The boat swelled as it reached the cross channel currents and suddenly, for the 19-year-old, the short 40-mile trip became frightening as the sea began to swell and the boat rocked and dipped fiercely.

Brushing a lock of his hair back from his eyes, he tried to look straight ahead, all the while wishing he'd have kept his good sense and stayed home.
The letter may be there, he reasoned, and he'd have saved money by not coming. Still, a fellow could take only so much!

The boat took another nose dive and Peter, plainly and visibly frightened, got up to leave and walk down into the room below when he became intrigued and fascinated with a single passenger. She was on the top deck, wearing a navy, all-weather coat and sou'wester hat, and was all alone. With one hand, she clutched an umbrella, holding it over her head, and with the other, she held an umbrella over her knees, all the while sitting motionless, apparent that she felt at home with the sea.

She looked grim as she watched the elements and observed the seasick passengers, but like a monument she sat, keeping her vigil. She reverenced the Seas. What were her thoughts; what was she seeing? Peter wished he knew her secret.

The boat plunged. He grabbed hold of the seat which he had started to vacate and held on for dear life. The sea became angrier, the waves higher, and the rain poured down in torrents. The boat reeled and rocked, swaying like a drunk under the influence of alcohol. The wind growled like a beast in the forest and the sea replied with lashing waves. Passengers were blown about; hysteria reigned.

"Get me off! Get me off!" a young woman screamed above the shrill whine of the now low-moaning wind. Her cries were lost, however, in the roar of another blast of fierce wind. Suddenly the boat dipped; the waves were higher than the vessel itself. Peter felt the color drain from his face. Why did he come? he asked himself silently, wishing his desire to get away and see the amusements at the end of the 40-mile trip hadn't gotten the best of him.

The umbrella lady folded her umbrellas, moved her eyes to the bridge and smiled. Peter took courage. She was obviously used to this weather.

The gale reached force 9-10 and when the docking site came into view, people rushed like cattle to get off.

Peter stepped off the boat and hurried away, wanting to see all he could see before the time came for the return trip back. He may as well enjoy himself, he reasoned, since he was here.
But he didn't enjoy himself. In spite of all he'd heard about the place, he found no pleasure in a single thing. Others around him squealed with delight and sheer pleasure over the beauty of the place and the simple amusements present. Not Peter; his thoughts lingered on the storm and the even greater horror of the return trip.

Feeling disgusted with himself over having spent a sizeable sum of his few fast-dwindling savings, he hurried to a small restaurant and bought a sandwich and a fruit salad, wandering from shop to shop after he'd eaten, marking time till the boat was ready to leave.

He was down near the dock long before it was time to leave. Standing beneath an ample awning outside one of the stores to keep from getting wet, for it began to rain, his mind wandered to the letter he had written some three weeks ago in response to an ad he'd seen in the paper. Would he have an answer today perhaps? he wondered, hoping he would. He wanted to begin life in a different way; try to forget the past, as much of it as he could, and make a new beginning. A new and different environment would be an asset, he soliloquized pensively. Hopefully.

People began streaming down to the boat and the docking site and Peter, realizing the time had come, followed the crowd, his heart hammering inside his chest. Would the seas have calmed? he wondered. Or would this trip be a repeat of the one across? He shuddered.

Instead of merry-making and laughter, as was the case when the sightseers had boarded the boat in the early morning, stern-faced passengers now boarded the vessel. Peter included.

Once the vessel had pushed off from the docks and was seaward bound, Peter searched the boat for the umbrella woman. Not finding her, he decided the trip across had been a return trip for her. How he wished it had been the same for him—that he had been home when the boat docked and anchored. But such was not the case, he told himself, and he must make the best of the situation. After all, forty miles wasn't like going abroad.

Seeing a newspaper lying abandoned on a seat, he picked it up and began reading, trying to calm his fears. Already the boat was rocking. In disgust, he tossed the paper aside and went up on deck. What he saw made him shiver with fright. The sea, like mountains, seemed to be surging up from
the mighty deep. He had never seen anything like it and, by the expressions on others' faces, those far more seagoing than he, they had never encountered anything like it before either.

The waves rose as high as mountains, leaving in their rise sea troughs as deep as canyons into which the vessel plunged and rose, plunged and rose. The waves, like powerful beasts, rose awesomely then shed their caps like mammoth waterfalls. In the next instant, the sun broke through a cloud and the waves looked like frightening horses tearing through the water. The sea changed color: first blue, then grayish-blue, then greenish-blue. The boat rocked and reeled furiously. Drunkenly.

Suddenly there was darkness. Total darkness. The sun dipped and so did the boat.., in inky blackness. People screamed. Peter, feeling it was all a horrible nightmare, said aloud, "Oh, God, help us!"

A wave lifted the vessel up to what appeared to be the level of the sinking sun. The boat was high on the sea, riding the crest of the wave. Peter, for a brief moment, saw the setting sun cast a pink glow over the sky, reflecting the color on the beast-like waves and painting the sea an electric pink. Then, instantly, the light and color disappeared and all was again total and complete darkness as the boat plunged down, down, downward into the vast sea trough.

"God, if you really do exist," Peter prayed, "please help us."

He saw light again and realized the boat had once again managed to survive and continue to be afloat. Looking toward the faint glow in the sky, he saw a rainbow. His heart leaped within him. Was there really a God after all? he wondered, discerning in the distance the port where he would disembark and set his feet upon terra firma.

Stepping from the boat when it reached the docks, Peter exhaled in relief. What a foolish thing he'd done by taking the boat trip! he chided himself again. Well, he had learned one lesson and learned it well; never, never would he go on that trip again. Never!

He hurried along the pavement till he reached his car, parked in one of the many parking areas around the port. Then he headed out of town toward the freeway and home.
Darkness had long since fallen by the time he reached the small inexpensive apartment which he called home. Irritated at himself for having wasted both his frugal savings and the day, he turned the key in the door, gathering the mail from the floor where it had dropped when the postman slipped it through the slot.

Turning a light on, Peter looked through the few pieces of mail in haste, his heart racing when he saw the letter.

With trembling fingers, he ripped the envelope open.

"Dear Mr. Yarbrost, " the letter said.

"I have read your letter with interest and, having given much thought to what you have written, notwithstanding the fact that you ARE inexperienced, I would like to meet you personally. Please be at my home next Tuesday at 2:00 o'clock in the afternoon.

Sincerely Yours,

Hannah Anna Barber"

"Well, I guess that's that!" Peter said forlornly. "I still don't know if I have the job or if I don't."

Folding the letter and sticking it inside his sport jacket, the only jacket he had, he opened the refrigerator and scrounged around for something to eat, once again chiding himself for having wasted the money on the trip. Why was it, he wondered, neither bitterly nor hatefully, that some people had so much and others so little? It boggled his mind. If his mother hadn't done what she did, he thought, he'd still have had a home. Still, he reasoned, his tiny two-room apartment with its over-crowded condition and much-worn furniture, was far better than coming home to a drunken, brawling mother.

Bitterness washed over him at the thought of the one who was his mother. Bitterness and pity. Somehow, the two feelings didn't harmonize. One minute he was torn between pity and compassion for his mother and the next, he was filled with loathing and bitterness. The two feelings, each striving for dominance and mastery in his mind, kept him torn to pieces
emotionally. This, he finally admitted, was his big purpose in taking the boat today. He had done it in hopes of forgetting the wound inflicted upon him by his mother's sudden disappearance. "I'm going to another city, Peter," her badly-scrawled note on the table had said. "You're a big boy now and you really don't need me anymore. I've located a better job. The rent's paid on the house till the last of the week..."

That was it. No address and no name of the city. Nothing to go by if he needed her. Nothing. In essence, she was saying, "Drop out of my world; I don't want you around anymore."

Unbidden tears washed Peter's blue eyes. He was both amazed and angry at their sudden unannounced appearance. Twice he had acted strangely today: once on the boat..., no, two times!..., when he had talked to God and now, crying. He was about to crack up physically, he was sure. But then, a fellow could stand only so much, too.

If only he knew something..., anything..., about his father! he thought, sighing as he scraped out the last bit of tuna salad from the jar where he had put it the night before. His mother was as close-mouthed on the subject as a clam, never mentioning his name even and forbidding him to ask questions, stating simply, "That's a closed chapter of my life, Peter. Ask no questions."

Out of respect for her and her orders, he didn't ask questions. But she couldn't restrict him from wondering and thinking about his father. No, she couldn't. Often, his mind conjured up dreams and visions of a fine, tall and respectable man, doing his daily work in an office and returning home at night, his first question being, "Where's Peter?"

When he was small and didn't know any better, he'd often sat on the porch step waiting for a man whom he'd neither seen nor met, hoping the gentleman would say, "Hey, you must be Peter Yarbrost; you look like me; I'm your father."

But the dream and the game of pretend never became reality; each went unfulfilled. No fine-looking, tall, respectable gentleman ever came. And if he had done so, the man of his dreams would never have been able to locate them. His mother was restless, remaining nowhere long and in no given city or place.
Just like she did to me now, Peter thought, taking a bit of the tuna salad. Only this time, it was finis. Oh, she hadn't told him so on the bit of paper. But then that hadn't been necessary; her, "... You really don't need me anymore," had spoken volumes to him.

A knot formed somewhere inside his esophagus.

He tried to swallow it but it remained there, an acute and keen reminder of the deep hurt inside his heart. He had no one to turn to. No one. And suddenly, in spite of her drunken condition, he missed his mother.

Burying his face in his arms, he sobbed.

