

POOR CLARE

BY CHIARA ATIK

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POOR CLARE was originally produced by the Echo Theater Company, (Chris Fields, Artistic Director), Los Angeles, California in October 2022. It was directed by Alana Dietze, the scenic design was by Amanda Knehans, the lighting design was by Azra King-Abadi, the costume design was by Dianne K. Graebner, the wig and hair design was by Klint Flowers, the sound design was by Jeff Gardner, and the production stage manager was Christopher Jerabek. The cast was as follows:

CLARE	Jordan Hull
PEPPA	Martica De Cardenas
ALMA	Kari Lee Cartwright
BEATRICE	Donna Zadeh
BEGGAR	Tony DeCarlo
FRANCIS	Michael Sturgis
ORTOLANA	Ann Noble
SERVANT WOMAN	Trinity Catlin
UNDERSTUDY	Sam Morelos

CHARACTERS

CLARE

PEPPA

ALMA

BEATRICE

BEGGAR

FRANCIS

ORTOLANA

SERVANT WOMEN

THE POOR

POOR CLARE

ACT ONE

Scene 1

Assisi (Italy), 1211.

Clare, eighteen, is sitting cross-legged on a wooden bench. Behind her, her two servants, Peppa (fifties) and Alma (thirties), are busily braiding her hair into one of those insanely complicated medieval hairstyles involving lots of loops and plaits.

Clare is young, she's beautiful, she's Christian. She's like a contestant on The Bachelor, but not the dramatic villainous ones, but rather the nice, pretty ones who rub the backs of the girls who are crying.

Life has been pretty good for her. She's got great hair.

She's cupping a chalice, from which she takes occasional sips as she listens to Peppa and Alma gossip.

She yawns. It's early.

ALMA. I don't know that I have any good gossip. I'm trying to think.

PEPPA. Did you hear Guido Conti is back?

ALMA. No! When'd he get back?

PEPPA. Yesterday. Yesterday morning.

ALMA. Oh my god!

CLARE. Wait, who?

PEPPA. You know Ubaldo?

CLARE. No?

PEPPA. He works in the stables?

ALMA. Ubaldo!

CLARE. Does he have a beard?

ALMA. No, you're thinking of Renzo.

PEPPA. That's Renzo. Ubaldo is kind of heavier, a bit older, he's got a scar on his lip—

CLARE. Oh, yeah yeah yeah yeah.

ALMA. His tunic is red.

CLARE. Right, yes.

PEPPA. So Ubaldo's son, Guido, just got back from Crusade.

CLARE. Oh my gosh!

ALMA. Did you see him? Does he look the same?

PEPPA. He looks exactly the same. Bit swarthier. We threw a little homecoming for him last night.

ALMA. Fun!!

PEPPA. The stable guys all pitched in and got a boar.

CLARE. Aw.

ALMA. That was sweet. Those guys are so sweet.

PEPPA. Yeah, they're a really good crew. *(To Clare.)* Bodkin?

Clare hands her a long, thin needle, which she's keeping in a pile in her lap. Peppa expertly uses it to pin up a braid, then begins on another strand.

ALMA. What's he gonna do now?

PEPPA. Well his dad was trying to convince him to take a week off, at least, reacclimate—

ALMA. Sure.

PEPPA. But he was like “no no,” you know, doesn't wanna be a burden, so I think he was gonna go see today about a job. Probably in the stables.

ALMA. Awww, with his dad! That's really great. I'd been praying for him.

PEPPA. Yeah, everybody was!

CLARE. Did he say what it was like?

ALMA. Bodkin?

Clare hands her one.

CLARE. Did Guido say what the Crusades were like?

PEPPA. He said he was very lucky not to get sick. I guess most people got sick?

ALMA. I've heard that!

PEPPA. What else...oh, well, he sailed obviously.

CLARE. Oh, wow, yeah.

PEPPA. They were on a ship for three weeks. OH! HE SAW A WHALE!

CLARE. Really??

ALMA. Stop!

PEPPA. That's what he said.

CLARE. How did he even know that that was what it was?

PEPPA. I think it's the type of thing that if you see one, there's no doubt what it is.

CLARE. Whoa.

