

SISTER M. STEPHANIA, O.S.F.

December 19, 1967

She had addressed her own Christmas cards -- and to the holiday message she added her own, -- "I won't be writing any more because I know the end is coming." All very matter of fact -- no heroics -- no bid for sympathy. Just, "I won't be writing any more."

Sister Stephania had made her peace with pain. Now it was just a matter of waiting for the end which she knew was coming.

It was a hard-won resignation. She had so wanted to go back on mission -- to St. Ludmilla's where she had spent so many years -- or to Des Plaines to help Sister Dolorosa -- or to any other place where she could be of use. It was only gradually that she accepted the fact that Our Lady of Angels needed her now, but once she did accept it, there was no looking back. This was her life now. When the end came, it would find Sister Stephania "where she was needed."

The rendezvous was the Infirmary at 5:25 on a quiet December morning. She had been restless for several days, locked in a silent world -- for her hearing aid bothered her too much now, and she refused to wear it. The Christmas carols, the greetings of her friends, these were on the periphery. Alone in her world of silence she waited for the end she no longer feared.

Did she remember the old times -- the old friends who had filled her almost fifty years of convent life? Did she think of the Junior Sisters in whom she had such a particular interest, over whom she worried and for whom she so often prayed? Did she remember Blackie and fleetingly regret that she would not see him again? There's no way of knowing, of course. Only one thing is sure: Sister Stephania met death with open eyes and stout heart. She was, in the doctor's words, "Very brave!"

It would have pleased her to know of this tribute -- but she would have discounted its validity. She did not think of herself as particularly heroic. She was just doing what everyone had to do: learn to die. And Sister Stephania was learning to die gracefully. She had made many of her own Christmas cards -- she had made Sister Andre a special feast day greeting for November 30th. She had tried to "keep going" as long as possible -- going down for meals and therapy -- returning at last in early December to the Infirmary for Father Dominic's anointing -- and the twelve days that separated her from Eternity.

Sister Clarissa was watching her through the night, and shortly after three she saw a change. But there were still two hours of lingering for Sister Stephania. It was a quiet lingering, and a quiet passing, -- the way she would probably have wanted it, had she been given a choice.

And right now Sister Stephania's probably marveling at how simple dying can be -- once you've learned how to do it gracefully!

GOD GRANT HER REST ETERNAL!

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