

Borrowed Angel

BY MARGUERITE HAMILTON

Foreword

By

Irene Dunne

HANOVER HOUSE Garden City, New York

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Foreword

By

Irene Dunne

MOST mothers can write and converse glowingly of the achievements and accomplishments of their children. But few mothers have such an ideal to write about as does Marguerite Hamilton.

It is heartening, indeed, in this age when the eyes of the world are focused on teen-agers, to see one who, despite her handicap of physical disability, exemplified the ideal. For anyone who was as full of life and spirit as Nancy, it meant no little sacrifice and struggle to find herself suddenly with a disease which became progressively worse. Yet she knew instinctively that God was asking a great sacrifice of her and she gave all with a willingness and cheerfulness that must have meant a great deal to the heart of God Who finds so few today willing to give when it hurts.

During this centennial celebration of the appearance of Our Immaculate Mother at Lourdes, it seems fitting to accompany the Hamiltons on their trip to this beautiful shrine. The trip with its attendant inconveniences was a labor of love for Marguerite Hamilton. Undaunted by insurmountable obstacles, she courageously faced them all, relying solely upon God for guidance.

Truly, *Borrowed Angel* is an inspiring book—one which will strengthen faith in God's providence; one which teaches self-effacement; one which shows that it is possible to live God's will.

Preface

NANCY Hamilton's life, even before birth, seemed destined for the cross.

A few months before she was born, her father was killed in an accident. Nancy came into the world with a rare and crippling disease with the frightening name of lymphohemangioma—a disease affecting the lymph glands and blood vessels, and deforming the body through swelling and misshapen limbs. This, along with other complications, was so rare, there was little hope for a cure.

For a while it was thought that a series of what the doctors called “whittling down” operations would counteract the painful swelling that had so disfigured Nancy’s legs and feet and her left hand. But, after forty operations, including the amputation of two fingers and both legs at the hips, medical science was at a loss. The disease continued to spread on through her frail little body until finally it snuffed out her life.

Although Nancy and I lived alone, we were often visited by my fun-loving mother and dad—or “Nana and Pa” as Nancy called them. My sisters, Sheila and Hazel, often stopped in with their families for happy visits too, so we were never really alone.

While Nancy was a patient at the St. John’s Catholic Hospital in Santa Monica, California, she began to study the Catholic faith—a faith she seemed to have been living since the day of her birth.

On her ninth birthday, Nancy was baptized at the Blessed Sacrament Catholic Church in Hollywood. The following morning she received First Communion in the little chapel at St. John’s Hospital. Two years later I received my First Communion in the faith that was to give us every answer in our sometimes puzzling life.

It was during Nancy's last stay in St. John's Hospital that the Nancy Hamilton Fund was organized in Santa Monica. There had been so many news stories in the papers about Nancy and her operations and her cheerful outlook on life, that people began to want to do something for her. So donations had poured into the local newspaper office for her post-hospital care. The donations came from school children, housewives, society women, businessmen, club groups, and many others. It was to be used for any medical care she would be needing. The Fund amounted to over eight thousand dollars in money, and uncountable wealth in heartfelt letters and prayers. After Nancy's death, the remainder of this Fund was donated to her beloved Camp Paivika for handicapped children.

It was during Nancy's stay in St. John's that the book, *Red Shoes for Nancy*, was written about her wonderful life up to her twelfth year. *Borrowed Angel* takes up Nancy's story where *Red Shoes for Nancy* left off.

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Borrowed Angel

A Prayer Helps

WHEN Nancy came out of St. John's Hospital, she was in a wheelchair. Her fortieth surgical operation had been the amputation of her leg.

The newsmen were waiting at the door to snap her picture as she came out. They knew they could depend on the smile they had photographed so many times.

Nancy didn't let them down.

I was taking Nancy to a home she had never seen before. We had been living in a third-floor walk-up apartment that we had endearingly named "Sky House" because it was so near to heaven.

But now that the disease that had followed Nancy all through her twelve years of life had cost her both legs, we had to live where a wheelchair could do the job her legs had once performed.

Inasmuch as our family consisted only of Nancy and me, it was not too difficult to find a place to live. I had rented a little apartment at the William Tell Motel in Santa Monica. Just a couple of blocks from our beloved St. John's Hospital, and an easy walk to the ocean.

Nancy loved the place from the first moment she saw it. It was a big motel—110 units, with a huge outdoor swimming pool. Our neighbors were all so friendly, I could see where Nancy would be a little busybody, scooting from one visit to another. Her favorite visiting place was down at the main office—especially in the evenings—where Virginia, the night manager, would let her work the switchboard and even answer some of the tourist's queries.

It had been a good move. Although we did miss our spacious Sky House apartment.

Despite the fact that our cottage was ground level, Nancy could

not manage to get in or out of the house alone. A single step on the little cement porch made this feat impossible. I had to give her a hoist up or down each time.

I noticed that Bruce, the day manager, kept watching us each time we came out or in. I thought this was just idle curiosity until one day we returned home from a visit. There at our doorstep was a bright new homemade wooden ramp. Now Nancy could scoot up and down at her own free will.

With so much surgery and "whittling down" of Nancy's body, one would think that the disease had been checked. But it persisted—spreading slowly up through her body until she gradually had to discard ready-made clothes for specially made full skirts to hide as best we could the swelling that was now attacking her abdomen. The disease had baffled the doctors in their many attempts through the years to help her. They were at a loss as to what to do next, other than to wait and see how it would affect her next.

Nancy, despite the fact that she was often in pain, completely ignored her physical ailments and lived each moment to the full, spreading the infectious happiness that was hers to anyone she met. We were anything but a family for sympathy!

We stayed at the motel for many months, Nancy gradually learning to get around with unbelievable agility. Her former home schoolteacher came once again to instruct her, and things went along as normally as they could.

One thing concerned me about Nancy spending so many hours in a wheelchair. How would she ever get any exercise?

I talked this problem over with the doctors and they agreed that swimming would be a wonderful exercise for her. But how could I ever get her in and out of the busy motel pool without attracting too much unwelcome attention?

God figured it out for us.

Quite by accident I learned of an apartment available at a large beach hotel. The use of a large indoor heated swimming pool was included in the low winter-rate rental.

I checked on this and learned that Nancy could go into the pool with me an hour before it opened every morning. There was a group of handicapped children already taking advantage of this arrangement.

So we moved into our two-room sixth-floor hotel apartment on a cold wet stormy day when the ocean looked gray and forbidding

from our windows and made us feel cozy and secure in our new home.

There was no kitchen in this apartment, but the management had put in a little hotplate and a refrigerator. That was enough for all the cooking I could do.

We could hardly wait to get down to the swimming pool. We wouldn't feel self-conscious if there were other crippled children there.

But we were to learn what would be repeated many times in the months to follow.

Although the children were crippled with polio, or accidents, or rickets, their bodies still maintained somewhat of a semblance to the human form.

Nancy was always the most shocking in a group.

I also learned something else that first day at the swimming pool.

I could make a big issue of it and refuse, from self-conscious pity, to take Nancy anywhere in public. Or I could completely ignore the physical for the spiritual charms that Nancy seemed to possess to abundance.

I did the latter, and we had many a wonderful morning, swimming and splashing and laughing in the warm beneficial water.

We loved our hotel home with its four windows facing right onto the ocean. We were only a stone's throw from the Santa Monica pier, so we could lie at night and watch the lights dancing in the water as we were lulled to sleep by the boom of the waves, so near our apartment.

We took many walks on the pier, at night when the fishermen used torches to see the fish darting through the deep green water, and in the daytime when the sun or the fog made walking in the ocean air so invigorating.

We bought two little glass-rod fishing poles, but didn't use any bait when we fished. We were sorry for the poor fish!

Fishing had its headaches. We never could go out and cast our lines like anyone else. There was always someone to give us advice and a helping hand. Many were surprised when, time and again, they would stop to see if we had caught anything, and would find all our hooks empty of bait. Then would come the instructions for bait tying.

We finally solved this problem by tying little wads of cotton on

each hook and telling our gullible helpers that it was special bait from a friend in India.

"Couldn't be so good," drawled one skeptic; "I ain't never seen you catch a danged thing in all the times you been out here!"

One excursion that thrilled Nancy beyond words was to walk along the beach esplanade to the amusement pier at Ocean Park. There she would spend her dimes for darts and games of limited skill that would net her a bevy of plaster prizes—all of which she passed around to her growing number of friends at the hotel.

On one trip to the pier, we stopped to read the billboards announcing the Lawrence Welk dances. Then one day we were fortunate enough to meet Alice Lon, the likable vocalist on Welk's program. Alice and Nancy took to each other instantly and became really good friends, each seeing in the other the goodness of God.

A few days before Christmas, we were surprised one evening by a group of Los Angeles postmen who came as bearers of goodwill and a turkey dinner from their buddies in the postal service. Everything was there—from a huge raw turkey to the making of a pumpkin pie.

It was a wonderful gesture, but it sort of backfired when a postman, balancing the huge box of turkey, asked which was the way to our kitchen.

The only kitchen we had was the hotplate hidden behind the sofa.

I did the best I could by saying that our kitchen was "out there"—pointing vaguely down the hall, and that he could just set the food on the bookcase.

Next day we drove down to Costa Mesa to share with Nana and Pa our scrumptious holiday dinner.

The days after Christmas seemed to drag. Cold, foggy days that made any inspiration an effort. We had been going several times a week to a prosthesis clinic in an effort to get Nancy on artificial legs, but progress was at a standstill.

It was a good time for a vacation from everything.

That's what God must have thought too.

We received an invitation from a friend to drive up to Lake Arrowhead to visit her.

I accepted readily, without stopping to think that this was snow season up there.

We started out with a few warm clothes, but no snow chains and no knowledge whatsoever of how to drive in a blizzard.

The farther we drove along the northbound highway, the colder it got. When we stopped at a Mexican café in San Bernardino at dusk, we were nearly frozen.

"If it gets any colder, I'm going to turn back," I said to Nancy, and then corrected myself when I saw the disappointment in her face. "I'm kidding!" I grinned and blew on my numb hands to warm them.

The hot spicy Mexican food warmed us up considerably. I didn't feel so doubtful now about continuing up the mountain.

A few miles out of San Bernardino, the road turned to wind up a steep mountain grade.

"This is the road we take to Camp Paivika!" Nancy sat up eagerly.

"Well, I bet it wasn't as cold as this on your camp trip or you'd have been ice skating instead of swimming in your pool."

"Do you think we'll see any snow?" Nancy asked excitedly.

I hadn't thought of snow. I guessed there would be some on the top of the mountains. Right now there was rain—big splashy drops that kept hitting the windshield like bullets. The road was a black, lonely one. In fact, we were the only travelers going either way—up or down. I wondered how much farther we had to go, and how I always managed to get into situations that others seemed to avoid.

We climbed the edge of the mountain for another few black miles, and then Nancy suddenly leaned forward and shouted,

"Look, Mom, snow!"

The huge raindrops had changed into great white snowflakes in front of us.

I slowed down. "Nancy, we can't go up there if it's snowing! How could I ever manage you and the wheelchair in a snowstorm?"

Nancy said nothing, but slumped back quietly against the seat. She had always wanted to see snow.

I drove a little farther, the roadway getting more slippery and skiddy with each turn of the wheels. We passed a lone car at the side of the road. The driver was putting tire chains on the back wheels. Just beyond him we came to a road sign: TIRE CHAINS REQUIRED. I drove to the first widening in the road and turned the car around.

"See, honey, it would be impossible to go any further," I explained.

Nancy didn't answer, and I knew that she was crying softly to herself in the dark.

"We might have tried to make it if we had had tire chains," I argued.

Minutes later we came to a dimly lit garage with a sign on the door: USED TIRE CHAINS FOR SALE.

I swung into the driveway and, just by coincidence, the mechanic had some chains to fit our little car.

Once again we headed up the black mountainside, the newly mounted chains going chunk! chunk! chunk! and pulling us back like a playful giant.

Nancy had sat up again to peer out the windshield in wide-eyed excitement.

"Thank you, Mom!" She laughed and flung her arms around my neck.

"Don't mention it," I grinned back. Her happiness was worth anything we might encounter—or so I thought.

We were really very comfortable in our little car. We had the heater on, we had added some antifreeze to the engine, and the tire chains were keeping us pretty well on our side of the road. I began to enjoy the beauty of the snow with Nancy.

By now the little white snow patches had changed to one solid white blanket. The snow-covered fir trees were like white angels beside the road.

The farther we drove, the deeper the snow got. Finally it obliterated all the road signs. I had doubtful moments wondering if we were on the right road, or if we were nearing the North Pole. The last sign we had been able to read had given the startling title RIM OF THE WORLD to our wondering eyes. We were indeed on top of the world. And all alone there too. Not a car had passed us in over two hours. I had Nancy flatten her nose against the side window to see if she could spot a sign of some kind. She found one, and called out so suddenly I slammed on the brakes and sent us in a half spin across the lonely road.

"There's a sign up on that little hill." She pointed back beside the road.

"That's a funny place to put a road sign," I said, but got out to investigate. The cold wet snow made a soggy mess of my light shoes as I felt my way back along the roadway. Nancy opened her window and, pointing and waving, directed me up the snowy wet slope of a six-foot hill. I found the sign and then wended my way back to the car, taking my soaked shoes off so that I could grip the foot pedals better.

"What did the sign say?" asked Nancy.

"It said: ONLY YOU CAN PREVENT FOREST FIRES. But I think we're on the right road. I saw some lights shining around the curve of the hill."

True. We were just outside of the picturesque little village of Lake Arrowhead.

We were lucky enough to find a hotel where we could drive almost in the front door. I had no trouble at all getting Nancy's wheelchair through the freshly fallen snow and into the lobby where an enormous log fire was waiting to greet us.

We would drive up to our friend's cabin in the daylight when I could better see where I was going.

We spent three glorious days with our friends. Their cabin was a dream come true. From the large living-room window we could look away down the fairy-tale white mountain slope to Lake Arrowhead, nestled like a sapphire in the beautiful valley.

Nancy made a snowman, had a snowball fight, rode down the mountain on a toboggan, and did everything else that an active youngster likes to do.

Our hostess invited us to stay as long as we wanted to, but I had an uncomfortable feeling that we should be on our way. I felt that all was not well at home.

On the drive down the mountain, I told my fears to Nancy. "I'm worried about Nana and Pa," I explained, "and I don't know why I should be. They were perfectly well when I phoned the other day."

Nancy looked ahead seriously and said, "I'll pray real hard for them." Then she made the sign of the cross.

I knew the minute I saw Nana that something was wrong. She was real glad, but surprised to see us.

"I thought you'd be gone a couple of weeks," she said, holding the screen door open for the wheelchair. "Pa was real sick, but he got better all of a sudden this morning."

Pa came out of his bedroom looking pale but waving and smiling to us.

"Sure, I'm okay now, kids."

And he was.

For several months we had left Bambi, our little Maltese dog, with Nana and Pa. Before that, he had been shunted off to the

boarding kennel so many times during Nancy's hospital stays, he was beginning to develop an inferiority complex.

Nana and Bambi had become so attached to one another, we didn't have the heart to take him back home with us—even though we wanted a dog so much.

Near Christmas time I got an unexpected check in the mail, so we decided to go dog shopping with our windfall. Nancy could have the new pup for a Christmas present.

We read the "Pets for Sale" column in the newspaper, then bought the first dog we went to see—a miniature black poodle puppy. She came home to the hotel in Nancy's arms, and I don't know which was happiest—dog or new dog owner.

Then came the ordeal of name choosing.

"It can't be just an ordinary name," mused Nancy, "because this isn't an ordinary dog."

She thought for several days, selecting first one name and then another. I offered a few suggestions, but finally gave up.

"You're going to have that poor poodle so confused with all the names you've been calling her, she's going to go off her trolley!" I said flatly.

Nancy, resting her chin on her hand, answered thoughtfully,

"I think I've got her name at last. I think I'm going to call her Tay."

"But you've got a people friend called Tay. She might take offense."

Nancy laughed.

"Poodles don't take offense! And anyway, she would be named Tay-the-poodle."

So Tay-the-poodle it was.

Hollywood

WE were driving home from Los Angeles one day when we happened to pass the crippled children's school that Nancy had gone to several years before.

"How would you like to stop in and say hello?" I asked.

Nancy thought it would be fun, so I pulled into the parking lot, put her in her wheelchair, and entered the main door. We were just in time to meet the school principal coming down the hall.

"Nancy!" she cried, and came hurrying toward us, arms outstretched in welcome.

Nothing would do but that Nancy stay the rest of the day and have lunch with her schoolmates. I was to go on about my business and return for her when school was over.

I had no business to go on about, but I went anyway because I knew what pleasure it would be for Nancy to be with her friends. Home teachers were good, but companionship was lacking in a lone classroom.

I wandered around Hollywood, amusing myself with many memories and even visiting the apartment we had lived in a few years before. It would be nice to live in Hollywood again.

When I returned for Nancy, I was met with a wonderful plan—why couldn't Nancy become a regular class member again? It would only involve our moving to Hollywood, and we really had no home ties at our hotel apartment, I was informed.

Inwardly I rebelled at another move, but seeing Nancy's eager face as she waited for my decision, I agreed. So it was arranged that Nancy would return to the classroom the following morning as a regular seventh-grade pupil. I would spend the time she was in school looking for a new home and getting settled. Simple, they thought. But they didn't take into consideration I would have to find a place that would accept a dog, that would be easily accessible for a wheelchair, and that would be in scope of our limited budget. Simple, they said.

It took me three days of searching before I found a place. Most

of the landlords balked at the dog, some asked if she was housebroken. That she was. She wouldn't go anyplace but in the house. Finally I found a nice one-bedroom apartment right in the center of Hollywood and just a mile or so from Nancy's school. Then started the endless carting and hauling of our belongings. The task was made simpler by Nancy being in school all day. I had only to drive her over to class, then drive back and forth all day with loads of our belongings until it was time to pick her up again after school. For two people who had admittedly detached themselves from worldly possessions, I didn't know where so many things came from—there seemed to be no end to the loading and hauling. But finally we were settled. Nancy thrived on the daily contact with people of her own age. And there was always something from the outside world to talk about at suppertime.

In spite of its being a crippled children's school, Nancy was the only double amputee. There was one girl, a pretty little curlyhead, who had lost one leg in an auto accident. I had learned that she was now being fitted for an artificial leg. I wondered how the news would affect Nancy, who was not able to use artificial legs, due to the painful, persistent swelling. Even a saint fresh from heaven might be envious in such a situation. I said nothing but waited for results.

Nancy came home beaming one day.

"You know Sandra, the little girl who lost her leg?" she asked.

I bit my lip and nodded.

"Well," Nancy continued, "she came to school today wearing her new leg. Everybody tried not to notice it, but I told her it looked real nice so's she wouldn't be so embarrassed about it."

O Lord, Nancy had so much more than legs! Thank You.

Each morning I would drive Nancy to school, then be there in the afternoon to pick her up. This sort of set her off from the gang in a way. Most of them rode chattering home on the yellow school busses.

How wise the principal was to sense this! She came over to me one afternoon and said that she had arranged to have Nancy picked up by one of the bus drivers. "I don't know how they'll manage to lift her in and out of the bus, but they'll do it!" She smiled. "After all, half the fun of coming to school is to ride with your classmates."

So Nancy would wait at the front of the apartment house every morning, then the two of us—the bus driver and myself, would

form a handseat and lift her from the wheelchair onto the front seat where she would be fastened securely with a seatbelt.

There would be a wheelchair waiting at the school grounds for her. And one of the bus drivers to help get her into it.

Every afternoon I would take Nancy's wheelchair to the busy corner and wait to see the bright yellow bus come bouncing along Wilcox Avenue with its precious load of passengers.

Nancy had many things to tell about her school life and her classmates. One evening at supper she said, "Remember that little redheaded girl in our class? Well, this morning she had a heart attack. She just leaned her head down on her desk, and we were all quiet and prayed until the nurse came and helped her. Marybelle made the sign of the cross because she is a Catholic. And then I did too. Not because Marybelle did, but because I knew that God would want me to."

Another time she said, "When I first went to school, I used to just start right in eating at lunchtime without making the sign of the cross or even saying grace out loud. But after a while I said it like I always do, and now everyone at our table waits to say grace before they start to eat."

There was one girl that Nancy liked in particular. A girl a few years older than herself, and much more active in many ways. One day, in an uncharitable mood, I said to Nancy, "I don't know why you chose that particular girl for your special friend. She seems—well, so noisy and loud."

Nancy looked away thoughtfully as she answered, "I want to be real nice to her because she is only going to live until she is sixteen, and she's fourteen now."

I was shamed into speechlessness.

I surprised Nancy one day after school. I drove over to meet her and told her that we were going to take a little drive into the Hollywood hills. "The country looks so pretty today, maybe we can find a place to have a picnic supper," I suggested.

Nancy was all for it.

We took the road from Griffith Park up toward the Observatory. "Maybe we can even go in and take a look at the moon!" I planned as I drove into the spacious parking grounds and got Nancy and Tay ready to walk around the Observatory grounds. But our plans turned to momentary disappointment. The building entrance was filled with trucks and trailers and cars and people.

"Looks like they're making a movie," I said to Nancy.

One of the workmen overheard me and came to give some information.

"They're filming a sequence of *Rebel without a Cause*," he said. "That new star, James Dean, is the lead in it—that's his car." He pointed to a tiny white sport car beside us. "He sure is proud of it!"

The car looked like an undersized marshmallow on wheels.

"Who's James Dean?" I whispered to Nancy as we started to leave.

She shook her head and shrugged her shoulders.

The workman beckoned to us. "Would you like to come up closer and watch them?"

I would much rather have taken a walk along a country path, but we followed our gracious guide as he led us through the maze of movie material and up to the very steps of the Observatory.

"There's Jimmy Dean over there," he whispered, and pointed.

Our eyes followed his finger and saw a boyish-looking figure reclining in a canvas chair. He was with a group of people awaiting camera cues, but seemed alone in the crowd. He sat quietly, face turned to the skies for the full benefit of the afternoon sun.

We stood quietly watching as the cameras rolled and several scenes were shot. A woman came over to pet Tay and to tell us about her little dogs. She was very friendly and very attractive. We learned that she was the mother of Natalie Wood.

The director yelled "Cut!" and the silent spectators began to relax and to converse. A young girl, one of the actresses in the picture, came skipping over to talk to Nancy and to pet Tay.

She stood for a while with us, her back to the Observatory. "Don't mind if Jimmy Dean doesn't come over and talk to you," she apologized. "He always gets into the mood of the picture he's making—and this is a gloomy one!"

I was a bit edgy because all the time she was talking, Jimmy Dean had been standing in back of her waiting to talk to Nancy.

The girl finally turned, and gave a little start when she saw Jimmy. We all laughed.

Jimmy leaned over and shook hands seriously with Nancy. Then he came over and shook hands with me, looking straight into my eyes in the most unusual, compassionate way.

We stood talking awhile about such things as dogs and parakeets. Jimmy told Nancy about his little pet parakeet and smiled as he said, "I've tried everything to make him talk, but he won't."

When we had said good-by and gone back to our car, I could see that Nancy was still up in the clouds.

"Oh, Mom, isn't he *wonderful*!" she sighed. "If I could choose anybody on earth for my husband, I would choose Jimmy Dean—he says so much without talking!"

Nana came up for a few days visit with us. She was always so much fun, and so youthful in her ways, we loved to have her with us. She brought all of her best clothes and we "did the town"—going to the Farmer's Market, to Cinerama (we lived directly in back of the big theater sign, so Nancy always pronounced it Aamarenic), to the Brown Derby restaurant, and anywhere else we could think of. We even went window shopping along the Sunset Strip.

We stopped one afternoon in front of a travel bureau display of European tours, and I mentioned to Nana, "Wouldn't it be wonderful if I could take Nancy to visit the Shrine at Lourdes?"

Nana looked at me thoughtfully and said nothing. It was as though she was making a mental note of it to tell God about some day.

Nana, when she got all dressed up, looked more like my sister than my mother. I many times wondered how she could stay so youthful and happy with all the hidden disappointments she had had in her life. And all the insecurity. Pa and the three of us children—my sisters Hazel and Sheila and myself—were always planning to do so many great things for her when we became a success in a worldly way. But whenever any of us needed consolation or a couple of bucks, we always ran to Nana.

It was good that she valued our love, and not our material attributes.

Each morning we attended Mass at our neighborhood church. Nana, though she was not a Catholic, would go with us, sitting quietly observing and absorbing the movements of the Mass to the best of her ability.

Nancy and I were the only ones in our family who had chosen the Catholic faith as our own. Our decision had met with approval with each family member. A religion that could do as much for anyone as it was doing for Nancy and me must be a good one. The family heartily sanctioned our choice and stuck to their own. We had several religions in a family gathering, but they never clashed—and we never discussed them. We lived them.

One day, sitting in church and watching Nana, I thought to myself, "Someday I'm going to ask her if she wants to take instructions in our faith." But there would be plenty of time. Now, just the fact that she attended Mass with us was enough.

During Nana's visit, she and Nancy shared our bedroom and I slept on the living-room couch. I would lie there, far into the night, listening to the stifled giggles and sudden outbursts of laughter. They were like two children on a holiday.

One night I heard Nancy's voice, "Nana, your feet are away over here on my side of the bed!"

Then I heard Nana's Scottish brogue, "Well, they're pretty nice when you get to know them!"

I thought they would wake the neighbors with the ensuing laughter.

Another time Nana and Nancy disappeared into the bedroom and shut the door. I heard much muffled laughter, then the record player grinding out the "Hawaiian War Chant." The two of them came wriggling in a hula dance into the living room, dressed in makeshift Hawaiian costumes, to gyrate around the room while I sat and howled. They even had an old feather boa wound around Bambi's middle and he was dancing to free himself from it.

No wonder we loved Nana so much.

School closed for summer vacation a few days before Nancy's thirteenth birthday. It was a time when the family seemed to be scattered all over the country. Sheila and her new husband Mac were traveling in the East, Hazel and her family were living at an air base in Arizona, and Nana and Pa were looking for a place to live in Riverside. Nancy and I would have to spend her birthday alone.

We decided to take Tay and drive out to the San Fernando Mission in the valley. There we could have a picnic in the park and make a tour of the mission itself. It was the best thing we could think of to do.

It was a sunny, hot day and really beautiful in the peaceful valley. The children so often found racing through a park were not there today. We had the place to ourselves to wander quietly through the memory gardens and read the signs of historic interest. We stopped to rest beside the fountain and statue of Father Serra when suddenly a swoop of children came running into the park. They saw Nancy and stopped in open-mouthed wonder to

stare at her. Then one asked what must have been a heartbreaking and constant question to Nancy: "What happened to your legs?"

I wanted to wheel her away quickly, but Nancy motioned the children to gather around her. They obeyed dutifully, and she started talking to them, putting an arm around one youngster who was leaning against her chair.

"I was traveling away over on the east side of Africa," began Nancy, her eyes twinkling, "when all of a sudden a big lion came running at me. So I hopped into my solid-gold airplane and started to come home across the ocean. But my plane ran out of gas and dumped me on an island where a big giant came out of his cave and—chewed my legs right off!"

The children stood transfixed while I quietly backed Nancy's wheelchair out of the wondering group.

We stayed at the mission until sundown, going to visit the various historic rooms and to read of the battles and struggles of people of another era. We stopped in the quaint little hand-decorated chapel, then out in the cemetery to read the names of the priests who were buried there. Yesterdays and today folded into one as we relived the story of the Padres.

On the way home Nancy looked a little glum. I finally asked why, and if she had enjoyed the birthday day.

"It was a wonderful day," she reassured me. "Only I was thinking, I didn't have any birthday cake."

I stopped at the first super-market and surprised her with a little white layer cake and some candles.

"It's too bad your mother isn't clever as well as beautiful," I joked, "then you'd have had a cake personally baked by me."

"No! No! Not that torture!" Nancy dramatized by putting her clasped hands to her bosom.

That evening she wore the new voile dress that Nana had made for her out of an old one of Sheila's. Nana had added a clever ruffle at the waist to help camouflage the swelling in Nancy's abdomen.

The day after Nancy's birthday, I received a letter from her doctor. He was now located at the beautiful new hospital in Westwood and wanted her to come in for a series of tests and examinations, to begin in a few weeks.

Nancy's medical expenses, throughout her life, must have been stupendous. I never knew. The care was given through several

channels. We received aid from the State Aid for needy children and from the hospital clinic funds. The doctors, too, would often donate their time and skill in an effort to help. We were indeed fortunate. She couldn't have had better care if she had been born to a millionaire.

I was so relieved that Nancy took the transfer from her beloved St. John's Hospital to this new Westwood one without a murmur. She had once told me, sitting up in bed after one of her operations, that she was sure she could never go to another hospital other than St. John's. "This is just like my home," she had said fondly as she looked around the pretty room.

I read the doctor's letter over carefully.

"It looks like these tests and hospital visits are going to take plenty of time—not to mention the fact that you might even be a bed patient there. Maybe we'd better move nearer the hospital."

"If we move *again*, you'd better just tie strings on our things and drag them along when we go from place to place," Nancy suggested.

But move we did. The very next week.

We were driving along Wilshire Boulevard one afternoon when we saw a cute little brown cottage for rent. It was only partly furnished, but it was just two blocks from the Westwood Hospital.

We took one look at it and paid a month's rent.

Little Brown Cottage

GETTING settled in our little cottage was fun. It was the first time Nancy and I had had a real home of our own. I found that there were many extra tasks to be done. For instance, mowing the lawn, erecting the television aerial, putting up drapes—but the tasks only made the place homier.

The cottage faced Wilshire Boulevard, on a corner that was busy night and day with commuters waiting on benches for busses to Los Angeles. It was interesting to us to sit on our front porch and watch the traffic stream past as we relaxed in our home security.

The television aerial was quite a feat to accomplish. I had to nail a long pole to the roof, string the wire on it, then get it over the sloped roof to the front window. We sat and debated the best way to do this. Finally I decided to tie a big rock on the wire and fling it over the roof to the front yard. The scheme worked wonderfully. The rock, tied to the wire, sailed over the roof and disappeared on the other side. I ran around to finish the job.

The wire was hanging there all right, but the rock was gone.

Nancy, who had been sitting on the front porch waiting, beckoned wide-eyed to me.

"Mom," she whispered, "you almost conked that man waiting for the bus. A big rock came sailing over the roof and landed right at his feet. He sure did jump! What were you doing anyway?"

I thanked God it had been a miss instead of a hit and went quickly into the house until the bus had picked up its startled passenger.

Our beds, too, proved somewhat of a problem. The cottage was too small for regular couches, so we bought a set of bunk beds at an

army outlet store. The bunks looked real good until we got them home and tried to set them up. They must have seen the worst of many wars. The lower one was fine, but the upper one lurched and swayed like a young sapling in the wind. It seemed strong enough, what with the enormous bolts I had fastened it with. But it had seen its best days and wobbled accordingly. Nevertheless, it was the only place I had to sleep, so, after Nancy was settled for the night, I crawled up to my precarious perch. Neither of us slept much that night. I got seasick, and Nancy said she lay the entire night expecting me to drop down and join her any moment.

It was lucky that Hazel and her husband Nick stopped by shortly after that. Nick bolted the bunk beds to the wall and we used them without fear for the rest of our stay in our cottage. We fixed the lower bunk up like a train for Nancy, with bookshelves, radio, place for her dinner tray, and everything. Many days she stayed right in her little retreat, and the relaxation was good for what was to follow soon.

The little private patio, too, was wonderful. We got some tin ham cans from the refuse can of a nearby restaurant, punched holes in them and nailed them around the fence for candle holders. They gave out a beautiful flecked glow when we lit the candles at night and had our supper outside.

We put up a homemade shrine of Mary, and got a rubber wading pool for Nancy. We were so private in our little backyard, she could splash to her heart's content in a flimsy figure-revealing old bathing suit of mine. Tay loved these swimming parties. She would dash over for a slurp of water from the pool, then race round and round the patio, barking to her heart's content. There was no one within hearing distance to annoy. In our little country cottage in the midst of stylish Westwood, we were like two sparrows in a nest of peacocks.

From our front porch, we could look up the street to the hospital that was to be Nancy's help or heartache. Time would tell.

We still had about a week before our appointment there, so we enjoyed it to the full.

But time has a way of slipping past. The doctors were ready to see what they could do for Nancy. We kept our early morning appointment at the medical clinic. Nancy was examined thoroughly, then we were given an appointment for the x-ray clinic. This was to be thorough, from the looks of the instructions we were to follow. Nancy was to have a light supper, then nothing to eat

again until after the appointment the following day. No breakfast, no nothing but castor oil.

She was ready and willing to oblige.

I felt like a heel the following morning, sitting eating my breakfast while Nancy waited unfed. But, I had argued with myself, I needed the physical strength to get us both through the ordeal that lay ahead.

A few minutes before eight, we were at the x-ray reception room, ready for whatever was to come.

We didn't have long to wait. We were ushered to the dressing room for Nancy to don a split-back gown, then into the x-ray room where she was given a big glass of what looked like a vanilla milkshake.

She drained the glass without a murmur, then made a wry face.

"That was just like drinking melted chalk!" She wiped her coated lips.

"I know, honey," the nurse smiled, "barium is awful."

Nancy was shifted from her chair to the big black x-ray table. As usual, I had to do the lifting because I was the only one—through experience—who knew the best way to handle her.

The nurse brought a chair and set it in a corner of the room for me. "You'd better stay in here," she said to me. "Nancy will probably be on and off the table all morning."

She switched off the light and went out of the room, leaving us waiting in a darkness illuminated only by a tiny red light in the ceiling.

The doctor, wearing a heavy black rubber apron and big black rubber gloves, came into the room and greeted Nancy as though he knew her. I couldn't recognize him because I couldn't see him very well in the inadequate glow from the red light.

The examination began.

Nancy was told to lie still and hold her breath. Machines buzzed and clicked and rubber-aproned figures moved busily around the x-ray table. Hours or years passed, I couldn't tell which. My body grew numb with inactivity, yet I couldn't leave. The moment I would get up to go out would be the moment the doctor would want to ask me something, or to have Nancy lifted.

At last the nurse came in, switched on the regular lights and said, "All done, Nancy. Doctor has ordered some lunch sent down for you."

As she spoke, a boy entered carrying a tray of food. We ate like two starved people. It was past one o'clock.

We were not to learn the results of the examinations for about a week. We tried to live as normally as we could during the waiting period, Nancy amusing herself by working on a book she was writing. She called it "Ernest the Non-Great Monkey," and sat every day typing the manuscript.

I kept busy with art-work assignments and tried to keep the budget balanced by working late into the nights. Our little cottage, with its extra utility bills, was more costly than our apartment homes. I talked this over with a friend one evening, saying maybe there was something I could sell as a sideline. Nancy sat listening attentively as she played with Tay.

It was several weeks later that a package arrived, addressed to Miss Nancy Hamilton. It was from a dress manufacturer in the East.

I looked at it curiously and handed it to her.

"Must be some mistake," I said as she grabbed it and smiled to herself.

No mistake.

She tore the package open and proudly showed me its contents. Several of the ugliest gray and dun-colored aprons I had ever seen.

"I ordered these because I'm going out and sell them and make some money for you!" she beamed.

It took quite a bit of tact not to hurt her feelings and to manage to rewrap the aprons and return them from whence they came.

A hospital secretary phoned one afternoon to tell us to report the following morning to hear the results of all of Nancy's tests.

It was an appointment I didn't look forward to.

We were to see a doctor new to us. He was well acquainted with Nancy's case history, and was very kind as he sat the next morning and talked to me.

But his kindness didn't ease the blow any.

They still had not found anything definite that medical science could do to help Nancy, or to stop the swelling.

"There is one plan that we have been considering," the doctor said slowly. "It's to perform a hysterectomy. We couldn't guarantee that it would help Nancy any, but it just might stop the spread of this unusual condition. Such an operation, of course, would mean that she could never bear children."

I listened numbly with my heart in heaven for support to get through, thanked the doctor, and wondered how I could ever explain the decision to Nancy.

Nancy was waiting in the reception room, helping the desk clerk file some papers while the girl chattered about her new boy friend and her plans for the future.

I waited until we got home, and then said as casually as I could, "Well, they think perhaps another operation——"

That was no news to Nancy. She shrugged unconcernedly.

I felt conscience-bound to explain further.

"This one would be the kind they usually do to grown women. It's called a hysterectomy. . . . It would mean that you could never have any children of your own."

Nancy straightened up abruptly and said emphatically, "No! I won't do it! I won't have that kind of an operation! I want to get married and have children!"

It was the first time in her life she had not gone along fully and completely with any treatment the doctor had suggested.

It was getting near camping time. I didn't know whether it would be possible for Nancy to go this year as she had every summer. Double amputees are considered quite handicapped, even in a camp for crippled children.

Well, there was no harm in asking.

We drove down to the Crippled Children's Society headquarters one day, and were informed that Nancy would be more than welcome at the mountain camp.

"She handles herself so well, we never have any trouble with her," the counselor smiled.

So packing preparations were begun.

Nancy would be up at Camp Paivika for almost two weeks. She would return the day after my birthday.

"I'm sorry about that, Mom," she said. "But we can have an *after-birthday* party for you."

I told her not to worry about it.

"Nana and Pa want us to go down and visit them awhile. We'll celebrate down there."

The day for camp arrived. I drove Nancy to the Crippled Children's headquarters and helped the bus driver lift her into the big bus, then tried not to worry about how she was going to get off the

bus at camp. I had been assured that she would be well taken care of. It was my part now to let go of her—mentally as well as physically.

I did the best I could for the next ten days, being reassured by her letters from camp that she was having a wonderful time. One letter described a dance party . . . "One boy danced with me," she wrote, "and he made me seasick, he swung my chair around so fast. He held onto the handles and that's the way we danced. He wanted to have a second dance, but I told him I would rather sit that one out with him. So now he thinks I'm in love with him, but I'm not."

What a difference, I thought, this grown-up letter from the ones of last year in which she had described, in scrawled pencil, her nature studies and her fun in the swimming pool. This letter was like one from an adult. Yes, Nancy was growing up.

Then camp vacation time was over and it was the day for me to drive down and meet the homecoming bus.

I stood back and let all the children with braces and crutches get off the bus before I climbed in to help Nancy from the front seat.

She looked as if she had been hit in the mouth by a tomato. "I was trying to put my lipstick on while we were driving around the mountain," she explained as she threw her arms around my neck and transferred half the gooey lipstick to my cheek.

I had good news for her. We had some passes for the Dale and Roy Rogers Rodeo show to be held in the Los Angeles Coliseum the following day.

"Let's drive by the Coliseum on the way home," I suggested, "and see where our seats are, and how best to get your wheelchair to them tomorrow."

We drove down Figueroa Street to the immense oval structure. Each entrance led upward in a flight of steps. I left Nancy in the car while I checked our section, then climbed up a flight of the steps. Our tickets were for two seats right at the ringside. I stood, tickets in hand, looking down the dizzying descent of steps and tried to picture a wheelchair bumping down them. I couldn't. So I returned to the car.

"There must be an easier way to get to those seats," I theorized to Nancy.

We drove around to the performer's entrance and I showed our tickets to an official-looking man.

"Sure, you can come right in this way tomorrow," he said pointing to the wide arena entrance.

We were to go in the same way the bulls and the horses and the cowboys entered the show.

"I'd hate to get there late," I mused to Nancy on the way home; "we might go riding in on a Brahma bull!"

We arrived over an hour early the next day. In spite of that, the huge coliseum was over half filled with colorfully dressed spectators, their varicolored clothes making a rainbow in the sunshine.

I wheeled Nancy down the now busy ramp, past cowpunchers and frisky ponies and out into the arena. It's a good thing we had fairly conquered self-consciousness by now. An official paraded us around the ring like the beginning act of the show. Our seats were right beside the judging stand and almost within reaching-out distance to the exciting parades and races that followed. We enjoyed ourselves immensely, especially when Dale and Roy, with the Sons of the Pioneers, stood in the middle of the arena and sang the songs we loved so well.

When we got home, a surprise was waiting for us. My sister Sheila and her husband had arrived from New York and were waiting at the cottage for us.

"I don't know why we came home so soon," said Sheila. "Mac should have stayed in the East, but I just wanted to get home to visit Nana and Pa for a while. So Mac is going to attend to some business here in town while I go down to Costa Mesa for a few days."

We said that we would be there in a day or so for a good old family reunion.

Home Call

*M*_Y after-birthday party was to be held at Nana and Pa's little apartment in Costa Mesa. Sheila phoned us to say that they were expecting us for an early dinner. It was going to be ham, in my honor.

Nancy and I were in a gay mood as we drove into the dried-grass yard and were greeted by our waiting family, all lined up beside the clothes pole like a welcoming committee. Even little Bambi was excited, barking his welcome to Tay. We could smell the ham cooking in the sunny kitchen.

We had not been there for more than an hour when Nana, who had been unusually quiet, said that she had better lie down for a while.

For Nana to go to bed in the daytime was something really unusual. She was the strength of each of us. Many a time she had cared for us in our minor ailments, when all the time she had been suffering with some ache far greater than our own. To see Nana go into her bedroom and shut the door put a damper on all our spirits.

Sheila went into the kitchen to take over the unfinished preparations for my birthday dinner. Nancy and Pa disappeared into his room to talk of many things. I tried to amuse myself by looking through a scrapbook of home ideas that Nana had been keeping for years. She never was envious of home owners, but hoped that some day she could have a wee hoose in the hills to call her own. The dogs raced after each other around the dining table, their barking the only noise in a house grown suddenly too quiet.

By dinnertime Nana still did not feel well enough to join us.

"I must have picked up a little flu bug—it's nothing," she assured us.

We tried as best we could to enjoy the fancy meal. There was

even a birthday cake with my name and "Good Luck" on it that Nana had decorated.

That evening I suggested to Sheila that we run down to the swank drugstore at Newport Beach and get Nana a bottle of Scotch whisky. "I think a hot toddy will fix her up," I said none too cheerfully.

Before going, I stopped to change into my new blue denim slacks that my sister Hazel had sent me from Arizona.

"Let's take Tay—she's such a fancy dog, and it's such a fancy drugstore," I laughed, and swooped Tay up in my arms.

The drugstore was packed with the high-society yachting crowd from the harbor. They surely must have seen poodle dogs before. But Tay was attracting so much attention as she watched everyone from the shelter of my arms, it made me uncomfortably self-conscious.

We passed the soda fountain and all heads turned to look after us and grin. It was the same at the liquor counter and all back through the aisles of the store. Everyone was smiling at us.

As I leaned over to put Tay in the car, I said to Sheila, "Tay sure did attract attention in there!"

"Tay nothing," she answered. "Your fancy new slacks are split from beam to beam. You'd better hurry up and get in the car."

I didn't need a second prompting.

Nana thanked us for the whisky, but declined any. She just wanted to rest. "I'll be all right in the morning," she smiled in her usual way.

But next morning Nana was worse.

The flu, or whatever it was, was certainly making her sick. She stayed in bed for several days, with Sheila hovering near her like an angel nurse night and day. Nana had an aversion to doctors, so we kept putting off calling one. But finally we had to.

He told us that it was probably a virus that had been going around, and that Nana would be herself again in a week or so.

I had left some unfinished business in Hollywood, so decided to drive home overnight and attend to it. Nancy was to stay with Sheila and Pa and do what she could do to help.

I phoned from Hollywood the next morning and learned that Nana was about the same. Nancy talked to me and told me that she was being real good, and had even baked a cake that morning.

There seemed to be nothing to worry about.

A few hours later Sheila phoned.

"You'd better come as quick as you can," she said, making an effort at calmness. "Nana is much worse. We've called an ambulance to take her to a hospital."

The fifty-mile drive to Costa Mesa seemed like five thousand. I tried to hurry, but got entangled in the vacation-bound traffic and had to crawl behind it.

I arrived at Nana and Pa's home just as a big tan ambulance drove into the yard.

Nana was in a coma, her taut features unrecognizable.

The white-clad young men had her quickly and gently onto a stretcher and into the ambulance before I could find my voice for questions.

They were taking Nana to a county hospital eighteen miles away.

Pa rode with the ambulance driver. Sheila sat beside Nana, and Nancy and I hurried to our car to follow them.

It grew dark enough to turn on the lights as we sped through the unfamiliar countryside to a hospital we had never seen.

At the ambulance entrance, I left Nancy in the car while I followed the wheeled stretcher down the gloomy basement hallway. A young nurse, turning to look over her shoulder at Nana, called into the emergency clinic, "Here comes another one! This three-day holiday is going to be a dilly!"

The stretcher was wheeled into a curtained cubicle and Nana was transferred to a narrow hospital wheeled stretcher. She lay, eyes open but unseeing, as we waited for the doctor. She couldn't move or control her face.

I found her unresponsive hand and held it while I prayed as I have never prayed before.

After what seemed a long time, a young doctor came in, examined Nana briefly, then told us to wait with her in the hall.

He would order a space for her in the women's ward.

We followed the wheeled stretcher into the hall and stood while many others, too grief-stricken with their own hospital business to notice us, crowded together on the row of wooden benches.

Sheila went out to the car to be with Nancy. Pa stood silently beside me and waited.

At last an intern came and wheeled the wheeled stretcher to the elevator. We followed down the darkened hall to a large ward where women peered through the darkness to see who was coming in.

It was a relief to get Nana off the wheeled stretcher and into the smooth white bed. She still gave no sign of knowing where she was.

We stood beside the bed a while, hoping Nana would recognize us and smile. Pa looked ready to drop from nervous exhaustion. I came to a decision and insisted that he follow it. He was to drive home with Nancy and Sheila, get some rest, then come back in the morning. There was not much any of us could do right now, I argued, and if I needed them I would phone.

Pa finally agreed and went dazedly out to tell Sheila and Nancy.

I found a chair and set it as close to Nana's bed as it would go, then sat down and tried to believe the things that had happened.

I had been sitting for about an hour in the dark room when a nurse came bustling in, saw me, and gave a little surprised start.

"Visiting hours are over," she said sternly.

"But I'm going to stay here all night," I explained.

The nurse shook her head. "It's against the rules. Unless the doctor advises it. Your mother is not on the critical list."

I wondered where I could go, now that the car was gone. The hospital, in the black of night, seemed to be surrounded by endless barren fields and nothing else.

"Is there someone I could see about staying?" I asked meekly.

God must have come to the county hospital, the nurse's manner changed so quickly. She gave me the name of her supervisor and told me to go over to the office and ask permission to stay. "But it's never been done before, so good luck to you." She hurried away to answer a call and I found my way to the stairway.

I had to go out of the hospital building and cross a roadway to a little office building. I stopped a moment for a little talk with God before I opened the swinging door.

The supervisor was so nice, she gave her permission immediately, even adding, "Don't worry now, your mother is going to be all right."

I thanked her and went out into the starlit night.

"Thank You, God," I said looking to the sky. "That was almost a miracle . . . but now, how about a *real* miracle?"

I didn't know exactly what I wanted the miracle to be, but I had the feeling that God was smiling to me and following me back into the hospital.

I tiptoed into the ward and saw that a young man and an elderly one had come in. They were standing at the corner bed beside Nana's. The woman patient, I had noticed, had been breath-

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ing in a heavy rasping sort of way. I pulled the thin cloth curtain along the wire to give the family more privacy. The woman was going to die.

The breathing got quieter, then suddenly stopped. I heard stifled sobs, then silence as the men moved out into the hallway.

What an abrupt death. What faith it would take, in an experience like that, to believe in life everlasting.

I began to wish dreadfully for the comfort of a priest. For a rosary, or a crucifix. We had come so suddenly, I had nothing with me. This was a county hospital, where people of many creeds came in their suffering. A Catholic would have to come prepared, or with enough faith to get through.

Time ticked away as I sat in the darkness. Nana had not moved, and seemed to be scarcely breathing. If only we had been more prepared for this! If only I had taken more time to see if she really was interested in the religion Nancy and I had chosen. Each time she had gone to Mass with us, Nana had been keenly observant and mentioned many times her love for the dignity of our church. She had often told me about a friend she had had as a girl—a Catholic who, as Nana related it, “would hurry to her church instead of home if she had need of consolation or help. A religion like that must have something to it,” Nana would surmise.

And yet, I had done nothing to promote Nana’s devotion. I had been afraid of hurting the other members of the family. They had as much right to want Nana in their church as we wanted her in ours.

“If only I had talked it over with a priest,” I reprimanded myself. “If only I could talk to a priest now——”

Through the stillness of the hospital night I heard a man’s questioning voice. Then I heard a nurse answer, “No, this is not the place.”

Something made me get up and tiptoe to the door and look out into the hallway.

There stood a Catholic priest.

I must have startled him, the way I came bounding out of the dark room. He stepped back, then came forward to see what I wanted.

“Could you come in and see my mother?” I whispered eagerly, pointing to the darkened ward.

He spoke with a distinct Spanish accent.

“I have a hurry call, and I’ve come to the wrong place, but I will

come back afterwards—in about an hour,” he assured me with a compassionate smile and a sturdy handshake.

I returned to Nana with new lightness in my heart. In the dimness of the room, I could just make out her features. Her face was still contorted and expressionless. I leaned over and stroked her forehead.

“Nana, I’ve been talking to a priest.” I knew that she was hearing me. “He is coming in to see you soon. Would you like to be baptized into the Catholic faith?”

Nana turned her head slowly, looked into my face—and grinned!

“Yes,” she whispered, and pressed her hand ever so lightly against mine.

I couldn’t stop the tears then.

God had sent my miracle.

As promised, the priest returned and gave Nana his blessing. She was aware now of everything that was going on. Her eyes had lost the glassiness. She watched the priest intently, with a sense of peace that was overwhelming.

I told the priest that Nana had expressed the desire to be baptized, and could he do it right then?

He asked a few questions, and then said that he was willing.

As we waited for the nurse to get someone to act as godmother, the priest began to make preparations.

“Where is she from?” he asked, stooping to open his briefcase.

“From Scotland,” I said fondly.

“Scotland!” He stood upright in his surprise, then explained, “I mean where does she live—what parish is she from?”

This time I gave the correct information.

A nurse came in and gave her name as the godmother, and Nana was received into the faith that had done so much for Nancy and me.

“I will stop by tomorrow afternoon,” whispered the kindly priest. “I am here for only a few days while the regular priest is on retreat. That’s why I got in the wrong place tonight.”

“That’s what you think,” I wanted to say but didn’t.

It’s hard to explain the change that had come over Nana. Although she was still unable to move or to speak more than one word, I knew that she was conscious of everything I said or did. I spent the rest of the night with my head on her pillow, talking of memories and future plans. I kept her hand in mine because she

wanted it that way. I told her how much I had wanted to be a big success so that I could buy her a little home in the country. Nana said "Oh," and frowned and put my hand up to her cheek to console me in my failure. As with Nancy, I found that much passed between us from heart to heart. There was no need for lip words.

Toward the morning Nana whispered "My legs," and I moved them up for her. She had been lying many hours without being able to move them herself.

The blackness outside the hospital windows gradually turned to gray, and then to morning light. The hospital took on its noisy activity, and I stood up to stretch my cramped body. Nana's eyes followed me, she even managed a wee smile when I told her I was going out to get some coffee at the vending machine.

It was good I had gone out into the hall. I ran into a somewhat disheveled looking young priest. He was hurrying down the hall, but I cornered him.

"Could you come with me a moment?" I asked.

Without answering except for a nod, he turned and followed me to Nana's bedside.

I leaned over. "How are you, Nana?"

Nana moved her dry lips. "Fine," she whispered with some effort.

I turned to the priest. "Could my mother receive Extreme Unction from you?"

Without realizing it, the priest frowned and ran his fingers through his black hair.

"Extreme Unction! On a first Friday and there are two hospitals waiting——"

"Well, don't let me detain you!" I said quite huffily, and was shocked at my own rudeness—to a priest! One does strange things in desperation.

The priest had set his briefcase down and was stooping to look at Nana. "I don't know if I can give her Communion—I don't know about her confession——"

Then suddenly, he couldn't have changed more if an angel had flown down and sat on the bed before him. He became as humble and gracious as he had formerly been rushed and distant. He took Nana's hand gently in his and stood looking thoughtfully down at her. Then he turned to put on his vestments.

I walked away as he sat beside Nana and asked her some questions. Questions to which Nana could respond only by a nod or a feeble reply. But it was enough.

The priest was going to give her First Communion!

I knelt beside the bed while Nana received the Host—just a tiny fragment of it which she was able to take to her heart.

Then she received the last rites. The priest administering while I, ignoring all convention, leaned over Nana and explained to her. As the priest anointed her eyes, I whispered, "That's so you'll be able to see God, Nana." He anointed her lips while I whispered, "Now you can say 'hello' to our Lord."

I doubt that the willing priest had ever performed such last rites before. But, thanks to God, he had the grace to see that my efforts and my love were sincere.

He seemed in no grand rush now to get to the many awaiting him, but stayed to give me his blessing and to make the sign of the cross over Nana. He actually seemed to grow in stature as he grew in holiness before my eyes. God knows His own, I thought as I thanked him and said good-by.

It wasn't imagination. Nana became so peaceful and serene after the experience, the attitude of everyone in the hospital overwhelmed me. Nana, instead of being referred to as "that patient in bed number three" became "Little St. Nana." They couldn't do enough for her.

It was about nine o'clock when the hospital doctor assigned to Nana's case came into the room. He looked very youthful, but very efficient.

After checking her over, he asked me a few questions, then ordered an oxygen tent and many complicated instruments and scientific machines. It was hard to realize that this was a county hospital and we had arrived as an unknown charity case.

Before they put Nana in the oxygen tent, I slipped my miraculous medal around her neck and explained what I was doing. Nana gave a tiny smile and a nod. She knew and understood.

It had been only a few weeks before that Nancy and Nana had sat reading the story of the miraculous medal, and Nana had told me that I must be sure to read it because it was so beautiful.

The day became unbearably hot. I went into the little rest room and put wet paper towels on my swollen feet while the doctor and nurses worked with Nana. When I got back, the doctor shook his head and said, "She's a critically sick woman—but we'll see what we can do." Then he stood a moment looking down at her. "She's

a sweetheart," he said quietly, and picked up his medical kit.

I went down the hall to phone the folks. Sheila answered and said that Hazel and her nine-year-old boy Brian were on the way from Arizona. Hazel would come directly to the hospital and stay with Nana while I went home for a rest. I asked to talk to Nancy. For some reason, I thought it best not to mention Nana's baptism to the family until I had more time for explanation.

But I could hardly wait to tell Nancy.

I heard the familiar "Hello?" and answered immediately, "Guess what, Nancy? Nana was baptized a Catholic last night, and this morning she received Holy Communion and Extreme Unction!"

Nancy gave a loud squeal. "Oh, Mom, isn't that *wonderful*!"

