

# Fort Vancouver

a play in two acts

by

## Sharon Sassone

Recipient of the Oregon Literary Arts Fellowship in Drama

In the decade before the Civil War, a homesick young soldier is stationed at primitive-but-flourishing Fort Vancouver in the Oregon Territories and wants desperately to be reunited with his wife and babies back home.

Meanwhile, a group of sheltered nuns are sent to “civilize” the vicinity around the fort with a school, a hospital, and an orphanage, only they are not given the money they need to build them. The nuns are in for a rude awakening in the far Northwest where just about anything goes—and often does.

Sister Joseph, who went on to found the Providence Hospitals, and the unhappy soldier—Sam Grant, who went on to be Major General Ulysses S. Grant and the eighteenth President of the United States—both need the same thing—cold, hard cash—and develop an unlikely alliance in their efforts to get it.

Sharon Sassone  
3555 SE Division Street, #3  
Portland, Oregon 97202  
(503) 234-7188  
[shashasassone@yahoo.com](mailto:shashasassone@yahoo.com)

# Fort Vancouver

a play in two acts

by

Sharon Sassone

ACT ONE  
Scene One

*Time:* Summer of 1854

*Place:* Outside the log walls of Fort Vancouver in the young-but-growing Oregon Territories of the United States.

*At Rise:* A man's body hangs without fanfare from a tree.

*Two nuns SISTER JOSEPH and SISTER PRAXADES, and a beautiful, young postulant, MARGARET, enter. They carry suitcases, and many items that women would bring to begin a new life on the frontier. Margaret pulls a large trunk behind her.*

*The three women come upon the hanging body and are horrified. They stand and stare at it, completely at a loss. Finally Str. Joseph makes the sign of the cross.*

STR JOSPEH

Pray for him, Sisters. Whatever he did—or didn't do—pray for him.

*They pray. Then they go sit on their luggage and wait. And wait. And wait.*

STR PRAXADES

I can't believe this. He's not even here to meet us.

STR JOSEPH

Father Tossi must have been delayed. We're on the frontier now. No trains to deliver people on time.

*They continue to wait. And wait. And steal glances at the dead man hanging in back of them.*

MARGARET

I wonder what he did.

STR PRAXADES

Something I'm sure he wished he hadn't done.

STR JOSEPH

We must not judge him. God rest his soul.

STR PRAXADES

This heat. I need some water.

STR JOSEPH

Offer your thirst up to Our Lady, Sister Praxades.

*They continue to wait. And wait. An old—old—trapper, OL' OLLIE, enters. He sees the body before he notices the nuns. They see him and are somewhat afraid.*

OL' OLLIE

Holy Christ! It's Big Sy! I always knew they'd hang you some day. Ha! You got what you deserved, you ole'—

*He notices the women watching him. He goes over to them.*

OL' OLLIE (cont'd)

Howdy.

ALL WOMEN

Howdy.

OL' OLLIE

Why—you must be the nuns who were comin'!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

STR PRAXADES

What gave us away?

OL' OLLIE

I'm Ol' Ollie. No, no need to get up, Ma'am.

STR JOSEPH

I'm Sister Joseph. This is Sister Praxades and our postulant, Margaret.

OL' OLLIE

How do.

STR PRAXADES and MARGARET

How do.

*Sister Joseph sits back down. Ol' Ollie scootches onto the luggage with the women.*

OL' OLLIE

My bones is killing me. I'm old as the hills, ya know.

STR JOSEPH

Make yourself comfortable, Mr. Ollie.

OL' OLLIE

Jest Ol' Ollie, Ma'am.

STR JOSEPH

“Ol' Ollie.”

*They all sit quietly and wait. And wait. The heat is awful.*

OL' OLLIE

You know that there is the fort over yonder?

STR JOSEPH

Yes.

OL' OLLIE

Gate's right around the corner. Jest over yonder.

STR JOSEPH

Yes. I see.

OL' OLLIE

You could jest walk on over there. They's expectin' you.

STR JOSEPH

We are waiting for Father Tossi.

OL' OLLIE

Well, you could wait a long time for the good padre. He's probably up in the mountains baptizing a dying baby—

MARGARET

—oh no!

OL' OLLIE

—or a living baby, they live sometimes. Sorry, Ma'am, I surely did not intend to distress you. *(To Sister Joseph)*  
Tender hearted, ain't she?

STR JOSEPH

Yes. We love her for it.

OL' OLLIE

Pardon my saying, Miss Mar'grit, but this here's the Northwest Territories, and it won't do for you to be too tender hearted. A gal's got to be strong and sturdy out here.

MARGARET

I am—

STR JOSEPH

She'll do just fine, Ol' Ollie. It appears you've lived in these Territories for a long time.

OL' OLLIE

Oh, hell, yeah...oh, pardon my cussin'...I'm sure not used to talkin' to fine ladies like yerselves. A thousand pardons.

STR JOSEPH

Accepted. Tell us something about the history of the place. I could not find a book on the subject other than that this territory was discovered by Captains Lewis and Clark on their famous expedition.

OL' OLLIE

Pshaw, Lewis and Clark didn't "discover" the Territories. There was trappers here way before them.

MARGARET

You, Ol' Ollie?

OL' OLLIE

Well, no, Mar'grit, that was even before my time. But there are plenty of stories about those trappers—and they're true. And they got along with the Injuns jest fine. So long as they left the Injuns alone, the Injuns left them alone.

STR PRAXADES

Ol' Ollie, did you notice that man hanging over there?

OL' OLLIE

Yes, thank you, Ma'am, I saw 'em. Ah, the truth is, the Injuns didn't go on the warpath till the Blackrobes came in, acting like they was the bosses of everybody. Preachin' their Bibles and "Thou shalt not do this and thou shalt not do that." That's when the massacres started.

MARGARET

Who are the Blackrobes, Mr. Ollie?

STR. JOSEPH

Us.

OL' OLLIE

Ooops. I guess you would be considered Blackrobes, too, wouldn't you? Hee, hee, I wonder how the Injuns are gonna react when they see *women* Blackrobes invading their territory!

STR JOSEPH

We are not invading. We're here to help.

OL' OLLIE

Sorry, Ma'am. Of course you are.

STR PRAXADES

Ol' Ollie, about that man...*hanging*...over there....

OL' OLLIE

He won't hurt you, Ma'am—he's dead. Now, where was I? Oh, yes, the worst massacre was prob'bly the Whitman missionaries...Methodists...and their poor wives and chil'dern. A wagon train too, resting their teams, just in the wrong place at the wrong time. Everybody kilt, exceptin' some of the women and chil'dern who surely would've preferred dying to what became of 'em. Cain't recall anybody's name now except Dr. Whitman hisself who shouldda knowed better than to bring them women and chil-dern into this wild territory. Cain't recall that other family's name. It's right on the tip of my tongue...naw...cain't remember. I was a old man back then too. I been old fer a long time.

STR PRAXADES

Am I the only one who is aware that we are sitting here in front of a dead man hanging from a tree?

STR JOSEPH

No, you are not, Sister Praxades, but you are the only one who finds it impossible to stop talking about it.

OL' OLLIE

No need to worry about a man who's been hung, Sister Max Sadie. It's the ones who ain't been hung yet that you need to watch out fer.

STR PRAXADES

Praxades.

OL' OLLIE

What's that, ma'am?

STR PRAXADES

My name is Sister Praxades.

OL' OLLIE

Ain't that what I said?

STR JOSEPH

Pray for him, then, Sister. That's all you can do.

*Str. Praxades goes to the corpse and kneels. Margaret joins her.*

STR PRAXADES

“Hail, Mary, full of grace. The Lord is with Thee. Blessed are Thou amongst women and blessed is the fruit of Thy womb, Jesus...”

*Ol’ Ollie takes off his hat respectfully but cannot help scratching his head in dismay. Str. Joseph remains seated beside him but finishes the prayer with the other two women.*

ALL WOMEN

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

OL’ OLLIE

My, I reckon you ladies surely *ARE* religious.

STR. JOSEPH

I reckon we surely are. Go on with your history, Ol’ Ollie. It will help us to acclimate to our new home.

OL’ OLLIE

Help you what?

STR. JOSEPH

Adjust.

OL’ OLLIE

I suspicion it’s gonna take quite a bit of adjusting fer you ladies here. This here’s the wild west,, Ma’am. It ain’t no ladies’ Sunday soiree.

STR. JOSEPH

Do we look like we came for an outing? We’ve been sent here!

OL’ OLLIE

Who sent ya?

STR. JOSEPH

The Lord, of course!

OL’ OLLIE

Did He happen to send guns and warm coats along with ya?

*Str. Joseph smiles a little. She is beginning to understand this mountain man’s humor.*

STR JOSEPH

Don’t blaspheme, Ol’ Ollie. Now, go on with your history.

OL' OLLIE

Now, these here Whitmans was having their supper, all at the table, saying “grace” like a preacher family would be—although I kin tell you “grace” didn’t help ‘em that day—when them Injuns attacked. Busted right into the cabin, killin’ the men with their clubs—like this—grabbing the gals and the chil’dern and even stealin’ a poor baby right outa its cradle.

MARGARET

They stole a baby?

OL' OLLIE

Right outa its cradle! Now, one poor fella managed to git away and rode his horse all the way up to Fort Walla Walla—cause Fort Vancouver wasn’t built then, of course—with a bunch of them blood-thirsty Injuns on his heels, and the blasted fort wouldn’t let him in! *(The women are shocked.)* Well, I guess the soldiers thought it was better to let that one man get torn to pieces—which is what them red skins did to ‘em—instead of opening the gates and taking a chance on the whole pack of ‘em getting in.

MARGARET

They wouldn’t let the poor man in?

OL' OLLIE

A shame, ain’t it? I heard that poor fella wasn’t even a Methodist. Jest travelin’ with the wagon train.

MARGARET

What happened to the children and the baby?

OL' OLLIE

Some fellas from the Hudson Bay Comp’ny ransomed back a few of them by tradin’ those blankets the Injuns like so much. They make ‘em into coats, you know—and I wasn’t kiddin’ when I said you need a warm coat up here in the winter. I hope you brought yer long johns in them satchels—

MARGARET

—but the children?

OL' OLLIE

Most of the young ‘uns never got found.

STR PRAXADES

I can’t stand looking at him, Sister Joseph!

OL' OLLIE

Me? *(He checks his pants’ fly. Feels his face.)*

STR PRAXADES

Not you—him! (*pointing to the hanging man*)

STR JOSEPH

Could you not cut him down, Ol' Ollie?

OL' OLLIE

Not until I know who strung him up. It's best not to make unnecessary enemies in the Territories, Ma'am. Now, buck up—don't fret over that son of a...him. He got what he had a'comin'. Sit here and I'll cheer you up with another story.

MARGARET

Thank you, Ol' Ollie.

OL' OLLIE

Now, after the massacre, the U.S. Cav'a'ry naturally showed up to teach them Injuns that they couldn't get away with massacreing folks like that. Trouble was, the Cav'a'ry showed *all* the Injuns what for—whether they was the *guilty* Injuns or not—and then, of course, them other Injuns retaliated by takin' some white folk and bein' mighty unkind to them—among them a couple of yer Blackrobes who had been doing nothin' except trying to teach the red skins how to read or some such nonsense. They kilt one of them priests—tortured him quite sadistically. They say—

STR JOSEPH

That's enough.

OL' OLLIE

It sure is. 'Cause what them Injuns did to that poor priest, you don't wanna hear.

STR. JOSEPH

No, we don't—

STR PRAXADES

—what did they do?

OL' OLLIE

Heh, heh. You're a feisty one, ain't ya? Father Tossi's gonna have his hands full with you three women living with him like his three wives!

STR JOSPEH

We most certainly will not be like Father Tossi's wives! What an immoral idea.

OL' OLLIE

*(Winking)* Nobody sticks their noses into the private business of nobody else around here.

STR. PRAXEDES

We have no private business to stick your nose into.

MARGARET

We'll be living in the convent.

OL' OLLIE

Oh, you will? Where is it?

STR PRAXADES

At Father Tossi's mission, of course.

OL' OLLIE

Up yonder on the mountain?

STR JOSEPH

Yes—why does that surprise you?

*Ol' Ollie scratches his head in confusion but says nothing.*

STR PRAXADES

What is it, Ollie?

OL' OLLIE

I jest don't recollect a convent being up there.

STR JOSEPH

Father Tossi recently had it built for us.

OL' OLLIE

He did? Oh...hmmmm...

STR PRAXADES

You better get out of the sun, old man, your memory's gone.

MARGARET

Sister Praxades, Ol' Ollie probably just hasn't been up to the mission since the convent was built. Is that it, Ol' Ollie?

OL' OLLIE

I don't know anything...I truly don't.

STR JOSEPH

Surely you know of Father Tossi's humanitarian work amongst the savages.

OL' OLLIE

Now *that* I surely do know—only the padre won't let you call them "savages." He says we are all God's chil'dern, equal-like, and he don't mean it as a joke when he says it.

STR. JOSEPH

He sounds like a very good man.

STR PRAXADES

He was supposed to meet our ship.

OL' OLLIE

Hell be along as soon as he can, Sister. He's not one to fritter away his time, so some good deed is prob'bly keepin' him busy.

MARGARET

I hope he hasn't met with some harm.

OL' OLLIE

I doubt it. Not with Fort Vancouver here now and with everybody and their brother signing a peace treaty and all these missionaries—Methodists and Catholics and God-knows-what—teaching us all to "love thy neighbor," which if that ever happens, I'll eat my hat, tail and all.

*A sullen mountain man, PIM ST. CLARE, enters with his very pregnant Indian wife, WOMAN WHO TAKES LONG WALKS ALONE IN THE WOODS. They silently stare at the hanging man.*

OL' OLLIE

Uh oh. Trouble. (*He touches his rifle instinctively but does not aim it. His voice is friendly.*) Good afternoon, Pim. Good afternoon, Woman Who Takes Long Walks Alone in the Woods.

*The Indian woman turns and nods. Pim does not respond but continues to stare at the hanging body. Str. Praxades whispers to Str. Joseph.*

STR PRAXADES

It's like Sodom and Gomorrah here—a corpse dangling in the breeze and people just staring at it.

OL' OLLIE

Don't you mind them, Sister, they don't come into town very often so you won't be bothered by them.

STR PRAXADES

They are gawking at a dead body!

OL' OLLIE

Sorry, Sister. Things must seem a little crude to you here...  
*(Cautiously to the man)* Pim, why don't you take yer wife and  
 go on home?

PIM

Wife? Ha!

OL' OLLIE

Pim, we don't want no trouble. I don't know who hanged him.

PIM

I don't care.

*In his own sweet time, Pim saunters offstage. His wife reluctantly follows him.*

STR. PRAXADES

Why did he scoff at the word "wife?" Aren't they married?

STR. JOSEPH

Sister Praxades.

OL' OLLIE

What kin we do? Licentiousness runs rampant once you  
 set foot outside the fort. Why the padre sent fer you here,  
 I'll never know. I tried to talk him out of it, but—

*An obviously-inebriated soldier enters. This is 30-year-old ULYSSES S. GRANT. He stumbles  
 over to the hanging corpse and stares at it.*

GRANT

I don't believe it.

OL' OLLIE

Believe it. It's Big Sy.

GRANT

Who hanged him?

OL' OLLIE

Don't know. I can think of a dozen people right off the  
 top of my head who would have liked to—you being  
 one of 'em, eh, Sam?

GRANT

You got that right. His brother seen him yet?

OL' OLLIE

Pim was here a minute ago. Didn't cause no trouble though.

GRANT

You would have thought his own brother would have cut him down.

OL' OLLIE

Course, I wouldn't be surprised if Pim's the one who strung him up! *(Both men laugh. The women do not.)* Oh, sorry, ladies.

STR. JOSEPH

Is Pim related to Big Sly?

OL' OLLIE

It's Big "Sy", Sister, and they're brothers.

