**TITLE : THE PRIVATE DIARY OF A NUN**

**SUBTITLE : 12 YEARS OF SILENCE, A LIFETIME OF BREAKING CHAINS**

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**DEDICATION**

To every woman who entered a religious community with a sincere heart, believing that she would find peace, spiritual fulfilment, and a life devoted to God, only to encounter suffering behind doors that were supposed to offer refuge.

To every nun who has endured humiliation in silence, who has gone to bed hungry while food remained within reach, who has suffered abuse at the hands of those she was taught to respect, and who has wondered whether speaking the truth would cost her everything she had sacrificed to build.

To those whose tears were never witnessed, whose wounds were never acknowledged, and whose cries for help were buried beneath the fear of scandal.

This book is also dedicated to the women who found the courage to speak, to those who protected the vulnerable when it was easier to remain silent, and to those who understood that genuine faith can never be an excuse for cruelty.

Above all, I dedicate these pages to every young woman who still believes that serving God should never require surrendering her dignity, her freedom, or her right to live without fear.

May no woman ever mistake abuse for obedience, oppression for holiness, or silence for faithfulness.

And may every soul who has suffered in secret discover that the end of silence can become the beginning of healing.

## PREFACE

There are stories that can be told in a single breath, and there are others that require an entire lifetime before their meaning can be understood.

*The Private Diary of a Nun* belongs to the latter.

At first glance, this is the story of a young woman who leaves her family to embrace religious life. She is filled with hope, guided by faith, and determined to devote herself to the service of God. Like many young women who enter a convent, she believes that the walls of a religious house will protect her from the harshness of the world.

Yet the world she encounters is not the one she imagined.

Behind the routines of prayer, the solemnity of religious ceremonies, and the appearance of spiritual discipline, she gradually discovers a reality that challenges everything she thought she understood about authority, obedience, and human dignity.

Her suffering does not begin with a single dramatic event. It unfolds gradually. A meal disappears from her daily routine. A request for food becomes an offence. Her health deteriorates. Her studies become increasingly difficult. The people around her continue with their lives while she struggles to understand why a place dedicated to the service of God has become a place where she feels abandoned.

Then come experiences that are far more difficult to describe: intimidation, coercion, sexual abuse, and the devastating discovery that those who speak most confidently about holiness are not necessarily the ones who practise it.

This novel explores those contradictions through the intimate voice of Esther, a woman who records her experiences in a private diary. Her words are not those of a detached observer. They are the words of someone who has lived through events she struggles to comprehend, someone who writes because speaking aloud has become too dangerous, too frightening, or too painful.

Her diary becomes her refuge. Within its pages, she can ask questions she would never dare to ask in public. She can acknowledge her anger without pretending to be unaffected. She can confess her exhaustion without being accused of weakness. Most importantly, she can preserve the truth of what happened to her.

But Esther's story is not merely a chronicle of suffering.

It is also the story of a woman who refuses to allow her wounds to determine the limits of her future. She considers leaving the religious life she once embraced with such devotion. She questions her calling. She struggles with the apparent contradiction between the God she loves and the behaviour of those who claim to represent Him.

Nevertheless, she eventually makes a decision that changes the direction of her life.

She will remain, not because she believes that suffering is a requirement of holiness, and not because she accepts the right of others to abuse her, but because she hopes to become the kind of leader who will protect the women who come after her.

Years later, when she is appointed Mother Superior, she begins to challenge practices that have been concealed by fear and obedience. She insists that the women under her responsibility must have access to food, protection, education, and the freedom to report misconduct. She refuses to allow religious titles to become shields for wrongdoing.

Her journey raises questions that extend beyond the walls of a convent.

What happens when obedience is demanded without justice? What becomes of a vocation when those entrusted with spiritual guidance exploit the people who depend upon them? Can a woman preserve her faith after being betrayed by people who taught her to trust them? And what does it mean to forgive when the truth has not yet been acknowledged?

