

THE LAST NUNS

A play for radio
by
Jo-Ann Challis

CHARACTERS

Sister Candice (70)
Sister Flo (56)
Sister Marnie (92)
Sergeant Bostock (35)
Princess Alixandra (23)

With:

Sister Bronagh
Celebrant and congregation

SCENE 1: INT. SISTER MARNIE'S ROOM - DAY

FADE IN:

A CELEBRANT LEADS A SMALL CONGREGATION OF
WOMEN IN PRAYER

SFX: THEIR VOICES ARE DISTANT AND A
LITTLE DISTORTED, TRANSMITTED INTO THE
ROOM VIA AN UNRELIABLE DEVICE:

1. CELEBRANT: .. through our Lord Jesus Christ, your
son, who lives and reigns with you in the
unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for
ever and ever.

2. CONGREGATION: Amen.

FROM WITHIN SISTER MARNIE'S ROOM, TWO
WOMEN NOW JOIN IN WITH THE CONGREGATION:
ONE VOICE FIRM AND DECISIVE, THE SECOND
HIGHER PITCHED, HESITANT

3. SISTERS CANDICE
AND FLO: Amen.

SFX: THE TRANSMISSION NOW STARTS TO DROP
IN AND OUT, THEN FINALLY GIVES UP:

4. CELEBRANT: The Lord bless us, and keep us from all
evil, and bring- (CUTS OUT)

1. SISTER FLO: (WAITS ...) It so nearly made it to the end today.
2. SISTER CANDICE: And bring us to everlasting life. Amen.
3. SISTER FLO: Amen.
4. SISTER MARNIE: (RAGGED BREATHING)
5. SISTER FLO: Of course, soon we won't need to listen to them over the computer. We'll be at the mother house, with our Sisters.
6. SISTER CANDICE: (IN HUSHED TONE) We can't think of that now. We must be patient, if we still possess that virtue.
7. SISTER FLO: (LOWERS HER VOICE ALSO) Of course.
(PAUSE) But it's so hard not to think.
That after so long, we'll be able-
8. SISTER MARNIE: (A GASP, A LONG BREATH OUT)
9. SISTER FLO: Why is Sister Marnie making that sound?
Is this the end?
10. SISTER CANDICE: It can't be long now. I shall ask for a doctor's visit as soon as possible.

SFX: SISTER CANDICE RISES WITH
DIFFICULTY, HER HABIT RUSTLING
11. SISTER CANDICE: (SHE GIVES A LITTLE WINCE OF PAIN)

1. SISTER FLO: Is it your back again?
 2. SISTER CANDICE: Just a twinge. She's been getting more awkward to lift, I've found.
- SFX: A VOICE (SISTER BRONAGH) INTERRUPTS THEM, DISTANT AND DISTORTED AS BEFORE:
3. SISTER BRONAGH: (THROUGH COMPUTER) Sister Candice, can you hear me? The video's not working.
 4. SISTER CANDICE: (TO THE COMPUTER) I hear you, Sister Bronagh.
 5. SISTER BRONAGH: And Sister Marnie? Is there any change?
 6. SISTER CANDICE: Only what we have been told to expect.
 7. SISTER BRONAGH: She's a tough one. Ninety-two now, isn't she? I remember that time, three years ago, she could barely speak for coughing.
 8. SISTER FLO: (WRYLY) We remember it very well.
 9. SISTER BRONAGH: Sister Flo, good morning! And when she broke her leg—
 10. SISTER CANDICE: Please can you let Reverend Mother know that I shall call her as soon as ... as ...
 11. SISTER BRONAGH: I will.

SFX: SISTER BRONAGH'S VOICE NOW DROPS IN
AND OUT:

1. SISTER BRONAGH And know that we are taking it in turns
to pray for you day and night, Sisters.
And we shall— (FINALLY CUTS OUT)

SFX: A SHRILL DOORBELL FROM DOWNSTAIRS

2. SISTER FLO: (PAUSE, SURPRISED) Perhaps a doctor
decided to call anyway.
3. SISTER CANDICE: Unlikely! It was so much easier when we
had the good old NHS!

SCENE 2: INT. HALL/PARLOUR - DAY

SFX: SISTER CANDICE'S LIGHT FOOTSTEPS
ALONG AN UNCARPETED FLOOR, THEN SHE OPENS
THE FRONT DOOR JUST AS THE BELL RINGS
AGAIN

1. SISTER CANDICE: Good morning.
2. SGT BOSTOCK: Ah! I mean ... Good morning!
3. SISTER CANDICE: If you wanted the entrance to the Municipal Care Hub, it's opposite the end of this building.
4. SGT BOSTOCK: No, that's not ... Are you the Reverend Mother?
5. SISTER CANDICE: We have no superior here. She is with our mother house in Ireland. I'm Sister Candice.
6. SGT BOSTOCK: Right. Sorry. I mean, I don't know why I'm ... (TRAILS OFF, AWKWARD IN THE PRESENCE OF A NUN). My name is Bostock. Sergeant Edward Bostock. Here's my ... (HE SHOWS HER HIS IDENTIFICATION)
7. SISTER CANDICE: Is there a problem, Sergeant?
8. SGT BOSTOCK: No. Well. I'm with the ... Could we talk inside? That is allowed, is it?

SFX: IN REPLY SISTER CANDICE SWINGS OPEN
THE FRONT DOOR ...

1. SGT BOSTOCK: Thank you ... Sister.

SFX: ... AND SHUTS IT FIRMLY

2. SISTER CANDICE: Follow me, please.

SFX: THEY WALK ALONG THE CORRIDOR, THE
SERGEANT'S FOOTSTEPS LOUD AND HEAVY

3. SISTER CANDICE: And be careful of the—

SFX: THE SERGEANT'S FOOT GOES THROUGH A
FLOORBOARD WITH A CRACK

4. SISTER CANDICE: Oh dear. The floor is very rickety here.

5. SGT BOSTOCK: (SHOCKED BUT GOOD-NATURED) No bother!

SFX: HE EXTRACTS HIS FOOT -
THEY ENTER THE PARLOUR AND SISTER CANDICE
SHUTS THE DOOR

6. SISTER CANDICE: And I apologise for the uninviting
chairs. We receive few visitors, and we
live mainly upstairs now, of course.

7. SGT BOSTOCK: I see. (NOT SEEING)

SFX: WOODEN CHAIRS SCRAPE ON THE BARE
FLOOR AS THEY SIT

1. SISTER CANDICE: I'm afraid I must ask you to come to the point of your visit quickly.
2. SGT BOSTOCK: Nuns are always very busy, I suppose. When I looked at your website, you were all doing lots of things.
3. SISTER CANDICE: (AN IRRITATED SIGH) That site should have been taken down when the community closed.
4. SGT BOSTOCK: Closed?
5. SISTER CANDICE: Evidently. Five years ago now. Spring 2063. Two of us remained to care for a Sister who was ... is ... too ill to leave. Now, you are here because ...?
6. SGT BOSTOCK: Well, in brief, the person I work for needs a sort of refuge, somewhere calm and inspiring, to prepare for an announcement about her future.
7. SISTER CANDICE: Then, with regret, we can't assist.
8. SGT BOSTOCK: But isn't that what places like yours do, offer somewhere to people in need?
9. SISTER CANDICE: We are an enclosed order, but in the past we offered accommodation to those on retreat, or to discerners - that is, women considering joining our community. But now we have only the few rooms above, with no amenities fit for a visitor.

