Dreiser Theodore

Jennie Gerhardt: A Novel

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Содержание

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CHAPTER I

One morning, in the fall of 1880, a middle-aged woman, accompanied by a young girl of eighteen, presented herself at the clerk's desk of the principal hotel in Columbus, Ohio, and made inquiry as to whether there was anything about the place that she could do. She was of a helpless, fleshy build, with a frank, open countenance and an innocent, diffident manner. Her eyes were large and patient, and in them dwelt such a shadow of distress as only those who have looked sympathetically into the countenances of the distraught and helpless poor know anything about. Any one could see where the daughter behind her got the timidity and shamefacedness which now caused her to stand back and look indifferently away. She was a product of the fancy, the feeling, the innate affection of the untutored but poetic mind of her mother combined with the gravity and poise which were characteristic of her father. Poverty was driving them. Together they presented so appealing a picture of honest necessity that even the clerk was affected.

"What is it you would like to do?" he said.

"Maybe you have some cleaning or scrubbing," she replied, timidly. "I could wash the floors."

The daughter, hearing the statement, turned uneasily, not because it irritated her to work, but because she hated people to guess at the poverty that made it necessary. The clerk, manlike, was affected by the evidence of beauty in distress. The innocent helplessness of the daughter made their lot seem hard indeed.

"Wait a moment," he said; and, stepping into a back office, he called the head housekeeper.

There was work to be done. The main staircase and parlor hall were unswept because of the absence of the regular scrub-woman.

"Is that her daughter with her?" asked the housekeeper, who could see them from where she was standing.

"Yes, I believe so."

"She might come this afternoon if she wants to. The girl helps her, I suppose?"

"You go see the housekeeper," said the clerk, pleasantly, as he came back to the desk. "Right through there" – pointing to a near-by door. "She'll arrange with you about it."

A succession of misfortunes, of which this little scene might have been called the tragic culmination, had taken place in the life and family of William Gerhardt, a glass-blower by trade. Having suffered the reverses so common in the lower walks of life, this man was forced to see his wife, his six children, and himself dependent for the necessaries of life upon whatever windfall of fortune the morning of each recurring day might bring. He himself was sick in bed. His oldest boy, Sebastian, or "Bass," as his associates transformed it, worked as an apprentice to a local freight-car builder, but received only four dollars a week. Genevieve, the oldest of the girls, was past eighteen, but had not as yet been trained to any special work. The other children, George, aged fourteen; Martha, twelve; William ten, and Veronica, eight, were too young to do anything, and only made the problem of existence the more complicated. Their one mainstay was the home, which, barring a six-hundred-dollar mortgage, the father owned. He had borrowed this money at a time when, having saved enough to buy the house, he desired to add three rooms and a porch, and so make it large enough for them to live in. A few years were still to run on the mortgage, but times had been so bad that he had been forced to use up not only the little he had saved to pay off the principal, but the annual interest also. Gerhardt was helpless, and the consciousness of his precarious situation – the doctor's bill, the interest due upon the mortgage, together with the sums owed butcher and baker, who, through knowing him to

be absolutely honest, had trusted him until they could trust no longer – all these perplexities weighed upon his mind and racked him so nervously as to delay his recovery.

Mrs. Gerhardt was no weakling. For a time she took in washing, what little she could get, devoting the intermediate hours to dressing the children, cooking, seeing that they got off to school, mending their clothes, waiting on her husband, and occasionally weeping. Not infrequently she went personally to some new grocer, each time farther and farther away, and, starting an account with a little cash, would receive credit until other grocers warned the philanthropist of his folly. Corn was cheap. Sometimes she would make a kettle of lye hominy, and this would last, with scarcely anything else, for an entire week. Corn-meal also, when made into mush, was better than nothing, and this, with a little milk, made almost a feast. Potatoes fried was the nearest they ever came to luxurious food, and coffee was an infrequent treat. Coal was got by picking it up in buckets and baskets along the maze of tracks in the near-by railroad yard. Wood, by similar journeys to surrounding lumber-yards. Thus they lived from day to day, each hour hoping that the father would get well and that the glass-works would soon start up. But as the winter approached Gerhardt began to feel desperate.

"I must get out of this now pretty soon," was the sturdy German's regular comment, and his anxiety found but weak expression in the modest quality of his voice.

To add to all this trouble little Veronica took the measles, and, for a few days, it was thought that she would die. The mother neglected everything else to hover over her and pray for the best. Doctor Ellwanger came every day, out of purely human sympathy, and gravely examined the child. The Lutheran minister, Pastor Wundt, called to offer the consolation of the Church. Both of these men brought an atmosphere of grim ecclesiasticism into the house. They were the black-garbed, sanctimonious emissaries of superior forces. Mrs. Gerhardt felt as if she were going to lose her child, and watched sorrowfully by the cot-side. After three days the worst was over, but there was no bread in the house. Sebastian's wages had been spent for medicine. Only coal was free for the picking, and several times the children had been scared from the railroad yards. Mrs. Gerhardt thought of all the places to which she might apply, and despairingly hit upon the hotel. Now, by a miracle, she had her chance.

"How much do you charge?" the housekeeper asked her.

Mrs. Gerhardt had not thought this would be left to her, but need emboldened her.

"Would a dollar a day be too much?"

"No," said the housekeeper; "there is only about three days' work to do every week. If you would come every afternoon you could do it."

"Very well," said the applicant. "Shall we start to-day?"

"Yes; if you'll come with me now I'll show you where the cleaning things are."

The hotel, into which they were thus summarily introduced, was a rather remarkable specimen for the time and place. Columbus, being the State capital, and having a population of fifty thousand and a fair passenger traffic, was a good field for the hotel business, and the opportunity had been improved; so at least the Columbus people proudly thought. The structure, five stories in height, and of imposing proportions, stood at one corner of the central public square, where were the Capitol building and principal stores. The lobby was large and had been recently redecorated. Both floor and wainscot were of white marble, kept shiny by frequent polishing. There was an imposing staircase with hand-rails of walnut and toe-strips of brass. An inviting corner was devoted to a news and cigar-stand. Where the staircase curved upward the clerk's desk and offices had been located, all done in hardwood and ornamented by novel gas-fixtures. One could see through a door at one end of the lobby to the barbershop, with its chairs and array of shaving-mugs. Outside were usually two or three buses, arriving or departing, in accordance with the movement of the trains.

To this caravanserai came the best of the political and social patronage of the State. Several Governors had made it their permanent abiding place during their terms of office. The two United States Senators, whenever business called them to Columbus, invariably maintained parlor chambers

at the hotel. One of them, Senator Brander, was looked upon by the proprietor as more or less of a permanent guest, because he was not only a resident of the city, but an otherwise homeless bachelor. Other and more transient guests included Congressmen, State legislators and lobbyists, merchants, professional men, and, after them, the whole raft of indescribables who, coming and going, make up the glow and stir of this kaleidoscopic world.

Mother and daughter, suddenly flung into this realm of superior brightness, felt immeasurably overawed. They went about too timid to touch anything for fear of giving offense. The great red-carpeted hallway, which they were set to sweep, had for them all the magnificence of a palace; they kept their eyes down and spoke in their lowest tones. When it came to scrubbing the steps and polishing the brass-work of the splendid stairs both needed to steel themselves, the mother against her timidity, the daughter against the shame at so public an exposure. Wide beneath lay the imposing lobby, and men, lounging, smoking, passing constantly in and out, could see them both.

"Isn't it fine?" whispered Genevieve, and started nervously at the sound of her own voice.

"Yes," returned her mother, who, upon her knees, was wringing out her cloth with earnest but clumsy hands.

"It must cost a good deal to live here, don't you think?"

"Yes," said her mother. "Don't forget to rub into these little corners. Look here what you've left."

Jennie, mortified by this correction, fell earnestly to her task, and polished vigorously, without again daring to lift her eyes.

With painstaking diligence they worked downward until about five o'clock; it was dark outside, and all the lobby was brightly lighted. Now they were very near the bottom of the stairway.

Through the big swinging doors there entered from the chilly world without a tall, distinguished, middle-aged gentleman, whose silk hat and loose military cape-coat marked him at once, among the crowd of general idlers, as some one of importance. His face was of a dark and solemn cast, but broad and sympathetic in its lines, and his bright eyes were heavily shaded with thick, bushy, black eyebrows. Passing to the desk he picked up the key that had already been laid out for him, and coming to the staircase, started up.

The middle-aged woman, scrubbing at his feet, he acknowledged not only by walking around her, but by graciously waving his hand, as much as to say, "Don't move for me."

The daughter, however, caught his eye by standing up, her troubled glance showing that she feared she was in his way.

He bowed and smiled pleasantly.

"You shouldn't have troubled yourself," he said.

Jennie only smiled.

When he had reached the upper landing an impulsive sidewise glance assured him, more clearly than before, of her uncommonly prepossessing appearance. He noted the high, white forehead, with its smoothly parted and plaited hair. The eyes he saw were blue and the complexion fair. He had even time to admire the mouth and the full cheeks – above all, the well-rounded, graceful form, full of youth, health, and that hopeful expectancy which to the middle-aged is so suggestive of all that is worth begging of Providence. Without another look he went dignifiedly upon his way, but the impression of her charming personality went with him. This was the Hon. George Sylvester Brander, junior Senator.

"Wasn't that a fine-looking man who went up just now?" observed Jennie a few moments later.

"Yes, he was," said her mother.

"He had a gold-headed cane."

"You mustn't stare at people when they pass," cautioned her mother, wisely. "It isn't nice."

"I didn't stare at him," returned Jennie, innocently. "He bowed to me."

"Well, don't you pay any attention to anybody," said her mother. "They may not like it."

Jennie fell to her task in silence, but the glamor of the great world was having its effect upon her senses. She could not help giving ear to the sounds, the brightness, the buzz of conversation and laughter surrounding her. In one section of the parlor floor was the dining-room, and from the clink of dishes one could tell that supper was being prepared. In another was the parlor proper, and there some one came to play on the piano. That feeling of rest and relaxation which comes before the evening meal pervaded the place. It touched the heart of the innocent working-girl with hope, for hers were the years, and poverty could not as yet fill her young mind with cares. She rubbed diligently always, and sometimes forgot the troubled mother at her side, whose kindly eyes were becoming invested with crows' feet, and whose lips half repeated the hundred cares of the day. She could only think that all of this was very fascinating, and wish that a portion of it might come to her.

At half-past five the housekeeper, remembering them, came and told them that they might go. The fully finished stairway was relinquished by both with a sigh of relief, and, after putting their implements away, they hastened homeward, the mother, at least, pleased to think that at last she had something to do.

As they passed several fine houses Jennie was again touched by that half-defined emotion which the unwonted novelty of the hotel life had engendered in her consciousness.

"Isn't it fine to be rich?" she said.

"Yes," answered her mother, who was thinking of the suffering Veronica.

"Did you see what a big dining-room they had there?"

"Yes."

They went on past the low cottages and among the dead leaves of the year.

"I wish we were rich," murmured Jennie, half to herself.

"I don't know just what to do," confided her mother with a long-drawn sigh. "I don't believe there's a thing to eat in the house."

"Let's stop and see Mr. Bauman again," exclaimed Jennie, her natural sympathies restored by the hopeless note in her mother's voice.

"Do you think he would trust us any more?"

"Let's tell him where we're working. I will."

"Well," said her mother, wearily.

Into the small, dimly lighted grocery store, which was two blocks from their house, they ventured nervously. Mrs. Gerhardt was about to begin, but Jennie spoke first.

"Will you let us have some bread to-night, and a little bacon? We're working now at the Columbus House, and we'll be sure to pay you Saturday."

"Yes," added Mrs. Gerhardt, "I have something to do."

Bauman, who had long supplied them before illness and trouble began, knew that they told the truth.

"How long have you been working there?" he asked.

"Just this afternoon."

"You know, Mrs. Gerhardt," he said, "how it is with me. I don't want to refuse you. Mr. Gerhardt is good for it, but I am poor, too. Times are hard," he explained further, "I have my family to keep."

"Yes, I know," said Mrs. Gerhardt, weakly.

Her old shoddy shawl hid her rough hands, red from the day's work, but they were working nervously. Jennie stood by in strained silence.

"Well," concluded Mr. Bauman, "I guess it's all right this time. Do what you can for me Saturday."

He wrapped up the bread and bacon, and, handing Jennie the parcel, he added, with a touch of cynicism:

"When you get money again I guess you'll go and trade somewhere else."

"No," returned Mrs. Gerhardt; "you know better than that." But she was too nervous to parley long.

They went out into the shadowy street, and on past the low cottages to their own home.

"I wonder," said the mother, wearily, when they neared the door, "if they've got any coal?"

"Don't worry," said Jennie. "If they haven't I'll go."

"A man run us away," was almost the first greeting that the perturbed George offered when the mother made her inquiry about the coal. "I got a little, though." he added. "I threw it off a car."

Mrs. Gerhardt only smiled, but Jennie laughed.

"How is Veronica?" she inquired.

"She seems to be sleeping," said the father. "I gave her medicine again at five."

While the scanty meal was being prepared the mother went to the sick child's bedside, taking up another long night's vigil quite as a matter of course.

While the supper was being eaten Sebastian offered a suggestion, and his larger experience in social and commercial matters made his proposition worth considering. Though only a car-builder's apprentice, without any education except such as pertained to Lutheran doctrine, to which he objected very strongly, he was imbued with American color and energy. His transformed name of Bass suited him exactly. Tall, athletic, and well-featured for his age, he was a typical stripling of the town. Already he had formulated a philosophy of life. To succeed one must do something – one must associate, or at least seem to associate, with those who were foremost in the world of appearances.

For this reason the young boy loved to hang about the Columbus House. It seemed to him that this hotel was the center and circumference of all that was worth while in the social sense. He would go down-town evenings, when he first secured money enough to buy a decent suit of clothes, and stand around the hotel entrance with his friends, kicking his heels, smoking a two-for-five-cent cigar, preening himself on his stylish appearance, and looking after the girls. Others were there with him – town dandies and nobodies, young men who came there to get shaved or to drink a glass of whisky. And all of these he admired and sought to emulate. Clothes were the main touchstone. If men wore nice clothes and had rings and pins, whatever they did seemed appropriate. He wanted to be like them and to act like them, and so his experience of the more pointless forms of life rapidly broadened.

"Why don't you get some of those hotel fellows to give you their laundry?" he asked of Jennie after she had related the afternoon's experiences. "It would be better than scrubbing the stairs."

"How do you get it?" she replied.

"Why, ask the clerk, of course."

This plan struck Jennie as very much worth while.

"Don't you ever speak to me if you meet me around there," he cautioned her a little later, privately. "Don't you let on that you know me."

"Why?" she asked, innocently.

"Well, you know why," he answered, having indicated before that when they looked so poor he did not want to be disgraced by having to own them as relatives. "Just you go on by. Do you hear?"

"All right," she returned, meekly, for although this youth was not much over a year her senior, his superior will dominated.

The next day on their way to the hotel she spoke of it to her mother.

"Bass said we might get some of the laundry of the men at the hotel to do."

Mrs. Gerhardt, whose mind had been straining all night at the problem of adding something to the three dollars which her six afternoons would bring her, approved of the idea.

"So we might," she said. "I'll ask that clerk."

When they reached the hotel, however, no immediate opportunity presented itself. They worked on until late in the afternoon. Then, as fortune would have it, the housekeeper sent them in to scrub up the floor behind the clerk's desk. That important individual felt very kindly toward mother and daughter. He liked the former's sweetly troubled countenance and the latter's pretty face. So he

listened graciously when Mrs. Gerhardt ventured meekly to put the question which she had been revolving in her mind all the afternoon.

"Is there any gentleman here," she said, "who would give me his washing to do? I'd be so very much obliged for it."

The clerk looked at her, and again recognized that absolute want was written all over her anxious face.

"Let's see," he answered, thinking of Senator Brander and Marshall Hopkins. Both were charitable men, who would be more than glad to aid a poor woman. "You go up and see Senator Brander," he continued. "He's in twenty-two. Here," he added, writing out the number, "you go up and tell him I sent you."

Mrs. Gerhardt took the card with a tremor of gratefulness. Her eyes looked the words she could not say.

"That's all right," said the clerk, observing her emotion. "You go right up. You'll find him in his room now."

With the greatest diffidence Mrs. Gerhardt knocked at number twenty-two. Jennie stood silently at her side.