(Chapter 2)

How long Peter sobbed, he had no idea. He only knew that with the dam of tears having flooded and flowed, he felt a great sense of relief. It was the first time ever he'd emptied himself of tears, he realized, and foolish though it may have appeared and seemed, it was like a great balm to his heart.

He finished the small amount of tuna salad then sat pondering what he could do until Tuesday afternoon arrived.

At thought of the appointment with Hannah Anna Barber, his heart seemed to jump into his throat. For the first time since he had written and given his qualifications, or lack of qualifications and experience to the woman, he felt fear and a sense of uneasiness. Why had he told her that he had had no experience whatever as a gardener and ground keeper? He could have told her something else; something more positive. But what? That he mowed lawns as a kid to get spending money for books dealing with building and such like things? That he weeded flower beds for a banker's wife in one place where his mother had moved them so he could buy a few new shirts and a pair of trousers before school began that fall? No, he couldn't tell her that. The rich knew nothing of poverty and the struggle to exist.

Peter sighed. A feeling of rightness washed over him as he thought about the answer he had given her in reply to her question, "How much training and experience have you had as a gardener and ground keeper?" On the line below the question, he wrote in careful, unwavering style, "None.
But I'm eager and willing to learn." And now . . . well, it was obvious he didn't
have the job. Still, the prospect of the interview was heartening and bright
with promise.

He read the letter over again. Then folding it carefully, he slipped it
back into the pocket.

The next few days found him roaming the streets (like a vagabond dog,
he thought, only he wasn't vagabond) going from door to door in search of
little odd jobs until his scheduled appointment on Tuesday. With his mother's
frequent moves, he hadn't lived in the area long enough to find decent work.

The days crawled by with tedium and monotony. Who wanted to give a
stranger work? he thought, not faulting the people when they told him, "No,
no work today."

Immediately, he made a firm resolve; it was much like he did when he
first remembered seeing his mother smoking and drinking. Something rose
up inside his eight-year-old heart that day that made him feel noble, if a bit
militant, and finding a secluded, dark corner in the dingy little bedroom, he
stood tall and erect, and with hands folded over his heart he vowed that
neither tobacco nor strong drink would ever touch his lips.

And he'd kept the vow. Now, with the same noble feeling washing over
him, he vowed that he'd locate honest work somewhere and settle down, to
never again pull his stakes and move unless it was out of dire necessity or
need. A man needed roots to dig in and grow.

Again, that feeling of rightness possessed him, making him smile. "I'd
say you're almost believing there is a God, Peter old boy," he teased himself
aloud the last night of his wait. "And if there is, you'll get that job tomorrow."

Then, feeling a bit guilty for reasons he couldn't explain, he said, "Now
that's no way to do a thing. I'm certain my father wouldn't have done thus.
One has no right to bargain and barter with a Divine being, if indeed there is
one. No, if I get or don't get the job, I will accept it like a man and seek
elsewhere." Thus thinking, he fell asleep.
Peter awoke early the following morning to the sound of someone pounding on his door and shouting, "Let me in, Mabel. I know you're in there."

He waited in almost breathless silence, his heart hammering in his chest like a sledge hammer. He looked at the Clock beside his bed. 4:00 A.M.

"Let me in!" the man demanded, his tongue thick-sounding and his words slurred. "I'll smash the door, Mabel..."

Getting to his feet, Peter called through the locked door, "Mabel doesn't live here. Now leave or I'll have to call the police."

"Where's Mabel?" the man demanded.

"I don't know where she is. But unless you quiet down, you'll wind up in jail. Now leave me alone."

Muttering loudly but incoherently, the man stumbled down the street. Peter watched till he disappeared behind a row of houses then he crawled back in bed, shivering from the experience. "Drink!" he exclaimed aloud in disgust. "It makes fools out of otherwise good men!"

Like on a screen, the nightmarish experience of his mother's drinking escapades flashed before him, vivid and painful, leaving him drained of color and strength momentarily. How he had longed to help her! But always, she kept him at "arm's length," telling him when he begged her to quit that it was her life and for him to mind his own business.

Not until the first streaks of approaching dawn began to show in the eastern sky, did Peter go back to sleep. And when he did so, it was only to sleep fitfully and dream about his mother. She was falling, falling, falling, sinking into the deep troughs of the sea, much like the boat had done a few days ago. He had tried to rescue her, catch her even, and pull her up. But she resisted him and thrust him away, screaming, "It's my life, Peter. Mind your own business."

He awoke with a start and sat up in bed. His night clothes were wet with sweat. He felt sick; sick at heart. "Mother!" he cried in anguish. "Mother,
don't! O God..." Trembling, he jumped out of bed. God? Was there really and truly a God? Did Someone care about him, Peter Yarbrost? Why did he always call His name if He didn't exist? Or did He?

He slumped into a chair, resting his face in the palms of his hands, and wept. Yes, wept. For the second time in his grown-up life, he wept. Oh, if only he knew the certainty of some things: Where was God, if indeed He was God? (There it was again, the same question spinning around inside his brain and making him feel he'd go mad if he didn't soon find out the answer.) Why did his mother keep him away from church? Hadn't Tommy Pitkin invited him to go with him when they lived in a small town somewhere in Texas (or was it Oklahoma?) when he was six years old?

Sitting there, feeling terribly frightened and alone, Peter relived that scene in painful detail. Such a simple question Tommy had asked: "Please Mrs. Yarbrost, may Peter go to Sunday School with me? Mom and Dad won't go and I'd like someone to go and sit with me. Please, Mrs. Yarbrost..."

His mother had gotten to her feet and, taking her hand, she slapped Tommy a resounding blow, shouting, "Get out of this house and don't ever come into it again. Of course, Peter can't go. Not now nor ever! Do you hear me, Tommy Pitkin? Never!"

Like a frightened and whipped puppy, Tommy darted across the low hedge and was gone. Peter had tried to follow him but his mother's angry voice caught up with him before he had time to disappear. "Get back in this house, Peter!" she shouted from the doorway. "I mean now. This instant!"

Once inside, trembling and visibly angry because she had driven away the only friend he had, Peter said quickly, "I guess I'll go if I want to!"

His mother's face had paled. She looked ghostlike. Whether from the shock of his first-time-ever talk-back, or for some other reason of which he knew nothing, she became limp looking, much like a crumbling wet dishrag, and fell into a chair her eyes liquid pools of unbelief. Then, like a lion disturbed from his food, she was on her feet, screaming at the top of her voice, "Don't you ever talk to me like that again, Peter!" she screamed. "And you won't go to church; not so long as you live under my roof. Now, I don't want to hear you mention church; not ever! Do you understand, young fellow?"
Frightened, he had nodded his head and walked through the door into the beautiful sunshine and the peace and quiet of the outside in search of Tommy. But he never saw his friend again. The next day, his mother had packed their few belongings inside the car and moved them on to another town.

Peter straightened his shoulders and slipped out of his nightclothes into a pair of slacks and a shirt, wondering again like he had done so many other times, why his mother deprived him of the friendship and fellowship of other children his age. It had bothered him. Always. Why couldn't he have friends like others? The closest things he had to a friend, outside of Tommy Pitkin, were his books. He loved his books and enjoyed reading. A good thing he did, he thought, making the bed and getting himself some breakfast.

He watched the clock, (how slowly the hands moved!) and when one-thirty-five P.M. rolled around, he slid beneath the wheel of his old but still-good, used car and headed toward the east end of the city. It would be located somewhere in the suburbs, he was sure.

His heart raced and thumped inside his chest. Would he be satisfactory or was the woman, out of sheer courtesy perhaps, going to interview him then tell him that due to his lack of experience she couldn't use him? "I'm sorry, Mr. Yarbrost," she would say, trying to convince him that she was truly sorry, "but I need an experienced gardener, someone who knows what to do without me having to be there and watch over him every single minute of the day. You do understand, don't you, Mr. Yarbrost? I'm an exceeding busy woman..., luncheons, bridge parties, clubs. In fact, I have many of my clubs and luncheons and parities in the garden. That's why it's so-o important that I have a gardener with know-how. Someone with experience and skill. Thank you for your interest, Mr. Yarbrost. I'm sorry if I have inconvenienced you in any way and I wish you success in finding employment."

Peter shivered slightly at thought of hearing the words. And it just was possible that he'd hear them. Or some like them.

He was tempted to turn around and forget that he had ever answered the ad... ever received a reply to his answer..., but something inside compelled him to go on. He had no steady employment now, his heart told
him, so what was there to lose? Nothing. The least he could find out was that he wasn't hired.

In his heart, the almost six-foot-two young man knew this was the one thing he didn't want to hear. He needed the job. It would give him the privacy and the security he wanted and was seeking for.

He took the bypass to where he turned off then hurried to Magnolia Boulevard. Driving more carefully now, lest he miss the road, he saw row upon row of beautiful stucco houses, all with picture-pretty flowers and shrubs and well-manicured lawns. He gasped in awe and wonder. He had never seen anything more lovely in all his life.

Bougainville Lane curved off the boulevard to his right and Peter, following it, was impressed with the magnificent trees that lined either side of the road. They formed a solid mass of umbrella-shade for him. He was impressed, deeply so.

He followed the gently-sloping, gracefully-winding lane, marveling how far off the Boulevard it was taking him. He finally came to a large wrought-iron gate with tall metal spires which stood like black sentinels guarding the stretch of road up which he had just come and keeping watchful duty over the happenings behind or within the gate.

"Now what?" Peter said, getting out of the car and going to the gate, only to find it locked securely and tightly.