This book does not suggest that every religious community conceals abuse, nor does it claim that the actions of corrupt individuals define the Catholic Church as a whole. Rather, it

examines the consequences of unchecked authority and the danger of protecting an institution's reputation at the expense of vulnerable human beings.

Faith, in its deepest sense, should lead people towards compassion, truth, and responsibility. It should never be used to silence a victim or excuse a crime.

Esther's story is told in the first person because the intimacy of a diary allows the reader to enter the private world of a woman whose public identity often conceals her suffering. Her voice evolves as she grows older. The young woman who once struggled to understand her circumstances gradually becomes someone capable of confronting powerful people and defending those who cannot defend themselves.

Her transformation does not erase the past. Some memories remain painful. Some questions never receive satisfactory answers. Yet her life acquires a purpose that extends beyond her own survival.

As the years pass, Esther learns that courage does not always announce itself through dramatic gestures. Sometimes it begins with a sentence written in a notebook. Sometimes it consists of asking for help, refusing an unwanted touch, opening a kitchen to a hungry woman, or listening without judgment to someone who has been afraid to speak.

And sometimes, courage means telling the truth even when the truth threatens the very world in which one once placed all one's hopes.

The pages that follow invite the reader to accompany Esther from the innocence of her childhood to the trials of her religious formation, through twelve years of silence and towards the responsibilities of leadership and the reflections of old age.

Her diary is a record of pain, but it is also a testimony to endurance, accountability, and the possibility of change.

May every reader who opens this book remember one essential truth: no calling, institution, tradition, or position of authority gives anyone the right to violate another person's dignity.

And may Esther's voice remind those who have suffered in silence that their lives are worth more than the secrets they have been forced to keep.

*From the private diary of Esther*

**CHAPTER ONE : THE GIRL WHO PROMISED HER LIFE TO GOD.**

Dear Diary,

My name is Esther, and before I became known as Mother Esther, before the responsibilities of religious leadership rested upon my shoulders, and long before other women would look to me for protection, I was simply a girl who wanted to belong to God.

When I look back upon my life, I sometimes wonder whether the child I once was would recognise the woman I eventually became. Would she understand the reasons behind my silence ? Would she recognise the faith that remained within me after so many

disappointments? Would she believe that the same convent she once imagined as a sanctuary could become the setting for some of the darkest years of her existence?

I cannot answer those questions with certainty.

What I do know is that my story did not begin with suffering. It began with love, hope, and a sincere desire to serve the Lord.

I was born into a Christian family in Ireland, where faith was not something we remembered only on Sundays. It accompanied us through ordinary days, family difficulties, moments of celebration, and the quiet hours before sleep. Prayer was woven into the fabric of our household so naturally that I cannot remember a time when I did not know the sound of my parents speaking to God.

Our home was modest, but it was rich in things that money could not purchase. We had the comfort of belonging to one another. We had familiar voices around the table, the reassuring presence of our parents, and the conviction that whatever difficulties came our way, we should never forget to pray.

My parents believed that education was important, but they also believed that knowledge without character could become a dangerous possession. They taught us to respect others, to keep our promises, and to remember that a person's dignity did not depend upon wealth, influence, or social position.

My mother, especially, had a quiet way of teaching. She did not need to raise her voice to make herself understood. When she corrected us, she often did so through questions that forced us to examine our own behaviour.

"Esther," she would sometimes ask, "what is the value of knowing the Scriptures if you cannot recognise the suffering of the person standing before you?"

At the time, I thought I understood her meaning.

It would take many years for me to understand how deeply those words would become connected to my own life.

A family shaped by faith

I had two brothers who were preparing for the priesthood at the seminary. Their decision had brought great joy to our family. My parents were proud of them, and although they missed having their sons at home, they supported their formation and prayed for their perseverance.

Whenever my brothers returned during a break in their studies, I listened attentively to their conversations. They spoke about theology, the Scriptures, the sacraments, and the responsibilities that awaited them if they were ordained.

Their lives appeared disciplined and purposeful.

They woke early, followed a demanding schedule, attended classes, studied religious texts, and participated in communal prayer. They were learning not only the doctrines of the Church but also the responsibilities associated with pastoral ministry.