I told her not to say anything about it, then added, "Maybe you'd better tell Pa. But let me tell the rest of the family."

She agreed that was best.

The doctor stopped me in the hall to tell me that the tests showed Nana to be suffering from a very bad heart condition and diabetes.

"We'll do all we can," he said kindly.

For the next four days, Hazel, Sheila, and I alternated as Nana's private nurse at the hospital while Pa kept house and tried to keep the kids and the dogs out of mischief.

Nana didn't improve.

On the fifth day I took Nancy with me to stay with Nana. She was right at home around the hospital, visiting one ward after another and talking to everyone.

We had brought a lunch because there was no place to buy food near the hospital. Nancy sat in the garden and shared her picnic with the patients. Later, I looked out the window and saw a line of wheelchairs with the occupants all sitting quietly looking up toward our window. They were praying with Nancy for Nana.

It was a long day. Nana lay quietly without asking or expecting any more from us. Late that afternoon I asked, "How are you, Nana?" and once again she smiled a wee bit and answered, "Fine."

But she wasn't.

The doctor had told me that she probably wouldn't live through the night.

At dusk Nancy came in to sit quietly at one side of the bed while I stood at the other. She put her hand in Nana's as she softly recited the rosary. When she had finished, she came over to me and whispered, "Nana got so *beautiful* while I was praying for her!"

I knew it was time to call the family.

I phoned, and Pa answered.

"I think you'd better all come over, Pa. I believe Nana may go to heaven tonight."

Pa answered as calmly as he could, "We'll be right there, honey."

Hurried footsteps down the hall brought the family, still unbelieving but knowing.

As sick as Nana was, none of us had expected her to die. Death is like that.

"We would have been here sooner," whispered Hazel, "but Brian got his lip caught in the zipper of his jacket."

We stood, holding each other's hands and saying our own personal prayers as twilight faded into darkness.

Someone tapped me on the shoulder, and I turned to see the priest.

He motioned me to follow him to the porch where he answered the unspoken question that had been tormenting Nancy and me all day.

"I guess your mother is going to join our Lord," he began. "I stopped by to tell you not to worry about any arrangements your family might make. You don't have to be concerned about her body—God has her soul." Then he added, "I had so many calls to make tonight, but something made me drive away out here to reassure you."

He stopped in to give Nana his blessing and then went on his way, little realizing the comfort he had brought to us.

I stood at Nana's bed again and looked out at the sky. A tiny golden star seemed to be getting born. It was blinking in rhythm to Nana's faint breathing. As it grew brighter, Nana's breathing became weaker.

Then it shone out bright and steady in the heavens.

I knelt beside the bed and made the sign of the cross.

Nana had gone home.

Manna from Heaven

WE had an unusual invitation for Thanksgiving. One we accepted readily.

We were invited to have dinner at the Monastery of the Angels, and afterward to meet the cloistered nuns.

"And, Nancy," Reverend Mother had written in her invitation, "we are looking forward to hearing you sing 'Old Kentucky Home' for us!"

We had moved back to the motel in Santa Monica because the cottage had proved too expensive. Bambi had come home to live with us again.

We left the two little dogs yelping at the window of our apartment as we drove out the driveway early Thanksgiving day.

"I see what they mean by a dog's life," said Nancy. "They always get left behind."

"Not *always*," I reminded her.

The drive to the monastery was a beautiful one. We arrived in time to have a nice chat with Reverend Mother before we were ushered into the priest's dining room. There the two of us were served a dinner fit for an epicure.

After dinner we were escorted up to the pleasant recreation room where the cloistered nuns sat waiting to greet us.

Talking to them was easy, because they made us feel so important. They listened in rapt attention as we told of our adventures, or laughed like happy angels when we told a funny story.

Then Reverend Mother announced, "And now I believe that Nancy is going to sing for us."

Doubtfully, I held my breath. No need to. Nancy was going to sing. She was perfectly at ease.

In her clear little voice, with just a touch of shyness, she began to sing "Old Kentucky Home." As assurance grew, she sat up straighter and sang loud enough for all the spellbound nuns to hear.

Nancy had a nice singing voice. She couldn't carry a tune very well, but her tone quality was unusual. Sort of plaintive. It revealed much of the hidden cross she managed to mask behind her smile and her happy speaking voice.

"Old Kentucky Home" was the sad sort of song that fitted her voice very well.

There was much applause when she finished.

Then Reverend Mother stood up to say, "And now we have a surprise for you, Nancy. Our little French sister will sing her native song for you."

The piano boomed out the national anthem of France as a dark-eyed sister stood to sing of home and memories.

It seemed strange, hearing the rousing "Marseillaise" sung in a Hollywood cloister.

Everyone was sorry when our visit came to an end. The nuns sat watching us depart as they threw kisses to Nancy.

One of them called after us, "What do you want to be when you grow up, Nancy?"

Nancy turned in her wheelchair. "I want to be one of three things—either the mother of seven children, a night-club dancer, or a cloistered nun!"

We left amid peels of laughter.

It was shortly after Thanksgiving that an idea began to form—an idea that was to take us halfway around the world.

Nancy and I were reading in bed late one night when the phone rang. I picked up the receiver, and a friend greeted me apologetically:

"I hate to call at such a late hour," she began, "but I *had* to tell you about an article I've been reading! It's about Lourdes. Have you got this month's *Reader's Digest*? I think you should read it."

I found the magazine and read the article aloud. It told of the famous Shrine of the Virgin Mary in southern France.

"That's odd," I remarked, closing the magazine thoughtfully. "I've had Lourdes on my mind so *much* lately. First a cloistered nun sings us the national anthem of France, and then Dotty calls us in the middle of the night to tell us about the Shrine!"

"Maybe it means that we should go over there," Nancy said casually.

"Sure—halfway around the world with a wheelchair and seven dollars," I answered sarcastically.

Nancy ignored my sarcasm as always.

"Maybe God wants us to go for all those who want to go and can't," she said quietly. "We could take their prayers to the Shrine for them."

"And exactly how do we get across the ocean?" I continued in sarcasm, "With our bank balance, we couldn't even get to Azusa—or maybe you intend to put water skis on the wheelchair and skid across the Atlantic?" I was trying to be funny now.

Nancy ignored the remark as she counted the days on the calendar, her crooked little forefinger pointing and calculating.

"Wouldn't it be nice if we could get there for Our Lady of Lourdes day? That's about two months from now."

"Wouldn't it be nice to fly to the moon?" I asked, and turned out the light.

But darkness didn't silence Nancy. She was in a talkative mood.

"Wouldn't it be wonderful to be where the Mother of God appeared on earth?" she asked across the darkened room.

"Um-hum," I answered, not a bit too enthusiastically. "I've heard they have wonderful miracle cures there—would you be expecting a miracle, Nancy?"

No answer. I thought Nancy hadn't heard. Then her voice came softly through the darkness,

"Just to be able to visit the Shrine would be a miracle to me."

I wondered how I could move heaven and earth to make that desire possible.

Nancy always liked to bring Christmas into our home with the beginning of December. So we became Christmas tree conscious a few days after the month began. Though the holiday was weeks away, we went out tree shopping. Nancy liked a *big* tree that she could sit beneath and look up at all the glittery baubles. But for the past couple of years, our homes had been so tiny, we had to make the tree tiny too. This year was no exception. We got one about three feet high.

As always, we chose an old-fashioned fir tree because, as Nancy said, "It smelled like Christmas." We had given all our tree trimmings away in our many movings, so we had to start from scratch. I

wanted so much to take Nancy into the dime store and let her go hog wild, but I had to keep one eye on the wallet and one on her selections.

We did pretty well—even managing a little crib scene and a set of tree lights.

"Next year I'm going to have bubble lights on the tree," remarked Nancy as we chose the cheaper, plainer ones.

When she wasn't looking I bought one bubble light to surprise her.

Maybe next year—that was for God to decide.

Nancy trimmed the tree all by herself. She did a remarkably good job, despite the fact that the wheelchair somewhat hampered her movements. Bambi and Tay sat watching, not knowing whether the tree was for them or for Nancy.

When it was finished, I set it atop our bookcase and we both stood to admire it. The one bubble light danced gayly on its green branch. The white angel on the topmost branch looked down and smiled. We couldn't have had a prettier tree if it had been trimmed by Santa himself.

Nancy sat with hands clasped and eyes shining.

"I love Christmas!" She sighed happily.

"I guess you love everything." I patted her on the head. "I'm sorry the tree had to be so little. Maybe next year——"

"It's perfect!" Nancy answered, and took her two little dogs up, one on each side of the wheelchair seat to admire the fairyland tree with her.

We had the tree about five days, lighting it every night and enjoying the presence of Christmas. Then one night we had some visitors. They had driven from a nearby town in their old car to bring Nancy a box of homemade oatmeal cookies.

They admired the tree and the way Nancy had trimmed it. They listened as she named the figures of the tiny crib scene at the base of the tree.

"Have you got your tree yet?" Nancy asked when the Christmas scene had been admired to the full.

I was sorry she had asked that question. So was Nancy after the woman replied, "We're not going to be able to do much in way of celebration this Christmas."

They had had so much illness and financial reverses, they were scarcely making ends meet.

The evening progressed, and the tree was quite forgotten, until it was time for the visitors to leave.

As they were putting on their wraps, Nancy signaled for me to come into the kitchen for a whispered conference.

I came back into the living room rubbing my chin in a thoughtful way, then did as Nancy had asked me to do. I picked up the little Christmas tree, trimmings and all, and took it out the front door to place it in the back seat of our friends' old car.

It took them a few minutes to grasp what I was doing, then they began to remonstrate loudly.

Nancy only wriggled in her wheelchair and laughed. "You *must* accept it—it's a gift!" Then she motioned for me to take the crib scene and carry it out to the car too.

The friends drove away, too overwhelmed to say thank you, the tree and trimmings bobbing gayly in the back seat.

I came in and shut the door.

"I only hope you don't decide to give *me* away some day," was all I could say.

Nancy didn't answer. She was busy trying to wrap up a Spanish guitar that she wanted to give Pa for Christmas.

The guitar had been a gift to Nancy while she was in the hospital the year before. She could play it quite well, playing it left-handed because of the two finger amputations on her left hand. She was really adept at picking out the chords as she sang along with the strumming.

Nancy had kept the guitar beside her in the hospital. She had the use of a private phone at that time, so she put two and two together. She would sit in bed and practice a song, then phone some friend and give a telephone serenade.

One of our friends had recently been talking about this to me. She had been to the hospital to visit Nancy, and had been concerned with the look of pain and suffering that Nancy was trying so unsuccessfully to hide at the time.

"I couldn't help thinking how brave she was," said Aida, "to be sitting there smiling and talking to me when I knew the pain was so bad.

"I wasn't home more than half an hour from the visit when Nancy phoned me, saying she wanted me to hear a song she had been practicing. When I heard that sweet little voice singing 'You Are My Sunshine,' I tell you, I just sat there and bawled."

Nancy continued to play her guitar after she came home from

the hospital, and even took a few lessons. But after a while we had to put the guitar away. Her left hand had become too swollen to hold the pick properly.

It was another stab of the fear that was tormenting me . . . the unchecked swelling that was creeping slowly but surely through Nancy's entire body.

For some unknown reason we had managed to budget our finances so well during December, we had a little to spare. I was counting it over, about a week before Christmas, when an idea struck me.

"Nancy." I drummed the table and looked at the two extra five-dollar bills. "How would you like to spend a night in a hotel in Los Angeles? It wouldn't be a fancy one, but we could go out and see all the Christmas stores and do a lot of window shopping."

Nancy was delighted with the idea. We started right then and there to make plans.

That afternoon one of the local newspaper executives phoned. I wondered what he could be wanting when he asked if I could run down to his office for a few minutes.

I was there within half an hour. He smiled in his own pleasure as he handed me a check.

"We thought Nancy should have a little something for Christmas," he grinned. "Spend it on something for her."

"I know exactly what we're going to do with this!" I said as I thanked him. "We're going to go down to Los Angeles and stay in a hotel for a couple of days. . . . Nancy loves the Christmas excitement so much."

I could hardly wait to get home to tell Nancy.

We decided to go that very weekend.

"I'd like to go to a little out-of-the-way hotel where nobody knows us." I started planning. I had such a desire to have Nancy all to myself this Christmas.

We were busy packing when a phone call knocked all our plans into a cocked hat. The newspaper executive was phoning to tell us that it had all been arranged. Nancy and I were to be the guests of the Statler Hotel in Los Angeles. They were expecting us that very afternoon.

We were welcomed like royalty at the bustling city hotel, a bell-boy escorting us to a beautiful suite on the fourteenth floor. The room was filled with flowers and fruit and gifts and welcome cards.

I sat down and tried to figure out why God had singled us out for so many wonderful happenings. It was too much for me.

But Nancy had taken it in her stride and analyzed the situation by saying, "Sometimes we have to receive to give the gift of giving."

We strolled through the lobby later that afternoon, looking in all the exotic gift shops and watching the busy city people.

We saw posters announcing the Terrace Room dinner and floor show. Nancy wanted very much to go that night, but thirteen seemed a little too young . . . and it must be very expensive. To her disappointment, I told her that we would have dinner in the Coffee Shop.

We had no sooner returned to our room than the hotel manager phoned to ask if we would be his guests for dinner in the Terrace Room.

No miracle would surprise me now—but I *did* wonder how God managed to think of everything!

It took us the rest of the afternoon to dress for the occasion. I was so thankful that I had brought along my best dress. Nancy even had a white fur jacket that Sheila had picked up at a rummage sale for her.

We entered the candlelit Terrace Room in style. Our table was the first by the rail above the stage. We would be practically a part of the floor show which was to begin in an hour. We had plenty of time to try to eat the fancy food which we were too excited to swallow.

A tuxedoed man at the table opposite us kept looking over at us. I hoped he wasn't criticizing Nancy's youthfulness, though she looked tonight like a college debutante!

Later I discovered why he had been so attentive. A page boy came in to deliver an enormous Christmas flower arrangement to Nancy, with the compliments and admiration of our neighbor. We smiled our thank you across to him, and he grinned in his goodness for the rest of the evening.

The headline performer was Roberta Linn, a pretty and talented singer. The comic was a good-looking fellow named Bobby Sargent.

Roberta did several song and dance numbers, then Bobby came onto the stage and had everyone in stitches with his comical antics. Nancy watched him intently, and I could see that boy-friend blues had hit again. She was really smitten!

After the show the headwaiter came and asked if we would like to take a tour of the fabulous hotel kitchens. So we followed him

through the maze of salad kitchens, meat departments, bakeries, freezers, and dessert sections. It was all very interesting, but not half as interesting as the part Nancy had discovered: the dressing rooms for the floor show performers.

When the tour ended and our host had been thanked, Nancy begged to return to the dressing-room section so that she could wait at the entrance and meet Bobby Sargent.

At first I protested emphatically, then thought, "She's a teenager—no wonder she's an idolizer."

We returned to the section of the kitchens that led to the dressing rooms.

"Only one thing, Nancy," I insisted, "I'm not going to wait here like a nut. When I see Bobby coming out, I'm going to duck behind one of these posts. You'll have to talk to him yourself."

That suited Nancy fine.

We didn't have long to wait. It was between shows time. Bobby suddenly popped out of a dressing-room door, and I popped behind a post.

I saw him lean over and listen to Nancy as she talked—none too shyly, to her new heart-throb. They talked for quite a while, then Bobby shook hands with her. Then he leaned over and gave her a kiss on the cheek.

Nancy wouldn't wash that side of her face for over a week.

In our hotel room, Nancy relived each word Bobby had said to her, adding as an afterthought, "He has a television show, and he wants me to be on it Christmas night. He's going to call us next week to tell us more about it."

A phone message was waiting for us. Could we be in the lobby at nine the next morning? The newsmen wanted some pictures and a story of Nancy.

"Oh me, here we go again—smack into the limelight!" I sighed as I turned out the light and we lay listening to the dreamy music that came out of a tiny speaker in the wall.

There was a large group of newsmen waiting for us the next morning. They wanted pictures of Nancy looking at the fancily wrapped empty gift boxes under the tall metal Christmas tree in the lobby.

As usual, Nancy posed and smiled while I stayed in the background as much as possible. I didn't know what type of story they

were wanting for their newspapers, and I didn't want to influence them. I let Nancy do the talking while I sat on a couch and waited for the familiar ordeal to be over.

A reporter came over and sat down beside me. Notebook in hand, he began, "Nancy says you're going to Lourdes."

"Are we?" I thought, but managed to say, "We hope to."

"When do you plan to go?"

Oh, these needle-pointed questions . . . We planned to go when God or a miracle made it possible.

To the reporter I said, "Nancy would like to be there on Our Lady of Lourdes day—February eleventh."

"In all those blizzards!"

Even for a reporter, he looked startled.

That afternoon we saw the picture and story of Nancy in the newspaper, but didn't think much about it one way or the other. It told about a little girl who had come to see the bright lights of a city at Christmas—probably for the last time.

We stayed for three glorious days at the hotel, and then stopped at the kennel on the way home to pick up Bambi and Tay. How glad they were to see us!

How nice it was to get back to our simple little motel home.

Toward the middle of the week Bobby Sargent phoned to tell me about his television show, and to ask if I could bring Nancy down as his guest on Christmas night. The program was called "Life Is What You Make It," and featured people who had made a success of living, despite handicaps.

I told him that we would be glad to be there. If I hadn't Nancy would have exploded—she was that much in love with Bobby.

Christmas morning we went to Mass at St. Monica's Church and then, as on so many other Yule holidays, drove out to San Fernando Valley to spend the day with the Roy Rogers family at their ranch in Chatsworth.

We had met the Rogers family when we were living in Hollywood. Their home at that time had been just a few blocks from ours. The Rogers children, playing in their front yard, had struck up a friendship with Nancy—a friendship that was to last over the years, and to bless us with neighborly acquaintance with one of the most wonderful families I have ever known.

The weather this Christmas was not very nice. A cold gray

drizzle had dampened everything but our spirits as we drove out toward the Rogers Ranch in Chatsworth. The usually beautiful hills and fields surrounding the ranch house looked cold and uninviting today.

I drove up to the back door and took Nancy into the house through the dining room. The house was overflowing with the happiness that is Christmas. The children had received bikes and were trying them out around the driveways.

With a wave to Dale, busy in the kitchen, I walked across the dining room and pushed open the door to the living room. Then I stood in shocked surprise. The only thing in the room was one big bare light bulb. The place had been stripped from ceiling to floor. Charred rafters told the story of the fire I had forgotten about.

A neglected Christmas decoration candle, I recalled having heard in a radio newscast, had set the Rogers home afire less than a week before. The damage had been confined to the living room—and here I saw the tragic results.

I shut the door quickly and pretended not to have noticed. No one was saying anything about the tragedy.

We drifted into the family activity. Nancy scooted off with her chum, Linda Rogers, to tell her about her new boy friend Bobby. Linda and Nancy were about the same age, and had become close companions.

I went into the kitchen to see what an undomestic person like myself could do to help with the dinner preparations.

Time passed all too quickly, and it was soon the hour to get together for the blessing and the old-fashioned Christmas feast.

Grownups and kids trailed after Roy as he walked into the large den where trays had been set out in readiness for the dinner.

We all stood with hands folded while Roy talked to God. As he was finishing, he added, "And about that fire, Lord—thank you for leaving us so much of our home to live in."

Dale gave her blessing, then we all filed into the dining room to the buffet-style dinner.

We stayed at the Rogers' until it got dark. We were planning to drive from Chatsworth over the new Freeway into Hollywood to Bobby's TV program. It would go on the air rather late, but everyone at the Rogers' had promised to wait up and watch it. They wanted to see what we looked like on television.

"We're just guests," I explained. "I don't think we're going to be on the program."

But we were.

Bobby had arranged to come down from the stage to Nancy's wheelchair in the audience. Here he told of his admiration for her courage and cheerfulness. Then he added that she had told him she hoped to make a trip to Lourdes, to visit the Shrine of Our Lady. He handed her a large golden trophy with her name on it, and an envelope that contained a check that was to be the start of our fund for our journey. Then he leaned over and kissed her on the cheek.

Nancy thrilled at the trophy and the check—but what she prized most was the kiss on the cheek.

After the broadcast, we went with the cast of the show to Nickodell's restaurant for a snack. Nancy sat beside Bobby—or rather, on a pink cloud, and looked as happy as I've ever seen her.

It was after midnight when we walked to the parking lot, but Nancy was wide awake. She made me stop on the sidewalk under a street lamp to see the gift that Bobby had given her. It was a tiny pink rosary in a gold pin-on case that even had her name on it.

"Bobby engraved that himself. And he's a Catholic. I'm so glad!"

What a lucky little girl she was to receive so much so often—and to have the grace to really appreciate it.

On the way home I did some thinking.

Nancy had never actually asked for anything. She had the unshakable faith to know that what was for her she would receive. It was all in God's plan.

Like her wee dog Bambi. She had not said, "I wish I could have a little white dog!" She had been only five years old at the time. She had pinned a picture of a little white dog on the hospital wall beside her bed, and had said simply, "Now God can see the kind of dog I want. If He wants me to have it—He'll send my dog to me." And he had! Bambi had come to us like a miracle, the gift of some unknown friend.

I thought now about this Lourdes trip. It had been more or less of a whim, or wishful thinking my mind . . . until God and Nancy had begun to make it look like a reality.

Nancy had once said in her casually candid way, "If you know that God wants you to do something, you have to take the first

step out of the boat into the deep water to show that you're willing and you trust Him—then He sends the water wings."

Maybe I should have the faith to know that if we were supposed to go to Lourdes, the way would be opened for us. Maybe the money would pour down out of heaven. That would be the only way I could see for such a miracle to materialize.

We had left the bright lights of the city, and were nearing our home in Santa Monica. We were the only ones on the darkened Wilshire Boulevard. I had not been paying much attention to anything in particular, but suddenly I slowed the car down and looked at Nancy.

"Did you see that piece of paper fluttering on the road?"

Nancy shook her head.

"It looked like *money*!" I laughed as I drove on. Then I slowed down again, made a U turn, and tried to locate the spot where I had seen the piece of paper. I got out of the car and looked up and down the empty boulevard. Then I saw it again—a little piece of paper fluttering along the road as though it had wings. I scurried after it and picked it up.

It was a ten-dollar bill.

Miracles Do Happen

FOR many days following the brief television appearance, we were deluged with mail. People wrote sending us a dollar, five dollars . . . but mostly they sent prayers. And requests for prayers.

"If this Lourdes plan doesn't do any more than make people more prayer-conscious, you will have accomplished a great deal," I said to Nancy as we sat trying to answer each of the letters. She thought so too.

Nancy was a great help in acknowledging all the mail we had been receiving through the years. We had traveled around so much and met so many people who had kept in touch with us, most of the time our home looked like a miniature post office. Nancy had a portable typewriter and could type as well as I—which wasn't saying much; we were both hunt-and-peckers. But she managed to answer as many of the letters as I did.

She sat looking through the letters one morning. There were several bits of money in the mail. She looked at me with a sly grin. "Most of this money they're sending will go for postage to thank everybody!"

As the days progressed, Nancy's wish to go to Lourdes became more and more of a reality. Money began to pour in our front door. It came from people in every walk in life—and every religion. It was given with such genuine warmth, I couldn't refuse it, though sometimes I wondered if it was right for so many people to be so good to us so many times in our life.

Everyone was getting so much pleasure in anticipating the happiness and spiritual fulfillment the trip would bring to Nancy.

Los Angeles really poured out its heart to us.

Secretaries would stop by in their employers' Cadillacs to leave a check and a prayer; various clubs and organizations throughout the city gave luncheons and teas to gather donations. A waitress, still in uniform, stopped by one night with the donations from those she worked with.

No one seemed to think that Nancy's desire to visit the Shrine of Our Lady was a foolish idea. Many, it is true, thought that she was going with the hope of a miraculous physical cure.

One elderly man came all the way from Los Angeles on the bus to visit us. He sat for a long time, asking us the exact fare to Lourdes, the exact time it would take to get there, and the price of meals and hotel accommodations over there—most of the things we did not know ourselves. When he stood up to go, he said, "Well, I've had a good look at Nancy. I'll come back when you come home and see just what those baths over there can do. If she's cured, I think I'll take a trip over there myself—rheumatism's pretty bad."

We promised to pray for him. He needed prayers.

By the middle of January we had half of the money we would need if we were going to make the journey. I had long since decided I'd better stop being overwhelmed about events and get down to business.

I got in touch with Nancy's doctor, and he gave his sanction for the trip . . . if we flew over. The boat trip in such rough weather would be too strenuous, he thought.

I wondered what he thought about the trip itself, whether he thought I was doing a foolish thing. He was not a Catholic, but then, neither were so many who were working so hard to make Nancy's trip possible.

It was unbelievable that every wish of Nancy's could be granted. I didn't see how we could possibly manage to get over to Lourdes by the eleventh of February. I had checked with a travel agency and learned that to go by plane from Los Angeles would take three days. Two to Paris, then one day on the train to Lourdes.

We had a little over three weeks to get everything together, including passports, health certificates . . . and the rest of the fare.

I did what I could and left the rest up to God.

We were going out to a party one afternoon, but this was one time Nancy wasn't too anxious to go. Bambi, our wee white dog,

had suddenly become very ill. He was at the veterinarian's, where he had been for several days.

About a week before, we had noticed that, though he looked as cute as ever, he had difficulty in eating. And in standing up. His legs turned to rubber when I took him out of his little wicker basket and stood him up in the yard. He kept getting worse until finally he couldn't stand up at all—just lay in his basket, wagging his tail and barking happily to us. The only thing he wanted to eat was ice cream, which Nancy fed him from her fingers. We had to decide that it was best for him to go to the veterinarian's. We took him to the same doctor who had found him for us the dreadful time he had been lost.

The doctor had taken one look at Bambi and put his hand on Nancy's shoulder as he said, "Better let him rest here a few days. It looks like a brain tumor."

We had left Bambi there in his basket, wagging his tail and barking happily after his departing young mistress. Maybe he knew he was about to go to his dog heaven.

Each day Nancy had phoned to learn that Bambi was neither better nor worse. He was just lying in his basket resting.

We had canceled all appointments so that we would be home if the doctor phoned.

But this party was different. It had been planned weeks ahead in our honor.

I was getting the car ready when I heard the phone ring. Nancy answered it, then called to me, "It's Dr. Snow. He wants to talk to you about Bambi."

As I had guessed, wee Bambi had died. I thought it best to keep the news from Nancy until we got home from the party, but she had guessed.

"Is Bambi dead?"

She had asked so quietly, I could hardly hear. I nodded and put my arm around her as she had a good cry, then told her that we didn't have to go to the party now if she didn't want to. She wiped her eyes quickly and said, "We can't disappoint Helen when she's invited us—I'm okay."

That night Nancy sat with pencil and pad, writing, then scratching out words, then writing again. Pretty soon she wheeled over to her typewriter and typed the following poem, which she handed to me without a word.

Talking is hard when tears are so close.

A LITTLE WHITE DOGGIE NAMED BAMBI

*A little white doggie named Bambi
Oh how happy he is now,
A little white doggie named Bambi
Before his Master he'll bow.*

*A little white doggie named Bambi
With his wee little tongue of red,
A little white doggie named Bambi
He has a blue velvet bed.*

*A little white doggie named Bambi
Now in heaven with Nana,
A little white doggie named Bambi
Ache any more he canna'.*

*A little white doggie named Bambi
His Nana one day wanted him,
A little white doggie named Bambi
While sitting under an orange blossom limb.*

*A little white doggie named Bambi
A little dog-angel he is,
A little white doggie named Bambi
Eating his ice-cream fizz.*

*A little white doggie named Bambi
Oh how happy he is now,
A little white doggie named Bambi
Before his Master he'll bow.*

As the people continued to shower us with their prayers, and with their donations—and even with warm clothing for the trip—I began making our plans more definite.

Tay-the-poodle, it was arranged, could stay with Sheila and Mac at their apartment in Los Angeles. We would keep our motel apartment, because we didn't know how long we would be away, or where we could find a better place to live when we came back. The freedom from packing and storing our things would more than make up the expense of it.

I phoned one airline to ask about taking a wheelchair aboard and learned that it was permissible if the occupant could walk up the steps to the plane. Insurance did not cover lifting chair

and rider. That was out. The next airline was more obliging. They were sure that I could find someone at the airport to help me carry the passenger aboard.

There seemed to be so much planning and timing and chartering to my inexperienced travel mind, I decided to go to a travel agency and let them schedule our trip. It was a wise decision. We met Marion, a travel consultant who took over all the confusing details for me, even to giving me a carton of cigarettes to take to the priest at Lourdes. They would be a rare treat, she informed me.

Marion, we learned, was a recent widow with four children, two of them teen-age girls. She was a staunch Catholic and eager to have us make the journey.

"Know what we'll do the day that you leave?" she asked. "We'll have all the school children start a nine-day novena to follow you right to the Shrine!"

It was a comforting thought.

Marion arranged everything, writing down and figuring out the time changes and the approximate expense of the trip.

I looked at the expense column sadly. We didn't have enough money to go.

"You'd have to leave the day after tomorrow if you wanted to get to the Shrine for Our Lady of Lourdes day," she said helplessly. Then added, "We'll just have to pray harder!"

A few days later a French priest friend of ours phoned to learn how plans were progressing. I told him that we were not going to be able to get to Lourdes on the day that Nancy had hoped.

"But that's all right," Father's French accent broadened in assurance. "You can still go and be there in the *octave* of Our Lady of Lourdes day—that will be the same as arriving on her special day!"

I thanked Father, and he promised to say some extra prayers for us.

I sat down to read the paper and the news jumped out at me: FRANCE SUFFERS FROM THE COLDEST WEATHER IN HUNDRED YEARS.

It was foolish, this whim of ours to visit a shrine where the Mother of God had appeared. Even the weather was against it.

I pulled back the window curtain and stared out into the court. The rain was coming down in torrents and splashing up from the window sill. It wasn't a day of cheeriness, either outside or in.

I got up and opened the card table to fix our late breakfast.

We'd have hot chocolate and buttered toast. I couldn't be bothered fixing eggs.

We no sooner sat down to eat than someone came pounding on the door. It was Carolyn, one of Nancy's wonderful nurse friends. She had brought a stranger with her, an elderly, rather shy man. He came in and sat down on the couch after taking his wet coat off. Carolyn stayed a few minutes to say that she was on her way to do an errand, and would return for the man she had introduced as "Mr. Angel." She hurried out the door before I could protest.

It took all my powers of graciousness to entertain our uninvited guest. He seemed a nice enough person, but today of all days—everything was going wrong.

Nancy asked our guest if he would like a cup of coffee. I went into the kitchen and made a cup of instant coffee, feeling ashamed that I had not thought of it myself.

Mr. Angel thanked me profusely.

What a nice man he was, and what an attractive, shy smile he had! I lost some of my aloofness and began to talk to him in a more interested way.

He talked of his early days on the railroad and we were fascinated with the adventure stories he told. He had become more at ease now, and told us that he had followed the story of Nancy for many years, and had every news clipping that was ever printed of her!

I tried to cover my earlier unfriendliness by being oversolicitous. He ignored both moods in genuine friendliness.

We learned that he was a daily communicant and that he had offered many of his communions for Nancy.

The visit had been so interesting, we could hardly believe that Carolyn had been on an hour's errand and had returned for Mr. Angel.

We hated to see him put on his coat to go. In fact, we both kissed him and told him to come back real soon.

"I'll do that." He smiled as he put on his hat and placed a little package before Nancy at the table.

She glanced at it as she followed him to the door, calling after him,

"Thank you for the package, and be sure to come back as soon as you can!"

I went into the kitchen to warm the cocoa and Nancy returned to the table to open the package.

"Mom! Come quick!" She called.

I hurried in to find her sitting with the opened package in her lap . . . enough money to assure our trip to Lourdes!

No wonder Carolyn had called our visitor Mr. Angel.

That afternoon I phoned Marion and told her to go ahead with the plans for the plane trip. We could leave any time.

Flight Begins

MARION was to meet us at the Los Angeles International Airport. We were scheduled for the nine o'clock flight on the Super Constellation nonstop trip to New York.

"Don't get any fancy ideas, though," she had laughed over the phone; "you're going tourist on this de luxe ship. They have special seats for the people with the tourist tickets."

We would have been glad to go baggage, we were so anxious to get started.

What a lot of last-minute scurrying around and farewells! Virginia pinned an orchid corsage on Nancy's new white coat and gave her a hasty kiss. Sheila and Mac loaded our baggage in their car. Pa climbed in the back seat of the Nash and we were on our way.

We couldn't have chosen a prettier night. The moon was round and clear, the white moon clouds looked as if they were saying, "Come on up and join us!"

We drove through the agricultural suburbs and on toward the blue-green lights of the big airport. Several times my heart skipped a beat as I thought, "In just a little while now, all this family help will be standing on the ground, and I'll be up in the air with the full responsibility of Nancy." It wasn't too frightening, because I had such a strong feeling that God and all His angels would be traveling with us.

We pulled up at the TWA entrance at the airport and saw Marion and her eldest daughter waiting for us.

Mac was there too, and had our luggage unloaded. He was standing knee-deep in it.

"I don't know how the heck you're going to manage all this baggage and the wheelchair," he said, shaking his head.

Marion was already taking over the situation. She had brought

a blue denim duffel bag and was shoving as much of our luggage and as many of our gifts into it as she could.

It was an improvement. Now I had only the metal stool, the wheelchair, Nancy, my purse, the briefcase, and the duffel bag to handle. It would be easy.

We made quite a procession as we trooped into the waiting room.

Here were many surprises.

We were greeted by a cheer from a crowd of our friends who had gathered to see us off. Marion went bustling off and soon returned with a very official-looking man. He escorted us to a private room where we were to wait in style for the plane to be announced.

Several reporters were there waiting for us. Pictures were taken of Nancy and me smiling to each other—which was easy to do, because we were both so happy.

More corsages and gifts and friends arrived. The party grew more and more hilarious as take-off time approached. The official-looking man came in to see our tickets, then told us that the crew had gotten together and donated a first-class seat to us for the trip to New York!

Someone grabbed me by the arm and propelled me out of the farewelling crowd and up a flight of stairs to the executive club. Sheila was following close behind me. We had a cocktail and looked out of the window to see our plane in the last stages of flight preparation. My stomach started having butterflies, and I thought that now would be the time to get out the bottle of Dramamine and start my travel-sickness preventive measures. Our flight was called as I started opening the little bottle of pills. Frantically I hurried to get one in my mouth before I had to get on the plane. I shook the bottle as we hurried down the steps . . . it was empty. I had discarded the wrong bottle at home.

It was enough to tempt me to turn back and call the whole thing off.

In the private room, everybody was hastily kissing everybody. Even those not going were kissing each other in the excitement.

I didn't have to start looking after our luggage yet. Many hands were willing. But I did manage to grab the wheeled stool, which was a good thing.

The V.I.P. was wheeling Nancy's chair. Our friends had to leave us at the gate, but the family was allowed to come to the steps

of the gigantic plane. The ever-present newsmen came along too.

There didn't seem to be many people getting on the plane. In fact, we were the only ones. To my embarrassment I discovered that they were holding all the passengers back until Nancy was settled on the plane!

I looked up at the open doorway of the ship and at the flight of silver steps leading to it. St. Peter's gate will not look higher or farther away.

Everyone wanted to help. No one knew exactly how.

As politely as I could, I edged the V.I.P. away from the handles of Nancy's wheelchair and started to back up the flights of steps. News bulbs flashed, and I managed to smile instead of groan with Nancy's weight. Four or five relatives and officials thought they were helping by holding onto the wheels and handles of the chair, and we all arrived puffing at the platform—only to discover that the wheelchair was too wide to go through the plane door.

Oh glory, You must be very close at times like these, Lord. Otherwise there would be no ending to this travel story.

Mac was on the platform beside me. I whispered to him to race down the steps and get the stool I had left with the baggage at the foot of the platform.

He was back in a flash. We got Nancy edged onto the stool and then through the door where she stopped to turn and throw a kiss to everyone. Which was very thoughtful, or very hammy of her. We were already enough in the limelight without playing it up.

The three stewardesses were waiting in the plane for us. One directed us to a seat toward the front of the plane. More trouble. The fancy red carpet in the aisle was so thick, the wheels on the stool wouldn't turn. And the aisle sloped up like a hill.

We overcame that too. Mac and I pushed while Nancy pulled herself along by grasping seat handles. We got there.

The seat was real comfortable.

We gave Mac a running good-by kiss and settled back to see all the passengers we had detained.

I didn't see a sign of our luggage. Or Nancy's wheelchair. But I figured that, with so many willing hands outside, our things would be following us. I had the purse, the briefcase and the stool, which, we had discovered, fit nicely in front of Nancy where her legs should have been. It made a convenient table for her to eat at.

I was still searching for the Dramamine, thinking it might have spilled in my purse. I hated to leave without it.

The motors started purring louder. A stewardess came through for the last minute check-up. We fastened our seat belts—and the plane started to move!

We taxied slowly to the far end of the field, stood while the motors roared, then slowly—faster—faster, we came back toward the airport. Then—*up*.

We had left earth for what heaven would bring.

"It's just like going to heaven," Nancy sighed happily as she settled back after waving frantically to friends we could no longer see or who couldn't see us.

We watched for a while to see the familiar landmarks disappear one by one, then settled back to enjoy our trip. I opened a last-minute letter we had received from the Monastery of the Angels. It was a beautiful handmade card with the inscription, "Our angels will be flying along with you!"

What a beautiful, comforting thought to take along with us.

The stewardess came to ask if we would like something to eat. Of course we would. She asked if I would like a bottle of champagne. Of course I would. Nancy ordered hot chocolate—a much wiser decision than mine.

We had heard that flying sharpens the appetite. It certainly did make us hungry. We ate all the fancy little sandwiches and everything else that was edible. The stewardess was thoughtful enough to go back and refill our trays. The champagne tasted good. I emptied the little individual bottle, then settled back sleepily as Nancy sat and watched the silver clouds floating by so near our window.

Half an hour later I woke up and thought that I had lost the top of my head.

"Great!" I thought. "In a few hours we will be in New York, and I'll arrive with a hangover."

Through half-closed eyes I peered at Nancy and told her my dilemma.

"I'll pray for you," she said simply.

In five minutes my headache was completely gone. And I was never sick for as much as a minute during the entire trip!

Prayers are powerful.

Toward dawn, there was a movement around the aisle as passengers made ready for landing. I got a bit panicky when I didn't

see a sign of Nancy's wheelchair, but tried to leave it up to God to have it ready when it was needed.

Our first look at New York as the plane touched earth showed that it was snowing. We were both thrilled.

The stewardess came to ask us to remain seated until the other passengers had disembarked.

The wheelchair, she said, was in the baggage compartment, and would be brought to us.

"You'll have plenty of help!" she laughed to us.

Excuse me, God, for worrying.

God of the Airways

*T*HE wheelchair was brought to the door of the plane, and Nancy was transferred quite simply from her stool to the snow-covered wheelchair seat. She looked up, laughing, to the sky and tried to catch the snowflakes as I turned the wheelchair around for the descent down the steep flight of steps.

The men of the plane crew gave a hand and we were on the ground as quickly and easily as if Nancy had walked.

Here we got a surprise.

There was a cluster of people to welcome us. Mostly newsmen, but also a nice young man from one of the New York churches. He had come all the way out to the airport to see that we were taken care of. We were so well taken care of, we didn't have much chance to pay any attention to him. I am sorry to say that he quietly disappeared, and we didn't even have time to thank him for his kindness.

Everything was happening so unexpectedly!

Someone took over Nancy's wheelchair for me, someone else carried her wheeled stool, someone took me by the arm, and we all plowed through the snow to the waiting room. We were escorted to the room used for air personnel. A phone message was waiting for us there. Two of our New York friends were on their way out to the airport to see us. I hoped they would arrive before our Paris plane took off. We didn't have much time between planes.

Our luggage was brought in and stacked in a corner for us. I sat down to while away the hour or so we had to wait. A stately-looking man came over to me and said that he would like us to

follow him. We left our luggage in a corner and pushed through the crowd in the waiting room after our unexpected host.

He led us out through the swinging doors and into the snowy roadway where he pointed to—of all things—a Catholic church! Right there in the busy airport! A beautiful new church called Our Lady of the Skies.

Our host led us into the chapel, where we stopped to say a much-felt thank-you prayer to those watching over us.

New York, being three hours behind our Western clocks, was not stirring too much in this early morning hour. The chapel was empty, which made it all the nicer.

We were led past the altar and through the sacristy to a beautiful sitting room. Here we were surprised to find a table set and waiting for us. Coffee was perking, and there was a plateful of sweet buns.

How our host had known we were coming, we didn't know. And we never asked, so we never found out.

While we were eating, a pleasant-looking man in uniform came in to tell us that he was a customs official. He was going to attend to our baggage, seeing that it was checked through to Paris, so we wouldn't have to worry about it.

He joined us for coffee. He sat next to Nancy and told her of his love for the Catholic Church, and how much his faith had meant to him during the war. Then he took a medal from his pocket and placed it in Nancy's hand.

"This medal was with me all through the hell of war," he said. "I told God I would wear it until *just* the right person came along to give it to. I'd like you to have it, Nancy."

Our two New York friends arrived and we made places for them at the rapidly crowding coffee table.

We were laughing and talking and getting better acquainted when a ground stewardess came in with another news photographer. He wanted to know if he could get some shots of Nancy in the chapel.

They were about to go over for the photos when a neatly dressed young man from the airlines public relations department came in. He was a bit formal, and made me somewhat nervous at first. I thought he had come to tell me that they would not be able to take Nancy and the wheelchair on the plane.

Instead he had come to say that they were going to put Nancy and me on the plane about fifteen minutes ahead of schedule.

They would taxi up almost to the very door of the church and get Nancy aboard, then load the other passengers.

I thought it was a joke—super-super-deluxe service. But the young man had said it in all seriousness. He didn't appear to be annoyed by all the extra work involved to get Nancy aboard.

Nancy and the ground hostess were waiting at the door with the newsman to go over to the chapel.

I motioned them to go on without me. I wanted to have a little visit with our friends.

It surprised me to see the public relations official offer to wheel Nancy. I didn't think he would have wanted to bother. I was even more surprised when I looked out the window. They had taken the long way around to the chapel to give Nancy a look at the snow. The young man was making snowballs and handing them to Nancy to throw against the building. He was singing a lively ditty to her, laughing as she was laughing. There was no formality now, only genuine friendship and—as far as Nancy was concerned—the budding of another romantic crush.

My two friends were thrilled about our trip, and considered it a miracle that we were going. They knew us well enough not to ask when we would be returning, but said they would be ready with a party for us when we did decide to come back.

I described to them the luxurious plane we had arrived in.

"That's nothing," said one, "just wait until you get aboard the transcontinental plane—they're like flying palaces!"

I pictured Nancy and me in our private plane suite, with maybe a sun porch to sit on and watch the clouds fly by.

We finished up the coffee, then strolled over to the chapel.

Nancy was still busy having pictures taken by the newsman. He saw me and motioned for me to come and get in the pictures. I tried to recall the last time I had looked in a mirror or combed my hair. I couldn't remember. I think it had been in Los Angeles.

I stood back as more pictures were taken of Nancy and the trim stewardess. The young personnel executive, arms folded thoughtfully, stood beside me and watched quietly. I am sure he had more important things to do, but he was not anxious to leave. He kept looking over at me as though he wanted to say something, then would change his mind and continue to watch Nancy as the photographer continued to take pictures. He was a nice-looking fellow, the executive, now that the formal crispness was

brushed aside. He was well acquainted with God, I thought as I watched him from the corner of my eye.

Nancy was watching him too. She kept looking over and smiling in a very coquettish way that seemed far beyond her years.

Finally the young executive had to leave to attend to some business. As he was walking away, he turned to me and—with difficulty because he was speaking from his heart—said, “Mrs. Hamilton, that little girl does something to me . . . I just can’t explain it.”

He didn’t have to.

Time passed all too quickly. Soon it was time to have a last little talk with God in the chapel and then hurry to the waiting plane.

Nancy hardly had time to kiss everybody good-by before she was hoisted up the stairs of the plane. We took a seat opposite the doorway. There was a single seat in the back of us, and then the rest room. It was the best seat for many reasons.

As in Los Angeles, I had no worries about the baggage. I had only to hang onto my purse and the metal stool and attend to Nancy.

Our friends had lined up at the fence, and were waiting to see us airborne. The other passengers began coming in. We noticed, with some alarm, that many of them conversed in French with the stewardess. We didn’t know one word of French. It had never really occurred to me until now that we would be practically without tongue in Europe.

With all the excitement of getting aboard, we hadn’t taken a good look at the plane that was about to carry us across the Atlantic.

As the motor revved up and the purser swung the door shut, we took a look around. This was definitely the tourist flight. After our luxurious first-class accommodations, this looked a little like the Spirit of St. Louis.

We taxied down the runway, leaving our friends like so many windmills waving at the fence. We moved slowly across the field and then went into a hangar where we sat for an hour while workmen washed the ice coating off the plane with hot water.

By the time we took off, we were all hungry and expecting lunch. Nancy and I especially, because we couldn’t get caught up on the three hours we had lost en route.

The stewardess turned on the speaker to tell us that we would be

having lunch in about an hour. We would land and eat in the airlines café in Boston.

"My gosh, *now* what to do!" I thought. Was I going to have to struggle up and down the plane steps with Nancy every time we had to get out to eat?

The stewardess must have read my mind or seen my worried face. She came over to me and said that I would not have to worry. They had arranged to have Nancy's meals served to her on the plane!

The plane no sooner got up in the air and under way than it had to come down again to land us for our lunch. A taxicab was waiting at the Boston airport to take a load of hungry passengers to the restaurant. It was strange, getting out of the plane and waving to Nancy. Supposing there was some mix-up and she went on to Europe without me? She could take care of herself, I thought, grateful for her self-assurance. The stewardess had stayed on the plane too. She and Nancy were having a grand time when I left them.

There were several taxis for our party. We took quite a long drive to the café. I lost sight of our plane, but was glad to see that we were still in the airport.

Our flight was numbered; so, as we entered the fancy and very crowded café, we were ushered as a group to a large table and told to order whatever we wanted from the lunch menu.

I hoped that Nancy was faring as well as I. From our table, we could see the planes taking off and landing. At first my heart went up with each plane, and I tried to recognize some familiar markings on the soaring planes, hoping that Nancy was not on her way overseas without me. I realized how foolish my fears were, and was able to enjoy the rest of the meal with my traveling companions.

By the time the meal had progressed to dessert, there was a congenial atmosphere to Flight 12 table. One of the diners turned to me to ask what I thought of our plane—as though I traveled every week to Europe and could compare planes. I told him that the plane was comfortable, but that it looked sort of patched up and tied together.

We must have been talking rather loudly, because everyone at the table laughed. They were still laughing as we got into the taxis and headed for the waiting plane. This trip was going to be fun!

Nancy, as could be expected, was having a ball with the crew.

She had hidden bits of food all around our seats, she informed me in a whisper, because she hadn't known what else to do with it.

"They brought me so *much* to eat! And I didn't want to hurt their feelings by sending so much of it back."

"That was thoughtful," I agreed as I removed a chocolate éclair from under the arm rest.

Our seat was right beside the water cooler. All Nancy had to do was to reach across the aisle when she thought she wanted a drink. Incidentally, they ran out of drinking water over Ireland, and couldn't figure out how so much had disappeared so rapidly.

We had hoped that the single seat in the back of us would remain vacant. It would have afforded so much more privacy. But a strange-looking man eased into it in New York and hardly moved out of it until we got to Paris. He didn't even get out when we stopped for meals because he had brought his own basket of food with him. He sat the entire trip with his hat pulled down and his overcoat collar pulled up and paid not the slightest attention to anyone. He had been sitting behind us for quite a few hours when Nancy looked over to me, made a wry face, and put her fingers to her nostrils. I smelled something too. But we didn't say anything about it.

Several hours later we noticed the smell again. This time we peeked between the crack in the seats to see what our mysterious companion was doing.

He had a stone crock open, and was spreading some soft runny cheese on little round crackers.

Once we knew what the smell was, it didn't bother us any more.

"Maybe it keeps him from getting airsick," snickered Nancy.

"I think I'd rather be sick!" I whispered back to her.

Nancy moved over to sit beside the window. If I wanted to look out, I stood up and flattened my forehead against the round window in the door opposite us. I couldn't see anything but clouds, but the exercise was good to ease my restlessness.

Our watches were beginning to act crazy. The farther we traveled, the more time we lost. We began to get hungry way before supper-time. I wondered how and where we were going to eat, because we were now flying over the ocean.

The stewardess saw my hungry look and announced that dinner was to be served in the plane.

I knew that tray service started at the front seat. Nancy would have a long wait. But no, I was wrong. The first meal out of the

compact kitchen was for Nancy. The stewardess brought it to her and set it on the metal stool in front of her. A delicious chicken dinner. She was as cozy and comfortable as though she was sitting on her daybed at home and not flying 15,000 feet above the sea.

I stood and looked out the door as Nancy ate. I didn't want to be snitching things off her tray in my hunger. The view was out of this world. We were having about three hours of sunset, in the direction we were traveling. And we were seeing it away above the clouds. The result was that, as far as I could see, there was nothing but a carpet of sparkling golden fleecy clouds.

If I ever see heaven, I think I will recognize it. We must have taken a short cut through it that evening.

The dinner was delicious, and the passengers so informally friendly, we were enjoying it immensely. The stewardess had removed her cap and jacket, and the purser was in his shirt sleeves. I wondered if the de luxe flight was having as good a time in their more formal mode of travel. Our plane was like a commuter's bus. There was even one young girl in slacks and bobby pins. Imagine, setting your hair in New York and combing it out in Paris!

The lady in front of us was on her way to spend the weekend with her army officer husband. "What I'm really going for, though," she confided to us, "is to get one of those new Parisienne hair-cuts!"

She leaned over the back of the seat and handed me two sleeping pills, which I accepted to be polite but later discarded. We could sleep without them—that is, if the roar of the motors didn't keep us awake.

We weren't too anxious to sleep anyway.

We were eagerly anticipating our first stop in a foreign country.

Some time in the middle of the night, we were scheduled to land at the bleak, snowy airport at Gander, Newfoundland.

Nancy asked me to be sure to wake her if she went to sleep before we landed. I promised I would, and then fell fast asleep myself.

I didn't wake up until I felt Nancy poking me and calling, "Hey, Mom! Fasten your seat belt—we're landing!"

In the Middle of Nowhere

WITH sleep-bogged eyes I looked out the ice-covered window. All I saw was a little clump of lights glowing in the middle of the darkness.

So this was Gander.

The purser and two passengers had to push on the door to open it after we landed, the wind was that strong.

Nancy, as in Boston, stayed on the plane with the stewardess. I braved the elements to see what I could see.

We had about half an hour stopover at the airport. Most of the passengers went immediately to the coffee shop, but I fooled around looking at the souvenirs and post cards. I sent some cards home and had the thrill of using foreign postage stamps on them. Then I bought a cute little real sealskin seal paperweight to give to Nancy, but knew that she would soon give it away. She did.

Back on the plane, we got ourselves as comfortable as we could, then settled down for the night. By now, I didn't know if it was midnight or morning, the hours were getting so mixed up, and getting worse the farther we traveled. But we knew that we were getting awfully sleepy.

I was about to doze off when I heard the loudspeaker click on. The stewardess was standing in the middle of the aisle to tell us something. I got an odd feeling in the pit of my stomach when she said, "We are now heading out into the open sea where we will be flying until we reach Ireland in time for breakfast. We have made many trips and have had no casualties, but just for a matter of safety, we want to demonstrate the use of the life preservers." She was unfolding a yellow one as she talked. "This is called a Mae West, and it goes on like this—" Here she demon-

strated how easy it was to put on and to inflate. "If you should be forced to leave the plane, this would keep you up in the water for many hours. To leave the plane is called 'ditching,' which has never occurred in all of my trips overseas!" She laughed reassuringly.

I glanced at Nancy to see if the demonstration had frightened her. I should have known better. She sat wide-eyed, taking it all in and evidently enjoying the thrill of adventure.

After the demonstration she reached down and lifted out one of the two tightly encased life preservers beside our seat.

"It would be sort of fun to wear one of these," she commented.

"Fun!" I cried. "I don't think there would be much chance of getting out of that ocean alive!"

"So?" Nancy shrugged her shoulders. "We'd go to heaven."

Death had never frightened her.

Nancy went to sleep soon after the ditching demonstration. But I found that it had set me to thinking. I wasn't frightened in the least, but I couldn't stop thinking about all that space, and all that water, and nothing else under our tiny plane.

I got up and walked across the aisle to cup my hands to the window and stare out into the big blackness.

The stars were like an inverted bowl of diamonds.

God was watching. We'd be all right.

I went over and curled up on the seat beside Nancy and went to sleep.

The roar of the motors had become more or less music to us. When they changed from a roar to a purr, I awoke immediately and glanced out the window. The sun was coming up, and I could see land beneath our plane. The signal was on for us to fasten our seat belts, so I woke Nancy.

"I think we're coming into Ireland," I informed her.

She was instantly awake.

"I hope I get some Irish oatmeal for breakfast—or does oatmeal come from Scotland?"

"I don't care if it comes from Timbuctoo, just so's I get something to eat. I'm starved."

The purser had an easier time with the door this stop. It was windy out, and very cold, but there was no snow.

I left Nancy waiting to have her breakfast served in style in the plane while I went over to the airport café. The walk across the field was bracing and wonderful. I could smell peat moss and

shamrocks and was sure that it wasn't my imagination running rampant.

We had landed at Shannon, which is in the lower part of Ireland.

The airline personnel here were dressed in kelly-green uniforms. I couldn't help but notice the apple-red cheeks and the beautiful coal-black hair of the people . . . they all looked so Irish!

It was a grand breakfast, made doubly good by the fact that it was included in our fare, as were all the meals en route. I ate heartily, enjoying especially the marmalade and the stacks of home-made wheat and oatmeal breads.

On the way back to the plane, I stopped to look at the airport shops. The biggest crowd of tourists was around the liquor store where Irish whisky could be bought duty free. There were also duty-free cameras at a fraction of the price we pay for them imported. Then there were the elegant Irish linens, and the woolen shops.

I bought two things: An Irish sweepstakes ticket, which we gave to Mac when we got home. He still has it pasted on his bedroom wall. And a tiny silver spoon with an Irish shamrock on the handle. I thought Nancy might like to start a spoon collection, but by the time I got the next one, she had given the Irish spoon away.

Nancy was watching anxiously for me to enter the plane. When she saw me coming, she held up both hands to bar me from sitting down and stage-whispered, "Don't sit down on the seat, Mom!"

Puzzled, I leaned to see what she had to tell me.

