

## The Nun's Trail, Dramatis Personae

Harry Fielding, a convict

Vivian (Fingers) Farnsbarnes, a convict

McVitie, a prison officer

Mother Superior

Sister Michael

Sister Chastity

Sister Cosanostri/Raymondo Bononcini

Angus, the cook

Lilian Smudges, the cleaner

1.

ACT 1

SCENE 1

FINGERS WHISTLES LOUDLY AND  
TUNELESSLY.

HARRY: FINGERS!

HARRY: Yes, Harry.

HARRY: Put a sock in it. You've been whistling for an hour and it's getting to me.

FINGERS: That's great! I'm not even allowed to be cheerful in my own room.

HARRY: Cell, Fingers! It's a cell - and I have to share it with you. Besides, you only know one tune and that's only got two notes in it. You sound like a cuckoo with a nut stuck in it's throat.

FINGERS: I've always wanted to do bird impressions.

IS ABOUT TO TRY ONE.

HARRY: Fingers - NO!

PAUSE

FINGERS: Harry?

HARRY: (Impatiently) Yes, what is it now, Fingers?

FINGERS: How long are you in here for?

HARRY: Oh, a long stretch this time. Ten years to be precise. Less, if I get parole.

FINGERS: Ten years? What did you do to earn that?

HARRY: Just a spot of house clearance in Romford.

FINGERS: What do you mean, 'house clearance'?

HARRY: Well, you know, the usual sort of thing: I hired a big removal van and emptied a house of its contents.

FINGERS: Is that against the law?

2.

HARRY: It is if the owners don't know about it. They came back from their summer holiday to an empty house. Only trouble was the owner was the Chief Constable. Mistake number one: I picked the wrong house.

FINGERS: How did you get caught, Harry?

HARRY: Ah, that was mistake number two. I flogged some of the big chief's hardware to a fence in a pub - only the fence turned out to be an undercover copper and he recognised some of the chief's clobber.

FINGERS: That was clever of him.

HARRY: Not really, it was all security coded. All he had to do was put it under a u.v. lamp. I reckon the last laugh was on the big chief, though.

FINGERS: Why's that then?

HARRY: Let's just say some of his items I was trying to flog were of a unusual nature: lots of superhero comics, superman, Spiderman and such like: hundreds of Star Trek videos - and even some uniforms. Seems the old man liked to dress up as Captain Picard in his spare time.

FINGERS: Jeepers, what do you think his wife thought about that?

HARRY: I should imagine she wouldn't have thought it unusual. After all, her wardrobe included a Catwoman costume and a Lieutenant Ohura uniform. Perhaps they met at a Trekkies convention.

FINGERS: I'd like to have been a fly on the wall down at the nick when that lot was brought in.

HARRY: Well, I've heard that the following Christmas the chief received no fewer than eighteen copies of 'Hitch-hikers Guide to the Galaxy'. And the biggest catch-phrase at the station that year was 'Beam me up, Scotty!'

FINGERS: What about 'is it a man, is it a bird? No, It's the Chief Constable'.

HARRY: Alright, Fingers, that's enough? What're you in here for anyway?

FINGERS: Driving offences!

3.

HARRY: Driving offences? Is that all. You must have killed someone to have got time for that.

FINGERS: No, I was driving quite normally when I was stopped.

HARRY: Don't tell me - you were driving on the pavement?

FINGERS: Nope!

HARRY: Wrong way up a one-way street?

FINGERS: Nope!

HARRY: No insurance?

FINGERS: Nope!

HARRY: No licence?

FINGERS: Come on - use your imagination.

HARRY: Under the influence of your mother-in-law?

FINGERS: I was driving a getaway car with half a million in crisp, new banknotes in the boot.

HARRY WHISTLES IN ASTONISHMENT.

FINGERS: I offered a share to the traffic cop who stopped me but he wasn't interested. I got another five years for that.

HARRY: But, if you were driving normally, how did you get rumbled?

FINGERS: The boot flew open on the M25 and the dosh was spread like confetti over all four carriageways. Caused a twenty mile tailback.

HARRY: (Guffawing) Poetic justice they call that.

FINGERS: I wouldn't know, I never read any poetry.

HARRY: Not even, 'I wandered lonely as a clown'?

FINGERS: What?

HARRY: Or 'Twas the night before Christmas and all through the house, you could hear my Ma yelling and slapping her spouse'?

FINGERS: Never heard it!

