

## Chapter XII

### The Big Opening

The time for opening my retreat drew near. As much as I wanted to speed it, I knew certain things would have to be done first. I had finished my hardest tasks, but many others remained. I needed to frame and hang a number of pictures. I had sent one feather mattress out to be renovated and made into bed pillows but the one of down still billowed over a considerable area of the basement.

Boxes and barrels, packing straw, paint cans and brushes seemed to be everywhere. Such accumulation must be cleared before the basement would be ready for occupancy. Besides, spring cleaning lay ahead, all except the floors, which had been recently done.

Each task seemed to take more time than I expected, for instance even such a simple thing as finding screws for putting up the fixtures for my draperies. On a slab of plaster for testing them, some screws seemed too fragile. Coarser ones cracked the plaster. Even the toggle screw expanded as it was guaranteed to do, but left a hole where the fixture was supposed to be. The final solution was a sheet metal screw dipped in boiling water. With a cross of Scotch tape over its head, it held as though it were welded.

At last I was able to hang the beautiful draperies that Selma had made. My only regret was that she was now at her home in the West and couldn't enjoy her handiwork with me. Instead of being able to welcome her for another visit, as her daughter and I had anticipated, recently we had received distressing news about her health.

The frames I had antiqued for mirrors and for my oil paintings turned out better than I had hoped. The woodland scene over the mantel reminded me of my real forest outside, and the Scottish lake Mother had painted, hung over the chest of drawers, made all the decoration needed in my living room.

I placed a framed picture of Christ on or above the desk in each room. In the dogwood room I also hung a copy of the legend which tells how that tree, once as mighty as the oak, was changed into its present twisted form after its wood was used for Calvary's cross. The story tells that in pity for the tree that shared His suffering, the crucified Lord shaped it so that it never would have to serve such a purpose again. The coloring and shape of the blossoms were also made to symbolize the tragic event.

On a chilly spring afternoon, I was going through a box of photographs in hope of finding something suitable to frame and hang on the bleak, concrete-block basement walls. I found small pictures of my father and mother with their growing family, then some taken of my brothers and sisters at various ages, unfolding a cinema in which I felt I was merely a spectator until I came on one vitally concerning myself. It was of Ted and me. He was not my first sweetheart, but in my maturer years, one who seemed to be my ideal of a lifetime companion. As I looked at the picture, I was lost in the memories of a golden autumn day years before and in thoughts of how different my life might have been! But my reminiscing was suddenly cut short by the penetrating gaze of my paternal grandfather. From the image of his heavily bearded face, in the enlarged photograph before me, his eyes fixed themselves sternly on me. People said he was genial and kindly, but I felt that he would stand for no foolishness. That was a good thing for me to remember now. With Ted married and living overseas, certainly that chapter was closed for me. Under Grandfather's relentless stare, I returned the disturbing photograph to the box with other unusables. The picture of Grandfather I framed and gave the most prominent place on the basement walls; one of my father, Nathaniel Dial, as United States Senator, beside it.

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Most frustrating was the task of getting the down from the old mattress into pillow ticking. It seemed to fly in all directions except where it was supposed to go and before I had finished, the whole backyard was decorated with fuzz. I must have looked like a half-plucked gosling, and for days I felt as if I were breathing out feathers.

Besides household tasks, I saw that a second growth of brambles



*Senator Nathaniel Dial, son of Captain Albert Dial*

was coming on. A muscle I had sprained laying a flagstone walk put me in bed for a few days. I could have enjoyed lying back on a heating pad while I mended some frayed rugs, if I hadn't been worried over finances.

The cost of brochures for advertising my retreat with stamps for mailing would be about fifty dollars. I was wondering how I could meet this extra expense when I heard my buzzer. Mrs. Fowler, a neighbor, was collecting for the membership drive of our citizen's association. The dues, including a subscription to the local paper, were three dollars and fifty cents.

"I'll be glad to join," I said. Trying to stall, I continued, "I will

bring you my dues as soon as I have the change."

"This is one time I'm loaded with money," she laughed, "other people's. How much do you need?"

I answered as casually as possible, "I'm nursing a bum shoulder today. I'm afraid you will have to wait until I can get to the bank."

"That's O.K. Take care of that shoulder. Let me know if there is anything I can do for you. The drive lasts until the end of the week." She was gone.

"The end of the week," I thought. "It's likely to be months."

My hunch proved to be correct. When the check came for my dividends, it wasn't enough to take care of my obligations, much less any kind of dues. Truly I was scraping the bottom of the barrel, scraping hard. One thing I couldn't have stood at this time would be for Dave or any of my friends to say, "I told you so," or worse still offer condolences. I must hold on!

I had long lists of names to whom I would soon send my opening announcements. Then, I felt sure guests would begin coming. I almost panicked at the thought of cooking for so many strangers, but Lee had survived. Cooking wasn't hard, if I kept my mind on what I was doing. Right now my problem was having something to cook.

