEL

Good. Because I do not want to see her.

(Another moment)

SISTER ANNE

Would you like a cup of coffee? It's Mocha Java.

MICHAEL

All right.

(She crosses to a coffee maker on a small table)

MICHAEL (Cont'd)

(finally sitting down)

So. I thought you lived in Europe. Austria or something.

SISTER ANNE

I did. In Gaming [*pronounced "Gah-ming"*]. I taught there six years.

MICHAEL

I see.

SISTER ANNE

You want anything with it?

MICHAEL

No thanks. And your father?

SISTER ANNE

He's fine. Lonely since Mother died.

MICHAEL

I'm sorry.

SISTER ANNE

Thank you. Actually it's been over five years now. Her illness is what brought me back here.

MICHAEL

Is he still teaching? Still coaching?

SISTER ANNE

He retired seven years ago. But he's over there every day during the season.

(She hands him a mug)

MICHAEL

Thanks.

SISTER ANNE

You're welcome.

(She sits at her desk)

MICHAEL

(laughs, looking at her)

Man...

SISTER ANNE

What?

MICHAEL

It's amazing how everything comes back.

SISTER ANNE

Yes, isn't it.

MICHAEL

And there you sit, a Sister of Mercy.

SISTER ANNE

I assessed the situation and concluded that Lindsey's need for your involvement in her life at this particular time--

MICHAEL

--There will be no court order?

SISTER ANNE

I take full responsibility for misleading you.

MICHAEL

Well congratulations. Here I sit. Thank you very much.

SISTER ANNE

You have every right to be annoyed.

MICHAEL

So what's next on the agenda, Sister Anne Frances Emmanuel?

SISTER ANNE

There is no agenda. Lindsey simply needs your help with what's happening here. You're the only person she can turn to. And I can't manage this alone. It's gotten too big. I need someone who knows Lindsey and can watch out for her interests.

MICHAEL

So cancel the show. Tell her she can't paint any more pictures. Have her crochet blankets. It's all the same to her.

SISTER ANNE

No, it's not. This is a major break through. A miracle. God working through her, in her.

MICHAEL

Oh, please. Spare me. I grew up with her, remember?

SISTER ANNE

(getting up)

You have to see the work, Michael. It's extraordinary.

(She crosses to a closet)

MICHAEL

I don't want to. I don't want to get involved with any of this.

SISTER ANNE

(retrieving a stack of unframed watercolors of various sizes)

It's truly amazing.

MICHAEL

I'm not interested.

SISTER ANNE

(taking the paintings back to her desk)

You have to see these.

MICHAEL

(standing)

I appreciate your passionate concern for my sister, but I think it's time for me to leave, seeing I've just been informed there's no legal reason for me to stay. Goodbye and good luck.

(He starts out)

SISTER ANNE

Michael, stop!

(He does)

SISTER ANNE (Cont'd)

Don't you think it's strange you can't stomach the thought of even looking at her work? That you refuse to acknowledge her worth, her very existence as a person, let alone as a member of your own family? This is your sister we're talking about.

(moving closer to him)

Please. Stay. I know what it feels like to lose a brother. Remember? The difference is that Bobby died and you're still alive.

MICHAEL

(turning to her)

Yes, that's right. Bobby's dead and I'm still alive. But what you fail to acknowledge is that, living and breathing as I am, I don't have it in me to get involved with this. Can't you hear what I'm saying?

SISTER ANNE

I hear it but I don't believe it.

MICHAEL

(with a mix of anger and pain)

Sister of Mercy, have mercy on me.

(This stops her. They look at each other a moment)

SISTER ANNE

I'm sorry. I'll take it slower.

(taking the paintings back to the closet)

See, I'm putting the pictures away. You're safe.

(returning to her desk)

Now let's start over, okay? You've just arrived at the door. We're seeing each other for the first time in seventeen years.

(She sits)

So. Where would you like to begin?

MICHAEL

Amazing...

SISTER ANNE

There is a trust fund being set up to handle deposits from her sales. That part is accurate. Want to start there?

(MICHAEL shakes his head, incredulous)

SISTER ANNE (Cont'd)

A pro bono lawyer is arranging it. A friend of ours. He says it's best in cases like this if a member of the immediate family, a blood relative, is one of the trustees.

MICHAEL

There's no need for me to know anything about a trust fund or how it's managed.

SISTER ANNE

Her paintings are currently selling for three thousand dollars a piece. The dealer handling her work takes half. Because of the success of the current show another is being arranged for June at a big gallery in Chicago. She's confident the prices will triple by then. Then it's on to New York and she says they'll at least double again, maybe more.

MICHAEL

So what? Can't this place use the money? I don't understand how this is a problem.

SISTER ANNE

It's not the home's money. It's your sister's. She has hundreds of paintings. And produces more every day. The proceeds could soon be in the hundreds of thousands of dollars.

MICHAEL

So?

SISTER ANNE

That's far larger than we anticipated. We feel the family should have a voice in how it's managed.

MICHAEL

The "family's" unavailable.

SISTER ANNE

(shuffling through papers on her desk)

And it's not just the money. The whole thing has mushroomed into this media event.

(she finds a large newspaper clipping, holds it out to him)

Here. Look at this. From last week's Minneapolis Star Tribune.

(MICHAEL doesn't take it)

SISTER ANNE (Cont'd)

Earlier this week we got a call from ABC. They're thinking of doing a feature for the Evening News during National Disabilities Month. Lord have mercy. I don't know what that will mean. The dealers think it's wonderful of course, but I don't want this to become a three-ring circus. I don't want her life turned upside down.

MICHAEL

What did you expect?

SISTER ANNE

I've been trying to do what's best for Lindsey. Her work should be seen. It should be celebrated.

MICHAEL

It's ironic, isn't it? There once was a time you wanted to be an artist.

SISTER ANNE

Please don't change the subject.

MICHAEL

You were going to knock 'em dead, remember? And you had every right to think you would. You were very good. What happened?

SISTER ANNE

You know what happened.

MICHAEL

And that precludes you being an artist?

SISTER ANNE

My priorities have changed.

MICHAEL

Oh, I see. Do you still paint?

SISTER ANNE

No.

MICHAEL

Why not?

SISTER ANNE

This discussion does not concern me.

MICHAEL

There was a time your talent animated your very being. I used to love that about you. The excitement you felt. That look in your eyes as you worked on something. Remember?

SISTER ANNE

Yes. I remember.

(MICHAEL, now a boy of seventeen, runs down center into an outdoor summer afternoon)

MICHAEL

(enthusiastic, pointing to something in front of him)

Here. Here. This is it. Do this.

(SISTER ANNE, now as ANNE, a free-spirited girl of sixteen follows him down stage carrying a sketch book and a box of pencils and charcoal.

The lights in the office fade out)

ANNE

(looking off where he's pointing)

What?

MICHAEL

Out there. That old house and the shed. The trees leaning over.

ANNE

I can't just draw on demand.

MICHAEL

Yes you can. You're amazing. You're the most talented woman artist in the world.

ANNE

"Woman" artist?

MICHAEL

Yeah. In the world.

ANNE

Not just "the most talented" artist?

MICHAEL

Yeah. The most talented artist. Who happens to be a woman.

ANNE

That's better.

MICHAEL

That's what I said. The most talented woman artist in the world. Come here.

(He grabs her and pulls her to him)

ANNE

(loving it)

Michael!

MICHAEL

What? You being a woman is the best part.

(He kisses her)

ANNE

Do you want me to draw this or not?

MICHAEL

I'm not sure anymore.

(He kisses her again)

ANNE

Well, make up your mind.

(He kisses her again, this time more passionately. She returns the kiss with equal passion. He lowers her to the ground, lies on top of her)

MICHAEL

I love you, Annie. I don't care how good you are as an artist.

ANNE
(pushing him off her)

What?!

MICHAEL
I'd love you if you couldn't draw a straight line.

ANNE
I'm not sure I like that.

MICHAEL
Why not?

ANNE
Because I am an artist.

MICHAEL
And a woman.

ANNE
A woman artist.

MICHAEL
There. You said it.

ANNE
(pushing him away)
Get out of here.

(She opens her sketch pad and the box of pencils, looks out
at the scene in front of her, sizing it up)

MICHAEL
Let's time it.

ANNE
That's silly. It makes me nervous.

MICHAEL
(checking his watch)
Two minutes.

ANNE
For this?

MICHAEL

Yeah. Nothing's impossible for the greatest woman artist in the world. Ready?

ANNE

Okay.

MICHAEL

Get set.

(He looks at his watch, waits.

Suddenly LINDSEY stands, rigid, clutching her keys in her hands)

LINDSEY

Michael! Brother Michael!

