

The Our Lady of Perpetual Mercy Quilter's Circle

By Jeff James (© 2005)

(The setting is a room filled with quilting materials, including sewing machines, cloth, quilting frames, etc. Three elderly women sit working on parts of the quilts. From stage right to stage left, their names are as follows: AGNES, BEATRICE, and CLAUDETTE. Two almost finished quilts hang on the back wall. These quilts depict two scenes: one of a man in an electric chair about to be executed - this is AGNES's - and one of a woman weeping over a grave - CLAUDETTE's.)

BEATRICE

(Intones)

In which our girls announce their causes.

AGNES

My son is a very talented young man. So intelligent. He has so many possibilities in front of him. He could be a doctor, a lawyer, or even a politician. He could travel the world and become a multimillionaire. He made just one mistake. That's all.

CLAUDETTE

My son was a very talented young man. So intelligent. He had so many possibilities in front of him. He could have been a doctor, a lawyer, or even a politician. He could have traveled the world and become a multimillionaire. But someone made just one mistake. That's all.

AGNES

I watched my son grow up and become so strong. He is a good boy, but he doesn't always make the right choices. I worry about him sometimes, but what can you do? I was as shocked as everyone else when I heard what he had done. It just didn't seem like something my boy would do.

CLAUDETTE

I watched my son grow up and become so strong. He was a good boy. I knew I could trust him to make the right choices. I worried about him sometimes, but what can you do? I've never been so shocked as when I heard what had happened. It just didn't seem possible that it could happen to my boy.

AGNES

My son may have killed, but I don't think he should be killed.

CLAUDETTE

My son has been killed. The question of whom should be killed, however...

BEATRICE

In which our girls lob the first volleys.

AGNES

The reasoning behind the death penalty does not make sense to me. If it is wrong to kill a person, then why should another person be killed in retaliation? Where is the justice in that? Who has the right to decide that one life is more valuable?

CLAUDETTE

The reasoning behind the death penalty makes perfect sense to me. It is wrong to kill a person, yes, but should a person who kills another keep the same rights?

CLAUDETTE (Cont.)

Do they deserve to live, having taken another human being's life? Is death not a fit punishment for a killing? I can see some justice in that. Who was he to decide that my son's life was not valuable?

AGNES

Why kill more people? Why can't my son's punishment be to live with the shame of what he has done? Can't he learn from his mistake? Can't we let the judgement be up to God?

CLAUDETTE

What if he got out of prison? Would he kill more people? Who could say he could even change? Why does he have the right to live? Why does he even get to breathe air?

BEATRICE

The Great Equation.

(Two chalkboards roll onto the stage. Agnes and Claudette each go to one and proceed to draw equations as they talk.)

AGNES

All deaths are bad. Murders are bad and executions are bad. One was bad, so why should another be good? One murder plus one execution equals two deaths. One plus one equals two.

CLAUDETTE

All senseless deaths are bad. Murders are bad because they have no sense. Executions are good because they are the sensible consequence of murder. One murder plus one execution equals null. One plus one equals zero.

(The ladies push the boards back offstage, then turn and begin to stare each other down. Suddenly, Agnes breaks into song.)

AGNES

(Sings)

The quilt of my dreams -
I sew all the seams.
The cloth is all shades
My work never fades.
I've been working for ages-
The quilt has its stages.
My work is quite true
But I don't know about you...

CLAUDETTE

(Sings)

You couch every word
In sayings absurd.
This contest you make
Is decidedly fake.
My quilt is the best
Can beat all the rest.
Your work is so bad
I'm almost quite sad.

AGNES

(Sings)

It's true it is funky,
The colors quite chunky,

AGNES (Cont)

You think it has style,
I find it quite vile.
Your quilt is so tasteless
Your pride is quite baseless.
Prepare yourself, dear
Cause no one will cheer.

CLAUDETTE

(Sings)

Insults don't faze me
You'll never erase me.
My patterns are pristine
And yours are just unclean.
I'm so sorry, hon
You won't have much fun
When I get the cheering
And you get the jeering.

BEATRICE

(Yells)

Enough! Enough! I've had enough of this song.

AGNES

What?

CLAUDETTE

Bea, settle down. We were trying to have a discussion here.

BEATRICE

You were getting on my nerves. Neither of you can sing.

AGNES

Well, we're trying to settle this, so butt out.

CLAUDETTE

Unless you want to choose?

BEATRICE

I suppose. Give me your cases again.

AGNES

My son committed a crime. He had never committed a crime before in his entire lifetime. He was a fine upstanding gentleman. One day he was walking down the street and he made one mistake. Because of his mistake, someone died. He was convicted of killing that man, and was put on death row. He will be put to death soon.

CLAUDETTE

My son never committed a crime in his life. He was a fine upstanding gentleman. One day, he was walking down the street and another man decided that he deserved to die. It was wrong, but it was not a "mistake." I think it is hard to make a mistake when you know exactly what you are doing. His killer was put on death row, and will be put to death soon.

BEATRICE

And the quilts?

CLAUDETTE

My quilt is called "Murdered."

AGNES

No! My quilt is called "Murdered."

CLAUDETTE

No, your quilt should very obviously be called "Murderer"

AGNES

I could say the same about yours!

(In this next part, each woman yells out the name of her quilt and what she thinks the other quilt should be called, and points at each respective quilt.)

CLAUDETTE

(Her quilt)

Murdered!

AGNES

(Claudette's quilt)

Murderer!

CLAUDETTE

(Agnes' quilt)

Murderer!

AGNES
(*Her quilt*)

Murdered!

CLAUDETTE
(*Agnes' quilt*)

Murderer!

AGNES
(*Claudette's quilt*)

Murderer!

CLAUDETTE
(*Her quilt*)

Murdered!

BEATRICE

SHUT UP! (*Pause*) Personally, I think they're lovely companions. Besides, It's just a difference of one letter. Why don't you call them "Murderer and Murdered?"

AGNES

We could.

CLAUDETTE

I suppose.

BEATRICE

Let's get back to work.

(The women return to their quilting. Blackout.)

THE END