

ENTRANCE TO HEAVEN



THREE

HAIL MARY'S



by

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WHEN will you be baptized?" This was my constant query to Carlos' parents. They were hard-working, respectable Igorots who lived near the mission. Besides Carlos, they had seven other children—two boys and five girls. I always stopped to visit them whenever I happened to pass along on horseback. Always I was accorded a warm welcome. To my question, however, I invariably received the same reply, "Nem akay . . . , later." Perhaps seeing she disappointed look on my face they softened their refusal by adding "Father, baptize our children first. We will follow later."

Sure enough their children were sent to our school. After two years of religious instruction, they were baptized.

Carlos was intelligent and amiable....

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Carlos was intelligent and amiable. Months before he was baptized, he came from his barrio through sunshine and rain for the Sunday Mass. At school, he always copped the first honors and knew his catechism better than any other child. After his baptism, he was a familiar figure in the confessional and at the communion rail every Sunday. So fervently did he pray that his guardian angel must have been very busy delivering his little petitions to heaven. The Fathers with me often asked themselves, "How will this nice boy turn out later?"

Since our school had no intermediate grades, Carlos was forced to go to the public school for his fifth grade. He was deprived of his religious instruction. There was no

longer anyone to urge him to go to church on Sundays; yet for a while, Carlos remained faithful to his religious duties.

Then came a time when Carlos was no longer to be seen at Mass. Nevertheless, when he met me, he had the courage to look at me straight in the eye. Once when I had the chance to see him alone for a moment, he acknowledged that he had two close friends who were non-Catholics and were light-headed boys. They exercised a strong influence over him.

"My boy," I admonished," continue to pray. Never forget to greet your Blessed Mother morning and evening.

The conductor of a jeepny.

PHOTO A. LAMMINEUR



As long as you are faithful, she will remain your Mother and show you how much she loves you when you least think it."

He promised to pray.

Two years passed. Carlos graduated with honors from the sixth grade. In the meantime his father had died. By God's grace, he was baptized before his death. The mother remained the sole support of the seven small children. Carlos, had remained good-hearted, saw that without his help, the family would not be able to make both ends meet. He, therefore stopped studying and looked for a job in Baguio.

In the city, he found work as a conductor of a jeepney. He received five per cent of the daily collection. He worked conscientiously and received a salary of ninety pesos a month. His first pay envelopes found their way to his mother.

Alas! The poor boy did not know the dangers around him. He fell into the company of his co-laborers who brought him to his downfall. They taught him how to gamble and to drink. They had him understand that to be a full-fledged man, he had to have girl friends. Carlos found girls to be his friends, all right. With them he frequented the show houses. His money was spent for paying these evening entertainments.

He thought himself happy that now he could compare himself favorably with the other boys of seventeen. He left off completely going to the Sunday Mass. Like many others he still-ed his conscience by saying, "I have no more time."

All the while, though, he remained

the friend of the missionaries. Whenever a priest boarded the journey he was conducting, he did not accept the Father's fare. Gallantly he would say, "Father, it has already been paid for."

Once in a while, when I happened to meet him in my visits to Baguio, I asked him, "Do you still pray, Carlos?"

"Yes, Father, I pray my three Hail Mary's".

As the days unraveled into months, the Fathers asked among one another, "Will Carlos lose his faith?"

The news reached us one day that Carlos had been seriously wounded in an accident. At the first opportunity I had, I went to the hospital to visit him. The nurses informed me that for the most part of the day, he was unconscious. They added the consoling information that in his delirium he was heard to say, "Ave Maria, a napnoca iti gracia...Hail Mary, full of grace..."

Before I entered the ward, the doctors warned me that they feared he was going to die. With a prayer in my heart, I sought for him among the rows of the sick and wounded. He was completely swathed in bandages and only his face was free. As I approached, I saw him move his head a little. He bravely managed to twist his lips into a semblance of a smile. "Thanks be to God he is conscious," I breathed. Bending low over him, I cautiously informed him of the danger he was in.

His answer came in labored whispers: "Father, I would still like to live, but God always knows best. Perhaps if I would get well, who



*I wandered lonely as a cloud
that floats on high o'er vales and hills....*

PHOTO C. AERTS

knows I might never get to heaven. It is hard to live well... Father, will you hear my confession?"

There in the midst of the curious gaze of the other patients, Carlos humbly made one of the best confessions I ever heard. In the bottom of his heart he had remained upright. There was always something in him that urged him to be better than he actually was. His evil friends and his bad surroundings had weakened his will, but always it had remained inherently good.

"Father," he said after I had given him the absolution, "I have been faithful to my three Hail Mary's, but seldom have done more. I often thought of the Blessed Virgin whom you taught me to love even before my baptism. I hope now that my Mother will help me to go to heaven."

Indeed, Our Lady was helping him. The following day, he was fully conscious when I brought him Holy Communion. Very devoutly he followed the prayers. I next gave him Extreme Unction and the Papal Blessing. I promised to be back in a couple of days.

Our Lord, however, had other plans. He saw that now Carlos' soul was ready to be gathered to His Heart. That same day, his wounds became infected. At midnight, his Mother Mary came to conduct Carlos—the Igorot boy who might have gone astray, but who, until the end, had remained her faithful child—the Igorot boy who had not forgotten to greet her mornings and evenings—to her abode in heaven. No doubt Carlos is there now singing with the millions of blessed souls the eternal "Ave Maria".