He walked around the mammoth gate, looking for a latch or a handle, when he heard a faint click and the gates swung slowly ajar.

Getting back into the car, he followed the wellpaved, curving driveway to the top of the hill in front of the house, and parked. A black labrador retriever frolicked toward him from around the house, his inkyblack tail waving Peter a furiously-glad welcome. Then a woman emerged from the front doorway.

Peter gasped. He wasn't prepared for what he saw.

(Chapter 3)
"You are Peter Yarbrost?"

The question, asked so softly, so caressingly by the neatly and simply-dressed woman on crutches, left Peter almost speechless.

"I... I am," he stuttered, taking in the simplicity of her dress, the wealth of golden hair with sprinkles of silver shining through, and the gentle curve of her mouth. She looked like a madonna, he thought. No, an angell But angels didn't use crutches. At least, he didn't think they did. But then, how would he know? He never attended a single church service in his whole nineteen years of natural life.

"I see you are punctual," the woman observed, consulting the simple timepiece surrounding her left wrist. "I like punctuality. It takes discipline to be punctual."

Really! Peter thought. Well, he had never stopped to think of it that way. But then, when one thought and pondered it through, she was right; it did take discipline to be punctual.

"As you may have guessed, I Am Hannah Anna Barber." Then, with a merry twinkle in her morning glory-blue eyes and a beautiful smile on her face, she said, "You look disappointed, Peter... you don't mind if I call you Peter, I hope; Mr. Yarbrost sounds so very formal. So distant. Were you expecting someone quite . . . different?" she asked pleasantly,

Peter was embarrassed. How had she known? Was she perhaps a mind reader; someone into E.S.P.? Mental telepathy?

"I am pleased to meet you, Mrs. Barber," he replied, trying to regain his composure. "And you may call me Peter, if you like, Frankly, I'm not disappointed in you, it's just that I am a bit surprised."

"And how's that?"

"Well..."

"You expected a fashionable woman with sequined clothes and diamonds in her hair," Hannah teased, "a woman with a razor-edged tongue, curt manners and 'high brow' friends. Now that we understand each other a
"It's beautiful here," Peter commented, walking beside the woman.

"Thank you, Peter. I'm very fond of the place. Ooops!" she exclaimed as one of her crutches caught in a crack of the cobblestone walk and threw her off balance momentarily. "I'm not accustomed to these things," she added. "And it will be a real joy and blessing when I don't need them anymore. But still, they're better than carrying that heavy cast around for weeks and weeks. Ever break a leg?" she asked teasingly. "Well, don't try it."

She laughed. It was so soft and so pleasant that it reminded Peter of the wind singing ever so gently through the pine trees.

Since she was awkward on crutches, their progress was slow and Peter was thankful. It gave him time to observe his immediate surroundings. What he saw filled his heart with an indescribable longing. He'd never seen beauty, in comparison, to what he was drinking in here. It was a veritable paradise. He wanted the position. Oh, he did!

"God," he said silently, "please . . ."

"Well, here we are at last," Hannah said comfortingly, dropping into an exquisite turquoise chaise lounge, being careful to place her crutches beside her on the clean-scrubbed pale pink sandstone patio.

A mockingbird sang lustily in clear lilting tones in a tree above them and all around, hanging from trees and on rods and poles, were baskets and pots of blooming begonias, fuchsia and ferns, petunias and ivies. Peter felt he was dreaming."You like it, Peter?"

The woman was smiling again.

"I... I'm overwhelmed, Mrs. Barber."

"You may call me Hannah, Peter. This sounds far less formidable to one so young as you. And out seeking employment, too! You're quite a courageous young man. Another admirable quality and characteristic."
"Thank you. But frankly, I don't know how you've come to that conclusion. What made you decide this? It is a nice compliment, however."

Hannah Barber threw her head back; her rippling laughter filled the patio. "Don't you know, Peter?" she asked. "That's easy to figure out. Anybody who would answer an ad the way you did, and admit to having no experience whatever to qualify him for the position, well, that took courage. Real courage! Why did you admit you didn't have experience?" she asked quickly, her blues eyes watching his face carefully. "You could have said you knew all about tending gardens and keeping grounds..."

Peter sat on the edge of the thickly padded lawn chair. With unwavering voice, he said, "No; I couldn't have. It would have been a lie. And for all I may not know about the right and the wrong of a thing, I know it's wrong to lie. My conscience tells me so. And since I must live with my conscience and myself, well, I try to keep things as peaceful as I can."

"That's saying a great deal for a boy of your age. Let's see, you listed your age as 19. Right?"

"That is correct."

"Parents living?"

"My mother; I can't vouch for my father."

"Separated?"

"I suppose that's what you'd call it. Frankly, I don't know what you'd call it." Then, without knowing just why he did it, Peter told Hennah everything, adding, "So now you see why I say I don't know what to call the set-up between my parents. I've never seen or met my father to my recollection."

"But they were married? Your father and your mother?"

"Yes. One time something slipped from mother's lips about my dad and her on their honeymoon. Feeling she must have said too much for my ears to hear, she changed the subject abruptly, getting violently angry with me when I persisted in knowing about my father."
"And where is your mother now, Peter? Are you living together?"

"We were until a few days ago. A week and a half ago, she moved away, leaving no forwarding address nor anything. I don't know where she is. Don't have the faintest idea even."

"You have an apartment, I suppose?"

' 'A small one. Yes."

"Do you enjoy gardens?"

"I'm sure I will if I have the opportunity to be in one. I never had a real garden to work in and enjoy. But I'm quite a lover of forests and trees and woodland flowers."

Hannah Barber studied Peter carefully. Then she said, "Let's have a look at the nearby gardens. There's acres and acres to be looked after, as you can imagine. But I shall show you only what is nearest the house. My leg won't tolerate the long walks just yet." Pulling herself up on the crutches, she led the way down a winding walkway.

At every bend in the path, Peter became more amazed and awesmitten. This couldn't be reality, he told himself over and over again and again. It was like something one would read about in a book; a sort of unbelievable wonderland. Flowers, flowers, everywhere flowers, of every variety, color and description. They nodded as he passed from lowly earth-bound, well-mulched, weed-free beds and sprinkled redolence upon him from tall-growing bushes, all carefully tended and perfectly landscaped to blend harmoniously into the total geography.

"I can't believe this is real!" Peter exclaimed softly. "It's the most beautiful place I've ever seen."

"Like I told you earlier, I'm quite fond of it here. ' '"

A little farther on, Peter saw the turquoise head of a peacock. Then another and another. "You must be fond of peacocks, also," he said lightly, reaching a hand out to stroke the shining head.
"Yes and no. It was Arthur's idea that we have some on the grounds. He loved them. Arthur was my devoted husband. He passed away six months ago."

"I'm sorry, Hannah."

She sighed tiredly. "I miss him terribly. But I know where he is."

Eagerly Peter said, "How can you know? I mean, well, does anyone know? Really know?" His eyes searched the older woman's face earnestly. Soberly.

"How can one know? you ask. Why, Peter, it's simple: 'He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him' (St. John 3:36). Arthur loved the Lord and served Him faithfully for better than 60 years. So I know he's with the Lord in Heaven."

"This Son, Who is He? I mean..." Resting on her crutches, Hannah looked Peter over from head to foot and from foot to head. "You mean you don't know about Jesus Christ, God's only beloved Son?" she asked in shocked but kind amazement.

"I never heard of Him," came the sad reply. "In fact, I know nothing about God. Nothing! If there really is a God nor..."

"There is a God, Peter. A very real and wonderful God. In fact, He is so wonderful that He sent His only begotten Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, into the world to die for sinners, whom we all were, and are, until we are born again of God. Then we become new in Christ; had a change of heart."

Well, it sounds wonderful! Who can experience this? I mean, is it expensive? What does it cost?"

"All who will may experience it, Peter. And it costs no money whatever. The invitation is, 'Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat...' (Isaiah 55:1)."
"Th... thank you..., for those beautiful words, Hannah. Yes, thank you." Peter replied, his heart pounding inside his chest. There was a God! he thought exultantly. There was a God!

"We'll go down this path," Hannah said, turning to the right and once more leading the way, supported by her crutches. The peacocks followed.

"The peacocks are beautiful," Peter declared. "Their voices aren't. And their vanity is rather annoying at times. So much like some humans." Here Hannah smiled. "I suppose you sense my utter distaste for pride," she said, coming quite suddenly into a small clearing where a neat, clean cottage stood.

Painted in stark white, with gleaming, lemon-yellow shutters and a tile roof, the cottage had a regal bearing. Growing along its cobblestone front walk were daffodils, hyacinths, jonquils and tulips. Snuggling up close to the front of the house were low-growing azaleas of almost the same color flowers as were the shutters.

Peter sucked his breath in at the sight. Never had he seen such beauty and color. He thought of the many and varied run-down apartments his mother had moved him into; apartments where nothing grew or existed, nothing but the asphalt or concrete sidewalks and walkways. Sometimes they weren't fortunate enough to have even a paved sidewalk; it was nothing but hard-packed earth in dry weather and mudholes in wet, rainy weather.

"This is the gardener's home," Hannah explained, throwing open the door and motioning Peter through.

"You mean... he... lives here? the gardener?"

Hannah looked a bit amused. "Yes, of course, Peter. Arthur and I have always kept the gardener and his wife on our premises. He's never really done. His work, I mean. Oh, we've never driven him; he had regular hours..., from eight to five..., with an hour off for lunch. But Burt got too old. Had to quit. Cried like a baby. But his legs can't take all the walking nor climbing trees anymore."