(Immediately ANNE gets up and, as SISTER ANNE, goes to LINDSEY. MICHAEL stands suspended in a faint light down center, still looking at his watch)

SISTER ANNE

(putting her hands on LINDSEY's shoulders, calmly)

Are you finished with your painting?

LINDSEY

Michael come, bring dolly.

SISTER ANNE

No, Lindsey. Michael will not bring a dolly.

(looking at the painting taped to the table top)

Are you finished?

LINDSEY

Michael come. Keys unlock.

(MICHAEL moves off downstage left, watches the two of them)

SISTER ANNE

Yes, you are.

(She starts removing the tape from the painting)

This is wonderful. I like your new painting very much.

LINDSEY

Yes.

SISTER ANNE

I like the colors.

LINDSEY

Michael come.

SISTER ANNE

The flowers are singing.

LINDSEY

Yes. Flowers singing. Yes. Keys unlock.

SISTER ANNE

(holding up the painting)

And what are they singing?

LINDSEY

Flowers singing.

SISTER ANNE

What song are they singing?

LINDSEY

"Morning has broken." Flowers singing.

SISTER ANNE

Yes, that's wonderful. Yes, I see. They're singing to God.

(singing)

"Morning has broken, like the first morning..."

(LINDSEY delighted, joins SISTER ANNE)

LINDSEY and SISTER ANNE

(singing)

"Black bird has spoken, like the first bird..."

LINDSEY

(laughing)

Yes. Flowers singing.

SISTER ANNE

Yes.

(She hugs LINDSEY)

LINDSEY

(putting down her keys and taking the painting from
SISTER ANNE)

For Michael. Painting.

SISTER ANNE

Are you finished for today?

LINDSEY

(handing the painting back to SISTER ANNE)

Give Michael. Present.

SISTER ANNE

You've been at it all afternoon.

(LINDSEY starts taping a fresh sheet of water color paper
to the table)

SISTER ANNE (Cont'd)

Maybe you should take a break, Lindsey.

LINDSEY

Paint new picture.

SISTER ANNE

Are you sure? Maybe you should rest.

LINDSEY

No. Paint new picture.

SISTER ANNE

Suit yourself.

LINDSEY

Suit yourself.

SISTER ANNE

And what are you going to paint now? More flowers?

LINDSEY

Paint new picture.

SISTER ANNE

Of what?

LINDSEY

(without hesitation)

Black bird.

SISTER ANNE

(laughs)

Of course.

(She gives LINDSEY a quick kiss on the top of her head
and starts out, painting in hand)

I'll see you later.

LINDSEY

(already at it)

I'll see you later.

(SISTER ANNE crosses back to her office)

MICHAEL

(from downstage, to the audience)

I was letting it happen. I don't know why. This noose being slipped around my neck...

LINDSEY

Lindsey paint black bird.

MICHAEL

(a hand to his throat)

I could feel it, the rope growing taut, making it difficult to breath...

(moving back to the office)

Pulling me further in the direction I didn't want to go...

LINDSEY

Lindsey paint black bird. Black bird singing. Like the first day.

MICHAEL

(to SISTER ANNE)

She's right here? Right down the hall?

SISTER ANNE

Yes. It's the only way I can be with her and get to the rest of my work.

MICHAEL

You've got this all planned out, haven't you? Convince me to stay and then, presto, she appears in the doorway. Instant family reunion.

SISTER ANNE

That's just our arrangement. She needs to be close by. I'm her overseer. Besides, she likes working in that room. It's got good north light.

MICHAEL

I could have walked right into her.

SISTER ANNE

It wouldn't have killed you.

MICHAEL

I should have never come out here.

SISTER ANNE

She won't budge. You're safe.

MICHAEL

I don't trust you.

SISTER ANNE

Okay, leave if you must. Take a left down the hall and you won't come near her door. She doesn't know you're here.

MICHAEL

Fine.

SISTER ANNE

But before you go at least take a look at this.

(referring to the painting in her hands)

She just finished it and said she wanted me to give it to you. I know you don't want it, but at least take a look at it.

MICHAEL

No thank you.

SISTER ANNE

Michael, for God's sake! Look at what your sister is doing!

(She turns the painting to him and he's forced to look at it. The instant his eyes hit the painting, there's a sudden burst of blinding white light and we hear the deafening SOUND of a roaring house fire. Then a total blackout; the SOUND fades out as)

LINDSEY

(screaming in the darkness, moving down right)

Hurt dolly! Lindsey hurt dolly!

(Lights up dimly down right revealing LINDSEY, now a girl of fourteen, sitting on the floor near the phone table holding a large worn doll with no hair. Clearly in pain, she holds the doll close to her, rocking back and forth, crying)

LINDSEY (Cont'd)

Hurt dolly...Bad girl...Lindsey hurt...

MICHAEL

(a thirteen-year-old boy, moving over to her)

Lindsey, where are you? Lindsey?

(LINDSEY lets out a sob, continues rocking with the doll)

MICHAEL (Cont'd)

Lindsey?

(He sees her and stops)

What's the matter?

(LINDSEY clutches the doll tighter to her and starts sobbing openly)

MICHAEL (Cont'd)

(kneeling down next to her)

Is something wrong with your doll? Let's see. Let me see it.

(He tries to take it, but she holds on tight)

Come on, Lindsey. Give me your dolly.

(He tries again to get the doll, using more force.
LINDSEY resists, becoming hysterical)

LINDSEY

Hurt dolly! Hurt dolly! Lindsey hurt dolly!

MICHAEL

Stop it, Lindsey! Stop screaming!

LINDSEY

Lindsey hurt dolly! Lindsey hurt!

MICHAEL

I said stop it!

(He manages to wrench the doll free from LINDSEY's arms. The entire chest cavity of the doll has been ripped open and a large pair of scissors stuck all the way through its body and out the back.

LINDSEY thrusts her hands toward MICHAEL. They are red with blood)

MICHAEL

(backing away, the doll in his hands)

Oh, my God! Mom! Mom!

(The lights blackout stage right and come up again in the office and art room.

LINDSEY returns to the art room and the present, calmly wiping off her hands on a paper towel and resuming work on her painting.

MICHAEL moves back to the office, still holding the mutilated doll. He stands staring at the painting SISTER ANNE is holding)

SISTER ANNE

It's of flowers singing "Morning has Broken."

MICHAEL

Why are you doing this?

SISTER ANNE

Michael, please.

MICHAEL

Why?

SISTER ANNE

Why do you think?

(Suddenly MICHAEL is aware of the doll in his hands. He looks at it in horror and throws it down stage.

SISTER ANNE puts LINDSEY's painting on her desk and crosses down to the doll, picks it up. She is now a girl of twelve. MICHAEL follows her downstage)

ANNE

Why would she do this?

MICHAEL

(the boy, angry)

You're asking me?

ANNE

But why would she?

MICHAEL

Because she's totally out of her mind. She should have never been born!

ANNE

Michael! That's terrible!

MICHAEL

It's the truth! She's beyond sick. She's sub human. Damaged to the point of no return. I wish she was dead.

ANNE

(looking at the doll)

Maybe that's what she thinks, too.

MICHAEL

She doesn't think! She can't think! She doesn't have the capacity!

ANNE

Stop it! Calm down.

MICHAEL

Why the hell should I?

ANNE

Michael, stop it!

MICHAEL

I hate her! I hate her! I wish she was dead!

(He breaks down and falls to his knees, crying)

ANNE

I'm sorry, Michael. It's terrible, I know.

MICHAEL

God did this. I hate God.

ANNE

Michael, don't say that. That's a sin. A mortal sin.

MICHAEL

I don't care. So is she a sin. I don't care if I rot in hell. It's the truth.
(looking up)
I hate you, God!

ANNE

(crossing herself)
Please Lord, forgive him. He's very upset.

MICHAEL

Will you shut up? I don't need your prayers, Annie.

ANNE

Yes, you do. And so does Lindsey.

MICHAEL

She doesn't even know what a prayer is!

ANNE

God hears them all the same. You should be ashamed of yourself.

MICHAEL

Well, I'm not. I hate God and I'm not afraid to say it. It makes me feel good.

ANNE

That's evil.

MICHAEL

I don't give a damn.

ANNE

Michael, don't.

MICHAEL

I'm the one who has to live with her.

ANNE

I know. But you can't hate God.

MICHAEL

I don't care what you think.

ANNE

Why do you think she did this?

MICHAEL

Ask her!

ANNE

Really. Why would she?

MICHAEL

She's out of her mind, stupid. There are no reasons.

ANNE

Yes there is a reason. She's trying to tell you something.

MICHAEL

Well, I don't care.

ANNE

(handing him the doll)

You should.

(MICHAEL grabs the doll and, getting to his feet, throws it violently to the ground)

MICHAEL

That's what I think about it!

