Noreen burst into the mammoth drawing room in great excitement. "Mother!" she called, "Mother!"

Sybil, the maid, met her halfway across the room. "Your mother's upstairs finishing her dressing," she announced unceremoniously and matter-of-factly.
"Oh! Is she going out this early? It's only 3:20," Noreen replied.

"The boat leaves in six hours," Sybil answered, "and it will take Carlos a good four hours to get her there."

"Boat?" Noreen asked, her pretty face registering both surprise and consternation.

"I'm going abroad, Noreen," Mrs. Hannibold explained, crossing the room to her daughter.

"Not again!" Noreen exclaimed, her voice registering a pitiful plea. "You -- you . . . why didn't you tell me?" the girl asked.

"I didn't want to upset you," Mrs. Hannibold said. "You remember the scene you made the last time I sailed. . . ."

Noreen's eyes flashed fire, then tears came. "Yes. Yes, I do remember the 'scene' I made," she retorted hotly. "But . . . but doesn't a girl have more right to her mother than some old social group . . . stupid, old social group . . . who care for little more or less than bridge, cards, and cocktails and being overly-solicitous and affectionate to those of the opposite sex . . . other than their own spouse?"

Mrs. Hannibold paled. Slowly, the hot flame of anger rose high in her cheeks. "How dare you speak thus to your mother?" she exclaimed, raising a heavily jeweled hand to strike her daughter.

Noreen stood her ground. "Every word I have spoken is the truth, Mother. You know it is; and I don't like the group of women who come here so frequently. They're going abroad, too, I suppose!"

"Quiet! Quiet, Noreen! It's none of your business who is nor who isn't going on this cruise."

Noreen's tears fell fast now. "I suppose this means that you'll not be home for my graduation. . . ."
"Your father will be here," Mrs. Hannibold replied lightly and nonchalantly.

"Thanks!" Noreen answered shortly.

"Oh, stop acting like a martyr, Noreen! What's so special about a graduation? Thousands of teens graduate from high school every year. . . ."

"And the most of them have their parents . . . in the plural . . . there to see them graduate. But I am one of the 'exceptions.' My mother was too busy making big news in a certain daily paper . . . on a cruise, as usual . . . when I had a birthday party that would have meant everything to me had she been there. And the time I was thrown from the riding horse and hospitalized for three weeks, she was abroad also. Too busy having a 'good time' with those other than her family, to come home. And . . . and now . . . again. . . ."

"Oh, cut it, Noreen! You're no longer a child. Your father is here, as well as Carlos and Sybil. Furthermore, I shall be sending you rare and expensive gifts. . . ."

"It's not the gifts I want; it's my mother!" Noreen interrupted.

" Grow up, Noreen, and act your age. Sybil will take good care of you. She will take the place of a mother. She's most capable. . . . "

Noreen rushed past her mother, up the stairs to her room. She shut the door and locked it securely. Tossing her armload of schoolbooks onto a desk near the window, she threw herself across the bed and cried until she fell asleep from exhaustion.

So shocked, hurt, and disappointed was she over hearing the news of her mother's trip abroad that she decided against telling her that she was valedictorian of her class. It would be of little or no consequence to her mother, she realized with a sudden sinking sensation.

A light tap on her door awakened her. She sat up in bed with a start but made no answer, fearing another encounter with her mother. The hurt inside her was too deep to talk about anything.
"Noreen." It was Sybil's soft, well-modulated voice. "Noreen, honey, dinner is ready."

"I don't want anything, Sybil. Thanks."

"You will feel better after you eat," the maid said. "And your father detests having to eat by himself."

"I can't eat, Sybil! Not a single solitary bite! I feel as if I'd choke if I tried."

"Open the door, honey. Let me come in."

"Is . . . is Mother . . . has she gone?" Noreen asked hesitatingly.

"She left shortly after you came up here," Sybil replied as Noreen opened the door.

Seeing the hurt in the seventeen-year-old's eyes, Sybil put a loving arm around Noreen's slender shoulders. "You must be brave, honey," she crooned softly, stroking the girl's long, blond hair. "You have a good father. A wonderful father!" Then, as if she realized her statement placed Mrs. Hannibold's reputation on the 'no-good' side of the picture, she added hastily, "Your mother said to be sure to tell you good-bye for her and for you to have a good time while she is gone. . . ."

Noreen raised a hand of restraint. "Don't, Sybil! Don't say anymore. I don't want to have Mother's idea of a 'good time!' I don't. I don't!"

