



SEAT 14A

A short play

Setting: The interior of a small commercial airplane—the kind that makes forty-five minute trips between same-state cities. This setting may certainly be implied. The only absolutely necessary staging consists of three chairs lined in a row facing the audience, and a fourth chair set apart, off to the side.

Cast: Sister Socorro, a nun, 50s

Elaine, 60s

Tom, Elaine's husband, 60s

Madge, a medium, 40s

Alanna, a flight attendant, 20s

Agent Bradford of the FBI, 40s

Agent Kieve of the FBI, 30s

Darkness. Sounds of people moving, conversing, etc. A BING is heard.

ALANNA (*voice-over*): Ladies and gentlemen, in a few moments we will open the cabin door so that all passengers can disembark. Thank you for flying with us today.

Lights up on an isolated portion of the plane: a one-row section of three consecutive seats. In the leftmost seat is SISTER SOCORRO, looking pious. Next to her is ELAINE, and beside Elaine is her husband TOM. The couple gets up and stretches, and Tom reaches for the bags.

TOM: Good flight.

Moving, fidgeting underneath Sister Socorro's robe. The other two passengers don't notice. Suddenly, smoke begins to seep out of openings in the robe. Sparks fly.

ELAINE: Oh my God! What's going on? You're on fire!

Part of the robe has indeed caught on fire. Elaine and Tom are panicking, but Sister Socorro remains calm. Her eyes are closed and she is humming some tune. She smiles.

ELAINE: What in God's name?

Sister Socorro, her eyes still closed, cries out joyously.

SISTER SOCORRO: At last! Yes!

TOM: Terrorist attack! She's going to blow up the plane!

Sounds of passengers screaming, shouting, general chaos, etc. Elaine grabs a magazine and smacks the nun in an attempt to put out the fire.

ELAINE: Help! Stop her!

Tom throws himself across Elaine and grabs Sister Socorro by the throat. He throttles the nun with both hands. Sounds of chaos continue. ALANNA emerges holding a fire extinguisher. She unleashes its contents on all three passengers.

ELAINE: Ah! My eyes!

TOM (to Sister Socorro): Who are you?

SISTER SOCORRO: Noooooo!

The flames have been put out entirely. Sister Socorro sobs. Tom drags her to her feet and brings her into the aisle. Sound of a cabin door opening. Commotion continues as two FBI agents, BRADFORD (a man in his 40s) and KIEVE (a woman in her 30s) enter.

ALANNA: That's her.

KIEVE: The nun?

Agents grab Sister Socorro. Kieve gets out handcuffs.

SISTER SOCORRO: I'm not to blame! It's they who've interfered with the Lord's work!

BRADFORD: These wackos'll do anything. Dressing up as a nun....

SISTER SOCORRO: I am a nun! And an American citizen. I love doughnuts!

ELAINE: You may be American, but what did you think—

you'd just light a bomb under your robe and we wouldn't do something about it? We watch the news!

SISTER SOCORRO: It's not a bomb. It was His divine plan!

Handcuffs are secured and agents begin to lead Sister Socorro off-stage. As they leave:

KIEVE: I advise you not to say anything else.

SISTER SOCORRO: But I speak the truth when I say this is the Lord's doing, not mine! I didn't start myself on fire—He did!

KIEVE: Spontaneous combustion, huh. Let's go.

MADGE: Wait!

Lights up on a nearby section of the stage, revealing MADGE, seated. She rises and points at Bradford and Kieve.

MADGE: These past few moments I have been in contact with your long-deceased boss, J. Edgar Hoover, the most famous—or infamous—FBI director America has ever known.

KIEVE: Don't tell me we're going to have to take you in too.

MADGE: Like the nun, I'm telling the truth here. I'm not surprised you doubt my abilities as a medium, but you'll see. I have J.E. himself here, ready to speak out on this poor woman's behalf.

Kieve glances at Bradford then goes for Madge. The medium raises her hand.

MADGE: Halt! Watch.

Bradford falls to his knees and clutches his head. He moans and groans then writhes on the floor in agony. Kieve draws her gun and aims it at Madge.

