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A Girl Named Avril

By Mrs. Paul E. King

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CHAPTER 1

Avril walked gracefully across the living room, her small dainty feet making no sound whatever as they sank into the thick plush carpet. She paused in front of the enormous French windows and drank in deep draughts of the cool fresh morning air that stole stealthily in through the partially opened windows.

Her gaze took the enormous sweep of lawn in at a single glance. It was beautiful. Everything was beautiful; just as God had made it. A mocking bird, from his perch on one of the crepe myrtles, broke out in melodic mimicry of numerous other birds. Avril listened enraptured as the lovely notes rose and fell in seeming syncopated rhythm.



What had she said wrong?
she wondered.

Ben, the gardener, crossed the wide piazza in front of the windows. Avril's heart was full of love and tenderness for the old man. He looked up and saw her framed inside the windows "Mornin', Lassie," he drawled pleasantly.

"And a good morning to you, Ben," Avril called back. "Could you do with a cup of tea, I wonder?"

"Thank ye, dear girl, but Manda she fix me a great breakfast. Hotcakes, sausages and all. I'm fuller'n a tick. Thank ye."

Avril smiled at Ben's expression; but she knew that if the old man said he was full, he was full! Ben didn't mince words. Whatever he said was so. She knew, too why Ben was 'fuller'n a tick: Amanda was the best cook to be found anywhere.

She knew why her parents had selected Ben and Amanda Brown as gardener-cook couple out of the many they had interviewed! The Peabody's wanted only the best. They got it in Ben and Amanda.

Avril followed Ben's aging but still agile frame until he was lost to sight among the shrubs and bushes and flowers of the mansion, then she let her eyes follow the high wrought iron fence which surrounded the Peabody place to roam at random. To her left, far away, it seemed, the squat Georgian Dower House of the Stevich's peered myopically through its rambling shrubberies. Across the road from it, the spire of the gray-stone church showed in definite outline against a cloudless sky whose blue was the color of the ocean.

Her eyes wandered on and on, following the long, wide, paved driveway of the mansion that wound its way in and out among the shrubbery, trees, and bushes and finally emerged, nearly a half mile downhill, on to the highway leading into the city. To her right, the still waters of the moat gleamed brightly. It wasn't really a moat, Avril recalled, rather, a small lake that curled round one part of the mansion, and which, when she was a child, she always pretended had been a moat. Its banks sloped gently down to a broad expanse of water-lilies, then on the farthest side were covered with a vast, dense shrubbery of laurel and holly which cut off any semblance of a fence beyond. The mansion itself was exquisite; not cold and formal and foreboding looking like so many of the homes of Avril's acquaintances. Her mother, an extremist for the pomp and show of the wealthy, had preferred a different type house. The front walls of the house were covered with Virginia creeper, glowing green and crimson round leaded windows. The tall, elaborately curled chimneys with their fiat caps added height to the mansion's two stories. A white-stone lintel sparkled above the massive, carved oak front door. In front of the house the driveway split. A branch to the right led off to the riding stables and back-yard; the main drive expanded into a broad sweep facing the door.

Avril turned quickly away. She walked to the grand piano and let her fingers run idly across the gleaming keys. "My Jesus, I love Thee; I know Thou art mine." Her voice was soft and sweet and well modulated. She sang the song through, tears spilling down her cheeks from an overflowing heart, then she walked to the window again.

What was this feeling that so possessed her lately? she wondered. This feeling that she must draw a mental picture of her present surroundings and her loved ones and trace the patterns in bold outline indelibly upon her mind? Was it a foreboding of some future ill to befall her? A warning, perhaps?

As she had done previously, Avril's eyes drank fully and freely of the beauty of her surroundings. Her ears noted the farthest, faintest bird song. Strange, she mused, how

she, a Peabody, had come to be a Christian. Avril Peabody a born again and wholly sanctified Christian!

It was then that she thought of the chain of events that led her this way.

It was during her second year of nurse's training when the flood had swept through Middleville, a town some thirty miles distant. Avril, along with one of the doctors, had volunteered her services on her off hours. She worked dutifully and tirelessly beside the doctor, doing whatever jobs were demanded of her; the 'office' being set up in the home of a very poor family -- mother, father, and four children. In her short stay there, something had radiated and shone out in that little family that was indefinable. The family was happy and joyful, content and at peace!

Then, in complete contrast, there was another couple she had encountered in her final year of training. The little daughter was dying slowly with leukemia. In spite of their deep heartbreak, Avril couldn't help but notice the calmness and 'resigned-ness' of the parents.

"You are very brave!" she had commented to them one day. "I admire your courage."

The young mother stepped into the hallway. Motioning for Avril to come outside the door, and she exclaimed through tear-dimmed eyes, "I couldn't bear it if it wasn't for the Lord Jesus helping me. Since my husband and I surrendered our lives fully and completely to the Saviour, He carries the heavier end of this load. Salvation is a wonderful thing, Miss Peabody. I hope and pray that someday you may experience what my husband and I know and feel."

Those words had set her to thinking.

Then there was Ben and Amanda. They were different. Like the poor family in whose house she had worked during the flood, Ben and Amanda possessed joy. Their very beings radiated with constancy of spiritual happiness while continual inner peace flooded their happy faces. It was something none of the Peabodys certainly had ever possessed or experienced . . . With all their wealth, even!

In all three cases, and quite distinctly different groups of people, Avril had been quietly conscious of something in their lives . . . something she could only think of as a "plus" quality. Seeing it thus, she felt led to go to Ben and Amanda for the answer. To trace it to its source. There in the humble but cozy and clean living room of two of the servants' quarter, Amanda led Avril to Christ. She was gloriously converted and made new. Shortly thereafter, through Ben's testimony and persuasion of spirit, she was led into the second work of grace. She was entirely sanctified.

In the glad afterglow of her new life in Christ, she felt as if the entire world should know.

She tried to communicate her feelings and her inner peace and joy to her parents but they thought it so much nonsense. Likewise her two sisters and one brother. She found herself visiting more and more with Ben and Amanda; secretly, of course, lest she bring the wrath of her parents down upon the heads of the Godly servant-couple.

"Meditating again Avril?" It was Stacie, her younger sister. "I heard your song," she mocked. "Don't you think it a bit out of place in the Peabody mansion?" She thrust the barb at her sister.

Avril turned and smiled into her sister's eyes. "Oh Stacie dearest, I wish you would change your mind and get converted. I have constant peace and joy in my heart now. Something I never had before."

"Hush!" Stacie cried, throwing her long, graceful arms wide in exasperation. "I told you never to mention this to me again. Never! Do you hear, Avril? I can't imagine what has possessed you!" Saying thus, she bristled out of the room.

Avril watched her sister as she walked from the room. Stacie was beautiful, she mused again, as she had done on so many other occasions. Her raven hair hung loosely over her shoulders and her complexion and color was startling... dark brown eyes and olive complexion, with natural richly red lips.

She was statuesque, but she was anything but cold. A smoldering statue, then...? Oh, if only Stacie could taste of heavenly things!

Avril's musings and heart-yearnings were cut short by Mrs. Peabody herself coming into the room. Before she addressed her even, Avril knew that her mother was nearby: the almost intoxicating, heady fragrance of her mother's favorite perfume told her so.

"Avril." She spoke softly . . . (almost too softly). "Avril," she said again, "your father and I have arranged a cruise. A Caribbean cruise this time. We will expect you to accompany us. It is to be a family affair," she added. "Virginia and Basil and the two children will be going, as well as Lance and Stacie."

Avril's eyes brightened momentarily at the prospect of seeing her sister and her family. "Virgie's going?" she asked, turning from the window to face her mother.

"Virginia's going," Mrs. Peabody affirmed. "She and Basil and the children will meet us here. We'll fly from here to the boat. There will be shopping to get done. You must arrange your schedule accordingly."

Avril's face went suddenly white. "I can't go, mother," she said quickly, "I'm on special duty right now."

"Nonsense! Of course you can go. You will go, Avril!"

"But I... I can't. I've obligated myself. I wouldn't think of breaking my word!"

"Obligated yourself!" Mrs. Peabody mocked, her voice rising with agitation. "Obligated? Since when has a Peabody been obligated?"

"I promised, Mother..."

"It's time you broke some of your promises, Avril! Why your father and I ever consented to this foolish idea of nursing and allow you to take nurses' training, is still beyond my reasoning. Why can't you forget this foolishness and pursue your music? The opera should be your field. Your voice and music teacher attest to this fact. Your talent and your abundance of ability in this field of culture is outstanding. Even now, the world could be bowing at your feet. You could be a goddess. Your name and fame, plus praise and wide acclaim of your greatness, would be on every lip and tongue. Why not pursue this great talent, Avril? Instead of serving, you should be served! It's only fitting, you know; we are Peabodys!"

"Mother, please?" Avril pleaded kindly. "Must we go through this again? I . . . I'm happy. Extremely happy. I enjoy doing for others. I guess I wasn't made to be served. I'd rather serve, Mother dear!"

