

MYSTIC MARGARET

By

Amy Drake

MYSTIC MARGARET

© 2023 by Amy Drake

CAUTION: Professionals and Amateurs are hereby warned that performance of **MYSTIC MARGARET** is subject to payment of a royalty. It is fully protected under the copyright laws of The United States of America, and of all countries covered by the International Copyright Union (including the Dominion of Canada and the rest of the British Commonwealth) and of all countries covered by the Pan-American Copyright Convention, the Universal Copyright Convention, the Berne Convention, and of all countries with which the United States has reciprocal copyright relations. All rights, including without limitation professional/amateur stage rights, motion picture, recitation, lecturing, public reading, radio broadcasting, television, video or sound recording, all other forms of mechanical, electronic and digital reproduction, transmission and distribution, such as CD, DVD, the Internet, private and file-sharing networks, information storage and retrieval systems, photocopying, and the rights of translation into foreign languages are strictly reserved. Particular emphasis is placed upon the matter of readings, permission of which must be obtained from the Author in writing.

The English language stock and amateur stage performance rights in the United States, its territories, possessions and Canada for **MYSTIC MARGARET** are controlled exclusively by Next Stage Press. No professional or nonprofessional performance of the Play may be given without obtaining in advance written permission and paying the requisite fee. Inquiries concerning production rights should be addressed to genekato@nextstagepress.com

SPECIAL NOTE

Anyone receiving permission to produce **MYSTIC MARGARET** is required to give credit to the Author as sole and exclusive Author of the Play on the title page of all programs distributed in connection with performances of the Play and in all instances in which the title of the Play appears for purposes of advertising, publicizing or otherwise exploiting the Play and/or a production thereof. The name of the Author must appear on a separate line, in which no other name appears, immediately beneath the title and in size of type equal to 50% of the size of the largest, most prominent letter used for the title of the Play. No person, firm, or entity may receive credit larger or more prominent than that accorded the Author

MYSTIC MARGARET

*To my mother,
Rosemary Breitfeller Wilkes.*

MYSTIC MARGARET

CAST: 4 Women, 4 Men

Written for eight actors. See below for doubling suggestion.

**Note: Grace and Gilia are to be played by the same, actor, suggesting that Grace is Gilia reincarnated. The cast may be expanded to 23+ actors.*

MARGARET	17-50, Farm girl to mystic
GRACE	30s, Tourist With leg injury/
TOWNSWOMAN 3	30s, Farm wife/
WIFE	30s, Villager/
GILIA	30s, Nun, hospital worker
LUCREZIA	40s, Margaret's stepmother/
MARINARIA	60s, Elderly villager/
ANGEL 1	30, Messenger from Heaven/
TOWNSWOMAN 1	30s, Farm wife
TANCRED	45, Margaret's father/
GUGLIELMO DI PECO	45, Arsenio's father/
SPIRIT 1	30s, Laborer/
PAZZO	60s, Bishop, brusque
ARSENIO	20-25, Margaret's noble lover/
FRA GUINTA	30-50, Margaret's confessor
RANERIA	60s, Sister of Marinaria/
LUCREZIA	40s, Margaret's stepmother/
TOWNSWOMAN 2	40s, Farm wife
JESUS	33, Margaret's savior/
ORLANDUS	17, Possessed by demon/
ANTONIO	25, Margaret's son/
HUSBAND	30s, Villager/
SPIRIT 2	30s, Laborer

TIME: 1247-1297

PLACE: Cortona, Italy

MYSTIC MARGARET

MYSTIC MARGARET

ACT 1
SCENE 1

Modern day. A chamber in the Basilica of Cortona. The frail body of Saint Margaret lies under a glass case. Behind her hangs a red velvet curtain studded with precious gems.

GRACE enters wearing modern dress and limps into the church. She solemnly approaches the body of St. Margaret, lying peacefully under a glass case. Grace gazes down at St. Margaret, kneels, and prays. Sunlight streams in a stained-glass window creating a glow encompassing Grace and Margaret. Grace slowly rises, testing her injured leg with her weight, and walks without a limp. She looks up joyfully and exits.