KIEVE: Whatever you're doing, stop it or I will drop you!

Bradford's moans, groans and cries cease. When next he speaks it is in the voice of J. Edgar Hoover.

BRADFORD (*as J. Edgar Hoover*): There'll be no need for that, Agent Kieve.

KIEVE: Gary?

Bradford stands.

BRADFORD (*as J. Edgar Hoover*): Gary? My name is J. Edgar Hoover, founder of the organization you work for, Agent Kieve. Forty-eight years I directed the agency, forty-eight years of keeping subversives off the shores and out of the establishments of our great country. I might not have gotten all the respect I deserved when I was alive, but, damnit, as your superiorest of superiors I demand that respect now! Put away your weapon or face demotion!

Kieve turns her gun on Bradford.

KIEVE: Stop messing around, Gary!

BRADFORD (*as J. Edgar Hoover*): You doubt that it's me, your superiorest of superiors!? How dare you!

Bradford draws his gun so quickly it seems to materialize in his hand. Kieve makes as if to shoot but backs down. She continues training her weapon on Bradford, who does the

same to her.

KIEVE: What's going on here?

MADGE: He's possessed, don't you see? J. Edgar Hoover has inhabited his body! I promise you he'll leave as soon as this is resolved.

KIEVE: I can resolve this just fine.

MADGE: He's only helping!

BRADFORD (*as J. Edgar Hoover*): Agent Kieve, for the last time stand down and listen!

Kieve tenses, seems about to shoot, then with a cry of frustration lowers her gun. Bradford does the same.

BRADFORD (*as J. Edgar Hoover*): Very wise. You have averted a catastrophe, Agent Kieve, and for that you are to be commended. But let's not pat ourselves too quickly here. There's still the question of the nun: was she or wasn't she attempting to bomb this aircraft? For the answer let us go to the source herself....

SISTER SOCORRO: You mean I get to explain? That's a new one. All right....As a child I knew this would happen. I'd been waiting for this moment for so long! When I was young I saw a member of our church, a man, burst into flames during the offering of the sacrament. We didn't put out the flames. He wouldn't have wanted that. And I knew then that when I entered the church to do His work I too would be taken that way, in the blazing arms of the Lord! Of course I didn't know when it would happen, only that it would happen. In the last year I've been praying each morning, afternoon and evening, sensing, and just the other day the Lord answered me: soon.

(to Kieve) I'm sorry—I didn't think He would take me here. It was such a short flight and, well, it really was an innocent mistake.

Kieve heaves a sigh, shakes her head.

SISTER SOCORRO *(to Elaine and Tom)*: Do you believe me?

ELAINE: Heck, sister. If Hoover can take over his body, I'll believe God can blow up yours.

TOM: Do you have a spare rosary?

SISTER SOCORRO *(to Alanna)*: And you? You who did what was necessary, a heroine in this world but a meddler in the next?

ALANNA *(sheepish)*: Maybe you'll, you know, get another chance?

BRADFORD *(as J. Edgar Hoover)*: What we need is democracy in action. Put it to a vote. All those in favor of believing that the nun was about to be taken by the Lord in a fiery self-contained eruption, say aye!

Alanna, Madge, Tom and Elaine simultaneously shout aye.

BRADFORD *(as J. Edgar Hoover)*: The ayes have it. Release the nun!

Kieve, dumbfounded, releases Sister Socorro who proceeds to shake and smooth out her burnt robe.

BRADFORD *(as J. Edgar Hoover)*: Truth has triumphed over the subversive elements at

work in—

Bradford as Hoover cries out and falls to the floor, writhes, etc. The others watch as the fit passes and Bradford is again himself.

BRADFORD: What happened?

KIEVE: Come on. You don't need to know.

BRADFORD: But the blackout—

KIEVE: I'm writing the report on this one.

The agents exit. Alanna ushers the others in the same direction.

ALANNA: Everyone, please depart. And remember: what you've just seen is of national importance, so by all means keep it a secret!

Lights dim. Commotion, people moving, etc.