4.

HARRY: You must have read some poetry at school!

FINGERS: Didn't go to school.

HARRY: What never?

FINGERS: Well I did about three times but I soon decided it was not for me.

HARRY: But surely, your parents must have known.

FINGERS: Never had a father, Mum didn't care. She was drunk most of the time. Actually, come to think of it, she did used to call out in the mornings, like this: 'Vivian, it's time for school'.

HARRY: What, your sister didn't go to school either?

FINGERS: Didn't have a sister.

HARRY: Then who was Vivian?

FINGERS: That's me you idiot!

PAUSE

HARRY: You're never called ..... Vivian.... *(laughing)* Did they think you were a girl when you were born or something?

FINGERS: *(Standing)* Now just you look here, you pompous git. *(Grabbing Harry by the lapels and shaking him)* I've had enough of you already and we've only been in the cell together for two hours. If you don't shut your trap I'll stick your head between those bars.

HARRY: Alright....alright.... Vivian, *(Fingers steps towards him)* er, Fingers. Your secret's safe with me. Relax! I think I'll unpack my stuff. *(Jumping off the bunk)* You know, it's not easy for me, either, fielding your incessant questions!

FINGERS: What does incessant mean?

HARRY: There you go again. Every minute another question.

FINGERS: Have you been timing me?

HARRY: Look, let's have five minutes of silence, shall we. Agreed?

5.

FINGERS: Agreed!

PAUSE

FINGERS: Has it started yet?

HARRY: Of course it's started but you've spoilt it now. Let's start again.

FINGERS: O.K. but you must say 'now' when it starts.

HARRY: NOW!

ANOTHER PAUSE

FINGERS: How do I know when it's finished? I haven't got a watch.

HARRY: It can't finish if it never starts, can it!

FINGERS: Sorry, Harry. Let's try one last time and you say 'finished' when we get to the end.

HARRY: It really doesn't matter what I say, does it! If you hear me talk it must be the end.

FINGERS: Not necessarily. You're talking now and it hasn't started.

HARRY: Are you ready?

FINGERS: Yes, Harry.

HARRY: Now!

ENTER MCVITIE, A PRISON OFFICER.

MCVITIE: Finished!

FINGERS: I thought five minutes was longer than that.

MCVITIE: Every minute seems like an hour to those detained at Her Majesty's pleasure.

FINGERS: You spoilt our game.

HARRY: Fingers, it was not a game. I need some peace from time to time or I'll go mad.

MCVITIE: Not another bloody Fingers. There are fourteen already in this prison. There's Fingers O'Flaherty in East Wing, he's a lifer, then there's Fingers Watkins the jewel thief, Fingers the safe-breaker, he's ...

6.

HARRY: You could call him by his real name.

FINGERS: I warned you, Harry. I'll break your neck if you ever tell anyone my name.

MCVITIE: Then you shall be, 'The man with no name'!

FINGERS: Very funny. And who are you anyway?

MCVITIE: I am room service, haven't you worked that out for yourself. Day shift, South Wing, Her Majesty's representative, Jock McVitie, your minder.

FINGERS: I don't need no minder.

HARRY: Do you want something, McVitie, or is this just a courtesy call?

MCVITIE: Let's get one thing straight, Harry Fielding, you call me Mister McVitie.

FINGERS: And if we don't?

MCVITIE: Then you'll be cleaning out the latrines every morning for a month.

FINGERS: O.K. Mister McVitie.

MCVITIE: Actually, I've come to warn you.

FINGERS: Thanks for the warning, you can go now.

MCVITIE: Very funny. I suppose you heard about the fate of the previous occupant of this cell?

HARRY: Stop playing games, McVitie, and get to the point.

MCVITIE: Mr McVitie! The point is, he disappeared. One night he was tucked up and snoring, the next morning he was gone.

HARRY: Impossible!

MCVITIE: Some say the Mob got him, broke into the cell, cut him up into little pieces and flushed him down the toilet.

FINGERS: They did that?

MCVITIE: The Mob can do anything. No-one's safe from the black hand, even in jail.

7.

FINGERS: What's the black hand?

MCVITIE: You've never heard of 'the black hand'?

FINGERS: Is that what coal-miners get?

MCVITIE: No, it's what traitors to the Mob get. It means certain death.

FINGERS: Oh Mother! (*Fingering his neck.*)

HARRY: And just who was this prisoner - the one who 'disappeared'?

