**NICE PEOPLE DANCING TO GOOD COUNTRY MUSIC**by Lee Blessing *CATHERINE.*

Well, I\*ve . . . been on retreat for awhile from the convent. You can go on retreat from a convent. (*Pause*) You know, I really could cook up here . I’m not dodging your queston I like eating simply. So, it’s no shame to go on retreat. They don\*t kick people out. That\*s not how they do it. How do they do it? They ask them to go on retreat. And if that doesn\*t work out, they ask you if you wouldn\*t be more comfortable in a secular mode. I mean, I\*m nor unhappy. There\*s no need. Really. It was just the logical outcome of. . . certain events, that\*s all. Things I said. Not bad things. Nothing awful, really. Just inappropriate things. Things that made people in a strict order uncomfortable. Not political things, ot reform things... Dirty words. It\*s a very sort of unexpected but not entirely unheard-of syndrome I developed recently. I noticed it one day a few months ago. I was going to breakfast one morning — a morning like any other morning—and I passed one of the sisters in the hallway. She\*s a woman I saw every day, someone I\*d never harbored an evil thought about. She smiled as she went by, looking serene, and I smiled back at her and said, "Isn\*t this a lovely morning, Sister Shit?". I don\*t know where it came from. It\*s one of my clearest memories, though: the look on her face, the way she recovered almost at once, and asked me to excuse her, but she hadn\*t quite heard . . . And even *I* wasn\*t sure at that moment, just what I\*d said. I couldn\*t have said what I thought I\*d . . . So anyway, I smiled pleasantly and apologetically, and took a deep breath, and said, "You heard me, Fart-face," and walked on. I did. I swear I didn\*t mean to. Sister Beatrice never hurt me in her life. She was one of the ones I liked best. And **it\*t** not even a matter of that. We\*re in the same holy order, we\*re children of God. It just came out of me. Like speaking in tongues or something. The words just leaped out of me. They had to be spoken. That\*s what my psychologist said. Wouldn’t you see a psychologist? I saw everybody. I saw lots of people in the Church: priests, nuns, bishops — everyone. I cussed them out. All of them. Except God and my psychologist. Eve, I never meant to say any of those things. But I couldn\*t help it. I started swearing like a linebacker every time I saw the convent. And I\*d say other things, too. Irrational things. I\*d recite the backs of Wheaties boxes. Not at breakfast — other times: during devotions, working in the garden. I didn\*t even know I read the backs of *Wheaties* boxes. It was just there, suddenly, word for word. I don’t know why Wheaties, it\*s what we ate. But other things, too. Things I\*d heard on the radio, rules from games I played as a kid, bird calls, sounds from comic books: Bam! Rat-a-tat-tat! Ka-boom! Usually during meditation. The psychologist said that I wasn\*t cut out to be a nun. He said I was unconsciously trying to break out of the constraints of convent life. It\*s not the obscenity. I got no bigger thrill saying fart-face than yelling "red light green light" or barking like a dog. It was the impropriety of **it.** That\*s all I wanted. To shock people. To shock myself. I\*ve been numb for months. I mean, there I was — I had everything planned out. I was committed to a life of service in the Church, and suddenly it was . . . Sister Shit. My parents didn’t say anything. Nothing helpful. I went home to explain — you know, maybe stay a week? I was there three days. They couldn\*t believe I\*d failed at ‘my life\*s mission.\* They spent the whole time whimpering like a pair of lost puppies. *(Sighs.)* Finally, Mom accused me of wanting to have children, and I left. So, I came down here. I didn\*t know where to go. Nobody up there would talk to me. And I didn\*t want to go see Aunt Margaret. I don’t know what I’ll do now. Live a normal life, I guess. I always thought I\*d be special, a little more . . . something than the usual person. But I\*m just the usual person. Hi ;)