



Reluctant Press presents:

Her New Habit

Monica James



AN 'ADULT TV' E-BOOK

Copyright © 2008, Reluctant Press - All Rights Reserved

Reluctant Press TG Publishers

This story is a work of fiction. Any similarity to persons living or dead is entirely coincidental. All situations and events herein presented are fictional, and intended only for the enjoyment of the reader. Neither the author nor the publisher advocate engaging in or attempting to imitate any of the activities or behaviors portrayed.

Persons seeking gender reassignment surgery, hormone therapy or any other medical and/or body-altering process should seek the counsel of a qualified therapist who follows the Benjamin Standards of Care for Gender Identity Disorder.

Protect Professional Fiction on the Internet!

We need *your* help! We want to keep providing our readers with low cost, professional quality fiction on the Internet. We spend thousands of dollars to edit, illustrate and typeset *each story*. It is important, therefore, that everyone works to help keep professional fiction alive on the Net.

This story is protected by US and International copyright law, and is owned exclusively by Reluctant Press, which retains exclusive rights to publish these materials. The civil penalties for copyright infringement can be severe, including substantial monetary damages, injunctive relief, and liability for attorneys' fees incurred in prosecuting a case. If a court determines that the infringement was committed willfully, statutory damages of up to \$100,000 for each copyright infringed can be awarded. Even if not found to be acting willfully, a defendant can still be held liable for statutory damages of \$500 to \$20,000 for each copyright infringed. **These penalties apply even if money was not charged.** In addition, criminal penalties may be imposed if someone willfully infringes a copyrighted work for commercial advantage or private financial gain. This crime is punishable by up to five years imprisonment, up to \$250,000 in fines, or both. State civil damages and criminal penalties vary from state to state and country to country, but are always severe.

The best way to keep professional illustrated fiction available on the Internet is to do **YOUR** part to protect the author's and publisher's copyright. *You can be part of the solution.* Encourage others to purchase our stories. Never share the access rights you've purchased. **You** make the continued availability of TG fiction on the Internet possible. Thank you for your cooperation!

Her New Habit

By Monica James

Some like it hot; some like it cold
Romantics like it boiling
In the pot,
Not on hold

Cara Mia, 2007

Chapter I The Carmelite Nun Steps Out

It was late Friday afternoon on the Las Vegas Strip. The breeze born in the nearby desert was dry, tepid.

“Ah, ‘evening, Sister,” the barker said. He had just come out on the sidewalk to start his evening’s work as hawker to entice the tourists into the Circus Club Theatre.

She looked at him and smiled. “Do you still have every light bulb on even in daytime?”

He watched her as she observed the promo-posters of cross-dressers advertised as “female impersonators.”

“You are early for vespers, Sister,” he joked.

“She turned a sly eye and winked at him. Las Vegas is all right if you don’t mind living inside a pinball machine.”

He laughed. “People come here for the action; there might even be a hint of sin. That would be your concern; that right, Sister?”

“Some of it. So, young man; I’d like to go in. Do I just walk in? I’m not so very different from any other tourist.”

He was immediately nervous. "Really, I don't think this would interest you."

"But it does, it's just what I'm searching for. I'm looking for a job."

Mouth gaping, he cleared his throat. She looked up at him with a shy smile but there could be no denying the intensity in her eyes. For the first time he became interested in the beautiful nun, guessed her age as mid-twenty-something, and frowned. "You know, Sister, there are a lot of traditions broken in this town. We specialize in lewd shows, raucous behavior and quickie divorces followed up by quickie marriages."

"Ah, precisely. I am quite aware. Now, you may consider me as free and loose as an errant tumble weed; may I pass?"

Without waiting for an answer she stepped into the modest foyer and, with one last determined sigh, parted the faux-velvet curtains to step inside. She was met with a refreshing blast of cool air and, when her eyes became adjusted to the darkened room, she made her way to the bar.

The barmaid looked startled. "Whoa, Sister. You in the right place? I guess you are if you are saving souls."

She smiled and touched her waist in an endearing gesture. "If the souls cry for rescue; yes, perhaps. I should rather become one of the lost generation. Can you help? I'm looking for a job."

Speechless, the barmaid blinked and fastidiously began wiping down the polished bar with a damp cloth. "You're serious, aren't you?"