MCVITIE: RAYMONDO BONONCINI was his name.

FINGERS: Hey, I've heard of him - he's that jazz bloke.

HARRY: That's Mancini.

MCVITIE: Took with him the secret of the Star of Nepal.

FINGERS: Was he an astronomer, then?

HARRY: It's a diamond - you idiot. I remember now. Bononcini was a jewel thief. He pulled off one of the biggest diamond robberies in history. The Star of Nepal was - is - a black diamond. It was given to Queen Victoria by one of her Maharajas as a birthday gift and was kept in the British Museum - until about five years ago, when it was stolen.

MCVITIE: The diamond was never found. Rumour has it that Bononcini brought in into prison with him.

FINGERS: Hey, perhaps he ate it - and the mob cut him up to search inside him?

HARRY: Have you been watching Pinocchio?

MCVITIE: Now, I must finish locking up. And I don't expect any trouble from you two - or else....

HARRY: Or else what?

MCVITIE: Your wives will not be allowed to visit.

FINGERS: That's not a punishment - it's a blessing!

MCVITIE: Just remember my warning, both of you.

EXIT MCVITIE, SLAMMING THE DOOR.

8.

FINGERS: What was it he wanted us to remember, Harry.

HARRY: That we should make every effort to escape. Now, lets start searching for a way out.

FINGERS: But I know where the way out is - it's the same as the way in - and he's just locked it.

HARRY: Remember what he said about Bononcini. There has got to be another way out - a tunnel or something - but it must be really cleverly hidden.

FINGERS: You don't think he was cut up and flushed down the bog then?

HARRY: Of course not, you idiot. Now help me look. Don't you want to escape?

FINGERS: Well I dunno.

HARRY: What do you mean, 'I dunno'?

FINGERS: You don't know my wife, do you?

HARRY: No, of course not.

FINGERS: If you knew her you'd understand!

HARRY BEGINS TO SEARCH POSSIBLE PLACES FOR A TUNNEL. FINGERS SEARCHES SOME RIDICULOUS PLACES, SUCH AS THE CEILING.

HARRY: Now what're you doing, Fingers?

FINGERS: I'm looking for a tunnel, like you said.

HARRY: Well, you won't find it up there. I don't suppose he wanted to escape to a cell on the top floor.

FINGERS: No Boss, I'll look in here.

EXIT FINGERS TO BATHROOM.

FINGERS: Nice toilet!

HARRY: Stop admiring the porcelain - it's not an art gallery.

FINGERS: Hey, this toilet's wobbly.

HARRY: You're not supposed to be sitting on it.

9.

FINGERS: Hey, it swivels round. Look, Boss!

HARRY: Why did you call me Boss?

FINGERS: If we're going to be a team one of us has to be the gov'nor and I don't rate my chances.

HARRY: Let me sit on there.

FINGERS: I was here first.

HARRY: I'm the boss, remember!

FINGERS: Oh alright.

HARRY: I see what you mean - it rotates.

FINGERS: I never said it rotates.

HARRY: You did!

FINGERS: Didn't!

HARRY: Alright, well you said swivel. It means the same. Hey look! it slides as well - and what's this?

FINGERS: A hole, Boss.

HARRY: I can see that, you fool. Quick get me a light.

FINGERS: Sure, Boss.

ENTER FINGERS. HE CLIMBS ONTO HARRY'S BUNK AND ATTEMPTS TO UNSCREW THE LIGHT BULB. AFTER BURNING HIS HANDS HE TAKES OUT A HANDKERCHIEF AND REMOVES THE BULB. HE EXITS TO BATHROOM.

FINGERS: Here you are, Boss.

HARRY: Argh! You idiot, I didn't want a light bulb! Especially a hot one. Never mind that - let's go.

FINGERS: Go where?

HARRY: Up the passage!

FINGERS: Well, I dunno .... perhaps I'll stay here....

HARRY: Fingers! If you stay here you'll talk - unless I kill you.

FINGERS: Let's go down the tunnel.

10.

HARRY ENTERS AND DIGS AROUND IN HIS LOCKER.

FINGERS: Where are you going?

HARRY: Just collecting a few things. Razor, spare socks, you know.

FINGERS: Oh yea. I need a few things myself.

FINGERS PICKS UP A TEDDY BEAR AND HIS PYJAMAS.

HARRY: Is that all you're taking? *(Exit Harry to bathroom, shaking his head in disbelief.)*

FINGERS: Can't think what else I'd need!

