

Marie Jean, Sister
The Help of his ...
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THE HELP OF HIS GRACE

The Story
of a
Benedictine Sister

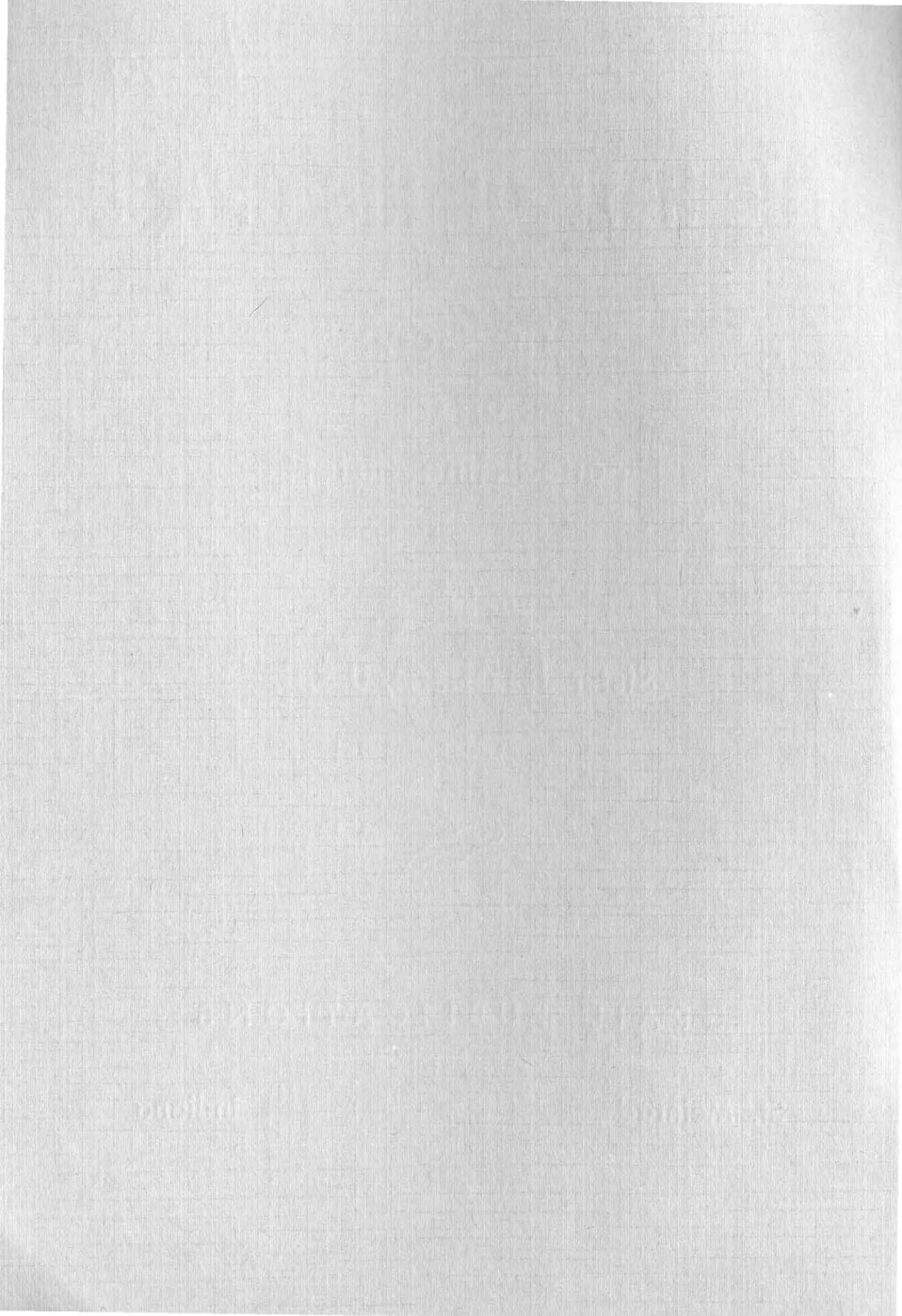
by
Sister Jean Marie, O.S.B.



GRAIL PUBLICATIONS

St. Meinrad

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Dedicated
TO THE MOTHER OF GOD

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PREFACE

“... and let us beg God to supply by THE HELP OF HIS GRACE that which by nature is lacking to us.”

—Rule of St. Benedict

Consulting your watch you had noticed that it was time for you to do your usual typing for Sister Justina. Sister Therese had always done that, but when she had died Reverend Mother had sent for you. “You type, don’t you, Sister?” (Sister Edgar always said typing was as important to a Sister as cooking to a young wife. She herself had taught you typing). “Do you think you can type for Sister Justina for an hour on Saturday in Sister Therese’s place?” Mother asked, and she looked worried. You had thought of your already crowded program—and then far away you seemed to hear Sister Cyprian’s high-pitched voice, “Always making excuses, aren’t you? You’re the only one in the house who has anything to do.” You had smiled when you remembered how the words had irked you. “I’ll try, Mother,” you had said.

So with your skirts flapping in the rough wind you had made your way down the path to the front door, through halls, and up stairs until at last puffing you had stood before Sister Justina’s door.

You had opened the door after a soft rap, and had already removed the cover from the typewriter when Sister Justina spoke. “Sister, here are some leaflets Mother gave me on vocations. What do you think of them?” You had gone over, and as you did you noticed that Sister had looked tired, and the lines on her face seemed deeper than ever. And then as you looked through the leaflets you felt the resentment rising up

within you. Gay novices strolling along flowered paths. Sisters playing tennis, Sisters praying in a beautiful chapel, with only the balos missing!

You had put the leaflets down abruptly and reached for the paper you were to insert in the typewriter. "Sister Mary Ellen, you haven't answered me," Sister Justina had said with a touch of impatience. "I think they're, they're—well, horrid!" you had said, like a child groping for the right answer. Sister Justina turned and said half-smilingly, "That's a pretty broad statement! What don't you like about them?" And you had said to her:

"They aren't honest, and they're sentimental. Why don't they put on the front page, 'Come join our carefree group; you'll have everything you want . . . and the nuns are all so sweet and charming.'

"Where is the Cross; draped with pink silk for fear it might frighten? But His love for us is revealed on the Cross—and our love for Him is proved and purified by the crosses we accept for His sake. Do we challenge the girl of today to respond with courage to that Love which implores her to accept? Oh no, we might discourage her, so we tell her how attractive convent life is—and then wonder why she's unimpressed. She can have these pleasures and more in the world. And never given a glimpse of the crucified Savior, she turns away disappointed and uninspired. Why should we bother to compete with the world when we are dedicated to a kingdom that is not of this world; to the peace that Christ has promised—but only if we too share the cross and in our weakness find His abiding strength."

And Sister Justina had seemed so taken aback, that I started to apologize, for it was the most I had said at one time for as long as I could remember! But she had smiled and said quietly, "I think it's true. We don't help girls to see Benedictine life as it really is, and so they either turn away unimpressed, or come to the convent only to be dismayed by the first difficulty that confronts them." And I remember wishing half out loud that someone would write what it is REALLY like to be a Benedictine. And Sister Justina had said, "Why don't YOU?"

You Wanted To Be A Benedictine

WALKING to church one spring morning your mind was in a turmoil. You were a senior in high school and it was nearing the end of the year. Just last week you had purchased your gown for the senior dance. You had looked for a bargain. You must have given the clerk in the dress shop a shock. She had smiled challengingly and held up a strapless evening gown with the words, "This is very cheap." You had looked straight at her and answered, "In more ways than one!" Perhaps you shouldn't have but you enjoyed her chagrin as she hastily put the garment away. Now the dress with all the frills was bought, but you weren't too happy. All year a figure seemed to glide before you—a Benedictine Nun—the one that you might be. There was a soft voice too, a voice which you tried to hush, but it always came back, faint and persistent, like a rainbow in the sky.

You started to evaluate the boys you knew. Dick? Uh uh, he was too boastful. Bill? No, he was so rude sometimes. Jim? Well, he was like a big brother, nothing more. And so you went on and on, but you always ended up by telling yourself that you could never sit across the table from any of them for the rest of your life. Did you want God—yes and no. In fact you had worried a little, and Mother thought you were ill. She

had insisted on your having a physical check-up. So you went, thinking all the while: "*He* can't help me decide what I want to do." Finally you were in the doctor's office and he was testing your heart with an impersonal, professional air. You would have enjoyed saying after the heart testing, "Should I be a Benedictine?" You wondered what he'd say. "You'd think I was the skeleton of a grasshopper" ran through your head. Now he was shaking his head. "You're physically perfect," he said in a puzzled tone. "Really!" you wanted so say sarcastically—only you didn't. Instead you left the office. You didn't care to linger.

Last night shortly after dinner you had gone down to see Father John, the old pastor who had baptized you and given you your First Holy Communion. To you he was the kindest, most understanding person you knew. You felt that you could tell him anything. You said, "Father," and swallowed hard. Then you blurted it out. "I want to be a Benedictine Nun." You closed your eyes then and took a deep breath. When you looked again Father was wiping his glasses and gazing out of the window. His voice was low, "So, you want to be a Benedictine. Why a Benedictine?" "Because," you said with the naïveness of a child, "You've always told me so much about the holiness and simplicity of their lives." "Wait now, Mary, you won't attain that saintliness in a day, nor a year. It will take a lifetime. Are you quite sure you want to be a Benedictine? If you have prayed over it, go, with my blessing." You whispered, "Oh, yes, Father, I really think I can make the grade. At least, I can try."

When you came out of the rectory after talking to Father for about an hour it seemed that the stars in the sky were candles

put there just for you. You walked slowly drinking in the beauty of the night—and then you remembered the party! Consulting your watch you found you had exactly thirty minutes to get home and to make ready. You forgot about the stars as your feet picked up speed. How could you forget! Two minutes before time you were ready. Your older sister had looked at you disapprovingly. She was sharp, and always ready at least fifteen minutes before time.

The party was like all the rest. You enjoyed the music, the laughter and the fun as you always did. Sitting across the table from Jim you leaned forward and said, "Jim, what would you say if I told you that I was going to be a Benedictine nun?" Jim had put his glass down abruptly and stared. "A what?" he had gasped. "A nun," you said again, a little annoyed. "No, you'll never make a nun. Don't misunderstand. They are good holy women, but well, you just don't fit into a picture like that. Shall we dance?" You were angry—angry at Jim for what he had said, angrier at yourself for having told him. You had thought as you danced that you'd tell no one but your parents. Jim hadn't taken you seriously, so he wouldn't repeat the story. The stars had gone out of the night and it was cold and lonely—no one seemed to care. When you finally arrived home you had knelt at the window for a long time praying your rosary. Wasn't the Mother of God listening? Finally you had put your head down and sobbed, "Mary, my mother, I need you so." The only answer was the murmur of the spring breeze as it rustled among the budding leaves. But somehow Mary seemed to have heard your prayer for peace seemed to enfold you in its arms and you slept.

Tomorrow came; you would tell mother and dad, but no

one else. You didn't want your mind shattered with doubts as it was last night. So you broached the subject when you were alone with them. Dad had put his paper down very slowly and regarded you with puzzled eyes. Mother's eyes had smiled as she said, "I always wanted one of my girls to be a nun." Dad had been skeptical. "If it were Susan I wouldn't be so surprised. She is so practical that I would almost picture her as a Mother Superior. But you, Mary, how can you ever do it, you with all your love of life?" Mother frowned and said, "Now, Dad, do you think God wants a convent full of old maids?" You had made it clear to both of them that this was to be a secret. You just wanted to slip away softly, without noise or fuss. So it had been left at that.

Spring came and went. Graduation was a thing of the past. The class Will had mentioned that you would be a gym teacher, so none of them guessed that you were leaving to work for God, to feed the hungry and comfort every heart that would ask you for help.

July and August days passed on gilded wings. You would never forget that summer with its song and laughter. You swam far out into the lake sometimes, just to see what it would be like to be alone. You danced and met people, trying all the while to study each personality. Getting along with people was so important in the convent and in your new work Father John had said. Often you were just a little dazzled by it all and wondered if you could ever leave it. You had written and it all was arranged. You were to enter on September 8th, the Blessed Mother's birthday. Even your clothes had been taken care of. You had ordered them from a firm that sold religious goods.

September 7th you had said good-bye to mother and dad at the station. They would tell the rest of the family and explain that you just couldn't say good-bye. It was raining—the soft, gentle rain that you always loved. Was the world perhaps shedding tears because you were leaving it? Dad had looked away when it was time for farewells, and had talked in a loud voice so as to distract you. Mother's eyes were misty with rain or tears you had noticed. "Remember," she whispered, "No life is a bed of roses. Always trust God and everything will be all right." Then before you knew it, the train had moved away from those two dear ones. You had pressed your nose to the pane, and tried to see them but they were gone.

Then it came to you as a shock how much everything meant to you. You felt sobs in your throat which were struggling to reach the surface. The train slipped past lakes and hills on and on. You had wanted to be a Benedictine, but how much did you want to? It had seemed the devil himself had taunted you that God couldn't possibly satisfy the longing in your heart. Then you had closed your mind and read, prayed and watched your fellow passengers.

It seemed ages before the train finally pulled into the station not far from the Benedictine convent. The station was dingy and you found it hard to get a taxi. The driver was friendly but also curious. "I suppose you have a relative at the convent," he had said. "No," you answered. "A friend perhaps?" "No," you said again. Your funny bone was working now, and you had taken special delight when the man removed his hat and scratched a bare spot on his head. But you soon forgot him as he turned up a street and drove up a driveway lined with spruce trees. There was St. Joseph in a circle looking so

kind. "Thank you, St. Joseph, for welcoming me," you had said. Then, before you knew it, the taxi had stopped.

The next thing you knew you were standing on the doorstep, and the taxi was disappearing down the driveway. "Ring the bell, then step inside," the sign had said. So you did. A nun had seemed to appear like magic, for you hadn't heard her. "Could I see the Mother Superior?" you asked timidly. She had taken you to a parlor where everything was spotless, and then she was gone. In a few minutes another Benedictine had appeared. She had looked at your bag, then immediately back at you. "You're the new candidate, aren't you?" she had said. "Yes, Sister," you had replied. She walked over and took both of your hands. You had looked up straight into a pair of quiet, understanding brown eyes. "You must be tired, and hungry. I'll see that you have something to eat, and a rest. Would you like to say hello to Our Lord?" You nodded and Mother had led the way into a beautiful chapel. Here you will honor and glorify God's name by chanting His praises day after day in the Divine Office, the main work of Benedictines. That had been one of the things that had led you here. You wanted to praise God on earth as the angels did in heaven. You had looked up at the Tabernacle, and all your troubles seemed to disappear for a moment. You had taken the first step in a grand adventure with Our Lord. "I want to be a Benedictine," you had whispered, "To love You only, now and forever."

A Benedictine Postulant

It was over—you took a deep breath. You were walking up the hall after being received into the Benedictine Community. The click of your high heels echoed and re-echoed down the long empty corridor. It was all so new, so strange. The novice mistress, Sister Edgar proceeded you into a room and the door closed quietly. The first time you had looked into her eyes you had been startled. They were such peaceful, serene eyes, with just a bit of humor.

Then you saw the dress. To yourself you had whispered, "Christ, I'd do this for no one but You." Sister Edgar was watching you without seeming to. After you were dressed she had held a mirror before you. Gone was the tailored suit, the sheer stockings and yet, somehow your heart rejoiced. It had all been like a strange dream until you heard Sister Edgar say, "We always let the postulants sleep late. You won't have to get up until a quarter of six." You had almost gasped audibly. Of course, she was joking, but one look at Sister Edgar's face confirmed her statement. You had never liked to get up early. A quarter of six, indeed! That was a good time for the birds. Everything is so different here, you had thought.

Everywhere you turned you met strange faces. You were introduced to the five novices and four other postulants. At

recreation you were subdued, and you knew that they were all watching you, and hiding their feelings behind polite conversation. Would you ever fit in, you had wondered. Then when you were in your alcove with the soft tread of footsteps about you and the silence broken only by the movement of the white curtains, your courage had broken and when you had finally gotten into bed tears came making your pillow damp. In years to come that silence was to be most welcome to you after a hard day in school. Now the world you had left seemed to take on brighter colors and your new life here seemed drab. Finally you fell asleep. You were awakened by someone touching your pillow. It was dark and the dormitory was chilly. "Time to get up," a voice whispered. You had put one foot bravely out—ugh, but it was cold! When you were finally dressed you found a postulant waiting to take you to chapel. She reminds me of Susan, you had thought, so practical, so efficient. You had entered the chapel and shared a pew with another postulant.

The Mass began and there was a quiet hush about you. You glanced around and were surprised. Everyone seemed absorbed in what was going on at the altar. A peace that you had never experienced before seemed to be all about you. Now the priest was distributing Communion and the flickering candles on the altar threw a soft, glowing light on the nuns who filed to the Communion rail. When the nuns came back you noticed that the oldest nun came first, followed by the younger. Again you noticed the quiet calmness of their faces. A soft touch on the shoulder reminded you that it was your turn. You went up and as you did you whispered, "Please God, make me a good Benedictine." And after Communion only one thought filled your mind. "It is good for me to be here." The saints in heav-

en must have smiled, wondering if you expected to stay on Tabor for the rest of your religious life. Calvary would not stay hidden too long and you needed this glimpse of God's grandeur to stimulate your courage.

So the days in the convent slipped by. At first there was so much novelty you had forgotten to be lonesome. Fall had seemed to be a blaze of bright colors, like your life. Even the studying, dishwashing, and cleaning had a special appeal. The long prayers had left your knees stiff at first, but that too was disappearing.

December 1st had brought with it a beautiful snowfall, and your first real homesickness. Sister Edgar insisted on ten-minute walks each day. Up and down you would walk in a path lined with the trees, whose branches interlocked, forming an arbor overhead. They had been heavy with snow that day. Then the world you had known beyond the convent suddenly took on an appealing beauty. Gone was your peace, your joy! And with your heart pounding you had gone to Sister Edgar's office to tell her you had no vocation.