She cupped her hands to her mouth and whispered, "You should have seen all the food they brought me *this* time! I've hidden most of it on your seat."

I was afraid to look down. There might be a bowl of porridge and cream on my pillow.

Nancy had been more cautious. She had wrapped each piece of food neatly in a piece of Kleenex. I found bits of bread, gobs of butter, and blobs of marmalade in various places of concealment.

"I just couldn't send it back, they were so nice," she explained. "You should have seen the tray, Mom. A great big silver one"—she measured with outstretched arms—"and it was *loaded*. A real nice man in a white jacket brought it to me and told me to send for him if I wanted any more."

I wished that I could open the plane window and throw the

food out to the sea gulls. It was a shame to waste such good Irish cooking. I shoved it into the briefcase as best I could.

And then I sat down on a soft-boiled egg that Nancy had forgotten to tell me about.

We were flying low now. Enough beneath the clouds so that we could keep our noses flattened against the window and see the country as it stretched beneath our plane. Through the thin cloud patches, we saw the green that is Ireland, and marveled at the many stone walls that cut the Emerald Isle into a jigsaw puzzle pattern. We even saw a shepherd with his flock and his dog. Then we came to a beautiful winding river.

"That's the River Shannon," said our stewardess.

"Did you ever stop to think," I turned to ask Nancy, "how rivers are so personally connected with places?"

"Never thought one way or the other about it," said Nancy, trying to see the full length of the Shannon. "When do we get to Paris?"

The stewardess heard the question and stopped to answer it.

"We were supposed to arrive at Orly Airport at nine this morning, but we're five hours off schedule. We'll be arriving about two this afternoon."

"Good thing nobody is waiting for us!" laughed Nancy. "That would be *some* wait!"

We still had quite a bit of time before arrival, but even so, I started to gather our things together. My, but we had a lot of things to carry! Nancy had been receiving gifts all along the way—gifts that would be useful later, but cumbersome now. It was almost impossible to get everything stowed away so that I could either hang it on me or hand it to Nancy as I wheeled her chair.

The hours passed quickly as I arranged then rearranged our luggage.

"Seat belts, Mom!"

I looked up. The signal was on. We must be nearing land . . . France! My heart skipped a beat.

The motors softened as the plane began to descend.

The clouds thinned and we had our first glimpse of Paris.

"There's the Eiffel Tower!" shouted Nancy.

"And the River Seine!" I added.

Nancy pinched me on the arm. "Just so's you'll know you're not dreaming!" She laughed.

The motor cut off and spluttered a bit. We were landing. From

the window, I could see a big sign, ORLY, and lots of other signs. But I couldn't read them. They were all in French.

The only French words I knew were what I had learned that morning from a fellow passenger: *merci* and *entrez*. I wondered if I had done the right thing in tackling such a tremendous task.

Well, this certainly was no time to be thinking about it.

Table d'hôte

NANCY put on her little blue flowered hat to arrive in Paris in style. It was beyond me how she always managed to look so fresh and beautiful, no matter what she had been through. And how I always managed to look so tacky.

The plane came to a landing. Passengers stood lined up in the aisle. We were to follow our New York routine: sit tight until everyone had made their exit, then wait until the wheelchair was brought to us.

A blast of cold air hit us as the plane door was opened. It wasn't snowing, but it was cold enough to be the North Pole.

The stewardess went out onto the platform, then leaned her head in the door to call excitedly, "Wait until you see what's waiting for you!"

I hoped she was talking to someone else, but she wasn't. She looked right at me as she said it.

I got up and looked down the flight of landing steps. News reporters. About a dozen of them. All excited and blowing about in the wind. The crew was having a bit of difficulty holding them back until all the passengers had been unloaded and the wheelchair hauled up.

I had an uncontrollable desire to hide under the seat and stay there until we got back to America.

So many hands helped us, I had only to guide the wheelchair down the steps. Three reporters came bounding toward me to start asking me questions—in French—as someone else took over the wheelchair and Nancy disappeared into the airport building.

I was hedged in by a ring of reporters, all talking at once in their native French tongue. I stood nodding and then shaking my head and trying not to look as panicky as I felt. One of the trench-coated reporters managed to say "Book" in English. Then they

all took up the chant, "Book! Book!" as we started in parade across the windy airport toward the door where Nancy and her crowd of questioners had disappeared.

The only book that I could think they were wanting was possibly a copy of *Red Shoes for Nancy*—a story about Nancy. We had a copy of it in one of our suitcases.

As we marched, I tried to signal to Trench-coat by repeating "Book!" and pointing to the stack of baggage coming off our plane.

We entered the building en masse and I caught a glimpse of Nancy, hat askew, a dazed look on her face as she sat looking up into the Frenchmen's faces and trying to answer their French questions in English.

Her wheelchair was backed against a high iron rail fence that separated the travelers from those in the waiting room. She was hemmed in by busy-bee reporters on one side and curious on-lookers crowded around the other side of the fence to get a better look at her.

I hardly had time to nod before I was propelled to the baggage section where a slow-moving conveyor belt was bringing the baggage to be checked out.

From this I understood that the reporters wanted the book . . . and they wanted it *now*. I tried to recall which suitcase I had put it in. And what the heck I had done with the key.

Each lot of luggage that passed us would have all the eager-eyed reporters pointing to it and then looking at me to see if it was ours. I kept shaking my head.

Finally I saw the battered blue duffel bag and the twin metal suitcases come rolling into view. I pointed to them and nodded as I searched frantically through the mess in my purse for the key. My hand came in contact with a key as the luggage was grabbed and I was helped bodily to a corner where there was a counter on which I could open the suitcase.

I sure hoped the lone key was the one for the suitcase containing the book.

While all eyes watched eagerly, I turned the suitcase over, inserted the key, and flung the suitcase open just as it slipped from the edge of the counter, and all our underwear went scattering across the station floor. Wrong suitcase.

In wide-eyed wonder, the patient reporters tried to fathom what I was doing. They were chivalrous enough to help me gather up

my scattered belongings. I tried to let them know I would send them the book later. I hadn't any idea where I would send it, but was hoping that I could stall them off until I got my bearings—and my daughter.

What a relief it was to see a brass-buttoned official coming toward us, followed by a pretty French girl in uniform. They were both speaking English!

Brass-buttons asked what our plans were. I told him that we were to catch a train for Lourdes.

"But that is so late! What are your plans until train time?" he asked.

Then it dawned on me. We had missed connections with the morning train. The next one was at nine that night.

I shrugged and smiled with a reassurance that I was far from feeling.

"We'll fool around someplace until train time," I answered vaguely.

"A hotel perhaps?"

"Perhaps."

If they would just go away and leave us alone, I thought unkindly. I'd rescue Nancy and we could stay around the airport for the rest of the day. There might even be a couch in the rest room for her to take a little nap. However, they were still insisting on facts.

"Which hotel?" asked Trench-coat.

He had been the one to start all this commotion with his word "book," I thought. Evidently he knew a few more English words.

I shrugged my shoulders and looked rather helplessly toward the nice-looking French girl. She turned to Brass-buttons and they went into a momentary huddle. Then she turned to me and beckoned smilingly.

"I will take you."

Brass-buttons had hurried away to summon a cabman out on the platform.

The French girl said something in French to the reporters and they disappeared like a swarm of swatted gnats.

Nancy was brought over beside me and was almost too bewildered to greet me. She straightened her hat and rolled her eyes as she whistled. "So *this* is Paris!"

We saw our baggage being carried hastily to the platform and were beckoned to follow. A big shiny black limousine stood with

the door open waiting for us. The French girl got into the front seat and I eased Nancy into the rear. There was plenty of room inside the car for the wheelchair too.

I climbed in beside Nancy and sank into the soft cushions as a white-moustached man in a beret and blue smock put his hand in the window.

I shook hands with him and smiled in a gracious way.

"He wants money," explained the French girl. "He loaded your baggage in the car."

Sheepishly I opened my purse and took out a good old American dollar which I handed to him because I couldn't find my change purse. He looked at it none too happily and shuffled off toward the baggage room.

"They don't like to take American money," explained our French friend.

Oh, for a good guidebook on what to do in foreign countries!

As the chauffeur got in and we rolled away, Nancy turned to me and showed me a fistful of bills.

"Nancy! What have you been doing?" I asked in blank amazement.

"The crew on the plane took up a collection and gave it to me to have a good time in Paris with," she grinned.

It was too late now to thank them in any way other than in my prayers.

Our French girl guide described Paris to us as we rode along the cobbled streets.

"You're not seeing the best part of our city," she apologized.

It looked awfully nice to Nancy and me. We drove through the suburbs and then into the city. What a thrill it was to realize that we were actually driving through Paris! Everyone seemed to be in a bustling hurry. We saw beret-topped Frenchmen intent on their destination as they scooted along the streets. Wool-stockinged children in playgrounds, and trim-looking women, most of them clad in ski suits and overshoes because it was so cold. The round signposts with their colorful posters intrigued us too. Paris would be an easy city to love!

I imagined that we were going to some hotel to wait in the lobby until train time. That would be restful. Much more so than waiting in the crowded airport.

The car pulled over to the left curb and the chauffeur held the door open for me. I got Nancy into the wheelchair and turned

to look at the hotel. A sudden series of news bulb flashes greeted us. The reporters had scooted on ahead of us to take more pictures.

They didn't follow us into the hotel, but waved a friendly goodbye to two of the most naïve travelers they had probably ever encountered.

The hotel was of weathered stone, as were most of the buildings surrounding it. The lobby was old-world and elegant. I hoped they had a dining room. It would be a good way to pass some time, and we were both pretty hungry.

Our girl guide escorted us to the desk, said something in French, and we were handed a big brass key.

A porter came to take our luggage, and we were escorted to an open-work elevator.

Too puzzled to ask questions, we went along silently to see what was coming next.

The wiry little porter scurried ahead of us down a tremendously long hall and opened a door to one of the rooms. He put our baggage in, so we assumed we were to follow.

It was a lovely room with two big brass beds in it. Each of the beds had an enormous feather-filled comforter on it. The real lace curtains on the long windows hung to the floor. And there were heavy red velvet drapes, as though royalty had stayed there at one time.

The French girl drew one of the stiff lace curtains aside and told us to come and see the view. Across the street from us flowed the famous Seine. A magnificent white-domed building, our guide informed us, was the Sacre-Coeur on Montmartre. "And over there," she pointed to the left, "is the Louvre, then farther over—the Eiffel Tower."

We gazed and admired until she turned to us to ask, "Is there anything I can do for you before I go back to the airport? You are to make yourselves at home in this room until time for your train to Lourdes. They will come for you in plenty of time."

We were beginning to feel like two American ambassadors. We wanted to thank someone, but didn't know where all the service and kindness was coming from.

Our French friend made ready to leave, and I gathered enough courage to ask if there was some place we could get something to eat.

"Of course, you must be hungry!" She smiled. "I will send up the waiter."

All this, and room service too! We wouldn't be surprised at anything from here on.

Our friend said good-by and we thanked her as much as we could. A few minutes later there was a tap on the door and, in my best French, I called "*Entrez!*"

It was the waiter. He handed me a great big French menu and stood with pencil and notebook while I tried to look at the food items as though I knew what they were.

Nancy looked over my shoulder and then whispered, "Remember what Carla said about ordering meals in France—just order table d'hôte and they will bring you the meal of the day."

"That's right, Nancy, I forgot."

Handing the menu back to the dapper white-coated waiter, I tilted my head and said in continental style, "Table d'hôte, please."

He looked at me with no expression whatever on his face.

I repeated, "Table d'hôte."

He stared a moment, raised his eyebrows, then handed me the menu to point out to him what I was trying to tell him.

I shook my head and said, "Hot meal!" I repeated it: "Hot meal!"

In wide-eyed amazement, he nodded to me and backed out of the room.

He was gone long enough to whip up the finest French meal we could imagine.

"That's one reason I wanted to stop off in Paris," said Nancy, licking her lips, "I wanted one of those fancy French meals I've read about . . . Oh, Mom, there won't be *snails*, will there?"

"There's liable to be anything, from the funny look the waiter gave us," I answered.

Finally there was a tapping and a bumping at the door. An elegant linen-covered table was wheeled into our room. Two large silver covers hid the contents of the plates.

The table was pushed up to Nancy's wheelchair and I took my place across from her. I unfolded the beautiful linen napkin and looked up just as the waiter, with a flourish, removed the silver covers.

There sat two bowls of *oatmeal!*

In disbelief, I gaped over to Nancy. She was giggling so hard, there were tears in her eyes.

The waiter, anxious to please, looked at me questioningly.

"'Ot meal?" he asked.

"Oatmeal." I nodded and tried to keep a straight face.

Nancy was beginning to look pretty sleepy, so I suggested that she take a little nap and I would take a bath. I didn't want to sleep for fear that I would never wake up again that year. I was feeling my age, or the strenuous trip. But a hot bath in the horse-trough-sized bathtub freshened me. I lay down to relax a while—just as the phone rang.

I hastened to answer it with a "Hello?" forgetting where I was. A voice in French words came out of the receiver; I strained my wits trying to decipher the message, then ended by saying "Oui," and hung up. This foreign-language business was getting beyond the comical stage. It was as though I had been suddenly struck dumb as far as communicating with anyone beyond one-word sentences.

I lay down to relax just as someone knocked on the door.

It was our friend, the trench-coated reporter.

"Book?" he smiled.

I was ready for him. I had found the copy of *Red Shoes for Nancy*. Returning his broad smile, I handed him the book and he darted away after a hasty thank you—only he said "*Merci*."

I decided not to try to lie down any more. Instead, I sat at the window and watched the fishermen along the Seine. What a perfect place this would be for a vacation—or a honeymoon! Well, I wasn't on either. I'd better make a last-minute check of the baggage to see that we had everything.

The luggage had been set conveniently in a little private baggage room just inside the door. I checked it over; everything was in order.

The room was beginning to darken with the twilight. Nancy was sound asleep. The lights along the Seine were blinking through the mist and early darkness. It wasn't the lively, gay Paris I had pictured. We must be quite a ways from the center of the city. I'd have to look it up on a city map when I got the time. I looked at the clock, and then laughed to myself. We were without time, we had so many different versions of it. It must be getting close to eight o'clock, Paris time. I'd better wake Nancy and get her ready for the last lap of our journey to Mary.

We were ready and waiting when the porter came for our luggage. How wonderful everyone had been to us during our brief stay! I hoped that such an elegant room was not too expensive.

I stopped at the desk to return the key and settle our bill. A

tuxedo-clad manager, in perfect English, informed me that there was no charge. Everything had been taken care of.

What could I say? Words are sometimes so inadequate.

The street was dark, and very cold. The wind whistled through my clothes and froze my skin. We heard the funny Beep! Beep! of the Paris taxis and laughed to ourselves as we waited for our cab.

A miniature French car arrived. The porter and cabman conversed for a moment in French, then the wee car sped away.

Several moments later a large, more suitable cab, arrived. I was able to slide Nancy onto the front seat and put the wheelchair in the back with me as they loaded our luggage on the top.

We sped away into the blackness of the night.

In our drive to the railway station, we got to see some of the real Paris. We passed gay little cafés and brightly lit square-window-paned shops that made us want to get out and go in. But we had just time to catch our train.

"I'm glad we won't have all that fussing with the wheelchair up any steps," I said a bit wearily to Nancy. "I've heard that the French trains have platforms the same level as the station floors. I'll just have to wheel your chair from the station into our coach!"

"That will be fine," Nancy answered, also a bit on the weary side.

A blue-smocked porter came to meet our taxi at the station. I pointed to all our luggage atop the car and the porter waggled his head in solemn sympathy.

We had our tickets ready, so we had only to cross the freezing platform, make our way after the hurrying porter through the rather gloomy waiting room, and out to where the rows of black trains stood waiting for their passengers.

I don't know why, but a sudden fear and homesickness struck me as I hurried along after the porter. It was all I could do to keep from crying.

The porter had stopped with our baggage at a coach with a white sign LOURDES on it.

I took one look and burst into tears.

The floor of the train was nearly shoulder-high.

The only way to get into the coaches was by a perilous-looking iron ladder stairway.

Momentarily stunned, I stood and let the tears run down my cheeks as Nancy turned to see what had happened, and a news-camera bulb flashed in my face.

Railway to Realization

I'VE never been so ashamed of tears. I've never had such an outburst, before or since. It was over as quickly as it had begun. For a moment, I had thought that Nancy and I were traveling alone—I had forgotten all the prayers and the unseen angels who were traveling with us. From the depth of my heart I heard the stirring "Marseillaise," and knew now why it had been sung to us in the convent so many miles away. It gave me courage to go on.

I turned and smiled to the newsman. He smiled back, and I even joked with him about the height of the train floor. I knew now that God would be giving me a hand. To lift Nancy any higher than my elbows was beyond my powers. No other person could help me, because her weight was so unbalanced, and there was no way to get hold of her except under her arms. She couldn't be lifted like anyone else.

I put my arms out to Nancy now, said a quick, fervent prayer, and swung her to a sitting position on the floor of the train as the news-camera bulbs continued to flash around us. This time they would catch laughing photos because God had helped.

The wheelchair was hoisted up to us, but proved to be too bulky for the narrow train aisle. Once again the metal-wheeled stool proved a godsend. I got Nancy onto it and we rolled her jerkily along the corridor to the first little compartment where she eased onto one of the two seats facing each other.

The hardest part of our journey was over.

A news reporter, accompanied by a schoolgirl, followed us into the compartment. He sat down and, in English, introduced us to

his daughter. She spoke only French, but stood smiling during the entire visit.

It was so good to converse with someone who spoke as we did! I was able to gather much-needed information in the little time before departure. I learned that there was no dining car on the train, and that I had better dash off and get some food at one of the many little carts on the railway platform.

I left Nancy talking as I hurried to the first stand and got two big sandwiches on hard French rolls, two bottles of lemonade, two oranges, and some chocolate candy. Then I remembered that I had only unwelcome American money with me. I took the bag of food, stuffed some American money into the peddler's hand, and dashed for the train before he could protest.

I was no sooner seated than the train gave a funny little shrill peep-peep that set us to laughing. The newsman and his daughter said good-by in the nick of time to get off, and the train started with a jolt that almost sat us on the floor.

We would be in Lourdes at sunrise the next morning!

The train compartment was as cozy as a little parlor. We shut the sliding door, pulled down the shades of the aisle windows, and sat back to enjoy ourselves. The plush-covered seats had backs that reached high above our heads. The seat itself was too narrow to be very comfortable. We began to wonder if they had been installed wrong. The high back should have been the narrow seat part! But then, too many would be traveling and sleeping second class as we were, rather than taking the first-class passage for the bed that went with it.

Once the train got under way, it rode smoothly enough. We could hear the wheels clickety-clicking along the rails, and it gave us a contented, sleepy feeling. We sat quietly watching the lights flash past the train window and dreaming our own dreams. The lights gradually grew farther and farther apart. Finally there was only a solitary, lonely light flashing now and then in the darkness.

Nancy lay down on the perilously narrow seat, and I made a pillow of my coat for her. It would be good if she could sleep the rest of the journey.

But sleep was practically out of the question. We were to stop at many little wayside stations many times during the night. And each time we stopped, it was a matter of hanging on tight to anything solid, or landing on the floor! The train whistle would give a shrill peep-peep. Then a series of grinding, groaning shivers would

go through the coach as we came to a thunderous halt, sometimes to load or unload one solitary passenger at the dimly lit country stations.

We made a game of the stops. Whenever we heard the whistle, one of us would shout, "Brace yourself!" and we would grab anything near and hang on, laughing until we couldn't catch our breath.

It would be the same when the train started. There would be the peep-peep warning, then the series of shivers as we groaned along the track. It must be an uphill pull all the way to Lourdes—or so it seemed.

About midnight, as far as we could determine, we decided to eat our picnic lunch as we watched the now snowy countryside flash past the window. The scenery was getting more and more beautiful, as much as we could see it through the darkness. We passed miles of woods with trees like graceful, slim dancers. We climbed steep narrow passages that must be lovely in the daylight.

"I wish we could have seen the châteaux," I said. "I've heard they have some beautiful ones all through this part of the country. Too bad we didn't get the day train."

"Maybe we'll get it on the way home," Nancy answered.

On the way home—I wondered when that would be, and what would be waiting for us at Lourdes. I didn't want to think that far ahead. God, I was sure, had wanted us to make the journey. It wasn't for me to question why.

Nancy managed to get a bit of sleep, lying as comfortably as she could on the red plush seat.

I stayed awake to catch her if she started to roll off the narrow bed.

The conductor came in for our tickets. He nodded in a friendly way, but didn't try to speak. I guess he knew only French.

Half an hour later he was back with a folded newspaper. He beamed at me and pointed to one of the pages. I could see a series of pictures of Nancy and me, and a lot of French words.

The conductor realized that I couldn't read the story, so he tried to explain it to me in French. I nodded and smiled and pretended to understand—he knew better. He stood scratching his head and thinking, then suddenly his face broke into a wide grin. With his forefinger, he wrote in the dust of the window what he had been trying to tell me. He wrote it in French.

It must have been early in the morning when Nancy awoke. I

decided to take a little walk down the aisle and stretch my legs and find some drinking water.

I stepped out into the corridor where a group of French soldiers were standing. They took no notice of me, but continued to talk and to drink wine from the bottle on the floor beside them. It was a big tall bottle of red wine. None of the soldiers were drunk. They were drinking as all French people do, in a sensible instead-of-water way.

I couldn't see anything in the coach that looked like a drinking fountain. I wondered how I could ever explain my want. One of the soldiers was watching me now. I put my hand to my mouth as though I was taking a drink. He grinned and brought me the bottle of wine. I smiled and refused it.

"*Agua*," I explained.

"That's Spanish, Mom!" Nancy called out.

The conductor came through the coach, so I went through the pantomime of drinking water again.

He nodded vigorously and went on toward the front of the train.

By now, all the soldiers were watching me. I pointed to my wrist watch and said "Time?"

They clustered around me to admire my old watch.

In desperation, I pointed skyward, hoping they had heard of sun dials.

They decided it was time to be leaving me to my own strange ways, and went back into their compartment.

An hour or so passed. I got so thirsty, I felt as if I had eaten a blotter. Our door slid open, and the friendly conductor came in carrying a bottle labeled Vichy water. He had no bottle opener, and neither did we. For the next ten minutes he obligingly tried to uncap the bottle with his teeth, on the window sill, on the doorknob, on the armrest, under the fastened-down travel pictures, and even on the light fixture. The top wouldn't budge.

Then he had an inspiration. Putting the bottle under his heavy shoe, he wedged the top with his heel until it popped off, spilling half the water across the floor. There was enough left to quench our thirst, for the time being at least.

I gave him a half dollar, and he went smiling on his way with his American souvenir.

Each time we stopped at a station, I tried to catch the name on the dimly lit signposts. I remembered uneasily that someone had told me that the names of the stations are not called out on the

trains as they are in America. It would be easy for us to slip right past Lourdes without realizing it. The farther we traveled, the more the thought weighed on me. Finally, still in the dark of the night, I took all of our baggage out of the compartment and piled it in the corridor beside the outside door.

The conductor came through as I was stacking the last two pieces. Excitedly he shook his head and started carrying it all back into our compartment.

"Lourdes?" I asked meekly.

He nodded emphatically and waved his hand through the air. It looked as if he was telling me that we still had a long way to go.

I settled down beside Nancy, and we both went to sleep.

We didn't wake up again until the sun shone in our faces.

What a breath-taking sight met our eyes!

Graceful, snow-covered trees, a river flowing along beside the tracks, an enormous expanse of white meadow, and beyond, the unbelievably beautiful white-mantled Pyrenees Mountains. The sun had tinged them a delicate pink, as though their natural beauty was not enough to bid us welcome.

We sat without words, just holding hands and thanking God for His goodness to us.

The train began to slow down. The conductor came in to take our luggage to the door as I had done so many hours before.

Nancy climbed onto her metal stool, and we stood beside the window to catch our first glimpse of the spot we had come across the world to visit.

"That must be the River Gave," I whispered to Nancy. I was too awestruck to talk out loud.

She nodded.

The train was crawling now. We began to pass a few farm-houses. Two-story weathered stone buildings that looked as if they had been there for ages. They had probably been standing when Saint Bernadette lived here.

It was hard to realize that this was not a dream.

Then we saw the Grotto.

We both drew in our breath as it came into view. We hadn't expected to see it from the train.

The magnificent stone church towered high on the rock above. In the fleeting glimpse, we were aware of candles glowing like the lights of heaven.

We passed too quickly to grasp any definite view. We were so

overcome, we could only nod to each other with stars in our eyes and a lump in our throat.

The train came to a grinding halt, and the door opened onto the covered station.

Two arms reached up to Nancy.

A priest—Father Cassagnard—had come to welcome us.

He was so huge and so strong, he took Nancy's wheelchair and swung it to the platform as though it were a feather. Then he gave Nancy a laughing toss into it.

I had nothing to do but climb down the ladder stairway and shake hands with our first friend at Lourdes.

There was someone with him—a pleasant young man who was introduced to us as the manager of the hotel we were going to. The manager spoke only French, but Father Cassagnard acted as interpreter. The Father had recently returned from Glasgow, Scotland, where he had been studying the English language. He spoke it with a Scottish and French accent.

"There are only three hotels open in Lourdes now," he said as we walked through the station. "The one you will be staying at is called the Ambassadeur."

We walked on out of the station and into the snowy street. The snow was falling in large fairy flakes. We stopped to look around us. It was as though we had landed in a storybook fairy-tale town. The quaint, snow-covered buildings were set off by a breath-taking view of the towering white mountain peaks and the long beautiful valleys. It was an unforgettable sight.

Father Cassagnard talked as he guided the wheelchair through the trackless snow of the station sidewalk.

"This is not the season for Lourdes, you know," he said with an infectious grin and a shake of his head. "There are only a few cafés and shops open now."

I had a sudden panicky thought.

Suppose the Grotto and the Baths were closed too!

God answered my question through the priest.

"We've had several blizzards lately," he said, "but only yesterday a three-month-old baby and his father went into the Baths—right in the blizzard!"

Thank You, God.

Nothing like a little blizzard would stop us, now that You have brought us safely to our destination.

The Friendly French

W^E walked to the side of the station where a bus stood waiting for us. I quickly sized it up, and worried about how I would ever get Nancy up and into one of the seats. My worry wasn't necessary. The hotel manager opened up the back door, and Nancy—wheelchair and all—was lifted into the space for wheelchairs in back of the bus! Our luggage was piled in around her, and away we went, the four of us in the rattling bus. The manager drove while Father Cassagnard sat smiling to us. He certainly was a likable person! Flashing black eyes, a mop of black hair, and the most infectious grin I have ever seen.

We wound down narrow, crooked roads, then made a quick, sharp turn. We stopped in front of a pretty little hotel with two large lobby windows that made it look more like a store than a hotel.

The hotel doors were flung wide, and a bevy of people came racing down the steps to meet us. A stylish elderly woman, the manager's mother, stood smiling to us from the top of the steps. Two smartly dressed houseboys, a typical French maid, and a cute young crew-haircut boy lined up at the back of the bus to see what they could do to help us. Once again Nancy was lifted, wheelchair and all, out of the bus and up the white marble steps of the hotel right into the lobby. Everyone clustered around smiling and shaking our hands as though we were a long-lost part of the family. It was wonderful! Though a bit overwhelming.

We met an attractive young girl named Madelon and were much relieved to learn that she spoke English, though rather slowly, pronouncing each word with great thought and care.

All the others, with the exception of Father Cassagnard, had been speaking to us in French.

The two apple-cheeked houseboys brought all of our luggage in from the bus and loaded it beside the tiny gilded elevator. Then they stood smiling—not for a tip, but to shake hands with Nancy. They were dressed in black felt slippers, dark red vests and white aprons over neatly pressed trousers. They were shining with health and cleanliness.

Father Cassagnard gave my hand a hearty shake and said he would be back to see us again in a few hours. The manager got our room key—an enormous brass one—and handed it to one of the houseboys. He opened the ornate door of the tiny elevator and stood back for me to wheel Nancy into it. I started and then stopped abruptly. The wheelchair wouldn't fit in the miniature French lift.

A look of dismay passed over the group of faces.

As if in a vaudeville act, I got the metal stool and set it with a flourish in front of Nancy.

Playing up to my act, she slid quickly onto it, pulled herself into the elevator, and sat clasping her hands above her head and bowing.

I got in beside her, and the little elevator started up the open shaft, leaving a ring of smiling upturned faces watching us go up in the air.

We stopped at the second floor just as the young crew-cut French boy came blowing and wheezing into sight. He had run all the way up the stairway—carrying Nancy's folded wheelchair!

By the time Nancy had been transferred to her chair, everyone from the first floor was on the second floor. Each one was carrying a piece of our luggage. They stood, waiting and smiling, to show us to our room.

All we needed to complete the procession down the hall was a brass band.

Our room was at the far end of the hall. I had never seen any place as spotlessly clean as that hotel. The natural wood floors were shining, the banisters gleamed with polishing, the rugs were spotless. The place had an odor of foreign spices and oils and herbs. It was heavenly!

The manager flung the door to our room open and stood back for us to enter.

Such a beautiful room! It, too, had the fragrance of cleanliness and herbs. Two light blond wooden beds, a huge old-fashioned

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The manager flung the door to our room open and stood back for us to enter.

Such a beautiful room! It, too, had the fragrance of cleanliness and herbs. Two light blond wooden beds, a huge old-fashioned

wardrobe, night stand and dresser, and a few chairs completed the furnishings. How homey it was! Above the beds was a natural wood crucifix.

There was a private bathroom too. A nice big one. There were two big-size terry-cloth bathrobes hanging on the door hooks. I thought someone had forgotten them, but remembered in time not to mention it, that it was the custom in France to furnish bathrobes to hotel guests.

Our luggage was brought in and piled into a corner.

One by one our smiling new friends said adieu. Madelon stopped to ask if we needed anything.

"We could sure use some food!" I laughed and held my empty stomach.

She nodded smiling. "I will see that you have something to eat soon."

Nancy made herself comfortable on one of the soft beds. I went over to look out the window. We were on a side street, at the bottom of a steep hill. Snowflakes as big as butterflies were drifting slowly through the air. The street looked narrow and lined with shops. Most of them looked like gift and souvenir shops. I couldn't tell too well because none of them were open. Several warmly bundled people were walking down the hill—all going in one direction. With a sudden thrill, I realized they were on their way to Mass at the Grotto of Lourdes!

The most awful smell drifted into our room—like burning horse-hair. We wondered what it was and where it could be coming from. It was getting stronger.

There was a knock on the door, and the crew-cut boy came in carrying a large tray. The little French maid followed him into the room and set a table between Nancy and me. Then she set out our breakfast. Poached eggs without the toast, French rolls, sweet butter rolled into fancy curled designs, and two white crock pitchers. One contained hot milk, and the other the smell we had noticed. It was French coffee. Black as tar and about as unpalatable to our unaccustomed taste. I tried some of it mixed with hot milk, but had to revert to hot milk—straight.

All through the meal we were interrupted by first one and then another of our new friends . . . to see if we liked the meal and if they could get anything else for us.

When we had finished our breakfast and the tray had been re-

moved, Nancy lay back on her bed and said that she was going to sleep for three days.

I took my shoes off and stretched out on my comfortable bed, just as someone knocked on the door.

It was the stylish mother of the manager with Madelon.

They had come to tell us that they would like us to move to a room down the hall.

"It is much larger and more luxurious," explained Madelon slowly. "There are large windows from which you can see the River Gave and the Basilica."

Even the view and the Basilica did not tempt me as much at that moment as the comfortable bed.

But they were being so gracious, we couldn't refuse.

"You will not be charged any more for this room," explained Madelon as we began once more to gather up our luggage.

My actions were met by hasty hands of disapproval. I was not to touch one bit of the luggage.

Everyone had come back to carry it for us.

Once again the procession moved down the hall, heading for the room with the view.

It was larger and prettier—but much colder! The long French windows were not ample protection from the blizzard outside.

I tried as best I could to look pleased at the move.

Nancy wrapped her coat tightly around her and managed a thank you smile too.

The attractive French mother pulled the freshly starched lace curtains aside for us to have our first view of the Basilica. It was breath-taking. The towering church spire rising into the clouds directly ahead of us looked ethereal. I moved closer to the window to get a better view. Below was a little winding street that led sharply up a hill. Beyond the street flowed the River Gave. Beyond that, the tall iron rail gates of the Esplanade leading to the Grotto. We were within easy walking distance to the spot where the Mother of Our Lord had appeared. It would take some time to get used to, this miracle.

Our luggage was piled in the corner by the ever smiling, never tiring houseboys. Once again adieus were exchanged and we were left to ourselves.

Nancy immediately slid onto one of the beds, pulled the big fluffy yellow comforter over her ears, and pretended to snore.

"Don't disturb me again—for *anything!*" she laughed, and was asleep in a matter of minutes.

I thought I'd take a hot bath before getting some rest. I went into the spacious bathroom, then decided against it. It was a very nice bathroom, but so cold my breath blew like steam across the air.

I got into my new pink flannel pajamas and dropped onto the soft bed. I think I was asleep before I hit the mattress.

I opened my eyes almost the same time Nancy did. We looked across at each other trying to recall where we were, then smiled in remembering.

The room was twilight-dark. I got up and looked out the window at a weak-looking sun shining on the snow.

"Is that sun rising or setting?" I asked Nancy in puzzlement. She didn't know.

"I wonder how many days we've slept?" I asked her in a drunken sort of way. She couldn't answer that either.

I thought about calling down to the office to ask them, but remembered that they would answer in French.

"I think we must have slept for about a week," mused Nancy, "I'm that hungry."

I was hungry too. Mighty hungry.

"Maybe you could phone down and just say 'Dinner.' Someone would surely understand," I suggested to Nancy.

She tried it.

A few moments later there was a tapping on the door.

"*Entrez,*" I called, proud of my French.

The door opened and the young crew-cut boy, François, came in with a menu. He looked at me, opened his eyes wide, then averted them and his face turned a beet red.

Still sleep-dazed, I looked down at myself.

I was sitting in my pink pajamas.

Hastily I dived into the bathroom and grabbed one of the terry robes. But when I came back into the room, François had vanished, leaving the menu on the foot of Nancy's bed.

"He's going to be embarrassed every time he meets you now," reproached Nancy. "You should be more careful, Mom."

I promised to be more careful, then reached for the menu.

We couldn't make head nor tail of it.

"For goodness sakes, don't order any more *table d'hôte,*" warned Nancy.

We waited for someone to come in and advise us what to eat. We didn't have long to wait. François returned with a suave, good-looking man in a tuxedo. He could speak enough English to give us a little bit of help in our selections.

Nancy couldn't look at the menu for looking at him.

New crush coming, I thought.

The suave young man's name was Guy and he had charge of the kitchen while the regular cook was on sick leave.

Guy pointed to several items on the menu. I readily nodded my head, not knowing in the slightest what I was ordering.

Our two meal planners bowed out, smiling, and we washed up for either breakfast, lunch, or dinner—we couldn't figure which. We didn't know whether it was night or morning.

Guy and François soon reappeared with a beautifully set table and a stand with a copper chafing dish on it. It looked as if we had ordered an omelette, and Guy was going to make it in flames before our wondering eyes.

We were enjoying our elegant meal when Madelon came to visit.

"We were hoping that you were not ill," she said in her mild way. "We rang the telephone and knocked on the door, but you did not answer."

"Is this night or morning, and what day?" I asked.

She studied me strangely.

"It is Saturday. The same day as when you arrived. But you have slept the entire day!" She wasn't smiling. "Father Cassagnard called several times too."

We weren't making too good a first-day impression.

But how wonderful that sleep had been! We both looked and felt much better for it. I wasn't a bit tired now—even though we had lost nine hours in our travels.

The phone rang and we asked Madelon to please answer it for us.

"It's Father Cassagnard," she said, turning to us. "He wants to know if he can come up and visit you."

Nancy pointed frantically to my bathrobed figure.

"Let him come and visit," I answered, and dashed into the freezing bathroom to get into my skirt and sweater.

Father Cassagnard arrived as Guy came for the table and chafing dish.

I started to order coffee, thought better of it, and ordered two hot toddies and one hot milk, remembering we were now in France.

Nancy was studying Guy and François as they cleared away the dishes.

I could read her mind. She was trying to decide which one would be the boy friend, the suave Guy or the cute François.

Father Cassagnard stayed only long enough to drink the hot toddy and to ask if we wanted to attend eight o'clock Mass at the Grotto the following morning.

We were only too willing, so he promised to say it in Nancy's honor.

As much as we had slept that day, we were anxious to get back into bed and get more sleep. I was careful, though, to set the alarm to French time.

We wanted to be on time for our first Mass at Lourdes.

Before I crawled into bed, I opened the two long French windows, despite the falling snow.

From our beds, we could see the tall spire of the Basilica and hear the soft rushing of the River Gave. Then we heard the chimes playing "Mother Dear, O Pray for Me," the hymn so well known to all at Lourdes.

"Isn't it beautiful?" I whispered across the darkness to Nancy.

"It couldn't be any more beautiful if it was heaven," whispered Nancy sleepily.

In Touch with God

W_E awoke the next morning without the aid of the alarm. I took a look at the weather, and then set out every bit of warm clothing I could find. It looked like we were about to have a blizzard.

I put my hat and coat on before going into the bathroom to get washed. The water was steaming hot, which was comforting.

Nancy was ready about the same time as I was. We tiptoed as we entered the hall, still dark with morning twilight. There was no need for such quiet on our part. Aside from the guests in the room adjoining ours, we were apparently the only ones in the hotel.

We rang the elevator bell, and then leaned over the polished stairway railing to watch the tiny gilt cage ascend on its fragile-looking cable. We also saw one of the red-vested houseboys dart to the stairway and come bounding up two steps at a time to beat the elevator.

Puffing and panting, he arrived in time to open the elevator door and bow us to enter. I motioned back that I intended to walk down with the folded wheelchair while Nancy rode.

No, I must get in the elevator.

Obedying, I stepped in beside Nancy and left her wheelchair sitting in the hall. The houseboy picked it up and staggered down the steps with it as we rode down in comfort and watched him struggle.

He arrived in the lobby at almost the same time the little elevator bumped to a stop.

I tried my best to thank him. Nancy did too, by giving him a kiss and a bear hug that sent him off blushing.

François and the little French maid helped us down the slippery

white marble steps of the hotel. We had only to cross the street to be on the bridge that crossed the River Gave. From there it was only a few steps to the open gates that led along the Esplanade to the Basilica, and beyond that—the Grotto.

It was a long, beautiful walk, made doubly so by the fresh fallen snow, and the fact that we were the only ones in the entire fenced-in Esplanade.

I looked back as we walked slowly along and was surprised to see the Lourdes was a town of steep hills surrounded by majestic mountains.

Beautiful, but not too easy for wheelchairs.

We took our time, not talking, and looking long at each snow-covered statue as we passed them.

Several heavily clad people began to follow behind us in our trek toward the Grotto. One aged woman was wheeling what looked like an oversized wooden baby buggy—quite a common conveyance here at Lourdes.

We could see that she was hurrying to catch up to us, so we waited for her.

She came up smiling in a toothless grin and nodded her head toward the wheelchair.

“Nancy?” she asked.

It gave me a start to hear her say Nancy’s name, but I nodded and smiled back.

Then I leaned over to see who was in the baby buggy.

It was an elderly man, her husband, wrapped in a cocoon of blankets with a woolen cap pulled down over his ears. He grinned up at me like a mischievous elf, and I couldn’t help myself—I kissed his withered cheek. The woman in turn came over and kissed Nancy.

I noticed that she was wearing rags wound around her feet and legs to keep out the cold. She could speak English.

“Fifteen years here.” She motioned to the Grotto and then to her husband.

I gave her a kiss too because she looked so holy and so good. Then Nancy leaned over into the wooden buggy and kissed the invalid.

We all laughed at the kissing bee and continued on our way. Nancy and I walked on ahead of our fellow pilgrims because we wanted to catch our first glimpse of the Shrine when we were alone.

The couple understood and waved us on our way.

I had never seen two such peaceful, happy people—the invalid with the grace of God upon him, and his guardian angel wife.

We stopped long enough at the Plaza in front of the Rosary Chapel to say a prayer as I knelt and Nancy bowed before the statue of the Crowned Virgin. It is a beautiful statue of the Virgin Mary on a stone pedestal and crowned with a wreath of electric lights. Unusual. But it shows the love and devotion the people of Lourdes have for Our Blessed Mother.

From the Plaza, we passed under one of the two archways that lead up to the Crypt Chapel like two welcoming arms. I was having difficulty in walking because the ground was covered with a thick coating of slippery, hard-packed ice. I was glad it wasn't fresh fallen snow. That would have been difficult with the wheelchair.

My feet were growing uncomfortably numb. I had not thought to bring any overshoes with me, and had only a pair of woolen socks to fend out the cold. The thin California shoes gave little protection from the freezing ice terrain.

Once under the archway, we stopped at a little shop to the left of us and bought two tapers. They were long thin candles with a blue tip at the base. We selected two rather thin ones. They could be had in all sizes and price ranges, from a tiny pencil-taper to one needing a wheelbarrow to get it over to the Shrine. We figured that God and Mary could see our little light as well as the larger, stronger ones.

We had come out into a wide court that led along beside the noisily flowing Gave. We kept close to the wall at the left because the ice was smoother there. And because we were nearing the row of brass spigots that contained the precious holy water of Lourdes.

Looking up, we could see the enormous gray stone church set sturdily into the rock foundation of Massabielle. A snow-covered hill sloped off from the steep rock and ended in the shoulder-high stone wall beside our path. In the wall was a row of perhaps fifteen brass faucets that looked like modern doorknobs. Beneath was a stone trough to catch the precious water that spilled from much filling of jugs and bottles. One of the brass knobs had been left open so that the water would continue to run out in a clear stream. Otherwise, the water would have frozen in the faucets.

From the wall, the rock of Massabielle jutted out a bit.

We followed the rock around the jutting . . . and came suddenly face to face with the Shrine!

I held my breath as I raised my eyes to the cleft in the rock and beheld the blue sashed figure of Our Blessed Mother.

I got down on my knees as Nancy bowed her head in reverent prayer.

We stayed motionless a long, long time before the statue, gazing up at the beautiful holy figure, the golden roses at Her feet, the inscription JE SUIS L'IMMACULEE CONCEPTION on the wreath about Her head. And the repetition of it in the native Basque tongue, QUE SOY ERA IMMACULADA COUNCEPTION at the base of Her feet.

Gradually we came back to earth enough to notice the rest of the Grotto.

There were about half a dozen people sitting on the old-fashioned benches waiting for the Mass. The rock around the Grotto was black with soot and smoke from the thousands of candles that had been offered in prayer over the years. A few smoke-blackened crutches and canes and braces hung from one part of the rocky cavern. There were not as many as we had anticipated. That was good. We didn't want to think of bodily illness and cures, but of spiritual graces and awakenings that had transpired there.

Several huge icicles hung from the rocks, one just beside the figure of Mary.

It added a touch of fairyland.

I became aware of a scraping and a spluttering noise. The spluttering, I discovered, was from the burning candles. So many candles! So many prayers and petitions to heaven. The candles ranged in size from thin ones like we had to tremendous waxen trees that stood alone at the side of the altar and gave out a physical as well as a spiritual warmth which was most welcome.

The scraping noise was made by a colorful man in leather breeches who was scraping up the endless flow of melted wax with a flat hoe.

The spluttering and scraping were part of the sounds of a visit to the Shrine, along with that of the musical flow of the River Gave behind us.

To the right of the Shrine was a glass door that looked as if it led right on into the very heart of Massabielle. It was the new sacristy.

We found a place near the front of the Shrine just as the sacristy door opened and Father Cassagnard came out to begin the Mass.

I felt myself being poked on the shoulder and turned to see who

was doing the poking. It was the man in leather breeches. He walked toward the altar and beckoned us to follow him. Puzzled, I took hold of Nancy's wheelchair and did as commanded. We were led to the little open grillwork gate at the right side of the altar, and then up the step and around the back of the marble altar itself! I didn't know whether to continue to follow our escort or not, but I did.

There was a regular passageway that led beneath the feet of the statue of Mary, around behind the altar and over to the left side of the Grotto where some wooden kneeling benches had been placed.

Our wax-scraper guide motioned me to put Nancy's chair here . . . almost up on the altar itself, and for me to use one of the kneeling benches.

It was much warmer here, under the shelter of the rock. We were so close to Father Cassagnard, we could almost reach out and touch him as he stood talking to Our Lord.

We were the first to receive Holy Communion that morning.

The Host seemed to be smaller and harder than those used in our churches at home. But what an indescribable feeling to receive God in such a hallowed spot! I felt that I must keep my mind and my heart free from any selfish desires. We were so close to God and His heavenly hosts, any wish would surely be granted.

After Communion I continued to watch the movements of the priest. I became aware of his exquisite French lace surplice, so delicate and ethereal!

Then I happened to look down at his feet.

Father was wearing the biggest, heaviest, blackest shoes I have ever seen.

It was like a fusing of heaven and earth.

Peekaboo Reporters

WE were anxious to see the actual bath waters. After Mass, we walked on down the path that led beyond the Grotto. Several hundred feet away was a gray marble building facing the River Gave. It was the newly constructed bathhouse—a dignified, sharply designed structure with a ramp leading up to the covered stone porch and the row of metal doors.

Aside from several workmen, we were the only ones in that part of the Grotto. The snow was thick on the hill above us. The path was coated with a thick layer of hard-packed ice, as it was in the Plaza and the Grotto. It was not too difficult to slip and slide along as I pushed the wheelchair toward the bathhouse.

The stillness was entrancing. The only sounds were the puff-puff of a gasoline motor on a saw the workmen were using, and the ever-present loud swishing noise of the River Gave as it flowed along beside us. The river was yellow and opaque, telling of glaciers it had passed in its descent from mountains to the valley. In the summertime the water would be crystal clear—but always cold.

We stopped at the foot of the bathhouse ramp to read a sign, written in French. We could make out only the hour numerals, and even they were different from what they are in our country. We assumed that the 10 meant that the baths were open at ten in the morning, and the 15—we counted on our fingers—would be three o'clock in our time.

We went up the cement ramp and paused at the first huge metal door. The building looked cold. And deserted. There was a row of doors—about eight of them—which we later learned were divided between the men and the women bathers. The first ones were for the women visitors, and the remainder were for the men.

I left Nancy sitting on the porch while I took a walk a little farther along the path. I had to hop over construction boards and

dodge workmen who paid little attention to me. They were working on the stone embankment that kept the river in its place so close to the walkway.

As I followed the lonely path along the embankment, I wondered if Angel Nana could know that we had actually arrived in Lourdes. I recalled her knowing expression the day I had mentioned such a journey to her. I wished there could be some sign from heaven, no matter how slight, to assure me. Then, quite unexpectedly, I came to a large stone statue beside the path. The plaque was inscribed, SAINT MARGARET OF SCOTLAND. Nana's name was Margaret, and she was from Scotland. Seeing her namesake saint so unexpectedly was enough of a sign for me . . . Angel Nana knew.

I went back for Nancy, and we walked to the Grotto Shrine where we lit our two slim tapers and placed them in one of the circular racks at the Altar. The flame from our candles was as bright as that of the much larger ones. Candles are like that . . . no matter how little or battered or soiled they are, once they're lit the light from them is always the same.

I guess it's that way with our souls in God's eyes.

After lighting the candles and leaving our prayers we walked around the passageway in back of the altar. At a cleft in the rock, almost beneath the spot where the Virgin Mary had appeared, was a wire enclosure. It was filled with unopened letters. Father Casagnard later explained to us that this was where people left their special intention letters. Letters were also sent here from all parts of the world. They were never read by earthly readers . . . they were left there for Our Blessed Mother.

From the altar, we returned to the drinking-water spigots where there was a handy tin drinking cup. I filled it and was about to hand it to Nancy when I happened to catch sight of two men peeking at us from behind a tree.

Seeing that I had noticed them, they came forward rather sheepishly. One was carrying a news camera.

The cameraman spoke a few words of English.

"Bath?" he said, pointing to Nancy, and then back to the bathhouse.

Momentarily annoyed, I frowned and shrugged my shoulders.

The reporter reached in his pocket and brought out a little bag of candy he had bought for Nancy. The candies were shaped and colored like the pebbles in the River Gave.

Ashamed of my annoyance, I smiled and thanked him.

Immediately he pointed to the tin cup, and then to Nancy.

"Drink?"

Nancy drank the holy water as the camera flashbulb clicked.

Through pantomime the newsmen made it known to us that they would like some pictures of Nancy at the Grotto.

We returned to the Shrine for a picture of Nancy and me standing looking up at the Virgin Mary.

I hoped that Our Blessed Mother would not be annoyed. It seemed a bit sacrilegious to be taking news photos in such a holy spot.

I looked down to see how Nancy felt about it.

Her face was serene and noncommittal.

Her mind was more on the things of heaven than on the two eager-beaver news reporters.

We started back to the hotel and were a bit miffed to see that the newsmen had attached themselves to us. They wanted a picture now of Nancy being wheeled across the Plaza in front of the Basilica. We obliged, and I looked as pleasant as I could under the circumstances.

I had such a guilty feeling about all this publicity in such a hallowed place.

We couldn't shake our news hounds. They followed along at a respectable distance behind us as we walked along the lengthy Esplanade.

"They live at the same hotel we do," explained Nancy. "I saw them go in the room next to ours yesterday. And they came here on the same train we did."

I couldn't believe it. They had followed us all the way to Lourdes to see what was going to happen to Nancy.

As we crossed the bridge in front of the hotel, the more persistent of the newsmen sprinted in front of us to ask the question again.

"Bath?"

He pointed to his wrist watch.

I didn't want to influence Nancy in any way.

I let her answer.

She looked to see if she had my approval, then turned to the newsmen and held up three fingers.

She was going in the baths at three o'clock that afternoon.

This really pleased the newsmen. They looked at each other in happy anticipation.

Maybe they would witness a Lourdes miracle!

We went into the hotel and sat down to rest in the quaint little lobby. But the newsmen were still not through with us. With broad smiles and beckoning fingers, they motioned for us to come to the lobby gift shop.

Nancy had another picture taken as she sat smiling at a statue of St. Bernadette.

Many times I wondered what Nancy thought of the many news picture-taking ordeals she had had in her life. She never mentioned them one way or the other. Although she was always ready to smile and pose when a picture was to be taken, I never once remember seeing her read a news story—or even mention to anyone that there was a story about her in the newspaper.

After the gift-shop picture, the newsmen went smiling on their way, and we were left to our privacy. I suggested to Nancy that she go upstairs and take a little nap, but she had other ideas.

Madelon was on duty at the desk in the lobby, so Nancy stayed beside her while I went on upstairs alone. All the way to the second floor, I could hear Nancy's giggling admission that she liked *both* François and Guy, and would Madelon help her to choose one of them for a boy friend.

At noon I went down to the lobby to see about some lunch. Nancy and her new confidante were still discussing the possibilities of the two boy friends.

"I like Guy," Nancy was saying, "but he already has a wife. François can't speak English, so maybe he could teach me French and I could teach him English . . . I think I'll decide on François."

She saw me coming down the stairs and called, "Mom, can we eat in the dining room today? Madelon says it's open on one side." Then she turned and stage-whispered to Madelon, "François works in the dining room at noon!"

Most of the dining room was closed because three painters were redecorating it in pretty pastel with intricate gilded scrolls. However, there was one small section open for the few winter diners.

We found a place at one of the easily accessible tables and tried again to decipher the French menu.

Guy came mincing from the kitchen, impeccable in his tuxedo, pencil poised to take our order. Nancy sat eying him thoughtfully, mentally comparing his qualities with those of the more boyish François.

I handed the menu over to Guy and told him to bring whatever he chose. That pleased him. All smiles, he went out to concoct something I hoped wouldn't be too hard on our purse or our digestion.

A row of temporary screens had been set up between the painters and the diners. The three artisans were working now, on a scaffold where they could look over to see us. They all three started to sing in the most beautiful harmony, a Basque folksong with trills and yodels that set our fingers to tapping. I could see by the way they kept watching us that the concert was for our benefit.

Nancy clapped when they had finished the first song. That was all the encouragement they needed. They were busy entertaining us during the entire meal, their yodels keeping time with the swish of their paint brushes.

We were sitting at a large picture window facing the River Gave. We had a perfect view of the Esplanade, the towering graceful Basilica and the mountains with their blanket of white. A large crucifix stood out from the mountain to the left of the Basilica. It was on the path that wound around the mountain past the bronze and startlingly lifelike Stations of the Cross. Somewhere back in those hills was the home of the Bishop of Lourdes. Madelon had told Nancy that we might even be able to catch a glimpse of him before we left Lourdes.

Our lunch was a good one. It was buttered trout, caught in the River Gave that very morning. Guy brought it to our table on a wheeled cart containing nameless herbs and spices which he mixed together to make a sauce that completely submerged the flavor of the trout.

François stood beside Guy to screw the caps back on the bottles as they were used.

They both looked the height of efficiency and urbanity.

Nancy was having a difficult time in deciding definitely when the competition between boy friends was so close.

After lunch I returned to our room and Nancy stayed in the lobby to talk to some of the tourists who had arrived from Spain. They were in Lourdes for only a few hours, as were so many who came to see the Shrine.

I tried to content myself in the room, but was too nervous about the three o'clock event. I wondered what Nancy was really expecting when she plunged into the icy waters.

I wondered what God and Our Blessed Lady were expecting to do for her.

It came time to get Nancy bundled up and start the cold walk across the Esplanade. I tried not to think about the icy water, or to notice the snow as it caked into the wheels of Nancy's chair as we walked.

Nancy was especially quiet, and looked a little bit scared.

At the Shrine we stopped to say a little prayer before continuing on to the cold-looking marble bathhouse.

There was only one workman and the noisy river to greet us. I checked my watch, thinking perhaps we were too early. Ten minutes to three—or ten to fifteen in French time.

The workman was digging a trench beside the bathhouse ramp. He watched us silently as I slipped and slid along the icy walkway. As we passed him he genuflected and made the sign of the cross. I hurried on, embarrassed and self-conscious.

The late afternoon shadows made the bathhouse porch even colder than the shady Grotto. Nancy reached out her hand, ran her fingers across the cold stone wall—and said nothing.

I tried the first huge bronze door. It was locked.

Perhaps we should have made an appointment somewhere . . . I didn't know.

We stood a moment, wondering what to do. I started to go down the ramp to take Nancy back to the hotel.

The workman came running up to us and pointed a gnarled finger toward the Grotto. A woman, wrapped in a heavy fur coat, was coming toward us, her head bent low to keep out the cold.

She looked up and smiled as she approached.

What a beautiful woman! Hair in Grecian style, large luminous eyes, clear olive skin . . .