STR. JOSEPH

His brother! Why, he stood here and didn't even say a word!

GRANT

Never was any love loss between those two.

OL' OLLIE

Pim will probably jest be happy not to have to share the woman with his brother no more.

*The women look at him aghast. Suddenly Grant seems aware of the women.*

STR. PRAXADES

You mean they shared—

GRANT

You stupid old man, saying that in front of nuns!

OL' OLLIE

Sorry, Sam. Sisters, I got a big mouth

GRANT

Oh oh.

OL' OLLIE

What?

GRANT

These are nuns.

OL' OLLIE

They surely are.

GRANT

Is today Tuesday?

OL' OLLIE

I don't know.

STR JOSEPH

Yes, it is.

GRANT

Oh oh. And you are Father Tossi's nuns?

STR JOSEPH

We are Sisters of Charity nuns come to work here *with* Father Tossi.

GRANT

Oh oh.

STR JOSEPH

What is is?

GRANT

If this is Tuesday and you're the nuns—oh oh!

STR PRAXADES

He's drunk!

STR JOSEPH

That's obvious, but what is it, young man?

GRANT

I am supposed to meet you at the dock. I gotta get to the dock.

OL' OLLIE

They ain't at the dock no more, Sam. They ain't been there for several hours.

GRANT

Oh oh.

STR JOSEPH

Will you stop saying that? Who are you and where is Father Tossi?

OL' OLLIE

This here is Fort Vancouver's quartermaster, Captain Ulysses S. Grant. Um, stand up straight, sir, and, here, let me help you button yer jacket. He don't always look this way, Ma'am. Now where's yer hat?

GRANT

It's not on my head?

OL' OLLIE

Did you lose lose it in the jackpot again?

STR PRAXADES

Jackpot? You mean a card game—this morning already?

OL' OLLIE

Why don't you go on back to the barracks, Captain, and have a rest and Commander Bonneville kin introduce you to the good Sisters properly tonight at dinner.

GRANT

I'm the quartermaster. It's my job to introduce *him* to them... 'cept you'll have to introduce *me* to them before I can introduce *him* to them.

OL' OLLIE

I jest did introduce you. This is Sister Joseph, Captain.

GRANT

How do you do, Sister Joseph? I'm Brevet Captain U. S. Grant. At your service. (*He tips his missing hat.*)

STR. JOSEPH

How do you do, Captain Grant.

MARGARET

U. S.? United States Grant, sir?

OL' OLLIE

Ulysses Simpson Grant, Mar'grit.

GRANT

I could have told her. I know my own name.

OL' OLLIE

I wasn't sure if you did.

STR JOSEPH

Ulysses? From Homer's "Iliad?"

GRANT

I don't often meet anyone who has any idea where it's from. My grandmother named me. It was one of her favorite books and she insisted I had to be named "Ulysses." At least she wanted the English version of the name. I could have been stuck with Odysseus. Did you read "The Iliad," Ol' Ollie?

OL' OLLIE

Now, Sam, you know I cain't read.

MARGARET

Why does he call you Sam if your name is Ulysses?

GRANT

U. S. Grant—the cadets at West Point liked to say it stood for “Uncle Sam.” Everyone calls me Sam now.

STR JOSEPH

We shall call you Captain Grant.

*Grant stands up straight and salutes her, then shakes her hand enthusiastically with one hand while patting her arm with the other.*

GRANT

I like you. I know just where I stand with you—do you mind if I sit down?

*He slides to the ground by holding onto Sister Joseph.*

STR. PRAXADES

Take your hands off of her! A nun is not touched by a man!

GRANT

Heavens to Betsy, I am very sorry, Ma’am. The good Lord won’t strike you dead because I touched your arm, will He? I’m sorry that I’m just a wee bit in-eb-be...in-eb-bee...

STR PRAXADES

Drunk.

GRANT

Hmp. Now you don’t like me do you? Admit it. What’d you say your name was?

STR PRAXADES

I didn’t.

STR JOSEPH

This is my assistant, Sister Praxades.

*It is not missed by all present that Sister Praxades stiffens and gives Sister Joseph an annoyed look when she is introduced as her assistant. Grant gets to his feet again.*

GRANT

And who is this pretty young lady?

STR. JOSEPH

This is our postulant, Margaret.

GRANT

A pleasure to meet you, Marg...Marg....

MARGARET

Sir.

STR JOSEPH

You may leave now, Captain Grant. Ol' Ollie can help us to the fort.

GRANT

I can help. *(He tries to lift luggage. He drops it, stumbling to the ground.)* I guess I can't help.

OL' OLLIE

Get on out of here, now, Sam. You're embarrassin' us. And Commander Bonneville could show up any minute...and you know what he said about if he catches you in this condition agin.

GRANT

Commander Bonneville? That—

OL' OLLIE

Sam, please!

*As Grant leaves, he bumps into the hanging corpse, tips his imaginary hat politely, and laughs.*

GRANT

Excuse me, Big Sy! You're not looking too well today. Hee-Hee! Hey, you see I'm growing a beard, just like you big, tough mountain men? Did you introduce the good sisters to Big Sy, Ol' Ollie? Sisters, this is Big Sy—the meanest son-of-a-you-know-what that ever—and I mean ever—walked the face of this earth. And we are truly happy to see him get what's been coming to him for a long time now. *(He trips and falls.)* Hey, did you push me, Big Sy? You see that, Ollie? He pushed me! Hee! Hee! But I'm fine. I'm fine. Adieu, good Sisters, adieu.

*He once again tries to tip his hat but can't find it on his head. He walks in circles.*

OL' OLLIE

*(Formally, trying to rescue the moment)* I'm appalled and ashamed that you have to be witness to Captain Grant's little episode, Sisters. He's normally a very sober man. He...he's jest a little troubled at the moment. You see, he lost a big crop of potatoes, and—

GRANT

Don't say that word "potato!"

STR JOSEPH

I'm afraid I don't understand. Captain Grant is a potato farmer?

GRANT

Don't say that word! I hate potatoes! Sister, I plowed those fields with my own hands—planted every seed with these very hands. Watered those little spuds like a daddy takes care of his little babies. And then when they start sprouting, what happens. Huh? What happens?

STR JOSEPH

I don't know.

GRANT

Rain.

STR PRAXADES

Rain is good for potatoes.

GRANT

Weeks and weeks—and weeks—of rain.

ALL THE WOMEN

Oh.

GRANT

You know what happens to potatoes in flooded fields?

STR JOSEPH

They rot.

GRANT

They rot. They rot, don't they Ol' Ollie?

OL' OLLIE

Yes, they rot, Sam. You couldn't help it. The potatoes were doing fine until the rains came.

GRANT

Biggest rains ever remembered here—the one dang year I plant potatoes!

OL' OLLIE

He was desperate for money to send to his wife. He even tried to sell ice.

MARGARET

To whom?

OL' OLLIE

Sent huge chunks of it on a ship to San Francisco, where they needed it cause it was unseasonably warm there.

GRANT

But then it got unseasonably warm here—

OL' OLLIE

And all the ice melted on board the ship. Lost all his ice along with all his pota—

GRANT

I said don't say that word potatoes to me!

STR PRAXADES

But why was an army captain planting pota—vegetables?

OL' OLLIE

Thought he could raise potatoes for the soldiers here and pay hisself for the crop.

GRANT

It wouldda worked too—except for the damned weather... hey...where's the fort? The fort's gone!

OL' OLLIE

Mind yer language, Sam. Now, Sister Prax-sadies and Mar'grit, I'm gonna need you to take our friend here into the fort. Jest go up to the biggest buildin' in there and introduce yerselfs. They'll take him off yer hands. They always do. Then have one of the soldiers on duty make you some tea.

MARGARET

Must we go, Sister?

STR JOSEPH

Do as Ol' Ollie asks, Margaret. I'll wait here for Father Tossi.

OL' OLLIE

The Captain's harmless, ladies, don't be afraid of him.

GRANT

It was around here before. 'Scuse me, Big Sy, can you show me the way to the fort? *(He belches.)* 'Scuse me.

*Str. Praxades and Margaret reluctantly take Grant's arms and lead him offstage. Grant looks into Margaret's face.*

GRANT

Why, thank you, ma'am, thank you. Christ, you nuns are getting' prettier every day.

OL' OLLIE  
Language, Captain, language.

*They exit. Grant bumps into something offstage. Str. Joseph hurries toward the sound*

GRANT (O.S.)  
I'm all right. Nothing broken!

*FATHER ANTHONY TOSSI and THE REVEREND WILLIAM BANDER, both dressed like lay people without a hint of religion about them, enter unseen from another direction.*

BANDER  
I told you it was him.

TOSSI  
Who would have believed it? They finally got Big Sy.

OL' OLLIE  
Sister Joseph, the padre has arrived!

TOSSI  
Sister Joseph, you're here.

*Str. Joseph looks him up and down, then kneels and bows her head for a blessing. Ol' Ollie looks confused again, then removes his hat.*

BANDER  
I didn't know you were royalty, Tony.

*Father Tossi puts his hands on the kneeling woman's head and silently blesses her. She arises.*

STR. JOSEPH  
Thank you, Father Tossi. I've been waiting to meet you.

TOSSI  
I was helping out over at the Dale's farm.

OL' OLLIE  
Something wrong with Fritz Dale?

TOSSI  
Broke his leg in two places. Bill and I went and did his chores whilst the Mrs. is laid up with the new baby.

OL' OLLIE  
It's just one thing after another for that poor family. See, I told you, Ma'am, the padre was off doing some good deed.

TOSSI  
Didn't Captain Grant meet you, Sister?

OL' OLLIE

There was a little mix up—the Captain didn't realize it was Tuesday.

TOSSI

Uh huh. I apologize for that, Sister. He promised me he wouldn't dr—well, never mind now. May I introduce the Reverend William Bander? He's a Methodist, but we put up with him because he's a good fisherman and he shares his catch with us.

STR. JOSEPH

How do you do, Reverend Bander.

BANDER

It's a pleasure, Sister Joseph. I'm sorry you have to see this. There aren't always bodies hanging from trees here.

TOSSI

No, they hang from other places too.

STR JOSEPH

I see I shall have to get used to frontier humor quickly.

BANDER

It helps if you do.

OL' OLLIE

You know what they hanged him for, Bill ?

BANDER

Horse thieving, I heard. Took an Appaloosa from the Danvers' homestead.

TOSSI

How he thought he was going to get away with that...

BANDER

Old Man Danver and his sons came into town and grabbed him out of the saloon and strung him up right then.

OL' OLLIE

Dang if I didn't pick the wrong time to go check my traps 'round the crater—I missed all the fun!

BANDER.

Sister, it's *really* not this bad all the time, especially if you stay inside the fort....

STR. JOSEPH

We did not come here to stay inside the fort, Reverend.

Fort Vancouver by Sharon Sassone

BANDER

Yes, yes, I know, you came to build a school, and all the settlers around here are thrilled about that—

STR. JOSEPH

—not a school—not at first. We came to build a hospital.

BANDER

Oh? Father Tossi told us you were coming to build a school. A lot of settler children need schooling.

TOSSI

Ah...yes...a school...and a hospital—

OL' OLLIE

You told me they was gonna build a orphanage, Padre.

TOSSI

—and an orphanage.

BANDER

It's true—we need an orphanage, Sister. You see, we have a lot of mixed marriages—

OL' OLLIE

—marriages?

BANDER

—well, whatever you want to call them. The fur trappers and miners mate with Indian girls and when the baby is born the Indians won't take it into their tribe because it's half white and the trappers and miners won't keep them because they're half Indian. So they just abandon them.

STR JOSEPH

Poor children!

OL' OLLIE

'Course it's more important to build the hospital and the school since we gotta take care of the white chil'dern before we worry about the half-breeds.

TOSSI

All children are God's children and we'll take care of them all as best as we can.

OL' OLLIE

Amen, Padre, thank you fer remindin' me about how the good lord thinks. It's jest that I been sorely counting on an orphanage, now that I'm gettin' so old. I was thinkin' I could live there too. Earn my keep huntin' fresh meat for us all.

Fort Vancouver by Sharon Sassone

BANDER

Well, which is it, Tony—hospital, orphanage or school?

TOSSI

Um...well.....all of them.

BANDER

You're expecting Sister Joseph to build a hospital and a school and an orphanage—with just her two hands????

TOSSI

I I told you, Bill, her two hands are worth more than a dozen of the rest of us. Tell him, Sister, how your father and grandfather are two of the finest carpenters in Montreal. Tell him how you learned everything from them, as good as any man—or better.

STR JOSEPH

Modesty prevents me from saying so.

TOSSI

I give you permission.

STR JOSEPH

Then—yes—I am a master carpenter. I can build anything—have built everything—chapels, barns, wagon, a greenhouse—and I wish you could have seen the magnificent coffin I made for our late Mother Superior. I carved the entire—

TOSSI

Thank you, Sister, that's enough modesty.

BANDER

Impressive. Nevertheless, she only has two hands, Tony, magical as they may be.

TOSSI

And Sister Praxades' and Margaret's hands, too. And I've been thinking about hiring some of the men who are always looking for work around town.

BANDER

You barely have money for food, let alone paying extra hands. Look how quiet Sister Joseph's gotten. I'll bet you've scared her half to death now she realizes.

OL' OLLIE

I don't think Sister Joseph scares easily.

*Sister Joseph does not speak immediately. She is deep in thought.*

STR. JOSEPH

I did just realized...Father, is there a convent for us?

TOSSI

Uh, not yet, but there will be one, just as soon—

STR. JOSEPH

—as I build it?

TOSSI

Yes.

STR. JOSEPH

But Monsignor Blanchett sent you money to have a convent built for us.

TOSSI

Ah, yes, but I had to buy supplies for some desperate families that were passing through.

OL' OLLIE

Would that be the Kohler family? Where the mother died?

TOSSI

Yes. The man was left with six children. I had to give him money to send for his sister, plus one of his wheels broke on their wagon—and he had six children...

BANDER

If I recall correctly, Tony, you bought them a horse when one of their's went lame.

TOSSI

What good is a wagon without a horse to pull it? Their needs were many—and immediate—but I still have half the money left.

BANDER

See what you're up against, Sister? He spent half your money on a family just passing through.

OL' OLLIE

Heaven help you.

TOSSI

That's what I'm counting on.

*Pim St. Clare and his wife return. She is pulling a heavy bag of supplies.*

OL' OLLIE

Pim, you come to collect your brother?

PIM

No.

BANDER

But don't you want to bury him?

PIM

Why should I? *(He begins to leave.)*

BANDER

Then I'm going to buy him, Pim.

TOSSI

He's a Catholic, Bill!

BANDER

How you figure that?

TOSSI

His last name's St. Clare. That's French Canadian Bill, and you know it. He's Catholic.

PIM

He'll burn in hell either way.

*WOMAN WHO TAKES LONG WALKS ALONE IN THE WOODS*

I want...

PIM

Dammit, woman, nobody cares what you want! Come on!  
*(He exits. She hurries after him.)*

TOSSI

Well, let's get him cut down.

BANDER

No need, Tony, I lined up a few of my church elders to come get him and take him over to the barber to get him cleaned up for our burying him tomorrow.

TOSSI

Excuse me, Bill, but I'll be burying him tomorrow.

BANDER

With all due respect, Tony, I'll be burying him.

TOSSI

Ol' Ollie, you knew his father—Pierre St. Clare. You said you used to hunt with him when he was alive, and he was a Catholic, wasn't he?

BANDER

I once spoke to Big Sy about coming to my church.

TOSSI

Big Sy never talked to anybody in his life except to curse ‘em.

BANDER

Well, once I did ask him if he believed in God, and he did answer me—sort of—well, he nodded, I think—

TOSSI

—now, Bill, a man of the cloth shouldn’t be telling such a whopper.