"Yes; who do I talk to?"

The barmaid raised her eyebrow in question. Her smile was friendly but reserved. "I can inquire, Sister. You do speak like a college girl. This is getting weird."

Doña Mia tapped her foot, impatient. "Very well, then. Let me rephrase the question: To whom may I speak about employment?"

As if wounded, the barmaid called out in the empty theater, "Max. Help, please."

Not exactly 'Hey Rube' but it had the right result. Max came out from his office cubicle just behind the bar. He stopped dead in his tracks, amazed to see a fully vested Carmelite Nun standing expectantly facing him.

Her angelic face, framed by the nun's headpiece, the wimple, demanded his attention. He had the feeling that if he did not reply, this gentle soul would accost him.

Doña Smiled at the manager, but her words were firm. "I will be grateful for an opportunity to audition," she said in an even tone.

He took an extra long gaze, once again admiring her scrubbed face, forceful features without a trace of makeup, the lustrous eyes and firm ambiance. "Very well, then. Come along, dance for me." He led her to the small stage, clicked on the sound system and motioned her forward. "You will be in costume, of course, but the dance routines should be effective even if you're in a burlap bag with a patent leather belt." He chuckled at his own aphorism and stepped aside. The music filled the theater, reverberating to define the stark silence. The barmaid was in rapture.

"I came prepared," she said evenly. She untied her cape at the neck and waist. She slipped it off her shoulders and draped it over a chair. "There, that's better."

She danced easily, falling into the rhythm, creating her routines as she continued on. Taking each step, twirling, stomping and skipping, she congratulated herself for dressing in case the audition would be immediate. She had on her thin black silk skirt, gold trimmed. Over that, starting at the waist, the black belt held fringe-fingers of charred lace that extended down to mid-calf. As she danced, the skirt was static but the long fringes flew about. The moving body hinted at the hips and thighs, created an erotic image. When the music paused she posed like a statue of Aphrodite, waiting, her breathing easily controlled. Beginning again, she was confident her dance routines, impishly choreographed to impress the club manager, emphasized her svelte body. The black V-neck blouse held a crescent shaped moon blinking as if from a violet-shaded black light secretly flashing. The simple ornament was a distracting suggestion centered on her cleavage that perhaps a new mystery was being formed right there, then, in an empty theater, compelling, needing, the distant desert forgotten.

When the music stopped with a bass crescendo, all that could be heard was random sound from the outside, a car horn, a distant siren. There was absolute silence.

While Doña Mia danced, three of the show-stopper dancers had come in. They were surprised to see the gorgeous girl dancing in audition for Max. They knew there was no need for an additional dancer. When Doña Mia finished dancing they called out and gave her a round of applause.

Finally, Max stepped forward and took her hand. "Thank you, Doña; that was lovely. Now, go introduce yourself to Odile, our costume designer. You two can come up with an ensemble." Doña Mia, breathing evenly like an experienced athlete, put on her robe and fastened it.

Max motioned to the newly arrived dancers so one of them would show her the way. He then went back to his small office.

The three approached. "I'm Drexel," the first one said. "This is Mika, our lead dancer and this is, well, she also dances."

She laughed, a hearty good-natured tone from the depth of her throat. "Thank you, pleased to know you, Drexel, Mika and, uh, also-ran." They escorted her to the seamstress's workshop, a spacious loft.. After motioning her inside, they left, their arms around each other's waists.

Odile turned — she had some red material in one hand, several pins in her mouth, when Doña walked in. "Oh," she said. "A nun; are you a new dancer? Max should be here to introduce you but, yikes! Where is he?" Her wide brow creased in confusion.

Doña laughed and stepped forward. She extended her hand and Odile took it.

"Thanks for the welcome ceremony. I shan't soon forget the red satin in your hand and collection of pins in your mouth."

They both laughed. "I'm working on an idea; costume like a crimson stain across the shoulders. She pinned a double fold of gauze to the shoulder of her shop manikin. Next she clapped her hands like a small child having dressed her Barbie Doll.

Just the one gesture, pinning and folding the costume basic design, was so full of energy that Doña was momentarily fascinated by the spirited girl.

Odile hastened to clear a chair for Doña to sit. "Now," she said in her best busy tone, "I need to get your measurements. Can you remove your shawl and hood?"