Her quiet voice answered your knock with, "Deo." "Gratias," you replied through your tears. Before you knew it you had told Sister the whole story. She had never interrupted, just sat and listened. "Maybe if I went home and entered when I was about twenty-eight," you had said feebly. A flicker of amusement changed to one of concern as Sister Edgar's eyes turned for a moment to the white loveliness outside. "Yes," she murmured, "take everything you can from life, and give God the rest. What makes you think God would keep your vocation on ice?" "I don't know," you had stammered. Sister

Edgar had a way of explaining things—she made them so simple. You had always seemed to see the stars shining in the heavens after she spoke, no matter how dark the night. Then she had gone on saying, "Do you think the devil wants you here? Haven't you any faith in God? God has chosen you and you wish to forsake Him. Remember this, Mary, God will never force you to be a Benedictine in His ranks." She had talked for a time and you had left the office knowing that whatever happened you would remain if God willed it.

The days before Christmas were filled with activity but you missed the stores and the crowds. You no longer could roam about at will. The novices had all given vivid accounts of Christmas in the convent, but you were quite sure they were exaggerating. The day before Christmas found you just a little tired. After supper you had climbed the stairs and gone into chapel. You stood in the doorway spellbound until Sister Inez's forefinger had brought you back to earth, and you had heard her whisper, "Go ahead." Only the colored lights on the trees were lighted and the chapel seemed aglow with warmth and beauty. "Had Bethlehem been like this?" you had wondered. There seemed to be such a mystery about this Christmas. You had wanted to stay there forever and ever watching the blue and golden lights throw shadows everywhere; knowing that God was in His Tabernacle. Then the nuns had sung the glorious Christmas hymns of the Liturgy and you knelt, drinking in the beauty and love of your first Christmas in the convent. It was all so heavenly, you hated to see it come to an end. The spirit of Christmas had lingered until after Epiphany, and then slowly faded away. And you remembered that Sister Edgar had said to always keep Christmas in your heart.

The months slipped past slowly molding you, taking some of the dross of the world from you. Sometimes you had missed the attention the outside world had given you, the smiles, and the compliments. But strange as it seemed the trials and hardships seemed to have brought a quiet love of God. And often in chapel you begged St. Benedict to make you just what God wanted you to be, to teach you humility and the loving obedience of Him who was obedient unto death.

Sister Edgar had told all of you that obedience was your big vow, so you had worked hard to do things just right. The Divine Office was the Benedictine prayer, and when you learned that it was the prayer of the Church, of the Holy Father, of all priests, you were thrilled. And if the Latin in which it was chanted did not flow fluently from your tongue you had studied all the harder. Often you had felt Sister Janice's eyes upon you when you stumbled over the syllables at class. Her pronunciation was clear-cut, like a bell. "I'm awfully clumsy," you would say to God, "but I'm doing my best." You had always felt He understood.

Spring came and everything became alive. The birds broke out in song; the trees began to bud; the grass began to quicken beneath your feet. Soon it was Easter. The convent had to be cleaned from top to bottom. You had been surprised to see the teachers in the convent pin up their habits and go to work with a scrub bucket in one hand and a cleaning cloth in the other. Then you had remembered the Holy Rule of St. Benedict which said that the nature of a Sister's work did not distinguish the daughter of St. Benedict but her humility.

The liturgy of Holy Week had been so sorrowful, so solemn with the spirit of the suffering Christ. Then Easter dawned,

so joyous and real that the Resurrection seemed to have happened throughout the convent. Now you were looking forward to being clothed in the Benedictine habit. "In May," Sister Edgar had said.

You hadn't known if it was a wing or not, but you had a hole in the shoulder of your candidate's cape. You had never been too handy with a needle. Just the same you had proceeded to patch it. You had sewed it on very carefully and on holding it up for inspection found to your dismay that the patch had been sewed on the outside. All the novices had laughed gleefully. Now you would have to rip it off and put it on under the dim night light, for the bell had rung for night prayers. You sighed later as you stood there after Compline ready to sew the patch on once more. Looking up when a shadow had fallen in front of you, you had beheld Sister Kathleen. With a smile and a sign she had taken the cape from you, and had deftly sewn on the patch. In the soft light her face looked kind and gentle. It had occurred to you then that Christ's virtues shone in all about you.

You had thought May would never come, but at last it was here. Six of you had gone into retreat eight days before reception. Now the day was nearly here. "Tomorrow," you had thought, "I'll belong to Christ in a special way." You were sitting under a tree in the orchard listening to the hum of insects and feeling a cool breeze on your face. Your heart had been very full. Far away you had heard shouts from a baseball game. You remembered suddenly how you had never missed a baseball game and the excitement that always swept over you during a game. Here you were, a modern girl sitting under a

tree with nothing to amuse you and really and truly liking it. You had looked at your postulant dress and laughed.

Night came and you scarcely slept. You had been so excited. Finally you fell into a deep sleep in which you dreamed of baseball, home, and your postulant dress. Everything was mixed up. The five o'clock bell made you spring out of bed. Then you fell back on your pillows, for you had remembered that on reception day you slept late. Mass wasn't until eight. The irony of it had been that you couldn't sleep. You were wide awake. Someone put out the light and you heard the last novice tiptoe down the stairs. You had wanted to call out, "Never mind being quiet. We're all awake." After a while you got up and touched the folds of the satin gown hanging there waiting for you. You had looked out of the window at the rolling lawns sprinkled with dew, at the trees swaying gracefully in the morning breeze. All the world had seemed rosy, like the dawn. You had thought they would never come to tell you it was time to go. But at last you had heard a soft step on the stairs and a hushed voice said Mother was waiting. How you ever got to chapel you had never seemed to know. Walking up the aisle you had felt like a strange, new person. God had let you walk on clouds for this special occasion. You would never again wear the cape with the patch. From this day on for a year you would be a Benedictine novice. You had looked up at the altar as the organ played a hymn, and the nun's voices filled the chapel. In the Tabernacle, the center of an altar tastefully arranged with flowers, was Christ. He had stooped down and chosen your heart among the many of the world for His own. "Christ," you had prayed, "Keep me here as Your own until death comes to unite us forever."

It Was All So New

THE satin gown you had worn had given way to the coarse serge of the Benedictine habit. You had felt its roughness, which signified the life you would lead. The veil had become a heavier white, and the coif around your face felt tight, as if it were shutting out the world you had known. The whole ceremony had been so lovely, so unreal.

While the choir had been singing the strains of "Holy God," you had looked up and told Him you loved Him so. You had been so young, so untried. How little you had known of the trials of Religious life which await every follower of the Crucified. Love is proved in deeds—not in words. But that would come only when God knew you were ready.

It had been such a wonderful day. Your whole family had been there. Mother had been so concerned about your health, dad had been proud, and even Joe had forgotten to tease you. Susan had been more serious than ever and had whispered to you, before saying good-bye, that she was engaged. You had treasured every moment of that day.

And then as you tripped happily through the hall, a little clumsy in the new garb, you felt a hand on your arm. Turning you looked straight into the keen eyes of Sister Justina, a professed Sister. You had always found it a pleasure to talk to

her on recreation days. She was always so interested. Someone had told you she was quite literary minded. She had handed you a slip of pink paper. "I wish you'd keep it," she had said with a smile and was off. It was nearly the end of the day and you had thought of the song, "When You Come to the End of a Perfect Day." The poem on the pink paper had startled you—one part especially which said:

"Jesus, my Spouse, e'er now I pray
Keep my heart when thrills have passed away
In days to come—*frozen, alone,*
May my love then be more Thine own.
When life seems most too hard to bear,
May I thank Thee that Thy Cross I share."

This all puzzled you so and looking at everything through rose-colored glasses you had not dreamed that suffering had so many strange forms.

That night you had lain awake for a long time going over the whole day while the darkness and God's love enfolded you. At last you had fallen asleep.

A Benedictine novitiate either makes you or breaks you, someone had said. St. Benedict wanted the members of his Order to be tried to see if they truly sought God. You had sat at your desk one afternoon deeply absorbed in "The Life of Father William Doyle," the book given you for spiritual reading. You were thrilled at his heroism, and had imagined how you, too, would do great things for God. "Sister Mary Ellen, were you studying the stars? I called you twice." It was Sister Edgar standing beside you. "Yes, Sister," you had said, rising with haste and scraping the chair as you did so. "In the convent we move quietly," she had said. Glancing up you had looked

straight at Sister Matilda. Her eyebrows were slightly raised and you had seen the mocking smile in her eyes—at least you interpreted it as such. And Father Doyle had gone back to the trenches; you were too angry at Sister Matilda to feel like a martyr. You followed Sister Edgar to the office, careful to walk quietly. She had talked that day and had given it to you straight. A Benedictine must be ready to face humiliation with a smile. That and many other things were brought to your attention. “As you are as a novice, so you will be as a professed Sister,” she had said.

You had gone back to the novitiate with many misgivings. “Golly,” you had thought, using slang only now and then in your thoughts. “I didn’t know anyone could be so imperfect.” A few months ago Sister Edgar had told you to take one thing at a time—so you had taken the absent-mindedness. That got you into the most trouble. The bell! You had completely forgotten the time. You had made a dive for the door, almost colliding with Sister Ida in your haste to leave and, hurrying down the hall with your veil almost straight out; Sister Edgar’s words had seemed tauntingly to follow you, “You walk too fast, too. Can’t you manage to get to chapel thirty seconds instead of two seconds before time?” And as you flew past Sister Florence, you heard her say, “There seems to be no religious decorum any more.” You had felt very small and lonely that day. Father John had said it wouldn’t be easy, and it wasn’t.

It was hot, so terribly hot. You shifted your position in the straight-backed pew. The chanting of the choir had gone on and you had felt drowsy. Your clothes had stuck to you. Funny, but you hadn’t felt a bit like praying. Why was it that you had experienced no kind of exaltation from the Divine Office?

Did everyone feel like this? Your eyes had drifted to Sister Georgia across from you. She sat very erect. In fact, her position had made you feel stiff. You had tried to concentrate on the psalms, but a fly distracted you again. "My God, I want to love you, even in this heat!" you had thought. You had asked Sister Edgar about this indifferent feeling at Office. Her right eyebrow had risen slightly at your question. "Do you go to Divine Office to praise and give glory to God, or to get crumbs of a great inner peace for yourself?" she had asked mildly. The Office was *the* Benedictine work, the work of God, and you praised Him regardless of feeling. It was like a great symphony carried by Angel wings before His throne. You praised Him in the heat and in the cold; when filled with joy and when your whole being was tired. You offered God praise for all that He is, for what He had given you, and for those who forgot Him. Sister Edgar had made it as simple as that.

Summer had passed and Fall had come, splashing the landscape with its richest colors. Leaves skipped gaily along the driveway—everywhere. Before long the trees had stood bare and shivering until the snow had gently clothed them in shimmering white.

Then with the coming Spring you had felt a change in you for in May you would promise God your chastity, poverty, and obedience. And though Canon Law allowed you to promise for only three years, your heart would say, "Forever." The days had passed so slowly it seemed, for you had been so anxious. As the time drew closer you had longed desperately to kneel before God's altar and consecrate to Him forever, all that you were, all that you could ever be.

Then one day you had seen a nun do something that seemed

rude and unkind. It had surprised you for it never occurred to you that nuns were quite human, and had different homes and backgrounds. Sister Edgar had found out about the scene you had witnessed. "So you were perhaps shocked, Sister Mary Ellen?" she had said quietly. "No, Sister," you had answered, "but I was surprised." "Good, I'm glad that is your reaction. Remember that you came here with plenty of rust, and all your failings. So did everyone else. You came seeking perfection, and only by striving will you attain it. Christ was never shocked at the Jews. He loved them but not their sin, and He prayed for them. You must imitate Him—love and pray for your Sisters when they make mistakes. Trust God and do your best," was the advice she had given you.

Once again it had been May, and in ten days you would be God's own in a special way. Your heart was singing. It was nearly time for your second retreat. You had been watching a robin perched on a branch of apple blossoms when you heard footsteps near by. "Sister Mary Ellen, Sister Edgar wants to see you in her office." It had been Sister Johann's soft voice. "I hope there is nothing wrong," she had added. You had wondered if there was. Oh, yes, you had tried, but you broke things, laughed when you should have been sober, stumbled over the lessons at Office, and so many other things. You had breathed a prayer. "Straighten things out, Blessed Mother. It just seems as if I can't stay out of trouble," you prayed, as you knocked at Sister Edgar's office door.

Before you had time to get your breath you had seen the yellow telegram on Sister Edgar's desk. It was so brief, and yet so clear. "Dad seriously ill." You had felt so still and numb inside. Sister Edgar spoke gently: "I'm awfully sorry,

Sister Mary Ellen, and if you wish, you may go home to see your father. But if you do you will have to make another year of novitiate because the year must be uninterrupted, according to Canon Law." "What do you think I should do?" you had whispered in a hollow voice. "You must decide for yourself, Sister. The decision must be yours. Go to chapel and ask the Holy Ghost for guidance," had been the quiet answer. You had thought over all the pros and cons as you knelt there for about ten minutes. Then you felt calm and your mind had been made up. "I'll make vows, Sister," you had told Sister Edgar in a choked voice, "I am sure God will take care of Dad, and I can pray for him." Sister Edgar smiled. "I was hoping you would decide that," she said softly. "God will not be outdone in generosity."

The days of retreat had slipped past one by one, and at last the day had arrived. You had felt serious and sober that May morning when you were to promise God to give Him the greatest gift you had—yourself. You had known you couldn't expect anyone from home but still you thought, "Maybe *someone* will come." You had read your vow formula through with no stumbling. It had been so good to be near God and feel His strength. You had experienced joy and had known that your father would get better—you had just felt it.

It was over now and you had walked down the aisle to the strains of "Holy God." The other five novices had been greeting their fond parents and relatives. You had looked quickly around and then your heart had fallen down to your ankles. There was no one there for you—not even a friend. "Thank you, God, for the cross," you had said, and your throat was hot and dry.

You had gone to the refectory and had eaten breakfast with the other newly professed. Everyone was so kind, never mentioning anything that would make you think that you were alone. You had scanned the special delivery letter at your place. Dad was much better and they would come to see you soon, but they just couldn't make it today. You had felt relieved. The Sisters were leaving to be with their parents. Sister Johanna had lingered. "Sister," she had said, "you could have dinner with us. Mother would be delighted." You had been touched. "No, Sister," you replied, "I'll get along fine and just celebrate with the nuns." "If you should change your mind, it's still all right. I have the necessary permission." You had said, "Thanks," and turned away to hide your emotion.

As you walked out of the refectory Sister Placida had stopped you. "Didn't anyone come?" she asked, "Oh, you poor child." That did it! The tears came like a cloudburst. "Now, now," you had heard a voice say. Someone had taken your arm. A door had opened and closed. "Sit here," someone had said. Glancing up through your tears you had seen Sister Edgar. "Cry it out and you'll feel better," she had advised. "If only no one had given me any sympathy," you said through your tears. The storm hadn't lasted too long, and then you were yourself again. The rest of the day had passed happily. You couldn't be sad with so much rejoicing around you, and the knowledge that God was pleased with you.

For a long time that night you had lain awake staring out of the window in your alcove at the perfect picture of God's stars. "Somewhere beyond," you had thought, "lived Christ and His gracious Queen." "My God, I love you much, very much," you had whispered as you had fallen asleep.

In The King's Service

YOU had thought it would be so easy. When you had done practice teaching the children were always responsive, and it hadn't seemed hard either for the experienced teachers. And the book on teaching had had so many examples about different children, and how you should act. You had never dreamed that children could be so different, but these children all were!

You had sighed and glanced at the little boy in the front seat with tear-filled eyes. If it were Sister Enid she'd know exactly what to say and do, but she had taught for fifteen years, and was an expert. This was only February in your first year of teaching, and everything seemed to be in a slump. Now what should you do—consult the book which never seemed to have an answer for your third graders? If only Sister Enid would come around, she'd smooth the whole thing out. You remembered her saying at lunch that she would be supervising some basketball game so there wasn't a chance. Anyway you had thought with a shrug of your shoulders, "It's about time I fight my own battles and solve my own problems."

"James," you had said after clearing your throat and sending a swift prayer heavenward for help, "Have you finished?" The head shook and the tears rolled faster. "Here, I'll help you," you had said. Then you had noticed how drawn the little tear-

stained face was. In no time you had finished and James was smiling. The smile looked like the sun shining on a tired picture. You had dismissed him then. You'd have to check his record in the office and see what his background was. Maybe Sister Jane could help. She was from town and knew almost everyone. She'd supply what the record didn't.

Just then you had heard a slight tap on the opened door, and Sister Jane was standing there. "I'd like to walk home with you tonight. What time do you go?" she was saying. "You're an answer to a prayer," you had said after you had told her the time you were leaving. "Do you know James Gallen?" you asked. Sister Jane smiled, "If you mean Walter Gallen's son, yes. I have his brother in 8th grade." "Is there anything about his background?" you questioned. "His card in the files suggests everything is fine." "You can tell you're new at this! Those cards don't reveal very much, except the occupation of the parents, etc. James' father has a good position, but he drinks. His mother is inclined to nag, and lives in a social whirl. Be kind to James, Sister. He gets plenty of neglect at home. Most of all he needs love and understanding. As Sister Enid always says, 'We are teaching children, not subjects.'" With that she had gone, leaving you with the puzzle of James solved. You had made your plans for James with a prayer that you'd bring God's love into his woebegone little life.

The months had slipped by, and before you knew it June and the closing of school had arrived. You had loved them all very much, from Jean, who was so angelic, to Mike who always tried your patience. Everything was finished now. You had sat at your desk for a long time thinking of the many things that had happened. The desks were so empty, and you had felt so lost,

as if the memories in this room were silently slipping away. You had been the only new teacher, and the personalities of the others had seemed so different.