From the beginning of my project I had expected success and had gone about my work, never doubting. I wondered why I was now so severely tested. Surely all my effort couldn't be a mistake. From the study in my Thursday class I had learned much about the world around me and the function of my soul and spirit in it. If there was any practical value in these lessons, I resolved that now was my time to find it. I had done all I humanly could. The only thing left was "to put it in the light," as Selma would say.

Beside my stream one afternoon, I felt that I must receive an answer. Seated on the bench beneath the poplar, I was comforted by a sense of oneness with the woodland around me and most of all with the ripples of the stream. This led to gratitude for such enjoyment at my very door, and for the Power that provided it. There my thoughts lingered. Moments passed in contemplation of the Mighty Power behind all creation—then—deep stillness. As simply as the sun dispels mist, my burden lifted, melted away. When I returned to everyday consciousness, I knew that my problem was solved for me.

Instead of holding on to it as I had been doing, I could now, "Let go, and let God."

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Not long after, deliverance came in a letter from Frank Beamer, a former piano teacher in the private school in Washington where I had taught Speech. From his home in Miami, Frank wrote asking if I could take his wife, Sue, for a while at my retreat. She was in need of a rest and would like to remain a month, or longer.

I almost wept.

At once I wired agreement and immediately began getting her room ready. The turquoise walls made a pleasing background for the simple furnishings and the yellow and gray accessories. I wondered where Sue Beamer could rest better than in my mother's softly padded rocker, looking out over the woodland with the stream winding through it.

As I sat there a pair of robins brought bits of vine and twigs to the sill where they were starting their nest. This seemed like a good omen for me and for the home I had prepared for wayfaring guests.

Frank sent a Special Delivery check for twenty-five dollars for his wife's reservation and asked me to bill him for the rest. When Sue arrived on Saturday by plane, I had a hot dinner waiting which she seemed to relish. She was younger than I expected with wavy, dark brown hair and wistful, heavily lashed brown eyes.

While my guest roamed around the grounds, or sat beside the stream or on the big rock dangling her feet in the water, I went about my tasks. In her room she enjoyed watching the robins with their babies in the nest on the sill until the young family had taken flight. She never mentioned having any problems, but I felt that something was troubling her and prayed that it would lift. A few times she asked me about the meaning of some of my religious books she had read, and seemed responsive to the idea of a Higher Self, our divine spark within, which lovingly directs all our activities.

In a letter from Frank soon after Sue returned home, he said that she seemed like a different person, in fact that her two months' visit with me had saved their marriage. I found reward in that as well as in the two hundred and forty dollars I received for my services. It

was wonderful to pay all my bills, even the one to my citizen's association, and to have some surplus.

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I was proud of my brochure of Havenwood, a bright yellow folder with the cover and a map done by an artist friend. How could anyone resist it, especially members of religious groups who would surely welcome news of a place in which to "invite their souls"?

Everything was in readiness, even down to a box of screws that had needed sorting. I enjoyed looking around my home, furnished with some things the Salvation Army once wouldn't have hauled away. There was the backless chair, now skirted and serving as a stool at a dressing table; the old tea cart, with its wheels removed, turned into a coffee table; the mirror from above Mother's living room mantel cut in two and, in their antiqued frames, hung above vanities; the basement floor covered with Mother's kitchen linoleum. There was also the packing barrel, sawed in two and touched up for periodical tables; several brightly enameled boxes and orange crates converted into shelves; and outside two boxes fastened together and covered with shingles as a shed for the lawn mower. Most of this salvaging was my own handiwork, except where a hammer and saw were needed. There I realized my limitations and knew that if anyone should depend on me to erect his shelter, he would have to live in a tent.

As a temporary covering for the cot in the basement, I had stuffed a pad with packing straw—a Beauty Rest for a hen, maybe, but I certainly didn't expect anybody to sleep on it.

I had done the best I could with what I had. My announcements were on their way and I was ready for the Big Opening. My time was free just to answer the telephone and relieve the postman of his load.

But the telephone didn't ring—the first day, nor the second, nor the third. Neither did any requests for reservations come by mail. It was unbelievable.

After two weeks a friend phoned asking for the basement room for a week. The basement room! Beautiful Hildegard Nelson on that pad! She may have wondered why I gave her the choice upstairs room at no extra charge. If I had had red carpets, I would have spread them for her.



*"Beautiful Hildegard Nelson on that straw pad. . . . If I had had red carpets, I would have spread them for her."*

We had a wonderful time together, her visit, like Sue Beamer's, serving as a booster to my faith and courage. However, it still remains a mystery how Frank knew about my retreat. Sue thought that some friend had told him about it, but Frank could never recall who it was.

