

Scene 13

Peggy, Rachel, Polly, Izzy, Jane march into dinner, moving the benches as they sing. Phebe, Betsy, Hannah go to their dinner on another part of the stage.

ALL. *(Singing.)*

COME THE FEAST IS READY,
WHILE THE TABLE'S LOADED,
WITH THE CHOICEST FRUITS FROM AFAR AND NEAR.
WHILE LEADERS AND PEOPLE, PARENTS AND CHILDREN,
LOVE, AND AFFECTION, ALL ARE HERE.

(Both groups kneel. Fanny enters, late, and kneels.)

HANNAH. Gracious God, we are your humble servants.

PEGGY. Mother God, Father God, we thank you for this food.

BETSY. We thank you for that which you have provided us.

RACHEL. May we serve you.

PHEBE. May we use this food in your everlasting service.

PEGGY. We eat in silence and respect. Amen.

ALL. Amen.

HANNAH, BETSY, PHEBE. Amen. *(All sit. The Sisters eat in silence. Each has a small dowel as a prop. Hannah, Betsy and Phebe are eating alone together. They are freely talking, in great contrast to the quiet dinner of the rest of the women.)*

BETSY. This squash could do with some seasoning.

HANNAH. Sister Peggy cooks plain and simple.

BETSY. Mighty fine bread, though.

HANNAH. Sister Phebe ...

PHEBE. Yes, Sister Hannah?

HANNAH. I'm concerned.

PHEBE. About what?

HANNAH. About the girls.

PHEBE. Yes?

HANNAH. Their hearts are to God, but their hands don't seem

to want to work.

PHEBE. I'm not catching your meaning.

HANNAH. The girls are not attentive to their work.

PHEBE. The work is getting done.

HANNAH. Sister Polly has missed her kirchen duties. Sister Fanny takes long walks alone. The girls are not doing their share, are they?

PHEBE. No, they are not.

HANNAH. Ah. *(A beat.)*

PHEBE. They are young. They drift off, return.

HANNAH. More than that.

PHEBE. Perhaps.

HANNAH. What do you think is happening?

PHEBE. I don't think they are lazy.

HANNAH. That is not what I am asking.

PHEBE. They are attentive at service. *(Hannah turns to Betsy.)*

HANNAH. Sister Betsy?

BETSY. These beans are good.

HANNAH. Sister Betsy, you are as inattentive as the girls. There is an oddness in the air, an expectancy even. Sister Polly keeps running with the younger girls.

BETSY. Sister Polly never had a childhood. Sister Polly was working on her back in a fancy house in Lexington when she was twelve.

HANNAH. I am well aware of Sister Polly's provenance. *(To Phebe.)*

You must guide them better, Sister Phebe. You must tend to order.

PHEBE. Yes, Sister Hannah.

HANNAH. You must keep them better occupied. I see girls whispering in the corner. We have no secrets here.

BETSY. Sister Hannah — *(Pulls a heart-shaped gift drawing out of her pocket.)* One of the girls gave this to me.

HANNAH. They are not permitted to make such things.

BETSY. She said she was the instrument. She said it was from Mother Ann.

HANNAH. Mother Ann?

BETSY. She said that Mother Ann came to her from heaven and told her to make this for me. That this is a gift from Mother Ann to me.

HANNAH. And you believe her?

BETSY. There are strange things going on. What shall we do?

HANNAH. Sister Phebe, what do you think we should do?
 PHEBE. I think we should wait.
 HANNAH. That is good advice, Sister Phebe. We will wait ...
 And we will watch.
 BETSY. I wonder what we have for dessert today. *(Lights change as the next scene begins immediately. One of the benches steps in place for the following scene; the rest are placed on the sides. The women sit on them.)*

Scene 14

Fanny is seated on the end of a bench, in the special interrogation light. Hannah and Peggy stand on either side of her.

HANNAH. *(To Peggy.)* What did you see?
 PEGGY. Who was there with you?
 HANNAH. What did you see?
 FANNY. I saw angels.
 HANNAH. *(To Fanny.)* Who was there?
 FANNY. Angels. There were angels there.
 HANNAH. You must tell us who was with you.
 FANNY. I tell you. I tell you again and again. I saw angels.
 PEGGY. *(To Hannah.)* Maybe she saw ...
 HANNAH. *(Overlapping.)* You must tell us what you saw.
 FANNY. Angels —
 HANNAH. *(Overlapping.)* There was another sister there?
 FANNY. No.
 HANNAH. Brethren? Who was there? *(A pause.)*
 PEGGY. There are good reasons ...
 FANNY. I'm thinking.
 PEGGY. We'll help you think.
 HANNAH. There were Brothers there?
 FANNY. I don't know their names.
 HANNAH. Brothers from the North Family?
 FANNY. Not Brothers.
 PEGGY. Men from town?

HANNAH. Old men? Young men?
 FANNY. Not men.
 PEGGY. Boys?
 FANNY. No.
 HANNAH. Not men or boys?
 FANNY. Angels! Gabriel, Michael. Peter. I don't know all their names.
 PEGGY. Oh, Lordy.
 FANNY. I'm telling you. There were angels. *(Lights change.)*

Scene 15

Peggy begins to sing. Betsy bears her and enters.

PEGGY. *(Singing.)*
 GLORY UNTO GOD WE'LL SING
(Betsy motions Peggy to stop. Betsy looks around to see if anyone is listening. She motions Peggy to continue. When Peggy begins to sing again, Betsy joins in.)
 PEGGY, BETSY.
 PRAISE TO CHRIST THE SAVIOUR
(Betsy begins to harmonize, much to Peggy's excitement.)
 WHO THE JOYFUL NEWS DID BRING
 THAT WE MIGHT CONQUER EVERY SIN
 AND REIGN O'ER DEATH FOREVER
(They sing full out, joyfully.)
 ALL THE HEAVENS PRAISE HIS NAME ANGELS GIVE
 HIM GLORY
(They become aware that they might be overheard.)
 SAINTS ON EARTH COME JOIN THE STRAIN
 LET YOUR CHORUS BE THE SAME
 CRYING HOLY HOLY.
(As the song finishes, the women have returned to their seats. Lights change.)