

UNIVERSAL
LIBRARY



111 015

UNIVERSAL
LIBRARY

SEEING EYE WIFE

by

VIRGINIA MOORE

This is the story of a man very like your neighbor—he has a job to which he goes five days a week, a wife, a son, a second-hand car, and a house with a mortgage on it. The only difference between him and your neighbor is that he is, to use his own words, “blind as a bat.” He finds this inconvenient in living in a world made for the sighted, but not at all depressing. If he were given a choice between his sight and a million dollars, without any doubt he’d take the million, or even a good deal less.

To individuals who still connect blindness with the beggar and his tin cup, or with a patient figure in a rocking chair, this book will be an education. *This* blind man doesn’t sit on the edge of the stream of life—he gets in there and swims. And it’s his job to make swimmers of other persons who lose their sight, and to persuade the sighted world to allow them to swim. He wages a never-ending battle, not with blindness, but with the sighted world which finds it difficult to accept those without sight as fellow human beings not basically different from themselves. The battle is a friendly one, waged without bitterness and often with hearty laughter.

As the title indicates, the story is told by the blind man’s sighted wife, who probably comes as near to understanding blindness as any sighted person can. With sympathy but without tears, she tells the story with love and humor.

VIRGINIA BLANCK MOORE

Seeing Eye Wife

CHILTON COMPANY—BOOK DIVISION
PUBLISHERS PHILADELPHIA, NEW YORK

COPYRIGHT © 1960 BY
VIRGINIA BLANCK MOORE

FIRST EDITION

All Rights Reserved

Published in Philadelphia by Chilton Company, and
simultaneously in Toronto, Canada, by Ambassador Books, Ltd.

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOG CARD NUMBER 60-12507

MANUFACTURED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
BY QUINN & BODEN COMPANY, INC., RAHWAY, N. J.

.

To Ethel Towne Holmes and Mabel Martin Nading
through whom Bob and I found each other.

.

Introduction

Fifteen years ago I, a sighted woman, married a blind man. This is the story of that marriage.

Blindness seems to be the object of a universal curiosity. Everywhere we go I see in covert glances and frank stares the question, "What's it like, being married to a blind man?"

I can't make a blanket statement, since every blind man is just as much an individual as every sighted man, but I can tell what it's like being married to Bob, who is, in his own words, blind as a bat.

Those who expect to find this a tale of emotional turmoil in which the two of us try to bridge the abyss which yawns between the world of the sighted and the world of the blind will be disappointed. There is no such abyss to the sighted woman who loves a blind man. There are problems, yes, since the world is made for the sighted and some adjustments are necessary in order that those without sight may live comfortably and safely in it, but they are not the fundamental difficulties which most persons would expect.

They expect emotional difficulties because they have never seen a blind person except through a veil of pity

and tears. They still regard blindness with the same horror as the world did in the Dark Ages. They don't know that times have changed for the blind as well as for the sighted during the last few centuries.

I have written the story of our life and love together in an effort to rend this veil of tears and bring into true focus a picture of a blind man in the modern world. It is my hope that, in so doing, I may bring to the reader the recognition that a blind person is a human being not basically different from himself and entitled to participate in life on an equal basis instead of being segregated by pity and treated like a child who never grows up.

VIRGINIA BLANCK MOORE

Contents

1. Rightabout-Face	1
2. Prelude to Romance	11
3. A Lesson in Love	21
4. I Fall	29
5. Love Letters in Braille	41
6. Honeymoon	49
7. No Soap Opera	56
8. Seeing Eye Housekeeper	66
9. We Become Parents	75
10. Bringing Up Nathan	80
11. Neighborhood Adoption	92
12. Life in a Goldfish Bowl	103
13. Battle of the Tin Cup	112
14. From Idiot to Genius	120
15. Hope Springs Eternal	131
16. Safety Valve	139
17. Selling Blind Labor	149
18. Unseen Problems	158
19. Traveling Without Sight	165
20. World by the Tail	175

.

Seeing Eye Wife

.

.
1.

Rightabout-Face

I had said I would never marry a blind man. I had said it emphatically, and it's no wonder the boss was startled that September morning when she learned that I had done a complete rightabout-face and was planning to become a Seeing Eye wife.

I'd been wondering for two days how I could break the news to her, but since no inspiration came to my rescue, I just blurted out, "You remember I said I didn't know how a sighted woman could marry a blind man? I know now."

She sat perfectly still for what seemed a very long time, and then she asked, "Who is it?"

"Bob," I answered.

She wasn't the only one who was startled, of course. A girl doesn't attain the age of twenty-nine without a single romance, and then in the space of eleven days get herself engaged—and to a blind man to boot—without evoking exclamation marks in the minds of a few people, including herself.

As I look back now, I don't know why the fact that I was going to marry a man without sight should have come

as such a shock to any of us. If ever life had prepared a woman for such a career, it had prepared me. From the time I was five years old, I'd been getting ready, had I only known it.

The first preparation was far from pleasant. It happened on a February afternoon when my mother had stepped over to visit a neighbor for a moment. My older sister and I were playing in the big kitchen where the wood-burning range roared in one corner. I was hanging doll clothes along the oven door handle to dry when I looked down and saw my dress aflame.

My memories of what happened after that are confused. They say I ran outdoors and around the house, the flames eating their way upward. The next thing I knew I was in the neighbor's kitchen, and my mother was pouring water over me from a tub on the stove. I remember the grim look on my father's face. He had been called home from the factory where he worked. And the doctor wrapping me in cotton, and someone carrying me home on a stretcher.

I had saved my eyes by protecting them with my right arm, but from the hip up on my right side and all over the lower part of my face, I had third-degree burns.

I don't remember the pain that must have been there, or how my mother nursed me during the months that followed. But I do remember the day my mother handed me a mirror. I looked into it with shocked eyes. Scar tissue had pulled my lower lip down, and my neck was a mass of ugly scars. I began to cry silently, but neither of us uttered a word.

And that little scene marked the beginning of the attitude we were to take toward this thing that had happened to me.

We couldn't ignore the physical incapacity, of course. After two years in bed I was rather weak, so I had to regain my strength and learn to walk again before going to school. My folks took me to the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota, and though they didn't do anything about my appearance there, most of my burns healed after almost three years, and I did become strong enough to get about.

My mother taught me to read, and at the age of eight I started to school.

I don't remember dreading it or feeling terribly embarrassed when the teacher had to scold the class for staring at me. Perhaps psychologists wouldn't approve of the course which my parents had decided to pursue and which they had taught me, by example, to follow, but it seemed the best one under the circumstances. At least it worked out very well for me until I was graduated from high school.

The fact that I was a good student helped me immensely. I hadn't been in the first grade two days before the teacher took me off to a little room and had me read from a second-grade primer. When I could read it without any trouble, she put me ahead into the second grade.

This ability to learn easily gave me something most of the others didn't have. It set me apart from them, but not in the horrible way that my scars did. This was something they could envy me for—with a touch of admiration—and it built up my confidence tremendously.

My childhood wasn't too different from that of my four sisters and my brother. I played active physical games with them in the summer, went swimming in the lake near our house, played with dolls.

But in the winter when the bitter wind nipped my scars too painfully, I spent most of the time sitting near the kitchen stove reading.

I devoured fairy stories, where the bewitched heroine was changed back from an ugly old woman or a beast into a beautiful princess. I liked all stories with happy endings. Children's stories of that day were filled with morals, and I absorbed them all. I became painfully honest, painfully tolerant of other races and creeds, painfully loyal to family and friends. I couldn't possibly have consciously identified myself at that age with a minority, but I wept over *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and leaned over backward to be friendly with the one Negro girl who attended our school. I knew, if anyone ever did, that being different on the outside didn't mean you were different on the inside.

I did have unhappy periods during those years when I was sent to hospitals to try to undo the damage the flames had done to my appearance. It wasn't the pain I minded, but being separated from my family. I always felt lost and lonely when I knew I was going, and wept for days. And although I had fourteen or fifteen operations, I couldn't see that they made any difference. It was a lot of unhappiness for nothing, as far as I could see.

My parents apparently finally came to the same conclusion, because when I was in the eighth grade, they quit sending me, and I remember my high school days with nothing but pleasure.

I led my class scholastically, was elected an officer by several groups within the school, and became editor of the school paper. I had plenty of friends, and though I didn't have dates, neither did many other girls with whom I chummed, and there was nothing wrong with the way they

looked. I looked forward with confidence to life when I would get through high school and could go on to college. It seemed that all one had to do to overcome a handicap was to ignore it, and other people would too.

That was a happy state of mind, but unfortunately it didn't last very long.

The first thing to upset it came about a week before graduation when the school nurse asked me to come to her office to meet a representative of the state board of vocational education. My heart sank when she told me that the board would be willing to pay my tuition and for my books when I went on to school, as a rehabilitation measure.

As I talked pleasantly with her, discussing my plans, my mind was saying angrily, I'm not handicapped. I can think and hear and see and walk and talk and use my hands as well as you can. I wish you'd go away and leave me alone. I was happy before you told me what the rest of the world thinks about me.

But at the time, there seemed nothing else to do but accept. I had a small amount of money that my grandfather had left me but not enough to get through college. I couldn't expect financial help from home, and it wouldn't be fair to my parents to turn down this chance to get an education. I had to accept, but I hated it. I was ashamed. I felt branded with the word "Handicap" as I went out the door of the nurse's office, and a load settled on my heart that stayed there until I was out of college and self-supporting.

That interview was just the beginning. When I reached the campus that fall, I found I had the only single room on the floor which housed the girls who worked for their board and room. And in the dining room I sat at a table

with two blind girls. Just the three of us at the corner table. I felt like the grandfather in the old tale who had to sit behind the stove and eat his meals from a wooden bowl.

As I look back now, I know that that segregation policy in the dormitory was the next step toward Bob and happiness, but not a glimmer of a silver lining to this dark cloud of unhappiness came to me then. I was homesick and humiliated, and that's a horrid combination.

Perhaps I would have packed my bags and fled to the comfort of my family's bosom had I not discovered that I wasn't alone in my misery. Mabel, the younger of the two blind girls, was having as rough a time adjusting to our new environment as I was, and in addition, she was having a reader problem.

She had been placed in a room with the girl who was to read to her, but the reader was so interested in a romance that she found little time to administer to Mabel's academic needs. When Mabel mentioned the fact that she had to read a certain book for history and didn't know how she was going to get it done, I volunteered to read it to her, since I was in the same class and had to read it anyway.

Even before we had finished the history book, she was urging me to apply for the job of reading to her. Her readers were paid by the National Youth Administration, and it didn't hurt my feelings at all to ask for that kind of help, since so many of the girls with whom I worked in the dormitory kitchen were employed under the auspices of that organization.

I had chosen journalism as my major, since I liked to write and had enjoyed working on the high school newspaper. But when I got to the fundamental course of reporting, I cursed myself bitterly for my choice. I just

didn't have the nerve to be a reporter. It was agony to meet new people, because I thought I knew what they were thinking. I knew I must be repulsive to the more sensitive ones, and I'd go out of my way to avoid meeting the people on my beat who were supposed to give me the news.

I found too that in college social life is much more important than it is in high school. Even the girls whom I didn't consider attractive at all got bids for dances. I'd help the girls into their formals and cheer them on their way and hope they'd never know how I felt when they left.

After four years Mabel and I were graduated together, each with a Phi Beta Kappa key, gold honor stars on our black gowns, a diploma in our hands, and vast inferiority complexes in our hearts. I wept as we drove away from the campus for the last time. God knows why; I don't. It certainly wasn't because I'd been happy there.

Mabel went to work almost immediately as the proof-reader on the Works Project Administration Braille transcribing project being sponsored by the Iowa Commission for the Blind, a state-supported agency responsible for educating and rehabilitating the adult blind, and ameliorating their condition in general.

I went home. During my first month there I wrote innumerable letters of application. I kept house for the family while my mother went out and did day work. Then one of my college roommates wrote from Arizona, wanting me to come and stay with her and her sister. "Maybe we can find work out here," she wrote. So I went and stayed until she went back to school in the fall. But there was nothing to do except door-to-door selling, and that was worse than a newspaper beat as far as I was concerned.

In October I had a letter from the director of the Iowa Commission for the Blind. She said that the transcribing

project was taking more of her time than she could allocate to it from her other duties, and she was looking for someone to supervise it. Mabel had told her about me. Would I like to try the job? It would involve choosing books to be transcribed, getting permission from the authors, working with the transcribers and proofreaders.

It sounded like a job made to order for me, so I hurried to the bank, borrowed eighty-five dollars to pay my expenses for the first month, and was soon on my way to Des Moines.

If my college career had overwhelmed me with a feeling of rejection and inadequacy, this next period of my life was to go a long way toward repairing my shattered ego and toward putting me another step along the road to a full and happy life.

Mabel, with whom I would be working, was living with a blind man and his sighted wife—the Captain and the Lady we called them—and they welcomed me into the family circle with as much love as if I had been their own daughter.

The boss made it apparent that she was pleased with my work, and the work itself I loved. The job meant working with blind people, men and women who found other men and women attractive if they had pleasant voices, a sense of humor, and amiable dispositions. They weren't interested in outward appearances, and when they showed evidence of liking me, it salved my wounded spirits no end. With love and appreciation on every side—and a monthly pay check too—life, for the first time in five years, seemed really worth living.

Then one day I went to see a doctor because I had a cold I couldn't throw off. I didn't know him, had never seen him before. He looked me straight in the eye and

said, "Why don't you have some plastic surgery done?"

I told him about the fifteen operations. He said that just the week before, in a medical journal, he had seen the report of the wonderful results achieved by a plastic surgeon in Kansas City, a man who had invented a machine for removing large areas of skin to be used in grafting. He would look it up for me and let me see it.

I left his office with my mind in a whirl, but I didn't really start hoping until I saw the article and the "before" and "after" pictures it contained. Then I sat down and wrote to Dr. Padgett, the plastic surgeon. I told him I didn't have very much money, but that I would pay eventually if he could do anything for me. Back came a letter, encouraging me to come. If I could pay my hospital bills, he would wait for his operating fee.

The Lady went to the state school for the blind that summer to act as matron for the adult summer school, and she and the Captain insisted that I keep house for him and not pay any board and room so that I would have the necessary money by fall.

During the next two years I had three operations. I can't honestly say I didn't mind the pain, because I did. It was like being skinned alive three times! "How do you have the courage to go back?" people would ask me. It wasn't courage. That kind of pain is something that sears and is gone. Days and weeks and months bring an end to it. The pain of being different from other people on the outside was much less endurable.

The results of plastic surgery aren't nearly as miraculously apparent as fiction would have people believe. I knew within a couple of weeks after the first operation that my lower lip had been repaired. But it wasn't until several months after the third operation that the high

color under the transplanted skin began to fade, and the heavy seams where the new skin and the old came together began to smooth out, and I could realize what a wonderful thing Dr. Padgett had done for me.

I was twenty-six when I bought my first lipstick. Though there were still scars and always would be, I felt like the transformed princess in the old fairy stories the first time I put on the lipstick—released at last from the spell of some dark power which had held me since childhood.

·2·

Prelude to Romance

By the time I underwent the plastic surgery, the WPA project on which I had started to work had long since ceased to exist, and I had become secretary to the boss, which, in our small agency meant stenographer, book-keeper, and file clerk. World War II was on, and friends kept telling me I should leave the Commission and go to work at the ordnance plant or someplace where I could make some money.

But I didn't want to change, money or no money. Efficient office help was difficult to get at the price the Commission could pay, and I felt I owed it to the boss to stick with the job which she had saved for me during those sessions with the plastic surgeon. It was she who had given me a chance to prove myself, and I didn't feel in the least inclined to desert her now.

And the job itself had become really more than a job. Now that I was less set apart from other people, I was even more interested in those who never could hope to escape being branded as handicapped—the blind people for whom we worked. I didn't pity them because they couldn't see—

I hadn't wanted pity because I was ugly. But I sympathized with them for the limitations put on their lives by sighted people who seemed to think, because they were blind, that they were capable only of sitting in a rocking chair with folded hands, or worse, of standing on a street corner with a tin cup.

Then one day Joe Clunk came to visit us, a short dark, heavy-set man wearing black glasses and carrying a white cane. He had a hearty laugh, a pleasant smile, and fortunately for blind people, a persuasive tongue. It was years before I realized that what Joe Clunk had accomplished in the years before our meeting was to be indirectly responsible for my own future happiness. That day I was interested only in his mission.

He had come from the Federal Office of Education where he was chief of services for the blind, to help us try to get money enough to hire what was then called a placement man for blind people—a man who could find jobs for them in factories.

More than a quarter of a century before, Joe had been a newly blinded man, but a man with a vision. Up to his time most blind people who worked did so in their own homes, under programs such as the Iowa Commission for the Blind sponsored, or in sheltered workshops, where special environments were created for blind workers who produced articles with the help of sighted supervisors. Few of these home-bound employment projects or sheltered workshops were self-supporting. They were subsidized by either a private or government agency.

The blind people who worked at these semicharitable jobs had been taught the same trades and crafts as other blind people had for decades. If you were blind you were just naturally either a piano tuner, a broom maker, a rug

weaver, or a basketmaker. Regardless of how capable a blind man might be, all he was ever taught were those trades. This served to confirm the belief of the public that blind persons could be employed only in those few trades.

But Joe Clunk had other ideas. He thought blind people had the right to be self-supporting, to live in dignity and with self-respect among their fellow citizens. He didn't consider that a man had lost anything too vital when he lost his sight. As long as his mind and the rest of his body were normal, all he had to do was find a job where vision wasn't required and go to work.

He saw no reason why blind individuals couldn't work among sighted ones in factories, doing a day's work for a day's pay. And being Joe Clunk, he didn't stop with a vision—he set out to make it a reality.

He realized that selling the employer on giving a blind man a chance to work was about the toughest selling job ever undertaken. It couldn't be done by the blind men who wanted to work—it would have to be done by the agencies which were interested in the rehabilitation of blind persons.

Joe started out working for a small agency on this program, and in a few years had done such an outstanding job in the United States that he was invited to Canada to set up a similar program there. When he came back to the United States he was made chief of services for the blind in the Office of Education.

By the time World War II had begun, Joe and his staff had encouraged a number of state agencies to employ industrial placement agents to find factory jobs for their blind clients.

The Iowa Commission for the Blind wanted Iowa to be among those states, and Joe's visit marked the beginning of the campaign to get enough money to hire a placement

man, so that Iowa's blind would have the opportunity to become useful working members of society. For two years the boss and I worked together on material to present to the members of the state legislature, asking for funds for this work.

It wasn't a job to either of us—it was a Cause. For the first time, we felt, the capable blind had a chance to throw off the shackles of financial dependence on others and to make for themselves useful lives in the sighted world. It had been done by a few blind individuals down through the ages. Now it could be done by the man who could work with his hands, the so-called average man.

Had I known then that my own personal happiness also depended on our success, I couldn't have worked harder or been more interested.

It was a day almost comparable to my lipstick one when the news came that the state legislature had seen the light and was allowing us enough money to hire a placement man.

There weren't very many men available for the job, but the Commission finally succeeded in hiring Augie, a young blind man who had made a survey of factories in the East to determine what jobs could be done by blind individuals, and who had worked at the task of placing blind persons on such jobs in the state of Kansas.

With this much accomplished, I began to get restless. I could see nothing ahead for myself but thirty or forty years of working on this job which could be handled by any well-trained and conscientious high school graduate. My sisters and girl friends were all married and having families. I reminded myself that once I would have been more than satisfied with what I now had—self-respect and security. But my persuasive powers didn't work on me.

The boss had the same idea. She thought it was a waste of my talents, though she didn't want to lose me in the office. The program once more was to be expanded. Federal funds were to be sent to augment those allocated for our use by the state. Now we were to have a case finding person, and the boss asked me to take the job.

It meant a big increase in salary and an increase in prestige. It was at least a step out of the rut in which I found myself. But it also meant I should have to leave the warm friendly atmosphere of the office, and have lonely hotel rooms to return to at night instead of the Lady's welcoming home. I struggled with the problem for days.

There never was a more useless battle with frustrations, because the problem had been taken out of my hands, though I had not the least suspicion then that such was the case. It was in much more capable hands than mine—long, strong, slender ones belonging to a blind man.

Augie had started working for the Commission as a placement man in May of 1943. A year later, with the placement program well under way, he was ready to move on to greener pastures, and the man who was selected to take his place was Bob.

Bob wasn't a complete stranger to me the day he came to work for the Commission. The summer after I started to work, Bob had been a student at the adult summer school conducted by the Commission at the Iowa School for the Blind at Vinton. The Lady, who was acting as matron for the women, had written me about him. "There's a young man here by the name of Bob Moore," she wrote. "He looks so much like Mabel that everyone is amazed. I'm anxious for you to see him."

One weekend I went to Vinton to visit her. I was sitting at one of the tables in the long dining room when I first

saw him. He was tall and very thin, with a lot of light-brown hair and a clean-cut look, and he did look very much like Mabel.

At the end of the summer when the boss brought the Lady home, I went out to welcome her, and there was Bob crawling out of the back seat and checking the trunk to be sure his typewriter was riding safely.

“Bob, this is Virginia,” the boss said casually.

“How do you do?” we each said formally, and that was that.

If anyone had told me I was going to marry this man five years later, I would never have believed it. Because I wasn't ever going to marry a blind man. Not that I had anything against blind men, because I knew a lot of nice ones. But I did have something against them as husbands for me.

I had known a number of sighted-wife, blind-husband combinations since I had worked for the Commission. They came to the office to try to find work for the husband, or to buy leather materials, or warp for rug weaving. Usually the husband just sat, and the wife transacted the business. She didn't consult him. When it was time to go, if they were buying materials, she paid for them. If he came looking for work, she answered most of the questions asked in the process of filling out questionnaires. He was strictly the silent partner.

It was after one of these couples had left the office that I had shaken my head and made my very unprophetic remark about not ever being able to marry a blind man.

I knew myself well enough to realize that I would never be aggressive enough for two people, since I never even had been aggressive enough for one. If I married, I wanted

someone who could lead me, so to speak, not someone who needed to be led.

John, another blind man who lived in our household, told me something about Bob after we were introduced that day. He said that Bob was born in Iowa but had grown up in Nebraska and gone to the state school for the blind there. His mother was dead, and his father, stepmother, and their two small children now lived in the little town of Silver City in the western part of our state.

They hadn't lived in Iowa the required five years for Bob to have established residence as required to get blind assistance, so most of the time he hadn't even had smoking money. John told me how he and two other men, out of their limited resources, bought tobacco and papers and left them in Bob's room so that he wouldn't know where they came from.

One time Bob came to visit John, and they walked down to the Commission office to visit the boss. I hardly saw Bob that day since I was particularly busy. But John was feeling remorseful that night because of all the walking. "I didn't know until we got home," John moaned, "that Bob was wearing a pair of his brother's shoes, and they weren't big enough for him."

The next time he came to town I didn't see him at all. The Captain had been killed in an automobile accident the day before, and I had been out of the hospital less than a month after the second operation. Bob's coming and going barely registered.

But I kept hearing about him. The boss worried about him even more than she did most of her clients. "There should be something that boy could do," she would say. And finally she did find something for him to do.

The Commission had an industrial program for blind people who could work in their own homes. Materials were sent out to them from the Commission office, the finished products were returned there, and the Commission sold them to a retail company which peddled the blind-made products from door to door. All over the state, blind people were weaving rugs, assembling iron cords, hemming ironing-board covers, making door mats and such. One year brush making was added to the list, and the job was given to Bob.

I wrote a few letters to him then about materials and payment for his work. Then in December, 1941, we received a letter from him saying that he had heard about a rope splicing job in a tent and awning company in Waterloo and he was going to get it if he could. He would send the brush-making materials back.

The next correspondence came from Waterloo. He was working at the tent and awning company and had decided to get himself a Seeing Eye dog. He would be given a leave of absence from the job.

He wrote us from Morristown, New Jersey, full of enthusiasm about Jars, his dog. "Don't ask me why they named him Jars," he wrote. "I think they name dogs alphabetically, and they couldn't think of anything else that begins with J!"

Shortly after he returned to Waterloo with Jars, Augie succeeded in breaking down the resistance of the John Deere Tractor Factory management and secured jobs in that plant for three blind men. Bob was one of them, and he was put to work assembling oil pumps for tractors.

After that I heard quite a lot about him. Augie was impressed by his skill on the job and by his judgment of people off the job. When Augie decided to move on, he

suggested to the boss that Bob be given a try at the job.

The boss wasn't sold on the idea. "What do you think?" she asked me anxiously several times. Frankly I didn't know, and I said so. But experienced men were impossible to get at the price Iowa was willing to pay, so she finally asked Augie to broach the subject to Bob. After all, he was an Iowa boy, she knew he had good character and had overcome a lot to get as far as he had. Augie agreed to stay long enough to give Bob some training on the job if he would agree to accept the position.

Augie wasn't at all sure that Bob would agree. It would mean a cut of almost a hundred dollars a month in earnings, which was a lot for a man who had been working less than two years. But Augie reported that Bob wasn't satisfied with his activities after working hours, and he might be persuaded to move to another city in the hope of finding a better social life.

Augie was right. Another blind man was put on the oil pump assembly job, and Bob came to the Commission.

I remember well the day he walked in, led by Jars. He was still as tall and thin as I remembered him, but pale, almost as if he had been ill, from working all the sunlight hours in the factory. He wore a dark-blue suit which was a little short in the sleeves for him; this wasn't too surprising since it, like the shoes, had belonged to his brother Gene who at that time was still a Japanese prisoner of war. When Bob sat down in the chair assigned to him, less than three feet from my desk, I noticed that his fingernails were black and broken from his factory work. I noticed too that he had a nice smile and a most infectious laugh.

The following week, after a shopping trip with Augie and his sighted wife Mary, Bob came into the office looking like a different person. He had on a good-looking brown

suit, a tan shirt, and a brown and orange necktie. I thought with approval that I couldn't have done better myself in selecting them. That night I told Thelma, my roommate at the Lady's, about the metamorphosis, and she gave me a speculative look that left me wondering.

As the weeks passed, he looked better each time he returned from an out-of-town trip with Augie. His complexion grew tanned, and his fingernails returned to normal. He was pleasant to have around the office, the little time he was in, and Jars was perfectly behaved. In fact, they fitted into our routine so well that I didn't pay too much attention to them until that Saturday morning of July 22 when Bob had been working for the Commission about six weeks.

And then a little red button on an adding machine started what proved to be the most revolutionary eleven days of my life.