After a moment the door was opened, and in the full radiance of the bright room stood the Senator. Attired in a handsome smoking-coat, he looked younger than at their first meeting.

"Well, madam," he said, recognizing the couple, and particularly the daughter, "what can I do for you?"

Very much abashed, the mother hesitated in her reply.

"We would like to know if you have any washing you could let us have to do?"

"Washing?" he repeated after her, in a voice which had a peculiarly resonant quality. "Washing? Come right in. Let me see."

He stepped aside with much grace, waved them in and closed the door. "Let me see," he repeated, opening and closing drawer after drawer of the massive black-walnut bureau. Jennie studied the room with interest. Such an array of nicknacks and pretty things on mantel and dressing-case she had never seen before. The Senator's easy-chair, with a green-shaded lamp beside it, the rich heavy carpet and the fine rugs upon the floor – what comfort, what luxury!

"Sit down; take those two chairs there," said the Senator, graciously, disappearing into a closet.

Still overawed, mother and daughter thought it more polite to decline, but now the Senator had completed his researches and he reiterated his invitation. Very uncomfortably they yielded and took chairs.

"Is this your daughter?" he continued, with a smile at Jennie.

"Yes, sir," said the mother; "she's my oldest girl."

"Is your husband alive?"

"What is his name?"

"Where does he live?"

To all of these questions Mrs. Gerhardt very humbly answered.

"How many children have you?" he went on.

"Six," said Mrs. Gerhardt.

"Well," he returned, "that's quite a family. You've certainly done your duty to the nation."

"Yes, sir," returned Mrs. Gerhardt, who was touched by his genial and interesting manner.

"And you say this is your oldest daughter?"

"Yes, sir."

"What does your husband do?"

"He's a glass-blower. But he's sick now."

During the colloquy Jennie's large blue eyes were wide with interest. Whenever he looked at her she turned upon him such a frank, unsophisticated gaze, and smiled in such a vague, sweet way, that he could not keep his eyes off of her for more than a minute of the time.

"Well," he continued, sympathetically, "that is too bad! I have some washing here not very much but you are welcome to it. Next week there may be more."

He went about now, stuffing articles of apparel into a blue cotton bag with a pretty design on the side.

"Do you want these any certain day?" questioned Mrs. Gerhardt.

"No," he said, reflectively; "any day next week will do."

She thanked him with a simple phrase, and started to go.

"Let me see," he said, stepping ahead of them and opening the door, "you may bring them back Monday."

"Yes, sir," said Mrs. Gerhardt. "Thank you."

They went out and the Senator returned to his reading, but it was with a peculiarly disturbed mind.

"Too bad," he said, closing his volume. "There's something very pathetic about those people." Jennie's spirit of wonder and appreciation was abroad in the room.

Mrs. Gerhardt and Jennie made their way anew through the shadowy streets. They felt immeasurably encouraged by this fortunate venture.

"Didn't he have a fine room?" whispered Jennie.

"Yes," answered the mother; "he's a great man."

"He's a senator, isn't he?" continued the daughter.

"Yes."

"It must be nice to be famous," said the girl, softly.

CHAPTER II

The spirit of Jennie – who shall express it? This daughter of poverty, who was now to fetch and carry the laundry of this distinguished citizen of Columbus, was a creature of a mellowness of temperament which words can but vaguely suggest. There are natures born to the inheritance of flesh that come without understanding, and that go again without seeming to have wondered why. Life, so long as they endure it, is a true wonderland, a thing of infinite beauty, which could they but wander into it wonderingly, would be heaven enough. Opening their eyes, they see a conformable and perfect world. Trees, flowers, the world of sound and the world of color. These are the valued inheritance of their state. If no one said to them "Mine," they would wander radiantly forth, singing the song which all the earth may some day hope to hear. It is the song of goodness.

Caged in the world of the material, however, such a nature is almost invariably an anomaly. That other world of flesh into which has been woven pride and greed looks askance at the idealist, the dreamer. If one says it is sweet to look at the clouds, the answer is a warning against idleness. If one seeks to give ear to the winds, it shall be well with his soul, but they will seize upon his possessions. If all the world of the so-called inanimate delay one, calling with tenderness in sounds that seem to be too perfect to be less than understanding, it shall be ill with the body. The hands of the actual are forever reaching toward such as these – forever seizing greedily upon them. It is of such that the bond servants are made.

In the world of the actual, Jennie was such a spirit. From her earliest youth goodness and mercy had molded her every impulse. Did Sebastian fall and injure himself, it was she who struggled with straining anxiety, carried him safely to his mother. Did George complain that he was hungry, she gave him all of her bread. Many were the hours in which she had rocked her younger brothers and sisters to sleep, singing whole-heartedly betimes and dreaming far dreams. Since her earliest walking period she had been as the right hand of her mother. What scrubbing, baking, errand-running, and nursing there had been to do she did. No one had ever heard her rudely complain, though she often thought of the hardness of her lot. She knew that there were other girls whose lives were infinitely freer and fuller, but, it never occurred to her to be meanly envious; her heart might be lonely, but her lips continued to sing. When the days were fair she looked out of her kitchen window and longed to go where the meadows were. Nature's fine curves and shadows touched her as a song itself. There were times when she had gone with George and the others, leading them away to where a patch of hickory-trees flourished, because there were open fields, with shade for comfort and a brook of living water. No artist in the formulating of conceptions, her soul still responded to these things, and every sound and every sigh were welcome to her because of their beauty.

When the soft, low call or the wood-doves, those spirits of the summer, came out of the distance, she would incline her head and listen, the whole spiritual quality of it dropping like silver bubbles into her own great heart.

Where the sunlight was warm and the shadows flecked with its splendid radiance she delighted to wonder at the pattern of it, to walk where it was most golden, and follow with instinctive appreciation the holy corridors of the trees.

Color was not lost upon her. That wonderful radiance which fills the western sky at evening touched and unburdened her heart.

"I wonder," she said once with girlish simplicity, "how it would feel to float away off there among those clouds."

She had discovered a natural swing of a wild grape-vine, and was sitting in it with Martha and George.

"Oh, wouldn't it be nice if you had a boat up there," said George.

She was looking with uplifted face at a far-off cloud, a red island in a sea of silver.

"Just supposing," she said, "people could live on an island like that."

Her soul was already up there, and its elysian paths knew the lightness of her feet.

"There goes a bee," said George, noting a bumbler winging by.

"Yes," she said, dreamily, "it's going home."

"Does everything have a home?" asked Martha.

"Nearly everything," she answered.

"Do the birds go home?" questioned George.

"Yes," she said, deeply feeling the poetry of it herself, "the birds go home."

"Do the bees go home?" urged Martha.

"Yes, the bees go home."

"Do the dogs go home?" said George, who saw one traveling lonesomely along the nearby road.

"Why, of course," she said, "you know that dogs go home."

"Do the gnats?" he persisted, seeing one of those curious spirals of minute insects turning energetically in the waning light.

"Yes," she said, half believing her remark. "Listen!"

"Oho," exclaimed George, incredulously, "I wonder what kind of houses they live in."

"Listen!" she gently persisted, putting out her hand to still him.

It was that halcyon hour when the Angelus falls like a benediction upon the waning day. Far off the notes were sounding gently, and nature, now that she listened, seemed to have paused also. A scarlet-breasted robin was hopping in short spaces upon the grass before her. A humming bee hummed, a cow-bell tinkled, while some suspicious cracklings told of a secretly reconnoitering squirrel. Keeping her pretty hand weighed in the air, she listened until the long, soft notes spread and faded and her heart could hold no more. Then she arose.

"Oh," she said, clenching her fingers in an agony of poetic feeling. There were crystal tears overflowing in her eyes. The wondrous sea of feeling in her had stormed its banks. Of such was the spirit of Jennie.

CHAPTER III

The junior Senator, George Sylvester Brander, was a man of peculiar mold. In him there were joined, to a remarkable degree, the wisdom of the opportunist and the sympathetic nature of the true representative of the people. Born a native of southern Ohio, he had been raised and educated there, if one might except the two years in which he had studied law at Columbia University. He knew common and criminal law, perhaps, as well as any citizen of his State, but he had never practised with that assiduity which makes for pre-eminent success at the bar. He had made money, and had had splendid opportunities to make a great deal more if he had been willing to stultify his conscience, but that he had never been able to do. And yet his integrity had not been at all times proof against the claims of friendship. Only in the last presidential election he had thrown his support to a man for Governor who, he well knew, had no claim which a strictly honorable conscience could have recognized.

In the same way, he had been guilty of some very questionable, and one or two actually unsavory, appointments. Whenever his conscience pricked him too keenly he would endeavor to hearten himself with his pet phrase, "All in a lifetime." Thinking over things quite alone in his easy-chair, he would sometimes rise up with these words on his lips, and smile sheepishly as he did so. Conscience was not by any means dead in him. His sympathies, if anything, were keener than ever.

This man, three times Congressman from the district of which Columbus was a part, and twice United States Senator, had never married. In his youth he had had a serious love affair, but there was nothing discreditable to him in the fact that it came to nothing. The lady found it inconvenient to wait for him. He was too long in earning a competence upon which they might subsist.

Tall, straight-shouldered, neither lean nor stout, he was to-day an imposing figure. Having received his hard knocks and endured his losses, there was that about him which touched and awakened the sympathies of the imaginative. People thought him naturally agreeable, and his senatorial peers looked upon him as not any too heavy mentally, but personally a fine man.

His presence in Columbus at this particular time was due to the fact that his political fences needed careful repairing. The general election had weakened his party in the State Legislature. There were enough votes to re-elect him, but it would require the most careful political manipulation to hold them together. Other men were ambitious. There were a half-dozen available candidates, any one of whom would have rejoiced to step into his shoes. He realized the exigencies of the occasion. They could not well beat him, he thought; but even if this should happen, surely the President could be induced to give him a ministry abroad.

Yes, he might be called a successful man, but for all that Senator Brander felt that he had missed something. He had wanted to do so many things. Here he was, fifty-two years of age, clean, honorable, highly distinguished, as the world takes it, but single. He could not help looking about him now and then and speculating upon the fact that he had no one to care for him. His chamber seemed strangely hollow at times – his own personality exceedingly disagreeable.

"Fifty!" he often thought to himself. "Alone – absolutely alone."

Sitting in his chamber that Saturday afternoon, a rap at his door aroused him. He had been speculating upon the futility of his political energy in the light of the impermanence of life and fame.

"What a great fight we make to sustain ourselves!" he thought. "How little difference it will make to me a few years hence!"

He arose, and opening wide his door, perceived Jennie. She had come, as she had suggested to her mother, at this time, instead of on Monday, in order to give a more favorable impression of promptness.

"Come right in," said the Senator; and, as on the first occasion, he graciously made way for her.

Jennie passed in, momentarily expecting some compliment upon the promptitude with which the washing had been done. The Senator never noticed it at all.

"Well, my young lady," he said when she had put the bundle down, "how do you find yourself this evening?"

"Very well," replied Jennie. "We thought we'd better bring your clothes to-day instead of Monday."

"Oh, that would not have made any difference," replied Brander lightly. "Just leave them on the chair."

Jennie, without considering the fact that she had been offered no payment for the service rendered, was about to retire, had not the Senator detained her.

"How is your mother?" he asked pleasantly.

"She's very well," said Jennie simply.

"And your little sister? Is she any better?"

"The doctor thinks so," she replied.

"Sit down," he continued graciously. "I want to talk to you."

Moving to a near-by chair, the young girl seated herself.

"Hem!" he went on, clearing his throat lightly, "What seems to be the matter with her?"

"She has the measles," returned Jennie. "We thought once that she was going to die."

Brander studied her face as she said this, and he thought he saw something exceedingly pathetic there. The girl's poor clothes and her wondering admiration for his exalted station in life affected him. It made him feel almost ashamed of the comfort and luxury that surrounded him. How high up he was in the world, indeed!

"I am glad she is better now," he said kindly. "How old is your father?"

"Fifty-seven."

"And is he any better?"

"Oh yes, sir; he's around now, although he can't go out just yet."

"I believe your mother said he was a glass-blower by trade?"

"Yes, sir."

Brander well knew the depressed local conditions in this branch of manufacture. It had been part of the political issue in the last campaign. They must be in a bad way truly.

"Do all of the children go to school?" he inquired.

"Why yes, sir," returned Jennie, stammering. She was too shamefaced to own that one of the children had been obliged to leave school for the lack of shoes. The utterance of the falsehood troubled her.

He reflected awhile; then realizing that he had no good excuse for further detaining her, he arose and came over to her. From his pocket he took a thin layer of bills, and removing one, handed it to her.

"You take that," he said, "and tell your mother that I said she should use it for whatever she wants."

Jennie accepted the money with mingled feelings; it did not occur to her to look and see how much it was. The great man was so near her, the wonderful chamber in which he dwelt so impressive, that she scarcely realized what she was doing.

"Thank you," she said. "Is there any day you want your washing called for?" she added.

"Oh yes," he answered; "Monday – Monday evenings."

She went away, and in a half reverie he closed the door behind her. The interest that he felt in these people was unusual. Poverty and beauty certainly made up an affecting combination. He sat down in his chair and gave himself over to the pleasant speculations which her coming had aroused. Why should he not help them?

"I'll find out where they live," he finally resolved.

In the days that followed Jennie regularly came for the clothes. Senator Brander found himself more and more interested in her, and in time he managed to remove from her mind that timidity and

fear which had made her feel uncomfortable in his presence. One thing which helped toward this was his calling her by her first name. This began with her third visit, and thereafter he used it with almost unconscious frequency.

It could scarcely be said that he did this in a fatherly spirit, for he had little of that attitude toward any one. He felt exceedingly young as he talked to this girl, and he often wondered whether it were not possible for her to perceive and appreciate him on his youthful side.

As for Jennie, she was immensely taken with the comfort and luxury surrounding this man, and subconsciously with the man himself, the most attractive she had ever known. Everything he had was fine, everything he did was gentle, distinguished, and considerate. From some far source, perhaps some old German ancestors, she had inherited an understanding and appreciation of all this. Life ought to be lived as he lived it; the privilege of being generous particularly appealed to her.

Part of her attitude was due to that of her mother, in whose mind sympathy was always a more potent factor than reason. For instance, when she brought to her the ten dollars Mrs. Gerhardt was transported with joy.

"Oh," said Jennie, "I didn't know until I got outside that it was so much. He said I should give it to you."

Mrs. Gerhardt took it, and holding it loosely in her folded hands, saw distinctly before her the tall Senator with his fine manners.

"What a fine man he is!" she said. "He has a good heart."

Frequently throughout the evening and the next day Mrs. Gerhardt commented upon this wonderful treasure-trove, repeating again and again how good he must be or how large must be his heart. When it came to washing his clothes she almost rubbed them to pieces, feeling that whatever she did she could scarcely do enough. Gerhardt was not to know. He had such stern views about accepting money without earning it that even in their distress, she would have experienced some difficulty in getting him to take it. Consequently she said nothing, but used it to buy bread and meat, and going as it did such a little way, the sudden windfall was never noticed.

Jennie, from now on, reflected this attitude toward the Senator, and, feeling so grateful toward him, she began to talk more freely. They came to be on such good terms that he gave her a little leather picture-case from his dresser which he had observed her admiring. Every time she came he found excuse to detain her, and soon discovered that, for all her soft girlishness, there lay deep-seated in her a conscious deprecation of poverty and a shame of having to own any need. He honestly admired her for this, and, seeing that her clothes were poor and her shoes worn, he began to wonder how he could help her without offending.

Not infrequently he thought to follow her some evening, and see for himself what the condition of the family might be. He was a United States Senator, however. The neighborhood they lived in must be very poor. He stopped to consider, and for the time the counsels of prudence prevailed. Consequently the contemplated visit was put off.

Early in December Senator Brander returned to Washington for three weeks, and both Mrs. Gerhardt and Jennie were surprised to learn one day that he had gone. Never had he given them less than two dollars a week for his washing, and several times it had been five. He had not realized, perhaps, what a breach his absence would make in their finances. But there was nothing to do about it; they managed to pinch along. Gerhardt, now better, searched for work at the various mills, and finding nothing, procured a saw-buck and saw, and going from door to door, sought for the privilege of sawing wood. There was not a great deal of this to do, but he managed, by the most earnest labor to earn two, and sometimes three, dollars a week. This added to what his wife earned and what Sebastian gave was enough to keep bread in their mouths, but scarcely more.

