

A Twisted Tale

By K. M. Shea

Joan didn't like her name very much. It was plain and boring. When she first joined the convent she was hoping to change her name to something cool and sassy, like Susannah. After all, Sister Susannah sounded *much* cooler than Sister Joan. Really, as far as a name goes, Joan sucked--in her opinion anyway. It WAS her name that got her in this boat load of trouble to begin with anyway.

Joan sighed and continued trekking down the dirt road, switching her nun manual as well as her Bible into the opposite hand so she could dig out the crumpled piece of paper that held the directions to her newest assignment.

The assignment where she was sure to be killed.

"Why must this happen to me?!" Joan asked the sky, flinging her arms up into the air. After a dramatic moment Joan allowed her arms to flop to her sides before she scratched at her itchy wimple that covered her rebellious blonde-white hair. She hated her uniform.

Joan was a young nun. Sixteen to be exact. That was why Joan was supposed to be acting as an *apprentice* on this mission, not the only exorcist.

When the request was sent to the Convent of Saint Catherine it stormy night. After a crack of lightning there was a loud thud outside. Joan, being stuck with latrine duty because she dropped a skunk down the archbishop's chimney, was sent outside to investigate since her stench would be likely to drive off any unwanted intruder.

Instead of a prowler, Joan found a note scrawled in elegant writing that was tied to a rock. Once Joan brought it in, Sister Kate, the head nun of the Convent of Saint Catherine, read the note out loud.

To the nuns of Saint Catherine's Convent:

The Sisters grumbled at this, their convent was called the Convent of Saint Catherine. NOT Saint Catherine's Convent, as many people called it.

There is a horrible haunting by a demon of imaginable power in my home. I have tried everything to rid myself of the demon, but it will not depart from this world. I plead with you, please come to my aid!!!! I will pay ANY price you ask of me, just come! I imagine it will soon be the death of someone!

It is noteworthy to say that the Convent of Saint Catherine was not like any other convent, mostly because all of the nuns of the Convent of Saint Catherine were trained exorcists, and were well known country-wide.

The note went on to explain, in depth, the powers of the demon, which included, but was not limited to: singing that could strike a man dead, a persistence to absolutely

ruin the poor chap's home, the ability to use words of power to kill a person, and it also commonly lured hapless princes to their doom.

It was settled that someone had to be sent. Joan was elected to be the apprentice, mainly because there were only three other apprentice nuns, and none of them were as expendable, nor as annoying. But Joan was only trained in the basics of exorcism. A veteran Sister would have to go with her and oversee the entire mission, since this was a dangerous demon.

Sister Kate decided that Sister Margaret was to go. Sister Margaret was fat and often bellowed like a pig. Joan did not want to go with Sister Margaret. So Joan begged Sister Kate—who, while she was cranky at times, was really was a spitfire and was quite kind and, more over, was the very reason Joan joined the Convent of Saint Catherine—to come with instead.

When Joan was ten Sister Kate exorcized a violent demon from the orphanage Joan lived in. She saved Joan, and Joan was very grateful even if Sister Kate didn't allow her to rename herself Susannah.

But, Sister Kate told Joan after a substantial amount of begging, "Consider yourself lucky you're getting out of privy duty," and booted them out early the next morning.

So Joan and Sister Margaret walked the rather long distance to the described house. (Directions were written on the back of the desperate note.) It took them a week and a half of walking, which was quite a chore for Sister Margaret. Joan and Sister Margaret generally did not get along, so they mostly ignored each other. However, the previous night things came to a head.

Joan introduced herself as Sister Susannah to the innkeeper, and Sister Margaret exploded. To Sister Margaret's credit, Joan *had* pushed her awfully far that day. For most of the morning she had cried "Suuueeeyy! Sueeeyyy! Pig, pig, pig, your great Auntie M is coming to visit! Suuueey!" as they walked. Sister Margaret had not appreciated Joan's reenactment of the chimney skunk and the archbishop either. So really, Joan, without speaking directly to Sister Margaret, had driven her to anger long before the poor, squat, little innkeeper complimented Joan on the alliteration of Sister Susannah.