Mrs. Peabody's hands flew to her daughter's slender shoulders. Her face burned hot with rage. Lifting dainty but heavily bejeweled hands, she exclaimed, "Look at these hands, Avril Peabody! They're ladies hands; like yours were meant to be! None of the Peabody hands need ever show signs of work. But yours . yours..."

"I'm happy, Mother and I love my work. I shall always be grateful to father and you for granting me my desire and allowing me to train until now I am a registered nurse..."

"But there is no need for you to continue!" Mrs. Peabody answered harshly. "We tolerated your training only because we both thought it to be a passing fancy; one we hoped would diminish and wane with both time and training. I'm thankful for only one thing . . . that your training was gotten at the exclusive Mountain of Alps Hospital. You have humiliated the family dreadfully, Avril. The time has come to put an end to your nursing!"

"Please, Mother!" Avril said, speaking softly and tenderly. "I can't. It is my life. I feel God had His hand in all of this; just as He has had His hand upon my life so long as I can remember."

"Quiet!" Mrs. Peabody shouted. "God? Who ever heard of a Peabody speaking religiously! Where did you learn all this.., this... trash?"

With profound hurt in her eyes, Avril looked at her mother. "Oh, dear, dear mother! How I wish you all knew what I feel and know in my heart! It is not trash. Far from it. It's real. Jesus Christ has become the One altogether lovely to my heart and life. When I got converted and sanctified wholly, I found something of far greater value than silver and gold, What the Peabody money couldn't do for my soul, Jesus Christ did. What I have cannot, dare not, be categorized as trash. Money can't buy happiness and peace of mind and continuous joy . . . such as I have since I met my lovely Saviour."

Mrs. Peabody's face turned ashen white. "You . . . you are a disgrace to the family! A blotch on the Peabody name! Why can't you be normal like your sisters and brother? Look at Lance! He's a playboy; a showy, flashy specimen of Peabody. His name is seen weekly, in one or another paper and magazine.

His performances on stage have brought your father and me many proud moments. Stacie likewise. She's going places, Avril. Her dancing has brought her wide acclaim and fame; both abroad and in the States. Look at her arms and her hands! They're every inch a Peabody. But you.., you, Avril Peabody! . . . yours are servants' hands!" she hissed.

Avril's eyes dropped momentarily to her hands. True, they weren't always smooth nor well groomed according to Peabody standards, but they were helpful hands and kind. Hands that were always ready to lighten another's load or burden and help the sufferer towards comfort and more ease. A pleased smile turned the corners of her mouth. What matter that she didn't fit into the Peabody mold! She was completely and indescribably happy in the center of the will of God. He, it was, she must obey and please.

As she turned to go to her room, her mother caught her by her shoulders. "You will either give up your nursing and this religious nonsense and settle down to being a Peabody or you will leave home, Avril!" she exclaimed, her eyes ablaze with rage and anger. "The choice is yours!"

The color drained from Avril's cheeks. Never had she seen her mother so angry. Throwing her arms about Mrs. Peabody's neck she said softly, kindly, "I shall leave home, Mother dear. I cannot deny nor renounce the Christ who died for me and my sins. I love Him most dearly, Mother. I always will. Good-bye."

With her shoulders straight and an inner glow radiating from her sweet face, Avril went to her room to pack, hearing her mother mumble something about she must have brought the wrong baby home from the hospital when Avril was born.

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CHAPTER 2

Long blue shadows darkened the vivid green of the Peabody turf as the sun sank low in the heavens. The sounds and scents of the evening were intensified. Avril, packed and standing inside the mansion door waiting for the cab to arrive, gave the familiar surroundings a long last look. She was saying good-bye forever to these things, she felt. Her heart told her so. In spite of this knowledge, she had an indescribable peace and calm.

There was no one there to bid her good-bye. All day her family had deliberately avoided her; hoping, she supposed, "to bring her to her senses," using her mother's phrase.

Her mother and father had left early, going to one of their innumerable social functions; Lance was singing at one of the fashionable supper clubs and Stacie had gone for an early dance rehearsal. Only Ben and Amanda, with tear-filled eyes, had told her how very much they would miss her. It was just as well this way, she soliloquized.

"I'll write you," she had promised Ben and Amanda before leaving the godly old servant. "You must get the mail from the general delivery window, however; when you go into town for supplies, Ben," she warned. "Else father or mother may dismiss you if they find out I'm writing to you."

Thus they had parted, with a promise that she would write and a prayer from Ben, full of petition and earnest supplication to God that He would take care of "His little lamb, Avril, and guide her every move right."

It was like a holy benediction, Ben's sincere and heart-felt prayer, and Avril carried its importunity and sweet fragrance with her into the cab and on into the apartment in which she settled.

The days passed into weeks and before she knew it, September skipped up on her in scarlet-slippered feet, wearing goldenrod and purple asters in her hair. It was on just such a day, all bright and gold with sunshine, that the head nurse approached her as she came on special duty.

"Your patient expired, Avril," she said in an impersonal tone of voice. "Mrs. Digby passed away a short while ago," she emphasized.

Avril's hand flew to her heart. "Did . . . did she leave any message? I mean, did she say anything before she died?"

"Miss Hilliger said she kept repeating something or other about, 'Tell her it's all right. Tell her I'm all right.' Strange woman, Mrs. Digby."

Avril sighed deeply. Happy tears sprang involuntarily to her eyes. "Thank you, Mrs. Crutcher," she said. "I know what she meant. Oh, I'm so thankful!"

"It's a good thing you understand, Avril. None of the rest of us did. No one seemed to be able to get next to her like you. Oh, by the way," she said, "a friend of mine called. She was inquiring as to whether I knew anyone I'd care to recommend to do special duty for a friend of hers. I told her about you. Seems as if the individual has lost all hope of living and is confined to a wheelchair. My friend said the work would be neither hard nor strenuous and the wages are excellent. Nearly double what you made caring for Mrs. Digby. Your... disposition and your deep faith in God is needed everywhere, Avril."

Struck hard by the death of Mrs. Digby, Avril made no immediate comment.

"Think it over, Avril," her superior advised. "I can give you my friend's phone number should you care to contact her. Personally, I hope you comply and take the offered position." With those words Mrs. Crutcher walked briskly down the spotlessly clean hospital corridor.

Slowly Avril made her way to the room of the now deceased woman. Already the bed was freshly dressed and the room made antiseptically clean. She walked to the nurses' station not far away where she made small conversation with several of the girls who were scanning charts before walking outside.

What should she do? she wondered. She knew she could always stay on at the hospital but she wanted only God's will for her life.

For a long while she walked, praying as she did so for the continued guidance and leadership of the Holy Spirit.

She walked on and on, thanking God for leading her to Mrs. Digby. She was sure, from Mrs. Crutcher's words, that Mrs. Digby had prayed through and got converted before passing away. Oh the many hours she had spent with the dear soul, praying for and with her. But it had paid off in big dividends!

So absorbed in prayer and meditation was she that she didn't realize how far she had walked. She found herself presently near a church.., not more than 30 yards away, in fact. She turned and looked back. The little city lay behind her; before her was a graveyard. Around her waved the lank grass. Thistles and poppies of the unkept church-yard, studded with moss-covered headstones leaned at exhausted angles. Intrigued and fascinated as well as curious, she plunged into the overgrown cemetery to read and observe the epitaphs.

It was while she peered closely at the headstand of a certain Ebenezer Stromburg and read the now-faded, almost illegible, smoothly chiseled words, "The Lord shall guide

thee continually," that the voice of God seemed to strongly impress her to accept the position about which Mrs. Crutcher spoke.

She meandered leisurely through the graveyard, reading what words she could decipher on the ancient tottering head-stones, purposing that she would return another day to the apparently forgotten and abandoned grave-sites, then she hurried home.

The phone in her apartment was ringing as she entered the door. She picked up the receiver. "Hello," she said softly, "Avril speaking."

"Yes, Avril," it was Mrs. Crutcher. "My friend, Mrs. Merrymen called. She is anxious that I locate a cheerful, pleasant, and upright nurse for this friend of hers. Have you given it any consideration at all?"

"Yes, I have, Mrs. Crutcher. I believe I have the answer; however, I would like a week to pray more earnestly about it. What would my duties be should I accept? Did Mrs. Merrymen specify anything in particular or is it just general duty?"

"It is to be a companion as much as anything, Avril; but you will be nursing some also. That is, administering medication and giving injections when and if needed. Nothing heavy nor strenuous, understand."

"I shall have my answer for you within a week, Lord willing. But I should miss not coming into the hospital every day."

"The change will do you good, my dear," Mrs. Crutcher said in a concerned motherly fashion. "I have been troubled about you lately. Your color, Avril! You need a change from the hospital. You take your work so seriously and work too hard."

