

SISTER M. ETHEL, O.S.F.
March 20th, 1965

In the chill of the early March morning, the phone suddenly rang out with ominous insistence, and over the miles came Sister Richard's voice, heavy with heartbreak. Sister Ethel, who had made such splendid recovery from gall bladder surgery, had died in St. Joseph's Hospital in Denver, of post-operative embolism.

The first reaction was stunned disbelief. Sister Ethel had been walking about the room when the Sisters came in from Loveland on Sunday. She was "Fine!" on Tuesday and on Thursday when they called. But Friday evening the doctor noted a slight change, diagnosed a "mild heart attack," and postponed her dismissal from St. Joseph's originally scheduled for Sunday, the 21st.

It was not long after midnight when the nurse, making a routine check, took one look and called the doctors on the "Heart Attack Team." But the battle could not be won, in spite of their efforts, and Sister Ethel who had for nearly twenty years manned the outposts of the Community in Alabama and Colorado, died with awful suddenness in the hospital sixty miles from her mission and her Sisters.

But -- not unprepared. Friday evening, hours before death beckoned, she had been anointed by Father William Sievers, the chaplain at St. Joseph's. Did she want to receive the Sacrament of the Sick? "Oh, yes," answered Sister Ethel. "Thank you."

Did she have a premonition that it was to be a last anointing? There is no way of knowing. She may have thought, as she had told Mother before going to the hospital, "They're making it worse than it really is!" Or she may suddenly have sensed the shadowy presence lurking just outside her quiet room, waiting the one moment when he would slip inside and lay his hand gently on her heart. At any event, Sister Ethel, at 8:30 on St. Joseph's night, consciously, serenely, received her last Sacrament.

It was 1:40 Joliet time when the doctors pronounced her dead, and Sister Richard and Sister Rosemarie, numbed and shaken, faced the hard and bitter truth: kind, understanding, always approachable Sister Ethel would never return to Loveland. St. John's would never again echo her soft Tennessee speech, that accent which all her Midwest years had never entirely erased. Sister Ethel would not come home on Sunday. Sister Ethel would not come home again.

On Saturday afternoon Sister Ethel left the Rockies she had learned to love, and came to Joliet for a last time. The plane that brought her also carried Sister Richard and Sister Rosemarie, who had planned for that weekend a very different homecoming.

GOD GRANT HER REST ETERNAL!

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