"You are a *disgrace* to the convent! I don't know why Sister Kate keeps you around!" Margaret huffed as the innkeeper scurried away.

Joan meditated that perhaps the pig call had been mean, if not a bit much. (But she wouldn't have done it if Margaret didn't make Joan sleep on the floor and eat pieces of burned bread while Margaret devoured the whole loaf!)

"Perhaps, because without me there would be no one to clean the outhouses?" Joan volunteered.

Margaret's red face took on a bright purple hue. "You disrespectful child!" Margaret growled, starting to lumber after Joan.

Joan was much more fleet-footed than Margaret and trotted away, hopping over a bench to flee to safety. Unfortunately, Sister Margaret either did not see the bench, or she thought she too could jump over it like Joan had. Either way the bench tripped Sister Margaret, who went tumbling to the floor and landed on her face. On her way down she severely twisted her ankle.

Now Joan wondered if the whole injury was played up merely so Sister Margaret could send Joan off, unsupervised, to the prescribed home to exorcise the demon, probably in hopes that she would be killed.

Joan paused when she came to the end of the road, which stopped at gigantic cave that had to be at least forty or fifty feet high. Huge wooden doors barred the way, and iron knockers the size of Joan's head were attached to the doors at eye level.

"Hmmm," Joan supposed, reading the note. It described a "Stone Entrance" at the end of the road with "giant wooden doors". Joan hadn't ventured off the road, so this *had* to be the right place, even if it did look suspicious. It almost looked like it was a dragon's lair from a fairy tale.

Joan hefted up one of the large knockers and let it fall against the door with a thump. "Hello?" Joan called after a brief moment of silence. She muscled the knocker back up and banged it against the door. "Hello? This is Sister Joan from the Convent of Saint Catherine, the exorcist," she tried.

The door creaked open, a terribly loud noise that grated Joan's ears like rough sandpaper. When the noise stopped the door was open roughly a foot. All was black behind the entry, except for a giant, glowing eye that was about the size of two of Joan's fists.

Joan took a step back. Had the demon already killed the sender of the note?

She was preparing to run when she heard a deep, throaty, and desperate voice cry, "You made it! Heaven's be blessed—you're finally here!"

Both doors were flung open and nearly went flying off their hinges to reveal a dragon roughly the size of two draft horses. His scales were ebony black and his claws were razor sharp and silver. Two ivory white fangs winked into view behind his lips, and his head was long and narrow like a horse's. His wings were tucked up against his sides—black with silver veins—and he sat on his hind feet like a cat as he worriedly scratched his cheekbones.

Joan's first thought was that the Sisters of the Convent of Saint Catherine had been tricked, and that she was lured there to make a boney meal for the dragon. But when Joan's panicked mind paused she noticed that the dragon was wringing his paws and looked awfully upset as he babbled away at Joan, speaking so fast she couldn't understand a word he said.

"Did the demon curse you?" Joan asked, breaking through the gibberish.

The dragon blinked. "No, why?"

"You really are a dragon? You're not a human cursed to look like a dragon?" Joan suspiciously asked, straightening her askew wimple.

The dragon considered her words. "No, but if it would make you feel better I could say I am."

Joan was now very afraid that she was going to be dragon food. "So exactly what kind of demon is this that even *you* cannot handle it, Master Dragon?" Joan expectantly asked, masking her fear.

The dragon's eyes narrowed. "A horrible one," he whispered, as though thinking about it would summon it. "What is your name might I ask?" the dragon asked, brightening for a moment.

Joan thoughtfully frowned. Was it normal for dragons to ask their future food what their name was? "I am Sister Joan of the Convent of Saint Catherine."

“Ah, so it is you! A pleasure to meet you Joan, I am Flynn. Now tell me: can you just blow her up, or will you strangle her with that rosary of yours?”

“Excuse me?” Joan paused, she had been paging through the nun manual, looking to see if any of the directions spoke of dragons as clientele.