• 3 •

A Lesson in Love

That momentous day started off like any other Saturday morning, only worse. In the mail I found the monthly report from the state comptroller's office telling me how much money was supposed to be on our books in several different funds. I sighed when I saw that I was \$1.10 off in the marketing and manufacturing fund, which was made up largely of checks paid out to blind workers, most of them totaling \$2.25 and up. We sent out a lot of them in a month, and I didn't expect to find the discrepancy in a hurry.

I opened the ledger, pulled the cover off the ancient adding machine, and pressed down on the starting bar. Nothing happened. As far as I knew, this was the first time since it had been dragged down from the state house attic some fifteen years before that the thing had refused to function. In spite of the fact that I am just about as unmechanical as a human being can be and still claim to have an I.Q., I started looking for the trouble. I knew there wasn't any hope of getting a repairman on a Saturday morning.

I checked the cord leading into the machine, and the plug going into the outlet. I pushed and pulled buttons I had never been aware of before. Bob was sitting less than a foot away, the back of his chair turned to the machine. Without turning his head, he finally reached the long fingers of one hand behind him and said, "Did you try this button?"

I leaned over the machine and watched him pull up on a little red button. "I didn't even know it was there!" I said in surprise.

"Try it now," he suggested.

I pressed the bar, and the old familiar hum once more emanated from the machine.

Eleven days later I found out why he hadn't turned his head—his look of satisfaction would have probably made even me, gullible as I was, suspicious. But at the time I just thanked him and went on hunting for the error.

At closing time at noon that Saturday, Bob and Augie began teasing me because I had been gone the weekend before when they had been invited to my sister's for Italian spaghetti. They accused me of trying to avoid them, which wasn't true at all. I simply had been spending a weekend with a college friend out of town.

"We're going to spend Bob's red points for steak for supper tonight," Augie said. "How about eating with us?"

My hundred and ten pounds on a five-foot-four frame was not really a good indication of how interested I was in food, especially steak, so I accepted.

"I've got to get my money transferred to some bank here in town," Bob told me then. "Jars is at the vet's, so how about having lunch with me and taking me to a bank afterward?"

I couldn't very well turn him down after he had fixed the adding machine, so I said, "Okay, only I have to go right home afterward and do my washing."

Something must have told my subconscious that this was a special day in my life, otherwise I surely wouldn't remember it so well. It was sunny, but not too hot. I had on a red and white dress I had made from some thin material given me for my birthday.

We started out sedately enough, with Bob's right hand just above my left elbow, and his white cane swinging easily from his left hand.

I was inwardly giving thanks that he was on my left side, where his fingers would encounter no scars. I knew it was silly to feel that way, but I did. To a blind person, without personal contact, I was whole and unblemished. It was a nice feeling, and I wanted to keep it.

"I think I should give you a demonstration of how sighted people lead blind people," Bob said lightly. "Pretend you are the blind person, and I'm your sighted guide." At that, he took a firmer grasp on my arm and began to propel me rapidly along ahead of him. I laughed, because I had seen it happen that way so many times.

"That way they can let you fall off the curb before they notice there's one coming up," he went on. "Or they can leave you standing in the middle of the store just by dropping your arm while they dart off to look at something."

"I suppose it was Mabel who taught me how to lead," I said, "though I don't remember her doing it in so many words."

"Well, there's a vast difference even in experienced guides, I can tell you," Bob answered. "It's so simple you'd think all sighted people could tell how to do it at

a glance. But most of them insist on pushing instead of leading.”

We reached the streetcar at the same time as twenty other people just emerging from the state house, and to my complete astonishment, I found myself the first of them to enter. I was always the last to board a streetcar unless someone came within a hair of missing it and thus managed to be behind me.

Nothing bashful about this man, I thought.

He stood firmly behind me on the already loaded car, his strong arm easing the shock of the frequent jolts. That was a nice, comfortable feeling too, depending on someone else’s strength. His chin once or twice gently brushed my hair, and I thought, I like tall men.

The restaurant was crowded, with a line extending back to the door. The hostess was crowding people around tables, and six into booths intended for four.

“We’d like a table by ourselves, please,” Bob told her when our turn came. I looked at him in astonishment. But then I thought, of course he can’t see all these people.

I didn’t know him very well at that point. Much later I would realize that nothing going on around him was escaping him. He would have heard the chairs being moved to accommodate more people, the sudden lull in a conversation between friends as a total stranger was seated at a table with them. And later also I was to learn that this luncheon was the opening gun in a big campaign, and Bob wanted no third person dampening his ammunition. We had the table to ourselves.

We ordered fresh pork, and I offered to cut it for him.

“I’d ask the waitress to ask the chef to do it if they weren’t so rushed,” Bob said apologetically. I hastened to assure him that I didn’t mind at all. And to myself I

was thinking, thank goodness he isn't one of the independent ones when it comes to eating!

Bob ate gracefully, with a piece of bread in his left hand which he used unobtrusively to maneuver food onto his fork.

When the waitress finally showed up with the coffee, I knew exactly what she was going to say, and she did.

"Does he take cream in his coffee?"

I hurriedly raised my water glass to my mouth to cover my smile and wondered how this self-assured young man was going to deal with this situation.

For ten years I had heard blind people gripe because about 99 per cent of that body of the public which earns its living as waitresses and sales people behave as if its blind customers are present in body only.

Very casually Bob remarked, "He likes his black."

When the girl took off, I told him about my friend Vic who lived at the Home for Sightless Women. She went with the matron of the home to fill out some papers at an office. "How old is Mrs. Morgan?" asked the interviewer, who sat directly across the table from Vic. "You'll have to ask *her*," replied the matron. "You may tell the lady I am fifty-one," Vic said gently.

We both laughed at the story. "I wonder if subtle remarks like that ever make any impression," I said. "I know it must be awfully frustrating to be treated as if you can't hear or think just because you can't see."

"Sometimes they help," Bob assured me. "Usually the second time I go to a place the girl will ask me directly. And it's surprising how fast you can leave the category of idiot and become a genius in their eyes."

"I suppose you can't really blame them," I said. "They probably haven't any idea how you can know they are

addressing you. They don't know your name, you know."

"If you were a waitress, how would you do it?" Bob asked.

I thought for a moment. "I'd say, 'Do you use cream or sugar in your coffee, sir?'"

"See! A smart girl wouldn't have any trouble," he applauded.

"I've had ten years' experience, sir," I reminded him.

"How about if there were several blind men?" he challenged. "You haven't had ten years' experience with a situation like that!"

I came up with, "I'd say, 'Which of you gentlemen takes cream or sugar in your coffee?'"

"See! I told you you were smart!" he said triumphantly, and we laughed some more. Laughter came so easily that day, I should have been warned.

When we finished eating, he gave me the money to pay the check. "I've got a friend in Waterloo who insists on paying the bills himself," he remarked. "He has his wife lead him up to the counter, and he gropes around looking for the place to put the money. She could just as well pay the bill and it would be better for everybody. He claims he doesn't feel like a man if he doesn't do those things. I think that's silly. If you can do things as well as a sighted person, do them. If not, where unimportant things like this are concerned, let them. That's the way I feel."

I thought that sounded like a sensible viewpoint. I'd been paying my own bills for years, and it certainly didn't make me feel he was any less a man because I laid his money on the counter. But I was uneasy for another reason—I wasn't used to having other people pay my way, especially a man.

After lunch we went to the bank, and I sat at another

desk while Bob completed his business with one of the officers. Toward the end of the interview, he called me over and asked if I would sign a card for him. I had signed my name for lots of blind people during my years with the Commission. It was routine business, so I just wrote my name on the back of a little card they shoved toward me. After we were married Bob would say, "I had to marry the girl. She could have drawn out all my hundred and fifty dollars if I hadn't!"

When his business was completed, he tried to talk me into going to the dentist with him, but I was firm. "I've got to wash clothes," I said. "I'll take you to the dentist's office, but then I have to go."

"Oh, you don't have to take me," he said, patting his white cane. "I've been there before—I just wanted your company."

I must have looked puzzled as he strolled off. He wasn't acting true to form at all.

I was still in the basement washing clothes when the phone rang. The Lady's brother answered it. "It's for you, Virginia," he called. As he handed me the receiver, with a decided lift of his brows, he said, "It's a man."

It was indeed a man. "Augie and Mary are coming over to pick me up so we can get the steak," Bob said. "How about riding along?"

"I'm just about through washing, so I suppose I could," I said a little dubiously. There is such a thing as being yanked out of a rut a little too abruptly!

"Fine," he answered, not giving me a chance to change my mind.

We had the steak and then sat around for hours talking. Augie played *The Nutcracker Suite* on his beautiful radio-phonograph combination, and Mary popped corn.

It was an evening all of us could enjoy—good food, music, conversation—nothing to remind any of us that the two men lacked one of the senses through which some of the good things of life must be appreciated. And I, who was used to retiring not later than ten o'clock, was still awake when the clock struck two thirty.

Then Mary backed out the Chevy, and we started across town to take Bob to his rooming house. It was chilly at that hour of the morning, and Bob used that as an excuse to put his arm around me. He slid his hand down my right arm, and I inwardly shrank. Now he knew for himself what someone no doubt had told him. I sat rigid, and he gently squeezed my arm.

Then he kissed me. Wolf! I thought scornfully, but I couldn't very well slap a blind man. I turned my face away, and he turned it back and kissed me again. I didn't like it, and, as he told me later, I was about as responsive as the side of a refrigerator. But that didn't daunt Bob. He kissed me a couple more times before he got out of the car in front of the rooming house.

A little later as we drew up in front of my place, Mary said, "Dorothy and Joe are coming for dinner tomorrow. You might as well come too."

"All right," I said, "I'll walk up with them."

Augie gave a little chuckle. "Bob's invited too," he said.

I slammed the car door and went into the house. I was just beginning to suspect that I was the victim of a conspiracy. But I didn't lie awake thinking about it. After all, it was three o'clock in the morning and long past my bedtime.

•4•

I Fall

I'll bet you tell that to all the girls, I thought the next morning in church, and my mind wasn't referring to the sermon to which I was supposed to be listening. I felt I wouldn't have minded Bob's advances so much if he hadn't seemed so experienced. I knew what my roommate would have thought if I'd mentioned my emotions to her. My God! The girl will be thirty in another year. How naïve can you be! But it isn't years that bring wisdom, it's experience, and I had lived in a vacuum all my life as far as romance was concerned. To all practical intents and purposes I was fourteen years old, with a first stolen kiss on my lips and conscience.

I was confused because I didn't see how Bob could have been much of a ladies' man without my having heard about it. After all, I did get in on most of the news gathered and distributed via the grapevine method used by the blind people of the city and the state. And I knew that it was a surprisingly effective news-gathering agency, considering that a lot of the reporters were home-bound. But of course they all had telephones, and most of them having

gone to school together, they were all interested in each other.

Though Bob had not gone to the Iowa School for the Blind as a child, still he had attended three summer sessions there and had worked with a group of blind people in Waterloo, and under those circumstances, I didn't see how he could have escaped the attention of the grapevine.

It disturbed me that when we arrived at Augie's for dinner, I had a letdown feeling because Bob wasn't there. Mary explained that Bob had phoned he would be late because he was having trouble getting a taxi.

Late in the afternoon the others decided to go to a movie, and Bob said he would walk home with me and catch a streetcar from there.

We sat on the glider on the big screened-in porch and talked. Finally I realized that it was eating time again, and we went to the kitchen where I made coffee and sandwiches.

Back to the glider and more talk. From the porch I could see the streetcars coming a couple of blocks off. After it grew dark, and I decided Bob would probably be wanting to leave, I said, "Here comes a trolley."

I stood up, and Bob obediently stood up too, and we moved toward the screen door. Then suddenly he grabbed me and kissed me and guided me toward the glider again.

I still didn't particularly like the kissing, but I did like his company, and finally I was admitting it to myself. For a while I dutifully notified him each time a trolley appeared, but it was a total waste of breath on my part, so I finally quit.

In the office the next morning we acted as if we had not seen each other off company time, but at noon Bob walked to the state house with me when I took some papers to the comptroller's office. The boss was on the first week

of her vacation, and the day before she left I had promised that I would take the new job. I had told Bob this the evening before, and he hadn't said a word against it, but now he said, "I don't think you'd like that other job."

"Oh, dear," I moaned. "Here I've finally made up my mind after struggling for weeks, and now you discourage me."

"It takes a lot of stamina to travel all the time," he reminded me.

"But if I'm going to work all my life, I can't just stay on this job. There's no future in that," I protested.

He told me later that his heart sank when he heard that "going to work all my life" bit, but you would never have known it. The rascal just went on unselling me on the new position until he had convinced me, and I was very unhappy about it.

Before he and Augie left for the western part of the state the following morning, we planned a swimming party and picnic for the next Saturday. I made a couple of pies, I remember, and my brother-in-law teased Bob all during the picnic about how much attention he was getting, and made dire predictions about how abruptly that ended after matrimony. It embarrassed me, but Bob didn't seem to mind.

In the afternoon we went swimming. I came out of the bathhouse to find Bob waiting, looking taller and thinner than ever in bathing trunks. I took hold of his hand and we walked through the hot sand to the water's edge, and then into the sharp coldness of the water. I gasped as we walked farther in. When the water reached my chin, Bob put his arm around me and held me up till his body too was completely covered.

"Hang on," he said. I put my hands on his shoulders,

and he started looking me over Braille system. I let him.

I knew that he would have had someone describe me to him, but a description by a sighted person wasn't going to mean much to a man who always had been blind, I realized. What difference did it make to him if people thought I had pretty brown eyes and hair? He didn't know brown from purple. And before this affair went any further, I wanted him to know what I looked like to *him*.

I was self-conscious, but I didn't feel as I had that first time we had walked to the car line together. Then I had been thankful that I was walking on his right, so that it was my unscarred arm he used for guidance. And that night in the car I hadn't wanted him to touch my scars. Now I wanted him to know about them, and the scanty bathing suit I wore kept few secrets.

It wasn't more than a minute, probably, that I lay there against him. Then he kissed me lightly, and we swam together to a raft which floated not far off. He swung himself up and pulled me up after him. When he pulled me over against him as he lay back in the hot sunshine, I knew that the patches weren't going to make any difference, and my heart sang.

That Saturday night he slept on the studio couch in my sister's living room, and I went there in the morning and fixed bacon and eggs for everyone. It was after breakfast that I learned he could sing. I loved it, and he frequently sang to me after that when we sat on the glider at my house. That night the songs were mostly forgotten while we talked, and I learned many things about him that I had never known before.

He was the youngest of seven children, and the only blind one. His folks had taken him to Dr. Gifford in

Omaha when he was two, and again when he was four, but nothing could be done for his eyes.

His parents separated before it was time for him to go to school, and he was seven before he was finally taken to the Nebraska School for the Blind to be educated. He spent the summers with his mother or his father, with his older sister, or an aunt and uncle. His mother had worked as a cook in a restaurant, and she hadn't had time to coddle him, so he grew up very normally.

When he was fifteen his mother died from injuries suffered when she was hit by an auto as she stepped from a streetcar.

The summer after he was graduated from high school, he and a schoolmate tried to make a go of tuning pianos, but they had no car and times were hard, so they had to give up. Bob's Uncle Jim didn't like the idea of his nephew's loafing around with nothing to do, so he insisted that Bob go back to school for another year.

When he finished that extra year, he and the friend tried tuning again. But the year was 1934 (I was just starting to college) and I knew from experience how few people had money to pay for tuning pianos when too often there wasn't enough to buy bread for their children.

It was then that Bob moved back to Iowa with his father, stepmother, and their two small children. Part of the time he lived with them, and part of the time in a bachelor establishment with his three older brothers. He helped them with their milk route, lifting the heavy cans into the back of their dilapidated truck. Then one day one of Bob's brothers, hands numb with cold, dropped a cream can on Bob's right foot and broke a toe.

"That was the turning point in my life," he told me

that night on the glider. "I sent to the Commission for a talking book machine. I read a lot, and I thought a lot. I decided I was going to amount to something."

After a while he was asked to go to the summer school, which was principally for people who had lost their sight as adults and who needed to learn to live as blind people. Bob accepted, not because he felt he could learn anything he didn't already know about living as a blind man, but because anything was better than doing nothing. He spent three summers that way. At the end of that time he was eligible for aid to the blind, and he was getting seventeen dollars a month when he received a letter from his friend Ernie in Vinton about the job in Waterloo.

"Dad thought I was nuts," he said frankly. "He said, 'It's the middle of winter and ten below zero. This is no time to be going off on a wild-goose chase. You've got smoking money, haven't you?'"

But Bob caught a ride in a truck to Omaha and waited in the bus station there from 7:30 in the evening till 2:30 in the morning to catch a bus to Vinton Junction. He hitchhiked the ten miles or so into Vinton, where he stayed with Ernie and his wife Helen overnight and caught a bus for the forty miles to Waterloo the next day. There he got a room in a cheap hotel.

The very next day he started to work at the rope splicing job. His hands blistered, and he had to wrap them with tape. He and his blind fellow workers learned to soak their hands in hot water before they started to work so that they could splice more ropes and make more money.

In the beginning he was making sixteen dollars a week, which didn't cover his room rent and meals, so he went to taverns and played the piano and sang for tips.

"I had a chance to play an organ for twenty-five dollars

a week in one of those places," he told me, "but I had decided by that time that I wasn't going to be a professional musician because I wasn't good enough ever to reach the top."

After a time he decided he wanted a Seeing Eye dog, so he went to New Jersey and got Jars. Then he went to live in the home of Jim and Flossie. Flossie also worked at the tent and awning company. They had three children and several other roomers, so it was much less lonely than living in a hotel.

Then the job with John Deere came along.

"It was wonderful having those big pay checks," Bob told me, "but there wasn't really anything to spend money on. I needed clothes, but I didn't have anyplace to wear good clothes, so I didn't buy them. I tried going to church and taking part in the social activities, but that really wasn't what I was looking for either. So when Augie suggested I take this job, I decided I would."

He had made friends with both sexes but had had no romantic interests since he was in high school, he said, and I believed him. He hadn't been in a position to offer a girl marriage until the last year or so, and he was not one to let himself become vulnerable without being able to take care of the situation.

I told him about myself too, and we parted reluctantly after midnight.

By the following Thursday when a college friend came to visit me, I said to her, "Doris, I've got a surprise for you. I'm in love. If he asks me to marry him, and he will, I'm going to."

I hadn't supposed that there would be the same thrills attached to love at twenty-nine as there would be at sixteen. I didn't expect to have my heart start hammering every time

I heard Bob's voice on the telephone, or to skip a beat when he appeared in the office door, but it did.

Suddenly such popular songs as "You Were Meant for Me" and "I'm Glad I Waited for You" weren't trite at all, but something that might have been written expressly for us.

I knew Bob was bothered just as much as I was, because one morning when we had met for breakfast, his hands were shaking so badly he had to hold his coffee cup in both hands.

"What's the matter with your hands?" I asked anxiously.

"You," he said briefly. "When I was in Waterloo, Jim said, 'What in the hell is the matter with you, Bob? You're nervous as a cat!'"

"What did you say?" I asked.

"I just about knocked him and Flossie off their perches when I told them I was in love," he answered.

That first luncheon date had been July 22. About one o'clock in the morning of August 2, I called a cab for Bob, and while we waited for it, I fell asleep with my head on his shoulder. Suddenly I woke up, for he was saying, "What are we going to do about this?"

"That's your department," I answered.

"How long do you think you could stand me?" he asked.

"As long as we live," I answered.

"I have a confession," he said seriously after a moment. If he had dragged three wives and six children from his skeleton closet at that moment it wouldn't have fazed me. "I pushed that button down on the adding machine," he went on humbly.

"Why?" I asked wonderingly.

"I wanted to see if you had a temper," he confessed. "I guess I've been in love with you for quite a while. I told my folks about you when I went home over the Fourth.

I was jealous when I heard you talking so sweetly to all those blind men on the telephone. But I told myself I had to be sure you were the kind of a girl I thought you were, so that's what I did."

I kissed him.

"I wasn't nearly as sure as I acted," he went on. "You'll remember that when I finally did ask you to lunch, you just about had to say yes or be rude, and I didn't think you would be rude."

The taxi came much too quickly that night.

The next morning I told the Lady and sat down and wrote a letter to my folks. In my weekly letters to them I hadn't mentioned anything about a romance, because I didn't want to get them stirred up if nothing was going to come of it. Darlyn, my sister, wrote that they took a cab and came right up to her house with the letter. I realize now that they must have been terribly upset. Here I was about to marry a man I'd gone with less than two weeks, and a blind man at that. But they had never told me before what to do in my life, and they weren't about to begin now.

The boss was due back from her vacation in a couple of days, and I began worrying about how to break the news to her, and, as I remarked before, I didn't succeed in doing it very gently.

When she went to do an errand that noon after my announcement, Bob and I rode along. "Well, as I indicated to you this morning, we're going to be married," I said.

She answered quickly, "Not tomorrow!" And we assured her that we would wait until Bob got back from his upcoming six weeks training course in the East.

"Bob," she said, "you're the luckiest man in the world." And a little later, "I'll never take another vacation!"

Naturally I had to go back on my promise to take the new job, but the boss asked me to go to Kansas at her expense to find out exactly what the layout was, because we were patterning our enlarged program of services to the blind on the one that had been adopted there.

I learned many things that week I spent in Kansas. How the Kansas agency for the blind was run, of course, but also that life without Bob was nothing and I had to get back to him as soon as possible and stay with him the rest of our lives.

The night I was due back he had come in from Washington, a town in southern Iowa. He had half a dozen soldiers, who had ridden the bus with him, on the lookout for me.

“What color hat does she wear?” one of them asked.

“Gosh, I don’t know if she wears any!” Bob exclaimed.

“Never mind, we’ll find her,” assured his helpers.

But I didn’t need to be found. I spotted him long before I got off the train and was in his arms before he could begin to wonder whether I had made it.

The two weeks before his trip to the East simply flew. The boss thought my parents should have a chance to meet the groom-to-be, so she took us to meet my family, and our whole clan gathered in a park and had a picnic dinner. It’s a wonder that didn’t end the romance. I found out later that picnics are Bob’s pet abomination!

It was hot on the way home, and we had the car windows wide open. When we were almost to Des Moines, Bob put his nose against my hair and said, “Mmm, your hair smells good. The wind has blown all the perfume out.”

That night, much to my roommate’s disgust, I collected my various bottles of cologne and threw them in the garbage can.

“I always thought that when you fell, you’d fall hard,” she remarked, shaking her head.

Before Bob left for the East, he had to decide what to do about Jars. Poor Jars had spent most of his time in the kennels since Bob came to the Commission because Bob couldn’t take him on his trips. A dog is as bad a scene stealer as a baby, and Bob explained to me that the one time he did take Jars, he made no progress with his selling job at all. At the end of the interview the factory owner shook hands, congratulated Bob on having such a good dog, and asked him to bring Jars back to see them again!

“If you were selling something that required just good will, like toothpaste or breakfast food, a dog would be perfect,” Bob said, “but in a job like this, where you are telling an employer how independent a blind person can be, it isn’t good to have a dog along. And lots of them couldn’t have dogs in their factories, of course. That would be true, for instance, of any plant where food is processed.”

He knew that Jars would be miserable shut up in an apartment all day while I was at work, even if we could find an apartment where a dog would be accepted. It was a hard decision for Bob to make, but he decided he had better send Jars back to the Seeing Eye while the dog was young enough to be trained with someone else.

He didn’t go to the veterinarian’s to tell Jars good-by. There is nothing sweet about the sorrow of parting with a dog who has been your closest companion for more than a year. So he called the vet and asked him to make arrangements to send Jars back to New Jersey.

“The sooner he forgets about me the better,” Bob said.

I was heartsick for them both, and felt guilty toward Jars. I knew that if I hadn’t come along, Bob would have

kept him for use on weekends at least, even though he couldn't use him during the week. But Bob consoled me with assurances that Jars would be much happier working seven days a week for some other blind person who really needed him.

So our lives changed, little by little, preparatory to the biggest change that was to take place October 22, when we would be married. It was thinking about the date that sustained us when we parted at the railroad station early that September morning. Six weeks seemed like an eternity, and remembering my week in Kansas, I frankly didn't know how I was going to stand it. But as I turned away from the station, I was already planning what was to go in the letter I would be writing that night.

•5•

Love Letters in Braille

I had two choices about writing to Bob. I could write longhand or use the typewriter and have some bellboy or hotel desk clerk transfer my tenderest words and most intimate thoughts to Bob's waiting ear, or I could write in Braille so he could read them himself. Anyone who has ever written a love letter knows that I didn't really have a choice at all—Braille it had to be.

I had been acquainted with Braille, though not intimately, ever since I had gone to work at the Commission. One of my duties as supervisor of the Braille transcribing project had been to check the pages of the Braille manuscripts to be sure that the penciled numbers corresponded to the Braille ones so that the sighted workers at the bindery would get the pages in the right place. Once, when Mabel had to copy several pages of a book after proofreading, and the printed copy of the book was not available, I had read the Braille pages back to her—slowly and laboriously with my eyes. And I had explained Braille to plenty of people.

It wasn't difficult to understand at all, I'd tell them.

The whole Braille alphabet is in one little group of six raised dots, called a cell. The six dots are arranged in two vertical lines of three each. For teaching Braille, the dots are numbered from one to six, and learning the system is simply a matter of memorizing which dots make up which letters of the alphabet. Dot number one is *a*, dots number one and two are *b*, etc. Very simple. Yes, indeed.

I should have had a recording of my lecture when I sat down to write my first Braille love letter that night. It had been three years since I'd had anything to do with Braille, and I never had written any of the stuff.

I was well equipped. I had brought home from the office the wooden slate with its attached metal slide, a stylus to press into the paper to raise the dots, a supply of Braille paper, and a card containing the Braille alphabet.

I was well equipped except that I had forgotten most of the alphabet, and I was in no mood to stop and learn it now when I was so impatient to tell my love of my love.

So I fitted a piece of paper into the metal slide and started out, using the alphabet card in front of me as a guide. It was tricky; I had to remember that the letters must be written just opposite to the way the chart showed them, because it was a reading chart and not a writing one. When I took the paper from the slate and turned it over, the raised dots were on the other side. It was like writing backward so that when your script is held up to a mirror, it is readable.

