



BRIEF RETREATS

A secular traveler discovers that New England monasteries are good places to rest, to contemplate, and even to restore one's soul

Article by John Sedgwick

"Surely the Lord is in this place; and I knew it not."

—Genesis 28:16



tall, bony young man in white and black robes led me to my room. He opened a low, arched door on long, Gothic hinges. It's the bishop's quarters, he explained. Only the bishop has never been here. He eyed me for a moment, his shaved head gleaming under the light, before adding that dinner would be served in a few minutes, at quarter to five. Vespers would follow right after. Then, in a swirl of robes, he withdrew.

That was Brother Luke, a Trappist monk. I was to spend the night at his monastery, St. Joseph's, in the farming town of Spencer, outside Worcester. Built by the monks in 1952 out of rocks pulled from these fields, the monastery is long and low, with chapel, refectory, and dormitory all shooting off from a small central cloister filled with statues of the Virgin

Mary. The town's rolling hills were just visible out my latticed window—stern and black under the still-glowing sky.

Brought up as a lackadaisical Protestant, I have always been fascinated by people who dedicate themselves completely to their God. Now I would have a chance to see the mechanics of such devotion firsthand. Along with ten other men, priests mostly, I would be on retreat, as the expression is. The others were here to refresh their faith. I was here to find mine.

The tradition of accepting guests into the monastery goes back to Christ's New Testament declaration that he would return to earth as a stranger. Monks, then, have a mandate to be hospitable to strangers. But they still enjoy their solitude. At St. Joseph's, guests are confined to the guest house. As I noticed on the way in, a stern notice, "Monastic (Continued on page 145)





Brief Retreats

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Cloister—No Entry," marks the limit of the retreatants' welcome.

...

After Luke left, I sat down on the hard bed and considered my surroundings. I'm familiar with the distress one feels at the prospect of spending the night—the most vulnerable part of the day—in a strange place. But I didn't feel it yet. I felt, instead, oddly relaxed, as though there, with the stone walls radiating their coolness against my back, I had somehow gotten to the bottom of things.

...

I caught the first glimpse of my fellow retreatants at dinner. I didn't actually meet them until later, for the retreatants' meals are eaten in silence. I took a place next to an imposing prelate with a silver crucifix and waited. Finally Brother Luke burst through the kitchen doors, bearing plates steaming with half-chickens, peas, and potatoes. When everyone was served, Luke said grace: "Thank you, O Lord, for this food. And may our house be filled with your love."

Everyone dug in, silently. Then there was a loud click, and the recorded voice of a British Jesuit came over a loudspeaker and began talking about Christ. I didn't pay much attention, being absorbed in the question of how, without breaking the silence, I could get my clerical neighbor to pass me the tea. Eventually, the priest turned to me and whispered, "Would you like some tea?"

For dessert, we had chocolate-chip cookies.

...

Only under unusual circumstances are the seventy-five monks at St. Joseph's allowed to leave, for they have taken a vow of "stability," binding them to one monastery for life. They have also taken vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience to the rules of the order.

The life of these Cistercians of the Strict Observance, as Trappists are officially titled, is austere in the extreme. It used to be even more so, requiring weekly self-flagellation, a strict code of silence (with necessary communication made in sign language), and fasts nine months out of the year. Those practices ceded to the Second Vatican Council reforms of the 1960s, but few comforts of modern life have crept in to replace them. In the main, monastic conduct still reflects the regulations laid down by Saint Benedict nearly 1,500 years ago. The monks rise at three-thirty in the morning for matins and lauds, which constitute the first of the seven canonical hours they observe in the chapel every day of the year; they retire at eight after complin, the last one. Aside from the nearly four hours spent in chapel, their time is taken up with private meditation, study of the Scriptures, and work. Because the Trappists refuse to live

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off charity, the abbey at Spencer supports itself by running a commercial jelly factory, Trappist Preserves, by manufacturing religious vestments, in their Holy Rood Guild, and by selling hay and corn to local farmers.