“The demon, the demon!” Flynn exclaimed, his wings shifting position. “You had better hurry and get ready, she’ll be here any second.”

“She?” Joan repeated, aware that she was starting to sound dull witted.

“Yes, the princess!” Flynn snapped.

“PRINCESS?” Joan shouted.

“SHH, SHHH!” Flynn hissed, moving to grab Joan with one of his silver clawed paws. “She’ll hear you!” he whispered as he secured a claw around her waist.

“Did I hear someone ask for The Princess?” asked a pouty, feminine voice.

“Now you’ve done it,” Flynn grumbled. “If you have Holy Water on you now might be a good time to dump it on her. I hope it burns through her skin *and* smears her makeup,” the black dragon gleefully snickered.

From the shadows of the dragon’s den appeared a pink saturated female. Her dress was a pale pink—sparkling and spotless. A silver crown was perched on her head, surrounded by luscious blonde curls the color of gold. (Joan was glad her limp, flaxen hair was hidden by her veils.) Her eyes were robin egg blue, and she had a white, toothy smile. She was the perfect picture of a princess.

Flynn whimpered.

The smile fell from the princess’ face once she caught sight of Joan. “Oh, just a nun,” she said, folding her arms and pursing her lips.

“Ahhh,” Joan said, her brown eyes flicking back and forth between Flynn and the princess.

The princess brightened. “You must be here to perform the marriage ceremony!” she squealed.

“Marriage? Between whom?” Joan asked, ignoring the glares the dragon was sending her.

The princess ignored Joan. “Why the dragon! Look dragon, I know you love me soooo much, but I’m sorry. I cannot marry you even if you have kidnapped this nun to perform a marriage ceremony for us!” she said, daintily lifting a white gloved hand to her forehead.

The dragon squeaked and sent Joan pleading looks, obviously hoping for help.

“He loves you?” Joan asked with a frown. There seemed to be something mentally wrong with this princess.

“Oh yes!” the princess said, throwing herself at the dragon. She planted a big kiss on his cheek, even as he struggled against her, and smiled as there was a poof of smoke. When the fog cleared a tall, black haired boy with black clothes was held captive in her grip.

“Help!” he hissed, straining his neck up against her weight as she threw both of her arms around his neck. Clearly it was Flynn...in a human form.

Joan paused, her forehead wrinkling. “So you, princess, believe that Flynn, the dragon, wants to marry you, and you are against it?” she summarized. The princess nodded as Flynn pried a hand off his neck. “If you are against it, why do you remain here? Why not return home?”

“Because he *ate* all three of the princes that came to rescue me!” the princess said, her face a mask of grief.

Joan paused, blinking as Flynn furiously shook his head in denial. “I see,” she said after some time.

“Princess, shouldn’t you be ruining my home, erm, cleaning up?” Flynn wheezed as he tried to rally air to his oxygen deprived lungs. She had switched her grip to his chest.

“Oh that’s right!” the princess exclaimed, dropping Flynn like a rag doll. The dragon turned human rocketed forward, colliding with Joan.

They fell to the ground in a crumpled heap and remained there for a few moments as the princess floated away. “What kind of twisted tale have I gotten myself into? And get off, you’re as heavy as a whale,” Joan grouched.

“You have to help me!” Flynn demanded, grabbing Joan’s shoulders and pulling her forward until they were nearly nose to nose. “I’ve tried *everything!*”

“Like?” Joan sourly asked.

“I hired three princes to rescue her. None of them would take her! I had a witch curse her, *nothing happened!* I took her to a troll who wouldn’t eat her because he was afraid she would make him sick. Her own parents are unwilling to take her back!” Flynn cried.

“How did you end up with her in the first place?” Joan logically asked.

“By a horrible, horrible mistake,” Flynn grumbled.

“Then why don’t you just...kill her?” Joan uncomfortably asked.

“What makes you think I haven’t tried?” Flynn darkly asked.

“Look, she’s a girl, I can’t exorcise a girl!” Joan declared.

“Oh sure, sexiest,” Flynn snorted.