OL’ OLLIE

Of course, Woman Who Takes Long Walks Alone in the Woods is a Injun, and the Big Sy spent more time with them than he did with his own people. I suspicion she was gonna say she wanted her people to bury him before Pim shut her up.

BANDER

Like hell they will—I spent a lot of time trying to save his soul! Pardon me, Sister, I forgot myself for a moment, but I assure you. Tony, that I’m burying Big Sy tomorrow.

TOSSI

We’ll see.

BANDER

Yes, we will. I’ll be going to check on the whereabouts of those elders. Good afternoon. *(He tips his hat and exits.)*

TOSSI

Just a minute, Bill, I’m coming with you. Ol’ Ollie—

OL’ OLLIE

Go on, go on. I’ll take Sister Joseph to the ranch.

*Tossi tips his hat and hurries after Bander. Str. Joseph gazes after them in dismay. Ol’ Ollie laughs as he starts collecting the nuns’ luggage.*

OL’ OLLIE

I suspicion I can safely say you ain’t never seen a priest like that before, have you?

STR JOSEPH

You can safely say. *(She picks up some luggage too.)*

OL’ OLLIE

You want me to take this to the ranch or back to the dock?

Fort Vancouver by Sharon Sassone

STR JOSEPH

Why would I want them back at the dock?

OL' OLLIE

You mean, you're stayin'?

STR JOSEPH

But of course! Now, why do you call the fort a ranch?

OL' OLLIE

The quartermaster's house is called the ranch 'cause it's the biggest house in the fort.

STR JOSEPH

Why does the quartermaster get the biggest house?

OL' OLLIE

Cause it's part of his duties to entertain any dignitaries and such. That's why Cap'tin Grant was 'sposed to welcome you.

STR JOSEPH

Captain Grant is the one who entertains dignitaries? Captain Grant??? The madmen are running the asylum!

*Pim and his wife re-enter. Pim goes up to his brother's body.*

OL' OLLIE

So, Pim, you've decided to bury your brother after all?

PIM

No.

WOMAN WHO TAKES LONG WALKS ALONE IN THE WOODS

He wants Big Sy's money.

PIM

It's my money now.

OL' OLLIE

Can't you even wait until he's cut down?

PIM

No.

STR.JOSEPH

You don't want to bury your own brother but you want to empty his pockets into your own?

PIM

Stay out of this, old lady.

OL' OLLIE

Keep talking to the Sister that way, St. Clare, and you'll end up like your brother. Reverend Bander's men are gonna cut down Big Sy, since you're shirking your duty, and they'll give you whatever is in his pockets. You come back in the morning for his burial—

PIM

I want my money now.

*Pim lifts his wife up and she takes whatever she can from the corpse's pockets. He grabs the money and leaves. His wife runs after him.*

STR. JOSEPH

That poor girl looks like she's going to have her baby any moment and yet she runs after him like he owns her.

OL' OLLIE

He does. He and his brother bought her off one of her uncles a few years back.

STR. JOSEPH

Surely that's slavery.

OL' OLLIE

Surely it is. It's commonplace, I hear tell, down south.

STR. JOSEPH

Yes, well, they're getting ready to fight a war over it.

OL' OLLIE

I heard that too. You think that'll come to pass?

STR. JOSEPH

I hope it doesn't come to bloodshed, but it's got to be stopped. One human being can't be owned by another!

OL' OLLIE

You think not?

STR. JOSEPH

Of course not.

*Ol' Ollie looks as if he might say more, but, on second thought, he simply shrugs.*

OL' OLLIE

Uh huh...well...

STR. JOSEPH

Go ahead, say it. What's on your mind?

OL' OLLIE  
 Jest "Welcome to Fort Vancouver," Sister.

*Scene.*

ACT ONE  
 Scene Two

*The next morning, Big Sy is being buried. The Rev. Bander is praying over him. Father Tossi is praying over him, and an Indian chief is giving him rites too. Ole' Ollie, Strs. Joseph and Praxades, Margaret, and Woman Who Takes Long Walks Alone in the Woods watch. Ol' Ollie scratches his head in dismay.*

OL' OLLIE  
 Well, at least Big Sy is getting' a good send-off.

*Scene.*

ACT ONE  
 Scene Three

*A few days later. OFFSTAGE, Margaret is SINGING. With back to the audience, someone, dressed in flannel shirt, overalls, big hat, and tool belt, is hammering on the beginning of a cabin wall. Captain Grant enters, wiping his brow with a handkerchief.*

GRANT  
 Whew! I swear this hike up here gets steeper every time I make it, Tony. How are you doing today?

*The builder turns around—it is Sister Joseph!*

STR. JOSEPH  
 I'm afraid I'm not Tony, Captain Grant. Good to see you up and around again. Remember me?

GRANT  
 Oh, my G—

STR. JOSEPH  
 Uh, uh.

GRANT  
 Sister Joseph. Well, I'm ashamed to look you in the face. From what Commander Bonneville tells me—and will never let me forget—I thoroughly disgraced myself and the entire Fourth Regiment the day you arrived. I do owe you an apology.

STR. JOSEPH  
 Come, sit down, you must be thirsty. Margaret!

Fort Vancouver by Sharon Sassone

*Margaret, still humming, enters. She is dressed in a simple dress and apron, her long hair flowing down and tied back with only a little head scarf. Grant is taken aback at her beauty.*

MARGARET

Yes, Sister? Oh—

STR. JOSEPH

You remember Captain Grant?

MARGARET

It's not likely I could forget.

GRANT

I'm sorry, Margaret. I'm told I became...ill...on...

STR JOSEPH

You vomited on her, yes, Captain Grant.

GRANT

Everyone calls me Sam. And I do apologize from the bottom of my heart.

STR. JOSEPH

Captain Grant could probably use some bread and water after his climb up here, Margaret. Oh, dear, that sounds like prison rations, doesn't it?

MARGARET

I'll bring some jam with the bread. Prisoners don't get that.

GRANT

Thank you, Margaret. After the way I behaved when we first met, you are very generous to offer your hospitality.

MARGARET

It's good to see you back on your feet, Captain Grant.  
*(She giggles as she curtsies and exits.)*

GRANT

Did she mean literally or figuratively?

STR JOSEPH

Oh, you were off your feet—literally—crawling around on the ground at one point, howling like a wolf, you said.

GRANT

Heaven help me.

STR JOSEPH

Yes.

GRANT

*(Laughing)* I am sorry, Sister. Especially about the girl. She's going to be a nun?

STR. JOSEPH

That, I am told, is her intention. And we will see over the course of the year whether it is God's intention. Now, to what do I owe this visit, Captain?

GRANT

To apologize for not meeting you at the dock when you arrived.

STR. JOSEPH

And?

GRANT

You're a direct woman, aren't you?

STR. JOSEPH

I've found it saves so much time, haven't you? What is it you want to see me about, Captain?

*Grant takes out a piece of wood and a knife.*

GRANT

You mind if I whittle, Sister? I find whittling frees up my mind.

STR. JOSEPH

And what do you have on your mind, Captain?

GRANT

It's difficult to talk to you, dressed like a man. I never expected to see a nun dressed like this.

STR. JOSEPH

I am out of uniform, aren't I? Just like you.

GRANT

I'm off duty, Sister. Anyway, I don't wear my uniform all that much anymore. Things are very lax here.

STR. JOSEPH

Yes, I've noticed.

GRANT

I meant "duty-wise." You know I fought in the Mexican War—and they've made me a quartermaster! They've got me keeping stock of our supplies.

STR JOSEPH

Someone has to do it.

GRANT

Kind of a waste to train me at West Point and then stick me here in nowhere as a bean-counter. And may I add I'm a very efficient bean-counter. I have a lot of time on my hands so I thought I'd come up here and help you out.

STR. JOSEPH

Were there no card games in town, Captain?

GRANT

Ewww—someone's been telling tales about me. Commander Bonneville perhaps?

STR. JOSEPH

He didn't need to. Your condition when I arrived told me everything there was to know.

GRANT

Oh, really?

STR JOSEPH

But, yes, Commander Bonneville did mention your sins at dinner.

GRANT

My sins? Huh. I never thought of myself as a sinner. Everybody drinks in the army and if I didn't play cards I'd never have any extra spending money. While Bonneville was listing all my "sins," did he bother to mention that I send every penny of my salary to my dear wife back in Ohio?

STR. JOSEPH

Yes, he did.

GRANT

And did he tell you I've got two baby boys—one I've never even seen—back there too? Here, look at this.

*Grant puts down his whittling and carefully takes a piece of paper out of his pocket. He lovingly unfolds it. The paper looks as if it has been looked at often. Str. Joseph admires it.*

STR. JOSEPH

How precious. It's your little son's hand print?

GRANT

Yes—his mother helped him trace it.

STR JOSEPH

He still must be very small.

Fort Vancouver by Sharon Sassone

GRANT

Four years old.

STR JOSEPH

Is his name Sam?

GRANT

No, Freddy, after his grandpa. Julia named the new baby after me—Ulysses. She calls him “Lyss.”

STR JOSEPH

Not Sam?

GRANT

Naw, Sam is what they started calling me at West Point—“U. S. Grant”—Uncle Sam? And then just Sam.

STR JOSEPH

You’re proud to be a West Point graduate, aren’t you?

GRANT

Yes, Ma’am, I am, even though I don’t look like one.

STR JOSEPH

You do look it.

GRANT

No need to flatter me.

STR JOSEPH

In your eyes—when you’re sober, like now. I see an obvious intelligence...and a great deal of grief. Loneliness can eat out a man’s heart, Sam. Better bring your wife and children to Fort Vancouver. You can be a soldier and a family man at the same time.

GRANT

I don’t know how, Sister. I can’t afford to get them here, let alone feed and clothe them. You know how much I earn a year?

STR JOSEPH

Everyone has money problems—

GRANT

Six hundred and fifty dollars plus room and board.

STR JOSEPH

I must admit it sounds like a lot to me. We could certainly put that much money to a good use here at the mission.

Fort Vancouver by Sharon Sassone

GRANT

A nun doesn't know how expensive it is to try to buy a house, raise a family, live respectably.

STR JOSEPH

Doesn't she?

GRANT

If they would at least give me a full Captain's pay—it's not that much more but a few hundred—but I'm a brevet Captain so my pay rank is only Lieutenant.

STR JOSEPH

I don't understand. Are you a Captain or a Lieutenant?

GRANT

Both. For honorable service in the war with Mexico, they gave me the "honor" of being called Captain...but they didn't raise my pay, so I'm really still a Lieutenant.

STR JOSEPH

Do they do that often?

GRANT

Oh, yes, all the time. When you hear a man being called a certain rank, don't assume he's getting paid for it. I can't bring Julia and the boys out west on six hundred and fifty dollars a year. Julia is used to better than this. She's from a higher class than I am—

STR JOSEPH

—but she married you, didn't she?

GRANT

I want her to be happy, and she won't be happy out here. I won't do this to her.

STR JOSEPH

I shall keep you in my prayers, Captain.

GRANT

I did not intend to unburden myself on you.

STR JOSEPH

I feel fortunate that you did. Here, don't forget to take Freddy's hand print back.

GRANT

Thank you. *(He lovingly refolds the paper.)*

STR JOSEPH

Commander Bonneville sees that you're heartsick for your family, too. That's why he's tolerated your disgraceful behavior up till now.

GRANT

"Disgraceful behavior." Whew! I have been raked over the coals—and so politely—I scarcely feel burned at all.

*Margaret's SINGING is heard offstage. She enters with a tray.*

MARGARET

Here you are, Captain. I put up this jam myself last summer. Brought it all the way from home.

GRANT

Then it means all the more, Margaret. Thank you.

MARGARET

And some for you too, Sister. You must keep up your strength. Sister doesn't eat enough, Captain Grant, but we're working on that.

STR. JOSEPH

As you can see, she's the youngest among us but the biggest mother hen. Thank you, Margaret, I shall eat and drink as you instruct.

GRANT

That was a mighty pretty song you were singing, Margaret.

MARGARET

Thank you, Captain. My momma used to sing it to us when we were small. You know it?

GRANT

Me? Hardly. I'm tone deaf. Truly. I only know two songs—one is "Yankee Doodle" and the other—isn't. But perhaps you can try to teach me the words sometime, even if I can't remember the tune.

STR. JOSEPH

Margaret, go watch the kettle for our tea please?

MARGARET

Yes, Sister. *(She exits.)*

GRANT

*(Calling after her)* A watched kettle never boils!

STR. JOSEPH

Please eat, Captain.

GRANT

You called me Sam a few minutes ago.

STR. JOSEPH

It seemed right then—and now it seems right to call you Captain again.

GRANT

What's your given name?

STR. JOSEPH

You may not call me by my given name.

GRANT

I know that.

STR. JOSEPH

Esther. Esther Marie.

GRANT

A good bible name.

STR. JOSEPH

Yes. You won't mind if I finish nailing this frame while we talk, will you, Captain?

GRANT

Mother Hen said you're supposed to eat too.

*She puts a piece of bread in her mouth and it dangles as she nails. Grant does the same and holds the board as she nails. Margaret comes out carrying the tea.*

MARGARET

What is this? Feeding time at the zoo?

*Grant mimics a gorilla and Margaret laughs as she pours the tea.*

STR. JOSEPH

*(With her mouth full)* Thank you, Margaret.  
*(Margaret exits, singing "Yankee Doodle" merrily.)*

GRANT

So how are things going living here at the mission with Father Tossi?

STR. JOSEPH

"The mission?" There's one cabin and a barn.

GRANT

Well, he calls it the mission so we humor him. He's such a gentle soul, I just hate to tell him I've seen shanty towns that look better than his mission.

STR JOSEPH

He has been very good natured about sleeping outside while us women take over his cabin.

GRANT

Good thing it's summer.

STR. JOSEPH

That's why I need to get this built.

GRANT

I wondered what we were building. It's a cabin for Father Tossi?

STR. JOSEPH

No.

GRANT

No? Ah, it's the convent for you women then!

STR. JOSEPH

It's a smoke house. I'm going to butcher some pigs for the winter and hang them up here.

GRANT

What's that got to do with where Father Tossi sleeps?

STR. JOSEPH

I'm making it two stories. He can sleep under the hams.

GRANT

So you're a butcher too? You would have made some man a wonderful wife.

STR. JOSEPH

I did. *(She looks at her ring.)* I am married to the greatest man who ever walked the earth.

GRANT

Sorry, Sister. It must be your get-up that made me forget for a minute that you're a nun. Aren't those Father Tossi's clothes?

STR. JOSEPH

Yes.

GRANT

How did he feel about your appropriating them?

STR. JOSEPH

He complained mildly at first, but I asked him, “Father, do you think I can build a convent, a school, a hospital, and an orphanage while wearing my habit?” He thought it over and decided I could wear his overalls. *(They laugh and sip their tea.)*

GRANT

Margaret serves a fine English tea, doesn't she?  
Where is she from?

STR. JOSEPH

How long since you were home, Captain?

GRANT

Eighteen months.

STR. JOSEPH

Then I will forgive you for looking at Margaret the way you did and your questions, and attribute them to homesickness, but be aware, Captain, I'll tolerate no more of that sort of thing. You keep your mind on your wife and sons or else you will not be welcome here at the mission.

GRANT

Raked over the coals a second time. I'd better just eat my bread and jam.

*Ol' Ollie arrives. He is carrying all his worldly possessions.*

OL' OLLIE

Morning, Captain Grant. Morning—that you, Sister Joseph?

STR. JOSEPH

If I had known I was going to have so much company today, I'd have kept my habit on. Yes, it's me, Ol' Ollie. Come sit down. You must be exhausted.

OL' OLLIE

Jest why the good padres had to build this mission up on a mountainside, I don't know.

GRANT

It was the safest location around. They built it before Fort Vancouver was here.

STR. JOSEPH

Have some tea, Ol' Ollie. And bread and jam.

OL' OLLIE

Thank you, ma'am—Sister. Ah, is that there what you're building the hospital?