I had pictured the bath attendants as stocky, bulky women—I don't know why.

The woman shook hands with me, kissed Nancy, and motioned for us to follow her to the first bronze door. She couldn't speak a word of English.

She unlocked the heavy door and pushed it open, then stood aside for us to enter.

The interior of the building was the same as the outside—cold gray marble.

Thank You

WE had entered a long room, separated from the baths by blue-and-white striped canvas curtains. The French attendant held the curtain back on the first cubicle for us to enter. We were in a fairly good-sized dressing room lined with backless wooden benches. A tiny electric heater sent a warm glow to my frozen feet. At the far end of the room was a white curtain. Beyond that was the bath.

I placed Nancy's wheelchair as close to the little heater as possible. The snow on the wheels began to melt and run in trickles across the floor, but the pleasant French woman didn't seem to mind. She was busy shaking the wrinkles out of an unbleached muslin gown for Nancy. The gown looked much like those used in hospitals. There were several of them hanging on pegs on the wall.

It was getting near time for Nancy to take her warm clothes off and plunge into the icy water.

I wondered if she really wanted to.

Putting a hand on each arm of her wheelchair, I leaned over so that we were face to face and said quietly:

"Nancy, you know—you don't *have* to go in the water. It's entirely up to you. Do you want to go in?"

Nancy had lowered her chin and averted her eyes. She took a deep breath and, without looking up, nodded.

I knew by that gesture how scared she really was—how much of an effort it had been for her to nod her approval. I knew she wouldn't want it any other way, so, without a word, I helped her to undress.

The Frenchwoman was standing waiting, holding the muslin gown to the heater. As Nancy removed her woolen undershirt, the woman replaced it with the warmed gown. Nancy smiled up at her and said, "I will say a prayer for you."

I think the woman understood, by the way she smiled back.

I tied the gown ties at the opening in the back. There was a big opening because Nancy's swollen body took up most of the slack.

I turned the wheelchair toward the bath as the attendant slid the curtain back on its metal rings, and we got our first look at the bath.

It looked like a sunken bathtub, about eight feet long and three feet wide. At the end nearest us were three gray stone steps leading down into the crystal clear waters. The water was about three feet deep in the gray stone bath. Wooden floor boards ran the length of each side of the bath for the attendants to walk on as they helped the bathers. At the far end of the tub, against the gray stone wall, was a ten-inch plastic statue of Our Lady of Lourdes. It was covered with lipstick, and looked slightly battered.

I wheeled Nancy as close to the first step as possible. The attendant gestured that the two of us should lift Nancy from under her arms and ease her down onto the top step. She hadn't fully realized how heavy Nancy was. I thought for a second that all three of us were going headlong into the water.

The water was not up to the top step, but the stone must have been cold. Nancy gave a gasp and a shiver, then eased herself down the next step and into the icy water. She gave a loud gasp as the shock of the cold water hit her. The attendant on one side and I on the other managed to keep a firm hold of her. Nancy grabbed for my hand and held tight as she propelled herself farther into the water. The French attendant was reciting prayers as we moved jerkily along toward the far end of the bath. I was praying too. I prayed that—whatever happened—I wanted it to be God's will, not mine.

Nancy would want it that way.

Near the end of the tub, Nancy made a quick, determined plunge, grabbed the statue and kissed it. Her lips moved silently as she glanced toward heaven and smiled. Then she placed the statue back on the shelf and gave a startled squeal when the attendant suddenly doused her backward into the water.

We got back to the steps in record time, Nancy propelling herself along like a marathon swimmer.

Here came a heartache.

I didn't know how to lift her back into the wheelchair from the steps. Her thin arms were too frail to hold the tremendous

weight of her body for such a distance. We couldn't grasp her any other way.

We tried pulling and tugging, but Nancy's wet, slippery skin made it an impossible situation. The wheelchair seemed six feet high. Nancy sat shivering on the cold wet floor, the clammy muslin gown pasted against her body. I didn't know what to do. And then the attendant got an idea. She reached in back of her and got a canvas chair seat with strap handles on each side of it. Nancy scooted onto this, put her arms around my neck, and we hoisted her up to the wheelchair seat.

Then something strange happened. Dripping wet and cold as she had been, when I got her in the dressing room, she was as dry as could be, and glowing with an inner warmth.

She had stopped shivering and sat strangely quiet, with a new inner peace that was never to leave her.

It was as though she had learned something wonderful from heaven that she couldn't even share with me.

I didn't ask.

I was still trying to catch my breath as Nancy started taking off the muslin gown. We heard footsteps at the front door. The attendant hurried out to investigate. We heard her talking excitedly in French, then the somewhat apologetic voice of a Frenchman.

Probably nothing important. French people always talked as though they were excited.

But when the attendant returned, brushing the curtain hastily aside, we knew she had encountered something unusual.

She motioned me to come to the entrance.

I peeked out of the curtain to see our two friends, the newsmen, waiting nervously.

They wanted my permission to take a picture of Nancy in the baths.

"The Bishop gives permission," one informed me, and waited with eager eyes.

I felt a surge of anger and, tightening my lips, started to shake my head emphatically.

I felt Nancy pulling on my sleeve and leaned over to see what she wanted.

"Let them, Mom," she whispered. "It's advertising for Mary."

I hadn't thought of it that way.

I stood aside and the newsmen came in beaming as Nancy modestly held the muslin gown up to her naked body. Only I

could know how very embarrassed she was, because she certainly didn't show it.

Another news picture was taken.

The news reporter, with notebook poised, leaned toward the wheelchair to ask, "Did you ask for a cure, Nancy?"

She looked quietly into his face for a moment and then, with a faraway smile, answered, "Oh no. I said 'Thank you' to Mary, and she said 'Thank you' to me."

Q.T.

Housekeeping

WE tried as hard as we could to like our large luxurious room at the hotel. But, as the blizzard weather continued at Lourdes, the room got colder and colder. We got into the habit of putting on our hat and coat every time we went into the big cement-walled bathroom.

One morning, we were having a light breakfast in the room and Nancy ended the table grace by saying, "Dear God, thank You very much for this big beautiful room . . . and please make us like it."

For the first few days after our arrival, it snowed so hard, we were not able to go to the Grotto. The wheelchair wouldn't push through the drifts of fresh-fallen snow. Father Cassagnard came regularly every morning to bring Holy Communion. From our large front windows, we could see him coming around the wide snowy walk of the Esplanade, his black cape flying in the wind, his Basque beret pulled down tight on his head. It was an unforgettable sight.

Each morning before Father Cassagnard's arrival, the little French maid would come into the room and set up a shrine with a crucifix, shiny brass candlestick, freshly starched white linen cloth, and even a little vase of gay native flowers. She did it all with such an air of willingness, I am sure that God must have blessed her for it.

Nancy got in the habit of spending the afternoons down in the little lobby. There were usually a few tourists to talk to . . . and there was François, who presided over the tiny bar at the side of the lobby. Nancy discovered that for the equivalent of an American quarter she could get a Coca-Cola, and François would serve it to her on a silver tray with a lace doily and two cookies. She spent most of her airplane gift money on Cokes and service.

I spent the afternoons in the room, trying to get caught up on

the neglected correspondence. I had a miserable time trying to keep warm as I sat huddled over the fancy desk.

One afternoon Nancy opened our door to come in, and then sat in the hall laughing at me.

I was sitting in the middle of the bed, my coat, the two terry robes and three sweaters on me, the two feather quilts around my shoulders, and Nancy's red pompom woolen hat pulled down over my eyebrows. Even then I was shivering.

Nancy, still laughing, said, "Mom, why don't we move back to the little room down the hall? It was much warmer than this one."

I peered at her from under the woolen hat. "I wouldn't dare tell them we want to move again, even if I *do* gradually turn into ice here."

Nancy scooted over beside me. "I'll tell them, Mom; let me?"

She could win any argument in the tone of voice she was using. I agreed. "The next time we are downstairs you can tell them." I threw off the two comforters. "Maybe we'd better go down right now and get it over with."

So, once again, the procession wound along the hall to the smaller, more comfortable room. I knew it would have been useless to suggest that we do the moving ourselves. We made a production of it, the two of us and the full crew of house servants.

The little room *was* warmer. I was able to sit without the coats and robes. But I missed the inspiring view of the Basilica. This view of the closed shops on the side street wasn't very interesting.

We were in the room one day and one night.

The next day, Nancy came up from the lobby to tell me that there was an American couple from our own state of California staying at the hotel. They wanted to see me. I know now how Livingston in the jungle felt.

I couldn't get downstairs fast enough.

A vibrant, cheerful woman was waiting to greet us. Beside her sat one of the best-looking men I had seen in many a moon. He looked like Charles Boyer. He was wearing a flattering Basque beret and tweed sports coat. He was in a wheelchair.

Nancy introduced us, and I shook hands with the wife, Marie. Then I reached out my hand to shake hands with Pierre. Realizing my mistake, I hastily put my hand in my pocket.

Pierre couldn't move anything but his eyes and his lips.

Nancy suggested we all have a Coke. She wanted to treat us.

We moved the two wheelchairs to one of the tiny marble-topped

tables and began to talk about old home times. Marie and Pierre had arrived at the hotel several weeks before we did. They had a room on the fourth floor. I told them about our numerous moves, and about the elegant and freezing de luxe room.

"Why don't you move up beside us?" suggested Marie. "All the rooms are vacant up there. It's real warm, with a wonderful view, and"—she leaned closer to whisper—"we do our own cooking on the Q.T.—much cheaper!"

I looked over to Nancy. "*We couldn't* move again!"

Nancy shook her head in agreement.

"Not if *I* have to tell them to come and get our things!"

"I'll tell them," Marie offered magnanimously. "It's cheaper up there, too!" she added, and clinched the deal.

The now well-trained procession paraded us up to a cute little dormer-windowed room on the fourth floor. From this new height we could see the bend of the River Gave as it flowed along beside the gray hospital building in the Esplanade. We also got a grand view of the sharp-peaked mountain behind the spire of the Basilica.

This, I was sure, would be our last move at the Hotel Ambassadeur.

Nancy and Pierre remained in the lobby while Marie helped me get settled. I learned that they were from southern California too, that Pierre had been famous for his crepes suzette in his own restaurant, and that a nerve condition had paralyzed him completely. Marie, all alone, had brought him to Lourdes. They had driven across the country in their station wagon and had come to France by ship.

"We'll be glad to take you and Nancy along with us wherever we go," Marie offered generously. "It's almost impossible to get anywhere in Lourdes with a wheelchair—it's so hilly. But we go everywhere in the station wagon."

How good God was being to us, to even furnish transportation for two snowbound pilgrims!

It was nearing noon, so we went downstairs to get Pierre and Nancy. The tiny elevator could hold only two people and one folded wheelchair at a time. We insisted that Pierre and Marie go first. There was so much fussing with the transfer from chair to metal stool where we were concerned.

Pierre, we discovered, could stand up with assistance and could take a few steps, very slowly, from his wheelchair to the elevator. He could talk, too. His voice was so quiet, we had to learn to

listen when he wanted to say something. He had a tremendous sense of humor, and kept Nancy giggling. The two of them were hitting it off well together. Each of them had risen above their cross, so there was no pity or comparing illness—only a joviality that grew as friendship progressed.

Marie invited us to come up and have lunch with them. "We've got meatballs and spaghetti!" she whispered.

So we joined them.

Pierre had to be fed like a baby, with even a large linen napkin tied around his neck like a bib. This didn't hinder the fun. We joked and laughed as though we had all come to Lourdes on a holiday.

Marie brought out a fancy fruit cake as a special treat. Pierre, seeing it, said "Boom! Boom!" and his brown eyes twinkled in merriment.

"That's his favorite expression," laughed Marie. "Back in the good old days when he would be rushing around the restaurant attending to everything, he had the habit of saying 'Boom! Boom!' when all was going well."

Nancy took a bite of the cake, looked over to Pierre and solemnly said, "Boom! Boom!" They both snickered at the joke because Pierre couldn't laugh out loud.

After lunch Marie suggested that we leave Nancy and Pierre in the lobby while we went up the hill to the town of Lourdes to do some housekeeping shopping for me.

It surprised me to learn that there was a town.

"Oh, this is only the tourist district down here," laughed Marie. "It's all closed down for the season around here, but Lourdes is quite a large town. It's about half a mile up the hill—and we'd better get going if we want to do some shopping before the stores close."

Pierre, we learned, liked to play cards. So he and Nancy had a game of rummy in the lobby—Nancy playing her hand, then moving around the table to play the cards for Pierre as he directed her.

We drove up to the town in the station wagon so that we could be back in plenty of time to go to the Grotto for the three o'clock baths.

"Pierre doesn't take a full bath," Marie explained as we drove up the steep winding hill. "He takes what they call a partial bath . . . the water is so *cold*, you know!"

She was not one to fish for sympathy. It was heartbreaking to hear her say absently, "Sometimes he gets so discouraged——"

She stopped talking because she had gone too far on the subject, and because we had pulled up in front of a hardware store.

Marie had brought her French guidebook, and knew how to use it. We had no trouble in asking for a little electric hot plate and a couple of tiny pots and pans and some silverware.

"You'll need an extension cord too," she added.

"Well, that's *one* thing I thought to bring!" I said, priding myself on my good judgment.

"The American ones are no good here," Marie said, taking the wind out of my sails. "The circuits or something are different."

We got a French extension cord and went on to the pastry shop.

It was a pretty town. Much different from the closed-up atmosphere of the tourist section where we were staying. The people looked cosmopolitan and busy. The shops were modern and filled with inviting wares.

"I guess I'll have to get some overshoes. My feet have been frozen since we've been here," I said, looking in a general merchandise window. Marie looked at the price tags and figured them out in American money. "They cost about nine dollars, those fur-lined ankle boots."

I decided to wait a while.

I learned that shopping in Lourdes meant making the rounds of many shops. A butcher shop carried meat and dairy products, a drug-store carried drugs, a pastry shop had pastry and candy. It was interesting to go into the various little shops, but very time-consuming.

I was a little worried about leaving Nancy so long.

"Don't worry about Nancy," laughed Marie. "She's got everyone at the hotel wound around her little finger. They'd do anything for her!"

We stopped in a clean-smelling shop for cheese, butter, and milk. The cheese was cut off of a great big round one to our specifications. The butter was cut from a huge pat with a thin wire for a knife. The milk was ladled out of a big can into bottles Marie had brought along for the purpose. We bought three eggs apiece.

There were no bags or twine for our purchases. Each item, even the three eggs, were twisted into little bits of paper and handed

over the counter to us. That explained why I had seen all the native Basque residents carrying shopping bags of canvas slung over their shoulder. They were a very necessary commodity. I bought one and slung it over my shoulder like a true Frenchman.

"Put your scarf over the top of the bag so's they won't see the groceries when we go through the lobby," Marie suggested wisely.

We parked on the street in front of the hotel. Through the big glass window we could see Nancy and Pierre busy at their card game.

How wonderful to have companions in our adventure!

It took several trips from our car up to our room to get all the homemaking equipment to its destination. If Madelon, at the desk, suspected anything, she didn't give a sign of it.

I unpacked the groceries, then took a little nap, waking in the nick of time. The baths would be open in fifteen minutes.

I took Nancy's hat and coat down to her. It was silly—getting all bundled up to get completely undressed and into the freezing waters. Then I remembered how very special this water was . . . how very blessed we were to be able to be here.

Nancy put on her coat without a word, glancing out at the fast-falling snow.

Pierre watched her closely.

"Are you going to take a complete bath?" he asked edgily.

Nancy nodded emphatically.

Here was a cue for Marie.

"If Nancy is brave enough to go right in the water, why don't you, Pierre?"

Pierre wrinkled his nose and gave a little shiver.

"It's so cold!" he groaned.

Marie, standing behind his wheelchair, signaled to Nancy. She caught the message. She reached over and took Pierre by the hand.

"Pierre, if I go right in—will you?"

Pierre sat thinking a minute, then looked up to Nancy and smiled mischievously.

"Okay, we go right in. Boom! Boom!"

We all went off, laughing.

Marie had obtained a special pass so that she could drive the station wagon under the arches of the Basilica, past the Shrine, and almost to the very door of the bathhouse.

The bathhouse doors were open, though we were the only ones at this end of the Grotto. No, there was a gray-haired, distinguished

man sitting on one of the porch benches. He saw us and came to meet the station wagon.

"This is Mr. Hunt," introduced Marie. "He takes Pierre into the baths. By the way, Mr. Hunt—Pierre has promised to take a complete bath today!"

Mr. Hunt smiled and Pierre groaned.

Marie accompanied us into the women's section.

"I'll take a bath too," she said to Nancy. "Then afterward I can help lift you in."

Nancy turned to me.

"How about you, Mom?"

I hedged quickly and shivered inwardly.

"I'll be too busy looking after you, Nancy. And anyway—I'm not sick."

I was sorry I had said that. Nancy had not come here because she was sick. I wanted to apologize but saw that she had ignored the remark. She pointed her finger at me.

"You're scared! But I'm going to see that you get in at least once before we leave—even if I have to *shove* you in!"

There were two husky attendants this time. And two other bathers. The bathers had already been in the waters and were dressing.

Mary hurriedly undressed and took the bath as I helped Nancy out of her clothes. She put on the wet gown that Marie had used.

As we made ready to put her into the bath this time, we sat her on the canvas seat and each took hold of the two handles.

I could see that Nancy was terrified—not of the cold water, but of being lifted on such a precarious seat. She looked toward me desperately and I nodded my head toward the little statue of Mary. Nancy understood. As we made ready to lift her, she whispered quickly and determinedly to me, "They won't drop me . . . Mary will be helping."

She was doused into the water, had kissed the statue, and was back in the chair in no time at all.

The glowing, peaceful radiance had come into her face again as before.

Pierre was waiting beside the ramp for us.

I couldn't help but notice the change in him. His face was glowing with happiness, and his eyes were sparkling.

As the two wheelchairs met, he turned his eyes to Nancy and said happily, "I offered my bath for *you*, Nancy!"

Nancy cocked her head and grinned.

"And I offered my bath for you!"

We all stood laughing in the love of giving.

Before leaving the Grotto, we stopped in the station wagon to sit in silent prayer before the Shrine. Our reverence was broken only once when Pierre said solemnly, "All those glowing candles! Someday I'm going to ask the Bishop a favor. I'm going to ask him to move those candles down to the bathhouse, where they'll do a lot of good in keeping the bathers warm!"

We didn't know whether to laugh or not.

It was fun to get back to the hotel and get out our new house-keeping equipment. I had stored it in half of the old-fashioned wardrobe closet. It was the only place I could lock up while we were out of the room.

Our window had a thick stone sill and two outside wooden shutters that could be closed against the cold. Marie showed us how to close the shutters, put the hot plate on the stone sill, and then shut the window and pull the shade down.

"Now nobody can see anything or smell anything if they come unexpectedly in when you're cooking," she said.

It was a great idea. But it didn't work for us the first night.

I had bought a couple of potatoes, some ground beef, and an onion for minced-collops-and-toddy stew, one of Nana's Scottish dishes and a favorite with Nancy. I put the ingredients in the new bright blue saucepan, added the water and a lid, then put it on the sill to cook. It was steaming nicely when there was a knock on the door and I hurried to pull down the window shade.

Madelon, who lived right across the hall from us, had come for a little social call.

Thank heaven the window was shut and the shade was down.

We must have talked for a long time.

When she left, we were greeted by a cloud of black smoke when I opened the window. The ground meat had entirely disappeared, and the only thing left of our pretty new pan was a blackened pot with a hole in it.

We went down to the restaurant and Guy made us an omelette in the fiery chafing dish beside our table.

Paris Gowns

—Just in Case

ON the third trip to the baths, I knew that I must either go in or be called "chicken." Nancy, it was planned, would take a partial bath this time, leaving me free to take care of myself. Marie was going in too. She didn't mind the cold water any more than a polar bear.

Marie was first, then Nancy.

With a partial bath, the attendants wet cloths in the bath and then place them on the affected part of the body while prayers are being said.

A large piece of muslin that had been dipped into the holy water was placed on Nancy's abdomen while we all prayed. I am sure that Nancy and I didn't say any *asking* prayers, but the others in that dressing room must have stormed heaven with requests in Nancy's behalf. They all seemed so solicitous of her.

Then it was my turn.

I undressed quickly, put the open-backed little muslin gown on, and started in a mad rush toward the bath. I had intended to take a running jump into the water—leaping over the two steps to get in and under as soon as possible. However, the attendants held me back. Wagging their fingers at me, they made it plain that I must go in slowly, one step at a time, while they said appropriate prayers.

The first touch of the icy water on my big toe set my scalp to tingling. I got down and into the water with a gasp that must have been heard at the Grotto.

I kept one thing in mind all the time the two attendants prayed, and I edged along through the water to the statue of the Blessed

Virgin: I mustn't plead for a cure for Nancy. We both wanted it God's way.

I tried to fill my mind with something other than Nancy. Anything.

As I kissed the statue of Our Lady, I mumbled, "Please, Mary, warm my feet."

I was so thankful that the attendants couldn't understand English.

I felt the same glow that Nancy had experienced when I got out to dress. And the same peaceful serenity.

I didn't need a towel because my skin was dry.

Nancy had been watching me intently to see my reaction to the bath. She looked pleased.

"You look holy," she summarized.

I didn't tell her what I had prayed for.

But my feet were so warm, I didn't put the wool bobby-socks back on. I never had cold feet again all the time we were in Lourdes.

Pierre, too, had taken a partial bath.

He sat waiting with his faithful escort for us to come out. We had walked to the baths today because the air was so clear and the sun was so warm.

On the way back to the hotel, we stopped at the Shrine. There were perhaps a dozen people there. People from every walk in life, and every country. There were no cripples or invalids in evidence. They would be coming later in the season with the enormous pilgrimages, when the weather was more friendly. Now there was only a handful of worshipers. One, a dark-skinned priest, knelt with bowed head. His hair was shiny wet. He had evidently just come from the baths.

There were five Spanish nuns kneeling at the altar rail. One got up and walked through the open gate to stand at the feet of the Blessed Virgin's statue. Then she leaned over reverently to kiss the smooth worn gray rock that was part of the cave formation. The very place Our Lady had once walked.

As she turned to leave, she reached up and took a bit of the earth from the hallowed spot and put it carefully in her hanky.

Marie motioned and we followed as she pushed Pierre's wheelchair through the gateway. They stood silently beneath the statue.

We followed and leaned to kiss the shiny dark rock. I genuflected

and we both made the sign of the cross. I had such a strong feeling that Mary was looking down at us and smiling.

From the rock, we continued on around the back of the altar to stop and look at the niche filled with letters. Then we went on to the far corner of the cavelike opening. Marie pointed and whispered:

"There's the source of the spring of holy water. That's where Bernadette dug the hole when the Virgin Mother directed her."

We saw a rectangular iron cover with a stout padlock on it.

"They had to protect the spring from disbelievers and marauders," Marie explained. "People tried to poison the water."

It was hard to believe.

We went back to the benches and stood awhile in meditation. We always found that, when we came to the Shrine, we never wanted to take our eyes off the statue, or to leave the Grotto. It had an indescribable fascination . . . such a holiness and peace.

More people had arrived now, and were lined up to file past the rock and kiss it. Some had their rosaries in their hands and stopped to touch them to the rock.

Nancy sat watching them awhile; then, unscrewing the gold case of her favorite rosary, she took the pink beads out and handed them to me. Without words she motioned for me to go up and touch the rosary to the rock.

I refused, and leaned to whisper, "I don't want to do that when all those people are sitting watching me. You can go yourself sometime."

Nancy was adamant. She knit her brows together and dropped the little pink rosary into my hand.

There was nothing for me to do but go.

Foolishly I thought, "I wonder if those people think I'm a religious fanatic, touching a rosary to a rock."

I made as hasty a trip as I could, and returned to Nancy. She held out her hand for the rosary.

It was gone.

I searched quickly through my pockets, in the cuffs of my coat sleeves, in my gloves. Not a sign of it.

"Go back to the altar and look for it," whispered Nancy, frowning with anxiety.

One trip to the altar in front of all those people had been enough. To go back and start searching for a tiny rosary was too

much. Yet I knew what that particular rosary meant to Nancy. It was the one that Bobby Sargent had given her.

Back to the altar I paraded, my head low in self-consciousness.

There, at the foot of the rock, lay the little pink rosary. I don't know yet how it could have slipped out of my hand without my noticing its absence.

As I stooped to pick it up, I raised my head to look up at the statue of the Blessed Mother. She seemed to be smiling down at me and shaking Her head. I could almost hear Her saying, "Oh, Marguerite, how much there is for you to learn!"

I put the rosary in my pocket and turned to leave the altar. All the faces in the Grotto were turned toward me, but no one was looking at me. They were all intent on the Blessed Mother.

On the way back to the hotel, we took the Esplanade walkway to the left. It led past the office of the *brancadiers* and the gray stone two-story *asile*, or hospital, of the Grotto.

As we passed under the curved archway of the Basilica, a picturesque French gendarme waved and smiled to us. He was not yet too busy, but his task would be a big one soon—when the summer months brought the swarms of pilgrims.

At the side of the hospital was a tiny fenced-in garden and a beautiful statue of St. Bernadette. She was dressed in the habit of the Sisters of Charity Order of Nevers.

We were so intent in looking at the statue, we didn't notice the sister kneeling, trowel in hand, in the garden. As we came nearer she looked up and smiled, and said "Hello" in English with an Irish accent.

What a pretty person! Her face glowed with health and holiness.

She put the trowel down and came to the edge of the fence to shake hands. Her smile captivated us all. She was dressed in a habit exactly like the one of the statue directly behind her. She told us that she was Sister Mary Patrick, that she lived at the hospital, and that she was the only one of all the sisters there who could speak English. She said that she would introduce us if we would come to the hospital sewing room some afternoon.

We promised to be back as soon as possible.

"I'll bet she's from Ireland. She's nice," remarked Nancy.

"You could cut her brogue with a knife," grinned Pierre.

Marie stopped walking and looked at Pierre.

"Should I tell them that Irish joke Harry told us?"

Pierre grinned approval.

Nancy leaned forward eagerly to listen as Marie started:

"There was an Irishwoman who came to Lourdes from the auld country. She was a good woman, but liked a wee nip every once in a while. She took a jug of Lourdes water home with her, as so many people do. When she got to the customs official, he looked at her suspiciously, shook the jug, then opened it and sniffed. 'Wine!' he reprimanded. The Irishwoman looked at him with feigned surprise. Rolling her eyes and raising her hands, she exclaimed, 'Begorra, another Lourdes miracle!'"

We had been walking as Marie talked. We were now in front of the hotel. The smooth marble steps were a real menace. So we had learned to go around to the side street, through the gift shop and in through the level side door of the hotel.

We were gradually getting to be part of Lourdes.

We left Nancy and Pierre at a card game while we hurried up the hill to get something from town for supper.

"Don't ever make the mistake of coming up here between one and three in the afternoon," counseled Marie. "All the shops are closed at that time."

"I know it," I answered. "I came hiking up here yesterday right after lunch. I thought it was a holiday or something."

I got two little pieces of beef and we had a dandy meal of steak and fried potatoes. It was difficult to get canned vegetables, but that didn't bother Nancy. We had some watery tomatoes, hard French rolls, and delicious French pastry to round out the meal. We were gradually getting used to eating the sweet butter without trying to add salt to it as we ate.

But we couldn't get used to the smelly French coffee.

The next day it was snowing hard. We would not be able to go to the Grotto or to visit the sisters at the hospital as we had planned. Nancy seemed to want to stay in bed anyway. She lay facing the wall as she talked to me. I gave her her breakfast in bed and had to ask her to please turn around and get ready to eat it.

"Why do you always lie facing the wall?" I asked a bit moodily.

Nancy sat up unconcernedly and straightened her nightgown as she answered, "I can't lie on my right side very well, Mom."

I set the tray down and looked at her more closely.

There was a lump the size of a football at the side of her ribs.

I couldn't say anything because I didn't know what to say. I didn't know what to do about it either. All I knew was that her

condition was beyond a doctor's help. If she was to be cured, it would be by divine hands.

We ate breakfast in forced gaiety.

We planned to make this an "at home" day. Nancy sat in bed working diligently with notebook and pen while I sat at the window and watched the snow fall, then got busy again on some letter writing.

The peaceful quiet was broken by the sharp ring of our telephone. We had some visitors on their way up to see us.

A few minutes later, I greeted two pleasant-looking, very humble people, a professor and his wife. They lived in Lourdes and had come as friends to offer their services as our guides. They spoke with a beautiful English accent. The wife, Vi, had deep blue eyes and a sweet old-country air about her. She spent her time, we learned, in being of any service that she could to the pilgrims at Lourdes. She did this out of the goodness of her heart, with nothing expected in return. Her husband, Harry, was the same. He was a professor at one of the local schools, and acted as a professional guide when the masses of people arrived during the summer months. He was quiet-spoken, with a twinkle in his eyes that denoted a keen sense of humor. Nancy detected this and clowned with him each time we met.

Our visitors had stopped in to see if we wanted to go up to the manse and see Bishop Théas that afternoon. A group of pilgrims were going, and it would be a wonderful opportunity for us to go along.

I looked over at Nancy. I knew she wasn't feeling at all well that day. Vi had been sitting on the edge of her bed talking to her. I could see that it was rather an effort for Nancy to keep up her part of the conversation. I debated whether to accept or refuse the invitation.

Vi patted Nancy's hand and asked, "How do you feel, dearie?"

Nancy's face lit up. "I feel fine!"

I told our new friends that we would go—or at least I would make the visit. I might decide to let Nancy rest in bed.

When our visitors had left, I turned to Nancy and asked, "Why do you always say 'fine' when anybody asks how you feel? I know you're not feeling so hot today."

Nancy pursed her lips comically. "If I didn't say 'fine' nobody would be there to talk to. People don't want to hear about aches and pains."

As she talked, Nancy opened her notebook and bent studiously to her work.

"What are you doing, writing a novel?" I laughed.

Nancy, busy with pen, answered without looking up:

"I'm designing some gowns. We can stop in Paris on the way home and get them for me if God cures me."

I dropped the post cards I had been holding and, heart in my throat, moved quietly over to sit beside her.

"Nancy . . . do you expect to be cured here at Lourdes?"

It was a cruel question. But I had to ask it. I had to know her attitude and her purpose in coming to the Shrine.

It would help me to cope with anything that came to us.

Nancy closed her notebook and said unemotionally, "Of course I *want* to be cured. But if I'm not, that's all right too. Maybe God wants me to be here at the Shrine and not get cured and still love Him more than anything in the world. Maybe that's the way He wants me to help all those who come to Lourdes and don't get their bodies cured."

It was such a profound statement, it left me momentarily speechless.

Then such a flooding of peace and happiness descended upon the room! There would be no disappointment in our lives . . . only a tremendous joy in following God's will—in knowing that, whatever happened, it would be God's plan and not ours.

It made heaven so important and earth so transient!

I had heard of people who offered themselves as victims of Divine Love. The thought had always rather frightened me. I pictured haggard, moaning saints heaping coals of pain upon themselves.

I looked over at Nancy.

Head tilted, she was humming to herself as she sketched another Paris gown, with the waist of it as tiny as a wasp's. Happiness seemed to flow from her and spill out across the room . . . or was it the happiness of God and His loved ones showering down upon us?

I couldn't distinguish.

A Basket of Prayers

I LEFT Nancy amusing herself that afternoon. I went down to the lobby to join the group of people who were going to visit the Bishop.

Two nicely dressed brothers had arrived from California that morning. One, a businessman, introduced me to his rather nervous brother. The brother had had a stroke and was partly paralyzed, but managed to walk quite well. At first glance it looked as if there was nothing wrong with him, but there must have been a tremendous hidden cross, judging by the way his brother watched over him. They were planning to stay at Lourdes a week, and had rented a little car that was being delivered from Pau, a neighboring village.

"I want you and Nancy to ride to Bartres this Sunday," offered the businessman generously. "I'd like to show Nancy the beautiful country around there. That's where Bernadette lived and tended to the sheep when she was just a little girl, you know."

I looked forward to our trip. I had thought of renting a car myself, but it would have been an extra expense on our limited budget.

There were seven of us to make the visit. Pierre, Marie, and the two brothers rode up in the station wagon. The rest of us followed by walking up the winding road that led up past the Esplanade, the Basilica, and on into the beautiful hills. We turned down a little side road and passed a snowy meadow. In the distance we could see the Bishop's home, a quaint dormer-windowed structure that nestled into its surrounding beauty like the holy place it was.

The station wagon was waiting at the driveway for us. Vi and

Harry had walked with me. They had come along to act as interpreters.

We waited at the foot of the manse steps until a male secretary came out and announced that Bishop Théas would soon be out to greet us. I wished so much that Nancy could have been there. She hadn't shown her disappointment, but then she never did.

We took note of the countryside as we waited. A meadow stretched ahead of the home and rose gradually in rocky hills. Several domestic ducks waddled through a nearby orchard and eyed us curiously.

"You should see this place when the snow's off the ground," said Harry, raising his hands, "it's really heavenly."

On the walk up the hill I had noticed workmen digging an enormous hole in the back meadow. I asked what that was for.

"That's going to be a reservoir to store the excess water from the Grotto," explained our guide Harry. "You know, sometimes there are so many visitors here every day, it's pretty much of a drain on the spring!"

I thought again how wonderful it was to be here with the feeling that we had Lourdes all to ourselves. It more than made up for the discomfort of the cold, and the absence of the spectacular pilgrimage processions in the Esplanade. The only candlelight procession we had seen as Nancy and I strolled through the deserted Esplanade was the glow of the stars shining down from the cold blue sky. The only music was from the Basilica chimes as they rang out the hymn to Our Blessed Lady at regular intervals. I didn't see how they could be improved upon.

My thoughts came quickly back to present events as the ornate doors at the top of the steps opened and Bishop Théas came majestically down, his hands extended in welcome. His eyes spoke the kindness and compassion that was in his heart. He greeted each one of us individually, paying special attention to Pierre and the invalid brother.

When he had returned to the house, the group decided to return by way of the Grotto, but I went my solitary way down the shorter road because I was a bit anxious about leaving Nancy alone in the hotel room.

I heard her laughing and talking as I hurried down the hall toward our room. Sister Mary Patrick had walked over from the Grotto hospital to pay us a visit.

She was a lot of fun. Interested in everything we had brought

from America, and ready to tell us all about life at the hospital as well as her girlhood days in Ireland.

We were so interested in each other's company, we didn't notice that the day was waning and darkness was setting in.

Sister was in the middle of telling a story when her eye happened to catch the clock. With a start she jumped up and cried, "Oh, I'm going to be late! I should be back at the hospital this very minute!"

We felt guilty for having detained her. I offered to go over and explain her tardiness to the Reverend Mother.

Sister shook her head.

"That won't be necessary—but you *could* walk over with me."

Nancy nodded. "Go ahead, Mom."

"Okay, honey. Tell Pierre and Marie I'll be right back."

We were planning to have a little supper party that evening in the lobby.

Sister and I walked across the bridge as fast as we could go with dignity. From there we took the path to the right that led along beside the River Gave. It was a little shorter than the main road. And a little less conspicuous. Sister had pulled up her skirts so that her ankles showed. She looked at me with a twinkle in her eyes and said, "If I thought nobody was looking, I'd run!"

"Let's," I laughed, looking around and seeing no one.

We started on a trot. Then we ran faster. As we neared the hospital, we were on a mad neck-and-neck race, laughing as hard as we could with the little bit of breath we had left.

At the big wooden doors of the hospital, Sister pulled the bell cord and a window upstairs flew open. A head popped out, called something down in French, then disappeared.

Sister adjusted her habit, tried to slow her breathing to normal, and waited for the door to be opened.

As she walked with great dignity into the hallway, she turned and gave me a mischievous wink and an Irish grin.

Pierre and Marie had not called for us when I returned to the hotel, so I sat down to have a little visit with Nancy. I had been rather neglecting her all day.

She read me excerpts from some of the many letters we had been receiving. Most of them asked that the writer and friends be remembered in our prayers at the Shrine.

Nancy must have been considering this rather seriously all day. She looked thoughtfully at me and asked, "Mom, is it all right if

I send God and Mary several prayers at a time? Sometimes when I'm sitting in the Grotto talking to Them about everything, I wonder if I have remembered everyone who asked for prayers."

I told her that I was sure each prayer would get to heaven if she had promised from her heart to remember each person.

Nancy gave a sigh of relief.

"There were so *many* I promised when we were starting to come over here! I couldn't carry all the prayers, so I sent them in a basket ahead of me, and then picked them all up in my heart when we got here. Was that all right to do, Mom?"

I assured her that it was all right.

No wonder she had been so fervently busy with her prayers as she sat gazing up at the statue of Our Blessed Mother at the Grotto.

I thought she had been praying for herself.

Marie came in and said that Pierre was waiting in the lobby for the dinner party.

"He's as hungry as a bear after all that fresh air today!" she said, laughing.

She went on down the stairway because there was scarcely room for Nancy and me and the stool and the folded wheelchair in the gilt elevator.

We passed her on the way down and laughed as she pretended that she was going to slide down the shiny banister. The little elevator was more like a toy than a conveyance. What a blessing it had been to us!—even though it took so much effort on Nancy's part to get in and out of.

In spite of the compactness of the lobby, it had been so well arranged that, besides the marble-topped tables on the bar side of the room, there were two dinner tables—white linen cloths and all.

We had never eaten in the lobby before because the kitchen was on the mezzanine floor. To serve a lobby meal meant that Guy and his boy helper François had to make endless running trips up and down the winding stairway.

Tonight, however, we felt like celebrating.

The lobby was warm and bright. It was interesting to watch the few traveling-through tourists as they sat in the lobby to await travel connections. The four of us seemed to be the only ones who were making a long stay of it at Lourdes. Marie and Pierre

were waiting for their personal answer to their pilgrimage to the Shrine, so their plans were as indefinite as ours.

Nancy and I were planning on staying until God wanted us to go on . . . or until our funds ran out.

Guy, handsome in his freshly pressed tuxedo, brought the menu.

Pierre waved it away.

"I want scrambled eggs without the fancy fires and service," he said a bit petulantly. He was hungry.

Marie hushed him and, as Guy hurried off for more silverware, said under her breath, "You know how Guy likes to bring the chafing dish and serve in style—don't stop him."

"But he takes so long—just to scramble a couple of eggs," moaned Pierre comically.

We had a nice dinner, served from the chafing dish. Guy did the serving as François ran up and down the stairs after things, and we thought he was going to run his legs off. Once in a while the two dinner servers would remember something they had forgotten, and we would watch the double marathon up and then down the stairs.

Pierre started to eat his eggs, then asked for a little more salt. There was none on the table.

Guy, napkin flung nattily over his arm, gave a little bow and said, "One moment, I will get it."

He started toward the stairway.

Pierre called after him, "Stop running up those stairs!"

Guy stopped, turned to us smiling graciously, and with forefinger in midair said, "It enjoys me!"

As he started up the steps, Pierre turned his laughing eyes to Nancy.

"You're teaching the wrong one English. Guy needs it more than François."

Nancy chuckled. "I guess I'll have to teach both of them."

She had been exchanging language lessons every day in the lobby, and knew quite a few French words. François was progressing in English too.

Pierre asked Nancy to play cards after dinner, so Marie went upstairs to get the card deck and I wheeled Pierre over to one of the marble-topped tables. As I came back to get Nancy, I whispered to her, "I don't think you should spend so much time playing cards here. It seems irreverent. You've been playing almost every afternoon."

Nancy cupped her hand to her mouth and whispered back to me, "Sometimes I don't really want to play—but Pierre likes to. He can't move, so I move his cards for him when he tells me the way he wants them played."

Nancy's sacrifices were all done so unassumedly, it was hard to recognize them.

I left her sitting in the lobby playing rummy with Pierre.

When I went down for her later, I mentioned to Marie that Father Cassagnard often came with Communion for Nancy, and asked if she would like Pierre to receive also. She smiled over to me and said, "That would be nice, but we're not Catholic." *

That was quite a bit of news to me.

Nancy and I got in the elevator first. Because Marie wanted to show Pierre how well Nancy could manage herself.

With a smug little smile and an air of importance, Nancy rang for the wee elevator, pushed the openwork door to one side, shifted from her chair to the metal stool, then propelled herself by a series of jerking motions until she had edged into the elevator.

I started to fold the wheelchair, but she remonstrated loudly. This was to be a full demonstration for the benefit of Pierre.

Reaching through the doorway, she shoved and pulled until she had folded the metal wheelchair, then pulled it in beside her, shut the door with a bang, pushed the bell, and started to ascend as we all cheered.

I ran up the steps to help her out, but no, she wanted to do that all by herself too.

"Now maybe Pierre will try it too," she confided to me.

We called good night down the open stairwell and went on into our room.

Besides the brothers and Pierre and Marie, we were the only guests staying at the soon-to-be-crowded hotel. It was rather an eerie feeling, to be in that big quiet building with so many empty rooms.

The brothers had the room directly beneath ours. Pierre and

* Pierre and Marie stayed at Lourdes for over a year. Three days before his death in Toulouse, a neighboring village of Lourdes, Pierre was baptized into the faith and received the last rites. Marie returned to California, but at this writing, she is again at Lourdes where she went to deliver one thousand woolen blankets to the Grotto hospital . . . the fulfillment of a promise made by Pierre to the hospital nuns.

Marie were a door down the hall from us. We were close enough to hear the movements from each of the rooms.

That took away some of the loneliness.

It was strange, though each one of us had traveled across the world because of a cross, we were as gay as college students when we met. It often slipped my mind—the real purpose for our temporary association.

Before I hopped into bed, I opened the wooden shutters of our window so that we could lie and listen to the River Gave and the sweet tones of the Basilica chimes. There was not a sound on the darkened street below us, or in the hotel.

Then we did hear something else.

We heard the desperately heartbreaking sobs of a man crying.

"Who is it, Mom?" whispered Nancy.

I didn't know.

But God would know. He was listening too.

See Ya Later—!

ALTHOUGH Pierre and Marie went each day in their station wagon to the baths, we declined their offers to ride with them. We always walked over when the weather permitted. Vi often accompanied us, and told us many wonderful stories of her long stay in Lourdes. She never mentioned any physical healings, but only the spiritual miracles that had transpired while she was a witness.

"After all," she said wisely one day, "the spiritual graces and favors received from Our Blessed Mother are so much greater than any of the physical cures."

We thought so too.

So many times we were the only ones at the baths. But every once in a while we would meet a pilgrim who had stopped while en route to someplace else. Once in a while an invalid would arrive for three or four days' visit to the Grotto.

We were walking past the Shrine one sunny afternoon when we came to a family, also on their way to the bathhouse. It was a mother and father and their young son, Mark. Mark was in one of the specially made wheelchairs for children. He looked about seven years old, and so sweet, I wanted very much to give him a kiss when I shook hands with him. But he would have been boy enough to resent it. Aside from looking rather frail, there appeared to be nothing wrong with him.

We kept the two wheelchairs side by side as we walked along. The two occupants struck up an immediate friendship. I saw Nancy reach over and hand something to her new little friend. It was the rosary someone had brought her from Rome.

Mark thanked her like a little gentleman, and then went on with his dad to the men's bath section. I took Nancy into the now familiar first door of the women's section. Mark's mother followed us into the dressing room. I learned that they had come from Cali-

fornia for a three-day stay at Lourdes. They were staying at one of the other two open hotels, so we hadn't heard of their arrival.

It was nice to meet someone from home, even though so briefly.

I also learned that Mark had a brain tumor and was expected to live only a few more weeks.

I wondered if they were expecting a miracle cure here at Lourdes.

We finished in the baths and came out to find Mark and his dad waiting on the porch. Mark's hair was dripping wet. He had been completely immersed in the holy waters.

Mark and Nancy sat talking like old friends while his mother combed his hair. His dad leaned against one of the stone pillars to talk to me.

"So many folks will think we're crazy to bring Mark so far when he's so sick," he said quietly. Then, looking up, he watched the flowing Gave until he could form the words he wanted to say. "They don't understand what *faith* means. It doesn't mean getting cured or not getting cured. It means you know God will do the right thing by you." He stopped, embarrassed.

I nodded silently to let him know that I understood what he had been trying to say.

This was their last day at Lourdes, so we were a little sad with our good-bys. Mark was silent, giving Nancy only a brief nod as we parted.

We had walked down the ramp and were starting toward the Grotto when Mark called in a ringing voice to Nancy, "See ya later, Crocodile!"

We turned and laughed.

His mother came running to catch up to us. She was all apologetic.

"Did Mark call Nancy a crocodile?" she exploded.

We laughed hard and long.

"He meant 'See ya later, alligator.' It's a popular song!"

We all laughed and Mark wrinkled his nose in a grin as we waved good-by to him.

We stopped in at the Grotto hospital on the way back to the hotel. We were in the nick of time for a tea party. It was being served to the ladies who came to the hospital to help the sisters sew the vestments and altar cloths for the church. We were led into the large room containing a long table, around which was seated the busy sewing group. We couldn't make out what they were all talking about, because their conversation was in French.

At the desk beside the table sat the Reverend Mother. She was really pleased to meet us, and extended her hand warmly to Nancy. Nancy, thinking to make use of the French she had been learning, said something to Reverend Mother. A peal of laughter greeted her words. Sister Mary Patrick leaned over and said, "Nancy, do you know what you said to Reverend Mother? You said 'Good evening, little one!'"

Nancy laughed with the rest of us.

We were given some tea and cakes and sat smiling to the row of faces as they smiled to us. Sister Mark Patrick was the only one we could converse with. She asked us if we would like to go on a tour of the hospital.

Of course we would.

We waved good-by to everyone, and followed Sister out the door.

"Of course you know we have no patients here now. The first group will be coming at Easter. Eight hundred blind children."

Sister led us into the summer-camp-looking big dining room, then on into the pretty little chapel.

"We have no doctors at the hospital, because no medical treatment is given," she was explaining as we walked. "Each pilgrimage comes with their own priest and their own doctor."

"Have there been any cures?" I asked like an insipid curiosity seeker.

Sister nodded, then asked, "Did you know that many come because they want to die in such a holy place?"

That was news to me.

Sister then told us a story that impressed Nancy so much, she repeated it many times afterward.

"We had a blind woman here once," she said. "The woman was perfectly well except for the blindness. She came here with the wish to die at Lourdes. They all joked with her about it because she was such a young woman and so apparently healthy. Well, nothing happened during the three days she was here, then on the last night, she was standing beside her bed brushing her hair—and she fell to the floor dead."

It was an unusual story to hear at Lourdes, where so many come pleading for life.

Sister took us through each of the lengthy wards. They were named for the saints, the lettered sign visible above each door.

"Here would be my ward," said Nancy as we entered the one with St. Therese's name above it.

There was a double row of beds in each ward—about eighty beds, all impeccably clean, and just a little bit old-fashioned to our eyes accustomed to St. John's Hospital at home.

From the wards, we went on to the enormous and very modern kitchen. The sisters did much of the kitchen work during the pilgrimages. That must really be a job—to feed so many so often. Yet the sisters took it calmly in their stride. I marveled at the serene way they were looking forward to the tremendous amount of work, so soon to be their lot. I mentioned this to Sister, and she laughed in answer.

"Sometimes we wonder ourselves how we'll get everything done! Many's the time a pilgrimage will leave the hospital in the morning, and we'll have to have all the linens changed and the beds ready again by evening, but"—she laughed again and tilted her head—"the Blessed Mother always sees that we get done in time!"

We were back now to the sewing room. Reverend Mother came over to Nancy and smiled so that her face became as radiant as an angel's. She handed Nancy an envelope containing relics of Saint Bernadette, then turned to Sister Mary Patrick and said something in French. Sister translated it to us.

"Mother says that she has something very special for you. But she won't give it to you until the day you are leaving Lourdes!"

Nancy wriggled in excitement, and thanked the Reverend Mother with a kiss.

We waved good-by and everyone nodded smilingly as we opened the big gray wooden doors that led out to the Esplanade.

We arrived back in the cozy hotel lobby just as a heavy snowstorm started.

Marie and Pierre were in the lobby, sitting watching the feathery snowflakes talcum-powder the streets.

"I hope this isn't going to be another blizzard," said Marie. "Did you hear about the young girl that's on her way to the Shrine?"

Pilgrims at this season were scarce. Any newcomer made a topic of conversation. We hadn't heard of this particular one, so Marie enlightened us.

"This poor girl is twenty-two years old. Her parents are bringing her all the way from America on a stretcher. She's been completely paralyzed, and like a baby, since she was six years old."

As Marie spoke, I said a mental prayer for the family. A stretcher in a snowstorm in a foreign land.

There was courage!

Next morning we learned that there had been a minor train accident about five miles out of Lourdes. The girl on the stretcher had had to be lifted out of the train window and into an ambulance that had been summoned from Lourdes for the purpose.

"Dear God," I thought, "let them receive the consolation they will need from You after such a journey."

The snowstorm had proved to be a mild one. I was able to take Nancy with Pierre and Marie to the baths that afternoon.

As we approached the bathhouse, we saw a cluster of people standing outside the door of the women's section.

A hospital stretcher was wheeled out from the baths as we arrived.

"It's the young girl," whispered Marie.

Blankets enfolded a slight figure—not much larger than a six-year-old child. The girl's mother was arranging the blankets so that the invalid could keep her face exposed. I leaned to offer a prayer.

"She doesn't see," explained the mother. "She knows her dad and me, but she can't respond very well."

I looked at the expressionless face lying there staring at nothing. My heart ached.

The girl's father came to lean gently over and whisper something to his daughter. He looked up, and his eyes were brimming.

"She smiled to me—the first time in sixteen years!"

He was so overcome, he had to turn away.

Yes, God had rewarded their hardship and their faith in their journey to His Mother's Shrine.

We saw the family later again that day when they were at Benediction in the Rosary Chapel.

How gentle and compassionate everyone at Lourdes was to the consolation-seeking pilgrims who came from every corner of the world to find their personal answer to heartache!

The young girl, wrapped in warm blankets, was lying on a stretcher at the foot of the altar.

God, what were You thinking when You received the love and faith of that family?

Each one of us in the church that day learned a lesson we would never forget.

A family who had offered their love and not their questions to You. The girl had smiled—that was enough. . . .

We walked down the steep ramp beside the hospital wheeled stretcher the young girl had been placed on. I couldn't help watch-

ing the radiant happiness on the faces of her parents as they talked of their daughter. She had been a perfectly normal child, but had not responded to a surgical operation, performed when she was six years old. For sixteen years they had cared for her as a helpless infant.

God, Your saints are not all up there in heaven!

The family was going back to the Grotto hospital to return the wheeled stretcher, then Marie planned to drive them back to their hotel in her station wagon.

As we parted, they called after us, "We hope you're going with us tomorrow—we're going up to meet the Bishop!"

I promised that we would try to.

We had been invited to a party that night.

Marie and Pierre had arranged to have a crepes suzette party in the newly decorated dining room of the hotel. Vi and Harry and the two brothers would be there too.

We got dressed in our finest that evening and were the first arrivals in the dining room. François was putting the finishing touches to the elaborately set dining table. He smiled admiration at Nancy's pretty dress. Nancy ignored him completely, as though the fancy dress was just an old rag she had thrown on—but she primped slyly each time he wasn't looking.

We were all in a gay mood that night. Our table had been placed at a window where we could see the moon shining on the Basilica and beyond the silver gleam of snow on the mountain. A radio played French music as we drank our French wine and tried to eat the strange-looking hors d'oeuvres that Guy had prepared with meticulous care.

Nancy was doubly wary of any strange-looking dish that appeared before her. She was afraid someone would slip her a snail someday.

As the meal progressed, the party became more hilarious. Conversation drifted from Lourdes to England, and then across to the States. We admired the new decorative colors in the dining room and tried to ignore the nostril-gagging fumes from the new paint. But as the evening wore on and the room became warmer from the heat of the radiators, the fumes grew worse. Finally we were eating one bite and then taking two wipes at our watery eyes. We opened a few of the windows, but had to close them again because the snow was blowing in.

Marie, at the head of the table, started laughing at the row of red tear-filled eyes before her.

"This is *some* party," she laughed. "Everyone's crying!"

We had the dessert served in the lobby, where the fumes were only slightly noticeable as they wafted down from the beautiful dining room.

Nancy and I were the first to take the elevator up to our room.

"Don't forget tomorrow—the Bishop!" called Marie, her face turning slowly upward to follow us as we disappeared through the opening of the stairwell.

I sure hoped that Nancy would be able to visit the Bishop.

I'll Be Back

ANOTHER disappointment for Nancy. She had to stay in bed the next day.

It was one of her low days, when her body wanted to give up but her spirits wouldn't let it.

We amused ourselves by writing letters and by taking some flash pictures with our little camera. Nancy took one of me sitting by the window writing letters, and then I grabbed the camera to get a picture of a wagon and a team of white oxen crossing the bridge. The morning passed quickly enough.

Marie came in to see if we were going to walk up to the Bishop's manse. She was going to take the young girl in her station wagon, so there would not be room for us to ride. Nancy looked so radiantly happy, Marie joked about her laziness in staying in bed.

That was a strange thing about Nancy. She could be suffering indescribable pain and not let anyone know.

We let Marie think that Nancy was lazy and wanted to rest.

"Then why don't you come along, Margie?" she asked. "It's such an unusual opportunity to see a Bishop."

I remonstrated, but Nancy coaxed.

"Please, Mom, you go for both of us. You can tell me all about it when you get back."

I went for both of us.

There was quite a group this time. The Bishop received us in the living room of his beautiful home.

He blessed the prostrate figure of the young invalid, speaking gently in his native tongue. Then, as before, he greeted each one of us individually. And once again I was overwhelmed by his compassion and understanding. How very much suffering he must

have seen during his stay in Lourdes! How wonderful that he showed admiration and not pity for those who sought his blessing.

Harry interpreted the Bishop's words to us when we were gathered at the station wagon after the visit.

"He says each one who bears a heavy cross receives special graces to carry it."

How true.

Each one I had met at Lourdes so far had been so in control of his burden, so in touch with God, his cross had become a blessing.

Nancy rested in bed for a few days, and no one suspected the pain she had gone through when she emerged smiling on a sunny afternoon to take her place at the rummy table beside Pierre.

The weather was sunny and warm now, the snow almost gone. The businessman brother stopped by to remind us of our proposed ride with him on the coming Sunday. We would leave right after lunch and be gone a couple of hours. Bartres was only a few miles into the country from Lourdes.

We had been keeping a wicker-covered jug of holy water in our room and drinking it in the luxury of living so close to its source. I noticed one evening that the jug was almost empty, so told Nancy that I was going to take a walk across to the Shrine to refill it. I loved to stop in the Grotto in the darkness. It was then that the statue of the Blessed Virgin seemed to come alive in the flickering glow of the candles. Mary, for some reason, seemed closer there in the darkness than in the light of day.