It was almost like trying to write love letters in a foreign language. The words I wanted to say would run on and on in my head, and my poor fingers would try to keep up but never succeeded. Added to the mental toil was the physical effort; punching a stylus through heavy Braille paper is downright manual labor when you aren't used to it. Dur-

ing the following six weeks I developed a callus on the middle finger of my right hand that is still there, and in my mind I developed a hearty respect for people who read and write Braille with ease and dispatch.

I didn't know until much later that what I wrote was almost like reading a foreign language too. Bob said he told the boys that there would be at least one advantage to marrying a blind girl—you could read her Braille. But I didn't know but what I was doing fine, because he managed to make out enough so that he could answer all my questions as well as remark on all my activities.

Bob, of course, could write to me on his typewriter. Those long typewritten epistles I hurried home to each night were a mixture of love and business. He didn't have time to write to the office and to me, and there didn't seem to be any doubt in his mind as to where the letters should go.

So I'd take them to the office and read the parts pertaining to business to our understanding boss. Bob told us about lectures on methods of making placements, methods which had been perfected by Joe Clunk and his staff and found to be effective in getting jobs for blind people, and for helping them to remain employed.

He told about visiting various factories and having the opportunity to try dozens of different kinds of jobs. He told us about a course in salesmanship where they made recordings and then played them back to discover their mistakes. It was apparent from what he wrote that the Federal Government was doing its best to turn out experienced placement men from the raw recruits sent by the several states to take the course.

The parts I didn't read at the office were what I read and reread and hugged to my heart. Nice foolish little

paragraphs like, "I feel fine, but I am afraid my mind is in Des Moines. To be more exact, it is where you are, although maybe at times when you aren't where I think you are, I could truthfully say that I have lost my mind. That isn't as bad as it sounds, because you will take good care of it and maybe exercise it more than I do."

At first he called his classmates by the names of their states or the cities from which they came, but gradually I came to know them by their names too. Some of them were married and some single, but all of them must soon have become unutterably bored with hearing about me.

"When I came to breakfast this morning," Bob wrote, "Chicago said, 'Now we can eat breakfast—Virginia is here.'" And later, "Nebraska just put his arm around me to open the table drawer, remarking as he did so, 'Don't get excited, this isn't Virginia.' As if I didn't know!"

And one Sunday, "I just lay around today, honey, and dreamed of you. I did give Georgia, Missouri, Nebraska, and Chicago a lecture on your charms, and how they had changed my life from one of just drifting aimlessly to one of positive direction. Lewis of Georgia said he couldn't tell for sure what effect you had on me because he hadn't seen me before. He said, 'If you were any screwier before and lived in Georgia, you would have been shot long ago.' He was kidding, honey. They all feel that they know you now."

Another time he wrote, "I haven't been to any joints, and not because I haven't had a chance. I have decided that any serious drinking is out from now on. A social drink or two is all right, but you don't drink, and if I did, you would have every right to, and I don't want you to, so I will limit it to that.

"You will have to take note of what the well-dressed

young 4-F's are wearing, so that I will know how to dress. Lots of people hesitate to tell a blind man when his clothing goes out of style, and the first thing you know it's twenty years out of style and he doesn't know it. And if you ever see me slipping about good grooming, don't hesitate to tell me. I want you to be as proud of the way I look as I am of you."

And later, "I told the boys you were hemstitching some linen towels and place mats, and they told me I'd never get a chance to use them except when company was present. I soon set them right on that score. 'Nothing is too good for the Moores,' I said, 'only maybe too expensive.'"

I had other things to do besides reading letters, of course. There were three bridal showers and a luncheon to attend. I also had to find us a place to live at a time when apartments were about as plentiful as hen's teeth.

There were almost none listed in the paper, so a friend drove around with me all one Saturday afternoon looking for "Apartment to Rent" signs. There were very few such places, and my heart sank when I entered them. The landladies must all have visited the same auctions to find cast-off furniture for their dark and dreary rooms. Except that the addresses were different, you couldn't tell one from the other.

If they looked dreary to me, I shuddered when I thought of how they would appear to Bob. It didn't take eyes to feel the worn treads on the steep stairways give a little with each step, or to sense the walls pressing in on both sides of the narrow halls. He would hear the echoes given off by cold linoleum on the rough floors, and feel the furniture, bumpy from too many coats of paint applied by amateurs.

No matter how clean the places looked, they all had

the faint smell that comes from too many years of cooking and laundry done in a small space, with cheap paint and cheap wallpaper being applied only when the need became urgent. The smell was faint to me, but I knew it wouldn't be to Bob. My experience with the perfume had taught me how important odors, or lack of them, were to him. I knew that any of these apartments would remind him of the places in which he had lived during those years after his parents separated, when the depression made it cheaper to move every three months rather than to pay rent. We couldn't bring our bright new dreams into such surroundings.

Then one evening, just an hour before I was to be guest of honor at a shower, I saw an ad in the paper. The address was clear across town, but I hopped on a streetcar and went to look. My heart lifted when I saw the house. It had to be old, because houses that big and in that style just aren't being built anymore, but it had an air of spaciousness and graciousness, not only on the outside but also on the inside. The woodwork shone, the steps, covered with good carpeting, gave not at all. And my dazzled eyes could hardly believe what I saw when the landlady opened the door to the apartment for rent, one of ten in the house.

The rose-colored rug was almost new, the soft green studio couch didn't sag, the pretty curtains hung in graceful folds, and the loveliest mahogany table I had ever seen just stood there and gleamed at me. The kitchenette was big enough for one medium-sized person to turn around in, and so was the bath, but they were miniature perfection. There wasn't any odor. Every scrap of paper must have been steamed off the walls, every flake of paint re-

moved from floors and woodwork, when the house had been remodeled into apartments.

It looked as though Providence had been looking out for me again, because the rent was reasonable and the landlady didn't even look shocked when I told her my husband-to-be was blind. I had heard that there were some who didn't like to rent to blind persons, and I didn't want to enter this paradise under false pretenses and then find we weren't wanted. But the knowledge didn't seem to concern her at all. I made a ten-dollar deposit, and came back with the Lady the following morning to clinch the deal.

The week before Bob was to return, I bought my going-away clothes. I wanted them to be pretty and becoming, but I wanted them to mean something to Bob too. So the dress, a two-piece black one with rhinestone buttons down the jacket and a peplum to help show off my slim waist, was made of taffeta. I knew he would love the rustle of it when I walked beside him.

My roommate was frankly disappointed with the nightie I had selected. She had several beautiful ones—a glamorous black chiffon trimmed with lots of lace, and some heavy satin ones in luscious colors. But lace doesn't feel as glamorous as it looks, and though I knew Bob would like the stiff smoothness of the satin, still it wasn't very seductive. I smiled to myself as I put the soft, clingy knit rayon one I had chosen into a drawer. This wedding nightie wasn't meant to be admired by eyes, but appreciated by fingers, and I was satisfied that it would meet that requirement.

I didn't even try to find a hat that would be pleasing to a blind man. Any man who thinks milady's millinery

looks ridiculous should try only his tactile sense on a woman's hat. Without vision to see color, and how the hat combines with his lady's eyes and hair to make a pleasing effect, it's very nearly impossible to appreciate a woman's hat. The day I brought home the little black number I had selected, I stood by the dresser with my eyes closed, running my hands over it, and smiling to myself. I could just see the look of mingled disbelief and amusement on Bob's face when he'd run his hands over it.

A week before our wedding date I had two of the things most important to a prospective bride—a trousseau, and a threshold across which to be carried. All I needed was the most important item—the groom—and every click of a train's wheels brought him nearer.

•6•

Honeymoon

Our wedding wasn't one of those you read about in the newspapers, where the Seeing Eye dog leads his master to the bride. It was like hundreds of small home weddings no doubt taking place that very afternoon all over the country, except that in this instance the groom and a few of the guests were blind. Bob simply grabbed the arm of his best man when the time came, and we met in the Lady's living room and were married.

There were the usual tears and laughter, the usual ice cream and cake and coffee, the usual old shoes and rice thrown after us, and then we were off. The boss, driving us as far as town with our suitcase, suggested that Bob remove the carnation from his lapel.

"That's a dead giveaway," she said.

I smiled as I shook the rice out of my curls, and thought that the public would probably have to be blinder than the groom to miss the fact that we were newlyweds, carnation or no carnation.

I felt self-conscious as I led Bob across the hotel lobby to the desk. "We have a reservation," I said, as confidently

as I could manage. "Mr. and Mrs. Robert Moore." I tried to say it as if it weren't new to my tongue, and the desk man's expression didn't betray whether I had succeeded or not. He pushed the register toward me, and I signed it. I could feel his eyes on us as we followed the bellboy to the elevator. We rode the five floors in silence, and as silently followed him to our room.

I glanced quickly about the place while Bob took care of the tipping. A drearier hotel room I had never seen. But as the door closed on the bellboy's heels, Bob put out his arms and I stepped into them, and the room didn't matter at all. The scenery didn't look much like the entrance to heaven, but who cared about scenery? We were married, and alone for the first time.

It was a wonderful honeymoon, even if Bob did have to work during half of it. After all, I'd worked for the Commission for six years, and he for less than six months, so it was natural that I should have more time off. After spending the first night in Des Moines, we went to Chicago to stay a few days with Bob's sister, and it was in the La-Salle Street station on our way there that I got my first real lesson in being a Seeing Eye wife.

As we stepped into that big place full of gates and scurrying people, I shrank against Bob in panic. "How will we ever find our train?" I gasped.

Bob gave my arm a little shake. "Do you know what a post card is, sweetie?" he asked.

"Why, of course," I answered. "What's that got to do with this madhouse?"

"They always get where they are going, don't they?" he asked blandly.

"I guess so," I admitted.

"Well, if a little post card can do it, I guess you can,"

he remarked dryly. "As long as you can talk and ask questions, you can get there."

We did too, of course.

A couple of days later I discovered something else that every blind man's wife learns in a hurry. Bob's brother-in-law Ralph came home from his shift at one of the railroad yards and said that one of his buddies had seen us at the station.

A vision of that station came to my mind. There had been hundreds of people there, and I knew very well I'd never have been able to identify one of them.

"How did he know who we were?" I asked.

"It was you all right," Ralph grinned. "He remarked about what pretty legs you have and how much in love you two seemed to be."

"When you're with a blind man, sweetie, you're noticed," Bob put in.

I thought about that for a minute. "I guess I really haven't been seeing other people since I've been going around with a blind man," I concluded. "I thought you and I were the only ones on that cloud."

Bob grinned and kissed me. "For a Seeing Eye wife you are mighty unobserving," he said, but he didn't seem to mind.

I think I'm probably the only gal in the world who can say, "My husband found a job for a blind girl while we were on our honeymoon."

When we set out from Des Moines, I certainly didn't expect to have that claim to fame. It is true that Bob was supposed to stop in Burlington on the way back to try to locate a job for a client, but the initial call at any factory isn't expected to result in the immediate hiring of a blind

person. It usually just gets management over the first shock at being asked to consider such a thing, and many times it doesn't even do that.

So the morning Bob set off for the employment office in Burlington, I settled down on the bed with a newspaper to await his return with a tale of having done his duty by having broken the ice at a factory or two.

I smiled as I heard him come whistling up the hall a couple of hours later. The interviews couldn't have gone too badly, I thought.

"How did it go?" I asked, after more important matters had been taken care of.

"Phyllis can go to work a week from Monday," he said airily.

"You're kidding!" I accused.

"I'm not either," he declared.

"How did you do it?" I asked, still not really believing.

"I just told the man I was on my honeymoon and didn't want to waste any more time than necessary," he answered.

"Shades of Joe Clunk!" I moaned, collapsing on the bed.

"Joe would have loved it," Bob assured me, "even if I didn't follow all the rules and regulations. Phyllis is going to load cookies on an icing machine and make up cartons that cookies are packed in when she isn't busy with the loading."

"Did I ever tell you I think you're wonderful?" I asked.

"That's what you're supposed to think, now and forevermore," my bridegroom answered matter-of-factly. "And right now I think I'm pretty wonderful myself!"

There was one other item of business he was supposed to do before we could start back to Des Moines. He was to call on a blind man who wanted a job. The man and his

wife, also blind, lived on a bus line, so I decided to go along and act as guide, since Bob hadn't been there before.

As we stepped into the house, Bob introduced me as the new Mrs. Moore.

"Oh," said the hostess, "Margaret Glidden!"

There was a sudden silence. Margaret Glidden, which isn't her name, was a blind girl who worked with Bob at the tent and awning company. Rumors had evidently been flying, but not recent ones! I swallowed a giggle, and Bob finally recovered his mental equilibrium enough to say, "No, she was Virginia Blanck."

I could see them vainly trying to place me among the blind of the state, so I said quickly, "I work at the Commission. I keep books and that sort of thing."

I knew that would tell them, without my saying so, that I was sighted, which was what they wanted to know.

The only way I could tell that Bob was still a little flustered was that he forgot his hat, and we had to go back after it! Our hostess probably recounts that story as one of her most embarrassing moments, but if she knew how many laughs we've had from it, she wouldn't mind having committed that faux pas.

With missions accomplished, we could go home, but the train didn't leave for several hours, so we decided to go shopping for a few items that the showers had failed to provide, such as egg beaters and nutcrackers and spatulas. It was Bob's suggestion that we go into a hardware store, and I unwittingly picked out the biggest one I could find. If I had known what I know now, I'd have found a smallish dime store with a minute hardware counter, because we only had two hours till train time. But I innocently led him into that big affair and started to look for egg beaters. But with a rapt look on his face, my new husband stopped

at the first counter and began to explore. Not an item on the counter escaped his busy fingers.

“What’s this?” he’d ask occasionally, and I’d read what the sign or the blurb on the box said. It was the first time since we’d been married that I actually felt he’d forgotten I existed.

I looked at him in wonder. Hardware didn’t interest me in the least, aside from cooking utensils and other strictly domestic items. No wonder he had surprised the Federal people under whom he trained with his knowledge of tools and machinery. They didn’t expect anyone who had been blind all his life to know which was the business end of a screwdriver. That was about the extent of my knowledge of tools, but it was no wonder this blind man knew about them.

Bob’s interest and curiosity in that hardware store were such as I’d expect to find only in a scientist’s laboratory. I followed him down the counter, more and more amazed at the way his long fingers picked up an object, identified it in a second, and put it down. Fortunately the egg beaters were on the second counter or we never would have had time to purchase one.

“You like hardware stores?” I asked innocently, as we hurried back to the hotel for our bag.

Bob grinned sheepishly. “Well, yes,” he admitted. “I could spend all day in one.”

“We darn near did,” I reminded him as I glanced at my watch, “but I can think of worse places for husbands to spend their days.”

Bob squeezed my arm. “I’ll go shopping with you in the dry goods store someday,” he promised, and I could tell from the tone of his voice that he was offering the supreme sacrifice.

We remember our journey back to Des Moines chiefly for the decrepit condition of the train, and the coffee in Ottumwa, which tasted as if it had been filtered through barnyard straw.

"You'll be worn to a frazzle when we get there," Bob said solicitously as the train jerked and bumped on its way.

"I can rest. We still have two more days before our honeymoon is over," I reminded him.

He pulled my head down on his shoulder. "It will never be over if I can help it," he said seriously.

"Lucky me!" I answered. "A girl is supposed to find out all kinds of unpleasant things about her new husband on a honeymoon. He's supposed to show that he's selfish and a brute, and all the other things he hid while he was courting her. And in almost a week of living with you, all I've been able to locate is one vice."

"What's that?" he asked quickly.

"Hardware stores!" I answered, and giggled as he tweaked my ear in revenge.

No Soap Opera

At this point we probably could have rented our key hole to any number of soap opera script writers looking for material for their sob stories. A new bride, a blind husband. What glorious opportunities for heart-rending situations, tears, and emotional upsets! It should have been good for weeks of a "Listen tomorrow" serial.

But in real life it would have taken a different bride or a different groom or both to have made anything very dramatic out of the first months of our marriage. If I had been the gay butterfly type, always on the go, I could have felt beautifully frustrated, tied to a man who couldn't see. If Bob had been the sit-in-a-corner kind of blind man, dependent on me for a livelihood, he could have grown bitter, and become jealous of the hours I spent away from him.

But unfortunately for the seeker of sob stories, there just wasn't anything to get excited about, and it was several months before I worked up anything lurid enough for the soap opera industry. Bob worked for our living just like

any other husband, and I was perfectly content to live within the limitations of the things that he could enjoy. In fact, I'd lived within those limitations long before I had a blind husband to consider.

My early accident, and later the plastic surgery operations, had not exactly turned me into a ball of fire. I regularly retired at ten o'clock and didn't yearn for dancing and shows and other forms of entertainment because I would have been too tired to enjoy them had they been offered me. I liked to read and sew and write letters—quiet occupations which didn't take me into crowds and which conserved my energies for the job of earning a living.

Bob, on the other hand, had unlimited energy. "We Moores are all night owls," he told me early in our courtship, and the reason, in Bob's case at least, was because he had so much stamina. He just never seemed to be tired, and I was tired all the time.

This might have looked a little promising to a keyhole renter because it did bother me. How could I possibly keep up with a man so full of energy! Surely this could develop into a domestic crisis—but no, Bob wouldn't allow it.

One night he was voicing his admiration of Jo Stafford as a singer. "She's got so much steam," he said. I'd heard him say that, always in an admiring tone of voice, about several people.

"Sweetie," I said wistfully, "why did you marry someone who didn't have any steam at all?"

"A blind man has no business marrying a girl with a lot of steam, honey," he said with a hug. "He'd never be able to keep up with her, and he'd have to worry all the time about whether he'd be able to keep her happy. I got what I wanted in a wife, don't worry."

And that took care of that without any opportunity for histrionics.

If our keyhole observer happened to be one of those who believed that the blind live in a world of their own and can never cross over into the world of the sighted, he would certainly be justified in looking for evidences of trouble from that source—but Bob and I didn't seem to know that we weren't occupying the same world. We found, on the other hand, that in many ways we lived together more completely than any sighted couple.

The difference is apparent as soon as we get up in the morning. There is no newspaper coming between us across the breakfast table. We chat as we eat. When Bob gets home at night, the evening belongs to both of us. We read the paper together and talk about what has happened during the day. If there is a good radio program, we listen to it. If not, we read a book or magazine.

On weekends, when the other girls are hunting and golfing widows, I feel pretty smug. The same goes for bowling and other sports in which Bob doesn't participate, although many blind persons do.

Our entertainment, as well as our home life, is geared to activities both of us can enjoy. And the surprising thing is that this entails no feeling of sacrifice on my part because what Bob doesn't enjoy, I don't happen to care much about either. Some blind persons enjoy movies, but Bob isn't one of them. I never was a movie fan, so we just skip the theater going. Few blind people, if they never have had their sight, ever manage to become proficient dancers, but many of them do dance and love it. Though I like to dance, I've never done much of it and don't enjoy it enough to make me want to dance with

someone else rather than miss out entirely, so we skip dancing.

Bob doesn't care about playing cards because he has to use Braille cards. "I'm a lazy Braille reader," he admits without shame, "and I slow the game up too much when I'm involved." I had played, but never well. It had always seemed to me such a waste of my powers of concentration, with nothing to show for it at the end of the evening but the booby prize. So we don't play cards.

"What *do* you do for entertainment? Sounds like a pretty dull life!" a lot of people might say. But we don't find it so.

Most of our entertainment consists in having friends in for dinner or going to their houses. Dinner is followed by plenty of conversation. A blind person truly can enjoy this sport because he is on completely equal terms with the sighted. Bob says the reason he doesn't play cards is because it interferes with conversation!

Sometimes there were jam sessions, back in the days when we had an ancient piano and an equally ancient clarinet. We also have a large collection of records, both popular and classical. Music is something that most blind persons appreciate immensely. "Did you ever hear a group of people sing better than a bunch of blind ones?" Bob often asks, with pride in his voice, after we've been to a gathering where community singing is part of the program. And of course the answer is no.

We go to social gatherings occasionally when we can't get out of them gracefully, and there too we share the experience more than most couples. As Bob points out, blindness is a terrible social handicap. You can't recognize your friends unless you hear them talk, so you don't

even know who is present unless someone tells you. Also it's difficult to get around in a room full of people unless you have a guide.

To hear Bob talk about all the difficulties that arise when he attends a social gathering, you'd think he doesn't enjoy them. But such is far from the case. He likes people, and he's always the life of the party when he does attend. He's definitely not the retiring kind and will sit down at the piano at the drop of a hat to get the party going.

But it's much easier for him to enjoy himself with me at his elbow to say, "Here comes so-and-so," or "Mabel has a new dress," or "Charlie is really dressed up." Then he can keep things going in fine shape. Mabel is greeted with a wolf whistle and Charlie is kidded about a new girl friend, and everyone has a wonderful time, including me.

The keyhole rent wouldn't have been entirely wasted, because of course our adjustment to each other wasn't completely without pain. After all, we were two human beings who had gone our independent ways for twenty-nine years, and then suddenly were having to pull together as a team.

One thing Bob gave up was Saturday-nighting. He had been accustomed to going out with a few friends and having a beer or two in convivial surroundings to celebrate the end of the work week. We tried it a couple of times, but I turned out to be a wet blanket.

I loved watching the people—this was new territory for me—and seeing Bob having a good time. But along about ten o'clock, which is barely the shank of the evening for Saturday night, I'd get so sleepy I couldn't hold my eyes open. Then Bob would tell the gang he'd have to take his Sleepy Time Gal home, and we'd go.

With this much of a start on a situation, our keyholer might be pardoned for hoping that it would develop into a storm, but once again Bob was completely unco-operative. "You can't enjoy that kind of thing, and I can't enjoy it without you, so to hell with it!" he said.

One adjustment I had to make was living with the radio, which was on almost constantly when Bob was home. I had never been very fond of the radio, preferring to read when I had leisure time. When I was in high school and my dad listened to programs for hours on end, it almost drove me to hair pulling. But now, of course, it was different. I could have ranted and raved and delivered ultimatums—"Either the radio goes or I do!"—but this time I was the one who refused to co-operate in pulling out the tremolo stop. I loved Bob, and I knew the radio was necessary for his happiness. I didn't ever have to sit around with nothing to occupy my mind or hands. I always had something to read or sewing to do. Reading was denied Bob, but the radio was a good substitute, and he was going to have it.

I realized that to a blind person the radio is more than a source of entertainment; it is educational as well since every presentation is built from the beginning on the idea that it has to be taken in by the ear. Often when we sit down at night to read the newspaper, we find that there isn't an item on the front page that hasn't been presented on a newscast. Then Bob knows that even without visual help he is as aware of what is going on in the world as the next man. So for his sake I learned to accept the radio, enjoying what I could and ignoring what I didn't want to hear. In later years I was to tell our son that I could turn my ears off when I wanted to—and I very nearly can!

I'm not very proud of the fact that we finally did manage

to produce an emotional upset that would have been grist for the mill of any writer of tear jerkers. I shouldn't say "we"—I should say "I," because Bob was in no way responsible. To this day I don't know what made me behave the way I did.

Bob had taken a blind client out to the ordnance plant, located a few miles from Des Moines, to put the man to work. He had left the house early, and I expected him home about five-thirty as usual. About noon a snowstorm came up, and it grew steadily worse as the hours wore on.

I hadn't ever before been concerned about Bob's ability to take care of himself, but suddenly I was scared to death. I had visions of him wandering around out there in the country by himself with no signposts to guide him.

Six o'clock came. I paced up and down the apartment and wept. I went downstairs to the door and looked up and down the street. Real soap opera heroine stuff—only I wasn't acting. Seven o'clock came, and just as I was wondering if I should call the police, the downstairs door opened, and Bob came whistling up the stairs.

He and his client had had to wait for hours and had only just gotten through the red tape before he came home.

I didn't tell him I'd been worried. He knew it, of course, but he didn't mention it either. Instead of carrying on in grand style, as a true soap opera heroine would have done, I silently set about the task of putting my emotional house in order again. I knew that I had been wrong. Bob wasn't a child, even if he was blind, and I couldn't keep him attached forever to my apron strings. He was a grown, self-sufficient man, who had taken care of himself pretty well for twenty-nine years before I came along to assist in the job. It was up to me to trust him to continue taking care of himself, and not to tear down his confidence by

weeping and wailing for fear he might get lost. I *couldn't* worry, or both of us would be miserable every time he went out.

I have pretty well kept to that resolution ever since. Only one other time, when a three-day blizzard raged and Bob was in Cedar Rapids, was I tempted to try to trace him by telephone to be sure he was staying out of the storm. When he reached home, he assured me that he had had no intention of leaving the hotel by himself in that weather.

"Even if I had, the bellboy wouldn't have let me," he grinned. "Every time I even looked as though I wanted to touch the door, he'd hurry over and say, 'That's no place for you out there, boss,' and I stayed as patient as I could. Wore their lobby rug out, though, with my pacing."

Even a near tragedy that occurred later didn't shake my determination not to act like a mother hen with an errant chick, though I'll admit I had a few gray hairs after that day which weren't apparent before.

I was to meet Bob at the bus station on his way from work. I was standing on the corner waiting for him when he got off the bus. One side of his face was completely black, his top coat was black in spots, and he didn't have his cane.

I couldn't breathe for a moment, and then I said foolishly, "Where is your cane?" as if that stick of wood were more important than anything else.

"There wasn't anything left but the handle," he said, "so I just threw it away."

"What happened?" I finally managed to ask.

"I was waiting with the usual state house crowd for the streetcar, and one of the fellows grabbed my arm and said to come along, and just then this car went swishing

by. If I hadn't been holding back a little, it would have gotten me instead of the cane."

I was scared—and furious. There is a white cane law in Iowa which says that a motorist is to come to a complete stop when he approaches a person with a white cane. And white cane notwithstanding, a motorist isn't supposed to pass a streetcar stopped for loading. The white cane law is probably the most flagrantly disobeyed law in the state, not excluding the liquor law, and at that moment I was ready to berate all officialdom, from the governor on down, because of the laxity in its enforcement. But Bob, of course, took it more calmly.

"Next time I'll do my own watching," was the way he put it.

We couldn't even work up a decent case of jealousy between us. Bob knew very well that I had never loved anyone but him and never would. And I was like our friend Lena, who once said to me, "I wouldn't want anything but a blind husband. You don't have to worry about their being led astray by a beautiful blonde, and everywhere Steve goes, I go, except to work."

Of course I didn't get to go to work with Bob, and he was out from under my vigilant eye three-quarters of the time, but she was right about beautiful blondes being the least of a Seeing Eye wife's worries. Physical beauty in a woman doesn't mean a thing to a man who has always been blind. A man who became blind as an adult could get a thrill out of someone else's description of a girl qualifying as whistle bait, but it takes more than that to excite a man who has never seen a glamour girl. It takes a pleasant voice and a nice personality, which are much rarer than good figures and pretty faces.