SCENE 2

The same church in the year 1297. FRA GUINTA has come to pay his respects to the woman he loved.

FRA GUINTA. I am Fra Guinta, Margaret's confessor and confidante. I faithfully recorded all she told me about her life before coming to the friary and her mystical visions. I knew Margaret for over twenty years. I'm still not sure whether her visions were divinely inspired or hallucinations of a girl who had habitually starved herself. There is no doubt that there was something mystical about Margaret, which captivated my heart and preserved her body, perhaps the vessel of miracles. *(Beat.)* Margaret continues to appear to be sleeping for some weeks now. The sweetest fragrance of violets emanates from her body with no sign of decomposition. Whatever her gifts, she was chosen by Christ to lead by example, a tall order for a small frail feminine woman who became mother to an order and founder of a hospital. Who could have done more? Who knows what more our Margaret will do for those who call upon her in the future? This is her story.

MYSTIC MARGARET

SCENE 3

Tuscan farm in the year 1262. Teenage MARGARET is a striking beauty with dark hair and brown eyes. She has a natural glow about her. Margaret is coming from the barn when she is besieged by LUCREZIA.

MARGARET. Can't we get a farmhand to help when Papa is away? I can barely keep up with the all the chores.

LUCREZIA. If we could afford to pay another farmhand, we would have one. Then, we could get rid of you. I'd put you in a convent.

MARGARET. Send me away! This is my home! My mother would never have--

LUCREZIA. --Your mother is dead. Your father married me to run the farm, not cater to you. Honestly, child, I don't know why your father keeps you around.

MARGARET. I'm old enough to get married. Has Father set aside a dowry?

LUCREZIA. Ha! As if your father could afford a dowry!

MARGARET. Some of the boys in the village think I'm pretty.

LUCREZIA. You're too pretty for your own good.

MARGARET. Papa will be back in a few days. I'll ask him if he's picked out a husband for me.

LUCREZIA. Don't waste time with such nonsense. *(Beat.)* Now, go down to the stream and get my bath water. And pick some chamomile. I feel a chill coming on. *(Lucrezia exits inside the house. Margaret picks up a pail. ARSENIO, a handsome young nobleman, rides up on his horse. They pause and gaze at each other.)*

MARGARET. Can I help you?

ARSENIO. I was traveling through the village in search of lodging. Could you direct me to the nearest tavern?

MARGARET. There is an inn just down the road.

ARSENIO. Could your stable hand fetch some hay for my horse? I could leave him by the barn if that's alright. He needs water, too.

MARGARET. That's fine. I'll fetch it. I take care of the animals.

ARSENIO. You? Doesn't the farmer have a man around to do that?

MYSTIC MARGARET

MARGARET. No. I'm his daughter, Margaret. I don't mind though. I like animals.

ARSENIO. It's nice to meet you. I'm Arsenio. I live on the other side of the hill.

MARGARET. On a farm?

ARSENIO. Our family's estate in Montepulciano.

MARGARET. Oh, my! I've never been that far away.

ARSENIO. It's just past the marsh and the woods.

MARGARET. Can I get you some bread for the next leg of your journey?

ARSENIO. Thanks. That's very kind of you. I've been riding all day and I'm hungry.

MARGARET. I made it fresh this morning.

ARSENIO. You tend to the farm and the kitchen?

MARGARET. My stepmother thinks it's practical that I do the work.

ARSENIO. The farm looks prosperous enough to get some men to work the land.

MARGARET. I don't think we could ever bring in enough money to please my stepmother.

ARSENIO. This is no work for a lovely young woman. *(Margaret melts at the compliment. Arsenio steps towards her. Margaret backs away.)*

MARGARET. It's not all drudgery. I learned a lot from watching the changing of the seasons and how nature cares for her own.

ARSENIO. I could use a guide like you on my travels.

MARGARET. Are you going on a crusade?

ARSENIO. No, to check on my father's property. I was sent out to survey the land.