I admired their determination.

Sometimes, I imagined what it would be like to devote one's entire existence to something greater than personal ambition. I wondered what it meant to answer a calling so completely that one's plans for the future were shaped by a promise made to God.

I knew that my path would not be identical to theirs. I was a girl, and my aspirations were different. Nevertheless, I felt that the desire growing within me was no less serious.

I wanted to serve.

I wanted to help those who were lonely, comfort those who were grieving, and offer encouragement to people whose faith had been weakened by hardship. I imagined myself living among women who shared the same devotion, working together in an atmosphere of mutual respect and prayer.

I did not dream of becoming important.

In truth, the idea of authority frightened me more than it attracted me. I wanted a life in which I could be useful without needing recognition.

When I watched my brothers preparing for their future ministry, I often asked myself whether God might also be preparing something for me.

I did not yet understand that a vocation is not simply a desire to do good. It is also a journey of discernment, during which enthusiasm must be accompanied by patience, knowledge, and the willingness to examine one's motives.

At that age, however, I possessed more conviction than experience.

I believed that if my intentions were sincere, the road ahead would eventually become clear.

The first stirrings of my calling

I cannot identify a single day when I decided to give my life to God. There was no extraordinary announcement, no dramatic event witnessed by the entire family, and no moment when I suddenly became a different person.

My desire developed gradually.

It was present when I sat quietly after evening prayer. It accompanied me to church. It returned whenever I thought about the future.

Sometimes, while the congregation sang, I found myself paying less attention to the people around me and more attention to the words being spoken. I would wonder what it meant to surrender one's life to a purpose that could not always be understood in advance.

Other times, I would watch the women who served in the parish and think about the possibility of joining a religious community.

I was particularly interested in the way religious life brought together prayer, study, service, and discipline. I wanted to understand how a woman could organise her entire day around her relationship with God while remaining useful to the people who needed her.

The idea fascinated me.

I began to read more about the Catholic faith. I wanted to understand the meaning of the sacraments, the role of the Church, the importance of the Eucharist, and the foundations of Christian teaching.

My brothers' studies at the seminary had already introduced me to some of these subjects, but I wanted to learn for myself. I did not wish to depend entirely upon what someone else told me. I wanted to read, question, reflect, and develop a mature understanding of the faith I hoped to profess.

My mother encouraged my curiosity.

"If you want to serve God," she told me one evening, "you must learn to distinguish between what you truly understand and what you merely repeat. Faith does not require you to stop thinking."

I remembered those words because they gave me permission to ask questions without feeling that every question was a sign of weakness.

I began to understand that religious devotion and intellectual development were not enemies. A person could love God and still need to study. One could pray sincerely and still require guidance. One could respect religious authority without surrendering the responsibility to think carefully.

These lessons would later become more important to me than I could possibly have imagined.

The gift I did not fully understand

There was another aspect of my childhood that I found difficult to explain.

I possessed a deep sensitivity to spiritual matters. Certain experiences affected me more intensely than they seemed to affect other people. I sometimes had dreams that remained vivid in my memory long after I awoke. There were moments when I felt compelled to pray for someone without knowing exactly why. At other times, an image or a thought would trouble me so deeply that I would spend hours reflecting upon it.

I did not know whether these experiences represented a particular spiritual gift, the workings of an active imagination, or the natural sensitivity of a young person trying to understand the world.

I was careful not to claim knowledge I did not possess.

Still, I felt that these experiences encouraged me to pay attention to my inner life.

When I had a disturbing dream, I wrote it down and considered it quietly rather than immediately declaring it a revelation. When I felt moved to pray for someone, I did so without assuming that I understood the person's circumstances. I learned that spiritual discernment required humility and that an intense feeling was not, by itself, proof of divine instruction.

Nevertheless, my experiences strengthened my desire to learn more about prayer.

I wanted to understand the difference between a dream, an intuition, a temptation, a fear, and what a believer might interpret as a spiritual prompting. I wanted to become more mature in my faith rather than allow my emotions to govern my decisions.