I knew exactly what Lena meant. The sighted wife of a

blind husband does have a feeling of security that few other women can possess. She shares her husband's life so completely that there isn't room for another woman in it, and she feels that she is needed much more than if her husband were sighted. All women like to think they are indispensable, physically and emotionally, to their husbands, but no woman is surer that such is the case than a Seeing Eye wife.

For our keyhole watcher this is a very discouraging history, I'll admit. We simply were not good soap opera characters. It's true that Bob was blind and both of us inexperienced in the ways of marriage. But we lacked the traits on which emotional disturbances thrive—selfishness, deviousness in our dealings with each other, suspicion. We loved each other more than we loved ourselves. We had lived in loneliness long past the time when most persons have found love and had a family. We recognized our marriage for what it was, an island of love and security in an uncertain world, and nothing as foolish as immature squabbings should be allowed to threaten it in any way.

•8•

Seeing Eye Housekeeper

Even though we provided no good sob-story material, the first year or so was not entirely without incident. Before we had lived in the apartment for a week, I discovered that some of my ideas about men would have to be revised and a few housekeeping procedures would have to be eliminated.

It took me a few days to become aware that certain conditions must prevail if a blind person is going to live comfortably in a world that is made for the sighted. The first evidence gave me unmitigated pleasure.

All my life I'd seen my mother pick up after my father and brother. I'd heard friends complain about the shambles their husbands made of the bathroom, about soiled clothing strung around the house, about caps left off toothpaste tubes. I thought it was the nature of the male to be untidy, and the destiny of the female to bring order out of his chaos.

But not in our household. When on the first day after our arrival home nothing was out of place except what I dislocated myself, I thought the dear boy was really mak-

ing an effort for my benefit. By the third day, when I saw Bob place his electric razor back on the dresser in the exact spot from which he had removed it, I began to suspect that this was no pose. By the fifth morning, when I hadn't even had to pick up a pair of sox, I couldn't keep from voicing my pleasure.

"You're awfully tidy, my love," I said. "Don't you ever leave anything out of place?"

Bob chuckled. "I haven't got that good a memory," he said.

"What's memory got to do with it?" I wanted to know.

"If I didn't have a place for everything and keep everything in its place, I'd have to keep remembering what I did with the thing last time I used it. This way I know where it is. You learn that sort of thing in a school for the blind. Residential schools for the blind may not teach you to live in a sighted world, but they sure as hell teach you to live like an efficient blind person."

It took me another day or two before I realized that this very desirable trait of my new husband's was going to involve a little trial for me because I'm not naturally an orderly person. I read one time that the condition of a person's mind can be judged by the state of his dresser drawers—which I've always hoped wasn't true! Anyway, with Bob's comfort and happiness as motivating forces, it didn't take me long to learn that I was going to have to mend my ways.

The first lesson came one day when I saw him run his hand over the entire top of the dresser before I realized he was looking for the fingernail file he had left there. I had used it at the dressing table and left it there. No more of that, I decided. Then I saw him reach out for the ash tray which should have been sitting beside the radio. I had

washed it that morning and left it in the kitchen. Lesson number two.

By then I had decided that even if I weren't orderly about my own things, I could and would keep in their places articles that Bob might want to use. I loved the man, and I was going to make his home as comfortable as possible. My intentions were wonderful.

Then a couple of weeks later, while Bob was out of town, I got one of those urges all women seem to be subject to—I'd change the furniture around a little. But when I studied the situation I discovered that there was just one change I could make, and that was to move the end table on which the radio sat from the west end of the studio couch to the east end. I had forgotten about it by the time Bob reached home Friday night.

After our usual smooching session at the door, he stepped into the bedroom with his suitcase, and I turned to the kitchen to make coffee. Just as I turned around again, he was sitting down on the studio couch and reaching for the radio that was no longer there.

My heart sank a foot. "I moved the radio," I said quickly.

"I see you did," was all he said. But that was all he needed to say. Right then and there I vowed that in our home he was going to know where every stick of furniture was. Every time he left our door he had to be on the alert to be safe. Here at home he was not going to be under that tension. If something had to be moved, he could help me in the rearranging, and then he would know what the changes were.

As time went on, I found there were a few other matters besides the "a place for everything" policy which Bob

felt strongly about—matters a sighted husband might not have any opinion about at all.

I soon discovered that he didn't like plastic. He was inspecting the leatherette covering on the chair seats when he told me so.

"Why don't you like plastic?" I asked, bewildered. In this day and age that seemed as old-fashioned as saying you preferred a horse and buggy to a car!

"It may *look* pretty," he said, "but to me it feels like the cold oilcloth on my mother's kitchen table."

I ran my fingers over the chair seat. He was right.

"I know that people rave about place mats and curtains and drapes and other things made of plastics," he remarked. "What beautiful colors they are and how much they look like cloth. But they don't feel like cloth—they feel like plastic."

"When we get our own chairs, I'll make needlepoint," I promised. "And we'll have curtains at the windows like we have here, and cloth place mats or tablecloths."

Even before the issue came up I had decided ours would not be a paper napkin household. On our honeymoon we had talked one evening about where we would go for dinner, and Bob said, "I'd rather pay fifty cents extra and go some place where they have cloth napkins."

I knew he was not one to throw money around wildly for no reason, and I asked why he felt that way.

"No matter how well a blind person eats, he's bound to get a little food on his fingers, honey," he answered. "Once you've used a paper napkin, it's done for. If you use it to wipe your fingers, what are you going to use for insurance on your lap? And one spot on clothes means a cleaning bill that would probably cost considerably more

than fifty cents. I can't take an extra suit of clothes on the road with me, or I'm not going to, anyway. And it just gives me a lot more peace of mind to know that I'm not endangering the looks of the only pair of pants I have available at the moment."

That sounded reasonable. And even when he didn't have to worry about a change of clothes, when he was home for the weekend, I knew he'd be more comfortable if he had a cloth napkin.

It was a good thing I was past the bride's biscuit stage when I got married, because I had more to worry about in planning company dinners than how the food tasted. Of course that was important too, but even more so was the question—how difficult is the food to eat?

Bob told me one time that a former student at their school, who now was affluent, had given a dinner for the boys in Bob's class. It was a gala occasion, and the boys really looked forward to it, as probably the host did too. But the host, only partially blind himself, had forgotten to put himself in the position of his totally blind guests and had ordered a half chicken for each boy. A whole half chicken! Aside from taking it in their two hands and rendering it apart, which no one suggested, the boys didn't know how to cope with it, so most of the chicken was left on the plates.

I knew better than that, of course. When we had chicken I cut it into the separate parts and let the guests know at the beginning of the meal that their host and hostess planned to pick them up to eat them, and they were welcome to do the same. Many kinds of meat did present a problem, I found. If we had several blind guests, by the time I had cut the steak or roast for all of them, the meal was cold. It was a problem that took a little thought, but I finally

managed a solution. I prepared meatballs with mushroom sauce, using the latter as the gravy for mashed potatoes. Any blind person could handle the meat by himself on that menu, and I often used it when we had guests who couldn't see. Once we had the meatballs three times in two weeks, and Bob mildly suggested that maybe we were having guests too often!

I soon discovered also that blind people have nightmares about salads. In their dreams they have been known to reach out with a fork toward the salad, only to have it go flying across the table into someone's lap. It must be a horrible feeling to try to cope with a solid piece of lettuce, your only instrument a very inadequate fork. Jello salads aren't much better. It takes a master of balance to raise a forkful of that stuff the eighteen inches or so between the salad plate and the diner's mouth. I overcame the salad obstacle by serving instead carrot sticks and olives and celery and such, to be eaten with the fingers.

Serving proved a little difficult too. It just isn't practicable to serve a group of blind persons family style. So rather than let the food get cold by placing it first in serving dishes, and then fixing all the plates myself at the table, which involved a double chilling of the food, I simply fixed the plates in the kitchen, transferring the food directly from the utensils onto the plates.

I found that Bob had one idea about food which didn't have anything to do with how the food could be eaten. He liked the menu to be a surprise but didn't say so outright. When I'd ask him if there was anything in particular he'd like, he always insisted that was my department. Finally one day he explained: "I grew up in a school for the blind where you knew what you were going to have to eat three weeks from Tuesday." That did it. I consulted only myself

about the menu from then on and wished I could have withdrawn some of the meatball menus.

In the clothing department I decided that Bob should wear white shirts all the time instead of colored ones. They not only looked dressier, I reasoned, but also Bob would not have to worry about matching shirts with suits. A shirt was a shirt if it was white, and all he had to do was put on a clean one each morning.

That was a nice idea, but when he came home one Friday night to find me exhausted and still struggling with the ironing, he put his foot down. "We'll get me some colored shirts, and I can wear them two days," he said. "That will cut way down on your ironing."

"But how will you tell what color they are?" I wailed.

"You always fold them for my suitcase anyway and pick them out each week. I don't change suits in the middle of the week, you know. If I don't have blue shirts in my suitcase the week I'm wearing my brown suit, I can't get mixed up, can I?"

"But I might not always be here to lay out your shirts," I insisted. (Women are always borrowing trouble, Bob contends, and I guess he's right.) Then a bright idea occurred to me.

"I'll mark them!" I announced triumphantly.

It was Bob's turn to be dubious.

"I'll make Braille dots with French knots," I explained. "The shirts you wear with the brown suit I'll mark 'br,' and those you wear with the blue, 'bl.' If they aren't marked, you'll know they are white."

"That's a good idea," Bob conceded. His approval made me happier than having solved the problem.

Another thing I soon found out was that Bob liked a ticking clock, the louder the tick the better. He not only

wanted a healthy-sounding alarm clock in the bedroom, but a ticking and striking clock in the living room. The alarm clock was so loud that once some guests who were occupying the bedroom placed the offending timepiece in a dresser drawer. It was then Bob explained to them and me that a ticking clock orients a blind person in his own home more than any other device. Nothing else makes a noise, except the refrigerator when it goes on, or the radio, but a clock is on the job twenty-four hours a day. After that I removed the alarm clock from the bedroom when we had guests occupying it. In the still of the night it must have sounded like a riveting hammer to their unaccustomed ears!

It was a good thing for both of us that Bob and I entered married life with the same ideas about the duties of husband and wife in a household. It was his job to make a living—mine to make a home. Neither of us thought of my continuing to work on anything but a temporary basis. We wanted to save enough money for a down payment on a house and to buy some furniture, and then my office days would be over.

It was only after we moved from a practically choreless apartment to a house three years after our wedding that we realized how fortunate it was that we didn't subscribe to the ideas of so many couples of our acquaintance—that the wife help make the living, and the husband help keep house.

In our case it just wouldn't have worked, because no man could be less domestic than Bob. He can light the fire under a pot of coffee to warm it up if it becomes absolutely necessary, but that is about as far as he will go. Blindness isn't really a very good excuse for his lack of domestic skill, because we know blind men who can scrub floors, wash dishes, and fry chicken. But Bob uses it because it is the

best excuse he can think of for not donning an apron or swinging a dustmop!

This might have irked some women, but not me. One day when I stuck my nose in a neighbor's door and saw the husband blissfully cooking at the stove, with egg dripping all over the outside of the skillet, I came home and said to Bob, "I'm so glad I married a blind man!"

"Why?" he asked.

"Dale is making himself and the kids an egg sandwich because Gladys is uptown. Does that answer your question?"

Bob grinned. "You don't like men messing around in your department, do you?" he said.

"Nope," I answered emphatically. "I like to do the cooking and plan my own color schemes and pick out your suits. You might want to have a say about some of those things if you could see. This way I have my own way about everything!"

In a pinch Bob could manage to do what had to be done. He proved that if necessary he could mow a lawn and do a baby washing and even get a child's breakfast, but it was never something he enjoyed doing, and when I was able to take over again, both of us heaved a sigh of relief. As far as I was concerned, being a Seeing Eye housekeeper was nice work if you could get it, and I had it!

.9.

We Become Parents

There had been a time when I thought that if I were reasonably attractive physically and had a job so that I could be self-supporting, I would ask nothing more. Having achieved both, I found they weren't enough. I wanted love and emotional security. That came too, in the fullest measure, but womanlike, after a few years I wanted something more—a baby.

I always had had a strong maternal instinct. Since I was the second in our family of six, I'd had plenty of opportunity to get tired of taking care of babies, but I never did. I was crazy about them always. And now I felt that Bob and I had something to offer a baby who would be part of us both—unlimited love, and enough of the material things of life to keep it happy.

I wasn't thinking only of the baby's happiness, of course, but of us too. It seemed to me that with a child you could grow to full maturity. Without one there was no real future, no matter how well you might do financially, no matter how content you were with each other.

When most people want babies, they have two choices

about acquiring one—they can have it themselves, or adopt one. When one of the prospective parents is blind, there is only one choice. They must have it themselves, unless they have ways of getting a child through irregular adoption channels, which we didn't. Agencies won't come right out and say they would never award a normal child to a couple when one of them cannot see, but they say cautiously that each case is considered on its merits. And as long as there are so many would-be parents, and so few children to fill the need, it is just natural that parents without handicaps should be awarded the children. Our problem was simple, therefore—we'd have to have one of our own.

The problem was simple, but it turned out that the solution was not. One thing we didn't have to worry about, and that was whether we would produce a blind child. We had agreed during our brief courtship that there would be no children until we determined definitely that Bob's blindness couldn't be passed on. And if there was any possibility that it might be transmitted, we just wouldn't have a family.

In a little black strongbox that Bob had carried around with him to his various living quarters, I found a piece of pasteboard with a number on it. Underneath the number were instructions to supply those numerals when asking a Dr. Gifford about any case. So shortly after Bob and I were married, I sent the number to Dr. Gifford along with a letter telling him what we wanted to know.

Both Bob and I knew that, contrary to the belief of most of the sighted public, all blind persons do not beget blind children. Even those who are born blind, as Bob was, do not necessarily carry in their reproductive organs the genes which produce blindness in a child. In these cases blindness is caused by something which happens after concep-

tion has taken place. This "something" may be an accident, or a disease of the parent or the child. And sometimes the cause is unknown. Something happens to the embryo in the mother's womb to keep the child's eyes from developing normally, an accident of birth for which there is no accounting.

We knew that eye specialists are learned enough in this day and age to predict with reasonable certainty which causes of blindness are hereditary. Dr. Gifford wrote back promptly, assuring us that we should feel free to have children. He said Bob had been examined by both his father and himself, and he told what they had found. He mentioned that there were no other cases of blindness in Bob's family and that Bob's Wassermann was negative, which ruled out syphilis as a cause. I didn't understand the technical details about what was wrong with Bob's eyes, but if I had, they still wouldn't have told me what caused the blindness. The doctor thought perhaps Bob's mother had suffered an infection while she was carrying him. At any rate we didn't have to worry about passing it on.

But unfortunately, as happens in many cases, wanting a child and conceiving one were two different matters.

I went to Dr. Owen, our family doctor, and he could find no reason why I didn't become pregnant. My blood count had slowly risen to normal after two years of iron and liver shots, I had gained ten pounds, and I was in apparent good health. As time went on and nothing happened, Dr. Owen thought perhaps I had been made sterile by X-ray treatments which had been given to me for my scars when I was about twelve.

To say that I felt bad about our failure is putting it mildly. I felt desperate. I think I can truthfully say this was the first time I had felt bitter about anything that life

had seen fit to deal out to me. Babies—unwanted ones—were being born all the time. It didn't seem fair to me that we couldn't have one.

I had worked for two years after our marriage, and then I had quit because we thought with more rest and less nervous tension, I might have a better chance of becoming pregnant. I remember I used to listen to a woman's radio program every day about noon. It was a good program, and I enjoyed it, but it always ended with the words, "You can do anything you want to do—if you care enough." At that my blood pressure would go up about fifty points and I'd mutter, "That's what *you* think." Nobody could care more, of that I was sure.

We decided then to consult a specialist, so I called the Planned Parenthood League and was referred to a doctor who tried to help couples wanting children. Bob went with me, and the first thing the doctor inquired about was the reason for Bob's blindness. Dr. Owen had asked the same question when I broached the subject of children to him, and Bob said he wouldn't have thought much of either doctor if he hadn't been concerned about the possibility of blind offspring. My answer was the same in both cases—I drew out the letter from Dr. Gifford and passed it over.

This doctor read it carefully and nodded. "At least you had the best eye specialist in the Midwest," he told Bob.

Any couple who's ever tried to have a baby when nature refused to co-operate in the venture knows what we went through the next few months. But the day finally came when I announced to Dr. Owen that I was certain I was pregnant.

"How long are you overdue?" he asked.

"Five days," I said.

He laughed and said I'd better not spread the news yet, but I was sure I was right, and I was.

In due course we became the proud parents of Nathan Robert Moore. The nurse held the baby so Bob could feel his plump little arms, and his head, shaped so much like Bob's own, and his feet, which were large even then. I thought he had the most beautiful blue eyes I had ever seen, and if Bob had had any lingering doubts that they might not be perfect, his fears were dispelled the moment I told him.

He was not to touch the baby again for fifteen days, when we went home from the hospital. But while the other proud fathers haunted the window through which the babies could be seen, Bob sat by my bed listening intently for a certain yowl from the direction of the nursery. "He's the loudest of the bunch," he'd say fondly.

One night he told me he had walked to the car line with the father of a new daughter, and the man had had the unmitigated gall to offer him a cigar. "I was the one who should have been giving *him* the cigar—and I did," he said.

Dr. Owen said you couldn't touch Bob with a ten-foot pole, he was so proud, and if the white cane made a sensation going so confidently up and down the hospital corridors, we were blissfully unaware of it. Even my being very weak and ill for a long time after Nathan's birth didn't dampen our joy in having a son.

• 10 •

Bringing Up Nathan

As soon as Nathan became old enough so that people thought he had any understanding at all, some of them would ask me, in a conspiratorial whisper, "Does he know about his father?"

This question somehow always found me unprepared, and I must have looked blank before I realized what they were talking about. The tone of voice brought up a picture of Bob in a convict's suit. Then the light dawned, and I'd smile and say cheerfully, "Oh, you mean does he know he's blind?"

And of course he did at a very young age. I really haven't any idea when Nathan first did realize. From the time he was old enough to play with toys, when I'd say, "Show it to Daddy," I'd always add, "Put it in his hand."

By the time he was walking, which was at the age of fourteen months, he seemed to know instinctively when a person was blind.

I belonged to a club whose members were either blind or sighted wives of blind husbands.

"Show your new shirt to Margaret," I'd say to Nathan.

Margaret is sighted. He'd toddle over in her general direction and stand there, displaying his finery.

"Show it to Alice," I'd say. And he'd toddle over to Alice, take her hand, and put it on the shirt.

As he grew older, I encouraged him to keep his toys out of the way of Bob's feet. My instructions weren't heeded very well, and Bob was compelled to drag his feet across the floor to avoid stepping down on the toys. This got to be such a habit, he found himself dragging his feet for two blocks after leaving the house. But when Nathan became old enough to mount tricycles and play with wagons, I worked at getting him to realize they shouldn't be left on the sidewalk. Just before Bob would be due home, I'd scan the sidewalks and send Nathan on the run to remove all his equipment. No doubt Bob would find them with his cane before he would fall over them, but in home territory he goes rather fast, and there is no use taking chances.

I've heard so many stories about people falling over children's toys on the sidewalk that I never forget, and automatically remove wagons and tricycles as I move down the street toward the car line, even though Bob is in the farthest corner of the state.

Every time I see a wagon astraddle the sidewalk, I grin, thinking of Bob's favorite story concerning wagons. When he was going to high school at the Nebraska School for the Blind, he and a group of other blind boys went all over town without benefit of canes. They were always falling over toys which had been left on the sidewalks, and one boy, Elmer, who had been sighted until the age of fifteen, was particularly bitter about such carelessness on the part of householders.

The other boys in the gang, most of whom had grown up blind, were used to bumped shins, but they egged Elmer

on. "Throw the next one into the street," they'd suggest. Just after one such suggestion—crash!—Elmer had run into a wagon. He picked it up and hurled it in the general direction of a house. Bob said the wagon hit the porch on all four wheels and slammed into the front screen.

A woman hurried to the door. "What's wrong out here?" she asked.

"Your damn wagon was on the sidewalk, and I fell over it," said Elmer, rubbing his aching shin.

"Can't be *our* wagon," the woman answered. "Ours is on the porch." And after that, every time one of the gang would run into anything, he'd mutter, "Can't be *our* wagon," and the rest of the boys would roar.

Perhaps it is because Bob is so skilled at getting around that Nathan didn't seem to realize what his duties as a guide were. I've had parents tell me that their children could lead them safely across streets at the age of two, but not our son. When he was four, he and Bob were going to the neighbors one day, and he said, "Daddy, you're leading me off the sidewalk!"

Somewhere along the line, certainly not from his parents, he picked up a lot of ideas that sighted people seem to be born with, and we had to get rid of these as quickly and gracefully as possible.

One day we were getting ready to go to a club meeting, and he said, "Will Mabel be there?"

"No," I answered, "Mabel is working today." She was substituting for the operator at a hospital vending stand.

"I didn't know *blind* ladies could work," he said.

"Oh, God," I moaned to myself. "Human beings *are* born with that idea."

There was one thing I had to do something about, and

in a hurry. When Nathan was about three and a half, he suddenly entered the phase of wanting to surprise everyone. I had to jump when he shouted, "Boo!" at me when he got up in the morning, and a dozen times during the day too.

One night when he went to give his dad a good-night kiss, he decided to sneak up and surprise Bob. Bob heard him whispering the plan to me and went along with the game. Nathan crept to the davenport, climbed up beside Bob, and planted a kiss on the back of his dad's neck. Bob was dutifully surprised. That was so much fun that Nathan decided to try it again the next night.

But that evening Bob had half his mind on a baseball game he was listening to, and when he heard Nathan approaching, he automatically held out his arms to him.

Nathan stormed back into his room where I was waiting to tuck him in bed.

"Daddy, you are supposed to be surprised," I called. So then, of course, he was.

That went on for months, and finally Bob said to me one morning at breakfast before Nathan was up, "I like to play the game, but I don't want him thinking I don't know what's going on just because I can't see."

I said I'd think of something, and by the following Saturday morning, I had the solution.

When we finished eating breakfast, I said to Nathan, "You know when you sneak up on Daddy and give him his good-night kiss, he really knows you're there. He's just playing a game with you."

"No, he doesn't," our four-year-old answered confidently. "He can't see me coming."

"Let's play a little game," I suggested. "You sit in the corner of the davenport where Daddy always sits. I'll

put a handkerchief around your eyes so you can't see, like Daddy. Then I'll pretend I'm you. I'll go in your room and creep out as quietly as I can, and you see if you can tell when I'm here."

That sounded like great sport to him, so we set the stage. I came out of his room as quietly as I could. I crept across the floor. His mouth, beneath the blindfold, was in a wide expectant grin. Then I put my knee on the davenport, just as he always did.

"I feel'd ya!" he shouted triumphantly. And that's all it took.

Later in the day, he said to me, "Mama, when I had that handkerchief around my eyes I felt dizzy."

"It was probably the shock of the revelation," said Bob.

There was another revelation one Sunday morning when I was so sick with flu that I couldn't get up and get breakfast. About a year after Nathan's birth I had entirely regained my health and strength, so he had no memory of my ever having been sick.

"*You* can't get breakfast," he said bitterly to Bob.

"You tell Daddy how to get your breakfast, and he can get it," I assured him. Since it was evident that his mother was failing him utterly, he finally consented to go to the kitchen.

"What do I do first?" his dad asked.

"You take the pink pan," said Nathan. Lying in the bedroom, I grinned in spite of my aches and pains. That was a big help to a blind man. But Bob didn't let that stump him.

"Let's see, where do we keep the pink pan?" he asked, and Nathan showed him.

The cook was told to mash half a banana in the bottom

of a bowl, pour precooked oatmeal over it, sprinkle sugar over that, and then pour the heated milk from the pink pan over all, and mix. It was a long-drawn-out process. All the ingredients first had to be located—banana, sugar, oatmeal, and milk. Lying in the bedroom listening to the conversation, I was astounded at all the motions I went through every morning without thinking about it.

Finally I heard Bob settling Nathan's chair at the table. Short pause. "How is it?" he asked.

"I can *feel* the sugar," answered Nathan, "but that's all right," he added with magnanimity.

"I forgot to put the sugar in till last," the cook confessed.

Then I heard Bob move into the kitchen again, light the fire under coffee left from the night before, and the click of the toaster as he started the Toastmaster.

A few moments later when he entered the living room with the toast from the automatic toaster in his hand, Nathan said admiringly, "You can do just about anything, can't you, Daddy?"

"Yes, just about," his dad conceded modestly, probably feeling, after the pink pan episode, that he could.

All children learn to take advantage of their parents' weaknesses, whether it be a mother's softheadedness, as in my case, or a father's blindness, and Nathan was no exception.

We had plenty of forewarning, however. We had heard hair-raising stories about the escapades of children with two blind parents. One anecdote was related to us by Art; he had spent some time in the apartment of two blind friends who had two boys of six or seven or thereabouts.

Art said he started across the living room one day, and he stepped on something which crunched beneath his foot.

Holding his breath, he stepped again. Another crunch. "Dorothy," he called frantically to his hostess, "there are eggs all over the floor!"

Someone had brought a couple of dozen eggs and they had been sitting peacefully in a pail on the back porch until the boys decided to decorate the living room floor with them.

Jack, another blind friend who had visited the same family, told about the time a neighbor came calling. Dorothy politely asked her to sit on the davenport, and settled down herself beside her guest. Something squished as she sat down, and it must have taken the poise of the sphinx for her to have sat there till the visitor was ready to leave. When the visitor rose, Dorothy followed her to the door, with mashed potatoes dripping behind her from the dinner plate on which she had sat.

With one sighted parent, it is hard to achieve such complete devilment, of course, but children will do the best they can, nevertheless.

Bill, who is blind, and Mary his wife, who is not, were telling us one Sunday about their Randy, who is just a few months older than Nathan. Bill said he was waiting for a taxi one cold winter night, sitting on the closed-in porch until it arrived.

Randy finally said brightly, "The taxi is here, Daddy."

So Bill donned all his winter garb and stepped into the freezing blast. Only when he heard Randy giggling, and no sound of a motor, did he realize that he had been taken by his son.