After she hung up, Avril sat down in a comfortable chair. Dear Mrs. Crutcher! She had filled the place of a mother in her life and in her aching heart. A tear slipped out from beneath her eyelashes and dropped onto her folded hands. She knew one thing, Mrs. Crutcher had her best interest at heart and would not have suggested the position to her had it not been all right.

It was a Tuesday in late September when Avril, with bags and baggage, set out for her new assignment. A delayed Indian summer had set in during the previous night. Balmy breezes wafted through the air during the morning and the temperature rose to 75 degrees by afternoon.

The leaves of the trees, almost completely turned to gold, crimson, and orange, fluttered apologetically, not certain what the season expected of them.

It was late evening when Avril entered New Hope on the Sea. She pulled into a clean looking gas station and asked the attendant the way to the Shelton Garraway home.

"The Shelton Garraway place, Ma'am!" the attendant exclaimed, puckering his lips and letting forth a long, loud whistle, at the same time scrutinizing Avril with a sardonic smile. "Are you kidding?" he asked, coming up close alongside the car and giving her a critical glance.

Avril's cheeks burned hot with embarrassment. What had she said wrong? she wondered anxiously. Why the disbelief in the attendant's voice?

"You serious, lady?" the man asked, lifting his service station hat and scratching his head thoughtfully.

"I would appreciate knowing how to get there," Avril answered in a soft voice. "They are expecting me."

The attendant apologized profusely then gave her explicit and carefully detailed directions.

Thanking him kindly, she went on her way. It was easy to find, the man had said, if one followed the coast road. Locating it, Avril sighed deeply and drove on. It would lead her to Cranberry Road, he had said, some four or five miles out.

She watched carefully for the signs which were becoming increasingly hard to see in the gathering dark of twilight. Then she saw it. Turning right, as she had been instructed to do, she drove another couple miles then found herself in front of a pair of massive wrought iron gates.

How would she ever get inside? she wondered. Or was this the place even? True, she hadn't expected her employ to be in such an isolated place!

As she sat thinking, wondering what to do, the gates swung suddenly ajar.

"Miss Peabody?" a man asked, stepping through the gates to stand beside the car.

"I am she. Avril Peabody. Is this the Shelton Garraway place?" she asked.

"None other, Miss Peabody. We have been waiting for you. I am Mr. Jorgenson. Glenn Jorgenson. May I drive the car for you, please?" he said, opening the door for Avril to get out then hurrying around to the opposite side where he held the door for her to enter.

Settling himself behind the wheel, Glenn Jorgenson said simply, "It's a good little way to the house and I know the road better than you. Have a nice drive up?" he asked casually in a friendly sort of way.

"Lovely!" Avril exclaimed. "God is so extravagant with His artistry and His handi-work. There are times, like today, when I see all these marvelous and beautiful creations of His that it staggers my mind and my thinking..., to know that I am His child. Me, a child of the Heavenly King! Have you ever felt this way, Mr. Jorgenson? Or ... or aren't you a Christian?"

Glenn Jorgenson shifted uneasily in his seat. "Well... I... uh..."

"Sorry!" Avril exclaimed. I had no thought of embarrassing you. It's just that I wish every one were born again..., made new, in Christ. It's a wonderful life!" She made the exclamation more to herself than to anyone else.

"Miss Peabody," Glenn Jorgenson began, straightening his body and staring straight ahead, "it... it may be wise for you... ah... not to mention your religious beliefs and feelings to Mr. Garraway. He... well, he has some bad days; like today, for instance, when he can't tolerate conversation of any kind, much less the kind of which you were just speaking."

Avril's hands tightened in her lap. "Mr. Garraway is my patient?" she asked quickly. "It... it isn't Mrs. Garraway?"

Glenn Jorgenson turned quickly and looked at Avril, stifling a chuckle as he did so. "Shelton Garraway doesn't have a Mrs. Miss Peabody. He isn't married."

"Oh-h! I didn't realize." Avril's cheeks burned hot with embarrassment. Why hadn't she thought to ask Mrs. Merryman or Mrs. Crutcher about the patient? She had taken for granted that her patient would be one of her own sex and gender. But this Shelton Garraway must be all right else Mrs. Crutcher would not have approved of her taking the position.

Seeming to sense her thoughts, Glenn Jorgenson explained, "Your duties will be simple, Miss Peabody. A nurse, yes; but only for administering medication and injections when necessary. You will be mostly a companion for Mr. Garraway. Your duties will consist largely of reading to him when and if he so desires and wheeling him to the patio which overlooks the ocean... if his stubbornness will allow you to do so."

"But I am sure you could have hired anyone else for just these services!" Avril said quickly.

"Mrs. Merryman's a wise woman, Miss Peabody. She said you possessed something that she was certain would help to cure Shelton Garraway eventually. You will

not always find your charge pleasant and emenable, however. At times, like today, he will be most difficult and trying. Try to be patient and understanding with him. Here's the house," he said, helping her out and ushering her through the well-lighted doorway.

Avril, concealing her shock and surprise at having taken a position in the home of another of equal or more wealth than her parents, was welcomed warmly by the butler, the cook, and the housekeeper.

"You must be starved!" Mrs. Barbee the cook exclaimed, patting Avril's small hands in a comforting motherly way. "I'll have the food out in less than ten minutes," she promised as she hurried through the house.

"Your room is ready and waiting for you," the housekeeper said. "But since the evening meal is about to be served you may like to freshen up a bit. The powder room is this way." And Mrs. Thatcher led the way down a thickly carpeted hall-way to a well-lighted room hung with the same exquisite chandeliers as lighted the spacious living room, only these were smaller in size.

When Mrs. Thatcher had closed the door, Avril surveyed herself in one of the mirrors above a marble-topped wash-bowl. She smiled as she washed her hands and face. Powder room indeed! Only she wouldn't be powdering her face. Her complexion was fair and dewy-fresh looking. Hers was God's natural makeup for woman.

Taking a comb from her purse she combed the few strands of stray hair back and fastened it with the others arranged neatly on her head before going out for the evening meal.

What did her patient look like? she wondered. And would he be joining them for the meal after his 'bad day?' She was suddenly anxious for all introductions to be made and over so everyone could relax the better.

* * * * *

CHAPTER 3

As she rather expected after Glenn Jorgenson's referral to Mr. Garraway's 'bad days,' Avril didn't get to meet her patient upon her arrival. Nor did she meet him the following day.

"The master of the house is not feeling well today," fat, pudgy, but congenial Mr. Cockney informed Avril after breakfast. Mr. Cockney was a gray-haired and gray-bearded man whose sharp blue eyes twinkled in a nest of wrinkles. As with the other members of this strange household, Avril liked the old man on sight. He reminded her a wee bit of dear old Ben. She knew immediately that his wit and mirth were big additions to the Garraway place. Had each member been selected for some specific and

special contribution he could make to the one called Shelton Garraway? She wondered; and had Mrs. Merryman had a part in selecting said subjects just as she had selected her?

Mr. Cockney broke into Avril's thinking with, "Take the day to do as you like, Miss Peabody. I am with Mr. Garraway the most of the time. I shall call for you if I need you. Why not enjoy the library?" he asked, gesturing to a room beyond the wide oval reception hall from where the marble reflected the overhead chandelier and domed ceiling.

"Thank you, Mr. Cockney, I will. I shall also try to get a bit more acquainted with the surroundings on the outside. I have an overwhelming passion for the out-doors."

"Very well," he said, smiling down at her, before striding quickly away.

What a strange situation, Avril thought, watching the elderly man disappear down the hallway. Quickly she entered the library. Oh, the books! she walked back and forth across the room past shelves filled to the ceiling with books. A ladder rested at the end of one wall. She moved it, sliding it back and forth easily. It rolled silently on its well-oiled trolley.

Near the long windows stood an enormous desk which took up one side of the room. The other three walls were lined neatly with books. Leather settees and over-sized arm-chairs were arranged for easy conversation. Avril scanned the books quickly and found the shelves contained all the old classics she had ever heard about or read. Would there be any good fundamental religious books? Her eyes scanned titles, printers, publishers, and authors. "No Bible even!" she exclaimed, quickly deducing the fact that the shelves contained no religious books whatever. She walked out of the library and stood gazing fixedly at the elaborate furnishings and fixtures in the drawing room.

High in the center of the ceiling hung a tremendous crystal chandelier, tinkling musically in the slight breeze. An enormous fireplace with screen, poker, bellows, and brass firedogs, glinting and freshly polished, gave the illusion of a stage setting. Mrs. Thatcher was a real perfectionist where cleaning was concerned, Avril mused, and Shelton Garraway must be a millionaire.

There were over-sized green velvet, tête-à-tête chairs, tables, tapestried Queen Anne chairs, large ornately gold-framed oil paintings on the pale green hand-woven material-covered walls, a gigantic painting over the fireplace and graceful lamps, statuary on taborets.

An ebony concert-grand piano was almost lost at one end of the vast room. (How her fingers longed to feel again the touch of the ivory keys. To wander over them in some hymn of faith and courage!) Deep green velvet draperies bordered the long window

frames; rich off-white curtains with undulating scallops nestled against them; and a fringed green hand-woven rug covered the floor.