You had locked the desk with a sigh, glanced once more at the empty desks, and started for the door. The key in the door had an empty click, and you felt lonely. "You hate to say good-bye don't you?" You had heard a soft voice say. Turning you had looked straight into Sister Ruth's dancing brown eyes. Your expression said, "Yes." "You'll get over it," Sister Ruth continued. "It will give you that feeling every year, but after a while you won't mind it so much. Then along comes a class that is really hard to manage. You've tried all the tricks you know and some that are new, but nothing works. So when you close and lock that door you give a big sigh of relief. See you at the convent." Sister Ruth hurried off, and you knew why. Waiting at the end of the hall was Sister Walter. She had been saying her rosary with a patient expression as she waited. Sister Walter was noted for never wasting a minute, as well as for always being five or ten minutes early. You had walked slowly down the hall knowing that you would never forget this year. "Help them become good men and women, dear God," you had prayed.

Summer brought with it retreat. Your soul had felt as if it had been washed with refreshing summer rain. You had learned to love Sister Patricia, your Scholastic mistress, as much as Sister Edgar, although they were so different. Yet, it had been made so clear to you that you must regard your superior as the voice of God. Perhaps some day you would find it hard to obey that voice when it came from a person with an un-

attractive exterior. Could you take obedience then with a smile? The question sometimes had troubled you.

It had been a sultry day in mid-summer and you were scrubbing a floor in the basement. A scurry of hurried feet caused you to look up. Sister Edna, who would never think of causing a disturbance, stood in the door. "A pipe burst," she gasped. You had heard the drip of water coming from the kitchen. The moment you stood in the door laughter ran through your whole being. Sister Elaine was turning off the water which was flowing on her upturned face, while Sister Lillian was rubbing her hands together saying softly, "Oh, my." By this time Sister Edna was at your side. One look at you and she had said in a breathless voice, "Sister Mary Ellen, don't stand there and laugh. Do something. Get a man!" So you both had ended up by mopping up the water in the kitchen, with Sister Edna now and then casting angry glances at you much to your secret amusement.

So many amusing things had happened in those three years that elapsed between first and last vows. There was the time the Scholastics had put on a pantomime for Reverend Mother's nameday. An older Sister had trained you. None of you was graceful but you had been the clumsiest. Your motions seemed to be only a matter of chasing flies. That night you had all walked down to the community room perspiring beneath your white gowns. Sister Inez had sung "Nearer My God to Thee" in her deep alto voice and the rest of you had gone through the motions of the pantomime. Sitting in the very front row with over-grown smiles were your former Scholastic associates. They had tried to make you laugh. However, you had all managed to be quite sober.

There had been the time Mrs. Gerbs had brought her daughter's Sister doll to show you. "She calls it Sister Marjorie," she had beamed, "I told her she should call it Sister Mary Ellen, because it looks just like you." "You can dress a doll up in a Benedictine habit, but that doesn't make it a Benedictine," you seemed to hear Sister Patricia say again as she had so many times. You had smiled as you studied the doll's blank face, its helpless hands. "Beauty is only skin deep. If you're a good little girl that's all that matters." You remembered your mother had said this when you were a child and your older brother Dick had teased you about your turned-up nose and freckled face. Mrs. Gerbs had gone off happy, unmindful that she had caused an inward shudder by comparing you to a lifeless doll.

Then there had been the serious and beautiful things. The retreats, forty hours devotion, Benediction with candles sending their soft light in all directions, like the graces which God so freely bestowed. There had been hours spent in front of the Blessed Sacrament with the thought of your heavenly Bridegroom so very near to you. The little irritations and failings in daily life had seemed so very small in comparison to everything else. But all this had lasted just so long, and quickly, silently, shortly before last profession, dryness descended upon you. Your whole soul had been like the Sahara Desert—no life, no feeling, only a barren numbness. Gone were the scent-filled prayers. Doubts assailed you—were you good enough, would they keep you?

You had sat in the summer house near the Sisters' cemetery where you could see the life-sized crucifix of Christ. He was so blackened, His face so beautiful, so sad. You had always come to this very spot, and talked things over with Him when the

stars had gone out of your sky, and the going was rough. Sometimes the snowflakes would fall softly and soothingly on that Face you loved; again the autumn leaves would blow persistently against the base of the crucifix, seemingly to beg for mercy like the souls He had died to save. When the trees had been bare and everything was dreary He was your forsaken Christ. The day before last vows you had sat quietly looking up at the Face. You had felt that your very heart was slowly turning to stone. Life had never seemed so dear, so sweet in that world you had left behind. You prayed your rosary, and tired to meditate on the sorrowful mysteries. "Mary," you whispered at the end of your prayer, "Help me." It had been then that peace had come to you, and you had felt the protecting folds of her mantle. She would always be with you beneath the cross, strengthening you, giving you the courage to follow Him. And wasn't that, after all, what St. Benedict wanted? You would never attain perfection, but you would always pursue it. Your star had been shining again high in God's blue heaven.

The next day had been like a dream. You had gone up and given everything you had or ever would have to Christ. Lying under the pall you had asked His Mother to present to her crucified Son your whole body, soul, mind and will. Your earthly heart was unable to hold more happiness. You arose to don the choir cloak with a new feeling, a new joy. As you walked to your place in chapel your hands tenderly grasped the candle which symbolized your life. As you kissed it and handed it to the Bishop everything seemed to sing in your heart. The religious life before you had been so mysterious. You had not been able to see the hopes and fears, joys and sorrows, failures, and successes which were a part of every life spent wearing the

religious habit. Too soon everything was over and the choir was singing "Holy God." You had walked slowly from chapel with the other newly-professed.

Mother, Dad, Joe and Ann had been waiting for you. Dick, you knew was somewhere in Europe with the armed forces, but, where was Susan? "Susan couldn't come," Mother had said quickly, almost too quickly. "Bob is sick," Joe had added hastily. "She's been married three years now, hasn't she?" you mused. By that time you were in the parlor, and everyone was talking. Dad looked at your ring with the IHS, and thought it beautiful, Mother studied the seventy-two pleats in your choir cloak and marveled at the fine piece of work. As for Ann she had tapped the toes of her high-heeled kid slippers, and told you how long the services had been, and how she had thought you would die before they ever raised the pall. She was a junior in high school, and was bored just like you used to be when anything was long. Joe had teased you with pretended astonishment at your cotton hose and sensible shoes.

The dining room had been tastefully decorated and everyone had enjoyed it. Joe said he was amazed at the good cooks they had here. He thought all Sisters did was pray. The Sisters waiting on table with white aprons and cuffs were smiling pleasantly as they served everyone. You had been so proud of them.

The day had seemed to pass on silver wings, and before you knew it you were praying Matins in chapel. You had thought of Susan and how they had evaded questions about her. When Mother had kissed you good-bye she had whispered, "Pray for Susan, Sister Mary Ellen." "Why didn't they tell you?" you had wondered. "Why all the secrecy." You had been dis-

tracted and during one whole psalm. "I'm sorry, God," you had said and gone on fighting distractions.

Darkness had set in when you reached the dormitory after a wonderful day, and from your window that night you had watched little fleecy clouds chase each other across the sky. The moon had thrown silver shadows on the trees, the wind sighed as it entered the open window. Your religious life would be like this. Some places you would be able to see and understand, as you could see the gleams of moonlight. Other places would be shadows, like the trials which you would not comprehend. "Let me bring Glory to Your name," you had prayed to the God on His throne beyond the sky. "May I always consider what You want me to do. And, dearest Lord, let me love you more and more as the years slip by." You had smiled in the darkness and slipped between the cool sheets to dream of the humility that St. Benedict so patiently and unfailingly demanded in his Holy Rule.

God's Vineyard

THE bell went off with its usual unmusical five o'clock sound, ending your dreams of brooks, trees, and flowers. You had yawned, sat up, and made the Sign of the Cross. As you closed the window and turned on the light you had shivered in the chill autumn dawn. Everything was always so silent, you had thought. Sister Eunice's closing of the door had reminded you to hurry a little. You had remembered your meditation as you walked down the hall. Was Christ still there telling you, as He had told the apostles long ago, that He would make you a fisher of men? Through the hallway windows you had looked up into the early morning sky where a few stars still glimmered. You had slipped into the chapel already partly filled with nuns making their usual early morning visit. Everything had been so calm, quiet and peaceful. It was hard to believe that only a few hours from now you would be thrust into the highways and byways of school life. You had offered Him the day, begging His help.

The bell had rung for Office, "Aperi Domine," Mother Gerard began, and the rest of the choir joined in. Sister Mark had forgotten to intone the first psalm at "Prime" but Sister Janet was on her toes immediately taking it up in her sweet voice. "In case the priest forgets any part of the "Requiem" when she

dies she'll wake up and help him out," you had thought a bit impatiently. Then you checked yourself. You were getting your physical exercise jumping at conclusions. It was much too early to be judging someone who was much holier than yourself. "St. Joseph help us all today in school," you prayed while the words of the psalms fell from your lips like light snowflakes. "Give us counsel and patience at all times." At "Tierce" you had prayed to St. Thomas Aquinas that he might aid your community. You asked that God would give you all the gift of fortitude and the virtue of obedience. Before you knew it the choir was singing the "Salve Regina." It had seemed to fill every corner and nook in the chapel, drawing down the smile and blessing of Heaven's Queen.

It was time for meditation, and as you had looked through the open window you could see the outline of the trees in the morning mist, and hear the soft whispering of the morning breeze. You said a fervent "Deo Gratias" to God for arranging things so that you could be near a window. You had closed your eyes, and you were walking with the gentle Master along the shore of the Lake of Galilee. The sun was rising in the morning sky, filling it with golden radiance. Far away there were boats on the blue waters of the lake. You had turned to the gentle figure in white, and touched His sleeve. "I'm frightened," you whispered. "So often in school I'm afraid. Mostly I fear myself. There is the dread of failure. Please help me." Then you had looked up into His gentle face. The sad, understanding eyes did not reproach you. The lips did not utter words of blame only, "You do your best; that is success." In the distance you had seen a lady in blue coming to meet you. Her robe moved gracefully in the gentle wind, and her face was shining, not

only from the sun, but with a great inner light. "She will help you, trust her," the Master was saying, and you had put your hand in hers as trustingly as a child.

The sanctuary was all lighted now. The nuns had risen to their feet. The priest was beginning Holy Mass. "I will go unto the altar of God; to God, Who giveth joy to my youth," you had prayed. The candles flickered softly, and you were with Mary, only the sun wasn't shining anymore. It was a dismal day, and the birds had stopped singing. You were in the narrow streets of Jerusalem, and there were dirty, unkempt men and women pushing against you. You had clung tightly to Mary. "Where is He?" you whispered. Then you had seen her face, so sad, so loving. "He is here, child; we will see Him in a moment," she had said. It was the Offertory and you had said, "Take, O Lord, and receive my health, my strength, my very life. Do with me just as You please. I embrace all lovingly—sufferings, wounds, death; if only it will glorify You one tiny bit." "That prayer consoles Him," the Lady had said, "because He knows you mean it."

You had seen Him now through a crowd of modern people, people you knew. His robe was soiled now with blood, and the spittle of men; His face disfigured and filled with pain. You had so wanted to run to Him at least to wipe the blood and dirt from His Face. Then you had seen the figure of a nun do it with such tenderness. You had looked up into Mary's face, and she had nodded in answer to your unspoken question. It was someone you knew; someone with whom you lived.

You had heard the bell ring for Consecration, and you had looked at the tiny white Host and chalice, and through eyes of faith saw Christ hanging. You had gone back two thousand

years and were still clinging to Mary. The sky was dark, and the earth shook. "Can't I help Him?" Your voice seemed swept away by the rough wind. "I thirst," the Figure on the cross had murmured through tortured lips. You had looked about for water, but there had been nothing but the cold, dark earth. Mary pressed your hand, "He means souls, Sister Mary Ellen. The souls of the children you teach." You had looked up into the suffering face and promised, "I'll do my best, my very best." You had still been beneath the cross when Sister Janet had tapped you to remind you of Communion. Christ had died on the cross for you. "Make my soul beautiful for Him please, Mary," you had begged as you tried to make a perfect act of Contrition. With the Host, peace descended into your soul. Again you were with the gentle Christ, and He was pleading for your love. He was asking you to carry His warmth and kindness into a cold, cruel world that had forgotten Him. You hadn't wanted to go. You had wished to remain here forever just loving Him. The candles had been extinguished. Only the sanctuary lamp flickered in the semi-darkness.

Reverend Mother rang a tiny bell, and you had gone up to the cell you shared with Sister Eunice to make your bed and bring down the things you needed for school. After breakfast you had started off for school with Sister Augusta.

A light dew had fallen and glistened on the grass. You had been able to smell the scent of spruce trees along the path. The sun rising in the east looked rosy and glad. On the street children hurried on. "They always are on time the first day and the last," Sister Augusta had remarked. As you entered the school she added, "Will you be ready to go home at eleven-thirty?" "I'm ready right now!" you answered, unmindful of

the promise you had given Christ. Sister Augusta had laughed a little. "God bless your day," she said as she went down the hall.

The stairs creaked as you climbed them. You heard the noise and bustle of boys and girls waiting to get into the room. "Good morning," you said as you unlocked the door. "Mornin', Sister," came from ten lusty throats. "Gary went to public," Dennis informed you before you had taken two steps. "He wants to play football." You had worked hard with Gary and the thought that football was more important than a Catholic school education hurt. They were all around your desk now, talking about their vacations. "But I'm glad to get back to school," Diane had said tossing her pigtails. "You get sick of doing nothing." You had been relieved when the Mass bell rang and they were in rank. Tomorrow they would be Sister Margaret's problem. The second bell had rung and the halls and stairs echoed with marching feet. Before going into church you had seen Gary slip into rank. He had looked in your direction then and smiled. "Why, Gary," you said with relief, "I heard you went to public school. Did you change your mind?" "No, Sister, but my father changed it for me." The church had been stuffy so you had asked Jim and David to open the windows. "Christ bless Gary's father for sending him back, even if Gary can't be classed among the angels," you had prayed. The late-comers were trailing in now. Father Albert was beginning the Solemn High Mass to the Holy Spirit. We and our 700 pupils surely need it you had thought! You started your rosary—the joyful mysteries today. It hadn't been peaceful like the chapel. Paul looked at John as if he wanted to say something, then looked back at you and changed his mind.

There had been a sudden gasp and you saw Pat had fainted. You had gone quickly to him. Pete and Larry were gallantly holding him in a kneeling position. "Spread him out on the seat," you had whispered desperately. "First-aid junior certificates issued to them last year, and they had forgotten everything," you thought. Then as Pat came back to reality you had taken his arm and slowly escorted him to school. The couch in the first aid room was in use, so you had gone to your classroom, and made Pat sit with his head on the desk. As you had started to open the windows Pat, who was always anxious to help said, "Want me to open the windows for you, Sister?" You had explained to him that you weren't anxious to have him faint again. So you had gone back to church just in time to meet the ranks coming out.

They had squirmed in their seats as they waited for Sister Angelica to come and take them to 8th grade. At last she had stood there reading their names as they shuffled to their feet. Meanwhile you had arranged everything on your desk at a ninety degree angle—but you had known it wouldn't remain that way! You had never been able to have the papers on your desk in an artistic pile. They always had looked as if they had been blown there. "Good-bye, Sister," Mike had whispered as he edged past. "Be good to those darlings who are coming in."

For a moment all was quiet. Sister Angelica hurried in handing you a report card. "He'll be in *your* room, Sister. Both parents are fallen-away Catholics. Be good to him." Karl Taylor's report was a revelation. His marks had been just passing in spite of the high intelligence which he had. At the end of the report his teacher had written with perfect penmanship, "Karl

does not study. He wastes time and annoys others." You had thrust the report quickly in your desk at the sound of many approaching footsteps. There your pupils had stood waiting for a signal. "You may choose any seat you wish," you had said and smiled. The books had said you should never smile the first day, but you usually did anyway. After a mad scramble the smoke seemed to clear. Wonder of wonders—the girls were all in the back while the boys sat quietly in the front seats. You had read their names and had them rise. You would try to connect some part of them with their names so you'd remember them. "Karl Taylor," you had said.

In the front seat a little boy got hurriedly to his feet. Your eyes had met and it had seemed that you were friends immediately. His brown eyes danced and his freckles fairly shone. "He won't be my problem child this year," you thought. "Your books are in the desk," you were saying. "Each one has a number. Give me your name as I call the number of your book. Karl you will remain a few moments while I make out a record for the office."

In no time they were all gone but Karl. You had taken out your pen and started to fill out the registration slip. After it was finished Karl had leaned over your desk and said confidentially, "I'm a bad kid, Sister." "Oh, I wouldn't say that," you had answered while you thought of the report in your desk which resembled a battlefield. "The teacher last year said I was the worse kid she ever had," he continued. "Were you?" you asked. "Well, I don't think you are so bad." So Karl had gone on telling you all about his faults and failings. "Tell you what, Karl," you had said as you lined your rollcall book. "I'll give you a medal of the Blessed Mother, and say three 'Hail

Marys' every night so that she'll make you a good boy." "I don't know any prayers," Karl had promptly answered. You had been aghast at this, but quickly hid your dismay by searching through a desk drawer for a medal. "You bring your catechism here and you can read the prayer until you know it," you said. Karl had gone off with his catechism and medal after you explained the "Hail Mary," leaving you alone with your thoughts. "I know, I didn't do you justice, Mary, when I explained you to him, but you do the rest, please," you prayed.

A soft rap at the door had made you turn from your work. The little girl tossed her golden curls and handed you a note. "Please write the number of girls and boys in your room. Also have their names, etc., in the office as soon as possible." You had patted the little girl's head, then went back to your work. The morning was filled with interruptions. The last knock was Sister Susan who had told you there would be a meeting with the pastor at one-thirty. You had hurried downstairs, and found Sister Augusta waiting and both of you had hurried home. You didn't want to be late for Divine Office.

