Suor Angelica

SOLE ACT

(Ave Maria –
Hail Mary, full of grace,
the Lord is with you.
Blessed art thou amongst women,
and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.
Hail Mary...)

SOUR ANGELICA
Pray for us sinners,
now and at the hour of our death!

THE SISTERS
Pray for us sinners,
now and at the hour of our death!
Amen.

THE MONITRESS
Sisters in humility,
you were late for service
and so was Sister Angelica,
but she has done full penance.
Instead, you, sisters,
have sinned heedlessly,
and lost one day of this holy celebration!

A LAY-SISTER
I am guilty of the sin
and beg severe punishment,
and the graver it be,
the more thanks shall I give,
sister in humility.
THE MISTRESS OF THE NOVICES
Those arriving late for chapel
must kneel and kiss the ground.

THE MONITRESS
You will repeat mentally
twenty times a prayer
or the oppressed and the afflicted,
and for those who live
in mortal sin.

THE LAY-SISTERS
With joy and fervour!
Christ my Lord,
Beloved Bridegroom,
I only wish to please Thee,
now and in the hour
of my death! Amen!

THE MONITRESS
Sister Lucilla, to work.
Retire and observe silence.

THE MISTRESS OF THE NOVICES
It's because this evening she laughed
and made others laugh in the choir.

THE MONITRESS
Sister Osmina, in chapel
were hiding two scarlet roses
in your sleeves.

SISTER OSMINA
It's not true!

THE MONITRESS
Sister, go to your cell.
Do not linger! Our Lady's watching you!
THE SISTERS
Sovereign Lady, pray for her.

THE MONITRESS
And now, sisters in joy,
since it pleases the Lord
and to return
more cheerfully
to our labours,
for love of Him, rest yourselves!

THE SISTERS
Amen!

SISTER GENEVIEVE
Oh, sisters, sisters!
I want to show you
where a sunbeam
has entered the cloister!
Look where it falls,
there, there among the greenery!
The sunlight is upon the sweet sedge!
So begin the three evenings
of the golden fountain!

THE SISTERS
It’s true, in a moment
we’ll see the golden water!
And for two evenings more.
It is May, it is May!
It is the fair smile of Our Lady
which comes with that ray.
Queen of Mercy, we thank Thee,
we thank Thee!

A NOVICE
Sister, may I ask
permission to speak?
THE MISTRESS
Always, to praise holy
and beautiful things.

A NOVICE
What act of grace by the Virgin
gladdens the sisters?

THE MISTRESS
A shining sign
of God's goodness!
On three evenings only in the year,
as we come out of chapel,
God allows us to see the sun
falling upon the fountain and
turning it to gold.

A NOVICE
And the other evenings?

THE MISTRESS
We either come out too soon
when the sun is high, or too late and the sun has set.

THE SISTERS
Another year has passed!
Another year gone!
And we have lost a sister!

SISTER GENEVIEVE
Oh, sisters in pious toil,
when the jet has begun to glow,
when the jet becomes golden,
would it not be good to take
a pad of golden water
to the grave of Sister Bianca Rosa?
THE SISTERS
Yes! Our sister sleeping there
would certainly like it!

SISTER ANGELICA
Desires are the flowers of the living,
they do not bloom in the realm of death,
because the Blessed Virgin helps us,
and in her kindness
freely anticipates our desires;
before a desire flowers,
the Mother of mothers has granted it.
Oh, sister, death is more beautiful life!

THE MONITRESS
We cannot have desires
even while we are alive.

SISTER GENEVIEVE
If they are innocent and pure, why not?
Haven't you a desire?

THE MONITRESS
I? No!

THREE SISTERS
Neither have I!!
Nor I!
Nor I!

SISTER GENEVIEVE
I have,
I confess it.
Thou knowest,
my sweet Lord,
that in the world I used to be a shepherdess...
I haven't seen a lamb for five years.
Lord, does it vex thee
if I say that I want
to see a tiny one,
to nurse it,
touch its cool nose
and hear it bleat?
If it is a sin,
I offer the Miserere mei
Forgive me, Lord,
Thou who art the lamb of God.

SISTER DOLCINA
I have a desire, too!

SISTERS
Sister, we know
your desires!
Some tasty morsel!

Juicy fruit!
Gluttony is a deadly sin!
to the novices
She's greedy! She’s greedy!

SISTER GENEVIEVE
Sister Angelica, What about you?
Have you any wishes?

SISTER ANGELICA
I? No, sister. No.
She turns to water the flowers

THE SISTERS
May Jesus forgive her,
she's told a lie,
she's told a lie!

THE SISTERS
We know that
she has a great longing
for news of her family!
She has been in the convent
for more than seven years
but has heard no word.
She seems resigned,
but is so tormented!
In the world she was very rich,
so said our Mother Abbess.
She was noble!
Noble! A princess!
They made her take the veil,
it seems ... as a punishment.
But why?
Why?
Who knows?
Well, who does?
Well, who does?