Dona swiftly set her outer garments aside. "This OK?"

"Sure, relax; it's painless."

They laughed again. It was an easy meeting of two very different people both easily congenial. "I'll keep you to your word."

"Ah, you are very feminine. Don't always know what to expect around here."

"That's the gender, yes." She closed her eyes in stoic regard as Odile measured her head size, then her neck. She turned to look at Odile when the efficient fingers lapped her neck. She was amused when Odile clicked the roof of her mouth with her tongue. She put both hands on her knees and swung around to look at Odile.

The busy costumer was slightly taller, about the same age, but with elegance in her bearing that Doña had not noticed at first. Her stare, when she looked at Doña was direct, unassuming, which made Doña comfortable. She decided then she would get to know the charming girl better. A friendly relationship she thought then, would be all she needed.

She became aware that Odile was mumbling, or chanting, apparently to herself. Next, she said, "First and foremost a dancer has to be able to move. I have some material here, modern dance fabric that is stretchy." She stopped abruptly and turned to stare at Doña. "I see you as a scene-stealer. By yourself would be enough, but the costume, like sets, is the support for the dancer."

Doña smiled. "Well said. Shall we get on with it, then?"

"Stand up," Odile said and wrapped one arm around Dona's waist. . She measured the hips and waist, and then snapped the tape measure away. "May I comment that you have an attractive figure? Do they allow that in the convent?"

Doña laughed again. "Who could notice?" she quipped. "Anyhow, I am on leave to do some research. May I rely on you to select some clothes for me to wear? Everyday things, I mean."

"My pleasure, Sister." Next, Odile hastened away and returned with a camera. "If you'll stand over there, please, I need some pictures so the boss can show off his new dancer."

"Oh, OK. What shall I do?"

"I'll do it, don't worry." She snapped on a floor lamp and positioned Doña at the angle in the photo booth she wanted. She unbuttoned the linen vest piece until Doña's breast cleavage was exposed. Doña blinked when the busy girl pressed her breasts to let the cloth draping her breast line fall naturally. "Very lovely. We'll design something to do your neat form justice."

Doña nodded and squeaked, "Thanks. Justice is not precisely what I had in mind but, go ahead, do your best." After pausing a moment she decided to try to impress the attractive girl. "When my veil is the top of a matador's cape with just the decorated hilt of the

sword showing, I shall think of you. When my veil is a glowing cloud floating above me, I shall think of you."

Odile grinned. "You are a trip. I have to admit I've never been this close to a nun before. This is kind of exciting." She removed the belt and set it aside. That done, Doña's skirt fell to the floor. Odile quickly picked it up, brushed the dusty side officiously, and hung it up on a hook just outside the photo booth.

Dona squared her shoulders and faced Odile. The cool breeze from the air conditioner enveloped her. She stood firm, proud of her figure, and confident of showing her form. At one point she smiled at the thought of telling Odile to close her mouth.

"Oops, sorry. Didn't mean to gape at you. Your legs are exquisite."

"I'll take that as a compliment. I'm a dancer; conditioned legs shouldn't surprise you."

"Guess not, but a sexy nun does."

They both laughed again. Odile took out the roll of film and snapped the camera shut. "I'll drop these off on the way to lunch. Join me?"

"Thank you. I was so nervous I didn't have any breakfast."

Odile tipped her head to one side and evaluated her new friend. "We better get you some clothes. If you go in the nun's habit, that's one thing. But, if you go in panties and bra you'll stop traffic."

Doña laughed some more, slipped on her skirt and fastened her shawl. "OK to secure these wayward buttons?" She asked, teasing.

"I guess you call that a sense of humor. My education is complete."

They left for the afternoon break. At the Town Bistro they slid into a booth and looked at the menu. The waitress knew Odile by name but raised one eyebrow when she saw Doña. Odile introduced her and they ordered veggie wraps.

"Friend of yours?" Doña asked. She put both elbows on the table and rested her chin on the backs of her hands.

Odile smiled. "She isn't used to seeing me with someone new."

"Am I someone new? You better bring me up to date."

Odile smiled again. "Yes; the four dancers you saw in the pictures at the club entrance are, well, regulars around here. Have you seen their act?"

"No, but I'm anxious to include them in my research. The photos show them as very pretty girls. Going with the advertising about female impersonators, I thought there would be something you could tell me."