With a flourish of her hand, Mrs. Barber said, "Still interested Peter? The job's yours if you think you can handle it."
Interested? Peter felt like falling at Hannah's feet and kissing her shoes. "Oh yes!" he found himself exclaiming. "Th... thank you, Hannah. Thank you! I promise, I'll do all you tell me to do. I'm willing to learn."

"Burt will be here tomorrow to get your work lined up and to show you what to do and how. He'll be in every day for two weeks, to 'break you in.' After that, you'll be on your own. I would suggest that you get moved in here yet today. Also, get your hair cut. I want my men to look like men, not hippies."

"Yes, Ma'am," Peter answered, pushing the hair off his forehead and feeling suddenly uncomfortable and out-of-place around the simply attired woman, with his long hair.

"Around back is a parking place for your car," Hannah said, pulling the door of the house shut and walking toward the back of the cottage, still following the cobblestone walk with its borderlined flowers dancing and nodding as they passed.

"As you will notice, Peter, I am returning by a different path than the one down which I brought you. Notice, too, the driveway; this is yours. You will come up the main driveway off Bougainvilla Lane, of course, until you come to the first road to your right. This is your road."

"Thank you, Hannah. Thank you most kindly!" Peter said emphatically, tears brimming in his eyes.

They reached the sun-filtered patio and before he left, Peter took Hannah's hand in both of his and in a hoarse whisper said, "You don't know what this means to me. Again, accept my thanks. I'll not disappoint you."

"I know you won't, Peter. And if you need anything, well, you know where I live. I had Melissa dress your bed and bring towels down. Thought a 19-year-old boy may not have an abundance of linens. Get moved as quickly as you can."

"I will. Oh, I will. And, like I said, I won't disappoint you. You have been so kind." On an impulse, Peter drew Hannah's small hand up to his lips and
kissed it. Then he rushed along the side of the house, got into his car and drove away.

Hannah and Jet watched as he left. A tear rolled down the woman's cheek. "You won't disappoint me, Peter; I know that! No, you won't!" she exclaimed brokenly, adding, "Oh, God, guide the boy. Use me."

Picking up her crutches, she went into the house. Jet followed close behind.

(Chapter 4)

All the way down Bougainvilia Lane, Peter felt he was dreaming. He wanted to laugh and cry and shout for joy, he was so happy. First he rejoiced to know..., actually know... there was a God; next he rejoiced over the fact that he had gotten the job. Now for the learning, he thought soberly. Instinctively, he appealed, "Oh, God, now that I know You do exist, and that You are real, please help me to learn the art of gardening and of being a ground keeper. And, God, teach me about Yourself. I'm so ignorant; but I want to learn. I've missed out on so many good things. Lead me."

Turning off onto the Boulevard, Peter realized that he had made..., or prayed..., his first real prayer. His other outcries had been only quick appeals for emergency help.

A quick glance at the clock in the car revealed that he had little time left to get his hair cut. The barber shops would soon be closing. Taking an exit where he saw a shopping center, he drove around until he found what he was looking for. Then he parked the car and hurried inside.

Sliding into an empty chair, the barber asked, "Styled, blocked, tapered, permanent.?”

"Cut, Sir. A conservative man's kind of haircut."

"You kidding? Styled and blocked would be becoming to you."

"Cut, Sir."
"Well, it's your head and your hair," the barber remarked quickly. "I hope you won't be sorry."

"I won't, and I'm not. Thanks for your concern."

All the while the barber shears hummed and cut, Peter's heart was singing. Again, he had that indefinable feeling of rightness, like this was the way he should have looked all along. He closed his eyes, his mind going over the events of the past few hours in careful detail.

"Six dollars," the barber said, brushing the hair off his shoulders.

Peter glanced at himself in the mirror, paid the barber and left.

Packing was no problem at all for him. With few earthly belongings and possessions of his own, he had the car packed and loaded in less than an hour. Turning the key in to the landlady, he told her she could keep the few pieces of bedding he’d had; she would find them folded on the mattress.

The sun was sinking by the time he drove up Bougainvilla Lane. Fireflies dotted the lawn, their little lanterns blinking on and off sporadically, and the air was redolent with the scent of flowers and freshly mown grass. "What a lovely place," Peter said aloud, finding the road which would take him to his cottage. His home.

The thought of having a home of his own overwhelmed him, and when he parked the car and saw a faint light burning inside the cottage windows, it was more than he could take. Leaning over the steering wheel, he wept for joy.

Pulling himself together, he began unloading his few belongings and carrying them into the cottage.

The scent of food started the gastric juices flowing inside the young man. He realized with a sudden, keen and gnawing awareness that he was hungry. And little wonder, either. He had forgotten to eat anything since the scanty breakfast he’d had.

A look around the spotlessly clean and carefully furnished kitchen, drew his eye to the table. On its clean lemon-yellow cloth was a plate and a silver
setting, a glass tumbler and a cup and saucer. A note beside the plate read, 'Supper's in the oven, coffee's in the pot, iced tea's in the refrigerator. Help yourself.'

A peek inside the warm oven revealed a roasting pan with a small roast inside, browned to perfection and surrounded by golden yellow carrots, whole potatoes and onions, all gently steaming in a rich brown gravy. His mouth watered.

"First things first," he told his growling stomach. "You'll have to wait until I'm fully moved in and set up."

He hurried from the lovely kitchen into a cozy living room, pausing to catch his breath, which seemed to have left him in the delight he was having over each new discovery. He had been no farther than the lovely kitchen when HAnnah and he had walked here this afternoon, and now the beauty of the living room left him almost weak with glad surprise.

Carpeted from one wall to the next in eye-pleasing, restful earth tones, the furnishing looked new and totally suited for the room. Along one wall, a stone fireplace occupied floor to ceiling space and on either side of the fireplace, recessed into the wall, were book shelves with sliding glass doors. Peter could hardly believe it. A place for his books! Not beneath a bed in a dusty box, but on tea/bookshelves.

Setting the box on the floor in front of the bookcase, Peter hurried to the car for the other two boxes. How thankful he was that his desire for reading had been for good books, books he need not be embarrassed to grace the beautiful shelves that would hold and contain them, he thought.

Hanging the last of his few clothes on the rod inside the ample clothes closet in the beautiful, airy-light bedroom, Peter hurried back into the kitchen, taking the roaster from the oven and eating a meal like he hadn't had in days.

It was when he opened the refrigerator to pour himself a glass of refreshing iced mint tea that he discovered a well-stocked refrigerator. The kitchen cup boards likewise. He stood back and surveyed it all in utter shock and Amazement. He hadn't seen so much food in a cupboard or a refrigerator in all his life. Again, he felt like he was dreaming. But the
delicious food and refreshing tea told him it Was real. And it was his. Bowing his head, hesaid, "Thank You, God. Thank YOU."

He washed and dried his few dirty dishes, found where each belonged inside the closed cabinets and drawers, and left the kitchen in as tidy and neat order as he had found it. Then he settled down to dusting off each book carefully and placing it proudly inside the glass-encased book shelf, carrying the emptied boxes to a trash container he saw while unloading the car. He almost missed seeing the container, so cleverly concealed was it by a grouping of beautiful flowering azaleas and hibiscus.

He walked from room to room in a state of euphoria, thankful beyond words that he had discovered the tiny ad in the paper and that he had had the "courage," as Mrs. Barber said, to answer it and make inquiry about the position. Then he sat down on the long sofa in the living room and looked around.

On one of the end tables beside the sofa lay a book. It was open, like someone had been reading from it. Reaching over, Peter picked it up. Immediately, his eyes fell upon the words, "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come buy wine and milk without money and without price."

Why, that was what Mrs. Barber had quoted to him! Peter realized. The verse was marked in blue with a marking pencil. Beside it, he found a brief notation: See St. John's Gospel--chapter 4, verse 14, it read.

St. John's Gospel; where was it found?

While he was deciding how to locate the Gospel, his eye fell upon another clearly-marked Scripture verse; no, two of them! They were located not far from the first one that had captured his attention. "Seek ye the Lord while He may be found," he read, "call ye upon Him while He is near:

"Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon."

" 'Let the wicked forsake his way,' " Peter said aloud. "I... I guess that means me."
He read the three underlined Scripture verses over again and again, and each time he did so, he felt like he must do something about it, like he must heed the injunction to come and to forsake. But what did one do? How did he begin? And where?

He was so ignorant about spiritual things! he thought while a great inner hunger took possession of him. It was like no hunger he had ever endured, and he had gone hungry on many an occasion when his mother had spent the food and rent money to quench her burning lust for liquor. But this hunger was different. Oh, so different. It brought tears to his eyes and a peculiarly-strange feeling to his heart. A feeling that he needed something. Or Someone.

"God," he said, looking upward, "will You help me please? "I don't know where to begin, nor how; show me! Teach me! Please! Something's lacking inside of me. Here it says for me to come; I'm coming. It says for the wicked to forsake his way; I forsake it,

God. Now what do I do next? Oh, God, help me. Help me! I feel... lost! Save me!"

Peter looked around him. Had God slipped into the room while he was pleading for help and had his eyes closed? His burden was gone! He had peace inside! A deep settled, constantly-flowing peace! Joy, too! Oh, something happened to him. Something wonderful and glorious. It was like bells were ringing in his heart. Bells of joy and peace and gladness!

He got to his feet and, with the Bible clutched tightly to his chest, he paced back and forth through the cottage, weeping for pure joy. He was free. Free--in Christ. "Thank you, God!" he exclaimed over and over.

How amazing and wonderful, he thought. For nineteen years he had been in total spiritual darkness, and now the Light dawned. After nineteen years of living like a heathen, he was made new in Christ!