MARGARET. All this way?

ARSENIO. Yes. We have vast holdings. But pretty girls don't work on our land. We have men for that.

MARGARET. Do you live in a castle?

ARSENIO. Well, it's large, but not quite a palace...

MARGARET. You must be tired. If you'd like to rest awhile under the oak tree, I'll bring out some figs and bread. First, I have to go to the stream for some water.

ARSENIO. Talk with me awhile longer.

MYSTIC MARGARET

MARGARET. No, I must fetch water for my stepmother. She grows impatient.

ARSENIO. I'll come with you. Maybe you could tell me about some of the signs you see in nature?

MARGARET. Alright. You can learn a lot if you look for signs.

ARSENIO. What do you look for?

MARGARET. The flight patterns of birds signaling the change of seasons. The leaves turning over before a storm. The bats at night fall. I love to watch bats. They're so graceful. Like dancers.

ARSENIO. That's unusual. Girls are usually afraid of bats.

MARGARET. Not me. Oh, and I listen to the cicadas. Their songs bring us closer to salvation. *(Beat.)* Sometimes I have glimpses.

ARSENIO. Glimpses? Of what?

MARGARET. Heaven. At least I think it's Heaven.

ARSENIO. What makes you think so?

MARGARET. Sometimes when I look up at the treetops they look like they're glowing. Like just before a storm or a vivid sunset, only more intense. *(The scenery takes on a warm glow.)*

ARSENIO. *(Curious)* How long have you experienced this?

MARGARET. I've had the glimpses most of my life.

ARSENIO. Have you told anyone else?

MARGARET. No. I'm afraid I'd only be laughed at. Or beaten. *(The glow fades.)*

ARSENIO. Margaret, your secret is safe with me.

MARGARET. You don't think I'm mad?

ARSENIO. No. I think you're perfect. *(Arsenio leans in to kiss Margaret. They are interrupted by Lucrezia bellowing from the back door.)*

LUCREZIA. Margaret! Where's my bath water? Who are you talking to?

MARGARET. Mother, this is Arsenio. He lives on the estate over the hill. He was looking for a place to rest.

(Lucrezia sizes him up, taking notice of his fine clothing.)

LUCREZIA. Well, invite him in.

(Arsenio enters the house. Margaret, one step behind him, is stopped by Lucrezia.)

LUCREZIA. I know what you're thinking.

MARGARET. What do you mean?

MYSTIC MARGARET

LUCREZIA. You're hoping that the young nobleman is going to take you away from all this...splendor. Well, you're wrong. He's just looking to have a bit of fun and be on his way.

MARGARET. We were only talking.

LUCREZIA. Yes. For now. I see the way he looks at you. Lust is a sin, you know.

MARGARET. He's very nice.

LUCREZIA. As long as that's all you're doing. We don't need another mouth to feed.

SCENE 4

Two weeks later. Afternoon. The barn. Margaret and Arsenio are lying in the hay. Arsenio puts his hand on Margaret's leg. She pushes it away.

MARGARET. Arsenio, I don't know about this. It's not as if we're betrothed.

ARSENIO. Margaret, you are the most beautiful creature I've ever beheld.

MARGARET. You have become everything to me.

ARSENIO. It's been kind of your stepmother to put me up.

MARGARET. Kindness has nothing to do with it. She thinks that if she's nice to you your father will give us more land.

ARSENIO. I don't know what my father will say when he finds out I haven't ridden more than a few miles. I don't want to leave you. I love you, Margaret.

MARGARET. I love you, too, Arsenio. (*Beat.*) I wish you could stay forever.

ARSENIO. I must go home soon. (*Beat.*) Margaret, why do you put up with Lucrezia's cruelty?

MARGARET. I have nowhere else to go.

ARSENIO. No long-lost relatives to take you in?

MARGARET. No. At least I haven't made their acquaintance. And Papa's family have stopped coming around since he married her. Although he hasn't said so, I don't think Papa can stand her either. I think that's why he goes away so much.