I also developed a habit that would remain with me throughout my life: writing down what I experienced and what I thought about it.

At first, I used an ordinary notebook.

I recorded questions from my religious studies, passages from the Bible that had impressed me, and prayers I wanted to remember. Sometimes I wrote about the people I had encountered during the day. On other occasions, I simply expressed my gratitude for the life I had been given.

I had no idea that writing would eventually become one of the few ways in which I could preserve my sense of self.

Back then, my notebook contained the thoughts of a hopeful girl.

It did not yet contain the testimony of a wounded woman.

What religious life meant to me

As my interest in religious life became more serious, I began to study what joining a convent would actually require.

I learned that becoming a nun was not a matter of expressing a desire and immediately receiving permission to remain in a religious house. Religious formation involved stages, discernment, instruction, and a gradual commitment.

A woman considering such a vocation needed to understand the community she hoped to join, its spirituality, its rules, and the work expected of its members. She needed time to discover whether her desire was enduring and whether she could live the practical demands of community life.

The process could include periods of initial contact, postulancy, novitiate, and, eventually, religious profession, although the exact arrangements varied between religious institutes.

I found the idea of this gradual formation reassuring.

It suggested that a vocation should be examined carefully rather than accepted merely because a young woman felt enthusiastic. I imagined that the women responsible for my

formation would guide me with wisdom, correct me when necessary, and help me develop the maturity required for a life of service.

I expected discipline.

I expected sacrifice.

I expected that there would be days when prayer felt difficult and work seemed exhausting.

What I did not expect was cruelty disguised as discipline or humiliation presented as a test of obedience.

At that stage of my life, I could not imagine that someone might deliberately deprive another person of food while insisting that the community's spiritual principles remained intact.

I could not imagine that a religious title might be used to intimidate a young woman into silence.

Nor could I imagine that anyone would attempt to persuade me that my body belonged to another person simply because that person possessed authority within a religious institution.

Those possibilities were entirely outside the world I had constructed in my mind.

I believed that the people who had devoted their lives to God would understand the seriousness of their responsibilities.

I believed that the language of compassion, service, and humility would be reflected in their conduct.

I was young, but my trust was sincere.

The decision that changed my future

The possibility of joining a religious community abroad eventually became a practical consideration rather than a distant dream.

The community I hoped to enter was in England. The prospect of leaving Ireland filled me with a mixture of excitement and apprehension.

I would be separated from my parents and brothers. I would have to adjust to a different environment, become familiar with unfamiliar routines, and learn how to live with women whose personalities and backgrounds might differ greatly from my own.

There would be new expectations, new responsibilities, and a new language of daily life, even though English was already familiar to me.

I understood that I would be entering a structured community rather than an ordinary household. Meals, prayer, work, study, and periods of rest would be organised according to a timetable. Personal preferences would sometimes have to give way to communal responsibilities.

I welcomed the challenge.

I imagined waking before dawn to prepare for the morning Office, joining the other sisters in prayer, attending Mass when scheduled, studying the Scriptures, and carrying out whatever duties were assigned to me.

I imagined the chapel in the early morning, when the rest of the world was still quiet. I imagined the soft turning of pages during the readings, the measured rhythm of communal prayer, and the feeling of belonging to a group of women who had chosen a similar path.

I imagined working beside them in the kitchen, helping to prepare meals, keeping the house clean, and supporting those who needed assistance.

Most of all, I imagined that I would grow.

I wanted to become a woman whose faith was not merely an inheritance from her parents but a conviction strengthened by knowledge, experience, and service.

When the time came to prepare for my departure, I began organising my belongings.

I chose practical clothes, packed my books, and gathered the personal items I considered necessary. Among them was my notebook.

It was small enough to carry without difficulty, yet it contained some of the most important thoughts I had ever written.

I also took a Bible that had accompanied me through many years of prayer. Its pages reminded me of familiar passages, family discussions, and moments when a single verse had helped me find the words I needed.

Before leaving, I spent time with my family.

