

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. . .

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.

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.

MARGARETTA: (*R. of BERTHE*) I told you, Sister Berthe—
(*There is a knock on the door.*)

MOTHER ABBESS: Ave!

(*SISTER SOPHIA enters, comes to above desk.*)

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?

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

BERTHE: (*Crosses D.L.*) Exactly what I say! (*She sings.*)
She climbs a tree and scrapes her knee,
Her dress has got a tear.

SOPHIA: She waltzes on her way to Mass
And whistles on the stair.

BERTHE: And underneath her wimple
She has curlers in her hair.

SOPHIA: I've even heard her singing in the Abbey!
(*BERTHE moves to MOTHER ABBESS.*)

BERTHE: She's always late for chapel—
 SOPHIA: But her penitance is real.
 BERTHE: She's always late for everything
 Except for every meal.
 I hate to say it
 But I very firmly feel
 BERTHE and SOPHIA:
 Maria's not an asset to the Abbey.
 MARGARETTA:
 I'd like to say a word in her behalf—
(Crosses to desk.)
 MOTHER ABBESS: *(Speaks)* Then say it, Sister Margareta.
 MARGARETTA: Maria. . . makes me. . . laugh!
(All look at SISTER BERTHE, then look front.)
 SOPHIA: How do you solve a problem like Maria?
 MOTHER ABBESS:
 How do you catch a cloud and pin it down?
 MARGARETTA: How do you find a word that means Maria?
 BERTHE: *(Raising both hands)*
 A flibbertijibbet!
 SOPHIA: *(Raising both hands)*
 A will-o'-wisp!
 MARGARETTA: *(Raising both hands)*
 A clown!
 MOTHER ABBESS:
 Many a thing you know you'd like to tell her,
(Crosses D.S.R.) Many a thing she ought to understand.
 MARGARETTA: But how do you make her stay *(Crosses L. to MOTHER A.)* And listen to all you say?
 MOTHER ABBESS: *(Crosses C.S.)*
 How do you keep a wave upon the sand?
 MARGARETTA: Oh, how do you solve a problem like Maria?
 MOTHER ABBESS: *(Raising both hands.)*
 How do you hold a moonbeam in your hand?
 MARGARETTA: When I'm with her I'm confused, *(Crosses*