Another time they were uptown, and Randy insisted on carrying a package. Bill, who is a bit of a worrier anyway, asked him finally if he still had the package, and Randy said, "No, I lost it," though he had it in his hand.

Bill and Mary weren't happy about this development, and we wouldn't have been either. At that time Nathan had shown no inclination to indulge in such antics, but it soon appeared.

One Saturday morning he was annoyed with us because it was raining outside, and I was reading the morning paper to Bob inside. No attention. Well, he'd get some.

At Easter his Sunday school teacher had given each child a little plastic bunny with something inside to make it rattle. Nathan also had in his playbox some plastic blocks which rattled. That morning he came out of his room with a blue plastic block, shook it by his father's ear, and said in a beguiling voice and with an impish smile on his face, "Daddy, this is my bunny."

This was it, and I stepped on it promptly and firmly. Our son had not heard such shock and outrage in his mother's voice in all his four and a half years, and he looked at me in surprise.

"That is not your bunny, and I don't think it's very nice of you to try to fool Daddy just because he's blind," I said sharply. No one said another word on the subject and the matter never came up again.

There were only two reasons why Nathan had any cause to feel that he was being put upon because his father couldn't see. One had to do with a kitten—and the other with television.

If Nathan had wanted a puppy, there isn't any doubt that he would have received one in short order. Bob had had a string of them from early childhood on up to Jars. He loved them all, and every dog he has met since, as far as I have been able to determine. But much to his disappointment, Nathan not only didn't care for dogs, he didn't even want one around. But he loved kittens.

Bob, on the other hand, can't stand a cat. They are so quiet a blind person can't tell where they are, most of them won't come when called, and Bob, whom I sometimes call "The Nose," swears you can smell a cat as soon as you enter a house inhabited by one. I explained to Nathan why Daddy didn't like cats, and he accepted the explanation graciously.

But one morning he said to me, "Mama, do you know what I would do if Daddy wasn't born blind?"

"No, what?" I asked.

"I would get a kitten," he said solemnly.

That shook me, and it shook Bob when I told him. He even said that we'd try to get a kitten for Nathan for Christmas. Our neighbor said he thought he knew where he could get us one, but something happened, and the kitten never did materialize. The desire for it seemed to have reached a peak that one morning, and Nathan never did mention it again, so we let the subject drop.

When television first came into the neighborhood, that was another problem. Bob doesn't take kindly to television, since it is a death-dealing blow to conversation, which is his favorite sport. I didn't care about it either. You can't write letters or read a book or do needlepoint or embroider and watch television. I enjoyed doing all those things, and very few television shows I had seen convinced me that watching them would be more fun. And besides these important considerations, we couldn't afford a television set.

So Nathan started visiting the neighbors at certain times of the day. Fortunately there were several sets in the neighborhood, so he didn't have to patronize one too often. And usually there were several other children watching too, so one small addition didn't bother the hostess too much.

During this era we met a friend on the streetcar whom I hadn't seen for a long time, and she asked if we had succumbed to television yet. I said no, and Nathan spoke up, "Because my daddy is blind," he explained. But he didn't seem to feel a bit sorry for himself because of it. In the end we solved that problem by getting a used set for his room.

It is much harder, I think, to be the blind father of a little boy than it is to be the little boy of a blind father.

Well do I remember one of the few times I left Bob to watch over Nathan when he was a tiny baby. Unfortunately I had fed our son prunes that morning for the first time in his three months of life, and he didn't need prunes.

When I reached home a scant two hours later, Bob was cleaning the baby up for the third time. Babies are messy enough at best, and when you can't see what you are doing, they are even worse.

Our friend Jack, who has a sighted wife and several children, once told us that when his wife leaves him to baby-sit, he gathers the children in a circle around him and they play there until the mother returns. "No fighting" is the rule until she takes over again.

"I freeze when one of them screams until my wife goes to find out what is the matter," Jack said with a sigh.

I've noticed that both Bill and Bob have a tendency to shout at the children more than is necessary, or would be necessary if they could see what was going on. After a certain amount of silence, which is seldom golden where children are concerned, Bob will say, "Nathan, what are you doing?"

Sometimes Nathan will answer cheerfully, sometimes he will answer in an aggrieved voice, and sometimes he doesn't answer at all. He doesn't like the feeling that he is

being checked up on, and Bob doesn't like the feeling that he is responsible for what is going on when he doesn't know what is going on. Usually I take a quick look and give Bob the information. Fortunately for us, Nathan never was much of a hand to get into trouble, so now when Bob stays with him, unless they are doing something together, Bob leaves Nathan to his own devices, which works out very well.

Sometimes when we have been with Bill and Mary for several hours and have had to arbitrate several wars between the boys, Bob and Bill shake their heads dubiously and decide they should never have had children. Mary and I smile, because we know most sighted fathers reach that conclusion quite frequently too, and because we know that these particular children are the pride of their fathers' lives.

Each year on Nathan's birthday we have his picture taken and a new one is put in Bob's billfold. One year I decided we couldn't afford it. I thought it was selfish on my part to spend the money for something that was so purely for my pleasure and not Bob's. When he came home that weekend, I said, "I think we'll just skip the picture taking this year. We can't afford it, and after all, he hasn't changed much since last year."

"You go ahead, I'll pay for it," he said immediately. "I've got to have an up-to-date picture of him in my billfold."

"I always tell the people I show it to that I have the advantage," he chuckled. "They can't show their kids' pictures to me."

"Looks just like his father," he says modestly when people tell him how good-looking Nathan is. And he pretends to be unconcerned. "You should tell his mother

those things—she eats them up,” he’ll say, as if they didn’t matter to him at all.

When Bob attended a recent convention of workers for the blind, some would-be psychologist asked him, “Has your child reached the stage where he feels he lacks something because his father is blind?”

Telling me about it later, Bob said, “I just said, ‘*My* child?’ and everybody laughed and the subject was dropped.”

I feel the same way. I have no guilty feelings whatsoever about Nathan’s having a blind father. In fact, the relationship between most blind men I know and their children is really better than that between the average father and child. The blind father, perhaps feeling that he is inadequate in some ways, makes up for it by giving his children more attention. Nathan doesn’t have to share his father’s interest with a set of golf clubs or a bowling alley or a gun.

I also feel that where one member of a marriage partnership is blind, as in our case, the family relationship is close, and I feel this gives a child a feeling of security and family unity that is often lacking where the father and mother have widely different interests.

A remark Nathan made one night as I tucked him into bed shows what he thinks about his dad.

“Is Daddy coming home tonight, Mama?” he asked.

“No, honey, not until Friday,” I answered.

He gave a wistful sigh and remarked, “I want to see Daddy with all my blood.”

Neighborhood Adoption

If there were any lace curtains in the neighborhood into which we moved, no doubt there were eyes behind them the day we arrived. A blind man! What do you do with a blind neighbor!

We were blissfully ignorant of the neighbors' concern. Although both Bob and I had grown up in small towns, our years of city living had almost made us forget that there was such a thing as neighbors who are interested in each other. In our three years of apartment living, we had become friendly with only about three people, the remainder of them remaining purely on a "hello" basis as we passed on the stairs.

One day not long after we moved, when I walked to the little store around the corner, two women hailed me from the porch of the brick house on the corner. I was delighted as well as surprised.

They didn't come right out and say they knew my husband was blind, but I smiled to myself when one of the first questions they asked was, "Where does your husband work?"

“At the Commission for the Blind,” I said. “You’ve probably seen him going by.”

They nodded, and then one of them (whose name was Margaret I learned later) shook her head sadly and said, “My heart goes out to anyone who can’t see.”

I laughed. “Your heart won’t go out to Bob when you get to know him,” I prophesied. But I knew she wasn’t convinced, because a week or so later when I mentioned that he would be coming in that night about eleven, she asked if he would be coming on the streetcar. It was nice weather and I thought he would.

“Shall I go to meet him?” she offered. “It will be dark, you know.”

I laughed again. “It doesn’t make any difference to him if it’s dark,” I reminded her. We couldn’t have our neighbors meeting streetcars, for heaven’s sake. We wanted to be a normal couple in a normal neighborhood as soon as possible, and that would be no way to begin.

But we soon discovered that it was going to take a long time before we would be regarded as just another neighborhood couple. Here was a blind man with a pregnant wife—obviously they needed help and protection, and the neighborhood was there to see that they got it.

Since our yard was so full of trees, and Bob is allergic to branches hitting him on the head as he wanders around his estate, it seemed to me that during that first summer he was forever going out the side door with a saw, bent on removing a branch which was foolish enough to droop its leaves within six feet one inch of the ground.

By the time I’d finish some little task and follow him out, there would be two or three neighborhood men doing the job. As often as not, they wouldn’t approve of the type of tool provided, so they’d scout around till they

found another kind of saw or hatchet or ax, and by the time the fallen limbs had been dragged to a brush pile in the vacant lot next door, there would be half a dozen men sitting around chatting with Bob.

It wasn't only branches that needed cutting either—there were 14 trees on our 60-foot by 120-foot lot, and many were placed most inconveniently. During his vacation Bob cut down three cherry trees, a plum, a catalpa, and a walnut. They weren't big trees, but Bob thought they resisted annihilation a little too vigorously. So he got smart. The next time he wanted a tree removed, he waited for a fine Saturday morning when the whole neighborhood was out, and then he went to the garage for a two-man saw.

That day I took a picture of three or four men cutting down the Chinese elm while Bob leaned nonchalantly on a clothesline pole.

"I'm going to call this 'A picture of Bob cutting down the Chinese elm,'" I said.

When Bob came in to put the tools away that day, I said, "Pretty smart, aren't you, young fellow."

He grinned. "I'm naturally lazy, sweetie," he remarked. "They can do it a heck of a lot easier than I can. I've proved I can do it, but I've also proved to myself that by the time I feel around and see what I'm doing, it takes me ten times as long."

The neighbors weren't obvious about their curiosity those first months, but we knew they were watching from remarks they would let drop. One said she always watched Bob go by their place on the way to the streetcar. "I don't know how he does it," she said, shaking her head.

Another, farther up the street, remarked one day, "My husband just can't get over how Bob mows the grass." As

Bob remarked about that, "It's nice someone thinks I can mow grass. He must inspect it from a moving vehicle!"

Another said, "Charlie just can't get away from the window when Bob is raking leaves or playing with Nathan or something."

One man frankly didn't believe he was really blind. "I think he's spoofing us," he said to his wife. "Why, he knows what I'm going to do before I do it. How could a blind man do that?"

His doubt was shaken a little when he drove in one night and saw Bob halfway up in the elm tree, sawing away at an offending branch.

"What in the hell are you doing up there in the middle of the night?" he demanded.

"Taking this branch off," said Bob, matter-of-factly. "What difference does it make what time it is?"

"It's dark. The only reason I saw you up there was that my lights caught you as I turned in the drive."

"No darker than usual," Bob remarked cheerfully.

Silence from below. "I suppose not," finally came the answer.

But what really convinced him that Bob was blind as a bat was the time a car was left parked across a driveway not far from our place, and Bob, going at his customary fast clip when he is in familiar territory, ran smack into the thing.

"Nobody would do that to his shins if he could help it," our neighbor decided. "He must be blind."

Dale was the first to accept the fact that Bob wasn't physically helpless just because he couldn't see. This might have been because in his childhood he had known an old blind man so handy that he could steal chickens undetected!

One day Dale told Bob that the firm for which he was working was disposing of some shuffleboard alleys, and he and some friends were cutting them in two and planning to use them for workbenches. Would Bob be interested in having one. Bob, of course, jumped at the chance.

A couple of afternoons later when Bob arrived home from the office, there lay the shuffleboard by the side of the porch. It was twenty inches wide by eight feet long and three inches thick, made of solid maple, and I didn't see how we were going to get it down to the basement.

"Dale and George brought your bench top," I greeted Bob. "It's down here by the porch."

He stood there a minute thinking, and then he grinned. "That son of a gun wants to watch me struggle to get that thing downstairs," he said. "I'll show him."

He changed his clothes in nothing flat and set to work. He finally got it on Nathan's wagon, and all I had to do was steer the wagon a little. It took much grunting and perspiration, but the thing finally lay in the corner of the cellar.

The job was barely finished when Dale drove by. He said later that he and George had rushed back to the shop and then home, because he wanted to gloat over Bob tackling that board. I don't know which of them got the most satisfaction out of the whole situation. I think it was about a fifty-fifty proposition.

By rushing to do all his work for him, the whole neighborhood had spoiled him outrageously, but Dale's treating him like a normal human being put him on his mettle in regard to that workbench. He spent all the following weekend making legs for the thing and getting the board in position on them. When he finished, it was as

solid as a rock, and then, and only then, did he call the boys in to look at it.

Gradually Bob entered into more of the neighborhood activities. He helped Dale clean old paving brick that was to be used to construct a fireplace. He pulled nails from salvage lumber the gang was constantly carrying home.

All the nails went into a pail in our garage, which was better known as Warehouse Number One. Bob told the boys he planned to use those nails when we built a new fence across the back of the lot; we'd have to do it before too long because every high wind threatened to lay the old one flat.

"What kind of fence are you going to build?" Dale asked during one of the Sunday morning coffee sessions. Bob told him in detail, but Dale didn't seem much impressed.

Then one Sunday in May, Bob left for Philadelphia for a week's refresher course sponsored by the Federal Government. The boss took him to the airport and invited Nathan and me to ride along. When we returned to the house about noon, the old fence was just being loaded into Verne's trailer, and before Bob landed in Philadelphia that night, the new fence was up.

Verne and Dale manned the power saw while Charlie pounded the pickets into place.

"How about some coffee?" I suggested.

"If you'll bring it out here, we'll drink it," they said. "Can't take time off to come in the house."

So I brewed coffee and carried it and cookies to the warehouse. Verne poured a cup of coffee and carried it over to Charlie who was swinging his hammer for all he was worth.

“If you hammer real careful, Charlie,” said Verne, “I think you can drink this without stopping.”

They did take time out for dinner, but that was all, and they were a tired trio when they left about dusk, leaving me with instructions to get the fence painted before any rain fell. They had even put a garbage rack on the end of the fence toward the garage, and when it had a primer coat of paint, it really looked elegant.

They couldn't wait for Bob to get home the following Saturday. Verne took us to the airport to meet him, and Charlie and Dale rode along.

When we pulled into our driveway, Dale said, “Bob, before we go into the house, I wish you'd show us which of those posts is good enough to keep for the new fence.”

“None of them,” said Bob promptly, but he went along, and when his hand landed on the new fence, I guess the boys decided it was worth the work.

“Didn't cost a cent but nails,” Charlie declared with pride.

“If you guys hadn't carried my pail of used nails to the dump it wouldn't have cost that,” Bob retorted.

“I didn't like the way you planned to build the thing,” Dale said. “You wanted it way too high. So we just decided we'd build it to suit ourselves.”

In spite of the workbench episode, we found out that the boys weren't entirely convinced that their blind neighbor didn't need a keeper, and they still aren't, for that matter.

They started building power saws, buying motors from discarded washing machines and other appliances. Bob ran Dale's a time or two, and when one Christmas I asked them what kind of a tool I could get Bob for Christmas, they told me he'd like a power saw too, and I could get him a mandrel, which would cost about five dollars and

which would be a beginning of a saw for him. They did the shopping, which was fortunate, since I had no idea what a mandrel was, even after they had explained it to me.

Bob was delighted with it, and a friend of the family produced a motor from an old Hart Parr washing machine to help the project along.

Almost a year later, however, the saw was still unassembled. The boys were still trying to figure out how to make it absolutely safe for a blind man to run!

But Stan, another neighbor, had no such qualms. When he moved and was looking for a place to store his printer's saw, he asked Bob if he'd like to use it for a while. Bob, of course, was delighted.

The first afternoon it was in the basement, he put a new plug on the end of the cord, and cleaned the saw till it shone. Then I heard a loud buzzing, and the smell of heat and wood drifted up from the cellar.

"Come on down," the carpenter invited me. He showed me how the blade could be adjusted to different heights, and then cut several pieces of wood while I watched. He had discovered that the switch didn't work, so one Saturday afternoon he remedied that simply by cleaning it thoroughly. And at long last he finally cut two blocks of wood to prop up our hide-a-bed where it tended to sag.

Several friends have looked horrified when we talk about Bob's running a power saw, but I don't worry at all. I know he's operated much more intricate machines than a saw in his work in factories, and besides, as I've heard him say more than once, "A blind man doesn't grow to manhood without developing safety habits—he'd be run over and killed long before he was grown if he didn't have them."

If the boys are engaged in a project in which Bob can't

participate, he assumes the role of sidewalk superintendent, and if that gets boring, he can take himself to the home of another neighbor, who is also a salesman. This man doesn't sell blind labor, but he has the gift of gab which goes with salesmanship, and he's a wonderful companion for a blind man because his idea of a good time is to sit and talk, with a long cool one in his hand.

I once read an item to Bob about an organization called "Exercise Anonymous." The idea was that when you felt a desire to work or exercise coming on, you would call a friend, and he'd bring over a couple of bottles and sit with you until the urge had worn off. Bob told Norman, his talking companion, about it, and they can always use that as an excuse to get together. They disagree on everything from baseball to politics, but on the deleterious effects of physical labor they are in complete accord.

The labor gang tried to interest Bob in one of its hobbies—auction going—but thank goodness they didn't succeed.

One night they took Bob to an auction, and when they returned, Dale and Bob carried a huge picture of oriental poppies into the house. Dale had a big grin on his face.

"You've been wanting a big picture—look what Bob bought you at the auction. Only paid ten dollars for it."

I wasn't the least bit disturbed. "I know my husband better than that," I scoffed. "In the first place he wouldn't buy a picture without my seeing it, and in the second place, he wouldn't pay ten dollars for it. No one appreciates pictures any less than Bob does, and you know it."

Then Dale admitted he had bought it for himself, but for much less than ten dollars.

After the boys left, Bob said he wasn't going to any more auctions. "There just isn't time to look over the stuff before they start selling, and it goes too fast for a blind man, or

me at least," he told me. "Besides, we can accumulate enough junk in our basement without paying for it," he added, to which I gave a hearty "Amen!"

Even after I ceased to be pregnant, the paternal attitude of the neighborhood didn't change. There were some chores I had to do that a wife with a sighted husband doesn't, so the men often take those jobs off my hands. They also do jobs like removing mice from traps, shoveling sidewalks, and fixing the washing machine when I get a blanket wound around the wringer. But these things aren't done for me because Bob is blind, but because he is out of town when the need arises. They are chores he could and would do if he were home.

The time came when the Commission opened a district office in Waterloo, and Bob was put in charge. That meant leaving our deeply carved niche in Des Moines, but in Waterloo, a hundred miles away, we found many ready-made friends because Bob had lived there when he first went to work and had since made many friends, particularly among the members of the Lions Club, when the town was his territory as a placement man.

Bob even found a substitute for his "Exercise Anonymous" friend in Bud, whom he had known back in his tavern-playing days, and who in the meantime had acquired a nice wife and two children whom Nathan and I could enjoy.

Perhaps other newcomers are treated as well as we were when we came to Waterloo, but we somehow have a suspicion that because of Bob's blindness we have been singled out for special favors.

Surely not every newcomer is surprised by a group bringing its own refreshments and bearing a gift certificate large enough to purchase a new chair and a floor lamp.

Surely not every newcomer, when he buys a secondhand table and six chairs has the chairs delivered, unasked, via station wagon by a neighbor; and the big round table hauled on a bitter winter night on a sled pulled three blocks through the snow by a new friend and his wife.

It looked as though once again we'd been "adopted," and it was a very nice feeling.

•12•

Life in a Goldfish Bowl

"I lost my temper this morning," Bob announced.

I was lying across the bed on a Friday afternoon watching Bob unpack his suitcase. As usual, he was telling me about the things that had happened to him during the week.

I perked up my ears, because that doesn't happen often, and there was no contrition in his voice. He might as well have said, "I lost my temper, and I'm *glad!*"

"In the first place," Bob went on, "one of my boys lost his job because he talked too much, and I was upset about that. Then I went to the bus station, and a character came up to me, and his first words were, 'How long have you been blind?' He didn't even have the courtesy to say 'Hello' or 'Good morning' before he started in. I was in no mood to tell him my life history, but as politely as I could manage, I said, 'All my life.' 'Have you been saved?' he demanded. 'Several times,' I said, moving away. But he moved right along with me. 'You know there are ways of getting your sight back,' he persisted. 'Get me on the bus!' I said to the bus driver."

"Did he?" I asked.

"Fortunately he did," Bob grinned.

"Same old story, new chapter," I observed.

We hadn't been married two weeks before I found out that for a blind person there isn't any such animal as a private life. That experience of being recognized in the railroad station in Chicago had only been the beginning. That was just secondhand experience.

The firsthand ones began when we returned to Des Moines and started appearing together on the streets of our fair city.

I remember the first time. We were on our way to the grocery store, and a woman stopped us by taking hold of my sleeve.

"Was he blinded in the war?" she asked solemnly.

I was completely taken aback, but I finally managed to say, "No, he's been blind all his life."

She just shook her head sadly and walked on.

"For gosh sakes," I muttered.

"Don't let it bother you, sweetie," Bob advised. "You should know by this time that a blind person just doesn't have a private life. People have been asking me personal questions since I was knee-high, and I expect they always will. Total strangers, too."

He was right. I should have known by that time. The fact that we would live a goldfish bowl sort of existence outside the walls of our own home shouldn't have come as such an overwhelming surprise after my years of working in an agency for the blind and associating closely with several sightless friends.

I had laughed as hard as anyone when Mary, the Commission's blind home teacher, came in one Monday morning and greeted us with, "Wait till you hear what happened to Ethel and me yesterday! We were waiting

for a streetcar at 9th and Grand, and two women were standing there talking. Finally one came over to me and asked if I was blind. I told her I was, and then she asked if Ethel was. 'Blind as a bat,' I said cheerfully. Then she walked back to the other woman, and do you know what she said?"

"Hard telling," someone offered.

"She said"—dramatic pause—"They shouldn't be allowed on the streets!"

As I said, I laughed as hard as anyone, and Bob assured her that someone finally had recognized that she should be in a mental institution.

"I'm sure the woman just meant it wasn't safe for you," soothed the boss. That was funny, too, because Mary had been getting herself around the state with the sole aid of her white cane for almost two years.

But when Bob and I had to contend with such people, I didn't think it was so funny.

That first encounter was only the beginning. Not two days later a woman sitting in back of us on a streetcar leaned over and tapped my shoulder. I looked around. "Is he your husband?" she asked. I nodded.

"I used to be married to a blind man," she said sadly.

I told Bob afterward that I couldn't figure out whether the marriage had been a sad experience, or if she was sad because it had somehow come to an end.

Another time, on a Sioux City streetcar, a woman said to me, "I feel for you—I have a blind daughter."

I saw red, and it was a good thing we were getting off at the next corner. "Why do sighted people act like blind ones can't hear!" I demanded. "Why do they act as they do?"

Bob just shrugged. His philosophical attitude didn't

cheer me up one bit, because I knew that at times he was just as irked as I was about it, only he didn't dare show it. He was an intelligent, mature man, and I didn't see why he should have to submit to being treated like a mentally deficient child.

The next time I exploded on the subject, Bob reminded me that I was the one who had studied psychology.

"But, sweetie, all I took was a course in beginning psychology," I protested. "And we didn't study abnormal psychology."

"Maybe it isn't abnormal," he suggested.

"I'll find out," I said grimly.

During my spare time the following week I started hunting up back numbers of a periodical called *Outlook for the Blind*, published by the American Foundation for the Blind, and I found out that what I was looking for had been right there waiting for me.

When Bob came home the following weekend, I poured my findings into his receptive ear.

"You," I said with authority, "are a member of a minority group, just like a Negro is a member of a minority group."

"That figures," he agreed, lighting a cigarette and preparing to absorb more such startling information.

"And the majority group—the sighted people in this case—prejudge you on four different levels, it says here—physical, mental, emotional, and moral. And naturally they give you a lower rating than they do themselves, just as they do the Negroes."

"Well, we know damn well they think all blind people are physically helpless," Bob agreed.

"I suppose that is natural," I said. "Vision is so necessary to them in doing all the tasks of their daily lives

that it is hard to believe these things can be done without vision. Margaret watches you walk to the car line and marvels because she herself, if the telephone rings at night, can't get across the dark living room to answer it without running into two or three pieces of furniture."

"And another thing," Bob reminded me. "More than half of all blind people didn't become blind until after they were sixty-five. Naturally they aren't going to become too handy after that age, and a lot of them are just as helpless as a sighted person thinks they should be."

"It also says here," I went on, "that so much of our knowledge and education comes to us through visual channels that the sighted person is convinced there must be a void in the mentality of the blind person, and that's why they think you are mentally deficient."

"This idiot would like a cup of coffee," Bob remarked.

With our cups filled, and the *Outlook* propped up in front of me, we prepared to hash over the remainder of the article.

"Before we leave this mental business," Bob put in, "I'd like to say that it doesn't take much to get sighted people over that hurdle. If you show any sign of intelligence at all, they immediately think you are a genius."

"That just goes to prove this article's contention," I pointed out. "Sighted people think all blind ones are mentally inferior, so when they find one that apparently isn't inferior, they think he can't be a normal blind person—he must be an above average one, and therefore a genius."

"And if a sighted person thought a man was *happy* though blind, he really would rate him feeble-minded, wouldn't he, sweetie?" I went on.

Bob nodded. "He thinks of himself as blind and can't

believe that he wouldn't rather be dead," he remarked.

"That's the emotional level," I pointed out. "Now we come to the moral."

We pondered that for quite a while.

"There are some people who still think that most blindness is caused by venereal disease," Bob finally decided. "And I suppose they think that if the sin is not that of the blind person himself, punishment is being vested on the child for the sins of his parents."

I laughed. "I remember one time when Mabel was proof-reading for the Commission, a man who worked upstairs stopped her in the hall one day and asked if blind people ever sin. Mabel said of course they did, they were just like sighted people. And then later she found out he was losing his sight, and we thought he probably wanted to know if he was automatically going to become a saint when he could no longer see."

"He was probably scared to death he was going to have to give up wine and women," Bob grinned.

"It doesn't say in this article, or in any of the others I read, why sighted people are so uninhibited about asking personal questions of blind ones," I went on, "but I've got an idea. They think a blind person is physically and mentally less mature than they, and so he stands in the same relationship to them as a child would. And you know people don't hesitate to ask a child anything."

Bob agreed that was probably a good explanation.

