FRANCESCO

A Musical

by

Louise M. Mangini

Edited Draft, Print Edition, 11/1/13
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List of Songs:

Act I, Scene i – Street in Assisi, ca. 1203
“Oh, Sweet Beloved One”
Dance to “Sweet Beloved One” (?)
“March to Perugia”

Act I, Scene ii – Forest, ca. 1206
“Come let us love” for Entrance to Forest
Dance with Leper + Song (“Butterfly”?) (“In Your Love”?)
“Build My Church” + Reprise

Act I, Scene iii – Street in Assisi, ca. 1206
“I Want to Become a Fool”
“A Song of Freedom”
Reprise of “Fool”
“There Is a Longing” or “Kyrie”
“Lady Pica’s Song” (?)

Act I, Scene iv – Street, days later,
“Papa Wants” (?) + Fool Reprise
“Love Is Not” (Lady Pica)
Finale, Act I

Act II, Scene i – Forest, ca. 1212
"Little Portion" (?) "Sweet Beloved One" – Hymn + "Kyrie" (?)

Act II, Scene ii – Forest, 1212
"I Heard the Voice"
"God's Song" (?)

Act II, Scene iii – Forest Hill
"O Gracious Light" (?)
"Fire Music" (?)
Procession with Clown, Clare, Francis
"I Heard the Voice" – Sung by All

Act III, Scene i – In front of the Vatican
Friars chanting (?)/Sing Reprise to "March"
Pope's Song – "Lord, I Love the House in Which You Dwell"
Reprise of Pope's Song
Reprise – Finale of Act III

Act III, Scene ii – Papal Apartment

Act IV, Scene i – Foot of Mountain, ca. 1224
Ballet – Follow with:
Song of Francesco – "Dear Beloved One"
Psalm 8 (?)
Job Ballet (?)
"Bob's Song" (?)

Act IV, Scene ii – Forest and Porziuncola, ca. 1226
Clare's Song to Francis (?)
Reprise of Clara #1 (Or "Little Portion" ?)
Finale – Reprise of "God's Song" + ?

FRANCESCO - PROLOGUE

Time: Evening, Current Time
Place: The inside of a church

As the lights come up, we see Br. Felix, a Franciscan friar, writing in a journal. He is sitting in the Great Choir, stage left.

After a moment, a Young Person enters. Y.P. goes to pray, then—noticing Br. Felix, wanders over to him with shy hesitation. For a few moments, Y.P. stares quietly at the friar, who is engrossed in his writing.

Br. Felix: (Looking up thoughtfully, is startled to see Y.P.) Good heavens! Oh--pardon me. I didn't see you come in. (Laughing at himself) Oh—you did give me a start. You see, I was so involved with my writing I was oblivious to everything else. Dear, dear, forgive my rudeness---- I am Brother Felix. (He waits for the Y.P. to respond. Y.P. just continues to gaze at Br. Felix. This is somewhat unnerving to the friar.) Err—is there something—ah—that I can do for you? (He smiles.)

Y.P.: (Shyly) Well, no, not exactly. My name's Terry. My parents are at a meeting upstairs. I decided to come and say some prayers and I saw you writing. (Terry's childish curiosity overcomes the shyness.) What were you writing?

Br. Felix: I'm trying to write a play based on the life of St. Francis of Assisi. I'm hoping we can do it as part of an Advent service.

Terry: St. Francis? Oh, yes, I've heard about him. He loved animals, birds and trees, didn't he?

Br. Felix: (Cheerfully) Well, yes, Terry—he did love all the things of nature, but he loved people, too. And most of all, he loved the Lord and spent his whole adult life trying to live the Gospel. He was quite a man.

Terry: Oh, I would like to hear more about him (shy again). Do you have time to tell me about him while I wait for my parents?

Br. Felix: (Glancing at his watch) Well, I have a little time before Compline. Maybe you'd like me to read my play to you.

Terry: (Happily) Oh, yes, Brother Felix. I would like that very much.

Br. Felix: (Pleased) Very well, then. Come sit beside me. You'll be the first to hear my play. (Terry bows at the altar and happily sits next to Br. Felix.)

(As Br. Felix continues, sets are brought in suggesting a street in Assisi in the 13th Century. Merchants with carts appear. People stand in groups talking, and a group of young men are getting ready to entertain some young ladies. There may be also some street acrobats, jugglers, etc.)

Br. Felix: Now close your eyes and try to imagine a street in Assisi, Italy, around the year 1200 A.D. It is a lovely, warm Spring day. People are enjoying a chat in the sun. The merchants are selling their wares, and, if you listen carefully, you might even hear some young men serenading some young ladies.

(The lights fade on. Br. Felix and Terry come upon the scene described.)

Act I, Scene i

Act I, Scene i: "QUEST FOR GLORY"

Scene: The streets of Assisi, Italy, in the year 1200 A.D. It is the afternoon of a sunny Spring day.

As the lights come up, we see a group of merchants selling their wares, some beggars begging, perhaps some acrobats, jugglers, some street musicians, and shoppers. A group of young men is singing to a group of young women. One of them is Chiara.

SONG: Sweet, Beloved One #1

(As the song ends, there is applause. Business at the tables and carts continues for a moment. Then the focus is fixed on a cart loaded with fine cloth and fabrics. The voices of the men get louder and angrier.)

Pietro: (Owner of the cart, addressing one of the two men standing with him. He is indignant and angry.) O mio mi! I hope that you are not calling me a crook, Giovanni!

Giovanni: (Laughing) A crook? Never, Pietro, never. (In a jovial aside to the third man at the table, Augusto) A shrewd businessman, perhaps, maybe a man NOT influenced by romantic sentimentality, even a cold opportunist, perhaps, but a crook? (Laughs) Never. (Back to Pietro). No one in all Assisi would ever think of calling Pietro Bernardone a crook.

Augusto: (Unhappily) Not a crook, but a very hard and unfeeling man. Pietro, all I ask is for you to give me one month's extension on my loan.

Pietro: And, I told you, my dear Augusto, that I would be most happy to give you an extension…but that I would have to charge you a higher interest for that month. Business is business.

Augusto: Caro Dio mio. I am your friend, Pietro. Have a little mercy, for the love of God.

Pietro: One thing I have learned, my friend. That neither the Love of God or friendship has anything to do with business.

Giovanni: (To Augusto) Remember, Pietro has to keep his dear son, Francesco, living like some dashing French Prince.

Augusto: Ah, si, Francesco… He does live well…but I have seen HIM give well, also. I have often seen him give money and food to the poor.

Pietro: (Snorting) Money to the poor. Whose money? Mine. Whose food does he give away? Mine. Tell me, who pays for the bread he feeds the poor? Me. It is I the poor should thank.

Giovanni: Say what you will, Pietro…it would not hurt you to imitate your son a bit more.

…POSSIBLE SONG…

Pietro: Imitate Francesco? Ha. If I did that, not only would I be a fool, I would be financially ruined within a month. Basta. Do you want an extension on your loan or not, Augusto?

Augusto: (With a deep sigh of resignation) Alright, alright. What else can I do?

(Sound of offstage voices, laughing, talking. Sound gets nearer.)

Pietro: (Making notes in a book) Bene, bene. Eh! What is all that noise?

(A group of young people bound in, led by Francesco. The young women are looking at him with admiration, the older men in the crowd frown, the other young men look pleased, the musicians, charged by the energy and gaiety of the young people, begin to play a sprightly tune…tambourines, etc. The clown does a bit of a dance with Chiara and Francesco…and/or perhaps juggles a bit, ending with a deep bow at Francesco's feet. Much applause.)

Pietro: (Pushing the juggler out of the way) Francesco! Che fa? Where have you been all day? And why are you and your friends acting like drunken fools?

Francesco: (Bows with exaggerated humility) Ah, Papa. Buon giorno. Behold your son. Look well, for you are looking at a future knight…a Hero to be.

Pietro: (Smiling…to one of the young men) Is he mad…or is he simply trying to drive me mad?

Rufino: (The young man) No, Signore Bernardone, he is not mad. He is excited. We are all excited. We are going to war.

Pietro: War? And where are you going to war?

Rufino: In Perugia.

Francesco: (With happy zeal) Oh, Papa, I know what you are thinking. I know what you are all thinking. But I'm going to surprise you. I'm going to surprise EVERYONE. (Ecstatic) I am going to change the world. (The light changes for a moment, maybe a flash of lightning.) Oh, what was that? (He looks startled.)

Giovanni: (Laughing) He is going to change the world, but he is afraid of a cloud passing over the sun. (Many laughs.)

(Chiara, one of the young women in the crowd, steps toward Francesco.)

Chiara: Oh, Francesco, I know you are brave and strong…but I am afraid.

Francesco: Afraid? Ah…don't worry, Chiara, my little sparrow, they will never hurt me.

Chiara: (A bit coyly) Oh, I'm not afraid of that, so much. I'm…I'm afraid you'll forget all about me.

Francesco: (Enjoying the flirtation) Forget you? Forget the days we shared together in laughter? The nights we spent together in…dancing…the secret dreams we shared. (Winks.) Ah…how could I forget such things?

Chiara: (Half seriously) Well, after all, when you come back, you'll be a real hero. All the girls in Assisi will be after you.

Francesco: (Enjoying the idea) Hmm. Yes, that is true. (In mock thoughtfulness) I see your point. (Chiara reacts with surprise, a bit hurt.) (Francesco laughs.) Oh, my little squirrel. You don't have a thing to worry about. You know how I feel about you.

… (Perhaps reprise of "Sweet Beloved One")

(Donna Pica enters, stops to observe what is happening. Francesco cannot see her.)

Pietro: (Realizes his son is serious; his anger gives way to affection and pride.) You really mean it. You are going to war with Perugia? (Francesco nods with a wide smile. Donna Pica puts her hand over her mouth so as not to cry out.) Bravo, Francesco. It takes a man to fight a war. (Looks deeply into the boy's eyes.) I know you will make me proud of you. (Embraces Francesco.)

Donna Pica: Francesco.

Francesco: (Bows with sincere respect.) Oh, Mama. Have you heard? (She nods wordlessly.) Oh, I wasn't going to leave without telling you goodbye… Mama, I need your blessing. I will make you proud of me.

Donna Pica: (Trying to be strong) Yes, I know, caro figlio mio. (Begins to cry.) Forgive me, forgive me, mi caro. I know I shouldn't cry. I want to share your joy, but…(sobs).

