

Chapter XIX

The Underworld and I

Martha Upton lost no time in trying to get me fired. Before noon the following day a mother called asking to have her son, Dan, transferred to another teacher. Dan was an emotionally disturbed child who kept the class in turmoil most of the time. Life would certainly be more peaceful without him, still I didn't want to let him go. We had started giving a series of plays, generally called socio-drama, in which the children worked out their own solutions for difficult classroom problems. Dan not only enjoyed taking part, he was beginning to apply the lessons to himself and seemed to be gaining in self-control.

My principal agreed with me that it would be a mistake to move the child, but this didn't halt Martha's campaign. Neither did the reprimand she had received from the principal for visiting my classroom without permission from his office. Judging from the number of complaints which kept coming in against me, these incidents only added to her determination to have me dismissed.

I was in trouble enough without a shock I received at home one afternoon. As I came in from school, a strange woman phoned urgently asking to speak to the landlady.

"I am she," I replied.

"Jack Hall lives there, don't he?"

"Yes, but he is at work now. If you would like to leave a message. . . ."

"No'm, but I've got something to tell you about him. He's a dope peddler."

"What do you mean?"

"Exactly what I'm saying, ma'am. I'm a Negro woman, and my son is being ruined by that fellow at your house and the woman he runs around with. They are selling him dope and I thought you orter know."

She hung up before I could get her name or number. Jack Hall was a tall, amiable-looking blond who had moved into my basement several weeks before. Dope pusher was a serious charge. I could hardly reconcile it with the fellow's pleasing boyish appearance and the job he said he held as manager of a service station in Annandale. The woman might be some crank, or someone trying to settle a grudge. Or maybe it was just a hoax. The least I could do was to drive out to Mr. Hall's service station and investigate.

There he was at the address he had given me, servicing cars. Could I believe that clean-cut young man was guilty of what an unknown person, really just a strange voice over the telephone, had accused him? With his ready smile, clear blue eyes and frank open countenance, this seemed beyond belief. I knew nothing of any girl with whom he was running around either. After he had serviced my car, feeling sure there was some mistake, I drove home with a sense of relief.

Before I had finished dinner, however, the woman was on the phone again, this time highly excited, "My son's in a bad way. If you don't put a stop to it, I'm going to have your place raided." Before I could reply, she went on, "I've warned you now, and that's that." Again the receiver clicked and I stood dumbfounded.

I could see the headlines. A teacher's home raided for dope peddling! It would be all that Martha needed to have me out of my job—disgraced.

"Dope peddling! Dope peddling!" kept hammering through my head. If I only had Bill Fulton's telephone number to ask him to hurry home from work. He had lived in my home for several months and seemed to be mature and level-headed. When he finally appeared, I poured out the story to him. I felt even worse when he said that on his way to his car that morning he had met a young lady with a rain coat over pajamas going toward the basement.

"The first thing is to see what we can find. Let's have a look in his room," Bill suggested, and I followed him to the basement.

Going through the young man's things made me feel shaky, as if I might be the criminal. I wasn't sure just what to look for, but Bill examined every article carefully, even a box containing soiled laundry.

"There's nothing here for us to report," Bill said. "We'll just have to wait."

Hearing a key in the lock on the basement door, I knew it was too late to escape and was trying to think of some plausible excuse for our being in his room when Jack Hall walked in with a young woman. That gave me my cue.

"Good evening, Mr. Hall. I'm afraid you don't understand your privileges here."

"What do you mean?"

"Inviting a woman into your quarters."

"We're just stopping for a minute," he said casually. "This is my friend, Miss Ainsley."

"Hall, I'll go wait in the car," the girl said.

"I guess you better," he replied.

"And I hope you don't let this happen again," I admonished.

"I won't," he said agreeably. Turning to her, "Wait for me. I'll be on out in a minute."

"And don't forget your pillow," she called.

"Your pillow?" I said.

"Yes, these hot nights we're sleeping out on the mall."

"Not together?"

"You wouldn't expect a young lady to go there alone, I hope?"

I had had all the shocks I could stand, so I followed Bill upstairs. I don't know just when Hall moved his things, but next morning his belongings were gone, along with my pillow.

What a relief to be rid of them! It was like waking from a bad dream. And yet my responsibility hadn't ended. Shouldn't I make a report? Bill advised against it since we had found no evidence of dope around. Of course they might have had it in the purloined pillow. I decided to call the authorities and they said they had had the couple under surveillance until two days before when they had suddenly disappeared.

For several weeks nothing happened. Then one afternoon when I stopped for gas at the service station where Jack Hall had worked, the new manager told me that the couple were in jail.

"For dope peddling?" I asked.

"No charges were made about that. On the way to California, they were arrested for theft of the car they were driving. Jack Hall is doing extra time for charges the girl's husband brought against him."