“No, no, no. She’s a human! Even if I were to throw gallons of Holy Water on her nothing would happen! She’s not possessed and she’s not a demon,” Joan rephrased while fixing her wimple and wishing Flynn would let go of her shoulders.

“You don’t understand, she’s talking me to *death!*” Flynn said.

Joan sighed and slowly repeated. “There is nothing I can do to help you!”

The dragon looked downcast for a moment and mumbled something under his breath. “Sister Kate said you would be able to help. Can a nun lie?” he asked, looking back into Joan’s eyes.

“I suppose so.”

Flynn looked sour for a moment before brightening. “I know! Marry me!”

“Marry you?” Joan echoed, feeling quite shocked. She had never guessed she would ever be proposed to like this, or by a dragon for that matter.

“Marry me! And then we can kick the princess out, claiming we need peace on our honeymoon!”

“Honeymoon?” Joan blankly repeated.

“Yes, isn’t that what married couples go on?” Flynn asked, scratching his head. Clearly he didn’t understand what marriage entailed.

Joan broke out of her shocked reverie. “Look here, Flynn. NO, just NO,” she said.

Flynn let go of Joan and backed up, shaking his head. There was a puff of smoke and he flapped his dragon wings to fan it away. He had reverted to his dragon form. “It just might work!” he said, completely ignoring Joan.

“Flynn, dragon! Did you not hear my answer, NO!” Joan said.

“Please?” Flynn begged.

“No!” Joan firmly replied.

“Come on! You’re a nun! You’re supposed to help the needy!” Flynn said.

“You are right, I’m a NUN. I am forbidden to *get* married!” Joan sharply replied.

Flynn paused. That thought certainly put a cramp in his plan. “Well, then don’t be a nun!” he concluded.

Joan stared at the black dragon. Were all the legends of cruel, man eating dragons true? Joan found it hard to believe as she stared at the incredibly wimpy and closed-minded Flynn. “Look, just eat her!” Joan declared.

“Eat her? No way! You must be jesting,” Flynn said, his intelligent, horse-like face wrinkling with disgust.

“She might not taste pleasant, but it would get rid of her!” Joan reminded Flynn.

“Dragons don’t eat people. Me eating her has the same probability as you eating her!” Flynn refuted, shaking his head.

“What?” Joan stumbled.

Flynn rolled his eyes. “Biologically it doesn’t make *any* sense! The amount of energy I would get from eating you, per say, is minute compared to the amount of energy I would get from eating a cow, or a coconut.”

“A coconut?” Joan paused.

Flynn nodded. “See there’s this thing called the food chain. And numerically speaking you can get the most amount of energy from eating plants, and the least amount from eating something that eats the thing that eats the plants. The amount of received energy just wouldn’t make it worth it! Think of it biologically. The biggest animals are always herbivores.”

“Enough! I get it, you don’t eat people!” Joan waved her hand. “So make an exception just this once!”

“That would be barbaric!” Flynn scoffed.

“And marrying a nun is any better?” Joan said.

“Excuse me,” a man said. The arguing nun and dragon ignored him.

“It wouldn’t be so bad,” Flynn said. “I *am* rich! You should see my treasure hoard.”

“But I would be married to a DRAGON!” Joan shouted.

“You are so narrow-minded,” Flynn scoffed, rolling his dark eyes.

“Uhh, pardon me,” the man tried again.

“I am not! I am a nun! I took a vow of chastity!” Joan snorted.

“I’ve said it already, but you could always quit,” Flynn offered.

Joan stared at him. “You can’t just QUIT being a nun!”

“So sorry to interrupt, but could you tell me—” the man started.

Joan and Flynn simultaneously turned to the speaker and snarled. “WHAT?”

The interrupter, probably a little older than Joan. He was a prince, that much was obvious between his shiny brown hair, sparkling white horse, and the golden circlet fastened around his head.

“Could you tell me where The Princess resides?” he asked. Joan and Flynn swapped unbelieving glances. “I mean, you are a dragon, so perhaps you would know?” the prince trailed off.