ANNE

(crossing herself, falling to her knees, with great urgency and at a fast pace--she is truly frightened)

Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee.

MICHAEL

Annie, shut up.

ANNE

Blessed art thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.

MICHAEL

Come on, Annie. Stop it!

ANNE

Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

MICHAEL

Please, don't.

ANNE

(her lines to MICHAEL not breaking the tempo of the prayer)

Say it with me. Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee.

MICHAEL

Come on...

ANNE

You, come on. Blessed art thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.

MICHAEL

Why are you doing this?

ANNE

Holy Mary, Mother of God--

MICHAEL

--Annie, stop--

ANNE

--Pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death. Amen. Say it with me. Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Say it, Michael.

MICHAEL

I don't feel like it.

ANNE

Say it anyway. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

MICHAEL

Annie...

ANNE

Say it. Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Just get on your knees and say it. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

(She closes her eyes and clasps her hands in front of her, more calmly, letting the power of the prayer take her over)

Hail Mary, full of grace the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.

(MICHAEL, defiant, stands watching her)

ANNE (Cont'd)

(evermore peacefully, slowly, as she arrives deep inside the prayer, a child in utter surrender)

Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death. Amen. Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

(opening her eyes but not looking at MICHAEL, with complete serenity)

I'm not stopping.

(closing her eyes again)

Hail Mary full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.

(totally at peace, gently)

You need to pray, Michael. You need to pray right now. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

(remaining on her knees and glowing with devotion, she begins her transition back into the older SISTER ANNE)

Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.

(MICHAEL walks slowly back into the office)

ANNE (Cont'd)

(completing the transition back to SISTER ANNE)

Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

(LINDSEY, rocking back and forth, joins her)

SISTER ANNE and LINDSEY

Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.

(Now fully back in the present, SISTER ANNE gets up and returns to the office, leaving the doll downstage)

LINDSEY

(softly)

Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death. Amen. Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.

MICHAEL
(to SISTER ANNE)

Just tell me.

LINDSEY
Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death. Amen.
(She looks up and smiles, as if she sees something or
someone above her)

SISTER ANNE
(to MICHAEL, gently)
I know what she's feeling. It's very simple...

LINDSEY
Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning,
is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

SISTER ANNE
You are her brother, her only sibling, and she is in need of your love and concern. And
you have a responsibility here. You must know that. Not legally. Not because of some
trust fund. But because it is the decent thing to do and you are a decent person, as much
as you try to hide it.

MICHAEL
I know who I am.

SISTER ANNE
Do you?

MICHAEL
And what I'm capable of handling.

SISTER ANNE
I don't think so.

MICHAEL
You're very impressive. Tough as nails and never a flinch. And more unrecognizable by
the minute. It's amazing what an all-consuming faith in God will do to a person.

SISTER ANNE
It is. But that doesn't change the issue at hand.

MICHAEL

No.

SISTER ANNE

Which is what you're going to do about your sister's need for you in her life.

MICHAEL

You've got my answer.

SISTER ANNE

It's a coward's answer.

MICHAEL

(laughs)

You sound like your father. The good ole challenge to my manhood. Very good.

SISTER ANNE

Whatever it takes.

MICHAEL

As you proceed to sharpen the knife to cut me apart if I don't obey your orders.

SISTER ANNE

I'm simply asking, on Lindsey's behalf, for your involvement in her life. She will never move forward without it. Never be able to take the next step.

MICHAEL

To what? The next step to what? She's going no where. The damage is permanent. Always has been, always will be.

SISTER ANNE

You've seen this painting. Lindsey has become a productive, working artist of exceptional talent.

MICHAEL

What is this? Your own personal projection about the power of art? Come on. She's the same brain damaged, severely disabled creature she's been her entire life.

SISTER ANNE

She's a person, not a "creature."

MICHAEL

She's incapable of even knowing what she's doing with these pictures. That they have any value, monetary or otherwise. That they have any purpose other than keeping her occupied, filling her hours day after day. You have determined that something extraordinary is going on here. You have decided it's worth pumping up this recreational

therapy into something falsely important and significant. And then again, maybe what's really fueling this is your own lost dream of one day being an artist yourself. That this is one way for you to finally get a taste of that--being Lindsey's alterego, her "overseer," as you say, her "protector."

SISTER ANNE

That was unfair.

MICHAEL

Who's being unfair here?

SISTER ANNE

I love your sister. I believe in her as a person first and as an artist second. But there is no denying that she is producing some of the most beautiful, artistically valid works I've ever seen. That is a fact substantiated by every dealer, curator, and critic who has seen it so far. And she is being affected in positive ways. Her focus is sharper. Her speech is clearer. The range of her conscious thought is expanding. Granted, it does have a therapeutic value, but that does not deny it's worth. On the contrary, it reinforces it.

MICHAEL

Fine.

SISTER ANNE

And she's reflecting your father's gifts as an artist.

MICHAEL

Aha! I was wondering when you'd get to that.

SISTER ANNE

I've loved your father's work for many years.

MICHAEL

Pull out all the stops.

SISTER ANNE

In fact, I've managed to purchase three of his paintings for the home.

MICHAEL

Congratulations.

SISTER ANNE

So when Lindsey joined us, my hope was that one day I could work with her, to see if she might have any of your father's talent. That perhaps this part of her mind was intact and only needed to be activated and released, awakening a means of expression she's never had available to her. That was my hope, my daily prayer.

LINDSEY

(jerking out of her chair, in a quiet whimper)

No. No. No. No.

(moving downstage)

Nothing. Bad. Lindsey bad girl.

(She falls to the floor, curling up in a fetal position)

SISTER ANNE

It took a long time. She arrived here from the state hospital in terrible shape. Very withdrawn, closed off.

LINDSEY

Bad. Nothing. Dolly. Bad. Bad girl...

SISTER ANNE

She'd lie on the floor for hours condemning herself and crying.

(She leaves MICHAEL and crosses directly to LINDSEY,
kneels down next to her)

SISTER ANNE (Cont'd)

(gently)

Lindsey?

LINDSEY

(recoiling)

No! Dirty. Bad. Lindsey bad girl.

SISTER ANNE

Lindsey Stouffer, you are not bad. You are good and God loves you.

LINDSEY

(crying)

No. Nothing. Nothing. Nothing.

SISTER ANNE

Do you know who I am?

LINDSEY

Nothing...

SISTER ANNE

Lindsey, look at me. Do you remember me? Do you know who I am? Do you know my name?

LINDSEY

No. Bad. Nothing...

SISTER ANNE

Look at my face. Can you see my face?

LINDSEY

No...

SISTER ANNE

Yes, you can. You know who I am. Look at me and tell me. Tell me my name.

(LINDSEY suddenly bolts upright and looks at SISTER ANNE. She is very tense. A beat)

SISTER ANNE (Cont'd)

There. That's right. Now you remember me, don't you? Now you know who I am.

LINDSEY

Lindsey bad girl.

SISTER ANNE

No. You are not a bad girl. Lindsey Stouffer is a good girl. A good girl who God loves very much.

LINDSEY

God.

SISTER ANNE

Yes. I love you, too. I love you, Lindsey Stouffer.

LINDSEY

(bursting into tears)

Love. God love. Love. Love. No.

SISTER ANNE

Yes. He does. God loves you...

(She starts to put her arms around her, but LINDSEY pulls away)

LINDSEY

No!

SISTER ANNE

And I love you, too.

LINDSEY

God love. I love.

SISTER ANNE

That's right. God loves Lindsey. I love Lindsey.

LINDSEY

Lindsey.

SISTER ANNE

Yes.

LINDSEY

(crying again)

Love Lindsey.

SISTER ANNE

Yes. That's right. God loves. God loves Lindsey.

LINDSEY

God love Lindsey.

SISTER ANNE

Yes. He does. God loves Lindsey.

(LINDSEY slowly reaches out to SISTER ANNE and touches her cheek)

LINDSEY

God love Lindsey.

SISTER ANNE

(letting LINDSEY touch her face)

Yes. And I love you, too.

(LINDSEY, concentrating intently, touches her other cheek, then suddenly withdraws her hand. Carefully, SISTER ANNE puts LINDSEY's hand back on her cheek, then reaches out and touches LINDSEY's cheek. This holds for a moment as they look at each other)

SISTER ANNE (Cont'd)

(finally)

Do you remember me, Lindsey? Do you remember my name?

LINDSEY

(continuing to touch SISTER ANNE's face)

And I love you, too.

SISTER ANNE

Yes. And what is my name?

LINDSEY

Name.

SISTER ANNE

Do you remember my name?

LINDSEY

Remember my name.

SISTER ANNE

What is it?

LINDSEY

What is it?

SISTER ANNE

Your name is Lindsey. What's my name?

LINDSEY

(smiling, still touching her face)

Yes.