THE NURSING SISTER
Sister Angelica, listen!

SISTER ANGELICA
Sister, what's happened, tell me!

THE NURSING SISTER
Sister Clara was out there
in the garden,
trimming the roses on the trellis;
suddenly a swarm of wasps flew out
and stung her on the face!
Now she's in her cell, moaning!
Oh, sister, soothe the pain
which is giving her such agony!

THE SISTERS
Poor girl! Poor girl!
SISTER ANGELICA
Wait a moment – here are herbs and flowers!

THE NURSING SISTER
Sister Angelica always has a good prescription made with flowers, she always knows where to find a blessed herb to soothe pain!

SISTER ANGELICA
Here, this is spurge; with the milky juice from it bathe the swelling; and with this make a potion. Tell Sister Clara that it’s very bitter but it will do her good. And tell her too that wasp’s stings are small sufferings and she must not complain, for complaining only increases the pain.

THE NURSING SISTER
I'll tell her.
Thank you, sister, thank you.

SISTER ANGELICA
I am here to help.

ALMS-Collectors
Praise be to Mary!

THE SISTERS
For ever more!

ALMS-Collectors
A good collection this evening, Sister
FIRST ALMS-COLLECTOR
A full oil-skin.

SISTER DOLCINA
Oh, good!

SECOND ALMS-COLLECTOR
Hazel nuts, six strings.

FIRST ALMS-COLLECTOR
A basketful of walnuts.

SISTER DOLCINA
Nice with salt and bread!

THE MONITRESS
Sister!

FIRST ALMS-COLLECTOR
Here’s flour!
And a cheese
which is still oozing milk,
as sweet as a nut,
and a bag of lentils,
eggs, butter and that's all.

THE SISTERS
A good collection this evening, Sister.

SECOND ALMS-COLLECTOR
For you, ravenous sister.

SISTER DOLCINA
A stem of red-currants!
Take some, sisters.

SOME SISTERS
Thank you, thank you!
A SISTER
Oh, if I take some I shall suffer damnation!

SISTER DOLCINA
No, take some!

SISTERS
Thank you!

FIRST ALMS-COLLECTOR
Who has come to visit this evening?

SISTERS
No one.
No one.
Why?

FIRST ALMS-COLLECTOR
Outside the front door there stands a rich-looking carriage.

SISTER ANGELICA
What did you say, sister?
A carriage outside?
A richly appointed one?

FIRST ALMS-COLLECTOR
Belonging to nobility.
It must be waiting for someone visiting the convent and perhaps soon the parlour bell will ring.

SISTER ANGELICA
Oh, tell me, sister, what was the carriage like?
Did it have an ivory coat of arms?
Was it upholstered inside
with dark blue silk
embroidered in silver?

FIRST ALMS-COLLECTOR
I don't know, sister, I really don't:
all I saw was
... a fine coach!

SISTERS
She's turned pale ...
Now she's scarlet!
Poor sister! She's upset!
She's hoping it’s her family!

Someone's coming to the parlour ...
A visitor
For whom ...?
Who can it be for?
If only it were for me ... 
Or me ...
my mother bringing us
the white doves ...
If only it were my cousin
bringing good lavender seed.

SISTER ANGELICA
O Blessed Mother,
look into my heart!
Give a smile for me to the Saviour.

SISTER GENEVIEVE
Oh, beloved sister,
we pray to the Star of Heaven
that the visitor is for you

SISTER ANGELICA
Dear sister, thank you ... thank you!
THE ABBESS
Sister Angelica!

THE SISTERS
Ah!

SISTER ANGELICA
Mother, mother, tell me!
Who is it? Who is it?
Mother, speak!
I've been waiting for seven years,
waiting for a word, a letter...
I've offered my all to
Our Lady in full expiation.

THE ABBESS
Then offer her also the anxious
desire which now disturbs you!

SIX SISTERS
Give her eternal rest, o Lord:
and may perpetual light shine on her.
May she rest in peace. Amen!

SISTER ANGELICA
Mother, I am calm and obedient.

THE ABBESS
Your visitor is your aunt, the Princess.

SISTER ANGELICA
Ah!

THE ABBESS
In the parlour,
Only say what conforms to obedience and necessity.
Every word is heard
by the Holy Virgin!
SISTER ANGELICA
Let the Virgin hear me. Amen.

THE PRINCESS
Prince Gualtiero, your father, and Princess Clara, your mother, when they died twenty years ago ... left their children in my care ... and the entire family estate. I had to divide it as I thought fit and with absolute justice. It is what I have done. Here is the document. You can read it, examine it and sign it.