Odile took a deep breath and exhaled slowly. "You are the soul of diplomacy. They are not girls, they are guys; the breasts are real but the male equipment is hidden in the costume. Rather tricky, if I do say so myself."

Doña was silent as she processed what Odile had just said. "And Max is concerned with, uh, what exactly?"

Their lunch came and Doña carefully took one bite after another, still thinking over what Odile had told her. "OK, now that I'm here, it's where I came in."

Odile giggled. "No matter where you go, there you are."

"Max said something about an intermission attraction."

"Yes, he's mentioned that several times. He didn't know what to do until he saw you. I can see he has made a good choice."

Doña was distracted, then, "The girls, they sure look good in the pictures. Are they all gay?"

Odile giggled again. "The tall one is the leader because he has the most experience. That's Mika. He is planning to have the male/female operation; it's called gender reassignment. I'd describe she/he as sexually 'open' in that he's unsure at this juncture what his attitude will be. It's an expensive procedure and he is saving for it."

"And the others?"

"Two live together and frequent the gay scene after the club closes. They fool around a lot. Mostly, I think they are just young and carefree right now. But, they do take their hormones to keep their femininity active. Aside from this, in case you tend to be judgmental, they are all really nice people. Sure have seen a lot worse."

"You missed one."

Odile hesitated. "Drexel is my favorite. Comes from good family, is well-educated and loves the dance routines they do. We sometimes go out together after closing to the coffee shop or to get a drink someplace."

"I can tell you like him. Does he like girls?"

Again, Odile stopped talking while she planned what to say. Next she reached over and took Dona's hand. She pressed the fingers gently. "You'll find out sooner or later so I better make the situation clear. I like Drexel a lot; normally I don't like guys but Drexel as a girl is more feminine to my way of thinking. My preference is girls. Hope you're not shocked."

"Oh," Doña whispered and looked more carefully at Odile who sat facing her, smiling and waiting. "I'm not passing judgment. I honor your preferences. I now recall how interested you were today in getting measurements and taking pictures. Should I be flattered?"

Odile scooped up the lunch check and turned to get out of the booth. "Doña, you are the most self-confident, secure, girl I've ever met. You don't need to be flattered; you know who you are."

Doña looked up at her. The wistful glint in her eyes was enchanting. "Now, I'm flattered. I'm glad you find me attractive."

Odile hesitated before answering, swiftly left a table tip and paid the bill at the cashier. "This is on Max; he just doesn't know it yet." She giggled.

On the street they stopped to admire a painting in a gallery window. Odile took the opportunity to gently grasp Doña's hand. "Yes, you are very attractive," she whispered. "But

I want you to know all lesbians are not promiscuous by nature. I'm happy with my life the way it is, Drexel included."

As they left the shop window, Doña grinned happily. "I respect that," she said crisply. They walked on in silence.

Just as they stepped into the alleyway leading to the stage door, Odile's cell phone buzzed. The austere notes of Gershwin's Rhapsody insisted on an answer. "Pardon, please." She glanced at the LDS. "It's Max; he always knows how to find me."

As Odile carried on an animated conversation, which Doña only was privy to half of, Doña pulled the heavy door open. She stood in the vestibule. She waited.

Odile came in after several minutes delay and, somewhat out of breath, took Doña's hand to lead her up the steps. "Max is waiting for us, come on."

They found Max sitting comfortably at a small cocktail table in the lounge serving area. He stood up as they approached which Odile noted was definitely out of character. Something is up, Odile thought, and it includes our Doña Mia.

The barmaid sprang out of the shadows and delivered three café lattes. She sported her best wide grin which meant, to Odile, that whatever it was, the barmaid was informed.

"On behalf of the Circus Club Theatre, we'd like to make you an offer. As our intermission dancer, you receive two-hundred a week – Mondays are paydays – which should be generous unless I'm wrong about your other income."

Doña Mia smiled in appreciation. "I accept, I think," she said playfully. "What other income?"

Odile could stand it no longer. "Tips! With your dances and my costumes, tips!"

"Odile will show you the studio apartment. It has a private entrance from the alley just beyond the stage door. You'll find it comfortable, I hope. There's a kitchenette if you like to have your own meals. Any questions?"