1. SGT BOSTOCK: But it's exactly what I'm looking for!
It's contained, no distractions, there
are (STRUGGLES) ... you. It's perfect.

2. SISTER FLO: (FROM UPSTAIRS) Sister Candice! Can you
come?

SFX: SISTER CANDICE STANDS

3. SISTER CANDICE: Sergeant, you must understand, even if we
were better equipped to help, I would
first have to report the request to
Reverend-

4. SGT BOSTOCK: (CUTS IN) No! No reporting. This concerns
... it concerns ...

5. SISTER CANDICE: Sergeant, I really can't-

6. SGT BOSTOCK: (CUTS IN) The Royal Family. The person
needing a refuge is Her Royal Highness
Princess Alixandra.

7. SISTER CANDICE: I see! (PAUSE AS SHE ABSORBS THIS NEWS)
Now, she's one of the younger ones, isn't
she? Wasn't there once a problem with
some jewellery, and suspected-

8. SGT BOSTOCK: (CUTS IN) Yes. That was ... Anyway, the
Castle wants her to step up, take on more
responsibilities ... one responsibility in
particular. She's never coped well with
being in the spotlight and recently her
behaviour has become ... well, regrettable.

1. SISTER CANDICE: Sadly, that is all the more reason why I can't help. Reverend Mother would never risk attracting attention to the Order, what's left of it, in that way.
2. SGT BOSTOCK: I tried to find another ... community, is it? But you seemed to be the only one.
3. SISTER CANDICE: There may be some Benedictines near York. But no one's heard from them in years.
4. SISTER FLO: (FROM UPSTAIRS AGAIN) Sister!
5. SGT BOSTOCK: (INCREASING DESPERATION) You would be acting in our national interests! The king himself has asked—
6. SISTER CANDICE: (CUTS IN) Reverend Mother decides what happens here; not, with respect, King George.
7. SGT BOSTOCK: Then please, will you ask her?

SFX: SHE WALKS TO THE DOOR, OPENS IT,
SPEAKS TO HIM AS SHE WALKS AWAY
8. SISTER CANDICE: Please close the door after you. Firmly!
9. SGT BOSTOCK: (FLUSTERED) You can contact me on Spill! ... or on FactTile! Or my card, Sister! My card's on the ... table ...

SCENE 3: INT. SISTER MARNIE'S ROOM - DAY

SFX: FOOTSTEPS UP THE STAIRS AND INTO THE ROOM AS SISTER CANDICE ENTERS

1. SISTER CANDICE: I'm sorry, Sister. That took— (SHOCK AS SHE NOTICES SISTER MARNIE AWAKE) ... Oh!
2. SISTER FLO: It's happening again, isn't it!
3. SISTER MARNIE: (WEAK, SLEEPY, BUT COHERENT) Sister Candice, is that you? (SHE COUGHS) Help me to sit up. I am so thirsty! And maybe ... yes ... a little drop of soup. Unless you two are trying to starve me!
4. SISTER CANDICE: You must lie still, Sister Marnie.
5. SISTER MARNIE: Well, if you won't help me ... (SHE GROANS AS SHE TRIES TO SIT HERSELF UP)
6. SISTER CANDICE: Of course we'll help you, Sister!

SFX: THEY HELP SISTER MARNIE TO SIT UP AGAINST HER PILLOWS

7. SISTER MARNIE: (SHE COUGHS AGAIN WITH THE MOVEMENT) I thought God was calling me to his side this time. (SLYLY) Didn't you, Sisters?

SFX: SISTER CANDICE POURS WATER FROM A JUG INTO A GLASS

8. SISTER CANDICE: Calmly now! Small sips.

1. SISTER MARNIE: (TAKES AN INDECOROUS SLURP OF WATER BEFORE SPEAKING) I should really prefer a little tea.
2. SISTER FLO: Not soup now?
3. SISTER MARNIE: Soup? No! Your powers of concentration are as poor as ever. Tea, Sister Florence! Tea!
4. SISTER CANDICE: (TO SISTER FLO, HUSHED TONE) Chin up, Sister Flo. I shall call Reverend Mother.

SCENE 4: INT. PARLOUR - DAY

SISTER CANDICE IN PHONE CONVERSATION WITH
REVEREND MOTHER (WHO IS SILENT ON THE
OTHER END OF THE LINE)

FADE IN:

1. SISTER CANDICE: (TRYING TO KEEP HER DESPERATION UNDER CONTROL) ... Yes, Mother. We are rejoicing at her recovery. Again. But Sister Marnie is really very frail. My fear is that we are not able to give her the care she deserves. If other Sisters could join us, or even replace- (LISTENS TO REVEREND MOTHER'S RESPONSE) ... Yes, of course, they have their caring duties there with you. I thought perhaps some of the proceeds from the sale of the convent property could be used to fund some professional care ... (LISTENS) ... Yes, I realise the debts are considerable. But there is also the state of the building, with so many repairs left undone ... (LISTENS) ... No, Mother. (RESIGNED NOW) There is no reason why we are unable to carry on. There was one other matter, rather strange ... We had a ... (SHE STOPS, DECIDES NOT TO MENTION THE SERGEANT'S VISIT, QUICKLY THINKS OF ANOTHER SUBJECT) The boiler, it's been making an odd sound ... (LISTENS) ... Yes, of course you must. Thank you, Mother.

SFX: THE LINE GOES DEAD, THEN RAPID
FOOTSTEPS APPROACH

1. SISTER FLO: I couldn't wait. What did she say?
2. SISTER CANDICE: Here we stay, Sister.
3. SISTER FLO: (DESPONDENT) So that's that.
4. SISTER CANDICE: No, Sister, that is not that! If the situation is not changing, then we must. We must reform! We must reinvigorate ourselves! We have allowed ourselves to succumb to every fault. Impatience, self-pity, lack of compassion ... I should have confessed our weakness to Reverend Mother, trusted her to help us.
5. SISTER FLO: But she would be disappointed in us. (FEARFUL NOW) Did you ever hear of a Sister, when her community closed in Devon, Reverend Mother asked her to stay behind to tend the graves in the convent grounds?
6. SISTER CANDICE: I'm sure that's not true. (CONSIDERS) However, she may think twice about calling us to join our Sisters at the mother house. When the time comes, she may decide we are needed elsewhere.
7. SISTER FLO: (HORRIFIED) Elsewhere? You mean, another small community? One that's only just hanging on! Oh no! Do you think so?