Francesco: (Surprised, a little awkwardly) Oh, Mama. Don't cry. I will be fine. Don't worry. This is a great moment.

(Voices offstage begin to call to Francesco, Bernardo, and Rufino that the time has come to leave for Perugia.)

Rufino: (Trying to help his friend and also anxious to begin the adventure) Come, Francesco, we must hurry. Listen, Mario is calling. It is time to go.

Francesco: (Torn between excitement and his love for his mother) I'm coming. One more moment, Rufino. (To his mother) Ha, Cara Mama mia. Hold me in your prayer. Pray that our Lord will be with me every step of the way.

Donna Pica: That has always been my prayer for you.

Francesco: May I have your blessing, Mama?

Donna Pica: (Motions him to kneel. Then she sings, or says) May God, the Holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, bless you, my son. May Our Lady pray for you. May the Angels guard you. May the saints be your guide. Go with God, my son.

Francesco: (After a moment of prayer, stands, and turns toward Pietro.) Papa?

Pietro: (Sighing, but with a proud smile) Go, go change the world, Francesco. God knows it needs it.

(Francesco embraces Pietro, then goes to Donna Pica, who holds him a moment, until the offstage voices are heard again.) (A group of young men, some bearing arms, some with a hint of make-shift uniforms, enter and start to take Rufino and Francesco by the arms to lead them away with enthusiasm.)

Francesco: (Dancing away and standing proudly) Behold, people of Assisi, behold your young men. Look well, for when we return, we will be NEW men, for we will return in triumph, crowned with glory. Come. Who will join us?

(The Clown gets a piece of fabric off of Pietro's Cart and flings it over Francesco's shoulders, mantle-or cape-like.)

Good. He robes me in the Mantle of Courage. To Perugia. The victory is ours. (Exit to "The March.")

END OF SCENE i

TRANSITION, ACT I, Scene i-ii

(As Francesco and the others march out, lights fade on the Acting Area and come up on Br. Felix and Terry.)

Terry: (Excited) And did Francesco come back a victorious hero?

Br. Felix: (A bit sadly) Ah, no. Far from it, in fact, to tell you the truth. Poor Francesco was captured.

Terry: Captured? Oh, no. What happened?

Br. Felix: Well, he was thrown in prison.

Terry: And he was very brave and escaped, right?

Br. Felix: Ah, not exactly. He stayed in prison for a year. It is said that he was a great source of encouragement to his fellow captives. But, alas, he became very sick and at last was sent home to Assisi.

Terry: I bet his family was happy to see him.

Br. Felix: Happy, yes, but worried, too.

(As Br. Felix talks, the set changes to a forest scene.)

Terry: Why were they worried? Did they think he was going to die?

Br. Felix: No. But, you see, Francesco began to act very strangely. Not only did he continue giving away some of his father's materials, he began to go for long walks in the woods. Sometimes he would go alone—sometimes he would go with friends.

Terry: (Laughing) That doesn't sound so strange.

Br. Felix: Perhaps not—but, it was on one of these walks that Francesco did something very strange---and very wonderful.

(Lights fade on Br. Felix and Terry.)

Act I, Scene ii

Act I, Scene ii: A forest

(As lights come up, we see Francesco, Rufino and Bernardo walking up the aisle toward a forest. Stage right we can see the outline of a broken-down church, San Damiano. The crucifix is visible.)

A song may be sung in the background: “I Want to Become a Fool”

(Enter Francesco, Rufino and Bernardo--possibly singing.)

Rufino: Francesco, you seem so happy, and--believe me, I'm glad that you are—but, well, aren't you even a little concerned that your father is so angry with you?

(Francesco looks at his friend with an expression of disappointment that the painful reality has ended the gaiety.)

Bernardo: Rufino is right, Francesco. I thought he was going to beat you today when you gave that old woman that silk cloth.

Francesco: (Sitting on a stump and tossing stones absent-mindedly into the forest. He sighs heavily.) I know, I know. It is strange. I love my father and I know he loves me--but each day we seem to grow further and further apart.

Bernardo: Come now, Francesco. You can hardly blame him. After all--he is in business to make money by selling things--if you keep giving things away…

Francesco: Dear Lord, help me! Not only has my father not understood me--but neither do my friends. If only…

Rufino: (Looking into the shadows) Eh--what was that?

Bernardo: What is it? What did you see?

Rufino: I'm not sure—A—A shadow moved--I'm not sure what it was

Francesco: (Not yet frightened, but tense) Yes--I do see something--or someone. (Calling into the shadows) Who are you? Come out. Show yourself.

(The three men stare into the shadows for a moment. Then out of the darkness emerges a cloaked figure. They are able to see the figure more clearly than is the audience.)

Rufino: Oh, my God!

Bernardo: Jesus, Mary and Joseph! Spare us! It's--it's a leper.

Francesco: (Transfixed in a mixture of fear and horror in the strangled cry) O--Dear Lord—No—No—Please. (The Leper starts to move toward him.) NO!

(For a moment, The Leper and Francesco stare at each other as Rufino and Bernardo huddle together in fear.)

The Leper: (Softly and deliberately) Peace. Do not be afraid. I will not come any closer than you wish.

Francesco: (Still frozen with fear) What--What do you want of me?

The Leper: I have a great hunger--a great thirst.

(Francesco looks at The Leper, then at Rufino and Bernardo--then Heavenward.)

Francesco: Oh, God! I'm so afraid. (Pauses, then he forces himself to look into his pack. Then to The Leper) I have some dry cheese. A few slices of bread--a piece of fruit--I'll--I'll—I'll put them in the middle of the path. Don't move! Do not move until we are out of sight. Do you understand?

(The Leper nods. Francesco gathers the food; hesitates--then runs to the middle of the road. He bends down quietly. As he puts the food on the ground, The Leper raises his hand.)

The Leper: May God, our Father, bless you, my brother.

(Francesco freezes in a half kneeling position. Slowly, he lifts his eyes to look into those of The Leper; then still looking at The Leper, Francesco stands. Slowly he begins to walk toward The Leper.)

Bernardo: Santa Maria! NO! No! Francesco, stop.

Rufino: (Moving toward Francesco for a moment in an attempt to grab him) Francesco, are you mad? Don't touch him. He's a leper. God, don't touch him!

(Francesco has begun moving slowly toward The Leper. He stops, then solemnly kisses him.)

Rufino and Bernardo: (In horror) Good Lord, spare him. Mother of God, help us.

(After the kiss, Francesco bows, then slowly turns to face his friends. They, crying, move away from him. Francesco is smiling. His smile gives his face a look of radiant joy. The Leper remains motionless.)

Francesco: (Laughing slightly) Ah, Bernardo, Rufino. Do you fear me now? Do not fear me--do not pity me—Rather, rejoice with me.

Rufino: You--you kissed a leper.

Francesco: (Cheerfully) Yes, I know. Ah—go, my friends. Go back to Assisi. I need to go to give thanksgiving to God.

Bernardo: Thanksgiving?! Thanksgiving for What?

Francesco: (Laughing) For setting me free. Go. Go, my friends. And may God be with you.

Bernardo and Rufino: And with you. Goodbye, Francesco.

(Francesco watches them go--then turns to The Leper.)

Francesco: Oh, my brother--You asked me for a gift of food and, by God's grace--I was given a greater gift--oh my joy is so great. I will dance all the way to the poor broken chapel of San Damiano.

(Dance---Song)

(Francesco begins dancing, and soon The Leper joins in on the dance. As the dance goes on, Francesco gets more and more carried away with joy—and, as he dances in ecstasy he forgets The Leper--and does not see The Leper fling off the cloak--revealing The Clown. Francesco takes The Clown's hand and they dance. Suddenly--Francesco sees The Clown.)

Francesco: (Surprised) Oh --where did you come from? Where--where did the other go?

(The Clown mimes that he is mute.)

Francesco: Ah yes. You are the silent one. Ah, well--thank you, my silent friend--Thank you for sharing my joy. (Picking up his pack) Well, I'm off to San Damiano's to give thanks to God.

(The Clown mimes that he wants to go, too.)

Francesco: (Laughing) What? Oh--you want to go, too? Very well, let us go pray together. For the Lord cares about the prayers of the heart--not of the lips. Come, my friend.

(Hand in hand, the two walk toward the chapel--the crucifix.)

Francesco: Ah, poor little house of God…broken…broken. Like His Body--broken because man doesn't care--doesn't love.

(Cue for dance, perhaps a song of joy and praise--then God singing in duet—"Build My Church")

(Meanwhile--The Clown "prays" by dancing--perhaps joined by some angels. At the end of the song, Francesco and The Clown are kneeling at the foot of the cross.)

Francesco: (To the cross) Oh--blessed Lord--dear Jesus--I hear you—I--I heard you. And--and by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit—Oh, my Lord--by your grace--I will rebuild your church to the Glory of God, Our Father. (Cue for exit music)

(Angels' voices--reprise of "Build My Church")

(The lights fade slowly on Francesco and The Clown.)

TRANSITION, ACT I, Scene ii-iii
Br. Felix: (Ecstatic) And so, with his heart brimming with love
and joy, Francesco began to rebuild the little church of San Damiano.
Terry: All by himself? Where did he get the money? How did- --

Br. Felix: (Laughing) Oh my, slow down, slow down. Now, let's see—well, yes, at first he did do a lot of it himself. As for the money, Francesco began begging.

Terry: Begging? Ha! I just bet his father loved that.

Br. Felix: You could say his father was close to furious. But for a little while, he let Francesco do as he wanted.

Terry: Hmm. I guess he felt it was part of Francesco's sickness.

Br. Felix: Perhaps. But it must have been hard on poor old Pietro Bernardone. After all, it must be hard to hear people laugh and make fun of the son he loved very much. I can almost hear the people of Assisi now.

(The lights fade on Br. Felix and Terry and come up on the streets of Assisi. We see clusters of people talking as Pietro walks in, attempting to look calm, proud.)

Act I, Scene iii

Act I, Scene iii: "CONFLICT"

Scene: The streets of Assisi, ca. 1206. Time: Midday. A few
months have gone by since the last scene. We see clusters of people talking as Pietro walks in. He is attempting to look calm and proud.

Person # 1: Pietro, how is business going?

Person # 2: (Laughing) It can't be going too well. Francesco was begging for bread and money from my Augustina this morning. Really, Pietro, you should feed the lad. He is looking a bit thin and tattered.

Person # 1: (Also laughing) Ah, those Bernardones. One takes it from us by begging, the other gets it by charging fantastic prices. Either way, they get it.