It was at the opening of the joyous Christmas-time that the bitterness of their poverty affected them most. The Germans love to make a great display at Christmas. It is the one season of the year when the fullness of their large family affection manifests itself. Warm in the appreciation of the joys

of childhood, they love to see the little ones enjoy their toys and games. Father Gerhardt at his saw-buck during the weeks before Christmas thought of this very often. What would little Veronica not deserve after her long illness! How he would have liked to give each of the children a stout pair of shoes, the boys a warm cap, the girls a pretty hood. Toys and games and candy they always had had before. He hated to think of the snow-covered Christmas morning and no table richly piled with what their young hearts would most desire.

As for Mrs. Gerhardt, one could better imagine than describe her feelings. She felt so keenly about it that she could hardly bring herself to speak of the dreaded hour to her husband. She had managed to lay aside three dollars in the hope of getting enough to buy a ton of coal, and so put an end to poor George's daily pilgrimage to the coal yard, but now as the Christmas week drew near she decided to use it for gifts. Father Gerhardt was also secreting two dollars without the knowledge of his wife, thinking that on Christmas Eve he could produce it at a critical moment, and so relieve her maternal anxiety.

When the actual time arrived, however, there was very little to be said for the comfort that they got out of the occasion. The whole city was rife with Christmas atmosphere. Grocery stores and meat markets were strung with holly. The toy shops and candy stores were radiant with fine displays of everything that a self-respecting Santa Claus should have about him. Both parents and children observed it all – the former with serious thoughts of need and anxiety, the latter with wild fancy and only partially suppressed longings.

Frequently had Gerhardt said in their presence:

"Kriss Kringle is very poor this year. He hasn't so very much to give."

But no child, however poverty-stricken, could be made to believe this. Every time after so saying he looked into their eyes, but in spite of the warning, expectation flamed in them undiminished.

Christmas coming on Tuesday, the Monday before there was no school. Before going to the hotel Mrs. Gerhardt had cautioned George that he must bring enough coal from the yards to last over Christmas day. The latter went at once with his two younger sisters, but there being a dearth of good picking, it took them a long time to fill their baskets, and by night they had gathered only a scanty supply.

"Did you go for the coal?" asked Mrs. Gerhardt the first thing when she returned from the hotel that evening.

"Yes," said George.

"Did you get enough for to-morrow?"

"Yes," he replied, "I guess so."

"Well, now, I'll go and look," she replied. Taking the lamp, they went out into the woodshed where the coal was deposited.

"Oh, my!" she exclaimed when she saw it; "why, that isn't near enough. You must go right off and get some more."

"Oh," said George, pouting his lips, "I don't want to go. Let Bass go."

Bass, who had returned promptly at a quarter-past six, was already busy in the back bedroom washing and dressing preparatory to going down-town.

"No," said Mrs. Gerhardt. "Bass has worked hard all day. You must go."

"I don't want to," pouted George.

"All right," said Mrs. Gerhardt, "maybe to-morrow you'll be without a fire, and then what?"

They went back to the house, but George's conscience was too troubled to allow him to consider the case as closed.

"Bass, you come, too," he called to his elder brother when he was inside.

"Go where?" said Bass.

"To get some coal."

"No," said the former, "I guess not. What do you take me for?"

"Well, then, I'll not," said George, with an obstinate jerk of his head.

"Why didn't you get it up this afternoon?" questioned his brother sharply; "you've had all day to do it."

"Aw, I did try," said George. "We couldn't find enough. I can't get any when there ain't any, can I?"

"I guess you didn't try very hard," said the dandy.

"What's the matter now?" asked Jennie, who, coming in after having stopped at the grocer's for her mother, saw George with a solemn pout on his face.

"Oh, Bass won't go with me to get any coal?"

"Didn't you get any this afternoon?"

"Yes," said George, "but ma says I didn't get enough."

"I'll go with you," said his sister. "Bass, will you come along?"

"No," said the young man, indifferently, "I won't." He was adjusting his necktie and felt irritated.

"There ain't any," said George, "unless we get it off the cars. There wasn't any cars where I was."

"There are, too," exclaimed Bass.

"There ain't," said George.

"Oh, don't quarrel," said Jennie. "Get the baskets and let's go right now before it gets too late."

The other children, who had a fondness for their big sister, got out the implements of supply – Veronica a basket, Martha and William buckets, and George, a big clothes-basket, which he and Jennie were to fill and carry between them. Bass, moved by his sister's willingness and the little regard he still maintained for her, now made a suggestion.

"I'll tell you what you do, Jen," he said. "You go over there with the kids to Eighth Street and wait around those cars. I'll be along in a minute. When I come by don't any of you pretend to know me. Just you say, 'Mister, won't you please throw us some coal down?' and then I'll get up on the cars and pitch off enough to fill the baskets. D'ye understand?"

"All right," said Jennie, very much pleased.

Out into the snowy night they went, and made their way to the railroad tracks. At the intersection of the street and the broad railroad yard were many heavily laden cars of bituminous coal newly backed in. All of the children gathered within the shadow of one. While they were standing there, waiting the arrival of their brother, the Washington Special arrived, a long, fine train with several of the new style drawing-room cars, the big plate-glass windows shining and the passengers looking out from the depths of their comfortable chairs. The children instinctively drew back as it thundered past.

"Oh, wasn't it long?" said George.

"Wouldn't I like to be a brakeman, though," sighed William.

Jennie, alone, kept silent, but to her particularly the suggestion of travel and comfort had appealed. How beautiful life must be for the rich!

Sebastian now appeared in the distance, a mannish spring in his stride, and with every evidence that he took himself seriously. He was of that peculiar stubbornness and determination that had the children failed to carry out his plan of procedure he would have gone deliberately by and refused to help them at all.

Martha, however, took the situation as it needed to be taken, and piped out childishly, "Mister, won't you please throw us down some coal?"

Sebastian stopped abruptly, and looking sharply at them as though he were really a stranger, exclaimed, "Why, certainly," and proceeded to climb up on the car, from whence he cast down with remarkable celerity more than enough chunks to fill their baskets. Then as though not caring to linger any longer amid such plebeian company, he hastened across the network of tracks and was lost to view.

On their way home they encountered another gentleman, this time a real one, with high hat and distinguished cape coat, whom Jennie immediately recognized. This was the honorable Senator himself, newly returned from Washington, and anticipating a very unprofitable Christmas. He had arrived upon the express which had enlisted the attention of the children, and was carrying his light grip for the pleasure of it to the hotel. As he passed he thought that he recognized Jennie.

"Is that you, Jennie?" he said, and paused to be more certain.

The latter, who had discovered him even more quickly than he had her, exclaimed, "Oh, there is Mr. Brander!" Then, dropping her end of the basket, with a caution to the children to take it right home, she hurried away in the opposite direction.

The Senator followed, vainly calling three or four times "Jennie! Jennie!" Losing hope of overtaking her, and suddenly recognizing, and thereupon respecting, her simple, girlish shame, he stopped, and turning back, decided to follow the children. Again he felt that same sensation which he seemed always to get from this girl – the far cry between her estate and his. It was something to be a Senator to-night, here where these children were picking coal. What could the joyous holiday of the morrow hold for them? He tramped along sympathetically, an honest lightness coming into his step, and soon he saw them enter the gateway of the low cottage. Crossing the street, he stood in the weak shade of the snow-laden trees. The light was burning with a yellow glow in a rear window. All about was the white snow. In the woodshed he could hear the voices of the children, and once he thought he detected the form of Mrs. Gerhardt. After a time another form came shadow-like through the side gate. He knew who it was. It touched him to the quick, and he bit his lip sharply to suppress any further show of emotion. Then he turned vigorously on his heel and walked away.

The chief grocery of the city was conducted by one Manning, a stanch adherent of Brander, and one who felt honored by the Senator's acquaintance. To him at his busy desk came the Senator this same night.

"Manning," he said, "could I get you to undertake a little work for me this evening?"

"Why, certainly, Senator, certainly," said the grocery-man. "When did you get back? Glad to see you. Certainly."

"I want you to get everything together that would make a nice Christmas for a family of eight – father and mother and six children – Christmas tree, groceries, toys – you know what I mean."

"Certainly, certainly, Senator."

"Never mind the cost now. Send plenty of everything. I'll give you the address," and he picked up a note-book to write it.

"Why, I'll be delighted, Senator," went on Mr. Manning, rather affected himself. "I'll be delighted. You always were generous."

"Here you are, Manning," said the Senator, grimly, from the mere necessity of preserving his senatorial dignity. "Send everything at once, and the bill to me."

"I'll be delighted," was all the astonished and approving grocery-man could say.

The Senator passed out, but remembering the old people, visited a clothier and shoe man, and, finding that he could only guess at what sizes might be required, ordered the several articles with the privilege of exchange. When his labors were over, he returned to his room.

"Carrying coal," he thought, over and over. "Really, it was very thoughtless in me. I mustn't forget them any more."

CHAPTER IV

The desire to flee which Jennie experienced upon seeing the Senator again was attributable to what she considered the disgrace of her position. She was ashamed to think that he, who thought so well of her, should discover her doing so common a thing. Girl-like, she was inclined to imagine that his interest in her depended upon something else than her mere personality.

When she reached home Mrs. Gerhardt had heard of her flight from the other children.

"What was the matter with you, anyhow?" asked George, when she came in.

"Oh, nothing," she answered, but immediately turned to her mother and said, "Mr. Brander came by and saw us."

"Oh, did he?" softly exclaimed her mother. "He's back then. What made you run, though, you foolish girl?"

"Well, I didn't want him to see me."

"Well, maybe he didn't know you, anyhow," she said, with a certain sympathy for her daughter's predicament.

"Oh yes, he did, too," whispered Jennie. "He called after me three or four times."

Mrs. Gerhardt shook her head.

"What is it?" said Gerhardt, who had been hearing the conversation from the adjoining room, and now came out.

"Oh, nothing," said the mother, who hated to explain the significance which the Senator's personality had come to have in their lives. "A man frightened them when they were bringing the coal."

The arrival of the Christmas presents later in the evening threw the household into an uproar of excitement. Neither Gerhardt nor the mother could believe their eyes when a grocery wagon halted in front of their cottage and a lusty clerk began to carry in the gifts. After failing to persuade the clerk that he had made a mistake, the large assortment of good things was looked over with very human glee.

"Just you never mind," was the clerk's authoritative words. "I know what I'm about. Gerhardt, isn't it? Well, you're the people."

Mrs. Gerhardt moved about, rubbing her hands in her excitement, and giving vent to an occasional "Well, isn't that nice now!"

Gerhardt himself was melted at the thought of the generosity of the unknown benefactor, and was inclined to lay it all to the goodness of a great local mill owner, who knew him and wished him well. Mrs. Gerhardt tearfully suspected the source, but said nothing. Jennie knew, by instinct, the author of it all.

The afternoon of the day after Christmas Brander encountered the mother in the hotel, Jennie having been left at home to look after the house.

"How do you do, Mrs. Gerhardt," he exclaimed genially extending his hand. "How did you enjoy your Christmas?"

Poor Mrs. Gerhardt took it nervously; her eyes filled rapidly with tears.

"There, there," he said, patting her on the shoulder. "Don't cry. You mustn't forget to get my laundry to-day."

"Oh no, sir," she returned, and would have said more had he not walked away.

From this on, Gerhardt heard continually of the fine Senator at the hotel, how pleasant he was, and how much he paid for his washing. With the simplicity of a German workingman, he was easily persuaded that Mr. Brander must be a very great and a very good man.

Jennie, whose feelings needed no encouragement in this direction, was more than ever prejudiced in his favor.

There was developing in her that perfection of womanhood, the full mold of form, which could not help but attract any man. Already she was well built, and tall for a girl. Had she been dressed in the trailing skirts of a woman of fashion she would have made a fitting companion for a man the height of the Senator. Her eyes were wondrously clear and bright, her skin fair, and her teeth white and even. She was clever, too, in a sensible way, and by no means deficient in observation. All that she lacked was training and the assurance of which the knowledge of utter dependency despoils one. But the carrying of washing and the compulsion to acknowledge almost anything as a favor put her at a disadvantage.

Nowadays when she came to the hotel upon her semi-weekly errand Senator Brander took her presence with easy grace, and to this she responded. He often gave her little presents for herself, or for her brothers and sisters, and he talked to her so unaffectedly that finally the overawing sense of the great difference between them was brushed away, and she looked upon him more as a generous friend than as a distinguished Senator. He asked her once how she would like to go to a seminary, thinking all the while how attractive she would be when she came out. Finally, one evening, he called her to his side.

"Come over here, Jennie," he said, "and stand by me."

She came, and, moved by a sudden impulse, he took her hand.

"Well, Jennie," he said, studying her face in a quizzical, interrogative way, "what do you think of me, anyhow?"

"Oh," she answered, looking consciously away, "I don't know. What makes you ask me that?"

"Oh yes, you do," he returned. "You have some opinion of me. Tell me now, what is it?"

"No, I haven't," she said, innocently.

"Oh yes, you have," he went on, pleasantly, interested by her transparent evasiveness. "You must think something of me. Now, what is it?"

"Do you mean do I like you?" she asked, frankly, looking down at the big mop of black hair well streaked with gray which hung about his forehead, and gave an almost lionine cast to his fine face.

"Well, yes," he said, with a sense of disappointment. She was barren of the art of the coquette.

"Why, of course I like you," she replied, prettily.

"Haven't you ever thought anything else about me?" he went on.

"I think you're very kind," she went on, even more bashfully; she realized now that he was still holding her hand.

"Is that all?" he asked.

"Well," she said, with fluttering eyelids, "isn't that enough?"

He looked at her, and the playful, companionable directness of her answering gaze thrilled him through and through. He studied her face in silence while she turned and twisted, feeling, but scarcely understanding, the deep import of his scrutiny.

"Well," he said at last, "I think you're a fine girl. Don't you think I'm a pretty nice man?"

"Yes," said Jennie, promptly.

He leaned back in his chair and laughed at the unconscious drollery of her reply. She looked at him curiously, and smiled.

"What made you laugh?" she inquired.

"Oh, your answer" he returned. "I really ought not to laugh, though. You don't appreciate me in the least. I don't believe you like me at all."

"But I do, though," she replied, earnestly. "I think you're so good." Her eyes showed very plainly that she felt what she was saying.

"Well," he said, drawing her gently down to him; then, at the same instant, he pressed his lips to her cheek.

"Oh!" she cried, straightening up, at once startled and frightened.

It was a new note in their relationship. The senatorial quality vanished in an instant. She recognized in him something that she had not felt before. He seemed younger, too. She was a woman to him, and he was playing the part of a lover. She hesitated, but not knowing just what to do, did nothing at all.

"Well," he said, "did I frighten you?"

She looked at him, but moved by her underlying respect for this great man, she said, with a smile, "Yes, you did."

"I did it because I like you so much."

She meditated upon this a moment, and then said, "I think I'd better be going."

"Now then," he pleaded, "are you going to run away because of that?"

"No," she said, moved by a curious feeling of ingratitude; "but I ought to be going. They'll be wondering where I am."

"You're sure you're not angry about it?"

"No," she replied, and with more of a womanly air than she had ever shown before. It was a novel experience to be in so authoritative a position. It was so remarkable that it was somewhat confusing to both of them.

"You're my girl, anyhow," the Senator said, rising. "I'm going to take care of you in the future."

Jennie heard this, and it pleased her. He was so well fitted, she thought, to do wondrous things; he was nothing less than a veritable magician. She looked about her and the thought of coming into such a life and such an atmosphere was heavenly. Not that she fully understood his meaning, however. He meant to be good and generous, and to give her fine things. Naturally she was happy. She took up the package that she had come for, not seeing or feeling the incongruity of her position, while he felt it as a direct reproof.

"She ought not to carry that," he thought. A great wave of sympathy swept over him. He took her cheeks between his hands, this time in a superior and more generous way. "Never mind, little girl," he said. "You won't have to do this always. I'll see what I can do."

The outcome of this was simply a more sympathetic relationship between them. He did not hesitate to ask her to sit beside him on the arm of his chair the next time she came, and to question her intimately about the family's condition and her own desires. Several times he noticed that she was evading his questions, particularly in regard to what her father was doing. She was ashamed to own that he was sawing wood. Fearing lest something more serious was impending, he decided to go out some day and see for himself.