As the convent door closed behind you, a feeling of rest had come over you, for you were leaving the noise of the world for a time. After washing your hands you hurried into chapel just two minutes before Office started. You had said Sext in gratitude for your vocation. "But maybe, dear Lord," you said looking at the golden Tabernacle, "I'd bring more glory to your name if I prayed for these children instead of trying to teach them." You knew the answer to that. Christ had not given you a contemplative vocation. You must have a Martha's hands and a Mary's heart. During "None" you had asked St. Mary Magdalen to obtain for you the virtues of Chastity and Poverty.

It was soon over and you had begun your examination of conscience. Charity had seemed to be your biggest failure. You would try not to talk about anyone today, especially Sister Maria who appeared so superior. "Jesus, meek and humble of heart; make my heart like unto Thine," you prayed.

You had filed out of chapel after praying the "Angelus." At dinner you said the usual prayers in Latin. There had been a general scraping of chairs. The table reader read the usual books, then had started a new book. Sister Helena's mortified eyes had lifted for a brief moment as she scanned the book, then rested again on her plate. You had remembered then that she was to be the next reader. The book was about a mystic, and after the first paragraph you had decided you didn't like it for table reading. After the washing of dishes at table a bell had rung with a hurried tinkle. You had all arisen, prayed and filed out of the refectory praying the "Miserere" on your way to chapel. At "Vespers" you had prayed for the Holy Souls and asked to obtain the virtue of devotion. "Heaven knows I've been distracted plenty today," you had thought as you tried to concentrate on the psalms while Karl's freckled face seemed to take the place of each period and comma.

Sister Augusta was waiting at the door when you had arrived, out of breath as usual. "We'll just make the meeting, I think. I know what he is going to say," you had said. You had just finished unlocking your door when Sister Irma came down the hall. "Let's sit near each other," she had said. "You've been here eight years and I've been here nine. Order is heaven's first law, you know." You had taken a pad along to jot down the things you were to remember. As Father gave his usual talk you tried to recall what you would tell Officer Herlie that

the patrol boys would need, "2 raincoats," you wrote, "2 patrol belts and badges." "Order is heaven's first law," Father said loudly. Sister Irma had given you a quick kick and you had both laughed silently. Her chin had indicated Sister Evelyn, a scholastic, who was writing down every word Father said with great rapidity. The meeting ended and you returned to your classroom. "I'm putting a sign on this door, 'Do not disturb,'" you had told Sister Irma. "There were so many knocks today I'm surprised the door is still standing."

You had settled down to type the information for the office when a few bangs on the closed door had reminded you that your dream of a quiet afternoon was at an end. There stood Tom and Joe, your two problem children from last year. "Could we help you, Sister?" Joe asked. "Yes, come in," you said with a sigh. Then you brightened. "You can wax the desks." "Didn't we have those butterflies and cat-tails up last year?" Bill asked looking around. "Maybe," you had thought, "I should have put those stiff pansies up for a change." By the time the afternoon was over Jake had walked in eating an ice cream cone. "Sister, look at that guy," Joe said. "He comes when all the work is done." "Oh, he can empty the basket," you had suggested. "Sister, I ain't stayin'," Jake pleaded. "None of us are," you replied. "As soon as the basket is emptied we'll lock the door and go home." "I'll empty it, Sister, but I just came up to see if these guys were workin'." So, they had gone on all the way down to the street. You were glad Sister Augusta enjoyed them for two of them had decided they were going your way.

You made your way up to third floor on reaching the convent. After washing you had doused your face with cold water

to keep you awake during Matins. You had said Matins to obtain the gift of wisdom. (God had known you needed it.) The chapel was hot and stuffy, and you had felt drowsy and distracted. All your good resolutions and fervor had disappeared into thin air. Office had ended and you were still at sea trying to find some pious thought to cling to.

"Sister Philip is sick tonight. Hers is the only extra tray." Sister Barbara had said when you had gone in to carry trays. After fifteen minutes of tray carrying you had settled down to read "Vigil," a book which never failed to give you some inspiration. Later at supper the book about the mystic had been resumed. You had almost felt the dislike for the book among the nuns. It had seemed to penetrate the very atmosphere. Sister Carol had read on in her smooth voice. When she came to the part where the mystic had been told by God to leave her work to write Him love notes you had almost seen the forks suspended in the air. Beside you Sister Maria had chuckled very softly. You had heard Sister Gilbert say she thought they should select Benedictine saints if they were going to read about mystics. As for yourself, you had failed to appreciate it. Fortunately the Church had not spoken, so you had been at liberty to accept this mystic or not even believe in her.

So supper had passed. Lauds, which came next was peaceful enough until the intoning of the "Salve" when Sister Janice, who was playing the organ, gave Sister Rose Ann the wrong pitch. Sister Rose Ann had made a brave attempt, and had gone flat. Later at recreation she was searching for Sister Janice whom she claimed was playing "Yankee Doodle" when she gave her the pitch. Sister Edna had stretched out in a chair and relaxed. "Only one hundred seventy-nine more days," she

sighed wearily. Just then Sister Vincent brought forth a box of fudge. Now Sister Edna had opened her eyes wide and sat up very straight. "Where did you make the raid?" she had gasped. Sister Vincent's eyes had twinkled. "A mama came. She said her Jackie liked me so well last year. Then lo and behold, a box of candy appeared."

Out of the corner of your eye you had noticed Sister Bede looking over her glasses with disapproval at such a fuss. Sister Bede seldom smiled. She had always been a bit of a stoic. When she had smiled you had wanted to stand in front of her to get the full benefit. Maybe you could even take her picture, you had thought. It would be like the sun shining on ice for a brief time, and Sister Vincent was like the sun. Sister Bede smiled now, for not even she had ever been able to resist Sister Vincent's sparkling personality. You had often thought that some of you might shine like the stars in eternity, but Sister Vincent would be the sun.

Sister Maura started to ask about the candy. She was noted for her questions. "Write the questions down," Sister Vincent had said, "and I'll answer them some day when I have time." You had looked about, and remembered the remark about Sisters never doing anything. There was not a single bored face. Two Sisters were on the floor working out some kind of a chart, while others were playing the radio. In the midst of this Sister Philip had come in to tell everyone who was interested that there was chocolate cake being given out in the kitchen. There had been a scramble for the door, and soon some of you were feasting. "You'd think they never got enough to eat," Sister Joan said, trying to look serious and not succeeding very well.

You had gone back to the recreation room to have a good time until the bell rang.

When recreation had ended and Compline began, a deep silence filled the whole convent with peace. No one would talk until after breakfast the next morning, unless Charity or some obligation demanded it. Now a deep quiet had seemed to descend on everyone as a soft blanket containing God's mysteries. Shadows had fallen and the day had come to an end. Again you had been with God's Mother, only now the sun had set in the west and the pink and gold glory in the sky had disappeared with it. You had been thankful for everything as you said goodnight to Christ in the Tabernacle. You had walked from the silent chapel to take your rest filled with peace.

The year had been so peaceful—too good to be true you had thought. You had known from past experience how suddenly things could change. And change they had. Without any warning, Dick Morris, one of your best patrol boys, had become difficult. Sister Angelica, the principal, had sent for you, and told you bluntly that he must be corrected. Dick had been insolent to Sisters in the school; he had shown no respect for anyone lately. You had known that she was right, but you knew too that you were in for plenty of trouble. So you had gone over your line of attack carefully, only it hadn't worked. Dick was obstinate, and refused to understand, even after your patient explanation. Besides he had told his mother a fantastic tale about throwing snowballs, which she had believed and never bothered to verify. Once you had been tempted to call and explain, but you had remembered Christ. Did He go to the Pharisees and explain the situation? Your anger had slowly melted like mountain snows, and in its place was a bruised feeling.

Dick had used every trick he knew to undermine your authority, to turn others against you. In a few cases he had succeeded. You had felt helpless. Never before had any boy that you knew used such low tactics.

Two months had passed, and there had been no change in Dick's attitude. It was nearly the end of school. You had hated to see any boys leave school for the summer in that state of mind. In spite of defeat you had decided to make one last attempt. You had prayed and begged the Holy Spirit to enlighten you, but everything in you had gone dead and you were afraid. After you had sent for Dick you had stood at your classroom door waiting.

Once when you had been a child you had gone tramping through the woods too absorbed in the flowers and trees to notice the storm clouds gathering. The storm had come upon you quickly; the lightning had flashed and the thunder had rolled. You had stood trembling against a tree, too frightened to move, while the rain lashed its fury against your body.

You had felt as panicky now as you watched Dick saunter up the hall, head defiantly thrown back, the chip on his shoulder at a perilously sharp angle. You had clutched the crucifix on your rosary, and stood your ground. Dick's tongue had lashed at you and you had suddenly felt a quiet strength, as if Someone was in back of you encouraging you. You had spoken calmly, of sportsmanship, truthfulness, etc. Once you had thought you saw Dick soften and some of the defiance leave his face, but you weren't sure of anything anymore. You had ended up by telling him you would check on him as well as pray for him. You had gone into the classroom and closed your door. The rain pounding angrily against the window had

reminded you of Dick's words. For a quick moment you had thought how easy it would have been to lie to Sister Angelica about Dick a month ago. You had seemed to hear Joe's voice in the far distant past when someone had cheated in a basketball game for you, "If you can't win without cheating it's better to lose."

"Christ, I love you," you had said in your heart as you began the arithmetic class. The only answer was the patter of rain, and the incessant movement of your class. You had known you weren't at your best. Everything had been as flat as a cake without baking powder.

At dinner you hadn't been hungry. You had taken a cup of tea and a cookie. Everything was very informal when you had dinner cafeteria style at school. Sister Irma sitting across from you had glanced briefly at you and murmured, "Dick Morris again?" You had grinned, a feeble grin that had looked as if you had found it on a sunless street. You were glad for once to escape the usual chatter, and get the afternoon over quickly.

Finally school had closed and you had been checking your last spelling paper. "Alone? That's a little unusual," you had heard a voice say. Sister Irma had come in, pulled a front seat down, and studied you for a moment. "I came in to give you a talking to," she said at last. "Please, not tonight," you pleaded. "Now you listen to me," she began. You had noticed that her eyes were deep pools, and even her sturdy freckles were serious. "You have to stop worrying about Dick. I had him one year, and he's enough to make your nerves stand up and dance a jig. I know how you feel but God knows you did your best. What more can you do? Perhaps you did plenty of good, only God knows, and He's not telling." Now it had seemed that

you had changed your drenched clothes, as you had after the storm in your childhood. Mother was gently reprimanding you. "Thanks," you had said, "I'll do as you say." So you had walked home feeling as if there was a rainbow over your shoulder, and God had put a pot of gold there. "God bless people like Sister Irma," you thought.

In the days that followed Dick had gradually lost his mask of resentment. Nevertheless a barrier seemed to have come between you. You had prayed for him for a long time, often when you were weary.

School had closed with the usual hurry, and you had taken a last look at the deserted room to see if you had forgotten anything. You had closed the door then on mistakes and failures of the year.

At the door of the convent you had met Mother Gerard. "Well, Sister Mary Ellen, have you finished in school?" she asked. "How long have you been at St. Mark's School?" "Eight years, Mother," you replied. "Eight years," Mother repeated, as if making a mental note. You had wondered if that meant a change. The only answer had been the echo of your footsteps as you made your way through the quiet halls. Would the next year find you among the nuns who packed their suitcases and trunks, and went off to a mission for the school year? There always had been a lonely feeling when they left. They had been like the birds who left their homes for the winter, only they had gone in search of souls, not a sunnier climate. You wondered!

You Followed Him Into The Hills

IT was August the fifteenth. The first streaks of dawn came slowly in the east, and though early, the chapel was filling rapidly. This was the day you received your assignments—"Tickets" you had all called them, "Assignments" had seemed much too formal. Each convent had its own unique name. You had noticed the white envelopes staring at you from each pew. You walked a little faster than usual and your prayer had been brief and straight from your heart. "Sister Mary Ellen," (the type on your envelope had been dark and frightening in the dim, quiet chapel). Somewhere the silence had been broken by the ripping of paper, and you had joined in. It hadn't been exactly a surprise. "Your obedience for the year is 5th and 6th grades in Laca."

You had knelt motionless for a moment trying to visualize Laca for you had heard so much about it. You remembered what the Sisters who went there had said. "It was in the country. The house was old and often occupied by rats and mice. The children were simple and lovable." Many of the versions had been different, depending on the individual personality who described it. Now you had thought, you would go into this hill

country, but God would be near as He always had been so it wouldn't be too bad.

You had always felt a little lonely at this time of year when the Sisters left for their various missions and those at home spent long hours in school. Often you had taken long walks through the orchard with its ripening fruit, or to the Blessed Mother's grotto where the leaves were slowly turning colors. You always had found it hard to say good-bye to the nuns when they left, and were happy when they returned for the summer when the hills were green and lovely. Now you yourself were one of those to leave, and it had been different. You had felt as if you were going into a new, unknown land, and since you had always loved new things there had been gladness in your heart.

Soon, almost suddenly it seemed, you were on your way to Laca. The driver talked and the Sister with you answered. You had been too busy watching the scenes to pay much attention, but now and then Mr. McNell said something about roasting ears. You had learned later that "roasting ears" was corn. It was late in the afternoon when you had arrived there, and the sun was throwing its golden glow on the daisies and wild flowers that grew so profusely everywhere. Sister Marion who had known this country place with her eyes closed, pointed out the gleaming cross on the church. The car stopped and you were in a new land.

The new mission house had rusty red bricks. It stood beside the school. They both had appeared old as if someone had built them long ago, and then had forgotten their existence. On the hill the church had stood silhouetted against a blue sky. Everything had seemed bathed in sunlight.

Many strangers had been there to welcome you. Some had peered with curious eyes at all the Sisters who were newcomers. You had liked their simple ways at once, and you enjoyed the well-prepared chicken dinner. The day closed with Benediction.

Inside, the church had been cool and quiet. Here and there a footfall had sounded very softly. When you had heard the high school boys sing Benediction you had wanted to stay there forever, it was all so beautiful. Too soon it was over, you had filed out, and still the spell of the evening and Benediction had been upon you. "My but they were flat tonight," Sister Lucille beside you had exclaimed. You had come back to earth again. "I thought they were beautiful," you had meekly said, and knew from the smiles that your musical appreciation was null and void.

While unpacking your things you had heard a tap at the door, and Sister Lucille's head had come into view. "Get your pitcher and come on," she had said. Was she trying to tease you, you had wondered? Sister Elaine had paused in her unpacking to tell you you weren't at St. Joseph's Convent where water was plentiful. Even though you were skeptical you had followed Sister Lucille up the steps and around the church. "Where is this water?" you had asked suspiciously. "Right here," Sister Lucille answered with a grin. You had stopped short, and with an open mouth looked at the rain barrel. "But there'll be all kind of bugs and crawlers," you finally gasped. "We boil it before using it," Sister Lucille said patiently. "Ugh," you had grimaced. Both of you had laughed long at this. The boiling of water had become quite natural to you before very long. There had been the time when you had forgotten to get your jug filled with drinking water. You had turned on the drinking water, or what would have been drinking water

at home. You had looked long at the sulfur water which came from the faucet, before trying it on your teeth. Your teeth had felt as if they were coated with copper. "Never again," you had resolved. It would be a long time before water ceased to be a problem in Laca.

Never had you forgotten that first day of school. The quick silence when you had entered the classroom before Mass; all the eyes had been focused on your every move. You had noticed the appreciation each had for posters or anything else in the room. They had stood as you had called their names. It had all been a novel experience for you.

The countryside in October had been beautiful with the bright blue sky above the picturesque hills. Once you had coaxed Sister Evelyn to climb one of them. It had been grand to stand where you could look down into a valley of sunlight, dotted here and there with houses. Sister, who came from Germany, had found it hard to keep up, but you had enough enthusiasm for both of you. "Ve did go a long vay," she told the Sisters at supper that night.

That same week there had been a dance in the school hall. You had been awakened by the music. For a time you listened to the popular music, and then suddenly they were playing a very old song. The Man from Galilee had given you your first invitation during that song. You had lain between the cool sheets and remembered it all. You had been dancing with Tom when He came. "I'll See You in My Dreams" someone in the orchestra had sung in a deep voice. And then He was there unsought for, undesired. He beckoned to you but you had no wish then to follow Christ through the twisting roads of the

world in search of souls. He was more beautiful than the dawn and the dawn of a vocation was slowly coming into your soul. "No," you protested, "I can't give it all up." You had thought of Joan whom the boys didn't like, and then of Shirley who was fat and of Rita who was always buried in a book. Christ had shaken His head slowly because He had read your thoughts. He had left you a little sadly, but had smiled at you just once, and you had known you could never forget Him, but the world tugged at your heart strings.

You had lost interest in the things around you for a moment. This life had seemed to fade—nothing was in it but emptiness. But the cross had frightened you, and you were uncertain. Could you give up everything to this God-Man Who had invited you to go into a new land and among strange people? If you went, where would you go? You didn't know any Sisters. Then you had thought of Father John. He knew the Benedictines, and loved them. If they were all right with him they were all right with you. But you were so uncertain of everything. You had suddenly shivered and Tom had looked down at you, and asked if you were cold. He had suggested getting his overcoat, and you had both laughed remembering the night you had worn his overcoat home, when the night had turned quite cold. The sleeves had dangled over your hands, and it had been ankle length.

"... Because I'll See You in My Dreams," and the song was finished. You had smiled into the darkness. Christ had taken your dreams from the dust, and swept them upward on and on. It had seemed strange that so many things from the past should linger with you, but they had seemed to fit into your life even now.

The leaves had gone from the trees and the November winds blew harsh cold. You had stood in your classroom and looked for a moment at the grey ribbon of highway winding its way back to the St. Joseph's Convent, and the trees so bare against the slate sky. You had sighed for the motherhouse with its long, cool green corridors, the silent smiling nuns—and even the unsmiling ones. They would be coming from school now, closing the convent doors against the rain outside.