ARSENIO. When will I meet him? I have something to ask him.

MYSTIC MARGARET

MARGARET. He'll be back soon.

ARSENIO. Margaret, why don't you come away with me?

MARGARET. What?

ARSENIO. Marry me, Margaret.

MARGARET. Arsenio, how could I do that? I have to keep house and look after the animals and care for my parents.

ARSENIO. When have they ever cared for you?

MARGARET. We will need my father's blessing. He returns within a fortnight.

ARSENIO. I can't wait that long. Does it really matter what he thinks? You could stay with my family while everything is arranged.

MARGARET. What do you mean?

ARSENIO. You could have your own closet and bed chamber.

MARGARET. Oh, Arsenio, I don't know about this.

ARSENIO. Margaret, I love you. I want you to have the splendid life you deserve. And you will never have it here. Feasts, gowns, plenty to eat. Maids waiting on you. Please, come with me where we will both be happy. *I promise* I will marry you.

MARGARET. Let me pray on it.

ARSENIO. Don't take too long.

MARGARET. But who would look after the animals?

ARSENIO. Your father will just have to hire someone. Or your stepmother could do some work instead of ordering you around.

MARGARET. She isn't well.

ARSENIO. She looks pretty healthy to me. A girl like you shouldn't be wearing rags. If you were my wife, I would have fine dresses made for you and jewels to set off your eyes. You could live in comfort.

MARGARET. I have dreamed of that my whole life.

ARSENIO. I can make it come true. These last few days have been magical. Come away with me tonight. When the moon is full. I'll wait for you in the barn.

SCENE 5

Midnight. Arsenio is waiting by the barn with his pack. Margaret comes out to join him holding a few possessions wrapped in a blanket.

MYSTIC MARGARET

ARSENIO. Are you ready, Margaret?

MARGARET. Yes. I'm ready.

ARSENIO. (*Noticing Margaret's small traveling bag.*) Is that all you're taking?

MARGARET. I don't have much. Only my mother's comb and dress are worth taking. We have enough bread to see us through a day. (*Beat.*) I'm nervous. I've never been away from home before.

ARSENIO. It'll be fine. You'll have a new home. A fine home. My family will love you.

MARGARET. If you say so.

ARSENIO. Let's be off, then. (*Margaret and Arsenio ride away.*)

LUCREZIA. (*Looking on from the farmhouse door.*) Damn it all! Lost my housekeeper!

SCENE 6

Afternoon. Inner room at Arsenio's family estate. Tapestries are hung on the walls. Palm trees, lemon trees, and an olive grove surround the estate. The scent of lemons hangs in the summer air. Arsenio is confronted by his father, GUGLIELMO.

GUGLIELMO. Arsenio, what do you think you are doing bringing home a peasant to live with us?

ARSENIO. Father, I love her. I want to marry her.

GUGLIELMO. That's fine for a bit of fun but you can't *marry* her.

ARSENIO. Why not? Is she not beautiful? And charming?

GUGLIELMO. And beguiling. A marriage alliance must be between social equals. She hasn't been educated as a lady. What would we gain from bringing her into the family? There's certainly no dowry.

ARSENIO. We don't need more gold.

GUGLIELMO. What do you think we use to keep this estate going? To keep you in fine leather and your mother in silks from the East? To keep up the stables and the servants?

ARSENIO. I love her! I will not abandon her!

MYSTIC MARGARET

GUGLIELMO. Marriage is a carefully considered arrangement between two families who gain land and strength by joining together. She has nothing to offer.

ARSENIO. I chose Margaret.

GUGLIELMO. You will marry the girl I choose for you. Not a peasant!

ARSENIO. If you don't give us your blessing, we will run away together!

GUGLIELMO. Arsenio, I need you to take care of the estate when I'm away. You'll have to be prepared to take it over someday. That girl you brought home is not fit to be your helpmate. She's not a lady. She could never keep the books or oversee the staff. She lacks education and refinement. She could never be presented at court.