She held her fist with one hand and looked at Max. The intensity of that look became a stare and, unaccustomed to such gracious charm, Max was uncomfortable. He smiled and left the girls to discuss the plans.

Doña Mia stood up and stepped backward, still looking at Odile. "I guess we just have to wait," she said as if in apology.

Odile was confused. "Wait for what?"

"Monday, of course," Doña Mia said and grinned happily.

CHAPTER II She Dances

Doña Mia decided not to tell her newfound friends that the studio apartment was a palace compared to her cubicle at the convent. Collecting the meager amount of money she had to travel with, Doña Mia imposed on Odile. They went shopping for street clothes.

“What shall I wear for my debut?” Doña Mia asked.

“Haven’t had time to get all my ideas together. Can you wear that same outfit you danced in for Max to get the job? Your audition addition, shall we call it?”

“Well, yes; and we have Sunday to get other stuff together.”

“That what you usually do on a Sunday? I heard otherwise.”

“Somehow, I think it will work out,” she answered.

“Not to worry. Max is billing you as a sneak preview. He does that when he wants to get a feel for how the audience is accepting the act. Of course, they are all there for a good time, to drink and whistle at the girls, so it usually goes well.”

At the apartment, Doña Mia carefully laid out her vestments, wrapped them in the plastic garment bags from the store, and put them in the closet, farthest from the door. It was a moment for reflection. So many exciting things were happening that she was giddy, a new anxiety.

For several long moments she was overcome with a feeling of dread, of a pulsing sadness, marking her quest. Her mind reached back to the life she had before entering the Carmelite Order. Why, she asked herself, did she need to run away? And, further considering, why run when you don’t know from what you are escaping? Again, the cold sweat, the dwelling fear, the mindless angst, crept on her. It wasn’t the dance, she was confident of that, or the raucous crowd she had to entertain, she felt immune there. Something had happened in her life, a long time ago. It was blocked from her memory and she was frightened of it.

Odile rapped on the door. She hastened to let the girl in. “You OK?”

“Sure, come in. Keep me company. I’m trying on my new outfit for my first out-trip to the Town Bistro. Like it?”

Doña Mia buttoned the front of her half-blouse and posed for Odile. The material gathered around her shoulders and upper arms stretched to give a Victorian appearance. Odile applauded.

Next, Doña Mia dropped the full length skirt and stepped out of it. The matching mini-skirt clinging to her hips and thighs was so suggestive Odile had a moment’s lapse of breath.

“You are gorgeous. Getting a dance costume for you is a challenge.” Odile impulsively wet her lips and signaled for Doña to follow her to the costume workroom, her loft.

Once there, Odile closed the hallway door and secured it with the leather loop. She next set to work involving Doña in everything she did. She chattered incessantly as she fussed with some costume ideas for the beautiful dancing nun. Doña opted to keep silent. “Mm, the bodice I have for you is metallic, golden red Lycra, high cut in the front; the unseen adds to the unknown. That means it’s better to follow the curves,” Odile was saying, half under her breath.

Doña Mia observed that Odile liked to ‘think out loud’ when she is working.

“Ah, emphasis,” she continued, mumbling. “The swell of the breasts, the isolation of the rib cage, the stretch of the torso, enticing with each intake of breath and movement.

I've skipped the cleavage for now, not that you have anything to be concerned about in that department, because suggestion is more powerful than the visual."

She continued to handle some bulk materials, hemmed the skirt and again changed the height to flirt with the knees instead of the ankles. She next delved into her costume jewelry box and held up a crucifix necklace for Doña to consider. Then Odile stepped back to admire her efforts thus far. "What do you think?" she asked and tugged the full length mirror closer.

Doña smiled. "And, when it's all made up, you guarantee I'll be able to walk?" she asked, teasing.

"Ah, you remind me. Shoes."

Before Odile could leave to search for suitable shoes, Doña touch her arm to stop her. "Please, no offense, the Carmelite Nuns are known to be unshod. They call it discalced. I have a pair of Capezio FootUndeez to protect my feet from splinters and such."

Odile put hands on her hips and looked squarely at Doña Mia. "So, what's with this? You going to conduct a prayer service or something? We're getting you a sexy costume and, all of a sudden, we, like, make out as barefoot."

"Please, understand. The point is I will feel more comfortable without having to contend with your Buster Brown Oxfords."

