

That afternoon, at the risk of being hauled off for disturbing the peace, we repeated the treatment with added vim. This time the effects were lasting. After that any straggling starling passing over my place seemed to lose no time, as if he regarded the territory as a danger zone.

I hope I can claim a similar victory over crayfish. These pests for many years interfered with the flow of water in the lily pond. Their network of holes around the banks let the water escape underground instead of flowing off in a waterfall. Finally, I had the whole pond concreted, but time will tell what the ingenious little creatures may yet do.

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My school home-work left me with very little time for gardening, so Peggy Taylor, a nearby friend, offered to help me plant azaleas along my creek banks. I also had the services of Phil, her thirteen-year-old son who was slim enough to wiggle up through my very narrow trap door and over the rafters to rid my attic of straw where the starlings had nested. For this heroism I'm giving him honorable mention as well as for covering the attic louvres so that the starlings could never take over again.

Phil also built me a wisteria arbor, trellis for my climbing roses and steps down into the stream. The materials we used generally came from the junk yards young Phil and I liked to explore, his mother hauling our supplies in their station wagon. The young workman, paid at the rate of sixty cents an hour, one day confided that he was afraid he might soon have to pay a Federal income tax.

After our labors we made a ritual of having a slice of watermelon and one day as we sat on the bridge with the juice running freely, we began talking about religious denominations. I remarked that denominations had little meaning for me, that they were really man-made and the members often showed narrow-mindedness by seeming to think they could fence God in.

After a thoughtful interval, Phil surprised me by saying, "But one thing for sure, Miss Dial. You have fenced Him in here."

Out of the mouths of babes! Even beyond my expectation, Havenwood was fulfilling its mission. Here beside my stream, call it what they may, young and old had felt that "God is right here."

## Chapter XVI

### Alcoholics Too Numerous

How could so many drinkers, some of them alcoholics, slip through my screening, I wondered. "No drinking" I always specified in my ads and in interviews with prospective tenants. Maybe they didn't take it as seriously as I intended, or maybe they were desperate for a place to stay, or possibly they wanted shelter from temptation. Once they were a part of my household getting rid of them never seemed easy.

This was especially true of Olin, a courteous, nice-looking young man with a position in an auto-wash. His mother and sister came along to help him get settled, brightening his basement quarters with fresh curtains, extra pillows and other feminine touches. Later they all helped with my gardening.

I enjoyed having Olin and his family until one night he came into my living room thick-tongued and unsteady on his feet. I let the first occurrence pass with his promise that it wouldn't happen again. When it did within the week I regretfully gave notice.

In the case of Mr. Hart, I had no pangs at parting. In fact I was glad of an excuse for asking him to leave. His slow mental reactions might have been from drinking. Whatever the cause, when I tried to talk to him, his dullness made me feel that I might be trying to make a dent in a rock wall. My aversion to him increased when he asked to have seven blankets put on his bed. I might have felt some sympathy for a slim anemic, but I had none for a man padded with at least two hundred pounds of flesh. My exasperation reached its bounds when, after repeated notices, he kept parking his car so that it blocked the area reserved for my whole household. The first night I heard him fumbling for the keyhole and then saw him coming in with uncertain step, I readily gave notice.

For some time I had been hoping to expand my house. Plans for

an added room and a larger porch, drawn by Max Evenson, my engineer roomer, I had to abandon because of the high building estimates. However, with some used bricks, recently acquired, I thought I could go on with the sundeck so I made arrangements with Orville Burns, a bricklayer living upstairs. Mr. Burns was so absorbed with fishing it looked as if he would never get started. Not realizing that Stamp Stanley, my basement tenant, also a bricklayer, enjoyed a more calamitous form of amusement than fishing, I engaged him to begin the work at once. When I went off to a teacher's meeting one Saturday morning, how was I to know that the man who came to help Mr. Stanley was his vodka drinking partner? Upon my return that afternoon, I knew. I paid for my absence with a porch that had no two pillars aligned, a porch that quivered with every step.

Most difficult of all was my experience with Adam Hunt, a rugged-looking paper hanger, about forty years old. Soon after he moved in he went on a spree that resulted in a serious illness. He refused to be hospitalized until his condition became so alarming that I had to get him to a hospital without delay. When I visited him one Friday evening, I found him still in a critical state, draped with tubes for transfusing blood, for draining and nourishing him. Imagine my surprise the next morning at his appearing at my door.

