

Scene 1

(A church bell tolls somewhere off in the distance. ISABELLE dutifully mumbles a quick prayer then resumes her endless picking.)

(JOAN comes in from the field looking flushed and distracted.)

ISABELLE. There you are. Where you bin'?

JOAN. Bin' up on the hill with the sheep.

ISABELLE. Sheep came down a while ago.

JOAN. Well, that's where I bin'.

ISABELLE. A lotta burrs in the wool. Takin' me all day to clean it. Dunno what you're lettin' those sheep get into.

JOAN. Not gettin' into anything they haven't before.

ISABELLE. Well, they are. A lotta crappy little bits in here. Y'need to keep those sheep outta the scrub.

JOAN. Not goin' in the scrub.

ISABELLE. Seems they are, seein' all the pricklies I'm havin' to pick out.

JOAN. I'll pick 'em out if it bothers you so much. (JOAN sets a stool apart from her mother and starts picking through the wool.)

ISABELLE. Why you workin' there in the dim, move over here where you can see.

JOAN. I can see fine.

ISABELLE. You'll strain your eyes, you'll wear them out. Y'only got one set of eyes, gotta treat them right. Go on, set yourself in this nice patch of light.

(JOAN scoots her stool into the rectangle of light and continues to pick through the wool with her head bent down so ISABELLE can't look at her face.)

If you straighten up you'll see all the better. You hunch over like that, you'll crook your back, start lookin' like some old crone.

JOAN. Alright, Ma.

ISABELLE. Not goin' after you, just noticin' you're not yourself. Been noticin' a change.

JOAN. Just doin' my job, Ma.

ISABELLE. Is it the Bonheur boy? You feelin' somethin' for him?

JOAN. Gah no.

ISABELLE. He's sweet on you. I seen him lookin' at you.

JOAN. If he's gettin' ideas about me, not my fault.

ISABELLE. Not anyone's fault. It's natural for a boy to be lookin' atcha. You're a good lookin' girl. Nothin' wrong with it, if he's havin' a look.

JOAN. Let him look. Nothin' to me.

ISABELLE. He'll grow on you. He's decent. Works hard. And not so bad on the eyes. Y'think he's all serious business, then he smiles and gets that little dimple on his cheek. I like a man with a dimple, don't you?

JOAN. You marry him then.

ISABELLE. Why ya bein' so crabby?

JOAN. Don't give a crap about Dennis Bonheur's dimple. Sweet Jesus, Ma, there's a war on, there's bigger things to discuss.

ISABELLE. Fine, you wanna sit here and talk about findin' a severed head in the well? Is that what ya wanna chat about?

JOAN. Not sayin' I do.

ISABELLE. What do you want to talk about then?

JOAN. Don't need to talk right now.

ISABELLE. Don't know what you need more quiet for, when you haven't talked to a blessed soul all day. Only so much you can keep turnin' around in your head before you're bored to tears.

JOAN. Not bored, Ma.

ISABELLE. Glad you have such a lively mind that keeps ya such nice company. Good for you. Goody good for you. JOAN. Okay, Ma.

ISABELLE. Just need to say one thing. Don't get worked up now. When I was bringin' up your lunch, I saw you lyin' on the ground in the upper field. Whatever you'd bin' doin' — ain't nothin' so terrible. It's a normal part of wantin' a man.

JOAN. You thought I was diddling myself?

ISABELLE. Whatever it is, might as well come clean with me. Better I find out before your father does so's I can smooth the way. I seen it all, my dear. I know things, I done things. Whatever it is, we'll keep it between us. (A beat.)

Did someone get you pregnant?

JOAN. No, Ma, no.

ISABELLE. What kind of visions?

JOAN. Saint Catherine bin' appearin' to me.

ISABELLE. Oh. She's a lovely saint. That's lovely, Joanie. How long has this bin' goin' on?

JOAN. A while now.

ISABELLE. What does she look like, is she wearin' robes and all?

JOAN. Not lookin' at her clothes Ma.

ISABELLE. She have a halo?

JOAN. Yuh, there's a glow around her head.

ISABELLE. That sounds about right. How does she come to you? Give me the step-by-step.

JOAN. I start out by prayin'. Go on for a few hours or so.

ISABELLE. You can pray for that long?

JOAN. Yuh, sure.

ISABELLE. But do you doze a bit?

JOAN. No, Ma.

ISABELLE. It happens. I doze sometimes when I'm in church.

Sometimes your eyes get heavy and you take a quick snooze and you dream a bit.

JOAN. No, Ma, I don't get dozy. I don't doze when I pray, I don't do that.

ISABELLE. All right. Go on, you pray and then what happens.

JOAN. When Saint Catherine's about to appear to me, everything gets real sharp, vibrant-like, you understand?

ISABELLE. Sure...

JOAN. The sounds around me, they get loud — birds, cicadas, the bees in the clover, the sheep grindin' their teeth. And the smells — dirt, water, wool. The taste of the turnip I had for lunch. It all gets very large, you see. And wondrous. Even the dung balls on the sheep's arses are gorgeous to me. I see it all as part of God's creation, you know?

ISABELLE. Sure, that's lovely, yes.

JOAN. And then there's a light that blocks it all out. And a hum.

ISABELLE. A hum.

JOAN. A tingle. (Cupping her heart and then her groin.) That I feel here...and here.

ISABELLE. I see.

JOAN. And she's there. And we come together.

ISABELLE. Together how?

JOAN. She fills me. She slays me. She takes me apart.

(A concerned beat.)