SISTER ANNE

What?

LINDSEY

Yes. Yes...

(laughs)

God love Lindsey.

SISTER ANNE

That's right. God loves you.

LINDSEY

Anne!

SISTER ANNE

(almost overcome)

Yes!

(They embrace)

LINDSEY

Yes. Remember.

SISTER ANNE

Yes, you do.

LINDSEY

Anne love Lindsey.

SISTER ANNE

Oh, yes. Anne loves Lindsey.

LINDSEY

God.

SISTER ANNE

Yes. And God.

(Playfully, SISTER ANNE reaches out and touches LINDSEY's face and LINDSEY touches SISTER ANNE's. The lights shift as they become girls of twelve and fourteen, laughing and touching each other's cheek, nose, forehead, chin.

MICHAEL, thirteen, crosses to them)

MICHAEL

Annie, what are you doin'?

ANNE

We're playing a game. It's a new way of seeing each other. She likes to see with her hands.

MICHAEL

My mom's trying to get her to stop touching people. She'd be pissed if she saw you doin' that.

ANNE

But I'm not people. I'm her friend.

MICHAEL

I'm tellin' ya, you shouldn't do that.

ANNE
(withdrawing her hand)
Okay. We were just playing.

(LINDSEY grabs ANNE's hand and puts it back on her face)

MICHAEL
See?

ANNE
She's having fun. I don't mind.

MICHAEL
But she doesn't know when to stop. Or when it's okay. Come on, Annie.

ANNE
(again withdrawing her hand, reluctantly)
Okay.

(Immediately LINDSEY grabs ANNE's hand again and puts it on her face. This time ANNE tries to remove her hand and get up, but LINDSEY grabs tighter, holding it to her cheek)

ANNE
Ouch. Lindsey, let go.

LINDSEY
Touch. Anne touch Lindsey.

ANNE
You're squeezing too hard. Let go now.

MICHAEL
See?

ANNE
Shut up. Lindsey, please let go. It's time to stop the game now.

(But LINDSEY only holds on tighter to ANNE's hand)

LINDSEY
Anne touch Lindsey.

ANNE

Now you've gotten her upset.

MICHAEL

Lindsey, let go of Annie's hand.

LINDSEY

Anne touch Lindsey.

MICHAEL

No. Let go. It's time for your nap.

LINDSEY

Touch Lindsey!

MICHAEL

(grabbing LINDSEY's wrist and forcing ANNE's hand free
from her grasp)

No. Now stop it. Go in the house. Go to your room.

LINDSEY

(screaming)

Anne touch Lindsey! Anne touch Lindsey!

MICHAEL

No. Go to your room and sit on your bed.

LINDSEY

No! Anne touch Lindsey!

ANNE

Lindsey, don't.

MICHAEL

Go to your room and sit on your bed and fold your hands. Go!

(LINDSEY starts crying)

MICHAEL (Cont'd)

Go!

(Slowly LINDSEY gets up and moves to her chair in the art
room. She sits, folding her hands, rocking back and forth)

ANNE
(to MICHAEL)

I'm sorry.

MICHAEL
(turning away from her)

It's okay.

ANNE
I didn't mean to--

MICHAEL
--I know, I know.

(He's clearly upset and embarrassed)

ANNE
Michael, I understand. I'm sorry. I was just trying to make her happy.

MICHAEL
Yeah, well, you gotta be careful with that.

ANNE
I know. It was stupid of me.

MICHAEL
(his back still turned)
It's okay.

(He is near tears. ANNE wants to go to him, but can't)

ANNE
I'm sorry.

MICHAEL
(his voice breaking)
Yeah. Maybe you should go home now.

ANNE
I'm so sorry, Michael.

MICHAEL
Yeah.

(She crosses to him and gives him a quick kiss on the cheek)

I am. ANNE

Thanks. MICHAEL

Bye. ANNE

Yeah. MICHAEL

(ANNE moves back to the office as SISTER ANNE.

MICHAEL, still the boy, stands alone and isolated stage center. He wipes his face with his sleeve.

At her table, LINDSEY resumes painting)

LINDSEY
Paint beautiful picture. Black bird singing. Paint beautiful picture for Michael.

SISTER ANNE
(to MICHAEL, as if he was with her in the office)
Slowly she began to trust me, to believe that God did love her, that I loved her.

MICHAEL
(in the present, to the audience)
She kept at it. Telling me things I wasn't interested in hearing, things I didn't want to know...

(He moves back to the office)

SISTER ANNE
And the art work. That came slowest of all. For the longest time it was simple marks on a page, child-like drawings. Nothing special or unusual...

MICHAEL
But I couldn't leave. I just stood there with this growing sense of dread...

SISTER ANNE
But then, one day, after nearly three years of working together, something amazing happened...

(LINDSEY stands at her work table, once again looking up and closing her eyes, that radiant smile on her face. She lets out a laugh of pure joy.

SISTER ANNE moves to the doorway to the art room, quietly observing)

MICHAEL

In fact, for a brief moment, held there in that awful suspension, I wished I didn't exist. That I could actually disappear, not just from that room, but from the face of the earth...

(LINDSEY, still laughing, looks down with excitement at the painting in front of her. She picks up her brush)

LINDSEY

(joyously)

Paint beautiful picture. Lindsey paint beautiful picture.

(With a sense of wonder, she touches the brush to the paper. SISTER ANNE moves to the table, looks at the painting for the first time. She is stunned by what she sees--a miracle in the making)

SISTER ANNE

(amazed, almost speechless)

Oh, Lindsey. This is wonderful.

LINDSEY

(overwhelmed, a guttural cry, a cross between grief and elation)

Ah-h-h-h-h-h! Ah-h-h-h-h-h! Paint beautiful picture.

SISTER ANNE

Oh, yes! It is. It's beautiful. Oh, Lindsey! Praise God!

LINDSEY

(tears in her eyes)

Praise God. Ah-h-h-h-h-h!

SISTER ANNE

Yes! Praise God from whom all blessings flow.

LINDSEY

(laughing, crying)

Praise God.

SISTER ANNE

(joining her elation)

Oh, yes!

LINDSEY

God love Lindsey. Blessings flow.

SISTER ANNE

Oh, yes. He does love you.

LINDSEY

Lindsey paint beautiful picture.

SISTER ANNE

That's right. God wants you to paint beautiful pictures.

LINDSEY

Beautiful pictures.

SISTER ANNE

Because God loves you.

LINDSEY

(laughing)

God love Lindsey.

SISTER ANNE

Yes. He does. Oh, yes.

(LINDSEY resumes painting with clarity and focus)

MICHAEL

(to the audience)

Where was it coming from? This inability to dismiss the information, to throw it off as it was being hurled at me.

(SISTER ANNE gently kisses the top of LINDSEY's head,
then returns to the office)

MICHAEL (Cont'd)

Had she already rendered me helpless?

(abruptly, to SISTER ANNE as she enters)

Your single-mindedness still amazes me. Only now it's taken on a ruthlessness I don't recognize.

SISTER ANNE

No one is keeping you here, Michael.

MICHAEL

You follow the dictates of your Holy Spirit and lead your victim bleeding to the altar.

SISTER ANNE

You can still make a safe escape.

MICHAEL

If I cared enough I would demand that this all stop. Today. Now. No more shows. No more dealers. No more pictures. No more art of any kind. I would make every effort to remove you from your guardianship position and from having any contact with Lindsey whatsoever. I would want you out of this family's life.

SISTER ANNE

Then I guess I should be thankful you don't care enough.

MICHAEL

Yes, you should be.

SISTER ANNE

My prayer has been that enough of the old Michael would be intact to allow you to eventually see the importance of your engagement in this thing.

MICHAEL

Sorry to disappoint you.

SISTER ANNE

(crossing closer to him)

I watch her doing picture after picture and know she's painting every one of them for you. From the beginning that's been her motivation. She's painting her pictures for you, Michael. I didn't invent that. It comes from somewhere deep inside. This attempt to reach out, to touch your face, to love you. And to feel you return that love. This is her need. This is what she longs for every day. Her family. Her brother. Her one true connection to the world. She will spend the rest of her life calling for you, Michael. She is stuck in that groove, like an old record. And she'll keep on replaying it every day of her life. Calling to you, calling your name.

(MICHAEL moves downstage into an isolated light. The lights dim in the office as SISTER ANNE watches him)

MICHAEL

(to the audience)

So I stood there, one door down from that presence I could not face. Stood there in suspension listening to this person who once filled my heart and my dreaming. Who

belonged to God Almighty and was--as she had been since I last saw her--totally off limits to a mere flawed mortal such as I. But now instead of a noose I felt a pair of giant hands on my shoulders. I could feel the weight. Substantial and steady. Holding me there. A weight I couldn't throw off or get out from under.