This Shelton Garraway had a flair for finesse. His taste for the elegant was almost overwhelming. What about his taste for the spiritual? Avril wondered as, feeling suddenly the need for communion with God and a hunger for simpler things, she walked out of the room, down a long window-lined hall-way, and came out into the breakfast room.

She moved out onto a patio, brightly awninged, adjoining the breakfast room, then on through a rose garden and countless other flower gardens where humming birds flitted about almost as common as butterflies.

She seated herself on one of the ornate, white, lace-patterned seats in the garden and watched the tiny humming birds busy at work extracting nectar from the fragrant blooms of summers remaining flowers ere resuming her walk.

The Garraway estate occupied what was called "The Point." It was a promontory, a high cliff which jutted out into the sea and was reached only by Cranberry Road.

Walking leisurely over the grounds, her mind on things spiritual, she decided she must find a suitable place to pray. So long as the weather dealt her kindly she would go to that place each morning for prayer and communion with God.

Like her own dear parents, this Shelton Garraway was extremely materialistic. Had God sent her here perhaps to be "that salt" spoken of in Jesus' discourse. Or, "the candle," of which He spoke in the same chapter? She would have to go slow, she realized, and be "wise as a serpent but harmless as a dove," were she to win this wealthy man to the Lord. But was not Joseph of Arimathea, the wealthy counselor, an example of what God could do for even the wealthy man who wanted God!

So deep in thought was she that she failed to see she was almost at the extreme tip of the promontory. Not until her feet stepped on to a lovely stone patio and she heard a voice speak unkindly to her, did she have the faintest idea where she was.

"What brings you here?" The man swung around in his wheelchair and faced Avril. His eyes glared up into her sweet innocent face. "Didn't Mr. Cockney tell you I wouldn't be needing you today?" he demanded caustically.

"I . . . I'm sorry!" Avril's voice came out thin and small. "I . . . yes, Mr. Cockney relayed your message to me. I'm sorry that I have intruded upon your privacy," Avril said, gaining full control of herself. "It was not intentional . . . Mr. Garraway, is it? I'm Avril Peabody; your-companion."

A look of scorn and contempt crossed Shelton Garraway's face. "My nurse? Why don't they let me die? Why?" he ranted. "What good is a cripple, may I ask? Answer me, will you?"

She waited until the man's rage was spent. She must not sympathize! After a long while she spoke. "What good is a cripple? you ask. O Mr. Garraway, you amaze me! Instead of spending your days pining over your inability to do things and go places, why not practice healing and constructive thinking! It's quite therapeutic, you know."

Seeing the glint of anger and fire in the deep blue eyes, Avril said softly, "Pardon my intrusion of your privacy. I shall be going now. I was merely out walking. Think over what I have told you and whenever you need me I'm at your service. Good-day, Mr. Garraway."

"What a meeting!" she exclaimed aloud with a faint chuckle when she was safely away from the irate man. Then it struck her full force. Shelton Garraway was a young man! Not at all old and wrinkled and gray-headed like she had pictured him. Ah, no. He was a very young man with a handsome face (if he wouldn't scowl so). His hair was thick brown-red, Auburn.

What had rendered him a cripple? she wondered as she walked. Had he always been so bitter?

Deciding that she would find her outside place of prayer on some other day, Avril hurried back to the mansion and up to the seclusion of her own bedroom for prayer.

She stood inside the door surveying the spacious room. On a low raised platform stood the canopied, curtained bed. Situated under a wide casement was a chaise lounge; lavender velvet draperies were tied back with silver ropes.

The decor of the bedroom was in shades of lavender trimmed with silver: a lavender slipper chair; a figured silk-skirted dressing table complimented by a delicately scalloped mirror; a bureau and dresser topped with porcelain figurines, all the furniture marquetry inlaid.

Avril admired the muted colors of the walls, the richness of the furnishings and the velvet carpeting but her heart longed for a simpler, less-elegant place in which to talk with the Lord.

She gazed from the bedroom to, the spacious, private bathroom off one of the long walls. That was the ideal spot, she decided. It would be her private prayer closet when the weather was unfavorable and cold and snowy. Entering the room, she pulled the door shut behind her.

The following morning she arose early, with still no word nor orders from her patient. She, brushed her long jet-black hair until it shone. Arranging it neatly on the back of her neck, she dressed quickly then slipped noiselessly down-stairs and outside.

Sure that Shelton Garraway would not be on the breezy patio which was situated at the extreme tip of the Point and seemed, like the promontory itself, to jut far out into the ocean, she decided to go there first.

She reached the place in an incredibly short period of time and was fascinated with the view. Far out at sea was a vessel.., was it even moving? -- while beneath her, making an unusually lot of noise she thought, dozens of gulls rose and fell with the stiff breeze. Foamy mountains of waves crashed ceaselessly upon the rocks below, their salty spray dampening her like a misting rain. It was exhilarating and refreshing and she breathed long, deep, full breaths of the sea air into her lungs.

For the first time Avril noticed the vastness of the patio. This was the work of an artist-designer. Like the rest of the estate.., the gardens, sprawling lawns, and the mansion itself . . . the patio with its elaborate furnishings and its carefully planned layout, blended perfectly and harmoniously into the total picture.

It was kidney-shaped, seeming to follow the natural outline of the farthest point. Protecting it and encircling it lovingly it seemed to Avril, yet naturally, from a sheer drop-off into the briny waters below, was a wall four feet or more high; built from rocks of varying shapes and sizes and cemented solidly together into place. Around the wall, at well situated places and following the entire pattern of the patio floor itself, deciduous trees grew in enormous earth boxes while beneath their now nearly-bare branches were stone-cast or filigreed wrought iron benches and seats.

What an ideal place for reading, Avril soliloquized as she seated herself on one of the outdoor 'settees' and opened the Bible she had brought with her.

The hour still being early, and confident that she would have no interruptions, she knelt beside the bench and prayed. Sweet reassurance filled her soul. Reassurance that she was in the will of God by being here. "In quietness and confidence shall be your strength." Isa. 30:15. It was as if God had spoken the words aloud to her as she left the patio and started for the mansion the farthest way around.

She spied an apple tree and wondered how it came to be there among the many well-taken-care-of trees. She wondered too how it had managed to survive and exist among all the other carefully selected and chosen trees. Did it have special, favored significance to Shelton Garraway, this man with the hard caustic exterior? Did he play in it perhaps as a child?

Avril walked over to the apple tree and lovingly caressed its ancient looking, shriveled-up-appearing trunk. She leaned against the stout old tree that looked dead but

which she knew was very much alive. A few remaining leaves waved their banner of life proudly in the breeze. They were the soul of the old tree; proving again that one cannot always be judged by his looks.

Who would ever dream that under such a forbidding exterior dwelt a spirit of ethereal loveliness? That, come spring, the tree would show his soul again in leaf buds and ultimately blossoms!

She stood back and surveyed the old tree. An artist's dream indeed! Standing with his body bent to one side over the rock fence and his arms akimbo, he looked strangely like a ragged old beggar leaning over the fence for alms. The robin's nest clutched in the crooked fingers of his rheumatic arms looked like the cup he held out to catch the pennies of the world. Or could it be the sea spray?

In an instant Avril knew she had found the place for her to pray. The tree would come to life again ... with spring's awakening. From buried roots, through gnarled limbs, out of bent little brown leaf bud tips that awaken to meet the sun, frail, ethereal loveliness, rooted in the earth, would look up to heaven in thankfulness for its awakening. Its re-birth.

A sudden analogy flashed through her mind. Why not claim God's promises for Shelton Garraway! God, who brought new life to the old tree each spring could just as surely and readily impart His 'new life' to the seeming callused, hard, dead, and stubborn Shelton Garraway. She became suddenly convinced that the real Mr. Garraway was not nearly so hard and rough and tough as his exterior appeared. The exterior, like the apple tree, belied the cry of the real man..., the inner man.

"You're up early, Miss Peabody!" Mrs. Barbee exclaimed as Avril entered the house. "Had a walk already?" the cook asked, bustling about with her breakfast preparations.

"Oh, it's wonderful, Mrs. Barbee! The view from the point is quite spectacular. And to think that my God created it all!"

Mrs. Barbee nearly dropped the basket of biscuits she was carrying into the breakfast room. "That's the first time since I was a child that I have heard anyone speak so lovingly about God!" she exclaimed, brushing a tear aside.

"That's a Bible you have, isn't it?" she asked.

"Yes, it is. It's such a wonderful Book, Mrs. Barbee. You may borrow it if you care to."

"Thank you, Miss Peabody, but my husband and I have one. All we need do is get it out of the trunk and read it!"

"And you will do it, won't you, Mrs. Barbee?" Avril asked eagerly. "It is the eternal bread of life."

