

## Short Stories

**N**OBODY in the town of San Quintin could forget that once there was an American nun who came and lived there for ten years, as the brothers Esteban and Miguel could not. Her name was Sister Margaret of the religious order of the Servants of the Holy Ghost and the elder of the two brothers, Miguel, could remember her very well: well-spaced blue eyes, sparse eyebrows, thin lips, and the beautiful nose like the Virgin's in the town church. Years ago an American nun was here, remember? the towns folk would say in reminiscence, but now she has gone.

The American nun was staying by the little chapel, a short distance from the center of the town, a semi-concrete structure painted grey on the sides, and ivory white in front, with some trees and a green front yard, and a flowering garden bordering the short wood fence that enclosed the rectangular lot. Nothing disrupted the quiet of the place, save the birds twittering and the leaves rustling in the wind.

Most of the people in the town of San Quintin were indifferent about her presence for the first two years.

Even the two brothers, Esteban and Miguel, had the same attitude as the town had for the American nun in the beginning. Esteban had heard

of his mouth, giving the young man a grave look through his eye-glasses. "Why, Miguel, you ought to know that two hundred pesos is two hundred pesos. In words, that doesn't mean anything, but in cash that can buy even your soul! Hombre, no!"

Miguel left the villa quietly, not showing to Don Sebastian that he was hurt, but on the way to their hut he felt so alone and miserable that he started to cry. Esteban was the family he had, he was thinking, and without him he could not imagine how lonely life would be. But in the town of San Quintin, who would really care if his brother would die any day? he thought angrily.

When he passed by the chapel, Sister Margaret was there outside, watering the plants with a sprinkler. She stopped, and asked Miguel, "Why do you look so sad, young man?" Then she noticed the tears that glistened in Miguel's eyes, and all of a sudden she turned serious. "Why, you're crying!" she said with a warm concern and eagerness.

Miguel halted abruptly, feeling very awkward inside as he faced the American nun. He brushed his eyes with his sleeve, to make it seem he was not, not hurt at all, but he couldn't look straight at her, and was rather confused. "No, ma'am," he said, "I am not crying." Miguel remembered the old school rule, and he added, "Good afternoon, ma'-

# The AMERICAN

by FRANK A. ROBLES

about the history of her country, and talks about nuns and nunnery. Miguel was eighteen years old and was a farmhand in the big hacienda of Don Sebastian, and to his young mind only the farm was worth anything nothing else, not even heaven. He would not mind Sister Margaret, no matter how pretty she was, or how different.

But one day Esteban, who had been suffering from consumption of the lungs, was very ill, and all their savings had been washed up. Miguel went to the villa of Don Sebastian, and appealed for a loan. Two hundred pesos only, Don Sebastian, the young man said to the fat-bellied mestizo, cold and shaking slightly before the stocky figure of the hacienda owner.

"Only!" Don Sebastian growled, coughing from the smoke of the cigar he was holding in the corner am." He was a high school boy then, but he could