(SISTER ANNE kneels at the side of her desk, crosses herself, pulls a rosary from her pocket and begins praying)

SISTER ANNE

(softly)

Hail Mary full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb Jesus...

(She continues silently, mouthing the words)

MICHAEL

And then suddenly I remembered a dream I'd had the night before. I was standing in the attic of a large strange house, a house I wasn't supposed to be in. Before me was this rusted steel cabinet with one large drawer. Someone, something ordered me to open it, to look inside. So I tried pulling out the drawer, but it was rusted shut. I struggled and finally managed to pry it free. Inside, covered with a soiled cloth, was a row of severed and decayed human heads.

LINDSEY

(looking up from her work, smiling)

Paint beautiful picture for Michael.

(She continues painting.

The lights fade to black)

END OF ACT I

ACT II

(Lights up on MICHAEL standing alone down stage, hands on his shoulders)

MICHAEL

(to the audience)

These giant hands...

(He watches as lights come up on LINDSEY standing in the art room, looking up, her face radiant)

LINDSEY

(singing joyfully)

"Mine is the sunlight, mine is the morning..."

(Lights up on SISTER ANNE kneeling in silent prayer in her office. She gets up, moves to the art room as LINDSEY sings)

LINDSEY (Cont'd)

(singing)

"Born of the one light Eden saw play..."

(SISTER ANNE makes the sign of the cross, then, unseen by LINDSEY, begins gracefully spinning in circles, softly humming the song, picking up where LINDSEY left off. She moves downstage, transforming into ANNE at seventeen. LINDSEY remains standing in the art room, looking up at the light she feels shining on her)

MICHAEL

(watching ANNE)

Absurd as it would have seemed just that morning, I now had to ask myself, did I still love this woman? Is that what was holding me?

(ANNE "floats" closer to him)

MICHAEL (Cont'd)

That in giving herself to God, in becoming the bride of Christ, she never allowed me access to an escape hatch?

ANNE

(to MICHAEL, buoyant)

I can't really describe it. You just have to open your heart to him. Then it all floods in and you're filled with light. Filled with this wonderful, powerful, golden light.

(She spins around several more times, her face lifted to the sky. She is beautiful and aglow.)

MICHAEL, the boy of eighteen, watches her longingly)

MICHAEL

I love you that way, Annie.

ANNE

But feeling God's love is so much more. It makes you want to return it ten fold. A hundred fold.

(He goes to her, takes her in his arms)

MICHAEL

Right now, you fill me up.

(He kisses her gently. She takes his hands)

ANNE

You're the only boy I've ever loved, Michael Stouffer. The only boy I ever will love. But I can't love you and God in the same way. Or at the same time.

(dropping his hands)

He's calling me to him. I have to go.

MICHAEL

Annie...

ANNE

I know you don't understand. You don't feel what I feel. But I'm asking you to try.

(this isn't easy)

I'll never love another person like I love you, Michael. But I can't give back to you what you're so ready to give me. I just can't.

MICHAEL

Don't say that.

ANNE

I have to say it. I can't help it. God is calling me to serve him. I can't not go.

MICHAEL

Annie...

ANNE

You'll always be my best friend.

MICHAEL

Don't say that.

ANNE

You will.

MICHAEL

No.

ANNE

I'm sorry.

MICHAEL

(moving away from her)

No.

ANNE

Please. I love you as much as I'm able. That's just going to have to be enough.

(MICHAEL returns to the office)

ANNE (Cont'd)

Michael?

MICHAEL

(in the present, to the audience)

Right here on my shoulders. The weight. I could actually feel the size of it.

(LINDSEY laughs, then thrusts her arms high in front of her)

LINDSEY

Blessings flow! Praise God! Yes! Amen! Yes!

ANNE

(moving to LINDSEY, becoming SISTER ANNE)

Yes! Praise God!

MICHAEL

Or was it, in fact, my sister...?

LINDSEY

Lindsey is alive! Gift of life! Yes! Praise God! Amen!

SISTER ANNE

Amen. Oh, Lindsey.

(She embraces her)

LINDSEY

(a cry of complete elation)

Ah-h-h-h-h-h! Ah-h-h-h-h-h!

SISTER ANNE

(holding her)

Yes. Yes.

MICHAEL

As I stood there I thought I could almost hear her muffled cries through the wall separating us.

LINDSEY

Ah-h-h-h-h-h! Michael!

MICHAEL (Cont'd)

Was this just a trick of the mind? Allowing her physical closeness to once more invade my defenses and reach back through me...

(LINDSEY falls to her knees, hands clasped together, still looking up. SISTER ANNE goes to her knees with her)

LINDSEY

Ah-h-h-h-h-h!

MICHAEL

...pulling my heart out onto my sleeve?

SISTER ANNE

Yes, Lindsey. You are feeling the light.

LINDSEY

(reaching toward it)

Yes. Light. Feel light. Sunlight.

SISTER ANNE
God's light.

LINDSEY
Yes.

SISTER ANNE
The light from his throne.

LINDSEY
Throne. Yes. Light. Amen.

(She laughs joyously. SISTER ANNE holds her)

MICHAEL
Or was it the two of them? The combination. With the weight of a millstone, pinning me there...

(LINDSEY gets up, picks up her key ring from the table, clutches it to her)

LINDSEY
Michael here.

SISTER ANNE
(getting up)
What?

LINDSEY
Michael here. Keys unlock.

SISTER ANNE
Have you finished your picture?

LINDSEY
Keys unlock Michael.

SISTER ANNE
Are you finished?

LINDSEY
Finish.

SISTER ANNE
Okay. Then you should go to your room to rest. Would you do that?

LINDSEY

Go to room. Keys unlock.

SISTER ANNE

Yes. Take your keys.

LINDSEY

(starting out of the room)

Go to room.

SISTER ANNE

Good. Lie down and take a nap. I'll see you at dinner.

LINDSEY

(moving off stage)

Yes. Nap. Dinner. Room.

(turning back, gently jingling her keys)

Keys unlock.

(She exits. SISTER ANNE looks down at LINDSEY's painting taped to the table)

SISTER ANNE

Yes.

(She starts untaping the painting)

MICHAEL

All I knew was that I'd entered into something I now couldn't get out of. And whatever it was, pressing down on me, holding me there, I'd have to face it head on.

(Painting in hand, SISTER ANNE crosses to the office. MICHAEL stands waiting)

SISTER ANNE

Sorry. I got sidelined momentarily.

MICHAEL

Yes. I can imagine.

SISTER ANNE

By the "creature."

MICHAEL

I heard.

(SISTER ANNE puts the painting in the closet with the others)

SISTER ANNE

But she's gone off to her room now. You're safe.

MICHAEL

Is that so?

SISTER ANNE

(returning to her desk)

No. I lied again. You're not.

MICHAEL

You're right.

SISTER ANNE

She knows you're here. I didn't tell her, but she knows.

MICHAEL

She knows I'm here.

SISTER ANNE

Yes. She just told me.

MICHAEL

And how does she know that?

SISTER ANNE

She does that sometimes. Knows things without being told.

MICHAEL

As step by step the plan unfolds.

SISTER ANNE

I ignored it when she told me.

MICHAEL

Yes, of course you did.

SISTER ANNE

I thought you should know.

MICHAEL

I see. Now we pull a switch and confuse him with the truth. That should soften him up a bit more.

SISTER ANNE

Yes. As you continue being worked over by a manipulative nun who won't stop until she gets what she wants.

MICHAEL

Yes.

(The office phone rings and SISTER ANNE picks up)

SISTER ANNE

Sister Anne Frances... Hi... No, I'm sorry, I can't. Not this afternoon at least... Yes... Yes...

(checking an appointment book on her desk)

How about Friday morning?... Then how about next Tuesday?... Ten?... Good. I'll meet you at the Rectory... Thanks, Herb. Bye.

(She hangs up)

So where were we?

MICHAEL

Something about a manipulative nun.

SISTER ANNE

Oh yes. And you feel trapped.

MICHAEL

More so by the minute.

SISTER ANNE

And you don't know what to do about it.

MICHAEL

I know what I should do.

SISTER ANNE

Yes. So do I.

(crossing to the coffee maker)

Would you like more coffee?

MICHAEL

No, thank you. What were you doing in there just now?

SISTER ANNE

(pouring coffee for herself)

Praying with your sister.

MICHAEL

I see.

SISTER ANNE

As I've told you, Lindsey has found a deep faith in God.

MICHAEL

With a little help from her friends.

SISTER ANNE

Yes. Like every person who's lost and needs to find the way home.

MICHAEL

And she's found her way?

SISTER ANNE

She's finding it. Unique as it is.

MICHAEL

Again, congratulations.