1. SISTER CANDICE: (CAUTIOUS) There is an alternative path. I believe God has sent someone to us, someone who needs our assistance, and who may therefore help *us* – a new focus for our energies. But ... certain information could not be shared ... with *anyone* else.
2. SISTER FLO: I'll be guided by you, of course, Sister.
3. SISTER CANDICE: Very well. You remember we had an unexpected caller ...

SCENE 5: INT. HALL - DAY

SFX: HAMMERING AS SGT BOSTOCK REPAIRS THE
BROKEN FLOORBOARD, THEN GIVES IT A TEST
WITH HIS BOOT

1. SGT BOSTOCK: (TO SISTER CANDICE) Good as new. That part of the floor anyway. Now, the princess is very spiky. Until two hours ago she thought I was taking her to a yoga retreat in the Cotswolds. But, as we said, if you could try to get across some of your values in life.

2. SISTER CANDICE: Help her to appreciate how someone in her position can help others, yes. But if I knew exactly what she's struggling with ...

3. SGT BOSTOCK: I'm sorry, Sister. National-

4. SISTER CANDICE: (CUTS IN, IMPATIENT) Interests, yes. Then shall we let her in?

5. SGT BOSTOCK: OK. (TAKES A DEEP BREATH)

SFX: HE OPENS THE FRONT DOOR

6. SGT BOSTOCK: (SPEAKS TO A COLLEAGUE OUTSIDE VIA A DEVICE) Clear for Dragonfly!

SFX: CAR DOORS OPEN OUTSIDE, THEN SLOW,
RELUCTANT FOOTSTEPS ON GRAVEL TO THE
FRONT DOOR

1. SGT BOSTOCK: Dragonfly handover complete!

- SFX: HE SHUTS THE DOOR FIRMLY

2. SGT BOSTOCK: (TO PRINCESS ALIXANDRA) Your Royal Highness, may I introduce Sister Candice.

3. ALIX: (FLIPPANT, HIDING HER SHOCK) This is a lovely niche setup you've got here, Sister. Very minimalist. But unfort-

4. SGT BOSTOCK: (INTERRUPTS WITH A WARNING COUGH)

5. ALIX: (PAUSE ... THEN IN A FORCED POLITE TONE) Thank you for agreeing to ... put me up. Or maybe you didn't get a choice either.

6. SISTER CANDICE: Welcome to St Mildred's, my child.

7. ALIX: 'My child.' Do you hear that, Bossy?

8. SGT BOSTOCK: I did explain to Sister Candice the correct form of address.

9. ALIX: My child ... or Alix. Why stand on ceremony when you've brought me to a place like this?

10. SISTER CANDICE: Sister Marnie, who you'll meet, mustn't be aware of any unnecessary excitement. So it would be easier if you passed as an ordinary discerner.

1. ALIX: Whatever that is. So you mean, she won't recognise me? Not even from a TV stream?

2. SISTER CANDICE: That won't be a problem here. And besides, her eyesight is not what it was. Shall I show you to your room?

3. ALIX: I think I read somewhere once you called them cells, which is what Bossy thinks I deserve.

4. SGT BOSTOCK: Only sometimes, ma'am.

5. SISTER CANDICE: This way. And we do call them rooms.

SFX: SISTER CANDICE AND ALIX HEAD UPSTAIRS, THEN STOP AS SGT BOSTOCK FOLLOWS

6. SISTER CANDICE: Sergeant, you can't follow us into this part of the house! We should say goodbye now. I have your number if we need to contact you.

7. SGT BOSTOCK: I'm staying, Sister. Of course I am! Didn't I make that clear?

SCENE 6: INT. STOREROOM - DAY

SFX: BOXES MOVED AROUND AS THE SERGEANT
STRUGGLES TO ARRANGE HIS CRAMPED LIVING
QUARTERS

1. SGT BOSTOCK: (IN PAIN) Damn! My head! Sister Candice must think I can sleep standing up.

SFX: DOOR OPENS

2. ALIX: Ha! There is a god! I didn't think anywhere could be worse than where they've put me.

3. SGT BOSTOCK: I just need to get this bed thing set up and it'll be fine.

4. ALIX: It's a cupboard.

5. SGT BOSTOCK: (TRYING TO LIGHTEN THE MOOD) I've had strict orders about when I'm allowed to sneak upstairs to the bathroom.

6. ALIX: I - Can't - Stay - Here!

7. SGT BOSTOCK: (IRRITATION SPILLING OVER) Then you should have thought before telling the people at that night shelter you'd rather be homeless than live at the Castle!

SCENE 7: INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

SFX: PIPES GROAN AND BOILER HISSES AS
WATER RUNS FROM THE TAP

1. SISTER FLO: I'm so sorry this wretched boiler should choose your visit to conk out entirely. It's been on its last legs for years. I can manage the washing up, if you'd rather read, or ... well, something else.

SFX: SISTER FLO TURNS OFF THE TAP AND
LIGHTS THE GAS ON THE HOB

2. ALIX: Sister Candice has told me I must do whatever you do. It's part of the deal.

3. SISTER FLO: If you're sure. I'll heat up a saucepan's worth for Sister Marnie's wash. Sister Chloe always had a knack for keeping our dilapidated equipment going.

SFX: SLOSH OF WATER ON CROCKERY AS ALIX
WASHES UP

4. ALIX: Where's Sister Chloe now?

5. SISTER FLO: In Ireland at the mother house. She left with Sister Livy and Sister Stephanie. And that's where we're hoping we'll go-

SFX: BOILER MAKES ANOTHER CREAKY GROAN

6. ALIX: You're hoping ...?

1. SISTER FLO: Oh, nothing. I shouldn't be thinking about that now. Anyway, you'll see them when we videolink for prayers. It helps to make us feel not quite so alone.
2. ALIX: I'm not really much of a pray-er, not formally. So if it's not a hundred per-
- SFX: SHE CUTS OFF AT THE SOUND OF A WHEELCHAIR APPROACHING, COMING TO A HALT, BRAKES ON
3. SISTER CANDICE: (TRYING TO HIDE HER UNEASE) Sister Marnie insisted on meeting our young discerner this evening.
4. SISTER FLO: Our young-? Oh ... yes!
5. SISTER MARNIE: The first discerner in how many years? Another miracle, so soon after my own recovery.
6. SISTER CANDICE: Alix, this is Sister Marnie. She spent many years as our Novice Mistress.
7. ALIX: (HESITANT, ON HER GUARD) Good evening.
8. SISTER MARNIE: (TO ALIX) And you believe you have a vocation, child?
9. ALIX: I'm ... er ... not sure what I have.
10. SISTER CANDICE: It's early days! Alix will be helping me to clear the library tomorrow.

1. SISTER MARNIE: It's been years since I've had the chance to help a young mind find its way. I look forward to a good long chat-

2. SISTER CANDICE: (CUTS IN) What a pleasure that will be for you, Sister! (DELIBERATELY) Sister Flo was just about to bring a basin through, weren't you, Sister?