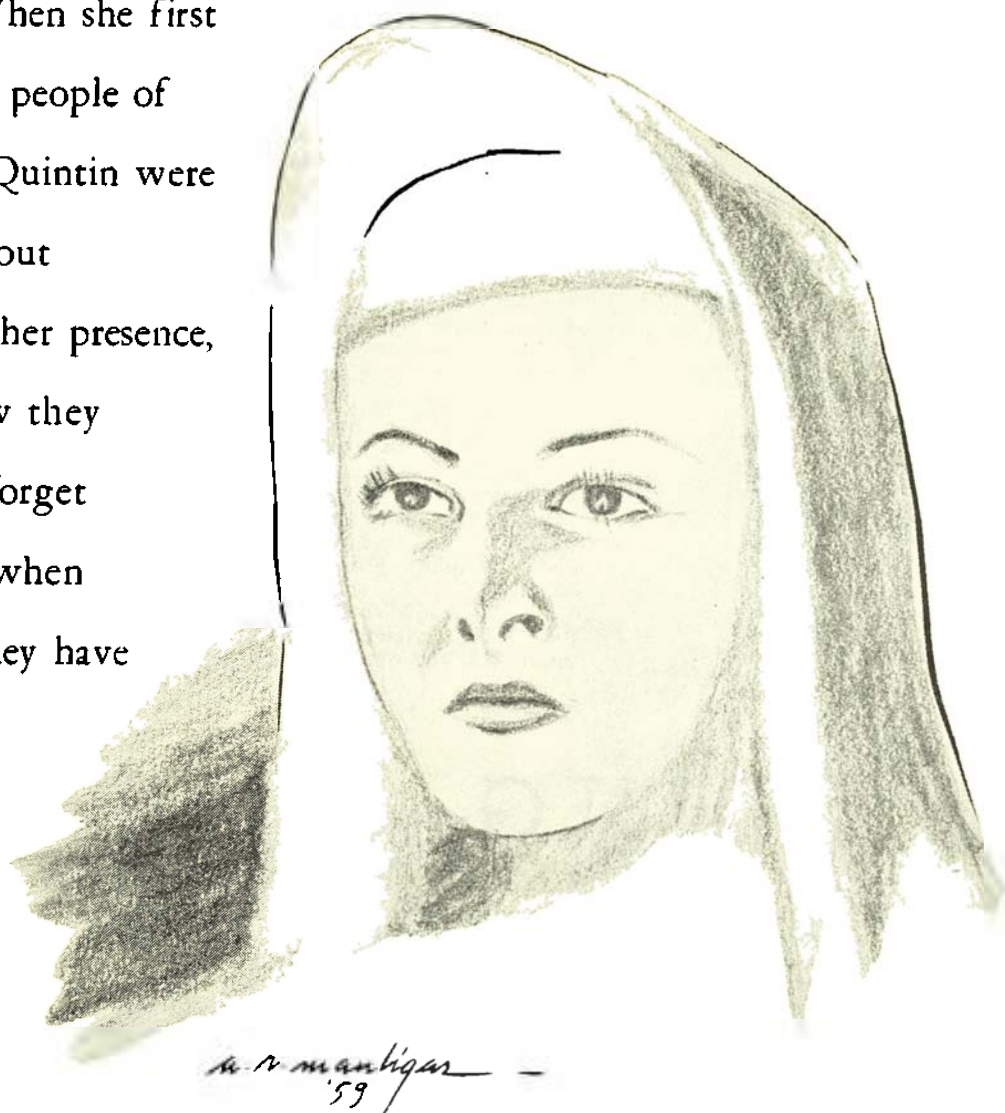
hardly understand the language of the American nun, and he stammered every time he wanted to say something.

Somehow, Sister Margaret had the young man talking about his great problem. She inquired whether nobody in the town could give him a hand, and to this, the young man's answer was eloquent silence. Miguel told the American nun what happened at the villa of Don Sebastian. Sister Margaret looked baffled.

Suddenly, her face brightened up. "You wait here, please," she said to Miguel. She turned and went into her room, and took a silver box from her wardrobe, where there was an expensive diamond ring, about the size of two grains of corn, and

When she first  
came, the people of  
San Quintin were  
indifferent about  
her presence,  
but now they  
could not forget  
her . . . even when  
they have  
turned old  
and gray . . .

# NUN



while looking at it she longingly whispered to herself: Mother, Mother.

Together the two went back to the villa of Don Sebastian, Miguel leading the way. It was nearly dusk, and the place was lighted by a three-horsepower generator. Only Sister Margaret went upstairs, for she figured it would be better if the young man would not be seen by Don Sebastian.

"Why, Sister Margaret, how are you?" Don Sebastian said boisterously, laughing and puffing a cigar. "Oh, it's so nice to see you. Please sit down. Este, Mameng, Sister Margaret is here." The old man settled himself in one of the rattan chairs in the spacious sala of the huge villa. Mameng was his wife, and in the town of San Quintin she was known as Doña Carmen; it was very dignified and aristocratic to be called "Doña."

After a short while, Sister Margaret left the

villa, together with Miguel. With her were the two hundred pesos which the old man had given her, refusing the diamond ring, which she had brought as security, shaking his balding head good humoredly, and saying, "No, no, never mind, it's nothing, it's really nothing at all." Before she and Miguel parted in the evening she gave the money to the young man. "Go to the doctor in the town, and buy whatever medicine he'll prescribe for your brother. I'll see Esteban tomorrow, and I'll pray for him tonight."

