

Mother Abbess /
Berthe /
Margaretta /
Sophia

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: 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*

C., R. of MOTHER ABBESS.)

Out of focus and bemused,
And I never know exactly where I am.

BERTHE: (*Crosses L. of MOTHER ABBESS*).

Unpredictable as weather,
She's as flighty as a feather,

(*MOTHER ABBESS backs up a step.*)

MARGARETTA: (*To SISTER BERTHE*)

She's a darling.

BERTHE: (*To SISTER MARGARETTA*)

She's a demon.

MARGARETTA: (*To SISTER BERTHE*)

She's a lamb.

SOPHIA: (*Crosses L. of SISTER BERTHE*)

She'll out-pester any pest,
Drive a hornet from his nest,

BERTHE: She could throw a whirling dervish out of whi

MARGARETTA: She is gentle,

She is wild, (*Raising both hands.*)

SOPHIA: She's a riddle.

She's a child. (*Raising both hands.*)

BERTHE: She's a headache! (*Raising both hands.*)

MARGARETTA: (*Dropping her hands*)

She's an angel.

MOTHER ABBESS:

She's a girl. . .

ALL: (*Looking front—On count of 8, all clasp hands at chest, look up in prayer*)

How do you solve a problem like Maria?

How do you catch a cloud and pin it down?

How do you find a word that means Maria?

MARGARETTA: (*Crosses S.R.*)

A flibbertijibbet,

SOPHIA: (*Crosses S.L.*)

A will-o'-the-wisp,