Person # 2: Hmmm. Francesco gets his "talent," err, honestly.

Pietro: (Trying to control his anger) I am not a thief...and (there is a hint of pain in his voice) ...and as for my son...well, he is not very well.

Person # 1: Ah, yes, poor Francesco...with a father who can buy him the best...and with nothing to do but play at rebuilding a church, and to entertain himself by begging and playing the poor fool. HA. I should be so sick.

(Enter Gigu and Giuseppi. They see Pietro. In some haste they walk to him and pull him aside.)

Gigu: Pietro, Pietro. We must speak to you.

Pietro: (A bit angry) About Francesco, no doubt. That's all anyone wants to talk to me about nowadays.

(Persons 1 and 2, sensing a conflict, wander off to shop.)

Giuseppi: Yes, about Francesco. You must stop him. His madness is beginning to affect the other young people of Assisi.

Pietro: What!? That is impossible.

Gigu: Well, then, he is doing the impossible. You know that there're others. Today all of them began wandering the streets begging. And singing like fools.

Gigu: They started out at dawn. Don't pretend you don't know these things, Pietro. Francesco is turning all our young men into fools, we are all becoming laughing stocks. You must stop him.

(Off stage, sounds of people laughing. Calls of "Here come the Fools of Francesco," "Here are the Clowns of San Damiano." There is also singing. Enter Francesco, Rufino, Bernardo, and Mario, singing. The Clown is dancing and juggling. They are followed by a group of people, some cheering, some jeering.)

SONG: Reprise of "I Want to Become a Fool," or…

Mario: Good morning, people of Assisi. God's peace be with you.

Rufino: We, the poor little brothers of San Damiano have come once again to give you a chance to experience the joy of giving.

(Some laughter from the crowd.)

Bernardo: We come, in The Name of Christ, to ask for a crust of bread, or perhaps a piece of dry cheese.

Francesco: "For as you have given to these, the least of my brothers…"

Pietro: (Near rage) Mother of God, Francesco. Have you completely lost your senses again? Are you totally mad?

Francesco: (Happily) Why, no, Father. I have become totally free. (To his friends) Go, my brothers. Take the Good News to the people. I will be with you shortly. (Mario, Bernardo, Rufino, and a few of the crowd exit. The Clown remains in the midst of the remaining crowd.)

Gigu and Giuseppi: (Together, ad lib.) Queen of Angels, what is happening? Pietro, please, talk to him. Do something. (etc.)

Pietro: I have had enough. I will not be made a fool by anyone…and, certainly, not by my own son. (He grabs Francesco.) You are coming home with me. I will lock you up until you come to your senses. (Begins to drag him.)

Francesco: But Father, I am only doing what the Lord told me to do.

Pietro: He told you to honor your father and mother. All you have done is make us a laughing stock.

Donna Pica: (Enters. Hesitates for just a moment, then overcomes her timidity.) Pietro. Please. The boy has done nothing. Leave him be. He has done no wrong.

Francesco: Bless you, Mother. Oh, Papa, Papa, don't be afraid to be a fool for Christ.

Pietro: I'll be a fool for no one. Not even God. (He pulls Francesco off stage. Donna Pica follows, weeping and praying.)

(At that moment, Rufino, Mario, and Bernardo enter. In the distance offstage, we hear Pietro's angry voice, Donna Pica's weeping and pleading, and Francesco thanking God for allowing him to suffer for Christ. Ad libs…)

Rufino: Eh! What is going on? It sounds as though old Pietro is murdering Francesco.

Gigu: A father can take so much. Just so much. I should do the same to you.

Giuseppi: Francesco is matto. He has gone completely crazy.

Bernardo: (Getting angry) Crazy? Why is he crazy? All he wants to do is serve God, to live the Gospel of our Lord.

Mario: Is it crazy to want to live a simple and holy life? To sing joyfully of God's love?

Gigu: Basta. The three of you are all as mad as Francesco.

Giuseppi: Maybe we should take them all home and beat some sense into them.

(Pietro enters, looking harried.)

Pietro: (To Gigu and Giuseppi) Viene. Let us go and have a few glasses of wine to wash away the memory of this afternoon.

Bernardo: But what about Francesco?

Pietro: (Barely able to contain his fury) I have had enough of Francesco today. He is safely locked up in a closet. Come, I want to have a drink.

Gigu: We should lock them all up. (Laughter)

Giuseppi: I could use a glass or two myself. What a day.

Rufino: You should listen to Francesco.

Mario: Yes, he can teach you how to be free.

Pietro: Ha. I don't need his lessons. I work hard at being free.

(Possible song about Freedom….)

Bernardo: Oh, don't be blinded by the world. Listen to Francesco.

Pietro: I've heard enough. (To his friends) Come, I hear Emilio has just made some wonderful Chianti. (Over his shoulder, as he and Gigu and Giuseppi exit) You do some thinking, or Francesco will have a lot of company in his closet. (Laughter)

Mario: (Sadly) Come, it is nearly time for Noonday Office. Let us go to pray that the Lord will set Francesco free.

Bernardo: (Laughing with some irony) My, Mario. Haven't you been listening? Francesco has been proclaiming that the Lord HAS set him free.

Rufino: Bene. Then let us go to pray that the Lord will show us all how to set the Church free.

(They begin to exit, singing _____. The Clown steps out of the crowd. With a swirl, a bit of a dance, he bows to them. They laugh. They return his bow. Perhaps continue song/dance (a reprise of "Fools for Christ"). Then The Clown cheerfully gestures to them to return to San Damiano. They exit and The Clown watches them go. He hears sounds of either "There Is a Longing" or "Sometimes I Feel." As Francesco continues to sing, The Clown looks toward the voice, pauses, then bounds into the shadows toward the voice. The song continues. We see Donna Pica. As the song draws to a close, we see her leading Francesco from the closet to the street. The song may end in a duet between the two. They embrace.)

Francesco: God bless you, Cara Mama, and I thank you.

Donna Pica: Carissimo, Carissimo. We have both defied your father. May the Lord forgive us. Go quickly, please. He is so terrible when he is angry. Hurry, Francesco.

Francesco: Better to have defied Pietro Bernardone than to defy God. Better to have to face the anger of my father than to have to face the wrath of the Lord.

Donna Pica: Ah, Benedetto figlio mio. Go with God. Arrivederci.

Francesco: Addio, Mama. The Lord be with you.

Donna Pica: And with your spirit.

(Another embrace. The Clown steps out of the shadows. Francesco sees him. The Clown bows to them. Both return the bow. Then, The Clown either does a short dance and/or juggles for a moment. This delights Francesco. He laughs and runs to embrace The Clown. They spin around together, then hand-in-hand dance around Donna Pica. At the end of the dance, The Clown again bows to them and they return it. Then The Clown puts out his hand. Francesco takes it. He laughs delightedly as The Clown pulls him off stage. Donna Pica watches their exit. Then, seeing some fruit in a basket in a

cart, she wistfully picks up a couple pieces and tries to juggle…perhaps she sings a reprise of _____some song_____.)

Then, crossing herself, she exits, as lights fade.)

End of Act I, Scene iii.

Note: With a short interlude of music and a change of lights, this scene may be merged with Scene iv.

POSSIBLE MUSICAL INTERLUDE TO SUGGEST TIME CHANGE.

TRANSITION, ACT I, Scene iii-iv

(Lights fade on Donna Pica, come up on Terry and Br. Felix.)

Br. Felix: So, Francesco and his friends went back to San Damiano and continued to rebuild the church.

Terry: You mean his father didn't go after him--he left him alone? Didn't he at least do something to keep him from begging?

Br. Felix: Apparently, Pietro left his son alone for awhile until—well—until Francesco sort of blew it.

Terry: (Laughing) Blew it? HA! You're kidding! How did he blow it?

Br. Felix: Well, as far as his father was concerned, he had blown it. Touched by the poverty he saw all around him, Francesco returned to his father's house and took bolts and bolts of his father's stock of fabrics—as well as many of Pietro's finest clothes. Some he sold to raise money to continue rebuilding San Damiano—and some he happily gave away to the poor.

Terry: Great! Just great. I bet his father had a royal fit! What did Pietro do?

Br. Felix: Basically, you could say he flew into a flaming red and purple rage. If Francesco was going to be a fool for Christ, it wasn't going to be at the expense of Pietro Bernardone. He decided to bring Francesco to face the Bishop of Assisi.

Lights quickly go out on Br. Felix and Terry—come up quickly on Act 1, Scene iv.

Act 1, Scene iv – "CHOICE"

As the lights come up, a great crowd is gathering, with much commotion. Gigu, Mario, Giuseppe, Bernardo, Person # 1 and Person # 2, The Clown, and others are in the group. There is much loud talking. (Ad lib.) Some are calling for rights for Francesco, some for the rights of the father. (Perhaps posters or sign boards can be seen.) The Bishop enters U.S.L. At the same time, Pietro enters D.S.R. He is dragging Francesco. Donna Pica follows, weeping.

Pietro: (In a rage, flings Francesco down at The Bishop's feet.) Per placer, Your Excellency, I implore you. Help me. This child of mine is destroying me.

The Bishop: Signore Bernardone, aspetto. Calm yourself. I want to understand what he has done.

Pietro: (Still in a rage) I will tell you what he has done. He has gone mad. He has robbed me, the ungrateful dog. All my life I have given him everything he could want. And yet, he robs me. (He goes to kick Francesco, who has remained where he was thrown. The Bishop steps between them.) In the name of Christ's Justice and Mercy, he has given away some of my finest things. I must demand justice.

The Bishop: These are very serious charges, Signore Bernardone. The boy has a right to defend himself.

Pietro: He has a right to defend himself!? And what rights do I have? By all the Holy Angels…I implore you. All Assisi knows what he is doing. I have become a laughing stock. You know I am telling the truth.

The Bishop: (With a sigh) Si, si, I know there is truth in what you say… (Almost to himself) …yet, perhaps there is even more to the truth…perhaps even greater than we can know. (To Francesco) Francesco, my son, I need to know why you have done what you have done before I can pass judgement. Speak, and may the Holy Spirit guide you to speak the truth.

Francesco: (Remains silent, in prayer for a moment.) What my father has said is the truth. I have willingly, no joyfully, given away the best he has given to me. (Smiles up.)

The Bishop: (Wry) It is good that you can admit to something known by all Assisi. But what I want to know is why you have done it.