"Come to think of it, I was just as bad as the rest of the sighted people when I said I wouldn't marry a blind man, honey," I said humbly. "Just because I knew a few retiring ones who were married to sighted women, I jumped to the conclusion that they were all like that, and of course

they aren't. Every blind person is just as individual as every sighted one."

"And every Negro is just as individual as every white man, too," Bob reminded me, "and they've been fighting that minority-majority attitude for generations.

"You know," he continued, "it's only been about the last twenty-five years that the run-of-the-mill blind person could hope to be self-supporting, have a family, maintain a home, and make a place for himself in a sighted community. There were a few outstanding blind people who were successful before that, but not enough of them to change the public's idea about blind people in general."

"Well, I guess we'll just have to let nature take its course," I sighed. "I don't know if I'm any happier now than I was before I found out the real basis of the problem. Before this, I was angry because I considered it a personal insult toward you when people treated you like a sub-normal child. Now that I know what an ingrained attitude it is, I'm just discouraged."

"You know what you need?" he said lightly.

"No, what?" I asked suspiciously.

"A kiss and another cup of coffee," he declared, and they did seem to help the situation a little.

By the following weekend, I had found a newspaper clipping which I triumphantly read to Bob.

"This is about Negroes," I advised him, "but it applies to our problem just as much. This man from the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People said that minorities are conspicuous, and accordingly, anything bad among them is highly magnified. To offset the slander of prejudice, he said, the Negroes have to show to advantage at every opportunity."

"Of course that is exactly what I tell my clients," Bob nodded. "That's what McAulay pounded into us when we were at the training course in Baltimore. He said you've got to be on your best behavior always, because all other blind people are going to be judged by you."

"If sighted people ever change their minds, it's going to be because of blind people like you," I said. "You're everything they think blind people aren't."

Bob chuckled. "It's nice someone thinks I'm wonderful, even if it is my wife who should know better."

"Ha! Lots of people think you're wonderful, and you know it," I said stoutly. "Remember what Harry told you last week—that sort of thing is always happening to you."

Harry, a blind client, had asked Bob if he remembered Keith. "Sure, he's the shoe repairman," Bob answered.

"I get my shoes fixed a dollar cheaper by him, but I've had to listen to twenty lectures about how wonderful you are," Harry said bitterly.

"Give him a dollar and tell him to quit bothering you," Bob advised.

"I don't blame Harry for getting bored with the lectures," I went on, "but every sighted person who thinks you are wonderful is bound to have gotten over some of this attitude we object to. When the word 'blind' comes up, they don't think of a dirty old person with a tin cup. They think of you—good-looking, neat, cheerful, independent."

"That's my wife talking, boys," Bob put in.

I ignored that. "What it really amounts to is that you, and all other capable blind people like you, are missionaries, to spread the message that blind people are just human beings. Some of them *are* helpless, some of them *are* mentally deficient, some of them *are* emotionally un-

balanced, and some of them are sinners—but you can say the same about sighted people.”

Bob pulled me to him. “I don’t know whether to call you Reverend or Professor,” he teased.

“I don’t care,” I said, snuggling down in his arms, “just so you call me!”

•13•

Battle of the Tin Cup

One day Bob came home looking as if he didn't know whether to laugh or cuss.

"What happened?" I asked, as he came in the door.

"Well," he answered, "I was sitting in the bus depot at Grinnell, waiting for the bus back. I had been to the shoe factory to see how Tom was doing, and thinking about that, and I had my radio sitting on my knee tuned to some music. And suddenly something rolled down over my hand and onto the top of the radio. I put my other hand down there, and it was a nickel. I was mad! I said, 'What the hell!' And a man said, 'I always like to help people out.' I said, 'I'm playing this radio for my own amusement, thank you,' and held out the nickel to him till he took it. I'd like to have said that the nickel wouldn't even buy a battery for a radio, but of course I didn't, and he finally went away."

That wasn't the first time Bob had had to cope with such a situation. Another time he was putting a girl to work as a dictaphone operator, and he was traveling with her

from her residence to the place of her employment to show her how to get there. The sight of two white canes was apparently too much for a woman who was also waiting for a streetcar. She came over and asked if they had carfare.

"Yes," Bob answered, "I have a job, and this young lady starts working tomorrow, so we're all fixed up. Thank you just the same."

Another time we had an anniversary coming up, and Bob was looking for a jewelry store which he knew was in a certain block. He planned to give me a piece of our silver as a gift.

"Could you tell me where the jewelry store is in this block?" he asked a man. The man mumbled something, and Bob heard his hand go into his pocket. In a moment he was thrusting a piece of money, fifty cents, into Bob's hand. Bob pushed it back at him.

"I don't want your money, I asked where a jewelry store is!" he said. The man mumbled and went on. "Then I did what I should have done in the first place—waited for a woman to come along," Bob said when he told me about the incident. "They're always more helpful."

Once Bob was eating in a restaurant with a partially sighted fellow whom he had just put to work in the Burlington ordnance plant. When they went to pay for their meal, the cashier accepted the money for the other man's check. Bob had put down a dollar and a dime, and he held out his hand for the few cents change he had coming. He was surprised to have both the dollar and the dime dropped back in his hand. "Hey!" he exclaimed.

"That's all right," said the man, "I wouldn't want you to pay for a meal in my place." Bob had to insist before

he would take the money. When they got outside, Bob's companion said, "I've heard of things like that, but this is the first time I ever saw it happen."

"People don't think you're blind," Bob told him, "or you'd have seen it before. You'd find that some people practically force you to be a beggar."

Occasionally Bob couldn't do anything about such unsolicited charity. Like the time when he got a haircut in a Cedar Rapids barbershop, and when he went to pay for it, the barber said, "The man who just went out paid for yours too."

We talked about the situation that day he came from Grinnell, trying to analyze why sighted people should take a well-dressed young man for a beggar.

"You know very well that most sighted people think blind ones are physically helpless," I suggested, "so of course they wouldn't be able to earn a living, so of course they would be begging for a living. Remember that time on the streetcar?"

Bob nodded grimly. It had happened a couple of months after Nathan was born.

It must have been something urgent that took us to town that Saturday, because I was still not well and seldom went out. Anyway, we climbed on the bus to come home, only to find that it should have been displaying an S.R.O. sign. As we entered, the bus driver half stood up and called back over his shoulder, "Who is going to give this man a seat?"

Unfortunately the floor of the bus was not equipped with a trap door, so there we stood, with Bob protesting, "I don't need a seat."

At that the bus driver stood up and glared at the miserable people who would sit while a blind man stood.

“This bus doesn’t move until this man has a seat!” he declared firmly.

Naturally someone got up and practically pushed Bob down where he had been sitting. I stood in front of Bob, hanging on to a pole. The bus driver was so indignant about the thoughtless people riding his bus, that his foot was heavy on the brake, and every stop and start gave us a horrible jolt. I could see Bob’s jaw set every time this happened, and I knew he was wondering, as I was, if my incision was going to stand the shock. But we knew when we were beaten.

During World War II when streetcars were always crowded, passengers often had insisted that Bob take their seats, but he always had thanked them and pointed out that he had good big feet and was perfectly able to stand. If they went so far as to leave their seats anyway, he’d push me into it, which embarrassed me no end, but not my husband. But this was the first time we’d come up against an overabundance of the Boy Scout spirit in a bus driver, and we frankly didn’t know how to cope with it short of getting back off the bus.

“And of course they don’t think I’m physically like other men, even though I do wear trousers and a masculine haircut,” Bob remarked. “I’ve told you about going into a hotel with Velma twice, and the clerks insisting on my sharing a room with her, even though they knew we weren’t married. This last time I finally said to the clerk, ‘My wife doesn’t like to have me sleep with another woman,’ before she gave up on the idea. It’s very embarrassing to Velma. My God, I’m not an *it* just because I’m blind! But if they don’t even think I can stand up on a streetcar, I don’t suppose you can expect them to believe I could do anything except beg for a living.”

"These same people that try to give you money have been paying taxes for years so that blind people wouldn't have to beg," I sighed, "but they don't seem to know it."

"I know it," Bob agreed, shaking his head. "Sighted people either think blind ones are plutocrats or paupers. There are a few who think we all get pensions and that we don't have to pay any taxes. I've told several people lately, who intimated that I was lucky not to have to pay taxes, that all we get is an extra deduction on our Federal income tax, because we have more expenses than sighted people do. And a few have been very surprised to learn that what blind people get from the government if they have no other source of income is not a pension but the same as relief, and if you work and earn a living, you don't get it."

It is some blind people themselves who keep the tin-cup idea prevalent in the public mind, of course. They prefer to beg for a living, because it is the method which affords the greatest financial returns for the least amount of effort.

"All you need is a tin cup, a pair of dark glasses, and a total lack of pride and dignity," Bob said bitterly one day after he had encountered a blind couple on a bus while on his way to Davenport to put a blind man to work in a farm machine factory.

The couple had a guide dog, and after the bus driver had helped the couple to seats, he patted the seat beside Bob and said, "Come on up here, old fellow. This man won't mind sharing a seat with you."

"I most certainly do mind," said Bob, brushing dog hairs off his suit.

"This is a Seeing Eye dog," the driver expostulated.

Bob ran his hand down the harness, encountering the

tin cup on the way. "This is not a Seeing Eye dog," he said definitely, "and I don't want him sitting here."

He nudged the dog, who jumped to the floor. The dog knew better than to sit in the seat, and so did the owners know he shouldn't be there. They quickly settled him at their feet.

Bob said he could feel the hard looks being directed at him. He heard one woman ask if it was a Seeing Eye dog.

"No," said the blind woman, "the Seeing Eye thinks it owns the dogs it trains. This one was trained for us by a man who trained dogs for the army during the war."

She didn't go on to explain that the Seeing Eye, and most other training schools for guide dogs, have contracts which make it possible for them to reclaim the dog if it is used for begging purposes.

Later Bob heard the couple telling people they were sidewalk entertainers. They lived in the East and missed their home so much. When they reached Iowa City, they complained bitterly because there was no taxi at the station, and when one rushed up, the man said to the driver, "Take us to the best hotel in town."

Bob, who had stepped off the bus to have a cigarette, grinned to himself when he heard that. He couldn't afford to stay at that hotel when he was in Iowa City—the state's per diem expense rate wouldn't cover room rent there and leave any money to eat on.

Nothing, and I do mean nothing, makes a man in Bob's line of work more angry than hearing about a blind beggar working in the same territory the placement man has to cover. Here is Bob, calling on employers to try to convince them that they should employ capable blind men and women; men and women who can do a day's work for a day's pay. He has to tear down in the employer's mind

all the prejudices and fallacies about blindness which the man has built up through his lifetime.

And if that employer has recently seen a blind beggar on the streets, confirming his idea that such is the traditional role of a blind person, the job is just twice as hard. It is easy for the employer to understand a blind beggar—he fits all the ideas the employer ever has had about blind people. The employer rebels all the harder then against accepting information which is in direct contradiction to what he has always thought and felt about people without sight.

Placement agents for the blind, of course, aren't the only ones who feel bitter about blind persons begging. When a blind beggar appears on the streets of Des Moines, the news travels swiftly along the grapevine to some blind person who works for a living. One of them is sure to call the Commission, and the Commission calls the city police and asks that the beggar be moved on.

When the Iowa Commission for the Blind was created in 1926, one of its duties was to discourage begging, and we have had a local antisolicitation law in effect in Des Moines since shortly after the turn of the century, but unfortunately neither the law nor the Commission has been able to wipe out begging by the blind entirely.

Unfortunately the police, like other sighted people, seem congenitally unable to resist the appeal of blindness, and they move the beggar on so gently that often he is back doing business at the same old stand the following day.

Almost never are these beggars from Iowa. They come here from Missouri or Oklahoma or some other states, and no doubt those from Iowa go to Chicago. So Bob probably is wrong about their having no pride—they have

enough at least not to ply their trade where people know them.

When Bob has such experiences as he had in Grinnell that day, we do get exasperated with the sighted people who make such boners even though we can understand that some of them are not informed.

That night Bob remarked, "These same people who are trying to give me money are paying the taxes which pay my salary. And what I get paid for is trying to convince employers that blind people aren't beggars. Talk about crazy mixed-up people!"

"No, you're wrong," I said.

"What!" I hardly ever think he's wrong, and he knows it!

"The almsgivers aren't the ones who pay taxes," I said definitely.

"How do you know?" Bob demanded, surprise and suspicion in his voice.

"People who pay taxes these days don't have money to give away," I said smugly.

•14•

From Idiot to Genius

All Bob's encounters with the public aren't as ego-shattering as these tin-cup episodes, of course, and I often think what a pity it is they have to happen because they don't serve any useful purpose. They make the blind person feel horrible, and no doubt the would-be benefactor thinks, "The ungrateful so-and-so!" and goes away in anger and chagrin, instead of being bathed in the righteous glow which he anticipated. It must be downright frustrating for him, too.

But many encounters do serve a useful purpose—they educate the public, and Bob is the one who comes away with a good feeling because he knows that one more sighted person understands the truth, or is nearer to the truth at least, about those who can't see. And we know these enlightening encounters please the sighted people too, because we've heard echoes of the tales they've told to other sighted people, probably ad nauseum. They are amazed and impressed, and they don't care who knows it. Bob calls these edifying situations "From Idiot to Genius."

I was in on one of them once and have never forgotten it, it's given us so many laughs.

It happened when Nathan was two years old, and we went to Minnesota on a vacation. My sister Ramona and her husband ran a cleaning establishment in a town near a little lake, so she rented a cabin for us and stocked it with food. It was mid-August, and to our dismay we arrived at the lake in the middle of a cold rainstorm. It wasn't an auspicious beginning, but the weather had cleared by the following morning, so we decided to brave the chilly wind and take a row on the lake.

We hadn't met the proprietor of the resort until we went to the lodge that morning to rent the boat. He was visibly taken aback when he saw Bob's white cane and dark glasses, but he waddled down to the lake ahead of us.

"He's a lawyer!" I whispered to Bob on the way down. "His certificate is hanging on the wall."

"Doesn't sound like it," Bob muttered.

When we got to the lake, Mr. Obermeyer turned to me and said, "You'll have to help me get the boat into the water. Can't do it by myself."

I kept my chilly hands in my coat pockets and didn't budge. I nodded at Bob and said, "My husband will help you."

"I used to move pianos," Bob said cheerfully, moving around to the other side of the boat. "Guess I should be able to shove a rowboat."

"Well, that was different," said the baffled resortman. "You weren't uh, er . . ."

Bob laughed. "Yes, I was. I've always been blind."

"Ain't that pitiful!" said the lawyer, shaking his head lugubriously.

“He’s the pitiful one!” Ramona snorted indignantly when we were telling her the story later.

By that time Bob had the boat in the water, and we climbed in. Taking pity on our poor landlord, I said, “Bob brought gloves to row with. Last time we went rowing, he got his hands full of blisters.”

The man’s face brightened as if someone had flipped a switch.

“Oh, you’ve done this before!” he exclaimed in obvious relief.

He made the hill in half the time he’d taken to come down, and Bob and I made a private bet that he was hastening to get his field glasses.

I hope he thought we wanted to go in circles—because that’s the way we went. Bob did the rowing, and I was coxswain, and a poor one. I was forever telling him to pull the left oar when I meant right, and vice versa. But anyway we did have our row and returned safely to land, and so began the education of Mr. Obermeyer.

The following morning the rain was coming down in buckets, the temperature was in the low fifties, and our spirits weren’t exactly up in the clouds.

I hung some bedding over a line in the cabin in a futile effort to dry it, and managed to knock down the light cord which was attached to the ceiling by a flimsy piece of wrapping cord. The light went out, so something was obviously disconnected.

Bob climbed up on a chair and thence to a rickety shelf and attempted to fix the light, but he had no screwdriver so had to give it up. At that sunshiny moment the bottle gas stove started to give out a smell which was unmistakable even to us poor innocents used to city gas, and in a few moments the fire went out. That did it.

We dressed Nathan, who was as cross by that time as a two-year-old can get, and off we set for the lodge. There it was warm at least, and we began to feel better. We explained our difficulties to Mr. Obermeyer.

"Bob tried to fix the light, but he didn't have a screw-driver," I said.

The man shook his head. "He'll try anything, won't he?" he asked wonderingly.

Bob, in the meantime, had wandered to a corner and come upon an ancient piano, so he sat down and proceeded to play a little, which evoked more head shakings from our host. He even offered to take us into town to visit my sister.

As we walked down the steps of the lodge, Mr. Obermeyer asked, "Where did you get that good-looking boy?"

Before Bob could open his mouth, I gave him a wifely nudge. I knew he wanted to say, "How do most men get their children?" I felt this was not the time nor place for such remarks—I didn't want to walk that mile to town!

We had to crawl over milk cans and miscellaneous junk to get into the back seat, and Mr. Obermeyer was profuse in his apologies.

"Think nothing of it," said Bob. "My boss's car is always like this."

"You *work*?" By this time he was about ready to admit that Bob might be a member of the human race. And when Bob casually mentioned that the day before he had helped knock a hole in a brick wall so that our brother-in-law could install a new piece of drying equipment, Mr. Obermeyer's fences were down.

When we had crawled over the milk cans once more and said adieu to our chauffeur, I said to Bob, "From idiot to genius in two days."

Bob grinned. "I'd like to hear some of the stories he

tells about me in the next year or two. I'll bet I steered a straight course across that lake, fixed the light with my bare hands, and maybe even drove the car into town for him."

I knew he was thinking about another vacation we'd had at a Minnesota resort. We had spent that one with my sister Darlyn and her husband. One day Curley and Lil, old-time friends of my family, dropped in on us. They hadn't met Bob, and when they arrived, he was amusing himself by picking up small stones out of the sand on the lake shore and batting at them with a broom handle he was currently using for a cane. Once in a while you'd hear a little clink and know he had hit one.

Months later we heard that Curley was telling everyone that Bob could pick up a small stone, throw it up in the air, and hit it with a broomstick—and he could do it time after time, without a single miss!

On that occasion we decided that sometimes a blind person can even *act* like an idiot and convince people he is a genius!

Usually I don't have the satisfaction of being around when these reformations occur, but Bob frequently tells me about them.

One Friday he rode home from Sioux City with a man who inspects sprinkler systems for an underwriter's association. Bob had mentioned to the desk clerk at the hotel that he'd like to find a ride to avoid the long bus trip home, and when this man came to check out, she said to him, "I believe Mr. Moore is still looking for a ride to Des Moines. Are you going straight home, sir?"

Bob said he could feel himself being inspected from top to toe, and hear the clerk making reassuring signs to the worried checker-outer.

"I guess I could take him," the man finally said.

"He had a different feeling about blind people by the time we got to Des Moines," Bob told me that night.

"How did you begin?" I wanted to know.

"Well, we just started talking about something common to both of us—buildings."

What do you know about buildings! is what I thought, but you don't say things like that to your favorite husband, so I waited.

"I told him that I was on the board of the Home for Sightless Women, and that we had been discussing putting in a fire alarm system because the legislature had passed a law requiring it. And I said I didn't see any point in putting in an elaborate one that would show just where the fire is, because what good is that going to be for an old blind lady on the second floor, for instance? And then he told me all about sprinkling systems. I'm going to report on them at the next meeting."

They had gone on to talk about the man's past, their philosophies of living, and women, among other things. Finally they arrived in Des Moines, and by the time that discussion came to an end, the man said he knew of several jobs that blind people could do. He was too polite to say what he had thought when Bob entered his car for the ride home, but there's no doubt that it was at the other end of the pole from his convictions when the ride ended.

As Bob put it, "He's a smart man—he thinks the same way I do about almost everything—including blind people now!"

Another time, I remember, the man in question didn't have a chance to marshall his ideas about blind people before he had them changed. I've often thought it must have been a terrible shock, when he thought about it afterward.

I was reading to Bob one Saturday afternoon when a knock came at the door. It was a man from the telephone company, wanting a key for the house across the street into which new tenants were moving. I said I didn't have the key any more, but he could call the owner and find out about it.

While the man and I were unsuccessfully trying to find the landlord's name in the telephone directory, Bob moved into action. He called information and got the owner's number. Then he called and explained the telephone man's predicament.

"Have you got a skeleton key? It will open with that," the landlord said.

Since Bob's hobby is collecting keys, he had not one, but twenty, skeleton keys, so he gave one to the man to use.

In a minute or two the man was back. He said he had tried to turn the key with some pliers, and the key had broken into three pieces.

"Okay," said Bob, "I'll get some others and come over and help you."

When the man went back across the street without waiting for Bob, I was sure he hadn't realized that Bob couldn't see. If he had, he would probably have jumped into the truck and driven off. But there he waited by the door until Bob came with the keys. After the man tried two or three keys, Bob asked jokingly, "Have you monkeyed around enough now so you'll let me open it for you?" Yes, he had, so Bob opened the door.

While the telephone man worked on the phone, Bob found out why some people get new-type telephones and some don't, which had been bothering him for some time. Finally he remarked that it was cold in there. He jiggled the thermostat.

“What does this thermometer say?” he asked.

The man came over and looked. “Fifty-five degrees,” he said. Then it struck him. “Are you blind?” he exclaimed.

“Yes,” Bob chuckled.

“My God!” he gasped.

I was watching when they came out of the house, Bob first, the man following. Bob came across the street by himself, and the man sat at his wheel in the truck and didn't take his eyes off this man who had helped him. Bob missed our front walk by two feet and stepped directly into a snow drift a foot high. If the man had any doubt that his assistant couldn't see, that should have taken care of it, and apparently it did, because he drove off immediately after that, not waiting for Bob to get into the house.

Bob chuckled when he came in. “When he stops to think about this tonight, I'd like to hear what he has to say. I guess it was worth a skeleton key.”

Bob uses two methods to convince sighted people that not all blind persons are mentally deficient—conversation and action. The first is more convenient usually, and often-times the only way in a given situation. And Bob thinks there is nothing to it. Talking isn't work—it's fun!

But the way I look at it, talking itself isn't what does the job—it's what he has to say. And having something to say is definitely work, as far as I can see. And it's certainly no job for anyone mentally lazy.

I'll admit that the beginning of a conversation doesn't require much brain power. It's just a matter of technique to get a person's attention, and it doesn't take much for a blind person to get attention.

“The very fact that I can talk seems to astonish a lot of people,” Bob remarked one time.

But just to make sure he's off to a good beginning, when another man is involved, Bob uses a method which I would label—"Not Sunday School Teacher Approved." He swears!

"Nothing convinces a man that I'm normal faster than a few words of profanity," he said to me once. "Maybe he gets in a cab with me because he's going to the same hotel. But he's not happy about it. I can practically feel him trying to make himself invisible in his corner so I won't know he's there. So I damn the train for being late and the weather for being hot as hell, and the first think I know, the man is relaxed enough to add a few words to the conversation himself. He probably thinks, 'Well, this man sounds like any other man.'"

The next step is to find common ground for a conversation, and after the weather, the next safest bet for a man is sports.

"If I've heard a ball game the night before—baseball or basketball or football, it doesn't matter which—I start talking about that," he said. "Whether the man agrees with what I think about the winning team or not, he forgets for the moment that I'm not a sighted person. When he starts mulling over this encounter later, he probably thinks, 'No ordinary blind man would know that much about a game that takes sight to appreciate. He must be a damned smart man.' And presto! I'm a genius. And the next time he sees me, we're old buddies and can talk about anything."

When Bob says *anything*, he does mean *anything*. And because this conversation method does depend on having lots of ammunition, Bob works on the gathering of information constantly. I guess I shouldn't say "works" though that is what it seems like to me at times. For Bob it is fun

because, like the Elephant's Child, he seems to have been born with an insatiable curiosity.

When I read the paper in Bob's absence, I scan the headlines and read a paragraph or two of the main stories if they interest me. The little human interest stories get most of my attention. I read Dorothy Kilgallen's column, give the editorial page the once-over lightly, glance at the ads, study the recipes, and read the comics. But when Bob is sitting beside me on the davenport, my reading habits change radically. We *read* the newspaper thoroughly.

"Here's a long article about insurance rates on cars," I remember saying once. "Do you want to hear that?"

We didn't have a car then, and the state of our finances didn't make it appear that we would have one until long after any rates under discussion that year would have been changed several times.

"A little of it," Bob said.

Long ago I discovered that that reply means, "Read the whole thing," so I do. The only things we skip are the recipes and the comics.

One year I gave Bob a subscription to the *National Geographic* magazine for a Christmas present, and most of the issues we read from cover to cover. Then, when our neighbor's encyclopedia didn't satisfy our quest for information, we ignored our budget and bought a set of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*.

We read books—practically all nonfiction. When I drool over a new mystery I've unexpectedly found on our library shelves, Bob tells me to read it to myself. He enjoys a good mystery as much as I do, but he doesn't feel he has that much reading time to waste. He'd rather read a good biography than anything. He likes to know what

makes people tick, and anyone outstanding enough to have a biography written about him is bound to be interesting, he figures.

And, as I've remarked before, he listens to the radio. I have certain fields of interest, and if a radio program doesn't fit in with them, I'll ignore the program. But not Bob. The only things he draws the line at are hillbilly music and children's talent shows on the local level.

So when Bob attends a smoker, he really has something to talk about. He can make a contribution to any conversation that comes up. He knows very well that he isn't going to get to discuss business with another man in his same line of work, because he's the only one in his territory working at it, so he has to have something else to talk about.

The "action" method is faster even than conversation, Bob assures me. Being able to use a skeleton key effectively is really all he did to convince that serviceman of his normalcy. The conversation about the telephone was just frosting on the cake—helpful, but not really necessary.

Bob refuses to admit that there is anything altruistic in his attempts to change the viewpoint of the sighted toward the blind, and I'll admit that primarily his objectives are purely selfish. It isn't good for anyone's morale and ego to be considered mentally inferior. Everyone has a crying need to be well thought of and admired, and Bob thinks it's foolish not to fulfill that need if possible. If the Cause gets a boost at the same time, that's all the better.

But whatever the motive, the results are the same—an enlightening of the people who can't understand that the persons who lack physical vision are, like themselves, human beings. Each encounter is like a picture—worth more than ten thousand words.

• 15 •

Hope Springs Eternal

If someone were to come up to Bob and ask, "If you could have one wish come true, what would it be?" I'd lay odds a hundred to one that he'd say something like, "Enough money so we could afford a new car," or "Enough money so we could live in Florida and I wouldn't have to work," or something equally mercenary. It just wouldn't occur to him to say, "I'd wish I could see."