My parents did not pretend that separation would be easy. They knew that I was leaving the security of home to undertake a demanding commitment. Their encouragement was accompanied by the understandable concern of people who loved their daughter and wanted her to be safe.

My brothers, who understood something of the discipline of religious formation, encouraged me to remain attentive, to study diligently, and to remember that humility did not mean abandoning sound judgment.

Their words stayed with me.

I was grateful for the confidence my family placed in me. I wanted to honour their support and demonstrate that the decision I had made was not an impulsive escape from ordinary life.

I was choosing a vocation.

Or, at least, that was what I believed.

My last night at home

On the evening before my departure, I found it difficult to sleep.

My belongings were ready. The journey had been arranged. There was nothing practical left to do, yet my mind continued to move between excitement and uncertainty.

I thought about the years ahead.

Would I become a good nun? Would I be capable of fulfilling the responsibilities entrusted to me? Would my spiritual life deepen? Would I be able to support other women in the way I had always hoped?

I also wondered whether I would ever feel homesick.

The thought embarrassed me a little. I had imagined that a strong vocation would make such concerns insignificant. I was beginning to realise, however, that a sincere calling did not remove every human feeling.

I could love God and still miss my family.

I could desire a life of service and still feel afraid of the unknown.

I could be determined to leave and still grieve the ordinary comforts I was leaving behind.

That night, I opened my notebook and wrote for a long time.

I recorded my hopes, my fears, and the promises I wanted to make to myself. I asked God to help me remain faithful without becoming proud, obedient without becoming thoughtless, and compassionate without losing the courage to recognise wrongdoing.

I prayed for my brothers, for my parents, and for the women I would soon meet.

Then I wrote one final sentence before closing the notebook:

*Lord, I am giving You my life because I believe that love is at the heart of Your calling. Teach me to serve You with a sincere heart, and never allow me to forget the dignity of the people You place in my path.*

I read the words once more.

They seemed simple enough.

I could not have known how difficult it would become to hold on to their meaning.

A new beginning

The journey to England marked the beginning of a new chapter in my life.

As I travelled away from the familiar places of my childhood, I thought about the people who had helped me reach that moment. I thought about my parents' prayers, my brothers' example, and the lessons I had learned through years of religious instruction.

I was leaving behind the life I knew in order to embrace one I believed would bring me closer to God.

I did not travel with suspicion.

I did not expect to find enemies among people who shared my faith.

I did not prepare myself for the possibility that I might one day need to defend my right to eat, to study, to rest, or to say no.

I was going towards a future I had imagined with hope.

When I finally approached the place where I would begin my religious formation, I felt a quiet excitement rise within me. I wondered what the chapel would look like, how the sisters would welcome me, and what my first days in the community would teach me.

I carried my Bible close to me and kept my notebook safely among my belongings.

I believed that I was taking the first steps towards the life God had prepared for me.

Perhaps that belief was not entirely mistaken. Perhaps the path ahead would eventually lead me towards a purpose I could not yet understand.

But I would have to pass through experiences that no young woman should ever be required to endure.

There would be days when I would question everything I had been taught. There would be nights when I would struggle to find words for my prayers. There would be moments when the people I had been taught to respect would make me afraid of them.

And there would come a time when the little notebook I carried so carefully would become the only place where I felt free to tell the truth.

I did not know any of this as I began my journey.

I knew only that I wanted to serve God.

I was young. I was hopeful. I believed that sincerity would protect me from the worst that human beings could do.

I was wrong about that last belief.

But I was not wrong to want to live a life of faith.

And so, with a Bible in my bag, a notebook in my possession, and a prayer upon my lips, I entered the first chapter of a life that would test everything I believed about God, humanity, and the meaning of courage.

*End of Chapter One*

**CHAPTER TWO : THE HOUSE BEHIND THE CHAPEL**

**The first six months**

Dear Diary,

I had always imagined that the walls of a convent would protect the peace of my soul. I believed that behind those walls, away from the distractions of the world, I would find women who had chosen the same path as I had: women who wanted to serve God, discipline their desires, deepen their understanding of the Scriptures, and dedicate their lives to something greater than themselves.