The monastery has no TVs or radios, but the monks make some attempt in their free time to keep up with the outside world, by reading the *Globe*. The abbot allows them to see only the front pages, lest they should become too absorbed in secular affairs. The Catholic journal, *The Pilot*, is available in full. The monks eat their vegetarian meals (only retreatants eat meat) in silence, while one of their number reads from a book chosen by the abbot. A recent selection, a long biography of Mary Tudor, was not well received. "I was relieved when she finally passed away," one monk confided to me.

And so the monk's life goes until he dies—which, because of the healthfulness of the diet and the regularity of the routine, often doesn't occur until he is well into his nineties. Then the monk is buried in a small plot beside the cloister, dressed in the habit he has worn all his life, the cowl pulled over his head. No coffin is used. The rest of the community attends the brief ceremony singing hymns. It is a time of rejoicing, for none of the monks has the slightest doubt that his dead brother has gone to walk with his God at last.

...

After dinner the retreat master, Father George, came up to me, robes swishing. An old man with scanty hair, he had been very kind to me on the phone. But now he came right to the point. "You write for *Boston Magazine*?" My heart sank: I knew what was coming. "Isn't that the outfit that wrote about our cardinal?" It was a rhetorical question; he'd read all about the magazine's controversial 1978 article in *The Pilot*. "The abbot has told me to tell you that you are not to speak to any of the monks." That was that.

Father George explained that the monastery had had bad times with journalists. Last summer, a Jewish reporter had come on retreat without identifying himself and had even taken the Eucharist. He went home, wrote up his experience in his hometown paper, and before long the *New York Times* had picked up the story: JEW TAKES HOLY SACRAMENT AT TRAPPIST MONASTERY. There was a big stink among Catholics over that. The abbey still gets letters about it.

...

The Trappists take their name from La Grande Trappe, the monastery in northern France, built, curiously enough, in the shape of an overturned four-master.

Armand-Jean le Bouthillier de Rancé, the founder of the order, was not a typical monk. An aristocratic cleric in his youth (he was the godson of Richelieu), he was a prime example of the general

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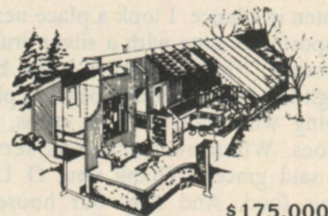


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Catholic decadence in the late Middle Ages. He wore fancy clothes, caroused, and chased after women. One woman in particular, the beautiful and charming Duchesse de Montbazon, bewitched him. No one knows how far Armand-Jean got with the duchess (she was twice his age), but the young cleric was devoted to her. One day, he learned that she had fallen sick. He burst into her room over the protestations of her attendants only to find his beloved's body stretched out in a coffin. Her head lay on a nearby table, wrapped in gauze.

Armand-Jean was informed that the duchess had in fact died a natural death. The undertaker had removed her head merely to fit the body into the coffin. That didn't appease him. Desolate, he sold his chateau, gave away all his money, and retired in 1664 to the nearby Grande Trappe with his valet, whom he turned into a monk. Together they set an example of ascetic austerity that won them a wide following and is still emulated three centuries later.

...

"Do you believe in God?"

Pete O'Donnell, a lay priest from Portland, who was at the Worcester monastery on retreat, asked the question that first evening, when we went for a walk. An heir to a beer fortune, Pete (not his real name) was something of a joker. When he handed a priest a glass of cider after dinner, Pete smirked, "That'll keep you running." The priest glowered with mock irritation and shook his cane while the other retreatants laughed.

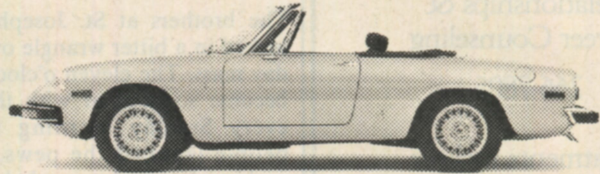
But the question he posed me was serious. I had to tell him that the last time I felt religious was when I was ten. My parents had to drag me to church in those days. But miraculously, as soon as I got inside the old, stone Episcopal church and saw the big, gold cross on the altar, I would suffer such remorse that I'd want to cry. I felt that in my reluctance to go to church, I had let Jesus down. My relationship with God had gone downhill from there, I told Pete.