"You're a sensible girl if ever I saw one!" Sybil declared firmly. "Now wash your face and let's get down to dinner."

As Noreen entered the plushly carpeted dining room, her father came to meet her. "You look too pale to suit me!" he exclaimed.

"I . . . I'm sorry, Father. I . . . suppose Mother's sudden and abrupt leaving has affected me." The tears, which were so close to the surface, now flowed freely. "I may as well tell you how I feel, Father, for I feel it deep inside of me . . . Mother just doesn't love us. She can't!"
Mr. Hannibold stroked his daughter's lovely long, silk hair for a moment, trying to soothe her. "We must overlook some things, dear girl," he said, wearily.

Noreen straightened her sagging shoulders. Her eyes flashed fire. "You mean I am to overlook Mother's insatiable desire for this unsatisfying social whirl of . . . of silly, stupid things? That I am to overlook the way she treats you and neglects you . . .?"

"Noreen," Mr. Hannibold said severely, "I will have no such talk in my home."

"But it's true, Father," the girl answered in a pitiful tone of voice. "Mother's not in love with either of us. She couldn't leave us like this if she were."

Mr. Hannibold's countenance changed. He turned suddenly ash-gray. He looked tired. So very tired and pained. "Shall we sit down to eat?" he said, leading the way to the table. "I . . . may be partly to blame for your mother's actions, Noreen. I should have married a woman more my own age. Your mother is still quite young and very attractive. . . ."

"And my father is a very handsome, portly man," Noreen interrupted. Waving a restraining hand in his direction she stated emphatically, "No, Father. No! You are not to blame. Mother could have looked the world over and she would never have found a better, more honorable and noble man than you. I esteem you the highest, dear Father."

Mr. Hannibold stifled a sob. His voice broke. "May I always be worthy of your esteem, Noreen," he said with a trembling voice.

They ate in silence for some time, Sybil's soft comings and goings their only slight interruptions. "I am valedictorian of my class," Noreen said matter-of-factly and modestly, breaking the silence.

Mr. Hannibold's eyes lit up perceptibly. He reached across the table and patted his daughter's hand affectionately. "I'm proud of you, Noreen. Real proud of you; and I'll be the happiest father ever to be at your graduation. But of course I'd have been happy if you weren't valedictorian even. What would you like to do after graduation? To celebrate, I mean?"
The word cut like a dagger in Noreen's heart. She hated celebrations, socials, "coming out" parties and such. It was all too reminiscent of her mother's kind of living. Even now she could hear her mother's sarcasm when she refused, on her sixteenth birthday, to participate in a "coming out" party for certain prominent debutantes . . . herself included.

"You aren't normal, Noreen. You can't be!" her mother had all but shrieked. "I wish you had more of a 'social turn' in you! You are so-o like your father. . . ."

"What shall we do to celebrate, Noreen?" Mr. Hannibold brought her suddenly out of her musings and memories. "It must be something special. You are a special girl and. . . ."

"Father," Noreen said softly, "I don't want any kind of celebration. I . . . detest things like that. Do you remember the couple you took me to see? Oh, it was long, long ago! How old was I then? Six, or seven, maybe? The house was in the country; set high on a hill surrounded by evergreens of every description and variety. It was springtime and water gushed madly down the hillside from a spring higher up in the hills. Could I . . . I mean, would you take me to see those people again? I liked that woman. She was so different, and she talked to me about God and Heaven. There is a God, isn't there, Father?"

Mr. Hannibold's throat constricted into a tight knot. "Yes, Noreen, there is a God. Only One . . . a true and living God."

"I wish you and Mother would talk to me about God like that woman did that day, Father. Oh," and a faraway dreamy look stole into the young girl's eyes, "she seemed so happy and so . . . so at peace with . . . everybody and with everything and so completely satisfied."

Noreen's father swallowed hard. "She is happy, Noreen. Very happy!"

"Do you know her very well, Father?"

"Very, very well, dear girl. She is my younger sister . . . Mrs. Jacob Sandby -- and she's a wonderful woman!"
Noreen's face and eyes registered immediate surprise and pleasure. "Then -- then . . . she is my aunt, Father! My very own dear aunt! Why haven't you and Mother told me about her before this? We could have had such wonderful times corresponding together and visiting each other."

"There are reasons, Noreen," he said simply.

