



# Heaven Begins Now

a Serialization of

## All The Way To Heaven

by Elizabeth Sherrill

About Mea's death I will write when I come to consider the heaven that awaits us beyond this life. The rest of her earthly journey is swiftly told. The year John and I married, her granddaughter, Cecily, was born, the child of her son, Richard's, short-lived marriage. Mea befriended his ex-wife and adored the little girl. As Cecily grew older, I watched the destructive pattern repeat itself. Cecily's mother didn't understand this exceptional child. The girl had refined instincts that Mea must defend against the commonplace influences of her home.



## Cecily

John and I tried in vain to show Mea what she was doing. Cautions were powerless against those love-starved early years. The sad drama was replayed. Mea gripped her granddaughter as she had the wax-faced doll, and forfeited the relationship with both mother and child.

### Imperfect Image

In Chappaqua Mea continued to be a cherished visitor, our three children looking forward to her coming as eagerly as my brother and sister and I had. Then at eighty-four, following a stroke that robbed her of speech, Mea entered Westchester County's home for the aged.

By then our children were grown and married, and writing assignments were keeping John and me on the road. But as often as I could, I would follow the chlorine-scented hallways to the ward where Mea's bed was the second on the left. In warm weather I would wheel her outside, otherwise to a corner of the Day Room, where I would hold her hand and converse for us both.

As one, two, three speechless years passed, I'd find her more and more often asleep. I'd sit by her bed, thinking about her life from orphanage to county home, where from beginning to end for this gallant lady there'd been no *pied a terre*.

I'd think about my journey, too, and the role Mea played in it. I had found Jesus the Way, by this time. In Mea he'd manifested his glad-heartedness and his compassion. But through friends too he reveals those qualities in ourselves that separate us from him. What about my readiness to feel superior to other people?

I had lots of time to ask this question during those silent vigils in the ward, and I received an answer that, for now anyhow, satisfies me.

*I was present in Mea's singling out of you, I believe I heard Jesus say. When she told you that you were special, exceptional, unique in all the world, it was I who was speaking.*

What I hadn't heard from Mea, he went on, what was missing in the image of him as reflected in her, was that each person on earth was special, exceptional, unique in all the world. *I wish every young girl had a Mea to tell her how much she matters.* To know myself infinitely valued, he told me, is to see into his heart. To judge someone else to be of less value is to miss that heart altogether.

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