"But God is the zenith. He's everything!" Pete exclaimed, extending his arms. We walked on in silence awhile as the dusk settled over the mottled hills. Then Pete blurted out, "Well, you don't believe that when you're dead, you're dead, do you?" That was about the size of it, I said. "No everlasting life?" he asked, astonished. Nope. Just then, the wind sent a leaf skidding across the pavement. To my surprise, I imagined it was sent by the Holy Ghost.

...

At around seven, I went to chapel for complin. The building was long and narrow. It had a steeply arched roof and smelled of cedar. The monks came gliding in over the polished tiles one by one, like skaters on a pond, with their robes billowing behind them. They were of all ages and all descriptions—fat, thin, short,

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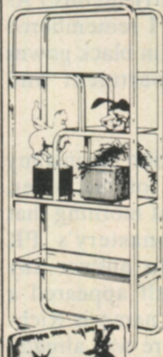
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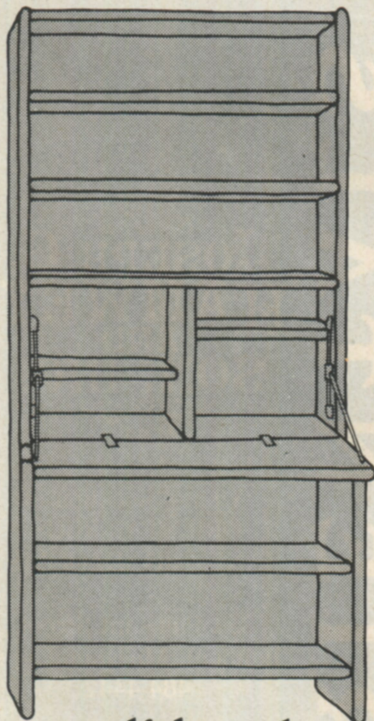
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tall, handsome, homely. Several Asians and two blacks were among them. The service went just as Benedict had prescribed a millennium and a half ago: some chanted psalms, a reading from the gospel, a prayer.

Brother Luke, who leads all the singing, played the guitar while the monks sang. In the candlelight, it was like a sing-along at camp. At the end of the service, the abbot came over and with a flick of the wrist, sprinkled all the retreatants with holy water.

...

The brothers at St. Joseph's were once locked in a bitter wrangle over their Sunday mass. The eleven o'clock service had become so popular with the locals that every Sunday morning hundreds of people jammed the pews, clogged the parking lot, and trampled the grounds. Many of the monks were offended. Others felt they had an obligation to the outside world. The discussion became heated over whether the public should be barred from the services. "Feelings ran pretty high," one monk told me. Finally, though, a compromise was reached. Mass would be open to the public, but the hour was moved back from eleven to half-past six. That did the trick. Nobody but the monks showed up.

...

After talking to Pete O'Donnell late into the night, I returned to my little, stone bedroom to sleep. Exhausted from defending my uncertain faith, I slept soundly that night, hardly moving until Pete woke me up at six-thirty for morning prayer. (Mercifully, we'd been allowed to skip the three-thirty matins.) As we walked to the chapel, I remembered that I'd dreamed that men in black gowns had broken into my apartment and hauled off all my furniture.

...

Despite the abbot's injunction against my conversing with members of the order, Father George told me that morning that Brother Placid, the monastery's PR monk, would be happy to answer any questions. The man himself appeared a short time later. His legal name is Richard, he explained. But there was already one Richard in the community when he arrived twenty-five years ago, on what happened to be St. Placid's feast day.

