

CHARACTERS

- CHARLES, abbot of Priseaux /
BROTHER MARTIN, his second in command /
BROTHER OLF, a novice /
BROTHER FELIX, a novice /
PEASANT WOMAN, from the village /
JACK, a one-eyed minstrel /
MARIE, his wife of sorts /
AGATHA, abbess of Bernay

PLACE

All action takes place in the chapter house of the monastery of Priseaux, France.

TIME

About 1250 A.D.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

This sort of thing really happened.

When one character begins speaking before the other has finished, the point of interruption is marked with a "/."

INCORRUPTIBLE

ACT ONE

Scene 1

*Martin
Peasant
Olf*

Interior of the chapter house of the monastery of Priseaux, France. Stone walls jut out at odd angles; areas of shadow are broken by sporadic shafts of light. Books everywhere — on shelves, on the floor. The skeleton of a saint lies upon an altar in a deep red cloth. On one side of the stage is a table behind which sits Brother Martin, a stern-looking monk in a well-worn habit, who makes notes on a sheaf of parchment pages. A peasant woman stands in front of the table.

MARTIN. I'm sorry.
PEASANT WOMAN. Please.
MARTIN. I said, I'm sorry.
PEASANT WOMAN. Just one.
MARTIN. I'm afraid that's impossible.
PEASANT WOMAN. It won't take a minute, I —
MARTIN. No.
PEASANT WOMAN. One little prayer ...
MARTIN. We need your penny first.
PEASANT WOMAN. I haven't got a penny.
MARTIN. Then you haven't got a prayer. *(Martin resumes writings; pause.)*
PEASANT WOMAN. I'll bring the penny after, when she's better.
MARTIN. No you won't.

PEASANT WOMAN. I promise.

MARTIN. No. You'll say she's better because you turned around in a circle three times and threw a piece of dung over your left shoulder.

PEASANT WOMAN. If the dung had worked, I wouldn't be here.

MARTIN. Precisely. Penny up front. *(He gestures to a dish on the table; she considers it for a moment.)*

PEASANT WOMAN. How do I know the prayer's going to work?

MARTIN. You don't, it's called faith. Blind faith. Not certainty, not doubt, not some scatological superstition, but reverent, confident belief. Which you demonstrate by making a humble offering to the saint. *(He slides the dish toward her.)*

PEASANT WOMAN. I should stick with dung, it's cheaper.

MARTIN. *(Patience exhausted.)* Fine — perhaps you should. You only come when you want some favor. Perhaps if you honored the church more often — *(Olf, a big, clumsy-looking monk, enters out of breath, a large heavy sack over one shoulder.)*

OLF. Where's the abbot, is the abbot —

MARTIN. Brother Olf: What have you been taught about speaking out of turn?

OLF. I was only asking if —

MARTIN. Asking is speaking and speaking is done one at a time ...

OLF. *(Indicating sack.)* I'm sorry, but —

MARTIN. Speaking done two at a time is interrupting ...

OLF. I had a question —

MARTIN. Interrupting is rudeness and will not be tolerated. What is your question? *(Peasant Woman has moved toward the altar and has begun praying softly.)*

OLF. I need to know where to put this.

MARTIN. *(For the hundredth time.)* If it's barley it goes in the alehouse, if it's millet — *(He notices Peasant Woman.)*

OLF. It's neither.

MARTIN. *(To Peasant Woman.)* What are you — ? Stop that. *(She continues.)* I said stop it, you haven't paid. *(She continues. He moves toward her, parchment pages in hand.)* Stop praying this instant! *(He turns her around.)*

PEASANT WOMAN. Haven't you better things to do than

harass old women?

MARTIN. Believe me, I've plenty to do: *(Leafing through the pages.)* There's the poor to be fed, the sick to be healed, the naked to be clothed —

PEASANT WOMAN. So, I'm poor.

MARTIN. I'm sure.

PEASANT WOMAN. I am, I'm poor.

CHARLES. *(Entering with another parchment page.)* Oh, Martin, would you —

OLF. Ah, Father —

MARTIN. *(To Peasant Woman.)* I don't care if you're poor, I don't care if you're sick; thank God you're not naked. If you don't pay the penny, you are *out of luck!*

CHARLES. *(Beat.)* Is there a problem?

OLF. I need to know where —

MARTIN. *(I believe the question was addressed to me. (To Charles.)* This woman wants an intercession ...

CHARLES. *(To Peasant Woman.)* What is it?

PEASANT WOMAN. My cow's got the mange.

CHARLES. Oh ...

MARTIN. BUT she refuses to pay.

PEASANT WOMAN. I haven't got a penny!

MARTIN. So she says.

PEASANT WOMAN. I don't.

CHARLES. It's not a lot to ask, you know. You'd pay much more if you went on a pilgrimage.

PEASANT WOMAN. I can't afford a pilgrimage. I can't afford this, but I've got to do something. Her milk's dried up, her hair's falling out ...

CHARLES. Yes —

PEASANT WOMAN. Her gums are all bloody ...

CHARLES. I understand your need; but you see, we have needs, too. If you want to pray to Saint Foy, you've got to give us *something.* *(She looks from one to the other, then reaches down deliberately, pulls a button off her tunic and drops it in the plate. Embarrassed, Charles relents.)* Go ahead. *(She crosses in front of the relics and begins praying; Martin looks at Charles in exasperation.)* Don't say it.

MARTIN. Why do I bother?

end