Pierre and Marie had left a few minutes before to take a little drive, but Nancy had plenty of company. She was waiting for a Coca-Cola and a cookie from François.

There were two or three people sitting on the benches at the Shrine, and Marie's station wagon was parked at the rear of the Grotto. I was disappointed. I had wanted to be all alone there—to tell Mary some of my own problems.

I filled the jug as inconspicuously as I could, then walked through the darkness to sit on a stone bench beside the river. From here I had a perfect, though somewhat distant, view of the Grotto and the statue. I had the all-alone feeling that I was seeking.

In my heart I talked to Mary. I asked Her if I was becoming a busybody—always meddling into everyone else's affairs. Perhaps I should become more of a recluse with Nancy, and not be so con-

cerned with the troubles of others. Maybe we were meddling where God wanted us to leave things alone. For instance, each time I had come to the Grotto, I had been concerned with prayers for others. It was about time I let others take care of themselves and attended to myself.

Wasn't it, Mary?

I felt myself asking the direct question.

I got a direct answer.

The heavenly stillness was broken by the chug and spit of a motor that wouldn't start. I looked over to see Marie fussing with the station wagon.

"See, Mary, that's what I mean. I can't even sit quietly a few moments and talk to you without finding something in this world that needs tending to. Is it right to neglect my prayers for such everyday happenings?"

I didn't wait for an answer.

Marie was out of the station wagon by now and was trying to push it as Pierre sat helplessly watching her.

I hurried over to them.

"Margie! Where on earth did you come from? I'm so glad to see you!" Marie's worried face softened. "I had just asked Mary for help when you popped up!"

Together we pushed and tugged at the car while Pierre sat and worried. I think he prayed a little too. The other Shrine visitors, now turning to see what all the commotion was about, would not be of much help. There was a lame man on crutches, a boy with a cane, and a wee elderly woman.

But the worried concern over the situation had left Marie. We made a joke of it, pushing and shoving until we finally got the car to budge. Marie jumped in and I continued to push as she fiddled with the mechanism. Then the welcome sounds of a motor catching caught my ears. The car was under way.

"Ride home?" called Marie from the window. She was afraid to stand there too long—the motor might conk out again. I waved her on and sat down on the stone bench.

This time I thanked Our Blessed Mother rather than queried her.

"I see what you mean, Mary—prayer without works is no good. In helping others, we help ourselves."

I slung the water jug over my shoulder and threw a kiss to Our Lady. She seemed enough of a friend for such familiarity.

The following afternoon was so warm and sunny, we thought we'd go for a walk around the Esplanade. It was the only direction we could go and not meet up with a steep hill.

I sat writing a few of our endless letters while I waited for Nancy. She was making a production of getting dressed. She had gone into the bathroom on her metal-wheeled stool, leaving the wheelchair jammed in the bathroom door. I could hear her splashing and scrubbing as she sang to herself. She had taken her blouse and skirt off, and was sitting in her bra and half slip.

There was a knock on the door.

"Come in—*entrez*," I called casually.

Madelon's voice answered meekly.

"The Bishop is here!"

How nice, I thought. I'd hurry and get Nancy dressed and down to the lobby to meet him.

I called back to Madelon, "Keep him here—and we'll be right down!"

The door opened a crack.

"But he is here now—in the hall!"

I stood stock-still, not knowing which way to run to do what.

I came to my senses and bounded toward the door, stumbling over the wheelchair in my haste.

Madelon's startled face peered through the slit in the door.

"Should I tell him to come in?"

Over her shoulder I could see the Bishop standing serenely waiting, his regal robes and purple sash looking so out of place in the tiny hallway.

He smiled at me, and I held up two fingers.

"In two minutes we will be ready!"

I turned and fell over the wheelchair.

Nancy was sitting stunned on her stool beside the washbasin. She had undressed in the bedroom and didn't know what to grab to cover herself. She settled this by holding the turkish towel under her chin with her two hands.

I fought with the wheelchair to get it unlocked and out of the way, fell over it again, and looked up to see the Bishop standing quietly smiling in the doorway.

I bowed him into the bathroom.

Nancy forgot her embarrassment and saw only the wonderful holiness and kindness in our visitor's face. Bishop Théas helped her into the wheelchair and we all went into the other room. Madelon

had disappeared like a startled rabbit, so we had no interpreter.

When God is present, no interpreter is needed.

We felt His presence in the room that day as we visited with the kindly Bishop and received his blessing.

Sunday was a beautiful day, and Nancy was as well as she had ever been. The drive to Bartres was one never to be forgotten. We passed through meadow country that was breath-taking in its beauty. Miles of green valley stretching to the jagged outline of the ice-cream-like white Pyrenees. Every once in a while along the road we would come to a wayside shrine. How much more inspiring than our highway billboards at home!

We also passed shepherds and their flocks of thick-wooled sheep.

"Nothing has changed here much since the time that Bernadette lived in Bartres and tended the sheep," said our escort.

We could well believe it.

The few homes that we passed were of stone and aged with the years. Many of them had long thin tree branches stacked in the yards, to be chopped up for firewood.

"They don't waste anything here," remarked our guide.

Bartres itself was only a group of homes and a beautiful ancient church.

We stopped at the church and went in.

"This is the church that Bernadette attended. It's exactly like it was when she was here," our friend whispered.

Outside again, we stopped to read the inscriptions on the old, old graves that surrounded the church. Nancy and our friend posed for a picture beneath a large stone cross. They had inadvertently chosen a very appropriate background for their picture.

On the way back to Lourdes we stopped at a Bartres drive-in café—a tiny stone cottage displaying the sign *LEMONADE AND BEER*. We were offered car service, but preferred to go inside. An ancient woman in a shawl came out to greet us.

"Nancy?" she asked, pointing.

I nodded in complete astonishment.

"News sure gets around!" laughed our friend.

We went through a gateway and across a muddy backyard. We had to wait before entering the cottage until someone shooed and shoved a huge sow out of the way and into a nearby sty.

The café was really the front room of the cottage. The family lived all around their café business. Two extremely old women were

sitting on benches right inside the fireplace, their stockinged feet stretched out to the tiny fire, worn wooden sabots beside them. They motioned for us to join them, so I ducked under the mantel and took my place beside them to enjoy my glass of lemonade.

We returned to Lourdes by a different route, a road that took us past the very hillside meadow where Bernadette had tended her sheep. There was a beautiful outdoor shrine to Our Blessed Mother at the base of the hill.

"Mary appeared to Bernadette right on that spot," informed our friend as he slowed the car for us to get a better view. "Bernadette saw the Virgin here several times, I believe."

It wasn't surprising, the place appeared that holy.

That evening we had a farewell party at the restaurant beside the railway station in Lourdes. The two brothers were leaving for California early the following morning.

During the meal, Marie brought up the suggestion that Nancy and I ride with Pierre and herself to Rome, Italy.

It sounded great. We both wanted to go.

"It would be an easy trip in the station wagon," she said, and we became all excited with the prospect. "Trouble is, this is the start of their rainy season. We'll have to wait about a month."

My enthusiasm waned.

Only God Himself knew where Nancy and I would be in a month.

The days flew by. It was hard to realize that we had been at Lourdes for almost a month. Nancy had taken many baths, and I had managed to get up enough coward courage to take three. Everyone we knew at Lourdes kept hoping to see some physical improvement in Nancy. I saw only spiritual happiness and was satisfied.

We spent many afternoons visiting the sisters at the hospital in the Grotto. They were always so pleased to see us, and would give us simple little tasks to do to make us feel more as one with them. They had rather a difficult time finding something to fit my limited skills. I couldn't sew, I couldn't embroider, I couldn't read to them in French, but they did find something for me to do. I sat and wound up the long cords that are used on the priests' vestments. Nancy found her task too. She ironed out the cords after I had wound them up.

How she enjoyed her afternoons with the beautiful French nuns!

It was nearing the time that the hospital would open for the first group of pilgrims. There was much to be done in preparation.

We were talking about this to Sister Mary Patrick one day as Nancy ironed and I wound cords. Reverend Mother had left for a three-day trip to somewhere, and we were disappointed not to see her. We stayed at the hospital several hours and then, as we were about to leave, Sister said:

"Wait a minute, Nancy, I have something to give you."

She went into the office of Reverend Mother and returned carrying a wrapped package.

"Mother said to be sure to give you this today. I don't know why! She had always insisted that she was going to keep it until you were leaving Lourdes!"

Nancy opened the box.

It was a beautiful white statue of St. Bernadette.

How kind of Reverend Mother to be so thoughtful of Nancy. We would treasure the statue always.

We thanked Sister Mary Patrick, and I added, "We'll have to think of some special way to thank Reverend Mother when we see her in a few days."

We started out the door, Nancy carrying the statue carefully in her arms. Sister was closing the big wooden doors when Nancy held up her hand.

"Wait! I've just thought of something! I know what I can do to help you get the hospital ready!"

Sister Mary Patrick came forward to see what Nancy had on her mind.

"I can wash all the windows for you!" Nancy stated, her eyes shining in anticipation.

Sister Mary Patrick laughed and patted Nancy's head.

"That's a promise, Nancy! You come over tomorrow and get started—there are about a thousand of them!"

Nancy left smiling at the thought that she was actually going to help to get the hospital duties done.

We had an early supper and then strolled slowly over to the Grotto.

Nancy was extremely talkative until we came within sight of the Shrine. Then she seemed to forget that I was even with her, she was so preoccupied and silent, as though she was conversing inwardly with a very special friend.

It was one of the few times that we were the only ones at the

Grotto. I walked over in front of the altar and sat down on one of the benches, leaving Nancy in her wheelchair alone at the side of the Shrine. I tried to keep my thoughts and my glances on the statue of Our Lady, but I couldn't help looking at Nancy.

She had withdrawn from the world as though it didn't exist at all.

We sat until our solitude was over. Three pilgrims came to kneel at the altar and tell their troubles to God and His Mother.

Nancy signaled to me that she was ready to leave any time I was.

As we walked slowly away from the Shrine, Nancy turned to me and asked, "Mom, could we leave tomorrow?"

"Leave *Lourdes*?" I asked in astonishment.

She nodded. "I'd sure like to."

Homesick, I thought. Well, we could leave if we could get packed in time. We had about twelve hours before train time.

I told her I'd do my best. I had a feeling that she was anxious to get going as soon as possible.

Although it was late, we stopped by the hospital to tell Sister Mary Patrick.

She started to plead with us. "You mustn't leave before you see the Lourdes processions——"

She stopped because an angel must have whispered to her.

"I understand," she said quietly, and stooped to kiss Nancy.

"I'll be back!" Nancy called over her shoulder as we went on our way.

I wondered why she had used the singular phrase when she spoke of returning.

Paris

WE didn't talk much about the sudden decision as we walked back to the hotel.

And I didn't say much about it to Madelon, who was just leaving the desk to go up to her room.

It would seem strange to many, my following Nancy's decision as though she were the mother and I the child. I knew inwardly that there was a definite reason for such an emphatic request, and did not try to find the answer. It would be revealed to me some day in some special way.

I knew, as I had watched Nancy there at the Shrine that evening, that she was in very close communion with Someone far more capable than myself to direct her. Her complete absorption, her momentary hesitation, then the sudden turning to me to ask if we could leave—it was not for me to question, but to follow.

Madelon was quite upset when she learned that we were leaving so unexpectedly. I asked her to tell our friends, because we wouldn't even have time for farewells. The train would be leaving at seven in the morning.

Madelon phoned and, in French, arranged to have a taxi call for us in the morning. We settled our hotel bill and were surprised to see the reasonableness of it.

We stopped in the hotel restaurant to have a little snack before commencing the task of getting our belongings together. We had been sitting there awhile when Father Cassagnard came in and joined us. He had heard of our departure plans.

Over a cup of coffee he told us of his desire to visit America someday. We told him to be sure to come and see us when he got there.

Rising to leave, he gave us his blessing, then went on his way, never once asking our reason for leaving so quickly . . . wise man that he was.

We went on upstairs to start the wearying job of packing as quickly as possible, and as compactly. It was past midnight before

we were ready to put out the light and open the shutters for our last look at the Basilica.

The snow was gone now. The moon was shining directly upon the large crucifix on the hill.

We sat silent, each with our own thoughts.

"I'm coming back real soon," said Nancy as she turned away from the window.

She had used the singular phrase again.

I didn't sleep much that night. I kept waking up and looking over at the alarm clock to be sure that we didn't oversleep. Drowsiness overcame me seconds before the alarm went off.

We dressed silently so as not to disturb anyone else at such an early hour. The moon was still shining in the window as I closed the shutters and picked up a pile of luggage. Nancy had preceded me to the lobby.

I arrived there to find her sitting at one of the little marble-topped tables eating her breakfast!

One of the houseboys had learned of our departure plans and had been waiting to serve us a farewell breakfast.

I was really too nervous to eat but did the best I could with the hot milk, hard rolls, and sweet butter that he brought to me. He couldn't understand a word of English. I kept wondering how to ask him if the taxi would be on time. I pointed to my watch, then pretended to be steering an automobile. He grinned widely and said, "*Oui!*"

For the following half hour, each time I would point to the clock or my watch, he would grin and say "*Oui!*"

At six-thirty the taxi arrived. All my worry and pantomiming had been wasted energy. We had plenty of time.

I thanked God for sending a taxi large enough to hold Nancy's chair and all our luggage. He might have sent one of those miniature foreign cars.

The taxi driver was typically French: beret, vivid blue jacket, and gracious smile. He handled all the luggage himself as I busied myself getting Nancy's coat on her. I heard a commotion at the lobby desk and turned to see the entire hotel staff grouped and waiting to bid us farewell!

With many tears and much hugging we were accompanied out to the taxi and sent on our way with the prayers and good wishes of our kindly friends.

The railway station was filled with workmen waiting for a local train. They were dressed in French blue work clothes and berets and carried canvas bags slung over their shoulders. Their train arrived as we came into the station. I had a sudden and frightening realization—the train we would be taking to Paris would not be starting from Lourdes. This would be just a whistle stop. I'd have to get Nancy up into the train coach, the wheelchair and all our luggage piled in beside her, while the train puffed impatiently to be on its way. The thought brought the perspiration to my forehead.

I did some hasty praying to God and His stronger angels. There would be a lot of muscle needed soon.

The taxi man handled all our luggage himself, bringing it in three loads to stack it on the station platform. I opened my wallet to pay him, but he waved his hand in protest and made the sign of the cross.

Nancy reached for his hand and kissed it.

I got Nancy and our luggage as close to the train tracks as I could safely do. I wasn't a moment too soon. We heard the peep-peep of the funny little whistle and saw the train come rushing toward us.

As though in a relay race, I leaned over and got a firm grip of Nancy under her arms—ready to swing her onto the train the minute the door was opened.

Before I realized it, she was sitting on the floor of the train, and I was tossing our luggage aboard as fast as my arms could swing. The wheelchair took some puffing and grunting, but I managed to get it up, then got my own feet on the train floor seconds before we began to roll away from the station.

No other passengers had boarded the train, and I had seen the slight-looking conductor only once as he popped his head in and out of the coach.

The only help we had had was from God and His strong angels.

In no time at all we were seated in one of the neat little private compartments, with our luggage scattered around us.

I hadn't had time to take much notice of Nancy during all the hauling and shoving, but I looked now to see if she was comfortably seated.

She was looking out of the window with the same faraway expression she had had at the Shrine the night before.

I looked out the window too, and saw that we were passing the Grotto.

"Look, Nancy," I called out excitedly, "you can see the statue of the Blessed Mother!"

I turned to see if Nancy was looking.

She was staring out of the window with tears running down her cheeks.

I hurried to comfort her.

"Nancy, if you're so sad about leaving Lourdes, why did you insist that we do it?"

Nancy ran the back of her hand across her wet face and stared after the disappearing Shrine. When it was out of sight and she was more in control of her emotions, she turned to me.

"If we had stayed *one* more day, I would have asked God and Mary to cure me."

I could only reach out my hand to hers as we sat quietly and watched the scenery fly past the moving windows.

Nancy felt the need of my nearness, so I moved closer to her and let her head rest on my shoulder. She was still in a detached, thoughtful mood.

"Anyway"—she looked up to me and smiled—"I finished all the prayers for everybody yesterday." She sat up so that she could look into my face. "But I didn't get to wash the windows at the hospital. Do you think they will understand why I couldn't stay to help them?"

She settled back into my arms and I put my cheek against the top of her head.

"I think they will understand."

All during the train ride, we had been wondering what the big silver knob was in the middle of the outside window. It was time to investigate. I pushed and pulled at it, and then quite simply, it moved down and slid the window open. We could ride the rest of the way through the lovely southern French countryside with our heads stuck out of the coach like two heifers on a cattle car.

We passed pretty little villages and streams with women kneeling at the water's edge, pounding their laundry on the rocks. The ancient way of washing was much in contrast to the newly modern red-tile-roofed shelters that stood beside these river laundries. We passed farmers plowing fields with antique plows and oxen. Harry had told us that modern farm equipment had once been tried

there, but had proven unsuccessful. The terrain was too rocky for any but old-time methods. Or so he had said.

We began to get hungry.

I knew there was a diner on the train. The next job was to find it—and to let the waiter know that Nancy would have to be served on a tray in the compartment.

I puzzled how to begin the search, looking up and down the aisle and rubbing my chin thoughtfully.

As I stood there, a white-coated waiter came from the adjoining coach and handed me a menu as he talked a blue streak of French. I said, "*Oui, oui*," and pointed to something on the menu, then gestured that it be served on the seat of the compartment to Nancy.

When the waiter had left, Nancy, arms akimbo, sat making a wry face at me.

"If he brings me snails, you're going to eat them!"

"I think snails must be a luxury in France," I laughed. "We haven't come across any yet."

"But there's always the first time," insisted Nancy.

People began to file through the aisle of our coach as though they were on their way to something. Must be lunch, I surmised, and so followed them into the dining car, leaving Nancy with the instruction that she eat everything the waiter brought her.

"Everything but——"

"I know . . . snails!" I laughed and closed the glass-windowed compartment door.

The diner was crowded. The host waggled his finger at me and ushered me to a seat at a far table where three very French-looking men sat busy with soup and a French discussion. They paid little or no attention to me.

I had planned to order a sandwich, because I didn't have too much French money with me. In our hasty travel preparations I had forgotten to cash a traveler's check at the hotel. When I had shown the check to the train conductor earlier that morning in hopes of getting a Coca-Cola, he had taken one look, waved his hands, and shaken his head vigorously. I'd have to cash them in Paris.

I couldn't find the French equivalent for sandwich, so once again pointed to something on the menu. I hit the jackpot—the full-course dinner of delicious Basque-style chicken. It took me two hours to eat the dinner, because after every course, everything on the table had to be cleared away, new silverware brought, and a

complete new setup placed before me. The dishwashers in France must really earn their wages.

We stopped for a long time at a large busy station where a number of G.I.s were standing around with their luggage and their families. I saw the sign, BORDEAUX, above the magazine stand. I had heard very vaguely of a large military camp there.

When I finally got back to our compartment, I found Nancy sitting looking out the window. She was surprised to see me.

"I thought you had gotten off the train," she said. "What took you so long to eat a sandwich?"

I told her about the fancy lunch and added, "Suppose I *had* gotten off the train—what would you have done?"

Nancy shrugged her shoulders as she searched through her pocket for something. "I'd have gone on home alone, but I was worrying how to pay this."

She handed me her lunch check.

She would have worried about the lunch check, but not about getting home all by herself . . . that was Nancy!

With each stop that afternoon, the train became more crowded. Our privacy had been so wonderful, I hoped that no one would be sharing the little compartment with us. But that could hardly be expected. We were traveling tourist class. Most of the other compartments were already full and overflowing.

The conductor was busy now, darting back and forth along the narrow passageway outside our windows. I saw him glance in at us each time he passed, and I felt guilty in taking up so much needed space with Nancy's wheelchair. It took up most of the floor space of the compartment. Maybe I should set it out in the aisle. But Nancy had fallen asleep, and I was selfish enough to want privacy and quiet for her. She really needed that sleep.

After one especially crowding stop, the conductor slid our compartment door open, looked down at Nancy, and then slid the door shut again. I started to telescope our belongings. We'd better not strive for privacy any more.

The conductor was back in a few minutes with a piece of paper in his hands. He wet the sticky back of the paper, then slapped it on the window of our compartment door and bustled off.

I went out to see if I could decipher the sign.

In bold letters it said RESERVE.

Nancy slept all the way to Paris.

As we neared our destination, there was one consolation. Paris was the last stop for our train. I could take my time with the baggage struggle.

Toward dusk the city buildings began to come into view. Passengers lined up in the aisle with their luggage and their concern for their own welfare.

I remained seated with Nancy until our coach had emptied, then took several trips to get our things piled on the station platform. Then I got Nancy down from the train and into her wheelchair.

The station was momentarily deserted. There was no baggage porter to be seen anywhere.

I left Nancy sitting with our pile of belongings while I went in search of a cart or a friendly porter. I found a somewhat brusque man with a cart, so beckoned him to follow me. He loaded our luggage as though he was in an awful hurry to get it where it was going and get to the next tipping customer. He stood waiting for directions.

I said "Taxi" as clearly as I could, but it evidently wasn't clear enough. He hurried us from the platform and on through the crowded station to the street platform. There he dumped our things beside a curb, which I discovered was a bus stop. The taxi stand was across the street. It was jammed with impatient travelers waiting their turn to hop into the tiny foreign cabs. Even if I could manage to signal one over to us, it would be of no use to us.

I stood looking around rather wild-eyed until a uniformed man came over and took hold of the situation. He whistled shrilly and, from out of nowhere, a large cab appeared before us like Cinderella's pumpkin coach.

The uniformed man opened the door for us and asked, "Hotel?"

The only hotel I could remember was the one we had stopped at on the way to Lourdes.

"Palais d'Orsay," I directed, thankful for my keen memory for names.

It was good to see the familiar hotel once again. It was good to walk over to the desk and see our friend the manager, and to speak English to someone who could understand what I was saying.

In no time at all we were settled in an elegant crystal-chandeliered room. Nancy climbed onto one of the ornate brass beds and sighed happily.

"Let's stay right here in this room until we go home!"

We stayed at the hotel for three days, taking walks beside the Seine, eating in the quaint little cafés, and thoroughly enjoying ourselves.

It was still very cold in Paris. The days were sunny, but our walks would set our cheeks to tingling and our eyes to watering. It wasn't the season for sightseeing but somehow we didn't mind the cold.

On the third day we ventured up to see the city of Paris. It was about a mile walk from our hotel—along the Seine, past the Louvre, and on to the rows of exquisite shops. We walked the length of the Champs Elysées and stopped at the Arc de Triomphe, where Nancy asked if she could see the eternal flame that she had read about.

To accomplish this, I had to lift a gigantic iron chain railing above my head and scoot her chair under it with my foot—which made quite a spectacle to the many highways of moving cars that merged at the famous spot.

From there, we decided to walk over and get a closer look at Eiffel Tower. We could see the tip of it above the buildings.

I headed in the general direction and walked until my feet were buzzing. But we couldn't find the Tower. So we started asking directions. We would stop a scurrying Frenchman, say distinctly, "Eyeful Tower?" and wait while he stared blankly, then shook his head. This routine was repeated several times, always with the same effect; we got nowhere. Then Nancy had a bright idea. She took a little box of candy out of her purse and pointed to a picture of the Eiffel Tower on it. It worked. The stopped Frenchman smiled broadly in sudden enlightenment and pointed north. We were within blocks of it.

The closer we got, the more stupendous the tower appeared to us.

Then we were standing directly beneath it, looking up through the lacy pattern of steelwork. There were quite a few tourists going up the short flight of stairs that led to an elevator. As we stood watching them, a woman in the gift shop beckoned to us. She gestured that Nancy could go up in the elevator too—wheelchair and all.

I went over and bought the tickets, getting the more expensive ones that would carry us up to the second level. Nancy was really excited as I hoisted her up the steps to wait for the elevator.

There was a crowd of people waiting. I hoped there would be room for us and the wheelchair.

We saw the glassed-in elevator descending and my doubts were dispelled. It was as large as a hotel dance floor.

Several American tourists got into the elevator with us. The couple in front of us we recognized as honeymooners. The tall man, his arm around his tiny new wife, was telling her not to get scared when we started to ascend. "The elevator curves around so you think you're right out in space," he was explaining. "But there's nothing to get sick or scared about. Just hang on to me." Then he added, "If you can't make it to the second landing, you can wait for me on the first level."

The elevator started smoothly. From the large windows we could see all of Paris flattening out beneath us. It was magnificent!

We stopped at the first landing and the new husband darted out the door, hanky to his mouth. His little wife went on up to the second level with us to get a better look at Paris.

The landing was open to the elements, with only an ornate iron railing between us and the sky. We took a walk completely around the tower, getting a beautiful view of a beautiful city as we munched hot roasted chestnuts.

Before taking the elevator down, we stopped at one of the little gift shops to buy a few cards and souvenirs. Then we went into the photo shop, where Nancy stuck her head through a board and had a comic photo cartoon made of her running up the Eiffel Tower in high-heeled slippers.

There was another tower level, a little above the one we were on. It had a nice-looking café on it, but we couldn't go there because it was reached only by a flight of stairs.

Once down on the ground again, it was no trouble at all to find our way back to the Champs Elysées. There I stopped to ask, "What would you like to see next, Nancy?"

"I guess what I'd rather see than anything is America," she answered.

I was of the same thought.

We stopped in the elegant TWA office on the boulevard and learned that we could get reservations for that very evening.

We agreed that would be fine, so the girl wrote "Mrs. Hamilton and Nancy" on a chart without even asking our name.

We went back to the hotel for another hasty bit of packing.

Hard-boiled Reporter

*I*T was so cold on the street, we stood in the hotel lobby to wait for our transportation to the airport. We didn't have long to wait. A smartly uniformed chauffeur came in the swinging door of the hotel and helped us out through the baggage entrance to a sleek limousine. We didn't even have to look to see if our luggage was following, we were being so well taken care of.

We streaked through the gay districts of Paris, then on out to the dimly lit suburbs where the lights from Paris homes shone out through the dark. They looked like the home lights of our own town. Strange how darkness has a way of eliminating the surface differences.

As we drove into Orly airport, we passed a huge plane getting ready for flight.

"There's your plane," informed the chauffeur, nodding his head toward the luxury cruiser. I began to wonder just how far this French hospitality could go. We had paid for tourist travel, yet this was beyond all doubt the *de luxe* plane.

The car came to a stop right outside a luxurious airport café. Its windows were at street level. From the car window I could see elegant diners at tables. They were watching us curiously. I wished inwardly that we had parked a little farther along the street. I'd have to struggle with Nancy and the wheelchair while all eyes had a floor show. Reluctantly I climbed out, adjusted my old pleated skirt, wrestled with the wheelchair, then leaned over to get Nancy—just as the plane revved up its powerful motors. A terrific gust of wind caught my skirt and sent it flying over my head. The diners had a floor show all right.

The chauffeur told us to go on into the waiting room and he would attend to our luggage. He wouldn't take a tip. Everyone seemed to know us and where we were going. We didn't even have to wait in line to have the customs officials check our luggage. It

was all done for us. We were escorted into a private waiting room and told to make ourselves comfortable. It was the room used by the airline personnel.

We had about half an hour before plane time. I left Nancy talking to a pilot while I went upstairs to spend the last of our French money. The shops were elegant! And so were the people sitting around the waiting room and the various cocktail tables and observation benches. It made me doubly conscious of my old woolen skirt and the two new runs in my stocking. As quickly as I could, I bought some French perfume, a little French doll for Nancy, some chocolate candy, and some chewing gum.

The plane passengers were lined up at the gate when I returned to Nancy. They didn't look quite as stylish as those I had seen upstairs. I soon discovered why. We were *not* scheduled for the deluxe flight, but for the tourist plane. It was really quite a relief.

We were helped into the rear seat again. There were not going to be too many passengers on this flight—in fact, we could each have a double seat to stretch out in.

We slept as much as we could, in a cramped way, and tried to get used to the roar of the motors in our ears. Before we realized it, we were in Shannon. And then in Gander.

I got out of the plane at Gander to get Nancy an apple. What a cold bleak place it was! The snow was piled in waist-high drifts against the airport building. The white flakes were coming down sideways in the strong winds.

Once inside the building, though, it was warm and cozy. People, together for a few minutes from all over the world, were buying souvenirs and post cards and doughnuts and coffee. There were huge maps on the wall, and a row of clocks telling the time in various countries. Time was an interesting topic now, it changed so crazily in these speedy around-the-world trips.

I got the apple and some comic books for Nancy, then started down the passageway toward the plane. I was stopped at the gate. Passengers had to wait inside until their plane was called. I waited half an hour while I ate some vanilla ice cream and looked out the window at a raging blizzard. Funny feeling, to be sitting so warm and cozy in a blizzard with a dish of ice cream.

Nancy was carrying on a conversation with the friendly stewardess when I got back in the plane.

"You'll have to move over into this seat with me, Mom," she said importantly. "There's a whole bunch of people getting on—

their plane from Spain had engine trouble, and they've been sitting here in the waiting room waiting for our plane to pick them up."

That explained some of the sour, sleepy faces I had seen in the café.

We started off again with the plane filled to capacity. Nancy and I managed to doze fitfully as we leaned against each other.

We would arrive in New York early in the afternoon.

"This is *one* time I don't want anyone to know we're coming," I said to Nancy. "I've never felt so tired and tacky. Tell you what let's do—let's go to an out-of-the-way hotel, rest up for a couple of days, get all our clothes cleaned, and then call up our friends as though we've just arrived!"

Nancy thought that was a very wise idea.

As the plane glided over Idlewild Airport, the women passengers began to adjust hats and apply lipstick.

"I'm not even going to put on any lipstick," I said to Nancy. "No one will know us."

We waited after the plane had landed until all the other passengers had filed out the door. There seemed to be quite a bit of excitement at the foot of the landing platform. I heard someone call out, "Is she in there?"

I got up to look out curiously.

Oh glory be . . . news reporters!

All waiting for Nancy. And what a crowd of them! They were clustered around the foot of the ramp, waiting impatiently for the last passenger to get down so that they could get ready to snap Nancy's picture as she was being wheeled down the steps. I didn't even have time to put my hat on.

Only one familiar face in the crowd. The customs official who had given Nancy the treasured medal. He took our baggage tags while I took the bouquets being thrust in our arms and the reporters took pictures.

We were escorted through the crowd of curious onlookers and into a private press room where the reporters gathered around us to hear our plans for the future.

We didn't have any plans.

"How long do you plan to stay in New York?" one reporter asked pleasantly while he waited to jot down my answer.

I smiled at him vaguely and raised my shoulders.

He didn't write anything down.

"What hotel are you staying at?" asked another.

I lifted my shoulders again and smiled to cover my dazed look.

"We never plan——" I started lamely.

Then the woman who had given Nancy a bunch of red roses spoke up. She had been sent by a friend of ours to greet us. "They're going with me," she informed the reporters.

At last they had some bit of news to put in their notebooks.

I sat wondering how our friend had ever learned that we were on that plane.

Several more pictures were taken. Then the helpful customs official came to tell us that our luggage was all taken care of and had been put in the car.

In the car?

Maybe all these people were getting us mixed up with someone else.

Our new friend explained. "We're driving over to Alma's in my car. It's parked right outside the doorway."

We shook hands with the reporters, and I don't know who was the more bewildered, the reporters or I. Nancy, with her usual poise, had managed to give some highlights on our trip and what we might be doing in the future.

But from me they got nothing.

Our new friend proved to be very pleasant. She pointed out various high spots as we drove along. Wanting to be interesting myself, I pointed at one of the many skyscrapers and asked the name of it. I only embarrassed our New York friend, because she didn't know. So I kept quiet and let Nancy do the talking the rest of the drive.

We had never been to our friend Alma's apartment. It was in the heart of New York city. A beautiful studio-type place. Alma had lunch waiting for us. She phoned others that we had arrived, and I tried to forget my stocking runs and tacky appearance as we met new friends.

As the afternoon wore on, I suggested that maybe we had better see about a hotel.

Alma informed us that it was all taken care of. A reservation had been made in the hotel right next door to her. In fact, our luggage was already over there.

Arrangements were made to have dinner at the hotel after we had had a few hours rest and a chance to freshen up. We could do with a bit of resting.

The hotel bellboy showed us to our room. As he opened the door, my first thought was, "Oh-oh, wrong room!" It was a large suite with bedroom, living room, and pantry. It was our room all

right. The card on a large floral piece said: "Welcome to New York to the Hamiltons."

We settled down in our Park Avenue suite to see what kind of surprise God was planning for us next.

By dinnertime we felt much better. I had had a bath and a change of clothes. Nancy had had a nice wee nap. We enjoyed our dinner with our friend, even though I kept covering yawns all through the meal. No wonder. It was now two o'clock in the morning where we had been not too many hours ago.

After dinner, our friend suggested that we walk down a few blocks to attend a Holy Hour with her.

I thought it best to leave Nancy at the hotel to rest while I accompanied my friend. I could see that Nancy was asleep on her seat.

The Holy Hour was beautiful. It was held in a small temporary chapel on Park Avenue. I really enjoyed it. But halfway through I had to excuse myself and go home. I didn't want to drop off to sleep in the pew.

We were sleeping late and sound the next morning when the phone rang. It was a news reporter wondering (again) what our plans were and what we were going to do that day.

I couldn't shrug my shoulders over the phone, so I made some inane remark.

He asked if we intended to do any sightseeing.

"I imagine we will, eventually," I answered in a neighborly way.

He still wasn't satisfied.

"The California papers are wanting stories and pictures of Nancy sightseeing——" He paused.

I turned to Nancy.

"The California papers want us to do something. Is it okay with you?"

Nancy raised her eyebrows and shrugged in an indifferent way.

I turned back to the phone. "We'll go out this afternoon, I guess," I suggested helpfully.

"Where are you going, and when?" asked the insistent voice on the other end of the line.

"Well, I guess we'll go to—the Empire State Building. About two o'clock."

It was the only place I could think of to sightsee.

The reporter said that he would meet us at the main entrance at two o'clock.

"I wonder why they're so interested in us," I puzzled. "There are so many exciting people in New York to take pictures of."

Nancy turned over and went back to sleep.

We arrived at the imposing Empire State Building a little before two o'clock. A sign in a window directed us to the ticket office for sightseers.

"I'll go and get our tickets while you wait for the newsman," I told Nancy.

There was such a line-up at the ticket desk, I thought it best to wait, so went back to Nancy.

She was talking to a man holding a camera.

"Did you get the tickets?" was his greeting.

"Not yet; too crowded," I answered.

"Good," he said. "Save you some dough. You won't need tickets when you're with me."

We walked over to the middle of the congested sidewalk because the reporter wanted to get some shots of Nancy and me staring up at the tall buildings.

We looked up in time to see a white pigeon fluttering skyward. It looked strange to see such a beautiful bird hemmed in by skyscrapers.

Pictures were taken of us going in the door of the building. By now, foot traffic had stopped to see what was going on and who in heck we were.

They never did find out.

We got into one elevator and zoomed skyward as far as it could go. Then we got out and got into another one to go the rest of the way up. When we got out, we stood in the hall a moment to listen to the eerie sound of the wind as it came roaring and moaning up the elevator shaft.

The reporter, in his rather brusque, hurried manner, led us to the entrance of the observation porch. Here we came to our bugaboo—a flight of stairs. Only ten or so leading downward. But with a wheelchair, any stairway is a headache.

Several bystanders saw us coming and rushed to give aid. I informed them politely but firmly that I could handle the job all by myself. I had only to tip the chair back, rest the wheels on each of the steps, and guide it down. But no, the bystanders insisted on helping. So, while I clung to the handles, my would-be helpers grabbed the wheels and raised the wheelchair into the air—giving me the full weight of the chair and Nancy.

I managed to struggle down the steps, and to catch my breath in time to thank my helpers. Then we followed our reporter escort as he led us to the far side of the porch to show us the view we had come so far up to see. There was a heavy wire fence around the entire porch.

"Suicides," our friend commented as he jerked his thumb toward the fencing. Below the iron fence was a heavy stone wall. Solid through. It was exactly high enough to be above Nancy's eye level.

She couldn't see anything but the porch and the sky.

The reporter climbed up the side of the building to get a photo of me pointing out to Nancy the view she couldn't see. My pointing arm got so cold in the terrific wind that was blowing, I thought I was going to have to go around pointing for the next couple of weeks with a frozen arm. The reporter's face was blue with cold when he finally got the shot he wanted of us. Then we walked around the other side of the porch where it was less cold.

By this time, Nancy and I had decided to take our reporter friend as we found him. He was neither friendly nor unfriendly . . . just sort of blasé.

Well, we were one of many daily assignments to him. He was used to getting people's news stories. Even ordinary people like us on a sightseeing tour. No wonder he seemed rather indifferent.

But he surprised us once.

He had noticed that Nancy wasn't seeing anything but the stone wall instead of all the land marks he was pointing out to us. He said, "There's Central Park over there." Then he handed his camera to me to hold and, without a word, picked Nancy up—wheelchair and all—so that she could see right over the wall!

We were too dumfounded even to thank him.

He didn't want to be thanked anyway.

Back on the ground floor, I stopped to thank the reporter for the trouble he had gone to.

Nancy turned in her wheelchair and crooked her finger at him. "Come here a minute," she insisted.

Dutifully the newsman leaned over.

Nancy put her arms around him and gave him a kiss. "Thank you, and good-by." She smiled.

As he stood up, the tears ran unashamedly down his face. With a quick wave of his hand, he pulled his hat straight and disappeared into the crowd.

OUR plans became more and more vague. We couldn't decide whether to stay awhile in New York or go on home to Santa Monica. So we let God do the planning.

We learned that we could have the beautiful hotel suite at greatly reduced rates, so we settled down awhile to see what time would bring.

Despite the fact that it was a downtown hotel, there was a real homey atmosphere about the place. Especially after I had stocked up on a few groceries, and we did our own cooking in the tiny kitchen.

The manager phoned one afternoon and said that she had two very important people who wanted to meet Nancy. We told her to bring them right on up.

A few minutes later she came in, escorted by two standard-sized poodles. Nancy was delighted! The poodles acted exactly like people, sitting down until they were introduced, and then coming over in a comically dignified way to shake hands with their hostess. One of them had even brought along his favorite rag doll to play with Nancy.

It filled the lonely spot Nancy had for her poodle Tay.

I left Nancy playing with her two dog friends while I went on a shopping spree down Madison Avenue. After being away from the American-type stores, it was grand to walk into a good old dime store and choose what I wanted rather than try to find a French word for my purchases. I bought Nancy a chic little blue hat and a genuine American hot dog with mustard.

Nancy wore the hat while she ate the hot dog and watched television.

"America is wonderful!" she said between bites.

That evening we tried to plan our future days as much as it was possible for us to do.

"It doesn't seem right to leave it *all* up to God," I remarked. "We should do some of the planning ourselves. We can start out early

tomorrow and see the sights. Is there anything special you want to see, Nancy?"

Without hesitation, Nancy held up three fingers.

"There's three things I want to see . . . I want to see Coney Island, Bishop Sheen, and the restaurant where the waiters insult people."

I wrote them down in my notebook in a businesslike way.

"Maybe we can get to a Bishop Sheen broadcast," I mused. "And we *might* get to see Coney Island, although I think it's closed for the season . . . but what do you mean by the insulting restaurant?"

Nancy explained. "I read about it once. The waiters insult the customers and spill soup and things on them . . . just in fun, you know."

It didn't sound so funny to me. "I think that's in Kansas or someplace—I believe I've heard about it. We'll see if there's one in New York."

Now that we had actually done some notebook planning, I felt less guilty about leaving each move up to God. We would start out sightseeing the first thing in the morning.

I woke next morning with Nancy calling excitedly, "Mom, look—snow!"

The bedroom window was banked a foot high with fresh-fallen snow.

I hurried to look out on the street. What a beautiful sight! The snow must be almost knee-deep.

What an impossible situation for a wheelchair.

Our notebook plans were shot. We spent the morning at the open windows, making snowballs and tossing them at the brick wall next door.

It snowed for a week. Cold blustery snow that stopped all transportation and turned New York City into a white fairyland of stillness.

Nancy was more than pleased to stay indoors, play with the books and games I got for her, and watch television. The enforced rest did us both a world of good. And the homey atmosphere gave me a sense of security that I had been losing lately. We had not a thing in the world to plan ahead for, so we enjoyed each moment as it came. The only worry that I had was that our funds might run out before the storm had its day. But then I remembered Nancy's wise advice so many years ago when I had been rather

worried over finances. She had said, "Don't count your money, count on God." So we counted on God once again and created a foundation of wonderfully happy memories that were to bring me so much solace later on.

One night we were watching the Hollywood Award program on TV. Helen Hayes was the mistress of ceremonies. When it was over, Nancy said, "Mom, I'm going to write a letter to Helen Hayes."

I didn't stop her. We mailed it to the New York broadcasting studio, and a few mornings later we got a phone call from Miss Hayes. She wanted to know if we would be in New York for a while, because she wanted to visit us. She would be out of town for the next ten days.

We said that we would be staying in New York and that we would enjoy meeting her.

"Another of your planning ideas busted," said Nancy as I hung up the receiver.

That very morning we had planned to get our reservation to go home to California.

The snow cleared enough for me to go out and do a bit of lone sightseeing. It was impossible to take the wheelchair. The snowplows had pushed the sooty snow into ridges along each curb, with just a single-file footpath to get through.

Nancy really enjoyed staying in the hotel. She sat in the lobby, ordered and ate her own lunch in the lovely dining room, or visited her poodle friends.

And I always brought her a little surprise when I came home.

I was sauntering down Fifth Avenue one drizzly afternoon when I stopped and turned back to look at a window display. There were huge posters showing Catholic missionaries at work in foreign fields. The display was titled "The Society for the Propagation of the Faith" . . . this must be the headquarters of Bishop Sheen!

Curious, I went into the lobby of the business building. A dime-store entrance led from the elevators, and straight back in the lobby was an office with a counter. I could see the familiar statue of Our Lady of Television. So I went on in.

An artistic-looking young woman was talking to a visitor at the glass counter. To the left, a pretty girl sat typing.

I walked over to the desk and, by way of introduction, said, "I'm from out of town——"

I got no further.

The young girl shook her head pleasantly and smiled. "I'm sorry, but there isn't a ticket left! So many have been asking and writing in, but the broadcast tickets have been sent out *weeks* ago—it would be impossible to get one. You know, there are only a few more broadcasts to this series."

I thanked the girl and told her that my daughter Nancy had wanted me to ask anyway—and started toward the door.

She hesitated only a second and then called after me.

"Just one moment please."

I turned back questioningly.

"Would you like to come upstairs with me a moment?" she asked.

I followed her up the flight of marble steps to the offices on the second floor. She was just going to open one of the doors, when it swung open and Bishop Sheen stepped out.

He looked as distinguished in his homburg hat as he did in his formal Bishop's habit.

I was introduced to him and stammered something. Then he went on his way, and we went on into the large office. I was asked to wait until my pretty escort went into another office. She came out with two tickets in her hand.

"What a lucky break for you," she laughed. "Last-minute change of plans for someone—so now you have two tickets to the broadcast!"

I asked if I could bring Nancy in later to thank her, and went home on a pink cloud.

Nancy nearly bounced out of her chair in happiness when I showed her the two tickets.

Right then and there she started planning on what she was going to wear to the broadcast.

The television broadcast was being held in a theater building. It was within walking distance of our hotel, so we walked over, leaving in plenty of time so that we wouldn't have to hurry.

We ate a light supper in an easy-to-get-in restaurant, then stopped at a florist's to buy a silly little duck in an Easter bonnet for Bishop Sheen.

"I know he will like it," chuckled Nancy.

I wasn't so sure.

The theater was small enough to be intimate. We arrived in time to watch the pre-broadcast scurry and to find a good place behind the last seat. We didn't stay there long. One of the workmen came hurrying over to take Nancy's chair and put it right down in front

of the front seat. Another few feet and we would have been up on the stage.

The theme music started, the commercial was given, then Bishop Sheen came onto the stage.

The broadcast was all too short. We were all so attentive to his words, we didn't see the hands of the clock pushing along. It was over too soon! The program went off the air, and then we were given an unexpected treat. Bishop Sheen stayed onstage to speak informally to the audience. He came over to our side of the stage and stooped down to shake hands with Nancy. She handed him the Easter duck, which he unwrapped right then and there, holding it up for the audience to see. There was much laughter and friendly informality.

Bishop Sheen went offstage for a moment, and then returned, strolling casually to the center of the stage—holding a great big blue plush rabbit upside down in his arms. He stood smiling while everyone had their laughs, then looked over to us and said:

"Nancy, this is for you."

With that, he came over and put the bunny in Nancy's outstretched arms.

Back in the center of the stage, he said that he intended to have another plush rabbit with him on his last-of-the-season broadcasts. Two weeks from tonight.

"Tell you what we'll do with the rabbit," he said thoughtfully, rubbing the side of his nose with a forefinger, "we'll raffle it off. Nancy, can you be here in two weeks to give out the raffle tickets?"

Nancy nodded eagerly and grinned in anticipation.

I sat worrying about our finances. Two more weeks in New York!

I hoped that God was counting our money.

When it was time to leave, the audience formed a line in the aisle to file past Bishop Sheen and shake his hand. We got in line too.

When it came Nancy's turn, she shifted the rabbit around to get her right hand free, reached up and took Bishop Sheen's hand and grinned.

"Know what I'm going to call the rabbit? *Fulton*."

In the Likeness of Christ

THE following afternoon, despite a slight drizzle, we took a walk down Fifth Avenue to visit the girls in Bishop Sheen's office and to thank them for their kindness.

The pretty girl at the desk had once been to Lourdes. She sat telling me about her trip as Nancy talked to the artistic young woman at the counter. The girl seemed to be extremely interested in Nancy and kept turning Nancy's head to study her features. Later she asked me in confidence, "Would you mind if I used Nancy as a model? I'm a sculptress, and I've been searching for a model for the Christ Child. I'm working on a model of the Madonna and Child—and Nancy is *exactly* what I've been looking for!"

Nancy and I agreed readily, and a date was set for the posing. We were to be at her Greenwich Village studio the following Thursday morning to spend the day.

Nancy wheeled over to chat with the girl at the desk. They wanted to know if she could stay around while I went shopping or did something for a few hours.

"Bishop Sheen is not here today," said the girl, "but I'd love to take Nancy to meet everyone upstairs."

So I went window shopping in the rain for a couple of hours.

It was getting dark when we finally emerged from the Fifth Avenue office to wend our way to Times Square. There was a dandy open-door hot-dog stand up there. Nancy could have her favorite supper, and I could sample all the exotic tropical fruit punches at ten cents a glass.

By now the drizzle had stopped and the air was like spring. The

wet pavements shone with the colorful reflections of the many neon lights. It was too pretty a night to go home so soon.

"And anyway," summarized Nancy, "nobody would even know it if we stayed out all night."

It gave me a momentary strange and lonely feeling.

We decided to take a walk up to see St. Patrick's Cathedral.

"Don't they have a Midnight Mass up there, Mom? Maybe we could stay and go to Mass."

I tried to think. "Seems I heard somebody tell us that they went to Midnight Mass. It's a special Mass for theatrical people, I think. Maybe it's a 2 A.M. Mass. I can't remember. Anyway, we can stay unless you get too tired."

We took our time going up Fifth Avenue. There were so many things to see, and windows to dream-shop in. One large department store had the windows decorated like a country garden, with lakes and parks and trees. The sound of birds singing filled the streets. They had in some clever way recorded bird songs and then broadcast them from the building. We stayed around that block for over an hour, going from one window to the next and back again.

Then we got hungry.

The New York restaurants were very disappointing. So many of them were either down or up a little crooked flight of stairs. So many of them had only wheelchair-barring swinging doors. We couldn't be choosy where we dined.

We walked along, looking at each eating place and sizing up the possibility of wheelchair entrance. None looked too promising. Then I heard someone say, "Pardon me, ma'am, but if you're looking for a place to eat——"

I turned to see a pleasant young fellow in a wheelchair. He pointed across the street.

"If you'll go over there, you'll find that you can get in easy. I eat there all the time."

The wheeled leading the wheeled.

We thanked him and crossed the street to the open-front restaurant.

By the time we got to St. Patrick's it was after nine o'clock. My first sight of the famous church was one of dismay. Steps. All the way around the building, high stone steps. I'd have to puff and struggle with the wheelchair while I tried to look as if it was nothing at all to lift. If I showed the least sign of a struggle, some would-be

helpers would be sure to come running and grab the wheels up in the air.

We walked around to the side entrance where the stairs were not quite so high and where we could be out of view of the people waiting for their busses.

There were quite a few people in the church. We stood at the entrance until I could get my breath, and until we could get used to such a big beautiful House of God.

In spite of the people, the church was as hushed as our little chapel at home. That's one of the blessings of a Catholic church—the ever quiet dignity.

We walked slowly around, looking at each of the many altars and stopping for many a little prayer. We had another disappointment. More stairs in the back of the church leading to several of the altars. I could have hoisted Nancy up the low marble steps, but she preferred to sit quietly in front of the main altar and say her prayers.

I walked slowly around to each altar in back of the main one so that I could describe them to Nancy.

The church had become so quiet! It was beautiful. We each lit a candle, then went on to the front of the church, where I browsed through the pamphlets and bought a few post cards, leaving the money in a slot. We felt no need for haste because, if we let enough time pass, we could stay for the Midnight Mass.

I handed the post cards to Nancy and whispered, "You'd think we were the only ones in here!"

"Just us with God," she smiled back in a whisper.

I looked around, then whispered again, "I think we *are* the only ones in here!"

Nancy looked around too, then rubbed her chin and raised her eyebrows.

"Maybe we can't get out!"

I tried the big heavy door nearest us. It was locked. I tried the next one. Locked. We went around to the side doors. They were all locked too.

I wasn't alarmed, but I began to size up the possibility of spending the night in one of the pews.

It looked for sure as if we had been locked in.

We crossed the entrance hall and went along the left aisle.

Away in the back of the church I could hear a rhythmic scraping and bumping. It was either a man or an awfully big mouse.

To our relief, we saw a janitor sweeping out the far corridor. We hurried to him and, without a word he unlocked one of the side doors and let us out into the night.

No doubt many beauty-distracted people had gotten shut in there before.

Right across the street from St. Patrick's was a towering office building with a very modernistic replica of the world perched high atop a pedestal. The world was represented by a series of wrought-iron rings encircling space.

"What a lesson," I remarked sagely to Nancy as we looked at the hollow globe. "There's the world and its pleasures—nothing in it. But right across the street is the *real* treasure . . . the Tabernacle!"

I waved my hand dramatically toward St. Patrick's.

Nancy turned and looked at me soberly.

"Sometimes you can get awfully corny, Mom!"

It was a good thought, though.

Greenwich Village looked a long way from our hotel on the map. We thought it best to take a cab. Here was another headache. It was almost impossible to lift Nancy into the back seat of a car. The particular way I had of swinging her around, made it vital to have a seat near and ready for her. Any juggling usually landed her on the floor. Only a few of the larger New York cabs were equipped with front seats beside the driver. Most of them had the meter where the seat should be. Consequently, we always had to phone the cab company and order a special cab. That was why we traveled via wheelchair pushing most of the time.

This time, though, we took a cab.

Greenwich Village looked as colorful as we had pictured it, with shops spilling their wares out onto the sidewalks for better customer appeal. The flowers especially, made even me want to stop and paint a picture of their gay spring beauty.

Jeanne, the sculptress, was waiting for us. Her little studio apartment was on the ground floor, thank goodness. There was a studio couch in it, a bookcase, a clothes closet, and a bit of food here and there. The rest of the apartment was filled with more than life-size holy figures that Jeanne was working on. They were still in the clay stage, but showed such depth of feeling, I felt like genuflecting before them.

Even the bathroom was full of clay. I went in there to get Nancy a drink of water and had to remove two tin pails full of wet clay

and step over a bucket filled with water and wet tools of a sculptress.

We loved the place! And we loved our new-found friend Jeanne. She was such a tiny, vivacious type of person. How she ever managed to create such gigantic works of art was beyond me.

I sat quietly on the couch reading an art book while Jeanne and Nancy went to work. Hours passed without a word, each one of us absorbed in our own activity. Towards midafternoon, Jeanne said that she was going to run out and get some cheese and crackers and milk for our lunch. She insisted on being the hostess all the way, so we let her go out and do the shopping at the corner grocery.

"Eat plenty if you're going to receive Communion tonight," she said, spreading a cracker with Muenster cheese. "You know, there's a new type of Mass tonight. By the way, would you like to go to my church with me? It's not far from here."

"Please, Mom, let's!" begged Nancy.

And so it was decided.

We ate lunch, I read the book, and the artist and model went back to work. The afternoon flew by, and it was time to go to evening Mass.

We walked down the street to Jeanne's church, an old-fashioned red-brick one . . . with extra-high stone steps leading to the entrance.

Several bystanders helped me by grabbing up the wheels of Nancy's wheelchair.

Only God knows where I got my strength at such times.

As always, Nancy and her wheelchair were placed in front of the front row of seats. Almost at the very altar itself. The church filled quickly and completely. It appeared to be a neighborly church, with everyone knowing everyone else. If it hadn't been for God in the Tabernacle, we would have felt like strangers.

The ceremony was an elaborate one, with many priestly officials celebrating the Mass and Holy Thursday. For the first time, we witnessed the washing of the feet, and then watched interestedly as the altar boys came to the altar rail with the crucifix for Adoratio.

To my dismay, I saw that Nancy's wheelchair was blocking an entire aisle. The priest had been glancing our way several times during the Mass. I imagined that he was thinking about the bottle-neck too.

But no, he wasn't.

He wanted Nancy to be the first to receive the Sacred Host.

He came straight across the aisles and up to her as she waited to receive.

It was the same when we kissed the feet of Jesus on the crucifix. Everyone stood back and waited until Nancy had bowed her head and touched her lips to the Wounds. Then she was wheeled back beside the pews and the Mass continued.

The three of us were powerfully hungry when we came out of church. Jeanne knew of a good restaurant, so we walked along, taking in all the sights as we chatted. The streets were now free from snow, but the cold was penetrating. It stung my eyes and started my nose to run. That's one time when wheeling a wheelchair is sort of awkward—both hands are busy.

The restaurant was cheerful and crowded. Bohemian, laughing people were sitting at the tables eating in an unhurried atmosphere. The aisles were nice and wide, so it was easy for me to get Nancy and her chair to the empty table in the center of the room.

We ordered the dinner special, then started to play the game of "Hinkey-Pink" while we waited for our food. It was a game that Nancy and I loved. One thinks up a silly phrase like "abode of a small animal." The others have to think of a rhyming description (mouse house) for the question. The one who guesses the answer then makes up another phrase.