You had left the classroom in a mixed state of mind. You liked it here, and yet you were lonely. St. Augustine's saying, "Our hearts were made for Thee, O Lord, and they are restless until they rest in Thee," had fluttered through your mind. You had thought of the bleakness of Christ's cross and you knew this loneliness was just a drop in comparison. No matter where you went the skies were bound to be sometimes grey, so you had just gone on.

Advent had come upon you and then Christmas. Such a glorious Christmas! Christmas had always been the happiest time of the year for you. You had helped the Sister sacristan, and found such joy in the snow-white linens, and the crib with the fragrant pine surrounding it. And then with the strains of midnight Mass still ringing in your dreams you had awakened Christmas morning to see the world outside wrapped in whirling snow. Mass that morning had been really Bethlehem. The electricity had gone out and the visiting priest had said Mass with the light of candles shining against the dark altar. The dim light reflected by the candles had fallen on the priest's vestments giving them a unique beauty.

At dinner everyone had been so joyous. You had slept for a time in the afternoon. When you had awakened you had

heard the cry of the wind, and upon looking out upon the hills had seen the deepening snow. Opening the door you had met Sister Monica laboriously making her way down the dark hall. "No light, no gas, no water, no nothing," she had said with a touch of humor. It was true. You had suddenly remembered that there were no electric lights. Supper that night by candlelight had thrilled you. Divine Office recited by candlelight had made you think of the monks of old. How wonderful it must have been to pray by the light of candles, feeling and knowing that God was very near. It had seemed to you that all of nature was paying homage to the Infant King.

"Dere is no vater," you had heard Sister Evelyn say in a discouraged tone. Some of you had looked out of the window, and now everything was wrapped in a mantle of snow. The storm had subsided, to be replaced by a silvery moon in a clear sky. "We'll try the pump," Sister Jane had said consolingly. She never could bear to see someone in trouble without making a special effort to help. Some candles and vigil lights shone here and there in the windows of the dark house. Sister Agnes had laughed delightedly at the whole situation. "She'll find something funny at her own funeral," Sister Ann had once said. Outside it had been so beautiful, with the lamplight from the few houses shining in the white stillness. You had all carried water and shoveled snow by moonlight—that is, all but Sister Monica who felt this was all a little beyond her! All too soon the lights had come on to remind you that this still was the twentieth century.

During vacation a large filling had come out of your tooth. Laca boasted of no dentist. The tooth had ached so much that you had become irritable. You'd just have to see a dentist, but

how? A coal truck went to Austin each day. Since there had been no bus or train service Sister Leon had decided that this would be better than imposing on someone to drive in this weather. Besides, the Benedictines had a small mission house there where you could stay until you could get a bus to the motherhouse.

The sky was clear when you and Sister Lucille had gone along a snow-covered road in the coal truck. Someone else might have complained about this unique mode of travel, but never Sister Lucille. You had often thought that shortly after her birth God had slipped a pair of rose-colored glasses on her nose for she found joy wherever she went. The Sisters in Austin were delighted at seeing you and found out when your bus left for St. Joseph's. "One just left," Sister Lucy had said hanging up the receiver and trying to look mournful. "The next one is at six." When it was time to go, Sisters Maria and Benedicta had said it would not be Benedictine hospitality unless they accompanied you. When you had stepped out into the street it was storming. Darkness was falling fast. The bus station had been a mass of lights and people were going and coming. It was so very different from the quiet country you had left behind. You had hardly been seated when the announcement that the bus would be an hour late had startled you all.

A sailor in his teens had come over and greeted you. Sister Maria sensing that he that he was lonely had drawn him into a conversation. He had been fighting on a ship off the coast of Japan. He had been afraid, and he still was frightened when he heard the sound of guns. He blurted his story out like a small school boy, who was puzzled and uncertain in a world that had gone mad in its thirst for power. Sister Maria had

waited until his story was finished. Thank God for Sister Maria's sympathetic nature which was never at a loss for kind, soothing words. She had smiled, and talked to the sailor until his tenseness had vanished. When your bus arrived he had smiled and nodded to everyone, but to Sister Maria his look was most grateful as she passed by him and had pressed a medal of St. Benedict into his hand. There were two things Sister Maria claimed never to be at a loss for—words and Benedictine medals.

You were in the bus now. The storm had seemed to reach a wild fury. The driver had wiped the windshield and climbed into the bus with a worried frown. The bus lurched forward and you were on your way. Looking from the window you had seen little more than blinding snow. The passengers looked anxious. You had prayed your rosary, and as you did so had closed your eyes against the sea of faces about you. Three hours later you had reached town. A woman in front of you had gotten out of the bus with three sleepy little youngsters. The bus terminal had been warm. Sister Lucille had kept her eye peeled for a taxi. The lady with the children had peered out of the window, while one little boy kept clinging to her skirts and falling asleep. The door had opened and slammed, then an unfriendly face had glared at all of you. "Could I get a taxi?" the lady said pleadingly. "I don't like takin' any taxi out in this kind of weather," was the rude answer. "That's what he's here for," Sister Lucille had whispered angrily. "I'll take you all," he had finally said ungraciously after a brief pause.

You had followed this man out into an angry night which seemed to blend perfectly with his mood. The lady had looked at you both as if seeking relief from the angry words. Sister Lucille had spoken a few words, and the lady had smiled. Her

home was near by, so the taxi driver went there first, then turned the car in the direction of the convent a mile or so away. The wind beat against the car, but the driver had said nary a word, as if he wished to deposit the two of you quickly with as few words as possible. In the darkness Sister Lucille was fumbling for the money for the taxi. "Can you open this?" she said handing you the wallet. "You don't have to get out any money. I'm not taking any," a gruff voice said in the darkness. You could hear Sister Lucille's subdued laughter. Before you knew it you were standing before a huge building that had loomed before you, and then blended with the fierce storm. The light from the taxi had flickered far down the driveway. The wind cut sharply against your face.

Sister Marcia, who was a light sleeper slept just above the entrance. You had thought of the Holy Rule: "That the monks be not disturbed at unseasonable hours." "Sister Marcia," you had both called and the wind had taken your voices and carried them away. You had tried again, this time with results. The window above opened and you heard Sister Marcia's "Who is it?" Before long you had both sighed with relief as you dropped your luggage in the room prepared for you, and listened to the storm raging outside. You had amazed everyone when you had appeared in chapel the next morning. "You never came in this storm!" everyone who saw you after breakfast had exclaimed. A hurried trip to the dentist, the cavity had been filled and the pain was gone. You were anxious to return to the country, because you hadn't wanted to be snowed in.

The storm had died down and the roads were cleared when you started back to your mission. As the bus had climbed the hills on its way to Austin you had thought of New Years long

ago. It had been New Year's Eve. There had been a tradition in your family to have a party at your aunt's house. This was about four miles away, and the whole family had gone in a big sleigh. You could still hear your father calling to the horses, the soft sound of the sleigh's runners gliding over the snow. You had always felt so secure, so good on that night. The Infant King had been as close as the stars. You had loved to look into the moonlit sky and then back at the snow sparkling in the white stillness of the night. Then you had imagined you were one of the shepherds of old worshipping the tiny King. You had breathed in the dry, cold air on those New Year Eves and drawn the blankets closer about you. Now it had been such a long time ago, yet you had longed for your dear ones as though it were yesterday. Tomorrow would be another New Year. It would be the beginning of another year filled with mistakes and failures, joys and sorrows. Just the same, each year brought you nearer to God and heaven. You would begin a new year at the mission house. It had filled your mind with resolutions as you journeyed on.

The months slipped past. Winter snows melted, and disappeared into the brown earth. A cool breeze replaced the north wind, birds began to sing. It was spring! Not only spring, but it was May, the month of Our Lady. You went to school that glad morning with a song in your heart, and a spring in your step. You had looked for a moment at the boys having a ball game just below the school. "I won't call them right away," you had thought. "Let them enjoy the morning sunshine."

You had checked IQ tests taken the day before, then you had pushed back your chair and looked up into the wide, frightened

eyes of a white-faced boy. "Sister," the boy had gasped, "Andy's lying in the road all bloody! A truck hit him!" The boy had sat down burying his head in his arms. "Sister Grace would know what to do. She loves first aid." Your mind had raced desperately. You had run out and a few feet ahead of you Sister Grace and Sister Adelaide had been hurrying toward the highway with blankets. "So they knew," you had thought as you hurried after them. On the side of the highway quiet children stood. A mass of faces had swarmed before you, and then you had seen him—a still bloody little body lying on the side of the road.

You had felt as if you were in a dream, watching a picture in which you had no part. Father's voice saying he thought some of the Sisters should tell Mrs. Hoff seemed to come from a distance. You had felt Sister Lucille's hand on your arm, and had followed her, taking a short cut through the field. Beside you Andy's two sisters cried silently. On a hillside someone plowed the green earth. The sun shone brightly throwing patches of gold on the green meadows, while not far away a bloody little figure had been lying. You had seen Mrs. Hoff, a hard-working woman, busy with her hands in bread dough. There had been no fainting, no hysterical crying—just, "I'll come. Mary look after Kathryn. She's crying."

You had remembered nothing Mrs. Hoff had said on that walk. God had seemed to have held her heart and kept it from breaking. The church bells had rung. You could hear Andy's voice a week ago saying, "Sister, I didn't miss Mass or school once this year." "Dear God," you had prayed, "Don't let him die." The children had gone into church. Sister Grace held the wrist of the motionless figure. Mrs. Hoff had knelt down and

said with a sob in her voice, "He's dead." You had heard Sister Grace's soothing voice, and then her whisper to you. "His pulse is getting slower. Try to comfort his mother." From the church on the hill the strains of the "Kyrie" drifted down. "Lord, have mercy on us," you had prayed silently. Andy's mother had first stopped to say a few kind words to the truck driver. She had turned to you and said in a broken voice, "It was hard to understand him, but he was a good boy." She would never get any decorations for bravery, this courageous mother, but God would strengthen—and reward her.

The doctor was there. He had come in from the neighboring town. His examination had been brief, and now he had studied Mrs. Hoff carefully, as if he were choosing his words. "Is he hurt bad?" she had asked him. The doctor had looked toward the green hill where the boy was plowing and nodded. "Will he live?" She had asked in a low voice. This time the doctor had looked directly at her and said, "No." "Is he dead?" Mrs Hoff's voice had shaken. "Yes," was the quiet answer and the winds had seemed to bear the words through the tree tops, blowing the sunshine from the earth. There had been tears in everyone's eyes. Mrs. Hoff had been driven home and the few people had left.

You were walking through the playground where less than an hour before a small boy had dashed after a flying ball, straight into the path of an oncoming truck. Sister Adelaide's consoling words were to the truck driver. "Come in and I'll get you a cup of coffee," she said. "I'm not a Catholic," he stammered, for the first time remembering that he was with nuns. Sister Adelaide had brought him into the convent. Sister Evelyn had coffee ready, as if her guardian angel had warned

her that someone would need it. The man drank the coffee and he had told Sister of his unhappy life. His mother had been a Catholic but she had fallen away. You had gone back to a classroom filled with silence and tears. A pall seemed to have fallen on everyone. Andy, who had been their classmate was now in eternity. The lessons that day had been flat and lifeless, but no one seemed to care.

At noon Sister Evelyn had looked concerned. The nuns had scarcely eaten. "Dey are all upset," she had told you. But when the days had passed and everyone was back to normal but you, Sister Evelyn had made it her business to speak her mind. After an indifferent, "I'm not hungry," from you when a carefully prepared dish was set before you, Sister Evelyn had given you a brief talk. Poor Sister Evelyn who worried and fussed over the nuns as no one else did. "You can do dat boy no good. You cannot teach da children if you do not eat. You vill get sick. Now you do try to eat dis noon," she had said. You had realized she was right. After a few days you had picked up the broken pieces and gone on.

Soon it was time to go back to the convent. Although you had liked the mission you were anxious for home. It would be a treat to walk down the long, cool, green halls. You had stood for a moment looking at the nearby hills. The classroom cupboard and desk were cleaned, your trunk was packed in case Reverend Mother changed your assignment in the fall. Beside you your suitcases were packed and ready.

Before long the car had come to take you back to the motherhouse. Behind you the mission house and school had faded away. The road had stretched before you like your future life in the convent. You had never quite known where it would

lead. There had been mistakes and failures at that mission. It hadn't been all smooth going. There had been Sister Helen who thought you were very irresponsible, and had never lost an opportunity to let you know when you were wrong. As a novice you had dreamed of great deeds. You would do such wonderful things for God! How little had you realized that it wasn't in big things you served Him, but in the humdrum of everyday life. The smile for Him when you were tired, the tears you kept back when you were hurt. You had even managed to make people think that nothing bothered you!

The meadows and woods had slipped past, and soon you saw the gray of the convent shining like a silver lance in the late morning sun. Behind those unpretentious walls were hidden lives that were seen by God alone. A retreat master once had said, "You have many saints in your community." Who were those saints whom you had met day after day? You would never know.

The car had stopped. You were home! What would the summer bring? You had wondered about it as you climbed the steps and entered the cool hall.

It Was Such A Summer

O H, but it was grand to be home! The corridor had seemed miles of cool greenness. The friendly smiles and hand-clasps had warmed your heart. The door had opened and Sister Patricia walked in, and sat for a moment watching you unpack. She was a perfect angel of a roommate. Every thing had been in order—just the way you liked things. The stand had fresh paper, the bed had been made up with crisp sheets pulled tight. On the window sill was a daintily arranged bouquet of roses. You had spoken your appreciation but Sister Patricia had brushed it aside. “Did you see the bulletin board?” she had asked abruptly. “No,” you had answered, “I came up the other way. Did someone die?” Sister Patricia smiled her exasperating smile, then said, “They might die when they read it.” “Sister, what is it?” you asked. “A biology summer class,” Sister had said in an awed voice.

The shoe in your hand had dropped with a thud. You hoped Sister was joking, but no she was going on. “Your name is one of the first ones. I’m so glad I had it. It was the summer you were still swimming in the lake and dancing in the moon-

light. I wore my candidate's outfit and studied what cats were made of." The door had closed while you still sat holding the shoe. All the joy had gone out of you. You had looked into the mirror and had known your health was perfect, the doctor had said so last month. "No," you had thought, "there is no escape." Outside the wind rustled the leaves on its way to your open window. So, you had prayed to Our Lady of Perpetual Help and had continued your unpacking. Everything had changed.

Retreat had opened that same night. The retreat master had read in a low monotonous tone. You had sighed, for you had so wanted someone to renew the life in your soul. Spiritually you had felt at a very low ebb. The chapel had been hot. Spiritual-reading books had all said retreats depended on you, but surely the retreat master counted. "He'll never set the world on fire or put it out if it is on fire," you had heard Sister Mildred tell someone. She had sat in one of the conferences at an earlier retreat, and you had seen her slip out of the side door after the first ten minutes. You could just see her move restlessly in her seat now.

The "Te Deum" at the end of retreat hadn't given you your usual lift. No matter what you did you had just felt as if everything were flat. You went through the usual exercises, you tried to pray but God seemed farther away than the planet Jupiter. Your will had loved God just the same while your mind was filled with distractions. "Mother of God, please tell Him I have no fervor. My heart isn't singing. It just seems tired and numb. I haven't felt like praying for ages, and the retreat didn't seem to help," you had told Mary when the retreat had ended.

"Biology class in the lab at 8:00," you had read on your way to breakfast. Just the thought of it had spoiled your breakfast. The toast had seemed cold, the coffee tasted weak. The martyrs of old went into the arena with a smile on their lips and joy in their hearts, while you went into a class you dreaded with drooping shoulders and a fallen chin! "Dear Lord, I'd make a fine martyr!" you had told Him. Somehow you had felt that He understood. Only He could know and understand the aversion you had for any crawling thing. Even as a child the sudden jumping of a frog from high grass had caused you to scream, or a small non-poisonous snake gliding through berry bushes had brought you to a standstill in rigid terror.

You had sat in your seat glum, yet trying to make yourself believe you would enjoy it all. The professor had soon appeared. He had been short, stocky with dark-rimmed glasses. His square jaw and alert eyes had denoted no mercy. You had disliked him at once. His efficiency, everything about him annoyed you. Like St. Nick in "T'was the Night Before Christmas," he went straight to his work. You had moved your right foot ahead of your left, and in so doing had caught a glimpse of Sister Edith's face. It had been filled with smiling rapture. The professor had dictated and you had tried to keep up, but you couldn't. By the time you had a word figured out he had been twelve words ahead of you. "Dear God, this is even worse than I expected," you had thought. At intermission Sister Edith had beamed at you, "I think it's going to be interesting don't you?" "No," you had said through clenched teeth. Before the class ended the professor had said smilingly, "Tomorrow we will have lab. I have some *catesbiana* preserved."

"Whatever that is," you had said to Sister Edith as you picked

up your notebook. "It's a frog," she had informed you, "I studied up on some of those scientific terms." "Then why didn't he say so? No matter what kind of a fancy name he uses a frog is a frog!" you had said with finality.

Sister Edith had shaken her head despairingly. "Sister dear, sometimes you are as unreasonable as a child," she had said in her high little voice, and walked away. "Sometimes I almost hate her," you had thought—and then looked up at the crucifix and couldn't hate anyone when Christ had asked us to love one another, even as He loves us.

You'd ask Sister Ann to work with you. She wasn't much more scientific minded than you were, and besides she was sweet and agreeable. If you had been a saint you'd have picked Sister Edith, but, as she had reminded you, you were still an unreasonable little child! You had to smile when you had thought of how impatient she would be with your indifference to a *caresbiana*. You had felt better then.

The next day had found Sister Ann and you waiting patiently for the frog to be dropped into the dissecting pan. The professor had presented each two Sisters with one. "He's afraid we might each want a *caresbiana*," you whispered to Sister Ann. Unlike Sister Edith there had been no smile on her face but she smiled at this remark. Plop! You had wanted to run out of the door beside you. In front of you resting pleasantly on the pan was the ugliest bull frog you had ever seen. Its eyes bulged and his whole appearance had sent a shiver through your body. Sister Ann had closed her eyes. "First we'll break the jaw," the professor had said rubbing his hands together in delight. "We'll take turns touching it," you had said to Sister Ann, and

and summoning all your courage you had followed directions for the jaw-breaking process. There was a snap, and the professor had been there congratulating you on the clean break, which had really been an accident.