SISTER ANGELICA
After seven years I stand before you. Let this holy place inspire you ... It is a place of clemency ... It is a place of compassion ...

THE PRINCESS
... and repentance. I must tell you the reason why I arrived at this division: Your sister, Anna Viola is to be married.

SISTER ANGELICA
Married? Little Anna Viola? My little sister? Oh, seven years ... seven years have passed, ah! Now little blonde sister, you are to be married, oh, my little sister, may you be happy! Who is she marrying?
THE PRINCESS
To one whose love has enabled him to overlook
the disgrace you have brought to our noble family.

SISTER ANGELICA
My mother's sister,
you are hard-hearted!

THE PRINCESS
What are you saying and thinking?
Hard-hearted? Hard-hearted?
You bring your mother
into this against me?
You dare to mention your mother's name?
Often, on an evening,
there in our chapel I pray.
In the silence of those prayers
my spirit seems to leave me
and join your mother's
in secret, ethereal communion!
How painful it is to hear
the dead mourn and weep!
When the mystical trance passes,
I have only one word to say to you:
Atone! Atone!
Offer my justice to the Blessed Virgin!

SISTER ANGELICA
I have offered everything to the Virgin,
yes, everything!
But there is something that I cannot give:
To the sweet Mother of all mothers
I cannot promise to forget ... my son!
My son! ... My son! ... My own son!
The baby who was torn from me,
Oh my son whom I saw and kissed only once!
My baby ... my baby far away!
This is the word I've been praying
to hear for seven years!
Tell me about him!
How is he, how is my child?
Has he a sweet face?
What colour are his eyes?
Tell me about him ... my son,
Do tell me about him ...

SISTER ANGELICA
Why don't you speak ...
Why not ... why not?
Another moment of this silence
and you will be damned for eternity.
The Virgin hears us and She will judge you.

THE PRINCESS
Two years ago
he was taken
seriously ill.
Everything was done to save him.

SISTER ANGELICA
He's dead?
Ah! ...

SISTER ANGELICA
Without a mother,
my baby, you died!
Your lips, grew pale and cold!
without my kisses
And you closed,
my baby, your beautiful eyes!
Not being able to caress me,
you folded your little hands in a cross!
And you died without knowing
how much your mother loved you!
Now that you are an angel in heaven.
you can see your mother,
you can come down from the sky
and I feel you fluttering about me ...
You’re here, you’re here, you kiss me, caress me ...
Oh, tell me, when shall I see you in heaven?
When shall I kiss you?
Oh, sweet end to all my sorrows,
when can I join you in Heaven?
When shall I die,
oh, when shall I die?
Tell your mother, pretty baby,
with a tiny twinkle of a star.
Speak to me,
my beloved, my loved one.

THE SISTERS
Sister, good sister,
Our Lady has heard your prayer.
You will be happy, sister,
The Holy Virgin has given you Her grace.

SISTER ANGELICA
Her grace has descended from Heaven,
it sets me all aglow,
it shines!
Now I can see my goal.
Sisters, I am happy, happy!
Let us sing. They are singing in Heaven!
Let us praise the Holy Virgin,

THE SISTERS
Amen!
Let us praise the Holy Virgin!

SISTER ANGELICA
Her grace has descended from Heaven!

SISTER ANGELICA
Sister Angelica always has a good prescription
made from flowers.
My friends the flowers who hide
in your little breasts drops of poison,
oh, how much care have I lavished upon you.
Now you will repay me.
Through you, my flowers, I shall die!

Farewell, dear sisters, farewell,
I leave you for ever.
My son has called me!
His smile appeared to me
in a ray of starlight.
He said to me: "Mama, come to Heaven!"
Farewell! Farewell!
Farewell, little chapel!
How often have I prayed in you!
Kindly you would receive my prayers and tears.
The blessed grace has descended!
I die for him and I shall see him again in Heaven... Ah!

Ah, I am damned!
I have taken my life, I have taken my life!
I die, I die in mortal sin!
She throws herself in despair on her knees
O Madonna, Madonna, save me, save me!
For the love of my child!
I have lost my reason!
Do not let me die in damnation!
Give me a sign of Thy grace,
Madonna, save me!

CHORUS
O most glorious of virgins,
sublime among the stars,
who created and nursed you
as a baby with milk-laden-breast.
SISTER ANGELICA
O Madonna, save me!
A mother begs you,
a mother implores you!
O Madonna, save me!

CHORUS
What Eve sadly took away
you restore to the precious seed:
Let the mourners enter the realm of stars,
Open the gates of heaven!
O most glorious of virgins, hail Mary!

SISTER ANGELICA
Ah!

CHORUS
Queen of virgins!
Faithful Virgin! Holy Mary!
Purest Mother! Hail, Mary!
Tower of David! Hail, Mary!

-END-