I was wrong about many things, although I did not discover my mistake immediately.

When I first arrived in England, I was overwhelmed by the unfamiliarity of my surroundings. The journey had left me tired, but beneath my exhaustion lay a quiet excitement. I had finally reached the place where I hoped to begin the most important chapter of my life.

The religious house stood within an extensive ecclesiastical property. Its buildings were old, its corridors long, and its grounds considerably larger than I had expected. Beyond the main residence stood a chapel, administrative buildings, and other facilities connected with the religious community. Farther away, on another part of the property, were buildings used by priests and members of the clergy.

The place had a solemn appearance. Its architecture seemed to invite silence, while the chapel, with its rows of pews and its sanctuary, gave the impression of a place where the world had agreed to step aside so that the soul might turn towards God.

I remember looking at the building and feeling grateful.

I told myself that I had arrived where I was meant to be.

I had no reason to suspect that the place which inspired such confidence in me would eventually become associated with some of the most painful memories of my life.

Five women beneath one roof

There were five women living in the house, including me.

The woman responsible for supervising our daily life was an experienced religious sister. She was not the Mother Superior of the wider congregation, but she occupied a position of authority within our residence. She coordinated our routines, assigned duties, and ensured that the community followed its established practices.

At first, I found her manner reassuring.

She appeared organised and confident. She knew how the house operated, understood the requirements of religious life, and seemed familiar with the practical difficulties of maintaining a community.

The other sisters had their own personalities and responsibilities. Some appeared reserved, while others were more sociable. We were not identical in temperament, but I assumed that our shared vocation would provide the foundation for mutual respect.

The house had a rhythm of its own.

We rose early. The morning began with personal preparation, followed by communal prayer according to the schedule of the community. We gathered in the chapel for the appropriate part of the Liturgy of the Hours, the Church's tradition of prayer at different times throughout the day.

Depending on the schedule, our day included morning prayer, Mass, meals, work, study, and other responsibilities. We read passages from Scripture, listened to spiritual reflections, and were encouraged to examine our conduct in the light of Christian teaching.

The Eucharist held a central place in our lives. During Mass, we listened to readings from the Old and New Testaments, heard the priest's homily, joined in the prayers of the faithful, and participated in the liturgy according to the Church's practice.

There were also moments of silence.

Sometimes we prayed individually. Sometimes we meditated upon a passage from the Gospels. At other times, we attended catechetical instruction or studied aspects of Catholic doctrine, the sacraments, and the moral responsibilities associated with our vocation.

I enjoyed these moments.

I wanted to understand the faith I had chosen to embrace. I believed that a woman who dedicated her life to God should continue learning throughout her life. Prayer was essential, but so were knowledge, reflection, and the ability to understand the teachings she was expected to follow.

My university studies were another important part of my life. I was determined to develop intellectually, because I believed that education would help me become more useful in the service of others.

I did not consider learning incompatible with humility. On the contrary, I thought that the more I understood, the more carefully I would need to exercise judgment.

At the beginning, everything seemed to fit together.

We prayed together. We worked together. We shared meals. We attended religious services and carried out the duties assigned to us.

I began to feel that I was finding my place.

For the first time since leaving my family, I allowed myself to believe that I might be happy in my new surroundings.

I could not have imagined how quickly that confidence would begin to crumble.

The first six months

The first months passed without any incident that I considered alarming.

I followed the timetable, completed my responsibilities, and attended my university courses. I tried to be attentive to the needs of the other sisters. Whenever I could help with a household task, I did so willingly.

I was not looking for special treatment.

I wanted to learn, to pray, and to become a good religious woman.

Then, gradually, something changed.

It began with food.

At first, I did not understand what was happening. There were occasions when the meal prepared for the community was served, but my portion was missing or considerably smaller than those of the other women.

I assumed that there had been a mistake.

Perhaps the cook had miscalculated the portions. Perhaps someone had forgotten that I had not yet eaten. Perhaps the food had been distributed before I arrived.

