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Final vows handwritten by each of the novices — many stay up all night to prepare them — held tightly in the hand of Mother Teresa.

CHAPTER 10

Final Vows — Special Mass

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A FEW DAYS AFTER RETURNING TO CALCUTTA from Varanasi, Sister Deena who oversaw the volunteers asked me if I would be interested in photographing two very special ceremonies for the Motherhouse at the end of November. One was a Mass during which the novices would be taking their first vows and the other was a Mass for the Sisters taking their final vows as lifelong members of the Missionaries of Charity.

I was stunned by this request since, as a rule, Mother Teresa and her organization rarely requested such services from a photographer. But now I was being given the opportunity to document the most sacred events of the year held by the Missionaries of Charity. I would be working for the woman I most admired in the world! I told Sister Deena that I would be leaving for a brief trip to Bangalore, but would return to Calcutta in time for both masses.

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Two weeks later, I registered for a second time at the Circular Hotel. In preparation for my assignment I had purchased film in Bangalore, but the battery pack for my flash unit was out of power. The recharger had blown up — overheated by the Indian electricity system. As a photographer, I was in a terrible dilemma. I didn't have the technical equipment necessary for my assignment.

As a last resort, I tracked down a camera repair shop in an alley behind a clothing merchandise warehouse. The man who owned the shop couldn't help me but was very considerate, sending one of his employees to accompany me to scout for electrical stores that might carry a compatible unit for my flash. We walked through the maze of streets near Howrah Station and into half a dozen shops without success.

I prayed on a street corner for a few seconds, and then my companion and I crossed the street to the last shop in the area. The tall man behind the counter took one look at my battery and without a word, turned and found a contraption on the shelf. He cut a few wires and plugged it into my unit. I was astonished to see a green light suddenly turn on. It actually worked!