Placid, a burly, bearded forty-five-year-old, wasn't very placid, actually. He was quick to laugh, with a rather unexpected *hyuk, hyuk, hyuk*. He wore a hulking digital watch.

Yet, the monastic life suited him. "Monks have to be content with lives of complete regularity," Placid said. "Otherwise they'd be climbing the walls after a week."

Prospective monks—usually young men who grew up taking their Catholicism more seriously than did their parents—have to undergo extensive interviews and pass an array of psychological



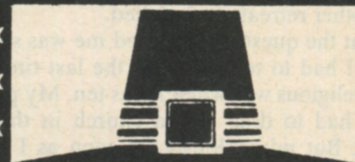
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and intelligence tests to show they can handle the routine. Once they enter the monastery they have about ten years to decide if they want to make the arrangement permanent and take solemn vows. Only about half do. There is, however, no shortage of monks at St. Joseph's. All seventy-five places are full. And its waiting list has 150 names on it.

I asked Placid how he overcame the worldly temptations of money, power, and sex. "I pursue them," he replied, "by thinking them through to their logical conclusion. I daydream about them. I imagine I have all the money in the world, or all the power. But, I think, then what? I see how boring it would be." He never got to sex.

The monks do have a few diversions. Brother Placid is a fan of Graham Greene and Helen McGinnis, as well as St. Augustine and Thomas Merton. He likes adventure stories. Placid, who plays the organ during the services, listens to classical music on an old phonograph at the monastery. He doesn't go for pop. As for disco, which he's heard about, he says, "I think it would make me physically sick." For exercise, Placid jogs. Many of the monks do, regularly pounding about the countryside in their sweat suits. A few of the monks like to shoot baskets out back, but there are never enough players for a full game. Others play softball—catch, mostly. A couple of the monks got excited about the Red Sox last summer, following them as closely as they could without sports pages or TV, and were heartbroken at the Sox' autumn collapse.

...

When Pete O'Donnell told Father George this morning that he had to make a board meeting of his beer company and couldn't spare the fifteen minutes for breakfast, the old monk just looked at him. "What's fifteen minutes?" he asked. Pete couldn't answer that. He stayed for breakfast.

When he finally took off, he left the monks a case of beer.

...

As I drove home, that morning's mass stuck in my mind. What with the Jewish reporter and all, I hadn't ventured to take the sacrament, but I did move into the choir stalls with the other retreatants when it came time. I took a seat next to a somber monk with a scruffy beard. The choir was bathed in light. I could feel the chapel swell with the sound of the monks' chanting.

Then came the kiss of peace. With some anxiety, I turned to the strange monk beside me. He turned to me. His face lit up. He grabbed my hand in both of his and smiled warmly. "Peace be with you," he said.

And with you.

"In my Father's house are many mansions."
—John 14:2
Excited by my experience at St. Joseph's,

I checked around to find out what other religious retreats were available to laymen like me and discovered several dozen around New England. Since I was interested as much for their amenities as for their religious offerings, I had a slightly awkward time making telephone inquiries. The cheery voice on the other end of the line would want to tell me about the retreats for married couples and the hours of services, and I'd want to know about its atmosphere and view. I felt a little guilty about this, of course. I settled on the St. Francis Friary, a former mansion that, I managed to find out, was a short walk from the seashore at Rye Beach, New Hampshire.

My friend Alice came along. On the phone setting up reservations, I explained that we just wanted to get away "to talk things over." The gentle voice on the other end said fine.

The friary was a colossal five-story Tudor mansion, complete with half-timbered exterior. The Atlantic Ocean was, as promised, a few hundred yards away. I wondered what St. Francis, who insisted his followers embrace poverty and live in nothing grander than a hut made of twigs and branches, would think of the place.

The floors creaked beneath heavy wall-to-wall carpeting as Alice and I approached the woman at the desk in the broad front hall. She gave us no keys, just room numbers (two).

"This place is enormous," Alice exclaimed as we trudged past room after room in search of our quarters. Mine was a spacious, twin-bedded chamber with a view of the sea; Alice's was a converted bathroom in the women's wing.