## Chapter XIII

### My Daily Needs on a Shoestring

A letter that sent my spirits soaring came from Mrs. Comstock of Fort Worth, Texas. She asked for reservations of my best accommodations for the first two weeks in August. My best meant the dogwood room at forty dollars a week for room and board. The two upstairs rooms were thirty dollars each and the basement room twenty-five dollars. At first I had wanted to let guests pay as they felt inclined, but some of my more experienced friends dissuaded me.

Mrs. Comstock's letter had a prosperous sound. Who knows what might happen if she liked Havenwood! For a moment I had grandiose ideas of oil wells flowing into my resources and maybe an endowment which would put me on easy street, but her visit was several weeks in the future and day-dreaming wasn't getting my cleaning and washing done.

At any rate my retreat was underway, not with the crowds I had expected, but enough to keep things going. The previous week Josephine Collier and an out-of-town friend had appreciated the real purpose of Havenwood and had each spent time alone on "the magic bench." Our talk fests together centered around our studies and spiritual experiences. We agreed that this life of inner adventure was beset with trials and testings yet blessed with enough blissful moments to spur us on. Our goal was union with the true self implanted within by the God of our very beings. None of us could express enough gratitude for the mission of Jesus, the Christ, in coming to our planet for the sake of all its humanity. By making daily use of His power, the Christ within, as our studies taught, it was becoming a vital personal matter to each of us.

My guests also enjoyed the meals and the surroundings. This was the kind of companionship for which I longed at Havenwood and

which I hoped was the beginning for many such visits by other members of our study group.

I was glad to have two ladies from a health food shop in Washington the next week-end. Following them, a government worker and her daughter spent part of their vacation with me. After a short lapse, Miss Rachel Taylor came. She felt the need of a rest from her strenuous duties as matron in a church orphanage in Washington. A friend of hers, a Russian refugee employed in the State Department, brought her out and got her settled for a week's stay. She was a stately looking woman with a Mona Lisa face circled with thick auburn braids. Her air of self-containment piqued my interest so that when she lifted her veil of reserve even momentarily, I felt privileged. However, I let her enjoy the quiet for which she had come. Miss Taylor's visit fortunately terminated the day before Mrs. Comstock's reservation for the dogwood room.

Excitedly, I began preparations for her arrival. After marketing, I spent the rest of the day, cleaning, polishing, and putting out my best linens. Late into the evening I worked on dishes that could be prepared ahead for the menus I had planned. I no longer dreaded cooking, in fact, I even enjoyed it. It seemed to put me in a class with miracle workers, stirring some unpalatables together and, with the help of a little heat, turning out something delectable. I wanted the Comstock visit to be as nearly perfect as possible and hoped that my newly acquired legerdemain with pots and pans wouldn't fail me.

I was especially glad that I had Lee's silver. I spent the next morning polishing it, setting the table, arranging flowers and putting finishing touches around the house. I had sent directions to Mrs. Comstock for getting out to Havenwood from the airport and was expecting her not later than one o'clock. I had a luncheon of cold cuts and a salad ready to be served.

My expectancy turned into anxiety when one o'clock passed with no word from my guest. Her plane was reported in on time. When I rechecked our correspondence, I could find no mistake. Maybe she had taken a later plane. The next one was due at eight o'clock that evening. Clinging to this hope, I spent an uneasy afternoon.

When my phone rang about eight o'clock, I leaped to answer it. Abbie Maybank, a neighbor, wanted advice about de-varnishing an old piece of furniture. I went to bed certain that I would receive

some explanation from Mrs. Comstock soon, but two weeks passed without a word. A picture post card, with a message about her happy stay in one of the "Camps Farthest Out" retreats in Wisconsin ended my Comstock air castle.

As a substitute for the glamorous Mrs. Comstock, a tired-looking old lady from Portland, Oregon, arrived a few days later. Maria Hauptman, having made the long trip to Washington by bus in hopes of finding a permanent home with her brother and his wife, stayed with me until they invited her over for a visit. In a short time she was back. They did not care to have her remain. If I could have offered her a home, I am sure it would have been a blessing to both of us, but I could not yet afford even part-time help.

Among the many useful things I learned from Maria was one of questionable value, dry cleaning my clothes with varsol. It did the work well and economically enough but left an odor guaranteed to drive all one's friends away. It was hard for me to accept the money she left for her expenses and a dollar bill she enclosed in a note later made me weep.

Josephine came out again for Labor Day week-end, which I knew marked the end of my retreat patronage for the summer. I was disappointed that none of my other study group friends had followed her example. Possibly they were still reluctant to risk my cooking. Rachel Taylor needed a place easily available and had found an apartment within walking distance from her work. That meant the end of her visits with me.

However, a happy surprise was in store for me. An elderly friend of Mother's came out for a month's stay while her daughter went on an overseas assignment. I met the challenge as best I could and all that I ever heard from gentle, patrician Mrs. Wall were words of praise and of concern about some of the work she saw me trying to do.