Mrs. Barbee was sniffing too loud for comment. At length, in a hoarse whisper she said, "I promise. I will read it again, Miss Peabody. Now run along and wash up. The master of the house will be down for breakfast this morning and he likes his meals served on time."

"What a marvelous corps of household help!" Avril exclaimed softly, climbing the long winding stairs. One thing certain, except for the master himself, the estate help were all cheerful and pleasant.

Depositing the beloved Bible on the dresser top in her bedroom, Avril washed hastily then hurried downstairs, eager to see what sort of mood Shelton Garraway would display this morning.

* * * * *

CHAPTER 4

The room fell silent as Shelton Garraway, dressed in a long-sleeved sport shirt and slate gray trousers, wheeled himself into the breakfast room followed by Mr. Cockney.

"Morning, Sir," Mrs. Barbee said in a hushed kind of way.

"Good morning, Mr. Garraway and Mr. Cockney," Avril greeted pleasantly. "I trust you had a good night's sleep, Mr. Garraway?"

For a brief moment the blue eyes seemed to notice no one. Then, quite brusquely he asked,

"Is breakfast ready, Mrs. Barbee?"

"Hot, and ready to be served, Sir."

"Then why are we waiting? Let us eat."

Mr. Cockney seated himself to the left of Mr. Garraway and, Avril noted, he seemed most protective and solicitous of the gruff-spoken young man to whom, she had learned, he was a sort of nurse-maid in helping to bathe and clothe him and waiting upon him in his personal toilet habits. The bond between the cheerful elderly man and his younger counterpart reminded Avril of a father-son relationship.

She cast a hasty glance at Mr. Cockney and felt a warmth well up inside her for the little old man with the twinkly deep-blue eyes. She liked him. Soundly. There was nothing superficial about him. He seemed to bare his soul with his smile and his carefully chosen words.

Avril bowed her head and, before touching any of the tempting food, she thanked God for it. A hush fell around the table.

She made several brave attempts at conversation with Shelton Garraway and was met with utter defeat each time. The man ignored her totally and completely. How Mr. Cockney tolerated his moody silence astonished her.

Breakfast, for the most part, was eaten in silence. Avril was glad when it was over and she could be more normal again.

Mrs. Thatcher and Mrs. Barbee found her alone in the enormous drawing room sometime later.

"You must overlook Mr. Garraway," Mrs. Barbee apologized, patting Avril's shoulder gently. "He can be a most difficult man at times."

Mrs. Thatcher picked up the conversation. "He lost all zest for living. This is what makes it so sad!"

Avril's gaze met the older women. "I'm convinced that Mr. Garraway is slowly but surely dying and deteriorating from self-pity!" She said it frankly and evenly. "You must give him no more pity nor sympathy. Neither one of you!"

It came as a shock to the two women.

"I'm serious," Avril asserted. "Shelton Garraway will never recover until he desires to recover. The physical therapist is neither brutal nor unkind and unsympathetic when he gives his patients their required (but extremely painful) treatments. Regardless of the pain and discomfort to his patient he gives the therapy, knowing that with time and continued treatment his patient will be the benefactor. Now both of you must help me. From this day on, no more pampering for Shelton Garraway. He has seen a doctor about his condition?"

"A notable specialist, Miss Peabody."

"And the doctor's prognosis?" Avril probed gently.

"As I understand it, the great surgeon wished to do surgery immediately," Mrs. Thatcher answered honestly. "Mr. Garraway refused."

"Perhaps we should tell you everything, Miss Peabody," Mrs. Barbee said kindly. "It may help you to better understand your patient and know how to go about handling the master of the house. He has no will to live." She paused momentarily, her eyes roving the hall-way as if afraid to see the entrance of the man in the wheel-chair.

In a subdued tone of voice she began again. "The girl he cared for left him for another man when she learned that he may be crippled for life. It's been better than a year ago and the master of the house has no will to live. That's the sad story."

"Nonsense!" Avril exclaimed. "Many another man and woman have been heart-broken and have gone on living beautiful and useful lives in spite of their heart-ache and heart-break."

"But you don't understand!" Mrs. Barbee interrupted. "This girl . . . her name was Stephanie Wainwright . . . let on like she really cared for Mr. Garraway! I see, according to the society page, her current flame is a Peabody. Lance Peabody. But of course you wouldn't know either one of them. I don't know why I bother you with these little incidents. At any rate, this Stephanie Wainwright and Lance Peabody are somewhere in the Caribbean, cruising with the Senior Peabody's and several other wealthy men."

"Mr. Garraway never reads the newspaper anymore so you must not agitate him by taking it to him. I hope this bit of information has not been too boring for you. It may help you to know how to handle Mr. Garraway and how to deal with him when he calls for you. Well, I must be getting back to my duties in the kitchen. I have a lamb roast to get ready for dinner. Mr. Garraway is especially fond of roast lamb with mint jelly. If I can be of any further assistance to you let me know." With that she hurried back to the kitchen, followed by Mrs. Thatcher.

As Avril started for the library, her head in a sort of whirl over Mrs. Barbee's news, certain things came into sharp focus. Those other young men, for instance!

Avril shuddered, confident that her father and mother had planned it for her! Trying to get her involved with men like Jason Princeton and Wallace Rockaway, both wealthy and both great 'social' drinkers who were totally and completely obnoxious to her. They were known to frequent the biggest-name night spots and places of ill-repute. Their vernacular was filthy and raw and Avril cringed when she thought of the type men her parents had hoped she would some-day marry. She thanked God that she had made her choice and moved out of the place that had been called home! God was in it all!

She had settled herself in one of the comfortable chairs in the library near the windows and was deeply engrossed in one of the fine old classics when Mr. Cockney presented himself in the doorway. "Mr. Garraway desires your services, Miss Peabody," he announced softly. "You will find him on the patio at The Point. I'm sure you know how to get there for I saw you having your devotions there. God bless you, my child!"

Avril gasped for happiness. How like Ben Mr. Cockney could sound! "Thank you, Mr. Cockney. I was beginning to wonder just when I would be needed, -- if ever!" She laughed.

"All good things take time!" the man asserted sweetly, his merry eyes twinkling. "Good luck to you, Miss Peabody. Don't allow Mr. Garraway to intimidate you. He's really not at all like the man you behold on the surface." Giving Avril another of his warm smiles, he disappeared down the hall-way.

"At last!" Avril exclaimed, laying the book on the table and hurrying to her room for a shawl. The days were becoming increasingly cooler and she knew how stiff the breeze could be at The Point.

With a bit of trepidation Avril advanced toward Shelton Garraway and the Point. She noted the hunched back and the sallow complexion and for a fleeting moment she found herself feeling sorry for this young man.

"You wished to see me?" she asked, approaching the wheel-chair.

He made no response but sat as one in a trance, gazing far out into the sea.

Avril, too, remained silent. She had had enough experience with people to know when to speak and when not to speak -- especially so with eccentrics, such as her present patient.

For a long while she stood, gazing out across the ocean where waves were rising and falling and sea birds were screeching and screaming loudly. She pulled her shawl more tightly about her slender shoulders, extremely thankful that she had thought to bring it along. The wind was little short of being cold. She glanced quickly at Shelton Garraway.

"Are you warm, Mr. Garraway?" she asked gently, her voice filled with concern. "That wind's a bit raw. You must not take cold."

The man's blue eyes, generally cold and steely-looking, took on a softer light at Avril's thoughtfulness and concern. He even looked human, she thought, and not at all like the bear he pretended to be. Shelton Garraway was playing a role; acting out a part too hard for him. Avril purposed, by God's grace and with His help, to penetrate that shell and watch as the real man emerged.., in Christ. It presented a challenge to her. She liked challenges; this one especially so.

"Shall I have Mr. Cockney bring another blanket?" she asked softly, standing near him. "That blanket about your legs doesn't seem heavy enough to keep you warm today."

The eyes softened some more. "Thank you," he said graciously and not at all unkindly, noticing suddenly how very petite and dainty his nurse looked. "Thank you," he said again. "I believe I could use another. Have Mr. Cockney send me the plaid one from the top of the trunk in my room."

"I will," Avril answered, walking swiftly down the walk toward what she was certain was the owner's suite of rooms. How wonderful to be needed again, she thought with a tinge of quick exhilaration.

Mr. Cockney met her. "Trouble already?" he teased, his wrinkled face and eyes both laughing.

"Mr. Garraway said to send the plaid blanket from the top of the trunk. The wind's cold today. I can't have my patient taking a chill and contracting one of the viruses going around."

Mr. Cockney's eyes twinkled merrily as he brought Avril the blanket. "You've made some headway I see, Miss Peabody!" he commented. "Good luck!" As she tucked the warm Scotch-plaid blanket carefully about Shelton Garraway's legs and feet, Avril asked softly, "Hadn't I better wheel you to the south part of the Point? The wind wouldn't hit you quite so forcibly."