...

The friary was built in the twenties as a "gentlemen's resort" by the sea. But the number of gentlemen plummeted with the Crash, and the building became a women's college, then a military school, then, finally, the friary. You can follow the building's history through the furnishings—the flowery plates in the bookshelves and brass chandeliers from its hotel days, the rec room from its academic years. The only indications that the place is now a friary, besides the chapel tucked away in the lobby, are the felt banners with religious mottoes, the paintings of the Virgin, and the crucifixes that are scattered about.

Unlike the Trappists, the Franciscans are an active order. They maintain extensive contacts with the world outside their friary, running various organized retreats for married couples and alcoholics. They are friars, not monks.

...

The chef wheeled a dolly loaded with crumbly meatloaf, mashed potatoes, salad, and various Lo-Cal dressings into the middle of the long, country-inn-style dining hall. Dinnertime. Alice and I helped ourselves and joined some friars

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at one of the two round tables in use. Although I had earlier seen one friar in the brown broadcloth robes of the order, all the brothers at dinner wore flannel shirts and blue jeans.

Unlike their Trappist counterparts, these guys were hard to take religiously at first glance. They looked soft and relaxed, as if they had just woken from a nap. The friars grilled Alice and me about our precise route north from Boston and, once we were talking about the city, complained about the lack of parking. A Carmelite friar, up visiting his Franciscan friends, joked about how sloppily his Carmelite brethren ate. They were always dribbling gravy on their scapulars (an apronlike outer robe) or dropping them in their butter dish. Put a Carmelite scapular into a pot of hot water, he said, and you'd have soup for twenty.

As the others excused themselves, one friar stopped to tell us where to find the Coke machine and the TV. Then we were left alone. I guess that's what's meant by a private retreat, which is what Alice and I were on. So far, it seemed little different from a vacation. That was fine with us.

...

After dinner we headed for the beach I could see from my room. Along the way we passed the retreat director, Father Kenneth, a gray-haired old salt. He was wearing his jacket inside out; the pockets flopped in the wind. He explained that the white lining showed up in the dark. If we were going to walk along the beach road, he said, we should wear some white too. Cars really zip along there.

We didn't have anything white, but we decided to risk it. Soon we abandoned the road to walk along the pebbly beach. A hazy moon and a handful of stars hung above us. Several of the boathouses by the water were still under repair after the big storm of February, 1978. The wind was calm now, and the air unseasonably warm. The sea sloshed about, making soft, sucking noises as it ran over the stones.

...

Lying on the bed together in my room, reading, Alice and I were terrified every time we heard footsteps out in the corridor. We were sure a delegation of friars would burst in the door and haul us off to face an Inquisition.

...

On the way to breakfast the next morning, we passed Father Emmett, leaning over a distraught young woman who was sobbing, red-faced, in the corridor. We discovered the two of them eating breakfast together by the stove when we took our dishes to the sink. The woman listened quietly, her eyes downcast, nodding now and then, while Emmett chattered consolingly.

...

We went to the beach again that morning to throw a football. A stiff offshore wind shot plumes of spray up off the breakers.

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...

One of the friars, Brother Ron, was a professional painter. We visited his gallery and studio on the top floor of the monastery, two flights up from the cloistered dormitory where the friars sleep. Ron wasn't there, so we just looked around.

Most of the paintings were abstract, patches of drab colors. In a pile by the door were Xeroxed copies of a magazine article on modern art. I recalled Ron's having said at dinner that he was into Kandinsky of late. There were, to our surprise, two portraits of nude women among the abstracts. Alice said their breasts looked misplaced.

...

A quick lunch of hot dogs and beans, and we were off. We never did go to mass. Never even found out when mass was held.

"Lord, who shall abide in thy tabernacle? Who shall dwell in thy holy hill."