This he did when a convenient morning presented itself and his other duties did not press upon him. It was three days before the great fight in the Legislature began which ended in his defeat. Nothing could be done in these few remaining days. So he took his cane and strolled forth, coming to the cottage in the course of a half hour, and knocked boldly at the door.

Mrs. Gerhardt opened it.

"Good-morning," he said, cheerily; then, seeing her hesitate, he added, "May I come in?"

The good mother, who was all but overcome by his astonishing presence, wiped her hands furtively upon her much-mended apron, and, seeing that he waited for a reply, said:

"Oh yes. Come right in."

She hurried forward, forgetting to close the door, and, offering him a chair, asked him to be seated.

Brander, feeling sorry that he was the occasion of so much confusion, said: "Don't trouble yourself, Mrs. Gerhardt. I was passing and thought I'd come in. How is your husband?"

"He's well, thank you," returned the mother. "He's out working to-day."

"Then he has found employment?"

"Yes, sir," said Mrs. Gerhardt, who hesitated, like Jennie, to say what it was.

"The children are all well now, and in school, I hope?"

"Yes," replied Mrs. Gerhardt. She had now unfastened her apron, and was nervously turning it in her lap.

"That's good, and where is Jennie?"

The latter, who had been ironing, had abandoned the board and had concealed herself in the bedroom, where she was busy tidying herself in the fear that her mother would not have the forethought to say that she was out, and so let her have a chance for escape.

"She's here," returned the mother. "I'll call her."

"What did you tell him I was here for?" said Jennie, weakly.

"What could I do?" asked the mother.

Together they hesitated while the Senator surveyed the room. He felt sorry to think that such deserving people must suffer so; he intended, in a vague way, to ameliorate their condition if possible.

"Good-morning," the Senator said to Jennie, when finally she came hesitatingly into the room. "How do you do to-day?"

Jennie came forward, extending her hand and blushing. She found herself so much disturbed by this visit that she could hardly find tongue to answer his questions.

"I thought," he said, "I'd come out and find where you live. This is a quite comfortable house. How many rooms have you?"

"Five," said Jennie. "You'll have to excuse the looks this morning. We've been ironing, and it's all upset."

"I know," said Brander, gently. "Don't you think I understand, Jennie? You mustn't feel nervous about me."

She noticed the comforting, personal tone he always used with her when she was at his room, and it helped to subdue her flustered senses.

"You mustn't think it anything if I come here occasionally. I intend to come. I want to meet your father."

"Oh," said Jennie, "he's out to-day."

While they were talking, however, the honest woodcutter was coming in at the gate with his buck and saw. Brander saw him, and at once recognized him by a slight resemblance to his daughter.

"There he is now, I believe," he said.

"Oh, is he?" said Jennie, looking out.

Gerhardt, who was given to speculation these days, passed by the window without looking up. He put his wooden buck down, and, hanging his saw on a nail on the side of the house, came in.

"Mother," he called, in German, and, then not seeing her, he came to the door of the front room and looked in.

Brander arose and extended his hand. The knotted and weather-beaten German came forward, and took it with a very questioning expression of countenance.

"This is my father, Mr. Brander," said Jennie, all her diffidence dissolved by sympathy. "This is the gentleman from the hotel, papa, Mr. Brander."

"What's the name?" said the German, turning his head.

"Brander," said the Senator.

"Oh yes," he said, with a considerable German accent.

"Since I had the fever I don't hear good. My wife, she spoke to me of you."

"Yes," said the Senator, "I thought I'd come out and make your acquaintance. You have quite a family."

"Yes," said the father, who was conscious of his very poor garments and anxious to get away. "I have six children – all young. She's the oldest girl."

Mrs. Gerhardt now came back, and Gerhardt, seeing his chance, said hurriedly:

"Well, if you'll excuse me, I'll go. I broke my saw, and so I had to stop work."

"Certainly," said Brander, graciously, realizing now why Jennie had never wanted to explain. He half wished that she were courageous enough not to conceal anything.

"Well, Mrs. Gerhardt," he said, when the mother was stiffly seated, "I want to tell you that you mustn't look on me as a stranger. Hereafter I want you to keep me informed of how things are going with you. Jennie won't always do it."

Jennie smiled quietly. Mrs. Gerhardt only rubbed her hands.

"Yes," she answered, humbly grateful.

They talked for a few minutes, and then the Senator rose.

"Tell your husband," he said, "to come and see me next Monday at my office in the hotel. I want to do something for him."

"Thank you," faltered Mrs. Gerhardt.

"I'll not stay any longer now," he added. "Don't forget to have him come."

"Oh, he'll come," she returned.

Adjusting a glove on one hand, he extended the other to Jennie.

"Here is your finest treasure, Mrs. Gerhardt," he said. "I think I'll take her."

"Well, I don't know," said her mother, "whether I could spare her or not."

"Well," said the Senator, going toward the door, and giving Mrs. Gerhardt his hand, "good-morning."

He nodded and walked out, while a half-dozen neighbors, who had observed his entrance, peeked from behind curtains and drawn blinds at the astonishing sight.

"Who can that be, anyhow?" was the general query.

"See what he gave me," said the innocent mother to her daughter the moment he had closed the door.

It was a ten-dollar bill. He had placed it softly in her hand as he said good-by.

CHAPTER V

Having been led by circumstances into an attitude of obligation toward the Senator, it was not unnatural that Jennie should become imbued with a most generous spirit of appreciation for everything he had done and now continued to do. The Senator gave her father a letter to a local mill owner, who saw that he received something to do. It was not much, to be sure, a mere job as night-watchman, but it helped, and old Gerhardt's gratitude was extravagant. Never was there such a great, such a good man!

Nor was Mrs. Gerhardt overlooked. Once Brander sent her a dress, and at another time a shawl. All these benefactions were made in a spirit of mingled charity and self-gratification, but to Mrs. Gerhardt they glowed with but one motive. Senator Brander was good-hearted.

As for Jennie, he drew nearer to her in every possible way, so that at last she came to see him in a light which would require considerable analysis to make clear. This fresh, young soul, however, had too much innocence and buoyancy to consider for a moment the world's point of view. Since that one notable and halcyon visit upon which he had robbed her her original shyness, and implanted a tender kiss upon her cheek, they had lived in a different atmosphere. Jennie was his companion now, and as he more and more unbended, and even joyously flung aside the habiliments of his dignity, her perception of him grew clearer. They laughed and chatted in a natural way, and he keenly enjoyed this new entrance into the radiant world of youthful happiness.

One thing that disturbed him, however, was the occasional thought, which he could not repress, that he was not doing right. Other people must soon discover that he was not confining himself strictly to conventional relations with this washer-woman's daughter. He suspected that the housekeeper was not without knowledge that Jennie almost invariably lingered from a quarter to three-quarters of an hour whenever she came for or returned his laundry. He knew that it might come to the ears of the hotel clerks, and so, in a general way, get about town and work serious injury, but the reflection did not cause him to modify his conduct. Sometimes he consoled himself with the thought that he was not doing her any actual harm, and at other times he would argue that he could not put this one delightful tenderness out of his life. Did he not wish honestly to do her much good?

He thought of these things occasionally, and decided that he could not stop. The self-approval which such a resolution might bring him was hardly worth the inevitable pain of the abnegation. He had not so very many more years to live. Why die unsatisfied?

One evening he put his arm around her and strained her to his breast. Another time he drew her to his knee, and told her of his life at Washington. Always now he had a caress and a kiss for her, but it was still in a tentative, uncertain way. He did not want to reach for her soul too deeply.

Jennie enjoyed it all innocently. Elements of fancy and novelty entered into her life. She was an unsophisticated creature, emotional, totally inexperienced in the matter of the affections, and yet mature enough mentally to enjoy the attentions of this great man who had thus bowed from his high position to make friends with her.

One evening she pushed his hair back from his forehead as she stood by his chair, and, finding nothing else to do, took out his watch. The great man thrilled as he looked at her pretty innocence.

"Would you like to have a watch, too?" he asked.

"Yes, indeed, I would," said Jennie, with a deep breath.

The next day he stopped as he was passing a jewelry store and bought one. It was gold, and had pretty ornamented hands.

"Jennie," he said, when she came the next time, "I want to show you something. See what time it is by my watch."

Jennie drew out the watch from his waistcoat pocket and started in surprise.

"This isn't your watch!" she exclaimed, her face full of innocent wonder.

"No," he said, delighted with his little deception. "It's yours."

"Mine!" exclaimed Jennie. "Mine! Oh, isn't it lovely!"

"Do you think so?" he said.

Her delight touched and pleased him immensely. Her face shone with light and her eyes fairly danced.

"That's yours," he said. "See that you wear it now, and don't lose it."

"You're so good!" she exclaimed.

"No," he said, but he held her at arm's length by the waist, to make up his mind what his reward should be. Slowly he drew her toward him until, when very close, she put her arms about his neck, and laid her cheek in gratitude against his own. This was the quintessence of pleasure for him. He felt as he had been longing to feel for years.

The progress of his idyl suffered a check when the great senatorial fight came on in the Legislature. Attacked by a combination of rivals, Brander was given the fight of his life. To his amazement he discovered that a great railroad corporation, which had always been friendly, was secretly throwing its strength in behalf of an already too powerful candidate. Shocked by this defection, he was thrown alternately into the deepest gloom and into paroxysms of wrath. These slings of fortune, however lightly he pretended to receive them, never failed to lacerate him. It had been long since he had suffered a defeat – too long.

During this period Jennie received her earliest lesson in the vagaries of men. For two weeks she did not even see him, and one evening, after an extremely comfortless conference with his leader, he met her with the most chilling formality. When she knocked at his door he only troubled to open it a foot, exclaiming almost harshly: "I can't bother about the clothes to-night. Come tomorrow."

Jennie retreated, shocked and surprised by this reception. She did not know what to think of it. He was restored on the instant to his far-off, mighty throne, and left to rule in peace. Why should he not withdraw the light of his countenance if it pleased him. But why —

A day or two later he repented mildly, but had no time to readjust matters. His washing was taken and delivered with considerable formality, and he went on toiling forgetfully, until at last he was miserably defeated by two votes. Astounded by this result, he lapsed into gloomy dejection of soul. What was he to do now?

Into this atmosphere came Jennie, bringing with her the lightness and comfort of her own hopeful disposition. Nagged to desperation by his thoughts, Brander first talked to her to amuse himself; but soon his distress imperceptibly took flight; he found himself actually smiling.

"Ah, Jennie," he said, speaking to her as he might have done to a child, "youth is on your side. You possess the most valuable thing in life."

"Do I?"

"Yes, but you don't realize it. You never will until it is too late."

"I love that girl," he thought to himself that night. "I wish I could have her with me always."

But fortune had another fling for him to endure. It got about the hotel that Jennie was, to use the mildest expression, conducting herself strangely. A girl who carries washing must expect criticism if anything not befitting her station is observed in her apparel. Jennie was seen wearing the gold watch. Her mother was informed by the housekeeper of the state of things.

"I thought I'd speak to you about it," she said. "People are talking. You'd better not let your daughter go to his room for the laundry."

Mrs. Gerhardt was too astonished and hurt for utterance. Jennie had told her nothing, but even now she did not believe there was anything to tell. The watch had been both approved of and admired by her. She had not thought that it was endangering her daughter's reputation.

Going home she worried almost incessantly, and talked with Jennie about it. The latter did not admit the implication that things had gone too far. In fact, she did not look at it in that light. She did not own, it is true, what really had happened while she was visiting the Senator.

"It's so terrible that people should begin to talk!" said her mother. "Did you really stay so long in the room?"

"I don't know," returned Jennie, compelled by her conscience to admit at least part of the truth. "Perhaps I did."

"He has never said anything out of the way to you, has he?"

"No," answered her daughter, who did not attach any suspicion of evil to what had passed between them.

If the mother had only gone a little bit further she might have learned more, but she was only too glad, for her own peace of mind, to hush the matter up. People were slandering a good man, that she knew. Jennie had been the least bit indiscreet. People were always so ready to talk. How could the poor girl, amid such unfortunate circumstances, do otherwise than she did. It made her cry to think of it.

The result of it all was that she decided to get the washing herself.

She came to his door the next Monday after this decision. Brander, who was expecting Jennie, was both surprised and disappointed.

"Why," he said to her, "what has become of Jennie?"

Having hoped that he would not notice, or, at least, not comment upon the change, Mrs. Gerhardt did not know what to say. She looked up at him weakly in her innocent, motherly way, and said, "She couldn't come to-night."

"Not ill, is she?" he inquired.

"No."

"I'm glad to hear that," he said resignedly. "How have you been?"

Mrs. Gerhardt answered his kindly inquiries and departed. After she had gone he got to thinking the matter over, and wondered what could have happened. It seemed rather odd that he should be wondering over it.

On Saturday, however, when she returned the clothes he felt that there must be something wrong.

"What's the matter, Mrs. Gerhardt?" he inquired. "Has anything happened to your daughter?"

"No, sir," she returned, too troubled to wish to deceive him.

"Isn't she coming for the laundry any more?"

"I – I – " ventured the mother, stammering in her perturbation; "she – they have been talking about her," she at last forced herself to say.

"Who has been talking?" he asked gravely.

"The people here in the hotel."

"Who, what people?" he interrupted, a touch of annoyance showing in his voice.

"The housekeeper."

"The housekeeper, eh!" he exclaimed. "What has she got to say?"

The mother related to him her experience.

"And she told you that, did she?" he remarked in wrath. "She ventures to trouble herself about my affairs, does she? I wonder people can't mind their own business without interfering with mine. Your daughter, Mrs. Gerhardt, is perfectly safe with me. I have no intention of doing her an injury. It's a shame," he added indignantly, "that a girl can't come to my room in this hotel without having her motive questioned. I'll look into this matter."

"I hope you don't think that I have anything to do with it," said the mother apologetically. "I know you like Jennie and wouldn't injure her. You've done so much for her and all of us, Mr. Brander, I feel ashamed to keep her away."

"That's all right, Mrs. Gerhardt," he said quietly. "You did perfectly right. I don't blame you in the least. It is the lying accusation passed about in this hotel that I object to. We'll see about that."

Mrs. Gerhardt stood there, pale with excitement. She was afraid she had deeply offended this man who had done so much for them. If she could only say something, she thought, that would clear this matter up and make him feel that she was no tattler. Scandal was distressing to her.

"I thought I was doing everything for the best," she said at last.

"So you were," he replied. "I like Jennie very much. I have always enjoyed her coming here. It is my intention to do well by her, but perhaps it will be better to keep her away, at least for the present."

Again that evening the Senator sat in his easy-chair and brooded over this new development. Jennie was really much more precious to him than he had thought. Now that he had no hope of seeing her there any more, he began to realize how much these little visits of hers had meant. He thought the matter over very carefully, realized instantly that there was nothing to be done so far as the hotel gossip was concerned, and concluded that he had really placed the girl in a very unsatisfactory position.

"Perhaps I had better end this little affair," he thought. "It isn't a wise thing to pursue."

On the strength of this conclusion he went to Washington and finished his term. Then he returned to Columbus to await the friendly recognition from the President which was to send him upon some ministry abroad. Jennie had not been forgotten in the least. The longer he stayed away the more eager he was to get back. When he was again permanently settled in his old quarters he took up his cane one morning and strolled out in the direction of the cottage. Arriving there, he made up his mind to go in, and knocking at the door, he was greeted by Mrs. Gerhardt and her daughter with astonished and diffident smiles. He explained vaguely that he had been away, and mentioned his laundry as if that were the object of his visit. Then, when chance gave him a few moments with Jennie alone, he plunged in boldly.

"How would you like to take a drive with me to-morrow evening?" he asked.

"I'd like it," said Jennie, to whom the proposition was a glorious novelty.

He smiled and patted her cheek, foolishly happy to see her again. Every day seemed to add to her beauty. Graced with her clean white apron, her shapely head crowned by the glory of her simply plaited hair, she was a pleasing sight for any man to look upon.

He waited until Mrs. Gerhardt returned, and then, having accomplished the purpose of his visit, he arose.

"I'm going to take your daughter out riding to-morrow evening," he explained. "I want to talk to her about her future."

"Won't that be nice?" said the mother. She saw nothing incongruous in the proposal. They parted with smiles and much handshaking.

"That man has the best heart," commented Mrs. Gerhardt. "Doesn't he always speak so nicely of you? He may help you to an education. You ought to be proud."