The morning had been like a nightmare. When at last it had been time to put the frogs back until the next lab period Sister Ann and you had both sighed with relief. "Did it go better today?" Sister Edith had said smilingly on her way out. "No," you had started to say stubbornly. Instead you had looked straight at her and said, "Maybe when I get to heaven I'll like playing with little bull frogs." Sister Edith's face had colored, and you had been ashamed of yourself. You had known she had scarcely any sense of humor, and now you had deliberately made her feel that you were making fun of her. You forgot the frog and remembered how many times you had done just that. Sister Edith had always been a bookworm. She had usually managed to get an "A." "If she wants high marks it's none of your business, Sister Mary Ellen. It wouldn't hurt you if you studied a little more," you had scolded yourself.

Weeks had passed with each day bringing a new aversion. The afternoons spent in the lab had been so hot that you could almost feel steam coming from your clothing. There had been no end of specimens. None of them had appealed to you. At night you had dreamed of them. Frogs had leaped over your bed, and you had awakened stiff and cold to stare wide-eyed into the darkness, and to hear the whistle of a far-off train rumbling its way through the night. The breeze outside had played tag with the leaves. You had pulled a blanket up and tried to sleep. Sometimes the moonbeams had caressed Sister Patricia's empty bed.

Sister Patricia was giving instructions to public school children in an obscure town and came home week ends, gathered material for catechism classes, and slipped away again. She had been so much like John the Baptist. She drew people to her, pointed to Christ, then stepped out of the picture. Children forgot Sister Patricia in a little while, but they had never forgotten the Christ she had told them about. "I must decrease; but He must increase" seemed to be her motto, and though she was loved by all she was soon forgotten. Often you had seen her arise at the break of day at the first sound of the bell after a sleepless night. There had been dark circles around her eyes, yet no murmur ever escaped her lips. You had thought of it now as you lay unable to sleep. Sister Patricia would have laughed her merriest laugh if anyone had told her she was a heroine of God. You thought of her now, and drew courage from the memories as you lay there with nerves tense, unable to sleep.

One morning you had awakened with your heart filled with more dread than usual. The professor has assigned a term paper on some specimen. Crawling under porches, walking through the garden, searching among the weeds near the pond for an insect had seemed hardly logical for you, who unlike Saint Francis had never regarded such creatures as brothers. Maybe a Monarch butterfly, you had thought, they at least had beautiful wings. "Of course," the professor had smiled when you had suggested it, "A comparison of a Monarch and Viceroy. Wasn't that what you wanted?" your mouth had opened a few inches, and your expression had become blanker than ever. "Yes, I suppose so," you had answered in a dull voice. You had paged through insect books and found that a Viceroy

butterfly was like a Monarch except for a spot here and a line there. You had walked through the meadow a few times but had failed to find one. "They are very rare," Sister Rose, an authority on butterflies, had told you. So, Monday morning had found you still wondering what to do next.

The lab was hot and stuffy. You had bent over a microscope, and pretended to be interested in the construction of a cell. You had heard the professor's footsteps coming nearer while you had prepared what you were going to say. You had wished desperately that you were a good politician for a few moments. True a first cousin of yours was a lawyer, but if he felt as you did he'd probably lose every case. You had cleared your throat and stammered, "I can't find a Viceroy butterfly." The professor had answered in a pleasant voice, "They are hard to find. I have a beetle if you'd care to have it." Your mouth had felt dry. He puzzled you, almost as much as the biology. (You had annoyed Mr. Connors years ago when you had been in his biology class. He never had reacted this way. He had scolded and raved and marveled how all the children in the family were so good—and you? When you had finished the course and successfully passed the exam you imagined he had burned midnight oil trying to understand.)

"Sister Ann," you had said when the professor had passed on, "Do you think I should accept, and take the razzing I'll get from the rest if they find out?" Sister Ann had looked up from the microscope and said, "It would be rude not to accept. Besides I don't think you'll get a specimen if you don't." You had sighed and later had mumbled something to the professor about the beetle. "I'll get it for you," he had said on his way to the door. "No, don't bother getting it now," you said uneasily

looking at Sisters Edna and Michael bending over a microscope. He had been back in no time. The beetle in the match box had been a dull, unattractive red. You had glanced around and no one seemed to notice, except one Sister auditing the class. "How do you rate?" she had asked, "If it were anyone but you!" "Is it dead?" you had hopefully asked the professor. "No, but I'll put him in the jar and kill him for you." Even Sister Ann had seemed to enjoy it. Before long Sisters Edna and Michael had seen your beetle and remarked on its oddness. You had known it would be a matter of minutes before they found out where it came from. So you had written a term paper on a beetle, which hadn't the slightest interest for you. Only you had no choice.

Sister Michael had found a stray cat one day, and brought it to class. The professor had been elated. Chloroforming the cat was bad enough, but when the cutting began you had felt a wave of nausea envelop you. The cat's plaintive meow was still in your ears when the professor had rolled up his sleeves and started to cut. He explained each part and you had grown sicker each minute. Someone had handed you a cloth and told you to put it around the professor's arm so that he would not get any blood on his sleeve. You had done so with a great deal of effort. Then you had gone over and had sat down beside Sister Julia. Her eyes had looked sick, and her expression had matched your feelings. Sister Julia had once shown you a pair of black gloves and explained that she wore them during lab period since she couldn't touch those various specimens. You had heard Sister Michael say, "What is the head like?" You had almost felt the smile of approval that would greet this inquiry. "That Sister Michael!" Sister Julia mumbled beside

you. You had been too depressed to even nod. All those sweet prayers you said in chapel had disappeared. You had even forgotten to offer it up. After dragging endlessly the morning had finally passed.

At dinner you hadn't been hungry. Trying to eat the meat had been the worst. You had finally told Sister Edna that you couldn't finish it. Never before had you left food. "Poor child," she had said when you had told her, and accompanied the words with a sympathetic look. Would the six weeks *ever* pass you had wondered? Even your prayers seemed cold and scientific!

So many afternoons had been spent at a microscope near a window where the sun poured down its rays and the air had been filled with odors that you seemed to lose all sense of humor. It was such a gruesome ordeal. Yet somehow you had gone right on eating and sleeping, and even living.

It was finally the day of the test. You had studied, and yet you felt you weren't ready; a hundred years could pass and you still wouldn't be ready. Every nun had seemed nervous except Sister Edith who had seemed so confident. Before you knew it you had been staring at a lengthy test. The tapeworm which you had studied about wasn't there. Your mind had gone blank, your heart had seemed to sink down to your heels where it played tag with your shoestrings. You hadn't spent much time on the test. You remembered the professor's sarcastic smile when you handed it in.

You had gone home then, opened and closed the front door and started up the cool green hall. You had knelt down in the back of the chapel, and put your head down. You had failed, you felt sure. You could almost feel the Sister Super-

visor's angry eyes upon you, and hear her crisp, cold voice say, "You didn't study, did you?" "But, God, you know I did my best," you said lifting your eyes and looking straight at the Tabernacle. You had felt better then as you had made your way through halls and up stairways to your room.

Sitting at your desk you had remembered all the children who came to you year after year. The children in your thoughts had been the poorer students, those who rarely made a seventy-five. Often you had reprimanded them; now you understood so well how they felt. Then a resolution had been born—never again would you consider just the marks in examinations, and not the child. Alice had come back to your mind from the last school term. Alice, a dreamchild who had sat still all day, whose papers were perfect, and whose conduct was beyond reproach. You bit your lip as you had remembered holding her up as a model to Rose Marie. Rose Marie had hated arithmetic. She had been a born leader, but not an "A" student. She had appeared more interested in meadows, and streams than in books. Once you had chided her for her indifference. She had looked at you with her clear, honest eyes, and suddenly two tears had rolled down her cheeks. And she had turned then and walked slowly from the room.

Now you had put your head down, and said slowly to Jesus, "Forgive me." It had done you good to be humbled. You had longed to draw all the dull children to you, not the stars for they lived by their own light. You found later that you had passed the biology course. But in your heart you had known that the lesson that had mattered was the humility and the tolerance you had learned.

Would Troubles Never End?

THREE days after the biology course you had developed a bad cold. Your cough had seemed to worsen by leaps and bounds. There had been the night when you had slipped from the room so as not to disturb Sister Patricia, and walked coughing down the hall. The night light burning dimly played with shadows along the wall. You had seen the silvery moonbeams peeping through the leaves from a nearby window. The library had been dark and deserted. You had groped about until you found a chair and desk. You had been so tired of coughing when somewhere in the house a clock chimed twelve. You hadn't slept, you had realized. It had been one o'clock in the morning before you fell asleep and you had known your few smothered coughs had awakened Sister Patricia who was a light sleeper. The time in the library had helped some.

The next morning you had slept in chapel, even during Mass. You had gone up to bed and in so doing omitted a picnic you would have enjoyed. Still the cold had lingered. "Such a time

to get a cold," Sister Janice had grumbled with good-natured impatience. Sister Patricia was of a different mind. "You should see a doctor," she insisted. You had remembered the old doctor you had gone to several years ago. You would have trusted him with your gold teeth if you had any. But Doctor Shad had retired a year ago, and as you had put it to Sister Patricia you were doctorless. "There are other doctors in town," she replied crossly. "Just to please you I'll go," you said hoarsely.

The next day had found you waiting your turn in Doctor Cooper's office. You had felt the tenseness that always was part of you with any doctor but Doctor Shad. Then your turn had come, and you had carefully put down your book and walked trying to appear casual and self-assured into the office. "How are you, Sister?" the doctor had asked pleasantly. "Just fine," you had wanted to say with sarcasm, "That's why I came." Instead you had launched into an account, stumbling along like a sixth grade boy who was trying to explain a diagram in English. The next thing you had been ushered out with two prescriptions to be filled at the drug store. You had thanked Doctor Cooper and he had shown you the way out.

When you had arrived home you had looked at the two small packages; the capsules were not as pretty as the red liquid, which looked like a cherry drink, and tasted like a mixture of vegetable juices. You had found that taking both cured the cough, but your chest was filled at certain times with a tearing pain. You had called Doctor Cooper a few days later. His voice had a trace of impatience. You should decrease the dose. The medicine shouldn't do that. You had told God when you went to chapel how you missed Doctor Shad. The cold had

finally left you, and later you had gotten rid of the cherry cough medicine, and the pills, too.

Two weeks later you had sat at your desk with the sunlight pouring in the open window. You were glad to spend the year at the motherhouse. Going away for a year had been a welcomed change but it was good to be back. It had seemed wonderful to have a large desk with roomy drawers, not like the long table with the crack through it and the two tiny drawers which you had used last year. You had run your hand over the polished top and smiled to yourself. Everything was in order. Even your plans for the first month were complete. Your heart had been light as you had walked home that afternoon in late August. You had felt as gay as the song a robin sang perched on the limb of a spruce.

Sister Gertrude met you at the door. "I thought you'd never come. Mother wants to see you right away," she said in her usual hurried voice. Your whole being had gone limp. "Was your mother sick? Was there something wrong at home?" You had prayed to the Blessed Mother on the way to the office. "Probably just those shoes that didn't fit," you had tried to reassure yourself, but deep in your heart you had known it was more important than shoes. "Sit down, Sister. You might not like what I am going to tell you," Mother's pleasant voice was saying. "You know, of course, that Sister Zita was sent to Laca this year in your place. She hadn't been well, and I thought the country air would do her good. She was there only a week when the doctor said it would be necessary to have her where a doctor would be available. You know what that means, Sister?" You had looked out at the green lawn stretching out to meet the hedge. The St. Joseph statue which had welcomed

you years ago seemed to be waving good-bye. "Yes, Mother," you had said in a quiet voice. "You want me to go in Sister Zita's place." Behind your eyes tears had burned. Mother's voice seemed to come from far away. "I knew I could depend on you. God bless you, Sister. Could you be ready by one tomorrow? That is when they are bringing Sister home." You had even managed a faint smile as you answered, "Yes, Mother,"

You had gone straight to chapel. You knew now why you had so much consolation in prayer the last few days. "Your will, not mine be done," you had said to the Eucharistic Lord Who dwelt behind the golden doors. The words had seemed heavy, almost without meaning. As you slipped out into the hall you had almost collided with Sister Maureen. "Did you hear about Sister Zita's coming home?" she asked breathlessly. "Yes, I'm taking her place," you said tonelessly and walked on. You had started to figure out how and what to get ready as soon as you reached your room. There was a soft knock a few moments later. Sister Irene had stuck her head in. Then she came in and closed the door. "Sister, I hear you leave tomorrow. I thought perhaps I could wash and iron your habit and have it ready when you leave." You had remembered suddenly that you had mentioned washing your habit at recreation. "I'd be so grateful if you would," you had told her. Sister Irene had smiled and gone off with your habit. At least you wouldn't have to worry about packing your trunk, that was still in Laca. All the rest of the day you had packed, and by noon the next day your luggage was all at the front door. Farewells had been said, and you were opening drawers, and looking through your desk to see that nothing was forgotten. You wouldn't have minded so much if you hadn't been all prepared for that other class-

room. Sister Patricia had left for a mission two weeks ago and the room had all the appearance of a deserted bird's nest in mid-winter.

A soft tap on the door had brought you back to reality. No doubt the people were waiting to take you back. Mother had said, "Be ready at one," and when you consulted your watch it had been one-thirty. "Deo," you had said hurriedly. "Gratias," a gentle voice had answered, and Sister Zita had walked in closing the door behind her quickly as if she were pursued. You had noticed the dark shadows her long lashes threw on her pale face, the tired eyes, and the trembling lips. Poor Sister Zita, so zealous, yet always held back by physical handicaps. Sister Zita with her high intelligence, her strong will power, always harassed by sickness that clutched her with greedy fingers, leaving her powerless, except for her strong desire to love God and give everything to Him. "I just had to see you, Sister Mary Ellen. I had to tell you how sorry I am for making you go back when you had everything ready for a different class," she faltered. "There isn't a thing to worry about," you had replied, taking out your kleenex and wiping the two tears making a path down Sister Zita's cheeks. "The children there are nice. Only next time don't be so abrupt. Let me know a few days ahead of time that you intend to get sick. Now tell me all about yourself." Sister Zita was smiling now and you had felt better, too. A few minutes and you would be on your way.

Soon the floor phone had rung, and you had known long before you heard footsteps coming down the hall that it was for you. "Hurry, Sister Mary Ellen," Sister Eva had said, "they are waiting for you." There had been hurried good-byes, and you

had been on your way talking to the kind people who were with you as if they had been old friends instead of mere acquaintances.

Sister Lucille had stopped in your room when you had arrived, and had offered her services. You had heard her tear something. Turning you had seen the months of July and August torn from the calendar in your room. "They're gone," she had said. "Thank God for that," you had answered; and the "September" which met your gaze had seemed to answer in a smug assurance, "But, I too, will have crosses."

The Picture Was Blurred

YOU could still hear Reverend Mother's soft voice. "I am keeping you at home this year. Your class will be small, and much easier than what you have had."

Two weeks later you had stood in the office of the well-equipped parish school and found the record cards for your seventh grade class. You had almost whistled when you saw the IQ of the class. "This is wonderful," you had said to Sister Angelica. "I'll just present the subjects. I never had a class before with such a high intelligence quotient." You had heard Sister Irma cough audibly and had turned to find both Sisters Angelica and Irma regarding you with a smile. "I hate to disillusion you," Sister Irma had said, "but that's the worst class that ever crossed St. Mark's gates. They've caused every teacher one big heartache. No, I don't think you ever did or will have a class like them." "Why?" you had exclaimed, "What's wrong with them?" "No one can exactly find out. It seems to be a mystery. You try your luck. They're really unique!" was the only answer Sister Irma would give.

You had held your breath the first three months of school. Then you had let it out very slowly. So far they had seemed

normal. There had been the usual days when everything went wrong, and days when one or the other pupil was difficult, but that was only to be expected. Then like a thunderbolt out of a clear sky things had suddenly taken a turn for the worse. "So this is it!" you had thought, while your lips had set in the determined line that you had inherited from your grandmother.

It was in early spring. Light gray clouds hung over the school, and there had been rain in the air. Outside, the problem boys threw wet, slushy snowballs. When the bell had rung Sam had walked in and flopped dejectedly into his seat in back of the room. Desks squeaked, papers rattled, the very boards of the floor had seemed to be made up of noise. You had glanced down during English class and noticed Sam toying with a compass which had almost reached Martha's back. Very quickly you had walked down the aisle, removed the dangerous instrument from his hand, and gone on teaching verbs. A few minutes later you had noticed Sam's shoelaces dangling from his neck. Your blood had rushed madly through your whole body, and you struggled to suppress your father's quick temper which you had never seemed quite able to subdue. If you could have just shaken him until you were tired. But someone's Blood was fighting, too, fighting to help you gain patience and self-control. He came to you each morning when the world was quiet; the most precious part of the day when you were Mary and listened and poured out your heart to Him.

"Sam, you will bring your shoelaces up, and put them on my desk." Sam had obeyed promptly, with a touch of defiance. You had fought back the angry words, and had gone back to the verbs. You knew from past experience that words would not help. The afternoon had passed while the shoestrings had

dangled from the side of your desk like your thoughts. What would the great Teacher Christ do? You had prayed and asked the Holy Ghost for inspiration. At dismissal Sam had rushed from the back of the room. "Could I have my shoelaces, Sister? I'm going fishing," he said rapidly. "No," you said. "You can't have your shoelaces now, and you're not going without them." Then had followed a deluge of tears. At the end of a half hour Sam had left giving you a smile and a pleasant goodnight, but somehow you had sensed that the battle was not ended or won.