—Psalms 15:1

The Franciscan friary, we decided, wasn't quite right. A friary is just not the place for a vacation. Alice and I reexamined our list and zeroed in on what looked to be the perfect combination of spiritual and material comfort, the *milieu juste*: a Carmelite retreat house on a hill in Peterborough, New Hampshire, known as the Common.

With the Carmelites, Alice and I went to mass first thing in the morning. The retreat house was built as a real house, albeit a rather grand one with twin high-pillared porticoes. When the Carmelites moved in, they had to stick their chapel in the library; behind the altar was a huge fireplace stuffed with stout birch logs. It was easy to imagine the men of the house sitting here after dinner, sipping port, smoking fine cigars, and discussing the stock market.

Now the room was filled with rows of captain's chairs, four of which were occupied by friars in civvies, two by gray-haired women from town, one by a nun, and two more by Alice and me. Father Brian stood by the altar in his long, brown robes—with a pair of hiking boots peeking out beneath—to conduct the brief service and lead the singing in his husky baritone.

For the Eucharist, Brother Carlo, round and baby-faced, like an overgrown cherub, positioned himself so he would be last with the wine. Or maybe it just looked that way. He clearly relished his divine obligation to polish it off, grabbing the chalice with both hands, tipping it way back to get every last drop, and smacking his lips when he set the cup back down. The room now had a sweet, perfumy smell.

As the two townswomen stood by the front door bundling themselves up for the long trek home, Carlo gave one a

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peck on the cheek. Brother Anthony, a straight-arrow type, bounded up to him and exclaimed, with mock severity, "I saw that, Carlo." Then he shook his finger at the woman, chiding, "Just wait till I tell your *husband*."

"But it was only the kiss of peace," Carlo protested.

"It looked like a romantic embrace to me," returned Anthony.

The woman giggled.

...

Anthony, who was in charge of the retreatants, invited Alice and me back to the kitchen for breakfast. The friars had baked an assortment of breads, which they were devouring while standing around a butcher-block table in the middle of a large institutional kitchen. Anthony must have had a reputation for clumsiness, for when he accidentally pitched his bowl of Quaker 100% Natural cereal (Father Brian called it gravel) onto the table, everyone screamed that he'd "pulled an Anthony."

"Well, what else *can* I pull?" Anthony shot back. "I am Anthony."

Brother Carlo was called to the phone—an Eleanor on the line. When he returned, one friar explained that Carlo was Eleanor's "spiritual adviser" in a voice suggesting that something more secular was involved. Carlo blushed. "C'mon guys," he exclaimed. "The woman is in her eighties." He added that she was something of a nuisance as well.

Another friar volunteered that he had heard Eleanor was on her last leg.

"Thank God," said Carlo, rolling his eyes to the ceiling.

...

That morning, Alice had waked up very early when her door creaked open and Brother Anthony peeped in at her. Their eyes met. The door closed. Anthony later explained that he likes to meditate in that room. He'd left his bench by the window there. He didn't mean to disturb her.

Anthony told us that the friars were gearing up for an invasion of twenty-five couples for a marriage encounter over the weekend. When I asked how single men could counsel couples on their marriages, he answered that just living with the brothers in the monastery was experience enough. "It's not that different," he said. "It's all a matter of communication."

...

The Carmelite order, which was founded on the slopes of Israel's Mount Carmel in the early thirteenth century, is positioned at about the midpoint in the monastic spectrum, sharing something of the Trappists' contemplative life, in the daily meditation, and something of the Franciscans' activity in the world, in the marriage encounters.

Not long ago, the Discalced, or bare-foot, Carmelites, as this branch of the order is known, endured lives almost as harsh as those of the Trappists. At the Carmelite monastery in Brookline, for in-

stance, friars used to whip their bare backs in a dark room once a week. For special penance, a friar would stretch himself across a doorway and let the entire order walk over him. If a friar made a mistake reading the Scripture during the offices, he had to kiss the floor. The whole order used to meet regularly to air grievances. The members would rise one by one to stand silently while everyone else in the room hurled criticisms at him; he was sloppy, he talked during offices, he was disrespectful. The beleaguered individual was not allowed to respond.