PEPPA. Hair tie.

Clare hands her a tiny leather strip from her lap.

CLARE. Well, I'm really glad he's back safe but I have to say I'm very anti-Crusade.

ALMA. I wouldn't mind seeing the sea.

CLARE. My mother's seen it! On her trips to the Holy Land.

ALMA. I didn't realize you cross a sea to get to the Holy Land!

CLARE. Yeah! I forget which but. You definitely go over the ocean for like a long time.

PEPPA. Your mom is brave.

CLARE. Yeah, totally. It sounds awful. I mean, she's glad she went. Like it's a good thing to do, going to the Holy Land. But it's like. So much work and money!!!

ALMA. Hair tie.

Clare hands her one.

CLARE. Like, even just to be gone that long is stressful and just. A big commitment! And you know, with my grandma getting older

it's like, every time she sets off on a trip she doesn't know what she's coming home to. Which is so hard. I dunno, would you be able to just drop everything and leave for a year?

PEPPA. (*With a glance toward Alma.*) Well, no.

ALMA. Definitely not.

CLARE. Right, yeah, me neither! It'd definitely be hard. And you have to bring *all* your own supplies, all your own food, because god knows what you'll find over there. It starts to add up! And you have to bring gifts for everyone you're going to meet. And like, nothing chintzy either, you need something really nice. Like a book or something.

PEPPA. Bodkin.

CLARE. And then *another* reason I'm like, not dying to go to the Holy Land even though I know it's like, a really good thing to do, is...they're not great with women over there.

ALMA. Really??

CLARE. Yes, and I find it pretty problematic. Like, they don't sequester women. My mom was just like, *out* in public. Like, out in the streets. *With the masses*. I mean she had bodyguards but that's it.

She holds out her hands in front of her to demonstrate space.

Here's my mom, and *here's* the general public. It's like. Not safe for women.

ALMA. Wow.

PEPPA. Bodkin.

ALMA. It's so weird because it's like. The Holy Land.

CLARE. I know.

ALMA. Like you'd think it would be more...

CLARE. I know. My mom's my hero.

PEPPA. (*To Alma.*) I'm done on my side.

ALMA. Sorry, yeah, almost.

Alma begins braiding faster.

CLARE. I *do* think I'll probably go someday. Just cause I think it's important to like, push yourself for your faith. And I want to be a

good Christian and obviously a big part of that is going to the Holy Land. But. I'm not exactly looking forward to it.

Her sister Beatrice enters. Her hair has also been done up in an extraordinarily complicated style.

BEATRICE. You're still not done??

CLARE. Almost. Oh my god! You look so cute!

BEATRICE. I know, they did a good job today.

CLARE. Wait come here, let me look at you.

BEATRICE. Look at the loop in the back.

CLARE. It's super cute, I really like it.

Peppa pins up Clare's last braid.

PEPPA. Alright. All done.

CLARE. Oh!—

BEATRICE. Oh, cool. It looks cool, Clare.

CLARE. Yeah?

She reaches her hand up to feel her hair.

It feels cool!

BEATRICE. Yeah, I love it. I'm getting that tomorrow.

PEPPA. Shake.

Clare shakes her head up and down and around. The braids stay put.

Does your head hurt? Too tight?

CLARE. It's fine! Is this side even? I can't tell if it's higher.

PEPPA. Let's see...

ALMA. I think you're good!

BEATRICE. Mom wants to get there early to talk to the bishop.

CLARE. Will you tell her I'm coming? I just need to get my breviary.

BEATRICE. Okay, we're in the courtyard waiting.

Beatrice exits.

CLARE. Wait, Beatrice!

Beatrice enters again.

Do you like this dress?

BEATRICE. Ya.

CLARE. Okay. I'll be right there.

Beatrice exits again.

I don't think I need the hot water bottle tonight. I was too warm last night.

PEPPA. It's supposed to get cool again tonight.

CLARE. Oh, really?

PEPPA. I can prepare it just in case but you don't have to use it.

CLARE. Okay, I was just saying in case it's less work for you.

PEPPA. A hot water bottle's no work. (*Fixing Clare's hair.*) Alright that should hold!

CLARE. You guys! Thank you!