Chapter XX

Counteractions

Although Martha persisted in her efforts, none of the transfers requested for children in my class had been made by the principal and I trusted none would be. With the session so near over it would be detrimental for a child to have to change his teacher. In the remaining weeks, I looked forward to getting my group ready for the big step ahead into the fourth grade. Therefore, it was a shock to me when my principal called me into his office one day and offered to transfer me to another school. It might be the easiest way out for me and it would end his difficulties, but without hesitation I replied that if my presence made things too hard for him, I would resign. However, I wouldn't consider being pushed off into another school.

That response seemed to satisfy him, for immediately he assured me of his full support. Evidently his positive stand was what the hecklers needed, because soon after that they subsided. The rest of the year passed pleasantly without further harassment. I was glad now to concentrate all my energies on teaching. Keeping the many activities going smoothly was almost equal to running a three-ring circus. We were always dramatizing in class—stories in reading, scenes in social studies, and even math problems.

In social studies and science my room overflowed with interesting exhibits as we studied about food, clothing, and shelter and even broadened out into the solar system. Projects of all kinds with plants—even scientific feeding of two white rats in separate cages—went on. Much of our work the children illustrated with their art.

In autumn our room was lined with gorgeous splashes of color—the trees pupils had painted. They illustrated book reports with whimsical pictures. In winter we painted snow scenes, sometimes murals in which every member of the class had a part. The wedding scene

from *The Golden Cockerel* was striking enough to decorate the office walls of the Fairfax Board of Education for a time.

Of all the fascinating activities, however, teaching my third graders to read was foremost. I planned to tutor in reading after retirement.

My opponents' failure to oust me didn't diminish their agitation over getting the walkway. That might have continued endlessly but for an occurrence that shocked the whole neighborhood. A youth under psychiatric treatment fatally shot a much-loved high school boy. Making his escape through the surrounding woods, the culprit had hidden his gun a few feet outside my fence. The following day police officers watched from behind my creek embankment for the culprit to return for his weapon. When he finally did, they took him into custody. My heart ached for both families, neighbors whom I highly esteemed. Although the arrested lad, whom I had taught in the third grade, was lovable, even then he had shown signs of emotional disturbance.

That tragedy was enough to silence talk about a walk through the woods. The sidewalk on Lee Highway was soon completed and, under protective supervision, the children passed safely back and forth to school in public view.

The residents of the Rixey Estates now began trying to get the alley easements vacated. Mrs. Hanks was one of the first to sign the new petition prepared by our lawyer. The owners of the new homes on hers and Mrs. Cox's lots readily cooperated, but again we had an objector, a rather violent one. She slammed her door in our faces and insulted anyone who broached the subject to her. Probably no one mourned when she sold her home and moved. A committee lost no time in paying a visit to welcome her successors. Happy day! Before we left, we had their signatures.

Several other homes had new owners whose signature we must get. That meant much running up and down the street for me, trying to find the residents at home and, I hoped, in the right frame of mind. I had to have help in finding one home owner who lived in a dimly lighted trailer court some distance away. He was home only in the evenings. Another was out of town so much that I had to keep watch until I finally waylaid him on his doorstep.

At last, I rushed the paper with all the signatures on it to our lawyer, expecting it to be recorded and the matter forever settled.

That was the news I heralded up and down the street, and everyone gladly chipped in to pay Mr. Gibson's modest fee. If I hadn't suffered from exhaustion, I am sure I would have staged a gala celebration. As matters turned out, I was glad I hadn't acted so prematurely.

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Now free from anxiety about the alley, I was leaving on a trip, my first of more than a few days, in my twelve years at Havenwood. At the station I repeated farewell cautions to young Mike Keating, whom I was leaving in charge of the house.

"Stop worrying. I know how you want things kept. Go and have fun!"

Certainly I should take his advice. If I could depend on anyone it would be Mike, who had lived in my home like a son for over a year. With him in the house and Alice Jones, my neighbor across the fence, standing by, surely I could go with a free mind.

However, I had just unpacked and was settling down for a lovely stay with my sister, Emily, in Birmingham, when I had a call from Alice. My first thought was of fire, but Alice was summoning me home because of goings-on of which she knew I wouldn't approve. Before I reached home, Mike and his one-woman house party had disappeared, in time to save Havenwood's reputation but not to restore my vacation or my faith in the young fellow.

Chapter XXI

Like New

I had looked forward to retirement from teaching as a time for some leisure, but I spent my first summer producing a bi-weekly TV program. Substituting for a woman who gave talks, "Thoughts of God," on station WMAL, I ambitiously planned my program, "Fun with Books," to have children participants. The idea was to discuss books that illustrated desirable traits of character development, the selections to be lively stories from the cream of children's literature. My erstwhile quiet home swarmed with children from ages six to sixteen—a different group for each program. Reading and selecting our books, writing the script, rehearsing, cutting, timing, and polishing went on endlessly. I felt as if I were on a ferris wheel that couldn't stop. I had hairbreadth escapes making it to the station with my flock in time for the early morning broadcast. And then there were the last-minute dropouts! By the end of the summer I was ready to become one myself.