Immediately the man's eyes became steely and fierce looking. "I can wheel myself!" he retorted hotly.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Garraway. I meant no insult. I am used to helping my patients. It is my duty to make you as comfortable as possible. Now," she commanded gently, "if you will wheel yourself over out of this stiff wind perhaps you will be able to tell me why you sent for me."

He gave Avril a withering look; one that would have greatly intimidated and frightened the average individual, but not Avril. In her profession, she had met with many another Shelton Garraway. She knew how to handle them. Sympathy was definitely out in this case! The man needed a rude awakening. He needed shocked. She would pray for God's help.

"Will you obey me, Mr. Garraway," she asked, "or must I wheel you across to the south side?"

Still he stared at her. A cold, hard stare it was.

Quickly Avril walked to the back side of the wheel-chair and started it in motion.

"I can wheel myself," he asserted less caustically but irritated, nonetheless. He set the wheel-chair in motion and was soon situated in the sunny spot designated by Avril.

It was a sort of alcove on the Point and the wind was never as strong and fierce here as out in the open. Avril had learned this one early morning while out on one of her daily walks. Here the sun's warm fingers always reached down to caress tired, aching, and fatigued muscles.

"It's a solarium of sorts," she said lightly, ignoring the man's agitation and rudeness of manner; "an open air solarium. It will do wonders for you, Mr. Garraway, if you will sit here a half-hour or more each day. You're entirely too sallow looking for a healthy young man," she added. "The sun will give you color. Now, what may I do for you? You sent for me. Remember?"

"Forget it!"

"I was sent for and now that I'm here I wish to perform the task for which I was sent. Are you in pain, Mr. Garraway or shall I read to you?"

Avril traced the frown lines on the young man's face with her observant eyes. "You have a book from which I shall read?" she probed gently.

With utter disgust lining his face, Shelton Garraway brought a book out from beneath the blanket on his lap and thrust it at Avril. "Do as you wish!" was his curt rejoinder.

Recognizing it immediately as one of the great classics from the well-stocked library, Avril opened the book gently. So as not to further annoy her patient, she didn't ask where to begin reading but seated herself nearby his chair and began reading from the very beginning.

In spite of her total and complete absorption in the book Avril, every now and again, cast anxious glances at Shelton Garraway who pretended to be either asleep or bored.

After an hour-an-a-half of reading he interrupted her with, "You may go now, Miss Peabody." There was no expression of gratitude or thanks; nothing but the brusque order.

Rising graciously from the chair, Avril closed the book. Placing a book marker at the page where she had left off reading, she handed the classic back to its owner. "I have enjoyed this immensely," she said, smiling into Shelton Garraway's face. "I hope you too have derived some good from it. Have a good day and send for me if I'm needed."

With that she walked gracefully down the curved walk toward the gardens, leaving Shelton Garraway staring after her in wide-eyed awe and wonder.

She had coped so sweetly (if firmly) with his sudden outbursts of anger and hostility until it left the man baffled. She was different from anyone he had ever met or known. What was the secret of her calmness? And how could she remain so sweet under the trying circumstances of his own making? he wondered. Sudden, deep, and secret admiration welled up inside him for her.

* * * * *

CHAPTER 5

The following morning Avril awoke to the sound of rain beating a soft staccato sound on her window-panes. Sitting up in bed she bounced quickly outside. The day was gray. Not a ripple of wind seemed to be stirring. The outside world seemed strangely silent. Even the birds, ordinarily noisy and busy, sat forlornly in the trees and tucked their heads far beneath their wings for shelter or nestled up close to the tree-trunks for protection. There was a feeling of foreboding . . . of storms to come.

She dressed quickly then had her devotions, asking the Lord (earnestly) to make her a blessing at the Garraway household.

As she walked down the long curving stairway she thought about her summons from Shelton Garraway the previous day. Involuntarily, she wondered what the new day held for her. She smiled to herself as she thought back over the days of 'duty' at this strange mansion. Duty indeed! She had been on a sort of holiday picnic!

Seeing no one in the spacious drawing-room and the ivory keys of the enormous grand piano seeming to beg her to play them, she slipped quickly over to the magnificent instrument and seated herself on the bench. Would she dare to play? she wondered, her fingers touching the keys lovingly. Almost tenderly they began playing the beloved hymns Ben and Amanda had taught her. Her soul seemed to be in another world and the presence of One very real stood by her. Soon her beautiful, clear soprano joined her skilled fingers in making melody unto the Lord.

"You play beautifully!" It was Mrs. Thatcher. Avril hadn't heard her enter the room. "Mrs. Barbee has breakfast ready," she announced. "I do hope Mr. Garraway was not near while you were playing."

"Oh-h?" Avril questioned.

"The man's a bit hard to understand at times, I'm afraid," Mrs. Thatcher explained half apologetically. "The accident did something to him. He said he . . . he never wanted to hear the piano played again."

Avril gasped, knowing full well that music of the right kind could be a great healer to both body and mind.

"The man studied to be a concert pianist at one time. But the accident changed a lot of things," Mrs. Thatcher said sadly, leading the way to the breakfast room.

As Avril had rather suspected, Shelton Garraway did not appear for breakfast.

Leaning a bit toward Mr. Cockney, she asked softly, "Is the master of the house ill this morning?"

Mr. Cockney's merry eyes looked sad. "I'm afraid so, Miss Peabody. He's ill and.., and ill-tempered. If only he would listen to reason and allow Doctor Blancheau to operate..."

"Perhaps someday he will, Mr. Cockney. I am praying."

"It looks hopeless, Miss. Utterly hopeless!"

Avril was strangely moved by the man's attitude. Never before had she seen him in this frame of mind. Shelton Garraway must have given him a truly bad morning thus far and if the weather outside acted as a physical barometer and was any indication of what more was to come, Mr. Cockney was in for a bad day. He needed her prayers like he had never yet needed them.

Avril's heart went out secretly in pity and compassion for the little man with the big heart, as she had come to think of Mr. Cockney.

After breakfast was over, she followed him to the end of the hall. "If you should need help," she said sincerely, "please let me know. The two of us together might be able to do wonders for Mr. Garraway."

Mr. Cockney stopped short and gave Avril a look of sincere appreciation and admiration, then quickly he said, "But the master is too rude and sharp-tongued and ill-tempered to have a true lady in the room. His tongue seems barbed these days."

"Never mind his tongue, Mr. Cockney; I have coped with many another Shelton Garraway in my years of nursing. I do believe, with God's help and your cooperation, we will be able to help the man of the house."

Mr. Cockney's tense frame relaxed slightly and he let forth a sigh. "You give me renewed courage, Miss Peabody. Thanks. It's just what I have needed this difficult morning. The man needs medication badly. He's suffering intensely; but he refuses to allow me to call for you. Says he wants to die."

"Then I shall go with you!" Avril exclaimed with a look of determination. "Perhaps if Mr. Garraway knew what awaited him at the end of life's road he'd change his mind," she said sadly as, side by side, the pair walked quickly to the suite of rooms at the far end of the sprawling mansion.

Mr. Cockney stepped lightly into the man's room. "Company for you, Shelton," he exclaimed softly and pleasantly, addressing the man by his first name and ushering Avril into the room at the same time, where she found him propped up in bed with an avalanche of pillows.

"I came to see if I could help make you a bit more comfortable, Mr. Garraway," Avril's soft voice soothed.

Seeing the man of the house turn cold, belligerent eyes on the near-trembling Mr. Cockney, she walked closer to the bed. "Mr. Cockney did not send for me," she defended. "I inquired about you. I wanted to come."

"I don't want you! I don't want anybody. Get out of my room; both of you! I want to die!"

Avril stood as rooted to the side of the bed. When finally the man's tirade of words had spent themselves and abated she said softly, "What may I do for you? You are suffering. The medication, please Mr. Cockney! I'm sure the doctor left medication for pain . . ."

"Get out, I said! Leave this room!"

"I was hired to be your nurse and reading companion, Mr. Garraway and up to this good hour I have done absolutely nothing by way of nursing you back to health," Avril said, speaking softly and kindly but firmly. "Now I mean to see what I can do to help you. I have been here better than three weeks and I have felt almost guilty at what little I have been able to do for you. Now I shall begin. The medication please, Mr. Cockney!"

"I don't want medication! Don't touch me: I want to die."

"Do you really want to die, Shelton Garraway?" Avril asked softly, drawing the necessary amount of pain-relieving drug into a hypodermic needle, readying it for the injection. "Are you prepared to die?" she asked pointedly, working all the while. "Did you know that after death an eternal hell awaits those who are unconverted and who have

never had their sins washed away in the blood of Calvary's Lamb -- Jesus the blessed Son of God. Have you ever heard about being born again?" Avril asked the man, going to him. "Now pull up that pajama sleeve. From today on . . . until you have the necessary surgery which will render you capable of walking again ... you are going to stick religiously to your doctor's prescribed medication. Your arm, Mr. Garraway!"

Shelton Garraway's eyes widened; his fists clenched and unclenched. "I don't generally take orders from a female," he said irritably.