3. SISTER FLO: (CATCHING ON) I was, Sister!

4. SISTER MARNIE: Tomorrow then!

SFX: SISTER CANDICE WHEELS SISTER MARNIE
OUT

5. SISTER FLO: (WHISPERING TO ALIX) Don't worry. You won't be having any good long chats. Sister Candice and I will make sure of it.

SCENE 8: INT. OLD CONVENT LIBRARY - DAY

SFX: THE MORNING HANDBELL CHIMES

FADE IN:

1. SISTER CANDICE: All the books on these shelves and the ones by the windows can be boxed up. The university will be collecting them at the end of the week.

2. ALIX: So this used to be part of your convent?

3. SISTER CANDICE: When the community closed, we had to pay our debts by selling off our buildings. They are now part of the Municipal Care Hub, even our chapel. I've held off the sale of our library for as long as I could. It's going to be two flats for visitors to the Hub. *Hub*. Such a depressing word. But brooding won't get the job done! If you don't mind the ladder, I thought you could hand down and I'll pack.

SFX: ALIX CLIMBS A FEW STEPS OF A LADDER

4. ALIX: Ready?

5. SISTER CANDICE: Ready.

SFX: HEAVY BOOKS HAULED OFF SHELVES,
DUSTED DOWN AND PACKED IN CRATES AS THEY
TALK

1. ALIX: Is Bossy guarding the door? I'm surprised he's let me out of his sight.
2. SISTER CANDICE: Let's just say I persuaded him he would be more valuably employed elsewhere.
3. ALIX: (BITTER) Or did he think, if I was alone with you, you might get me to talk?
4. SISTER CANDICE: And what would he want you to talk about?
- ALIX DOESN'T RESPOND, CONTINUES WORKING
5. SISTER CANDICE: Sergeant Bostock has told me very little of your situation.
6. ALIX: That's because he can't. Otherwise, off with his head!
7. SISTER CANDICE: Then I certainly shan't press the poor man for information. (PAUSE) But if you did wish to talk about anything, it would go—
8. ALIX: (DELIBERATELY CUTS HER OFF) Careful. This one's very heavy.
9. SISTER CANDICE: Ah! (ANOTHER BACK TWINGE) So it is.
- SFX: BOOKS BEING REARRANGED IN THE CRATE
10. ALIX: Are these books all like the ones you left in my room?

1. SISTER CANDICE: (PLEASED) You had a look through them, then?
2. ALIX: I'm not here to be converted, Sister.
3. SISTER CANDICE: I thought it might interest you to read a little of our history. I don't believe I've ever attempted to convert anyone.
4. ALIX: And you really aren't in any position to lecture me, I don't think. However grim things are for you here, you chose your life. And if that means putting up with whatever you have to put up with, like those vows ... I mean, how could you vow to be obedient forever?
5. SISTER CANDICE: (SOFTLY) So you did read something.
6. ALIX: A page. Maybe. I'm just saying, it was your decision.
7. SISTER CANDICE: In some ways, yes; in another way, the most important way, it didn't feel like I was the one doing the choosing.
8. ALIX: Well, I don't understand that, obviously. Just like you couldn't understand ... (SHE GIVES A SIGH OF FRUSTRATION) I'll start on the next shelf now.

SFX: SISTER CANDICE POSITIONS ANOTHER
CRATE

1. SISTER CANDICE: Ready. (PAUSE) Our lives must seem very narrow to you, Alix. But when we pray, we pray for the whole world, for everyone who suffers, who goes unheard or who can't pray for themselves. Whatever our situation in life, if we focus on what we can do to help others, instead of what we can get for ourselves, there is freedom in that. And instead of obedience, think of it more as a cheerful acceptance of acting in the best interests of the community.

2. ALIX: And is this what's in the best interest of your community? Everything packed up and gone, you left in those awful little rooms? You must have superhuman powers of acceptance.

3. SISTER CANDICE: Oh, we struggle! Just as much as anyone else. Maybe more. Every day, when I think what has happened to our community, to our home ... Let's stop for a moment. Come down.

SFX: ALIX STEPS DOWN OFF THE LADDER

4. SISTER CANDICE: It would mean so much to me if I thought you left here with some understanding of what we were, *before*.

SFX: FOOTSTEPS ON THE BARE BOARDS AS SHE CROSSES TO THE WINDOW, AND ALIX FOLLOWS

1. SISTER CANDICE: From this window, if you look straight across, that was the novitiate, for the trainee nuns. To the right was our workshop, where Sister Livy made some of these books we're packing up. Where those parking spaces are now was the hen run, where Sister Marnie battled to keep the foxes away from her hens. We were a real community, with such purpose and sense of fellowship! Over that wall was our vegetable garden. On the day the other three Sisters left, Sister Stephanie gave me a list of all the fruit and vegetables she grew. 'It's too much for me now anyway,' she said. 'I leave everything to your tender care.' But I already knew, her garden would be a building site by summer.
2. ALIX: (GLIMMER OF RELUCTANT INTEREST) Couldn't it all have been kept going somehow?
3. SISTER CANDICE: Yes! I believe it could, with God's help and under the leadership of a Reverend Mother of our own, someone with vision, and ideas to reach out. (STRAINED, EMOTIONAL) But there were so few of us by then. We had only very recently elected a new Reverend Mother, someone who desperately wanted to keep us alive, but we were told that she couldn't be recognised, that we could no longer have a superior of our own.

1. ALIX: I'm lost. Who told you that?

2. SISTER CANDICE: (STILL EMOTIONAL) The Church had decreed that small communities couldn't govern themselves, that a superior based in another community would take charge of us as well. We'd had no novices since Sister Flo ...

3. ALIX: So they pulled the plug?

4. SISTER CANDICE: (PULLING HERSELF TOGETHER) Alix, I shouldn't have spoken in that way. After extolling the virtues of obedience as well.

5. ALIX: (THOUGHTFUL) Don't worry. Your secret's safe with me.

SCENE 9: INT. KITCHEN - DAY

SFX: GUSH OF WATER AS A TAP IS TURNED ON,
THEN THE BOILER KICKS IN SMOOTHLY

1. SGT BOSTOCK: That should be as hot as you like, Sister Flo.

2. SISTER FLO: Oh, Sergeant! That is just marvellous.

3. SGT BOSTOCK: Also, I got some sealant and ran that round the side of the shower. I'll stand underneath next time you ... (EMBARRASSED) or one of you could. Anyway, hopefully, no more leaks.

4. SISTER FLO: You must let us reimburse you for the expense. At least, if we can.

5. SGT BOSTOCK: It was nothing. So that's two ticks off the list Sister Candice gave me. Sister Marnie's stairlift might take me a while to figure out. But I'll get there ...