This was a fitting workout for my remedial reading studies that began in September at the Reading Center of the George Washington University. To keep up with my assignments, I barely had time out for Christmas dinner. Specializing in this work, I felt, would prepare me for my retirement career. However, I wasn't proud of my record with the only pupil who had enrolled for tutoring that winter. In fact, I spent more time rounding him up for classes than in actual instruction. It might have been better if his grandmother and I, on his first afternoon, had let him remain on the top branch of a tree where he perched, defiantly swinging his legs.

Undaunted by this discouraging start, I set about getting my basement classroom ready. My only improvements there had been a knotty pine partition, storm windows, and making the basement entrance. I realized something must be done about the bare block walls, the untiled floor, the exposed pipes and rafters with grit con-



"I ambitiously planned my TV serial, Fun With Books, to have children participants."

stantly sifting down from the floor above. When Bob Larson, a basement tenant, offered to tile the floor, I immediately bought the materials and got him started just before he left for his Christmas holidays. He surprised me by returning with a bride. They moved into an apartment, and I was left with the basement floor half finished.

This was the beginning of an all-winter chain reaction. The new floor called for a tiled ceiling, and since wet clothes could no longer be strung from the rafters, I had to have a dryer. To make room for it, I had to install a smaller laundry tub. A new service box was needed for better lighting, and a two-vent wall appliance for improved heating. The undertaking had spread beyond the classroom into the whole basement.

At times during the winter I was cut off from my teaching supplies by freshly painted boards and doors laid between tables to dry. This

necessitated my crawling beneath them to reach my cabinets—an act highly amusing to my reluctant student.

In the classroom I had two large chalkboards installed and acquired an adequate supply of phonics charts, reading texts, and workbooks. My prize feature was a small library of interesting, simply written books. These, I hoped, would help pupils discover the pleasure they could get from books and inspire them in learning to read.

Final basement touches were a triple-door, multi-purpose closet, and a half bath. The latter I called "The Throne Room" because of its elevated position. During the December-to-May upheaval, my other basement tenant also sought escape through matrimony. Costly as the improvements were, I have since been well repaid, financially as well as in added comfort and student interest.

While my basement work was still under way, one morning as I studied for an exam I heard my buzzer. Opening the door, I stared in amazement at the tall, slender man, immaculately clad in smoked gray. It was Ted—with the same penetrating eyes, but there was something different. Suddenly, I realized he was wearing a toupee, becomingly styled.

"You look as if you might be seeing a ghost," he laughed.

"I think I am. Why didn't you let me know?"

"Ghosts never give notice. I had a short stopover in Washington and thought I'd take a chance."

"Come in so I can see if you are real." He followed me into the living room. "We have a lot of catching up to do."

"It's been a long time, hasn't it?"

"Let's not go into dates," I bantered.

"Time hasn't overtaken you—a little heavier, I believe."

"Kind of an understatement, I'm afraid."

"Don't worry. I've always liked them substantial looking."

"Tell me about yourself. What are you doing?" I asked.

"Right now I have an interesting job as distributor of Chevy trucks in Tahiti."

"The land of beautiful women? What need do they have for trucks?"

"You'd be surprised at how progressive they are. They really have something. Have you ever been there?"

"No. I've gone very few places out of the United States."

"That doesn't sound like you. Why not?"

"Lots of things have kept me home."

"I've had to get around quite a bit. I'm being transferred back to Paris now. I'll meet Gloria there." To my inquiring glance, he explained, "She's my wife—some girl. I'd like for you two to meet."

I replied casually, "Perhaps we can some time."

"It surprises me you've never married. I'm wondering what you do with all this house."

"There are others staying here—all men. I suppose you might call it a home for displaced husbands."

"Fine! I hope you have room for me, if Gloria ever throws me over. . . . I bet she is having her a time while I'm away. One thing about our marriage, we believe in giving each other plenty of freedom."

"Aren't you afraid?"

"Of what? You always did have old-fashioned ideas, didn't you? Gloria and I know where we stand with each other and that's all that really counts. But you—I'd like to get you out of the rut you seem to be in here. Maybe when I get back home, you'll come over for a visit sometime."

My answer was interrupted by a loud noise in the basement and Ted asked, "Is that one of your husbands moving out?"

"No. That's a carpenter making space for more to come." I laughed. "Wouldn't you like to see what I am having done?" As we went down the steps I explained, "This is the room where I do my teaching."

"But aren't you retired?"

"From the classroom, but I do private tutoring here."

"Adults?"

"None so far."

"One time you almost had me in on some of the things you believed. You aren't still off on the subject of religion, are you?"

"Is that how you think of it, Ted?"

"Religion's all right to a reasonable extent. Gloria and I go to church once in a while, to kind of keep up appearances, you know, but a long time ago we decided there is nothing to it."

"Oh? Maybe we get from religion in proportion to what we put into it."

"Certainly. We do contribute. The churches are always after you for something."

"I didn't mean just money. To really get anything we have to give in a lot of other ways."

Amusedly, he replied, "I declare, you ought to have been a preacher, but that's one thing that scares a man off. Of course every fellow to his taste."