Avril stood her ground, waiting patiently. "I shall wait, Mr. Garraway," she said softly. "Your arm, please!"

Reluctantly, he pulled up the pajama sleeve and submitted as Avril gave the pain-relieving injection.

The days and weeks that followed were not without difficulty; but each day as she cared for him, Avril witnessed to Shelton Garraway about the transforming power of Christ. Her life, unknown though it was to her, was doing far more to the man than her well-chosen words even.

"I'm convinced," she told him on a day in early February, "that, should you consent to have surgery, you would be able to walk again."

"Please don't mention it to me again," he said, speaking in far kinder and gentler tones than he had been.

Avril studied him long and hard. "You don't want to get well, Mr. Garraway. Is that it? You want always to live in your little world of self-pity where people will wait on you hand and foot and where you feel you have every legitimate right in the world to scream at them and make unreasonable demands of them! I pity you, Shelton Garraway! A whole new World awaits you; its yours for the wanting and the taking, yet you refuse it. No one, neither God nor man, can help you in your present frame of mind. You must want help . . . sense your need of God's help . . . and until you do, nothing can be done for you. I am praying daily that God will remove the scales from off your eyes and show you the glory and beauty living for Him."

"Stop it. Stop it! You don't know what it's like to . . . to.. be a... a castaway. You've never been in love, have you?" he asked in a mellowed tone of voice.

Avril's lovely face looked into his eyes. She sighed deeply. Then, in a tone of perfect understanding and tenderness she said, "Yes, Mr. Garraway, I was once in love. I, too, was jilted by the man I loved. Jilted and cast away for my new-found love in Christ Jesus my Lord. But it was the very best thing that could have happened. God was working things out for me and for my life.., for the good of my life. It cut deeply at the time but I learned, through reading the Bible and many hours of prayer, that my blessed

Lord had only done for me what I myself would have had to do... break off completely with the man I loved. The Scripture is very clear on this line. So you see, it was God's providence and His goodness to me that made the doctor whom I thought I couldn't live without to act as he did. He mocked my salvation and sanctification and he wanted no part of this kind life."

"And you let him go for... for..."

"For Jesus' sake, Mr. Garraway, and I have never been sorry. I had never known true happiness until I found the Saviour. This past year and a half has been the happiest part of my entire life. You can be the same if you will but ask Him to be merciful to you a sinner and bid Him to come into your heart."

Shelton Garraway stared long at his dark-haired petite nurse. "I'm sorry I spoke so unkindly," he said in a tone of voice Avril had never before heard him speak in. "I suppose other people do have heartaches and heart-breaks too."

"Many of them, Mr. Garraway. However, adverse winds and trying circumstances are stepping-stones to something far greater and better. Not infrequently this is God's way of drawing us to Himself. He offers us His undying, never-failing love."

"I wish I could feel as you do about these things. You have no bitterness whatever toward the man who wounded you. I can sense this," he said, suddenly closing his eyes and pressing his head back against the pillows.

Avril was silent, listening to the wind which by now was rising steadily. She walked to the windows and stared through the panes, listening to the wind as it howled around the house, unable shake off an unreasoning foreboding. She thought of Stephanie and tried to picture her as she must have appeared to Shelton: beautiful, winsome, and tempestuous as the wind tearing at the windows.

But what had Shelton Garraway to do with a love so stormy? Had she swept by, leaving him cold and empty? and might she not do the same to Lance Peabody when she tired of his company?

Avril slept fitfully that night. She awoke several times to the sound of a shutter banging and the mansion breathing in creaks and sighs. A branch of ivy was tapping in the wind on one of the windows, and the sound of it became more insistent, penetrating at last to her drowsy consciousness. It was not the ivy! Someone was knocking at the door and an urgent voice pleaded, "Please, Miss Peabody, come quickly!"

She started up in bed, fear gripping her. "Coming!" she called. She fumbled for slippers and dressing gown and ran to the door, her two long dark braids falling down her back.

Mr. Cockney stood in the hall-way, trousers and shirt pulled roughly over his pajamas.

"Mr. Garraway?" Avril asked anxiously.

The old man nodded. "Hurry! He can hardly breathe."

"Have you sent for the doctor?" she asked, nearly running down the hall-way.

"He forbids it."

Avril now ran ahead of Mr. Cockney, ordering as she did so, call the doctor immediately. I'll take over till he arrives."

"It's no use, Miss. He wants to die."

"Nonsense! He's not ready to die. Now call the doctor as I advised."

As she entered the room, Avril could hear the man's labored breathing.

His face was ashen against the pillows and the sweat stood out on his forehead.

He smiled with difficulty when he saw her. He looked almost relieved at sight of her. Or had she only imagined it?

"I... didn't mean ... for you to come," he said in a whisper; "but I . . . I'm glad you're here."

Pulling the drawer open in which the medication was kept, Avril shook two tablets into the palm of her hand.

He closed his eyes.

"Here! Take these, quick!" she ordered softly, holding the water to his lips as she placed the tablets in his mouth.

Shelton Garraway gasped then opened his eyes. "I.. guess I'm more of a coward than I realized," he said meekly, swallowing the pills. Reaching for her hand and searching her face anxiously, he said fearfully, "Pray for me, Avril. I... I'm scared!"

* * * * *

CHAPTER 6

As she prayed, Avril noticed Shelton Garraway's lips moving. Was he trying to repeat after her? she wondered. Watching him closely, she said the simple words, "Lord, be merciful to me a sinner and save me!"

The man's lips moved. Tears flowed freely from beneath closed eye-lids. "Be merciful, O God! Be merciful," he cried aloud. "I'm a poor, wretched sinner. Come into my heart." It was a plea -- an anguished plea -- one that netted results. The tense lines vanished from his face and his grip on Avril's hand relaxed. A smile played at the corners of his lips. Opening his eyes he smiled weakly. "It's all right, Avril," he said softly, calling her by her first name. "Christ has come into my heart. I'm not afraid anymore. Thank God!"

Avril's heart overflowed with joy. She sat by him in silence now, wiping the perspiration from his forehead in regular intervals, and listening intently for any improvement in his breathing.

Mr. Cockney came into the room stating that the doctor would be there as quickly as he possibly could. He was out on another call.

At the end of an hour Shelton's breathing seemed less labored and distressed. Avril gave him two more tablets and presently a little color came back to his face and his lips lost their blueness.

"Get yourself a cup of hot tea and go to bed, Mr. Cockney. There's nothing you can do and I'll let the doctor in when he arrives."

Mr. Cockney's voice was humble -- pathetic.

"Please, Miss Peabody," he pleaded, "I... I'll not be able to sleep."

Avril was touched deeply by the old man's love for Shelton Garraway. Giving him a quick but genuine smile she said softly, "Sit here by the fireplace and we'll both watch him."

They sat through the rest of the night, the old man and the girl, watching and listening, and as they did so a bond of deep appreciation developed solidly between them. The wind ceased its moaning and sighing with the dawn hours. At precisely quarter till six the doctor arrived, looking tired and worn.

"Sorry to have been so long," he apologized as Mr. Cockney let him in and ushered him up the winding stairs.

The old man made hasty introductions between nurse and doctor ere the latter began his examination of the ill man.

Avril stood close by the bed as the sensitive fingers of the doctor went over Shelton Garraway's chest. "Is there anything I can do?" she asked wistfully.

Doctor Marsh gave her an appraising look. "There's nothing for me to do either," he said, nodding his head in satisfaction. "You've got him through the crisis. I want you and Mr. Cockney to go to bed now and rest I shall stay close to Mr. Garraway."

It was with some reluctance that Avril left her patient's side; but when she crept wearily back into bed she slept the sleep of the exhausted. The early dusk of winter's evening was settling in her room when finally she awoke and combed her hair and dressed then hurried to Shelton Garraway's room.

He was awake when she entered and he smiled warmly when he saw her. Avril noticed the circles beneath his eyes and the pallor of his face. "Feel better?" she asked, coming up close to the bed and smoothing the covers and plumping the pillows.

"Everything's going to be all right now, Avril," he said with meaning, laying a hand upon his heart.

"Praise the Lord!" Avril said. "I can't believe I'm really me anymore. I feel all new and . . . and wonderfully different inside."

"That's because you are new, Mr. Garraway."

"Can't you call me Shelton? Please."

"I can; but it's not customary for a nurse to address her male patients in this manner."

"It's my request, Avril."

"Then I shall comply with your request and call you by your first name," she answered. "You will have the necessary surgery now?" she asked. "As soon as you are strong enough?"

A serious look crept into the blue eyes. "I . . . shall have to think about it."

"Pray about it." Avril suggested. "Begin talking to God like you and I are conversing. He gave your life back to you last night and I am fully convinced that He expects you to do the rest now. You can be a useful servant of His, Shelton. Your life is before you. This isn't the end; it's a glorious beginning for you with Christ."

"I will do as you say, Avril. I will pray."