SISTER ANNE

Michael, let's not do this anymore.

MICHAEL

What? I want to find out what you've done to my sister. Isn't that your goal here? Isn't that progress?

SISTER ANNE

Not in bitterness.

MICHAEL

Take it or leave it. That's all I can manage at the moment.

SISTER ANNE

I'll take it.

(She sits at her desk)

Maybe we are making progress.

MICHAEL

So what's going on?

SISTER ANNE

Nothing's "going on." I haven't "done" anything. Lindsey's a person in her own right. She makes her own decisions. Especially when it comes to her relationship with God.

MICHAEL

Bullshit.

SISTER ANNE

You don't know her, Michael. You haven't the slightest idea what she's capable of.

MICHAEL

Oh, yes I do.

SISTER ANNE

God is very real to her. Very close. She can feel his presence. Feel the power of his love.

MICHAEL

We're not talking about God's love.

SISTER ANNE

Yes we are. That's what this is all about.

MICHAEL

We're talking about her perceptions and how you're manipulating them.

SISTER ANNE

Oh, I see. That's certainly a popular word today.

MICHAEL

How you're using her to help you justify your own beliefs. Distorting what should be simple pity and a sense of compassion into a therapeutic nightmare that gives you the strokes at the expense of the patient. It's all so transparent. Attempting to mold these poor damaged souls into reflecting your own image of God. What you have embraced. Is this going to "heal" them? Is this going to suddenly make them whole? I stand here listening to you putting her through your religiosity in the next room, coaxing her ever further down your narrow road as she remains fixed in her madness, lost in her insanity.

(laughs)

What choice does she have in this? Where does free will come into play for her? She's a victim twice over.

SISTER ANNE

Are you finished?

MICHAEL

I don't know, am I?

SISTER ANNE

You've become a true cynic.

MICHAEL

That's right. And honest. On the money. Seeing it like it is.

SISTER ANNE

You have no idea what you're talking about.

MICHAEL

Wrong. I do know. I see what's going on. You're hoping beyond hope for a miracle to happen that will transform these wards into real human beings with normal functioning minds and feelings. Manufacturing Lindsey Stouffer into a great artist? Please. Let's enter the real world. She is totally out of her mind. You know that. I know that. The disorder is permanent. It's in the file. It's a plain, simple fact.

SISTER ANNE

The paintings are real. I didn't invent them.

MICHAEL

And what does that prove? She has no idea what she's doing.

SISTER ANNE

They're a reflection of God's power working through her.

MICHAEL

And that proves what? Her worth as a person?

SISTER ANNE

They're one physical manifestation of it.

MICHAEL

Their existence and her ability to turn out hundreds of them doesn't change anything. She's still lost. She's still incapable of functioning in the world. Or thinking for herself. She still needs care and surveillance twenty-four hours a day. That's the reality here. I lived the first half of my life with her, remember?

SISTER ANNE

(getting up, her anger finally surfacing)

Fine. And if I'm hearing you correctly, I assume you now endorse the alternative approach? I'm sure you remember that? Herding her into a cell, locking her in, and throwing away the key. Out of sight out of mind. No one cares anyway. No need to consider for a moment that her life may have any real value. Let's be practical here. Let's deal with the "problem" realistically. She is sub-human, after all. Let's treat her accordingly.

(really letting him have it)

But then that's what you've already done, isn't it? So I shouldn't be surprised. Like the ninety percent of families in this country who are in complete denial that their mentally disabled relatives even exist. You fit right in, living as if she died a long time ago!

(MICHAEL just watches her, seemingly unaffected.
SISTER ANNE collects herself a moment, then moves to
him, looks right at him)

SISTER ANNE (Cont'd)

(controlled, measured)

Well, as I know your heart is trying to tell you, she is very much alive and very much a person and very much loved by the same God who created you and me. The simple truth is that Lindsey does exist, she's still your sister, and she desperately needs you back in her life. That's what you have to face, Michael. That's the reality.

MICHAEL

You don't know, Anne. You don't know.

SISTER ANNE

I do know. I was with you.

MICHAEL

No. You were on the sidelines. With only a partial view and only some of the time.

SISTER ANNE

I was there when it mattered. I remember.

MICHAEL

(moving down stage)

No. You don't know. You don't.

(The lights cross fade)

SISTER ANNE

(following him)

Michael, please. Talk to me.

(They are both in their late teens)

MICHAEL

(very upset)

I can't.

ANNE

Yes, you can. Please. It's important that you tell me.

(MICHAEL covers his face with his hands, struggling to
keep control)

ANNE (Cont'd)

(a hand on his shoulder)

What happened?

(He pulls away from her)

ANNE (Cont'd)

Did she hurt herself again?

MICHAEL

Leave me alone.

ANNE

Was it something they did to her at the State Hospital?

MICHAEL

I don't ever want to see her again. I can't.

ANNE

Why? What happened?

MICHAEL

Just go home, Annie.

ANNE

Was it your visit that upset her?

(He looks at her a moment, then)

MICHAEL

We took her out for a drive.

(LINDSEY, nineteen, enters and runs to MICHAEL, takes his arm. She is very happy)

MICHAEL

I was in the back seat with her.

(looks at LINDSEY)

When we brought her back and pulled up to her building she--

LINDSEY

(pleading, clutching to MICHAEL)

No! Lindsey go home! Lindsey go home!.

(becoming hysterical)

Please! Michael take home! Please! Ah-h-h-h-h-h!

MICHAEL

(overlapping, shouting)

Dad had to call the guards. They had to pry her hands free.

(LINDSEY's hands are forced free and she is "dragged"
upstage)

LINDSEY

(screaming)

Michael! Please! Lindsey go home! Michael! No! No!

MICHAEL

(overlapping)

I couldn't do anything!

LINDSEY

Lindsey go home! Ah-h-h-h-h! Michael! Michael! Please! Lindsey go home!...

(She is "dragged" off stage)

MICHAEL

(overlapping)

I watched them drag her back into that awful place. I couldn't do anything!

LINDSEY (off stage)

Ah-h-h-h-h-h! Michael!

MICHAEL

(his voice breaking)

She was terrified. I just stood there and watched the doors close her in. She kept screaming my name.

(looking at ANNE)

Her face. My God. Dad couldn't even drive. We sat there in the car for at least half an hour. They both cried all the way home.

(suddenly steel-like)

I couldn't cry. I couldn't feel anything.

ANNE

Oh, Michael, I'm so sorry.

MICHAEL

Now Dad's taken off alone. He'll get drunk as hell tonight. And Mom's at home still crying. These visits are a crock. It's better if we just never see her at all.

ANNE

I don't think so.

MICHAEL

Why not? They just make us all sad. Why keep doing that? It's stupid. It's been so much better at home since she's been gone. It's only when we go up to see her that everything falls apart again. It's stupid.

ANNE

No, it's not. She's your sister.

MICHAEL

Oh yeah, thanks. That's a big help.

ANNE

We have to pray for her.

MICHAEL

I knew you'd say that.

ANNE

We have to. For your Mom and Dad. For you.

MICHAEL

I don't feel like it. You pray all you want, Annie.

ANNE

We have to ask him why.

MICHAEL

I don't want to talk to God right now. I don't think I ever want to talk to him again.

ANNE

I know. But you should and you will.

(She gets down on her knees and holds out her hand)

Come on.

MICHAEL

That's your answer to everything, isn't it?

ANNE

Yes.

MICHAEL

And I told you, I don't want to.

ANNE

You've got to tell him how you feel and ask him why this is happening.

(still holding out her hand)

Come on. Try. You need to pray.

MICHAEL

Annie...

ANNE

Please.

(Reluctantly MICHAEL kneels down next to her and takes her hand. She closes her eyes. He stares blankly ahead)

ANNE

Dear God, Michael needs to know why you've given him this burden in his life. Comfort him and help him deal with the sadness and pain of poor Lindsey. And be with Lindsey at the hospital.

(MICHAEL looks over at her, studies her face)

ANNE (Cont'd)

Protect her from all harm and comfort her. Let her know that Michael does care. That he does love her. Let her know that you love her too. May your Holy Spirit shield her and heal her.

LINDSEY (off stage)

(crying out)

Michael!

(MICHAEL jumps to his feet)

ANNE

What's the matter?

MICHAEL

I don't know.

LINDSEY (off stage)

Ah-h-h-h-h!

MICHAEL
(moving toward the office)
I gotta get out of here! I gotta leave this place!

ANNE
Michael. It's going to be all right.

MICHAEL
No! It's not.

ANNE
Michael!

LINDSEY (off stage)
Michael!

MICHAEL
No!

(ANNE gets up and, as SISTER ANNE, follows
MICHAEL back to the office. She stands looking at him a
moment in silence, then)

SISTER ANNE
It was sexual abuse.