My next guest, sent by my doctor in Washington, was a painful contrast, giving orders from the time she swept into my home with her maid. It's true, she was nervous, poor soul, but before she left, I was nearly in a decline. Just what my doctor had against me I have yet to find out, but I suppose any trials that put food in the ice box for the winter were worth undergoing.

During the long winter months a childish game with objects in my household sometimes relieved my sense of aloneness. It's a good thing

I wasn't being observed as I went about the house talking to May, the old Maytag washing machine; Sunbeam, my bright new furnace; and Rexie, my vacuum cleaner. Clem, short for my Clemson hand mower, was now on a rest cure from last summer's strenuous labor.

May, the spoiled child of the family, demanded my undivided attention as I stood by her feeding each piece of laundry to the old fashioned Maytag wringer. Neither did I appreciate her impish pranks, like grabbing my scarf and drawing it tighter and tighter until she nearly choked me.

Fortunately, other members of my inanimate family offset such conduct. For instance, my vacuum cleaner relieved me of "cleaning day virus" by removing dust not only from the floor, furniture and woodwork but from the air. Sunbeam, my bright new furnace, took the place of several handy men by responding instantly with the right degree of heat at the flick of the thermostat control.

I still wasn't up to Lee's efficiency in marketing, but I enjoyed the weekly outing with Alice Jones. She now gave me a ride which relieved me from trudging home with the heavy loads.

I was doing everything I could for the success of my retreat in its coming season by entertaining heads of personnel in government departments or of church groups at an occasional luncheon or dinner. I also spoke to women's clubs, in schools, and to government and religious groups—wherever I had an opportunity to tell about Havenwood.

The chief blessing of my quiet winter was time for religious study, not only of the lessons which I brought home, but books from the study group's small lending library—books by leading estoteric writers, past and present. Foremost, was a full set by Aleta B. Baker, founder of the Order of the Portal, to which our Thursday class belonged. Other writers, also, gave worthwhile information on the inner meaning of our life here and its potentialities. No longer did I have to tramp the streets of Washington to find what I wanted. Constantly spread before me was a feast to delight the soul.

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The crocuses had begun breaking the sod with their darts of color, but the first guest to break my winter freeze was uncrocuslike Mrs. Smithfield. Since nothing I did seemed to please my new arrival, I

could easily understand why her daughter boarded her out. And yet I sympathized with the old lady, who was irked with the seclusion of Havenwood. More to her taste would have been a booth in a busy shopping center where her lively chatter could attract patronage for her clever silhouettes. Although a number of young visitors brought friends who wanted silhouettes done, this was not enough to satisfy Mrs. Smithfield.

Her chief solace seemed to be the companionship of her brother, whom I secretly called "Goliath." Whenever he strode into my living room, his loudspeaker voice booming and his beard streaming like strands of Spanish moss, I shuddered. However, I resigned my living room to the pair as they sat for hours burning up the logs I had lugged in. Meal times weren't easy either, although Goliath was considerate enough to bring his own loaf of bread. A minor problem was Goliath's legs extending the length of the table, never leaving a place for mine. Fortunately, his home was some distance away, so that I didn't have to put up with him every day.

When I returned from market one afternoon, Mrs. Smithfield and all her belongings were gone. Immediately I reported to her daughter and insisted that I would refund the money for her remaining week. The daughter rounded up the escapee at the home of one of her mother's young friends and the next day brought the culprit back in a decidedly chastened mood.

Fortunately, another guest had arrived—a genial person from Augusta, Maine—who gave Mrs. Smithfield just the kind of companionship she needed. The magic of spring, which permitted Mrs. Smithfield to be out more, also, helped to bring about an unbelievable change.

The day after her return I was busy with a pick preparing the ground back of the water lily pond for my first garden. Suddenly, Goliath, with great effort, unwound himself from the kitchen steps where he and his sister were sitting and came toward me with giant strides. Although surprised, I offered no resistance when he took the pick and attacked the clumps of matted roots that defied my efforts. In no time he had the ground cleared and leveled, ready for the rows to be laid out and a variety of seeds dropped in.

His next act of chivalry was to bring in his own wood and even to leave a supply for me. My triumph was complete when he placed

poles, set with concrete, for a laundry line so that I could dry my clothes outside instead of all over the basement. I realized that Mrs. Smithfield had prompted these acts and before she left we were on pleasant terms that continued as long as she lived.

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In May I sent out a modest penny post card announcing, "The second season of quiet, comfortable Havenwood, a non-denominational sanctuary, providing accommodations and wholesome, appetizing meals for individuals and groups seeking 'a place apart,' easily reached by bus from Washington, D. C."

The last lines read: "Why not plan a stay at Havenwood? Perhaps you'd call it 'Heavenwood.' For reservations or further information write to or DIAL Miss DIAL."