ARSENIO. Then, I'll have no one! (*Beat.*) And if you try to run her off, buy her off, or God forbid, try to get rid of her by any other means I will quit this house and never return!

GUGLIELMO. I see. All right. Your "companion" may stay here for the time being. We will look on her as a cousin. She will be tolerated. But no more.

ARSENIO. Thank you, Father. I appreciate your indulgence.

GUGLIELMO. I do it for you, my son.

SCENE 7

One year later. Margaret's chamber. A heavily pregnant Margaret confronts Arsenio about marriage.

MARGARET. Have you spoken with your father about the wedding?

ARSENIO. I have.

MARGARET. Has he set a date?

ARSENIO. No.

MARGARET. No? The baby will not wait. You promised me that we would get married!

ARSENIO. We can't. I can't.

MARGARET. Can't or won't?

ARSENIO. The only way we can get married is to run off and find a village priest.

MARGARET. Let's do that. Now! Before the baby comes.

MYSTIC MARGARET

ARSENIO. We would have to leave the countryside. My father is known widely. Anyone who sees us traveling together could tell him where we are.

MARGARET. So, what if they did?

ARSENIO. I could lose my inheritance. Then, where would we be?

MARGARET. Arsenio, will your father not relent and give us his blessing? The eternal salvation of his grandchild is at stake. And ours.

ARSENIO. He will not. He says that he cannot give his consent for a wedding with a peasant.

MARGARET. But I've been like a daughter to him.

ARSENIO. He wants to set me up with a lady bringing with her a dowry and social position.

MARGARET. What did you tell him?

ARSENIO. That I will have you or no one. You will be my only wife— with or without the banns of marriage. Or the sanctity of the Church.

MARGARET. Continuing to live in sin could bring about the ruination of our souls.

ARSENIO. Margaret, what's done is done. I will stand by you and you alone. We will manage. You will have a suitable lady to assist you when the time comes. As long as I'm alive, my child will not be cast out.

MARGARET. Your father hasn't threatened to kick me out, has he?

ARSENIO. No. We have his tacit acceptance.

MARGARET. Thank Heaven for that.

ARSENIO. In my heart you are my wife, and I will continue to provide you with comfort. You and our child will not want.

MYSTIC MARGARET

SCENE 8

Feast Hall, decorated for a grand banquet. Margaret has delivered the baby. She and Arsenio are dressed in finery at a banquet. Lute music plays in the background. A fireplace mantle frames the couple.

ARSENIO. Margaret, look how everyone admires you.

MARGARET. I feel like a princess in this gown and the jewels of your kin.

ARSENIO. They are yours now.

MARGARET. You have given me everything I have ever wanted. And we have a handsome baby boy. *(Margaret looks away. Her glow wanes.)*

ARSENIO. Margaret, what is it?

MARGARET. Your father still hasn't consented to our marriage.

ARSENIO. Don't ruin a perfect evening.

MARGARET. It isn't...perfect...unless we are wed.

ARSENIO. All in due time.

MARGARET. What is your father waiting for?

ARSENIO. He will not relent.

MARGARET. What are you going to do about it?

ARSENIO. I've said all I can. If I push Father may put us out. Then, where would we be?

MARGARET. This isn't right.

ARSENIO. Try to enjoy your good fortune.

MARGARET. What? That you pulled me out of poverty?

ARSENIO. Yes. And provided a fine home. Everyone here treats you like a lady.

MARGARET. It will never really be mine. I will never be Lady of the Manor.

ARSENIO. You will always be my lady, in my heart.

MARGARET. The time will come when the faithful will say, "Oh, holy Margaret," for I shall be a saint and you will have wallets hanging at your sides. I implore you, talk with your father about our wedding.

ARSENIO. Very well, Margaret. Try to enjoy the festivities.

MARGARET. Very well.

ARSENIO. Good, Let's dance.

MYSTIC MARGARET

SCENE 9

The Di Peco estate grounds. Margaret hears Arsenio's hunting dog, Melchior, baying pitifully in the distance.