SCENE 10: INT. SISTER MARNIE'S ROOM - DAY

SFX: CLOTH WRUNG OUT OVER BASIN AS SISTER
CANDICE WASHES SISTER MARNIE'S HANDS

1. SISTER CANDICE: Alix, Sister Marnie's nails need
 attention. There are scissors in the jar.

SFX: ALIX HUNTS FOR THE SCISSORS AND
BRINGS THEM OVER

2. SISTER CANDICE: And the other hand, Sister. It's a relief
 to have hot water again, isn't it?

3. SISTER MARNIE: Did you have permission to call a
 plumber? I heard someone stomping around.
 Stomp! Stomp!

4. SISTER CANDICE: Not exactly. (ENCOURAGING) You can manage
 Sister Marnie's nails, Alix?

5. ALIX: (DISCONCERTED) Um ... I normally get mine ...
 I'll give it a go.

6. SISTER MARNIE: If you persevere in this life, child, you
 will learn we are not always given tasks
 suited to our talents. Or perhaps they
 suit our talents in a way that doesn't
 suit us. Isn't that so, Sister Candice?

SFX: ALIX CUTS SISTER MARNIE'S NAILS

7. SISTER CANDICE: (CALMLY) A little shorter, Alix.

1. SISTER MARNIE: How it must gall you, Sister, ordered to remain here to oversee the sale of *your* community, room by room, brick by brick. But you would have made a poor Reverend Mother. You enjoy having your own way too much! You cannot help yourself.
2. ALIX: (AMAZED, TO SISTER CANDICE) Hang on. You were the one they elected, who wasn't allowed to keep the job?
3. SISTER CANDICE: Keep your mind on your task, Alix.
4. SISTER MARNIE: Sister Florence, lemming that she is, referred to you as 'Mother Candice' one day, as she was putting on my stockings. I had to correct her most firmly, to avoid future embarrassment.
5. SISTER CANDICE: (ICILY) That was very considerate of you, Sister. Alix, take these towels to Sister Flo in the kitchen.
6. ALIX: Why didn't you say?
7. SISTER CANDICE: (FIRMLY) Sister Flo is waiting.
8. ALIX: (BARELY SUPPRESSED HUFF) I'm going!

SFX: ALIX LEAVES ... AND THEN SISTER
CANDICE CLOSES THE DOOR

1. SISTER CANDICE: (TO SISTER MARNIE, STRUGGLING TO CONTROL HER EMOTION) Something else for you to consider, in the interests of all of us ... while we drag ourselves through however many years of this torment remain. Perhaps, every now and again, you could try not being such a ...
2. SISTER MARNIE: (SLYLY) Yes, Sister?
3. SISTER CANDICE: (GRIMLY HANGING ON TO SELF-CONTROL) Nothing, Sister. I'll fetch your veil.

SCENE 11: INT. DOWNSTAIRS/PARLOUR - NIGHT

SFX: SISTER CANDICE SLIDES THE BOLTS
ACROSS THE DOOR AND LOCKS UP FOR THE
NIGHT

1. SGT BOSTOCK: (WHISPERS) Sister!
2. SISTER CANDICE: (STARTLED) Sergeant!
3. SGT BOSTOCK: Is that the only key to that door? And is there another exit?
4. SISTER CANDICE: (CONFUSED) Are you worried about a fire?
5. SGT BOSTOCK: Can we talk ... in there, the whatever you call it.
6. SISTER CANDICE? Parlour? Yes.

SFX: THEY CROSS INTO THE PARLOUR AND
SISTER CANDICE SHUTS THE DOOR

7. SGT BOSTOCK: You must make sure that the princess has no access to those keys, or any keys.

SFX: THE DOOR IS PULLED OPEN ROUGHLY AND
ALIX STORMS INTO THE ROOM

8. ALIX: Give them back! My phone, my phone clip, whatever else you've got!
9. SGT BOSTOCK: Ma'am—

1. SISTER CANDICE: (WHISPERS) Quiet!

SFX: SHE SHUTS THE DOOR AGAIN, GENTLY

2. SISTER CANDICE: If Sister Marnie hears what's going on, she'll demand a call to Reverend Mother and I'll have a lot of explaining to do.

3. SGT BOSTOCK: You didn't clear it with her?

4. SISTER CANDICE: God forgive me, I did not. Now, what is this about?

HER QUESTION IS MET BY SILENCE

5. SISTER CANDICE: Sergeant! Do you have Alix's possessions, and why are you so concerned about keys?

6. SGT BOSTOCK: The princess has contacted someone outside, and the Castle has reason to believe she may attempt to—

7. ALIX: Because of course they were listening!

8. SISTER CANDICE: Quietly! Is she a prisoner here?
Sergeant! There is something you are not telling me. You have made me break the night's silence so you can at least answer me.

9. ALIX: (BITTER) Tell her, Bossy. All of it. I absolve you!

1. SGT BOSTOCK: (FRUSTRATED) Aaagghh! All right. The Castle hopes shortly to announce the engagement of the princess to Elijah Shoemaker III, an American. But Her Royal Highness has not yet given her consent to the ... arrangement.
2. SISTER CANDICE: Then surely there is no engagement.
3. ALIX: (UNDER HER BREATH) If we were talking about any other family.
4. SISTER CANDICE: (CONSIDERS) You said ... 'arrangement'.
5. ALIX: Do you know anything about my brother's marriage, Sister?
6. SISTER CANDICE: Of course! To a Brazilian lady. But not royal, obviously.
7. ALIX: She comes from a big industrial family. Steel and cement. And Pixie's wedding - that's what we call Philippa ...
8. SISTER CANDICE: I saw a photo. To an Indian gentleman from one of the old royal families?
9. ALIX: Yes, but that wasn't really the thing. His family are big in food processing.
10. SISTER CANDICE: And your fiancé? Mr Shoemaker?
11. ALIX: Pharmaceuticals. I expect you're noticing a theme here.

1. SISTER CANDICE: (HORRIFIED) Do you mean these marriages are all business deals?

2. SGT BOSTOCK: Various think tanks and committees suggested it wasn't enough for the Royal Family to be patrons of causes and do tours abroad. They needed to do more to get the country back on its feet economically, help set up trade and business alliances. It's a hush-hush part of the second ten-year plan until they can tell if it's working.

3. SISTER CANDICE: (DISTRESSED) I feel complicit in this ... this medieval practice! I should never have agreed to your request. Perhaps in the morning you should leave.

4. ALIX: Yes!

5. SGT BOSTOCK: No! (HUSHES HIMSELF) No! The princess is too worked up. Let her have a few more days. Please, Sister!

SCENE 12: INT. KITCHEN - DAY

SFX: THE MORNING HANDBELL CHIMES

FADE IN:

SFX: CLINKING OF BREAKFAST THINGS BEING
PUT AWAY

1. SISTER CANDICE: When the sergeant came to us, I persuaded myself it was a sign of God's will when it was simply my desire to exert my own influence. It would be denying my responsibility to turn them away now.
2. SISTER FLO: The poor child! But can't she refuse?
3. SISTER CANDICE: In theory. But despite her bravado I believe the princess is upset at the prospect of letting her family down. And apparently the Americans are already showing signs of breaking some deals. The Castle would have to come up with a really convincing excuse, such as illness or ... insanity.
4. SISTER FLO: Or joining a convent!
5. SISTER CANDICE: That would not be convincing. That would be miraculous. I feel for her, Sister!
6. SISTER FLO: I'll take good care of her this morning.