The first guest to respond was Harriet Lynch, a true child of nature. She seemed gifted with some unusual power over wildlife. Birds, never before or since seen at Havenwood, visited while she was here. She enjoyed my library—we had many interesting talks about the books she read. I am always glad to receive her letters postmarked "Tulsa, Oklahoma," where she moved soon after her visit.

Not all my guests were so congenial; in fact, I had to learn to adapt to varied types. For instance, when a prominent club woman from Washington asked me for something to read, and I handed her one of my inspirational books, she said reproachfully, "My dear, I mean something entertaining. I would think you had a thriller of some kind."

I felt that my library was stocked with thrillers, but I hesitated to risk giving her another one.

All summer, guests trickled out from Washington for a day's outing, for a week-end, or for longer stays. A few came from a distance. An artist from California expected to pay all her traveling expenses by the sales of her books and symbolic drawings. As lovely as they were, I didn't feel that I could accept them as payment for her expenses. Since the response at her meetings in Washington was disappointing, she left me holding an "IOU." I'm glad to say that this she made good after her next stop.

Financial results for the summer were not encouraging. Near the end of August, I found that my bank balance was forty-nine dollars

and twenty-three cents with which to pay forty dollars on my bank loan, twelve dollars and ninety-four cents for gas, nine dollars and fifteen cents for water, seven dollars and fifteen cents for telephone, five dollars and twenty cents for electricity, and four dollars and fifty cents for garbage removal. This was my share for using my neighbor's cans for the garbage I couldn't put in my compost heap. I burned as much trash as possible, the rest I used for filling in some ditches at the back of my premises. Even by cutting expenses like this in every way possible and doing without help in both the yard and the home, my income was inadequate. On account of so much shade, my garden produced very little and with guests my food bills were high. I had also had to buy linens and other supplies. In addition, I needed storm windows, a basement entrance, a fence around my yard, a car, a place to keep it—improvements that would cost thousands of dollars. I hoped to sometime begin reducing the principal on my bank loan.

Most important I wasn't accomplishing what I had set out to do with the retreat itself. Instead of coming for a serious purpose, the majority of guests had sought creature comforts only. I was running a high class boarding house and being underpaid for it. I had been too inexperienced to count in my own labor with the other expenses or to ask for a deposit with each reservation. Others besides Mrs. Comstock had cancelled their reservations without giving notice.

As much as I disliked admitting it, my retreat was a losing business. I wasn't ready to abandon it entirely, but I couldn't go through life existing on a shoestring. Clearly something would have to supplement my income. What that would be, I now had to decide.

## Chapter XIV

### Reading, Writing and Roomers

Quaking at the thought, I posted a card, advertising "Room for Rent" on the bulletin board of my nearest drug store. Some permanent guests, I hoped, would insure me a steady income.

My first call was from a man who inquired gruffly, "Where is that room of yours at?"

I didn't mind the grammatical error so much as the sound of his voice. It made me answer, "I am sorry, but it is no longer available." "Then why in hell don't you take your card down?"

Evidently he removed it for me, because the next day when I checked the bulletin board it wasn't there.

After several people had looked at my rooms and had gone away saying they would think it over, I began to wonder if I should lower my rates, although I knew they were comparable to other rooming houses in the neighborhood. At last newly weds from Vermont moved into the dogwood room and a couple from Fort Worth, Texas, took one upstairs.

Besides easing the financial strain, these young people were a pleasure to have around. The Texans were a striking couple—Jeanette, with clear cut features and glossy brown hair, and Kenneth, a substantial-looking young businessman, training at Howard Johnson's to open his own restaurant in his home town.

The Shumates, an older couple from a small Virginia town, used a hot plate for housekeeping in the basement. As part payment for his rent, Mr. Shumate constructed my basement entrance, at last ending my imprisonment there. I no longer had to bring baskets of wet clothes and trash of all kinds up through the living room. The entrance also enabled me to move the old Stieff piano to the basement. It took four men to do it, but the space left in the living room made it well worthwhile.

Mrs. Nord from Ohio occupied the other upstairs room. She expected to buy her own home if she could secure a teaching position in Fairfax County. The morning she went to the Board of Education office for an interview, not expecting the trip to change my life, I rode along to register my rooms for rent to teachers.

Mrs. Nold was successful. Unexpectedly, the head of personnel offered me a job, also. Without hesitating, I accepted an assignment to teach third grade at Graham Road Elementary School. The work would begin the following week.

The school was within walking distance, if I went across the rear of my lot, out through the one behind mine, then down Rosemary Lane, a street with comfortable homes in their wooded surroundings.