HARRY: There's just about enough room for me to squeeze through. Hey, it's really black down here.

FINGERS: That must be the darkness!

HARRY: Come on, Fingers, it's clear now. Come down.

FINGERS: I'm...I'm stuck, Harry.

HARRY: Then you'll have to stay there until you lose weight!

FINGERS STRAINS AND SWEATS TO GET THROUGH. SUDDENLY HE FALLS WITH A THUMP.

FINGERS: Harry, where are you? I'm through. I thought I might break something but the ground's soft.

HARRY: That's because you landed on me, you buffoon!

FINGERS: Sorry, Harry.

HARRY: Now, reach up and rotate the toilet.

FINGERS: What's that?

HARRY: Swivel it!

FINGERS: Sure, Boss.

THERE IS A GRATING SOUND.

HARRY: Now we'll have to feel our way along.

11.

FINGERS SCREAMS.

HARRY: Fingers, what on earth is it?

FINGERS: It's a spider! I hate spiders. It's attacking me, Harry.

HARRY: Pull yourself together. *(We hear a slap)*

FINGERS: What did you do that for?

HARRY: That's what they do to hysterical women in the movies. Now come on! And keep your voice down. We don't want to be heard.

ACT 1

SCENE 2

AS THEY CRAWL ALONG THE TUNNEL.

FINGERS: *(In a hoarse whisper)* Harry!

HARRY: Yes, what is it now, Fingers?

FINGERS: Is it shaped like a nipple?

HARRY: What the hell are you on about now?

FINGERS: The diamond.

HARRY: I'm not with you.

FINGERS: Well, I was wondering why it's called the Star of Nipple.

HARRY: Not Nipple - you cretin - NEPAL. It's a country.

FINGERS: Never heard of it. Is it one of those they invented since the Russians pulled out?

HARRY: No it is not. It used to be part of the British Empire. It's where the Ghurkas come from.

FINGERS: It's not the only place. My Grandad used to grow them at the bottom of the garden.

HARRY: He grew what?

FINGERS: Gurkins.

HARRY: Do you know, fingers, having a conversation with you is like watching a movie with the sound out of sync. You're always a little behind the picture.

12.

FINGERS: I've never been in a movie, have you?

HARRY: Hey, Fingers, this feels like the end of the tunnel. I reckon we've crawled about a hundred feet in an easterly direction. That should have taken us at least thirty feet past the outer wall.

FINGERS: I can't see daylight.

HARRY: Fingers, it's night time.

FINGERS: I can't see anything.

HARRY: I can feel something here. It's a ladder! Fingers, this must be the way out.

FINGERS: You go first boss - see if it's safe.

HARRY: There's a sort of trapdoor here. It's ... it's a bit tight. Here we are.

(HE PUSHES UP THE TRAPDOOR AND  
EMERGES INSIDE A LARGE TRUNK IN  
THE CONVENT LOUNGE)

HARRY: My God, we're inside another building.

FINGERS: Not another cell block, surely!

HARRY: No, it looks different. I can see easy chairs and a coffee table and a crucifix.

THE SOUND OF CHANTING FEMALE  
VOICES IS HEARD, DISTANTLY.

FINGERS: Here, what's that noise? It sounds like one of them old movies - King Arthur and the Holy Grail!

HARRY: I think it's Gregorian chant - a psalm if I'm not mistaken.

FINGERS: I haven't the faintest idea what you're talking about.

HARRY: Now, there's a first!

FINGERS: Perhaps it's the prison choir.

HARRY: Nice idea, but there isn't one.

FINGERS: What about those West Indian gospel singers in C block?

13.

HARRY: There aren't any women in C Block.

FINGERS: Well, I'm not going up there - they might be devil worshippers looking for a sacrifice.

HARRY: Actually, Fingers, I believe this tunnel has delivered us to the Convent of the Sacred Heart over the road.

FINGERS: Well that's still a good reason not to go in. All those women locked in there for years without any male company. It's unnatural.

HARRY: On the contrary, Fingers, that's as good a reason to go in as I can think of. I'm going to investigate. If I don't return in half an hour, come and rescue me. No, make that three hours.

FINGERS: You go in if you want. I'm staying here. But let me know if you find her.

HARRY: Find who?

FINGERS: The holy tart!

HARRY: Holy tart? (*ponders*) Fingers - it's sacred heart - not sacred tart! Sometimes you're so full of malaprops you could explode!