Our game got noisier and more hilarious as our meal progressed. The waiter joined in the game, then the diners at the tables near us. We were one big happy family right on through dessert.

When it came time for us to leave, there was much hand waving and promises to meet again some time.

Too bad we never did.

Under much protest, I insisted on taking the check. Jeanne saw that it was useless to argue, so she said, "Well, I'll use the intended supper money to buy that new tool I need for my sculpture work. Then every time I use it, I'll think of you, Nancy."

Nancy grinned. "You won't have to do that, because you just spent the whole day making me in clay!"

Jeanne became serious. "That's right, Nancy. And every time I look at the little Christ Child now, I'll think of you."

We said good night and promised to have another day like it as soon as we could.

Jeanne went on her way homeward while we started to walk in the opposite direction. We were forty blocks from our hotel, but we wanted to do as much as possible and see as much as we could.

We Get Around

EASTER morning dawned sunny and clear. I surprised Nancy in a little-girl way by hiding an Easter basket and giving her some little Easter toys.

We were surprised later that morning by a beautiful gift—two floral corsages. We planned to wear them to Mass and on our Easter walk. I was not yet fully decided as to whether we should join the Easter parade along Fifth Avenue. We had been told that there would be thousands and thousands of people there. And when we expressed the desire to attend Mass at St. Patrick's Cathedral, we had been vehemently waved down by our wiser friends. Every Catholic in New York, it seemed, wanted to go to St. Patrick's on Easter morning. The friends thought that the Mass could only be attended by invitation anyway.

We started out dressed in our finest and wearing our fancy corsages. Nancy had asked me to promise her something: that we would go down to the poor part of the city and let her give her corsage to some poor lady who wouldn't have any. "We have so much of everything good," she said by way of explanation.

But first we started toward Fifth Avenue. No special plans in view. It just seemed to be the direction that God was leading us.

A few blocks away from St. Patrick's, we were amazed to see so many people walking down the middle of the streets. There was no motor traffic—only people. They were dressed like style mannikins, and all walking in the same direction—toward Fifth Avenue.

So we walked that way too.

In front of the cathedral was a huge derrick with television cameras on it. As far as we could see in either direction, elegantly

dressed people were parading up and down—all along both sidewalks and in the street. It was a breath-taking sight!

We stopped in front of St. Patrick's. A battalion-like row of New York policemen stood on the stone steps, edging the people on and away from the already overcrowded cathedral.

We walked along with the mob to the other side of the building, where Something made me leave Nancy in her chair beside the stone wall at the foot of the steps. I edged my way through the crowd and up to the open doorway to get one little peek into St. Patrick's.

A cop came over to me and motioned with his stick toward Nancy.

"Would you like to take the little girl in?"

Would I! What a miracle!

I hurried back down the steps to get Nancy while the policeman cleared a path for the wheelchair.

Nancy was sitting talking to a stout, elderly woman. The woman was dressed in a battered one-time Easter hat, a ragged coat, and run-down shoes.

She was wearing a gorgeous orchid corsage.

As I edged Nancy's wheelchair up the steps, she turned to me and said, "We don't need to go to the poor part of town. I found the lady for the corsage."

Our friend the policeman was not going to do the job halfway. He cleared a path right on through the crowd to the center aisle of the cathedral where Nancy sat flanked by a long row of policemen and trim military Waves.

The Mass was just beginning as we took our places. The tremendous organ boomed out the holy music and sent a thrill down my spine. As I stood silently watching the white-robed priest at the altar, I thanked God over and over for letting me be an active part of such a devotion to Him.

After Mass, the people filed down the wide aisles to see the rows and rows of white Easter lilies that overflowed the altar. I felt, as we stood a moment in prayer, that I could never be any closer to heaven on earth than I was at that moment.

One morning, shortly after Easter, we decided that it was time to move. We liked our Park Avenue hotel, but seeing that our New York stay was going to be a lengthy one, we thought it wise to find a cheaper place to stay.

I found a nice hotel up near Central Park, and we made the move without too much trouble. I ordered a cab, filled it with our luggage, left Nancy at the Park Avenue hotel while I rode with our things to our new home, then walked back and got her.

We were gradually learning how to get around in the easiest way.

The new hotel was nice too. Not too fancy, but swanky enough to make us feel like two pampered people. Our room was on the twelfth floor, facing the East River. From our wall-to-wall windows we had a perfect view of the U.N. building, several bridges, and the boats along the river. We loved to lie at night and listen to the toot-toot of the busy river tugboats as they tended to their many river tasks. We were higher than most of the buildings around us, so we had an interesting view of penthouses and rooftops.

We didn't have a kitchen at this hotel. But I had figured that we could eat out at the Automats almost as cheaply as I could do the cooking at home. I burned so many things, it more than ate up the profits.

There was an Automat about a block away from us. We could hardly wait to eat our first meal there. Nancy made me promise to sit at the table while she went around and dropped the nickels in and got the meals for us.

But that proved a disappointment.

In the first place, we were met by a revolving door. We couldn't get in. I felt like fighting obstacles that day. I looked up the manager, who came with a key and opened the one single glass door after he had moved a table and chair away from it. By that time, most of the diners had stopped eating to watch us.

I wheeled Nancy's chair over to the change counter where we got a handful of silver money in exchange for a bill. I sat down at the table as planned and let Nancy wheel herself importantly over to the food slots. A couple of people followed her, and three even got up from their meal to give assistance where none was needed. I sat trying to hold the good thoughts and wishing desperately that everyone would please leave us alone. Even if I had had to eat doughnuts and bread for my dinner, it would have been appetizing. Because it would have meant so much to Nancy to think that she had managed our meal all by herself. As it was, we ended up by having everyone put her money in the slots they thought she should have it in. We ended up with a mixed-up meal, a disappointed little girl, and a lot of self-pleased well-wishers.

Next meal we tried the cafeteria down the street. We found that

it was not too difficult to get in the narrow swinging double doors. I backed in as Nancy leaned over and held one of the doors open. The meals were fairly cheap and very good. We could do our own choosing. So we continued to eat there.

The weather was so nice now, we wanted to make the most of it. We bought a city guidebook and charted every place we would like to visit.

Coney Island was out. It was too far away.

"I'd hate to get away out there and find only a hot-dog stand open," I explained to Nancy.

She understood and did not press the point. Maybe we'd be back again sometime.

We were both anxious to take the boat trip around the island, but thought it best to wait until the weather warmed up a bit more. However, we did take the boat out to see the Statue of Liberty.

We took a cab down to the distant dock. We arrived in time for me to race to the ticket window while they held the boat for us. We rode over on the back platform deck and threw popcorn to the sea gulls as we watched the boats go by. The many river tugs were always a fascination to us. We both wished that we owned one and could live on it all the time—or until we got seasick. The Staten Island ferry passed and whistled at us. That ride had been on our schedule. But now it was off. Long flight of wooden steps to the boat entrance.

We both sensed an undescrivable thrill as we chugged along close beneath the Statue of Liberty and looked at the figure we had read so much about.

The boat landed us at a dock behind the statue. It was quite a thrill to walk along the well-kept paths to the base of the figure . . . where we got another disappointment.

Steps.

Long flights of them.

I didn't want to leave Nancy, but she insisted that I go on up onto the statue and wave to her.

So I went, though rather reluctantly.

There was a mob of people waiting to take the elevator to the ten-story high porch where Nancy wanted me to wave from. She was sitting at the side of the path waiting to see me up there. It would be a mighty long time before I could get into the elevator if I waited in that long line. So I took to the steps, running up the first two flights and crawling up the tenth one.

From my observation point on the porch I could see wee Nancy in her white coat, sitting patiently watching the people as they passed by her. I shouted and waved my arms until almost everyone on Bedloe's Island was looking at me—except Nancy. Finally a woman stopped beside Nancy and pointed up to the porch to her gyrating mother. Nancy waved both hands to me, and then we signal-talked for a while. With my hand gestures, I told her that it had been a long hard climb. With her hands, she motioned for me to go on up to the top of the statue. She never liked anything done halfway.

I didn't like to leave her sitting so long.

But I went.

There were twelve more stories to climb. The wide stairway of the first ten floors changed to a single-file winding staircase nightmare. Once we started on the ascent, there was no turning back. There was a line of climbers behind, and another in front. We all went round and round mechanically until I began to feel like the sister of a waltzing mouse. I thought we would never get to the top—or that we had taken the wrong flight and were climbing out onto one of the spears on the statue's headdress. I was getting frantic with worry about leaving Nancy so long.

But reach the top we finally did.

It was really worth the climb. From an enclosed platform, we looked out a curved arc of thick glass windows. It was a thrill to think that we were walking in the crown of the enormous statue. One window had a tiny little break in it. The wind whistled so hard through the hole, it blew my neighbor's hat off. My, but we were high up!

The downward journey was a little easier. And it gave each of us a sort of fiendish delight to hear the puffing and groaning of the ascending sightseers. They passed so near our winding staircase, we could easily have told them that they were almost to the top of their climb.

But nobody told anybody.

Once back on the ten-story porch, I raced to where I could get a view of Nancy. There she sat, God bless her, without the slightest sign of impatience. Yet I must have been gone well over an hour.

I told her as much as I could about the trip upstairs, once I was back on the good old ground again. We walked along the water's edge so that I could show her the very window I had looked out of.

Then we stopped at the gift shop and I bought her some candy for being so patient.

A cold wind had risen. A ferry was loading at the dock, so we ran to catch it.

It was warmer back in New York, so we decided to walk and see the sights rather than take an expensive cab and see nothing but the meter.

We passed the Custom House, Wall Street, and many other familiar New York landmarks. Then we stopped in an Automat where I left Nancy at the table while I did the choosing at the slots for our dinner.

Maybe someday we would have so much money, we could have an Automat installed in our dining room. Maybe someday I'd learn not to be so hurt with all the things Nancy wasn't able to do—look at all the things she *could* do!

After supper, we walked on through the deserted manufacturing districts and, by dusk, came to a rather cheap section of the city. One of the little showhouses was playing "The Uncle Remus Story," a picture that Nancy had always wanted to see. We were still far away from our hotel, I argued inwardly. And we'd be getting out of the show real late in the not-so-good neighborhood. But I still felt guilty about leaving Nancy sitting so long on Bedloe's Island.

We went into the show.

There were two pictures and several cartoons, so it was very late when we came out.

It was pouring rain.

The neighborhood looked even worse at that late hour. Neon lights flashed on the row of night clubs and cocktail bars. There was one taxi—a little one—standing at the corner. I hurried Nancy toward it, but a gaily dressed couple got in before we reached it. It would be best, I thought, to find a phone and call a cab. Maybe from the show office. Or farther along the street we were now on. We kept on walking in the rain to where the lights became less gaudy. I turned a corner and saw a swarthy-looking man come lurching toward Nancy's wheelchair. I thought at first that he was drunk, but saw that he was lame.

"Lady——" He beckoned me to stop.

I tried to overcome my fear as I waited for him.

"You need a cab, lady?"

I nodded in relief.

The man lurching out into the middle of the street and stood

amid the dizzying traffic until he spotted a cab. Then, putting two fingers in his mouth, he gave a sharp whistle and directed the cab to us. He even helped as best he could to get Nancy into the back seat.

God is everywhere.

Once back in our cozy hotel room, we got hungry again. That was no problem. We had discovered the delightful New York delicatessens, with the result that we had formed the habit of late-night snacking. For little more than a dollar, we could get some smoked fish, two slices of Muenster cheese, a couple of hard rolls, a bottle of Pepsi, and a bottle of beer.

We looked forward all day to our near-midnight parties.

While out shopping for our rainy night meal, I stopped in a drug-store and bought a drum-beating toy monkey and a cute little toy rabbit to surprise Nancy. She sure did love surprises.

As we ate our midnight lunch, we talked about the Uncle Remus picture. It had been a beautiful one, with lots of lovely scenes and colorful music of the Old South. Nancy, making a combination fish-and-cheese sandwich, looked up from her task and said, "You know, there's going to be a lot of that in heaven—people will sit around a campfire and sing the old-time songs just like they did in the picture."

I always liked when Nancy talked about heaven. She seemed such an authority on the subject.

We ate our sandwiches and drank our drinks and listened to the tooting of the tugboats.

If heaven was better than this, I wouldn't be sorry to get there.

To Touch

a

Dream

WE were both excited the next morning when Helen Hayes phoned and asked if she could come and visit us.

Nancy waited in the hotel lobby for her.

They came into our room laughing and talking together like old friends.

We had lunch sent up to our room, and spent the next few hours in pleasant chatter.

When it was time for Helen to leave, Nancy signaled to me that she was about to give something of ours away, and would it be okay?

I nodded in ready agreement, not knowing what she was planning on giving.

She wheeled over to the desk and took up the tiny music box that had belonged to Nana. My heart jumped in protest, but I stayed myself. She must have had a special intuitive inspiration to have chosen this for Helen.

Helen received it gracefully, turned the little silver handle to listen to the music, and then stopped because her eyes were filled with tears.

"It plays Brahms' Lullaby," explained Nancy, a bit puzzled by the tears.

Helen drew Nancy close to her.

"I know, honey; my daughter had a music box just like this when she was a little girl. I always think of her when I hear Brahms' Lullaby."

We walked to the street door with Helen and reluctantly said good-by.

As we were going up in the elevator, Nancy said, "There were

so many angels around Helen. They filled the room all the time she was visiting us."

Shortly after her visit we heard of the death of Helen's husband.

During the next few days, we took advantage of the nice weather. We were never home. We spent one sunny afternoon in Central Park Zoo, talking to the bears and laughing at the monkeys. On the way home from there, we visited the fascinating toy store we had noticed on a previous walk. We stayed in the store until closing time, taking imaginary journeys in the utility-sized boats and pontoons, playing house in the elegant doll houses, and handling everything we came to. The salespeople were more than willing to let the shoppers make use of the toys. It was a good idea. They seemed to be making lots of sales.

I marveled at Nancy's quick change of character. She could be the most grown-up young lady . . . or the simplest little girl. Whatever the situation, she was ready for it.

At the stuffed animal counter, we couldn't resist the cuteness of two raggedy little porcupine dolls. We took them back to the hotel with us, and set them up on the desk where Nancy would look at them every night as she lay in bed and tell me a continuation story about Pete and Polly, our porcupine friends. They became a part of our family, owing to Nancy's vivid imagination.

One day we took the around-Manhattan boat ride but misjudged the weather. Once out on the water, the wind blew so cold, all the passengers went rushing upstairs to the sheltered cabin. I had no way of getting Nancy up the stairs, so we sat in the poor shelter of the deckhouse and tried to enjoy our ride. A deck hand was kind enough to bring out his overcoat and put it around Nancy, but it was little protection from the biting wind. We were both rather glad when the ride ended, but looked forward to another trip—on a warmer day.

The day for Bishop Sheen's broadcast arrived. Nancy spent the afternoon in the hotel beauty parlor, getting a shampoo, manicure and hair styling.

My but she looked pretty when she finally came back to our room!

She put on her blue silk blouse, her striped silk skirt, and her blue flowered hat, then asked to borrow my perfume and my new shade of lipstick.

She was really sharp that day!

I looked at her, admired her, and then said in self-pity, "I'll feel

awful in this old suit of mine. I should at least have bought a new blouse or a fancy flower for my hat. I'll be so conscious of it."

Nancy, in a quick, indifferent way, looked down and let her hand rest on her swollen abdomen.

"How do you think I'll feel about *this*?"

She had never before let me know that she was even conscious of her cross.

We had dinner downtown and, as before, arrived at the theater early enough to watch the last-minute flurry of excitement that is every broadcast. Nancy knew many by name, having met them at Bishop Sheen's office. I left her chattering noisily as I went out for a Coke.

When I returned, she was posted at the front door, handing each person a raffle ticket as they entered. Many stopped to chat with her, having read of her recent trip to Lourdes.

One woman stopped to ask, "Did you get that lovely hat when you were in Paris, Nancy?"

Nancy laughed in answer as she watched with eagle eye that no one got in without a raffle ticket.

"No," she said candidly, "Mom got it for me in the dime store."

Minutes before broadcast time, Nancy was wheeled to the front-row center of the theater where she sat enraptured during the entire broadcast.

I preferred the background this time, finding standing room behind the last row of seats.

After the broadcast, everyone lined up as at the previous one, to shake hands with Bishop Sheen. I didn't want to be in the line again so soon after the other broadcast, especially when there were so many people. But Nancy was sort of trapped at the front of the theater. She would have to stay put until the aisle cleared of hand-shakers.

I went down and stood beside her. Several people were taking pictures of Bishop Sheen. This was one time I wished that we had brought a camera along. It would have been so nice to get a picture of Nancy with Bishop Sheen.

A young lady came over to me and said, "Would you mind if I took a picture of your daughter with Bishop Sheen? I have a Polaroid camera, so I can take a picture for you too."

I thanked her and inwardly told God that I wouldn't have minded waiting until the photo could be developed. He didn't have to be granting my wish by sending an instantaneous camera clicker.

Bishop Sheen was more than willing to come down off the stage and stand beside Nancy while they had their picture taken.

It turned out to be one of the nicest pictures Nancy ever had taken.

We were strolling around the streets of New York one evening when we came to Madison Square Garden.

"What a coincidence!" I said to Nancy as I pointed to the marquee. "Lawrence Welk is here tonight!"

"Oh, Mom, can we go in and see the show?" Nancy wheedled. I was dubious.

"It's sort of late to get any tickets, I'm sure they've all been given out weeks ago."

But we went around to the side door to ask.

We happened to ask a very important person around there. He told us to wait a minute, so we waited.

"I didn't ask him how much the tickets would be—if he can get them for us," I worried to Nancy.

The man came back, opened the door wide for Nancy and me and the wheelchair to come on inside. He didn't say anything about tickets, but led us to a good seat on the aisle, then adjusted Nancy's chair so that she could see clearly. I didn't even get to thank him, he hurried away so fast.

"Maybe we pay on the way out," whispered Nancy.

But I didn't think so.

It was God working again.

The show was a real hit. The fellows in the band played their best, which is really something. Alice Lon came out on the stage looking like a fairy princess in a gossamer white gown, and sang "Mr. Wonderful."

Nancy sat as one in a dream.

When the show was over, there was a general stampede to the stage for autographs. I knew that Nancy was wanting very much to say hello to Alice, so I edged along with the rest of the crowd.

"I see where I'm going to have to get you an autograph book . . . you're becoming a typical teen-ager," I said to Nancy.

Alice was standing with her back to us, busy signing one autograph after another. Nancy called out, "Hello, Alice."

Alice turned around, then laughed in surprise.

"Nancy! What are *you* doing here!"

She hadn't forgotten her Santa Monica fan.

In such impossible circumstances, they managed to carry on quite a conversation, Alice continuing to autograph books and smile to the crowd as she talked.

When we had taken our leave, I stopped to adjust Nancy's hat.

"Wasn't Alice nice to take the time to talk to you when she was so busy?" I asked.

Nancy was still in a dream world. She looked up at me with a heavenly shine in her eyes.

"Mom," she said under her breath, "I touched her dress!"

All of a sudden we knew it was time to go home to California. Our purse had a little something to do with the decision, but we had to admit to each other—we were homesick.

Though we had been living high and fancy, our little Santa Monica home was pulling at our heart strings.

Tay-the-poodle would be waiting, and there was so much to tell our many friends when we got back to home surroundings. We could hardly wait.

I went as quickly as I could to the ticket office and made our plane reservations, scheduling our departure for the very next afternoon on the tourist flight.

"We certainly did everything and saw everything while we were in New York!" I laughed to Nancy.

"We saw everything but the restaurant where they insult people," she reminded me.

"Well, I'll insult you at suppertime," I answered.

Another Lesson

THAT evening we had a farewell dinner at the hotel with a friend of ours. About noon the next day we took a cab to La Guardia Airport. We were both quite relieved that there were no news reporters waiting for us.

We wanted to slip quietly home.

I discovered that there would be no meals served aloft, so we ate a nice lunch at the café at the airport. Then I bought two box lunches as we made ready to board the plane.

By now I knew the routine so well, I didn't falter. Hurrying up the steps, I placed Nancy's wheeled stool at the doorway of the plane, then with the help of the crew, eased Nancy's wheelchair up to the platform. I must have been a little too confident. As I swung her from the chair to the metal stool, I misjudged the distance and set her down with a plump on the floor. It was nearly impossible for me to lift her when she was sitting on the floor. I saw her grimace in pain as I tugged at her in no gentle way. Her armpits had been getting sore lately from the lifting of her increased weight. The pain must have been almost unbearable. Yet it was the only way I knew how to lift her. Someone came and gave me a hand. Together we got her off the floor. She didn't utter a sound, except to say "Thank you" as we wedged her onto the plane seat.

With mixed emotions we sat and watched the New York skyline disappear into the afternoon haze. This was the last lap of a most unusual journey. We were so glad to be heading homeward, and so sorry to be leaving two months of friends behind us.

It had not been necessary to buy the box lunches. The plane made several stops en route, and I always had plenty of time to get out and buy what we fancied at the airports. At Chicago I bought Nancy a funny little trick pony puzzle and some comic books and Coke. That wasn't necessary either. When I got back to

the plane, she was drinking a malted milk someone had brought her, reading comic books from someone else, and wearing a trick squirting-rose lapel pin.

People were always so good to us.

The plane was real cozy. Nancy had once again placed the metal stool in front of her to use as a table. We spread the box lunches on it and had our supper as we watched the sun setting and listened to the harmonizing of a women's barbershop quartet. The quartet was homeward bound after capturing all honors at a recent contest. They were more than happy to entertain the rest of the plane passengers.

I began to feel a bit drowsy. But sleep next to Nancy was impossible. From the time the plane took off from New York, we had been surrounded by people . . . leaning over the back of the seat and kneeling over the seat in the front of us to talk to Nancy. She was in her element.

One handsome fellow insisted on bringing her a souvenir from each airport we stopped at. He spent most of the trip leaning over the seat ahead of us talking to Nancy. He told her all about his lapidary hobby, and promised to come and visit her and get her started in the rock-polishing hobby at home . . . that would be dandy, I thought unkindly. A one-room motel home with a rock-polishing outfit, probably equipped with running water. Maybe there would be room for it under the wall bed.

Nancy was quite enthused about going into the rock business.

"I could make enough money that you wouldn't have to worry," she said, turning eagerly to me.

"I don't worry anyway," I grinned.

Nancy didn't like my lack of enthusiasm.

Our plane was to arrive in Los Angeles at two in the morning. I didn't expect Sheila and Mac to meet us, but had wired them of our arrival time.

The plane was right on schedule.

As always, Nancy and I remained in our seats while the other passengers disembarked. Each one stopped to smile and shake hands with Nancy as they passed us. When the handsome young fellow stopped, he leaned over the seat confidentially and said:

"You know, Nancy, I've been watching you this entire trip. Everyone on the plane has been back here to talk to you because they've been attracted by that smile of yours, and yet you never once even left your seat. . . . You're a wonderful little girl!"

With a mischievous twinkle in her eyes, Nancy moved her skirt aside and pushed the stool away.

The young man stared in shock. He hadn't known that Nancy had no legs.

He stared awkwardly for a moment and then reached out his hand to take hers.

"God bless you, Nancy, I'll never forget you."

And with that he hurried away.

It was drizzling at the airport. Even so, Los Angeles looked awfully good to two weary travelers.

I pushed the wheelchair along the walkway and started looking for the taxi stand. Then I heard most welcome words, "Hi, Margie and Nancy!"

It was Sheila and Mac. How wonderful it was to hear those familiar voices.

They had brought our little Nash. Mac attended to the baggage while I skidded Nancy onto the front seat of the car. Sheila wedged in beside her, and Nancy wriggled in happiness.

I got into the back seat and hoped that I would find Tay-the-poodle lying there. I didn't. I thought it best not to ask about her.

As we got under way, Sheila said, "Tay is waiting for you at home. We thought there would be too much excitement if we brought her to the airport. She's had a bath today, and a poodle haircut to welcome you home!"

Nancy wriggled again and hugged Sheila.

"Oh, it's so good to be home!"

The three of us worked with the wheelchair to get Nancy up the long flight of stairs at Sheila and Mac's apartment. It seemed to be so much harder a task than it had been two months ago. Maybe it was because we were so unpracticed . . . or maybe it was that Nancy was so much heavier.

A series of shrill yaps greeted us. Tay was shut in the kitchen. She came dancing out, a blue bow on her topknot, a fancy new haircut. She wriggled and yapped and ran straight to Sheila.

Sheila pushed her down and pointed to Nancy.

"No, Tay, there's your mistress over there!"

But Tay wouldn't stop jumping up on Sheila. She would have to get acquainted with us all over again.

Finally Sheila picked her up bodily and put her in Nancy's arms.

There was a cold supper waiting for us. We had a real homecoming party. I could hardly eat for sleepiness. It was all the ex-

citement, the lack of sleep, and the difference in time. We had jumped three hours difference overnight. Nancy was as wide-awake and talkative as ever. I don't know where she got all her vitality . . . she never seemed to get tired!

We stayed with Sheila and Mac for about a week. There was so much to talk about, and there was such a feeling of home about the place. Mac had repaired or painted most of the furniture; there was nothing pretentious about the rambling upstairs apartment—but there was something there that money couldn't buy . . . a peace and a joy in everyday living. It was all over the place. It was heavenly after so much jumping around. We could have settled down right there for the rest of our lives.

I spent the days unpacking and relaxing. Sheila and Nancy became two housewife pals as they planned the meals, cleaned the apartment, and did the fancy baking. Sheila taught Nancy how to make coleslaw salad and bake cinnamon buns. We had them every day. Nancy was as happy and contented as a lark in a meadow. I watched quietly and wondered if God had chosen the wrong mother for her. I had never been able to give her the security of a home. Ours had always been a life of jump and go. Maybe Nancy couldn't have had a normal life. There was too much hospital routine in the first place. And she loved meeting people too much ever to be settled down in a normal home. No, I guess God knew what He was doing when He sent Nancy to me.

I liked to think so anyway.

We stayed on over the weekend, but with the understanding that we would leave for home early Monday. Sheila and Mac were real glad to have us with them, but as dear Scottish Nana had always so cannily warned when we went visiting, "Dinna wear out yer welcome!"

Sheila and Mac had their own life to lead, and we shouldn't take advantage of their hospitality.

We were watching television Saturday night when the doorbell rang. Pa had come up from Riverside to welcome us home. He no sooner got settled than the bell rang again and someone called, "Hi, up there—ready for the party?"

"Omigosh, the poker party!" Sheila put her hand to her mouth. "I forgot all about it!"

"Ooh, can I play?" Nancy asked eagerly as Mac hurried down to answer the bell.

Sheila looked over to me. "It's too late to cancel it now—do you mind? I know you're still tired from your travels."

"You go ahead." I stifled a yawn. "I'll sneak off to bed."

Sheila looked toward Nancy.

"Can Nancy stay up? She had a long nap today, and she loves poker!"

I let her play with the rest of the gang.

Although we were going to late Mass Sunday, we decided not to eat breakfast so that we could receive Communion.

As we entered the church, Nancy said, "You know, Mom, no matter how tired or sick or hungry I am, when I receive the Host, I always feel wonderful!"

What a lesson, I thought to myself.

On the way from church to the car, a fluttery middle-aged woman stopped us on the street.

"Oh, what a *beautiful* child!" she exclaimed, and leaned over to Nancy. "Look at those gorgeous eyes, and that lovely golden hair!"

Nancy tilted her head to better show off her gorgeous eyes and lovely hair.

I felt like giving her a crack on the head for such a display of vanity. However, I contained myself and waited as Nancy smiled and nodded to her admirer.

The woman went on her way down the street, and Nancy watched until she was out of hearing distance. Then she held the back of her hand to her mouth, rolled her eyes in mock agony and exclaimed, "Oh brother!"

No, vanity was not one of her faults.

Monday morning we packed the car and blessed it. We hadn't realized until we were without a car what a necessity it was in our life.

Sheila and Mac stood in the yard to see us off. When we were ready to leave, Mac took Tay off her leash and with a quick, fond pat, set the wriggling poodle in the car for Nancy to hold.

We drove slowly out the driveway and tried not to notice how Sheila and Mac were struggling to hide their emotions.

They had really gotten to love Tay.

We drove a few blocks while Nancy sat silently staring ahead of her. Then, as if finally making a decision, she turned to me and said, "Mom, drive back. I want Sheila and Mac to have Tay."

I pulled over to the curb and looked at Nancy in amazement. "Honey—not Tay! Why, you've wanted your dog so much, I thought we'd have to have her sent to you in France——"

Nancy stopped me short.

"Mom, we *must* give up the things we love."

Without another word I turned the car around.

I had an uncomfortable feeling that Nancy was trying to teach me something she knew I must learn.

Screwball Party

WHAT a grand feeling it was to open the door of our little motel home! There's no place quite like home, especially after a two months trek over the world and back. Every little knickknack and every one of Nancy's teddy bears had to be kissed fondly by two glad-to-be-home wanderers.

We hadn't told anyone we were coming, because we thought it best to get unpacked before the usual hubbub that was our life got under way.

But we had no sooner hung up our hats than the phone rang. A local newspaper reporter asked if she could come over and get a little story of our trip. We were more than glad to oblige. In fact, we even looked forward to seeing our reporter friend.

She came that afternoon, and we had tea and a nice chat. As we babbled away to her, we momentarily forgot that she was a newspaper reporter and we would no doubt soon be seeing our babble in print. We had a pleasant visit, nevertheless. Nancy gave our friend one of the medals we had brought from Lourdes. When I saw the thrill with which it was received, I regretted not having brought more from the Shrine.

When the reporter left, I mentioned this to Nancy, with the suggestion:

"Suppose we write to a shop in Lourdes, have them send us some medals, then we could give them to everyone and let them think we had brought them over here ourselves. No one would know the difference."

Nancy looked shocked.

"Mom! That would be awful! If we didn't actually bring the medals here ourselves, I'd *never* say we did. And anyway," she added as though to clinch the argument, "God would know!"

She was a real stickler when it came to matters of honor.

Our motel had a large, beautiful swimming pool and palm-decked patio for the use of the guests. It was the habit of a group of teen-agers to gather there early every evening and discuss youth topics such as sun tans, bop records, hotrods, crushes, dances, and cosmetics.

Although Nancy had been invited many times to join the group, I had always made excuses. It was sort of pushing her into adulthood, I argued within. Yet I knew that the real reason for my refusal was fear. I was dreading the time she would want to go out on dates like girls of her age. I wondered how God was going to handle that problem . . . an attractive, popular young girl—who couldn't get out of her wheelchair unless her mother was along to give her a hand.

I mustn't dwell on it, I thought to myself. For almost fourteen years now, we had lived each day as it came . . . and God had always provided the tools for that particular day. To jump ahead of a situation would be to doubt His providence.

But I had never let Nancy join the teen-age gang.

It didn't take us long to unpack and settle down into routine again—that is, what few routines we had in our sloughing-off life. Nancy was having no schooling, we had no medical appointments, we weren't planning to go anywhere—it was an odd “waiting for something” feeling around our home now. We got in the habit of sleeping late and staying up late. Sort of a Bohemian life that suited us perfectly.

We had had an early supper one evening, and Nancy had asked if she could go down to the motel office to visit with Virginia awhile. She had become one of our dearest friends, and a real pal to Nancy, letting her handle the calls on the motel switchboard during slack time. Nancy had become quite a proficient switchboard operator, even putting through some long distance calls for the guests. She usually stayed at the office until around eight, then she would buzz our apartment, ask if I had any calls to make to New York because she knew how to put them through. I would always be sorry to have to answer no, and that it was time for her to come home.

As it was dark outside, I always walked up to the office to meet her. A wheelchair is a hard thing to see by a motorist at night, unless he's in a teeny foreign car.

On this particular night it was so warm and lovely out under the stars, we walked homeward by way of the swimming pool. As I

pushed open the patio gate, we were met by shouts and greetings. The teen-age gang thought that Nancy was on her way to join them. Nancy turned to me and, without a word, waited to see what I would say. There was such unspoken pleading in her look, I couldn't refuse. "You can stay out here until nine," I acquiesced, "but no longer!"

An athletic young fellow stood up to make room for the wheelchair. "I'll see that she gets home okay," he offered.

I saw Nancy flutter in pleasant excitement. This particular young college boy had become her special crush and didn't know it yet.

I walked slowly and lonesomely back to the apartment and knew the selfish heartache of the mother of a teen-ager on her first night out.

I couldn't settle to do anything in the house. At last, with the excuse of visiting with Virginia, I walked down to the motel office.

What I really had in mind was to eavesdrop on Nancy and the new flame.

Virginia wasn't busy, so we strolled arm in arm around the walk and up to the low brick wall beside the pool. By seeming coincidence, we stopped on the other side of the fence from the laughing young patio group. We could see and hear without being noticed.

Nancy sat spellbound as one of the gang told of her trip to Disneyland. A little breeze had risen and I noticed that the new boy friend's coat was over Nancy's shoulders.

Virginia nudged me and whispered, "Look at that youngster! She could be sitting there bragging about her trip to France, but she never even *mentions* it!"

We strolled slowly back toward the office. Virginia continued, "You know, when you got home, I could hardly wait to hear about everything Nancy was going to be telling me. But when she came to the office, all she said was 'Hi, Virginia, what's new with you?' I've never seen anyone who lived so much for everyone else!"

At five minutes to nine, I heard the little metallic sounds a wheelchair makes, and knew that Nancy was approaching. I must not seem too anxious about her. I gave her time to say a private good night to her escort and then opened the door with, "Why, Nancy! Is that you already?"

I felt as though I were welcoming Cinderella home from the ball.

The next morning was so beautiful, we took a run out to the

Rogers Ranch to tell them that we were home. We always burst in upon them without the formality of prearranged plans . . . and somehow we always managed to get there just when we should.

On this particular day, it was unusually quiet as we drove up the country road to the ranch house. Betty, the cook, was in the kitchen and greeted us with open arms. I commented on the lull around the place.

"Didn't you know?" she asked. "Dale is in the hospital!"

It proved to be nothing too serious, so we asked if we should stop in and see her on the way home. Betty thought that would be fine, so after a short visit at the ranch we drove over to Burbank.

We were too late for the regular visiting hours. And I was doubtful about Nancy being able to go in with me, being slightly under the visiting age.

"Well, we can walk until we get stopped," I said, starting down the hospital corridor to the room Betty had described to us. "We'll just walk along in a businesslike way," I proposed, "and go right on into Dale's room so anyone will think that we have business in there."

It was a good thing that we had made advance plans. Two nurses and a doctor followed close at our heels as we walked down the hallway.

"Here's the door," I said to Nancy as I pulled a door open wide, pushed Nancy's wheelchair in, and followed in a businesslike way . . . only to discover that I had propelled us into the linen closet.

We stayed there with the door shut until we heard the doctor and nurses pass. I guess to this day they are still wondering about us.

But to get back to Dale. She was really glad to see us. Once we did get to her room, we had another job finding her amidst all the flowers. Her bed was practically hidden in floral arrangements.

It was good to hear Dale say that Nancy looked so wonderful after our trip. So many had looked at Nancy's body, mentally measured the swelling, and then commented in Pollyanna cheerfulness, "Well, it was worth going over there—to see if the water *would* cure Nancy."

Dale took one look at the radiance and peace in Nancy's face and said quietly, "How blessed you were to be able to visit the Shrine, Nancy."

We had brought something special for Dale. A small glass statue of Our Lady of Lourdes. It was filled with holy water.

"I filled it right at the Shrine for you," said Nancy.

Dale would treasure it, we knew.

After the visit to Dale, we figured that if we hurried through the freeway traffic (and who could ride the freeway *without* hurrying?) we could still make it to Santa Monica in time to have supper in the Rose Room at St. John's Hospital, so I nosed the Nash into the stream of traffic. All the way home Nancy prattled about the evening at the pool.

"The kids want to have a birthday party for me," she said happily; then added, "We'll do all the work ourselves, so you won't have to do a thing. Is it okay if we plan for June twentieth?"

I should have been very happy about a fourteenth birthday party. But somehow, I couldn't be. I know I dampened Nancy's enthusiasm by my remark, "We'll see. At least we can say yes—N.D."

N.D. was a family code. It meant Not Definite. Because so many of our plans had fallen through over the years, we had hoped to divert disappointment by "N.D."

Nancy had to be satisfied. I felt guilty at needlessly squelching her birthday plans, but I just couldn't look that far ahead in our life.

I had lived too long with a Borrowed Angel.

We got a big surprise when we walked into the Rose Room. Jessie stopped us at the cashier's desk and, all excitement, asked, "Would you mind if we gave Nancy a birthday party on June fifth? We know that's awfully early, but several of us will be away later on vacations, and others will be busy. So would it be all right if we had Nancy's birthday party early?"

"What a coincidence!" I laughed. "We were just talking about a birthday party. I think it would be perfect if you had it on June fifth, don't you, Nancy?"

Nancy grinned and nodded.

"Let's have it a Screwball Party, and everyone come dressed up as crazy as they can look!"

Jessie clasped her hands together. "The very thing! And how suitable!" She laughed and chucked Nancy under the chin.

When we were eating supper, Nancy leaned across the table to ask confidentially, "Can I have the other party too, Mom?"

I nodded and shrugged my shoulders.

I still couldn't say yes without adding N.D.

As we left the hospital, we saw one of our favorite hospital sisters in the rose garden. We stopped to chat with her as she clipped choice buds for the chapel.

As we talked, she kept looking over to Nancy with a faraway expression in her eyes. Then as we were about to leave, she put her hand on Nancy's head and said softly, "Isn't it wonderful to be so near to heaven?"

I didn't know whether she meant in the rose garden, or in life.

—And the Holy Ghost

SOMEONE was waiting for us when we got home that evening. Our dear friend and neighbor, Rose. She was the physiotherapist whose studio joined the motel grounds. Nancy and I loved her for her ready-for-anything companionship. There was nothing she would say no to when we proposed our crazy schemes, whether it might be a midnight picnic on the beach, or a flying jaunt to see the Hollywood lights. Rose was always ready and willing.

Tonight she was waiting to see if we wanted to go for a swim. There was no one at the pool, she informed us, so if I was willing, she would help lift Nancy into the pool.

Rose was one of the few I didn't mind having around when Nancy disrobed. She was not too shocked to see Nancy's body without the camouflage of a pretty ruffled skirt.

I agreed to the swim.

So, with much wriggling and squealing, we got Nancy into the warm water of the pool and an inner tube around her. She paddled around like a tadpole, and I had to caution her not to go into the deep end of the pool. Nancy was afraid of nothing.

As we lifted her back into the wheelchair, Rose looked at the swelling in Nancy's body.

"I'll bet treatment would do a lot for that," she said thoughtfully. "Tell you what—when I come back from my trip east in a couple of weeks, I'll cancel all my evening customers and just work on Nancy . . . no charge, of course."

"Bless you, Rose," was all I could say.

The girls from the Legion of Mary came regularly every Tuesday evening. Nancy would always be waiting eagerly for them. They

were working on a project, a scrapbook for the school children. It was being filled with stories and pictures of the lives of the saints. Each meeting night, one of the group would choose a saint, and then they would gather all the information they could compile for the next meeting. Nancy, of course, chose St. Therese when it came her turn. She was so interested in writing up the stories and in finding suitable pictures, that I became interested too. But I never actually joined the group at our card table. I sat at my makeshift desk in the kitchen and listened while each one read her homework, and then discussed other religious matters. It always amazed me, the way Nancy seemed to know so many of the answers without really studying too much beforehand. It was almost as though she had a direct wire to heaven, her answers were so profound.

After each lesson I would join them for the recitation of the Rosary. Nancy usually always led this, her beautiful voice giving new meaning to each decade.

It was always the same. Every Tuesday night Nancy would plead with her guests to come early for supper. Or to have a little party—or at least a Coke and some cookies. Their answer was always the same . . . the Legion of Mary was a study group and must not mix party with business. But Nancy was adamant. And persistent. She always saw to it that I had the Cokes and the cookies in the house just in case the girls changed their minds.

It was strange, on this Tuesday after the Legion of Mary meeting, Nancy asked the usual question about a party—and both of the girls agreed that maybe it would be a good idea, just that once, to have a little party.

Nancy bounced up and down in happiness. She was the Party Kid personified.

I got out the Cokes and the cookies and came to join the party at the card table. I saw Nancy give me the eye and knew that she was wanting to whisper something to me.

Excusing ourselves, we went into the kitchen for a little conference.

When we came out, I took one of our biggest, prettiest pictures down off the wall and handed it to one of the girls.

"We want you to have that," beamed Nancy.

The girl was overwhelmed and protested in embarrassment.

"I couldn't take the pictures right off your wall!" she laughed, and wondered just what to do about it. She held the picture up

before her. "How did you know it's one of my favorite pictures?" she asked.

Nancy was rummaging through her dresser drawer. She found what she wanted and came scooting over to the other girl.

"This is for you," she said, tossing a new prayer book into the girl's lap.

"You'd better keep them if Nancy wants to give them to you." I smiled. "She really gets so much pleasure in giving."

I couldn't help but glance up at the bare spot on the wall where our favorite picture of Jesus in the garden had so recently hung.

I hoped that someday I could attain Nancy's gift of perfect detachment.

The following Sunday was to be our last to attend Mass at St. Monica's Church.

We didn't know it at the time.

Nancy, in her usual place beside the confessional booths in the aisle, sat quietly, missal in hand, following the movements of the priest.

Which was more than the rest of us in that section of the church were doing. Most of us had our eyes skyward, following with nervous and ill-concealed titters the movements of a brown pigeon atop one of the aisle pillars.

In some unexplainable way the bird had managed to get into the church and was now solemnly strutting around the fluted pillar as it watched the Mass in progress. It was almost too dignified to be laughed at. But laugh we did. I leaned over the seat and tapped Nancy on the shoulder. "It looks just like a monk!" I snickered. Nancy shook her head solemnly and continued thoughtfully to watch the bird as it fluttered above her.

Quite unexpectedly, as the priest left the altar for the pulpit, the bird glided down . . . directly toward the Tabernacle, glided gracefully around the altar, and then up past the priest.

The priest halted his sermon in startled amazement and his eyes followed the bird as it floated quietly back to the pillar beside Nancy.

"That *could* be the Holy Ghost!" he chuckled.

Everyone laughed.

That is, everyone except Nancy.

She was sitting silently, lips moving in prayer as she made the sign of the cross.

God Asks

a

Question

WE wanted to share our jug of Lourdes water with as many as we could, so we were more than generous with our donations. That's why I couldn't fathom how, months after we had filled the jug at the Shrine, we still had enough of the holy water for those who seemed to need it. One night we sat at the kitchen table to fill another bunch of little plastic bottles we kept for that purpose.

"There *couldn't* be more than a few drops left!" I said to Nancy as I brought the little straw-covered jug from the closet. I snapped the stone top open to peer inside. "I'm going to see just exactly how much we do have left in there," I said, holding it up to the light.

Nancy stopped me with, "Don't be so curious, Mom; let God do the measuring. After all, He knows how many we should give it to."

We put the filled bottles in a little box, and Nancy made out a list of people we would visit in the morning. People we should give the holy water to.

Quite early the next morning we started out, feeling like special messengers as I drove where Nancy suggested. She had a bottle earmarked for her doctor in Westwood. We thought that we would stop at his office in the hospital before we had lunch.

On the way to the hospital elevator, we met one of the receptionists.

"Hi there, Nancy," she greeted pleasantly. "I haven't seen you since you got back from France!"

A little conversation followed, and then as the receptionist was about to leave, she said, "By the way, did you ever get those x-rays the doctor wanted?"

I shook my head.

"I didn't hear anything about them." I tried to recall a neglected x-ray appointment, then shook my head again.

"How about getting them right now?" she asked helpfully. "I'm sure they're not busy down in the x-ray lab today."

Nancy pulled at my sleeve in protest. I was caught between two tides.

"We could go down now," I said hesitantly.

Later I explained to Nancy, "It seemed like fate, Nancy, meeting that receptionist in the hallway. If I had said no, I wouldn't have felt right about it."

Nancy nodded in silent agreement and tried to hide another of her many disappointments. The next name on our visiting list had been to see Roy Rogers' mother out in the valley. Nancy and Mom Slye were like two lovable cronies.

We took the appointment slip and went down to the all-too-familiar x-ray waiting room.

It wasn't a long wait until the x-ray technician called us into the examination room. He tried to hide his shock at seeing how much worse Nancy was physically. But he was a poor actor, and didn't make us feel any better on such a suddenly gloomy day.

It was always so hard on me—those decisions. Maybe I should have refused the appointment, gone out to the valley and had a fun-filled day.

Deep inside I knew that that wasn't the answer. It would have been running away. Anybody can run. No matter if the outcome of the x-rays was good or bad, I would have regretted not seizing each opportunity to help Nancy . . . or to follow the path of the cross.

Nancy was stripped of all her finery, her jewelry and her medals, and decked out in an open-back hospital gown.

"We ought to know by now to dress you in easy-off clothes," I joked.

But neither of us felt like laughing.

However, Nancy did manage as usual to keep her heartaches to herself. She was graciousness itself to the nurses and technicians, and the woman patient who waited in the dressing room with her. Nancy amused the woman by telling her every funny story she could think of.

When the woman was called into the darkened x-ray room,

Nancy said to me, "She looked like she was scared inside, so I wanted to make her laugh."

We waited in the dressing room for quite a long time. I saw that Nancy was beginning to look awfully tired, and remembered that we had had no lunch.

"We'll probably be sitting right here for another hour or so," I said. "How about me running up to the soda fountain and getting us some sandwiches?"

Nancy thought that would be a good idea, but called after me, "The minute you get out of calling distance, the doctor will want you. Just wait and see!"

I laughed and waved over my shoulder to her.

What a terrific person she was! In all the years we had been going through these routines, I had never really let myself dwell upon the heartaches that she had gone through . . . and always with such a smile and a concern for the other person, that no sympathy was directed toward her.

I wondered how much more she could go through.

I wondered how much more I could go through . . . hurting for her.

We knew so many people, and had so many friends here at the huge hospital, I found myself walking along the hallway with a fixed smile on my face and a mechanical greeting on my lips. "Yes, we both enjoyed our trip to France. No, it hadn't affected Nancy's health any to travel so far." My mood was one of unsociability today. I almost wished that I would stop passing so many friends along the hall.

I turned down a side corridor to take a short cut to the soda fountain. The stillness stopped me in my tracks. It was suddenly as though I was the only one in the immense building. The shiny brown stone walls seemed to close me into profound and complete privacy, as though to say, "All right, dispense with the sham and handshaking . . . tell God what you *really* think!"

If there had been no roof on the building, I could not have been more conscious of heaven. I felt that God was waiting to hear from me.

Without a visible tear, I burst out crying inside. It was as though my heart had suddenly torn in two and revealed itself in all its naked agony to Him.

"God, we can't go any further! I can't watch Nancy carry such

a heavy cross. Please God—*do something!* . . . The cup runneth over.”

The minute I had inwardly spoken, I became my usual ordinary self. The stillness had left the corridor. The feeling of a Presence there was gone too.

I tried to analyze my emotions.

I had only a fear of what I had revealed to God.

But surely, He wouldn't take my outburst seriously. True, it had seemed as though He had asked, "Is the burden too heavy?" and had waited for my answer before His decision. But surely God would know that, as long as the burden was there, we would have the strength to bear it. Surely He would not take me seriously when, in my moment of weakness, I had asked Him not to let Nancy suffer any more. He knew that Nancy was everything to me—my very life itself.

I could never go on without her.

The experience had taken only a moment, yet it seemed as though I had been worlds away from Nancy. A complete earthiness had returned to the corridor.

I saw two of our hospital friends come around a corner toward me. I smiled and waved to them as I went on to get our sandwiches.

As Nancy had said, the doctor was waiting for me.

"He sent for you the *minute* you got out of sight!" she chuckled.

"Natch." I grinned, and handed her a cheese sandwich. She could get a couple of bites of it before she had to get on the x-ray table.

We went on into the x-ray room. Here we formed a sort of acrobatic team—Nancy hung onto my wrists as I got her under the arms and swung her up on the x-ray table. I couldn't have lifted her the way an ordinary invalid would be lifted.

The x-ray ordeal was quite routine, and over before either of us got too tired.

But we weren't in the mood after the appointment to continue on out to the valley to hand out the Lourdes holy water. We wanted, instead, to go some place where we could be alone.

"How about that fish restaurant out by Malibu?" I suggested.

That was a great idea. We both brightened considerably.

"I want to stop long enough to watch the seals!" laughed Nancy in anticipation.

As it was Friday, the restaurant was rather crowded, despite the

early hour. But it was one of the largest fish restaurants on the coast. We would have no trouble, I was sure, in slipping unobserved into one of the many booths.

The hostess met us at the door.

"Well, if it isn't Nancy!"

All of the waiting customers turned to see who was Nancy, and we were quite unwillingly the center of attraction.

"This young lady has just come back from a trip to France," explained the waitress. "She flew all the way over there to go to Lourdes!"

"Oh, I read about her in Chicago!" beamed a tourist. "Did you get any help from the trip, Nancy?"

I was about to take over for Nancy . . . no, she was doing all right by herself. Her eyes were shining as she looked over to the woman and answered, "Oh yes, it was worth going farther than halfway around the world to be where the Mother of God appeared."

The hostess beckoned to us. There was a booth ready. A nice one at the window where we could watch the sun as it slid into the blue sea. The tide was high, so the waves were crashing on the rocky beach and sending up a foamy white spray to dash excitingly against the big thick glass windows. The scene was wonderfully relaxing to both of us.

The waitress brought our clam chowder. Nancy bowed her head for table grace. She said her usual, "Thank You, God, for everything."

I looked across to her and said sharply, "What are you thanking God for *today*? We've had nothing but discouragement."

Nancy looked quietly at me a moment and then said, "He knows."

Corky

THERE was something lacking in our home. We needed a dog. We missed Bambi, and we missed Tay. Both were unattainable—so we looked in the want ads in the local papers in search of a pet. He must be a small dog—little enough to fit in the wheelchair beside Nancy. And he must be white, if possible. Somehow we knew that we would find one meeting these requirements . . . even after we had called several kennels and had been flabbergasted at the prices wanted for small white dogs.

"You'd think we were inquiring about a *horse*," I said one afternoon to Nancy. "I never dreamed dogs were so expensive."

"It's because we want such a *special* one, I guess," Nancy answered sagely.

I decided to personally visit the dog shops and kennels around town.

A tour of inspection profited me nothing. The dogs were either too large or too expensive. However, I continued to keep my eyes open.

One day I had left Nancy at home while I supposedly went grocery shopping. But in my heart I felt that this was the day I would find *the* dog and surprise her.

After two hours of animal shopping I began to think I was mistaken. Then I had an idea. . . . Why not let God take over the errand?

Trustfully I parked the car on a side street and sat quietly waiting for God to take over. I knew He would put some kind of sensible idea into my head. But when I suddenly got an inspiration I doubted strongly that it had come from Him.

I was to go to the local dog pound.

But, I argued with myself, if I couldn't find the special dog in a fancy dog store, I'd certainly never find him in a dog pound!

But I drove over there anyway.

The Humane Society office smelled like dogs and disinfectant. The pound master was busy filling out the necessary papers for a

man to take a dog home . . . a great big hulking German police dog.

You see, God, I argued inwardly, they don't have *little* dogs in pounds!

When my turn came, I asked if there were any puppies available.

"Yes, we've got some dandies!" answered the pound master. "Want to come out and see them?"

I walked eagerly out to the wire-enclosed kennels with him. There were the puppies. Five of them. Cute little short-haired yellow puppies. A little bit of every breed.

Little and cute now, but in five months they would be pony-size.

The pound master walked ahead of me, around the back of the cages to the gate. He was just going to get one of the puppies for me to hold when the phone in the office rang. He left me standing while he went back to answer it. My eyes wandered to the cage next to the puppies—and my heart took a sudden leap . . . there was the dog I was looking for!

Huddled in a corner of the cage was a tiny, fluffy, black-and-white dog!

Without waiting for permission, I slipped the gate open and took him up in my arms. Oh God, You knew all the time! I couldn't have described our desire better to You!

I apologized for doubting His wisdom for sending me to the pound.

The wee dog nestled into my arms. I was amazed at the smallness of his body. He was mostly ears and tail and head—and a mass of tangled long fluffy hair.

I was still holding him when the pound master returned.

"*This* is the dog we want!" I laughed.

The pound master raised his hand and shook his head.

"That's the *only* one in the pound that isn't available!"

My heart dropped to my boots.

"We'd be glad to *buy* him," I pleaded.

The pound master was still shaking his head.

"Not a chance. That dog was found early this morning. He will have to stay here the necessary three days to see if his owner claims him—and if he isn't claimed, the finders want him."

I could see that argument was useless. I put the little dog back in the kennel and walked out of the yard without even a glance at the would-be-big yellow puppies.

From there, I drove over to the Westwood pound.

The dogs over there were already horse-size.

Crestfallen, I started homeward. The thought kept going through my head, Why had it seemed like such a strong persuasion from God—to go to the Santa Monica pound? Then I thought, God kept *his* part of the bargain. . . . He had shown me the exact dog we wanted. All I had to do was to carry His plan through.

I drove back to the Santa Monica pound.

The pound master was surprised to see me again.

"Want one of those little puppies?" he asked helpfully.

"No," I answered firmly, "I want to see if we can have that little black-and-white dog. Would you give me the name of the people who found him?"

Patiently the pound master shook his head.

"It's against the rules, ma'am."

Then God must have stepped in.

The pound master reached into his desk drawer and took out a paper. "It's most unusual, but I guess it could do no harm." He gave me the name and phone number of the finders.

"They want the dog, though," he told me again as I thanked him.

I rushed home and told Nancy all about it, describing the wee dog as best I could. Nancy could hardly wait to see him. She phoned the number on the slip of paper, explained our desire to have the dog, and asked if we could possibly buy him from them. Then she gave her name and address.

"That was the grandmother," she explained as she hung up the phone. "The daughter is working, but she will phone us this evening."

"Now remember," I warned, "when the daughter calls, don't *beg* for the dog. God doesn't like beggars. And, as Nana always said, 'Wha's fer ye will na' go by ye'—if the dog is meant for us, we will have him."

Needless to say, every time the phone rang, we both jumped—and prayed.

Finally the call came.

Nancy had answered the phone. I heard her explaining our love for the dog and her offering to buy him. Then a long pause while she listened to what the granddaughter said. Then a squeal and "*Really? Thank you!*"

Nancy almost forgot to say good-bye as she hung up the phone.

"Mom, he's *ours!*" She laughed. "The lady said that she would

be glad for me to have him. She works all day and he would have to be shut in the little kitchen. She was just going to take him so that he wouldn't be put to sleep at the pound!"