Francesco: (With a peaceful smile) God has given us the best.

The Bishop: Ah, you have given away what did not belong to you.

Francesco: (Happily) Yes, that's right. What I give away belongs to my Father. All of it belongs to my Father.

The Bishop: So, you admit to being guilty of stealing from your father, Pietro Bernardone. (Gestures at Pietro, who nods in agreement.)

Francesco: (Rising, joyful, excited) Oh, no, no. Everything belongs to God, our Father. Everything. He gives us the very best of everything, but it is still His. And He wants US to also GIVE the best of everything. That is what I have done…I've given away the best I have been given.

The Bishop: Francesco, listen. This is a grave matter. Do you want to go to prison?

Francesco: Prison? No, I want to be free.

SONG: "I WANT TO SOAR"

(By the end of the song, Pietro is furious, Donna Pica is in tears, The Bishop is elated, and Francesco is radiant.)

The Bishop: (Looks at Pietro, Donna Pica, and Francesco. He is concerned but serious.) I am certain, Francesco, that you meant to do only what is right, but I fear you have caused your father much grief and embarrassment. You must do something to repay him, to make up for the dishonor you have shown your father.

Francesco: (Growing serious. Looks at The Bishop, then at his parents, and back to The Bishop.) Forgive me, Your Excellency, but you are wrong. I have not brought my father dishonor, but rather have paid him honor. For today and forever, I have only one Father, Our Holy Father, the Lord of All. And from this moment, I will own only that which He gives me. (Begins to remove his clothes.) He has always given me all I need. I will take His gifts and, by His Grace, I will give them to all I see. (Stands nude.)

(Out of the crowd, The Clown dances around, takes a brown cloth from a stand, then wraps it around Francesco.)

Donna Pica: Pietro, please, do something. Stop him, for the love of God.

Francesco: (With joy) Ah, dear Mother. Yes. That's it. For the love of God.

Donna Pica: (Struggling with tears) I have always known you were a gift from God, Francesco. Over the years, I have learned that when the Lord gives us a gift, he offers us a chance to return it as an offering of love to Him.

Francesco: Cara Mama. We have nothing else to give Him…or anyone, save what He has given to us first.

Donna Pica: (Gaining composure) I remember, when you were born, how I prayed that I would be able to give you back to Him, should He ask. (Holding him at arms' length, eyes shining with tears and affection) And you are such a precious gift, Caro Figlio Mio. But what I am just beginning to understand is that you are not only God's gift to me, you are God's gift to the world.

Francesco: And you are a great gift to me, Mama. You are the one who taught me how to love, how to pray, to seek God's glory.

Donna Pica: (Smiling) It was the best I could give you. But I, too, am only learning to love, Francesco. Perhaps it is my turn to start to learn from you. (If song is sung, she adds:) This much I am beginning to understand:

SONG: "LOVE IS NOT"

(If the song is not sung:) She embraces Francesco. (Or after song:) Go in peace, Francesco. I give you back to God.

Pietro: (To the Bishop) Your Excellency, I plead with you. I think they have both gone mad. Do something, anything, please.

(The Bishop looks at Francesco. At that moment, The Clown begins juggling. This catches Francesco's attention. He beckons to The Clown to throw him some balls. The Clown throws two, which Francesco begins to try to juggle, clumsily.)

The Bishop: Francesco, my patience is growing thin. For the sake of your father, Pietro, justice must be done. What are you going to do?

Francesco: (Stops juggling.) What am I going to do? (Thinks.) I am going to learn to be free…free to do whatever the Lord wants me to do…free to become whatever He wants me to become…even if He wants me to become a fool.

(Looking at The Clown, he begins to toss the two balls he has. The Clown offers him a third. He accepts it, but cannot handle them. The crowd begins to laugh. The Clown motions that he will take back a ball, but Francesco is stubborn. Donna Pica picks up one of the fallen balls and tosses it to Francesco. He tries and fails a few times and is about to give up. With a flourish, The Clown grabs the balls, and dances around, then places the balls back at Francesco's feet. They smile at one another. Francesco picks up the balls again.)

Francesco: Perhaps God wants me to learn to be a juggler. I may not do it very well yet, but I can learn. Yes, by God's Grace I could learn to be The Lord's Juggler.

Pietro: You will be God's own fool. (He is disgusted.)

Francesco: (Delighted) Yes, God willing.

The Bishop: (Thoughtfully) I must admit, I do not understand what is happening here today. Perhaps you are less a fool than I, Francesco. Maybe God wants us to risk being fools. (Pauses to reflect.) Perhaps…just perhaps, the world needs more fools in love with God.

Pietro: Santa Maria. I cannot believe what I hear.

The Bishop: Go, go, Francesco. Go learn to juggle for God. May He be with you.

Francesco: And also with you. (Looks around.) Come—who will come with me to learn to juggle, to learn to be a fool for Christ's sake?

(A few people, including Bernardo, step forward. The Clown juggles for a moment, then embraces Francesco as the little group of street musicians begin to play, "I WANT TO BECOME A FOOL." Singing, Francesco and his band exit following the dancing Clown, through the audience. For a moment, Donna Pica seems as though she will also follow. Then she sees two balls on the ground. She picks them up and tries to juggle, as Pietro storms off stage. Lights out.)

END OF ACT I

Act II - Prologue

Lights come up on Terry and Br. Felix. Br. Felix is showing Terry some pictures.

Br. Felix: Here is a picture of San Damiano, the little church Francis and his first brothers rebuilt. This is the shot of Assisi as it looks from the air today. Here is one where (as legend has it) Clare came to make her first vows, where Francis cut her hair.

Terry: Legend. But there was a real Clare, wasn't there?

Br. Felix: A very real Clare. In a sense, the story of Francis is incomplete without the story of Clare. She was Francis' first sister.

Terry: I know she was very wealthy. She must have had to really have courage to get her family to give her permission to follow Francis' life of poverty.

Br. Felix: Well, you're right, she did have a lot of courage. But she never got permission from her family.

Terry: Wouldn't Francesco help her explain her calling to them?

Br. Felix: Francesco! HA. Most of Assisi still thought him mad. And besides, Francesco was not prepared or even willing to have women in the order. Indeed, one might say Clare's first, and perhaps greatest struggle, was to convince Francesco that women, too, could live a life of chastity, obedience AND Poverty.

Terry: I wonder what she said to make him change his mind. That must have been quite a meeting.

The lights fade on Terry and Br. Felix and come up on Act II: Scene i:

Act II, Scene i

Act II, Scene i: A scene in a forest. Francesco, The Clown, and a few friars are praying. They begin to sing the Hymn of "Sweet Beloved One." With the friars are a few

interested and/or curious men. As the Hymn is sung, Clare walks in, quietly genuflects, and kneels with the others. When the Hymn ends, there is a moment of silence.

Francesco: Let us bless the Lord.

All: Thanks be to God.

Francesco: Ah, how blessed we are. I see many familiar faces among those who have come to worship with us and, adding to our joy, I see some new faces, as well. Come, join us in our simple meal. Feel welcome. We don't have much, but the Lord always sees to it that we have enough.

Sergio: (He is a newcomer and shy.) Father Francesco, are we allowed to speak?

Francesco: To speak? Yes, to speak, to sing, to dance—even to fly. Yes, even to fly.

Benito: He means, we know you and your brothers spend much time in silence—we—we do not want to cause you to break your silence.

Francesco: You know us well. Yes, silence is a great gift from God and to God. Yet, it is also a gift to be able to speak to our brothers. Thus, we have time for that, too.

(For Grace:)

Brother # 1: Let us give thanks.

(Perhaps a Hymn of Thanksgiving…or "Come Let Us Love" or "Little Portion…")

(All eat during the following.)

Sergio: Then, dear friar, speak. We have come to learn.

Francesco: To learn? From me? Hah? I can teach you nothing—except how to be a fool.

Benito: Do not joke with us. We really wish to learn.

Francesco: You wish to learn. Then listen well, for you are near to committing a mistake. Indeed, two mistakes. One—you call what I said a joke—when it was the truth. If you cannot discern the difference between a joke and a truth, how will you

learn the truth? And—second, I cannot teach you anything. Only the Lord can teach us. Perhaps, together, we can learn to become foolish enough to listen to Him.

Clare: Dear Francesco. For months now I've heard you preach your wonderful foolishness. And—and I try to tell others what you mean—about the freedom in obedience, the glory of humility, the richness in simplicity—the wonder and greatness of the Love of God found in life with Christ. But they laugh, and call me a fool, too.

Francesco: (Seriously) And I hope you give thanks to God each time they do call you a fool. It is a blessing to be a fool.

Sergio: Forgive me, Francesco, but I do not understand. How could being called a fool be a blessing?

Francesco: Because they mean you're like God.

Benito: WHAT! You—you call God a fool?

Clare: God is a fool. He doesn't need us, yet, He is our most humble Servant. He is perfect Justice, yet in His loving mercy He eternally forgives us our greatest sins; He is all Powerful; yet, He gives us perfect freedom, even to deny He is; He is life eternal, and still He lets us kill Him—on the Cross and in one we hurt. God loves us. He is a Holy Fool. Bless Him for His Glorious Foolishness.

(Perhaps a song by the brothers and Francesco)

Sergio: Tell me, Francesco—how does one begin to learn to be a fool for the Lord?

Francesco: Like all answers to good questions, the answer to this one is both simple and difficult: let go of everything and trust the Lord in everything. He will—does—supply all that you need at all times and all situations. Trust Him, and ever give Him thanks and praise.

Sergio: Would—would you give me permission to join you and your brothers?

Francesco: (Drinks thoughtfully.) No, I cannot.

Sergio: (Surprised and disappointed) What? Then—then who can?

Francesco: Does the air give the birds permission to fly? Does a stream give permission to the water to run down her bed? Does the velvet dark lady, Night, give permission to the stars to shine? (Sergio stares in mute confusion.) You will join us—if you do, because—because you have no choice—because it is what you must do to be who you are.

Clare: (Laughing) A fool. I am a fool for Christ. I wish to live in holy poverty. To serve the Lord in gentle humility and to praise him in Perfect Joy.

(Francesco is stunned and moved.)

Francesco: (After a moment) Clara—dearest Clara—how—how can I turn away one whom the Lord has called? (She starts to jump up in excitement.) But wait, dear lady. The road you wish to follow is filled with bliss, but lined in pain.

Clara: (Eagerly) I know, Francesco, I know. And I not only long to walk this road, my soul yearns to run every mile.