"Mr. Hunt, what are you doing here?" I exclaimed.

"I've come home to get well."

"How could they dismiss you?"

"They didn't."

That was like him. Just to walk out. It must have taken a Houdini act for him to free himself of all the needles and tubes and stand before me in one piece. Tragic for both of us was his leaving the hospital without permission. What was I to do? There was no way to get them to take him back. Even his doctor refused to advise me. Fearfully, I took a chance and began giving him frequent liquid nourishment.

I had the further shock of finding that he was a parole escapee, convicted for some petty theft, he said. Haunted by the thought of harboring a wanted criminal, all Saturday and Sunday I kept up the liquid diet. Either my treatment worked or to escape it, on Monday he was back on his job. I hate to think what the poor fellow must have gone through that week, but I wasn't having an easy time my-

self. When he spoke of returning to his mother's home in Ohio, I helped get him off without delay, even cancelling the rent he owed me. Later, I heard with great relief that he had made the journey safely.

I'm still wondering what may have happened to poor Pete Freeman, wizened little bartender with a face like a mummy. I remember him best for the collection of classic records which he played constantly on his Stromberg-Carlson player. It was well that he had this for comfort, embittered as he was by the death of his wife from cancer. Having gone from drink to tranquilizers, he was taking such excessive doses that while living in my home, he lost his job in a restaurant.

After much persuasion he finally went to my doctor, who prescribed a certain health regime under my supervision with tranquilizers eliminated. Giving him the right kind of food was easy, but to put Pete through a set of physical exercises was a job for a professional. And by me of all people! I can't describe the show that went on in my back yard. A rag doll could have done better than poor Pete on a "Stoop and Bend." On a push-up he probably would have fallen to pieces.

He did his best to help me around the place, but I was afraid to trust him out of my sight on his poor wobbly legs. When he got a craze for painting, I also had to watch carefully that he didn't include the old Stieff piano. Red was his favorite color. As the weeks passed without any noticeable improvement, I began to fear I might have him for the rest of his non-paying life. His getting hold of a gun with which he threatened to commit suicide, didn't help matters.

When he mentioned that he would like to go to Florida where his young daughter was in a foster home, I did everything possible to speed him on his way, even purchasing from him things I didn't need, including his gun. At last I saw him off in his old jalopy which I prayed would hold together for his trip.

Now when I play some of his favorite records, I wonder if his spirit may not hover near—but, I hope, not too near.

Bernie, an Italian drummer in a local band, had a long struggle with the drinking habit. He was helped by his religion and by his love for his children. After separating from his wife, he had placed his two small sons and a daughter in a foster home nearby where he visited them often, always carrying gifts he could ill afford, sacri-

ficing his own needs that they might have the largest of Teddy bears and the fleeci-est of sweaters.

He told me afterwards that while he lived in my home he had often prayed before the picture of the Christ in his room as well as doing penance at church. Nevertheless, his drinking finally got the best of him again and he disappeared leaving most of his clothes and several weeks' rent due. Not long after, I heard that he was in the hospital nearly dead from an automobile wreck. I delivered his belongings to his sister's home, never expecting to see Bernie alive. However he recovered and, as soon as he was able, went to work in a filling station. Gradually he repaid his debts—every penny he owed to me and to the people who kept his children.

Now, several years later, the reformed Bernie is located in a home of his own—happy to have his children with him.

## Chapter XVII

### Other Faults and Foibles

Not all my problems were with drinkers. As far as I know Mr. Alleron, with a frame like that of Paul Bunyan, may never have tasted a drop, yet he had a serious weakness. My first impression was of a person of great strength and courage who could make a stout protector for my household. How wrong it is to judge from appearances.

Big-hearted Bob Simmons, considerate of everyone, roomed across the hall from Mr. Alleron. One night Bob walked in his sleep and didn't waken until he hit the bottom of the stairs, splintering the door there. Barely able to crawl back upstairs, he spent a miserable night alone.

When I asked Mr. Alleron if he had heard the noise, he replied that he had.

"Then why didn't you help Bob?"

"Me? Unlock my door in the middle of the night and have some fellow knock me in the head?"

Fortunately, Bob's injuries soon healed, but in my estimation, my giant was crippled for life.