"Wonderful! But, honey," I warned her, "he still isn't ours. Remember, the owners might claim him in the three days we have to wait."

Neither of us could even imagine such a possibility.

For the following three days, we tried not to think about the wee dog. But we even named him.

We planned to call him Corky.

Nancy phoned the pound master and explained that, unless the owners came, the dog could be ours. She carried on a long conversation and later related it to me.

The dog, the pound master told her, had no doubt been cruelly mistreated. He was about four months old, appeared to have rickets, and was very nearly starved. In fact, he was so undernourished that his body was almost deformed, his stomach had shrunk so. And his hair was so matted, it would have to be clipped.

"You know, Mom," said Nancy after she had described Corky, "I'm glad that we're getting a dog that needs a lot of love and care. If he was a real fancy one, he would already be taken care of."

Each day Nancy found excuses to phone the pound . . . and incidentally to ask if Corky was still there.

No one had even inquired about him.

On the second day Nancy phoned the pound three times. She was about to call once again before their closing time when I warned her, "Nancy, don't hound that dog man."

Nancy laughed. "Oh, what a pun!"

But she went right on with the call.

Corky was still there.

On the third day, we decided not to phone until the very last minute. The pound master certainly knew by now that we wanted the dog. And what a disappointment it would be if the owner showed up just after we had called.

At four-thirty that afternoon Nancy got the kitchen clock and held it in her hands as she sat beside the phone.

"I'll wait until three minutes to five, and then I'll phone," she said.

She counted each minute off and then, promptly at the stated time, made the sign of the cross and picked up the receiver.

She didn't have to say who was calling. The pound master knew

her voice by now. She just said "Hello" and then "*Oh, thank you!*" and handed me the receiver.

Yes, Corky was ours.

The pound master was as pleased as we were.

"Could you be here at eight o'clock in the morning to pick him up?" he asked. "The newspaper reporters want to take some pictures."

I laughed into the phone. "We'll probably be sitting on your step at sunrise!"

Which wasn't much of an exaggeration.

The step was still wet with early morning dew as we stood and waited for the pound to open.

We stayed in the office while the pound master went out to the kennel for Corky. The newsman came in and, being an old friend of ours, shared in the excitement with us.

He was setting up his camera when the pound master came back, carrying the bedraggled little dog in his arms. He handed it to Nancy.

The newsman snapped a picture just as Nancy took the wee dog to her heart.

After the preliminary excitement, I asked about the fees for the dog, and learned that the men in the pound had taken care of that. Corky was to be a gift from them. They handed Nancy a fancy black-and-white leash for Corky.

They had thought of everything.

As we started out the door, the pound master said, "It certainly was strange about that little dog . . . I'll bet a hundred and fifty people wanted him. But the owner didn't even show up. He seems to have had no home."

"Maybe he fell out of heaven," said Nancy simply.

Familiar Stamping Ground

THIS was to be one of our "Visit Our Friends" days.

Nancy was all dressed up and looked like a fairy princess in her freshly ironed frilly white blouse and shantung yellow skirt. I was pretty much dressed up myself. The only one in the car who looked like a tramp was Corky. His tangled mat of hair was impossible. We had combed and he had howled until we finally gave up. His hair would have to be cut off and a new batch grown, to be combed and cared for as it grew.

So our first stop was at the veterinarian's to drop Corky off for his haircut.

The next stop was at the Westwood Hospital. We had a routine little appointment there. One of Nancy's doctors wanted to give her a little check-up and, no doubt, ask a few more questions.

It was good to walk into the cool elegance of the hospital corridors. The day was extra hot and humid for so early in the season.

We kept our appointment at the adult medical clinic. I didn't know how we happened to be in the adult rather than the children's clinic, but wisely kept quiet about it. I knew how much it pleased Nancy to be considered an adult, too grown up for the more familiar children's department.

We didn't have much of a wait this time. We were taken into an examination room almost before I had time to open a waiting-room magazine. If this visit was going to be this speedy, we'd even have time to get out to the valley for lunch with our first friendly visit.

The doctor came in and sat down beside Nancy. He asked a few questions, then probed a bit, professionally absorbed in thought

as he examined the swelling around her abdomen. Then, still examining and thinking, he said to me, "I think this fluid could be tapped."

That sounded awfully good to me.

I had heard of people being "tapped" and losing annoying swelling in a matter of minutes.

Nancy was not quite so elated.

"Will there be needles?" she asked, fear showing in her eyes.

The doctor patted her shoulder.

"Don't you worry, honey. You've had enough experience with needles not to fear them anymore."

Nancy smiled with an assurance she was far from feeling.

The doctor sat looking over her medical chart a minute and then turned to me.

"We'd better get this done as soon as possible. It will involve only an overnight stay at the hospital. . . . By the way, I don't know how Nancy happens to be at this adult clinic. By rights she belongs downstairs in the children's clinic."

I nodded and questioned, "How soon would she come in, doctor?"

"Well, today if you want her to."

I saw Nancy sit up straight in her wheelchair as though to protest. We had planned such a wonderful day in the valley. I wouldn't have blamed her for flatly refusing. Instead she sat quietly a moment as though talking it over with God. Then, quietly looking up at the doctor, she said, "It's all right with me if you want me to come in today. And, Doctor"—she reached for his hand—"whatever you want to do with me is okay too—even the history ectomy."

I could have kissed her, but I controlled myself.

Little did the doctor realize what a terrific double sacrifice she was making. Now, unknowingly, he was thrusting another upon her.

"You'll have to stay in the children's ward, seeing as you're not yet fourteen."

We waited for the necessary arrangements in the clinic waiting room. Neither of us talked hospital, but only about how funny Corky would probably look in his new haircut.

"Will you bring him for me to see?" asked Nancy with a catch in her voice.

"Sure I'll bring him," I comforted. "But gosh—you're only going

to be here overnight, and we can do our friendly visiting just as soon as you get home."

"Sure," agreed Nancy as she stared hard at the handle of her wheelchair.

We had never been in the children's ward. It was a beautiful place, with two-bed wards glassed in with picture windows to take away the hospital look. The nurse showed us a room facing the hospital court. Nancy's bed was the one next to the door. A little eight-year-old anemic girl had the bed next to the window. She was an ambulatory patient, so the room was empty when we entered.

I lifted Nancy in all her finery and fluffiness onto the high bed and wondered if they were making hospital beds a couple of feet higher now—or if it was Nancy's tremendous weight that made the task almost impossible.

The nurse brought a familiar hospital gown, and Nancy's feminine finery was changed for the stiffly unbleached muslin of the tie-in-the-back gown. We were asked how much Nancy weighed. What a frightening question that was becoming now! I tried to stave off the inquiry by saying as I shrugged my shoulders, "Oh, somewhere around a hundred and fifty. We haven't weighed her in a couple of months."

The nurse wasn't satisfied.

"We'll have to get her weight," she insisted.

"I don't know how you'll do that," I answered, trying to dismiss the subject. "For a while we weighed her—wheelchair and all—at the freight scales at St. John's Hospital and then deducted the chair's weight."

"When was she last weighed there?" needed the nurse.

I shrugged. "Oh, a couple of months ago, I guess."

"Well, we'll have to get her weight," she persisted.

She rang for an intern and asked him to bring some new kind of a bed scale. They were going to get Nancy's weight or else! But it was important to them—even though it was so inwardly frightening to Nancy and me. We didn't want to know how much she had gained in the past month or so.

The nurse left us awhile, and Nancy proceeded to explore the place, her eyes taking in everything as she sat perched on the hospital bed like a little monarch. How many times in her relatively short life the confines of her hospital bed had been her entire kingdom . . . and yet, she had actually reached across the world! The foreign letters we received proved that. I wondered what at-

traction she had for so many, and if she was aware of the attraction. She didn't seem to be.

Nancy pushed the buzzer beside her bed and a voice said, "Can I help you, please?" I looked at it in surprise, but Nancy, it seemed, had heard of the modern gadget.

"I was just showing my mother, thank you," she answered into the mouthpiece.

"We can talk to the nurse at the desk any time," she explained.

"Well, don't call unless you need her," I warned. "And not if it's just for a drink of water—those nurses are busy, you know."

Nancy nodded. But there was a mischievous twinkle in her eyes. I'm afraid she later ran those nurses a merry circle until they cut her down to necessary calls.

The day had turned into a real scorcher. The hospital gown looked hot and heavy. I offered to run down to the village and get a nice cool summer nightie.

"Okay . . . but come right back!"

Subconsciously Nancy was using the old expression she had always pleaded with when it had been time for me to leave her after hospital visiting hours. How long ago that seemed—the little-girl Nancy in the hospital bed! Now she seemed so out of place in the children's ward.

I bought a frilly pink nylon nightie, not realizing that nylon would be even hotter than the unbleached muslin.

When I got back to the hospital, the weighing contraption had arrived. There was a cluster of nurses and interns around Nancy's bed—trying to figure out how to use the new gadget and how to decipher the weight in pounds.

The scale looked like an ironing board. It could be raised level with the bed. All that Nancy had to do was to scoot across the mattress to a sitting position on the board of the scale.

After much scale juggling and debating, a weight was finally arrived at. I don't remember what the actual figure was, but I remember thinking to myself, "Oh they've made a mistake. Nancy couldn't *possibly* weigh that much!"

Nancy loved the fancy nightgown, so I didn't mention anything about the heat-retaining qualities of nylon. She seemed to be perfectly happy where she was, had made friends with several of the other patients, and had even discovered a former school classmate in the ward across the hall.

It was good that she could adjust so easily to disappointments. Lord knows, she had had enough of them!

We wondered whether Nancy's favorite doctor knew that she was in the hospital—or that she was back from Lourdes. He had been one that we had been planning to visit that afternoon. In fact, Nancy had a jar of Lourdes holy water and the little seal paperweight in her purse for him.

"I'll take a run up to the next floor and see if he's in his office," I said to Nancy, and suited actions to words.

The doctor was alone in his office. He was real pleased and somewhat surprised to see me. He was really surprised when I told him that Nancy was a patient in the hospital.

"What do they plan to do for her?" he asked interestedly.

"They're going to tap her—the swelling, you know," I answered brightly.

The doctor was noncommittal.

We changed the subject.

"I want to tell you how happy we were to learn of the twins," I beamed.

The doctor immediately became the proud father. He just happened to have a series of photographs of the adorable little ones in his desk. I stood and looked at each photo carefully as he explained that the twins were much cuter in person. The pictures didn't do them justice. Then in the midst of the talk about the twins, he said suddenly and seriously, "You realize, Mrs. Hamilton, there is not much more we can do for Nancy."

I had realized it for fourteen years. But I still didn't have the courage to put the thought into words.

I only nodded and said, "Nancy has a few little things for you."

Doctor stood up immediately. "I'd sure love to see her. Let's go."

We walked down the stairway because it was quicker than waiting for the elevator.

Nancy was as pleased as punch to see her beloved doctor.

He couldn't stop telling her how beautiful she was, and how very much she was doing for everyone by being so brave and continuing to be such a happy person. As he spoke, his voice took on a reverence, almost as though he were speaking to an angel.

Nancy handed him the little gifts, and in exchange received the photos of his twins to admire.

As he was leaving, the doctor, instead of his usual pat-the-young-

ster-on-the-head farewell, shook hands with Nancy as though she were a grownup.

That pleased her more than he ever realized.

I was surprised to hear the rattle of the food cart along the hallway. I hadn't realized how fast the time was passing.

With the sound, Nancy changed from a poised young lady to a giggling ninny.

The young intern who served the meal trays was all unknowingly the victim of another teen-age crush.

Nancy's school friend came in, and the two of them commenced a silly giggling campaign. They were acting up too much to even be interested in food. I thought it best to leave and let the nurse take over.

"Don't forget, you promised to bring Corky and show me his haircut!" called Nancy down the hall after me.

I had almost forgotten about Corky. It had been such an unusual day. Or had it been an *usual* day in our lives—my saying good-by to Nancy in a hospital?

I stopped at the nurses' desk for permission to wheel Nancy into the court that evening. I didn't explain that it was for her to see her dog's haircut.

The nurse willingly gave permission.

I was about to leave when the buzzer sounded and a familiar voice came over the receiver.

"Nurse—will you please ask my mother to come back a minute? Thank you."

Whatever could Nancy be wanting? It was nothing serious, because her phone request had been punctuated by stifled giggles.

All she wanted was for me to be sure to bring her little camera—with some flash bulbs.

She wanted to take some pictures of her new crush.

Corky looked like a skinned jackrabbit with whiskers.

I left him in the car while I went up to get Nancy. When she saw him, she laughed hard and long.

"They sure skinned you, Corky!" She put her nose to his and he wriggled in self-conscious delight. He realized that the new haircut was cause for laughter and happiness.

We walked around the court and enjoyed the unaccustomed evening warmth. We admired the sunset and discovered imaginary pictures in the fleecy golden clouds. Then all too soon it was time

to put Corky back in the car and take Nancy up to her hospital bed.

There was a momentary, uncontrolled wistfulness in Nancy's face as she kissed Corky good-by.

"I'll be home real soon, won't I, Mom?"

It was little-girl Nancy asking the question.

I took Corky and danced him into the car.

"You'll be home before you know it. . . . Just look at that big gold cloud over there, Nancy. It looks like a mansion in Paradise!"

Nancy looked and smiled.

Undecided Decision

THE following day I went over to the hospital before the regular visiting hours. They were quite lenient in letting parents into the ward—and I was sort of anxious to see what they would do for Nancy.

Her room was so crowded, I could hardly wedge into it. There must have been a dozen white-clad medical students, all grouped around a woman doctor who was describing Nancy's case history to them. Some of the young interns were fussing with their black-encased medical instruments. One was preparing to examine Nancy's heart. One was examining her tonsils.

I sat down unobserved in a corner while two of the interns, one on each side of Nancy, examined her ears. I tried not to become annoyed, but was a bit upset to think that she was being subjected to so much physical analysis and investigation.

Nancy saw me and winked and smiled as she held her head steady for the ear investigation. I motioned to her that I would stop the probing if she wished. She frowned protest and then smiled again. Evidently she was getting a bang out of being a temporary guinea pig.

The examination and explanation continued while I sat quietly by. When it was over and the group had gone on down the hall, Nancy leaned over the bed to say to me, "There was a doctor looking in this ear—" she pointed to one ear—"and another doctor looking in this ear, and know what they saw?"

I shook my head.

"They each saw an eyeball!"

She was completely enjoying this hospital sojourn.

As far as I could determine, nothing had been done to her yet. She was as swollen as ever. I was wondering whether to ask a nurse about it, when the buzzer rang. They wanted me at the desk.

I hurried out as another intern came in to check Nancy.

The nurse came quickly to the point. Two interns needed a medical case history of one of the hospital patients. Would I be kind enough to follow them into a private office and give them a medical report on Nancy?

Mechanically I followed the two notebook-fortified interns into a nearby office and took a seat for the third degree.

Notebooks were opened and questions began.

"What is wrong with your child?" asked one with professional politeness.

What's wrong with her, I thought. What *isn't*?—from a medical standpoint.

I groped for words. Evidently they had not seen Nancy; had probably picked her clinic number out of a hat.

"Well, one thing that's wrong is that she has no legs," I commenced.

There was the surprised "Oh, I'm so sorry." This was followed by two hours of questions. The interns had no doubt stumbled upon a prize medical plum and wanted to make the most of it. I told them all that I could think of, beginning with Nancy's first examination at the well-baby clinic in Santa Cruz when she was three years old.

When they finally left, reeling under the weight of notebooks and heads full of medical notes, they thanked me politely and commented on Nancy's evident cheerful attitude through so much pain and suffering.

Somewhat undone by the ordeal, I stumbled back to Nancy's room and was glad to see that we would be alone. She had been waiting eagerly to tell me something.

"Guess what," she said excitedly as I plopped down into a chair and eased my hot shoes off, "Joan was telling me that there's going to be a weekend camping trip to Camp Paivika. All the mothers and fathers can go with the kids, to see what the camp looks like. Can we go, Mom?"

I looked at her wearily.

"I'd like to go up to some camp today, find a lone pine tree and lie under it for a couple of years."

"No, Mom." Nancy frowned in mock annoyance. "Will you find out about it and see if we can go?"

I promised her that I would.

I didn't know whether it was unusually hot, or whether the many medical memories had tired and somewhat depressed me.

But I decided that I'd better go home and rest awhile so that I could be more cheerful around Nancy.

I kissed her good-by, promised to bring her some bubble gum and dangly gold earrings, then went out to drive wearily homeward.

Pa surprised me with an infrequent visit. He had driven over from Riverside with a new friend. I was glad to see him, tried to make light of Nancy's hospital stay, and tried to think of something interesting to say to a new acquaintance.

We were planning to drive over to the hospital to visit Nancy when the phone rang. It was a nurse calling from the hospital.

"Mrs. Hamilton? You can take Nancy home now."

No explanation. And I didn't ask for any.

Pa was pleased that Nancy was getting out of the hospital. He thought it best to wait with his friend at the motel while I went to get Nancy and bring her home.

I drove over alone, thinking that the tapping process must be quite simple if it could be done so quickly.

Nancy was not in her room. Her robe and books and cosmetics were packed and waiting to be taken home. I had to go along the corridors asking where she had gone. Finally I heard her laughing in the young children's nursery. She had gone down there to watch her intern boy friend feed the babies, a nurse informed me.

Nancy heard my voice and came scooting down the hall in her wheelchair to meet me.

"Oh, Mom," she chided, "I was hoping that you wouldn't come so soon! Can't you leave me here until this evening?"

I explained about Pa and his friend, so Nancy said a hasty good-by to her heart-throb and followed me back to her room.

"You stay here and I'll go to the desk a minute," I said casually.

I wanted to be alone when I asked the nurse about Nancy. She was as swollen as ever.

Evidently they had decided not to tap her.

I gave my name, and the nurse looked at the charts.

"No orders here, Mrs. Hamilton."

That seemed strange.

"Well, when do we come back?" I asked. "Is there a clinic slip there or something?"

The nurse looked again and shook her head.

I got Nancy and wheeled her out of the hospital as quickly as I could.

Nancy was wise to hospital ways.

"When's our next appointment?" she asked as I helped her into the car.

"No appointment. No nothing," I answered, and didn't look up at her.

Nancy was silent a moment. I was sorry that I had let my fears cloud her. As I got in the car, she looked over to me in a knowing way, shrugged her shoulders and said, "Well, that's that."

We didn't discuss it further.

Pa was glad to see Nancy, and proudly introduced her to his friend. I busied myself getting tea and cookies while Nancy, the essence of a poised hostess, showed Pa's friend all the pictures from Lourdes and carefully explained each one.

The friend was more than interested. We gave her a little bottle of the Lourdes water. She sat looking thoughtfully at it, then looked over to Nancy.

"Maybe now that you have been to the Shrine you will be cured."

"Maybe," said Nancy noncommittally.

Pa and his friend left in time to avoid the heavy traffic on the freeway. They had no sooner driven away than the hospital nurse phoned and asked if I could go over there for a few minutes, the doctor wanted to talk to me.

Could I?

I left Nancy playing with Corky and raced through the afternoon traffic, rushed up the hospital stairs, and then stopped in the hallway to catch my breath.

I didn't want them to see how anxious I was.

A young doctor came to the desk to talk to me. I had never seen him before, but he appeared to be well acquainted with Nancy's case.

Together we walked over to the elevator doorway for more privacy. My heart was pounding in my eardrums as I waited to hear what he had to say.

He started by using some highly medical terms which I tried to follow. Some of the big words I had heard before. But the only words I could understand were the ones he used at the end.

"We have decided not to do anything to Nancy for a while, but we will call you."

I thanked him and tried to hold onto the little ray of hope as I walked along the corridor. A doctor passed me. He had taken

care of Nancy several years before. I showed my surprise at meeting him, and stopped for a chat. But, with a friendly nod, he continued on down the hallway.

I didn't need any more to convince me of their decision regarding Nancy. . . .

I could read it in the pity in his eyes.

Monkey

See

THURSDAY morning we ate a leisurely breakfast and discussed the possibility of going to Camp Paivika. We got so enthusiastic about it, we decided to check up on its possibility. Nancy phoned the number her girl friend had given her. I heard her discussing the camp, saying how much we would love to go. Then she said, "Just a minute, please," and turned to me. "It's one of the camp counselors," she enlightened me. "He says that we can go up there tomorrow, or wait until we're more prepared when they go up there again in September."

"Tell him we'll go *now*!" I hurried to answer.

September was a long way off.

So it was arranged.

Even the bedding would be furnished. We had only to get ourselves up there. And if we didn't have transportation, a big yellow bus would be going Friday afternoon. We preferred to drive up in our little Nash.

Plans for our camp weekend filled most of the next few hours. Nancy, in an elegant Christmas gift nightie and pink negligee, sat and made out a list of things for me to get from town. I sat in the kitchen and made out our budget. I had been thinking things over, and had decided to start making out a regular monthly budget like any sane person. I wrote down a list of grocery expenses, car expenses, rent, insurance—there wasn't enough to go around for emergencies and miscellaneous, so I skipped those columns. I finished the budget in exhaustion. But in my hand I held a neat itemized list of all our expenses for the coming month. I would keep on the budget *to the penny*.

Or so I thought.

Nancy stayed in her negligee to sit and watch television. It

wouldn't take me long to go to the bank and then the dime store for our camping needs.

I took the list Nancy handed me and had to smile. Not a list of childish items like yo-yos and beanies, but bobby-pins, dangly earrings, misty-glow powder, and tawny-pearl nail polish.

Nancy saw the smile and hastened to explain, "You know, I'll be with the teen-age group this time. The little kids won't be going to camp until their group is invited."

True, the little kids wouldn't be there . . . only the grown-up little kids like Nancy.

I couldn't grasp the fact that she was starting into adolescence.

I stopped at our regular neighborhood bank and explained to our clerk friend how neatly we were going to budget the check she had just cashed for me. On the way out, I stopped at a desk to actually divide the dollar bills into neat little piles to cover the budget items.

And I then went across the street to the dime store and bought a monkey.

I hadn't *intended* to buy a monkey. In fact, he wasn't even in the budget. But I came upon him so unexpectedly in the dime store.

It's most unusual to see a monkey for sale in a dime store.

It's most unusual for me to have so much money in my wallet.

Quite naturally, or so it seemed to me, I had the monkey and the salesgirl had our budget money.

I had been buying Nancy's items at the cosmetic counter and checking them off as I got them, without another thought in the world—except maybe what I should get for supper to stay within our budget. I started out the back door. I always liked to go this way so that I could look at the parakeets in the cage. But this time, instead of parakeets, I saw a little marmoset monkey. The cage was on a high shelf. The poor little marmoset was perched as high from the shoppers as he could get. His eyes were round with fright, and his mouth was working nervously so that his needle-tiny teeth showed in a grin.

I stood and watched him for a moment, thinking he was vicious, until a woman said, "No, the poor little thing is scared to death!"

Nancy had once mentioned that someday, more than anything else, she wanted to have a real live monkey.

It seemed like fate, I argued with myself, and before I realized it, the monkey was ours.

I knew the salesgirl, and she knew Nancy, so we made a deal. She would keep the monkey and his cage in the store until Monday when we would be home from camp. Then I could bring Nancy down to get him.

I went on out the back door to see what I could get real cheap for our supper. Then I remembered. . . .

We weren't on a budget any more.

From the dime store, I went on down the street to the religious supply store to see our friends and to start looking for something for Nancy's birthday. She had been so pleased with the Little Flower statue the year before, I planned to get her something religious again this year.

Mrs. Connors, the shop owner, was busy talking to a very young priest and an attractive woman. I went back to talk to Mr. Connors. We got onto the subject of Nana and her baptism into the faith. "I always had hoped to give Nana so much," I said sadly; "I never gave her anything but worries."

Mr. Connors looked up from mending a rosary and said slowly, "What better could you have given . . . you gave her a ticket to heaven."

I hadn't thought of her baptism in that way.

Mrs. Connors called me over.

"Margie, I want you to meet Father Bob and his mother. Father Bob has just recently been ordained."

As I shook hands, I wondered how he had ever managed to get through so many years of study and look so young.

My, but his mother was proud of him! You could tell by the way she kept hanging onto his coat sleeve and laughing at his jokes, though she had no doubt heard them many times before.

Mrs. Connors told them about Nancy, and they mentioned having heard about her. Father said that he would like to meet her, so I asked them if they would stop by the motel on their way back to Westwood.

As they left the shop, Mrs. Connors said, "Father Bob will bless Nancy. You know, a blessing from a newly ordained priest always brings special graces."

"Golly, I forgot!" I put my hand to my mouth. "Nancy was going to stay in her negligee and bobby-pins! I'd better warn her that she has visitors on the way!"

I used the shop phone, but our line was busy.

I'd call later from the grocery.

But I didn't.

I forgot all about it. I got into the super-market and it happened to be free sample day, so it took all my concentration to find all the free-sample demonstrators.

It was way after lunchtime when I pulled up at our motel door.

The young priest and his mother were still there visiting Nancy. They were hitting it off wonderfully together, with much joking and reminiscing. Father Bob was saying that, several weeks before, someone had come up to him as his mother stood by and had requested that he hear their confession. "Oh, but we can't yet—we're not ordained!" his mother had said emphatically.

We all had a good laugh at that.

Nancy was still in her flimsy pink negligee. She had hastily removed the bobby-pins from her hair, but evidently had not had time to comb it. Her hair was still wound around in little doughnut curls all over her head. She didn't seem to mind, though, and was as poised and in control of the situation as she always was.

I was sorry, though, that I hadn't remembered to phone.

Father Bob gave Nancy a special blessing, and then promised to pray for her at each of his Masses.

We were sorry to see them go.

The door had no sooner shut than Nancy, arms akimbo, turned to me.

"Mom, *why* didn't you phone!"

I shrugged guiltily and made some weak excuse.

Nancy was quite upset.

"I *never* was so embarrassed in all my life!" she added.

I went over to the couch and sat down to stare at the floor. How was I ever going to tell Nancy about the monkey and the blown budget?

Now that I was home, it seemed like rather a foolish purchase.

Nancy wheeled quickly over to me and took my hand in both of hers.

"I'm sorry, Mom, I didn't mean to hurt you."

I looked up quickly.

"Oh no, it's not that, Nancy. . . . I was just thinking about something I did."

Nancy was all concern.

"What did you do, Mom?"

"I bought a monkey," I said under my breath.

"A *monkey*!"

At first Nancy thought I was joking. Then, when I didn't retract the statement, she began to squeal and wiggle in her wheelchair.

"You mean a real *live* monkey . . . Oh, Mom!" Her hands were clutched under her chin in excitement. Then she calmed down enough to say, "Gosh, the way you looked, Mom, I thought you had wrecked the car or hit something. . . . A *monkey!*"

She still couldn't believe it.

Neither could I. I was trying to figure out the best way to tell the motel manager.

The excitement settled down, and I handed Nancy her cosmetic items. "They were out of musty-glow powder, or whatever you call it. They'll have it in next week, and you can get it for yourself."

Nancy sat looking over the items. "I forgot to ask you to get goo to set my hair, but I guess I can fix it with these bobby-pins. How about calling the monkey Jock?"

And so Jock it was.

After an early supper, we packed our two suitcases—mine full of blue jeans and plaid shirts, Nancy's full of cosmetics and a new lavender silk skirt and ruffled peasant blouse that Virginia and her sister had given Nancy for an early birthday present.

There were so many last-minute errands to do the following morning, we thought that we would never get out of town.

First we took a sulky Corky over to the kennel to board him for the weekend. Then we went downtown and paid a few bills. Then we stopped at the dime store to get some sun glasses.

"Would you like to run in and see Jock?" I asked Nancy as we pulled up in front of the store.

Nancy hesitated.

"I'd like to see him, but I'm so anxious to get to camp!" She sat debating a second, then said, "Okay, let's go in and see him—but only for a minute!"

They took to each other right off the bat.

Nancy, of course, was delighted. Jock sensed a sympathetic friend. He even let her touch him. Then he put a tiny hand out and timidly held onto Nancy's finger while he sat and sized her up.

Nancy was thrilled to pieces.

"Oh, Mom, let's not go to camp!" she begged. "Let's take Jock home with us right now!"

It was all I could do to persuade her to bid adieu to her monkey friend and get back in the car.

We had to get started if we were going to get to camp in daylight.

Paivika

IT was afternoon before we got everything packed into the little Nash and under way. We were both in high spirits as we whizzed along the freeway and out of Los Angeles.

"I'm glad we're going to breathe some clear mountain air for a while. City life is good to a certain point."

Nancy agreed readily.

We drove along in silence for a while, and then Nancy said, "Be sure to take the road that leads to Riverside. I want to stop and see Pa a minute."

"But, honey," I argued, "that's quite a bit out of the way—and you can see Pa some other time."

Nancy was unusually insistent. She must have some reason for wanting to see Pa.

I took the Riverside road.

Nancy straightened in her seat importantly and grinned.

"I notice, Mom, that when I want you to do something and I say *do it*—you do!"

I pulled at my ear thoughtfully, wondering which one of us in this family was the boss.

Nancy stayed in the car while I went to get Pa. He was so pleased with our little visit, and had so many things he wanted to tell Nancy, I was glad that I had taken her suggestion—or order—to stop by.

It was the last time she saw Pa.

In San Bernardino, Nancy reminded me that I was supposed to be bringing a cake. I stopped in a grocery and got a packaged one. Nancy looked it over without a word, but I knew from her expression how disappointed she was that her mother was not a cook. The other kids would be bringing big fancy gooey homemade cakes.

From San Bernardino, we followed the same winding mountain road that we had traveled in the January blizzard. In its spring loveliness, it was not the least bit familiar to me.

We wound up higher and higher in the mountains and I asked Nancy, "Do you recognize anything yet?"

Nancy was tense with excitement. She sat erect so that she could better see out the window. Suddenly she reached across my face and pointed down a ravine.

"There's the red barn house—we're real near Crestline now!"

I had to caution her not to jump out the window in her excitement.

Sure enough. In a few minutes we drove into the quaint little town of Crestline. Being so early in the season, it was almost deserted, with only a few all-time inhabitants meandering around.

Nancy wasn't sure which road led to Camp Paivika. I drove into a gas station and asked the attendant.

"Oh, you mean that Crippled Children's Camp. Well, it ain't open yet—" He leaned into the car to explain Camp Paivika, got a good look at Nancy, and without further word pointed to the north. "Take that road about a mile, and good luck to you."

The road was lined with pine trees, their fragrance sending a woody, delightful odor to our eager nostrils. We passed a very modern-looking church, and Nancy leaned over the seat to tell me that was *her* church, and to show me the side door where all the wheelchairs were taken in at Mass.

We passed one or two people on the road, but most of the houses were still boarded up from their winter siesta.

By the time we got near the Camp Paivika road, we seemed to be the only two people in the world. It was a nice free-and-touch-the-sky feeling.

Nancy's pointing finger covered my vision again as she leaned over to direct me down a little side road.

"There it is!" she cried. "There's Camp Paivika!"

I turned the car into a little country road and tried to look at everything that Nancy was pointing to as I drove.

"There's the boys' cabins," she said as we passed a long rustic structure. "And away over there are the girls' quarters. See that first window? That's where I slept."

We rounded a hilly incline and she pointed out the water tower, the dispensary, the swimming pool. She pointed out everything but people.

The place looked deserted.

I pulled to a halt in front of the big rustic main lodge. There was plenty of space to park, because ours was the only car in the

camp. I got out and took a walk over to the swimming pool. It was empty. I came back to the car and asked somewhat angrily: "Nancy—did you get the date wrong? I don't think there's going to be anybody here but us and the squirrels."

Nancy was near tears at my unkind remark.

"I *thought* the counselor said June first," she answered in a little voice.

I left her sitting in the car while I went to scout around a bit. The lodge door was open, so I went in and made a tour of inspection. If I hadn't been so concerned, I would have appreciated the beauty of the place. As it was, I saw only big empty rooms, a huge cold stone fireplace, and an enormous kitchen without a suggestion of food in it.

Still, in spite of my glum mood, I couldn't help getting a thrill each time I recognized a place Nancy had loved and described to me in her glowing letters from camp. There was the large dining-room window, the miles and miles of mountain view from the row of front windows. Nancy's love for Camp Paivika reached almost worship. I was going to love it too—but what were we going to do up here all by ourselves?

The thought sent me back to the car to talk it over with Nancy. I am glad to say that my disposition had sweetened a little.

We were debating the question when we heard the droning noise of a buzz saw. I hurried over to the edge of the hill and came face to face with a man who looked exactly like Santa Claus. He had no beard, but otherwise the resemblance was remarkable. He was, we learned, the caretaker of the camp. He lived there all year round in a pretty little cottage down the hill.

Yes, he assured us, this was the weekend for the camping party. Most of the families would arrive later that night, because most of the parents worked and couldn't get there any sooner.

I was more relieved than I liked to admit. And very much ashamed at my loss of temper. Nancy forgave me as though she hadn't noticed my unpleasantness, which made me feel worse than ever.

Now that we were not alone on the mountain, we felt very brave. We enjoyed the temporary solitude. I began to notice the beauty around me and the tall, magnificent pine trees. They reached up into the sky as though they were wanting to shake hands with God.

Nancy got into her wheelchair, and we went on a tour of in-

spection. Half the charm of the place lay in its solitude. We could have been the only two people on earth that afternoon—only this seemed more like Paradise. As we walked, I thanked God for letting us have this unusual alone-together experience.

I pushed the wheelchair into the lodge. Nancy knew each square inch of the place, and didn't hesitate to describe it—along with all the past activities of the camp.

We walked on out to the fire ring where Nancy asked me to take a seat as a spectator. Then she went scooting up on the stage to show me how she had participated in a play the summer before.

From there we hiked over to an artistic little building, and I was about to wheel her up the ramp to the porch when she said with a grin, "This is where we kept a snake last summer—it's the nature building."

I lost no time in leaving the nature building, and Nancy laughed at my chicken-heartedness.

We came to a cement ramp about five feet high, and leading to nothing.

"That's where I got on the horse to go horseback riding last summer," she explained. "The counselor was already on the horse, and he just skidded me out of the wheelchair and into the saddle. . . . It sure was fun!"

I marveled at her bravery and showed it, so she continued with a self-important grin, "We galloped too!"

We went on down the path to the girls' cabins. I was shown the very corner and the very cot that Nancy had been assigned to the summer before.

The cabins were crude and smelled of rough unpainted wood—which made them all the more charming.

The bright sunshine was beginning to turn a rosy glow when we had finished the inspection. We came around the path, past the swimming pool and over to the car.

"You didn't go swimming last year, did you, Nancy?" I tried to remember.

Nancy shook her head. "Too many other things to do. But it was fun the year before—before I had the double amputation."

We let it go at that.

In our absence, a car had driven in and parked near us. No one was around, so I went scouting once again. I found two of the women from the Crippled Children's Society checking over the

supply of sleeping bags. They knew Nancy and were real happy to see us.

The mountain air was working on my appetite. I could have eaten a bear steak. But it was Friday, and anyway, the only wild animals around were a few skunks.

Nancy and I drove down to Crestline to get something to eat.

We found a homey little restaurant and ordered fishsticks which were cooked on a hot plate practically under our noses. The cook stood face to face with us as he stirred the tomatoes at the other side of the counter. All the time he cooked, he told us about the advantages of living year round in Crestline. I agreed with all he said. It would be such a nice village in the summer, and so much fun in the winter snows.

I mulled over the possibility of finding a cabin and moving up there. But suppose that Nancy had need of a doctor in a hurry. . . . I let the subject drop as wishful thinking.

Nancy asked for a nickel to play the juke box. In unusual generosity I gave her a quarter, which she immediately dropped in the machine, then pushed the same button five times.

"I played 'Ivory Tower' because it's your favorite piece," she explained.

After dinner, on the way back to camp, we stopped at the beautiful little Catholic church. I handed Nancy a dime to light a votive candle and waited as she wheeled up to the side altar. I saw her stretch up in her wheelchair to look into each of the candleholders, then drop the dime in the slot and sit back to say her prayer without lighting any candle.

When we got outside I asked her about it, and she told me that all the candles had been used.

"Then why did you drop the dime in?" I asked in my miserly way.

Nancy looked at me in a motherly way.

"God doesn't need the *candle*, Mom—it's the prayer and the faith that counts."

There were quite a few cars around the lodge when we got back to camp. It was such a friendly group, and everyone knew each other. Pretty soon I knew everyone too.

The kitchen was now loaded with food. Every family that arrived brought in a cake, boxes of homemade cookies, or big pots of food. I felt rather guilty about my potless arrival, but perhaps it was for the best that I didn't inflict my style of cooking on anyone.

The mothers had taken over the kitchen while the fathers busied

themselves bringing in huge logs for the fireplace. Pretty soon a roaring, crackling fire sent a glow over the entire room, making weird dancing patterns of the shadows on the beam ceiling.

Although everyone had eaten supper, we were going to have a snack before organizing the sleeping quarters and getting assigned our sleeping bags. I could smell the fragrance of cocoa being made in the kitchen, so went searching for Nancy to tell her about the snack.

She was with a group at the far corner of the room. Someone had brought a record player, and all the handicapped teen-agers were dancing as best their bodies would permit them. Some wheeled around on crutches, others limped in rhythm across the shiny floor. Nancy sat in her wheelchair, wagging her head and waving her arms to the music.

I waited until the dance was over, and then wheeled Nancy toward the dining room, stooping to say, "Isn't it a perfect place here, Nancy?"

Still waving her arms in rhythm to the music, she said over her shoulder, "It sure is! This is the only place I can come and be like other people."

Just then I happened to glance up at the dining-room window. The glass reached nearly to the ceiling, the wooden crossbars dark and proportionately heavy. The curtains had been partly closed so that only a portion of the window was showing. The wooden supports stood out to form a perfect cross.

"No matter how beautiful," I thought, "there is the cross—and what a big one!"

After a jolly get-together in the dining room, we all filed into the main room to get our sleeping bags.

"I've never slept in a sleeping bag before," I said to Nancy. "I don't know if I can."

"Oh, it's easy, Mom," laughed Nancy with a wave of her hand. "You just crawl in like this—" She tried to show me from the wheelchair how to crawl in. "And that's all there is to it."

How she was going to crawl in, I didn't know but refrained from asking. She had used one the summer before at Paivika, so was an authority on the subject.

A clean-cut young fellow arrived, and Nancy changed completely from sensible to senseless.

The change in her was whisperingly explained to me by one of her girl friends.

"That's Norbert," snickered the girl. "Nancy is nuts about him."

The women were assigned to the first cabin, and the next two were for the girls. The cabins beyond them were for the fathers and the boys.

I piled our sleeping bags on Nancy and wheeled her to the first cabin. One entire side of the place was still empty, so we had our choice of cots. We took two in the far corner and made our beds. Then we took a walk down to see how the girls were faring.

With all the giggling going on, they had managed to get their beds made up. But they were all in one part of the cabin. Everybody wanted to sleep next to everybody. All the cots had been shoved together so that there was barely room to walk.

Nancy's special girl friend came bounding up.

"Can Nancy stay in here with us, Mrs. Hamilton?"

The question hung on the suddenly quiet air. All fourteen faces turned toward me.

"Please, Mrs. Hamilton, let Nancy sleep in here!"

I really wanted very much to have Nancy with me that night. I felt that she was slipping away from me. Because she was growing up so fast, I guess.

I turned to Nancy and saw the pleading, yet silent look she gave me. She was leaving the decision entirely up to me. I clutched at a tiny straw of an excuse.

"There wouldn't be room for the wheelchair," I said as I surveyed the crowded room.

"Oh, we can fix that!" the girls shouted in chorus.

And, suiting action to words, they shoved all the cots except one closer together. Nancy's wheelchair could just wedge in beside the cot.

"Okay, let her stay—if it isn't crowding you," I added unnecessarily.

There was a shouted hurrah as I left the cabin to get Nancy's bedding.

I couldn't hold Nancy close to me *all* her life, I told myself. This was as good a time as any to start letting go of her.

I went back to the women's cabin and tried not to feel too much like a martyr—especially when I heard the peels of laughter coming from the girls' cabin.

Almost in Heaven

IT was warm and sunny when I woke the next morning. Nancy had already dressed and was up at the lodge with the rest of her gang.

Although she had no doubt looked clean when she left her cabin, the dust from the country paths had sifted up as she propelled herself along them. Her clothes were smudged and her face was smeared with dirt. It looked good. Nancy was always one to believe that "cleanliness is next to godliness" and seldom looked anything but immaculate.

The record player was swinging out bop tunes, and the gang was dancing again. The girls, comparing costume jewelry, lipstick shades and manicures, were like any other teen-age group.

I smiled a good morning to Nancy as I was passing her, then turned to question, "Whatever is that on your hair—did you spill something?"

This was met by shouts of laughter. Nancy in her most motherly way tried to explain, "No, Mom, it's glitter . . . all the kids wear it in their hair now."

I apologized for my hair-glitter ignorance and went on toward the kitchen where the smell of hotcakes lured me.

It had been prearranged that the fathers would cook and serve breakfast and the mothers would take over the dinner duties.

There must have been two hundred hotcakes on the griddle. The breakfast was to be served cafeteria style. Hungry people were already waiting in line.

So much laughter and pleasantness around the place! I looked up at the "cross" on the tall dining-room window and smiled. This was one place the cross didn't fit in. It had been conquered.

I turned to see where shouts of laughter were coming from. Two boys, wending their way breakfastward, were hysterical with laughter over some trick they had just played. One boy, on crutches, was leading the other—a blind boy.

My eyes searched for Nancy. There she was, at one of the tables, her breakfast stacked before her. How she had managed to get the tray and the wheelchair to the table was beyond me, but she had, and that was enough.

After breakfast, Nancy gave me a solicitous glance to see that I was all right, and then scooted off with her gang for more teen-age antics. No doubt about it, she didn't need me now. Several of the mothers were going on a hike, so I was more than free to go along with them.

Inwardly I marveled at the parents of these handicapped children. They were all so stylish, so vital, and happy! I had always thought that there would be a sort of a dullness, an I-give-up-God air about them. I was learning fast.

We hiked along the mountain trails and down into beautiful leaf-carpeted ravines. We were gone about three hours, yet I felt no concern over Nancy. The brief separation would be good for both of us.

The smell of dinner being cooked greeted us as we returned to camp. I didn't think that I could be so hungry after so many morning hotcakes, but mountain air can do it! We all ate like gluttons.

Nancy and three of her girl friends had been scheduled for the dishwashing task for this meal. The work got under way with much dish towel flipping and squealing and giggling—punctuated by terrific crashes as dishes hit the floor. Several of us decided we'd better take over if we wanted to have any dishes left for the remaining meals. I took over the dishpan.

Toward sunset, I took a little reconnoitering walk around the camp. There was a tiny empty cabin that appealed to me. Suppose that Nancy and I could live there for the next few months! How heavenly it would be to live so close to nature. To wake up with the bluejays squawking at our window, and the smell of pine trees in our nostrils!

I'd have to talk the idea over with Nancy. Maybe there was some work I could do around the camp for the summer.

There was to be a dance and a show in the lodge that evening. I went back to camp to see if Nancy had started to clean up for the event. I reminded myself that I mustn't baby her now, or be

too concerned over her appearance. It would embarrass her before her nearly grown-up friends.

Nancy was with the jitterbug gang again. They were sitting around the record player harmonizing with the records.

She wasn't too enthusiastic about leaving to wash up, but went along readily.

As we walked along the path toward the cabin, I said, "It's heavenly here, isn't it? This is *really* a place, Nancy, where you can be like anyone else——"

As I said it, there was a jolt and the front wheel fell off the wheelchair.

I checked and discovered that a vital bolt was missing. Through carelessness, we had let it become loosened over a period of time, and it had evidently dropped off some place in town. I searched frantically all through the yellow dust of the path, but could find nothing that had dropped off. Nancy was as helpless as though she had no wheelchair at all.

"Even in your special camp we're handicapped!" I stormed, and then regretted it when I saw Nancy sitting patiently wondering what we would do next.

I tipped the chair back and we limped to my cabin on the two hind wheels. Nancy transferred to my bed in the deserted cabin, and I left her sitting there in the stillness while I went back to the lodge to see if there could possibly be a spare wheelchair or a suitable nut and bolt around camp.

Both efforts proved futile. The extra wheelchairs would not arrive in camp until the season opened. There was no spare hardware around.

Much upset, I went back to the cabin and found Nancy sitting patiently on my bed looking out the window. "Doesn't she ever get riled about anything?" I asked myself.

She turned to smile to me. But there were two giveaway tear streaks on her cheeks.

I took my shoelace out of my sneaker and tied the wheel back on the wheelchair with it. It was like using a paper umbrella in a hailstorm. But at least it would enable us to go back to the lodge, where Nancy could sit while I dashed down to Crestline to look for a hardware store.

I cautioned her not to move but to sit still in the wheelchair and listen to the records. Then I hurried down to Crestline, where

I was lucky enough to find a hardware store and a bolt to fit the wheel.

When I got back, Nancy and her wheelchair were dancing with a boy, the wheelchair spinning and cavorting as the boy guided it around the floor.

My heart in my mouth, I dashed across the room.

"Nancy! I told you not to move. The wheelchair——"

Nancy laughed and pointed to the solidly fastened wheel.

"It's fixed! A counselor found a nut and bolt!"

The bop dance continued and I went over in a corner to sit down.

I felt so expendable lately!

As the evening wore on, plans began to take shape. Who was going to wear what for the dance and the show?

Nancy came scooting over to me for permission to wear the new peasant blouse and the lavender skirt.

I hesitated. It meant future ironing and washing—— Oh well, let her enjoy herself. I consented.

With a whoop of happiness she went off with her girl friends to the cabin. I didn't follow to see if she could get the clothes from the closet. If she couldn't reach them, there would be someone who could.

I fancied myself up and then returned to the lodge just as Nancy came in the side door. I had to hold my breath because she looked so beautiful. The white ruffles on the peasant blouse stood up like wings from her shoulders. Her eyes were glowing and had taken on a deep violet color in her happiness. The sparkling glitter in her blond hair gave the appearance of a halo.

It was good to see that she was totally unaware of the attention she was attracting. She was all absorbed in wondering what kind of impression she was making on Norbert, the counselor.

One of the fathers sat down at the old upright piano and made it shiver with rock-and-roll music. We all danced and laughed or sat beside the roaring fire to watch the others.

Heaven seemed so close that night.

Then it was time for the movies. I took a seat over to the side and noticed that once again—without planning it—Nancy was up in the front row. She was laughing and giggling with anyone who would look at her.

We watched one picture through, and then the lights were flipped on for the film to be changed. The woman next to me reached

over and touched my elbow to whisper, "Look at that little blond girl up there—doesn't she look like an *angel*?"

I nodded and smiled and hoped that she wouldn't discover that she was talking to the little blond girl's mother.

It was past midnight when the second picture ended. I edged my way through the crowd to get Nancy and help her back to the cabin. Nancy had a pleading look about her.

"Could I stay until Ellen goes?" she asked.

It gave me a strange feeling, leaving her there at such a late hour as I went off to bed. She had never been out so late without me. I knew that it would have embarrassed her if I had wheeled her off like a baby in a buggy, so I said casually, "Well, say good night as you pass my window then."

Nancy agreed and called after me, "Don't forget to get me up for Mass tomorrow!"

I crawled into my sleeping bag, but couldn't shut my eyes. I was really back there in the lodge with Nancy. I wondered what she was doing and how long she would be. There was still a large group of parents and children up at the lodge. Maybe I should have stayed there too. No, it was good to let Nancy have a certain sense of responsibility. She would know when to leave the party.

It wasn't too long before I heard the rattle of the wheelchair along the rough path. The girls were on their way to their cabin.

As they passed my window, I heard a soft "Good night, Mom, I love you!"

Nancy was so close—and yet so far away!

It was a strange feeling.

Such commotion emerged from the girls' cabin a few moments later! Shrieks of laughter and girlish voices in surprise. They must have been the victims of some silly prank.

I started to get up and check the situation. No. There were so few times in her life that Nancy could be a normal teen-ager . . . let her enjoy it.

It seemed that I had no sooner gone to sleep when I heard the muffled sounds of someone getting dressed. It was still dark. I lit my flashlight and looked at my watch. Time to get up if I was going to Mass. I dressed as quickly as I could and tiptoed into the cabin next door to waken Nancy.

It was like the calm after the storm in there. The girls were flattened out in complete surrender to sleep. I could have roller

skated through the room and not disturbed anyone. Nevertheless, I kept on my tiptoes as I moved toward Nancy's bed.

Nancy, like the others, was sound asleep, as nestled into her sleeping bag as she could manage. She looked so tired, so white and drawn, it gave me a momentary shock. I decided to let her sleep. God would understand.

Mass over, I found Nancy up and dressed and in the lodge when I returned.

"Why didn't you wake me, Mom?" she chided.

I felt guilty about it, then saw the tired look still hovering over her, and took comfort in the fact that she had wanted to go to Mass. We could drive down to the later one.

Inasmuch as the glorious weekend would be over that afternoon, we were going to have a combination breakfast and lunch at eleven o'clock.

At ten-thirty the hungry line had already begun to form in the dining room. Nancy was saving a place for me. She was as concerned over me lately as a mother hen.

Our trays were loaded down with ham and eggs and pancakes and sweet buns as we staggered to the tables. I sat down next to Nancy and she playfully pushed me away. "This seat is saved for Norbert!" She laughed. I started to get up, and she hugged me quickly. "I was only fooling, Mom!"

But I noticed that she watched the nearby Norbert coquettishly during the entire meal.

We still had a few hours before departure time, and I wanted to make the best of them. I took a solitary hike along the lower country road while Nancy remained with her jitterbuggers. Before leaving on the hike, though, I got our things packed and into the car, letting Nancy take charge of the sleeping bags. Norbert had the job of checking them in.

"Mind if I take the camera?" I asked selfishly. I knew that Nancy was wanting to take some pictures of the gang, but I wanted some color photos of the country.

She agreed without a word, and I went off with her camera slung over my shoulder.

The road passed through a little forest glade. From there it wound around the side of the mountain, then through a painfully charred section where once beautiful foliage had been. How terrible to see the ugly remains of a mountain fire.

I left the road and walked through a little field to stand breath-

lessly viewing the scene before me. It was over a mile down to the busy valley below, yet I could see the shimmer of cars in the sunlight. How near to heaven we were on our mountaintop!

I sat quietly listening to the sounds of the country around me. The hum of a beetle, the buzz of a swarm of bees, the soft rustle of the dry grass in the breeze—and the constant song of a little yellow bird in the tree close to me. I had noticed this bird since I had started my walk. He had been following me—or rather, leading me all the way. As I walked, he would flit ahead of me, taking a stand on a nearby tree limb to watch and sing until I came close. Then the performance would be repeated. It was as though he were trying to tell me something. I wondered what it was and if he was a special little golden messenger from heaven.

The bus was loading when I got back to camp. Suitcases were being rounded up and good-bys were being said. Many of the private cars had already left.

I looked for Nancy and found her with a few of her friends in the lodge.

"Here's the camera," I said guiltily.

"Oh, that's okay. I don't need it now. Most of my friends have already left." There was no reprimanding tone to her voice, no criticism of my selfishness. But it made me feel very uncomfortable to think that I hadn't left the camera with her in the first place.

Nancy was excitedly preoccupied, scurrying into the lodge and then out again to the loading bus. She was looking for someone.

"Know what's the matter?" giggled her girl friend as Nancy tried to keep her quiet. "She says that she won't leave camp until she gets a kiss from Norbert!"

I felt for a second as if someone had knocked me off my feet. But I rallied enough to think of a solution.

"How about compromising?" I asked tactfully. "If I get Norbert to have his picture taken with you, will that do?"

Nancy agreed none too willingly.

I went off to round up Norbert.

He was gracious enough to come and pose for a picture with Nancy.

By now it was time for everyone to get in the bus. Nancy said good-by to her friend Ellen, and then suddenly turned to me—still holding onto Ellen.

"Can she ride home with us?" she asked eagerly.

In my most selfish way I said no and made some lame excuse. I wanted Nancy all to myself on the ride home.

Nancy didn't argue the point. Ellen climbed into the bus and waved to us from the window. I waved back, feeling like a heel. The bus motor roared, and Ellen shouted above it, "Nancy—your earrings! I forgot to give them back to you!" She was trying to unscrew a pair of long dangly earrings as she hollered to us.

"That's all right—keep them!" shouted Nancy with a wave of her hand.

"But they're your *favorite!*" yelled back Ellen as the bus carried her away.

I didn't want to leave the camp. I made one excuse after another to fool around until one by one the families took off and we were once again alone on the mountaintop.

We took a final farewell tour.

It's not as though we were leaving forever, I kept telling myself.

But somehow I hated to think of going down into the valley.

On the drive home we stopped at a country fruit stand and loaded the car with fruits and berries and honey.

"We almost bought out the stand!" I laughed to Nancy as we went on our way.

"You got everything but cherries," she said soberly.

I slowed the car down. "Oh, honey, I forgot! You love cherries, don't you?"

I started to turn back.

"No, it's all right." Nancy stopped me. "I can have some another time."

She seemed so quiet and so far away in her thoughts.

I guess she was thinking about the mountains.

At home I quietly unloaded the car, taking in a big pine branch that I had found on my hike.

"The fragrance will remind us of heaven," I smiled to Nancy.

Day After Paivika

NANCY was still asleep when I woke up the next morning. I stood for a while beside her bed, looking quietly and prayerfully down at her. The weekend at camp had been good for her. Her face, serene in its relaxation, had enough of a sun tan to make her look like a regular outdoor girl. How pleased she was with that sun tan! I sent God a little prayer of thanks for letting Nancy seem so healthy despite her illness. One never thought of Nancy as being sick, because she never lived with her ailments.

As I stood with my thoughts, her unbelievably long lashes fluttered. She grinned at me through half-closed eyes.

"What are you watching me for, Mom?"

I laughed. "I was just admiring that beautiful sun tan you brought back from camp. Wouldn't it be great if we could live in the mountains all the time?"

"Have I *really* got a suntan?" asked Nancy, ignoring my question. "Hand me the mirror quick! I want to see it."

I handed her the mirror and watched her turn one side of her face and then the other for inspection. She was elated. "Do I really look sun-tanned?"

She was pursuing the subject, not in vanity, but in the knowledge that here at last was something that would set her apart from the wheelchair crowd. She would be able to participate when the teen-agers around the swimming pool compared sun tans.

We ate a hasty breakfast so that I could go and get our two animals. First Corky from the kennel, and then Jock from the dime store.

We hadn't really had a good look at Jock. It was quite exciting

for me to walk into the store and see him waiting in his fancy wrought-iron cage. He was rather wild that morning—or just plain scared. I managed to touch his little round head with the tip of my finger as I put him in the car. I hoped that Nancy wouldn't be disappointed in his unfriendliness.