The days that followed had proved that you were right. Sam had seemed to be trying special kinds of endurance tests on you. "Would he never give up?" you had wondered. It was like a game of tennis where the ball went back and forth across the net, and no one won, yet no one lost. It would begin each morning as soon as school began. Sometimes you had been lucky, and Sam had been at his best, but oftener you had steeled yourself against his unexpected blows. You had only let out a long relieved breath when you had locked your classroom at night. But you couldn't lock Sam out of your heart. Even while you were at prayer he had been there, taunting you for not being able to win him.

And the other pupils in the class!—when you had reprimanded them they had shown neither anger nor resentment. They merely sat—expressionless, bored little puppets. You had felt your words almost bounce back and roll slowly out of the door and down the hall like something rejected. It had been so unusual in children that your very brain had seemed to weary in trying to put the pieces of the puzzle together.

After Compline you had often knelt in the presence of your compassionate King, and told Him all about your strange class. "My dearest Lord," you had said one night looking over the day's failures. "They are really so odd, so unchildlike. I try so hard to paint pictures of You in words. I tell them how You love them, I give them a picture of You in the Holy Eucharist. Other classes have sat with eyes fixed upon me motionless. These children show no interest. You are like an outmoded Prince Charming to them. They seem pagan to the core, living for today only. They fit in perfectly with a modern civilization that has forgotten Your existence. I've tried everything." Then you had bowed your head. Far away, Christ seemed to have brought back to your mind a picture. It fascinated you, drew you away from the things that upset you.

It was over nineteen hundred years ago, and you were at the edge of a crowd. They were unkept, indifferent, with greedy eyes and clutching hands. Many of them were sullen and silent, others openly sneered. Was your class as bad as this? You shrank from them and clung wildly to the arm of the strengthening figure Who stood so majestically beside you. You leaned on Him for support, and His arm upheld you. And you looked up into His face and saw His love.

A deep, strengthening trust filled your heart. The world around you might be demanding, demanding more than you had seemed able to give, but there was no fear in your heart any longer. He looked down upon you with his gentle eyes and spoke quietly, "It is I Who have chosen to give you these wayward ones. Do not be dismayed at your helplessness, but seek them daily in love and in patience. You must search for them when they are caught in the brambles of a material world,

love them when they reject My strength. You will go into the dark streets of their hearts and bring them Light. You are Mine; these little ones are Mine. And because you love Me I know you will not refuse me. And your discouragement, your seeming failures—bring them to Me too, and I will bless them. Lift up your heart.” And I whispered, “Be it done to me according to Thy Word.”

Then the days had slipped past—blue days, grey days and sometimes plain black days when the competition had seemed too great for your feeble strength until you had remembered Him in your heart. It had seemed as if the powers of darkness were in your classroom, lurking in the corners. Had Satan perhaps smiled, a wicked black smile because he so often and so easily used television and the movies to so fill the mind and the heart that there was no place left for Christ and His Mother? “And the gates of hell shall not prevail against Him,” echoed in your heart as a reply. You had thought, too of Mary His gracious Mother whose scapular many of them wore. Surely she hadn’t let you down.

There had been a slight tap on the door, and Sister Angelica had told you briefly that Confirmation would be June 10th. When you had announced this to the class it brought the expected protest. School would be out by then, and they’d have to come back for practice. All the other Confirmation classes had been while school was in session, and the children had gotten out of classes.

You had finally silenced them, and with forced calmness made it quite clear what you thought of their attitude. “Little pagans,” you had told God through set teeth as you explained

an arithmetic problem, "Just plain died-in-the-wool pagans!" The time before Confirmation had caused you to shiver many times with disgust. You had been so sick of it all.

You had never forgotten their conduct in church. The boys' seats during the Confirmation novena had been far from filled. The few who had come seemed resentful, as if they had been driven. "I just can't lead them, Christ," you had said as the golden monstrance was lifted high, while the King looked longingly at the hearts before Him, the hearts for whom He had given His very blood. You complained, "I'm sick and tired of fighting."

The stuffy head cold you had, had increased your misery as your body shook with a spell of coughing. Sister Angelica sitting behind the girls had given you a worried look. The golden door had closed slowly. Down the aisle came the sound of many feet. "No," you had thought. "Oh, no, it just couldn't be," and you had closed your eyes slowly after seeing three boys slide into their seats. You had always been a baseball fan, but for a moment you had hated it when you saw the baseball gloves. The rest of the boys were suddenly alert. Gone was the lethargy of a few minutes ago. Sam was already smiling and talking. You had drawn a deep breath and gone slowly up the aisle. Your hands had itched with a wild longing. Just before the lights had gone out you had ushered Sam into the vacant seat near you. In the dimness Sister Angelica was checking names. You had moved a step forward. Before you Gail moved restlessly. "How long do we have to stay?" Harry wanted to know. His eyes had shone in the gathering dusk. "Only a few minutes until Sister checks the names," you said with all the patience you could muster. Your voice, not beautiful at its best, was

hoarse and your throat had been sore. At least you could be understood.

Then the rehearsal was over with, and you had started to leave. You had wanted to make a mad dash for the door as if it were first base, but instead you had walked as if you were enjoying it. Behind you the steps were heavy and anxious. In back of the church Mrs. Bibt, who usually knew everything, peered over her glasses and shaking her white head in strong disapproval had asked, "What are they grumbling about now?" You had wondered why she wanted to know, while you smiled politely. It was grand to be relieved of responsibility for a time. It had been a beautiful night outside.

At last Confirmation day had arrived. An 8th grade girl had offered to help you. You didn't know what you'd have done without her. The red bows the girls were to wear were placed on each desk. You had felt worried and hot all day.

The Mass that morning had been an agony. Those to be confirmed had been the most indifferent class you had ever seen. The day had passed and you were sitting behind a pillar inside the church listening to the Bishop quiz the Confirmation class. You had been so glad that soon it would be all over. The answers for the most part had been good—clear and distinct. You had noticed the red bows weren't too bad. The church was hot and stuffy with no breeze. There had been many people pressed close behind you listening intently. You had tried to cough quietly but every cough seemed to reverberate with a shattering explosiveness.

At last it had all ended and you were, once again, out in the night just a very tiny part of a large crowd. You edged your way through them, and they had moved aside politely. Sud-

denly you felt lonely, tired and discouraged. Sister Angelica and Sister Ruth had finally found you, and you had walked home beneath the silent stars. You were all glad the curtain had fallen and it was done. "Aren't they something to dream about?" you had said to Sister Ruth who was very young and still riding on a silver cloud. "I . . . hadn't noticed," she stammered. Sister Angelica had laughed at this. "Never mind, Sister," she said, "someday you will."

Safe in your own room you had closed your eyes. It was such a relief to be alone where you didn't have to put on an act. People expected so much from a nun. They pointed a finger of scorn at you when things went wrong, and promptly forgot you when things went right. Only God never changed, nor ever forgot. It was useless to let anything or anyone disturb you. It was then that you had noticed the note and the bottle of pills. "I heard you coughing in chapel this morning," the note read, "I tried to see you after breakfast, but they told me you had gone to school and wouldn't be back until late. The pills are for tomorrow, the drink is for right now." It was signed, "Sister Alice."

As you lay in bed watching the moonbeams throwing golden rays over the spread, and listening to the soft breeze stirring in the leaves, your mind went back down the years. Pride had fought with you from the time the stone door had closed at your entrance into the convent. It had taunted you when a superior whom you disliked gave you what you considered an unjust rebuke. You had kissed your scapular and thanked the Mother of God for helping you through those trying days. Not only that, but you had loved praise. You had clutched it to your heart as a child does a new toy, until you had discovered that

it *was* like a toy, quickly broken and as quickly forgotten. Very slowly God had stretched out His hand, and taken these toys from you. You had seen them given to others, yet it had not mattered.

Only one thing you had coveted—your reputation as a school teacher. The nice things people said about your teaching had warmed your heart. Now even that consolation had disappeared. That night you had lain frozen and alone, without thrills. It had been as if the Bishop had confirmed you in one thing, the emptiness of praise. You had known you would never completely trample pride, the hope of every Benedictine, but this battle Mary had won for you. Pride would again raise its ugly head, but the Son of God and His Mother walked with you, and you could do all things in Him Who strengthened you.

The moonbeams continued to fall, and you had gone back to the years before you entered. You had sat again in a seat, and watched Miss Kalon's face. "You will write a composition describing the classroom," she had said in her even voice which had never failed to bore you. Miss Kalon never deviated one iota from the English lesson. Her job was to get English across to a group of squirming 8th graders, and that she did. Your dull description of a classroom with windows, two doors, five rows of desks, and all the other uninteresting equipment was what she had expected. Had you written that her class left you without enthusiasm, that you longed for the bell to ring, that you dreamed of woods and streams each time you heard the song of a bird, Miss Kalon would have sat very tense at such revolutionary ideas. She would have told you in her precise New England way that you had better stick to facts. Tonight she would have said, "Mary, you aren't stern enough. You

smile too much." And you had known that God Who threw moonbeams in through your open window thought differently.

Christ had gently taken the class from your hands as a broken toy from a child. You had looked at Him with eyes that burned with unshed tears and whispered, "Fix it up, Lord. Make it whole and beautiful. Give me, please, humility. Let me cling to the crosses you send, for I know they are the expression of Your love. Let the rough wood never dishearten me. Let me never prefer the glittering stones of praise, of easier ways, of self-approval. May they never attract me more than the cross. Tonight something has gone out of my heart. May I suffer and die on the hard wood of the cross in willing and joyful acceptance. My God, I love You."

When you opened your eyes it was morning. Instead of moonbeams the first streaks of dawn were coloring the east with their blue and purple hues. You made the sign of the cross and arose to begin a new day.

Love and Shadows

THE school year had been coming to an end, and once again it was May. Everything was a mass of green beauty. The birds had filled the day with their song, while at night the wind had almost sung a lullaby. It had been such a peaceful night, and dawn was breaking in the east when the shrill ring of the phone had struck terror in your heart. You had been awake in a moment—whom was the bad news for? Perhaps Sister Rosalia, whose father had been so ill. You had heard Sister Dolores' soft steps and the phone stopped ringing. A soft tap a few moments later and Sister Dolores had been standing in front of you with the dawn and rising sun as a background. "Sister," she had whispered. "It is your mother. She is dying."

Icy fingers had gripped your heart, and the rosy dawn and life itself had seemed to fade. Your beautiful mother dying! You had loved her better than anything. Sister Dolores was talking in her understanding way. She had figured out a way for you to take an early morning train. You had seemed to hear the Sisters as from far away promising prayers, asking if there was anything they could do. You had to go alone. It

would be hard enough to replace one teacher, but two would almost be impossible.

So hours later you had found yourself traveling beside the blue Hudson. "Please let me be on time," you had prayed desperately. This had been your first trip North since the convent door had closed upon you fourteen years ago, and life had looked then as peaceful and calm as the River. Only God had seen the suffering and pain a life with Him would entail. "Albany," the conductor had called in his sing-song voice. You had found yourself walking down the aisle of the train. There was a two-hour wait at the station between trains, and for the first time you had observed the people around you. Beside you two small boys had fought over a ball, while the tired mother, with a wisp of gray hair falling over her forehead, tried to settle the argument without much success. There had been so many unhappy faces, even faces that seemed to have lost hope. You had said all your prayers on the train. Now you opened your book "Saints and Sages" for an inspiration.

"Mary dear, you haven't changed a bit!" You had looked up with a start. Vaguely, from the shadows of the past, someone stirred in your memory—Marge Dolan. Marge, one of the most popular girls in high school, and once your best friend. You had remembered writing to her as often as the rule permitted. Then the letters stopped and you exchanged cards. Seven years ago even the cards had ceased.

Now Marge stood before you, more glamorous than ever. Soon you had been in deep conversation. But this hadn't been the old Marge. You had seen it in her eyes—eyes so filled with bitterness. Then it had come. "Chuck's plane went down over France," she had said hesitantly. "We were to be married

as soon as he returned. I can't pray anymore. I haven't been to church in years. I've achieved success, but nothing matters. Chuck was the light of my life and he's gone. When mother called that you might be waiting here today for a train I made up my mind to see you. I wanted to tell you about it. Please don't preach, Mary. If you say I'm going to hell it won't even matter." Marge was groping for a light in a dark, embittered world. You knew that the light was Christ, but you couldn't push her. You had remembered how Marge had insisted on going to confession each Saturday, while you followed her good example. "Marge," you had whispered, "I am so sorry, so very sorry. There isn't anything I can do, or anything I can say. I won't say you're wrong; you know you are. I'll just pray that you'll come back to God some day." You had both sat there a moment unable to speak, and for just an instant you had thought you saw a glimpse of the old Marge.

Then the loudspeaker calling the name of the city near your home town had broken the spell. Marge had risen in a moment while you had reached for your bag, but it was already in her hand. She made a path through the crowd for you. Heads turned to gaze at the smartly dressed girl in her green suit and gold accessories, but Marge with chin held high had walked through the noise and turmoil with indifference. Not until she had you comfortably seated did she speak. "I like you more today than I ever did. I wish I could share your peace. Keep praying!" Then she had given you a hasty kiss and you had watched her lithe figure glide down the aisle to the pert click of her high heels. From the platform she had turned once to see if you were watching; then she smiled, waved, and melted into the crowd.

The train had started very slowly, and you had closed your eyes while your rosary had slipped through your fingers. You had prayed for Marge as well as for your mother. The hills with their green foliage had slipped past. The blue waters of tiny lakes were everywhere, while here and there a silvery stream tumbled over rocks. God was there in all this lovely nature; only in the hearts of men was He an outcast. Man whom Christ had hung between heaven and earth to save spurned His love. You had known now that all your religious life you would trust Him, and there was a quiet resignation in your soul, even as you realized that He was slowly calling your mother to His side. Your mother, the most precious thing in the world to you.

The train was coming to a stop at your home town. There were no crowds at the station like at Albany and you had been glad. Soon, very soon you would see your mother. Hope and fear had struggled for a place in your heart. You had seen Susan and Joe scanning the train long before they saw you. You had noticed as you greeted them how worried and worn out they looked.

You were driving home now after fourteen years, yet you felt almost like a stranger. Mother had asked to die at home surrounded by the things she had known and loved. Ethel Haner had been home on vacation, but the last few days she had spent with mother. She was such a wonderful nurse, kind and understanding. Mother was conscious but in pain. They had told you all this on their way home.

Dad had come to meet you at the door. He wasn't smiling and you had tried to comfort him. "Mother keeps asking for you, Mary. Hurry!" You had gone in to your mother. She had lain motionless, her face still and white. The room was

filled with silence. Your mother had smiled. "I'm so glad you came," she whispered. "You'll have to take my place now. Be good to Susan. Take care of Ann for me. There'll be times when she'll need love and understanding. I've been waiting to say good-bye all day." Then mother had wearily closed her eyes. You had asked for a blessed candle and someone handed you the very candle that you had given mother when you made last vows, the myrtle was still wound around it. You lit the candle and suggested praying the rosary. You had always asked the Blessed Mother for help when death should come your way. Now you felt very calm inside and your voice was steady. You had just finished the rosary when mother had opened her eyes; they had rested on each of you then had closed forever. You had put your arm around Susan and Ann who were sobbing, and comforted them, for mother was at peace, mother was with God.

A half hour later, Susan had taken you to your old room. You had to sleep at home for the nearest convent was thirteen miles away. As she opened the door Susan had said, "I'll get you something to eat. You must be starved." "Just a sandwich and some coffee," you answered. You had looked about at your old surroundings. It was almost the same as when you had left. Even the pictures were the same. You were like a person in a dream. You automatically opened the drawers and found your school letter, medals, etc., still intact. Poor mother, you had thought, keeping a room full of memories! "Eternal rest, grant unto her, O Lord," you said glancing at the picture on the wall, the picture of Christ in the Garden.

You had left your old room then, closing the door softly on the young girl who had once lived here—the girl you used to

be. How different you were. You had thought of the world of nuns with whom you dwelt and longed for the love and security of convent walls. Here you had lived most of your life before entering, except for the few years you had spent on a farm. You had felt as if you had stepped back into the distant past, and you were uncertain and afraid.

You were on your way to the kitchen when the front door had opened abruptly. It was too early for dad and Joe to return. Bob, Susan's husband stood staggering in the doorway. This bleary-eyed person couldn't be the Bob Susan had married! You had remembered him as a quiet, mannerly, attractive man. And now—but this undoubtedly *was* Bob. "So they let you out of the convent," he muttered with a thick tongue. Then he had looked over your head and smiled foolishly. "Never let her know about the black sheep you had married, did you, Susan?" You had felt your blood rush to your head. So this was the skeleton they had been hiding in a closet all these years. All of them had avoided talking about him, had evaded questions. Now you knew. Bob had slipped out of the closet. Susan's husband was an ordinary drunkard. Alcoholic would have sounded more refined but drunkard was more descriptive. All those years of training in self-control had come to your rescue. Under your scapular your hand had clung to the crucifix, and your prayer was swift. You had never dealt with people who were influenced by drink, but God in His heaven would help you.

By this time Bob had sunk into a chair. Susan had looked at you in mute embarrassment. "You stay there, Bob, while we get you some coffee," you had said in your usual tone. In the kitchen you had faced Susan's white, tight look with the words,

"You should have told me, Susan." Susan's words had come back brokenly, "I was too ashamed, and besides you couldn't have done anything." "I could have prayed," you reminded her. "Will you let me try to talk to him?" you asked. "Of course," she answered, "but I don't want him to hurt you. When he is drinking he is as unreasonable as a child." You had smiled as you poured the coffee, remembering how often you had planned and prayed over a wayward child sometimes with success, and at others, only to lose. You had met failure before.

As you helped Susan with the lunch you had gone over the situation. You had remembered when Susan was twenty and you had been in your early teens. She had always been precise and beautiful. You had been tall and clumsy. In doing housework you seemed to have a knack for doing things wrong. Susan had laughed in a way that had cut your heart, and her sharp, witty tongue had given colorful descriptions of your mistakes. She had never really meant to be unkind, but still she had never troubled to teach you how to do anything. You had always felt so awkward and so useless. It had just been her way. Had she unconsciously made Bob feel the same way, and as the saying went, "Driven him to drink"?