SCENE 13: INT. SISTER MARNIE'S ROOM - DAY

FADE IN:

SFX: FROM DOWNSTAIRS, INTERMITTENT
CLUNKING AND WHIRRING

1. SISTER MARNIE: More noise! What is that?

2. SISTER FLO: We've been able to find someone to look
at your stairlift.

SFX: PILLS DROP INTO A CONTAINER

3. SISTER FLO: These are the new tablets, Sister. Three
with water.

4. SISTER MARNIE: (SUSPICIOUS) Are you sure? I don't trust
you to read the label, Sister Florence.

5. SISTER FLO: (TRYING TO HIDE HER HURT) The dosage is
very clear.

6. SISTER MARNIE: Fetch our young discerner. Her eyes will
be more reliable.

7. SISTER FLO: Sister Candice left her some tasks in the
kitchen. We received a food parcel today.

8. SISTER MARNIE: Fetch her.

9. SISTER FLO: She's putting everything away.

10. SISTER MARNIE: Bring her here, Sister!

SFX: SISTER FLO GOES TO THE DOOR

1. SISTER FLO: (CALLS LOUDLY ALONG THE CORRIDOR) Alix, could you come here for a moment?

SFX: ALIX'S APPROACHING FOOTSTEPS

2. SISTER MARNIE: I said *bring* her here! Not shout. Since when has a Sister shouted?

3. SISTER FLO: I was in the middle of counting out the tablets for the week!

4. ALIX: (WHISPERS) I wish you'd told me you need food parcels, Sister Flo.

5. SISTER MARNIE: (TO ALIX) You see, child. We should never have allowed older women like Sister Florence to enter. A younger person like yourself can adapt. We haven't been able to talk much together, have we?

6. ALIX: Well, there's always so much scrubbing and folding and stewing to do.

7. SISTER MARNIE: There is something in your voice. The tone. It reminds me of ... who was it? A young novice many years ago now. I believe she was connected to the aristocracy.

8. SISTER FLO: (FLUSTERED BY THE DIRECTION OF SISTER MARNIE'S THOUGHTS) Alix, dear, you should really be getting on with your tasks.

1. SISTER MARNIE: (IGNORES THE INTERRUPTION) She had a vocation of sorts. But as contemplative as a potato peeler, and much less use. For some reason, your voice reminds me of her. No matter. Now, we must arrange a time for us to speak to Reverend Mother.

SFX: PANICKING, SISTER FLO DROPS THE
MEDICINE BOTTLE ONTO THE FLOOR

2. SISTER FLO: Clumsy me! There's no damage.

3. SISTER MARNIE: Sister Florence! Is even the simplest task beyond you?

SCENE 14: EXT. OUTSIDE BUILDING - NIGHT

SFX: THE ODD DISTANT CAR PASSES, THE HOOT
OF AN OWL

1. SISTER FLO: (LOW, ANXIOUS MUTTERING) I bless the Lord who gives me counsel, who even at night directs my heart.

SFX: SOME DISTANCE AWAY FROM SISTER FLO,
THE THUD OF FEET LANDING ON GRAVEL

2. ALIX: (IN DISTANCE, A GASP UPON LANDING)

3. SISTER FLO: I keep the Lord ever in my sight: since he is at my right hand, I shall stand firm.

SFX: FOOTSTEPS APPROACH CAUTIOUSLY ON THE
GRAVEL

4. SISTER FLO: I shall stand firm ... I shall stand firm ...

5. ALIX: (GENTLY) Sister Flo?

THEIR CONVERSATION CONTINUES IN WHISPERS

6. SISTER FLO: Alix! (ANXIOUS) Did I wake anyone else?

7. ALIX: What are you doing? I know you crowd get up early, but this is a bit extreme.

8. SISTER FLO: How did you get out? I locked the door.

1. ALIX: Window. Ledge. Porch roof. Pipe. Ground.
2. SISTER FLO: Are you running away?
3. ALIX: I don't know. I don't think so. But I will if you will!
4. SISTER FLO: (GIVES A STIFLED SOB) Oh!
5. ALIX: (NOTICING SISTER FLO'S FACE WITH CONCERN)
Sister, have you been crying? Why don't we go back in? Not the way I came out, obviously. Then you can tell me what's going on.
6. SISTER FLO: Not yet! Just ... not yet.
7. ALIX: Then, let's sit ... Over there ...
- SFX: THEY WALK TOGETHER ACROSS GRAVEL TO A BENCH
- CONVERSATION CONTINUES AT NORMAL VOLUME
8. ALIX: Look, I found something when I landed. By the door. A note or something.
- SFX: SHE TAKES A BIT OF PAPER OUT OF HER POCKET AND PASSES IT TO SISTER FLO
9. ALIX: Let's have some light.
- SFX: GETS A PHONE OUT OF ANOTHER POCKET

1. ALIX: Bossy thought he'd taken all my phones - but he underestimated me! (READING) 'I ask you to pray for my dad, Harry Conroy.'
2. SISTER FLO: It's a prayer request! We got so many of these in the old days. And people still get them to us. I've found them in plant pots, even in the little bird feeder I hang in the porch. (READING)'... Harry Conroy, who's been moved into the Appleton MCH.'
3. ALIX: MCH?
4. SISTER FLO: Municipal Care Hub. That place over there. (READING) 'I tried to manage at home but it was too much. He gets so upset when I visit now.' I shall pray for them. (CLOSE TO TEARS AGAIN NOW) That is, if my prayers still count for anything!
5. ALIX: If I was going to have anyone pray for me, it would be you, Sister.
6. SISTER FLO: (EMOTIONAL) I wanted to be a nun for such a long time! But I had to stay at home and look after my mum. We couldn't afford to do anything else. She was ill for nearly seven years. I was well over forty when I joined the community. Maybe Sister Marnie is right about me!
7. ALIX: She's lucky to have you looking after her.

1. SISTER FLO: (WORDS TUMBLING OUT NOW) I try to show compassion, but it's always I'm too this and too that. Too old! But not too old to clean up after her. All those years looking after Mum, and now it's happening all over again! And sometimes, Alix, I think I cannot be a nun any more! That's why you found me out here. I stand and I look at that gate and I imagine walking out of it, alone, back into the world.

2. ALIX: Don't leave because of her! Hang on till you can leave to join up with the other nuns, the ones on the computer.

3. SISTER FLO: But that's just it. It's not certain that's what will happen! I mean, if Sister Marnie tells Reverend Mother about you— (REGAINS COMPOSURE, REMORSEFUL) I'm sorry. I have no right to burden you with my feeble concerns. We must go back! I have to ring the bell soon.