"I am," said Jennie frankly.

"I don't know whether we had better tell your father or not," concluded Mrs. Gerhardt. "He doesn't like for you to be out evenings."

Finally they decided not to tell him. He might not understand.

Jennie was ready when he called. He could see by the weak-flamed, unpretentious parlor-lamp that she was dressed for him, and that the occasion had called out the best she had. A pale lavender gingham, starched and ironed, until it was a model of laundering, set off her pretty figure to perfection. There were little lace-edged cuffs and a rather high collar attached to it. She had no gloves, nor any jewelry, nor yet a jacket good enough to wear, but her hair was done up in such a dainty way that it set off her well-shaped head better than any hat, and the few ringlets that could escape crowned her as with a halo. When Brander suggested that she should wear a jacket she hesitated a moment; then she went in and borrowed her mother's cape, a plain gray woolen one. Brander realized now that she had no jacket, and suffered keenly to think that she had contemplated going without one.

"She would have endured the raw night air," he thought, "and said nothing of it."

He looked at her and shook his head reflectively. Then they started, and he quickly forgot everything but the great fact that she was at his side. She talked with freedom and with a gentle girlish enthusiasm that he found irresistibly charming.

"Why, Jennie," he said, when she had called upon him to notice how soft the trees looked, where, outlined dimly against the new rising moon, they were touched with its yellow light, "you're a great one. I believe you would write poetry if you were schooled a little."

"Do you suppose I could?" she asked innocently.

"Do I suppose, little girl?" he said, taking her hand. "Do I suppose? Why, I know. You're the dearest little day-dreamer in the world. Of course you could write poetry. You live it. You are poetry, my dear. Don't you worry about writing any."

This eulogy touched her as nothing else possibly could have done. He was always saying such nice things. No one ever seemed to like or to appreciate her half as much as he did. And how good he was! Everybody said that. Her own father.

They rode still farther, until suddenly remembering, he said: "I wonder what time it is. Perhaps we had better be turning back. Have you your watch?"

Jennie started, for this watch had been the one thing of which she had hoped he would not speak. Ever since he had returned it had been on her mind.

In his absence the family finances had become so strained that she had been compelled to pawn it. Martha had got to that place in the matter of apparel where she could no longer go to school unless something new were provided for her. And so, after much discussion, it was decided that the watch must go.

Bass took it, and after much argument with the local pawn broker, he had been able to bring home ten dollars. Mrs. Gerhardt expended the money upon her children, and heaved a sigh of relief. Martha looked very much better. Naturally, Jennie was glad.

Now, however, when the Senator spoke of it, her hour of retribution seemed at hand. She actually trembled, and he noticed her discomfiture.

"Why, Jennie," he said gently, "what made you start like that?"

"Nothing," she answered.

"Haven't you your watch?"

She paused, for it seemed impossible to tell a deliberate falsehood. There was a strained silence; then she said, with a voice that had too much of a sob in it for him not to suspect the truth, "No, sir." He persisted, and she confessed everything.

"Well," he said, "dearest, don't feel badly about it. There never was such another girl. I'll get your watch for you. Hereafter when you need anything I want you to come to me. Do you hear? I want you to promise me that. If I'm not here, I want you to write me. I'll always be in touch with you from now on. You will have my address. Just let me know, and I'll help you. Do you understand?"

"Yes," said Jennie.

"You'll promise to do that now, will you?'

"Yes," she replied.

For a moment neither of them spoke.

"Jennie," he said at last, the spring-like quality of the night moving him to a burst of feeling, "I've about decided that I can't do without you. Do you think you could make up your mind to live with me from now on?"

Jennie looked away, not clearly understanding his words as he meant them.

"I don't know," she said vaguely.

"Well, you think about it," he said pleasantly. "I'm serious. Would you be willing to marry me, and let me put you away in a seminary for a few years?"

"Go away to school?"

"Yes, after you marry me."

"I guess so," she replied. Her mother came into her mind. Maybe she could help the family.

He looked around at her, and tried to make out the expression on her face. It was not dark. The moon was now above the trees in the east, and already the vast host of stars were paling before it.

"Don't you care for me at all, Jennie?" he asked.

"Yes!"

"You never come for my laundry any more, though," he returned pathetically. It touched her to hear him say this.

"I didn't do that," she answered. "I couldn't help it; Mother thought it was best."

"So it was," he assented. "Don't feel badly. I was only joking with you. You'd be glad to come if you could, wouldn't you?"

"Yes, I would," she answered frankly.

He took her hand and pressed it so feelingly that all his kindly words seemed doubly emphasized to her. Reaching up impulsively, she put her arms about him. "You're so good to me," she said with the loving tone of a daughter.

"You're my girl, Jennie," he said with deep feeling. "I'd do anything in the world for you."

CHAPTER VI

The father of this unfortunate family, William Gerhardt, was a man of considerable interest on his personal side. Born in the kingdom of Saxony, he had had character enough to oppose the army conscription iniquity, and to flee, in his eighteenth year, to Paris. From there he had set forth for America, the land of promise.

Arrived in this country, he had made his way, by slow stages, from New York to Philadelphia, and thence westward, working for a time in the various glass factories in Pennsylvania. In one romantic village of this new world he had found his heart's ideal. With her, a simple American girl of German extraction, he had removed to Youngstown, and thence to Columbus, each time following a glass manufacturer by the name of Hammond, whose business prospered and waned by turns.

Gerhardt was an honest man, and he liked to think that others appreciated his integrity. "William," his employer used to say to him, "I want you because I can trust you," and this, to him, was more than silver and gold.

This honesty, like his religious convictions, was wholly due to inheritance. He had never reasoned about it. Father and grandfather before him were sturdy German artisans, who had never cheated anybody out of a dollar, and this honesty of intention came into his veins undiminished.

His Lutheran proclivities had been strengthened by years of church-going and the religious observances of home life, In his father's cottage the influence of the Lutheran minister had been all-powerful; he had inherited the feeling that the Lutheran Church was a perfect institution, and that its teachings were of all-importance when it came to the issue of the future life. His wife, nominally of the Mennonite faith, was quite willing to accept her husband's creed. And so his household became a God-fearing one; wherever they went their first public step was to ally themselves with the local Lutheran church, and the minister was always a welcome guest in the Gerhardt home.

Pastor Wundt, the shepherd of the Columbus church, was a sincere and ardent Christian, but his bigotry and hard-and-fast orthodoxy made him intolerant. He considered that the members of his flock were jeopardizing their eternal salvation if they danced, played cards, or went to theaters, and he did not hesitate to declare vociferously that hell was yawning for those who disobeyed his injunctions. Drinking, even temperately, was a sin. Smoking – well, he smoked himself. Right conduct in marriage, however, and innocence before that state were absolute essentials of Christian living. Let no one talk of salvation, he had said, for a daughter who had failed to keep her chastity unstained, or for the parents who, by negligence, had permitted her to fall. Hell was yawning for all such. You must walk the straight and narrow way if you would escape eternal punishment, and a just God was angry with sinners every day.

Gerhardt and his wife, and also Jennie, accepted the doctrines of their Church as expounded by Mr. Wundt without reserve. With Jennie, however, the assent was little more than nominal. Religion had as yet no striking hold upon her. It was a pleasant thing to know that there was a heaven, a fearsome one to realize that there was a hell. Young girls and boys ought to be good and obey their parents. Otherwise the whole religious problem was badly jumbled in her mind.

Gerhardt was convinced that everything spoken from the pulpit of his church was literally true. Death and the future life were realities to him.

Now that the years were slipping away and the problem of the world was becoming more and more inexplicable, he clung with pathetic anxiety to the doctrines which contained a solution. Oh, if he could only be so honest and upright that the Lord might have no excuse for ruling him out. He trembled not only for himself, but for his wife and children. Would he not some day be held responsible for them? Would not his own laxity and lack of system in inculcating the laws of eternal life to them end in his and their damnation? He pictured to himself the torments of hell, and wondered how it would be with him and his in the final hour.

Naturally, such a deep religious feeling made him stern with his children. He was prone to scan with a narrow eye the pleasures and foibles of youthful desire. Jennie was never to have a lover if her father had any voice in the matter. Any flirtation with the youths she might meet upon the streets of Columbus could have no continuation in her home. Gerhardt forgot that he was once young himself, and looked only to the welfare of her spirit. So the Senator was a novel factor in her life.

When he first began to be a part of their family affairs the conventional standards of Father Gerhardt proved untrustworthy. He had no means of judging such a character. This was no ordinary person coquetting with his pretty daughter. The manner in which the Senator entered the family life was so original and so plausible that he became an active part before any one thought anything about it. Gerhardt himself was deceived, and, expecting nothing but honor and profit to flow to the family from such a source, accepted the interest and the service, and plodded peacefully on. His wife did not tell him of the many presents which had come before and since the wonderful Christmas.

But one morning as Gerhardt was coming home from his night work a neighbor named Otto Weaver accosted him.

"Gerhardt," he said, "I want to speak a word with you. As a friend of yours, I want to tell you what I hear. The neighbors, you know, they talk now about the man who comes to see your daughter."

"My daughter?" said Gerhardt, more puzzled and pained by this abrupt attack than mere words could indicate. "Whom do you mean? I don't know of any one who comes to see my daughter."

"No?" inquired Weaver, nearly as much astonished as the recipient of his confidences. "The middle-aged man, with gray hair. He carries a cane sometimes. You don't know him?"

Gerhardt racked his memory with a puzzled face.

"They say he was a senator once," went on Weaver, doubtful of what he had got into; "I don't know."

"Ah," returned Gerhardt, measurably relieved. "Senator Brander. Yes. He has come sometimes – so. Well, what of it?"

"It is nothing," returned the neighbor, "only they talk. He is no longer a young man, you know. Your daughter, she goes out with him now a few times. These people, they see that, and now they talk about her. I thought you might want to know."

Gerhardt was shocked to the depths of his being by these terrible words. People must have a reason for saying such things. Jennie and her mother were seriously at fault. Still he did not hesitate to defend his daughter.

"He is a friend of the family," he said confusedly. "People should not talk until they know. My daughter has done nothing."

"That is so. It is nothing," continued Weaver. "People talk before they have any grounds. You and I are old friends. I thought you might want to know."

Gerhardt stood there motionless another minute or so t his jaw fallen and a strange helplessness upon him. The world was such a grim thing to have antagonistic to you. Its opinions and good favor were so essential. How hard he had tried to live up to its rules! Why should it not be satisfied and let him alone?

"I am glad you told me," he murmured as he started homeward. "I will see about it. Good-by."

Gerhardt took the first opportunity to question his wife.

"What is this about Senator Brander coming out to call on Jennie?" he asked in German. "The neighbors are talking about it."

"Why, nothing," answered Mrs. Gerhardt, in the same language. She was decidedly taken aback at his question. "He did call two or three times."

"You didn't tell me that," he returned, a sense of her frailty in tolerating and shielding such weakness in one of their children irritating him.

"No," she replied, absolutely nonplussed. "He has only been here two or three times."

"Two or three times!" exclaimed Gerhardt, the German tendency to talk loud coming upon him. "Two or three times! The whole neighborhood talks about it. What is this, then?"

"He only called two or three times," Mrs. Gerhardt repeated weakly.

"Weaver comes to me on the street," continued Gerhardt, "and tells me that my neighbors are talking of the man my daughter is going with. I didn't know anything about it. There I stood. I didn't know what to say. What kind of a way is that? What must the man think of me?"

"There is nothing the matter," declared the mother, using an effective German idiom. "Jennie has gone walking with him once or twice. He has called here at the house. What is there now in that for the people to talk about? Can't the girl have any pleasure at all?"

"But he is an old man," returned Gerhardt, voicing the words of Weaver. "He is a public citizen. What should he want to call on a girl like Jennie for?"

"I don't know," said Mrs. Gerhardt, defensively. "He comes here to the house. I don't know anything but good about the man. Can I tell him not to come?"

Gerhardt paused at this. All that he knew of the Senator was excellent. What was there now that was so terrible about it?

"The neighbors are so ready to talk. They haven't got anything else to talk about now, so they talk about Jennie. You know whether she is a good girl or not. Why should they say such things?" and tears came into the soft little mother's eyes.

"That is all right," grumbled Gerhardt, "but he ought not to want to come around and take a girl of her age out walking. It looks bad, even if he don't mean any harm."

At this moment Jennie came in. She had heard the talking in the front bedroom, where she slept with one of the children, but had not suspected its import. Now her mother turned her back and bent over the table where she was making biscuit, in order that her daughter might not see her red eyes.

"What's the matter?" she inquired, vaguely troubled by the tense stillness in the attitude of both her parents.

"Nothing," said Gerhardt firmly.

Mrs. Gerhardt made no sign, but her very immobility told something. Jennie went over to her and quickly discovered that she had been weeping.

"What's the matter?" she repeated wonderingly, gazing at her father.

Gerhardt only stood there, his daughter's innocence dominating his terror of evil.

"What's the matter?" she urged softly of her mother.

"Oh, it's the neighbors," returned the mother brokenly.

"They're always ready to talk about something they don't know anything about."

"Is it me again?" inquired Jennie, her face flushing faintly.

"You see," observed Gerhardt, apparently addressing the world in general, "she knows. Now, why didn't you tell me that he was coming here? The neighbors talk, and I hear nothing about it until to-day. What kind of a way is that, anyhow?"

"Oh," exclaimed Jennie, out of the purest sympathy for her mother, "what difference does it make?"

"What difference?" cried Gerhardt, still talking in German, although Jennie answered in English. "Is it no difference that men stop me on the street and speak of it? You should be ashamed of yourself to say that. I always thought well of this man, but now, since you don't tell me about him, and the neighbors talk, I don't know what to think. Must I get my knowledge of what is going on in my own home from my neighbors?"

Mother and daughter paused. Jennie had already begun to think that their error was serious.

"I didn't keep anything from you because it was evil," she said. "Why, he only took me out riding once."

"Yes, but you didn't tell me that," answered her father.

"You know you don't like for me to go out after dark," replied Jennie. "That's why I didn't. There wasn't anything else to hide about it."

"He shouldn't want you to go out after dark with him," observed Gerhardt, always mindful of the world outside. "What can he want with you. Why does he come here? He is too old, anyhow. I don't think you ought to have anything to do with him – such a young girl as you are."

"He doesn't want to do anything except help me," murmured Jennie. "He wants to marry me."

"Marry you? Ha! Why doesn't he tell me that!" exclaimed Gerhardt. "I shall look into this. I won't have him running around with my daughter, and the neighbors talking. Besides, he is too old. I shall tell him that. He ought to know better than to put a girl where she gets talked about. It is better he should stay away altogether."

This threat of Gerhardt's, that he would tell Brander to stay away, seemed simply terrible to Jennie and to her mother. What good could come of any such attitude? Why must they be degraded before him? Of course Brander did call again, while Gerhardt was away at work, and they trembled lest the father should hear of it. A few days later the Senator came and took Jennie for a long walk. Neither she nor her mother said anything to Gerhardt. But he was not to be put off the scent for long.

"Has Jennie been out again with that man?" he inquired of Mrs. Gerhardt the next evening.

"He was here last night," returned the mother, evasively.

"Did she tell him he shouldn't come any more?"

"I don't know. I don't think so."

"Well, now, I will see for myself once whether this thing will be stopped or not," said the determined father. "I shall talk with him. Wait till he comes again."

In accordance with this, he took occasion to come up from his factory on three different evenings, each time carefully surveying the house, in order to discover whether any visitor was being entertained. On the fourth evening Brander came, and inquiring for Jennie, who was exceedingly nervous, he took her out for a walk. She was afraid of her father, lest some unseemly things should happen, but did not know exactly what to do.

Gerhardt, who was on his way to the house at the time, observed her departure. That was enough for him. Walking deliberately in upon his wife, he said:

"Where is Jennie?"

"She is out somewhere," said her mother.

"Yes, I know where," said Gerhardt. "I saw her. Now wait till she comes home. I will tell him."

He sat down calmly, reading a German paper and keeping an eye upon his wife, until, at last, the gate clicked, and the front door opened. Then he got up.

"Where have you been?" he exclaimed in German.

Brander, who had not suspected that any trouble of this character was pending, felt irritated and uncomfortable. Jennie was covered with confusion. Her mother was suffering an agony of torment in the kitchen.

"Why, I have been out for a walk," she answered confusedly.