The girl's keen perception and intuition saw through the reason. "She... she's too good and far too religious for . . . Mother's way of thinking; is that it, Father? And to keep peace in the family, you never visit her and Uncle Jacob? But how did we manage to get away that time, so long ago, and spend those wonderful hours at Auntie's house? I thought it took us forever to get there," she laughed as a dreamy look stole into her green-blue eyes.

"Your mother was gone, Norrie. Since your aunt and uncle had never seen you, I was determined that the two of you should meet."

"But why was I not told that I had a loving aunt?"

"Your mother considered my side of the family as 'dead.' They are very religious . . . every one of them . . . and deeply spiritual people, Noreen, and not at all in favor of living questionable lives. So, in order to keep peace, I refrained from. . . ."

Noreen jumped up from her chair at the table. "Oh, Father," she exclaimed joyously, "I must have inherited certain great and noble characteristics from your side of the family, and I'm glad. Glad!" she cried aloud, rushing to her father and throwing her arms about him and hugging him tightly to her sobbing bosom. "Something inside me keeps crying out for something I can't explain nor describe, but I know I need it. I'm sure my aunt can help me. When can we go to see her? Must I wait until after I graduate?"

"I'm afraid so, Norrie. I'm all tied up at the office till after graduation. But we'll leave the very next day after you graduate and we'll stay a week or more. It's not too far away... only a little over a month. You'll be giving a lot of time to getting that speech of yours ready and the time will fly by. . . ."

The mere knowledge that she had such a wonderful aunt and uncle brightened Noreen's days immeasurably. She had met relatives on her
mother's side of the family at certain fashionable functions but had never had any association with her father's relation.

If she dared to make inquiry her mother responded with a curt reply, telling her they were "undesirable people."

When Noreen's graduation exercises were over and she found herself welcomed warmly by her father's sister and brother-in-law . . . Aunt Kate and Uncle Jacob Sandby . . . she got straight to the point. "I don't know what it is you have inside you, Auntie dear," she said tearfully, "but I want whatever it is I saw and felt that you had when I was here that one time so long ago. I want a different way of life and of living . . . from Mother's way, I mean."

Aunt Kate's arm tightened around the slender waist of the lovely niece. Bright tears flowed down her rosy cheeks. "I have prayed every single day for you, Noreen. Every single day since you were born," she emphasized, "that God would save your soul. Yes, I knew you would be getting saved."

"Just show me what to do, Auntie dear!" Noreen begged. "I'm as ignorant as a heathen, almost."

"Kneel here beside me, dear niece. Yes, Harry," she said, seeing the look on her brother's face and the bright tears in his eyes, "you may kneel also. The kind Shepherd has been waiting a long time for you to return to His fold. . . ."

"Father! . . . You... you mean... ?"

"Yes. I was once a wonderful Christian, dear, like Aunt Kate and your Uncle Jacob. But I wandered away, Norrie. Oh, so far, far away! I laid my cross down in exchange for wealth and riches and material things; things which cannot satisfy . . ." he said, sobbing bitterly and brokenly.

It didn't take long for Noreen and her father to find the blessed Lord Jesus as their Savior. They prayed fervently and poured their innermost hearts and feelings out in confession and repentance.

"This is exactly what I've been yearning for, and craving!" Noreen cried happily as she snuggled in her aunt's ample arms. "My poor hungry soul is satisfied. Oh, Father, why didn't I hear about this before? It's wonderful!"
"There's more, Norrie. There's more. There's a second, definite work of grace called Holiness of heart. This time I mean to seek until I know that I am wholly sanctified. I'm sure I would not have gone back on the Lord if I had paid the full price that first time," Mr. Hannibold said.

Noreen's eyes lit up. "Oh, Father, the mere mention of that sounds wonderful. Holiness of heart!" she exclaimed softly and reverently. "It sounds, well, all pure and clean and . . . and righteous and good."

"It is just that, Noreen, my dear; and a lot more," Aunt Kate replied sweetly. "It makes it possible for the Christian to live a wonderful victorious life until you can say truthfully, 'I am in the world but not of the world!"

"Oh, I must have it then, Aunt Kate!" Noreen exclaimed earnestly. "I have never liked the 'social whirl' kind of life. I know why, now: God has so created my heart that it could not be satisfied with anything less than His abiding presence. To think that He is living in my heart! Oh, I want this Holiness of heart. Right now!"

Not long afterwards a shout of victory rang out throughout the house . . . no, two shouts! Noreen and her father were sanctified Holy and with God's and each other's help, they could face whatever lay ahead for them.