SFX: SHE RISES, STARTS TO WALK BACK
ACROSS THE GRAVEL

4. ALIX: (TO HERSELF) That bloody bell!

CROSS FADE:

SFX: SISTER FLO UNLOCKS AND OPENS THE
DOOR CAUTIOUSLY

THESE EXCHANGES IN HUSHED TONES:

1. SISTER CANDICE: (INDOORS) Sister Flo! What have you been doing out there? (NOW SEEING ALIX) Alix!
2. SISTER FLO: I was only ... You see—
3. ALIX: (QUICK TO TAKE THE BLAME) She heard me getting out. She came to stop me.
4. SISTER CANDICE: Oh, Alix! You promised the sergeant you wouldn't do anything like that again.
5. SISTER FLO: You mustn't blame—
6. ALIX: (CUTS IN) I'm sorry. Sister Flo made me see sense. Please don't tell him.
7. SISTER CANDICE: What is happening to this house? This can't continue!

SCENE 15: INT. DOWNSTAIRS/PARLOUR - DAY

SFX: MORNING HANDBELL CHIMES

FADE IN:

SFX: GENTLE HUM OF THE STAIRLIFT

1. SGT BOSTOCK: (TO HIMSELF) Come on! Three more steps!

SFX: ALIX'S FOOTSTEPS DOWN THE STAIRS AS STAIRLIFT COMES TO A HALT

2. SGT BOSTOCK: (TO HIMSELF) Yes! (TO ALIX) Watch out for the screwdriver!

3. ALIX: So now you can add stairlift engineer to your long list of talents.

4. SGT BOSTOCK: It wasn't difficult once I'd got the hang of the transmission, ma'am.

5. ALIX: Don't call me that! Sister Marnie might hear. I need to talk to you. In the parlour.

6. SGT BOSTOCK: I need to talk to you too.

SFX: THEY WALK TO THE PARLOUR AND THE SERGEANT SHUTS THE DOOR

7. ALIX: (THINKS THIS IS ABOUT THE PREVIOUS NIGHT)
Get my telling off over with.

1. SGT BOSTOCK: (GRAVELY) The other side is getting twitchy. They want the announcement made by the end of the week.
2. ALIX: (PANICKING) *This* week?
3. SGT BOSTOCK: Do you know what you're going to do?
4. ALIX: (PAUSE) So one way or another, we're going to be leaving here soon?
5. SGT BOSTOCK: (GENTLY) Have the nice nuns advised you?
6. ALIX: Did it ever occur to you that they might need help more than I do?
7. SGT BOSTOCK: (WARY) If this is about the food order you wanted for them, I'm getting that today. But, Alix, you need to focus.
8. ALIX: And the stairlift is properly fixed now, is it, *Sergeant*?
9. SGT BOSTOCK: (ADMONISHED) Just a final tweak ... *ma'am*.
10. ALIX: Because I've got a mission for you.
11. SGT BOSTOCK: My mission is helping you to—
12. ALIX: (CUTS IN) To toe the line. So the least you could do is let me have some fun before I do.
13. SGT BOSTOCK: (PAUSE, ON ALERT) Define 'fun'.

SCENE 16: INT. KITCHEN - DAY

SFX: THE REGULAR THUMP AND SLIDE OF IRON
ON BEDLINEN

1. SISTER CANDICE: I can't see any alternative. I must tell Reverend Mother that I offered accommodation to a young woman, and a man, and that I thought we could do some good, but I was wrong.

2. SISTER FLO: (WEARY) I'll support you of course. Besides, it's only a matter of time before Sister Marnie gives us away.

SFX: SISTER FLO STOPS IRONING

3. SISTER FLO: Could you take hold of the other end of the sheet, Sister?

SFX: SHE SHAKES OUT A SHEET AND THEY FOLD
IT

4. SISTER CANDICE: Ever since I found out about Alix's predicament, I have felt so ashamed of myself. We are blessed to be called to this life, to have been free to follow that call ... whatever is asked of us. If there are consequences, I shall take all the blame myself.

5. SISTER FLO: (RESIGNED) No, Sister. The blame is shared. I encouraged you with my weak and selfish fears about the future.

1. SISTER CANDICE: Very well. After my morning's work I will tell the sergeant what we have decided. That is only fair. And then I shall call Reverend Mother.

SCENE 17: EXT./INT. ENTRANCE/HALL - DAY

SFX: FOOTSTEPS ON GRAVEL AS SISTER
CANDICE APPROACHES

1. SISTER CANDICE: (TALKING TO HERSELF) 'You see, Mother, the sergeant insisted for reasons of national security' ... No. 'No matter what the sergeant said, I should have—'

SFX: SHE STOPS, OPENS THE FRONT DOOR, AND
FROM WITHIN COMES THE SOUND OF THE
STAIRLIFT AND AGITATED VOICES

2. SISTER MARNIE: You don't have to grip on to me like a drowning man, Sister! I am quite secure.

3. SISTER FLO: Sister Candice! Thank goodness.

4. SISTER CANDICE: What on earth is going on?

5. SISTER MARNIE: I am having an outing with our young discerner.

6. SISTER CANDICE: A— What?

SFX: THE STAIRLIFT COMES TO A HALT

7. SISTER FLO: They were both quite determined, Sister.

8. SISTER MARNIE: Sister Florence, the wheelchair!

9. ALIX: (FROM THE TOP OF THE STAIRS) I'm bringing it now.

SFX: SISTER CANDICE HURRIES UPSTAIRS

1. SISTER CANDICE: One ... just one moment! Alix! (THEIR CONVERSATION WHISPERED NOW) Alix! If you'd waited, I could have found a way to forestall her.
2. ALIX: It was my idea. She won't be happy till we've had our chat. So we'll have it. I'll find a way to put her off talking to Reverend Mother about me.
3. SISTER CANDICE: But that doesn't matter any more. We've decided. I just need to explain to the sergeant.
4. ALIX: He's hiding outside. He'll tail us. He can do first aid if anything happens.
5. SISTER CANDICE: Oh, don't even think of it! One of us must come with you.
6. ALIX: Then there'd be no point. Please. Consider it my leaving present to you.
7. SISTER MARNIE: (FROM DOWNSTAIRS) Stop fussing, Sister Candice. All is well.
8. ALIX: (TO SISTER MARNIE) One wheelchair coming up! Or down. (WHISPERS TO SISTER CANDICE) Yes?
9. SISTER CANDICE: (PAUSE AS SHE CONSIDERS, THEN TO SISTER MARNIE) I'll help transfer you, Sister.

SCENE 18: EXT. PATH AROUND BUILDING - DAY

SFX: WHEELCHAIR ON GRAVEL

1. SISTER MARNIE: At last. We have escaped the clutches of the other two. You've spent too much time with Sister Candice and Sister Florence. They are egotistical and unstable.

2. ALIX: I soon realised I should spend more time with you, given all the knowledge and experience you have.

3. SISTER MARNIE: But not as much knowledge and experience as God, and God wants you to be happy. So do not be afraid to explore your vocation to the full. But here is not the right place for that. You must spend time in a community.