Miguel remembered that day, and ever since then he had frequently gone to the chapel to talk with the American nun, for which he soon became the laughing stock among the boys in the town, who clucked their tongues and wagged their heads roguishly. It was a terrific pleasure to be with Sister

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## The American Nun (Continued from page 19)

Margaret listen to her smooth American English. His brother Esteban got well in time, and soon the two of them were often there at the chapel in conversation with Sister Margaret, which made her very happy.

The following year was a year of hunger for the town of San Quintin. Rain did not come for months, and the sun baked the earth with intense heat, till even the weeds were withering from thirst, the farms became barren and nearly lifeless. During that time, Don Sebastian was busy playing his usurious trade and expanding his property with greedy shrewdness. The people in the town made frantic appeals to their patron saint, San Isidro, for rain, making processions and rituals each day. But the heat of the sun did not abate, and in desperation and fatigue the men started to grind their bolos and knives quietly, sullenly, as warriors would in anticipation of war.

Sister Margaret was terribly alarmed. She knew how serious things would get if hunger didn't stop. She mailed a letter at once, addressed to the head of their religious order in the city, asking for relief goods in great amounts. She could not figure out how long hunger would stay, and she was quite surprised that the government in the town would not do anything to avert the danger from rebellion out of discontent and frustration among the masses. "Why has the government not taken any step yet?" she asked Miguel. The young man merely shrugged his shoulder, and spat on the ground contemptuously, muttering under his breath. "The government, damn the government!"

The relief goods came quickly. Sister Margaret requested Miguel to go to the town to tell the people that there was food in the chapel, and soon enough the town folks came rushing noisily. Some men volunteered to assist the American nun distribute the corn flakes, sardines, corned beef, powdered milk, coffee and sugar, which took them the whole morning, and nearly every one got a share. Sister Margaret, then, sent another requisition for clothes and some more food, and the goods that were delivered to her again lasted for a good six weeks. Then rain poured down from the sky one day, and the farmers

plowed merrily. The once starving town of San Quintin held a big fiesta in honor of the patron saint, and in gratitude to Sister Margaret. To her, the people in the town gave a nice banquet at which the key men in the government and important figures in the civic organizations were present. "Oh, I'm so happy, Miguel," Sister sighed to the young man after the affair was over.

Five years later, the American nun died. A bullet from a tommy gun bored through the left side of her body, and wounds were found on the palms of her hands. She dropped by the roadside in the pitch dark evening when the rebels swooped down upon the town of San Quintin; she had come out of the chapel, having got word that Miguel was in town, under the alias of "Commander Lucifer."

Miguel had disappeared from the place two years before that raid. He had got into trouble with Don Sebastian, and through political influence Don Sebastian had him jailed in the municipio. Miguel thought he was being cheated by the Don in his wages. Bitterly he vowed to his brother Esteban that he would get out of the prison and get even by all means. He did, and that evening he was back hunting for the head of Don Sebastian with a .45 caliber pistol, and with his raiding band he had the policemen slaughtered like pigs.

After she got shot, Sister Margaret, however, did not die instantly. Before she died, she felt two strong arms cradle her limp body, and she thought it was Miguel. "Is that you, Miguel?" she asked faintly and panting; She felt droplets touch her face. She knew that was Miguel holding her. "Where have you been, Miguel?" she said again, her voice thinning out, and slowly her head drooped against the arms. Half-consciously she murmured: "Ring the bell and tell the town that God is here," as if she had memorized that line when she was in the grades; then her hands slid to her side, and she was dead.

Nobody in the town of San Quintin could forget that once there was an American nun who came and lived there, as the brothers Esteban and Miguel could not even when their hair had turned grey. ‡

friends. Romy was without a girl yet.

He was walking me home from my evening class. I was in a nasty mood. I saw him for a while back there talking to the "Madame Curie" in class, and an intimate conversation it looked like, too. My work all wasted on the four-eyed monster. Was she the girl?

"Liza, will you come to the dance with me? We'll go together with Tita and her escort."

My pulse quickened. "The special girl—". I had to be sure.

"You are the special girl and more if you will wear this brooch for me. It was grandma's brooch and she was our special girl."

My! I was the girl! ‡

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