GRANT

It's a smoke house. They need to store supplies for the winter.

OL' OLLIE

I need to be stored for the winter too. I'm mightily wore out these days. I was hoping you was building the hospital. I need a place to rest my bones.

STR. JOSEPH

You mean for tonight?

OL' OLLIE

I mean until I pass on, Ma'am.

STR. JOSEPH

Why, you seemed well enough a few days ago. What's ailing you?

OL' OLLIE

I'm not able to tell you, Ma'am, because it's of a delicate nature. I was hoping to talk to the padre.

STR. JOSEPH

He's not here. I don't think he'll be back for several days.

OL' OLLIE

Spreading the good Lord's word, is he?

STR. JOSEPH

Yes.

GRANT

You can talk to me, Ol' Ollie.

OL' OLLIE

It's embarrassing, sir, and you being the quartermaster and all.

GRANT

You can talk to me man-to-man, old feller. Come on, let's go down to the creek. We'll find a shady spot and sit and talk privately.

OL' OLLIE

If it's all right with you, Sister, I'll leave my gear here.

STR. JOSEPH

Of course. Take your cups of tea with you, gentlemen—  
but remember to bring them back.

OL' OLLIE

Thank you, Ma'am—Sister.

*The two men exit. Str. Joseph resumes hammering on the smoke house. Str Praxades enters.*

STR. PRAXADES

It's intolerably hot inside.

STR. JOSEPH

It's shady here. Sit down and shuck the peas.

*The two nuns do their work silently for a minute.*

STR. PRAXADES

We can't let that old man stay here. He might  
have something contagious.

STR. JOSEPH

You should not eavesdrop, Sister Praxades.

STR. PRAXADES

You must get the Captain to take him back down to  
the fort and keep him there till he dies.

STR. JOSEPH

That is not very charitable, Sister.

STR. PRAXADES

Charity must begin at home in times of need.

STR. JOSEPH

I've never heard such nonsense. Our Lord taught us  
to feed the hungry and clothe the naked. He never  
said only do so if you have plenty of food and clothes  
for yourself first.

STR. PRAXADES

Wonder if that old man is contagious? It would be  
better if he went—

STR. JOSEPH

I am the Superior here, Sister, and I will decide who  
stays and who goes.

STR. PRAXADES

I only said he might be contagious.

STR. JOSEPH

What's wrong with him is not contagious. It's called old age—weariness to the bone. He's lived most of his life alone in these mountains. He only wants companionship and comfort in a warm shelter until the good Lord calls him home. Would you deny him this?

STR. PRAXEDES

We don't have enough food to feed everybody.

STR. JOSEPH

We will rely on God.

STR. PRAXADES

God doesn't transform loaves and fishes anymore.

STR. JOSEPH

Sister, your lack of faith is daunting.

STR. PRAXADES

Your lack of common sense is what's daunting! Between you building a smoke house and Father Tossi off converting the savages and buying blankets for every wagonload of strangers that pass by—and Margaret singing all the time—I'm the only one who seems to understand that winter is rapidly approaching and there is no food stored!

STR. JOSEPH

I'm building this smoke house, Sister, for that very reason, and we have the cow for milk—

STR. PRAXADES

—unless we have to eat it first!

STR. JOSEPH

God led us here. He won't let us starve.

STR. PRAXADES

What was Father Tossi thinking, bringing us here with no supplies, no convent, no—

STR. JOSEPH

You're becoming hysterical, Sister Praxades. Go pray. Say the rosary for us.

STR. PRAXADES

There's too much work for me to—

STR. JOSEPH

Go pray before I lose my temper and say things to you I don't wish to say. Ask God to send me patience and you some tolerance while you're at it.

STR. PRAXADES

And what are you going to do while I pray?

STR. JOSEPH

I'm going to build this smoke house!

*Scene.*

ACT ONE  
Scene Four

*Str. Joseph is working on the smoke house. Woman Who Takes Long Walks Alone in the Woods enters, carrying a tiny baby.*

WOMAN WHO TAKES LONG WALKS ALONE IN THE WOODS

I'm lookin' for that Sister Joseph.

STR JOSEPH

I am that Sister—why, it's Woman-Who-Walks...er...  
Takes-Walks...By-Herself—it's Mrs. St. Clare, isn't it?

*Woman Who Takes Long Walks Alone in the Woods stares at her in confusion, then recognizes her. She places the baby into Str. Joseph's arms.*

WOMAN WHO TAKES LONG WALKS ALONE IN THE WOODS

There she is.

STR JOSEPH

Ah, she's beautiful! So tiny! God's greatest miracle.  
Did you bring her for Father to baptize? He isn't here  
at the moment, but if you...

WOMAN WHO TAKES LONG WALKS ALONE IN THE WOODS

No, Ma'am. I come to give my lil' kit to you.  
I hear you got that orphanage now, and this lil'  
kit is surely gonna die if she stays with me.

STR JOSEPH

Oh, no, no, no. I haven't built our orphanage yet.  
Probably not until next spring. You see, I...

WOMAN WHO TAKES LONG WALKS ALONE IN THE WOODS

She won't last till spring, Ma'am.

STR JOSEPH

Why is that?

WOMAN WHO TAKES LONG WALKS ALONE IN THE WOODS

Winter's too harsh up north for a scrawny kit like her.  
She won't make it through the winter. I'm frankly  
surprised I made it through the last one myself.

STR JOSEPH

Where is her father?

WOMAN WHO TAKES LONG WALKS ALONE IN THE WOODS

Dead.

STR JOSEPH

I meant Pim.

WOMAN WHO TAKES LONG WALKS ALONE IN THE WOODS

Pim says she's Big Sy's child.

STR. JOSEPH

Is there any chance of that?

WOMAN WHO TAKES LONG WALKS ALONE IN THE WOODS

Well, of course there is. How do I know which of them  
pigs is her father? They've both poked me often enough.

STR. JOSEPH

Oh...er...well...perhaps you should not go back up  
north with Pim then.

WOMAN WHO TAKES LONG WALKS ALONE IN THE WOODS

Why?

STR. JOSEPH

If Pim hurts you...

WOMAN WHO TAKES LONG WALKS ALONE IN THE WOODS

He'd hurt me more if I told him I wasn't comin'.  
You jest take care of the lil' kit, Ma'am. Raise  
her up right, like a lady, like you.

STR JOSEPH

In the very least, you'll have to sign papers making  
us her legal guardian until you come back for her.

WOMAN WHO TAKES LONG WALKS ALONE IN THE WOODS

Ma'am. I can't read nor write, but I'll put my  
"X" on whatever paper you say, but we got to  
do it fast. I came far out of my way to bring  
her here, cause I didn't want to jest leave her  
under a tree, like he told me to. But I got to go.

STR JOSEPH

Pim told you to leave her under a tree?

WOMAN WHO TAKES LONG WALKS ALONE IN THE WOODS  
Got to go, Ma'am.

*Sister Joseph hurriedly grabs the sketch she's made of the building she is working on. She has a pen and a bottle of ink nearby too.*

STR JOSEPH  
What's the child's name?

WOMAN WHO TAKES LONG WALKS ALONE IN THE WOODS  
No name, Ma'am. She was jst born yesterday.

STR JOSEPH  
She's got to have a name.

WOMAN WHO TAKES LONG WALKS ALONE IN THE WOODS  
What'd your mother call you?

STR. JOSEPH  
Esther.

WOMAN WHO TAKES LONG WALKS ALONE IN THE WOODS  
That'll do.

STR JOSEPH  
Put your "X" here. This means that we're your daughter's guardians while you're gone. When you come back, her guardianship will revert back to you, providing you show us you can take good care of her.

*Woman Who Takes Long Walks Alone in the Woods makes her "X" and turns without even kissing the baby goodbye. .*

WOMAN WHO TAKES LONG WALKS ALONE IN THE WOODS  
Won't be coming back. Much obliged. (*She is gone in an instant.*)

STR JOSEPH  
Well, Esther, born yesterday, were you?  
My goodness, you *are* a pretty little kit.

*Sister Praxades enters.*

STR. PRAXADES  
What is that?

STR. JOSEPH  
A baby.

STR. PRAXADES

Where did it come from?

STR. JOSEPH

Heaven.

STR. PRAXADES

That squaw left it, didn't she? They couple like animals and abandon their babies like they're so much trash.

STR. JOSEPH

Does an animal abandoning her baby wrap her in a quilt like this? This baby was well taken care of... even her bringing her here shows what a loving mother she is. And she's hungry. So—here—you take her while I go milk the cow.

*Sister Joseph gives the baby to Str. Praxades and walks away.*

STR. PRAXADES

What am I supposed to do with her? Ahhh...Margaret!

*Scene.*

ACT ONE  
Scene Five

*Ol' Ollie is sitting in a chair, covered with a blanket, and eating a bowl of food. Margaret, the baby in a sling, is humming while she peels potatoes.*

OL' OLLIE

This gruel is surely delicious!

MARGARET

*(Laughing)* It's farina. Looks like your appetite is coming back.

OL' OLLIE

I surely didn't mean to come here and catch pu'monia right away. I don't want be a burden to you fine ladies.

MARGARET

You are no burden—and you don't have pneumonia. Sister Joseph says you're exhausted and you've caught a chill. *(She begins to hum to the baby again.)*

OL' OLLIE

I know yer singin' to that young 'un, but I could set here and listen to you, too, all day. You're mighty good at caring for babies. You come from a big family, do ya, May'grit?

Fort Vancouver by Sharon Sassone

MARGARET

I'm the eldest of thirteen. I've been taking care of babies all my life.

OL' OLLIE

And you came to hate 'em, did you?

MARGARET

No! What makes you ask that?

OL' OLLIE

Well why else would a pretty, young gal like you waste yer life being a nun?

MARGARET

I assure you I have no intention of wasting my life. And what about you? Have you wasted your life?

OL' OLLIE

Yer a sassy whipper snap, ain't ya? Ain't you been taught to respect yer elders?

MARGARET

I'm sorry, I didn't—

OL' OLLIE

I'm teasing you, lassie. No offense a'tall. Did I waste my life? Dang, if I know how to begin to answer that one.

MARGARET

Have you ever been married?

OL' OLLIE

Nope...well...not legally.

MARGARET

Do you have any family?

OL' OLLIE

Well, I had a ma and pa jest like everybody's got to, but I left home when I was still a boy. Hated being behind a plow year after year. Wanted to roam, and roam I have.

MARGARET

Where you from?

OL' OLLIE

Let's see, well—hmmm—somewhere back east. If that ain't the damndest thing. I can't rightly recall. The memory goes when you're two hundred years old.

MARGARET

You can't be two hundred years old!

OL' OLLIE

Who says I cain't? How old are you?

MARGARET

Eighteen.

OL' OLLIE

Pshaw. You ain't hardly born.

*Captain Grant appears, helping a young, frail, man, ABNER LLOYD, walk into the mission.*

MARGARET

Captain Grant! *(Running inside)* Sister Joseph!

OL' OLLIE

Why, Abner Lloyd, is it? What in tarnation happened to you? *(He gives Abner his chair.)*

ABNER

Aw, I got the consumption, Ol' Ollie.

OL' OLLIE

Now that's jest terrible, Abner, jest terrible.

GRANT

You know Abner? Dang, you know everybody!

*Strs. Joseph and Praxades enter with Margaret. Str. Joseph is carrying another blanket. She goes to wrap Abner, sees that he has Ol' Ollie's blanket, and wraps the old man instead.*

STR JOSEPH

Good day, Captain.

GRANT

Sister Joseph, this is Mr. Abner Lloyd. Abner, Sister Joseph and Sister Praxades.

ABNER

Thank you for taking me in, Sisters.

STR. PRAXADES

What????

GRANT

Abner needs to be nursed, Sister. He's very weak.

STR. PRAXADES

We have no hospital yet—and limited supplies. He'll have to go, Captain. You shouldn't have—

STR JOSEPH

Sister Praxades. *(To Abner)* We'll get something hot into you right away, Mr. Lloyd. Margaret—

MARGARET

The farina's still hot, Sister. *(She hurries off.)*

STR JOSEPH

Just rest now after your exhausting trip up here, Mr. Lloyd.

ABNER

Thank you, Sister. But I liked being outside. I've been in my cabin quite a few weeks now. I'd nearly forgotten how tall the fir trees are—and so beautiful—tipped with the glistening sunlight.

GRANT

Abner used to be something of a poet when he wasn't being a blacksmith.

ABNER

Now that I have the consumption, I don't have the strength to do either.

STR PRAXADES

The consumption???

STR JOSEPH

Sister, go make some tea.

STR PRAXADES

Margaret is getting—

STR JOSEPH

Farina. I want you to get tea, Sister Praxades.

*Sister Praxades looks as if she might argue, but on second thought, she turns and storms off. Margaret returns with a bowl of farina.*

MARGARET

Now you eat this farina, Mr. Lloyd. We'll just have to take very good care of you to get you well again. *(Abner gazes at her. She has captured another heart.)*

ABNER

Why, thank you, Sister.

OL' OLLIE

Margaret ain't a nun yet, Abner, she's a pos'u'lent.

Fort Vancouver by Sharon Sassone

ABNER

But she has a baby. I mean, you have a beautiful baby—

MARGARET

Little Esther is an orphan, Mr. Lloyd.

OL' OLLIE

Big Sy's baby...or Pim's...we ain't sure.

ABNER

She's better off without either one of them for a father...  
and she couldn't have a nicer gal for a new mammy,  
looks to me. Now all she needs is a new pappy.

MARGARET

Ah...I'll go help Sister Praxades. *(She exits.)*

OL' OLLIE

My, ain't you a smooth talker?

*Grant walks away from the group and signals to Sister Joseph.*

GRANT

Sister, a word please? *(She joins him.)*  
I don't want to forget to give you this, Sister.

STR JOSEPH

Ten dollars! Are you trying to bribe me, Captain?

GRANT

No!

STR JOSEPH

Oh, I was hoping you were.

GRANT

I know better than that, Sister. I can afford to help feed  
young Abner here. I wish it could be more, but you  
know I have to send my pay to Julia and the babies.

STR JOSEPH

I can't take money from your family—

ABNER

Didn't you hear he won the race yesterday?

GRANT

Uh, this is a private conversation, Abner.

OL' OLLIE

Yer only six feet away, Sam, not invisible.

STR JOSEPH

You ran in a race, Captain Grant?

GRANT

I didn't run, Sister, Cincinnati did.

STR JOSEPH

Then this is Mr. Cincinnati's money?

GRANT

I don't know if anyone's ever called him "mister" before.

ABNER

The way he struts, I declare he probably would like it.

STR JOSEPH

Uh huh. And just who or what is this Cincinnati?

*Abner can contain himself no longer. He bursts with laughter.*

ABNER

It's his horse, Ma'am!

STR JOSEPH

You won this money in a horse race?

GRANT

Uh, oh. Is horse racing a sin too?

ABNER

Sister, don't you know Captain Grant is the best horse man in the country?

STR JOSEPH

The whole country?

GRANT

Well, maybe just this half of the country.

ABNER

No—the entire country! Why, he's been banned from every circus, carnival, and rodeo in the U. S. of A.

STR JOSEPH

I don't doubt it, but what has that got to do with your horsemanship?

GRANT

It's apparent that you have been told only of my sins, Sister Joseph, and not my accomplishments. I can ride any horse, mount any mustang—break any wild pony is half an hour—

STR JOSEPH

—half an hour?

ABNER

It's true! I've seen him do it! And he holds the longest-standing record for the highest jump at West Point... twenty-five feet high was it, Captain?

GRANT

Er...not quite that high, but close.

STR JOSEPH

And why does this get you thrown out of circuses?

ABNER

Because they offer a prize, you see, for any rider who can stay on their trick horse. They train the horse to buck off any man. Start and stop. Start and stop. Nobody can stay on, nobody.

STR JOSEPH

Except you, Captain?