"Didn't I tell you not to go out any more after dark?" said Gerhardt, utterly ignoring Brander.

Jennie colored furiously, unable to speak a word.

"What is the trouble?" inquired Brander gravely. "Why should you talk to her like that?"

"She should not go out after dark," returned the father rudely. "I have told her two or three times now. I don't think you ought to come here any more, either."

"And why?" asked the Senator, pausing to consider and choose his words. "Isn't this rather peculiar? What has your daughter done?"

"What has she done!" exclaimed Gerhardt, his excitement growing under the strain he was enduring, and speaking almost unaccented English in consequence. "She is running around the streets at night when she oughtn't to be. I don't want my daughter taken out after dark by a man of your age. What do you want with her anyway? She is only a child yet."

"Want!" said the Senator, straining to regain his ruffled dignity. "I want to talk with her, of course. She is old enough to be interesting to me. I want to marry her if she will have me."

"I want you to go out of here and stay out of here," returned the father, losing all sense of logic, and descending to the ordinary level of parental compulsion. "I don't want you to come around my house any more. I have enough trouble without my daughter being taken out and given a bad name."

"I tell you frankly," said the Senator, drawing himself up to his full height, "that you will have to make clear your meaning. I have done nothing that I am ashamed of. Your daughter has not come to any harm through me. Now, I want to know what you mean by conducting yourself in this manner."

"I mean," said Gerhardt, excitedly repeating himself, "I mean, I mean that the whole neighborhood talks about how you come around here, and have buggy-rides and walks with my daughter when I am not here – that's what I mean. I mean that you are no man of honorable intentions, or you would not come taking up with a little girl who is only old enough to be your daughter. People tell me well enough what you are. Just you go and leave my daughter alone."

"People!" said the Senator. "Well, I care nothing for your people. I love your daughter, and I am here to see her because I do love her. It is my intention to marry her, and if your neighbors have anything to say to that, let them say it. There is no reason why you should conduct yourself in this manner before you know what my intentions are."

Unnerved by this unexpected and terrible altercation, Jennie had backed away to the door leading out into the dining-room, and her mother, seeing her, came forward.

"Oh," said the latter, breathing excitedly, "he came home when you were away. What shall we do?" They clung together, as women do, and wept silently. The dispute continued.

"Marry, eh," exclaimed the father. "Is that it?"

"Yes," said the Senator, "marry, that is exactly it. Your daughter is eighteen years of age and can decide for herself. You have insulted me and outraged your daughter's feelings. Now, I wish you to know that it cannot stop here. If you have any cause to say anything against me outside of mere hearsay I wish you to say it."

The Senator stood before him, a very citadel of righteousness. He was neither loud-voiced nor angry-mannered, but there was a tightness about his lips which bespoke the man of force and determination.

"I don't want to talk to you any more," returned Gerhardt, who was checked but not overawed. "My daughter is my daughter. I am the one who will say whether she shall go out at night, or whether she shall marry you, either. I know what you politicians are. When I first met you I thought you were a fine man, but now, since I see the way you conduct yourself with my daughter, I don't want anything more to do with you. Just you go and stay away from here. That's all I ask of you."

"I am sorry, Mrs. Gerhardt," said Brander, turning deliberately away from the angry father, "to have had such an argument in your home. I had no idea that your husband was opposed to my visits. However, I will leave the matter as it stands for the present. You must not take all this as badly as it seems."

Gerhardt looked on in astonishment at his coolness.

"I will go now," he said, again addressing Gerhardt, "but you mustn't think that I am leaving this matter for good. You have made a serious mistake this evening. I hope you will realize that. I bid you goodnight." He bowed slightly and went out.

Gerhardt closed the door firmly. "Now," he said, turning to his daughter and wife, "we will see whether we are rid of him or not. I will show you how to go after night upon the streets when everybody is talking already."

In so far as words were concerned, the argument ceased, but looks and feeling ran strong and deep, and for days thereafter scarcely a word was spoken in the little cottage. Gerhardt began to brood over the fact that he had accepted his place from the Senator and decided to give it up. He made it known that no more of the Senator's washing was to be done in their house, and if he had not been

sure that Mrs. Gerhardt's hotel work was due to her own efforts in finding it he would have stopped that. No good would come out of it, anyway. If she had never gone to the hotel all this talk would never have come upon them.

As for the Senator, he went away decidedly ruffled by this crude occurrence. Neighborhood slanders are bad enough on their own plane, but for a man of his standing to descend and become involved in one struck him now as being a little bit unworthy. He did not know what to do about the situation, and while he was trying to come to some decision several days went by. Then he was called to Washington, and he went away without having seen Jennie again.

In the mean time the Gerhardt family struggled along as before. They were poor, indeed, but Gerhardt was willing to face poverty if only it could be endured with honor. The grocery bills were of the same size, however. The children's clothing was steadily wearing out. Economy had to be practised, and payments stopped on old bills that Gerhardt was trying to adjust.

Then came a day when the annual interest on the mortgage was due, and yet another when two different grocery-men met Gerhardt on the street and asked about their little bills. He did not hesitate to explain just what the situation was, and to tell them with convincing honesty that he would try hard and do the best he could. But his spirit was unstrung by his misfortunes. He prayed for the favor of Heaven while at his labor, and did not hesitate to use the daylight hours that he should have had for sleeping to go about – either looking for a more remunerative position or to obtain such little jobs as he could now and then pick up. One of them was that of cutting grass.

Mrs. Gerhardt protested that he was killing himself, but he explained his procedure by pointing to their necessity.

"When people stop me on the street and ask me for money I have no time to sleep."

It was a distressing situation for all of them.

To cap it all, Sebastian got in jail. It was that old coal-stealing ruse of his practised once too often. He got up on a car one evening while Jennie and the children waited for him, and a railroad detective arrested him. There had been a good deal of coal stealing during the past two years, but so long as it was confined to moderate quantities the railroad took no notice. When, however, customers of shippers complained that cars from the Pennsylvania fields lost thousands of pounds in transit to Cleveland, Cincinnati, Chicago, and other points, detectives were set to work. Gerhardt's children were not the only ones who preyed upon the railroad in this way. Other families in Columbus – many of them – were constantly doing the same thing, but Sebastian happened to be seized upon as the Columbus example.

"You come off that car now," said the detective, suddenly appearing out of the shadow. Jennie and the other children dropped their baskets and buckets and fled for their lives. Sebastian's first impulse was to jump and run, but when he tried it the detective grabbed him by the coat.

"Hold on here," he exclaimed. "I want you."

"Aw, let go," said Sebastian savagely, for he was no weakling. There was nerve and determination in him, as well as a keen sense of his awkward predicament.

"Let go, I tell you," he reiterated, and giving a jerk, he almost upset his captor.

"Come here now," said the detective, pulling him viciously in an effort to establish his authority.

Sebastian came, but it was with a blow which staggered his adversary.

There was more struggling, and then a passing railroad hand came to the detective's assistance. Together they hurried him toward the depot, and there discovering the local officer, turned him over. It was with a torn coat, scarred hands and face, and a black eye that Sebastian was locked up for the night.

When the children came home they could not say what had happened to their brother, but as nine o'clock struck, and then ten and eleven, and Sebastian did not return, Mrs. Gerhardt was beside herself. He had stayed out many a night as late as twelve and one, but his mother had a foreboding of something terrible tonight. When half-past one arrived, and no Sebastian, she began to cry.

"Some one ought to go up and tell your father," she said. "He may be in jail."

Jennie volunteered, but George, who was soundly sleeping, was awakened to go along with her.

"What!" said Gerhardt, astonished to see his two children.

"Bass hasn't come yet," said Jennie, and then told the story of the evening's adventure in explanation.

Gerhardt left his work at once, walking back with his two children to a point where he could turn off to go to the jail. He guessed what had happened, and his heart was troubled.

"Is that so, now!" he repeated nervously, rubbing his clumsy hands across his wet forehead.

Arrived at the station-house, the sergeant in charge told him curtly that Bass was under arrest.

"Sebastian Gerhardt?" he said, looking over his blotter; "yes, here he is. Stealing coal and resisting an officer. Is he your boy?"

"Oh, my!" said Gerhardt, *"Ach Gott!"* He actually wrung his hands in distress.

"Want to see him?" asked the Sergeant.

"Yes, yes," said the father.

"Take him back, Fred," said the other to the old watchman in charge, "and let him see the boy."

When Gerhardt stood in the back room, and Sebastian was brought out all marked and tousled, he broke down and began to cry. No word could cross his lips because of his emotion.

"Don't cry, pop," said Sebastian bravely. "I couldn't help it. It's all right. I'll be out in the morning."

Gerhardt only shook with his grief.

"Don't cry," continued Sebastian, doing his very best to restrain his own tears. "I'll be all right. What's the use of crying?"

"I know, I know," said the gray-headed parent brokenly, "but I can't help it. It is my fault that I should let you do that."

"No, no, it isn't," said Sebastian. "You couldn't help it. Does mother know anything about it?"

"Yes, she knows," he returned. "Jennie and George just came up where I was and told me. I didn't know anything about it until just now," and he began to cry again.

"Well, don't you feel badly," went on Bass, the finest part of his nature coming to the surface. "I'll be all right. Just you go back to work now, and don't worry. I'll be all right."

"How did you hurt your eye?" asked the father, looking at him with red eyes.

"Oh, I had a little wrestling match with the man who nabbed me," said the boy, smiling bravely. "I thought I could get away."

"You shouldn't do that, Sebastian," said the father. "It may go harder with you on that account. When does your case come up?"

"In the morning, they told me," said Bass. "Nine o'clock."

Gerhardt stayed with his son for some time, and discussed the question of bail, fine, and the dire possibility of a jail sentence without arriving at any definite conclusion. Finally he was persuaded by Bass to go away, but the departure was the occasion for another outburst of feeling; he was led away shaking and broken with emotion.

"It's pretty tough," said Bass to himself as he was led back to his cell. He was thinking solely of his father. "I wonder what ma will think."

The thought of this touched him tenderly. "I wish I'd knocked the dub over the first crack," he said. "What a fool I was not to get away."

CHAPTER VII

Gerhardt was in despair; he did not know any one to whom he could appeal between the hours of two and nine o'clock in the morning. He went back to talk with his wife, and then to his post of duty. What was to be done? He could think of only one friend who was able, or possibly willing to do anything. This was the glass manufacturer, Hammond; but he was not in the city. Gerhardt did not know this, however.

When nine o'clock came, he went alone to the court, for it was thought advisable that the others should stay away. Mrs. Gerhardt was to hear immediately what happened. He would come right back.

When Sebastian was lined up inside the dock he had to wait a long time, for there were several prisoners ahead of him. Finally his name was called, and the boy was pushed forward to the bar. "Stealing coal, Your Honor, and resisting arrest," explained the officer who had arrested him.

The magistrate looked at Sebastian closely; he was unfavorably impressed by the lad's scratched and wounded face.

"Well, young man," he said, "what have you to say for yourself? How did you get your black eye?"

Sebastian looked at the judge, but did not answer.

"I arrested him," said the detective. "He was on one of the company's cars. He tried to break away from me, and when I held him he assaulted me. This man here was a witness," he added, turning to the railroad hand who had helped him.

"Is that where he struck you?" asked the Court, observing the detective's swollen jaw.

"Yes, sir," he returned, glad of an opportunity to be further revenged.

"If you please," put in Gerhardt, leaning forward, "he is my boy. He was sent to get the coal. He – "

"We don't mind what they pick up around the yard," interrupted the detective, "but he was throwing it off the cars to half a dozen others."

"Can't you earn enough to keep from taking coal off the coal cars?" asked the Court; but before either father or son had time to answer he added, "What is your business?"

"Car builder," said Sebastian.

"And what do you do?" he questioned, addressing Gerhardt.

"I am watchman at Miller's furniture factory."

"Um," said the court, feeling that Sebastian's attitude remained sullen and contentious. "Well, this young man might be let off on the coal-stealing charge, but he seems to be somewhat too free with his fists. Columbus is altogether too rich in that sort of thing. Ten dollars."

"If you please," began Gerhardt, but the court officer was already pushing him away.

"I don't want to hear any more about it," said the judge. "He's stubborn, anyhow. What's the next case?"

Gerhardt made his way over to his boy, abashed and yet very glad it was no worse. Somehow, he thought, he could raise the money. Sebastian looked at him solicitously as he came forward.

"It's all right," said Bass soothingly. "He didn't give me half a chance to say anything."

"I'm only glad it wasn't more," said Gerhardt nervously. "We will try and get the money."

Going home to his wife, Gerhardt informed the troubled household of the result. Mrs. Gerhardt stood white and yet relieved, for ten dollars seemed something that might be had. Jennie heard the whole story with open mouth and wide eyes. It was a terrible blow to her. Poor Bass! He was always so lively and good-natured. It seemed awful that he should be in jail.

Gerhardt went hurriedly to Hammond's fine residence, but he was not in the city. He thought then of a lawyer by the name of Jenkins, whom he knew in a casual way, but Jenkins was not at his office. There were several grocers and coal merchants whom he knew well enough, but he owed them

money. Pastor Wundt might let him have it, but the agony such a disclosure to that worthy would entail held him back. He did call on one or two acquaintances, but these, surprised at the unusual and peculiar request, excused themselves. At four o'clock he returned home, weary and exhausted.

"I don't know what to do," he said despairingly. "If I could only think."

Jennie thought of Brander, but the situation had not accentuated her desperation to the point where she could brave her father's opposition and his terrible insult to the Senator, so keenly remembered, to go and ask. Her watch had been pawned a second time, and she had no other means of obtaining money.

The family council lasted until half-past ten, but still there was nothing decided. Mrs. Gerhardt persistently and monotonously turned one hand over in the other and stared at the floor. Gerhardt ran his hand through his reddish brown hair distractedly. "It's no use," he said at last. "I can't think of anything."

"Go to bed, Jennie," said her mother solicitously; "get the others to go. There's no use their sitting up I may think of something. You go to bed."

Jennie went to her room, but the very thought of repose was insupportable. She had read in the paper, shortly after her father's quarrel with the Senator, that the latter had departed for Washington. There had been no notice of his return. Still he might be in the city. She stood before a short, narrow mirror that surmounted a shabby bureau, thinking. Her sister Veronica, with whom she slept, was already composing herself to dreams. Finally a grim resolution fixed itself in her consciousness. She would go and see Senator Brander. If *he* were in town he would help Bass. Why shouldn't she – he loved her. He had asked over and over to marry her. Why should she not go and ask him for help?

She hesitated a little while, then hearing Veronica breathing regularly, she put on her hat and jacket, and noiselessly opened the door into the sitting-room to see if any one were stirring.

There was no sound save that of Gerhardt rocking nervously to and fro in the kitchen. There was no light save that of her own small room-lamp and a gleam from under the kitchen door. She turned and blew the former out – then slipped quietly to the front door, opened it and stepped out into the night.

A waning moon was shining, and a hushed sense of growing life filled the air, for it was nearing spring again. As Jennie hurried along the shadowy streets – the arc light had not yet been invented – she had a sinking sense of fear; what was this rash thing she was about to do? How would the Senator receive her? What would he think? She stood stock-still, wavering and doubtful; then the recollection of Bass in his night cell came over her again, and she hurried on.

The character of the Capitol Hotel was such that it was not difficult for a woman to find ingress through the ladies' entrance to the various floors of the hotel at any hour of the night. The hotel, not unlike many others of the time, was in no sense loosely conducted, but its method of supervision in places was lax. Any person could enter, and, by applying at a rear entrance to the lobby, gain the attention of the clerk. Otherwise not much notice was taken of those who came and went.

When she came to the door it was dark save for a low light burning in the entry-way. The distance to the Senator's room was only a short way along the hall of the second floor. She hurried up the steps, nervous and pale, but giving no other outward sign of the storm that was surging within her. When she came to his familiar door she paused; she feared that she might not find him in his room; she trembled again to think that he might be there. A light shone through the transom, and, summoning all her courage, she knocked. A man coughed and bestirred himself.

His surprise as he opened the door knew no bounds. "Why, Jennie!" he exclaimed. "How delightful! I was thinking of you. Come in – come in."

He welcomed her with an eager embrace.

"I was coming out to see you, believe me, I was. I was thinking all along how I could straighten this matter out. And now you come. But what's the trouble?"

He held her at arm's length and studied her distressed face. The fresh beauty of her seemed to him like cut lilies wet with dew.