4. ALIX: Would you tell me about your life here before everyone left?

SFX: WHEELCHAIR MOVES ONTO A PAVED SURFACE, AND THERE ARE SOUNDS OF DISTANT ACTIVITY

5. ALIX: Sister Candice told me where you used to keep your hens. Round about here maybe.

6. SISTER MARNIE: They've erected some of that terrible hub place over it.

SFX: THEY COME TO A HALT

1. SISTER MARNIE: I built the hen run myself. The novices took turns to collect the eggs. And then one morning, oh the screaming! Whichever novice it was - I can't remember now - she came flying back and we all went to look. All that remained was one little headless body. Feathers everywhere, and the blood!

SFX: A LOW BEEP

2. SISTER MARNIE: What was that noise?

3. ALIX: Just an alarm I thought I'd switched off. The blood, you were saying ...

SCENE 19: INT. SISTER FLO'S ROOM/UPSTAIRS/KITCHEN - DAY

SFX: REGULAR BREATHING OF DEEP SLEEP,
THEN HURRIED FOOTSTEPS

1. SISTER CANDICE: (AGITATED) Sister Florence! Wake up!

2. SISTER FLO: (STARTLED) I am! I am!

3. SISTER CANDICE: They aren't back!

4. SISTER FLO: But it's only been ... Oh, my goodness!

5. SISTER CANDICE: An hour and thirty-two minutes! I've been sitting at the library window one last time and watching for their return. There's no sign of them!

SFX: FRONT DOOR OPENS BELOW

6. SISTER CANDICE: Dear Lord, thank you thank you thank you!

SFX: THEY RUSH TO THE LANDING AS TWO SETS
OF FOOTSTEPS COME UPSTAIRS

7. SISTER FLO: (CONFUSED) Sergeant? Alix?

8. SISTER CANDICE: (DEADLY CALM) Just tell me what has happened, whatever it is.

9. SGT BOSTOCK: Please don't be alarmed. The princess will explain everything.

1. ALIX: (BRIGHTLY, PLEASED WITH HERSELF) We just took a bit longer because I sent Bossy off to do some more shopping. Let's get it unpacked.
2. SISTER CANDICE: Would you please start making sense!
- SFX: ALL FOUR MOVE INTO THE KITCHEN AND THE SERGEANT UNPACKS BAGS
3. SGT BOSTOCK: Before you do anything else, ma'am, you should tell them what you've arranged.
4. ALIX: I thought, as this is my last evening, we ought to have a special meal together.
5. SGT BOSTOCK: I'll have mine downstairs, obviously.
6. SISTER CANDICE: Stop! You will both stop and you will tell me what you have done! Where is Sister Marnie?
7. ALIX: (PROUDLY) Sister Marnie is in a lovely individual suite at the Municipal Care Hub.
8. SISTER CANDICE: Oh dear Lord!
9. SGT BOSTOCK: It looked really not bad.
10. SISTER FLO: What are they talking about, Sister?
11. SISTER CANDICE: (CONFOUNDED, TO ALIX) Why would you even think of doing such a thing?

1. ALIX: (CONFUSED, A LITTLE HURT) Because it's what you told me I should do. You said I should think about the good I could do in whatever situation I found myself in. I found myself here, and it was soon pretty obvious what good I could do.
2. SISTER CANDICE: And you, Sergeant? You felt no obligation to intervene?
3. SGT BOSTOCK: (FEELING INCREASINGLY AWKWARD) The Castle was piling on the pressure about the engagement. I thought if I let the princess get everything out of her system, she'd be more likely to come round.
4. ALIX: In fact, you've got my nearly fiancé to thank. I used this as an opportunity to find out a bit more about him, so I asked for his help. And he came good! His family are going to pay Sister Marnie's fees for as long as she needs.
5. SISTER CANDICE: Sister Florence, we must go immediately! We must tell them there's been a misunderstanding.
6. SISTER FLO: (HESITANT) If you say so, Sister.
7. SISTER CANDICE: If I say so? Of course we must! Or are you volunteering to explain this to Reverend Mother?

1. ALIX: Oh, actually, I should have said.
Reverend Mother already knows. (TO THE
SERGEANT) A chair for Sister Candice,
Bossy!

SFX: SISTER CANDICE COLLAPSES ONTO THE
CHAIR HE PROVIDES

2. ALIX: She was very stern with us to begin with,
but when we said we'd throw in a juicy
donation and pay off the community's
debts, she soon came round. And the best
news is, you're both welcome to go back
to all the other Sisters at the mother
house. I didn't want you to stop being a
nun, Sister Flo. And you should be back
in a proper community, Sister Candice.
And now you can be! (PAUSE, CONFUSED) So
why are you looking like that? Aren't you
pleased? Sisters?

SCENE 20: EXT. ENTRANCE - DAY

SFX: BIRDSONG ON A CALM SPRING DAY -
A KEY TURNS STIFFLY IN THE LOCK OF THE
FRONT DOOR

1. SISTER CANDICE: I have to leave the key with the diocese agent on our way to the station.
2. SISTER FLO: (NERVOUS SMALL TALK) Oh well, there's plenty of time. As long as the taxi arrives.
3. SISTER CANDICE: (TERSE) It will arrive, Sister.
4. SISTER FLO: (HER GUILT TAKES CONTROL) I always thought we'd be the last nuns to leave the community. But we aren't, are we? Sister Marnie's still here. Even if she's in that place, she's the last Sister. Maybe she's asked to be moved to her window so she can see us go!
5. SISTER CANDICE: I doubt if she asks for anything.
6. SISTER FLO: That last visit! I shall never forget it. I kept waiting for her to tell me I was untidy or slow or inadequate in every way. She looked the same but it was a different person behind her eyes. We did that to her.
7. SISTER CANDICE: We had the chance to stop it and we didn't, and we must live with that.

1. SISTER FLO: Oh, Sister! I spent so much time waiting for this moment to come, and now ...!
2. SISTER CANDICE: And now we must look to the future. We must grasp every chance to do God's work.
3. SISTER FLO: Yes, Sister.
- SFX: A BIRD SETTLES NEAR THEM, CHIRPING
4. SISTER FLO: I should have taken that bird feeder down. (TO BIRD) Someone else will have to feed you now.
- SFX: SHE STEPS OVER TO THE BIRD FEEDER, TAKES OUT A PIECE OF PAPER
5. SISTER FLO: There's a note here, in the bird feeder!
6. SISTER CANDICE: Not a prayer request, surely?
7. SISTER FLO: (SHE READS) 'Dear Sisters. I'm one of the people who can't pray for themselves, so perhaps you can do it for me. They've fixed a date for my big day. It won't be the happiest day of my life, and I'm glad, because that wouldn't be saying much for my future. Whatever happens to me, I will always remember you and hope that I did something right at least once in my life. All my love, Dragonfly.'

-THE END-