GRANT

*(Teasing)* Shucks, Ma'am, I am too modest to admit it... but yes.

*Abner has a coughing spell from all his talking.*

STR JOSEPH

Don't exhaust yourself, Mr. Lloyd.

ABNER

Naw, I'm fine. Haven't you ever been to a circus, Sister, or a rodeo?

STR JOSEPH

A little circus used to come through our village. They had marionettes.

ABNER

No, I'm talking about a big circus—with a huge striped tent and dancing bears and lots of horses and trick ponies!

STR JOSEPH

No, I never saw anything like that.

ABNER

Well, I'll be, I thought everybody'd heard about the Captain's winning every trick pony challenge on the circuit till they out and out banned him from any circus.

GRANT

One time, I was outmaneuvering every trick this one pony had up her sleeve. She kicked and stopped and threw herself all around the ring—and I still was a riding—and then the owner of the circus—he—it makes me die of laughter just to think about it—

STR JOSEPH

—What?

ABNER

A monkey!!!!!!

GRANT

He gets this big—huge—ole' monkey whose part of their show and throws this monkey on my shoulders as I'm circling the ring. With the horse pitching between my legs and the monkey pulling my hair and scratching my neck, I still hold on, not letting a muscle of my face show any weakness—the crowd screaming and whooping and busting their guts with hilarity! I circled that ring so many times the owner finally gave up and gave me the prize money.

ABNER

Didn't you ever hear of him on the carnival circuit, Sister? I'm surprised you didn't hear of him! *(He's coughing.)*

STR JOSEPH

No, it's something I've missed in my life.

ABNER

Aw, I'm sorry for you, Sister.

STR JOSEPH

So you won this money racing some poor fool who didn't know your prowess as a horseman?

GRANT

I can't win with you, can I? It was a ten-dollar prize. I won the race fair and square. I'm donating the money to the mission. If you'll take it. Will you take it, Sister Joseph?

OL' OLLIE

No, she won't—

STR JOSEPH

I'll take it.

GRANT

Mighty neighborly of you, Sister. Thank you.

OL' OLLIE

Well I'll be—

GRANT

It won't get you through the winter, I'm afraid.

STR JOSEPH

The Lord provides.

GRANT

I hope so.

STR JOSEPH

He just gave me ten dollars, didn't he?

*Scene.*

ACT ONE

Scene Six

*That same night. The stage is lit by moonlight. The SOUNDS of the mountain night are heard in the distance. Father Tossi arrives, tired and hungry. He trips over a lump on the ground. Ol' Ollie sits up and points his weapon.*

OL' OLLIE

Who goes there?

TOSSI

Father Tossi—don't shoot me, Ollie!

OL' OLLIE

Why, padre, yer home awfully late.  
*(Someone else sits up.)*

TOSSI

Who is this?

ABNER

Abner Lloyd, sir. Remember me? I used to be the town blacksmith?

Fort Vancouver by Sharon Sassone

TOSSI

Of course I remember you. What are you doing here, Abner?

ABNER

I got the consumption, sir.

*Sister Joseph rushes out, brandishing a large hammer. She wears a nightcap and has quickly thrown a blanket around her shoulders.*

STR JOSEPH

What is it? What is it? A coyote? A bobcat? What—

TOSSI

Just me, Sister. You may put down your weapon.

STR. JOSEPH

Father! I'm sorry. I thought—

TOSSI

—that you could kill a bobcat with a hammer?

*Str. Praxades enters, similarly dressed like Str. Joseph.*

STR PRAXADES

What's wrong? Father Tossi, is that you? Thank God you're back safely. I'll get you something to eat.

TOSSI

No, thank you, Sister. I'm exhausted. I'll just bunk down here with the men.

STR PRAXADES

Hot tea? Some coffee? You must be cold—

TOSSI

Just dead tired.

STR PRAXADES

Then I'll see you in the morning, Father. It will be good to have you say Mass for us. Good night, Father.

TOSSI

Good night, Sister.

STR PRAXADES

Coming, Sister Joseph?

STR JOSEPH

In a moment. I'm awake now—and it's a bracing night.

Fort Vancouver by Sharon Sassone

*Str. Praxades exits. Str. Joseph looks out into the dark and Tossi joins her. He stretches.*

TOSSI

It is a bracing night, isn't it?

STR JOSEPH

Am I keeping you from sleeping, Father? I'll just—

TOSSI

No, no, no...it's my back...that's a lot of bumpy miles to cover on horseback. And I'm not getting any younger.

STR JOSEPH

No, you're not.

TOSSI

You don't have to agree so readily.

STR JOSEPH

Would it help if I admitted that I'm not getting any younger, either? *(They chuckle.)*

TOSSI

From what I can see in the dark, looks like you built some good-sized buildings.

STR JOSEPH

That's a cabin we're going to use as a little hospital.

TOSSI

Very good. And what's that over there?

STR JOSEPH

That's a smokehouse—oh—and your bedroom below it. *(He looks at her dryly.)* You won't go hungry.

TOSSI

Could have been worse—we need a new outhouse too.

*All is silent again. A lone coyote HOWLS.*

TOSSI

The coyotes are in fine voice tonight.

STR JOSEPH

Do they scare you when you're riding alone out there?

TOSSI

The coyotes are the least of my worries.

STR JOSEPH

What—

*Suddenly, a loud, hysterical SCREAM, almost like a child if one didn't know better, is heard. She jumps sky high. The men on the ground sit up. Sister Praxades and Margaret rush outside.*

STR PRAXADES

Injuns? Is it Injuns?

OL' OLLIE

Wolf.

STR PRAXADES

Wolves don't sound like that—

MARGARET

—do they?????

*The SCREAM comes again, but further away. Sister Praxades and Margaret SCREAM.*

TOSSI

Don't worry, Sisters. It's moving away from us. Go on back to bed.

STR PRAXADES

Aren't you afraid it will eat you, sleeping out here? Come sleep in the kitchen, Father.

OL' OLLIE

*(To Abner)* I guess she don't mind if we get eaten, Abner.

ABNER

Perhaps you could go indoors, Ol' Ollie. You don't have to sleep out here on my account. Sister Praxades just wants to keep me outside because I got the consumption.

STR PRAXADES

I never said that!

ABNER

Yes, you did, when I asked to sleep in the kitchen, you said—

STR JOSEPH

She did, did she? I thought you frontiersmen preferred sleeping outdoors. I did not know you'd asked to sleep in the kitchen.

STR PRAXADES

Er...they...I...Mr. Lloyd...he's contagious!

STR JOSEPH

Ol' Ollie, you and Abner are welcome to sleep in the kitchen.

OL' OLLIE

I wouldn't mind a little extra warmth, Ma'am.

ABNER

Me neither. Thank you very much, Sister.

*They take their sleeping bags and go inside. Str. Praxades looks ashamedly at Str. Joseph and Father Tossi.*

TOSSI

It isn't always easy doing God's Will, Sister, but you certainly know that God does not wish for those two men to sleep on the ground when there is a warm floor a few feet away from them.

STR PRAXADES

Abner Lloyd has consumption, Father. So now he's in our cabin, on our kitchen floor, near our food, spreading his disease throughout the house—perhaps to the baby—

TOSSI

Baby?

STR PRAXADES

Yes, we have a baby. Our little group just keeps growing and growing, with no food stored, no money, and now consumption amongst us!

TOSSI

Nobody knows if consumption is contagious or not, Sister. Some people in a family catch it. Some don't.

STR PRAXADES

We'll find out if that's the case here soon enough, won't we, Father? Sister Joseph acts like she's not worried, but in truth—

TOSSI

You can't know Sister Joseph's truth, Sister Praxades. Go to bed. We'll discuss this in the light of day.

STR PRAXADES

But...yes, sir...good night, Father.

*Str. Praxades exits. Str. Joseph remains silent.*

TOSSI

Have you known her long?

STR JOSEPH

She was already a Sister of Charity when I took my vows ten years ago. She is significantly older than I am and furious that she was not given the leadership here.

TOSSI

Why wasn't she?

STR JOSEPH

If you can't see, Father, then I'm not going to waste my breath.

TOSSI

You can be too sharp sometimes, Sister. And impatient with those who need your patience.

STR JOSEPH

She could try the patience of Job. She's supposed to be here to help me, but I don't know what to do with her half the time. Every instruction I give her becomes a struggle of wills.

TOSSI

And that's another thing—your strong will—arrogance even.

STR JOSEPH

You don't have to like me, Father—

TOSSI

I didn't say I don't like you—

STR JOSEPH

—but you have to admit I'm getting things done. I've built a smoke house, the—

TOSSI

—You're doing a fine job, Sister.

STR JOSEPH

—you may not be able to call the cabin a hospital, but it's a beginning...more than you ever built...and I would think you would give me credit for—

TOSSI

Whoa! I am very pleased with what you've done in the short time I've been gone, , but let us not forget why you came here—to do those very things you are doing.

STR JOSEPH

Thank you for reminding me, Father...of course...I was told I had come here to build a hospital...Mother Superior never mentioned an orphanage...or a school...or a smoke house. *(They both laugh.)* But now that you're back, Father, you can help me with the heavy work and we can get the roof on the—

TOSSI

—er, I'm not actually *back* exactly.

STR JOSEPH

What?

TOSSI

I can't stay. I still have families to visit before winter sets in. And I have to get up to the gold mines before they get snowed in. And I have to get to one of my tribes near Walla Walla. They're battling measles—

STR JOSEPH

—well at least measles isn't fatal.

TOSSI

It is to them. They don't have an immunity to these white-man diseases. It's wiped out half the tribe, almost all the children already.

STR JOSEPH

Oh, no!

TOSSI

I promised I'd bring them some more blankets. They'll freeze if I don't.

STR JOSEPH

Then they must have them, but, Father, we don't have that many blankets.

TOSSI

Captain Grant is getting me a good price on them from the Hudson Bay Company. The thing is—I need to use the balance of the money from Monsignor Blanchett.

STR JOSEPH

I see.

TOSSI

Do you think you can write to Mother Superior and ask her for money to get through the winter?

STR JOSEPH

There must be another way.

TOSSI

You mustn't be too proud to ask, Sister.

STR JOSEPH

I'm not being proud. Mother Superior already robs Peter to pay Paul. We're Sisters of "Charity." We have no money of our own. Our leaving meant that she would have fewer mouths to feed. Mother Superior did not plan on supporting your mission in addition to the entire Sisters of Charity community!

TOSSI

"My" mission? How is it my personal mission?

STR JOSEPH

You wrote to Mother Superior asking for nuns to serve as nurses at your mission. You led us to believe that there was a mission here—

TOSSI

This is a mission!

STR JOSEPH

This is a cabin and a barn—and poorly-built ones at that! Oh, I knew I would have to do some carpentry work, but you never said I would have to build civilization itself! You said there would be a convent for us—

TOSSI

Monsignor Blanchett said that—

STR JOSEPH

—but he gave you the money to build it—

TOSSI

I could't get it done!

STR JOSEPH

Why not????

TOSSI

Don't shout at me, Sister!

STR JOSEPH

Don't shout at me, Father!

*They both calm down and sit quietly.*

Fort Vancouver by Sharon Sassone

TOSSI

I told the Monsignor this was no place for women. He said God would take care of you. And I never lied—I simply omitted a few details. I'm not a carpenter, Sister, I'm a missionary. My people are out there—in the camps, in the tribes. I can't sit here and play nursemaid to you women.

I

STR JOSEPH

Who asked you to play nursemaid? I can take care of myself and my charges, I assure you.

TOSSI

Good. Because I have to leave in two days. How much money do you have?

STR JOSEPH

Fifteen dollars.

TOSSI

That much?

STR JOSEPH

Captain Grant gave me ten and I had five left from traveling.

TOSSI

Grant's a good man...was he drunk when he gave you the money?

STR JOSEPH

No, but I would have taken it either way. Now, what can I do to earn some more money? What is the first thing every man needs around here?

TOSSI

Ah—you can't do that, Sister.

STR JOSEPH

Oh! Well, then, what is the second thing?

TOSSI

I trust you will discover it in God's time.

STR JOSEPH

I trust I will.

TOSSI

I think I am ready to sleep now, Sister.

STR JOSEPH

There's room in the kitchen for you, Father.

Fort Vancouver by Sharon Sassone

TOSSI

No, I'm used to sleeping under the stars. And like you said, it is such a bracing night. Good night, then, Sister.

STR JOSEPH

'Night, Father.

TOSSI

God bless you, Sister Joseph.

STR JOSEPH

*(After a long pause.)* You, too, Father.

*Sister Joseph stands aside, watching the night, then she goes inside.*

*Scene.*

ACT ONE

Scene Eight

*Sister Joseph is chopping wood. Margaret is working at a spinning wheel. Ol' Ollie is scaling fish. Abner sits weakly in the chair, tightly covered with his blanket.*

ABNER

It was mighty kind of Captain Grant to bring you that spinning wheel.

STR JOSEPH

Too bad none of us knows how to use it.

MARGARET

Well, now, I recall watching my grandmother use hers. She always said the flange's tauntness can make or break the thread. *(Sister Praxades enters.)*

STR PRAXADES

I finally got Esther to sleep. My goodness, that baby fights sleeping.

OL' OLLIE

Must be her Injun blood—they don't sleep much.

*The women look like they might answer him, but decide against it.*

STR PRAXADES

Sister Joseph, rest your back for a while. Let me take that. *(She takes the ax from Sister Joseph.)*

STR JOSEPH

Why, thank you, Sister.

*Sister Praxades hands the ax to Margaret. Margaret obediently starts chopping wood.*

STR PRAXADES

Let's see if I can make heads or tails out of this thing.  
Nobody in my family ever spun—or is it span?

OL' OLLIE

Spinned.

STR PRAXADES

Sister Joseph, we have enough flour for one, maybe two,  
more loaves of bread. Then it's gone.

STR JOSEPH

I wonder how much a bag of flour costs in town.

ABNER

Around forty cents a pound.

STR PRAXADES

Are you certain it's that much, Abner?

ABNER

I've been feeding myself for two years here, Sister.

STR JOSEPH

Captain Grant has offered to get us some for 25 percent off.

OL' OLLIE

That still ain't good.

STR JOSEPH

No, that still ain't good.

STR PRAXADES

Can't he give it to us for free?

STR JOSEPH

He's the quartermaster. He can't steal the supplies in his  
care. All he can do is give us a discount.

STR PRAXADES

Thirty cents a pound is still highway robbery.

ABNER

It's better than forty cents, Sister.

STR PRAXADES

Starve for forty cents or starve for thirty.

STR JOSEPH

Which brings me to the subject I wish to discuss with all of you and now seems as good a time as any.

STR PRAXADES

What is it?

STR JOSEPH

I have a plan to raise money for the winter. This plan may not appeal to all of you, but it is necessary.

STR PRAXEDES

*(Attempting humor)* You're going to sell me at auction?

STR JOSEPH

Who would buy you? No, I have a real plan, a plan revealed to me by Our Lord during my fervent prayers.

ABNER

Hallelulah!

OL' OLLIE

I'm all ears.

STR JOSEPH

The gold mines. There's money in the gold mines.

OL' OLLIE

You want to mine fer gold?

STR JOSEPH

Not mine, beg. We'll go on a begging tour to the gold mines and tell the miners all about our mission and our baby and Abner and Ol'Ollie—explaining the dire straights we're in. Surely they'll donate some of their gold dust.

STR PRAXADES

You want to go on a begging tour?

STR JOSEPH

The history of our Mother Church is full of such begging tours. Many of our greatest saints begged from town to town in support of the poor.

ABNER

It would be a very strenuous trip. I'm not sure I could—

STR JOSEPH

Oh, but, Abner, I need you to stay here and take care of the mission.

ABNER

Are you sure it's not too strenuous for you too, Sister?  
It isn't easy crossing those mountains.

STR JOSEPH

Our dear Lord will give us strength.