For a solid hour Peter wept and praised, praised and wept. Then, deciding that he must know more of the wonderful Book called the Holy Bible, he settled on the sofa to read, searching for St. John's Gospel by leafing carefully through the Bible until he located the Book, chapter and verse. "But
whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst;" the verse read, "but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life."

It was as if scales fell off his eyes. Why, he thought joyously, I have eternal and everlasting life!

Now I know why Hannah Barber said she knows where her husband is.

Intrigued and blest by what he had read, he turned to the very first chapter of the Gospel and began to read: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

On and on he read, through the Gospel. Once, then twice, receiving new light and greater insight into what he was reading each time he went through it. It was the most wonderful Book he had ever read, he decided, going through it a third time. Now he understood who God's Son was, and what a terrible price he had paid for his sins and his salvation. It bowed his heart with shame and opened the fountain of his tears anew. O what a great God, and what a Saviour!

Why had his mother deprived him of all this? he wondered, feeling a heavy burden grip his heart for her. Had she known about salvation and the Bible? He was sure she had, else why would she have been so bitter against the church and its teachings? Had she, too, like the wicked ones in John's Gospel, cried, "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!" Or had she, like Judas Iscariot, betrayed Him?

A shudder escaped Peter's body. Glancing at his watch, he noted the lateness of the hour and reverently placed the Bible back on the table. Then turning the light off he took a shower, went to bed and fell asleep to the liltingly-soft melody of a mockingbird singing to its mate in a crape myrtle bush outside his windows.

(Chapter 5)

Long before it was time to get up, Peter was awake and dressed, the joy of his new-found peace and soul-rest making him too happy and blest to lie in bed long. He wondered, when he went to bed last night, if it would remain with him constantly and to his delight and gratitude it had.
He made the bed, ate a quick breakfast, cleaned up the dishes and settled down to Bible reading. Through the Gospel of John he went again, reading certain passages over a second and third time, drinking in each and every thing he read.

A gentle knock on the kitchen door brought him back to his immediate surroundings. He hurried to answer the knock, the Bible still in his hands.

"Good morning, I'm Burt," the kind-faced man standing before him said.

"Good morning, Burt, I'm Peter. Peter Yarbrost. I'm glad to meet you. Can you come in?"

"Thank you, Son, not this morning. Hannah wants me to teach you what needs taught. Some of the work will come natural-like to you after a while." Surveying and studying him for a moment, Burt commented, "You'll make a fine gardener, Son. Yes, a fine gardener and groundkeeper. I see you've been reading. Do you like to read?"

"Indeed I do! And I've never read anything like this Book!" Peter exclaimed with tears brimming out of his eyes. "It has brought me peace way down deep inside. I have everlasting life, Burt! Got it last night while reading this Book and talking to God about how I felt."

Burr took a red handkerchief from his hip pocket and blew his nose. "Well, God said His Word would not return unto Him void. It doesn't, and it hasn't. Blessed be God forever and ever. Are you ready to go to work?"

"I am, Burt," Peter declared, placing the Bible carefully on the table and following the kind, white-haired man down a winding, meandering, shade-covered path.

"Better show you the greenhouse first and instruct you as to the care of the plants," Burt informed the eager young learner as he turned abruptly off the bark-packed path onto a cobblestone path which led to the greenhouse.

Peter, walking close to his companion's side, paused momentarily to glance across the emerald lawn. "I've never seen anything so lovely as these grounds," he remarked to Burt.
Burt paused outside the greenhouse and looked at Peter. "Hannah once had a man helping me who saw this place only as a source of keeping money in his pocket," he said. "It was merely 'just another job,' his exact words."

The pensive note in Burt's soft voice surprised Peter. "How do you see it, Peter?" he asked quickly, insistently.

Peter's reply was instant, almost fierce with intensity and honesty. "It's the most beautiful place I've ever seen. It's like a... an earthly paradise. I'll work hard to keep it this way. What was wrong with that other man--your helper? How did he view it--the grounds, I mean?"

Burt considered the question. "More like a blinded man might. Intuitively. Or through details so familiar he didn't notice them at all. It showed up in his work in no time at all, too. Hannah had to let him go."

Speaking with equally fierce intensity now, the old gardener said, "Love shows itself in everything we do, Peter. If we love someone, we are kind and gentle toward that one, finding and making ways to demonstrate that love; if we love... and enjoy... our work, it too feels the impact of active love... jobs are done efficiently and thoroughly, with little 'extras' thrown in and, instead of seeing how little we can do to improve a thing, we say 'I can't do enough.'"

"It's noble to work, Son. And I see you have the makings of a fine gardener. There'll be a man in once a week to keep the limbs and sticks and such things hauled away. You gather them together in designated places which I'll be acquainting you with and old Mr. Vickers hauls them away. It's amazing how fast these things collect. But then with all the trimming and cutting out of the old dead limbs, well, you'll see what I mean when we make our rounds. But come, let's go inside."

Peter gasped in awe and wonder at what met his gaze inside the greenhouse and for a brief moment, he felt like he was transported into a jungle garden. It smelled earthy and woodslke, with a tall clump of banana plants thriving luxuriantly in a far corner and bearing fruit, and orchids and begonias growing and blossoming in abundance among the ferns and lilies and myriad other flowers and plants.
Burt turned and saw the look of amazement. "It is lovely," he commented. "Sometimes I could hardly believe this was all real. My wife and I loved the place. It's been home for us for better than 30 years. But Sarah died..., my wife..., and age is taking its toll on these legs of mine. I had to quit."

"But where do you live now, Burt? I mean, well, the cottage is big enough for both of us . . ."

Burt's eyes filled with tears. "You're a good boy!" he praised. "And I see that Hannah knew what she was doing when she hired you. Thanks, Peter, but I better stay where I Rm. My sister and her husband have been so gracious to open their home to me. I do odd jobs around the house and keep their lawn and garden. Keeps my mind occupied and off my loss of Sarah. She was such a good woman! Don't settle for nothing but a good woman, Son, when you seek a wife. It will mean the difference between either a heaven or a hell on earth for you."

Peter shivered. How well he knew the nightmares and the horrors of living with a mother whose literal and actual god was strong drink. How dreadful it would be to have a wife like that! Again, he shivered. Instinctively, he thought of Hannah Barber and her kind, genteel, womanly manner. She was good, and goodness, through and through. His heart told him so. Though he had just met her yesterday, he knew she was a great woman.

How different his life would have been, he thought silently, if he'd have had a mother such as Mrs. Barber--a mother who loved her son and cared about his up-bringing, using the Bible as her guidebook of instruction and guidance in training him. As it was, he, like the little waif in a story he had read years ago, "just growed up."

Tears shimmered in Peter's eyes as he followed Burt, listening to the experienced man's careful instructions and observing his expertise as he worked among the flowers and plants, taking in and making mental notes of all he observed and heard, and filling them carefully and painstakingly away in the great mental cabinet of his brain. He had been endowed with a "keen mind" one of his teachers had once told him, calling it a "photostatic mind." Whatever it was, Peter was thankful to God for a mind that remembered and recalled things, even after hearing or seeing a thing only once. It was there, in the mental files, to be brought out and put to use when needed.
From the greenhouse, Burt gave him a tour of the entire grounds, acres and acres of it, much of which had tall pines growing on it.

Peter stood like one mesmerized. The pines, they were whispering to him! Actually whispering as the soft breezes played through their needly branches high above him. Beneath his feet was a carpet of thick red-brown needles, needing no padding to form the sponge-like cushioning for his feet.

"As you can see, Peter, there is no lawn to mow out here. The pine needles pretty well make their own carpet; no need of grass here. But you will have to see to it that all dead or dying limbs and branches are cut out of the trees. One pile will be placed at that tiny marker over yonder. See it?" Burt asked, pointing to a small upright piece of concrete or marble. Peter wasn't sure which it was.

"It's marble," Burt answered, seeming to read Peter's mind. "You'll find them at numerous and various places. I'll point them out to you as we go along. And, like I told you earlier, much of this will come to you as natural-like as when you breathe. One never stops and thinks, I've got to breathe, does he, Peter?"

Peter laughed. "No, of course not."

"Well, silly as that may have sounded to you, I was trying to make a point. Just as you never pause to think that you've got to take that next breath, so this work will become a part of you. Without realizing it, you'll come out here in the mornings and go about the work just as naturally as when you breathe. It becomes a part of you, Peter. I tell you, it does. And what a part! God walks with you, talks to you and helps you. You grow, too, Peter--strong and powerful and mighty in the Lord."

"I believe you, Burt; already I feel it."

After a while, Burt consulted his trusty pocket watch. "My stomach and that sun tell me it's time for something to eat. How about you, Son? Hungry?"

"I... I guess I'm not, Burt. I'm too excited. So much has taken place since this time yesterday. So many wonderful things have happened to me that I feel I'm dreaming. Kinda like I'm reading fiction or a fairytale about a boy who never knew what kindness and love were in his home, and suddenly
it's showered upon him from everywhere he looks and turns." Tears were spilling down Peter's cheeks when he finished.

Burt laid a gentle fatherly hand on his young shoulders. It was like a caress.

Oh, if only he'd had a father like Butt, Peter thought, while his shoulders shook with sobs.

Burt let him cry. Then he said, "God has wonderful surprises for His children, Peter. This is just a part of what He has for you."

