

MOTHER ABBESS SCENE 1

Scene Three

The Office of the Mother Abbess, the Next Morning

(The sparseness of the furniture gives the sense of monastic austerity. There is a desk center, an armchair on one side, a stool on the other, a prie-dieu a short distance away. There is a door on either side of the room. On the desk: inkstand and pen and some papers inside a portfolio. The MOTHER ABBESS, seated at left of desk, is consulting a list of names on a sheet of paper. SISTER BERTHE, standing right of desk, is holding in her hands a small black book and a pencil. SISTER MARGARETTA, standing right of SISTER BERTHE, but apart, has her hands folded beneath the panel on the front of her habit. Nonnberg nuns, when their hands are not employed, always keep them out of sight beneath the panel of their habit.)

MOTHER ABBESS. I think we should be pleased with our efforts. Out of twenty-eight postulants, sixteen or seventeen are ready to enter the novitiate. Let's consider the doubtful ones again. There's Irmagard...

SISTER BERTHE. Reverend Mother, there's no doubt about Irmagard - the religious life is no place for the pious.

MOTHER ABBESS. You mean the pretentiously pious, Sister Berthe. There's Christina - and there's Maria.

SISTER BERTHE. Well, after last night I don't think there can be any doubt in the Reverend Mother's mind about Maria.

MOTHER ABBESS. I gave her permission to leave the abbey for the day.

SISTER MARGARETTA. I told you, Sister Berthe-(There is a knocking sound.)

MOTHER ABBESS. Ave!

(SISTER SOPHIA enters, comes to above desk.)

SISTER SOPHIA. Reverend Mother, I've brought Maria. She's waiting.

MOTHER ABBESS. Sister Sophia, the Mistress of the Postulants and the Mistress of the Novices do not see eye to eye about Maria. How do you feel about her?

SISTER SOPHIA. I love her very dearly. But she always seems to be in trouble, doesn't she?

SISTER BERTHE. (Crosses downstage left.) Exactly what I say!

[MUSIC NO. 04 "MARIA"]

MOTHER ABBESS SCENE 1

SHE CLIMBS A TREE AND SCRAPES HER KNEE, HER DRESS HAS GOT A TEAR.

SISTER SOPHIA.

SHE WALTZES ON HER WAY TO MASS AND WHISTLES ON THE STAIR.

SISTER BERTHE.

AND UNDERNEATH HER WIMPLE SHE HAS CURLERS IN HER HAIR -

SISTER SOPHIA.

I'VE EVEN HEARD HER SINGING IN THE ABBEY!

(BERTHE moves to the MOTHER ABBESS.)

SISTER BERTHE.

SHE'S ALWAYS LATE FOR CHAPEL -

SISTER SOPHIA.

BUT HER PENITENCE IS REAL.

SISTER BERTHE.

SHE'S ALWAYS LATE FOR EV'RYTHING EXCEPT FOR EV'RY MEAL.

I HATE TO HAVE TO SAY IT BUT I VERY FIRMLY FEEL

SISTER BERTHE & SISTER SOPHIA.

MARIA'S NOT AN ASSET TO THE ABBEY.

SISTER MARGARETTA.

I'D LIKE TO SAY A WORD IN HER BEHALF:

(Crosses to desk.)

MOTHER ABBESS. Then say it, Sister Margaretta.