When school opened I had to make many adjustments. Following a regular routine of teaching under the best conditions wouldn't have been easy, but I began work in a building still under construction. The grime, confusion and noise were almost more than I could bear. The put-put of the riveting machine outside my room made it impossible to talk in a normal tone. When the deafening noise let up, my voice was always booming out as though I were addressing an outdoor gathering through a megaphone. At times my throat became so sore I would wonder if I could finish the day.

Other distracting noises came through the thin partition separating my classroom from the one adjoining. Since our only exit was through that room, we lived in dread of fire from our wood-burning stove. We had no complaint about the amount of heat the stove gave off, but that the warmth was not properly distributed. Children near the stove sweltered, while others suffered from the cold. We were also exposed to the elements because of damage to the existing roof before the second story was covered. When it rained the leaks overhead made it difficult for us to find a dry spot. Frequently we sloshed around all day in overshoes.

There were redeeming features. I remember having an unusually well-behaved group of children. Our playground was in a lovely grove of oaks. Best of all, we had an hour for lunch when the children went home for theirs. Many of these periods I spent in a state of exhaustion, stretched out on a counter above my cabinet, trying to recoup for the afternoon.

I could never have made it without the help and example of Ethel



Carter, my principal. Uncomplainingly, she endured her dungeon-like office, consisting of a desk and a chair in the hall. With the outside door loosely boarded up, she was without heat and light but with breezes a-plenty. She managed to keep up her circulation by helping all of us from the janitor up. I was doing only passably with learning the third grade form of handwriting in manuscript or printing. One of the things Mrs. Carter did for me was to make the charts I needed for classroom display. Another was to give me with my load of work a ride home each afternoon.

With qualms as to how I would be able to carry on my retreat, I awaited the arrival of Frances Orner, an osteopath from Woodstock, New York, who had reservations for a week. My fears were unwarranted. Like Reverend Bates, Frances also served as an angel in disguise—her treatments each night enabled me to take a fresh start the following morning.

My next guest, Bertha French from Hartford, Connecticut, was also a blessing. During her month's stay, Bertha looked after me like a hen with one lone chick. She not only prepared her own lunches, but even relieved me of some of the house work. The care of these two in this critical period was too good to last.

They were followed by others not so considerate for whom I had to prepare meals, clean and care for rooms and entertain until all hours at night. At the same time I had an endless amount of school work to do at home. It soon got the best of me, and I was forced to begin taking roomers only.

Among my winter guests was Vera Weidman, a delightful person, who called herself my "girl upstairs." If I had had my way, I would have kept her permanently, but I stood no chance with the competition of her ardent admirer in the State Department, a young man who has since become well known for his writings. In the spring they were married and went to live in an old home they had renovated themselves.

Before I realized how cold my upstairs was, my guests there must have really suffered. I was asking them to turn their registers off when they went out, and at night I cut the heat off entirely. But after I had slept there one night and had seen ice form inside the windows, I not only changed my thermostat habits, but had storm windows installed over the whole house, including the basement.

In the basement, I also substituted a stove for the hot plate.

It was wonderful to have enough income to take care of such needs, although one a little later came as quite a shock. One Saturday morning, I was startled at hearing a shriek in the basement. Sally, a high school girl who helped me on Saturdays, was working there. When I hurried down and saw her standing ankle deep in water, I knew what had happened. Some vital organ had given way in the old washing machine which I had thought would outlast me. That was the end of the Maytag handwringer era. A clever salesman talked me into getting an automatic washer, for which to this day I bless him.

That fall I had to meet another emergency. Just before school opened, I found that the neighbors behind me had fenced in their lot, cutting off my route to school. I didn't blame them, because other people were using their premises as a thoroughfare without even asking permission. Just the same I found it inconvenient. The alternatives for getting to school now were to ford a stream and climb two fences or buy a car.

The shiny black Chevy I bought, though used, seemed worthy of shelter. By shopping around, I was able to have a brick garage with extra storage room built for sixteen hundred dollars, about half the amount of most of the estimates I received.

Even with all these major expenditures I began paying on my bank loan, in the hope I wouldn't leave the debt to my successors.

During the summer, I was fortunate enough to make labor exchange with Lyle Collins, a consulting engineer who lived in my home. Incredible as it may seem, in exchange for some of my home cooked dinners, he surveyed my property and built a wall around the roots of the old poplar, from the streambed to ground level.

There have been many other willing workers whose services I will never forget: Waldo and Emanuel Bennett tugging railroad ties to stabilize the creek banks; Frankie Michael and others working in the mire of the stream to build a foot bridge across it; Mr. Michael attending to plumbing needs inside; John Griffith cutting trees, mowing and raking; Arthur Burwick, III, laying out a rock garden and planting two lovely white pines; Austin Wade, Arthur Burwick, Jr., and others shoveling snow, cutting wood and building fires; Everett Larkin bringing me apples each autumn from his mountain home; Charles

Bishop mending furniture; Ray Beach, handsome as a movie star and with the disposition of a Christian martyr, acting as general handy man; and dear old Bob Coar puffing away under my new washing machine when something went wrong. For valuable assistance in later years, I must mention Charles Charlton, Charlie Davis, Frank Coury, Nelson Potts, and versatile and ever accommodating Harvey White.