Francesco: Take care, Clara. We must guard against running after the desires of our own hearts, heeding only the voice of our own wishes.

Clara: (With passion) But my only wish, my one desire, is to give myself totally to God.

Francesco: That is the longing of every heart. Each soul longs to give itself to God, but often we refuse to hear the song of the soul. (Seeing her confusion) Clara—the key word is "listening." We must listen prayerfully.

Clara: But I know what I want to do with all my heart.

Francesco: Yes, of that I have little doubt. Now, you must pray to know what God wishes you to do. It is the voice of the Lord you must follow, not that of your heart—no matter how noble the call of your heart may be.

Brother # 1: Yes, indeed. For sometimes God calls us to follow paths which our hearts would resist.

Francesco: As Christ Himself resisted the cross. He submitted to God's will, not His own. Go. Go pray. Go listen. And may God's Holy Will be done.

(Lights fade.)

TRANSITION, ACT II, Scene i-ii

(Lights come up on Br. Felix and Terry.)

Br. Felix: So, Clara went away to pray and the brothers kept her in the daily prayers.

Terry: Clara must have had a great deal of courage. After all, I don't imagine her family would have been too happy to see her wish to leave to follow a band of hungry beggars.

Br. Felix: Yes, courage, patience, faith, and love of God. All these virtues made it possible for her to return to Francesco.

(Lights fade on Br. Felix and Terry. Come up on Francesco.

Act II, Scene ii

Act II, Scene ii: Early morning in forest. Stage is dark. Faint light begins to glow near Francesco.

(Francesco is in prayer by a rock. Clara wanders up the path—sees him—he remains in silent prayer a moment. Out of the shadows, The Clown comes in, juggling. Francesco looks up, sees The Clown—then sees Clara.)

Francesco: (Pleased to see both.) Peace be with you, my friends.

(The Clown bows.)

Clara: And with you, my brothers.

(Francesco, picking up her use of "brothers," studies her carefully.)

Francesco: I have not seen you for days. You have been in our prayers.

Clara: And you in mine. (Pause. Her voice is very steady, very sure, her eyes are shining.) Francesco, I have done as you asked. I have prayed and listened—and—I've heard His voice.

Francesco: (Startled) You heard His voice?! (Then, lost for a moment in a memory) Yes—I heard His voice, once—it seems so long ago—that wonderful day at San Damiano. (After a moment he remembers Clara.) You heard His voice. Tell me—did He tell you what you must do?

(Background: "I Heard the Voice of My Beloved One")

Clara: Yes. I heard the voice of my beloved one—and He called me to follow Him. (Begins to sing, "I Heard the Voice." At the repeat of the bridge [she does not sing the second bridge…] she and The Clown dance, then she sings the last verse again.)

(At the end of the song, Francesco stares at her solemnly—then slowly, his body relaxes and a look of joy comes to his face. Then, turning his face to heaven, he says happily…)

Francesco: Dear Lord and lover of men's souls. We most joyfully thank Thee for calling forth our sister Clara to become one of Your Fools. All praise to Thee, Oh Lord, Most High.

(The Clown twirls around, does a cartwheel, then the three frolic together, perhaps juggling balls back and forth for a moment—all enjoying the joy of the occasion. Perhaps music heard underneath the action.)

Francesco: (Out of breath, to The Clown) Go, Silent Brother—go tell the others that God has given us a sister. (The Clown dashes off into the audience and out. Then Francesco continues to Clara.) And now, dear sister, let us climb the mountain and pray for God's guidance that you may be embraced by Lady Poverty.

(As they begin to walk out the light goes down on them and comes up on Br. Felix and Terry, only dimly. As they speak, silhouette of Francesco and Clara climbing.)

TRANSITION, ACT II, Scene ii-iii

Br. Felix: And so they climbed the hill almost like young lovers.

Terry: Oh, but they were lovers—each was in love with God.

Br. Felix: (Chuckling, pleased) Well put, my child, well put. Yes, they were in love with God; in fact, they were inflamed with the Love of God. Indeed, among my favorite legends is the one which tells of the time the friars looked up to see the mountain aflame. When they ran up to put out the fire—they didn't find a fire. They found Francesco and Clara praying together. Perhaps it was a night much like this one.

(Lights fade on Br. Felix and Terry.)

Act II, Scene iii

Act II, Scene iii: A Forest Hill

(As the scene opens, one can barely see the outline of Francesco and Clara on a "hill," almost in darkness. As the scene progresses, slowly stars come out and the lights of dancing angels, until the two [humans] are encircled by dancing lights.

At the same time, as the scene opens, hopefully from the back of the audience, the friars enter carrying candles and singing, "O Gracious Light"; they are so concentrated in prayer that they do not notice what is happening on the hill. They kneel in a semicircle extreme downstage center-right.)

Brother # 1: Oh Lord, open Thou our lips.

Friars: And our mouth shall proclaim Your praise.

Brother # 1: Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.

Friars: As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end.

All: Amen.

Brother # 1: Praise ye the Lord.

Friars: The Lord's Name be praised.

Brother # 1: Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord.

Friars: Hosannah in the Highest.

(The Clown runs in.)

Brother # 2: It is the Silent One. The Lord be with you, Good Brother.

(The Clown bows with a swirl of his cape.)

Brother # 1: Have you news of our Father, Francesco?

(In a short dance, he twirls and indicates the mountain on which the silhouette of Francesco and Clara can be encircled by dancing fire.)

Brother # 1: (Exclaiming in fear!) A fire! Holy Angels and Saints defend us!

Brother # 3: And look—is that not Father Francesco in the flames?

Brother # 2: Holy Mother of God—and is that not a woman with him?

Brother # 3: Clara. Good Lord—Father Francesco and Clara are in the middle of the fire.

Brother # 1: We must go save t hem.

(All the friars, led by The Clown, race up the hill—perhaps with a musical background. As they run, the moon—full—the angels [flames] dance away as the scene brightens to find only Clara and Francesco when The Clown and Friars reach them. Both look surprised, but in calmness.)

Francesco: The peace of the Lord be with you, my brothers.

(The brothers stare at them mutely. Francesco laughs.)

Why, you come racing up the hill with a look of excitement in your eyes—as though you had some great news to tell me—and then you stand silent. Tell me, good Brothers, what brings you.

Brother # 1: (Still stunned) The—the fire.

Francesco: (Misunderstanding—concerned) Fire—not San Damiano!

Brother # 2: (Also stunned) No, Father Francesco. The mountain—here—you—flames all around you.

Brother # 3: (Recovering) Yes. The Silent One came to get us, and when we looked up here, we could see you and Clara surrounded by flames. The whole mountain was ablaze. (Pauses.) Truly!

(Francesco stares a moment at the Brothers, then he and Clara exchange looks of understanding. He nods to her.)

Francesco: My brothers, you only thought you saw the mountain ablaze.

Brother # 2: (Most upset) No, no. There was a fire. Forgive me, Father Francesco, but I would stake my soul on it.

Clara: Ah, dear Brother, be at peace. Your father Francesco is right. You did not see a fire. What you saw was the dance of the Angels.

Brother # 1: Angels! Angels dancing. Why, of course. I thought I heard music coming from the flames, but I was afraid to say anything lest you think me mad.

Brother # 3: (Looking at Brother # 1 as though he thinks he could be mad—then gives Clara and Francesco a similar look.) I give thanks to God that you were not being consumed by a fire—but tell me, dear Father, why were the Angels dancing?

Francesco: The angels were dancing in radiant and joyful splendor because our dear Clara has heard the call of the Lord and has decided to walk with us, hand in hand with Lady Poverty, wherever He leads.

(There is a moment of stunned silence while the Brothers digest this information and deal with their own feelings silently.)

Brother # 2: (A bit doubtful) Certainly, we must be thankful that dear Clara has heard the call from the Lord, but to walk with us—in Lady Poverty—she—she is a woman!

Clara: (With peaceful, yet confident joy) Yes, a woman whose only joy comes from humbly serving the Lord. Who only wishes those things which He so graciously offers to me out of the Abundance of His wonderful loving-kindness.

Francesco: (With friendly rebuke) Certainly, dear brother, you remember that the Holy Scriptures teach us that, in Christ, there is no male nor female. Certainly, if the Lord Himself has called her, how dare we turn her away?

(With a swirl, The Clown dances over and bows before Clara, then tosses the ball in the air.)

Francesco: Once again, the Silent One is right, it is a time for great joy.

(They dance, hopefully juggling the balls back and forth—the Brothers slowly getting involved. Then, all at once, The Clown catches and holds all the balls and looks deeply into Francesco's eyes. The Clown clasps one of Francesco's hands, and, putting the balls in his pockets, takes Clara's hand.)

Francesco: (A little mystified) How is it, dear brother—you speak no words my ears can hear, yet—yet you say so much? Your wisdom outshouts the silence. (To the others) This is, indeed, a time of joy, but solemn joy—of celebration, but holy celebration—for it is a time of surrender and dedication to the will of the Lord. Come, let us walk with Clara as she goes to be greeted by Sister Poverty, Sister Chastity and Sister Obedience.

(The Clown leads Francesco and Clara by the hand—possibly through the audience and around—with the brothers following. Other brothers may join in the procession; they sing either Psalms _____ or "Sweet…" or a Hymn. Candles may again be used here.

They all gather on a platform upstage. Francesco faces Clara. The Clown stands between them, but a bit upstage.)

Francesco: What is your desire, my sister?

Clara: It is my desire to follow our Lord, Jesus Christ, in a life of poverty, chastity and obedience.

Francesco: Let us pray. (All kneel, except The Clown.) Oh Lord, who on this day made a triumphant entry into Jerusalem and was greeted with songs of praise as palm branches adorned His path, greet now your little Sister, Clara. May her heart always sing of your love and her path be always strewn with the palms of Your merciful loving-kindness.

(He stands, and places his hand on her head to proclaim the blessing.)

(At the end of the blessing, he takes her hand. Music begins: "I Heard the Voice of My Beloved One." Solemnly, he puts out his hand to The Clown, who hands him a pair of scissors. Clara bows her head, and he cuts away her hair, then gives the scissors back to The Clown, bends down, and helps Clara rise to her feet. Again, he turns to The Clown, who hands him her habit. With graceful simplicity, Clara steps out of her dress and slips

on the habit. Clara begins to sing; at the last verse she is joined by everyone except The Clown, as the lights fade.)