He felt a great surge of tenderness.

"I have something to ask you," she at last brought herself to say. "My brother is in jail. We need ten dollars to get him out, and I didn't know where else to go."

"My poor child!" he said, chafing her hands. "Where else should you go? Haven't I told you always to come to me? Don't you know, Jennie, I would do anything in the world for you?"

"Yes," she gasped.

"Well, then, don't worry about that any more. But won't fate ever cease striking at you, poor child? How did your brother come to get in jail?"

"They caught him throwing coal down from the cars," she replied.

"Ah!" he replied, his sympathies touched and awakened. Here was this boy arrested and fined for what fate was practically driving him to do. Here was this girl pleading with him at night, in his room, for what to her was a great necessity – ten dollars; to him, a mere nothing. "I will arrange about your brother," he said quickly. "Don't worry. I can get him out in half an hour. You sit here now and be comfortable until I return."

He waved her to his easy-chair beside a large lamp, and hurried out of the room.

Brander knew the sheriff who had personal supervision of the county jail. He knew the judge who had administered the fine. It was but a five minutes' task to write a note to the judge asking him to revoke the fine, for the sake of the boy's character, and send it by a messenger to his home. Another ten minutes' task to go personally to the jail and ask his friend, the sheriff, to release the boy then and there.

"Here is the money," he said. "If the fine is revoked you can return it to me. Let him go now."

The sheriff was only too glad to comply. He hastened below to personally supervise the task, and Bass, a very much astonished boy, was set free. No explanations were vouchsafed him.

"That's all right now," said the turnkey. "You're at liberty. Run along home and don't let them catch you at anything like that again."

Bass went his way wondering, and the ex-Senator returned to his hotel trying to decide just how this delicate situation should be handled. Obviously Jennie had not told her father of her mission. She had come as a last resource. She was now waiting for him in his room.

There are crises in all men's lives when they waver between the strict fulfilment of justice and duty and the great possibilities for personal happiness which another line of conduct seems to assure. And the dividing line is not always marked and clear. He knew that the issue of taking her, even as his wife, was made difficult by the senseless opposition of her father. The opinion of the world brought up still another complication. Supposing he should take her openly, what would the world say? She was a significant type emotionally, that he knew. There was something there – artistically, temperamentally, which was far and beyond the keenest suspicion of the herd. He did not know himself quite what it was, but he felt a largeness of feeling not altogether squared with intellect, or perhaps better yet, experience, which was worthy of any man's desire. "This remarkable girl," he thought, seeing her clearly in his mind's eye.

Meditating as to what he should do, he returned to his hotel, and the room. As he entered he was struck anew with her beauty, and with the irresistible appeal of her personality. In the glow of the shaded lamp she seemed a figure of marvelous potentiality.

"Well," he said, endeavoring to appear calm, "I have looked after your brother. He is out."

She rose.

"Oh," she exclaimed, clasping her hands and stretching her arms out toward him. There were tears of gratefulness in her eyes.

He saw them and stepped close to her. "Jennie, for heaven's sake don't cry," he entreated. "You angel! You sister of mercy! To think you should have to add tears to your other sacrifices."

He drew her to him, and then all the caution of years deserted him. There was a sense both of need and of fulfilment in his mood. At last, in spite of other losses, fate had brought him what he most desired – love, a woman whom he could love. He took her in his arms, and kissed her again and again.

The English Jefferies has told us that it requires a hundred and fifty years to make a perfect maiden. "From all enchanted things of earth and air, this preciousness has been drawn. From the south wind that breathed a century and a half over the green wheat; from the perfume of the growing grasses waving over heavy-laden clover and laughing veronica, hiding the green finches, baffling the bee; from rose-lined hedge, woodbine, and cornflower, azure blue, where yellowing wheat stalks crowd up under the shadow of green firs. All the devious brooklets' sweetness where the iris stays the sunlight; all the wild woods hold of beauty; all the broad hills of thyme and freedom thrice a hundred years repeated.

"A hundred years of cowslips, bluebells, violets; purple spring and golden autumn; sunshine, shower, and dewy mornings; the night immortal; all the rhythm of time unrolling. A chronicle unwritten and past all power of writing; who shall preserve a record of the petals that fell from the roses a century ago? The swallows to the house-tops three hundred – times think of that! Thence she sprang, and the world yearns toward her beauty as to flowers that are past. The loveliness of seventeen is centuries old. That is why passion is almost sad."

If you have understood and appreciated the beauty of harebells three hundred times repeated; if the quality of the roses, of the music, of the ruddy mornings and evenings of the world has ever touched your heart; if all beauty were passing, and you were given these things to hold in your arms before the world slipped away, would you give them up?

CHAPTER VIII

The significance of the material and spiritual changes which sometimes overtake us are not very clear at the time. A sense of shock, a sense of danger, and then apparently we subside to old ways, but the change has come. Never again, here or elsewhere, will we be the same. Jennie pondering after the subtle emotional turn which her evening's sympathetic expedition had taken, was lost in a vague confusion of emotions. She had no definite realization of what social and physical changes this new relationship to the Senator might entail. She was not conscious as yet of that shock which the possibility of maternity, even under the most favorable conditions, must bring to the average woman. Her present attitude was one of surprise, wonder, uncertainty; and at the same time she experienced a genuine feeling of quiet happiness. Brander was a good man; now he was closer to her than ever. He loved her. Because of this new relationship a change in her social condition was to inevitably follow. Life was to be radically different from now on – was different at this moment. Brander assured her over and over of his enduring affection.

"I tell you, Jennie," he repeated, as she was leaving, "I don't want you to worry. This emotion of mine got the best of me, but I'll marry you. I've been carried off my feet, but I'll make it up to you. Go home and say nothing at all. Caution your brother, if it isn't too late. Keep your own counsel, and I will marry you and take you away. I can't do it right now. I don't want to do it here. But I'm going to Washington, and I'll send for you. And here" – he reached for his purse and took from it a hundred dollars, practically all he had with him, "take that. I'll send you more tomorrow. You're my girl now – remember that. You belong to me."

He embraced her tenderly.

She went out into the night, thinking. No doubt he would do as he said. She dwelt, in imagination, upon the possibilities of a new and fascinating existence. Of course he would marry her. Think of it! She would go to Washington – that far-off place. And her father and mother – they would not need to work so hard any more. And Bass, and Martha – she fairly glowed as she recounted to herself the many ways in which she could help them all.

A block away she waited for Brander, who accompanied her to her own gate, and waited while she made a cautious reconnaissance. She slipped up the steps and tried the door. It was open. She paused a moment to indicate to her lover that she was safe, and entered. All was silent within. She slipped to her own room and heard Veronica breathing. She went quietly to where Bass slept with George. He was in bed, stretched out as if asleep. When she entered he asked, "Is that you, Jennie?"

"Yes."

"Where have you been?"

"Listen," she whispered. "Have you seen papa and mamma?"

"Yes."

"Did they know I had gone out?"

"Ma did. She told me not to ask after you. Where have you been?"

"I went to see Senator Brander for you."

"Oh, that was it. They didn't say why they let me out."

"Don't tell any one," she pleaded. "I don't want any one to know. You know how papa feels about him."

"All right," he replied. But he was curious as to what the ex-Senator thought, what he had done, and how she had appealed to him. She explained briefly, then she heard her mother come to the door.

"Jennie," she whispered.

Jennie went out.

"Oh, why did you go?" she asked.

"I couldn't help it, ma," she replied. "I thought I must do something."

"Why did you stay so long?"

"He wanted to talk to me," she answered evasively.

Her mother looked at her nervously, wanly.

"I have been so afraid, oh, so afraid. Your father went to your room, but I said you were asleep. He locked the front door, but I opened it again. When Bass came in he wanted to call you, but I persuaded him to wait until morning."

Again she looked wistfully at her daughter.

"I'm all right, mamma," said Jennie encouragingly. "I'll tell you all about it to-morrow. Go to bed. How does he think Bass got out?"

"He doesn't know. He thought maybe they just let him go because he couldn't pay the fine."

Jennie laid her hand lovingly on her mother's shoulder.

"Go to bed," she said.

She was already years older in thought and act. She felt as though she must help her mother now as well as herself.

The days which followed were ones of dreamy uncertainty to Jennie. She went over in her mind these dramatic events time and time and time and again. It was not such a difficult matter to tell her mother that the Senator had talked again of marriage, that he proposed to come and get her after his next trip to Washington, that he had given her a hundred dollars and intended to give her more, but of that other matter – the one all-important thing, she could not bring herself to speak. It was too sacred. The balance of the money that he had promised her arrived by messenger the following day, four hundred dollars in bills, with the admonition that she should put it in a local bank. The ex-Senator explained that he was already on his way to Washington, but that he would come back or send for her. "Keep a stout heart," he wrote. "There are better days in store for you."

Brander was gone, and Jennie's fate was really in the balance. But her mind still retained all of the heart-innocence, and unsophistication of her youth; a certain gentle wistfulness was the only outward change in her demeanor. He would surely send for her. There was the mirage of a distant country and wondrous scenes looming up in her mind. She had a little fortune in the bank, more than she had ever dreamed of, with which to help her mother. There were natural, girlish anticipations of good still holding over, which made her less apprehensive than she could otherwise possibly have been. All nature, life, possibility was in the balance. It might turn good, or ill, but with so inexperienced a soul it would not be entirely evil until it was so.

How a mind under such uncertain circumstances could retain so comparatively placid a vein is one of those marvels which find their explanation in the inherent trustfulness of the spirit of youth. It is not often that the minds of men retain the perceptions of their younger days. The marvel is not that one should thus retain, but that any should ever lose them Go the world over, and after you have put away the wonder and tenderness of youth what is there left? The few sprigs of green that sometimes invade the barrenness of your materialism, the few glimpses of summer which flash past the eye of the wintry soul, the half hours off during the long tedium of burrowing, these reveal to the hardened earth-seeker the universe which the youthful mind has with it always. No fear and no favor; the open fields and the light upon the hills; morning, noon, night; stars, the bird-calls, the water's purl – these are the natural inheritance of the mind of the child. Men call it poetic, those who are hardened fanciful. In the days of their youth it was natural, but the receptiveness of youth has departed, and they cannot see.

How this worked out in her personal actions was to be seen only in a slightly accentuated wistfulness, a touch of which was in every task. Sometimes she would wonder that no letter came, but at the same time she would recall the fact that he had specified a few weeks, and hence the six that actually elapsed did not seem so long.

In the meanwhile the distinguished ex-Senator had gone light-heartedly to his conference with the President, he had joined in a pleasant round of social calls, and he was about to pay a short country

visit to some friends in Maryland, when he was seized with a slight attack of fever, which confined him to his room for a few days. He felt a little irritated that he should be laid up just at this time, but never suspected that there was anything serious in his indisposition. Then the doctor discovered that he was suffering from a virulent form of typhoid, the ravages of which took away his senses for a time and left him very weak. He was thought to be convalescing, however, when just six weeks after he had last parted with Jennie, he was seized with a sudden attack of heart failure and never regained consciousness. Jennie remained blissfully ignorant of his illness and did not even see the heavy-typed headlines of the announcement of his death until Bass came home that evening.

"Look here, Jennie," he said excitedly, "Brander's dead!"

He held up the newspaper, on the first column of Which was printed in heavy block type:

DEATH OF EX-SENATOR BRANDER

Sudden Passing of Ohio's Distinguished Son. Succumbs to Heart Failure at the Arlington, in Washington.

Recent attack of typhoid, from which he was thought to be recovering, proves fatal. Notable phases of a remarkable career.

Jennie looked at it in blank amazement. "Dead?" she exclaimed.

"There it is in the paper," returned Bass, his tone being that of one who is imparting a very interesting piece of news. "He died at ten o'clock this morning."

CHAPTER IX

Jennie took the paper with but ill-concealed trembling and went into the adjoining room. There she stood by the front window and looked at it again, a sickening sensation of dread holding her as though in a trance.

"He is dead," was all that her mind could formulate for the time, and as she stood there the voice of Bass recounting the fact to Gerhardt in the adjoining room sounded in her ears. "Yes, he is dead," she heard him say; and once again she tried to get some conception of what it meant to her. But her mind seemed a blank.

A moment later Mrs. Gerhardt joined her. She had heard Bass's announcement and had seen Jennie leave the room, but her trouble with Gerhardt over the Senator had caused her to be careful of any display of emotion. No conception of the real state of affairs ever having crossed her mind, she was only interested in seeing how Jennie would take this sudden annihilation of her hopes.

"Isn't it too bad?" she said, with real sorrow. "To think that he should have to die just when he was going to do so much for you – for us all."

She paused, expecting some word of agreement, but Jennie remained unwontedly dumb.

"I wouldn't feel badly," continued Mrs. Gerhardt. "It can't be helped. He meant to do a good deal, but you mustn't think of that now. It's all over, and it can't be helped, you know."

She paused again, and still Jennie remained motionless and mute. Mrs. Gerhardt, seeing how useless her words were, concluded that Jennie wished to be alone, and she went away.

Still Jennie stood there, and now, as the real significance of the news began to formulate itself into consecutive thought, she began to realize the wretchedness of her position, its helplessness. She went into her bedroom and sat down upon the side of the bed, from which position she saw a very pale, distraught face staring at her from out of the small mirror. She looked at it uncertainly; could that really be her own countenance? "I'll have to go away," she thought, and began, with the courage of despair, to wonder what refuge would be open to her.

In the mean time the evening meal was announced, and, to maintain appearances, she went out and joined the family; the naturalness of her part was very difficult to sustain. Gerhardt observed her subdued condition without guessing the depth of emotion which it covered. Bass was too much interested in his own affairs to pay particular attention to anybody.

During the days that followed Jennie pondered over the difficulties of her position and wondered what she should do. Money she had, it was true; but no friends, no experience, no place to go. She had always lived with her family. She began to feel unaccountable sinkings of spirit, nameless and formless fears seemed to surround and haunt her. Once when she arose in the morning she felt an uncontrollable desire to cry, and frequently thereafter this feeling would seize upon her at the most inopportune times. Mrs. Gerhardt began to note her moods, and one afternoon she resolved to question her daughter.

"Now you must tell me what's the matter with you," she said quietly. "Jennie, you must tell your mother everything."

Jennie, to whom confession had seemed impossible, under the sympathetic persistence of her mother broke down at last and made the fatal confession. Mrs. Gerhardt stood there, too dumb with misery to give vent to a word.

"Oh!" she said at last, a great wave of self-accusation sweeping over her, "it is all my fault. I might have known. But we'll do what we can." She broke down and sobbed aloud.

After a time she went back to the washing she had to do, and stood over her tub rubbing and crying. The tears ran down her cheeks and dropped into the suds. Once in a while she stopped and tried to dry her eyes with her apron, but they soon filled again.

Now that the first shock had passed, there came the vivid consciousness of ever-present danger. What would Gerhardt do if he learned the truth? He had often said that if ever one of his daughters should act like some of those he knew he would turn her out of doors. "She should not stay under my roof!" he had exclaimed.

"I'm so afraid of your father," Mrs. Gerhardt often said to Jennie in this intermediate period. "I don't know what he'll say."

"Perhaps I'd better go away," suggested her daughter.

"No," she said; "he needn't know just yet. Wait awhile." But in her heart of hearts she knew that the evil day could not be long postponed.

One day, when her own suspense had reached such a pitch that it could no longer be endured, Mrs. Gerhardt sent Jennie away with the children, hoping to be able to tell her husband before they returned. All the morning she fidgeted about, dreading the opportune moment and letting him retire to his slumber without speaking. When afternoon came she did not go out to work, because she could not leave with her painful duty unfulfilled. Gerhardt arose at four, and still she hesitated, knowing full well that Jennie would soon return and that the specially prepared occasion would then be lost. It is almost certain that she would not have had the courage to say anything if he himself had not brought up the subject of Jennie's appearance.

"She doesn't look well," he said. "There seems to be something the matter with her."

"Oh," began Mrs. Gerhardt, visibly struggling with her fears, and moved to make an end of it at any cost, "Jennie is in trouble. I don't know what to do. She – "

Gerhardt, who had unscrewed a door-lock and was trying to mend it, looked up sharply from his work.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

Mrs. Gerhardt had her apron in her hands at the time, her nervous tendency to roll it coming upon her. She tried to summon sufficient courage to explain, but fear mastered her completely; she lifted the apron to her eyes and began to cry.