Nancy was sitting at the open door, waiting for us. The happiness on her face more than made up for the monkey trouble that would no doubt follow. It was all she could do to sit still in her wheelchair in her excitement.

I brought the cage in and set it on the floor.

Corky started a volley of barking that sent Jock to the top of his cage in a squeaking frenzy of fear.

Nancy was crestfallen.

"I'll take Corky out awhile so's you can get a good look at Jock," I offered.

When I came in half an hour later, Nancy was sitting, her arms through the cage door, with Jock nestled like a baby in her hands.

"Sssh!" she whispered. "I was singing him to sleep. He looks so tired."

I tiptoed quietly outside again. It was probably the first time Jock had felt safe in a long time. Nancy had such a wonderful way with animals. I guess it was because she loved them all so much.

She wouldn't even let me swat at a fly.

At lunchtime I again brought up the subject of our living in the mountains. Lately I had had such an overpowering desire to be out and alone someplace with Nancy. Maybe it was because we had been meeting so many people and doing so many things. But then, that was Nancy's happiness. She thrived on being with people and in the center of activity.

So I was really quite surprised when she agreed with me that the mountains would be very nice. She was a bit casual about the subject, but I thought that it was because of her interest in the monkey. She suggested that it might be a good idea to phone the Gold Diggers Club and see if they could help us find something to do around Camp Paivika for the summer. The Gold Diggers were a group of women who had taken a working interest in the welfare of the crippled children's camp.

I phoned one of the camp executives and she promised to see what she could do. She would let us know in a few days.

We spent rather a lazy afternoon, with Nancy watching fasci-

nated as Jock watched her. She was almost beside herself with pleasure when Jock took a piece of sliced apple from her fingers and sat staring at her from bright little eyes as he chomped noisily. Nancy laughed so hard, I thought that she was going to fall right out of the wheelchair.

A neighbor stopped in to see what the commotion was about. She looked over her glasses at the playful monkey and, with raised eyebrows, asked: "How could you ever be bothered with a monkey?"

"I guess I'd buy a giraffe if Nancy wanted it," I answered a little too smugly.

Sometimes our most foolish purchases are our wisest.

Nancy was amused all afternoon. She sat beside the cage, laughing and giggling at the antics of the monkey. Jock, sensing his importance, egged her on.

When Jock finally went to sleep for the night in the little oatmeal-box bed we had made for him, Nancy turned to talk of Camp Paivika.

During the conversation I learned that her love for the mountains was equaled by a love for a certain camp counselor.

"Norbert stays at camp all summer!" she confided to me. "So when the kids from my camp group come up in August, I'll probably be going steady with him!"

Strange how I continued to think of Nancy as a little girl. I didn't want to think of her as growing up—as "going steady." I wanted her always as my little girl.

I guess every mother has that selfish thought now and then.

I recalled the group Nancy had been with during the weekend. They were really no longer children. Their conversation ran to future jobs in the business world, of steady dating, and even of marriage. It was hard to get accustomed to. Nancy herself had always more or less joked about her boy friends, and how she loved each one. It had never taken on reality . . . until last weekend.

Nancy was wanting her Fantasy Prince to be replaced by a real boy friend.

As if in pattern with our thoughts, one of Nancy's former classmates took that moment to phone. In a partly attentive way I listened to their teen-age prattle. Then it took all my attention.

Nancy's voice had dropped to intimacy as she cradled the phone closer to her lips.

"Did you drive through the park?" she asked. Then, "Did you run out of gas or have any car trouble?"

I felt I shouldn't be eavesdropping but had to see where this conversation would go next.

"I suppose he kissed you?" Nancy was giggling now.

She was on the listening side of the conversation for a long time, with only a little "Oh" or a snicker now and then. I wondered what was being revealed to her and if I should end this no doubt too intimate revelation. But I let it continue to the finish while I stood and tried to figure how to handle this new situation. How easy it would be for Nancy to fall into the wrong group of friendships. How easy . . . My heart turned cold, and I put the thought away. Nancy knew that God, and not I, was her judge. I was pretty sure she wouldn't offend Him.

Nancy finally hung up the phone and turned to me.

"We were talking about boy friends," she said, as though to exclude me.

"So I gathered," I answered curtly.

Then I sat down beside her and took her hand in mine.

"Nancy, we've never discussed things like this before, but I'd like to talk to you about—well, about boy friends and things."

Nancy's frankly innocent look dispelled any doubts I might have been harboring.

"Oh, you mean about sex." She waved her hand and shook her head. "Don't worry about that, Mom. I'd never let a boy kiss me unless I loved him. And I'd never do anything else unless I was married. . . . And then you could come and be his mother-in-law and take care of our children!" she added brightly.

Once again, as it had done so many times lately, the conversation had turned so that, instead of explaining things to my daughter, she had explained things to me.

It was as though she were the mother and I the child.

Martyr's Relics

ST. John's Hospital was having a party to celebrate the opening of the sixth floor of the new wing. It was to be quite a gala affair, with many dignitaries and celebrities attending.

Nancy and I had been invited too.

Nancy had been taking it easy all that morning—which was indeed an unusual thing for her to do! She had rested so much that morning, I was sure that it would not be too tiring for her to go to the event—even though we were going to her “screwball” birthday party that evening.

We could eat supper in the Rose Room at St. John's and then come home in plenty of time to get dressed in our crazy outfits for the party.

Nancy was looking fine, with the exception of her left eye. The outside corner of it looked very bloodshot. When I asked her about it and if it bothered her any, she shook her head quickly and seemed to want to ignore the subject.

She had been sewing so diligently for the past few days on some baby clothes, maybe that was causing the eyestrain. But she was so anxious to finish the clothes to give to the doctor for his new twins. She had probably worked a little too hard on them.

I told Nancy that, if we were going to have such a busy day, she would have to put the sewing away for a few days—until her eye got better. She was really disappointed, but put the bibs and the gowns in her sewing box without a word.

As she dressed for the party, she started to talk about the Legion of Mary and how much she enjoyed the meetings. Then she went on to talk about the saints, and from that she drifted into talk of heaven and Nana. Nancy always talked of heaven as though it were right next door and not away through a darkness. She was not smug in any way, but she just took it for granted that everyone

knew and loved heaven as she did. She always pictured it as a place with country meadows and homey cottages with friendly people settled there. Her favorite cowboy song, and one she used to sing with her guitar accompaniment, was "Come Home, It's Supper-time." After Nana died, Nancy used to sit looking up in the sky in the early evening and say to me, "I'll bet Nana is cooking supper now. She won't have any of the *work* of cooking like we have down here, but just the fun of setting the table and then calling all her friends to come and eat."

Today she got on the subject of birthdays.

"When I die," she said matter-of-factly, "that day will be my birthday in heaven."

I was only half listening to what she was prattling about, because I was busy keeping Corky away from Jock.

As she talked, Nancy had been dressing herself and choosing her accessories to go with the outfit. She wheeled over to ask me if she had on too much lipstick. As always, I took a Kleenex and wiped a good half of the brilliant color off her mouth, then told her to take off half of the over load of costume jewelry.

She had chosen the ruffy white peasant blouse and the lavender skirt to wear again. She always managed to look so sparkling clean when she got dressed up—but today it was different. She wasn't quite so sparkling. Maybe it was because she was a bit tired. Maybe it was the new sun tan. The redness in her left eye, too. Her eyes were always so clear and blue.

She didn't look quite like Nancy today.

I asked again if she really wanted to go over to St. John's, and knew by her answer that it was the only thing to do. Parties and people revived rather than tired her.

St. John's was buzzing with excitement and important people in their fine clothes. I felt a little out of place, even though we had so many friends there.

As we walked into the main lobby, Nancy's wheelchair was stopped a dozen times for her to be introduced to someone or talked to by a friend. The chapel organ had been placed outside the doors, and the organist was playing softly. As we moved toward the chapel, she turned to greet Nancy.

"Wait, I'll play your favorite piece, Nancy!" She smiled and began to play "Over the Rainbow." Nancy sat quietly listening, her thoughts in the clouds.

I enjoyed the music but was impatient to get upstairs to the new auditorium where the party was being held.

Impatient or not, I knew that I would have to wait until Nancy made her visit to the chapel. She never came into St. John's without stopping first thing to say a little prayer to God.

The organist played as though inspired, putting in all the trills and bell effects that Nancy loved.

When the song was ended, we proceeded to the chapel where Nancy, as usual, held out her hand for a dime to light a votive candle. She propelled the wheelchair down the side aisle in a businesslike way, across the front passage near the altar, where she paused seriously to bow her head to genuflect. Then she went on to the votive-candle stand, where she sat earnestly gazing upward before she chose a candle to light. She always seemed to have so many important things to discuss with Those above. I never asked her what her prayers were about, and she never told me.

From the chapel we moved on through the crowd toward the elevator. It was jammed. There were so many mink-coated, diamond-ringed people here today, once again I felt conscious of our everyday appearance.

Nancy had brought a Lourdes medal with her, because she wanted to hand it to Irene Dunne.

I had argued this point previously, saying that we should mail the medal to Miss Dunne and not make so much to-do about it. But Nancy had asked if she couldn't please take it in person to her friend.

"I want to *hand* it to Irene," she said. "Then it will be more like it came directly from Lourdes to her."

I could see her point.

Nancy had the medal in a little box when we stepped out of the elevator. The auditorium was packed. And there was a movement of many people in the hallway.

I stood a moment, wondering how to make a wheelchair inconspicuous. There seemed to be special activity in the far corner of the hallway, and then I realized that it was Cardinal McIntyre preparing to enter the auditorium!

If only we had timed our entrance a little better . . . If only God had planned it better, I wouldn't be in such an embarrassing spot. For a second that seemed hours, I stood wondering where to go to get out of the way.

Then I heard someone saying, "Well, here's Nancy!"

It was Irene Dunne. She came over to us for a special greeting as Nancy held out the medal for her—and Cardinal McIntyre came forward to give Nancy his blessing.

Everything was happening so quickly and unexpectedly, it reminded me of the time I had dropped a lighted match in a box of firecrackers.

Nancy was a bit confused, too, and momentarily lost her sense of poise. But she managed to regain it in time to thank everyone before we were escorted to our place in the auditorium.

Cardinal McIntyre came in with the other visiting dignitaries. To think that Nancy had received his special blessing! What a grace that was for her.

If we had not been in the right place at the right time, it would never have occurred.

I apologized to God for doubting His planning.

Fancy cakes and fruit punch were served after the program. I chose an extra-fancy pink-iced little cake and brought it back on a paper plate to Nancy—only to find that she was trying to balance four fancier ones as she drank her fruit punch.

Time passed quickly and pleasantly while we chatted and visited with our many friends. Nancy, although she was clowning and giggling, seemed so much older and withdrawn from the world today.

Frankly, I was too busy to take too much notice of her. I was talking to one group of friends while Nancy laughed with another.

What I did notice, though, was the overwhelming love that everyone was showering on Nancy—love which she accepted with subconscious grace, which made it all the more awe-inspiring to me. Once again busy people, *important* people, were going out of their way to show their love—yes, it was truly love, and not pity—or a catering to a laughing little girl in a wheelchair.

As I stood talking to one of the nurses, I noticed from the corner of my eye that Nancy was being introduced to a very distinguished-looking priest. I saw her shake hands in a grown-up, serious way as she listened intently to what he was saying to her.

Then I saw her bow her head reverently and kiss a medal or relic that the priest held out for her.

The priest was introduced to me. He was from Canada. He held up the relic and said with a sly twinkle in his eyes, "I tricked your daughter Nancy! I asked her to pray for *herself*!"

I laughed in a self-assured way.

"I'm afraid not, Father; Nancy will never ask God for anything for herself."

The priest tilted his head and smiled.

"I know. I've heard about Nancy . . . but I've tricked her!"

He held up his hand.

"See this relic? It contains the bones of three martyrs. I asked Nancy to ask them what God wanted her to do."

With that, he patted Nancy on the head and disappeared in the crowd in a self-satisfied way.

I stood quite still and had the feeling that the laughing, chattering crowd had disappeared and only God and Nancy and I were in the auditorium.

The Rose Room was crowded, and the girls looked tired from a busy afternoon. But they weren't too tired to be as friendly and smiling as always when Nancy was wheeled in for supper.

The booths were filled, and so were all the stools at the counter. We stood at the desk talking to Jessie, the cashier. Nancy reached up and started fumbling with the chewing gum stacked on glass shelves. I told her to leave it alone, but Jessie said, "Oh no, she's my little helper! She can sell more chewing gum than anybody around here!"

That was the cue Nancy had evidently been waiting for. She flipped the wheelchair around and edged through the crowded Rose Room calling, "Chewing gum, anybody? Wanna buy some chewing gum?"

I left on a mock errand to give Jessie free rein to curb Nancy if she wanted to. When I came back, Nancy had sold most of the gum off the shelves and was now busily rearranging the expensive holy statues in the glass case beneath the cash register.

Jessie winked at me and shook her head as I was making way to stop her.

"I guess that Nancy could do just about anything she wanted to around here—we all love her so much!"

She smiled and patted Nancy's lowered head.

"Seems to me she's taking advantage of your kindness," I said dubiously as I watched Nancy take a blue rosary and form it into the shape of a heart on the fragile glass shelf. She placed the cross carefully inside the heart shape and said with a sideways tilt of her head for inspection, "Sister Gertrude Therese taught me how to do that."

There were two empty stools at the counter. I was getting too

hungry to wait for a booth, so I hoisted Nancy from her wheelchair to one of the stools.

I couldn't help but notice how *much* heavier she was.

I ordered the special dinner plate. Nancy said that she wasn't hungry and would like her usual favorite—ham on rye with *lots* of mustard.

I started to protest and insist on a regular supper for her, then remembered the many months of severely strict—and useless—dieting that she had gone through without protest.

Let her eat and drink what she wanted—for a while, anyway.

Having free choice, she took advantage of it and ordered Coke instead of milk.

We were starting to eat when an extremely boresome individual leaned over Nancy's shoulder and started a long conversation about her aches and pains and troubles.

When she finally left, I made a wry face to Nancy to show my annoyance and whispered, "What a bore!"

Nancy frowned and whispered back, "Don't *ever* say that about anyone!"

Immediately I got angry and inwardly ashamed of myself. I wanted to scold Nancy for being flip—but she *hadn't* been flip. She had corrected a fault, and done it in such an adult way, I had the uncanny feeling that she was teaching me again. . . .

I had had that feeling several times lately.

I got up and walked over to talk a moment with Jessie, then went on out the door. I heard Nancy call, "Mom, you forgot me!"

True, I was still so utterly unconscious of Nancy's handicap, I had left her perched on the soda-fountain stool.

Over the years so many had remarked, "You know, when I'm with Nancy I forget that there is anything wrong with her physically."

She had the true knack of living above her handicap.

Fourteenth Birthday Party

GETTING ready for the screwball party was fun. Nancy was in one of her silliest moods, joking and giggling all the time we were devising crazy costumes to wear.

Nancy put on her dangliest earrings—how she loved dangly earrings! Then she tied her doll's little straw hat on top of her head with a ribbon under her chin and put on my red-and-white striped beach coat. Then she bounced up and down in her wheelchair and asked me if she looked silly enough. She did.

I had on a crazy getup too. A frilly smock, a woolen hat with a little toy boat tied on top of it, and tight slacks.

Red-haired Mary and distinguished-looking Mrs. Stafford arrived to go along with us. Nancy had invited them because we loved them, but also because they were both newly widowed. Nancy told me that she thought a party would be good for them.

They came in the door, giggling rather self-consciously about their silly costumes. Their laughter made Nancy even happier because she was anxious to "change their grief into a party."

The other guests were waiting for us at Jessie's apartment. As we stepped in the door, I was once again overwhelmed by the love and kindness shown to us. The guests were mostly girls who worked at the Rose Room soda fountain. They had worked hard all that day, and yet here they were, all dressed up like screwballs and waiting to shout "Happy birthday, Nancy!" as we came in the door.

The apartment was decorated with colored balloons, and there was a huge bowl of fruit punch and a big square birthday cake with Nancy's name on it. The living-room table was loaded with fancy-wrapped gifts.

We sat around and played games awhile, and then it was time for Nancy to open the gifts.

My, how her face glowed in happiness! She kept wriggling around in the chair in her excitement.

But in spite of her haste to see what was in the packages, I noticed that she always stopped, opened the gift card, read all the message, and then turned to thank the donor before ripping wildly at the fancy package.

I also noticed that there were no toys in the stack of gifts. Nancy was really growing up. She opened gifts of perfume, fancy soaps, new jeweled lipstick cases, a string of blue beads that exactly matched the blue of her eyes, fancy pins—typical gifts for a teenager. It gave me such a feeling of separation to see her so grown up.

I guess all mothers get that feeling every now and then.

The night became hilarious after the last of the packages were opened. We started a game of batting the balloons at each other. I had never seen Nancy in quite such a jubilant mood . . . as though she were trying to make up for lost time.

Or time that would never be.

After the free-for-all, we went into the kitchen. Nancy's wheelchair was rolled up beside the dinette table and she was handed a long knife to cut her white birthday cake. What a lot of laughing and nonsense and picture taking went on!

When everyone had eaten her fill, things began to quiet down, and it was suddenly time to go home. It had been a grand party, but all things come to an end—even fourteenth-birthday parties.

Wraps were brought, good-bys were said, and we all started to leave at one time.

One of the Rose Room girls insisted on wheeling Nancy's chair over to the car, so I let her, even though she was not much bigger than Nancy. She handled the chair easily.

"It's from practice," she laughed to me. "Nancy and I had lots of walks together when she was staying at St. John's." She leaned to talk to Nancy. "Now don't forget, you promised to be at my wedding this coming Saturday—I'll be counting on you!"

"We'll be there, God willing," I assured her as we said good night and headed for home.

It had been a beautiful evening. And Nancy had had her wish—a bang-up fourteenth-birthday party.

Even though it *had* been a little bit early.

Last Night

*T*HE day after the birthday party was a very strange one.

There was so much quietness around.

Nancy wanted to rest, so she stayed in bed until afternoon, spending the morning between sleeping and waking.

She must be really tired, I thought, to stay in bed so long. So many other days, not consciously observing her, I had seen her struggle from her bed into her wheelchair and get dressed—just so that she could conquer the fatigue and the heaviness she must have felt. A fatigue that was not alleviated by bed rest because it had been tried. To force Nancy to stay in bed was like trying to harness a jackrabbit. She thrived on activity.

I didn't feel any particular concern for Nancy on this day. We had been on the go so much lately, it was good that she herself had decided to rest.

Several times during the afternoon she started to get up, saying that she would get dressed and make up the bed. That she didn't want me to think that she was sick.

I assured her that I had no feeling of sickness around and that it would be a good day to relax and do anything we felt like doing.

Nancy was relieved at that. She settled down for another wee nap, and I busied myself with writing some letters and thinking about supper. It was such a lazy "away from the world" day, I didn't even feel like going across the street to the little grocery store. I'd open a can of hash and we'd have that with a poached egg. Corky liked hash almost as much as Nancy did.

About two in the afternoon I saw a little girl coming to visit Nancy. I went out and stopped her in the front yard, telling her that Nancy was taking a little nap.

It seemed odd, saying that Nancy was taking a nap. I had never seen her relax so much during the day. And many's the time I had

tried to get her to sleep as a youngster, but she would have none of this nap stuff.

Pat, the little girl friend, had come over to show Nancy her new bicycle. She also wanted to tell her that she was going to regular grammar school.

Pat was a polio patient. Her left leg was limp and almost useless. But she was making wonderful progress. She could swim like a fish. And now this bicycle. That would help to strengthen her weakened leg.

Pat went wheeling down the drive, guided on the bike by a clever learning device on the side of the back wheel. She waved and called back to me, "Tell Nancy I'll be back and let her ride my bike!"

That'll be great, I thought with no bitterness—a double amputee on a two-wheeled bike.

I was so glad that there was not the least bit of envy in my heart as I watched Pat pumping her way along the road.

God knew what He was doing with Nancy.

She was still asleep when I went back into the house. So I went down to the motel office to pick up our mail.

Picking up the mail was Nancy's job, and she loved it. How she ever managed to propel her wheelchair down that long driveway, into the screen door of the office, and back up the incline to our place, I'll never know. It was a job she took such pride in, because it was something she could do "all by herself." Those all-by-herself tasks were becoming fewer and fewer as the disease progressed. Both of us noticed the increasing helplessness, but neither of us spoke about it. . . . It might rip the lid right off the happy camouflage we lived in and make us both lie down in self-pity.

So every morning Nancy would sling the plaid school bag over her shoulder, wedge Corky onto the seat beside her, and away they would go with a merry "Good morning!" to everyone they met along the way.

Virginia, talking about Nancy one day, said that she had happened to be looking out the office window one morning when Nancy passed, thinking she was all alone and unobserved. Her face was contorted in pain. But by the time she got around to the office where several guests were standing, she was her usual smiling self, hiding the pain for God to share.

Today there was not the usual large stack of letters. A few from

our friends, and a post card from my sister Hazel. I read them as I walked slowly back to our cottage.

My, but it was still around the place today! Even the busy motel had taken on a temporary lull, which was most unusual in the spot where people were always coming and going, night and day. Today there was the occasional sound of a motor, and often the song of the birds in the trees about the place. The peacefulness was awesome in a way.

Nancy was in her wheelchair when I got back to the cottage.

This was another thing I marveled at. The way she could do things for herself . . . like getting around in the house, for instance. She slept on a day bed in our one-room wall-bed cottage. To get from the day bed to the wheelchair—which was quite a bit higher-seated than the couch—she had to grab onto the arms of the wheelchair, then give a terrific hoist to ease herself into the seat of the wheelchair—backward. Then she would swing around in the seat, straighten her skirt, and adjust her blouse.

I always looked the other way while she was doing this because, no matter how often I had seen her struggle or heard the satisfied puff of her breath as she righted herself, I could never get it to stop hurting me inside . . . all that work just to get out of bed.

Nancy didn't want sympathy, help, or comment.

Once in the wheelchair, getting into the bathroom was another ordeal.

The chair was too wide to go in the bathroom door.

Nancy kept her metal-wheeled stool in the bathroom, just beside the door. From her wheelchair she would ease herself onto this stool, and then push along the wall with both hands until she had scooted herself into the bathroom. The wheelchair, wheels locked, would be left in the entrance way of the bathroom so that she could reverse the routine on the way out.

Nancy always took her own bath too. She would skid over on the metal stool to the side of the tub, reach over and run the water to just the right height, then plunge into the tub.

I had to help her out after the bath.

Even that, she wanted to do by herself.

One day as I was lifting her out she said, "I've been thinking of a way that I can get out of the tub by myself, Mom. I can lean over the edge and then go out headfirst on my hands."

I told her that was a good idea, but if she didn't mind I'd rather lift her out.

On this particular day Nancy went on into the bathroom and washed real good. She was using some of my favorite perfume too, I could smell it. But I didn't feel like reprimanding her today.

I started to make up her bed and put the covers in the closet. Then I thought that maybe Nancy had better take it easy for the rest of the day. She was so very quiet and sort of distant today.

It might be adolescence.

Nancy came out of the bathroom all prettied up, her hair curled in the grown-up way she had lately acquired.

I noticed that her nose was dribbling a bit, and that her voice—the little she was talking today—was husky and strange.

I stopped reading the newspaper and asked, "Nancy, are you getting a cold?"

Nancy shook her head quickly. She didn't seem to want to talk about it.

I handed her Hazel's card and went into the kitchen to start getting supper ready. I could hear her getting out the folding card table and setting it up beside the day bed for us to eat on. Poor little kid. She had always wanted so much to cook and to help me around the house. Well, someday, maybe. This evening she could sit on the day bed and eat in a lazy way. It fitted the day and the mood.

I started the hash frying while I set the dishes on the table. Nancy had edged herself onto the day bed and sat, head bent low, reading Hazel's post card.

She was reading it out loud to herself, over and over, pronouncing each word slowly and carefully.

She was still picking out the words thoughtfully and pronouncing them slowly to herself when the hash was done and I came in and set the food on the table.

I had never seen her so interested in a card and its contents before.

I dished the food onto our plates and waited for Nancy to say the blessing.

She folded her hands for prayer, then looked up at me, her eyes meeting mine.

A fear I had never known grabbed at me.

I could hardly find my voice to say, "Is there anything the matter, honey?"

Nancy was looking at her plate.

She shook her head.

With a casualness that I was far from feeling I said, "I'll say the blessing tonight."

I bowed my head and said, "God, our hand is in Yours."

Because I knew that He was reaching down to take our hand in His that evening.

The blessing finished, I raised my eyes to look over at Nancy. Her head was turned away, and she was trying to hide the fact from me that she wanted very much to cry. I could see by the set of her chin and the way she hunched her shoulders and held her breath.

I rushed around the table and sat down on the day bed beside her.

She turned quickly and flung her arms around my neck and began to cry softly.

"Mom, I love you so much!" she whispered through her tears.

I had such a desire to take her on my lap and never let go of her. But I couldn't because her body was so swollen; I couldn't lift her. I could only keep my arms tight around her shoulders as I whispered over and over, "It's all right, honey. We'll go along with God in anything He wants, won't we?"

I could feel her head against my cheek nodding in assent.

We sat until Nancy's tight hold on me eased and she sat up. She tried to wipe the tears away without my seeing.

I sat numbly quiet, with such an empty feeling I couldn't move. I felt as though Nancy was going to go on and I couldn't go any farther with her.

It was such a left-behind sort of feeling.

Then suddenly Nancy was much better. She looked up at me with a trace of the old smile.

"I can't talk very well today," she apologized. "I want to say one thing, and I say something else instead. I kept reading Hazel's card over and over to myself, but it wouldn't come out the way I was reading it."

I had all I could do to keep from grabbing her and holding on tight and crying my heart out.

Instead, I got up off the day bed and went over to my place at the table.

"Well, let's get on with the meal!" I said as everyday as I could.

That was exactly what Nancy wanted.

She smiled and sniffed at the food.

"Gee, this hash smells good!"

We ate and tried to ignore the strange feeling around the room.

We ate quite well, considering the circumstances. Then I went into the kitchen to scrape the scraps into Corky's dish.

I heard a hasty bumping of the wheelchair as Nancy hurried to get in it. I darted into the room and found her trying to make a dash for the bathroom.

"Hold it, Nancy, I'll get the bucket!"

I was just in time.

Nancy vomited, then looked up apologetically.

"I almost goofed. Sorry, Mom." She smiled.

She looked so white, I suggested that she take a little catnap on the day bed.

I settled her comfortably and then went back to the dishes, trying to grasp the meaning of the strange feeling of heaviness—and darkness—around the place tonight.

Nancy was still dozing when I had finished the dishes and went in to look at her. I let her sleep as I sat and watched her.

She seemed so ashamed—or frightened!—at the way she was acting tonight.

Poor little kid. I hadn't really noticed until now how very swollen her stomach had become lately—especially in the last two weeks. It had been all she could do to turn herself around in bed. She managed this by hanging onto the window sill and then pulling on the edge of the bedcovers for support. I had been trying for the past couple of weeks not to notice, because I didn't know what to do to help her.

Right now she was lying on her stomach as she did so often lately. She had two high pillows under her head to balance her grotesque body.

The maddening thing about it was that the more misshapen her body became, the more radiant and beautiful her face became!

It was as though the devil and the Lord were having a battle to victory over her.

The light from the reading lamp caught the gold sheen of her hair now as she lay there sleeping. Her usually delicately pale cheeks were a light golden tan. Her lashes curled to cast a delicate shadow across her cheek.

I sat for quite a long time just looking at her and loving her.

Then I remembered the Lourdes holy water.

Why hadn't I thought of it before? Of course Nancy had often been much more ill than she was now, but maybe if I used the holy water it would take the heavy feeling away from our home.

Maybe it would get her to stop dozing the way she had been doing all day.

I got out the straw-covered bottle and shook it gently. The water gurgled in a friendly way. I uncorked it and wet my fingers, then said a little prayer as I flicked the water across Nancy's sleeping face.

Instantly she was alert and struggling to sit up.

"What's that?" she asked, touching her fingertips to the drops of water on her forehead.

I held up the jug of water.

"It's the Lourdes holy water."

I was wetting my fingers again. I made the sign of the cross with my wet fingers on her forehead.

Immediately I noticed a change in her.

The hot, flushed look disappeared. Nancy became wide awake, and the bloodshot cloudiness left her eyes. She looked seriously up at me with her usual clear heaven-blue eyes and said quietly: "Don't use the Lourdes holy water on me, Mom. I want it to be God's way."

I put the bottle back in the closet but felt that I had triumphed.

Nancy was well again.

We turned on the television, and Nancy got up in her wheelchair to watch it. She was her usual gay bubbling self, and even got the giggles as she played with Corky.

My fear of the blackness had almost gone. And then something happened to dispel it completely.

A tiny bird started to sing in our kitchen window.

It was getting almost too dark to see it, but I wheeled Nancy into the kitchen so that we could both watch and listen.

The bird was sitting in one of the open squares in the wire fencing just outside our window. It kept looking in at us as it sang a song so pretty, it seemed to come from heaven itself.

"I think it's an angel," whispered Nancy.

"I'm sure it's an angel, and heaven has come back into our house again," I smiled, without a trace of my early fear and heaviness.

We watched "Disneyland" on television—amid much hilarity.

Corky would *not* let Nancy alone!

He kept wanting to sit in her lap. And poor Nancy, she had no lap.

Corky would jump up, scramble for a footing, lick Nancy's face, and cuddle into her neck until she would push him away, hysterical with laughter.

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Everything had become so normal again!

I pulled a chair over close beside Nancy's wheelchair and sat watching the antics of Donald Duck on the TV as I held her misshapen, marvelous hand in mine.

I wanted to be *close* to her tonight.

She squeezed my hand and smiled to me, then said thoughtfully with a return of seriousness: "You know, I thought for a while tonight that I was going to heaven." She took her hand from mine and fanned the air as she added, "I just *couldn't* go to heaven until I had told everybody about Lourdes!"

I let the remark pass without comment. Nancy so often talked of heaven, it didn't startle me at all.

We sat and watched the next TV show.

The room was lit only by the reflection from the television screen.

Then suddenly I thought someone had switched on a light.

Nancy had pushed Corky away from her and was sitting up straight in her wheelchair, a look of startled wonderment on her face. Her eyes were opened wide, and she seemed to have a luminous glow of heaven around her.

Without realizing what I was doing, I found myself kneeling before her.

Nancy flung her arms around my neck and started patting me on the back as she said with indrawn breath, "Mom, Nana's in heaven! I know! I know!"

And then she started to cry harder than I had ever heard her cry.

But they were tears of happiness.

It was one of those experiences when I knew that heaven was too close to be asking any questions about it.

I wanted to ask Nancy if she had seen Nana or if an angel had come and talked to her.

To ask would have been to doubt.

One look at Nancy would have made anyone believe. She was bouncing up and down in her wheelchair, clapping her hands together and saying over and over, "Nana's in heaven! Isn't that wonderful?"

I guess that if all heaven is suddenly revealed to me during my last minutes on earth I'll just casually get my hat and say, "Well, when do we leave?"

There is something unexplainable about me that makes me turn miracles into casual occurrences.

I guess it would be just too much if I let it all sink in at once.

How many times, during the events that followed, was Nancy's word of assurance of heaven to comfort me!

Yet all I did at the time was say, "We're missing our television show!" as I slid into my chair and tried to grasp the meaning of the strange evening.

I couldn't stop the glow of happiness from taking over.

Heaven sure was close tonight!

We tried to keep our minds on the television show. But I couldn't help myself from stealing sidewise glances at Nancy. She seemed to be floating on a cloud, she was still so radiantly happy. And the glow around her almost dimmed out the television light.

Once during the program she leaned over and whispered shyly to me, "Mom, an angel just touched me. I felt it across the top of my head—like this."

She reached over and *very gently* brushed her hand across my hair.

I didn't realize then that in just a few more hours I would be feeling the same caress from Angel Nancy.

We watched another program—"Millionaire," and Nancy chattered like a magpie.

When the program was over I went to my desk in the kitchen to write some letters.

Nancy raced her wheelchair around the living room, chasing Corky until he had to come scrambling under my chair to find refuge.

Nancy came into the kitchen to ask if I was hungry. I could have said yes and thus let her have the pleasure of waiting on me, but I said no, I was busy and she could fix herself a sandwich.

Nancy always wanted so much to prepare meals for us—but I was always too busy, and kitchens were not built for wheelchair people, I excused myself. Everything was too high up.

I told Nancy that there was some baloney in the refrigerator. I got the mustard jar off the top shelf and took a can of concentrated lemonade out of the freezer compartment. Then I got the pitcher down so that Nancy could make some lemonade. How that pleased her!

I went back to my letter writing and she fussed around at my elbow.

The mustard jar was almost empty. I had to stop addressing a

letter to peer down into the dried-out jar that Nancy thrust under my nose.

"Yes, I'll be sure to get you some more mustard tomorrow," I promised absently.

Nancy poured me a sloppy glass of lemonade.

I refused it with an impersonal "Thank you, but I'm not thirsty just now."

She put the glass of lemonade in the refrigerator.

"You can drink it later," she said without a trace of annoyance.

I felt an inward stab of guilt at my indifference, but Nancy seemed to love me in spite of anything I did.

I'd make it up to her someday.

She took out two slabs of baloney.

No, I wasn't hungry either, I informed her.

Some night—maybe tomorrow—we'd have a "braunschweiger bust" party and she could fix the whole thing. But tonight I was busy.

Nancy nodded. It was an old familiar story.

"Someday!" She grinned at me.

It had become a family joke—everything I was going to find time to do for her—*someday*.

Nancy made a huge baloney sandwich and then looked in the vegetable bin.

"No lettuce. Gee, Mom, will you be sure to get lettuce tomorrow?"

I nodded absently.

She wheeled herself and the sandwich and a glass of lemonade into the living room.

How she could balance things on that wheelchair always amazed me.

I continued to write letters.

Nancy pushed a chair over near the kitchen doorway to be near me. She had her box of birthday gifts on the chair and was trying them on and showing them to me between bites of the baloney sandwich.

She tried on the new pink lipstick.

"How does this look, Mom? I'm going to save it for when I go to camp in August."

She arched her neck and turned toward me, pursing her lips.

I looked up a second.

"Too much—take half that lipstick off!"

Nancy reached for a Kleenex and wiped her mouth unconcernedly. She had heard those same words from me too often to be annoyed by them.

"How's that?"

She turned to me again and I looked up.

For a moment I was actually startled by her beauty. It seemed such an unearthly beauty . . . as though it were the radiance of heaven shining through her.

I looked away quickly because I couldn't stand it . . . loving her so much.

She had put on the new blue beads now, and I must look again. They were the exact color of her eyes—blue as heaven itself.

I finished writing a letter and then rose wearily. It had been such an unusual day, but everything was as it should be now. Nancy was prattling about summer camp and how she wanted to go down to the bank early in the morning to put her five-dollar birthday bill in her savings account. She wanted to have it ready when she started shopping for camp.

"Be sure to put in lots of party dresses this year, Mom," she chattered as I helped her put the birthday gifts away. "We have lots of dances in camp in the teen-age group, you know . . . and boy friends!" She cocked her head sideways and grinned at me.

My, but she was growing up!

In spite of her grown-up ways, her two favorite teddy bears, Toto and Frosty, had to be settled in their place on the window sill beside her before she would settle down for the night. This had been a custom for over ten years.

I helped her into bed and then sat for a few minutes with my arms around her.

The strange feeling that we were not walking the same road any more came over me again.

The left-behind feeling.

I was tempted to ask her to come over and sleep in my bed with me that night. But I knew what an effort it would be for her to get out of her bed and into mine.

Instead I kissed her, said my usual "Good night, my friend," and went to bed.

The little bird at our window sang through the entire night.

Call to the Mountains

WE slept right through the night. In fact, we were still sleeping when the phone rang a little after ten o'clock that morning.

Nancy was always the one who answered calls, because the phone was right beside her bed . . . and because she loved to talk.

I waited a moment for her to answer it this time, but she just stirred drowsily. I bounded out of bed and took up the receiver, sitting on the floor beside the day bed as I did so.

It was Mrs. Dietrich, a member of the Gold Diggers Club. She had an exciting plan to tell me about, so I nudged Nancy to get her to listen too.

Nancy opened her eyes sleepily and then closed them again.

When I hung up the receiver, I poked Nancy again to wake her.

"Guess what!" I beamed. "We can go up to the mountains for the *whole* summer! They've got a job for me in the kitchen at Camp Paivika!"

Nancy disappointed me by being almost noncommittal.

"Oh," she said absently, and sat up to adjust her wheelchair so that she could get in it and go to the bathroom.

Her indifference made me a little bit huffy. I picked up the card table and asked her to adjust the lock on it while I held it steady. She fumbled with the lock for a minute but was so preoccupied I finally did it myself. Then I went on into the kitchen to put the kettle on.

Nancy hoisted herself into the wheelchair. I could hear the snap of metal as she released the brake and started toward the bathroom.

I came back into the living room to ask her, "Do you think it's a good idea, about Camp Paivika, I mean?"

Nancy stopped wheeling herself to look up to me and say, "Don't plan, Mom—let God."

Then she propelled herself on over to the bathroom door and I went back into the kitchen.

What a strange thing to say, I thought. "Don't plan—let God."

I thought she would be so excited about going to the mountains.

I heard the wheelchair bump against the woodwork. I must remind Nancy not to jam the chair so tight against the bathroom door as she transferred to the metal stool. The woodwork was getting sort of banged up.

I turned on the water to fill a saucepan just as I heard something fall with a thud.

. . . and then the frantic barking of Corky.

I dropped the saucepan and ran toward the bathroom. Through the half-open door I could see Nancy lying on the floor. It was so seldom she fell! I hoped this fall hadn't hurt her.

I struggled, all thumbs, to unlock the wheelchair and get it out of the way. Finally I kicked it away.

Nancy was lying facing me.

One look at her and I fell on my knees, calling, "Nancy! Nancy!"

But she couldn't hear me.

Her face was distorted and tense in a spasm. Her open eyes couldn't see me as she gasped for breath. An ugly bruise on her beautiful little chin was beginning to turn purple. She must have hit the floor awfully hard.

Corky kept up his frantic barking as Nancy struggled for breath and began to thrash wildly as I tried to hold her and kiss her.

Then she lay still on the bathroom floor.

I ran into the living room to phone for a priest. But I couldn't think of the number of the church. I fumbled with the phone book until I dropped it. I could have called information, but I guess I wasn't thinking very sanely.

I remembered we had some ammonia capsules in the dresser drawer.

I tore the dresser apart to find them. The capsule broke into fragments in my shaking fingers. I held the pieces up to Nancy's nostrils. She pushed my hand away and began to thrash around again.

Then it was all over and she lay still.

I laid her gently down on the bathroom floor and straightened

her fluffy pink nightie. The bathroom window was open, and I could see the sky.

"Well, honey, it's over. You've left the cross," I whispered to her as I kept my eyes on the sky.

Corky had stopped barking and was sitting quietly beside me. I didn't cry.

Maybe it was a grief beyond tears.

I think it was an elevation upward . . . a momentary following of Nancy's soul in its flight to heaven.

I remained maybe a moment, maybe half an hour, kneeling there beside her and looking up at the sky.

Then I tried to take her in my arms and lift her onto the day bed. I couldn't move her.

I guess it really wasn't until that moment that I fully realized what Nancy had been carrying around for a body. . . .

She had never wanted me to notice.

I went into the living room and took the pink-and-white blanket off her bed. Her pillow, I noticed, was still dented where she had been sleeping on it.

I took the blanket back into the bathroom and managed to get it under her. Corky watched me curiously as I pulled at the corner of the blanket like a sled. I didn't want to leave Nancy lying in the bathroom.

I somehow got her into the living room, where Corky was waiting with his beanbag. He tossed it onto Nancy's back and then retrieved it himself when she didn't laugh and throw it to him.

I put a pillow under Nancy's head, and then straightened her hair. There was even a bobby-pin in it where she had wanted to make a curl.

I realized that I was still in my pajamas.

People would be coming in. I'd have to be dressed.

I put on a skirt and pink blouse. Only yesterday Nancy had said, "You look real pretty in that blouse, Mom."

I needed a belt for the skirt. I took a long time to select just the right one . . . because I didn't know quite what to do after I had found the belt.

I wanted a priest.

But my emotions still were too raw to explain my call to anyone at the switchboard.

How careless I had been to neglect having a priest's number close at hand!

There was a knock on the door. I didn't want anyone to come in. I didn't want to open the door. I didn't want the movement of the world outside to enter into the stillness of our house.

I opened the door a crack and peeked out.

There stood Father Ménager, the lovable French priest and family friend.

Dear God . . . thank You.

Father Ménager's huge frame seemed to fill the entire doorway like a bulwark of strength. Before I realized it, I was in his arms and he was saying, "Margie, what is it? What is it?"

He stepped into the room and I told him about Nancy.

With my arm still around him, we sat down on the day bed and cried together.

"I was halfway out to San Fernando Valley on an appointment when *something* made me turn all the way back and come to you," he said, blowing his nose.

The tears had been good for both of us.

"Did Nancy have the last rites?" he asked.

Fear gripped my heart as I shook my head.

"There wasn't time, Father—there just wasn't time! Of all the people on earth, you would think that Nancy would have been ready—but it all happened so quick!"

I *had* to ask the next question.

Tensely I looked straight into Father Ménager's eyes.

"Do you think it will make any difference about her going to heaven?" I held my breath.

Father gave a little chuckle and shrugged his huge shoulders.

"There's no doubt about Nancy going to heaven!"

Then he said thoughtfully, "Knowing Nancy, I think she even sacrificed Extreme Unction for someone who might not have it . . . someone who might not be prepared."

Yes, that *would* be like Nancy.

Nancy's Rosary

I DIDN'T tell anyone except the family about Nancy's death. But the people and the phone calls and the telegrams began to pour into the house.

It really surprised me.

How could so many hearts hurt over the death of one little girl? What I had thought was my own personal grief seemed to be spreading all around. Only it wasn't a black-grief feeling, but one of awe.

Someone we had known and loved such a little while ago was now with God.

I learned that Nancy had died from a blood clot in her lungs.

I didn't really want to know the physical cause of her death—I liked to think instead that God had known it was time to call her home.

I also learned that the city of Santa Monica wanted to "take over" for Nancy and me, to do all the many things I would have found so hard to attend to if I had been all alone.

Before I fully realized it, the time had passed and the hour had arrived to get dressed for Nancy's Rosary, to be held at St. Monica's Church.

My sister Hazel, who had come to stay with me a few days, helped me like a lady in waiting to a queen. I put on a light blue dress and pretty organdie coat. Nancy had once said that people should wear happy clothes to a funeral, because they should be pleased that one of their friends had gone to heaven. I couldn't let her down now.

Sheila and Mac came over to the motel, then Sheila's daughter Jean came in with her husband and their new baby.

"We didn't know if we should come," said Jean. "I had to bring Diana. We left the two older children with a neighbor, but we couldn't come unless we brought the baby."

"Wonderful!" I assured her. "Angel Nancy will be so pleased! You know how much Nancy loved children!"

I found that it was becoming easier and easier to talk about "Angel Nancy" and to believe that she was aware of it.

Hazel drove with me in our little car. Jean, her husband Bob, and the baby rode with Sheila and Mac. Pa was to meet us at the church.

I drove around the side street to the parking lot at St. Monica's. It was almost filled. They must be having a meeting or something in the school auditorium.

We walked around the back of the church and started in the side entrance. There seemed to be so many people all dressed up and walking along the sidewalk. I wondered what was going on in town.

And then I noticed that they were all going in St. Monica's Church.

Hazel stopped me before I got in the side door.

"Maybe we'd better go around to the front entrance," she suggested. "Pa will probably be waiting at the front steps."

We walked along the sidewalk with the crowd and turned the corner.

I couldn't help but gasp in my surprise.

Both doors of the main entrance were flung open. The church was a mass of flowers. Huge bouquets and delicate wreaths covered the entrance and led in a double row into the church. I had never seen so many flowers together at one time.

A policeman stood at the corner, directing traffic. Another was at the front of the church to keep the cars moving along.

All this for a little girl who had really had nothing to offer the world but a ready smile and a tremendous love for God.

It was unbelievable.

We edged our way into the vestibule.

Pa, who had been waiting for us, came quickly from where he had been standing behind all the floral displays. He looked so little in that forest of flowers! I caught myself smiling. Dear Pa. How good he had always been to Nancy.

One of the ushers took me by the arm. It was Don, a friend of ours. It was good to be cushioned in the friendship of familiar people and places at a time like this.

Don nudged my elbow and nodded toward the flowers as we started into the church. He wanted me to notice the red ballet slippers someone had attached to one of the large bouquets.

We stepped into the church.

I had to stop for a moment.

There, at the end of the aisle before the altar, was the pink velvet casket. It was closed now.

As we started to walk, I noticed that the shadows from the pews made a pattern on the stone floor. A pattern that looked like a path of thorns. It led straight up to the casket.

Beyond was the magnificence of the holy altar . . . and God.

There were not too many people in the church. I was not too aware of them anyway, but just a bit concerned to think that they had gone to so much trouble to use the large church when not too many were going to attend the Rosary. Then I remembered that it was still quite early.

Don ushered us to a seat a few rows from the front of the church. I had the aisle seat. Sheila, Mac, and Pa sat next to me. Hazel, Bob, Jean, and the baby sat just ahead of us.

I could see that Jean was nervous about the baby. She thought it might start to cry.

I tapped her on the shoulder and whispered, "Angel Nancy will see that Diana doesn't cry."

Jean smiled over her shoulder to me. Diana, in the care of angels, snuggled down to sleep. She slept soundly through the entire Rosary.

I sat quietly with my thoughts and my memories as I heard the shuffle of people finding seats.

My mind went back to the very first time I had discussed the Catholic faith with a priest. It had been at St. John's Hospital and I had had an enlightening talk with Father Collins. He didn't urge me in any way to join the Church, but his views seemed so sound, the depth of his religion so comforting, it hadn't taken me long to decide that it was the faith for me.

We were to meet many times after that—Father Collins and Nancy and I.

It was he who baptized Nancy almost five years ago. Had it been only five years? It was hard to think that we had ever been anything but Catholic.

How nice it would have been if Father Collins could have been here tonight. . . .

Someone touched me on the shoulder.

It was Father Collins.

In wide-eyed wonder I moved over to make room for him. I

didn't ask how he happened to be in Santa Monica when he was on a teaching assignment in San Francisco. God had probably sent for him.

The pink casket remained closed during the recitation of the Rosary. When it was over, there was a hush as the attendants turned the casket around on its wheeled stand.

Don leaned over to whisper to me, "Do you want it opened?"

I nodded.

There was a moment of activity while flowers were adjusted and Toto and Frosty were placed in smiling vigil at Nancy's side.

Another pause and stillness.

I didn't know what I was supposed to do, so I prayed. Or rather, I talked to God. He seemed so close to me tonight. As though He were trying to let me know that Nancy was safe in His arms.

I heard the movement of people getting out of the pews. They were forming a line in the aisle to come and file past Nancy.

It seemed to take a long, long time for the line to come to an end. I guess it was because so many stopped to say a special prayer.

Subconsciously I noticed them . . . newsboys, screen stars, laborers, executives, old people, and little children. It was like a mixed bouquet of hearts being offered to Nancy.

Then it was my turn. It was time for me to say good-by to the other half of me. I wondered if I could do it.

Father Collins was waiting for me to stand up. Together we walked to the velvet casket.

Nancy looked so beautiful! I stood beside her for a few moments while I let go of earth and hung onto heaven. Then I stooped over and kissed the tip of her pretty little nose.

As we moved away, I did something very foolish, I waved good-by to Toto.

The family was waiting at the parking lot for me. Jean, sleeping babe in her arms, came hurrying to meet me. Her eyes were wide in wonder.

"Margie," she exclaimed, "know what happened? Diana slept so *sound* all through the Rosary. But when we got up and stopped beside Nancy, Diana woke right up, turned, and looked at Nancy and smiled!"

"I guess Diana's got a special angel to watch over her now." I smiled and kissed the sleeping babe.

We drove Father Collins to St. John's Hospital, where he was

staying. As he turned to say good night, he asked abruptly, "When are you going to start writing Nancy's book, Margie?"

He couldn't have asked a better question. Because it made me realize that there was a path ahead for me. It wasn't stopping entirely tomorrow.

Sign of Angels

*T*HE next morning I awoke with the realization that it was to be a busy day.

And then I remembered.

Hazel was already up and fussing with the coffeepot.

I dressed methodically, putting on my new pink dress, white accessories, and blue organdy coat. It seemed an unusual attire for such an occasion. But it seemed like Nancy.

I was standing in the kitchen looking out the window when Hazel came quietly in.

"They're here, Margie."

If only I could slip out the window and run as fast as I could down the road and away.

The only place I could run was to God. He understood and seemed to put His arm around me as I turned from the window and walked out to the waiting limousine. I was glad to see that it was not a somber black, but a dignified metal gray.

A motel maid stood aside as the car started. She didn't know whether to wave to me or not. I waved to her, and she threw a kiss.

Yesterday she had stopped in our house to say, "Every time you saw Nancy, her arms were open wide to welcome you with that smile of hers. You never heard about her troubles, but somehow always seemed to tell her yours!"

It was a well-cherished tribute.

I had never seen a more beautiful morning. The world was sparkling with summer and newness. The park across from St. Monica's Church wafted sweet foliage fragrance to us as we drove past.

The limousine glided around the corner toward the church, and a cold fear suddenly clutched at my heart.

There stood the silver-gray hearse with the door opened.

God heard my inward cry.

He moved Hazel to put her hand gently on mine. It was all I needed to steady myself.

Though it was still quite early, the seats in the church were almost filled. As we walked down the aisle I became aware of a surge of colors to the left of me. It was Nancy's schoolgirl classmates, dressed in their graduation dresses, and here to pay her homage. Just a week before, Nancy had received an honorary diploma from the class.

As we sat down, I noticed the row of men in front of me. All important city officials, taking time out of their busy schedules to act as pallbearers for Nancy.

Three priests, Monsignor O'Flaherty, Father Collins, and Father Wood, officiated at the Solemn Requiem Mass. I hadn't even had to ask one of them—they had all been ready and willing friends of Nancy.

The beautiful solemnity and dignity of the Mass was a balm to me. As I received Holy Communion, I felt that Angel Nancy must be standing close to God to help me. So I said a little thank-you prayer to both of them.

I hadn't expected a sermon. So it was a pleasant surprise when Monsignor O'Flaherty entered the pulpit and started to speak.

Nancy and I had conversed many times with Monsignor O'Flaherty. But in a parish so large and so busy, I didn't think he would have had the time to really get to know his parishioners.

His sermon proved my ignorance.

He must have loved Nancy very much to give such a beautiful and sincere eulogy. He spoke of her always ready smile, despite her suffering.

So many these past few days had commented on the same thing! And yet I had never actually been aware of Nancy's continuous suffering and constant smiling. . . . She had hidden the pain and used the smile so adeptly. She had always seemed like a normal, average youngster to me.

The Mass ended.

The pink casket was borne down the aisle, followed by the rainbow-clad girls.

It was my turn to follow. I stood up mechanically, and Sheila took her place beside me.

Outside, a news-camera bulb flashed. Friends edged around the car as I sat back onto the seat. I opened the window so that I could shake hands with them. So many people! So many prayers. I could feel their unseen blessing.

We started slowly down the street so familiar, and yet so strange today.

I kept my eyes on the white helmet of the motorcycle-cop escort as he rode ahead at each cross street and then dropped back beside the car. How slow the motorcycle was going! And how quiet the muffled motor.

We were riding along Wilshire Boulevard now. Across the street I could see our Sky House home standing empty.

Hazel nudged me and nodded her head toward the street corner.

A group of little school children was standing there in solemn military formation. As we passed, they made the sign of the cross.

It seemed odd to be passing through so much everyday activity. I had thought that the world had stopped. And yet, here it was, as busy as ever.

The road led through the bustling suburbs, out through country fields, and then to the wrought-iron gates of Holy Cross Cemetery.

I had never been here before. I remembered having passed it several times, but always in an impersonal way. Except one time—just about a month ago.

Nancy and I had been driving home from a seashore weekend. I had actually startled myself by saying, with a glance at Holy Cross, "If you should ever be there, would you want me to come and visit you?"

The question had been answered as casually and unpremeditated as it had been asked.

Nancy had shrugged her shoulders and said, "You can if you want to, but I won't be there. . . . I'll be up in heaven with God."

What a strange conversation it had been!

But God must have prompted it for my future comfort and belief.

Inside the gates, we passed a white statue of the Sacred Heart, then a pond with ducks on it. What a beautiful, beautiful place!

I noticed the street names on the curbs as we moved slowly past them. "Our Lady of Peace," "Holy Innocence"—that must be for children.

I hoped they hadn't chosen a place for Nancy there. She considered herself an adult.

I felt ashamed of my thought.

God had chosen exactly the right place for her.

How kind everyone had been to attend to everything for me. I included God in my thanks to everyone, because today they seemed to be as one.

The car stopped beside the curb of "Mother of Sorrows." I stepped out the opened door into the bright sunshine. Subconsciously I noticed that there was a crowd waiting, and I wondered how they had had the time to come away out here.

The flowers from the church had been transferred here and were circled around the pink casket.

As the priests performed the final ceremony, the girls in pastel filed one by one past Nancy and placed a red rose on her casket.

Then it was over.

There was nothing else for me to do but to hang onto God and get back in the car.

Once again I opened the car window as faces crowded around it. One by one I shook hands with Nancy's classmates.

Only one young lady was in tears as she reached out her hand to mine.

"I promised Nancy I'd dance for her!" she sobbed.

Thank You, God, for sending someone who needed me at that moment.

I was jarred out of my numbness and able to say matter-of-factly, "Well, you *are* going to dance for her, aren't you?"

The girl raised her head in surprise. Then suddenly a smile broke through her tears.

"I'll dance . . . I'll dance for *Angel* Nancy!"

She gave my hand a quick squeeze and then raced to tell the other girls.

I let myself take one last look across the lawn.

If only there was *some* little sign from You, God . . .

If only I could believe for sure . . .

From out of nowhere a beautiful white butterfly floated down, touched a moment on the casket, and then soared up and out of sight in the puffy white clouds.

NEW ANGEL

*Hold her gently, Jesus,
She was very tired today.
She tried so hard to hide the pain
And keep the tears away.
You know how much she suffered, Lord,
Yet loved You all the while . . .
You know how many heartaches
Were hidden with a smile.
So, hold her gently, Jesus,
And I am sure You'll say
The Cross she bore so patiently
Became her Crown today.*