Some Walk In

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a little stick that Mom made to measure the distance apart. That was related to this mood, too. A starry sky and white-capped waves came back with the same emotion.

For the first time, she tried to analyze this strange, welcome feeling, which grew as she thought. Did other people know it? Mom, in there on the bed, used to fondle apples when she was selecting them for the Fair, and forget her weariness. Father often stayed out late after doing the chores on Sunday morning, looking at the cattle.

This special awareness was simple, yet a little mysterious. Power to enjoy and endure—it was a part of wisdom.

Sarah felt taller. She brushed her cheek with the soft, warm fur, then put the kitten down. Her fingers found the handle of the screen door. Stepping into the porch, she saw her father standing near the kitchen doorway. He was smiling.

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It was mid-afternoon. The sun was lazily warm and I was sleepy as I guided the car down the old upland road that ran over the ridge of the mountain orchard and then to home. My eyes must have closed for a second, because when I made the turn in the bend I suddenly saw another car. . . .

The next thing I knew I was walking along a dusty road toward a gate in a white picket fence. For a few minutes I stood looking over the slim white bars at the house, and then I pushed the gate open and went in. Inside everything seemed suddenly strange and yet there was a sense of returning home.

The house was the first thing I noticed. It was a little larger than most farmhouses and built out of some kind of white stone that gleamed where the sunlight shone on it. There were
trees and shrubs all around it, and in front of the steps leading to the door water softly flowed in a fountain. While I was standing there, the door opened and a girl came out and stood on the steps.

“Did you just come?” she said.

“Yes,” I answered. Then she came out into the sunlight where I could see her. She had dark brown hair and blue eyes. She seemed to be young, and yet there was something about her that was mature. She wore a simple white dress, and as she came down the steps I saw that she was carrying a pitcher. I watched her fill it from the fountain and then turn toward the house again.

“Come in, you must be tired.”

I FOLLOWED her. We went through a long hallway and into a large, airy room which seemed to be a dining room. The walls and ceiling were all white and there was a long white table with several benches in the center of the room. She motioned for me to sit down and went over to a tall cupboard. In a moment she returned with a bowl of strawberries and a pitcher of cream.

“I picked them in the garden this morning,” she said.

“At this time of year?” I asked.

“We have them all the time here,” she said with a little smile and poured some of the cream into the bowl.

I looked at her. “What’s your name?”

“Mary,” she said and sat down across the table from me.

“There are a lot of us here who are called Mary.”

I ate some of the strawberries. The sun came streaming through the many large windows of the room until it seemed that there were no shadows anywhere. The girl crossed the room again and returned with some sewing. After a while she said, “Do you think you will like it here? Later, if you don’t, you can go on.”

“On?”

“Yes. Some find it too quiet here and they like to go on to the city. There is more going on there. Tomorrow there is a big concert.”
"I like to hear music," I said.

WHILE we talked I looked out the nearest window into the garden behind the house. There were flower gardens and hedges and above them were many doves flying in slow circles.

"It's rather quiet now—nearly everyone is in the fields. They will be back soon. I think you will like it when they get back. We sit on the porch and talk and sing, and there is always someone new."

"How many are there here?" I asked.

Suddenly she rested her hands under the table and raised her head. "Listen," she said softly.

I could hear singing, very faint and far away.

"They are coming now," she said and smiled and her face became suddenly bright.

I turned my head toward the singing and through another window I could see the gate through which I had come. Now there was an old man with a long white beard leaning against it and looking out.

"That old man out there," I said wondering, "who is he?"

THE girl didn't look but she said, "That's Peter. He likes to slip away from the gate and go out into the garden and tend his roses. Sometimes he forgets and stays away—and then he keeps them waiting. . . ."

The singing was louder now. I could see faces . . . they were coming onto the porch. . . . "Peter," I said slowly, "Peter, am I in—?"

She was still staring out the window. "Yes, Peter will have to stay by the gate more. You are the third this week who came in without knowing."

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