"OK, on with the show." She adjusted the loose folds several times before the pins started to shape it. "Um, the back is cut low to the cute breach of the buttocks; some call it the lower cleavage. You're particularly well equipped there. Maybe you're Greek." She continued to work.

Doña Mia became amused. "Never, that I can recall, has anyone paid so much attention to me. You are a madwoman." She smiled and noticed her comments went unheard.

"The skirt is semi-sheer with four slits to allow freedom of movement. When the form is in silhouette, being lighted from the back, exposed bare legs flash in the light and shadow; sure to cause pandemonium."

"And, don't forget the five dollar bills from heaven."

"I won't. You can plan to do quite well judging from the attention you are getting from Max."

"It's called job security."

Odile cocked her head to look at Doña. "You already had that at the convent, right?"

Doña smiled. "Yes but this is more exciting."

"Is that exciting joy, or exciting passion?"

Doña stood up. "I hope to find out someday. Are we finished?"

"For now. The final touches I'll put on before the curtain goes up. I might have to call on you for another fitting but probably not."

Doña smiled again. "Is it Town Bistro time yet? If you don't feed me, I'll collapse."

Odile put her supplies in order and grabbed her cap which she wore backward so the bill covered her neck.

"You look like a teenager," Doña mocked as they walked to the Town Bistro.

Odile was thoughtful. "Do you mind telling me about this Carmelite Order, if that's what you call it?"

Doña pursed her lips. "Sure, why not? It's the order of Our Lady of Mount Carmel. It has been a part of the church for about a thousand years."

"You don't look that old."

"Well, I am; uh, maybe just a few centuries short. A famous story tells of two Carmelite nuns who lost their lives on the guillotine during the French Revolution. They were lovers and one couldn't live without the other."

Odile sighed. "That's so romantic."

"That's why it's a famous story. The entire convent of nuns perished and are now martyrs to the order."

Odile was playful. "If the friars would dress as nuns, would they be the first transvestites? That was gross, I apologize. So, what about the stage name Max is asking for? Any ideas?"

"Yes, I wrote it down for him so he would get it right. In Latin, Mount Carmel is *Monte Carmelo*. I selected the name, 'Carmelo Mia', like it?"

As they entered the bistro, Odile took Doña's hand and led her to their favorite booth. "Well, if Carmelo is the name of a mountain, it suits you just fine."

The same waitress brought them two steaming mugs of coffee and took their order. Odile glanced across the table at Doña who looked fresh in a short sleeve white blouse. The crucifix Odile had given her dangled on a gold chain around her neck. She stared at Doña expectantly.

She returned the stare and, after a moment, spoke up. "What?" she asked.

"You ready for tonight? It is Saturday and there will be a crowd."

"I can handle it. Why? Are you afraid for me?"

"No, I just wanted to say that I think the crowd will adore you."

"Thanks; I wish I had your confidence. Will you help me with the dress?"

She grinned and sipped her coffee. "Of course. After your first routine, I'll do some safety pin adjustments to make you look better."

Early that evening, when the curtain dropped on the "female impersonators", the audience roared with laughter and applause in response to the antics of the 'frantic four'. As the house lights were turned up, and the waitresses hurriedly filled orders from the bar, Doña Mia stood in the wings waiting for her cue.

She was as ready, she considered, as she would ever be. She felt confident in the revealing dress Odile had adjusted for her. The house lights dimmed, then were bright a moment, and again dimmed.

The music began and the crowd fell to an expectant hush, not sure what to expect. The music drummed the end of an overture, the small curtains shrouding the stage parted. Doña Mia stepped into the circle of light. Standing there in a statuesque pose, she felt a rush of pleasure to hear Mika introduce her.

“Ladies, laddies and gents. Welcome Carmelo Mia who has agreed to dance for us to express the little-known liturgical mysteries of her life in the Carmelite Convent.”

Sporadic applause and Doña was encouraged. She had, for some outlandish reason, thought the mention of the Carmelite Order would not be accepted. The music slipped into an even tempo and she broke the statuesque pose, raised her arms to hold both hands above her head and began a slow twirl. At this point, she shook her hands and two lights attached to her fingers flashed a subtle blue. Mika continued.