Memorable are the escapades of my teen-agers with their automobiles: some creating near explosions with old cars on which they tinkered out front, some driving without licenses, some arrested for reckless driving, one in serious trouble for attempting bribery of a police officer, and another for his habit of "borrowing" cars.

Most regrettable was what happened to Larry, a bright-eyed industrious lad from a family of eighteen in Mount Jackson, Virginia. Half of the four-hundred-dollar savings he had accumulated from his earnings in a filling station, he invested in what he thought was a car, in reality a pile of junk, camouflaged with a coat of flashy red enamel. Immediately repairs to salvage his purchase swallowed up the remainder of his savings, which he had reserved for completing his high school education in night classes.

Another tragic car victim was Sam Hicks, a nineteen-year-old from the coal mining area of West Virginia. Sam looked like a young bird fallen from its nest before its feathers had grown. As long as he remained in my home, he was an enigma, like a picture puzzle that refused to fit together. Although he seemed to be a power house of energy, his frail body was nourished on hastily eaten snacks such as pop and crackers. Yet he was doing a man-sized job grading and landscaping from sunup to dark. I sometimes thought he might be a sprite, existing on unseen energies, but more probably they were derived from his attachment to pale-faced Amaryllis, a tenth grader, whom Sam brought to see me one day. The young couple seemed determined to marry, regardless of her parents' objections.

Each day after work, Sam would rush to find me and, as if announcing receipt of a sweepstakes award, tell me of that day's dilemma. Generally, it was some disaster to his car, until more parts had gone wrong in it than I knew it possessed. His troubles didn't end with repairs. Fines against him for violations in driving had piled up until one day he telephoned saying that he must have seventy dollars at once or go to jail. I suggested that he try to get an advance from the place where he worked. He was already overdrawn there, but somehow he managed to get the money he needed.

I should have known better than to try to help him out by giving him some jobs around the house. The first thing he did was cut his finger by dropping a Venetian blind on it. If it had been my own wound, I would have band-aided it and gone on. Dorothy, my household helper, and I could have washed all the blinds in the house in the time I spent taking Sam to the doctor, dressing the finger and arranging for compensation. The small cut gained for Sam attention for which he seemed to hunger.

This excessive need, I felt was because of his deprived childhood, so I humored him as much as possible. However, I had to refuse when he insisted that I invite Amaryllis to visit me so that they could be married.

As trying as I found him at times, yet I admired him—left fatherless at an early age to be reared by an epileptic mother on relief, he had become a responsible citizen, courteous, energetic, and self-supporting.

I had many minor difficulties such as trouble about shower baths. Some let the faucet run full force for so long that I would feel my

blood pressure rise as I knew the hand of the water meter must be doing. The towels of those averse to soap and water looked as though they had taken friction baths. Some left chicken bones from snacks in their rooms and coffee stains on furniture and floor. And there were the heavy exercisers—I shuddered when they started. Others tried target practicing in their rooms. Once the safety of the whole house was threatened when smoke poured back into the room instead of up the fireplace chimney, because a lad started a fire without opening the damper.

Most frustrating of all my problems was tall, stooped, twenty-three-year-old Andrew Sands, a grotesque figure as he shambled along with his shirt tail blowing jauntily, looking as if he might fall to pieces any minute. When he fixed me with his balmy stare I found it so disconcerting that I was likely to blurt out something I hadn't really meant to say. Our conversations generally stopped short by my making some angry retort to which he would respond with an imbecilic chortle. This, I found, reflected a high state of satisfaction—he had accomplished his mission.

To make me feel small for even mentioning his overdue rent, he would contrast the paltry sum he owed me with the national debt. His worst obsession was that we could kill two birds with one stone, that is reduce the national debt and the exploding population by liquidating all senior citizens. He may have meant nothing personal, but I decided not to take a chance.

Because he had failed to pay his rent, or even to make an effort to find a job, added to his wild ideas and his conviction that taking a bath might give him pneumonia, I finally asked the sheriff to dispossess him.

As far from flawless as my boys were, I still preferred male roomers unless I could find a companion like Selma. Men were not around as much as women. A man could shave or shower without upsetting the whole household. Not so a woman. Her shampoo or her wet laundry seemed to fill the house. Unemployed women were the worst, chattering endlessly, as if they didn't have a duty in the world, lying in bed all day in a topsy-turvy room, or being constantly on the telephone. I've also had them raise the thermostat to such a temperature that even the candles collapsed, so that they could run around in Florida shorts in zero weather.