PEPPA. You look adorable.

ALMA. It's super cute.

CLARE. Are you guys heading to services?

ALMA. We went before.

CLARE. Oh my god, so early! Good for you. Okay, I'm off, then!

PEPPA. Have a good Sunday.

CLARE. Love you guys!! Oh say hi to Guido!!!! And welcome home!!! From me!!!!

Alma and Peppa bow deeply as Clare rushes out of the room.

Scene 2

Clare and Beatrice stroll home from church. Unseen by them, sitting on the ground is a Beggar.

BEATRICE. Okay so for the skirt, I'm thinking like a gold thread, and then the cloth would be like...I don't know, I'm thinking purple...

CLARE. K.

BEATRICE. Or like...purplish blue...

CLARE. Indigo?

BEATRICE. Something in the purplish-blue family. A purplish-blue, kinda flowy skirt with gold thread.

CLARE. I like that 'cause it's like...deferential.

BEATRICE. What do you mean?

CLARE. Blue is like, modest. It's what Mary wore.

BEATRICE. Well, wait.

CLARE. Uh-oh.

BEATRICE. For the bodice...like I want it to go to here-ish—

She gestures to her collarbone.

Very covered up, very classy.

CLARE. K...

BEATRICE. In red.

CLARE. No.

BEATRICE. Just like, a cute lil' red bodice.

CLARE. I don't want to not be supportive—but no.

BEATRICE. That's my vision!

CLARE. Beatrice! No! That is not appropriate.

BEATRICE. Why?

CLARE. *Red?* Mom would never let you.

BEATRICE. She might!

CLARE. You are fifteen!

BEATRICE. So? Mom was married at fifteen.

CLARE. Yeah, and A) that was disgusting, and B) when you're married you can wear whatever you want, obviously.

BEATRICE. And I'm never gonna *get* married if I don't show a little. Spark!

CLARE. What are you *talking* about.

BEATRICE. I'm just saying, we don't have that many opportunities to like—

CLARE. To what?

BEATRICE. To like *attract suitors*.

CLARE. Oh my god. You should not be worrying about this right now!!!

BEATRICE. I'm not *worried* about it, I'm just saying. I gotta like.

CLARE. ...what?

BEATRICE. Show people the light's on at the inn, if you catch my drift. I am open for business.

CLARE. I think you're too boy crazy.

BEATRICE. I'm really not.

CLARE. You *think* about them too much. Like, there are other things in the world, Bea!

BEATRICE. Easy for you to say!

CLARE. ...We don't know that.

BEATRICE. (*Rolling her eyes.*) Oh my god. She *said* she found you the perfect suitor, he's coming *to dinner*, why would he be coming *to dinner* if they hadn't already agreed on a—

CLARE. Don't jinx me!!!!!!! We don't know!

BEATRICE. Okay. Just. I thought the red bodice would be cute, and if someone nice were to see me walking to church and think so, too, that wouldn't be the end of the world.

CLARE. It honestly worries me that this is how you view relationships between men and women.

BEATRICE. Oh, you're such an expert.

CLARE. I'm just saying. That kind of point of view is not going to set you up for future happiness. Attracting someone has nothing to do with what you wear, and everything to do with inner confidence.

BEATRICE. Well then I'm fucked.

Clare stops walking, and faces Beatrice, earnestly.

Oh god. I was joking.

CLARE. Bea. Listen to me.

BEATRICE. *I was joking*, you don't have to—

CLARE. You have every reason to feel confident around men.

BEATRICE. Not really!

CLARE. Yes, you do! Don't talk down about yourself like that! Seriously! Repeat after me. I am wealthy.

Beatrice rolls her eyes.

Say it!

BEATRICE. I am wealthy.

CLARE. I am pious.

Beatrice laughs.

You are. You *are*. You pray!

BEATRICE. I mean I say the words?

CLARE. "I am pious."

BEATRICE. I'm pious.

CLARE. I am in possession of a sizable dowry...

BEATRICE. I am in possession of a sizable dowry...

CLARE. And any man in the kingdom would be lucky to have me.

BEATRICE. And any man in the kingdom would be lucky to have me.

CLARE. Yes!

BEATRICE. Eugh.