MARGARET. Melchior? Melchior! Come! (*Melchior continues baying. Margaret grabs a shawl and heads out to retrieve him. She enters the forest of oak trees and encounters Arsenio's dead body. His body is badly bruised, and his possessions are strewn about. His money purse is empty and turned inside out. Margaret runs to him and drops to her knees.*) Arsenio! NO!!! How could this be? Robbers! (*Margaret sobs and composes herself.*) Oh, my poor darling. I'll tend to your wounds. (*Margaret tears a strip off her dress and bandages his arm.*) Your father will find out who did this. They will not go unpunished. I know it must have taken a gang of thieves to overtake you. Where is your horse? (*Margaret looks around.*) If your steed turns up, he will lead us to the robbers. He has such distinctive markings. (*Beat.*) Arsenio, if you are still breathing you must hang on until we get you home! Please—for me! I can't lose you! At least until we get the priest! You can't leave us without confessing! How could we live without you? (*Margaret puts her hand in front of his face checking for breath. She then feels his wrist for a pulse. There is none. She wails.*) It's too late! (*Margaret sobs.*) Your soul could be in the fire pit of hell. Is it my fault for tempting you? That's what your father will say. (*Margaret sobs again.*) You said I was too pretty to resist. How can I ever look at my reflection again? (*Margaret rubs dirt on her face.*) Now, I am concealed. What will become of our child? How can I go on?

SCENE 10

Two weeks later. Margaret's chamber. She is lying in bed, disheveled and crying. Guglielmo knocks and enters.

GUGLIELMO. Margaret, how are you today?

MARGARET. Unwell, sir.

GUGLIELMO. We must talk about your future with us.

MYSTIC MARGARET

MARGARET. What are your plans for me and the baby?

GUGLIELMO. Margaret, you can stay on, but you'll have to earn your keep.

MARGARET. What do you mean?

GUGLIELMO. We could use another maid.

MARGARET. But I'm like a daughter to you. You said so.

GUGLIELMO. That was for Arsenio's benefit. You were my son's whore. We can't have you parading around here as though you are family.

MARGARET. But the baby is your own flesh and blood!

GUGLIELMO. We have no proof of that. You live with a man without being married. What else might you do?

MARGARET. Sir, I resent that!

GUGLIELMO. You have no one here to protect you now. I'm willing to give you food and shelter, but no more finery. Give me the necklace!

MARGARET. Arsenio gave it to *me*!

GUGLIELMO. That was not his to give. It belonged to my sister. It stays with the family. Which you are not!

MARGARET. Then, I give it back to you. I will not keep it. (*Margaret throws the necklace at him.*) We wanted to get married. You stopped us.

GUGLIELMO. I gave in to his wish to bring home a peasant girl because I thought I'd lose him. For his sake, I said nothing about clothing you like nobility but, that's over now.

MARGARET. I have lost my beloved!

GUGLIELMO. And I have lost my only son. If I were to glance at you over dinner my pain would be renewed. Day after day. I cannot be reminded. No, Margaret, I think it's best that you go now.

MARGARET. I have nowhere to go.

GUGLIELMO. Perhaps an elderly relative will take you in.

MARGARET. You know that I have only my father and stepmother!

GUGLIELMO. Get thee gone. (*He softens.*) I will give you a few gold coins for your journey. (*He tosses the coins on Margaret's bed.*) I expect you and the baby to be gone by morning.

MARGARET. How could you? What will Arsenio's mother say?

GUGLIELMO. My wife will abide by my wishes. It was her hope, as well as mine, that one day Arsenio would give you up. Then, we could have paid you off and set him up with someone suitable.

MYSTIC MARGARET

MARGARET. He would never do that.

GUGLIELMO. There would come a time when he would have to take over for me. He would need respectability to run the estate. He would never have it with you around to remind everyone of his folly.

MARGARET. This is my home.

GUGLIELMO. As I said, you may stay on as a maid. Or you can go back to your own people.