"But I didn't know Him, Burt--not until last night when I read the Bible. I didn't even know if there really was a God until Mrs. Barber told me there was yesterday afternoon. I never heard His name mentioned in any way except in foul, vile language and cursing. Strange as it may sound to you, Burt... yet it's true... every time I heard God's name mentioned and used in this awful way something within me cringed, and I shrank away from the people who so used this great name.

"My mother called me a sissy and a coward because I wouldn't smoke and curse nor drink and gamble. But I tell you, Burt, something inside me told me there was a better way, that life had a higher, nobler purpose than the one which my mother was leading." Peter shivered. "Drink's a beast!" he exclaimed passionately. "I've seen it drive my mother like a demon. It robbed her of every one of her motherly instincts... love, gentleness, kindness, compassion, care... you name it. For so long as I can remember, I was a nuisance to her, a hindrance and a burden. Yet I love my mother. And since last night, when I became new in Christ, I want to tell her about God's gift of salvation and how He can change her life. Forgive me for telling you all this, Burt; I should not have done so. It seems disrespectful to my mother."

"You may tell me anything you care to, Peter," the older man said, wiping tears from his eyes. Then quite abruptly he asked, "Is your father... well, I mean, what does your father think and say about your mother's bad habits and..., and her deportment and behavior?"

Peter turned honest eyes upon the man. "I don't know, Burt. You see, I've never seen nor met my father-unless my infant eyes looked into his face when I was too young to remember, of course."
Butt blew his nose and wiped his eyes. "Then perhaps you will give me the honor of being a surrogate father to you."

"Surrogate, Burt?"

"Yes, a substitute father. I'd feel greatly honored."

Peter's eyes were shining, not like a 19-year-old's, but like a small boy's. "Gladly. Willingly, Burt! However, it is I who am the honored one. Thank you."

"That means," Burt said as they walked back toward the cottage, "that any time anything bothers you, you are to contact me and we'll talk it over together and pray about it. That's what fathers are for."

"Really? Well, I often wondered about this. But having no father with whom to talk and consult, well, I just haven't known."

"You know now, Peter," Burt said, slapping the broad shoulders of the youth in a fatherly way.

They swung along at an even pace, side by side, toward the cottage. Suddenly Peter spoke, "Tell me something, Burt. When a woman sinks as low as my mother has sunk, is there hope of her ever coming back?"

"Of course there is, Peter. I've known some pretty low-down, good-for-nothing characters whom God has saved and cleansed and changed. Today they're flaming evangelists, fearless ministers and sacrificial missionaries. God can transform and change the vilest and the most sinful into humble and meek saints."

"But why didn't He do something to stop my mother before she sank so low?"

"Perhaps He did, Peter. But we are free moral agents. It's ours to decide if we follow Jesus and take the 'strait and narrow' way or if we go the devil's 'broad way' that leadeth to destruction."

"I see," Peter replied as, once again, he swung in step with Burt.
Arriving at the cottage, they discovered the table set for two. Wearing a gay floral-patterened cloth on its surface, the table looked jauntily casual, like it had been waiting for the two working men to come in, sit down and relax. Another note informed the pair that lunch awaited them inside the oven, with frosty-cold mint tea and dessert hiding behind the air-tight refrigerator door.

"Was your food always served to you this way?" Peter asked, spooning fork-tender pork and sauerkraut over his creamy mound of mashed potatoes.

Burt laughed, "I had Sarah, Son," he stated meaningfully. "I suppose Hannah thinks a young lad like you and an old man like me I don't know how to cook." A twinkle came into his eyes. "Guess she forgot about the time when Henri, a chef they once had, got sick and Sarah and I had to take over and prepare the meal for the missionary conference delegates. Had 74 of them, Peter, and what a time we all had!"

"I'm sure you did, Burt. Tell me, was Mr. Barber a Christian all his life?"

"For so long as I knew him, he was. And that's a good many years, Peter."

Peter ate in silence now, thinking just how wonderful it would have been to have known Hannah's husband and to have learned about God and His goodness from him. But little matter that he hadn't had this privilege; the main thing for anyone was to know God, and he had done this last night.

As soon as the meal was finished and the last dish wiped and put away, the two hurried once more outside. This time, Peter learned when to prune certain trees and bushes and the proper procedure in pruning. It fascinated him. Already he felt a possessiveness toward every living green thing, much like the future well-being and productiveness hinged largely on the care he gave them. With the feeling came a sense of diligence. Burr, missing nothing, sensed it and saw it and was glad.

The two parted at the cottage door just before dusk crept in among the azaleas, the hibiscus and the crape myrtles, tired but happy and uplifted.
Peter showered and changed clothes; then he reheated a bit of the left-over kraut for his supper before washing his work clothes out and hanging them on a line outside to dry. He would have to get another change as soon as he could manage it, he decided, hoping Hannah would not notice the ones hanging on the line.

He sat on the back porch step in the gathering twilight, watching the fireflies light their tiny lanterns and listening to the hushed, sweet call of a wood thrush singing in the woods behind his cottage. It was all so sweet and heavenly that his heart felt it couldn't take it all in. It was almost a "from rags to riches" sort of thing, he soliloquized happily--a sort of Cinderella fairy tale that was real.

What had made him answer the ad? he wondered suddenly, still marveling over the fact that he saw it even, so snugly was it hidden away among a jumble of other fine print. Was it possible that God had been taking note of him all along? he wondered, feeling a thrill of excitement wash over him at the thought. And could it be that God had instilled the utter loathing and total distaste for cursing and drinking and smoking in his heart as a small child? Could such a thing be possible? he wondered. If so, then he had been under constant surveillance of the Ahnighty, even though he was not aware of such a great happening in his growing-up years.

Peter's deep thoughts were interrupted and disturbed by a soft voice.

"Excuse me," the shy girl said softly, "but I knocked on the front screen door and, not receiving an answer, I walked along the path to the back where, quite obviously, I found you. I'm Melissa Cartright, Mrs. Barber's private secretary and Girl Friday. She would like to see you up at the house, please."

Peter stood to his feet quickly. Was she displeased with him? he wondered; with something he had done or left undone, unknowingly?

"Th... thank you, Melissa. I'm Peter Yarbrost. And if you don't mind, I'll walk along with you. I suppose it's you whom I need to thank for all the food I'm enjoying and which, I may add, could very easily spoil me forever for wanting to cook again. It's really very lovely and wonderful to come in and sit down and eat without a minute's worry or concentration on what to cook, and how to prepare it."
Melissa laughed softly. "I'm only the 'carrier,' Peter; Mrs. Barber is the donor--the giver."

"Well, thanks for carrying it down," Peter said. "And thanks for changing the tablecloth, too. Not that it needed it," he added, laughing softly and trying to forget that he would soon be at the house and come face to face with the kind woman who had the power to release him if she so desired.

"Mrs. Barber's quite a woman for change, Peter. She wants everything attractive and neat and homelike for her help, seeing to it that little things, like the tablecloth, for instance, don't become dull and monotonous. When I said change, I didn't mean in important things--spiritual or biblical things. On these, she will never change. But in any way that she can keep her help contented and happy, well, she'll make little change--something added to this room, that table or desk. I doubt you'll notice anything too drastic though in the cottage since she condiers that a sort of private dwelling, detached from the house. Then again, I don't know. You're alone, Peter, and Mrs. Barber has high respect and great praise for you already, . . ."

Her sentence trailed in the shadowy trees above them as they crossed the patio and entered the house through a sliding doorway at the back.

Sitting in a reclining chair of rosy pink, her eyes closed as though in meditation and thought., or was it prayer?... Mrs. Barber seemed totally oblivious to the two standing before the enormous stone fireplace, watching her ....

Should he speak? Peter wondered. Let Mrs. Barber know he was here?

Melissa touched his arm lightly, motioning him to follow her.

They slipped quietly out of the comfortable, cozy sitting room onto the patio.

Stars twinkled above them, fireflies flitted around them, and in the distance came the insistentely plaintive call of a whippoorwill, followed and answered by another from the opposite direction. Peter was almost scared to breathe, afraid he'd break the spell. He wanted to keep the moment forever. It was such a contrast to the way his life had always been., such a beautiful
contrast..., that he wanted to fold it to him, to wrap it around his memory to never be forgotten.

From somewhere nearby, he heard the soft strumming of a banjo and two voices blending together sweetly in song. He closed his eyes, feeling more like he was in Heaven than on earth. Tears rolled past the closed eyelids and danced down his ruddy cheeks. His mother had told him only sissies cried, but he had learned this wasn't so. No, it wasn't. Great men cried! Wept. Only last night, he had read about it in John's Gospel. He had read it and wept--with the One, Divine yet so human, that the fountainhead of His tears gushed forth and mingled with those of the broken-hearted sisters and friends.

The singing continued, softly, pleadingly: "There is a fountain filled with blood . . . Drawn from Immanuel's veins . . ."

There was a blending of spirits, a oneness about the workers in the big house. "Who is that?" he asked in little more than a whisper, so holy and reverent was the atmosphere.

"It's Silas and Amy, the cook and her husband. He's Mrs. Barber's maintenance man. Would you like to meet them?" Melissa asked eagerly.

"Oh, could I, please?"

"They'll be delighted to get to know you. They're a wonderful couple, Peter. So spiritual and Spiritfilled."

"Everybody I've met here is wonderful," Peter declared, following Melissa to the west end of the house.

"There they are," Melissa whispered, pointing to a small patio which was completely surrounded and enclosed by forsythia, jasmine, azaleas and lilacs. The air was redolent with the delicious perfume of the blooming flowers.

