

MOTHER ABBESS SCENE 2

(MARIA crosses downstage center, kneels, and kisses the MOTHER ABBESS'ring.)

Sit down, Maria, I want to talk to you. (MARIA sits on stool right of desk.)

MARIA. Yes about last night. Reverend Mother, I was on my knees most of the night because I was late - and after you'd been so kind and given me permission to leave.

MOTHER ABBESS. (Sits left of desk.) It wasn't about your being late, Maria.

MARIA. I must have awakened half the abbey before Sister Sophia heard me and opened the gate.

MOTHER ABBESS. Maria, very few of us were asleep. We could only think you had lost your way and to be lost at night on that mountain!

MARIA. Reverend Mother, I couldn't be lost on that mountain. That's my mountain. I was brought up on it! It was that mountain that brought me to you.

MOTHER ABBESS. Oh?

MARIA. When I was a little girl I used to come down the mountain, climb a tree and look over into your garden. I'd see the sisters at work, and I'd hear them sing on their way to vespers. Many times I went back up that mountain in the dark - singing all the way.

(She clasps her hands together and raises them above her head in an exuberant gesture. Then she catches herself, gives a guilty glance toward the MOTHER ABBESS, and puts her hands back beneath her cape.)

And that brings up another transgression - I was singing yesterday and I was singing without your permission.

MOTHER ABBESS. Maria, it's only here in the abbey that there is a rule about singing.