Not that he wouldn't like to see. As he says occasionally, "Being blind is like being poor—it's no disgrace, but it's damned inconvenient." But it isn't something he thinks about very often.

Only once have I ever heard him explode on the subject, and that time he said, "There are only two situations which make me feel so frustrated that I could blow my top! One is when I'm suddenly deserted by a guide in the middle of a big group of people, and the other is when I want something done that I know I could do with no trouble at all if I could see, but I can't get someone who is sighted to see what I mean."

But 99 per cent of the time he simply accepts the fact that he is blind, and goes on from there.

Hope springs eternal that he is someday going to see—not in Bob's breast—but in the breasts of total strangers who often approach him on the subject.

He says the first time that ever happened to him, he was about eighteen. He was sitting in the milk truck waiting for one of his brothers, and a man came up and spoke to him.

"They tell me you can't see," he said.

"Not only that, but I'm blind," Bob grinned.

"You're not really blind," the man assured him. "You just think you are."

"I've been this way ever since I was a baby," Bob remarked dryly.

"You just *thought* you couldn't see," the man insisted.

"Stubborn little son of a gun, wasn't I?" said Bob flippantly, and the man moved on.

About a year after Bob started to work for the Commission, he was waiting in a shoe repair shop to consult the owner about the possibility of a client's going back into the shoe repair business after losing his sight. The owner hadn't come in yet, and the wait was lengthy.

Another man who was also waiting started to talk to Bob.

"Would you like to get your sight back?" he asked.

"I couldn't very well get it back, since I've never had it," Bob parried.

"I know how you can do it," the man assured him. "Just stick your head in a bucket of cold water for three minutes. Do that several times a day, and the first thing you know, you won't be blind any more. Will you try it?"

"No," said Bob candidly.

“Why not?” the man demanded.

“Because I haven’t got time,” Bob replied. “Believe it or not, I’m working while I’m sitting here.”

The man tried once more. “I just know it will work if you give it a chance,” he said. “Won’t you just try it?”

“No,” Bob said with finality, “if I got my sight back, as you put it, I’d have to get another job.” That ended that conversation.

Every time a new article comes out in a popular magazine about operations which have resulted in sight for some blind people, someone will tell us about it. They don’t seem to realize that you have to have a certain thing wrong with your vision, and nothing else, before a corneal transplant, for instance, will do you any good. It’s like being urged to have an appendectomy to cure your stomach-ache, when the ache is caused by gallstones. And these well-intentioned people don’t realize as we do that it is usually not possible to restore vision to eyes which have not seen at all for an extended period of time because the optic nerve, not having been used, will atrophy. And no method to date has been found to replace a useless optic nerve.

Every time a faith healer comes to town, the same situation develops. We have never heard of anyone who knows personally a man, woman, or child whose vision, lost through a physical disability, has been restored by a faith healer. But the world is full of individuals who know someone who knows someone whose sight has been thus miraculously brought back. And feeling as they do that being blind is the worst possible fate, they don’t understand why Bob doesn’t at least give this method a try.

About a year ago a woman who used to live across the street from us called me on the telephone. She had called

several times before that, just to pass the time of day, but I could tell this time she had something on her mind. Finally it came out.

“Would you and Bob care to go to the faith healing meeting tonight?” she asked.

She sounded extremely surprised when I said politely, but firmly, that we wouldn't be interested. And she's never called back since. I suppose she figures that anyone who *wants* to be blind just isn't worth bothering with.

Bob isn't really a rarity when it comes to such complete adjustment—it's much more common than most people would think.

Take Mary, the Commission's former home teacher, for example. Mary has a small amount of vision in one eye, not in the center where it would be useful, but off to one side. Several years ago an announcement was made in the newspapers that a new kind of glasses were available to help people with that kind of limited vision, so that they may be able to read.

Mary was enthused, and Harold, her sighted husband, handed the necessary two hundred dollars over to her without a word. Mary is a college graduate and a very intelligent girl, and it would surprise some people to know that what she really wanted the glasses for was to read a cookbook. Harold, being a farmer, is often not at the house when Mary gets in a baking mood, and though she has a big file of recipes done in Braille, she isn't satisfied. She wants to try the latest one in the newspapers and magazines, and all those un-Brailled ones in the big cookbooks.

So she went to the doctor and had her eyes tested, and every time she came to a club meeting we'd ask her if she had the glasses yet. Finally one day she came flying into a

meeting, saying she'd had six telephone calls while she was trying to get ready.

"I just turned away from the telephone and told Harold I was going to scream if the thing rang again, and it rang!" she exclaimed. "And it was the doctor's office saying my glasses are ready."

"When are you going to get them?" we all clamored.

"Well, not this week," she said definitely. "I've got peas to can, and we're having a family reunion because Ray is coming with the new baby."

We all groaned. "That's what I call being well-adjusted to blindness," I sighed, and the girls all agreed with me.

Bob simply hates to work with a client who doesn't accept the fact that he's blind and going to stay that way.

One day he came home raging.

"I went to see that fellow who applied for a job," he said, "and all the time I was there he talked about how much better he could see than he used to, and how he could tell coins apart by holding them within two inches of his eye. He'll make a hell of a worker. He can't see well enough to work as a sighted man, and he can't or won't use his fingers like a blind man, so what good will he be?"

That reminded me of what the head of a state agency for the blind, a partially sighted man himself, once asked Bob.

"Bob," he said, "did you ever know a partially sighted person who was worth a damn?"

"A few," Bob admitted cautiously.

The man went right on: "Those who have any sight try to live as sighted persons—they won't admit they are blind. But they can't live like a sighted person because they aren't physically equipped for it, so they just live on the

fringe of the sighted world. They are like the Negro with a lot of white blood who tries to pass as a white. Sometimes they make it, but there is a lot of strain involved."

"That's what I tell my partially sighted clients," Bob told him. "I tell them if they admit they are blind, they can be damned handy blind men because they do have a decided advantage over those of us who don't see at all. And people would admire them. Instead they do a bungling job of trying to be sighted, and people just pity them or think they aren't very smart. If it made them happy to try to keep up appearances like that, it would be different, but it never seems to. Some of the blind people I know who won't admit they are blind by carrying a white cane, are among the most maladjusted individuals I know. They'd rather the public thought they were drunk than blind!"

The client who was bragging about his ability to distinguish coins is a case in point. He was sent by the Commission to a technical school, and his progress there was just as unsatisfactory as Bob had known it would be. It wasn't that he didn't want to work, because he did. And he wanted to do a good job. But he couldn't read the instruments with the little sight he was so proud of, and he couldn't feel those prepared for the blind students because he hadn't had enough practice using his hands.

"When are you going to bring me some good *blind* students like those two Harry (his predecessor) had?" the teacher groaned to Bob.

"I don't know," Bob admitted. "There don't seem to be very many of that kind around."

The way Bob scurries around at times trying to find a partially sighted person a job he would certainly fool anyone regarding his feelings on the relative merits of par-

tially sighted and blind persons as workers. But of course there are jobs that a totally blind person just can't do, and which a partially sighted one can. Jobs like cleaning machinery and sweeping. Jobs which call for mobility.

These jobs don't require the fine sense of touch which will substitute for eyesight on some jobs, but they do require that the worker see approximately where he is going. And if the partially sighted worker accepts and admits the fact that his sight is limited, he can get along on this type of job very well. As Bob points out, it isn't partially sighted people he objects to—it's partially sighted people who won't admit they are just that.

Since Bob believes that accepting blindness is the first step in the rehabilitation of a person who has lost his sight, nothing makes him more disgusted than a doctor who refuses to tell his client that nothing can be done to restore his sight. There are certain diseases which destroy sight in such a way that the lost vision can never be restored. Doctors know this, but some of them are reluctant to take all hope away from their patients. So the patients keep on hoping, and often go from doctor to doctor, squandering time and money that could be used to better advantage in learning to live as blind persons.

"When sighted people think that blind ones are emotionally unstable because they are blind, they are probably more often right than in some of their other opinions," Bob admitted after that coin-examining interview. "That's truer of those who have recently lost their sight than it is of those who have been blind for a long time. It takes a period of years to realize that life can and does go on, and sometimes very satisfactorily, even if you don't have sight."

"There was a picture of a young blind mother in the paper last week," I told him. "She had had one operation

and was going to have another which might give her some sight again after having been blind for eighteen years. She said she had been blind for so long that she really wouldn't be disappointed if the operations weren't a success."

Bob nodded his approval of her attitude. "I'm better adjusted than she is even," he said modestly, "because I wouldn't even have the operations just on the chance they *might* be successful."

"Not better adjusted—more afraid of pain," I teased.

"You're damn right," he agreed. "Anyone who doesn't have an ache or a pain—even if he is blind—doesn't have any right to bitch." And he meant it.

•16•

Safety Valve

“I wish I’d been married to you when you worked for John Deere, honey,” I remarked one night. “I’m sure you didn’t bring oil pumps home from the factory with you, but you certainly bring your work home now to share our bed and board.”

Bob knew I was only kidding, but there are times when we both wish his job weren’t a twenty-four hours a day affair. It really shouldn’t be that. Theoretically he goes to work at eight in the morning, gets off at four-thirty and has a half-hour lunch period, all this five days a week. But somehow it doesn’t work out that way.

When Bob came to work for the Commission, I knew more about his clients than he did. And as long as I worked there, I knew just as much. When I quit, after two years of married life, his idea was that I should be divorced entirely from the office and not have to worry about it. That might have worked if he had quit laboring when he left the office, but he didn’t.

He’d been in the same situation as too many of his clients, and could too readily put himself in their places.

One night when he was preoccupied, I said, "I'd rather know *what* you are worrying about and worry along with you than to sit here and worry about your worrying! Let's do like we used to do when I worked, discuss all that stuff that's bothering you. You've got to have a safety valve of some sort—let me be it. Besides," I went on, "I hear about your problems from our blind friends and worry about them anyway. And you know very well nothing you say to me will go any further. After all, I worked with confidential information for eight years and have the habit of not passing information along."

From then on, Bob didn't do his worrying alone. It isn't just cases we talk about, of course, but all the problems involved in his work, and the knottier they are the more we thrash them over between us.

I love the times when he has made a successful placement. He comes home all elated, and I give him fresh fried potatoes, his favorite dish, as a special reward. Both of us know how much a job means to a blind person who has been living on a minimum budget, perhaps for years. And it's not just the money that's involved either.

But when Bob has failures—that's another story. I remember one trip he made to a tent and awning company in a town about forty miles from Des Moines. He wanted to get a rope splicing job for a client. Now Bob doesn't consider a rope splicing job much of a job. From experience he knows that it is very hard work and doesn't pay too well. And usually it is not to be depended on for full-time employment except during wars. But in this particular case, he didn't feel that the client was qualified for a better job, and yet he did want to work. Bob felt that a few months on a rope splicing job would prove or disprove the client's ability and sincerity without the expense involved in bring-

ing him to Des Moines for a training course. For some reason that wasn't possible at the time because of family complications.

So Bob set off for this factory, not doubting at all that such a job could be obtained for his client, since rope splicers are seldom so attached to their work that they stay on for any length of time.

"Fresh fried potatoes?" I greeted him that night.

I could hardly believe it when he shook his head. "I didn't get the job," he said, "and while that owner is there, I don't expect to."

"Yike, he must really be a tough one," I said.

"He is," Bob agreed. "In the first place, he knew all about the fact that blind rope splicers had been used in Waterloo and here in Des Moines. He knew they could do the job. He didn't question that at all. But the first thing he said to me was, 'Don't all blind persons get pensions?' I'd like to have said to him, 'Could you get relief if you didn't have any income? It amounts to the same thing.' But of course I didn't. I explained that financial aid is available to those who can't work, but that it is hardly a satisfactory solution to the problem of blind people who are wanting to work and be self-supporting."

"Oh, dear," I sympathized. "Did you explain that what he calls a pension is just the minimum amount a person can get along on? And how would he like to live on less than a hundred dollars a month if he were a young blind person with all his life ahead of him?" I continued indignantly.

"Of course I explained," Bob answered, then grinned. "But maybe I should have taken you along."

"Didn't that convince him?" I asked.

"Hell no!" Bob answered. "He just said, 'I still don't

think they should work as long as the government will support them.' So to get away from the pension, I started talking about some of our clients and how successful they have been on jobs, and I mentioned the fact that Steve earned almost seven thousand dollars at John Deere last year. And do you know what he said?"

"What?"

"He said, 'What would a blind person do with that kind of money?'"

My mouth flew open and stayed that way for a minute. "What did you say to that?" I finally managed to get out.

"I just said, 'They like an occasional pork chop, too,'" Bob answered.

"And what did he say to that?" I wanted to know.

"He just said, 'I suppose so.'"

I didn't think Bob was half as angry about the incident as he should have been. I boiled every time I thought about it. I'd like to have taken that man by his coat collar and dragged him to Steve's house. I think he would have been extremely surprised to see that Steve has a sighted wife and two children, and that he wants for them just exactly the same things the factory owner wants for his family, if he is a normal family man, which I doubted after his interview with Bob.

"Don't let it bother you, sweetie," Bob advised me. "Anyone who thinks another man, blind or sighted, would have trouble spending money in this day and age can't be too intelligent, even if he does own a factory."

Another failure that really got us both riled up was Bob's attempt to find out if blind people can run an IBM bookkeeping machine.

Several years ago he got it into his head, after talking with a machinist working on IBM machines, that such a

thing might be possible. He wrote to the Federal office asking information on the subject, but that was one field they had not yet explored. There aren't too many large IBM departments in the state of Iowa, but finally a new state pension law was passed that was going to entail a lot of IBM work, and Bob went to the department which was going to be responsible for it.

He told the commissioners that he didn't know if blind persons could do the job. All he asked was a chance to find out, because if they could, it would open up hundreds of new job opportunities for blind persons all over the country. He felt that he could ask a state department for an opportunity to prove or disprove his theory, because tax funds were already being used to support the persons who might find jobs if he were successful.

The commissioners themselves gave him an attentive ear. Then they called down from their offices on the floor above two men who were in charge of their bookkeeping department. And here it was the same old story—they didn't want to admit that it might be possible for a blind person to do the work they were doing. There wasn't any use trying, it just couldn't be done. That was their attitude, and they stuck by it to the bitter end.

During the next few weeks, Bob did his best to meet their objections. He worked with an IBM technician on a system whereby IBM cards could be marked with Braille dots in such a way that with only five cards, any one of the 960 holes could be identified without the use of sight. This would make it possible for a blind person to run the sorting machine, Bob was sure.

But just when he was ready to have a blind man try the cards, a letter came from the department telling him point-blank that it could not be done.

Bob is seldom bitter, but he was bitter then. In his frustration he felt that the boss should use political influence to force the department to give him a chance. He knew that the Commission for the Blind never had been involved in politics and that it was the best policy in the long run, but the goal had been so close, and the possibility of success had looked so bright, that it was a bitter pill to swallow.

All employment counselors for the blind have such problems, of course, and to keep each other informed about progress in the different fields of employment, they get out a newsletter every three months. All over the country, placement men like Bob take turns editing it, and they all supply the news with which it is filled. News of a placement in one state may give a man in another state an idea. If a new kind of job is found, a man is glad to pass the news along to his colleagues. If business is slow, it isn't so discouraging when you know it isn't personal failure on your part, but a nationwide trend due to a slowdown of business in general. If business is good, it spurs a man on to making his share of placements.

After getting the negative answer on the IBM idea, Bob wrote to the current editor of the newsletter and through him to his fellow workers all over the country, telling them about his failure and giving them the system he had worked out for the IBM machines. He hoped that some placement man would take up the work where he left off, and perhaps find a more enlightened group with which to work.

Later he found out through the newsletter that the possibilities had been explored by a blind man who is in charge of handicapped workers for the IBM company. This man said the blind person was at too great a disadvantage.

That's all Bob wanted to know, and his frustration on that point ceased. The problem had lived with us for months, and I shed no tears when it was laid to rest.

It isn't just departments of state government which give him trouble, either. Some of his most unproductive interviews have been with a colonel in charge of one of the country's largest arsenals, located on an island in the Mississippi River.

During the war this arsenal employed a group of blind persons. Their work was the most menial and the dirtiest sorting jobs available. And they were given a classification of "temporary female" help so that under no circumstances could they earn any seniority. As soon as the war ended, every blind person was laid off with no hope of ever getting back on, no matter how good his work and attendance record had been.

Bob looked upon the arsenal as a good place for blind workers for several reasons. It employed seven thousand persons, for one thing, and there were bound to be a great many jobs that blind persons could do. For another, as a government agency it should be interested in hiring those who could produce so that tax money wouldn't be wasted. And thirdly, the Federal Government, which ran the arsenal, was appropriating millions of dollars to provide rehabilitation for handicapped people, and it seemed reasonable to him that it should be willing to hire the same kind of efficient help it was constantly urging upon private industry.

But the colonel had other ideas. He wanted no part of blind labor. He told Bob on his first visit that there were no jobs which could be done without sight—that all the jobs in the arsenal called for a high degree of skill and a lot of mobility.

Bob asked mildly, "Doesn't that create quite a traffic problem with seven thousand workers moving all over the place every minute of the day?"

Bob wasn't asking for jobs at that point. He was asking for a chance to survey the arsenal to find out if there were any suitable jobs. But he didn't get the opportunity.

After several more calls, equally futile, the boss wrote Iowa's Congressmen. The Congressmen were polite and interested, but nothing happened. Then she wrote the Federal office for the blind, and someone wrote back asking Bob to get a witness to the colonel's refusal, and they would see what could be done.

On his next visit, Bob took a man from the Davenport employment office with him. In twenty minutes the colonel said, "No!" five times.

When Bob and the employment office man got outside the colonel's office, Bob's companion said in a shocked voice, "I never knew there was such a s.o.b.!"

"He's older than I am," Bob answered. "I can outwait him."

When he returned home that weekend, he said bitterly, "The difference between a government agency and a private business is that the private business is out to make money, and the government agency is out to spend it."

He's hoping that the man who next heads the arsenal comes from Missouri—he'd love to have someone with a you'll-have-to-show-me attitude in that position. He has no doubt there are plenty of jobs suitable for the blind that he could show to a man interested in running the place with the greatest efficiency and with the least drain on the taxpayer's purse.

The strange thing is that just fifty miles down the river at Burlington, he found exactly the opposite attitude. And

the factory concerned is a private business, presumably interested in making money for its owners. It was this Midwest Biscuit Company which gave me such a shock on our honeymoon by accepting a worker on Bob's first call.

The two brothers who own that plant had just taken it over from their father, and they had that excuse for not acting on Bob's suggestion that they hire a blind worker, in addition to the usual stock excuses. But when Bob said, "Boys, let's get going on this—I've got a new bride down at the hotel," that did it. He was taken through the factory, and he demonstrated himself that a certain job could be done without sight. The girl was hired, then and there.

Sometime after that, there was a local girl who wanted a job, so Bob called the Midwest Biscuit Company again, and, sight unseen, another girl was hired. This girl was still working when Bob needed another job for a girl. He had not meant to call on the telephone again—there is such a thing as pushing your luck too far—but he had such a horrible cold that he hated to expose any more people than necessary. So once again he used Mr. Bell's invention and once again the company hired a worker, sight unseen.

Velma, the Commission's field representative then, went with Bob to get Betty, the third girl, started. When the elevator operator at the hotel where Bob stays in Burlington heard that Betty was going to start working at Midwest Biscuit Company, she said, "Why, how did she get a job out there? There are so many girls looking for work here in Burlington, I had no idea there would be an opening there."

Velma was at our house drinking coffee with us when she told us about the conversation with the elevator operator.

“You should have told her it was this little genius who was responsible,” Bob said modestly.

“I told her they had had such good luck with the workers we’d brought them that they were always glad to take another,” Velma answered. “Besides, she thinks you’re wonderful enough already—she said so.”

“That’s right, you protect my interests as much as possible,” I encouraged her. “They absolutely ruin him when he goes to that Burlington Hotel anyway. Dorothy in the dining room even cuts his toast into bite-sized pieces! I notice he doesn’t tell the help around the hotel how independent blind people can be.”

Bob tweaked my ear. “All the nice people I meet just make up for the ones like the colonel,” he remarked, and Velma and I agreed that he deserved a few nice ones.

Selling Blind Labor

I often think it must be an awful jolt to an employer when he finds out why Bob is visiting his factory. The news that a blind man is waiting to see him probably doesn't disturb him too much. All his life he's been conditioned to the idea that blind people as individuals, and groups of them as organizations, expect to have the public donate money for their welfare. He probably isn't as reluctant to give money to blind persons as he is to many other worthy causes, and businessmen are used to the pain of having to dig deep for charity.

But when Bob tells the businessman that he doesn't want money—he wants a chance for a blind person to earn it—that's another matter. Even though the employer has read stories in the newspapers about blind persons working in factories, his hair stands on end when he thinks of a blind person in *his* factory. In his mind's eye he sees a blind man getting caught in the machinery, running into things on the way to the rest room, and throwing his entire factory into panic and confusion.

His first horror past, he becomes indignant. He's not

in business for social work reasons, by God—he's in it to make money, and a blind person certainly wouldn't have anything to contribute to that end. There are agencies to take care of handicapped people like this—let them do it—he's not about to.

Naturally he doesn't want to say these things point-blank to the nice young man on the other side of his desk, because the young man is blind too. So the employer's mind starts racing frantically to see if he can't find a suitable excuse which will get him off the hook and still not hurt the young man's feelings.

The Federal office for the blind once made a list of fifty-six excuses that the struggling employers dreamed up in face-to-face interviews with placement men who were looking for jobs for blind people. Some of them were quite ingenious. The most popular, because no blame could then be attached to the employer, was that insurance companies wouldn't let them hire blind workers. This excuse was so popular, in fact, that the Federal Government issued a pamphlet, quoting letters from insurance companies. "Tain't so!" they said in effect. No blind worker, placed by an authorized agency, had ever been involved in a lost-time accident in a factory, and there was no reason for insurance rates to be increased on the supposition that they might be.

That must have been an awful blow, but the employers were far from being defeated. Another excuse they came up with was, "What if I did hire a blind person and he turned out not to be satisfactory? I'd never have the heart to fire him."

Bob, like all the other placement men, was armed with a rebuttal to that too. He, and not the employer, would take over the firing if it became necessary.

“How will this blind person get to work and into his place at the plant?” the employer asks. Bob assures him that transportation with other workers will be arranged by the Commission and the employer needn’t worry his head about it.

On and on go the protests; on and on go the answers. The process isn’t done in a day, sometimes not in a year, but eventually most employers reaching into thin air for an excuse come up with nothing but thin air.

Then it’s up to Bob to convince the employer that what his factory needs is a good blind worker. Blind workers, he says, are not distracted by every passing ankle—they keep on the job—and if they can’t do the same amount of work that a sighted one would do on the same job, off they go, never to darken the employer’s door again.

Bob points out that the absenteeism rate of blind workers is far below that of sighted ones. He tells about Betty, a girl who worked at the ordnance plant during World War II. When her car-pool ride failed to show up, instead of being tickled to death that she could stay home and do a few things around the house, Betty took a cab to the factory, even if it did cost her almost half a day’s pay. Placement men said blind people stayed on the job, and she was out to prove them right.

Blind people not only produce and stay on the job, Bob points out, but they are *safe* workers. They have to be careful, and they are. A sighted man might take a chance at adjusting a piece of machinery with the motor still on, trusting his sight and fast movement to keep him out of danger. A blind person, with no sight to trust, wouldn’t even make the attempt. So it is the sighted worker who lies in the hospital and draws compensation, not the blind one.

Many employers don’t have a breaking point, or at

least Bob hasn't reached it if they have, but many more of them do. "Okay," they finally say in despair, "if you can find a job and talk the foreman into taking a blind worker on, go ahead."

In most cases, by then the battle is half over. Bob finally leaves the poor badgered employer to recuperate in the quiet of his office and starts in on the personnel department.

Not long ago he had obtained permission from the top brass of one of the country's largest publishing companies to make a survey of their plant. He came home one night and said he had called that day to make an appointment to go through the following afternoon.

"I talked to this fellow who's going to be in charge of showing me around," he said, "and he asked, 'Are you blind?' I said yes, I was as blind as any worker I might want to bring them."

"Poor thing," I sympathized, "he's probably scared to death."

"He asked me how blind people could find their way around all those corridors, and I said I used to work for John Deere—did that make him feel any better? And he did seem a little reassured."

I was anxiously awaiting a report the following night when Bob came home. We knew that some people without sight were working in publishing companies in the East, but we didn't know whether this company was run in the same way. It turned out it wasn't. Those jobs for which the eastern companies hired blind workers had been eliminated entirely in this plant by machines which did the work of many persons. But Bob said he had found some wrapping jobs and some other possible ones that he would have to investigate more thoroughly.

“How did you get along with your guide?” I asked. “Was he still scared after he saw you?”

“Not for long,” Bob answered. “We had a little discussion about how blind people could do a job. I pulled that old one on him about getting his billfold out of his hip pocket. He hadn’t realized that he didn’t use his eyes in doing that. Nobody does until you point it out to them. It’s a mechanical thing. Your hand goes to the right place from force of habit, and of course that’s how a blind worker can do a production job and make such a good showing. By the time this fellow had described a few jobs for me, he was looking for ones that blind people could do just as hard as I was.”

“Did he agree that you didn’t have to see to do the wrapping operations?” I asked.

“Yes, he said he certainly agreed.”

“Is it really a good setup for a blind person, or would they have to make some adjustments?” I wanted to know.

“It’s perfect,” Bob replied. “The paper used to wrap the magazines is already cut and lying there on the floor in a pile. You pick up a piece, put it on a table. The magazines are going by on a conveyer. You pick up several, put them on the paper so that the little address tag on the bottom magazine shows through a hole in the paper. All the magazines in one bunch,” he explained, “go to the same town. The wrappers might work eight hours, for example, on magazines which will all go to Milwaukee. The packages are sent by freight and distributed after they get to that city.”

“Then,” he went on, “you wrap the package and tie it with string that hangs above the table, and then cut the string off with a ring knife on your finger.”

“What do you do with the package?” I asked.

“You shove it aside, and someone takes it away. There are three wrappers working at once, and I imagine it keeps one man busy removing the packages. Nothing extra would have to be done for a blind worker,” he added.

“Getting back to my guide; when we started out, his arm was as stiff as a poker where I was hanging on, but he got so interested, he forgot he was leading me. When we went up later to have coffee, I said, ‘Do you see now how blind people could get through these corridors without getting lost?’ and he laughed and said he did.”