Many a time I gnashed my teeth over the abuse of laundry privi-

leges. One young woman assumed that it meant she could wash daily. I could never figure out what she and her husband could possibly have done with all the towels she hung out. All of this may sound trivial, but it's enough to run a landlady out of her mind, if not out of her home.

Two extreme instances were responsible for my dropping female roomers altogether. One was a physical attack by a young woman when I objected to her using her breakfast privileges at four o'clock in the afternoon. Fortunately, her husband intervened. The other was the near arrival of a sweet young thing's baby in my basement. Of this misdemeanor no man would ever be guilty, even if he could.

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Selma, now back with her daughter, stood by me in all my vicissitudes, although her illness confined her to her room most of the time. Still she kept busy helping people with her prayers and performing many useful tasks for her family. I could count on her for sound advice and just talking over my frustrations with her often helped me find my own solutions. Above all, however, I valued her prayers, in which I found my bulwark.

She delighted in my successes as if they were her own. For instance, final payment of my bank loan occasioned our joint-rejoicing. I could now lie down at night with the satisfaction of owing no one. I could even foresee carrying out my retreat, possibly with some modification.

The prospects for closing the alley seemed hopeful and our committee was renewing its efforts. Mrs. Cox had sold her home and moved away. Only one house had been built on each of the lots she and Mrs. Hanks owned, so it made no difference what plans there might have been for a development. We had reason now to hope for success.

But a worse menace arose. Devonshire, a new elementary school, was being built on the corner of Graham Road and Lee Highway. My home lay between the school and the area from which most of the pupils would come. Attention began to turn toward the use of my alleys both on the side and at the back as the route for the children to walk to school.

My transfer to teach at Devonshire threw me into the midst of a controversy, so heated it almost ended my career as a teacher.

## Chapter XVIII

### The Alley of Uneasement

When Devonshire Elementary School opened in February, 1957, ferment was already brewing over the walkway for the children to get to school. The problem centered around the section between Woodlawn and Rosemary Lane, a very long stretch without any cross streets. Until some plan for a walk through this area could be worked out, the School Board was providing bus service for the children affected.

A committee appointed to investigate found four possibilities: a sidewalk on Lee Highway, with adequate safeguards; a walkway in the middle of the first block of Woodlawn; one along the stream through my yard; or continuation of the bus. There were factions pressing strongly for and against each plan.

Demoralized by the confusion, some of the children began making their own crosswalks wherever they felt inclined, damaging property as they went. When I got home from school one day I was shocked at seeing one of my large dogwood trees wilting on the ground. I learned that eight-year-old Oscar Crandall, who lived near, had cut the tree, and I sent for him to come to see me. His father accompanied him and made some flimsy excuses.

I managed to restrain myself at the time, but immediately I obtained permission from the authorities in Fairfax to fence in my part of the alley—provided, they said, there were no objections by neighborhood residents. The chain anchor fence I ordered, I hoped, was high enough to prevent trespassing. With the inducement of a bonus, the workmen began putting up the fence on Saturday with the promise to complete it on Monday. When they left at noon the first day, all the holes had been dug and most of the posts along the side and back had been set in concrete.

That afternoon at work on the creek bank, I was startled by the sound of voices, then I saw on the other side about a dozen men approaching, none of whom I recognized. I wondered who they were and why they were here. I supposed, to object about the fence.

I braced myself for the worst when a man who looked as if he had come on official business spoke, "Good afternoon, I am Congressman Joseph Freehill. You may have heard of me as your 'back yard Congressman.' My committee is exploring Custis Parkway, which I believe goes through here."

"No sir, at present you are on my grounds. The Parkway extends along the stream only to the front of my property."

"But an alley goes up through here, doesn't it?" one of the men asked.

"You bet your boots it does! Nobody can tell me different," a redheaded man announced.

After I had explained about the location of the alley to them, a thoughtful-looking man, observing the dense woodland, said, "Not much of a place for a walk."

As if he were settling the whole matter by spitting vigorously, the redhead proclaimed, "We could cut down the trees and make a walk with a fence on both sides of it."