CLARE. I really wasn't confident at your age, either, but saying these little mantras can really help. It's like fake it 'til you make it.

BEATRICE. (*Pouting.*) Well now I don't know what dress to have made.

CLARE. Okay, we said indigo skirt.

BEATRICE. Yeah.

CLARE. Okay, okay, what about like a green? Like a green brocade?

BEATRICE. I don't think brocade would really go with the white fur trim I'm supposed to use.

CLARE. Okay, what if...I lent you my ermine.

BEATRICE. Really??

CLARE. You CANNOT GET IT MUDDY though.

BEATRICE. I won't. Oh my god, I won't, I promise, I'll be so careful—

CLARE. I love that fucking ermine more than you and if anything happens I'll have you skinned and wear you for gloves.

BEATRICE. Jesus.

CLARE. Just saying.

BEATRICE. You're gonna be married in like a month and your husband is gonna buy you a thousand ermines—

CLARE. WE. DON'T KNOW THAT.

BEATRICE. Okay. I'll be so careful. I really promise. If it rains I'll have two servants carry the train—

CLARE. If it rains I'm not lending it to you!!!

BEATRICE. Fine. Of course. Yes. Deal.

CLARE. I don't know what I'm gonna do about *my* wardrobe. It might not make sense for me to have dresses ordered until I know whether I'm going to need a—

The beggar, who has been sitting quietly asleep and unseen throughout this whole conversation, suddenly reaches out to them.

BEGGAR. Could you help me get something to eat?

Clare and Beatrice SCREAM, completely startled, and run to the other side of the stage, laughing, exhilarated—the kind of “egging each other on” people sometimes do when they've been startled.

CLARE. OH. MY—

BEATRICE. That scared the SHIT out of me—

CLARE. I had *no idea* there was a *person* there—

BEATRICE. I didn't see anyone!!! I thought it was like, a literal pile of garbage—

CLARE. I like, can't breathe.

BEATRICE. Oh my god.

CLARE. I like. Screamed.

BEATRICE. I. *Screamed!*

CLARE. Oh my god. Were they there the whole time?

BEATRICE. My heart is like, still racing.

CLARE. Oh my god.

They look at each other and laugh.

Scene 3

Another morning.

Peppa and Alma are deep in a whispered conversation. Clare enters, her hair loose and past her waist. She's holding a chalice, a little bleary.

CLARE. Morning!

Peppa and Alma bow.

PEPPA. Good morning. ALMA. Morning.

Clare takes a seat in the chair in front of them. They begin brushing her hair.

CLARE. Can we do like, a bun in the back with those two loopy things on the side?

PEPPA. Of course.

Peppa and Alma begin to section off hair. Clare settles into her seat. Takes a sip of drink.

CLARE. How are you guys today? What's going on.

ALMA. Okay, so, you haven't heard.

CLARE. Heard what?

PEPPA. Alma...

CLARE. You guys. What.

ALMA. This guy...

She starts giggling.

PEPPA. This...young...youth...had a little moment in market square yesterday.

ALMA. He stripped naked.

CLARE. What???

ALMA. In front of everybody.

CLARE. Oh my god, what is HAPPENING? I feel like it must be a full moon or something. Yesterday there was this lunatic in the courtyard when my sister and I were walking, now this?

PEPPA. The world is going to hell, that's for sure.

CLARE. Were you there?

PEPPA. No, but my cousin was.

ALMA. I just missed it by like, a *second*. When I arrived they had just dragged him away.

CLARE. Just like, a crazy person??? I mean obviously a crazy person.

PEPPA. Poor thing.

ALMA. His dad's a silk merchant.

CLARE. What's his name?

ALMA. Francis. Know him?

CLARE. No.

ALMA. We haven't told you the craziest part.

CLARE. What?

ALMA. He did it *in front of the bishop*.

CLARE. WHAT?

ALMA. Swear.

CLARE. What is WRONG with people?

PEPPA. I mean, how much time do you have?

CLARE. What did the bishop do?

ALMA. He took off his own cloak and covered him.

CLARE. Wow. Good for the bishop.

PEPPA. Can you imagine being in the market, minding your own business, and then *that* happens?