Having finished our inspection of the basement, I invited him outside to see the grounds. As we stood on the bridge, looking up stream, I said, "This stream is my reason for buying Havenwood. The bridge here is my favorite lookout." When he didn't reply, I asked, "What do you think of it?"

"You deserve a lot of credit for all you've done, Beck, but. . . ."

"But what?"

"You simply shouldn't bury yourself like this here any longer."

"But I love what I'm doing!"

"Maybe you do, but look at what you're missing—all the beauty spots of the world; the Swiss lakes in the Alps, the blue Mediterranean from one of Italy's mountainsides, Norwegian fiords. . . ."

"But none of them would be home."

"What I'm trying to tell you is they would make home look like—'skid row.' This thing you call a stream with. . . ."

"Ted, please!"

"Excuse me. I know you must have worked like hell on it."

"I've had a lot of help. All of the boys. . . ."

"Yeah. I can imagine. One reason Gloria and I stick to apartments, she knows I don't want to be worked to death."

"I don't blame her, but. . . ."

Our conversation seemed to have come to a dead-end and I led the way back into the house. I suppose he realized he had hurt me and he tried to make amends by again urging me to visit them.

His last remark was, "We'd love to show you around. There are so many interesting things to do and see in Paris."

Ted's visit left me limp, but I had no time to go into shock with all the studying I needed to do. I kept at it until late that night, and did better than I expected on the exam next day, as well as in my later tutoring.

Now, after several years with pupils of all ages, the results are

generally gratifying. I have no more boys who escape into tree tops, but I do have to compete with my water lily pond nearby, where tadpoles are constantly turning themselves into frogs. What in a reading lesson can be as fascinating as such magic?

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During my years at Havenwood I had been subject to bruises, burns, sprains, cuts, infections, and a December ducking in the creek. I even survived the mass onslaught of incensed yellow jackets when I upturned their nest in the woodpile.

However, in the blackness of midnight soon after Ted's visit, my worst accident occurred. It was a headlong plunge down my basement stairs. After extinguishing my living room light, in the darkness I unwittingly walked through the open doorway to my basement stairs. I found myself treading air, wildly flinging out for a handrail that wasn't there. Then came the plunge forward. I can still hear the



"Skid Row."

crash and feel the jar of my head hitting the concrete floor. Fortunately, I missed the sharp corners of furniture nearby, and give thanks that my only injuries were a broken wrist, the other sprained, and a few leg and head wounds. I might have had a broken neck.

In the story of *Alice in Wonderland*, her fall down the rabbit hole enabled her to assume many varying shapes; mine down the stairs seemed to jolt me into a new sense of values. While I was convalescing, I had time to think through a good many things. One was about Ted's visit. Disillusioning as it had been, it enabled me readily to sweep away my shattered image. At the same time I felt I could profit by his truthfulness.

As soon as the cast was off my arm and the stitches removed from my wounds, I had a long-overdue permanent, then selected a whole new becoming outfit. I even went in for special cosmetics and slippers with heels high enough to show up a dainty foot and shapely ankle. Though it might have been a little late for me to begin, I determined I'd wear the shoes if they killed me.

"Skid row!" That was almost true, too, and I resolved to do something about the unsightly boxing along my creek bank at once.

Chapter XXII

Wrongs to Be Righted

When I consulted a stonemason in Falls Church about building retaining walls around the trees along the creek banks, he felt that these would be inadequate. Instead, he recommended a three-foot wall for the full length of both sides of the stream. Since his estimate sounded like a down payment on a mansion, I knew I'd have to find another way. I wondered if the county, which was responsible for drainage through our area, would send someone to see me about it.

Mr. White, who came from the section of Streets and Roads in Public Works, gave the impression of genuine interest in my problem. Seated with him on my bridge, I drank in what he told me about the county's plans for drainage improvements to prevent possible damage to property along the stream. From added blacktop areas around a number of apartment houses being built on the watershed above us, they expected increased flow.

Thinking the county's concern was well timed for me, I inquired, "What improvements do you expect to make?"

"Eventually we hope to pipe the stream in."

"Pipe it in?"

The shock was enough to make me almost jump off the bridge, but he added quickly, "We don't have the funds for that now, except in a few places."

"Thank goodness! You see, Mr. White, I bought my home because of the stream. Piping it would spoil it for me. I would like to protect my trees against erosion with a retaining wall which I hope the county will put in."

"I'm afraid they can't, Miss Dial. According to the overall plans which Carlson Engineers are drawing up, the county expects to raise and widen your stream bed."

"Why?"

"The land farther down is flatter and the stream bed shallower. Homes there are often flooded. By straightening and raising the deeper sections such as you have here, the water will run off more quickly."

"I don't understand. What's the point of rushing water down to where they already have too much? Wouldn't it be better to deepen the beds there?"

"We already have, as much as we dare. It wouldn't be safe for the children who constantly play on the banks, if we deepened them any more."

I had no argument against that so I asked, "How much would you raise and widen mine?"

"We ask for a thirty-five-foot easement and the bed would be only three feet deep."

"Thirty-five feet! What would become of my trees?"