“She’s in the cave! Please go and rescue her! Get married, have kids, and live happily ever after!” Flynn bid.

“So you’re the dragon that’s holding her captive?” the prince asked.

“Yes, now go get her,” Flynn swatted the question away before turning back to Joan, his black tail thumping on the ground much like a dog’s. “See? Didn’t this turn out perfectly?”

“I suppose so,” Joan mused as she watched the prince unsheathe his sword. The prince stalked across the road and raised his sword before smashing it down on Flynn with a grunt.

Flynn and Joan watched the prince with amused expressions. The sword chipped the edge of one of Flynn’s scales.

“Are you mortally wounded?” the prince asked Flynn.

Flynn’s nostrils twitched and he started “No. Are you really that—”

“Yes, you have fatally injured him, the pain just hasn’t reached him yet!” Joan interrupted, jumping in. “Go, hurry, rescue the princess. This evil dragon was holding her captive and was going to force me to perform a marriage ceremony on them!”

The prince nodded and dashed inside, disappearing through the doorway.

“What was that for?” Flynn complained.

“Shhh,” Joan hissed. “Lay down!”

“What?” Flynn bewilderedly asked.

“LAY DOWN!” Joan bellowed. “If the princess doesn’t think you’re dead she’ll never leave!”

That got Flynn splayed out on his side awfully quick. Meanwhile Joan dug in her wimple and unearthed her bottles of Holy Water. She hoped it wouldn’t hurt Flynn, a dragon. Joan emptied three canteens on his exposed belly, allowing the liquid to dribble down to the ground.

“That tickles!” Flynn giggled. So much for hurting him.

“Shh!” Joan hissed, kicking him and stubbing her toe on his scales.

“You really killed the dragon for me?” the princess’ irritating voice called.

“Play dead,” Joan ordered.

Flynn nodded and moments later his tongue extended out of his mouth and limply touched the dirt road while his eyes glazed over. Even Joan found herself wondering if he really was alive as his chest stopped moving.

“See, I vanquished the dragon!” the prince triumphantly exclaimed, pointing to the tipped-over Flynn as he and the princess stepped into the sunlight.

“You threw water on him?” the princess asked, arm in arm with the prince.

“No!” Joan stepped in. “Dragon’s blood is clear! That liquid is his blood!” she babbled, hoping the princess would buy it, which she did.

“Oh, really?” she asked, wide eyed before turning to the prince. “Did I ever tell you that he wanted to marry me?”

“Kind and elderly nun, would you like to come back with us?” the prince called to Joan, who fought the urge to rip out his throat.

“No, no. Someone has to bury this dragon. Even if he was so evil and cruel,” Joan waved, smiling over her clenched teeth. Elderly? Who did that jerk think he was? Joan was probably younger than him!

“Very well, good luck old nun!” the prince bid, mounting his charger before pulling the dreadful princess up in front of him.

“Good bye!” the princess sighed. “I hope you get a happily ever after too, even if you are just a plain old nun!”

“Yes...farewell!” Joan called. “I hope your horse trips and kills both of you!” she wished once they were out of hearing range.

“Are they gone?” Flynn whispered, his words slurring slightly since he was speaking around his tongue.

“Yes,” Joan acknowledged as they disappeared from view. “They deserve each other,” she bitterly added as Flynn rolled to his feet.

“Good riddance,” Flynn twittered. “Now I can finally live in peace. What is your fee for helping me, Joan the nun?”

“There is no charge,” Joan recited with an enormous sigh. “The Convent of Saint Catherine performs all its exorcisms out of good will toward mankind. Besides, I didn’t really do much.”

“Nonsense. There must be some way I can repay you,” Flynn said, ruffling his leather wings.

Joan studied the sky where the sun shone brightly overhead. “Well, if you wouldn’t mind dropping me off at the inn where Sister Margaret is waiting for me, I would be much obliged,” Joan supposed. It was a two hours walk back to the inn and she was not looking forward to it. “If you’re strong enough, that is,” she added as an after thought.