The thoughtful man spoke again, "A fence, huh. That's an invitation to a boy to climb over it. Mine would never get to school with a dry thread on him."

"You are objecting because you are at the other end of the street, John. Anybody can see that."

A heavy featured man said with an air of assurance, "It can be done all right. All we have to do is bring it before the Board."

Later I found he was Roderick Whitney, a lawyer in our area and, to my regret, prominent in civic affairs.

I held my breath as the group turned and began retracing their steps, so intent on their own conversation, accented with a lot of hand waving, that they stepped right over the post holes without seeming to notice them. Neither did they seem to observe the new posts already set along the side of my woods. Not until the last one had passed did I breathe freely again—even then not too freely, and I spent an uneasy afternoon.

The following day, as customary, a number of children played in

the area, some of them doing whirligigs around the posts. I kept my peace. I was glad to see the men at work before I left for school Monday morning, yet nervous for fear they might attract more attention than I wanted.

On the school playground at recess, one of my pupils asked me, "Why are you putting up a fence?"

"To protect my property."

"Can't we ever play there anymore?"

"Sometimes. There's still lots of room in the woods beyond my grounds."

"But there's no stream there. You don't own the stream, do you?"

"Yes. The part on my property."

"Gee, you are lucky, but I thought papa said it belonged to the government."

It was clear that I must have the fence up before there was time for too much talk. Rushing home from school, I found the men fastening the last bolts on the gates. I was talking to the foreman when Mr. Crandall, whose boy had cut down my dogwood, came toward me, looking appraisingly at the fence. I thought I was probably in for it now, but at least the fence was up.

Mr. Crandall began, "Well, I see you are getting your place fenced."

"Yes, Mr. Crandall."

"Too bad." I braced myself to hear him tell me I would have to remove it. Instead he said, "Oscar certainly hates to lose his playground."

"I'll be having him over sometime," I recovered enough to say.

"Thanks, he'll be glad to hear that."

I resisted adding, "If he leaves his hatchet home."

On the other side of the stream, the fence enclosed an area resembling a tropical jungle, a tangle of vines and matted growth in a nice grove of trees. Poison ivy vines the size of my wrist had cut strangling grooves around the trunks of many of the trees. It wasn't easy to clear but John Griffith, my able handy man, living upstairs, stuck at it until he had all the vegetation cut and heaped, ready for burning.

The local fire department consented to burn the area off. When the engine came clanging up to my home one afternoon, the whole

neighborhood gathered for the excitement. Mr. Slimac, the chief, stationed a dozen of his volunteers, in their sleek black coats and helmets, around the edge of my grounds. Each started a blaze to burn in toward the stream. Safely indoors out of reach of the poison laden smoke, I watched until all the mounds of vegetation and the stubble between them had burned away.

After the burnt area was filled, graded and planted with grass seed, I hadn't long to wait for the thrill of a level lawn that stretched the length of my property. This part of my yard has since been the scene of many happy gatherings. There are cookouts and watermelon cuttings with members of my household, neighbors and other friends; luncheons with Congressional families; Sunday afternoon services and picnics with my church associates; puppet shows and story hours with the children who had missed their playground. The favorite place to sit is on the bridge, for nothing seems to compare with the thrill of just being near the stream.

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Throughout the spring, conditions at the school were far from placid. Mr. Kelley, new at principalship, had a task that would challenge a veteran. Two student bodies and two sets of teachers must be unified. Some of the teachers were disgruntled at being uprooted in the middle of the year from positions of long tenure. Among the students were a number whom the other schools must have been glad to be rid of.

After lunch each day, my room with its western exposure seemed like an inferno, making even my best students restless and inattentive and classroom work difficult. I was also trying to inspire school spirit by composing a new song, by arranging a school broadcast, and by use of any other device I might think of.

Slender, blue-eyed Betty Simmons, secretary of the school, managed to help all of us as well as to attend to her own duties which seemed to include smoothing the ruffled feathers of our principal. One of his greatest trials was well-meaning, overly zealous parents. Foremost among these was Martha Upton, a recent foster mother, who always had answers for handling difficult offspring, advice offered even when it was not requested.

The spring session ended and summer passed without any decision

being reached about the walk. When school opened that fall the School Board continued to supply a limited number of buses.

