



Introduction

The skinny, blond boy stood at the upper end of the cove and stared. Water in a small creek gurgled around the jumbled array of moss-covered rocks. Trees lifted their leafy arms over the tiny cove, seeming to embrace the boy as he stood, hands on hips, as he often did when deeply impressed with something. *What a lovely place!*

The young fellow sighed. *I already hear the spring peepers starting their evening chorus. I would so love to explore this creek, but it's too late today.*

What impressed the boy most was a large bed of wide, very green, leafed plants. Along the edge of this lovely plant bed were several large clusters of daffodils in full bloom, giving the nook a bright yellow border. Kneeling among them, the boy buried his head into the first cluster of daffodils. *Yum, he murmured, closing his eyes in ecstasy. What a sweet smell of spring!*

Turning away from the daffodils, and brushing the hair from his face, the boy reached out to the wide-leafed plants surrounding him and said to himself, *I wonder what this plant is.*

Burying his face into the rich green leaves, he breathed deeply. Suddenly his head popped up, and a funny, knowing look crossed his face. "Phew!" *This is skunk cabbage, he mused. In a month this whole bed will be blooming with funny little flowers. I love spring, the fellow thought as he jumped up, but I have to get home before dark.*

Grabbing a handful of daffodils for his mother, he turned and ran through the woods. *I will be back soon to explore that cove, the*

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boy promised. *I want to see the skunk cabbage bloom. Even if it stinks, I like those flowers.*

When the young boy came to the edge of the clearing, he stopped and peered through the deepening dusk. *Will there be any deer out grazing?*

Still as a statue, he listened to the evening sounds. The spring peepers were now peeping their best as the dark gave them the security they had waited for all day. Each sweet, piercing froggie voice seemed to penetrate the boy's heart. For several minutes he listened, then shivered in delight. Seeing no deer, he hitched up his suspenders and stepped into the clearing. His bare feet felt the chilly dew kissing the new spring grass.

As the boy trudged across the clearing, he shivered again, this time because it was getting cold. When he thought of where he was headed, a warm feeling snuggled around his heart. He imagined the dining room all lit up. He could picture dear Mama dishing up the meal, his three sisters all getting in her way, trying to help set the table. Daddy would be on the recliner in the living room, probably reading or talking on the phone. *I wonder where my three older brothers are.* The only way to find out was to hurry home.

Quickening his pace, he pondered as he trotted along, *What will we have for supper?* Just over the knoll and he would know.

Life was good to the young Virginia boy. His family loved him, and his three brothers and he were never shy on excitement nor slim on adventures. Topping the knoll, he ran even faster toward the sprawling white house, its windows glowing with light and love.

He was taking the porch steps two at a time just as his mother popped her head out the window and called, "Little Paul!"

Yes. They wanted him. Little Paul knew he was always welcome at home. And he was so glad home was that white two-storied house at the foot of the Blue Ridge Mountains.



chapter 1

A Mansion Here Below

Mother and son stood on the low stone steps and stared, drinking in the beautiful scene. In the middle of a large, freshly mown lawn fenced by a low stone wall, stood a rambling white house with many glass windows. A porch ran along the front and one side. Several grand old trees surrounded the house. Down the sloping yard from the house were two dogwood trees in full bloom. To one side of the big house perched a tiny house that looked like a dollhouse compared to the big one. The small house was also painted white.

“That little house used to be the post office,” Mama explained.

“What’s that funny, tall house?” Little Paul asked his mother, pointing to a tall stone structure to their right.

“That’s the bell tower. They used to ring the bell way up here on the mountain every Sunday morning.”

“Why did they do that?” the little blond chap asked.

“I guess so people would know when it was time to go to church,” Mama answered. “I like the way the tower looks in the corner of the yard.”

Six-year-old Paul, going hard on seven, gazed admiringly at the bell tower. Ivy covered part of the red-brown building, giving it a green skirt. The jutting battlements at the top formed a pleasing pattern against the morning sky.

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“Well,” Mama sighed, “after living in the cabin on the Rock Pile for four years, I never dreamed I’d live in a house this grand. It’s like a palace. Well, Paul, I guess we’d just as well go up and help them unload.”



Yoder boys sitting on the rock wall in front of the house.

The moving truck was slowly backing up to the big house. Daddy was motioning to the truck driver as he inched toward the front porch. Many children and other helpful hands were standing by to unload the truck.

“What do you think, Martha?” the lean, black-bearded man asked. “Do you like it?”

“Don’t even ask!” she chuckled. “It seems a little like paradise to me. Can this really be true?”

After the truck was unloaded, the four boys were sure nothing was left for them to do in the house. So they quickly exited—Tim, Phil, Mark and, last but not least, Little Paul. They had something important to do, and they couldn’t wait to get started. They needed to explore the new place!

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Dashing outside, they ran first for the white building that used to be the Mission Home Post Office. "I wonder how long it's been since they brought the mail here," Tim said as he tiptoed through the open door.

"Must've been a long time ago," Phil answered. "Look how dirty and full of junk this place is."



Old Mission Home Post Office.

"Someday we'll clean up this mess and have a little house of our own to play in," Tim concluded.

As they entered the tiny building, Tim had noticed two small windows at floor level that opened to a strange basement. But the basement didn't have a door to it. On his hands and knees, Tim peered through a window with broken dirty glass while the rest waited. "I can't see," he said. "But we will explore that little basement sometime, boys. We will need a flashlight."

Then Tim dashed across the yard toward the woods.