"Amy loves her lilacs," Melissa told Peter softly. "And Mrs. Barber indulges us with our 'loves' and likes. They're good indulgences only; I'm sure you've already discovered this. The woman wouldn't have a single sinful thing
on the place. She hates sin like she hates snakes. Shall we go now and meet the Harcoffs?"

"Please, could we wait until they're finished singing?"

"You'll wait here for hours then, Peter: they sing and worship for hours."

"Oh, that's wonderful! Do they ever allow anyone to join them?"

"I'm sure they would. But most of us prefer to sit and listen, and feel what comes from their side of the house. It's just like God is all around this place. I sit and cry and praise God. It's holy ground, Peter."

"That's because the people who live here are holy. But come, the song is finished. I want to meet them during this brief interlude."

"This way," Melissa said, parting a forsythia bush and stepping into the faint circle of light on the patio.

"Melissa child!" Amy exclaimed softly. "You gave me the least little bit of a scare. But I'm glad you've come. And who is this fine young man with you? Peter Yarbrost, I do believe! Mrs. Barber talked so much about you Peter that I'd know you anywhere."

"Peter would like to meet you and Silas," Melissa said.

"Who needs introducing when Peter's already an established figure here?" Silas asked, grabbing Peter to him in a warm hug. "Welcome to Bougainvilla Rest."

"Thank you," Peter said, smiling warmly upon the couple. "It's wonderful to be here. You and Mrs. Harcoff sing well together. Would you mind singing the song you just finished singing, again? About a fountain filled with blood. I never knew anything about this until last night. I found God last night and I now have everlasting life. Oh, my heart is a deep pool of inner peace and soul-rest and sublime joy."

Tears tumbled down the couples' cheeks. Melissa's, too. "Praise the Lord!" Silas exclaimed happily as he strummed the banjo softly and began
singing, "There is a fountain filled with blood. . Drawn from Immanuel's veins; And sinners plunged beneath this flood... Lose all their guilty stain."

Peter stood reverently, eyes closed and head bowed. God was here. His presence was so real, so awesome, that he feared to move even. Oh, if his poor, dear mother would only be here for this moment! he thought. Surely, surely, she would be able to get free from the awful bondage of sin and sinful habits!

He hadn't noticed Melissa slip through the bushes, and not until the Harcoffs had finished the song and Melissa's soft voice announced that Mrs. Barber was waiting to see him, did he realize that she had gone to check on the woman.

Thanking the couple and warning them that they could expect a visitor some evenings, Peter hurried toward Mrs. Barber's patio.

"I'm sorry if I kept you waiting," Peter apologized sincerely.

"You didn't keep me waiting, Peter. I sent for you then fell asleep. I kept you waiting. Forgive me," she said, motioning for him to have a chair across from her. Smiling approvingly upon him, she remarked, "I like your hair cut. You look like the clean-cut, fine, upright young man you are. How did your day go?"

Instantly Peter was at ease. "Wonderful, Mrs. Barber. Just wonderful."

"Hannah, please, Peter."

"I'm sorry; I shall try to remember. Burt's a wonderful teacher..."

"He says you're quite an adept scholar, an eager and quick learner."

Peter felt color come into his cheeks. He had never been praised like this. A few times in school, perhaps, but never at home. "I'm going to love the work," he answered simply. "And with a teacher/instructor like Burt, well, I'll have to make good."

"You had a good night's rest, I hope?"
"It was wonderful. The cottage is so lovely. Thanks for the excellent food you've been sending down to me. It's been delicious. And all those groceries! Thanks, Hannah. Thanks, too, for the open Bible on that one table next to the sofa. It made the difference between everlasting life and hell's fire for me. Last night, I found God. I'm born again; I have everlasting life. Oh, my hungry heart is fully satisfied and my search for 'something'... or Someone! . . . is over. I'm so thankful you hired me, Hannah."

The woman could make no reply. Her frame shook with weeping.

(Chapter 7)

The two weeks skipped by on summer's golden feet. Burt was a skilled teacher; Peter an eager, willing and quick learner. Soon he was on his own. True to Burt's words, much of the work did come "natural-like." It became a part of him; he became a part of the ground and the many growing things in it.

More and more, he was convinced that God had a hand in his coming to this lovely place. The horrors of the past were slowly slinking out of his mind into the dark corners of oblivion as his new life in Christ emerged and took complete control of him and his entire being. He was "fat and flourishing," now completely dead to self and sanctified wholly and "alive unto Christ." Looking back, he wondered how he had survived nineteen years without Christ. Empty years they were. Void of meaning, too. Then Jesus came!

Tears of joy rolled down Peter's ruddy, sun-browned cheeks as he worked in the greenhouse before taking care of a mulching job that needed done in several of the flower beds. How had he managed to live without Christ? he wondered.

A lark flying overhead threw him a lusty song in passing. It was so beautiful that Peter, hearing it inside the greenhouse, rushed out to catch the last fragment of song. Ever aware of beauty and things beautiful, it seemed his senses since he had found the Lord were even more acute and aware to things around him... God's things of beauty, that is.

He stood now, moved by the uplifting song of the lark and noticing the snowy-white petals of the viburnum against the thick, dark-green leaf foliage
of the bushes. A soft breeze wafted the delicious perfume of the blossoms his way. He inhaled deeply of their sweet fragrance, observing the activity of the bees among the flowers and listening, fascinated, to their buzzing and humming.

Smiling and praising the Lord for His goodness to him, he hurried back into the greenhouse to finish his work. Since coming to Hannah Barber's lovely grounds and working with the flowers and trees, he had much time to observe the workings of the bees. As such, he understood fully the meaning of, "Busy as a bee." The tiny creatures seemed never to rest. Always the garden and lawn were full of them. Busy little creatures they were, pollinating and making hives of delicious honey at the far end of the Barber grounds.

Peter suddenly realized that aside from staples like sugar, flour, salt, cheese and such like things, Bougainvillia Rest, with its herd of beef cattle and its large garden and orchard, was really quite self-sufficient. Vegetables and fruits were frozen or canned fresh from orchard and garden, and always there was an ample supply of meat from the herd.

He had so much, Peter thought, realizing that he hadn't gone to bed hungry once since coming to work for the godly, kind, and motherly Hannah Barber. And what about his mother? he wondered again, as he had done so frequently since his glorious transformation. How he wished he knew where she was, so he could write her and tell her of the new Peter; tell her, too, that Christ could, and would, deliver her if she but granted Him the opportunity to do so.

He finished the inside work for the day then hurried away to do the mulching jobs. His life seemed like the garden and grounds he was tending--beautiful. For every day of gloom and hardship he had endured as a boy, God was pouring out weeks and months of blessings upon him now. It was like the rainbow he had seen that day when he took the boat (trying to forget his troubles and sorrows) and thought for a certainty they'd all drown and perish in the storm. And then the rainbow had appeared. Slicing into the eerie blackness of that frightful, fearful trip, he saw the spectrum of light. It lingered for only a brief moment. He wanted to grasp it; but as quickly as it had appeared, it was gone, obliterated by the churning, rolling, billowing clouds overhead.
Momentary though the rainbow had been that dreadful day at sea, it had served to buoy his spirits up, Peter remembered. It had given him a thrust and a promise of better things to come, though at the time he couldn't see how. Nor where or when. His life then was much the same as those dreadful clouds, he realized now . . . black and dreary. But Jesus came! his happy heart thought, comparing the new and totally different Peter to the old.

Months passed by. Trees once dressed in emerald greens turned vividly flamboyant, parading scarlet, gold and orange dresses. Some work ceased for the young gardener/ground keeper, other was increased. Now was the time to plant new bulbs, set out young trees and mulch for the upcoming cold snaps that may reach in as far as Bougainvilla Rest.

As he worked among the flower beds near Hannah Barber's patio one beautiful fall morning, the older woman said, "Peter, I want you here for supper tomorrow night, if God sees fit to spare us all that long. You've been working hard; so I want you to stop work early. Be here before five."

Peter looked up from where he was kneeling, planting tulip and hyacinth bulbs into the fertile soil. "I love my work, Hannah," he told her. "And I'm really not working too hard. It's a part of me. I'm thriving on it."

"That's quite obvious, and for this I am grateful. For a while, I was fearful that I'd never find anyone to replace Burt. But I was wrong; God had you out there all the time. You're more like a son to me than a gardener, though."

Peter smiled. "That's the nicest compliment you could give me, Hannah;" he replied, "for you see, you are like I always pictured the mother of my dreams."

"Don't make me cry, Peter," Hannah remarked. "You know I'm very fond of you."

"I guess that works both ways," Peter answered. "I still can't believe all of what has happened to me these many months is real, Hannah. I know it is; but when I think back..."

"The Apostle Paul said we are to forget those things which are behind, Son."
"True. And I do. But every once in a while they slip around to remind me where I was and where I am now; where God brought me to and took me from. It blesses my soul, Hannah."

"Of course it does. Well, I'll see you tomorrow night, the Lord willing. Now don't work too hard. And isn't that ground a bit chilly for you to be kneeling on?"

Peter's laugh was hearty and pleasant. "It doesn't get cold here. Not really. Oh, one knows it's winter by the shedding leaves of the deciduous trees and the lack of color from the blooming flowers; but really, Hannah, you've never known a real winter until you've lived in the far north of Maine. I remember one year . . . I was about ten or eleven then . . . when I nearly froze to death. Talk about frigid; our dingy, two-room apartment was!"

"You got around a lot, didn't you, Son?"

"Constantly, it seemed. And I loathed it. Back to our weather here; you never get a freeze, do you?"