Then came the Vatican II reforms of the sixties, and these old practices dropped away. One morning, the friars might wake up to find that the prior had decided they didn't have to fast anymore. Then they could eat meat. Then the penances fell away, the flagellation, the kissing of the floor.

Many of the older friars couldn't cope with the liberalization and left the order, although they had no place to go. It was too late to revoke their vows, however. So they just wandered off to fend for themselves.

...

As Alice and I discovered in the morning when we peered out of our foggy windows, the retreat house looms over Peterborough, with a clear view of Mount Monadnock out front. We trudged down the hill to town in the afternoon, making

The impeccably made bed is of equal importance to me...



angels in the snow along the way.

...

The retreat house is called the Common because it was built on Peterborough's original common two hundred years ago. The early settlers are all buried up here. A woman named Mrs. Cheney built the mansion in the early part of this century. When she died, it became a women's college before the Carmelites took it over nearly twenty-five years ago. The transition was slightly awkward because Mrs. Cheney always hated Catholics. The woman is entombed in a little chapel she built on the property. It's doubtful she would be able to rest in peace if she knew that Carmelites strolled about her grounds, worshipped in her library, swam in her pool, and slept in her boudoir.

...

Several years ago, the three friars who were in charge of the Common grew so attached to the place that they came to regard it as theirs. They bridled at suggestions from their Carmelite superiors about how the house should be run. They were known to reject young friars whom the superiors wished to install at the Common, if they weren't to the trio's liking. This didn't sit well with the mother house in Wisconsin. The prior ordered the three friars to remove themselves to another house. The friars wouldn't budge. Relations ultimately became so strained that there was talk of sending in the police to evict the threesome. Finally

a woman in nearby Sharon took pity on the brothers and asked them to move in with her, which they did. All across the country, Carmelites breathed a sigh of relief that a scandal had been averted.

...

I had a long talk with a young friar I'll call Andrew in Mrs. Cheney's elegant, carved-wood living room that evening. He had been living in a Dominican monastery outside Philadelphia for nearly two years (Dominicans and Carmelites are very similar) and was about to take his first vows. He professed no regrets about the prospect, since he loved the life of contemplation, but he betrayed some uneasiness about the day-to-day routine. He could count on one hand the times he'd been out of the monastery in the last month—to shop, to jog, to see a movie. He lived in pretty close quarters with twenty other men, nearly all of whom were more than twice his age. And he found the older friars finicky and irritable, insisting, for instance, that the altar candles be positioned just so. Any other way and the friars blew up at him.

But there was something else. Andrew had a bad case of disco fever, and he didn't see why he shouldn't be able to take a woman out dancing. He'd had a girl friend in college. (When he told her about his monastic plans, she asked him, "Andrew, are you sure you want to do this?" in a tone that he says suggested he was "pretty crazy.") Andrew had no plans

to get into anything serious with a woman; his relationship with God precluded that. But why couldn't he merely take a woman out dancing?