OL' OLLIE

I'd have to go with you, of course.

STR JOSEPH

Uh—Captain Grant is taking me—

STR PRAXADES

—and me.

MARGARET

I'd like your permission to accompany you, Sister.

STR PRAXADES

You have to take care of the baby.

STR JOSEPH

I need you to take care of the baby, Sister. Margaret  
will come with us.

STR PRAXADES

Why Margaret instead of me?

STR JOSEPH

She is half your age, if you force me to say it.

STR PRAXADES

There is many a good tune played on an old fiddle.

STR JOSEPH

And you will stay here and fiddle. We will be climbing  
over a mountain and a young violin will be more useful.

OL' OLLIE

I reckon Margaret purdy smile will get those old miners  
to give you some money.

STR JOSEPH

That thought has crossed my mind, I admit.

STR PRAXADES

You're going to use Margaret like a painted woman?

STR JOSEPH

Don't be melodramatic, Sister. Men enjoy looking at her. That's all. She'll smile. They'll give money.

STR PRAXADES

That's immoral.

STR JOSEPH

There is nothing immoral about it. God gave her this beauty. Why shouldn't we use it?

STR PRAXADES

If you do that, I'll...I'll...I'll write to Mother Superior... or the Monsignor...or the Bishop!

STR JOSEPH

Write to whomever you wish. Don't forget to ask them to send farina. I wonder why they don't sell that here in the Territories? Anyway, you will stay here and take care of the baby with Ol' Ollie and Abner.

OL' OLLIE

No, ma'am, I'm comin' with you. I know them mountains like I know my fingers and toes.

STR JOSEPH

Captain Grant can—

OL' OLLIE

He's from Ohio, fer lands' sake! You need someone who knows this land forwards and backwards!

STR JOSEPH

Do you think you're up to it?

OL' OLLIE

Sister, jest the thought of one more trip up into my mountains makes me feel like a young man of only seventy-five or eighty!

ABNER

Blast it, I wish I could go! I'm just useless. I can't chop wood nor milk the cow—nothing. I'm useless!

STR JOSEPH

Captain Grant's going to post two soldiers here while we're gone. They'll do the heavy work, but Sister

Praxades will need your sound council and expertise. This territory is still new to her.

STR PRAXADES

Sounds like you've got it all planned then.

STR JOSEPH

Yes.

STR PRAXADES

Without talking it over with anybody.

STR JOSEPH

I talked it over with God...and Captain Grant.

STR PRAXADES

Well...then it's all arranged.

*Sister Praxades stands to leave.*

STR JOSEPH

Sister Praxades, will you lead us in a novena to our Blessed Mother for the success of the begging tour?

STR PRAXADES

Now?

STR JOSEPH

But of course now. What better time?

*Str. Praxades begins to complain, then catches herself and gets down on her knees. The others, except for Str. Joseph, get down too. Str. Praxades begins the sign of the cross, the others join in, and Str. Joseph stands smugly watching Str. Praxades.*

*Scene.*

ACT ONE

Scene Nine

*Three days later. Str. Joseph, in her traveling habit, is saying goodbye to Str. Praxades, who holds the baby, and Abner. Abner's cough has gotten worse.*

ABNER

Be sure to camp near water—

STR JOSEPH

We will.

ABNER

—and keep a fire going all night. *(He coughs.)*

Fort Vancouver by Sharon Sassone

STR JOSEPH

The nights shouldn't get that cold yet.

ABNER

There are wolves in these mountains, Sister. You keep that fire lit. Ol' Ollie and Captain Grant know that, too, of course, but I can't stress it enough.

STR JOSEPH

Thank you, Abner. Sister Praxades, give Abner some honey to soothe his cough.

ABNER

And bears. Protect your horses at night, because the bears will eat them for supper if you don't.

STR JOSEPH

You mustn't worry so, Abner. God is with us.

STR PRAXADES

I still don't think this is a good idea.

STR JOSEPH

And what else is new?

*Margaret, in traveling clothes, appears from down the hill.*

MARGARET

We're all packed up, Sister. All we need is you.

STR JOSEPH

Then I'm off. Pray for us.

*Margaret kisses the baby's head.*

MARGARET

Goodbye, sweet Esther. Good bye, Sister Praxades.

STR PRAXADES

God be with you.

MARGARET

And you, Sister, and God be with you, Abner.

ABNER

And you, too, Margaret. Goodbye.

*Margaret and Sister Joseph begin to leave.*

ABNER

Don't forget to watch out for snakes!

*Sister Joseph and Margaret hike up their skirts in unison and exit.*

*Scene.*

*End of Act One.*

*\*\* Intermission \*\**

ACT TWO

Scene One

*It is twilight. Margaret, and Ol'Ollie are bedding down for the night. Sister Joseph is admiring the landscape. . Captain Grant enters.*

GRANT

The horses are hobbled. Everyone content here?

OL' OLLIE

I'm as happy as a clam. Full belly. Warm night.  
My mountains.

MARGARET

Listen to the crickets.

STR JOSEPH

How magnificent is God. Who else but He could  
have created *such* magnificence?

MARGARET

Amen.

STR JOSEPH

Look at the stars. That may be the Drinking Gourd over there.

OL' OLLIE

I'll have to take your word for it.

GRANT

Best get some sleep. The constellations will be here  
tomorrow night, too.

STR JOSEPH

Don't forget to say your prayers, Margaret.

MARGARET

I never forget that, Sister.

OL' OLLIE

Put in a good word to the Lord fer me.

STR JOSEPH

You might try talking to Him yourself.

OL' OLLIE

Heck, he wouldn't even recognize my voice no more.

*Time passes. Stars twinkle. Crickets sing. Moonlight beams. All is perfect.*

MARGARET

There's something on my legs!

STR JOSEPH

What? What is it?

MARGARET

Something *alive!*

STR JOSEPH

Kick it away!

GRANT

No! Don't move. Stay completely still.

*Grant and Ol' Ollie move silently to Margaret. Ol' Ollie takes the blanket's corner as Grant raises his rifle high.*

MARGARET

The Lord is my Shepherd...ah! It's crawling up...

GRANT

Don't speak!

STR JOSEPH

Oh, Lord, don't let it be a...

MARGARET

*SNAKE !!!!!*

GRANT

Don't move. Wait. Wait. Just wait. Ollie, the blanket.

OL' OLLIE

Ready.

GRANT

Now!

*Ol' Ollie throws back the blanket. Grant, like a super-hero, bashes the snake. Ol' Ollie throws the blanket over it and the two men stomp it to death. Ol' Ollie looks under the blanket.*

STR JOSEPH

Let us pray.

OL' OLLIE

That snake don't need yer prayers. It's as smashed as a pile of manure. This yer first snake, Ma'grit?

MARGARET

Yes.

OL' OLLIE

You wanta keep it fer a souvenir?

MARGARET

No.

OL' OLLIE

You want it, Sam?

GRANT

Naw.

OL' OLLIE

Sister—

STR JOSEPH

No! Thank you.

OL' OLLIE

I don't feel much like skinnin' it myself. I think I'll jest let the buzzards eat it tomorrow.

*Margaret reluctantly lies down and covers herself with a different blanket.*

OL' OLLIE (cont'd)

Good. You lay down. Jest holler if anything else crawls on you.

*Margaret quickly sits up.*

*Scene.*

ACT TWO  
Scene Two

*It is daytime. Scorching heat. Bramble bushes block their way. Sister Joseph and Margaret become tangled in the bushes. They struggle to free each other.*

MARGARET

I don't know how much further I can go, Sister.

STR JOSEPH

Captain Grant wants us to camp up there, Margaret.  
Just a little farther. A little farther.

MARGARET

Why do we have to go up so high?

STR JOSEPH

Don't question the Captain, Margaret. He knows what  
he's doing.

MARGARET

Forgive me, Sister, but this heat.

STR JOSEPH

We're almost there. A little farther—a little farther.

*The women stagger on.*

*Scene.*

ACT TWO  
Scene Three

SNAKE RIVER JUNCTION MINING CAMP—a *grim place*. Several motley MINERS, among them PIM ST. CLARE and a stout fellow named GLASGOW, crowd around to see the rare sight before them—two women—and the youngest one clearly beautiful despite her sunburned face and fly-away hair. Ol' Ollie and Grant bring up the rear, but Ol' Ollie takes the initiative.

OL' OLLIE

Good day to you, gentlemen. Some of you may  
recognize me—

PIM

Ha!

OL' OLLIE

Well, Pim, is that you? How do? Look, Cap'tin Grant,  
Pim St. Clare is here.

Fort Vancouver by Sharon Sassone

GRANT

Pim.

PIM

*(Sneering)* “Captain.”

GLASGOW

Ol’ Ollie? Why, I’ve been wondering whatever became of you, you ole’ sonofabitch!

OL’ OLLIE

Glasgow! It’s right good to see you again too, but you’ll have to mind yer language now there’s ladies amidst us—and they’re of the cloth. Listen up, gen’lemen. This here’s Sister Joseph, the founder of the hospital and orf’ranage down near Fort Vancouver. Perhaps you heard settlers talkin’ about it? The Sister’s got her hands full with a lot of babies and chil-dern and sick folk down there near Fort Vancouver and she needs our help to feed ‘em all.

*Sister Joseph gives Ol’ Ollie a startled look, but does not contradict him.*

PIM

Ha!

OL’ OLLIE

Sister Joseph has come all this way to speak to you on behalf of the sick, the desperate, and the abandoned. She wants a word with you.

*Suddenly WOMAN WHO TAKES LONG WALKS ALONE IN THE WOODS appears. Pim tries to push her away, but she won’t budge. Meanwhile, Sister Joseph had not been expecting to begin her “begging” quite so quickly, but she takes her opportunity.*

STR JOSEPH

God bless you, gentlemen—and lady. I am here to beg—yes, beg—as the saints of the Bible begged for alms for the poor of our mission near Fort Vancouver. We need—

OL’ OLLIE

Every cent you give will be used to feed the chil’dern of her orf’ranage and to heal the sick in her hospital, the first hospital in the Oregon Territory. We need your help, brothers, to make sure the chil’dern—they poor, innocent chil’dern—do not starve this winter. We need blankets and medicine and farina—yes, farina—a special gruel that helps sick folk get well. I’m living proof of that. And she needs beds—yes, beds—which Sister

Joseph can build cause she's a deuce of a carpenter, even though she's a lady, but how can she afford the lumber to make 'em? And feedin' everybody—flour is twenty-five dollars a bag...

GRANT

Er...Ollie....

OL' OLLIE

...or however much it is. We cain't quibble with numbers when so many chil'dern are in need. We have near a dozen orphans and an equal amount of patients in the hospital.

STR JOSEPH

Er...Ol' Ollie...

OL' OLLIE

Help us, brothers. The good Lord has blessed you with this abundant gold. Give generously, brothers, as dear, beautiful Margaret passes amongst you.

*Margaret takes her cue and immediately begins to collect money.*

STR JOSEPH

Each one of you who donates will receive a letter from me guaranteeing you free medicine and care should you get sick and come to our mission hospital.

GLASGLOW

All I have to do is get sick and come to your hospital and you'll make me well again?

STR JOSEPH

If it's humanly possible to make you well again.

GLASGLOW

And if it isn't?

OL' OLLIE

Then we'll take care of you nice and family-like until ya die and then we'll even give you a Catholic fun'a'ral. Uh—that's right, ain't it, Sister?

STR JOSEPH

Oh, yes.

GLASGLOW

That sounds like a fair deal.

OL' OLLIE

You men know you're sinners. This here's the way to get the good Lord to fergive yer sins. Give generously! Come on now, Margaret, take the good men's money!

MARGARET

Thank you, sir...thank you, brother....oh...you, sir?

PIM

Ha.

GLASGOW

Lovely young lady, I am Robert Kenneth MacCleary, not an insubstantial man. I swear to you, if you are brilliant and generous enough as to bestow this tiny, lovely young hand in sacred marriage to me, I will love and honor you forever...

OL' OLLIE

She's gonna be a nun, you damned fool!

GLASGOW

Oh, no! I beg of you, child, don't waste your loveliness on that! Marry me, lassie, and I'll keep you in pretties and dainties and I'll be the best damned husband—

GRANT

Cut out the cussing, both of you!

GLASGOW

Would you look at these golden curls? Why, you're as beautiful as an angel, my darlin'. Tell me you're not really going to let those sweet red lips dry up?

OL' OLLIE

Glasgow, I don't want to have to tell you again. Now take yer paws offa her.

PIM

Ha!

GLASGOW

I beg your pardon. How insensitive of me. Alas, if you cannot marry me, then I shall make a donation in the name of your loveliness. Do you have a bag for some gold dust my dear?

MARGARET

No, sir.

GLASGOW

Then you can have mine, Margie. My sister's name is Margaret too. We call her Margie. Come on, the rest of

you cheap sons-a-bitches, pour some of your dust into the little lady's bag!

OL' OLLIE

Honey, you just got gold dust out of the cheapest man this side of the Continental Divide! I have never known him give a red cent even to any living being.

STR. JOSEPH

Our Lord opens everyone's heart when it's for His blessed little orphans. God bless you, sir...God bless you all!

*Men crowd around Margaret, throwing their wealth at her, as Sister Joseph and the others watch in amazement. Margaret turns to Pim St. Clare and stops abruptly.*

PIM

Get out of my face, or I'll...

*Margaret keeps a smile on her lips, but the strain shows on her face. WOMAN WHO TAKES LONG WALKS ALONE IN THE WOODS approaches Sister Joseph.*

WOMAN WHO TAKES LONG WALKS ALONE IN THE WOODS  
She dead?

STR JOSEPH

Who?

WOMAN WHO TAKES LONG WALKS ALONE IN THE WOODS  
The little kit.

STR JOSEPH

Your baby? No, no, no. She's back at the mission

PIM

Get your ass back to our claim.

*She ignores him and moves closer to Sister Joseph.*

WOMAN WHO TAKES LONG WALKS ALONE IN THE WOODS  
She didn't die yet?

STR JOSEPH

Heavens no. She's doing beautifully, but she would do better with her real mother.

PIM

I said get back to our claim, woman!

WOMAN WHO TAKES LONG WALKS ALONE IN THE WOODS  
I just want to ask her—

*Pim whips out a knife and attacks her. She obviously is adept at dodging his attacks because she defends herself and only her arm gets cut. That's enough for Captain Grant, however, and he draws his pistol and aims at him.*

GRANT

I'll shoot you if I have to, Pim. I won't mind a bit.

*Pim sneers at Grant and rushes offstage.*

GLASGOW

I was hoping you would shoot him, Captain.  
He's been nothing but trouble around here.

STR JOSEPH

Let me see your arm, Woman Who—

*Woman Who Takes Long Walks Alone in the Woods runs after Pim.*

OL' OLLIE

Well, I'll be. No accountin' for some folks.

STR JOSEPH

He may kill her!

GRANT

Nobody made her go, Sister. People are strange  
out here in the wilderness.

STR JOSEPH

I don't understand...

*Ol' Ollie laughs and gives a wicked wink to Grant.*

OLE' OLLIE

Well, Sister, there is some things between men  
and wimmen that nuns don't understand.

STR JOSEPH

That's enough of that kind of talk.

OLE' OLLIE

Yes, ma'am, my lips is sealed.

*Scene.*

ACT TWO

Scene Four

*At a camp site, Str. Joseph, Grant, and Ol' Ollie are sitting around the fire counting the day's take. Margaret walks nearby.*

Fort Vancouver by Sharon Sassone

STR JOSEPH

Two hundred seventy-five...eighty...ninety...we raised close to three hundred dollars here—plus the gold dust!

GRANT

That's more than half a year's pay for me.

STR JOSEPH

Ol' Ollie, you did splendidly—

GRANT

Even if he did make it sound like you have dozens of children back at your orphanage?