MICHAEL
What?

SISTER ANNE
In Faribault. At the State Hospital. Lindsey was being sexually abused.

MICHAEL
What?

SISTER ANNE
Over a two year period. An attendant came to her room.

MICHAEL
Why are you telling me this?

SISTER ANNE
Because you need to know it. She was raped repeatedly and no one knew. She didn't
know how to tell.

MICHAEL

I don't want to know this.

SISTER ANNE

So she tried to kill herself. With a spoon she sharpened on the concrete floor. In the stomach. She was found bleeding to death in her bed. Your parents were told it was an appendix operation.

MICHAEL

Stop.

SISTER ANNE

She healed physically, but the trauma caused her to slip into a near catatonic state for years. After your parents passed away, she was moved to the State Hospital in St. Peter and left there to exist as best she could. When I arrived back here seven years ago I inquired about her and found her there almost unrecognizable. It took me nearly two years to get the transfer approved.

(moving closer to him)

But since then God has been leading her out of the darkness, Michael. It's happening.

(MICHAEL turns away from her)

SISTER ANNE (Cont'd)

I've been watching her transform right before my eyes. She's a different person than she was when she arrived. Than she was as a child. You have to know that. And she's calling to you because you represent the last doorway she has to get through emotionally. I don't totally understand it, but she does. She knows. God is telling her what she needs now and it involves you. That much is clear. She's reached a point in her life, in her development, that requires this reconnection. And I think you're here because in your heart you know that too.

(He turns back and looks at her, then)

MICHAEL

(to the audience)

It had happened. The monster had opened its eyes and was staring right at me. I was about to step into its mouth.

(He crosses to LINDSEY's painting on the desk. He picks it up, looks at it a long moment, puts it down. To SISTER ANNE)

All right. You win. I'll see her.

SISTER ANNE

Praise God. Oh, Michael--

MICHAEL

--Don't. Just go and get her.

SISTER ANNE

She'll need some time. It'll have to be done carefully.

MICHAEL

Whatever.

SISTER ANNE

She's in her room resting. Tomorrow would be best. In the morning. That's when she's strongest.

MICHAEL

Tomorrow?

SISTER ANNE

Yes, I think so. This has to be done right. She needs to process it, prepare herself. It will be a momentous thing for her.

MICHAEL

I'd rather see her today. This afternoon.

SISTER ANNE

I don't think that's possible. She needs time. You know that. It'd be best if I tell her you're coming to see her tomorrow.

MICHAEL

Tomorrow.

SISTER ANNE

Yes. You can stay in the guest quarters. It's a separate building in back. The old carriage house.

MICHAEL

Tomorrow.

SISTER ANNE

Michael, thank you.

MICHAEL

What?

SISTER ANNE

Thank you for agreeing to see her. You're letting God lead you and that is a beautiful thing.

MICHAEL

I'm letting you lead me, Anne. Not God.

SISTER ANNE

Your heart is leading you. That's the way God works.

(He looks at her a moment)

MICHAEL

You stole my heart and never gave it back.

(This stops her. She looks at him, then moves away)

SISTER ANNE

(finally, from the heart)

Michael. I cherish what we had together. I think of it as a special blessing. It's made me a fuller person, enriched me, allowed me to experience what it means to love another human being in a very special way. I see you now standing here in front of me and I see the boy you once were. The boy who gave me this gift, this blessing. And I still love him. I'm sorry for the pain I've caused you. For the struggles you've had with the road I chose to walk. I'm sorry for leaving you back there and what that's meant for you.

(with deep feeling, fighting tears)

But I do still love you.

(He turns away from her)

SISTER ANNE (Cont'd)

I want you to be happy. I want us to have a friendship. I do want that.

(She moves to him)

SISTER ANNE (Cont'd)

Michael?

(He turns to her. She holds out her arms. He looks at her a moment, then steps into her embrace.)

They hold each other as LINDSEY enters as a nineteen-year-old, moves downstage, sits, and begins rocking back and forth. She looks terrible, her demeanor very flat, her posture slumped)

LINDSEY

(to herself, methodically)

Big dolly, long brown hair. Big dolly, long brown hair.

(begins weeping, softly)
Big dolly, long brown hair. Big dolly, long brown hair.

(MICHAEL breaks from his embrace with SISTER ANNE.
They look at each other)

SISTER ANNE
(softly)
Thank you.

LINDSEY
Big dolly, long brown hair...

(MICHAEL turns, looks over at LINDSEY)

MICHAEL
It's been half my lifetime...

SISTER ANNE
Yes. I know.

MICHAEL
I can see her. The last time. Just before...

(The lights begin shifting as he moves up stage and from a
concealed knook retrieves a new, fully-clothed doll with
long brown hair, similar to the one seen in Act I)

MICHAEL
(looking at the doll)
Her cries were finally heard. My mother arranged a home visit from the State Hospital
over a weekend. I was a senior in high school.

SISTER ANNE
I remember.

(He crosses over to a position behind LINDSEY, holding
the doll behind his back. From the office, SISTER ANNE
watches)

LINDSEY (Cont'd)
(softly, to herself)
Big dolly, long brown hair...

MICHAEL
I still wanted to help, to give her some small pleasure. I needed to do that...

(in the past)
Lindsey?

LINDSEY
(not hearing him)
Big dolly, long brown hair...

MICHAEL
Lindsey?

(LINDSEY turns to him)

MICHAEL (Cont'd)
Lindsey, I have a present for you.

LINDSEY
Michael present.

MICHAEL
That's right. For your visit home. Now close your eyes.

(She does, very tightly)

LINDSEY
Present. Michael present.

MICHAEL
Yes. Now hold out your hands.

(She does enthusiastically)

LINDSEY
Yes.

MICHAEL
Michael has a present for Lindsey.

(He places the doll in her arms. LINDSEY opens her eyes)

LINDSEY
(clutching the doll to her)
Dolly! Dolly! Ah-h-h-h-h!

MICHAEL
With long brown hair.

(She begins to laugh)

LINDSEY

Dolly, long brown hair!

MICHAEL

(enjoying this)

Big dolly.

LINDSEY

Big dolly, long brown hair.

MICHAEL

Yes.

(LINDSEY, still laughing, smothers the doll's face with kisses)

MICHAEL (Cont'd)

Big dolly, long brown hair for Lindsey. To celebrate your visit home from the hospital.

LINDSEY

For Lindsey. Home from hospital.

MICHAEL

Yes.

(Laughing, she clutches the doll and rocks back and forth.

MICHAEL moves away from LINDSEY)

MICHAEL

(in the present, to the audience)

That night I had another dream. The same severed heads now came to life and began speaking to me. In unison they chanted that I should look at the paintings. All of them. That in the paintings I'd find what I needed.

(LINDSEY, still in the past, gets up and goes to the art room as the lights in the room shift to a dream-like quality, with reds and ambers. Setting the doll on the table, she starts wrapping it with a large sheet of blank newsprint, folding the ends and taping them shut)

LINDSEY

Michael bring present. Big dolly, long brown hair.

(She wraps the already-wrapped doll with another piece of paper.

In the office, SISTER ANNE kneels and begins praying silently)

MICHAEL

I woke up in a sweat. For a moment I had no idea where I was. But then my mind caught hold and it was clear what I had to do.

(starting back to the office)

Not a door was locked. I don't remember how, but I found my way in the dark back to the office, my body being moved for me.

LINDSEY

(softly)

Present. Michael. Big Dolly.

(He enters the office, goes to the closet. He doesn't see SISTER ANNE praying, nor does she see him)

MICHAEL (Cont'd)

The paintings, the paintings, they chanted...

(He picks up the stack of paintings in the closet and carries them into the art room. He doesn't see LINDSEY, nor does she see him. LINDSEY continues wrapping the doll)

MICHAEL (Cont'd)

I felt her in that room. Her presence. Her life...

LINDSEY

Big dolly, long brown hair...

MICHAEL

I had moved on, grown older. She'd remained back there, in the place where I'd left her...

(Not stopping to look at them, he begins setting the paintings out on the floor one at a time in a wide half circle downstage of LINDSEY at the table)

LINDSEY

Lindsey home. From hospital. Visit. Big dolly. Present. Michael give dolly...

MICHAEL

(laying out the paintings)

I didn't look at them. Just set them out, exposed them.

LINDSEY

Lindsey home from hospital. Visit.

(holding up the wrapped package containing the doll, her
tone suddenly changing)

Dolly. Hurt. Bad girl. Lindsey bad girl.

(increasingly upset)

No. Nothing. Lindsey bad girl. Hurt. Bad. Dolly.

MICHAEL

(still setting out the paintings)

I could feel how close it was. The heat of its breath.