End, Act II

Act III – Prologue – Scene i

Br. Felix: He had been born "Giovanni," but nicknamed "Francesco," "The Frenchman," as a child. Throughout his early youth, it seemed, Francesco Bernardone's search was for who he was, what he was to do with his life.

Terry: But certainly, after he had heard the voice of the Lord, he knew. After all, he gathered together a band of followers and began preaching. He knew then, didn't he, what his mission was to be?

Br. Felix: Perhaps. Yet, it is quite possible the understanding of the scope of his calling grew slowly. Indeed, all he really wanted to do was to live the Gospel, to love the Lord with perfect joy in poverty, simplicity, and chastity. He wanted to be a humble beggar.

Terry: Yet, he was not afraid to confront some of the most important people of his time.

Br. Felix: Very true. Indeed, one of the most beautiful episodes in his life was when he went to see the Pope.

(Lights fade.)

Act III, Scene i

Act III, Scene i: At the entrance to the Vatican

(Lights come up in the audience, down stage left near stage. A papal guard is standing watch. Francesco and a band of friars move down the aisle chanting and/or singing, "I Want to Become a Fool." The Clown dances around, perhaps blowing bubbles. They all approach the guard.)

Francesco: (Friendly, but properly respectful) May God, the Father of our Lord, bless you.

Guard: (Looking at the scruffy crew with mild disdain) I thank you for your blessing, and pray God will bless you on your way.

Francesco: (Not taking the hint) I have come to see the Holy Father. Would you be kind enough to tell me how I may arrange an audience?

Guard: (Laughs with genuine surprise.) Certainly you must be joking; the Holy Father is a very busy man. He does not have time to see any bands of…beggars who happen to wander past.

Francesco: (Undismayed) Forgive me. I fear I failed to explain. My brothers are not just wandering beggars. We have come from Assisi only for one purpose: to speak to the Holy Father.

Guard: But you are beggars?

Francesco: (Happily) Thanks to God's loving kindness, yes, we are beggars.

(The Clown does a summersault and blows bubbles at the Guard, who is not amused.)

Guard: (Getting irritated) Let me try again. The Pope does not have time to see beggars.

Francesco: (A bit surprised) Really? Oh, that is terrible. We have come such a long way. (Begins to weep.) It is so important that I see him. (He sobs into the arms of The Clown.)

(Just then, a Cardinal approaches. Fascinated by the scene before him, he stops and approaches the Guard.)

Cardinal: Buon giorno. (Looks at The Clown and addresses the Guard.) I see you are being entertained by some strolling players.

Guard: (Bowing) Buon giorno, Your Eminence. I regret to say I am not being entertained! These---people are here to see the Holy Father.

Francesco: (Throwing himself at the feet of the Cardinal) Oh, Your Eminence, holy prince of the Church, I implore you. Please tell the Holy Father we are here. It is of grave importance.

Cardinal: (Amused) Indeed? And, perhaps you could tell me why it is so important?

Francesco: (Looking up, smiling through his tears) Oh, yes. Please tell him we have come to ask his permission to be poor.

(Both the Cardinal and the Guard burst out laughing.)

Cardinal: (Trying to control himself) Is that what you want? Well, I can save you a lot of time and trouble. I hereby give you permission to be poor. (Laughs.)

Francesco: (Undaunted) I thank you, my Prince. Still, I implore you to tell the Holy Father we are here.

Cardinal: (Still chuckling, says to the Guard.) Why not? I bet the Pope could use a laugh. (To Francesco, with mock seriousness) I will gladly deliver your message to the Holy Father, Pope Innocent III.

Francesco: May God's Holy Name be praised. I give you humble thanks.

(Cardinal exits—Perhaps Francesco and The Friars do a song. Lights fade on Francesco, come up on stage--)

Act III, Scene ii

Act III, Scene ii: Papal apartment. Cardinal is seen approaching the Pope, who is sitting at a table, writing.

The Pope: (Looking up) Ah, Cardinal Sabini. You are just in time. I was just…

Cardinal: (Trying to keep a straight face) I have been asked to deliver an important message to you. From—some pilgrims.

The Pope: Indeed? Very well, what is this important message?

Cardinal: (Struggling to be serious) They have come in rags and tatters, all the way from Assisi. They wish to see you. (Begins to roar with laughter.)

The Pope: (Looks at Cardinal for a moment, as though weighing what he has just heard. Then he nods slowly and seriously.) Ask them to come in.

Cardinal: (Surprised by The Pope's tone. A bit unsure) They are simple beggars –with a clown. I--thought you might enjoy a bit of a diversion.

[First version:]

The Pope: (Quietly, but firmly) We want to see them—not to laugh at them, but to listen to them. (Their eyes meet.) Perhaps, my brother, we are being given a chance to welcome angels unaware. We are waiting to meet the pilgrims.

(The Cardinal exits. The Pope walks over to an altar upstage left. Kneels, is quiet a moment. (… perhaps a musical reprise of "Build My Church") (After a moment, the Cardinal returns with Francesco and The Friars. The Pope turns and he and Francesco look long into each other's eyes.)

The Pope: We welcome you, pilgrims, in the Name of Christ our Lord. Pray, tell me your names.

Francesco: (Bowing reverently) Oh, most Holy Father. I thank you for the great honor you have bestowed upon me and my brothers by granting us this audience.

The Pope: (A bit bemused) It has been said that pilgrims are a blessing from God. It seems, pilgrim, that you have chosen to live with nearly nothing. Have you also given up your names?

Francesco: Oh, forgive me, Holy Father. These are my brothers, and I, the least of the friars minor, am called Francesco.

The Pope: (Looking at The Clown) And what of him? Has he no name, Francesco?

Francesco: Why, he is a clown—a juggler. I don't know his name because he is mute. (Smiling) I call him The Silent One. (A bit more serious) But even in his silence, he brings me joy. He comforts me, he prays with me. And sometimes I feel God hears his silent

prayers more quickly than he hears mine. He, too, is my brother. Although I do not know his name.

The Pope: (Nods and smiles as he slowly surveys the friars.) Well, Francesco, you and your brothers are all welcome. Cardinal Sabini tells me that you have come from Assisi to see us. Tell us the reason for your pilgrimage.

Francesco: We have come to ask your permission to be poor.

[Continues at **]

[Or…Second Version:]

The Pope: A clown and beggars. My dear cardinal. The day has been long enough. (He shrugs with a smile.) Ah. Perhaps the day should end with a smile. We will see them.

(The Cardinal exits and a moment later returns with Francesco, a few followers and The Clown. All, save the Cardinal, prostrate themselves before The Pope.)

The Pope: (Studies them with amusement.) God's blessing on you, pilgrims. We welcome you. Our holy cardinal tells us you have traveled a long way.

Francesco: (Very reverently) Oh, yes, Holy Father. We have come from Assisi.

The Pope: And what is the reason for your journey?

Francesco: (Swallowing hard) We have come to ask you a great favor.

The Pope: Ah, bene. And what is this favor?

Francesco: We have come to ask your permission to be poor.

The Pope: Annoyed) You have traveled a long way to mock our holy office. Cardinal—show these…out. We are not amused.

Francesco: But, Your Holiness—we have not come to mock you—we really—

The Pope: (Firmly) Silence. We have heard enough. You have your instructions, Cardinal—

Francesco: (In innocent bewilderment, as the Cardinal prods them along) But, but he must listen. Oh, we wish to do God's will. We need his blessings.

Cardinal: Basta. The Holy Father has ordered silence. Be gone. (To The Pope) I'm sorry, Your Holiness. They—they seemed harmless. I will see to it that they go quietly.

The Pope: We will be in our chamber—see that we are not disturbed.

(Exit The Cardinal, Francesco, The Clown and Friars.)
(The Pope moves to another room—his chamber—perhaps music in the background--

The Pope kneels briefly in prayer, then stands, picks up a bible, and sits down to read. Soon, fatigue reaches him and he falls asleep. The light changes slowly—the music also—behind him, on a screen, the Dream begins to unfold. It may be done as a film project behind The Pope—or as a dance in silhouette, etc. The Pope, still asleep, "narrates" the Dream.)

The Dream… (A large church is seen, a figure below it.)

The Pope: Oh, Lord—how I love the house in which you dwell. (Song or Psalm 84***… See p. 42.)

(The building begins to shake, to tumble on[to] the figure. Both the figure and still-sleeping Pope reach out vainly to stop the movement.)

The Pope: (In his nightmare) Oh God in Heaven. Holy Mother, the Church is crumbling before my eyes—and—and I am powerless to help her—Lord—in your mercy—hear our prayers!

(Still in the dream—shadow—Francesco and the others enter. As they reach their hands upward, the shaking stops. There is a moment of silence as all remain with arms heavenward—then the Church, Francesco and the others fade away. The Pope awakens.)

The Pope: (Shaken) Holy Mother of God. (He sits for a moment bewildered.) Dear Lord—help me to understand—help me to know Thy will. (Gets up and paces a moment.) Oh—no—it cannot be. Surely, Lord—no—is it possible? Those—those beggars? (Musing to himself) "The stone the builders rejected…" (Pauses—then with resolve rings the bell vigorously for The Cardinal.)

The Cardinal: (Obviously just awakened himself) Your Holiness! Is there something I can— (stops—senses something)—is there something the matter?

The Pope: Where are the beggars?

The Cardinal: (Confused and still sleepy) The beggars are everywhere, Your Holiness.t

The Pope: (Getting impatient) The beggars you brought me today. The ones with the Clown. Where are they?

The Cardinal: Oh—they are gone. They won't bother you anymore. I am sorry they upset you so—I thought—with the clown and all—that you would find them amusing.

The Pope: I want them.

The Cardinal: What? Now?

The Pope: Now. Find them.

The Cardinal: But it is nearly midnight, Your Holiness.

The Pope: Find them. Now. NOW.

(The Cardinal scurries off into the audience looking for Francesco. The Pope kneels in prayer—maybe reprise of Psalm 84***--See p. 42)

(After a few moments, The Cardinal returns with Francesco and the others. The Cardinal looks irritated, the Friars bewildered and a bit frightened. A mixture of awe and apprehension [toward] The Pope.)

The Cardinal: Here are the men you wanted, Holiness.

The Pope: (Long look, then, quietly) Tell us who you are, pilgrims.

Francesco: These are my brothers, and I, the least of the Friars Minor, am called Francesco.

The Cardinal: What do you think they stole, Holiness? I will search them and throw them out so we can all get some sleep.