Flynn’s chest puffed out. “Of course I’m strong enough. I’m a dragon! Climb aboard,” he said, settling down and stretching out his wings so Joan could climb up his side.

Joan rolled her eyes but did as she was instructed, and hauled herself up his slick scales. “Ready,” Joan called after settling herself along a ridge at the base of his neck.

“Excellent, here we go!” Flynn determined before leaping into the air, his leather wings pumping.

They soared through the air, Flynn pointing out various landmarks as they followed the dirt road that would lead them back to the inn, the Frolicking Filly.

“Better stop here!” Joan called a few minutes later once the wooden inn appeared before them, roughly a mile away.

“Why?” Flynn bewilderedly asked.

“We don’t want to frighten anyone,” Joan shouted, holding onto her veils against the mighty gusts of wind.

Flynn shrugged, a motion Joan felt as a ripple underneath her. “Whatever you want,” he said before banking and gliding down. He performed a solid landing, hovering for a few moments before easing himself to the ground. He crouched down, allowing Joan to slide down his neck.

“Thanks for the lift,” Joan said.

“Kiss me,” Flynn ordered.

“What?” Joan asked.

“Kiss my cheek!” Flynn rephrased.

“Why?” Joan suspiciously asked.

“Oh, just do it!” Flynn rolled his eyes and huffed.

Joan blushed and awkwardly leaned over and kissed an ebony scale on his cheek. There was a puff of smoke, and Flynn coughed and stumbled out, a human boy clad in black once again.

“Thank you. Now I can walk you back to your room! Are you going to leave tonight?” he asked before starting out, crashing through the bushes.

“Umm, I don’t know. I’ll have to ask Sister Margaret. I assume we’ll probably go tomorrow since it’s already late afternoon and Sister Margaret doesn’t fancy sleeping on the road,” Joan said, wondering why on earth Flynn was coming with.

“There was another nun?” Flynn asked with surprise.

“Yes,” Joan acknowledged as they trudged toward the inn.

“Why didn’t she come with you?” the dragon-boy asked.

“She twisted her ankle last night, and it’s quite a hike to your cave,” Joan sourly replied.

“I see,” Flynn frowned.

“What?” Joan asked, seeing his furrowed brow.

Flynn waited a few moments before responding. “It’s nothing. Sister Kate just never mentioned that there would be two of you coming.”

“You spoke with Sister Kate?” Joan asked as they stumbled up the dirt path, yards away from the inn.

“Of course! How else do you think I requested your help? By sending a dispatch rider?” Flynn scoffed.

“Wait, so you didn’t leave a note with a rock outside?” Joan asked.

“Good Heavens no! Why would I do that? That’s about as cliché as you can get,” Flynn snorted as they neared the Frolicking Filly. “I went to Sister Kate, telling her of my princess problem. After laughing for a few minutes she told me that she knew just the nun to help me out—a girl by the name of Joan. After that I returned to my cave and waited for you.”

“So if you didn’t leave the letter...who did?” Joan asked with a great deal of confusion.

Flynn shrugged and pushed open the door to the inn. Both he and Joan blinked when they peered into the damp, musty building. Everyone was crouched under tables or chairs with their arms over their heads. “Excuse me, good people, but what are you doing?” Flynn asked before whispering to Joan, “I don’t understand you humans. You’re so...*dim*.”

Joan rolled her eyes and mentally replayed the image of Flynn almost crying as he told her about the princess.

“There was a dragon in the skies not five minutes ago!” called the barkeep, out of sight as he crouched behind his bar.

Flynn blinked and Joan shrugged. “You must have been seeing things. My friend and I have been walking for that long and we haven’t seen a dragon,” she replied. “Tell me, is Sister Margaret doing fine?” she asked once people started crawling out from underneath the wooden furniture.

“Sister Margaret? The plump nun?” the barkeep wondered, scratching his bald head as he tried to recall the name. “Ahh yes. She was doing great when she gathered her supplies before setting out this morning. Hey, weren’t you the little nun that came with her?” the barkeep asked.

“She LEFT?” Joan yelled.