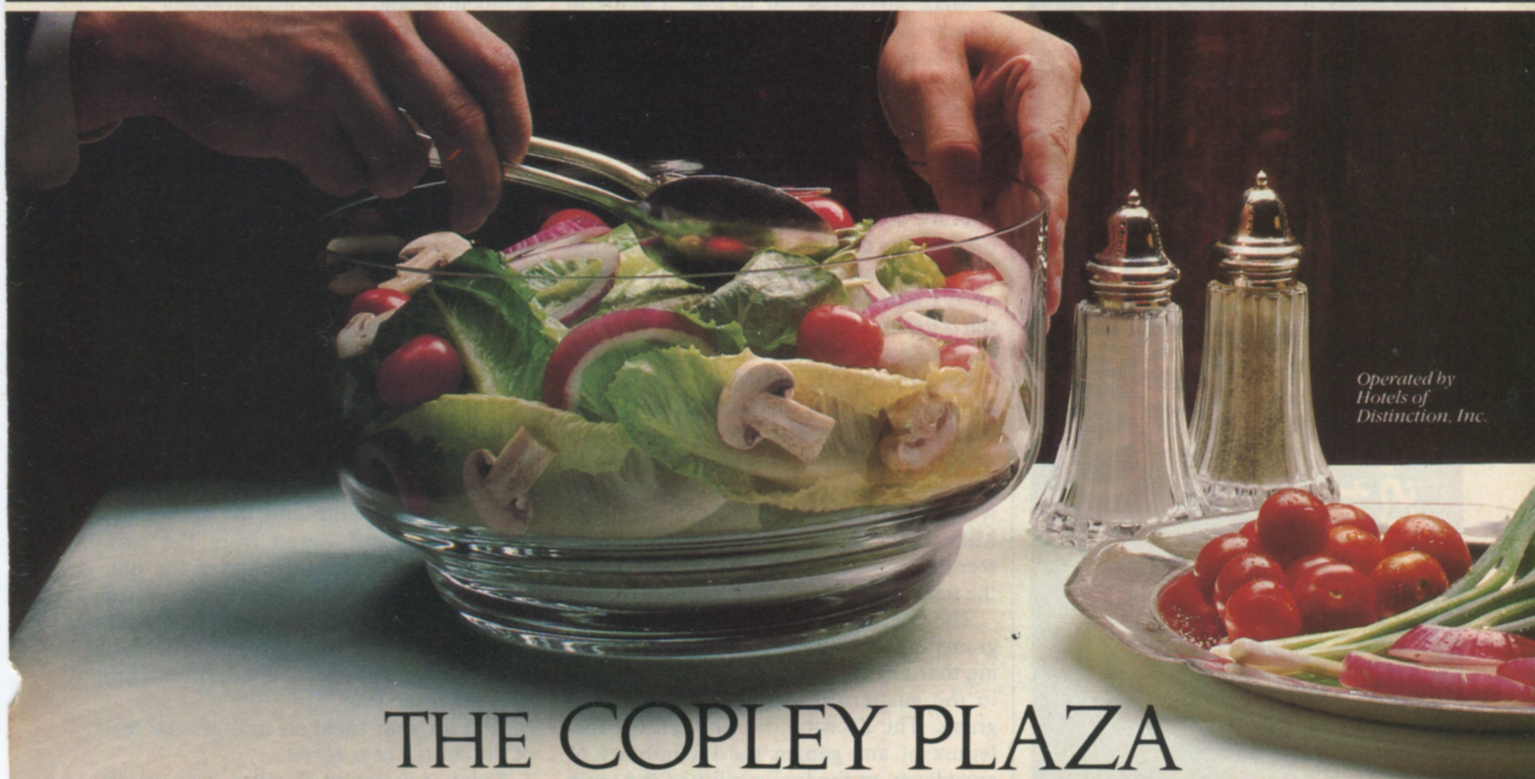
So he did. He called up a social worker he knew and asked her to go to a Philadelphia disco with him. She said sure. Andrew duded himself up in his few non-monastic clothes and slipped into town. At the disco everything went well. No one asked him what he did for a living or where he lived. He danced up a storm. And he managed to sneak back into the monastery without any of the brothers finding out. "Thank the Lord," says Andrew.

...

I thought about Andrew's plight as I drifted off to sleep amid the oriental furnishings and splendid carved wood of my bedroom. Monastic life isn't part of normal life at all; it touches at points, but really it might as well be off on another continent. Monasteries are enchanting, but as with perfectly preserved Shaker villages, it's nice to know you can drive off when you're tired of them.

Still, I was affected by the quiet grace of that high mansion on its Peterborough hill, as I was by the solemnity of the Trappist monastery in Spencer, and even by the easy spirituality of the St. Francis Friary at Rye Beach. Life did seem fuller in God's houses. I'm not too keen to live in any of these places, of course, but I certainly enjoyed my visits. □

...as the impeccably made salad.



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