I wish there were space to mention all who have since the early days contributed to the success of Havenwood and without whom I could never have carried on.

I hope that the home-cooked meals, gallons of coffee and iced drinks I served, and the ceaseless prayers I offered in their behalf as well as cash payments or deductions I often made in their rent may in some measure compensate.

Some of my favorites have come from an electric plant nearby. The company screens its employees so thoroughly that I seldom ask for further references.

Among my notables have been the first City Manager of Falls Church, Mr. Rhodes Woodbury and his wife. They followed Mr. Roy Braden from the state of Washington, here only long enough to prepare Falls Church for its managerial form of government. Also in my guest book are the names of wives and daughters of men of both houses of Congress, of the judiciary, the cabinet and a few of the distinguished gentlemen themselves.

## Chapter XV

### God Is Right Here

By the beginning of my second year at Graham Road School our building was finished. Things were so different it was hard to realize we were working in the same place. Across the hall from my second-floor classroom was the teacher's lounge with easy chairs and a couch. Ironically, with the cafeteria on basement level at the far end of the building and only thirty minutes for lunch, I had no time to sit, much less lie down, inviting as it was.

In my classroom, with cabinets, book shelves, cloak room, closets, sink and rest room for the children, I almost needed a blueprint to find my way around. Our surroundings seemed to stimulate both teacher and pupils.

Mrs. Andrus, our new principal, gave me the fundamentals for teaching reading, my first step toward specializing in that field. Using my previous experience, I had the class dramatize many of their lessons. After studying the Christmas customs in other lands, we gave a production with hand puppets before the whole school. One of our third graders painted a Bethlehem scene for our background, another improvised on his little electric organ music to introduce the children as they entered with their puppets. It was an especially good experience for participants who suffered from shyness. Of course this performance preceded the Supreme Court's ruling about religious observances in the classroom.

Our opening exercises always set the keynote for the day's activities. They began with a little song I had learned from Mrs. Carter the year before:

Father, we will quiet be,  
While we listen now to Thee,  
As we bow our heads we'll sing,  
"Thank you, God, for everything."

In the brief silence following the song, one could have heard a pin drop, the only complete quiet in our busy day. After a silent prayer, anyone who cared to could pray aloud. At first it was hard to get the pupils started, but later it was harder to get them to stop. These oral prayers were sometimes misused in petitions such as "Dear God, please give it to Johnny for socking me in the stomach," or "Please don't let the teacher see me when I am talking."

One child limelighted my shortcomings when she prayed, "Dear God, help us to be good today, so teacher won't have to yell at us."

As a rule, however, their expressions of complete trust did things to my heartstrings.

After a few songs, including a patriotic one, we gave the flag salute, ending devotions which had set the pattern for the day. At times when the class became too noisy, I would have them put their heads on their desks, close their eyes and silently repeat the words of our song.

As our prayer ended one morning a little girl said in an awed whisper, "Miss Dial, it seems like God is right here."

\* \* \* \* \*

It is amazing how quickly those days, filled with pressure, aspiration and achievement, became months and years. In a flash, it seemed, five years had passed. In that time I had made a big dent in payments on my bank loan. My Chevy was giving good service. It was a relief, too, to indulge in small luxuries again, after having gone for so long without them.

I seemed destined for the rest of my life to keep taking courses in teaching methods, psychology and education. If studying could do it, I should have become a super-teacher.

As a side line, I was successful in pairing off some of my co-teachers with men in my home. Alfred and Lola broke the record for speed by marrying two months from the day I introduced them. Betty and Milton may have set a slower pace, but not from lack of devotion. My renown as Cupid spread faster than I could supply the demand for eligibles.

One marriage for which I could claim no credit was that of Dave Tyler with his first sweetheart. His romance, like those where the hero wins his girl after a lifetime of devotion, was a happy one

for me as well as for Dave. His wife and I became good friends, and I have had many enjoyable outings in their Philadelphia and beach-side homes. The only trouble is that their luxurious manner of living spoils me for my own work-a-day life.

Only one visit with them was ever disappointing and that through no fault of theirs. Before I left home I felt sick and it was all I could do to go through the Thanksgiving festivities they had planned. When I returned home my doctor said I had pneumonia, a severe case. By ambulance I was carried to the hospital in a semi-conscious state. In a few days I passed the crisis but was still in a hospital bed through Christmas and New Year's.

When I returned home in January, I found the house in a neglected condition. One boy had checked out, leaving as his remembrance a drawer full of empty whiskey bottles and a month's unpaid rent.