The Pope: (With a note of disappointment) I did not ask you to get them because I thought they are thieves. (Looks at Francesco.) Perhaps, my brother, we are being given a chance to welcome angels unaware. (Looks at The Clown.) And what of him? Has he no name, Francesco?

Francesco: Why, he is only a clown—a juggler. He is mute, so I do not know his name. I just call him The Silent One. But even in his silence he offers me friendship, brings me joy, comforts me. He even prays with me. And sometimes I feel God hears his silent prayers more quickly than He hears mine. He, too, is my brother, even if I do not know his name.

**[Continue with either First Version or Second Version from this point on…]

The Pope: (Nods slowly.) You said you come from Assisi—to ask my permission to be poor. Yet, by looking at you, it seems as though you've taken care of that on your own.

Francesco: We have done the easy part. We have become poor in the eyes of the world. But we want to be poor for God. We wish your blessing to live lives of spiritual poverty.

The Pope: Certainly you know that many men before you have also had such longings. Perhaps you should make a pilgrimage of the abbeys and monasteries. You may find one which will allow you to live as you dream.

Francesco: (Thinks this over. Then shakes his head slowly.) Their call is to leave the world—to live apart from the world.

The Pope: And what is your call, Francesco?

Francesco: (He has never put it into words before.) My call—my call is to be poor—and with the poor. To live like them and with them. To serve our Lord by serving His people. To make the Church stronger by helping the People of God to know the renewing and strengthening power of God's love.

(Maybe reprise of "Papa…")

(Their eyes meet. Francesco begins to realize the scope of his mission [Version 2 only:] and The Pope understands the meaning of his dream.)

The Pope: You will be called a fool.

Francesco: What greater glory than to be called a fool for Christ?

The Pope: (Nods seriously. Sits for a moment.) And what do you want of us—of me? What can I give you that you have not received from our Lord Himself?

Francesco: (Realizing that the Pope believes in his calling. Thinks for a moment. The juggler dances up—bows to Francesco, then goes to embrace the Friars, who laughingly push him away. Looking woe-begone and heart-broken, The Clown sees The Pope. Reverently he bows. Instinctively, The Pope makes the sign of the cross over his head. Joyfully, he leaps up, runs back to the Friars, who receive him with affection—perhaps raising him up on their shoulders.)

(At this point, Francesco speaks, his vision clear.)

Francesco: Exactly. Once again, the Silent One has given me the words. Holy Father, our Lord has sent me to proclaim His love for the world. But who will listen to me, a simple poor man? No one. But you—you represent the Church. If the Vicar of Christ decrees that indeed the poor man of Assisi has his blessing to preach to and save the poor—perhaps—perhaps they will listen.

The Pope: (Smiling gently and nodding) Yes, yes, perhaps they will listen. Wait one moment. (Goes to his desk. As he writes he speaks…Reprise of Psalm 84*.)

End of Act III.

*****Psalm 84 *Quam dilecta!***

1 How dear to me is your dwelling, O LORD of hosts! * My soul has a desire and longing for the courts of
the LORD; my heart and my flesh rejoice in the living God.

2 The sparrow has found her a house and the swallow a nest where she may lay her young; * by the side of your altars, O LORD of hosts, my King and my God.

3 Happy are they who dwell in your house! * they will always be praising you.

4 Happy are the people whose strength is in you! * whose hearts are set on the pilgrims' way.

5 Those who go through the desolate valley will find it a place of springs, * for the early rains have covered it with pools of water.

6 They will climb from height to height, * and the God of gods will reveal himself in Zion.

7 LORD God of hosts, hear my prayer; * hearken, O God of Jacob.

8 Behold our defender, O God; * and look upon the face of your Anointed.

9 For one day in your courts is better than a thousand in my own room, * and to stand at the threshold of the house of my God than to dwell in the tents of the wicked.

10 For the LORD God is both sun and shield; * he will give grace and glory;

11 No good thing will the LORD withhold * from those who walk with integrity.

12 O LORD of hosts, * happy are they who put their trust in you!

Act IV, Scene i

Act IV, Scene i: The foot of Mount Alverno at sunset. Francesco and perhaps six friars and The Clown are singing grace over their meager supper. It is fall and the flowers and leaves flame in the fading sunlight.

Hymn – Grace ("Come, Let Us Love")

Francesco: (Looking with admiration at the mountain) Ah, my brothers—just look at that magnificent mountain. There is a wildness and fierceness about her, is there not?

Br. Elias: It reminds me of the wildness and flowers hidden in the hearts of men. (He shudders at the thought.)

Francesco: (Laughing) And it reminds me of the wild and fierce love God has for each of us.

Br. Junipero: (Also laughing) Dear Father Francesco, you never cease to amaze me. You find God in everything.

(During the exchange, The Clown has been surveying the area with reverent yet joyful interest.)

Francesco: And why not? "In His hands are all the caverns of the earth and the heights of the hills are his also."

(The Clown exits to hills.)

Br. Junipero: Forgive me, Father Francesco, but—well, as wonderful as this place is—that is—why have you brought us here?

(The others laugh, but Francesco looks at them sternly.)

Francesco: And why do you laugh? Does any one of you know why we have come here? (There is silence. A few shake their heads.) Well then, you should not laugh at your brother's question.

Br. Junipero: (Waits a moment for an answer. None comes. He looks around, a bit afraid to repeat the question. Then, summoning courage, he says) Father Francesco. Forgive me again for my stupidity—but—but—but I still don't understand why you have brought us here.

Francesco: (Smiling a bit wistfully) I have not brought us here. We are here because this is where the Lord has brought us.

Br. Junipero: But why!?

Francesco: (Gently) Forgive me, little brother. I don't mean to avoid your question. The truth is, I don't know why we are here.

(The Friars all react with the appropriate surprise.)

Br. Elias: (A bit annoyed) You mean we have come all this way to do nothing.

Francesco: (Looks at Br. Elias seriously.) To do nothing? Oh, dear brother. We are doing the greatest thing in the world. We are following the will of God.

Br. Elias: (Still unconvinced) And what is the will of God, dear father?

Francesco: (After a thoughtful pause, sigh) His will for us is that we wait patiently until he reveals his purpose for us. (Smiling) Peace, dear brother. I feel this wait will be a short one. Let us sit quietly in prayer. Surely God will guide us.

Song??—"Surely God Will Guide Us"

(After a short period of quiet prayer, The Clown returns, elated. Some of the friars seem to welcome the intrusion into their quiet. Others are less than pleased.)

Francesco: (With friendly curiosity) Have you made a wonderful discovery, my silent friend? (The Clown tugs at his sleeve.) Follow you? You want me to follow you? (Music—softly--beginning of the Ballet) Where? Up the mountain?

Br. Leo: No, Father Francesco. Who knows what you'll find up there?

Francesco: (Caught up in The Clown's excitement, smiles and says) Yes! Who knows what we'll find up there. (Gets up.)

(Music gets louder. Mountain grows more powerful—more visible.)

Leo: No, you must not go.

Francesco: Ah, dear Brother Leo. You are wrong. I must go!

Leo: (Swallowing hard) Then—then—I must go, too.

Francesco: (Looks at the others, who seem afraid he will ask them to go, too. Sensing this, he jokes.) Ah, dear brothers, how eager you all are to share in the great adventures and mystery before us. (Pauses.) But—forgive me, dear ones. I feel only some of us should go lest we get lost and need to be rescued. Only Brother Leo and I will follow the Silent One. (The Friars do not hide their relief too easily.) Keep us in your prayers.

The Ballet (A description)-

(Ideally, a set can be constructed to allow for actual climbing, a winding approach. Also, for the desired effect, a scrim with projects of clouds, etc., may be needed. I will describe it as I "see it" in my head.)

At the foot of the mountain, wild trees and plants can be seen in the fading sunlight. The Clown is in the lead, Francesco following, with Leo trudging behind. At first, The

Clown's enthusiasm causes him to bound ahead, then running back to grab Francesco's hands, pulling. Leo keeps trudging.

As the sunlight fades, the moon rises, revealing an approaching storm. Also, the mountain takes on a more dramatic quality.

Soon, The Clown and Francesco are nearly racing each other until it is Francesco who takes the lead. Now it is Francesco who runs back from time to time to pull The Clown along. Leo trudges on. Perhaps, either visually and/or through the music, there are visions of wolves, other wild beasts, and other haunting forms of strange beings are seen and heard.

By the time the little trio nears the summit, the storm, complete with thunder and lightning, has arrived in full force. A wind is whipping the few plants around. The moon is nearly full and is reaching the summit, about the same pace as the three people, but from the opposite side.

The last few feet of the way, Francesco and The Clown can be seen half-helping, wrestling, racing to the top. The Clown gets to the top a moment sooner, turns, reaches to Francesco and helps him to the top. There are some occasional flashes of lightning and sounds of thunder.

For a few moments, the two remain silent, beholding the world below. Br. Leo has remained at a lower level, too exhausted to move.

After the pause, Francesco speaks.

Francesco: (Music continues softly or Psalm 8…)

O Lord God, King of the Universe.
Blessed are you for the glory of your creation.

O Lord Jesus, my king and brother,
blessed are you for calling me to follow you.

O, Holy Spirit, comforter and guide,
blessed are you for the gift of your indwelling grace.

Glory be to the Father and [to the] Son and to the Holy Spirit,
as it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

(Throughout this prayer, unseen by Francesco, the figures of beings, shadowy, appear. The Clown moves behind Francesco. As the scene continues, the shadows of Francesco and The Clown are projected behind, slowly growing—the effect should be of the shadow of The Clown overpowering--overshadowing Francesco.)

("God's Song…??)

Francesco: (Continues oblivious of what is going on behind him, falls to his knees.) My God, my God! Never before have I felt so near and yet so far from you. So loved—and yet so alone. So blessed, and yet so afraid.

[One possibility:]

(Pauses, eyes turn to heaven.) Lord, I want to love you. Oh, I want to love you as much as you love me. I want to love you with the same fire which nailed you to the cross. (Pauses. Suddenly conscious of the Presences around him, he is filled with fear.)

Jesus, oh dear Jesus! Where are you?

(Francesco stands, and slowly dares to turn. He sees The Clown, who raises his arms to assume the attitude of the crucifixion. Francesco screams in terror.) Oh, my dear God!

"God's Song" (??)

Continue at **

[Second possibility:]

(Stands. "Sings Sweet Beloved One". As he sings, The Clown behind him, slowly takes the position of the crucifixion—the shadow of The Clown grows slowly larger.]