STR JOSEPH

Well, yes, Ol' Ollie, no need to exaggerate quite so grandly even if it is for a worthy cause. And you, Margaret, you did splendidly, too. Why don't you come sit by the fire? You'll catch a chill.

MARGARET

Sister, I would like permission to cut off my hair.

OL' OLLIE

No, not that beautiful hair, gal!

STR JOSEPH

The Lord gave you that beautiful hair, Margaret. It truly is a gift.

MARGARET

The Lord has given me many gifts, Sister. My hair is only the most obvious. I suddenly realized today that it's holding me back from showing people my other gifts.

GRANT

Your hair is a big asset to our beggin' tour. You realize that, of course?

STR JOSEPH

Captain.

MARGARET

An asset? Is that what you'd call it? I've never felt so...so ashamed in all my life.

STR JOSEPH

Ashamed? Because you have beautiful hair?

MARGARET

Which men coveted—and fondled—to my shame!

STR JOSEPH

And you would jeopardize the success of our tour to feed and clothe us all this winter, milk for the baby, medicine for Abner, lumber for the mission? You would throw all that away because now you feel ashamed having men admire your beauty?

MARGARET

What do you mean “now?” I’ve always felt uncomfortable being looked at. Maybe I’m only now realizing it. I am only now realizing it.

STR JOSEPH

A fine time to realize it. Most postulants realize it the day they enter the convent. They cut their hair and put on a plain white dress to show their intention to become a nun—oh—but then, you haven’t actually entered the convent—you’re just trying us out, keeping us on pins and needles while you decide, ‘Will I be a nun...or maybe I’ll get a better offer!’

GRANT

Those are very harsh words, Sister.

MARGARET

Is that what you think of me?

GRANT

We have many miles to travel together. Let’s all get some sleep and things will look different in the morning.

STR JOSEPH

Pray to Our Father to guide you in the one decision that is best for everyone concerned, Margaret.

MARGARET

Yes, Sister. *(She clasps her hands in prayer and exits.)*

*Captain Grant takes out his flask and takes a drink.*

STR JOSEPH

You drink right in front of me now? At least before you drank behind my back to hide your weakness.

GRANT

A sip of this might improve your disposition, Sister.

STR JOSEPH

How dare you?

GRANT

How dare you talk to that poor girl that way?

OL' OLLIE

I wouldn't mind a drink, Captain.

STR JOSEPH

Put that poison away, Captain, or...or...

GRANT

...or what, Sister? You know how to find your way home from here without us?

*Grant hands the flask to Ol' Ollie. Str. Joseph flops down on her bedroll, surrendering.*

STR JOSEPH

Why do I bother? Throw your life away. See if I care.

GRANT

Don't start in on my faults now, Sister Joseph.

STR JOSEPH

Oh, but you don't have any faults, do you?

GRANT

You know what your problem is, Sister Joseph?

STR JOSEPH

Apparently you are going to inform me.

GRANT

Well...to quote something from the Bible...although I can't tell you where...you're so hell bent on cutting the sty out of everybody else's eye that you can't see the giant Sequoia tree lodged in your own.

STR JOSEPH

Aren't you the pot calling the kettle black—stumbling drunk on the street like a common tramp, gambling your money away—

GRANT

—I actually win more than I lose—

STR JOSEPH

It's not humorous, Captain Grant! A fine man like you, throwing his life away!

GRANT

I'm throwing my life away? I? I graduated from West Point, for godssake! You know how hard it is to get into West Point? I didn't have any rich relatives. I come from working people—my father is a tanner in addition to a farmer—he worked day and night to pay for my education—

STR JOSEPH

Then why jeopardize it by drinking?

GRANT

Look what they got me doing! A quartermaster, for godssake!

STR JOSEPH

Stop taking the Lord's name in vain!

GRANT

I'm a soldier and they've got me counting blankets and making deals for the cheapest potatoes for the regiment. I fought in the Mexican War—against Santa Anna—I *ordered* the cannon dragged up into that church belfry in Mexico City! Me! *I was in command!* I'm a champion horseman, a brevetted hero, and where do they post me? Where? Northwest of Nowhere—the Oregon Territory. Little Fort Vancouver! And they didn't even put me in charge of the fort—I have to bow and scrape to that bastard Bonneville.

OL' OLLIE

Er...Captain...language.

GRANT

I doubt I said anything Sister Joseph hasn't heard before. You don't strike me as a shrinking violet, Sister.

STR JOSEPH

I was raised in a large family with lots of boys, and I've heard my brothers say many things they shouldn't have—but I never heard them whine like you.

GRANT

Now hold on—

STR JOSEPH

—Oh, boo hoo. Let me get my handkerchief so I can weep proper tears for your tragic story. Your pappa worked *his* life away to get *you* into West Point and they didn't even reward *you* with a fort of your own? Got to spend your days gambling in saloons and falling drunk in the street—

GRANT  
—and taking ungrateful nuns on begging tours!

STR JOSEPH  
Let me just find my hankie....boo hoo!

*Margaret has returned and is listening.*

OL' OLLIE  
We're all tired...do you mind if we all get some sleep now?

GRANT  
One more thing, Sister—

STR JOSEPH  
(*Covering her ears.*) I am no longer listening, Captain Grant!

MARGARET  
“Blessed are the peacemakers,” the Bible says, doesn't it?

*Grant looks guilty and drops onto his bedroll. Sister Joseph rolls over, turning her back on the others. Ol' Ollie and Margaret look at each other and stifle their laughter. They lie down on their bedrolls too.*

*Scene*

ACT TWO  
Scene Five

*The four are sleeping. A WOLF'S HOWL pierces the night. Then ANOTHER. They all awaken.*

OL' OLLIE  
I'll check the horses. (*He exits, carrying his rifle.*)

STR JOSEPH  
Is it safe for him to go alone?

*Grant motions for her to be quiet. Another WOLF is heard. Then ANOTHER and ANOTHER. Grant holds up a finger for each howl.*

GRANT  
(*whispering*) Six, seven?

MARGARET  
What?

STR. JOSEPH  
Wolves.

*More wolves are heard. Then gunfire. The women jump.*

Fort Vancouver by Sharon Sassone

GRANT

That's a big pack. Must be near a dozen, maybe more.

*Ol' Ollie returns, carrying two shovels. He raises ten—then ten more—fingers. He tosses a shovel to Grant, who begins digging.*

STR JOSEPH

How many???

OL' OLLIE

The biggest pack of wolves I've ever seen in all my days—and I seen a lot.

STR JOSEPH

Twenty wolves?

OL' OLLIE

*Hungry* wolves. They was only a few yards from the horses when I scared 'em off and moved the horses closer up the hill.

GRANT

They want meat; they'll be back. Margaret, keep the fire built up.

MARGARET

Do they want horse meat or people meat?

GRANT and OL' OLLIE

Yes. *(They are using the shovels.)*

STR. JOSEPH

What are you doing?

GRANT

We have to keep the wolves away by burning a trench around us. Fill the ditch with dry leaves.

STR JOSEPH

Do we have time for that? *( More HOWLS are heard.)*

MARGARET

They're getting closer!

*The wolves' HOWLS are heard again—and greater in number—first from one direction, then from another. It is a terrifying cacophony.*

GRANT

Damn! They're all around us!

STR JOSEPH

There's more than twenty wolves out there!

GRANT

Just keep working! Get ready, Ollie.

*Suddenly, Margaret looks up and sees a pair of eyes staring at her from only a few yards away. She screams. They are surrounded by glowing eyes. One wolf begins HOWLING, then another takes it up, until the entire pack is making a piercing sound straight out of hell.*

MARGARET

I see their eyes!

*They all move in closer around the fire, the men with rifles lifted. The women kneel and pray.*

GRANT

Keep your rifle ready, Ollie.

OL' OLLIE

I'm ready.

STR JOSEPH

Hail, Mary, full of grace—Margaret! You're on fire!!!!

*Str. Joseph rips off Margare's veil and stomps it out. The wolves continue to howl.*

STR JOSEPH (cont'd)

Dear Father, if ever you've protected us,  
protect us tonight!

*A crash of THUNDER is heard. Then LIGHTENING joins with the thunder. The beggars stand in awe.*

OL' OLLIE

By God, He's answering!

*It continues to thunder and lightening.*

GRANT

By God, they're gone.

MARGARET

The wolves? The wolves are gone?

GRANT

The lightening scared them off. They're afraid of lightening and thunder.

STR JOSEPH

Thank You, Father! Blessed be Thy Name! Thank You,  
Sacred Heart of Jesus. Thank You, Holy Mother....

*Margaret joins in praying with Sister Joseph. The two men just stand, amazed.*

GRANT

I wouldn't believe it if I hadn't seen it.

OL' OLLIE

I seen it and I still don't believe it.

*Scene.*

ACT TWO

Scene Five

*A few days later back at the mission. Str. Praxades is sitting alone, reading her prayerbook and praying. From time to time she brushes away tears. Str. Joseph and Margaret arrive.*

STR PRXADES

You're home! You're home! Praise God,  
you're home! Oh, how I've missed you!

*She warmly hugs Sister Joseph, who is flabbergasted but returns the hug.*

STR JOSEPH

Thank you, Sister Praxades, what a warm welcome.  
It is good to be home.

*Margaret goes to Sister Praxades and hugs her.*

STR PRAXADES

How was it? How was it?

STR JOSEPH

Successful. We'll have money for food now. Not  
much to tell...it was good...mostly good....

MARGARET

It was wonderful...I mean...it wasn't all wonderful...  
not when the snake almost bit me—

STR PRAXADES

What?

STR JOSEPH

And not when the wolves ate one of our horses—

STR PRAXADES

What? Wolves—

MARGARET

And not when Mr. MacCleary proposed to me, and stroked my hair—

STR JOSEPH

—a but not in a bad way—

STR PRAXADES

Is there a good way?????

MARGARET

And, of course, not when Captain Grant almost shot Pim— but, then, Pim *did* stab his wife—

STR PRAXADES

What?

MARGARET

She wasn't dead. She could still walk. In fact, she went after him.

STR PRAXADES

What next?

MARGARET

Well, let's see. Oh, how could I forget the miracle? God sent thunder and lightning so the wolves wouldn't eat us. I told you they ate one of our horses—but not us! A miracle!

STR PRAXADES

A miracle.

MARGARET

Don't worry—we raised over five hundred dollars.

STR PRAXADES

How did you raise five hundred dollars—by letting the men stroke your hair? (*Margaret stops in her tracks.*)

MARGARET

Well, of course not. Through faith, Sister—because even after I cut off my hair, the miners donated at the next camp! (*She snatches the hat off her head and reveals very short hair to Sister Praxades.*) Ta-daaaa!

Fort Vancouver by Sharon Sassone

STR PRAXADES

Well, look at you!

MARGARET

It feels wonderful—and—I have decided to take my vows!

STR PRAXADES

God bless you, child!

STR JOSEPH

I have much to tell you, Sister. What treasures we have gathered on this trip!

STR PRAXADES

I'm afraid we lost a treasure too.

STR JOSEPH

What do you mean?

MARGARET

The baby? *(She begins to run to the cabin.)*

STR PRAXADES

No, she's sleeping inside.

MARGARET and STR JOSEPH

Abner?

STR PRAXADES

He expired suddenly. He had a coughing fit worse than any of the others and then he just could not breathe. I tried everything, Sister. I gave him honey in hot tea and alone on a spoon. I had him breathe over boiling water. I made a tent over his bed. Nothing worked. It was terrible!

*She bursts into tears—genuine tears. Str. Joseph and Margaret exchange dismayed looks.*

STR PRAXADES (CON'T)

It all happened very fast at the end—which I believe was our Lord's way of sparing him any more suffering. He was such a sweet boy.

STR JOSEPH

You liked him?

STR PRAXADES

Of course I liked him! Who could not like a sweet boy like Abner? We buried him under that big tree near the creek, the soldiers and me. I know I shouldn't cry...I know he's with our Lord...but...I'll miss his company and our long talks.

Fort Vancouver by Sharon Sassone

STR JOSEPH

You may cry. Our Lord means for us to cry. That's why we are able to cry.

MARGARET

I'll miss him too, Sister Praxades. He was so cheerful. So kind. I...I...he didn't suffer much, you say?

STR PRAXADES

He looked very peaceful when he had passed on, dear. I had some long talks with him before...before. He talked about you. He was very happy to have met you. I've been praying for his repose.

STR JOSEPH

Well done, Sister. We'll have a Mass for him as soon as Father Tossi returns.

MARGARET

I'd like to say a prayer at his grave.

STR PRAXADES

I'll show you where it is. *(They exit.)*

*Str. Joseph goes to the chair and picks up Str. Praxades' bible. She kneels down, makes the sign of the cross, and begins praying. Just then Woman Who Takes Long Walks Alone in the Woods appears.*

WOMAN WHO TAKES LONG WALKS ALONE IN THE WOODS

I come to see the lil' kit, if you'll let me.

STR JOSEPH

Of course! How wonderful to see you! Where's Pim?

WOMAN WHO TAKES LONG WALKS ALONE IN THE WOODS

I run away. I don't want to be his woman no more.

STR JOSEPH

*(Looking upward)* Thank You, Father.

*Captain Grant and Ol' Ollie arrive with traveling gear, etc.*

OL' OLLIE

Well, look who's here! You leave Pim?

WOMAN WHO TAKES LONG WALKS ALONE IN THE WOODS

Yes.

GRANT

Another miracle. Sister Joseph, you appear to have the good Lord mightily on your side.

WOMAN WHO TAKES LONG WALKS ALONE IN THE WOODS

Captain! You want I should be your woman?

GRANT

Er...ah...no, thank you, I have a woman in Ohio.

WOMAN WHO TAKES LONG WALKS ALONE IN THE WOODS

I need a man to protect me against Pim.

*She looks over at Ol' Ollie. He stands waiting—hopefully. She decides reluctantly.*

WOMAN WHO TAKES LONG WALKS ALONE IN THE WOODS

I guess I be your woman now.

OL' OLLIE

Yes! Yes!

STR JOSEPH

Don't be ridiculous. You don't have to be any man's woman. There's no slavery in the Oregon Territory. At least there's not supposed to be. Come with me and I'll re-introduce you to your daughter. *(They exit.)*

GRANT

Now, Ollie, just between you and me—what would you have done with that girl if Sister Joseph had permitted it?

OL' OLLIE

I'd have to pray fer another one of them miracles to happen.

*Scene.*

ACT TWO

Scene Six

*It is a few days later. Str. Joseph is building something. Ol' Ollie and Woman Who Takes Long Walks Alone in the Woods are helping her. When the young mother turns around, a little papoose is on her back. They are unaware that Pim St. Clare is approaching. Str. Joseph turns around and sees him.*

STR JOSEPH

It's Pim!

OL' OLLIE

Ah, Pim, we don't want any trouble.

*Woman Who Takes Long Walks Alone in the Woods immediately darts toward the cabin. Pim grabs her. They struggle.*

PIM

You think you can leave me?

*He slaps her.*

STR JOSEPH

Stop that!

PIM

You think you can get away from me?

OL' OLLIE

Damn, where's my rifle?

*Pim slaps her again. Str. Joseph runs at him with a piece of lumber.*

STR JOSEPH

You let her go—I'm warning you—let her go!

*Pim pulls out a knife and lunges toward Str. Joseph. Ol' Ollie pulls his own knife.*

*Just then Captain Grant comes out of the woods with a pack of branches for the fire. He has his rifle drawn.*

GRANT

Put that knife down, Pim. I'd just as soon shoot you as look at you. Put it down. *(Pim throws down his knife.)*

PIM

I'll kill you when you ain't looking. I'll kill you and I'll kill her. I'll kill all of you in your beds.

GRANT

Your killing days are over, Pim, and from all I know about you, you've already had many a killing day. Get a rope to tie him up, Ol' Ollie.

*When Ol' Ollie moves away, Pim pulls a second knife and grabs Str. Joseph. Grant shoots. Pim grabs his leg.*

OL' OLLIE

Damn, you should have aimed higher.