"Some sacrifice is always necessary for progress, you know."

"But is this progress?"

"Miss Dial, I don't blame you for being disturbed. On my home place, we are losing a hundred-year-old oak so a highway can go through."

A highway with its roar riddling the quiet! I could hardly bear the thought. After assuring me that the fabulous amount the county would spend on the improvements along the creek would greatly enhance the value of my property, Mr. White offered to show me a nice piece of their work nearby. Willing to be convinced, but filled with misgivings, I went with him.

One look at the colossal drainage ditch was enough. Extending before me into the distance were solid concrete banks sloping on each side of a paved stream bed through which a poor little stream trickled as though ashamed of its existence. On each side of it were dry, dusty fields, denuded of trees and anything taller than the straggly clumps of grass which were having a struggle to survive. They would do this to Havenwood—this or pipe the stream, which would be like having a living entity—always seeking escape—interred in the middle of my yard. Besides, what would become of the birds, rabbits, squirrels, and other wildlife without their watering place?

When I visited my lawyer later that afternoon, he said Fairfax was planning a county-wide drainage project for which they could

condemn for needed easements. If I forced them to do that, I could expect no consideration. The best policy would be to go along with them, since there was nothing he or I could do to stop them.

With that ultimatum, any effort on my part seemed futile. Yet, I couldn't accept the devastation of my property without trying to save it. By what means, I had no idea at the time.

The advice of my minister, a woman, was even more frustrating. She said for me to give my problem into Higher Hands. How could I when I felt that I had been guided in finding and preserving my woodland? Did I now have to give it back? It was like Abraham having to offer up his only son.

To make it harder, my minister wanted me to write out my relinquishment and read it aloud, not once but with a fresh copy every night. That meant that I must be willing to accept whatever results might follow. As I stood beside my stream, I knew I couldn't do it. I would never be willing to have all my trees cut to make room for that hideous drainage ditch. Imagine living in such a place!

I remembered the couple in the Bible who fell dead for holding back from God part of the money they received from the sale of some land. I wouldn't expect punishment so drastic; just the same I would risk no pretense. I kept asking, "How could God let me come this far and then require me to give it all up? Is He that kind of a God?"

Of course I knew He wasn't. All creation belonged to Him to parcel out as He saw fit. This acre didn't really belong to me. He still held the title and, in His goodness, had let me taste of heaven here.

He liked beauty, too, or He wouldn't have made so much of it. Certainly, He didn't want it to be destroyed, not even for so-called progress. There had to be a better way and He would help me find it.

The ram was in the bushes all the time, but Abraham failed to see it until his son lay on the altar. My offering—stubborn self-will.

I felt better after I had written out my relinquishment and followed my minister's instructions. Gradually, the meaning of the words, "I trust His fairness, judgment and wisdom" began to take hold of my mind, decreasing the sickening fear that had enveloped me.

One day, as I sat pondering beside the stream, I had a tremendous surprise, like a vision of a protective Presence hovering over the

banks. Assured that my woodland was the recipient of its blessing, I thought, "What the county does here will be to my advantage." That didn't mean that my trials were over. Far from it.

In the days following, communication with "The Being on the Bank" was wordless, but I was never alone. More surprising, I was aware of gradually, little by little, its merging with my own being.

From existing circumstances, the inspiration I had received that day was hard to believe. In fact, every evidence was to the contrary. Its materialization seemed to depend on me. I had things to do besides pray.

Acting on the advice of a nature-loving friend, I tried to find someone in the United States Park Authority to help me. Discouraged at being passed along from one to another, I wrote to Secretary of the Interior Udall, who, as a resident of Virginia, had been speaking in our area about the preservation of Virginia's historic shrines and natural beauty. Disappointed that he, also, referred me to others, I trailed through one National Park Authority office to another.

Finally, two very courteous department heads sent me home well laden with pamphlets which had to do mostly with flood conditions on large rivers. However, something in the literature led me to Mr. Glen Anderson in the Federal Soil Conservation Department of Fairfax County, from whom I received my first ray of hope.

Mr. Anderson seemed to understand my love for Havenwood's primitive beauty and to appreciate my efforts to protect it. To him my crude boxings seemed preferable to a concreted ditch for drainage, and he had other suggestions to which I gladly listened. One was the use of gabions. These were boxings of wire mesh, containing small pebbles. Oblong blocks of gabions secured against a bank allow water to pass through, at the same time prevent erosion. Pictures of them with plants growing on them seemed quite attractive and I looked forward to finding out more about them from a representative of a gabion company who planned to visit our area in a few weeks.

After a month of waiting, since the visit seemed indefinitely postponed, I began to work on another suggestion made by Mr. Anderson. Rather than sacrifice both the stream and woodland, as a last resort, I wrote asking to have the flow of water re-routed to the outer edge of my grounds, where half of the ditch might be shared by

owners of the undeveloped property adjoining mine. In vain, I tried to get Captain Porter to come and see the set-up in person.