“Ah, yeah. She paid for another night in the inn though. Mentioned you might come back,” the barkeep shouted as Joan raced up the stairs and sprinted for their room, Flynn eagerly on her heels.

“Why are we running?” Flynn excitedly asked.

“She left?” Joan repeated. “That buzzard! I knew the pig call was mean, but was this really necessary?” Joan banged into their shared room, her sharp eyes scanning the room.

All of her possessions were left in the room, as well as two pieces of paper and a bag of coins...but Sister Margaret’s traveling pack and hulk were absent. Joan plopped down on the bed with unbelieving eyes.

“Joan,” Flynn said, handing her the pieces of paper.

Joan blankly took them and read them, her mind buzzing as she noted the first letter was from Margaret.

Dear Joan,

I'm sorry to leave you like this, but Sister Kate wished this, and I must agree. You, little poppet, are unfit for the life of a nun. Make no doubts, you are a good girl—fiery but good. (That pig call was a bit much, dear) However, I'm afraid you do not have the patience or the temperament required to be a nun. Because of this I was instructed to deliver you to this mission, which really doesn't deal with our field as you know, and leave while you tried to deal with Master Flynn, the dragon who is probably accompanying at you this point.

This room is paid for in full for another night, and I have left a bag of gold which should last you some time. If not, raid Flynn's stash. I'm sure he would be willing to house you for awhile too.

We will all miss you dearly at the Convent of Saint Catherine, dear. You brought a lot of humor to our lives. I will miss you.

Sister Margaret

PS: You should have dropped two skunks down the Archbishop's chimney. This was the first time in all my life I have ever heard of that dirty man bathing.

Joan blinked before moving onto the second note, which was from Sister Kate.

*Dear Joan,
You were not meant to be a nun.
Good luck.*

Sister Kate

Joan wondered at the shortness before she noticed that a longer note was scrawled on the back.

*Dear Joan, (again),
I must apologize on Sister Margaret's behalf. I have instructed her to behave most odiously to you on this trip in order to push your temper. You would inevitably resort to some sort of violence which would result in Sister Margaret's "injury", allowing her to escape as you help Master Flynn. (There now Margaret, are you happy? I still believe my previous note was enough.)*

You are a special girl, Joan. Your destiny is different than that of the Convent of Saint Catherine. Have many adventures, enjoy life, and say hello to master Flynn for me.

Sister Kate

Oh yes: We will miss you when we clean the outhouses.

Joan suddenly felt like she liked Sister Margaret much better, and that Sister Kate was a mean old hag. Joan also noticed that the handwriting from Sister Kate's note, and the mysterious note describing Flynn's predicament were exactly the same.

"Kate," Joan growled.

"So...they honorably discharged you?" Flynn wondered, reading the notes over her shoulder.

"Yes," Joan snapped as tears flooded her eyes.

"Ah," Flynn nodded. He was quiet for several minutes as Joan sniffed. "There there," he sighed, gently patting her back. "They do this to you out of love."

"No they aren't! If they loved me they would keep me around!" Joan cried.

Flynn gently hugged her. “That’s false and we both know it. So, what are you going to do?” Flynn asked.

“I don’t know,” Joan replied, her voice muffled against Flynn’s shoulder.

A devious smile cracked across Flynn’s face. “You know...you aren’t a nun anymore...”

Several months later—and assumedly many arguments after—the Sisters of the Convent of Saint Catherine receive an invitation:

*You are cordially invited to the marriage of
Joan a Darc and Master Flynn.
The ceremony will be held on the First day of Fall at the Covent of
Saint Catherine.
There will be feasting and free exorcisms provided,
We hope to see you there.*

Joan and Master Flynn

*See Kate, I TOLD YOU my handwriting looked like chicken scratch.
Besides, whoever heard of the BRIDE writing up the invitations? I Hope
Flynn’s cousins eat you. Or the archbishop.*

*(And no I will not clean the privies in exchange for your lovely
handwritten invitations, no matter how badly the latrines need to be
emptied.)*

The End