MARGARET. How could I? —

GUGLIELMO. --It's best that you leave discreetly before the sun rises. Pack your things and be gone. *(He exits.)*

MARGARET. *(She prays.)* Dear Heavenly Father, I don't know where to begin. I am afraid—for myself, my baby, and for Arsenio's soul. My world has crumbled and cast me out. I have led a sinful life. Lead me on the right path. Guide me. *(Margaret brightens.)* Who speaks? What do I hear? Bliss through humility? I can't stay here. If I am to labor, it will be for my own father. Maybe my family will take me back? Surely, they will forgive me.

SCENE 11

The marketplace in Laviano, Margaret's family's village. Margaret carries the baby through the crowd. She has been walking for days and looks haggard. She has a rope draped over her neck.

MARGARET. Make way for a sinner! I've returned to humble myself before you.

TOWNSPERSON 1. Who's that?

TOWNSPERSON 2. Could that be Margaret?

TOWNSPERSON 1. She still has her looks, but what happened to her?

TOWNSPERSON 2. She looks like she's been rolling around in the dirt.

TOWNSPERSON 1. She has a baby with her.

TOWNSPERSON 3. When did she get married?

TOWNSPERSON 2. Why is she alone? Has she gone mad? Ranting and raving like a lunatic.

TOWNSPERSON 1. What's she going on about? Being a sinner?

TOWNSPERSON 2. Must have something to do with the baby.

MYSTIC MARGARET

TOWNSPERSON 3. Remember when she ran off with that lord of the manor?

TOWNSPERSON 1. That was a long time ago.

MARGARET. Pardon me, could you spare a few coins for bread?

TOWNSPERSON 1. Margaret, is that you?

MARGARET. Yes, I've come home.

TOWNSPERSON 2. Have you seen your father? He's been missing you.

MARGARET. I want to, but I'm frightened.

TOWNSPERSON 3. Of what?

MARGARET. My stepmother. She hates me.

TOWNSPERSON 2. Margaret, your father's getting old. You must go to him.

MARGARET. I must find a home for my baby.

TOWNSPERSON 3. Where's your husband?

MARGARET. Dead. Killed by robbers. Although he was never really mine.

TOWNSPERSON 1. What does that? —

TOWNSPERSON 3. --Well, let's get you something to eat and then you can decide what to do. (*Townsperson 3 exits.*)

MARGARET. I've been so terribly wicked.

TOWNSPERSON 2. I can't believe that. You were always such a sweet girl.

MARGARET. I loved a man who couldn't be mine.

TOWNSPERSON 2. Was he married?

MARGARET. No, but his family wouldn't have me. And now I'm alone in the world with his child.

TOWNSPERSON 1. It is a lamentable situation. Go to the parish, confess your sins, and make peace with your family.

MARGARET. Do you really think they will take me back?

TOWNSPERSON 2. If they are good Christians, they will do what's right.

TOWNSPERSON 3. (*Returns with bread and a mug of ale.*) Here, Margaret, have this. It will give you strength.

MARGARET. Thank you. I must go home.

MYSTIC MARGARET

SCENE 12

Tancred's farmhouse. Margaret and TANCRED sit by the hearth. Tancred is consoling Margaret.

MARGARET. Papa, I've missed you so much and wanted to see you for so long. Can you ever forgive me?

TANCRED. Of course, child.

MARGARET. I've been so terribly wicked.

TANCRED. Then, you must go and make a confession.

MARGARET. I have been confessing my sins to everyone in the town who will hear me.

TANCRED. Why have you done that? That's only for the priest's ears.

MARGARET. I want to be clean and serve as an example.

TANCRED. You had many admirers. They will welcome you back.

MARGARET. I don't want to go back to my old ways. I want to start over and place my fortune with God. I caused Arsenio's uneasy relationship with his father.

TANCRED. Arsenio loved you of his free will. He chose to be with you. Don't carry a cross you shouldn't bear.

MARGARET. What if he's in Purgatory? Or Hell?

TANCRED. That's up to God. You must come to terms with your impetuous nature and find a way to make a good life for yourself and the baby.