The PTA and citizens' association kept meeting on alternate fortnights, with the regularity of chills and fever in a siege of malaria. Discussion of the walk was always on the agenda and as preference grew for the use of my alley, even mention of it would hit me in the solar plexus and sickeningly spread to the pit of my stomach. Often I longed for the days at Graham School where I had worked without such harassment. My position as a Devonshire teacher prevented me from taking part in controversies that affected me personally. With my life investment at stake, it was hard to keep silent. At the meetings, I often felt like the Spartan lad with the wolf gnawing away under his cloak.

Outside of school, I was busy writing letters, getting up petitions, and interviewing county officials. Naturally, my principal and members of the School Board didn't wish to become involved.

Mr. Freehill, who had introduced himself to me as my "back yard Congressman," was very frank about wanting a walk through my place as well as one on Lee Highway where it was badly needed for general use anyway.

My letter to Mr. Massey, Manager of Fairfax County, was turned over to Captain Porter, Director of Public works. In it I told how I had put everything I owned into the purchase of my home and how I had worked to develop it as a place where my friends and I could spend our retirement in peaceful writing and study. The proposed plan for a bisecting walk would destroy all such hopes. I also let him know of my concern for the children and of my sympathy for him and his staff in having to solve such a problem.

It was a pleasant surprise to hear that Captain Porter had read my letter in a meeting he conducted on the subject. However, it brought no noticeable results.

Selection of my yard for the walkway route seemed definite enough for one of the local papers to print an article about it. A woman candidate for office in Fairfax County stated to her audience that I had done the same as steal county property when I fenced in the alley easement. Fortunately, one of my friends who happened to be present set her and the assembly straight by explaining that everyone in the Rixey Estates had permission to fence and make use of the alleys.

There was no one to contradict Mr. Whitney, the PTA's legal counsel, when he announced at one of our meetings that citizens in the area had the right to use the alley, simply by removing my fence. That was one time my Spartan control almost gave way. I went home wondering if I should stand guard with a rifle, but the absurdity of the thought! The most formidable gun I had ever dared to touch was an air rifle! From my lawyer, I learned that I could get an injunction against anyone who tried to remove my fence without a court order. But I knew a fence could be leveled in less time than it takes to get any kind of legal action.

The anxiety, the tension! It was enough to wreck me. But my blessed Selma stood by. I know that without our many prayerful sessions, I never could have endured.

A few days after Mr. Whitney's announcement at PTA, I had a visitor. Martha Upton approached my house as if she were stalking prey. That and her fulsome preamble put me on guard.

"Miss Dial, the Executive Board of Devonshire met last night about a matter of deep concern to the whole community, a walkway for our children to get to school. Of course you recognize the need."

"They seem to be managing very well by bus," I replied.

"But this is a walking school."

"How can it be unless some provision was made for it when the location was selected?"

"That's beside the point. Nearly all of the children live within walking distance and walk they must. Our decision last night was to open the alley through your place." Her jaws snapped together.

"The easement ends at the back of my yard, you know, Mrs. Upton. What does your board plan for the children then?" I couldn't resist adding, "Are they to jump in the creek?"

"It's not a joking matter. But the county can take care of the right of way. It can always condemn for public necessity."

"If you can prove the necessity."

"Miss Dial, I haven't come here to argue with you. In fact my purpose is very different. We know what a generous woman you are and feel assured of your cooperation, so much so that last night we unanimously voted to honor you by placing a plaque on one of your trees out there—we will try to select the most prominent one, of course—to commemorate the civic-minded woman who so graciously

grants us this use of her property."

"I'm afraid, Mrs. Upton, your committee has made a mistake."

"Oh, no, all of us know of your dedication."

"Not to the extent of sacrificing my home to the public."

"Don't you love children?"

"In broken doses."

"Doses! You speak of them as if they are medicine."

"If you had all of Devonshire romping through your yard, wouldn't you?"

"That is a different situation."

"Why, Mrs. Upton? Just being a teacher doesn't make my home mean any less to me." I was ready to explode. After months of repression, the Patrick Henry in me took over in place of the Spartan lad.

"Please tell your committee that I shall never consent to having a public thoroughfare through my grounds."

"Do you care nothing for the safety of children?"

"A great deal, and for that reason I prefer having them taken to school by buses. If that isn't possible, I favor a route where there can be supervision all the way rather than in a heavily wooded area as secluded as mine here, and with the hazard of the creek beside."

