

# A Word with You

ROBERT CLANCY

Over the years, a lot of people I have known have passed away. And I sometimes find myself reflecting on the last days of these people.

Every one of us has a life to live that must some day draw to a close. And every one is the "only one of you in all of time" that Martha Graham spoke of to Agnes de Mille.

I think it's true that the Angel of Death flaps his wings in advance and that this is often felt or sensed by the one he is approaching. I think, too, that the signal is usually given far enough in advance to give time for preparing for the journey. To those who have lived their lives fully, who have given unsparingly of that unique "you," it requires only a rounding out, a punctuation mark. To those who have frittered away their inner resources, who have dodged the main issues, the summons is given in time to offer a last chance to make up for it.

Some, like Oscar Geiger and Joseph Dana Miller, round out an unstinting life with their *l'envoi*. Others hasten to and fro to gather together the spiritual baggage they have neglected, the nature of which is known only to those who have heard the call, and which seems to be something other than those things we call accomplishments.

And can we guess what it is that is deemed so important, so urgent, at this crucial moment of life's closing—this demand that seems unsated by so many praiseworthy deeds? While it's strictly between the individual and his Maker, I think it has to do with the giving of that unique "you." No one but the individual concerned knows when he held back when he might have given, when he turned away as a door opened, when he hurt instead of helping, when he chained his soul when it yearned to be freed.

This mysterious process of soul-building that occurs as one dissipates his substance for the benefit of others—this, I think, is the sort of thing that people seek at the end.

"What, when our time comes, does it matter," asked Henry George, "whether we have fared daintily or not, whether we have worn soft raiment or not, whether we leave a great fortune or nothing at all, whether we shall have reaped honors or been despised, have been counted learned or ignorant—as compared with how we may have used that talent which has been intrusted to us for the Master's service?"