(At the end of the song, Francesco reaches Heavenward, echoing The Clown's gesture. He remains still for a moment—then suddenly becomes aware of the Presence. With some hesitation and fear, he turns.)

Francesco: (Seeing The Clown's shadow behind, and the other figures) Oh, my dear God!

**[Continue, for either Possibility 1 or Possibility 2:]

(With music underneath, Francesco slowly moves toward The Clown. As he does so, his shadow begins to grow, so that by the end of the action, both shadows are the same size. The other figures hover and sway as the music slowly builds. Leo slowly crawls to the crest to behold the sight. When The Clown and Francesco get face to face, they start to reach towards each other, the great shadows behind accentuating the action, as does the music and effects in the sky. When the two touch, they begin to wrestle/dance slowly, suggesting the battle between Jacob and the Angel. At the climax, the two become lost in the dimming light, but the shadows become sharper as the two become one, with arms outstretched. The figures huddle around as in paintings of the women at the cross. There is a flash of lightning. Then the stage is black for a moment. As the light of the moon again slowly lights the stage, we see Francesco in a heap on the ground at the top of the mountain.)

"God's Song "

Leo: (Emerging from behind a rock. His love for Francesco overcoming his fear, he runs to him—"Holy Father Francesco, Father Francesco. Caro Dio mio. Don't let him be dead. Please, speak, say something—open your eyes—please.

Francesco: (After a moment, he moves weakly.) May God's Holy Name be blessed and praised.

Leo: Are you all right?

(Just then, the other friars come racing up the hill, frightened but concerned. They see Francesco in Leo's arms and each utters some words of worry.)

Francesco: (Reaching a comforting hand out, smiling weakly) Be at Peace, my brothers.

(At the gesture, Leo reacts.)

Leo: Father Francesco, your—your hands—blood--(looks down) and—your feet—are bleeding.

Br. Elias: Nails. Father Francesco, it—it looks like—like you have been crucified. What has happened here?

(Francesco slowly stumbles up with the help of Leo and Elias. As he stands, a dark stain can be seen in an area on his side. As he stands, supported by Leo and Elias, they all become aware of what has happened.)

Br. Junipero: Caro Dio Santo. The Stigmata.

(Slowly The Friars kneel as Francesco raises his hand in prayer. The music fades as the lights fade.)

End Act IV, Scene 1

Act IV, Scene ii

Act IV, Scene ii: Forest and Porziuncola, ca. 1226

(Years have passed. We are now in a cabin in the woods. Francesco, old, weak, nearly blind, is dictating to Brother Leo.)

Francesco: Ah, dear Brother, forgive me for taxing your patience. Would you be so kind as to read back to me the last few lines you have written?

Leo: [Words of Canticle of the Sun—all except the last few verses…]

Highest, all-powerful, good Lord,
Yours is the praise, the glory, and the honor,
And every blessing.
They belong to you alone, Most High,
And no one is worthy to speak your name.

So, praised be you, my Lord, with all your creatures,
Especially Sir Brother Sun,
Who makes the day and enlightens us through you.
He is lovely and radiant and grand;
And he heralds you, his Most High Lord.

Praised be you, my Lord, through Sister Moon
And the stars.
You have hung them in heaven shining and precious and
fair.

And praise to you, my Lord, through Brother Wind,
Through air and cloud, calm, and every weather
That sustains your creatures.

Praised be you, my Lord, through Sister Water,
So very useful, humble, precious and chaste.

Yes, and praise to you, my Lord, through Brother Fire.
Through him you illumine our night,
And he is handsome and merry, robust and strong.

Praised be you, my Lord, through our Sister Mother Earth,
Who nourishes us and teaches us,
Bringing forth all kinds of fruits and colored flowers and herbs.

Francesco: Ah, si. Bene. Now please add these lines.

[Words of Canticle of the Sun—the remaining few verses…]

O, and praise to you, my Lord,
Through those who forgive one another in your love,
And who bear sickness and trials.
Blessed are they who live on in peace,
For they will be crowned by you, Most High!

Praise to you, my Lord, through our Sister Bodily Death,
From whom no one living can escape.
How dreadful for those who die in sin,
How lovely for those who are found in your Most Holy Will.
For the second death can do them no harm.

O praise and bless my Lord.
Thank him and serve him
Humbly but grandly!

(Begins to cough. Then laughs rather weakly.) Ah, praise God, dear brother. It seems as though Sister Death is even closer than I thought. (There is a knock on the door. Leo jumps and looks afraid. Francesco chuckles.) Fear not, Brother Leo. When Sister Death does come, she will only knock on this door. (Taps his chest, which makes him cough again. Once more, a knock is heard.) Please, dear brother, the door.

(Br. Leo goes to the door. Summoning his courage, he opens it. Clara is there, hardly showing age, dressed in her plain, very aged habit.)

Leo: (Bowing both with reverence and relief) Mother Clara. How blessed and honored we are to have you with us.

Clara: The Lord be with you, Leo. Where is our Holy Father Francesco?

Francesco: (Revived by the sight of her) My dearest sister. May God be praised and thanked. Come. Come close so I might see you. I feel the eyes of "Brother Ass" grow dim.

Clara: (Kneeling by his bed and taking his hand. Laughing gently.) The eyes of your body may be growing dim, Father Francesco, but I am sure that the eyes of your soul are seeing more clearly each day.

Francesco: When it is God's will. (A look of sad doubt tinged with fear comes into his eyes.) Oh, Clara. Pray for me. Sometimes I see things, think things—I don't know. Are they gifts from God or delusions of the devil? For so long I have tried to live only to give myself to the Service of our Lord. I have been blessed beyond imagination. Who am I that God would bless me so! When I begin to think of how God loves me, I both rejoice and fear, lest I become prideful.

Clara: (Nods.) Yes. I know. The blessings from God can be fearsome gifts. Yet, if we continue to pray to receive them with humble thanksgiving, knowing that we deserve none of the divine joys we are granted, I feel secure that the Grace of the Holy Spirit will defend us from pride.

Francesco: But there is always the danger that…

Clara: Peace. The Lord's peace be with you, Father Francesco. This is the time to trust in Our Lord's love for you. His love is greater than any of your fears or doubts.

(Possible song: "Come Let Us Love" or…??)

Francesco: Cara, cara Chiara. Your words are the manna from heaven my soul needed for its final journey.

Clara: Where are your other brothers, Father Francesco?

Francesco: (Thinks, then looks at Leo.) I have been more asleep than awake lately. Brother Leo, where are our brothers?

Leo: They went to clean some stables. But it is nearly time for Evening Prayer, so they should be returning soon. Can I get you anything, Father Francesco?

Francesco: (Getting weaker) What I need now only God can give me. And like all His gifts, it is one I dearly desire yet find no way prepared to receive.

(Just then, the door opens and the friars come in.)

Br. Elias: God's peace to all who live here…

Clara: (Quickly looking at Francesco and Leo for permission to speak) …And His peace to all who enter.

(The Brothers all react with surprise, joy, reverence.)

Br. Elias: Mother Clara. Gift of the angels. May the Lord be thanked for this blessing of blessings.

(All The Brothers, except Leo, bow as she puts her hand on each head prayerfully. As she finishes, Leo rings a little bell. Quietly, each take their place in a small chapel in some room. Clara remains with Francesco. One brother lights the candles. After a few moments of silence, Br. Elias begins the Office.)

Br. Elias: [Words of a portion of one of the monastic offices, perhaps Evening Prayer…]

(As the prayers/hymn draw to a close, The Clown comes out of the shadows and moves toward Francesco and Clara. Clara bows when he comes toward her.)

Francesco: (Weakly) My dearest friend. It has been a long time since I've seen you. (Pause) I do not know if I am prepared to [take] the last step of this journey. I am so weak.

(During the next scene, The Friars remain in a prayerful tableau. The Clown begins to juggle. Gradually, Francesco sits up. The Clown tosses the balls to Clara, who catches them. He motions to Francesco to follow him. For a moment, Francesco hesitates. Music begins…)

Clara:

“And I must go where he leads me,
though the road is dark and long.

(Francesco begins to stand.)
“For here in his arms, I come alive.
I find freedom and peace…

(Both)

“I am strong.”

Francesco/Clara: (Singing)

“I heard the voice of my Beloved One,
and my joy is as deep as the sea—
so I’ll walk by his side and sing of his love for all eternity.”

(By the time the song is over, Francesco is on his feet between Clara and The Clown. Francesco addresses the Friars, whose attention is turned toward him, seriously.)

Francesco: (He is smiling.) Ah, fratelli—state contenti. This is a time of joy for—and I wish it to be a glad time for--you. (Looks at Clara and The Clown.) Ah, what a wonderful band of fools and madmen we have become. (Gesturing to include all)

(To the Friars) Remember, brothers, always to be humble, serving all. You will never be poor enough, for God gives us more than we need. Love all, not judging anyone; remember our Lord’s love for us even when we are furthest from him. And be joyful, always be joyful in all things. Consider all things, both pleasant and painful, a gift from God. Often his gifts are hard to bear at first, but if they are accepted joyfully, they become very light. And, dear brothers, never forget that you have not chosen this honor, you have been called to this honor. Pray always to have the courage to persevere. You are sent to a world which needs you, but a world which will scorn all you say and do. Keep in mind the words of our Lord, “Be of good cheer, for I have overcome the world.” Farewell, I go to Him whose love is beyond imagination. The Peace of the Lord be with you.

The Friars: And with thy spirit.

(Francesco turns toward The Clown, but his strength leaves him. He falls to the ground. The Clown, Clara, The Friars bring him to his cot, encircling it so neither he nor The Clown can be seen. The Friars and Clara begin to sing a song with the words, "…to be chosen"... As they do, can see the shadows of The Clown and Francesco move toward a light. The shadows move toward the growing light. When they merge, the light becomes a Christmas Star.)

Finale

Cast of Characters

In Order of Performance:

Narrator –
Brother Felix-
Young Person/ Terry –
Pietro –
Giovanni –
Augusto –
Rufino –
Francesco –
Chiara/Clare/Clara –
Donna Pica –
The Clown –
Bernardo –
The Leper –
Person # 1 –
Person # 2 –
Gigu –
Giuseppi –
Mario –
The Bishop –
Sergio –
Benito –
Brother # 1 –
Friars –
Brother # 2 –
Brother # 3 –
Guard –
Cardinal –
The Pope –
Br. Elias –
Br. Junipero –
Br. Leo –