“Would the foreman on that job be willing to take a blind worker?” I asked.

“I haven’t gotten that far,” Bob answered. “I’ll have to find out if I can get the job first, and I won’t do that until I have a client who I feel is really qualified. He will have to be strong and fast and want to work. That’s a big company, and if the first worker I take them is a good one, they will have a blind worker for years. If the first one fails, that’s a job opportunity that will be lost to us for just as many years.”

“What’s the next step, when you find the right client?” I asked.

“I’ll go back to the head office and ask for the job,” Bob replied. “There may be some union objections, and if there are, I’ll have to get the union and management together on them. When it comes to a showdown, neither one will want to be the one to say they would keep a blind man from working, so I don’t worry too much about that.”

“You don’t worry about foremen, either, do you?” I asked.

“No,” he laughed, “foremen and I talk the same language. They’re used to judging people on performance and not on paper qualifications. If a blind man or woman can

do the work, you won't find many foremen who will object to having them in the department. They soon find out that it does a lot for the morale in their area, if the blind person is really fitted to the job. If visitors go through, they never fail to point out their blind workers. They're proud of them. No, I don't have to worry about foremen. Their job is to make their departments produce, and they don't care if a man is sighted or blind if he can do the job."

"If all blind workers were like Bob at Maquoketa, you wouldn't have much to worry about," I remarked.

The day before we had gotten a newspaper clipping from a Dubuque newspaper. The headline said, "Takes Two Sighted Workers to Replace Blind Worker," and the article was about a blind man who had been working in a portable engine factory for almost two years, inserting valve springs in the motors.

"There are several reasons why that was a good placement," Bob remarked. "In the first place, Bob wanted to work. He'd been out of school two years and had never been able to find a job on his own. He had a sighted wife, and a baby on the way, and he wanted to work, by God. He *needed* a job. Secondly, he's been blind since childhood, and he knew how to operate as a blind man. We sent him to Tech, and we found out then that he could really use his hands."

"And the job was a good one too, wasn't it?" I suggested.

"Perfect," Bob agreed. "A sighted man couldn't see what he was doing either, so the man doing the job might as well be blind."

"How come a sighted man couldn't see?" I asked.

Bob looked pained at the thought of having to explain. You'd think he could see the blank look I get on my face

when anything having to do with machinery is mentioned. I realize that things mechanical are not my strong point, but I live in hopes that someday I'll suddenly see the light, so I insisted he tell me. "I'm listening!" I said brightly.

"Well, there is a spring that fits down into a hole in the motor block," began my reluctant tutor. "Bob has to guide a valve down through a valve spring while it's inserted in a hole in the block. Do you know what a valve is?" he asked.

"No," I admitted.

"Well, it's shaped kind of like a flat potato masher without a handle," he went on, trying to show me with his hands.

This was evidently not my day. "You couldn't make this any simpler?" I asked after a pause.

"Almost anybody should be able to understand this," he said sternly. "You're not putting your mind to it," his tone of voice added.

"Well . . ." sigh . . . "say you had a hollow rolling pin and you were supposed to put a piece of wood down through it for a handle. You couldn't see that handle going down through there. You'd just stick it in and guide it by feel to the hole in the other end. Right?"

"Right," I said, relieved. "Let's just forget about Bob's job," I said hastily. "I understand the principle."

"Okay," agreed my instructor. "Since it's something that eyes don't help you do, a blind man is just naturally going to be able to do it faster than a sighted one, because he's used to working without seeing and a sighted one isn't. It's really true that when Bob's on vacation, two men have to take over his place on the line to keep it going."

"Do the other workers in that department resent him?" I asked.

Bob laughed. "Resent him!" he exclaimed. "My God, they're so proud of him they don't know what to do. He's really the fair-haired boy around there."

As I put the clipping away, I thought how wonderful it was that some of Bob's placements do turn out so well. Not only for the client, but for Bob. His successes don't come very often, but often enough to keep him plugging away at the tough job of breaking down the employers' resistance.

As Bob sometimes remarks, "The man who claims it's hard to sell refrigerators to Eskimos, should just try selling blind labor!"

•18•

Unseen Problems

Although most of the difficulties Bob encounters in his pursuit of a living come under the heading of "animal," and two-footed animal at that, he has a few others that would come under the headings of "vegetable and mineral." He seldom mentions them at home, probably feeling that I would worry unnecessarily about him if he did, but one evening another blind traveler came to our house for dinner, and between the two of them, I really got the low-down on traveling without sight.

Our visitor was Annette, who traveled with a guide dog. She had come directly from the office with Bob, so I showed her the way to the bathroom so that she could freshen up before dinner.

"The guest towels are on the back of the door," I called back over my shoulder as I left her.

"And the toilet paper is right across from the stool!" Bob added.

When she returned to the living room, Annette and Bob exchanged stories about difficulties in finding various necessities while on the road.

“One time in a restroom at a St. Louis airport, I couldn’t find the do-jigger to flush the toilet,” she said. “I finally had to call someone in to find it for me.”

“Yes, I’ve encountered the things on the flush box, above it, and below it,” Bob grinned. “And the damned toilet paper can be anywhere in the room, and you’d swear at times it wasn’t there at all. I remember when I went to the convention in Florida, I hit a restroom where you couldn’t possibly have reached the paper from a sitting position. The architect must have had King Kong in mind when he put the holder way across the room under a window. A favorite hiding place is under the lavatory,” he concluded. “I always look there first.”

I can’t describe exactly how that conversation made me feel—but it wasn’t good. Here I’d been married to a blind man for quite a few years and had worked with other blind people for several years before that, and I had thought I knew their problems. And never, until that night, did I realize that the location of toilet tissue was one of them.

Next time we had a club meeting, I brought up this delicate subject. All the blind girls admitted that it was indeed a problem.

“It should be easy to find the paper in our bathroom,” I said, a trifle defensively. “It’s on the wall right across from the toilet itself.”

There was a little pause, and then Mabel said, “Most people wouldn’t look for it there. After all, there aren’t many bathrooms you can reach across.”

“I never thought of that,” I confessed. “Oh, gosh, I’ll bet every blind person who ever went in there had to hunt for it, though a midget could reach it from the stool.”

And since then I've tried to remember to tell newcomers where it is located.

Bob says that things like towels and soap in hotels are just as hard to find. You'd think they'd have a standard place to put them, like above the lavatory, but they don't.

And wall outlets for electric razors are also elusive. One time Bob had to climb on a chair, screw the bulb out of the center light, insert the plug he always carries, and shave standing on a chair.

"How did you know where the light was?" I asked.

"It's usually in the center of the room," he reminded me. And since his bump of location is very good, he can find the center of the room while I have trouble locating the chain on my bed lamp.

Bob and Annette also talked about eating problems—but this was more in the nature of an argument than a discussion.

When I was ready to serve dinner, I asked Annette if she was of the independent school of thought about eating, or should I cut her meat as I did Bob's. Bob makes no bones about the fact that he has no desire to be independent when it comes to having his food prepared.

"That was the only thing I didn't like about the Seeing Eye when I went to get Jars," he told Annette. "You had to cut your own food. The first morning I got hold of a new little waitress and talked her into it," he recalled with a grin. "The next morning I tried it again, but by that time she had been briefed, so she wouldn't do it."

Annette took up the cudgels for the Seeing Eye. "You make such a fuss about blind people being able to travel by themselves," she said. "And traveling is much more of a problem than cutting a piece of meat. I think the Seeing

Eye is right. You should know how to cut your meat if you have to."

"Cutting meat has nothing to do with getting a job, and traveling has," Bob reminded her. "And I don't have to cut meat. When I'm home, Virginia does it, and when I'm on the road, I ask a waitress. She usually has the chef do it, because he has sharp knives to work with. So nobody minds, and it's a heck of a lot easier on me."

"But if you should *have* to," Annette insisted.

"If I'm so far away from civilization that I can't get help to cut a piece of meat," Bob said with finality, "then to hell with table manners—I'll pick it up and chew it off."

"I'd rather not eat at all than to have someone I'm eating with reach out and get my plate and cut the stuff for me," Annette went on. "It makes me feel like an idiot or a child."

"I suppose you even struggle with a leaf of lettuce!" Bob teased her.

"Of course," she answered.

"Not me," Bob said, emphatically if ungrammatically. "I eat salads on the road because I have to eat everything that comes with a meal or starve, but if they don't cut the lettuce up for me, to hell with it. And by the time I hit a place twice, they know I want my bread or rolls buttered."

Annette shook her head in despair at such utter lack of pride, but Bob refused to be shamed.

"Cut the girl's meat!" he called out to me. And Annette really didn't mind that I did—it was just the principle of the thing.

But Bob and Annette did agree that hotel living does have its problems. Bob told her that twice in the previous

month he had been let off the elevator at the wrong floor in a hotel, and his key had worked in the lock of the door which corresponded to his on another floor.

“How did you know it wasn’t yours?” I asked.

“The first time the room smelled like perfume, and I backed out in a hurry,” he said. “The second time a coat was hanging on the back of the door and swung against my hand as I opened the door. Fortunately no one was in the room either time.”

We had been married a long time, too, before I discovered why Bob prefers to travel by bus rather than train. I hate bus travel myself, mostly because too many times I’ve been caught an hour from a rest stop with an urgent need and been too shy to say anything to the driver about making an unscheduled stop. Give me transportation facilities with a restroom at my elbow any old time. Bob, whom I accuse of having cast-iron kidneys, doesn’t have that problem, and he kept saying he’d rather travel by bus. I really thought it was because he likes chatting with the drivers, which is a little hard to do on a train. And he has traveled so much by bus that he knows a dozen or so drivers over the state by their first names. But I found out one day that I had been wrong all along.

For some reason I had gone to the station with him that day, which was most unusual. We had to walk about a half block to board a certain car. When we got on the train, Bob said, “I like to sit about the middle—it’s more comfortable riding that way.”

A porter stopped us after we had gone only a few steps into the car.

“Lady, is he tee-totally blind?” he asked.

“Yes,” I answered.

“Then sit him down here next to the rest room,” he ordered.

Bob promptly turned his back on the porter and started for the middle of the car, I trailing behind. He pulled me down in the seat with him. “Now do you understand why I prefer buses to trains?” he asked.

“Yes, I do, sweetie,” I admitted.

“You never know where the damn things are going to stop, coming or going, and which car you are supposed to board. If you hadn’t been here today, I’d just have had to depend on following the thundering herd onto the train, and that’s not easy with the noises you get around a railroad station.”

But what bothers him most about traveling, by train or bus, are those few occasions when he draws for a traveling companion what he calls a “silent partner.” One day coming from Council Bluffs on the train, he sat with a man for four hours and couldn’t get even one word out of him. For Bob that was about as bad as the worst physical torture yet devised.

When Bob went to the diner, he was talking with a woman at the table with him, and she agreed with Bob that the man was an oddity. “I offered him my paper after I finished reading it, before you got on the train, and all he did was grunt!” she said.

The difference between her and Bob was that she could read the paper and Bob couldn’t. There just isn’t anything for him to do to pass away the time while he’s traveling from one part of his job to another. Other people can read, or count white horses if they get desperate enough. Bob just has to sit. So naturally he wants someone to talk to, and usually he has no trouble.

Almost always by the end of a trip he has heard the details of "My True Story" from several people. Most of them are common people with the usual run of wonderful children and even more wonderful grandchildren. But occasionally Bob runs across someone with an unusually interesting hobby or business. I remember one time the man was a collector of cameos. But all these people have a good audience, because Bob is genuinely interested in everything.

Once when he came home from a trip, he announced: "I really had contrast on this trip. First I sat with a man who had a blind friend, a bachelor about fifty years old. We were talking about how hard it is for blind people to make social contacts, and he said his blind friend was lonesome and didn't have any way to make friends, so he just found a young prostitute for him. And then when he got off, a lady got on and tried to get me to go to the Sunshine Mission!"

"It takes all kinds to make a world," I quoted.

"Yes, and by golly I think I meet them all," he answered. "But heaven preserve me from the kind that won't talk!"

• 19 •

Traveling Without Sight

When strangers inquire about my husband's occupation, and I tell them he's a blind man and his work is to find jobs for other blind people in factories, the shock is usually apparent. But there are a few questioners hardy enough to absorb the shock and come up with another query, which is, mostly, "How does he get around?"

I'm sure most of them expect me to say that he has a full-time guide, or at least a guide dog. (A service club before which Bob recently spoke wrote that he would be welcome to stay at the program chairman's house—and also his *attendant*.) So when I say that he uses a white cane and travels mostly by train or bus, they look even more shocked. To tell the honest truth, when I stop to think about it, it shocks me too. And Bob says when *he* stops to think about it, it scares him to death!

But he doesn't stop to think about it often enough to keep him from doing it, and he's a firm advocate of every blind person's being able to get around without the aid of a guide if at all possible.

He once told a group of blind pupils at our state school

that there are three ways for blind people to get about, not counting the use of a guide dog. One, on the arm of a sighted guide; two, by yourself; and three, by yourself with the aid of a cane.

The first, of course, is the easiest and most convenient if the guide is a good one, but unfortunately good guides aren't very numerous. Their intentions are good, but their techniques are terrible.

I remember one time when I was still working, and an old lady and a young man guide came to the office to inquire about a talking book machine. As they were leaving, I noticed that he was grasping her arm and pushing her ahead of him, so I slipped out the door behind them and said, "Do you mind if I give you a lesson in leading? My husband is blind, and—"

They both gasped and looked so horrified that I stepped back.

"How did it happen?" the young man finally said with great sympathy.

"Oh, he's always been blind," I said cheerfully, and tried to bring the conversation back to the subject of guide service.

"If you let Mrs. Day hold on to your arm, and walk just a little behind you, she won't have the feeling that she might stumble into something," I explained. "She will also feel your body go down a little when you come to a curb, and feel it go up when you step on to a curb."

The young man nodded solemnly, but I saw them several weeks after that, apparently returning from church, and he was still pushing her in front of him. Next time I'll know better than to try to qualify myself as an expert on being a guide by volunteering the information that my husband

is blind. That was just the introduction to my story—but they took it for the punch line!

Of course there are some good sighted guides, but they are not always available, unfortunately. Even the most devoted relatives and friends are sometimes ill or tired, and then the blind person is left to his own travel devices—or to sitting in his chair until a guide is available.

When a blind person travels with a guide, he uses the guide's eyes to get him about, so he is really traveling in the sighted world. But when he goes by himself, all this is changed.

Bob told me once that the distance between the point where you are, and the point where you want to be, is the same for a blind person as it is for a sighted one, only you have to use different landmarks to get there.

For the blind person the landmarks aren't printed signs, but objects like trees against the sidewalk, hedges, fences, a hump in the walk made by a tree root, a cinder driveway, a slope down, a slope up. Things that can be felt by the tip of a cane or through the sole of the shoe. Buildings that shut off the wind and the sun.

Sounds, like cars telling where the streets run from where you are. The click of switches pointing out the turning points for streetcars.

Smells, like the gasoline fumes of an oil station, the food smells of restaurants, the mixed odor of drugs and cosmetics which wafts from a drugstore as the doors open and close. All of these are as important to the blind man as printed signs to the sighted.

Unfortunately these landmarks aren't as stable and dependable as the printed signs, which are seldom moved by anything less catastrophic than an earthquake or a gang

of boys on Halloween. The blind man's signposts can vanish or change completely in an hour's time.

Heavy snow and ice are perhaps the worst offenders. They are, to a blind person, what a London fog is to a seeing one. If the distance to be traveled is bounded by such things as fences or hedges, it isn't so bad, but in a really heavy snow, even the curbs leading to the street are lost.

I suspect Bob hates wind more than he does ice and snow. It distorts sounds so that they are no longer of any help in judging where streets are located, and one can never be sure how close a car is, or if it is coming in your direction or receding. And sighted people, not realizing that the wind is making things difficult, aren't nearly as quick to offer help as they are when the weather is what they consider bad.

In spite of the difficulties involved, there are a few blind persons who use the second method successfully. They get about by themselves with no mechanical aid. Or at least they think they use it successfully.

Some time ago there was a feature story in an Iowa newspaper about a blind man who practiced law and tuned pianos. Among other things, the reporter marveled at the fact that the man went about unaccompanied and didn't even carry a cane.

Later Bob happened to be in the town where the man lives, and a fellow from the employment office told Bob that one night when he was taking his girl friend home, he saw a man in the shadows near the house where she lived. He didn't know whether it was a prowler or a drunk, but he was sure it was one or the other.

After seeing the girl into the house, he went to investigate, and here was the blind man who had somehow be-

come lost. This could happen to a blind man with a cane, too, but at least a white cane would have explained immediately the presence of a man who was obviously where he wasn't supposed to be.

So Bob feels, as do many blind persons, that a white cane is a logical solution to the traveling problem. It provides what a blind person needs—a longer reach than is possible with his hands and arms and feet, and a visible sign to the sighted public that he is blind. And the fact that most of the fifty states now have white cane laws testifies to the help they are to the traveling blind man or woman, and to the sighted public which has no wish to involve itself in needless traffic accidents.

How much Bob's canes protect him is evident by their beaten-up condition after he has carried them awhile.

"Every mark on the cane is one not on my shins," he says.

He has marks on his shins too, and he freely admits that they are there because he hasn't used his cane as effectively as he might.

One night he came home with a broad grin on his face, and he laughed so hard when I asked him about a skinned place on his forehead that he could hardly answer me.

"I ran into a blind man!" he gasped. "I was walking up to catch the streetcar and thinking about having to cross that damnable Grand Avenue. I had my cane across my arm and was listening for traffic, and bang! I ran into someone and damn near went down. The thought flashed through my mind, why the devil doesn't he watch where he's going! and I grabbed at him, and my hand touched a cane, and just then Audrey said something, and I recognized him! He had just made it across Grand Avenue and was feeling so set up about doing it unscathed, that he

wasn't using his cane either. It drew blood on both of us."

Both of us almost collapsed, we laughed so hard, and by the following morning the story had run along the grapevine, and all the blind people in town were having the laugh of their lives.

Of course the white cane by itself doesn't get a blind person around safely. It takes constant alertness and correct interpretation of sounds and smells. It takes a good memory of ground that has been covered before, a sense of direction, and the ability to get a mental picture of the layout of the town.

When we go somewhere by streetcar at night, I'm always wondering where we are, but not Bob. I can't see the street sign on the corner because it's dark, and the grocery store looks different with lights on than it does in the daytime. But Bob hears a switch a couple of blocks back, or notices that we went over railroad tracks, and he's seldom at a loss.

He was at a loss not long ago, however. He was walking up a street in Cedar Rapids, and, as is his practice, he was following the clicking heels of a woman. The sound can tell him he's going straight in the business districts where the sidewalks are too wide to be bounded by his cane.

He said all at once he wondered if she were going crooked, or if he was, and before he had a chance to decide, a man took hold of his shoulders, swung him around to a straight course, and said, "You shouldn't follow that woman. Her husband might be waiting for her."

"He was gone before I could get my mouth open, and that's fast," Bob said when he was telling me about it. "Just then I heard a car door slam, so I knew she had angled across the sidewalk to a car."

We still laugh about the incident and wonder what other blind people the man knows. It's obvious he's someone who knows they are normal human beings, to be treated as such.

Bob would be the first to admit that some of his getting around isn't nearly as miraculous as it looks to the casual observer.

Once when he was speaking before a group of nurses in Waterloo, one of the women during the question period asked, "How did you get here?"

"I went from the hotel to the employment office, where I've been many times before," Bob answered. "One of the men there went to a drugstore with me for coffee, and he walked me over to the bus stop. I asked a nice lady standing there to tell me when the Cedar Falls bus came, and she did."

"That was I!" one of the nurses exclaimed.

Bob nodded. "Then you know that the bus driver got out and handed me into a seat on the bus. When we got to Cedar Falls, he let me out right in front of the building where I was going. A lady said, 'Are you going to the bank?' and I said no, I was going to a doctor's office upstairs. So she took me to the foot of the stairs. When I got upstairs, a young woman came out of an office and asked where I wanted to go, and she took me directly to the doctor's office, and he brought me here. Isn't it wonderful how the blind can travel by themselves?" he chuckled.

Since so much sighted help isn't always available, there are many blind people who prefer guide dogs to any other way of getting around. Either they have less courage than Bob, or more sense, whichever way you want to look at it.

And having had Jars for a year, Bob would be the last to dispute the claim that using a guide dog is the most

satisfactory way for a blind person to get around. A guide dog has most of the advantages of the human guide, since it is able to see danger and avoid it, and some extra attributes besides. A dog is ready to go when his blind master is. He never has more important things to attend to, is never too weary, and doesn't mind bad weather conditions. The dog is an alter ego, and after using one for a very short time, the blind person doesn't feel complete without him.

Following Jars into Bob's life, I found, was a lot like marrying a man shortly after the death of a beloved first wife. If I inadvertently led Bob under an awning so that it brushed his hat, he would say, "Jars wouldn't do that."

"Jars couldn't bake an apple pie, either," was my favorite retort, but just the same I'd keep a weather eye out for low awnings.

When Bob and Charlie, who took over Bob's job at John Deere, get together, they usually bring up the story of how Jars tried to give Charlie the brush-off one Saturday midnight.

Jars loved working with Bob, but he didn't like leading two blind men. A touch of jealousy might have entered into it, but anyhow, that night he trotted along sedately until he came to the corner of a brick building. He gave Bob plenty of clearance, but poor Charlie smashed full face into the building.

Jars was perfectly in the right, of course. No guide dog is expected to lead more than one person, and that person is supposed to be the one the dog is trained with. In fact, at least one guide dog school feels so strongly on that subject, that it has incorporated into its contracts the clause which permits it to take back the dog if it is used by any other person except the one trained to handle it.

To the sighted public in general, any guide dog is a Seeing Eye dog. But calling all guide dogs Seeing Eye dogs is the same as calling all coffee Chase & Sanborn or Butternut. Seeing Eye is what you might call a brand name. All Seeing Eye dogs are trained at one place—Morristown, New Jersey—and if a guide dog wasn't trained there, he isn't a Seeing Eye.

There are several different organizations training guide dogs for blind people. Like the Leader Dog in Detroit and the Pilot in Chicago. And there are many blind individuals who train dogs for themselves and find the results very satisfactory.

Naturally, whichever brand a blind person has he thinks is the best, but as our friend Jack remarked, "The success of a guide dog depends on the master."

Some blind people have absolutely no sense of direction, and no dog would be intelligent enough to lead them safely on the highways and byways. Some blind people have such a good sense of direction that it wouldn't take a highly trained or intelligent dog to get them safely to their destination. When you get a combination of a skillful blind man and a well-trained dog, you've really got a combination that can't be beaten for getting around.

As a blind man, Bob agrees without reservation. But as a placement man, it's a different story. He groans when he is expected to find a job for a blind man or woman with a guide dog. It's one thing to ask an employer to hire a capable blind worker, but it's quite another to have to ask him to make arrangements for a dog guide, too.

If all guide dogs were perfectly behaved, it wouldn't be so bad. But no matter how good a job of training is done by the school, and also by the blind person while he is attending the school, too often the dog deteriorates as

soon as he is out from under the watchful eye of the trainer. This isn't the dog's fault, of course. It is simply lack of discipline on the part of the owner. And a dog, like a child, can be spoiled in short order.

But even though a dog is well behaved, he still presents a problem on a job. Large dogs, no matter how exemplary their behavior, take up floor space, and their coats get muddy and wet in bad weather, and some of them drip saliva constantly. In addition to these disadvantages, they have to be aired periodically, and sometimes it is very hard to find a place to air a dog around an office building or factory.

And, as I've remarked before, a dog attracts attention as quickly as a baby, and the more unusual the place he is in, for a dog, the more attention he gets.

Even though he knows all this, sometimes on snowy, windy days Bob sighs for the independence and safety that Jars gave him.

"When I get too old for this job" (which he sometimes thinks is going to be only a year or two!) "I'm going to have another dog," he declares.

And when that day comes, I'll just be thankful and happy that I can bake apple pies.

World by the Tail

I expect we'd have continued to live this kind of life indefinitely—Bob on the road much of the time, Nathan and I at home to welcome him back, and I sharing his work experiences only secondhand—but then one day Bob mentioned, almost apologetically, that he had been having a pain across his chest and down his left arm.

I called the doctor at once for an appointment, and Bob said later that I didn't talk for two days, until we had the report that he was suffering from angina pectoris. I think he's probably right, because I was literally scared stiff. Here was something much more threatening than blindness had ever been. I felt our world, our wonderful loving world, tumbling down around our ears. Without Bob my life would be nothing.

But gradually we learned to live with a heart condition as well as Bob had learned to live with blindness, and I came to realize that if he took care of himself, he could live as long with this particular heart condition as he could without it.

The medical profession doesn't seem to know what

causes angina, but it is agreed that smoking increases the difficulty, and nervous tension seems to be involved, so we sat down to talk over what adjustments would have to be made in our lives, and Bob attacked them with his usual determination.

First he had to quit smoking, and he said that for the first three weeks the people at the office were almost impossible to live with, but then their dispositions improved. Then he had to cut down on his calorie intake, because he wasn't supposed to gain weight, and giving up smoking had made him prone to add pounds.

The next thing we decided was that we had to have a car. No more battling Iowa blizzards and sub-zero temperatures. So we bought an old Chevy that we later fondly christened "old bucket of bolts." I had a driver's license, because I used to drive during my college days. Bob always claimed I'd never driven a car before, because what I had driven was an Essex. But he took me through the state fair traffic for a week until I could meet any traffic situation with equanimity.

Then I started to drive for him, usually a day or two a week, mostly where public transportation was not available. But in Iowa, a rural state where hundreds of small towns and villages are without bus or train service, this involves a lot of driving.

Traveling by himself became much easier for Bob when he started to use a long Fiberglas cane which had been invented and manufactured by Augie, whose placement job Bob had taken over so many years before. Bob says, "With a long cane you are a step and a half behind trouble instead of a half step," and consequently the need to be on the alert every second is much less.

And so our lives took on a new pattern.

One day, after this had been going on a couple of years, I took our car through the inspection station to have the lights and brakes checked. As I waited in line, one of the inspectors, a total stranger, walked over to me and said, "What are you looking so pleased about?"

"Was I looking pleased?" I asked.

"Looked like you had the world by the tail," he said.

I laughed. "I was probably thinking how nice it was that this poor old car had at least gotten through the light inspection," I said.

But I wasn't thinking about the car at all. I was sitting there thinking how good life had been to me, and that I wouldn't change my lot as a Seeing Eye wife for anything in the world.