At Mrs. Thatcher's insistence, Avril went downstairs for the evening meal, marveling at the marvelous transformation in Shelton's heart and life.

"He's really different, Miss Peabody," Mrs. Thatcher asserted, going quickly down the stairs brushing her hand across her eyes. "He hasn't scolded any of us today. In fact, he was so kind and wonderful when I carried the food to him which Mrs. Barbee prepared especially for him, that I felt I was dreaming. He smiled at me and told me not to work too hard and for me to tell Mrs. Barbee the same. It's almost unbelievable!"

"With Christ all things are possible," Avril said thankfully.

Three weeks and four days later Avril entered her patient's room to find it empty and neatly in order.

She had become extremely happy in her daily routine and looked forward eagerly to being with Shelton. Since his conversion and recent experience of heart purity, a mutual bond and tie existed between them. Instead of the curtly spoken man she had first met, Avril discovered that her patient possessed an innumerable amount of excellent and lofty qualities. She marveled at his humble and meek spirit.

Where was he? she wondered. And where was Mr. Cockney? Always, he seemed to be near at hand, almost as concerned over her as he was over Shelton.

She hurried down the steps, all but running.

Mrs. Thatcher and Mrs. Barbee were talking in subdued whispers as she entered the drawing room.

"Where is Shelton?" she asked anxiously. "And Mr. Cockney? They're not upstairs and I know for a fact that Shelton isn't well enough to be in that wheel-chair."

"The master of the house is in the hospital, dear," Mrs. Barbee said gently.

Avril felt as if she were going to faint. "Hospital?" she exclaimed dumbly, dropping into a near-by chair. "Where? When did he leave? Why didn't anyone call me? Has he had another attack . . .?" Her slender hands flew to her head. She had known that his condition was worsening but she had told no one, only urged Shelton gently to have the necessary surgery.

"He didn't want you to know, dear girl," Mrs. Thatcher said tenderly. "He didn't wish to worry you. He and Mr. Cockney flew to the University hospital in Boston. Doctor Blancheau will operate early in the morning. Mr. Garraway requested that you be praying while the surgeon operates. He left a note for you."

Quickly Mrs. Barbee went to the kitchen and brought the note then excused herself graciously. Mrs. Thatcher followed her.

With trembling hands Avril read the neatly written, note: "Dear Avril," it said, "I am sorry to have done this to you but I felt it was best this way. If my heart had its way you would be right here with me. However, should worse come to worse . . . (and it may; Doctor Blancheau, with whom I have been in close contact for weeks, told me that every day counted) well, as I have already said, should anything happen I would rather not have you here. I want you always to retain the mental picture of me as you know me in the home., the new man in Christ; not a bandaged up corpse. It is because of you that I considered surgery. You have been the reason and cause for so many lovely things that have happened in my life. Pray for me but do not worry. Remember our promise!

"Should this be the end of the journey for me I will be anxiously awaiting your arrival inside the gates of the City. God's eternal City! I will get in touch with you just as soon as I am able. Till then, I remain

Devotedly yours,
Shelton."

"Remember our promise!" She read it again. A glad cry rose in her heart. Romans 8:28 had been her special promise since she got converted and she had passed it on to Shelton, marking the verse for him in the lovely new Bible he had Glen Jorgenson bring him from the city. It had acted as a strong and mighty anchor for both of them. And now, yes, now, Shelton was leaning upon and believing in that promise! She was on her knees long before dawn the following morning, nor did she go down for early breakfast. The grand old hall-way clock was striking the noon hour when she rose from her knees with the assurance that all was well. She started down the stairs.

"Telephone call for you, Miss Avril," Mrs. Thatcher called eagerly. Avril fairly ran down the stairs, "It's Mr. Cockney, I do believe!" Mrs. Thatcher said in great excitement.

"Hello. Avril Peabody speaking. Is this you, Mr. Cockney?"

"He made it, Miss Peabody! He made it! Shelton's going to live!" the little old man was fairly shouting the words into the mouthpiece. His voice sounded almost young, "Doctor Blancheau said he came through with flying colors -- said Somebody bigger than he, had worked a miracle for Shelton. Tell the entire household and . . . thanks for praying, Miss Avril. It's a miracle! A real miracle."

"It's God, Mr. Cockney. Praise His dear name! Please give Shelton my regards when he has rallied sufficiently."

Bright tears were shining in her eyes as she put the receiver in place and relayed the good news to the two women who were standing anxiously near-by.

"You worked a miracle in that man, Miss Peabody!" Mrs. Barbee exclaimed. "It's sheer pleasure to be in his employ anymore."

"God worked the miracle." Avril said sweetly. "Now I must write to my friends in a distant city and tell them the good news. They have been praying earnestly for Mr. Garraway."

With a light heart and quick steps she hurried to the library to write Ben and Amanda with whom she had maintained a steady contact.

Four days after his surgery, two dozen red roses arrived for Avril from Shelton. "To my favorite nurse! I am thinking of you.

Devotedly yours,
Shelton."

the attached card read.

The warm color rushed into Avril's cheeks as she arranged the long-stemmed beauties in one of the many fine crystal vases in the house.

Following the roses came daily short telephone calls from either Mr. Cockney or Shelton himself, keeping them all posted on Shelton's progress.

Two and a half weeks later a letter arrived. It was in neat handwriting. "My dear Avril," it began.

"Thank God, I am walking again! -- a bit tottery, I must confess -- but walking, none-the-less. How very good it feels to be on my feet again! It's a real miracle -- one that came about through God and you.

"I thank God for you, Avril, every hour of the day I thank God for sending you to me! I'm sure by now you have guessed how I feel about you. I do not ask that you immediately relate your feelings toward me (I don't have the right to do so: I feel most unworthy of you.) However, I am asking the Lord to lead and guide both our lives for His glory.

"Avril, believe me when I tell you that I never knew what real love was until you came along. Oh, I thought I was in love but I'm now fully aware that Stephanie Wainwright, tempestuous creature that she was, with her tremendous vitality, was little more to me than a flickering flame of infatuation. Going out of my life like she did when I thought I loved her, threw me into shock. At first that shock atrophied all emotion for me so that the will to live seemed to be non-existent, but God sent you along to bring me to my senses and to lead me to Him. One doesn't love an elemental, Avril, which is what

Stephanie was. Why do I mention all this? To let you know that my feelings for you are as different from the way I felt toward Stephanie as daylight is from darkness. There is no comparison!

"Also, I want you to know that I admire you greatly for your noble stand... against your parents and family even! Oh, you are a magnanimous and noble woman, dear Avril! So genuine!"

"How do I know all this and how did I find out? I know you are wondering and you have a legitimate right to know, so I shall start at the very beginning for you made a tremendous impression upon me (for good) from the first day I met you. I found myself attracted to you in a strange, unexplainable way; so I began observing you very closely, and to my amazement I discovered yours was an inner beauty and radiance unlike any woman I had ever met. Your unwavering faith, constant joy, and sweet spirit under all circumstances, coupled with the beautiful simplicity and modesty of your attire, arrested my attention and attested loudly to me of your wonderful unusual self.

"I quickly put a call through to Mrs. Merrymen and asked her to find out all she could about you and your life. This was relatively easy for her to do since she and Mrs. Crutcher are very dear, close friends. Needless to say, I learned all about your family's orders for you to leave the mansion because of your faith in Jesus Christ and then how you left with nothing but love for those who had so unjustly done you wrong.

"This is what really set me to thinking, Avril! I loathed myself for my self-pity every time you came into my presence. I knew I needed whatever it was you possessed; and when I suffered that severe attack the night Mr. Cockney called for you . . . well, that opened my eyes. I was scared, Avril! Suddenly, I knew I didn't want to die. God used that to humble me and bring me to Himself. And I came! Bless His great name!

"Please do not think for a minute that for all the chilly automation I may have driven you to thinking I am, that I'm made of stone. I'm not. (I did have a heart of stone before I met the Lord Jesus Christ, but He changed me and gave me a heart of flesh, like the Scripture says.)

"Now that I am able to walk, I want to make you happy, Avril ... for the rest of your life. I do not ask that you be hasty in your decision but I do ask you to pray and seek God's will concerning this.

"Also, should the Lord be so kind and gracious as to give you to me for my life's companion, (which I so greatly hope and pray may be granted) we must think of ways to use a great part of the money He has entrusted to me, for His cause. We will use it to spread the message that Jesus saves. We shall live for Christ and others, my dear!

"I am most eager to see your dear face again but this will have to wait for at least a couple weeks or more, according to my doctor.

"May God bless you and be with you till we meet again.

Affectionately yours,
Shelton."

Avril read and re-read the letter. A lovely tinge of pink flooded her cheeks. Hurrying to the library, she wrote Ben and Amanda. They would rejoice with her. What's more, the Lord may just work it out that in the future they may live at the Garraway house with Shelton and her!

It was a lovely thought. One that set Avril's happy heart to singing.

* * * * *

THE END