GRANT

I'll probably live to regret that I didn't.

PIM

You gonna let me bleed to death?

GRANT

Don't tempt me. Tie him up, Ol' Ollie.

*Sister Praxades has rushed over with a rope.*

OL' OLLIE

Where we gonna put him, Sister, till we kin get him down to the fort?

STR JOSEPH

In the smoke house.

OL' OLLIE

Of course. With the other pigs.

*Scene.*

ACT TWO

Scene Seven

*A few days later at the mission, Captain Grant is sitting with Str. Joseph. He is doing his customary whittling and she is reading two letters, one in particular.*

STR JOSEPH

Well, this is ridiculous.

GRANT

No, it's not.

STR JOSEPH

It's preposterous. You must retract this.

GRANT

I won't.

STR JOSEPH

You must.

GRANT

I don't want to.

STR JOSEPH

Why didn't you tell me?

GRANT

I am telling you—right now.

STR JOSEPH

You wrote this letter on April 11<sup>th</sup>.

GRANT

Yes.

STR JOSEPH

And today is what? July 18<sup>th</sup> or 19<sup>th</sup>?

GRANT

That sounds about right.

*She reads the letter again in exasperation. Grant continues whittling.*

STR JOSEPH

What did Julia say?

GRANT

She's gong to be very happy to have me home.

STR JOSEPH

What will your father say? You'll break his heart!

GRANT

It's done.

STR JOSEPH

You must retract this! You will regret it later, Sam!

GRANT

I'm beginning to regret I told you now.

STR JOSEPH

*(Reading the first letter.)* "Colonel S. Cooper, I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of my commission as Captain in the 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry and my acceptance of the same. I am, Colonel, very respectfully your obedient servant, U. S. Grant, Captain, 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry." They made you a full Captain! Your pay will increase!

GRANT

But I'd still be a bean counter at Fort Vancouver.

STR JOSEPH

For now—only for now! Why did you write this second letter? Why? (*Reading the second letter.*) “Colonel S. Cooper, I very respectfully tender my resignation of my commission as an officer of the Army, and request that it may take effect from the 31<sup>st</sup> of July next. I am, Colonel, very respectfully...U. S. Grant, Captain, 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry.” Why??? They make you an official Captain and you throw it back in their face—on the same day! This meant a pay raise, like you needed. You could have brought Julia and the boys out here! Why did you resign?

GRANT

I want to go home.

STR JOSEPH

You can bring home here—Julia and the boys—

GRANT

I don't want to bring my boys here. I don't want my children brought up here in this god-forsaken—

STR JOSEPH

It is not god-forsaken—

GRANT

—well, it sure feels like it is.

STR JOSEPH

What is the real reason? Are you in trouble with Commander Bonneville—did he catch you drunk on duty again?

GRANT

I'm not going to let you or anybody say that to my face!

STR JOSEPH

They're saying it behind your back already.

GRANT

What have you heard?

STR JOSEPH

That the Commander's threatened to court marshal you. It's the liquor...always the liquor.

GRANT

I wasn't drunk and I don't give a damn—darn—what anybody's saying. The only opinion I care about is Julia's, and she's always believed in me.

STR JOSEPH

I'm relieved to hear those rumors aren't true, Sam. So maybe... maybe...you want to reconsider.

GRANT

I don't.

STR JOSEPH

You're a good officer. The army's invested a lot of money in your training. I don't think they'll allow you to quit. I'm sure of it. They won't.

*Grant takes out another letter and hands it to her.*

GRANT

I received this yesterday.

STR JOSEPH

"Accepted as tendered." Jefferson Davis, Secretary of War."

GRANT

Hmp. *(It is an ironic chuckle.)*

STR JOSEPH

I don't believe it. That's it? "Accepted as tendered?"

*Grant keeps his head down and whittles. Ol' Ollie enters.*

STR JOSEPH (continued)

Well, I'm sick at heart...sick at heart.

OL' OLLIE

Why the long faces?

STR JOSEPH

Did you know Captain Grant has resigned?

OL' OLLIE

Resigned—you mean quit the army?

GRANT

That's what I mean—quit the army.

OL' OLLIE

I thought you were awfully quiet these days. What you going to do, Sam?

GRANT

Julia's father gave us some land adjacent to his in St. Louis for a wedding present and I'm going to farm it.

Fort Vancouver by Sharon Sassone

STR JOSEPH

Will Julia be happy farming?

GRANT

Oh, Julia won't farm. She—she's not cut out for farming.

OL' OLLIE

Are you???

GRANT

Well, I'm not cut out for counting potatoes for the army.

STR JOSEPH

They probably would have given you your own fort someday.

GRANT

I don't want any more "probably someday." I want my wife at my side everyday. I want to teach my boys to ride and send them to good schools, not some cabin with two dozen children in it and a teacher who barely knows how to read himself. I want a home. I'll farm. I'll work my fingers to the bone, but it'll be for me and my family. We'll be together. I know what I'm doing. I know how to work hard. Whoever hears of me in ten years will hear of a well-to-do old Missouri farmer.

OL' OLLIE

Old? Pshaw. You're just a youth yet, Sam, you got lots of miles to go before yer old.

GRANT

I feel—

*Grant is interrupted by the arrival of the Reverend Bill Bander.*

BANDER

There you are, Sam!

GRANT

Well, hello, Bill. What brings you up the mountain?

BANDER

I'm looking for you! Pim St. Clare's escaped. He killed his guard, stole a horse and got away.

STR JOSEPH

He'll come back here!

GRANT

He'd be a fool to come back here, but if he does, Ol' Ollie, this time shoot to kill.

OL' OLLIE

You bet I will.

*Grant gets prepared to leave. He checks his holster.*

GRANT

I brought lumber up on the wagon, so I gotta stop at the fort to get my horse—or did you bring Cincinatti up for me, Bill?

BANDER

Ah...no...you're going to have to use another horse.

GRANT

Why?

BANDER

It's your horse he stole.

OL' OLLIE and STR JOSEPH

Cincinnati????

GRANT

Oh no he didn't!

*Grant is off and running down the hillside before the others can blink.*

OL' OLLIE

That Pim, he's a dead man for sure now.

*Scene.*

ACT TWO

Scene Eight

*Back outside the gate of Fort Vancouver, as in the beginning of the play, a man's body hangs. This time it is the body of Pim St. Clare. Woman Who Takes Long Walks Alone in the Woods stands looking at him, as she did at Big Sy before. Ol' Ollie stands next to her, facing the audience so that they do not see his back yet.*

OL' OLLIE

Them that live by the sword must die by the sword.  
I think that's from the bible, though it might have  
been Padre Tossi, I cain't remember. Of course,  
Pim lived by the knife, not a sword.

WOMAN WHO TAKES LONG WALKS ALONE IN THE WOODS

Knife or sword. He's dead. He don't hurt me or  
my lil' kit no more.

*He gets closer to her and shows his back to the audience. He is wearing the papoose!*

Fort Vancouver by Sharon Sassone

OL' OLLIE

Amen to that.

*Strs. Joseph and Praxades enter, carrying boxes and suitcases. A third nun follows—it is Margaret in an apostulent habit now! They all put down their burdens and kneel at the feet of the hanged man. They silently say a quick prayer.*

*Enter the Reverend Bander and Father Tossi, also carrying boxes and things. They stop and say an even quicker silent prayer—neither man kneeling.*

TOSSI

We don't want to be late. The ship weighs anchor in half an hour. You coming, Ol' Ollie?

OL' OLLIE

Would I miss it? Where's Sam?

BANDER

He'll be right along. He asked that we get his things down to the dock.

OL' OLLIE

Let's go. Here, Sister Praxades, let me carry that for you. *(He takes one of her boxes.)*

STR PRAXADES

Thank you, Ol' Ollie. If it's not too heavy.

OL' OLLIE

Not a'tall, Sister, not a'tall. I feel as young as a man half my age.

MARGARET

*(Teasing him)* Which still makes you a hundred years old!

*Margaret, Str. Praxades, Ol'Ollie, and Woman Who Takes Long Walks Alone in the Woods exit in the same direction the nuns came from when they first arrived.*

TOSSI

You need my help, Sister Joseph?

STR JOSEPH

No, thank you, Father, I want to have a final word with Captain Grant. You go on ahead.

BANDER

Now don't you pick on him. Let him have a peaceful farewell.

STR JOSEPH

My dear Reverend Bander, I have never "picked on" anyone.

Fort Vancouver by Sharon Sassone

TOSSI

If he doesn't come out of that fort in five minutes,  
go in and get him, guns blazing.

*Father Tossi and the Rev. Bander exit. Str. Joseph sits down on the suitcases she had carried in. She looks much as she did in the first scene. She waits. She glances over at the hanging body of Pim. She waits some more. Finally, Captain Grant appears. He has his arms full.*

STR JOSEPH

Father Tossi told me if you weren't out in five minutes,  
I was to go in after you—guns a blazing.

GRANT

Seems pointless to shoot me now. They should have shot me  
before I resigned.

STR JOSEPH

Have you got everything?

GRANT

I think so. How's a man collect so many things when he  
has no money?

STR JOSEPH

Won't you please take some of the money we raised for the  
mission?

GRANT

Won't you please stop asking me? I would rather starve  
than take mission money.

STR JOSEPH

That's what I'm afraid will happen.

GRANT

Julia will fatten me up once I get home.

STR JOSEPH

And until you get home?

GRANT

I'm counting on you, Sister, to talk to the Almighty  
about feeding me.

STR JOSEPH

I've been talking to Him about you right along.

GRANT

Then why worry? *(They look at each other—seriously.)*

STR JOSEPH

Well, Sam, this is goodbye. It's been quite an experience knowing you. And a gift.

GRANT

I'm better at writing than at speaking—

STR JOSEPH

—I've seen your letters. You're not much good at writing either.

GRANT

You mustn't pick on me now that I'm leaving.

STR JOSEPH

Why does everyone think I pick on you? Come on, we don't want that ship to sail without you. There's a woman in St. Louis whose counting the days till you get there. Did you say goodbye to Pim?

*Grant looks at her, surprised, then delighted.*

GRANT

Why, Sister Joseph, you made a frontier joke!

STR JOSEPH

God forgive me, I did, didn't I?

*She picks up the suitcase.*

GRANT

Let me take that for you.

STR JOSEPH

No, no, no. You've got your own hands full. You ought to know by now I can lift twice my weight.

GRANT

Well, goodbye, Pim! I'm glad now that I'm going you won't be hanging around here any more.

*They look at each other and laugh at his bad joke. They head towards the ship.*

*Scene.*

*CURTAIN.*

## EPILOGUE

About five years later, Sister Joseph got demoted from her role as the nun in charge of the Vancouver Providence Mission after she fought a particularly-embarrassing public fight with the State of Washington over four thousand dollars she insisted they owed the Sisters of Chairity—but that's another story.

Sister Praxedes was named to replace her—but not without Sister Joseph's being honored for all that she had accomplished—by being promoted to the title of Mother. Despite her rather undiplomatic personality, Mother Joseph's many talents were recognized by the Church, and she was given the enormous responsibility of being the bursuar—or financial leader—of the Catholic Missions throughout the entire Pacific Northwest.

She took the responsibility very seriously and spent the remainder of her life going on begging tour after begging tour, raising money not only to run the Mission's orphanage and hospital, but also to found many new missions in the Pacific Northwest. Among them, she established a school for young Indian girls—an idea way ahead of its time.

When the U. S. Government realized that the land the Mission was on was valuable, they took it back. Mother Joseph raised the money through begging tours to buy new land and began again.

In addition to raising funds to build missions, Mother Joseph remained physically active in the designing and actual building of innovative structures. One hundred years later, she would be honored by the American Institute of Architects as the Pacific Northwest's first architect! She was a gifted sculptor too, making exquisite figures of the Infant Jesus even into her seventies.

Mother Joseph opened her final orphanage at the Turn of the Century and retired to a retreat house the following year, where she kept busy designing and embroidering a tabernacle veil for the Cathedral of Montreal.

When she became bedridden, Mother Joseph invited her little orphan friends to pray around her bed. She kept a box of candy at her side to reward—or bribe—the little ones who stuck it out and prayed the entire rosary with her.

Mother Joseph outlived all of the original nuns of the Fort Vancouver Mission. She died on January 19, 1902, at the age of seventy-nine.

In the eulogy at her funeral Mass, it was said of her:

*In her, the Western missions lose their foundress, their guide, their support. God alone knows what all those missions owe to Mother Joseph. By her astonishing activity in the accomplishment of works of mercy, Mother Joseph will remain in the history of Providence as one of its most remarkable members.*

It was Mother Joseph's original hospital system that is the keystone upon which the Providence Hospital network in the Pacific Northwest is still based today. Upon entering most of the Providence Hospitals, you will find on the walls old photographs of Mother Joseph and her nuns on mules at the various mining camps.

But perhaps the most astonishing accomplishments must go to Captain Ulysses S. Grant. After returning to St. Louis to farm, things did not go well. Crops failed. The disease of typhoid broke out, nearly killing his eldest son and leaving all the family, including Grant himself, permanently weakened. In addition to farming, Grant had been cutting down trees and selling the lumber, but after the typhoid illness, he could no longer do such heavy work.

Occasionally old army colleagues would run into him in St. Louis, and they were appalled by his scruffy appearance and poverty.

Grant tried to take on more professional occupations. He tried the real estate business but chronic illness lost him the position. He secured an appointment as a clerk in the United States Customhouse—uncomfortably similar to the position of quartermaster.. Within two months, Grant was let go.

Grant moved his family to Galena, Illinois, and went into partnership with a leather goods firm. His experience as a quartermaster made him adept at handling the books of the firm, but he simply was not interested in the work.

And then the Civil War happened.

In 1861, Jefferson Davis—the man who had written the terse acceptance of Grant's resignation from the army—was now President of the Confederate States of America. He entered the Confederacy into the Civil War at Fort Sumter.

Grant offered to be chairman of recruitment for the Union Army in Galena, and by the end of the first evening already had over eighty recruits. One thing led to another and Grant was made Colonel of the Seventh District Regiment.

Grant's accomplishments in the Civil War are too many to describe in detail here, but suffice it to say, he became a Major General in 1863 and was appointed General-in-Chief of the United States Army by President Abraham Lincoln in 1864. He was forty-two years old.

Grant became known for his brilliant battle strategy and his continued unkempt appearance—and rumor has it—his drinking. It is reported that he was usually wearing a worn and soiled uniform with muddy boots and without a sword at his waist. He said he was too busy to clean up, and indeed he was. He retained the beard he grew at Fort Vancouver throughout the remainder of his life.

His drinking has been the subject of many historians and their books. Most opinions seem to concur, however, that, although he may have drunk heavily during certain times, he was not drunk during his leadership of the troops. When one officer had complained to President Lincoln that General Grant drank too much, the President shrugged and said he only wished the rest of his generals would drink some of that same liquor so that they could be as brilliant. The President called Grant a man who was a “do-er”, not just a “talk-er”, and he greatly admired his ability as a soldier and leader.

Grant was one of the last people to confer with President Lincoln before he kept his fateful social engagement at Ford's Theatre. Mrs. Lincoln had invited Grant, who was in Washington to discuss the war strategy with the President, to attend the theatre with them. He declined, explaining that he and his wife were going to spend a little more time with their children before he returned to battle. Of course, President Lincoln was assassinated that night. Who knows if General Grant had been sitting next to Lincoln if Booth would have assassinated him too?

Robert E. Lee was now the Confederate President, and he surrendered to General Ulysses S. Grant at Appomattox on April 9, 1865. The Civil War had been won with Grant at its head.

In 1869, Ulysses S. Grant went on to be elected the eighteenth President of the United States. He served two terms.

Only fifteen years earlier he had been the disheartened and lonely quartermaster at Fort Vancouver in the Oregon Territories. \* \* \*