He said he planned to go over the whole project after Carlson Engineers submitted their charts. I feared that would be too late. Certainly, nothing could be changed after the Board of Supervisors had approved a plan and given it out for contractors' estimates. I seemed to be facing what my lawyer had predicted and gave thanks each day that nothing happened.

Feeling that I had to remain on guard, I cancelled a long-anticipated trip to Bermuda. My nerves were on edge, as if I might be sitting on a keg of dynamite, each moment expecting it to explode.

But a crisis at home at this time turned my thoughts to another problem. I had to choose between Amos Briggs, my handy man, and Bill Fulton as tenants. Duke, Bill's Dalmatian, was the cause.

In allowing Bill to have Duke with him, I was breaking all my precedents about taking pets. If I had granted admittance to all the monkeys, parakeets, tropical fish, guppies, and assortments of purebreds and mongrels for whom their owners applied, my human tenants would have been crowded out. Duke, my one exception, had won me over. His air of complete self-possession made me feel that he knew more than most dogs, and even more than some people.

As long as Bill carried his noble animal to work each day and let him sleep in his car at night, things were fine. But trouble began when Duke was given run of the grounds and established himself as guardian of my threshold, challenging everyone who stepped inside the gate. After notices by the postman and other home services that they would stop unless the dog was removed at once, Bill began tying him up in the woods at the back each morning when he went to work. However, Duke was so pitiful, whining and looking as though tears were trickling down his face, that sometimes I would free him for a while.

Thoughtlessly, I left him loose too long one day. While I was taking a bath, I heard such a commotion out front that I lost no time getting there. Duke, his back reared stiffly, stood on the porch, snarling viciously at Amos Briggs, who, red-faced enough to break a blood vessel, was jumping up and down outside my fence waving his clenched fists and swearing at Duke. Clutching my bathrobe with one hand and Duke's collar with the other, I tried to quiet the

rumpus. Duke subsided and I led him, gentle as a lamb, to the back porch.

Mr. Briggs came in proclaiming loudly, "Either that dog or I must go."

Mr. Briggs's services as handy man seemed indispensable. Then, too, he wasn't alone in his complaints.

When I told Bill about it, he said, "If Duke goes, so do I."

Hard as it was to have the master leave, it was even worse to see Duke, with an air of injured royalty, following him. This may have been a needless sacrifice, because shortly after Amos Briggs left because of ill health.

Since no high school boys were available, I answered an advertisement of a firm which did yard maintenance. Mr. Barney Wilson, a good-natured-looking Negro, came to make arrangements. On the first day the work of four men was fabulous; the second week the work of two was a shambles; the third Tuesday no one showed up. When I finally reached Mr. Wilson on Saturday, he assured me he would do my mowing before the arrival of weekend guests that afternoon.

Anxiously I waited all day and had about given him up when his station wagon stopped out front. A bevy of Negroes from about age six to seventy-six unloaded. Mr. Wilson had brought them to help him, he said. The sound of his mower, like music to me as I worked in the kitchen, suddenly stopped. His station wagon was disappearing up the street, my yard still swarming with his gang.

"What has happened?" I called.

"Mr. Barney's mower break down. He go to get it fixed."

What could I do with my guests expected at any minute? "Why didn't he take you with him?"

"He left us here to rake and clip," answered a middle-sized boy, waving a pair of clippers at me.

"Well, get busy and do it!"

The small fry not overly clad, who had evidently come along for an afternoon's outing, were chasing each other in a game of tag. To my suggestion that one of them come and sweep off the back porch and the others do some weeding, the only response I could get was, "Mr. Barney tol' us to clip and rake."

An old man was dozing under a tree, the rakers leaning on their

rakes. I heard no sound of clippers, but loud laughter and chatter. What a reception for my guests!

Mr. Wilson's timely arrival with the repaired mower kept me from exploding. Rakers began to rake, clippers to clip. The old man still snoozed and the children romped, but thank goodness, the mower mowed.

Entering my yard later that evening, Anne Whinery's first comment was, "How nice your yard looks."

Aileen Shane, the gardener in their Richmond, Virginia, home, said, "I'd like to borrow your handy man."

"You can have him for keeps," I said. "I finished with him today."

* * * * *

Never quite free from anxiety about my drainage problems, I was alarmed one afternoon to see a sheaf of papers attached to my door. My friend Sheriff Swenson's calling card, but not for me. It was a notice for Silas Gray, alias Paul Armstead, to appear in court on Wednesday, October fourth, at nine o'clock. Paul Armstead, my basement tenant, under an assumed name! Of what could the pale-faced little fellow, who walked with a limp, be guilty? He seemed too quiet and well behaved to be up to much, but I would leave the notice in his room.

His key to my basement door lay on the dresser, but all his belongings were gone. Whatever the trouble might be, he had made his get-away. Sheriff Swenson had helped me when I needed him, now I would return the favor.

When I told the sheriff on the phone what had happened, he said, "So the fellow has given us the slip again."

"For what is he wanted?" I asked.

"Skipping alimony payments, ten thousand dollars worth. We've been after him for four years."

"What will happen when you do find him?"

