Irene Hunt

Up a Road Slowly

"A writer of the first rank."
—*The New York Times Book Review*

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Three children stood outside our gate in the bright October sunlight, silent and still as figurines in a gift shop window, watching each step I took as I came slowly down the flagstone walk across the lawn. I was still weak from the same sickness that had stricken my mother, and it had been many days since I had played with any of the neighborhood children. There was a strong breeze that afternoon, and I remember how a brown oak leaf floated down and rested upon the red hair of the only boy in the group. It was funny; that shining leaf looked like a girl's hair-bow on a boy's head. For a few seconds I almost forgot the feeling of bewilderment and desolation within me, and I wanted to laugh at the silly look of a boy with a huge, flat hair-

bow on his red head. I didn't, though; I remembered quickly that it was not a day for laughter.

We stared at one another in the blank manner of young children confronted by uncertainty. As late as the hot, dry days of August we had played with one another, but now they saw me touched with a sorrow unknown to them, and I was suddenly a stranger. Their solemn faces reflected the warning of their mothers: "You must be very kind to Julie—very kind—"

The smallest of the three finally spoke. She was a child of five or so; she had a high, piping voice, and there was a look of determination about her as if she had suddenly decided to get to the bottom of a piece of mysterious gossip. "You're not going to live here anymore, are you?" It was actually more nearly a statement than a question. "We hear that you're going to live with your aunt in the country."

That is when I began to scream. I knew that there was something terribly wrong inside our house, but I hadn't known that something was about to drive me from my home. There had been many people in the house for the past two days; my aunt Cordelia was there, our own family doctor and another strange one, many neighbors, all of them with grave, white faces. "Adam hasn't said a word," I heard someone whisper. "He only sits and stares." That was Father they were talking about. There had been another whisper. "The doctor says that Julie is near hysteria; you must watch over your little sister carefully, Laura."

There was a stillness all through the house in spite of

the activity. I had sat for a long time in Mother's little sewing room that afternoon, and had watched the wind whip great wrinkles in the white sheets that hung on the line. The wrinkles had come to look strange to me as I watched them; they grinned at me, malicious, hateful grins.

The child who had spoken to me was frightened. I hated her because I feared that what she said might be true, and so I screamed and would have struck her if I had been able to get beyond the gate. She grasped the hands of the two on either side of her and they scuttled away, frightened and outraged.

Then my brother, Christopher, who had followed me out to the gate, called loudly for Laura, who was quickly beside me, speaking to me, lifting me in her arms. Laura was seventeen, beautiful, and my idol. It was she, rather than our frail mother or our father, a preoccupied and overworked professor, who was able to control a stubborn, somewhat overindulged little sister; many of my tantrums had been short-lived because of Laura. I would risk losing favor with almost anyone, but not with my sister.

She carried me up to her room overlooking the flower garden. The windows were open and the dry, bitter scents of autumn were in the air that stirred a curtain near the bed where Laura laid me. I vaguely wished that I could control the screaming, which distressed Laura, but I was completely helpless.

The doctor came in after a while, I remember, and forced me to swallow a small pill with a little water. Af-

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Julie would remember her happy days at Aunt Cordelia's forever. Running through the spacious rooms, singing on rainy nights in front of the blazing fireplace. There were rides in the woods on Peter the Great, and races with Danny Trevort. Maybe best of all were the precious moments alone in her room at night, gazing at the sea of stars.

But there was sadness too—the painful jealousy Julie felt after her sister got married, the tragic death of a schoolmate, and the bitter disappointment of her first love. Sometimes it all seemed like too much to handle.

Julie was having a hard time believing life was fair. But she would have to be fair to herself before she could even think about new beginnings...

"Hunt demonstrates that she is a writer of the first rank...Those who follow Julie's growth—from a tantrum-throwing seven-year-old to a gracious young woman of seventeen—will find this book has added a new dimension to their lives."
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