"Occasionally. If it's severely cold in the north or northwest, we do experience some cold days. But of course you are right, it's nothing like the weather you've experienced. Here we have much sunshine, beautiful green live oaks and holly bushes and magnolia trees, among many other things. And these survive only in the milder climates."

"And the mockingbirds sing all year long, don't they?"

Hannah laughed softly. "You've developed quite an affinity for the mockingbird, I see, as well as all our many other beautiful birds. I've noticed you think quite highly of Melissa, too," she added mischievously.

Peter blushed. "You don't miss a thing," he teased, adding seriously, "I am very fond of Melissa, it's true. But I prefer not to get serious thoughts for another year at least. I think it's honorable for a man to give a girl time to grow up and know her own heart. Same for a man. I want each of us to make sure of God's will for our life. Marriage is for keeps! It's too serious a thing to be taken lightly."
"You sound like a 'seasoned' saint, Peter."

Long after Hannah had gone inside, Peter worked in the flower beds around the patio. It was so exciting, placing bulbs into the damp, cool, dark earth and covering them over, then watching and awaiting the day of their "resurrection." Their rebirth. No one would guess as they looked at the now-bare, mulched flower beds that, come spring, the earth would be a showcase of color and beauty. But it would!

It was all so much like his soul, he thought. Once all was darkness and despair; then Jesus came, and now his heart was like a joyous and glorious perpetual springtime . . . full of glory and beauty. A garden of spiritual delights.

It was exactly 4:45 when Peter pushed the sliding sitting room doors open and slipped inside the following evening. Melissa met him at the door and ushered him into the room, stating that Hannah was detained with a visitor for a short while.

Peter enjoyed the time alone with Melissa, for in getting to know her better he discovered they had many of the same likes and dislikes and much in common. He was careful in his deportment around her and with her, wanting nothing to grieve the gentle and tender Holy Spirit within his heart. Like himself, Melissa was extremely sensitive to the checks of the Spirit. For this he was extremely grateful.

Hannah entered the room, announcing the meal was ready and complimenting Peter on his punctuality. "As I recall," she remarked, smiling into Peter's face, "I told you once before that it takes discipline to be punctual." Her eyes were twinkling.

Peter laughed. "I remember," he answered. "And at the time I couldn't quite understand the full meaning of the statement. A bit of serious thought, however, convinced me of its validity and its veracity."

Leading the way into the elegant formal dining room, Hannah said, "I hope you won't feel uncomfortable in here, Peter. I know how well you enjoy the cozy atmosphere of the smaller, totally informal dining area. But I thought things should be a bit different tonight; so it's into the Brocade and Candlelight room for this meal. I even told Silas and Amy to keep the french
windows open in case a mockingbird happens to feel like doing a bit of serenading in the magnolia tree."

"How thoughtful of you, Hannah! But I'm afraid most of the lusty singing is over until early spring. How I'll miss this!" he exclaimed.

The table was set for four and Peter, entering the spacious and elegant room, was sure they'd be lost in the vastness of the place. It was easy for him to visualize seventy to a hundred and more people dining in the enormous room. But four people . . . ! And who was the fourth?

As Hannah motioned Peter to his place at the table, a tall man entered from a side door. It was the door leading into Mr. Barber's office/library.

"Peter, Melissa, meet David Barber, my late husband's youngest brother," Hannah said, smiling and motioning Melissa to a chair near Peter, and David at the head of the table. "David, meet Peter Yarbrost and Melissa Cartright."

"I'm pleased to meet you both," the tall, broadshouldered, well-dressed man replied with deep sincerity. "And I understand you are making one of the finest gardeners and ground keepers my sister-in-law has ever had," David said, addressing his remark to Peter.

"Sometimes bias can enter into things like this, Peter replied humbly. "I'm doing it because I thoroughly enjoy my work, Mr. Barber, and out of overflowing love for a very special and wonderful woman. When I felt I had no worth whatever, I answered a tiny ad in the paper, and this wonderful woman, seeing a glimmer at least of something worthwhile in me, took me in and made me what I am. For the first time ever in my life I got the taste of kindness and of love. Hannah Barber deserves all the praise, if indeed there should be any praise for me. Through her, or, I should say, because of her and her reflection of the crucified, risen, living Christ, I am a Christian today. Her life has been so sweet and so God-like..."

"Please, Peter!" Hannah exclaimed, softly interrupting the unfinished sentence. "You'll have me crying unless you stop, and we don't want that."

Peter looked over at David and saw he was weeping. "OK," he said, "I'll not spoil the meal for anyone. So what shall we talk about?"
"The mockingbirds," Melissa answered shyly, pointing toward the open window and the lusty song floating through it into the room.

They all laughed heartily and the meal was served. Hannah was careful to keep the conversation flowing freely along ordinary, everyday-happening, lines.

Not until the main course had been served and the last bite of food eaten from each plate did she alter things. When she did, it surprised Peter. She began by singing softly, "Happy Birthday to you."

Amy entered with a birthday cake bearing lighted candles, twenty in all, her voice and that of Silas' joining in the singing.

Peter was shocked. Surprised. Pleasantly so. In his happiness and joy he had forgotten completely about his birthday. "Thank you, Hannah," he said hoarsely, feeling broken up deep inside. Another kindness, he thought, and another pleasant memory. A first, to be exact. He had never had a birthday cake. Never.

"You render me speechless," he said candidly and frankly. Afraid lest he weep in the presence of these wonderful people, he said lightly to the man at the head of the table, "See what I mean, David? She's spoiling me with kindness and love."

David said nothing. He blinked back fast-falling tears.

Getting to her feet, Hannah said brokenly, "David come here, please."

The tall, fine gentleman walked quickly to Hannah's side. Turning to Peter she said, "Our special birthday present to you, Son: Peter, meet your father; David, here's your son."

Peter was on his feet. "Really? Oh, tell me, Hannah, is...is...?"

"David is your father. As truly as you have been transformed and made new in Christ, this is your father."
They were in each other's arms then, sobbing, weeping and rejoicing. Suddenly Peter said, "But how can this be? I am a Yarbrost; you are a Barber."

Holding him at arm's length, David explained simply, "You are a Barber, Son. Your mother's maiden name was Yarbrost. On the birth certificate, which I have in my possession, you are Peter David Barber."

"Then you saw me? I mean, well..."

"Saw you! Oh, my son, my son! I loved you! Loved you! You were God's gift to me. You'll never know the pain and suffering and the heartache I endured when your mother suddenly disappeared, taking you with her. I've prayed for you every day of my life. Your mother, too."

"Wha... what happened, Father? Or is it none of my business? I mean, why did mother leave and take me with her?"

"It is your 'business,' you are my son. And after all these years God has sent you back to me. When Hannah called, telling me she had received a letter of inquiry regarding a job from a Peter Yarbrost and that she was sure it was you, well, I almost dropped everything and caught the first plane home. Then I remembered that my first obligation was to God. I knew Hannah and my Lord would take good care of you.

"Your daily, close association with Hannah, and then Burt, and the little things you told them of your past caused Hannah to do a bit of investigating of her own. What she discovered was positive proof of your identity. And now, back to your mother. Things went well for us, Peter, until I became a Christian and received the "Macedonian" call from God. Your mother turned against me like a tiger, declaring she would never, never go with me to a foreign field; nor even into a parsonage locally."

"Then... you are a minister, Father?"

"A missionary, my dear boy. I waited two years for your mother to return or send word to me of her whereabouts, traveling all the while as an evangelist across the country. But the call to 'other lands' burned in my heart like a flame. I had to go! The mission board sent me and I have been laboring
for God among the heathen all these years. It's been a rewarding life, one rich and full of the grace of God."

"Wa... was mother ever a Christian, Father?"

"Oh, yes, many years before I married her. She backslid, however, in her lateteens and fell head over heels in love with the world and the worldly crowd, of which I was a part at that time. We fell in love and married. In less than a year and a half, God sent you into our lives. That's when I knew I had to change my way of living. No son of mine should ever have memories of a shaming, sinful father. I went to an old fashioned holiness church and got gloriously converted and sanctified wholly shortly thereafter. Your mother refused to go, saying she had no intentions of changing. Not ever. When she saw that I was determined to go God's way, regardless of the cost or the cross, well, she disappeared. Ran away."

"And she's been running every since," Peter said sadly. "Do you think there's hope of her ever coming back to God?" he asked quickly.

"Only God knows the answer to that question, Peter. We know that 'nothing is impossible with God.' Your mother has been quite a light rejecter, and you know by now what the Bible has to say about such. It's a dangerous thing, this deliberately walking behind light. One becomes blinded, and things which are wicked and wrong appear to be all right. We must continue to pray, however, and leave her in God's great hands. He knows how to bring down the 'high places.' " David hugged his son.

Peter said quickly, "Oh, the ways of God are past finding out. I've felt I've been dreaming ever since coming here, and now this/Oh, Dad, I love you. I'm so glad God found you for me."

"I'm the one who is truly grateful. Bone of my bone, and flesh of my flesh, Peter David Barber! My little son, grown tall and fine-looking, and every inch a specimen of true manliness and Christ-likeness."

"All thanks be to God and to Aunt Hannah!" Peter exclaimed, throwing a pair of strong arms around the woman and kissing her cheek. "I love you, Auntie!"

"I guess I'll lose my gardener now."
"Not unless you chase me off the premises. I feel I'm fulfilling my call as surely as Dad has fulfilled his."

"Thank you, Peter . . . Son. I love you, and I believe you. God sent you here," she replied, weeping.

And as sure as he knew anything, Aunt Hannah was right; God did send him here! Peter thought joyously.

(The End)