LINDSEY

Ah-h-h-h-h-h! Lindsey hurt! Bad girl! Bad hurt!

MICHAEL

But I had to get them all out in front of me.

LINDSEY

(moving with the doll into the half circle formed by the
paintings)

Ah-h-h-h-h-h!

(She drops to her knees. MICHAEL sets out the last of the
paintings and steps back)

MICHAEL

And then I looked into its eyes...

(He looks directly at LINDSEY)

LINDSEY

Michael! Help Lindsey! Hurt! Big dolly, long brown hair. Bad girl. Michael!

MICHAEL

(frightened)

And the heads were right...

LINDSEY

(smashing the wrapped doll to the floor)

Ah-h-h-h-h-h!

(furiously ripping the paper off the doll)

Bad dolly! Bad dolly!

(tearing off the doll's clothes)

Bad girl! Hurt! Bad dolly! Lindsey bad girl! Ah-h-h-h-h-h!

MICHAEL

(in the present, watching)

Lindsey. No.

LINDSEY

(producing a stick match from a pocket)

Kill dolly!

(She strikes the match on the floor, lights it)

Fire!

(The lights go to black. All we see is the flame from the match)

LINDSEY (Cont'd)

Kill dolly! Kill Lindsey! Fire! Kill! Bad Lindsey!

MICHAEL

No!

(She lowers the match toward the doll.

Suddenly we shift into the midst of a roaring house fire. The SOUND is deafening. Flames everywhere. Dream-like. Frightening. Surreal. The affect of the fire should be created solely with lighting and sound)

MICHAEL (Cont'd)

(in the past, shouting, the burning house in front of him)

Lindsey?!

LINDSEY

(now weeping)

Bad Lindsey. Kill dolly. Bad girl.

(She falls to the floor and curls herself up in the fetal position.

MICHAEL runs headlong into the fire)

MICHAEL

(coughing from the smoke, unable to see, shouting over the SOUND of the fire)

Lindsey! Where are you? Lindsey?!

(He finds her. She's unconscious)

Oh, my God! I gotta get you outta here! Oh, my God! Oh, my God!

(He manages to drag her off stage, out of the fire, then reenters the burning house and stands looking at the paintings on the floor before him.

As he stands there, the lights very slowly cross fade back to normal and the SOUND of the fire fades out. We are back in the present.

It's completely silent. MICHAEL looks at the paintings surrounding him. Finally, overwhelmed, he goes to his knees)

MICHAEL (Cont'd)

(quietly)

Oh, my God...

(He covers his face with his hands.

LINDSEY appears, standing in the doorway to the art room looking at MICHAEL, keys in hand.

SISTER ANNE continues praying in her office)

LINDSEY

(softly)

Michael. Brother Michael.

(MICHAEL doesn't hear her. He remains on his knees, his head in his hands.

LINDSEY takes a tentative step or two into the room)

LINDSEY (Cont'd)

Paint beautiful pictures for Michael.

(looking at the paintings)

Praise God. Blessings flow.

(looking at MICHAEL)

Michael here.

(softly jingling her keys)

Keys unlock.

(Hearing the keys, MICHAEL looks up and sees LINDSEY for the first time. He gets to his feet)

MICHAEL

(softly)

Lindsey.

(LINDSEY stares at him a moment, then, like a dam bursting open, releases the years of longing in a deep-throated cry)

LINDSEY

Ah-h-h-h-h-h! Michael come. Ah-h-h-h-h-h!

MICHAEL

Yes. Michael come.

LINDSEY

(unable to move, but now in tears)

Ah-h-h-h-h-h...

MICHAEL

(crossing to her)

Brother Michael come.

(He opens his arms to her)

Lindsey.

(She is openly weeping now, but does not embrace him)

LINDSEY

Ah-h-h-h-h-h...

(Gently MICHAEL puts his arms around her and holds her to him)

LINDSEY (Cont'd)

Ah-h-h-h-h-h...

MICHAEL

Yes.

LINDSEY

(her arms still stiffly at her sides)

Michael. Michael. Michael come. Lindsey love Michael. God love.

MICHAEL

Yes.

LINDSEY

Ah-h-h-h-h-h...

MICHAEL

Yes.

LINDSEY

(suddenly, finally, embracing him tightly)

Yes. Yes. Yes. Michael come. Love. God love Lindsey.
Michael love.

MICHAEL

Yes. Michael loves Lindsey. Yes.

(SISTER ANNE moves to the doorway to the art room,
watches the two of them unseen)

LINDSEY

(suddenly laughing)

I love you. I love you. I love you.

MICHAEL

Yes. I love you. Michael loves Lindsey.

(LINDSEY breaks from MICHAEL and begins quickly
picking up the paintings on the floor)

LINDSEY

Lindsey paint beautiful pictures. Paint pictures for Michael.

MICHAEL

Yes. I know.

LINDSEY

Praise God. Beautiful pictures. Paint for Michael.

MICHAEL

Yes. They are very beautiful. You are a very good painter.

LINDSEY

Good painter. Beautiful pictures.

MICHAEL

Yes.

(She finishes gathering them all in a stack and presents
them to MICHAEL)

LINDSEY

(holding the paintings out to him)

For Michael. Present. Beautiful pictures for Michael.

MICHAEL

Yes, but you don't have to give them all to me.

LINDSEY

(still holding them out to him)

For Michael.

MICHAEL

But you need these paintings for your art shows.

LINDSEY

For Michael. Lindsey paint beautiful pictures for Michael.

MICHAEL

All of them?

LINDSEY

For Michael. All of them. All of them. Lindsey love Michael. Present. Beautiful paintings. Blessings flow.

(still holding them out to him)

I love you.

(MICHAEL takes the paintings from her)

MICHAEL

Thank you.

LINDSEY

(smiling broadly)

Thank you!

MICHAEL

They are wonderful paintings, Lindsey.

LINDSEY

Wonderful paintings. For Michael.

MICHAEL

Thank you.

LINDSEY

Thank you!

MICHAEL

Yes.

LINDSEY

Yes.

(starts to laugh)

Wonderful. God love Lindsey.

(She sees SISTER ANNE in the doorway, crosses to her)

LINDSEY (Cont'd)

Yes. Anne love Lindsey.

(MICHAEL, holding the paintings, watches as LINDSEY hugs SISTER ANNE)

SISTER ANNE

Yes. Anne loves Lindsey.

(to MICHAEL)

Sorry. I heard voices.

LINDSEY

(to SISTER ANNE)

Sorry. I heard voices. Lindsey come. Michael come.

SISTER ANNE

Yes, I see. Michael is here.

LINDSEY

(taking SISTER ANNE's hand)

Brother Michael. Anne.

SISTER ANNE

Yes.

LINDSEY

Brother Michael. Anne.

SISTER ANNE

Yes. I see him. I'm very happy for you.

LINDSEY

Happy. Yes. Brother Michael here. Keys unlock.

SISTER ANNE

(to MICHAEL)

Yes. Keys unlock.

LINDSEY

Happy. Blessings flow. Praise God.

SISTER ANNE

Yes.

(LINDSEY moves to MICHAEL)

LINDSEY

Yes. Brother Michael here.

MICHAEL

Yes.

(Looking into his eyes, LINDSEY slowly reaches out and touches MICHAEL's cheek. Then, after a beat)

LINDSEY

(with absolute conviction)

God love Michael.

(He looks at her a long moment, then takes her hand in his)

MICHAEL

Yes.

LINDSEY

(starting to laugh)

Blessings flow. Blessings flow.

(She moves to SISTER ANNE)

Michael come. Brother Michael come.

SISTER ANNE

Yes. Praise God.

LINDSEY

Yes. Praise God.

(She laughs.

MICHAEL moves down right, paintings in hand.

LINDSEY and SISTER ANNE stand with their arms
around each other as the lights in the art room dim)

MICHAEL

(to the audience)

As it turns out, the shows were cancelled. Not at my insistence, but at hers. She'd accomplished what she set out to do.

(He puts the stack of paintings on the down right table, then
moves downstage)

I have all those pictures. Her gift to me. They hang on my walls and are stacked in my closets. I've devised a bi-annual rotation schedule for them. And every day I look at them and see myself reflected back. A measure of sorts. A reminder.

(He looks back as LINDSEY steps away from SISTER
ANNE and into her own special light. She looks up,
radiant, as the light showers down on her)

MICHAEL (Cont'd)

Lindsey found her lost brother. But in the process he found the answer to the riddle. The solution to the mystery. So simple, yet so difficult to grasp. Lindsey knew it long before he did. She led him to it. Led him out of himself so he could come back to find himself. And as she reminds me each time I see her, that indeed is the source from which all true blessings flow.

LINDSEY

Blessings flow.

(She laughs her joyous laugh.

The lights fade to black)

END OF PLAY