FINGERS: Thanks, Boss.

ACT 1

SCENE 3

HARRY SQUEEZES THROUGH THE TRAPDOOR AND EMERGES INTO A LARGE WOODEN TRUNK. HE LIFTS THE LID RIGHT UP AND PEERS OUT.

HARRY: Fancy that, a trunk with a false bottom. (*Looks around*) Make the Lord strike me dumb if this isn't grand.

HARRY CLIMBS OUT AND REPLACES THE BOTTOM OF THE TRUNK. HE TRIES OUT ONE OF THE COMFY CHAIRS. THE CHANTING STOPS, A BELL RINGS OUT AND HE JUMPS UP AS THOUGH STUNG.

HARRY: What the hell?

VOICES ARE HEARD APPROACHING ALONG THE CORRIDOR. HARRY SWIFTLY HIDES BEHIND THE CURTAINS. ENTER SISTERS MICHAEL AND CHASTITY. MICHAEL IS MIDDLE-AGED AND VERY PLAIN BUT CHASTITY IS ABOUT TWENTY-FOUR, PRETTY AND CURVY. BOTH ARE DRESSED IN FULL-LENGTH HABITS AND WIMPLES.

SISTER CHASTITY: Why does the Mother Superior have to hit that bell so hard? It gives me a headache.

SISTER MICHAEL: Just one of her little foibles, dear. It's the only exercise she gets, you know.

SISTER CHASTITY: No wonder she's such a fat ....

SISTER MICHAEL: Really Sister Chastity! You should not talk about Mother like that.

SISTER CHASTITY: Well, perhaps she needs an aerobics workout like I do every morning. It keeps me in shape. (*Shows off her figure*)

SISTER MICHAEL: The Lord has blessed you with a slim and athletic body, Sister Chastity. The Mother Superior is rather fuller in the figure.

HARRY PEEPS OUT FROM BEHIND THE CURTAIN, GLIMPSES CHASTITY AND LIKES WHAT HE SEES. HE GRINS AT THE AUDIENCE BEFORE CONCEALING HIMSELF AGAIN.

SISTER CHASTITY: Nevertheless, she should still keep herself fit.

SISTER MICHAEL: I fear she is more concerned about her spiritual fitness than mere concerns of the flesh.

SISTER CHASTITY: You can't have the one without the other. I feel spiritually refreshed when I finish my workout.

SISTER MICHAEL: It must get very warm doing aerobics in your habit.

SISTER CHASTITY: Oh, I don't wear the habit when I'm exercising.

HARRY PEEPS OUT AGAIN.

15.

SISTER                    Really dear?  
MICHAEL:

SISTER                    No, I exercise naked.  
CHASTITY:

HARRY'S FACE IS A PICTURE. HE  
SHRINKS BACK BEHIND THE CURTAIN,  
WHICH TREMBLES VIOLENTLY. THE LID  
STARTS TO RISE ON THE TRUNK AND  
HARRY PUTS OUT A FOOT FROM BEHIND  
THE CURTAIN AND STAMPS IT DOWN,  
SQUASHING FINGERS'S FINGERS. HE  
LETS OUT A YELP OF PAIN.

SISTER                    What on earth was that?  
MICHAEL:

SR MICHAEL GETS UP AND LOOKS OUT  
OF THE WINDOW.

SISTER                    Just someone passing in the street. Why don't you  
CHASTITY:                    shut the window?

SISTER                    Very well, my dear. (*Shuts window*) Forgive me for  
MICHAEL:                    asking, but you don't seem the type to be a  
novice, what made you enter the convent.

SISTER                    It was my Mum's idea really. She says I should  
CHASTITY:                    try it and see if I like it.

SISTER                    My dear, taking holy orders is a vocation. This  
MICHAEL:                    is not something one enters into lightly.

SISTER                    I know that.  
CHASTITY:

SISTER                    One doesn't enter a convent in the same way as  
MICHAEL:                    one takes a job as a, a, a cleaner, for instance.

SISTER                    No, but there are some similarities.  
CHASTITY:

SISTER                    There are?  
MICHAEL:

SISTER                    Just look at me wearing overalls, with sore knees  
CHASTITY:                    from kneeling on the floor and scrubbing my soul  
till it's whiter than white....

SISTER                    Sister Chastity, please do not talk like that.  
MICHAEL:                    You will get this convent closed if you're not  
careful.