MARGARET. Can we stay here?

TANCRED. Of course. My home is yours.

MARGARET. But, what about Lucrezia?

TANCRED. I'll explain it to her. She is at the market. She'll be home soon. We can make room.

(Margaret throws her arms around Tancred and hugs him tightly.)

MARGARET. Thank you, Papa!

TANCRED. We'll get you some straw and blankets.

(Lucrezia enters carrying a basket of bread from the market.)

LUCREZIA. What is *she* doing here?

TANCRED. Margaret has come home! With our grandchild!

MYSTIC MARGARET

MARGARET. Please? May I have some bread?

LUCREZIA. I didn't buy it for you. (*Beat.*) I was afraid I'd find you here! I heard at the market that you had come through with a baby in tow.

TANCRED. Margaret and the baby are going to stay with us.

LUCREZIA. No, they're not! Imagine the disgrace she would bring to us. What will the neighbors think?

TANCRED. They will think Margaret has returned after a journey.

LUCREZIA. With a baby and no husband?

TANCRED. Margaret's young man has been killed. We are her family.

LUCREZIA. What about that fancy estate?

MARGARET. I can't stay there and live as a servant!

LUCREZIA. I thought they treated you like a princess.

MARGARET. Arsenio did, but his father never approved of us. He wouldn't allow us to get married.

LUCREZIA. That's what you get for taking up with a man above your station. You should have known they'd never accept you as one of their own.

TANCRED. Lucrezia, the village doesn't have to know what happened.

LUCREZIA. They already do. In the market, I heard that Margaret had freely confessed her sins to everyone who would listen. We can't have her live here. I'll not have a harlot stay under my roof.

MARGARET. But where would I go? I have no one else to turn to. Papa, let me stay! Please!

TANCRED. Of course, I want you to stay!

LUCREZIA. You ran off. You thought you were better than us. And now you come crawling back. This is my house now! You have no place here.

MARGARET. But I have nowhere else to go!

TANCRED. Lucrezia, please!

LUCREZIA. You won't even get into a convent. You're too weak to accept a celibate life.

MARGARET. You're wicked. You tricked my father into marrying you to get your hands on his farm. And money.

LUCREZIA. You compare yourself to me? If you want to make a public spectacle of yourself, go back to the marketplace and see if anyone will take you in. Or go live with the Flagellants. Just get out of this house before anyone sees you darkening our door.

MYSTIC MARGARET

MARGARET. PAPA! PAPA! You wouldn't! Don't make me go!

LUCREZIA. Tancred, if you insist that she stay, I will sell off your land and animals to keep her. Then where will you be?

TANCREDE. I'm sorry, Margaret. *(Tancred walks away downtrodden, shaking his head. Margaret gathers her bags and the baby, and they go outside.)*

SCENE 13

Moments later, under the fig tree outside Tancred's house.

MARGARET. *(She slumps down and prays.)* Dear Heavenly Father, can you forgive a sinner like me? My own family has cast me out. Now more than ever I need your guidance. Please, please, show me the way. Help me find the right path to caring for my son. I humbly ask that your Son fill my heart and guide me on my journey. Amen. *(Margaret picks up her baby and looks toward the open road.)* Look there, Antonio, off to the left is the fine castle where you were born. We could go back, and I could work as a servant, living off scraps of food from the household, even though Arsenio's blood runs in your veins. No, I am too proud to accept pity. I can't go back through the market. You heard how all those people who knew me jeered at me. *(Beat.)*

I am inspired to go toward Cortona. How will we find the way? We could at least find shelter and maybe some bread and rest for a night or two. They may know of a position for me with a family willing to take us in. But what if they've heard about my sordid past? Would they even consider letting me stay with them? Surely, they are more compassionate than my stepmother. *(Beat.)* What shall we do, my little one? Go back to the familiar, or go forward?

END OF ACT 1

***THE PLAY IS NOT OVER!! TO FIND OUT HOW IT ENDS –
ORDER A COPY AT WWW.NEXTSTAGEPRESS.COM***