

*MOTHER ABBESS rises.) Ave! (MARIA enters. She has her arms folded across her chest with her hands concealed beneath the short cape of her habit.)*

Come here, my child. *(MARIA crosses D.C., kneels and kisses MOTHER ABBESS' ring.)* Sit down, Maria, I want to talk to you. *(MARIA sits on stool R. 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 L. of desk)* It wasn't about your being late, Maria. . .

MARIA: I must have awakened half the Abbey before Sister Margaretta heard me and opened the gate.

MOTHER ABBESS: Maria, very few of us were asleep. We could only think that 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. (*MARIA 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.

MARIA: That's the hardest rule of all for me. Sister Margareta is always reminding me—but too late, after I've started singing.

MOTHER ABBESS: And the day you were singing in the garden at the top of your voice.

MARIA: But Mother, it's that kind of song.

MOTHER ABBESS: I came to the window and when you saw me you stopped.

MARIA: Yes—that's been on my mind ever since it happened.

MOTHER ABBESS: It's been on my mind, too. I wish you hadn't stopped. I used to sing that song when I was a child, and I can't quite remember—Please—

*(Swinging their arms 8 times, they end with their hands above their heads.)*

MARIA: *(D.C., R. of MOTHER ABBESS)* Mother! We were both singing at the top of our voices.

MOTHER ABBESS: *(Crosses above desk to L. of chair)* You're right. It's that kind of a song.

MARIA: And singing it always makes me feel better.

MOTHER ABBESS: Mother, where did you learn that song?

MOTHER ABBESS: I was brought up in the mountains myself. *(Motions MARIA to sit R. of desk.)* Maria. . . in spite of what you saw over the Abbey wall, you weren't prepared for the way we live, were you? *(Sits L. of desk.)*

MARIA: No, Mother, but I pray and I try.

MOTHER ABBESS: Tell me, Maria, what is the most important lesson you've learned here?

MARIA: To find out what is the will of God and to do it.

MOTHER ABBESS: Even if it is hard to accept?

MARIA: Even then.

MOTHER ABBESS: *(Rises, crosses D.L.C.)* Maria, the dress you wore when you came to us—is that still in the robing room?

MARIA: Why, no, Mother, I'm sure that's been given to the poor. Sister Margaretta said that when we enter the Abbey our worldly clothes. . . Reverend Mother, why do you ask?

MOTHER ABBESS: *(Crosses to below L. chair)* Maria, it seems to be the will of God that you leave us.

MARIA: Leave! Leave here! *(Rises.)* Oh, no! Mother, please no!

MOTHER ABBESS: For a while only, Maria.

MARIA: Don't send me away, Mother, please. This is what I want. This is my life.

MOTHER ABBESS: But are you ready for it? Perhaps if you go out into the world again for a time you will return to us knowing what we expect of you and that we do expect it.

MARIA: I know what you expect, Mother, and I'll do it. I promise.

MOTHER ABBESS: Maria.

MARIA: If it is God's will. Where am I to go?

MOTHER ABBESS: There's a family—a family of seven children—*(Sits L. of desk.)* you like children—you're very good with them. They need a governess until September.

MARIA: Until September!

MOTHER ABBESS: *(Writing an address on paper)* Captain von Trapp expects you this afternoon. He's a fine man—and a brave one. He was given the Maria Teresa medal by the Emperor. It was for heroism in the Adriatic.

MARIA: A Captain in the Navy! Oh, Mother, he'll be very strict.

MOTHER ABBESS: You're not being sent to his battleship.

*(She hands MARIA the address. Abbey bells are heard.*

*MARIA kneels. The MOTHER ABBESS makes the sign of the cross on MARIA'S forehead.)* God bless you, Maria. *(She starts out.)*

MARIA: Reverend Mother? Have I your permission to sing?

MOTHER ABBESS: Yes, my child. *(She exits L. MARIA rises. She looks about the room regretfully, then starts out singing to herself.)*

MARIA: These are a few of my favorite things.

*(SISTER BERTHE enters. She gives MARIA a reproachful look. MARIA stops singing and draws herself up spunkily.)* I have been given permission to sing. *(MARIA exits R. quickly. The Traveller Closes)*