I had been home a few days when a gentleman who introduced himself as Mr. Bullfinch called. Peering from beneath his dark bushy brows he blurted out, "I've come for my daughter."

"Your daughter?"

"You needn't play games with me. I know she is here. I've had them followed."

"You must be mistaken."

"Hank Caldebon rooms here, doesn't he?"

"Yes, he did. I'm just back from the hospital and I haven't. . . ."

"Well, he still does and my sixteen-year-old daughter is with him!—If you don't let her know I'm here, I'll. . . ."

At that moment we heard the basement door slam, followed by excited voices beneath us, one was that of a girl.

"That's Betsy now!" Shouting his daughter's name, Mr. Bullfinch hurried down the basement steps.

From the top of the stairs I could hear weeping, Hank trying to get in a word, and Mr. Bullfinch swearing.

Finally he drowned out everyone with his command, "Get your coat on, you wench. You're coming with me."

"But Mr. Bullfinch, . . ." Hank said.

The outside basement door slammed and from the window I saw Mr. Bullfinch stalking toward his car, followed by a fragile looking girl. Young Caldebon was hurrying up the basement stairs.

"What does this mean?" I asked as he entered the living room.

"Betsy and I are married, ma'am. We were married Sunday."

"And you've had her here all this time?"

"It was the only thing to do. I'm sorry if we've bothered you any. We've tried to keep quiet."

"You succeeded all right. Why didn't you come and tell me? I might have been able to help you."

He shrugged, "I don't know. I'm leaving now. I'd like for you to keep this for the money I owe you until I get back." He held out a set of Rogers silver which he said was his wedding present to Betsy and which I had the grace to decline.

Poor Hank! The next thing I heard the marriage had been annulled and Hank arrested—on what charge I couldn't find out.

My recovery seemed complete until back in school the last of February my ear abscessed and ruptured the ear drum. The roar within mingled with classroom hubbub made teaching a nightmare. My room mothers who had stood by me throughout my illness, insisted on relieving me for a part of each day, but our school had regulations against parents taking over even at lunch time. After eating in the din of the cafeteria each day and climbing the stairs back to my room, I could hardly get through the afternoon. Since I had used all my leave and had too many obligations to even think of resigning or taking time off without pay, there was nothing to do but stick it out.

\* \* \* \* \*

Later that spring, through the efforts of Carl Schubmehl, a landscape gardener living in my home, my dream bridge, wide enough to hold a table and chairs, became a reality. How proud he was the day he drove in with a telephone pole, sawed in two, in his truck. The pieces were just the right length for crossbeams which he covered later with oak boards. From a wrecked house he secured the posts and lumber for banisters. Best of all, he brought me a heavy oak bench which I had him place on the bridge. Many friends have since sat on that bench, watching the birds bathe in the stream and then fly to an overhanging branch to flutter themselves dry.

Alfred Worthington, an Englishman doing research at the Congressional Library, certainly got his share of pleasure from the bench.

It was his custom to relax on it every day when he came from work. I can see him now with his pinkish complexion, wrinkled like a cherub rough-dried. From beneath his wispy forelock that constantly dangled over his brow, his eyes sparkled like two bright beads.

One day after spending an unusually long time on the bridge, he strolled slowly toward the house and came into the kitchen where I was working. "Quite a place you have here, Miss Dial, quite a place," he said appraisingly.

"You enjoy the birds, don't you?"

"They are a part of it, but it's more. Something I can't quite put into words."

"I know, Mr. Worthington. That was my reason for buying Havenwood. I am so glad you feel it, too."

"It was a noble thing for you to do," he said, emphasizing the statement with a shake of his straggling forelock. How I would have liked to comb it from his forehead for him, but such attention from a landlady no doubt would have driven him to shelter with the timid thrush.

Hearing the thrush's song which has filled my woods each year from April to August has been one of my chief delights. Now thanks to Tony, a roomer who taped their songs on his delicate Japanese recorder, I am able to enjoy them the year round.

I am also indebted to Tony and two other FBI boys, Leon and Bob who lived in my basement one summer, for they rescued me from hordes of starlings to whom I was about to abdicate. The birds were nesting in my attic, roosting in my trees, and strutting around the yard as if they owned it.

Bob, an ex-baseball player, conducted the campaign. While he was collecting rocks, the rest of us went back under the trees and began beating furiously on garbage can lids. We let out Indian whoops led by long-legged, serious Leon who generally looked pious enough to be a Puritan forefather. Now banging and hallooing, he leaped around like a demented kangaroo. The starlings immediately took refuge in the highest branches and as soon as we were out of the way, Bob began throwing rocks into the tops of the trees. The starlings quickly vacated. Soon not one was in sight. As victors we ate our supper and laid ourselves down to sweet repose.

Our rest was short lived. By morning the starlings were back.

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.

\* \* \* \* \*

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