You had tried to distract Susan by talking about the gold-rimmed tea set, and when you had finished your snack had persuaded her to lie down for a few moments. In the living room Bob sat smoking a cigarette. You had brought his coffee, and putting the tray on the coffee table had said cheerfully, "Lunch is served." "Going to give me a sermon, I suppose," he breathed defensively. "Well, save your words. I've heard them all. Your mother was one of the few who didn't preach. I hate to think that she is dead," Bob had said as he reached

for the coffee and drank it very slowly. You had remembered classes where a child wanted understanding and Bob was really like a child. You had smiled and said, "Preaching is not my profession. You don't need someone to tell you about being wrong. You are going to stop drinking, though." You had smiled at Bob's startled expression and continued. "I still pray, Bob, and those prayers will be said for you. I'll also go without certain things that I like but can do without for you. God's been very good to me. He won't let me down this time either."

Then you had talked to Bob, dropping the serious tone. You had told him about funny incidents that happened in school, about the humor of the nuns you worked with. At the end of a half hour Bob had left. He had smiled, and said very quietly, "Thanks for the prayers. I need them." A few minutes later Joe and Dad had returned from making funeral arrangements. You had spent a long time trying to cheer everyone up, hiding your own heartache. When you had closed your door very late the tears had flowed unheeded down your face. You had knelt beside your bed and prayed for strength and for guidance.

When at last in bed between the cool sheets sleep seemed miles away. It was so different from the little mission house on the hill where you had been just another nun doing her work each day as best she could for God's greater glory. Below you in the street a car had screeched to a sudden stop, there had been the empty laughter of a girl; in the distance a dog had barked. Could this be home? The place where you once had dreamed now seemed so very barren, stripped of all its glamor.

The unpleasant sound of an alarm had awakened you. You had dressed while the dawn threw rosy streaks across the wall.

You had slipped out of the quiet house and made your way to church. Even the church had changed, but how little that mattered for Christ in the Tabernacle was ever the same. You had knelt in the shadows, since you wanted to be alone for a time with Christ. When the priest came out for Mass you had sighed for it was a new and younger priest. Father John was dead and you had missed his fatherly concern. It would have been grand to talk to him once again.

And as you prayed, the yesterdays had seemed to pass before you one by one. There was Marge, beautiful, lonely, unhappy; Susan and Bob with their tangled lives; Dad, grief-stricken at mother's death. Dick was somewhere in Korea flying a plane, and Joe was worried because he was unable to locate him. Ann had puzzled you, too. She was lovely, and as frail as a spring flower, but her smile had a forced gaiety, and she had seemed unsure of herself. "Please, God, help them all," you had said over and over again. Then as Mass had ended you had prayed for strength to keep your own grief to yourself.

The two days that followed had been hard days. You had smiled so much that you felt your smile had become fixed and frozen. Back of you had been all the prayer, the work, the joy and the suffering of the years spent in your Benedictine convent. At night, you had felt so alone in your room as you had looked long at the stars glittering in a darkened sky. But you knew that God was near. You remembered the love of your Sisters-in-Christ forged in the fires of daily work and worship; and the remembrance brought strength and abiding patience. Beyond the stars was your mother with Him for all eternity, and you had prayed with quiet confidence, "May she rest in peace."

Then it had all come to an abrupt end. The funeral, your brokenhearted father, the people offering their condolence. That afternoon when you had to plan for your return, Joe had suggested a plane. Wasn't there a landing field somewhere near where you lived? There was one only nine miles away, you had assured him. So arrangements had been made. Joe had always been very near to you. He seemed to be the only person back here who hadn't changed. If life had cut him, hurt him he didn't show it. Alone with him you had whispered, "Joe, do you think we could go past the farm where we used to live on our way to the airport? I'd love to see its green peacefulness just once more." "Of course," he replied gently, "of course."

Ann had been very obliging the next day. She had agreed to read her fashion magazine while you both looked about. "But really, darling," she had said in her smoothest tones, "I don't see what would interest you on an old smelly farm." As the car had stopped, all the forgotten yesterdays had rushed back. There it was almost as it had been in years gone by. There were the purple foothills of the Adirondacks. The forests with their pine scent had filled your nostrils. Even the house had been the same except for a coat of paint.

The farmer had been very obliging. He had remembered your father well. You had noted that your garb was a mystery to his staunch New England Protestantism. You had smiled at Joe, the first natural smile in a long time, and the two of you had walked down the dusty road which was little more than a path. You had gone down a bank, and stood at the edge of a little stream. The water had tumbled merrily over the moss-covered rocks, while a robin in an overhanging tree chirped

gaily. You turned to look at the bank covered with purple violets. They were so large, and such a deep purple. Here you had dreamed, waded in the stream, gathered the flowers. Yours had been such a happy childhood. It had been filled with so much beauty and love, but now it was gone. You had felt as if you were in a trance, and your hungry eyes could not tear themselves away. "We'd better go now, or we'll miss your plane," your brother had said as he put his arm about you. He had known how deeply you had loved this land of childhood dreams.

The ride to the airport was short. You had tried to say comforting things to Ann; she was so young, so restless. When the plane had started you looked down on both Joe and Ann until they became tiny specks. The plane had flown over silver streams, sparkling lakes, and soft green mountains. It was taking you back to a land devoid of all this, a place that had become your home. There had been no regrets, only a feeling of gratitude, for God had done great things for you. You had offered Him the silver streams and purple mountains, the soft breezes and refreshing rains, everything that you had treasured and loved. Only you had prayed silently, "Take care of my dear ones." The wind had seemed to bring the message straight from heaven, "You know I will."

Joe had called Sister Dolores and there was someone waiting for you when the plane landed. It had made you feel so good to see the Sisters. They had borrowed the car. School wasn't much fun with a teacher missing, and they were glad you were back. Jim Carr had played hookey a few days. Some of the pupils had asked if you weren't ever coming back. When you had finally arrived, the homely house had looked like a palace,

even the funny doorbell seemed to smile a greeting. Sister Dolores had taken one look at you and had sent you to bed. You had welcomed the command for you had been so very weary. You had scarcely gotten in bed when a knock was heard. Sister Edna had entered with a tray. You had said you weren't hungry but when you had seen the tray you had changed your mind. Before you had finally fallen asleep you had tried to pray but your prayers had been confused and distracted. You had finally fallen asleep as the nuns in chapel were chanting the beautiful prayers of the Divine Office to the glorious King Who had suffered so ingloriously on the cross for them. Now He had sent you a cross, but in His strength the burden was light.

...they Shall Not Die, But Live Forever

“**R**EQUIESCAT IN PACE”—the letters were bold and new on the tombstone. Only a month ago you were walking here with Sister Therese, and now she was dead. Sister Therese, with her quick laughter, had made you think of tinkling bells. You had remembered her telling you of the great spiritual dryness which had been hers for two endless years. “I can sit in chapel and even my faith seems gone. I am like a person in a dark cave searching, for a light that he never finds. Yet my soul is filled with peace.” She had said all this in her slow, drawling voice. You had listened and marveled. Then two weeks ago an acute attack of appendicitis and now Sister Therese was beneath the brown earth with the snow covering it.

“Pray for Sister Therese who is dying,” you had read that winter morning. You had felt sick for a moment. Then Reverend Mother had taken you to the hospital with her. Sister Therese had been conscious. There she lay, a smile on her lips and her eyes filled with pain. Sister Therese was going to the God Whom she had loved, meeting Him with a smile. “I’ll not forget you when I see Him,” she had whispered to you.

You had left the hospital filled with the loneliness of parting. Now as you stood for a moment looking at the blanket of snow covering Sister Therese's grave you had shivered and drawn your shawl closer about you. And in the silence there had come to you the consoling words of the Church, of that Liturgy that had so filled and given meaning to your life—and Sister Therese's—as a Benedictine: *Suscipiat te Christus, qui vocavit te.* May you be received by Christ Who has called you.

And you then turned and slowly walked back to the convent.

Sickness Changes The World

YOUR restless sleep had been disturbed by the demanding clamor of the alarm. It was June and warm. You had made a special effort to get up, but your head had fallen back on the pillow. The breeze coming in through the window was stifling. You had tried to rise again, and this time you had succeeded. Your throat had been raw, your chest filled with pain, while your head had felt like a roaring fire. You had moved slowly in the morning stillness, every move an effort. In a tree outside your window a bird had sung its morning song of praise. It was the last day of exams. The papers on the table with their usual red marks had reminded you that you would soon be finished. For just a moment you had thought of yesterday when the pupils in your class had seemed to move continually. "Sick, 'Stir?" Jimmy had asked, while your answer had been a tired smile. You had forced yourself to correct the arithmetic papers. You had to hurry, because you were leaving for the mother-house in another week.

You had stood at the door now and put the back of your hand on your forehead to steady yourself. The small table in

the hall had swayed, so had the banister, "I have to. . . ." you had thought. Then there had been a blissful darkness. When you had awakened you were in bed amid unfamiliar surroundings. You heard voices like a distant buzz somewhere near you, but what they were saying did not interest you in the least. You had closed your eyes again, nothing mattered. It seemed weeks had passed while you just lay there not caring. Nurses had come taking your temperature, your pulse. "Sister, will you please move? We want to change your bed," had echoed in your ears, but you lay wrapped in shadows, oblivious of everything.

Late one afternoon you had opened your eyes and looked about. Sister Matilda moved her position nearer to you observing you carefully. It was funny how God arranged things. In the novitiate you had never been on exactly friendly terms with Sister Matilda. True, you had never quarreled, but neither had you ever exchanged confidences. Sister Matilda had thought you impractical; you had thought her an extremist. Everything had to be arranged at a ninety degree angle or it had a messy appearance. Looking at her had made you think of hospital beds and long corridors with fluttering white. Sometimes you had thought you could almost smell the ether when she was near. After you had left the novitiate she had gone into the nursing field where her experience could be used. You had been placed in the teaching profession. At retreats you had met, nodded and smiled. That was all. Now you had been really sick for the first time, and here was Sister Matilda beside you.

"How do you feel?" she asked. You had mumbled something. "You have a long fight ahead of you but you're out of

danger now." You had listened attentively to Sister Matilda talk. Back in your mind somewhere you had remembered how each time you had opened your eyes Sister Matilda had been there. No doubt she had spent a great deal of her valuable time with you during these dark days. You had been suddenly ashamed of all the times in the past when your thoughts had not been exactly kind.

The days that followed had been long. It had been the middle of June before things had taken on any importance. One morning, just before dawn, you had awakened feeling hot and tired. There didn't seem to be a cool spot on the bed. You had shifted your position so that you could look at the sky. The silver streaks had changed to purple, then blue, and lastly pink, as the golden sun had come up out of the east. You had been so near the Creator of that sun, but just as you had reached out your hand He had been snatched from you. You hadn't been afraid to die. It was only now that everything was uncertain. You had been spared serious sickness, but now you had been in a world of shadows. You were no longer sure of yourself.

You had remembered Uncle Bill as you watched the sunrise. He had visited your home once when you did not want him to go away. Uncle Bill's kind gentle ways had won your heart. He was a big hero in your little mind, and you loved him. You had begged him to stay but that was impossible. "Come back, Uncle Bill," you had called after the moving car. Uncle Bill had turned, waved and smiled; then he was gone. You had stood in the dusty driveway with tears rolling down your cheeks, while the bottom seemed to have fallen out of your whole world. Mother had taken you inside and removed the pink

straw hat with the white flowers. Then she had washed your face and consoled you by telling you that Uncle Bill would come again. "I'll always love it," you had said touching the straw hat reverently with grimy hands, "Cause Uncle Bill gave it to me." Was the Blessed Mother perhaps saying what your earthly mother had said years ago? Did she perhaps whisper so low that you couldn't hear it that some day God would come again, and you would be with Him always? Your dry lips had moved quietly, and the prayer you had said was not sublime. It was simply, "I'll try to love this sickness, because you gave it to me."

There had been times over the years when your duties had been so pressing that you got very little sleep. You had often wished you could just sleep for a whole week straight! And now when you could have slept you had found yourself wide awake, and sleep miles away. The irony of it! During the long nights you had thought of boys like Dick Morris, who had caused you endless trouble in school. He and all his relations had disturbed your restless nights. Thoughts of them had trailed you even here. Nights had been long, dark and troubled with little sleep.

You had asked the doctor bluntly one day when you would be able to leave. "Two weeks more," he answered with a professional smile. You had searched his face in hope, that he was joking, but the doctor would have found such a joke a form of levity. He had no idea how the weeks ahead had grown in gigantic proportions in your tired mind. Despair had almost taken possession of you. It had seemed as if you were fighting an endless battle.

The nurses were kind, but they were strangers. You had felt relaxed only when Sister Matilda and the Sisters were around. To make matters worse Mrs. Cribbins appeared on the scene. She was a new nurse at the hospital with stiff, uncompromising ways. If the doctor had prescribed a hair shirt Mrs. Cribbins would have seen to it that you got two for good measure. You had felt uncomfortable as soon as she entered the room. You hadn't had nightmares since you had been a child, but of course, you would have them for the first time when Mrs. Cribbins was on night duty. You had fallen into a troubled sleep a short time after midnight, and dreamed as you so often did of childhood days. You had been making mud pies with Joe. Suddenly a car was coming toward you and you couldn't move. You had screamed wildly, and when you had opened your eyes Mrs. Cribbins was there. "You screamed," she said and her face was annoyed and unfriendly. You had longed for Sister Matilda who would have been so understanding. "I'm sorry," you mumbled. The light was turned off with an impatient snap, and you had heard the swish of Mrs. Cribbins starched skirt. "So, they have crabs in the nursing profession, too. That's something," you had said to yourself to take away some of the tension.

The next night you had dreamed that you were sitting under the pine tree near your home. Suddenly the tree was falling toward you. The process of the night before had been repeated, only Mrs. Cribbins was not only irritated, but angry. "You woke up the whole floor," she said, her voice as sharp as a razor. "Do you intend to do this every night?" "I was dreaming," you said. "I'm sorry." The sarcastic words tumbled over each other in their effort to reach your lips. You had turned away

so that Mrs. Cribbins would miss the angry flames in your eyes. She had gone then, as suddenly as she came. You had begged St. Benedict to keep you from disturbing anyone again, as you lay there sick and weary, and the nightmares had ceased to trouble you.

Sometimes you had thought of your brother; you had been so close to each other at home. He was married now and undoubtedly had forgotten all about you. Then one day a shadow fell across the floor, and you looked up and there stood Joe looking very dignified in his officer's uniform. To you he had looked like a king and for a moment you had been speechless with joy. But after a few days he had slipped away as quickly as he had come leaving you lonely and depressed. You had tried to swallow the tears, but they had refused to be swallowed. You had been too weak to choke them back. A footstep sounded near your bed. You had feigned sleep but your wet lashes had betrayed you. "Sleeping, Sister?" The voice was soft like the wind in spring. It was Reverend Mother. You had sighed with relief for you knew she would understand. You had told her the whole story from beginning to end. It was a hazy outline: the days when Joe and you had grown up together, the adventures you had, the confidences you shared; then the loneliness when you entered the convent and seldom saw him. Now you felt you wouldn't see him again for ages. Mother wasn't the preachy type, that was what made her so charming. She didn't say anything, but you knew she had understood, and when she left the tears on your lashes had dried. She had been like a ray of sunshine. The time in the hospital seemed much shorter now.

You had a long time to think while you were slowly regaining

your strength. Pneumonia leaves you so exhausted and helpless. You had to depend on people so much. Books which had always fascinated you had no appeal. The professional reading you had never had much time for you had found impossible. Your prayers were said with difficulty. Even holding your breviary had been an effort. Now you had really and truly known what it was like to be sick. You just weren't yourself.

The infirmary had never been a place you had liked to visit often. Yes, you had once taken care of old Sister Cyril's correspondence, even neglecting your own to do so. But how often did she have to send for you? You had thought yourself quite patient when she had exclaimed, "Why, the idea," after each sentence. Perhaps if she hadn't been blind, and had seen your expression she wouldn't have thought you such an angel. "God, forgive me for being such a conceited, overbearing creature," you had prayed. "Only You could have ever put up with my selfishness, and patiently wait for me to find through my own sickness how far from humble and considerate I *really* was." You had made a few resolutions then!

At last you were in your own bed in the convent, and your whole attitude toward life had changed. You were still far from well. You had walked down the corridors with the pace of a snail. Sleep had lost its refreshing effect. And no longer could you glory in all that you could do. The Sisters avoided asking you to do little acts of charity. You were still too weak to scrub floors, wash dishes or do anything but eat, sleep, and get well. Everyone else seemed so active and so busy, while you had dragged one foot after another all summer.

Finally after weeks, when you were back to normal and sickness had vanished like a bad dream you were more kind and

understanding, especially to the sick. And somehow you knew in a way that you had never known before, that what really mattered was to accept His Will, whether it be in daily work or in the apparent idleness of needed rest.

Invitatory

AND as I read over what I had written, I had wondered if I had said too much or too little. Life is made up of so many things, unexpected and unpredictable; and the religious life is no exception. But it is a good life, and blessed are those girls who amid the attractions of the world yet respond generously to the call of Christ. There is only one way to God, the way of love; but there are many paths. And the path of St. Benedict has led unerringly to the Heart of Christ for long and fateful centuries.

In the Liturgy which so forms the warp and the woof of Benedictine life, the joys and the sorrows, the ups and the downs of daily living find their true significance. From the morning Sacrifice of the Altar on through the final prayer of Compline, the prayer, the work, and the sacrifices return once again to the Altar that through Christ, God may be glorified in all things.

And if convent life is often ordinary and unspectacular, it is yet so real and deeply peaceful that with Peter we can only say with joy and gratitude: "Lord, it is good for us to be here!" And may some who read this one day share with us the comradeship of Benedictine life, and answer Him in her heart, "Dear Jesus, I want to be here, too."