"You don't mean you would put the little things out in traffic, do you?"

"No, not *in* traffic, of course. There should be every safeguard possible, and children themselves should be taught enough self-reliance to walk safely on a street."

"How can you double cross us like this? Sitting through all our meetings without uttering a word. . . ."

"You know the school policy about teachers taking part in controversies."

"Which you seem to have forgotten now."

"There is no law in the land to prevent a woman from defending herself when she is attacked in her own home."

"Attacked?"

"There are some ways worse than by physical violence."

"I come here with the best of intentions and look what I get! The School Board will hear about this. Don't think they won't. We'll have our walk through here, too." She stormed out with the parting



threat, "There's nothing you can do to stop us. Just wait and see!"

I knew I would pay dearly for what I had said. Why hadn't I just referred her to my lawyer? . . . Honor me with a plaque on a tree! My own tree! Over my dead body!

The following Saturday afternoon young Mr. Shanks from Public Works came to notify me that Fairfax County planned to make a walkway through my grounds and follow the stream through John and Peggy Pixley's lot which joined mine at the rear.

"How can you? That is private property."

"We've decided to condemn. A public hearing will be held three weeks from next Wednesday before the Board of Supervisors in Fairfax."

Stunned by the news, I took the young man outside to show him where the alley ran. "They might as well come through my living room as to bisect my yard! You see, Mr. Shanks, a great part of the year my yard *is* my living room."

I knew this man was only a messenger with no authority to change anything. However, I did pin some hope on a remark he made when leaving, "Miss Dial, I am sorry I had to bring you this news. I see no reason for us to condemn your land when there is undeveloped property just beyond your fence."

"Do you think the County could be persuaded to change their minds?"

"I doubt it. I was just giving you my personal opinion."

At once I alerted the Pixley's at their temporary home in Pennsylvania. Immediately John employed a lawyer. He also notified his next-door neighbor who flew up from Cuba for the hearing. Many of the property owners in the Rixey Estates attended the Board meeting. We asked Lytton Gibson to act as our legal counsel. I didn't know what might be expected of me at the hearing so I prepared a statement in case I should be called on.

Tom Gray, representative for our district on the Board of County Supervisors, had requested the hearing, but withheld his decision until he could hear all the facts. I listened uneasily when Mr. Gibson began presenting our cause at the hearing. Gradually, I relaxed when I saw that he was doing it ably. Mainly he urged use of a route through the woods beyond me which connected with a vacant lot on Rosemary Lane. His suggestion seemed quite reasonable until Mr.

Whitney spoke for the opposite side. Again, misgivings took over.

When we adjourned for lunch, instead of going to the crowded courthouse cafeteria, I slipped out to my car for a little prayer all alone. If the decision went against me, I knew I would need a lot of help. Tom Gray had all the facts now. My fate was in his hands. The Board generally passed what the supervisor for the involved area recommended.

As the Board members gathered after lunch, I studied Mr. Gray's suave countenance. It gave no indication of what his decision might be. I felt as though I had waited an eternity before he made his motion. It was what I had hoped for!— That the State Highway Department be asked to build the needed walk on Lee Highway.— The motion passed so quickly that I wondered if I had heard aright. Mr. Gray's motion contained the provision that if the sidewalk were not completed within a certain period the county would then consider construction of a walk over some other route.

The next afternoon when I was leaving my classroom, my spirits, soaring from relief, were suddenly deflated by a visit from Martha Upton.

"Mrs. Upton, don't feel too bad about the decision," I said. "The children will be all right, in fact they are better off this way."

"We wouldn't have had such a decision if you hadn't employed legal counsel and notified the Pixleys."

"Why shouldn't I?"

"Because you are a teacher. If I had a child, he wouldn't remain in your classroom. There are plenty of others who feel the same way and you will be hearing about it, too."

"I'm afraid I don't see the connection."

"You will."

I could have reminded her that her group also had had a lawyer and, as for the Pixleys, I had done what any neighbor would do for absent friends. But I was ready to drop, I couldn't listen to another word. So I said, "I'm sorry, but it's quitting time."

"Not for me, until we get what we want."

Gathering up my things, I eased her out through the door with me, then locked it.

As I left her, she called, "Sometimes you lose when you think you have won!"