"If they can't pay up, they generally go to jail."

"Jail?" I said, wondering how long it would take Paul to save such a sum from his shoe repair job. "Will that help him pay?"

"No, Miss Dial, but it may help his wife's feelings. All some women want is revenge."

"I didn't know anyone in the United States could be imprisoned for debt."

"They can't, ma'am, unless there is fraud. But these alimony cases are different. Silas Gray is charged with contempt of court."

"And the punishment for that?"

"Likely jail unless he pays."

"I never heard anything so crazy. It's double talk. . . ." From things Paul had told me, I decided he probably had kept up his payments until the marriage of his daughters four years ago. I remembered his wife held a well-paying job with the telephone company in Chicago, so I asked the sheriff, "Why don't you let the man alone? His wife has a good job and ought to be paying him alimony!"

"That would be the day," laughed the sheriff.

"Debtors' prisons went out with the dark ages in England. It's what people came to the United States to escape!"

"I know, ma'am. I don't like this business any better than you do, but the law's the law, and it's my job to carry it out. I'll appreciate it if you can give me a line on where the fellow's gone."

I knew that Paul Armstead had a sister living in Wisconsin. I even knew her address, but I answered, "He left no indication of where he intended to go."

Here was Paul Armstead, a dependable tenant, and, as far as I knew reliable in other ways, being hunted like a criminal.

Even worse was the lot of Ralph Frazier, a tenant some time later. My impression about these two cases might have been different if I had heard the wives' versions, but I couldn't help sympathizing with Ralph in his struggle to make ends meet. He held a responsible job, but with traveling expenses, car and weekly alimony payments, there was very little left for his personal needs. He lived on slim rations, frequently just light snacks in his room, and at times, I am sure, he had nothing except the few things I could induce him to share with me.

Finally, his car, which he needed in his work, was repossessed. This deprived him of his only means of livelihood and of any possibility of keeping up with his alimony payments. So charged with "contempt of court"—not for his indebtedness—Ralph Frazier joined the ranks of imprisoned "alimony paupers."

Chapter XXIII

Before and After California

My plans to spend a month in California from Thanksgiving through Christmas made it imperative for me to get an answer from Public Works at once. I had waited as long as I could to hear from them.

The books I had been reading in my spiritual quest delighted me so greatly that I wanted to meet some of the authors, most of whom were teachers on the West Coast. Either they were phonies or advanced far beyond the average person. Already I had set the date and made a tentative reservation for an apartment in Santa Monica. But I had to know the state of the drainage project before I would dare leave home.

To settle the matter I went to see Captain Porter, whom I had never met. The slightly gray Director of Public Works, a retired army officer, was an imposing figure, tall and erect, with a forthright manner that immediately inspired my confidence. He was sorry about the delay and felt sure that nothing would come up until after Christmas or even before spring. His assistants, Mr. Ferguson and Mr. Strickhouser, younger men in charge of the field work, agreed with him. I was glad they disapproved of re-routing the stream as, in desperation, I had once suggested. Although the prospects weren't encouraging, this decision left some hope for a better solution. At least I had the director's promise that he would let me see the new plans before the Board of Supervisors passed on them.

With this assurance, I began preparations for my trip, making reservation for flight the day before Thanksgiving and arranging my personal affairs. I would finish my classes the day before I expected to leave.

All was going well when on the fateful Friday, November 22, 1963, I had a double blow—first the assassination of President John

Kennedy about noon, and later that afternoon a message by telephone of suicide by Albert Traynham, a quiet, reserved man who had lived in my home. Many of his belongings were in the dogwood room, which he still held although he had been away several months because of illness, first hospitalized then convalescing in the home of a friend.

On Monday at the same hour as the President's funeral of state, a simple service was held at the Falls Church funeral home for Albert Traynham. Although the thought of the President's assassination was staggering, Albert Traynham's self-destruction seemed even worse. I was harried by thoughts of how I might have helped prevent the tragic death of this member of my household.

Delayed as I had been with my classes and personal affairs by the two funerals, it is a wonder I ever made my flight as scheduled. However, as I had planned, on the day before Thanksgiving, I was settled in my oceanside apartment on the Santa Monica Palisades. There the superb view, the balm of a California December, and the inspiration received from lessons by an advanced spiritual teacher helped me forget my problems. I met other religious leaders also, and while they impressed me with their sincerity, none seemed to satisfy me as well as the one whose services I regularly attended.

My stay in that part of California was followed by Christmas spent at Questhaven, a retreat farther south, tucked away in a mountain bowl with a glimpse of the blue Pacific in the distance. An administrative building and guest cottages dotted the landscape, which was shaded by an elfin forest and other types of trees. In a sheltered area to one side, we worshipped in the Chapel of the Holy Quest. Christmas Eve service there, conducted by a dynamic young woman who with her husband had founded the retreat, commemorated the inner ceremonial of that season. Different from any service I had ever attended, it gave me not only a new insight into the meaning of Christmas, but a heightened spiritual outlook.