ALMA. I almost was!!!! I missed it by like, a minute!

PEPPA. What would you have done?

ALMA. I don't know!

CLARE. Screamed. I would have screamed.

PEPPA. I think he must be really disturbed. He was ranting and raving when they took him away.

CLARE. Like about the devil and stuff?

PEPPA. About the poor.

ALMA. Oh god, I heard that. That was so weird.

CLARE. The poor?

PEPPA. The whole thing was a protest.

CLARE. Against poor people?

PEPPA. Against *poverty*.

CLARE. Like the concept of poverty?

PEPPA. He's "anti."

CLARE. That's so dumb.

ALMA. Gosh.

CLARE. Like who is *pro* poverty? It's just a thing. Like just a fact. Of life.

PEPPA. He thinks we're all just ignoring it.

CLARE. !!!! We're not!!!!

ALMA. No one's ignoring it.

PEPPA. All the, you know. The beggars that we have in town now.

CLARE. Well, we've always had peasants.

PEPPA. That's not the same. ALMA. That's not the same thing.

PEPPA. He's talking about—well maybe you haven't noticed but there are—

CLARE. No, I know—

PEPPA. *Tons* moving in—

CLARE. Yeah, I know what you're talking about. It's sad.

ALMA. I get really upset about it.

PEPPA. He thinks we're not doing enough. I guess.

CLARE. Well, what is taking all your clothes off supposed to do? Like, I'm sure the poor are so grateful that he just mooned the bishop.

ALMA. Ha!

CLARE. I'm sure that really keeps them warm at night.

Beat.

PEPPA. Yeah I mean I think it's more about renouncing his father's

wealth. His father's wealth paid for his clothes. So he doesn't want them anymore. He "cast them off."

ALMA. His father's a silk merchant. Bet those were some nice pantaloons he flung in the mud!

CLARE. I just don't get how he thinks any of it is like. Helping.

ALMA. There are better ways to help the poor!

CLARE. Right!

ALMA. Like, alms. And like.

CLARE. Soup kitchens.

ALMA. Yes.

CLARE. My family throws a three-day feast every year on my uncle's name day. It's like three days of food, we feed everyone.

PEPPA. We know!

ALMA. It's really nice!

CLARE. We don't turn anyone away. It's like, three guaranteed hot meals. With meat!

ALMA. Not everyone does that.

CLARE. It's a lot of work but we're happy to do it. It means a lot to us.

PEPPA. Of course.

ALMA. That's great.

PEPPA. I think it's good for everyone to do everything they can.

ALMA. I agree.

CLARE. Yeah. It's really important.

Peppa and Alma braid silently. Clare contemplates.

I mean, yeah, it's crazy. There are a lot of really desperate people right now, it's horrible. It's a horrible political climate. We should all be pitching in.

PEPPA. Yeah.

ALMA. Yeah.

CLARE. I just don't really get why this guy thinks taking his clothes off is the best way to help. Also, not to be that person, but a woman would never do something like that.

PEPPA. Never.

ALMA. So true.

CLARE. Because women are *rational*.

PEPPA. Amen.

Alma and Peppa braid. After a beat:

CLARE. I wonder if the bishop got his cloak back.

Scene 4

The town square.

Francis, an eccentric-looking man dressed in a bright blue robe and leaning on a wooden staff, holds a basket full of food, with a big conspicuous bow tied on it.

Clare stands across from him, smiling.

CLARE. I feel like we *must* have met at some point.

FRANCIS. Yeah, I dunno...

CLARE. Or at least have friends in common. Do you ever hang out with the Menotti brothers?

FRANCIS. Nope.

CLARE. What about Nello Briziarelli?

FRANCIS. I know who that is, but I've never met him.

CLARE. Greco Ferrante?

FRANCIS. Nope.

CLARE. Oh my gosh! He's like really tall, he was like, the *hero* when the Germans were trying to invade, he won like six battles or something, everyone's obsessed with him.

Francis shrugs.

It's such a small town! There's no way our paths haven't crossed.

FRANCIS. I dunno! I've been really doing my own thing lately, so.

CLARE. Okay, just one more, last one:

FRANCIS. Okay.

The play doesn't end here...

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