“Carmelo Mia is bringing the secret dance known only to hidden enclaves in Europe named “The Rain of the Rose Pedals” depicting how so many beauties do indeed come from above just as this heavenly creature has and who now dances for you.”

By this time the crowd was curious. Doña stepped into a small circle on the stage and began a figure-eight movement with her hips. Two more lights, to match the ones on her fingers, came on at her waist. More clapping encouraged her. The figure-eight was so exactly choreographed that, when she bent her knees and leaned far to one side, the sideways arc made by the streaming lights appeared as the symbol for infinity.

Doña Mia loosed a torrent of steps – she was twisting and turning, writhing, straining against the fabric adorning her lithe form.

Mika continued as the music reached for a crescendo. “A round of applause, all you lads and lasses, for this brave girl who dances into our hearts.”

Doña stepped off the stage, took a deep breath, and returned to the footlights for a bow. The applause replaced the music in crescendo.

“I did it, didn’t I?” she said as Odile complimented her. “I’m a hit.”

Max was ecstatic with the response. Reservations were adding up for the Tuesday debut of Carmela Mia. He called on Doña and Odile.

“We have to do something spectacular,” he began with an intense voice. “It’s all over the street that we have a dancing nun. I need ideas.”

Odile wrinkled her brow which she did when lost in thought. “Did you talk to Mika and Drexel?”

“Yes; nothing creative from them for the moment.”

Doña Mia spoke up. “I think I have something that we can develop. And it won’t require a special costume which will make life easy for Odile.”

Max was interested. “Never mind that. Odile is a genius. What are you thinking?”

Doña frowned before beginning. “OK, listen up. It’s my dance routine, right? So, let’s try this. Take my nun’s habit and dress a mannequin on stage left, by the lighting bank. We can fit a chalk-white mask under the wimple. Next turn the dummy to one side so nobody sees the face until the final moment of the dance when the dancer, that’s me, goes to the dummy, does some secret incantation of some kind, and turns the face into the light.

The dancer drops to the floor like an operatic heroine and the curtain closes. That should scare hell out of them, if you'll pardon the expression."

Max stood up. "Do it; sounds great. I'll get posters and, if there is time, run a human interest story about the dancing nun who has come to Vegas to help her convent out of wreck-and-ruin."

Odile was inspired by the idea. In a short time she had the mannequin dressed and ready to go. They found a mask for the face and decided to put heavy white chalk on each cheek. Next they outlined the eyes, nose and mouth in black India ink. Odile added some luminous paint splotches sparingly to get the ethereal effect. It went well.

Monday morning, Odile rapped on Doña's door.

"Hi, come in; I'm just out of the bath. We have an important errand today."

Odile went to the refrigerator and helped herself to some OJ. "Pray tell, what is that? Oh, leave out that pray part."

Doña grinned. "I have my paycheck; we go to the bank and open an account."

"So you're going to start a stash. In no time you'll be paying off the mortgage on a cloistered dog house."

"Laugh if you want but it's the way of the world. That's what I came here to learn about."

"If you can manage some time, Mother Superior, we need to do some final stitching on your dance regalia for tomorrow's opening. Maybe you can give me an appointment right after lunch at the Town Bistro."

The two friends went to the bank, gorged on veggie wraps at the bistro and headed back to Odile's costume loft. Their camaraderie was evident to the many people on the street who knew them and who also knew about the Carmelite nun making a bid to get the convent out of bankruptcy. Nobody gave a thought to the impossibility of any financial agent arranging a loan on a convent.

Tension hung in the air like an L.A. smog. Doña Mia waited for the appointed hour before going to Odile's costume loft. Thing -One and Thing-Two were transporting the Carmelite mannequin to the stage left position. It was ready for its unique debut.

Doña arrived at the loft just in time to see the girls tug and carry the mannequin down the hallway. "Easy there," she said, calling to them. "That lady is about a thousand years old."

Drexel shot back, "Doesn't look a day over five hundred."

She smiled and went in. Odile had prepared for the meeting by dressing in a small costume of her own to add some levity to the moment. She had on a black tutu, fringed with a single strand of white velvet, short enough to surprise everyone with well-turned legs.

Doña stood in the doorway and beamed. Then she applauded as Odile swept her arm across her torso and dipped in the fashion of an English maid. "How marvelous you look. You can have my job anytime," Doña said laughing.