My West Coast visit convinced me of two things: the integrity, dedication, and advanced development of the teachers I had visited and, judging from my own experience while there, the reality of an "open line" to heaven. I had no doubt that I would claim my "sealed package," let shine "the imprisoned splendor." With ardor I set about making what I had tasted momentarily my habitual way of life. As my active service, I felt ready to accept leadership of a

prayer group my church had offered me.

A few days before I was to leave for home I had a message that Selma was seriously ill. When I talked with her on long distance, not like herself, she was weeping so that she could hardly speak. I yearned to be with her. As soon as I reached home, I hurried to see her.

Her appearance was shocking as she lay in bed, fragile looking and pale faced instead of the radiantly vivid person I had always known. Signs of suffering showed in her face. Even then as I told her about my trip, some of the old sparkle came back. I was glad to be home to help her through this crisis. Illness had taken its toll but everything possible was being done for her medically. She responded well to the treatment and after a time showed marked improvement.

* * * * *

True to Captain Porter's prediction, no developments had taken place on the drainage project during my absence. In fact, nothing happened until six months after my return.

One sultry afternoon in midsummer a sudden torrential cloudburst brought the little stream surging down full force, as if bent on destruction. Large trees left by construction workers upstream came rushing through my place and were dashed from side to side like battering rams against the banks, displacing the boxings and dirt behind them. Together they swept under the bridge, carrying its foundation away. The rampaging waters of the little stream, bringing its load of debris, spread far beyond the banks.

It all happened quickly, like a scene in a movie. In a few minutes the storm had passed; the waters subsided, leaving my bridge loaded with wreckage of limbs, lumber, and trash. This I had to have hauled away before I could even cross to the other side.

Before I could report the disaster to Public Works, I had a surprise visit from Captain Porter. With him were his two assistants and Mr. Sparks, the draftsman from Carlson Engineers, who brought the long-awaited plans. Crouching down to study them as he spread them on the ground, I saw my doom. The stream would be piped past my home—through the rest of the grounds, the dreadful drainage ditch!

An ancient maple, a towering sycamore, elms, wild cherries, sassa-

fras, several poplars, and a row of dogwood, all of which the young draftsman designated as "populars," according to his plans, had to be cut. In addition I would lose azaleas and other plants along the banks.

As he pointed out each tree, I felt that he was pronouncing a death sentence for a friend.

Repeatedly, I groaned, "No."

Captain Porter, apparently unconcerned, was strolling up and down the banks, talking with Mr. Ferguson while the engineer went on adding to my misery.

Suddenly Mr. Strickhouser interrupted, "I don't see why we are going into all of this. We can't do anything until we get some money."

"If that's the case," I pleaded, "please just skip me, Captain Porter, and don't do anything!"

"That's just what Ferg and I are talking about, Miss Dial. I had no idea your stream was so deep and wide."

"It wasn't until the recent storm," I said.

"Well, as it is now, all we need to do is to make some temporary changes. We can throw rough stones, which we call riprap, around your trees and leave your channel as it is."

If Captain Porter had only come two years before as I had requested, how much anxiety he would have saved me. On the other hand, his visit was better timed after the storm had widened the bed. I was thankful for the help of my storm-driven stream and for Captain Porter's insight which prevented the sacrifice of my woodland.

Since the work could be done by the county crew, it could begin at once, without tedious waiting for estimates and selection of contractors. That afternoon we agreed that as soon as Mr. Sparks could revise the plans for my approval, I would give the county the right of way—"for drainage only," I reminded them. Well aware that I wanted no more involvement with alleys and walkways, they assured me their easement was only for constructing and maintaining the drainage improvement through my area.

Elated that the matter was working out so well and expecting the men to come back in a few days, I didn't even mention the damaged bridge.

The few days passed, a week, a month. To my telephone inquiries about our agreement, Public Works always replied that they were

waiting for the plans from Carlson Engineers. As the time extended into months, the relief I had first felt turned to desperation. Even my report about the damaged bridge brought no results. Fearing the hazards from winter snows, spring rains, and the storms of a second summer, I finally had some temporary props placed underneath the bridge.

It was hard to keep my courage up as I went about my customary duties, tutorings, caring for the house and yard, and leading my group at church. I feared that I was losing all that I had gained spiritually. Frustration lay heavy on my heart; my "line" seemed blocked with earthbound static; even Selma seemed unable to help me.

If I could only have known what was going on at Public Works!

Finally, at the end of the summer I had the answer. On a visit from Mr. Ferguson and Mr. Strickhouser, they announced a complete change of plans. Instead of the temporary riprap, they wanted to build a full-length wall of concrete rubble—the very thing for which I had asked at first!

Arranging the details took several months, because some of our ideas conflicted. The material was perfect, but I wanted assurance of better workmanship than the examples they showed me. I also wanted the wall to follow the natural contour of the banks and to be broken in several places by steps down into the stream.

To hold my own against some of the engineers and draftsmen wasn't easy, but with Captain Porter back of the project, I had hopes of final success.

At the same time, two other problems confronted me, one a serious crisis with the alley.