I tried not to attach too much importance to isolated incidents.

I did not want to become suspicious of people without reason.

The following day, however, I noticed that the situation was not improving.

On some mornings, breakfast was unavailable to me even though the others had eaten. Later, I found myself excluded from lunch. Eventually, there were evenings when I went to bed without having eaten dinner.

The most confusing part was that the house did not appear to lack food.

There were provisions in the kitchen. There were meals prepared for the community. The other sisters continued to eat, and nothing about the household suggested that we were experiencing a shortage.

Yet I was increasingly unable to obtain something as basic as a meal.

I tried asking discreetly.

Sometimes I received an evasive answer. At other times, my request appeared to irritate the person to whom I addressed it.

If I attempted to take something from the refrigerator or freezer because I was hungry, the reaction could be immediate.

Why had I taken it?

Who had given me permission?

Did I think I could help myself to anything I wanted?

I found these questions difficult to comprehend.

I was not taking food to waste it. I was not trying to challenge anyone's authority. I was hungry.

And I could not understand why hunger had suddenly become something for which I had to justify myself.

I began to feel ashamed of asking.

That shame was one of the most painful aspects of the situation. Hunger is a physical need, but when someone repeatedly makes you feel guilty for trying to satisfy it, the experience begins to affect your sense of worth.

I started questioning myself.

Was I becoming demanding? Was there a rule I had failed to understand? Had I done something that justified this treatment?

I examined my conduct, searching for an explanation.

I found none.

Still, I remained silent.

I had entered religious life believing in obedience. I did not yet understand that obedience could be manipulated by people who wanted others to accept injustice without question.

I thought patience would resolve the situation.

I thought that if I continued to behave correctly, the problem would eventually disappear.

I did not know that the silence I was practising would become increasingly difficult to break.

A body growing weaker

The human body can endure a great deal, but it cannot live indefinitely on hope and prayer alone.

My strength began to decline.

At first, I felt tired more frequently than usual. I struggled to concentrate during my studies and found it increasingly difficult to remain attentive during long periods of work or prayer.

I experienced dizziness. Standing for too long became uncomfortable. I sometimes felt so weak that even ordinary tasks required an effort I could scarcely explain.

My university work suffered.

I had always taken my education seriously, but I could no longer give my studies the attention they deserved. I read the same passages repeatedly without absorbing their meaning. My concentration wandered, and the simplest assignments seemed more difficult than before.

I was frightened by the changes in my body.

Yet I continued to tell myself that I must persevere.

I did not want my family to worry. I did not want to be considered incapable of managing the life I had chosen. Above all, I did not know how to explain what was happening inside the house.

How could I tell someone that I was going hungry in a religious community where meals were being served every day?

How could I explain that I was afraid to take food from a kitchen that contained enough provisions for everyone?

The situation sounded almost unbelievable, even to me.

There came a point when my body could no longer conceal the consequences of what I was experiencing.

I collapsed.

I remember the confusion surrounding those moments, the weakness that seemed to overwhelm me, and the frightening realisation that I could no longer force myself to continue as though nothing were wrong.

I needed medical attention.

At the hospital, my condition was assessed, and the effects of inadequate nourishment and dehydration became a serious concern.

For the first time in weeks, I was in a place where my physical condition could be examined without requiring me to justify why I needed help.

I should have felt relieved.

Instead, I felt an enormous sadness.

I had left my family to serve God. I had accepted the discipline of religious life willingly. I had worked hard to become a responsible member of the community.

And now I was lying in a hospital bed, weakened by circumstances I could barely explain.

When the sisters came to visit, they expressed surprise that I had become so ill.

There was food in the house, they indicated. The community had provisions. How could I have reached such a condition?

I listened to their words and struggled to understand them.

They spoke as though the existence of food automatically meant that I had access to it.

But those were two entirely different things.

Food could be present in a kitchen and still be inaccessible to the person who needed it. A household could possess sufficient provisions while one of its members was deprived of meals.

The difference was not difficult to understand.