Gerhardt looked at her and rose. He was a man with the Calvin type of face, rather spare, with skin sallow and discolored as the result of age and work in the wind and rain. When he was surprised or angry sparks of light glittered in his eyes. He frequently pushed his hair back when he was troubled, and almost invariably walked the floor; just now he looked alert and dangerous.

"What is that you say?" he inquired in German, his voice straining to a hard note. "In trouble – has some one – " He paused and flung his hand upward. "Why don't you speak?" he demanded.

"I never thought," went on Mrs. Gerhardt, frightened, and yet following her own train of thought, "that anything like that would happen to her. She was such a good girl. Oh!" she concluded, "to think he should ruin Jennie."

"By thunder!" shouted Gerhardt, giving way to a fury of feeling, "I thought so! Brander! Ha! Your fine man! That comes of letting her go running around at nights, buggy-riding, walking the streets. I thought so. God in heaven! – "

He broke from his dramatic attitude and struck out in a fierce stride across the narrow chamber, turning like a caged animal.

"Ruined!" he exclaimed. "Ruined! Ha! So he has ruined her, has he?"

Suddenly he stopped like an image jerked by a string. He was directly in front of Mrs. Gerhardt, who had retired to the table at the side of the wall, and was standing there pale with fear.

"He is dead now!" he shouted, as if this fact had now first occurred to him. "He is dead!"

He put both hands to his temples, as if he feared his brain would give way, and stood looking at her, the mocking irony of the situation seeming to burn in his brain like fire.

"Dead!" he repeated, and Mrs. Gerhardt, fearing for the reason of the man, shrank still farther away, her wits taken up rather with the tragedy of the figure he presented than with the actual substance of his woe.

"He intended to marry her," she pleaded nervously. "He would have married her if he had not died."

"Would have!" shouted Gerhardt, coming out of his trance at the sound of her voice. "Would have! That's a fine thing to talk about now. Would have! The hound! May his soul burn in hell – the dog! Ah, God, I hope – I hope – If I were not a Christian – " He clenched his hands, the awfulness of his passion shaking him like a leaf.

Mrs. Gerhardt burst into tears, and her husband turned away, his own feelings far too intense for him to have any sympathy with her. He walked to and fro, his heavy step shaking the kitchen floor. After a time he came back, a new phase of the dread calamity having offered itself to his mind.

"When did this happen?" he demanded.

"I don't know," returned Mrs. Gerhardt, too terror-stricken to tell the truth. "I only found it out the other day."

"You lie!" he exclaimed in his excitement. "You were always shielding her. It is your fault that she is where she is. If you had let me have my way there would have been no cause for our trouble to-night.

"A fine ending," he went on to himself. "A fine ending. My boy gets into jail; my daughter walks the streets and gets herself talked about; the neighbors come to me with open remarks about my children; and now this scoundrel ruins her. By the God in heaven, I don't know what has got into my children!

"I don't know how it is," he went on, unconsciously commiserating himself. "I try, I try! Every night I pray that the Lord will let me do right, but it is no use. I might work and work. My hands – look at them – are rough with work. All my life I have tried to be an honest man. Now – now – " His voice broke, and it seemed for a moment as if he would give way to tears. Suddenly he turned on his wife, the major passion of anger possessing him.

"You are the cause of this," he exclaimed. "You are the sole cause. If you had done as I told you to do this would not have happened. No, you wouldn't do that. She must go out! out!! out!!! She has become a street-walker, that's what she has become. She has set herself right to go to hell. Let her go. I wash my hands of the whole thing. This is enough for me."

He made as if to go off to his little bedroom, but he had no sooner reached the door than he came back.

"She shall get out!" he said electrically. "She shall not stay under my roof! To-night! At once! I will not let her enter my door again. I will show her whether she will disgrace me or not!"

"You mustn't turn her out on the streets to-night," pleaded Mrs. Gerhardt. "She has no place to go."

"To-night!" he repeated. "This very minute! Let her find a home. She did not want this one. Let her get out now. We will see how the world treats her." He walked out of the room, inflexible resolution fixed upon his rugged features.

At half-past five, when Mrs. Gerhardt was tearfully going about the duty of getting supper, Jennie returned. Her mother started when she heard the door open, for now she knew the storm would burst afresh. Her father met her on the threshold.

"Get out of my sight!" he said savagely. "You shall not stay another hour in my house. I don't want to see you any more. Get out!"

Jennie stood before him, pale, trembling a little, and silent. The children she had brought home with her crowded about in frightened amazement. Veronica and Martha, who loved her dearly, began to cry.

"What's the matter?" George asked, his mouth open in wonder.

"She shall get out," reiterated Gerhardt. "I don't want her under my roof. If she wants to be a street-walker, let her be one, but she shall not stay here. Pack your things," he added, staring at her.

Jennie had no word to say, but the children cried loudly.

"Be still," said Gerhardt. "Go into the kitchen."

He drove them all out and followed stubbornly himself.

Jennie went quietly to her room. She gathered up her few little belongings and began, with tears, to put them into a valise her mother brought her. The little girlish trinkets that she had accumulated from time to time she did not take. She saw them, but thought of her younger sisters, and let them stay. Martha and Veronica would have assisted her, but their father forbade them to go.

At six o'clock Bass came in, and seeing the nervous assembly in the kitchen, inquired what the trouble was.

Gerhardt looked at him grimly, but did not answer.

"What's the trouble?" insisted Bass. "What are you all sitting around for?"

"He is driving Jennie away," whispered Mrs. Gerhardt tearfully.

"What for?" asked Bass, opening his eyes in astonishment.

"I shall tell you what for," broke in Gerhardt, still speaking in German. "Because she's a street-walker, that's what for. She goes and gets herself ruined by a man thirty years older than she is, a man old enough to be her father. Let her get out of this. She shall not stay here another minute."

Bass looked about him, and the children opened their eyes. All felt clearly that something terrible had happened, even the little ones. None but Bass understood.

"What do you want to send her out to-night for?" he inquired. "This is no time to send a girl out on the streets. Can't she stay here until morning?"

"No," said Gerhardt.

"He oughtn't to do that," put in the mother.

"She goes now," said Gerhardt. "Let that be an end of it."

"Where is she going to go?" insisted Bass.

"I don't know," Mrs. Gerhardt interpolated weakly.

Bass looked around, but did nothing until Mrs. Gerhardt motioned him toward the front door when her husband was not looking.

"Go in! Go in!" was the import of her gesture.

Bass went in, and then Mrs. Gerhardt dared to leave her work and follow. The children stayed awhile, but, one by one, even they slipped away, leaving Gerhardt alone. When he thought that time enough had elapsed he arose.

In the interval Jennie had been hastily coached by her mother.

Jennie should go to a private boarding-house somewhere, and send back her address. Bass should not accompany her, but she should wait a little way up the street, and he would follow. When her father was away the mother might get to see her, or Jennie could come home. All else must be postponed until they could meet again.

While the discussion was still going on, Gerhardt came in.

"Is she going?" he asked harshly.

"Yes," answered Mrs. Gerhardt, with her first and only note of defiance.

Bass said, "What's the hurry?" But Gerhardt frowned too mightily for him to venture on any further remonstrance.

Jennie entered, wearing her one good dress and carrying her valise. There was fear in her eyes, for she was passing through a fiery ordeal, but she had become a woman. The strength of love was with her, the support of patience and the ruling sweetness of sacrifice. Silently she kissed her mother, while tears fell fast. Then she turned, and the door closed upon her as she went forth to a new life.

CHAPTER X

The world into which Jennie was thus unduly thrust forth was that in which virtue has always vainly struggled since time immemorial; for virtue is the wishing well and the doing well unto others. Virtue is that quality of generosity which offers itself willingly for another's service, and, being this, it is held by society to be nearly worthless. Sell yourself cheaply and you shall be used lightly and trampled under foot. Hold yourself dearly, however unworthily, and you will be respected. Society, in the mass, lacks woefully in the matter of discrimination. Its one criterion is the opinion of others. Its one test that of self-preservation. Has he preserved his fortune? Has she preserved her purity? Only in rare instances and with rare individuals does there seem to be any guiding light from within.

Jennie had not sought to hold herself dear. Innate feeling in her made for self-sacrifice. She could not be readily corrupted by the world's selfish lessons on how to preserve oneself from the evil to come.

It is in such supreme moments that growth is greatest. It comes as with a vast surge, this feeling of strength and sufficiency. We may still tremble, the fear of doing wretchedly may linger, but we grow. Flashes of inspiration come to guide the soul. In nature there is no outside. When we are cast from a group or a condition we have still the companionship of all that is. Nature is not ungenerous. Its winds and stars are fellows with you. Let the soul be but gentle and receptive, and this vast truth will come home – not in set phrases, perhaps, but as a feeling, a comfort, which, after all, is the last essence of knowledge. In the universe peace is wisdom.

Jennie had hardly turned from the door when she was overtaken by Bass. "Give me your grip," he said; and then seeing that she was dumb with unutterable feeling, he added, "I think I know where I can get you a room."

He led the way to the southern part of the city, where they were not known, and up to the door of an old lady whose parlor clock had been recently purchased from the instalment firm by whom he was now employed. She was not well off, he knew, and had a room to rent.

"Is that room of yours still vacant?" he asked.

"Yes," she said, looking at Jennie.

"I wish you'd let my sister have it. We're moving away, and she can't go yet."

The old lady expressed her willingness, and Jennie was soon temporarily installed.

"Don't worry now," said Bass, who felt rather sorry for her. "This'll blow over. Ma said I should tell you not to worry. Come up to-morrow when he's gone."

Jennie said she would, and, after giving her further oral encouragement, he arranged with the old lady about board, and took his leave.

"It's all right now," he said encouragingly as he went out. "You'll come out all right. Don't worry. I've got to go back, but I'll come around in the morning."

He went away, and the bitter stress of it blew lightly over his head, for he was thinking that Jennie had made a mistake. This was shown by the manner in which he had asked her questions as they had walked together, and that in the face of her sad and doubtful mood.

"What'd you want to do that for?" and "Didn't you ever think what you were doing?" he persisted.

"Please don't ask me to-night," Jennie had said, which put an end to the sharpest form of his queries. She had no excuse to offer and no complaint to make. If any blame attached, very likely it was hers. His own misfortune and the family's and her sacrifice were alike forgotten.

Left alone in her strange abode, Jennie gave way to her saddened feelings. The shock and shame of being banished from her home overcame her, and she wept. Although of a naturally long-suffering and uncomplaining disposition, the catastrophic wind-up of all her hopes was too much for her. What

was this element in life that could seize and overwhelm one as does a great wind? Why this sudden intrusion of death to shatter all that had seemed most promising in life?

As she thought over the past, a very clear recollection of the details of her long relationship with Brander came back to her, and for all her suffering she could only feel a loving affection for him. After all, he had not deliberately willed her any harm. His kindness, his generosity – these things had been real. He had been essentially a good man, and she was sorry – more for his sake than for her own that his end had been so untimely.

These cogitations, while not at all reassuring, at least served to pass the night away, and the next morning Bass stopped on his way to work to say that Mrs. Gerhardt wished her to come home that same evening. Gerhardt would not be present, and they could talk it over. She spent the day lonesomely enough, but when night fell her spirits brightened, and at a quarter of eight she set out.

There was not much of comforting news to tell her. Gerhardt was still in a direfully angry and outraged mood. He had already decided to throw up his place on the following Saturday and go to Youngstown. Any place was better than Columbus after this; he could never expect to hold up his head here again. Its memories were odious. He would go away now, and if he succeeded in finding work the family should follow, a decision which meant the abandoning of the little home. He was not going to try to meet the mortgage on the house – he could not hope to.

At the end of the week Gerhardt took his leave, Jennie returned home, and for a time at least there was a restoration of the old order, a condition which, of course, could not endure.

Bass saw it. Jennie's trouble and its possible consequences weighed upon him disagreeably. Columbus was no place to stay. Youngstown was no place to go. If they should all move away to some larger city it would be much better.

He pondered over the situation, and hearing that a manufacturing boom was on in Cleveland, he thought it might be wise to try his luck there. If he succeeded, the others might follow. If Gerhardt still worked on in Youngstown, as he was now doing, and the family came to Cleveland, it would save Jennie from being turned out in the streets.

Bass waited a little while before making up his mind, but finally announced his purpose.

"I believe I'll go up to Cleveland," he said to his mother one evening as she was getting supper.

"Why?" she asked, looking up uncertainly. She was rather afraid that Bass would desert her.

"I think I can get work there," he returned. "We oughtn't to stay in this darned old town."

"Don't swear," she returned reprovingly.

"Oh, I know," he said, "but it's enough to make any one swear. We've never had anything but rotten luck here. I'm going to go, and maybe if I get anything we can all move. We'd be better off if we'd get some place where people don't know us. We can't be anything here."

Mrs. Gerhardt listened with a strong hope for a betterment of their miserable life creeping into her heart. If Bass would only do this. If he would go and get work, and come to her rescue, as a strong bright young son might, what a thing it would be! They were in the rapids of a life which was moving toward a dreadful calamity. If only something would happen.

"Do you think you could get something to do?" she asked interestedly.

"I ought to," he said. "I've never looked for a place yet that I didn't get it. Other fellows have gone up there and done all right. Look at the Millers."

He shoved his hands into his pockets and looked out the window.

"Do you think you could get along until I try my hand up there?" he asked.

"I guess we could," she replied. "Papa's at work now and we have some money that, that – " she hesitated, to name the source, so ashamed was she of their predicament.

"Yes, I know," said Bass, grimly.

"We won't have to pay any rent here before fall and then we'll have to give it up anyhow," she added.

She was referring to the mortgage on the house, which fell due the next September and which unquestionably could not be met. "If we could move away from here before then, I guess we could get along."

"I'll do it," said Bass determinedly. "I'll go."

Accordingly, he threw up his place at the end of the month, and the day after he left for Cleveland.

CHAPTER XI

The incidents of the days that followed, relating as they did peculiarly to Jennie, were of an order which the morality of our day has agreed to taboo.

Certain processes of the all-mother, the great artificing wisdom of the power that works and weaves in silence and in darkness, when viewed in the light of the established opinion of some of the little individuals created by it, are considered very vile. We turn our faces away from the creation of life as if that were the last thing that man should dare to interest himself in, openly.

It is curious that a feeling of this sort should spring up in a world whose very essence is generative, the vast process dual, and where wind, water, soil, and light alike minister to the fruition of that which is all that we are. Although the whole earth, not we alone, is moved by passions hymeneal, and everything terrestrial has come into being by the one common road, yet there is that ridiculous tendency to close the eyes and turn away the head as if there were something unclean in nature itself. "Conceived in iniquity and born in sin," is the unnatural interpretation put upon the process by the extreme religionist, and the world, by its silence, gives assent to a judgment so marvelously warped.

Surely there is something radically wrong in this attitude. The teachings of philosophy and the deductions of biology should find more practical application in the daily reasoning of man. No process is vile, no condition is unnatural. The accidental variation from a given social practice does not necessarily entail sin. No poor little earthling, caught in the enormous grip of chance, and so swerved from the established customs of men, could possibly be guilty of that depth of vileness which the attitude of the world would seem to predicate so inevitably.

Jennie was now to witness the unjust interpretation of that wonder of nature, which, but for Brander's death, might have been consecrated and hallowed as one of the ideal functions of life. Although herself unable to distinguish the separateness of this from every other normal process of life, yet was she made to feel, by the actions of all about her, that degradation was her portion and sin the foundation as well as the condition of her state. Almost, not quite, it was sought to extinguish the affection, the consideration, the care which, afterward, the world would demand of her, for her child. Almost, not quite, was the budding and essential love looked upon as evil. Although her punishment was neither the gibbet nor the jail of a few hundred years before, yet the ignorance and immobility of the human beings about her made it impossible for them to see anything in her present condition but a vile and premeditated infraction of the social code, the punishment of which was ostracism. All she could do now was to shun the scornful gaze of men, and to bear in silence the great change that was coming upon her. Strangely enough, she felt no useless remorse, no vain regrets. Her heart was pure, and she was conscious that it was filled with peace. Sorrow there was, it is true, but only a mellow phase of it, a vague uncertainty and wonder, which would sometimes cause her eyes to fill with tears.

You have heard the wood-dove calling in the lone stillness of the summertime; you have found the unheeded brooklet singing and babbling where no ear comes to hear. Under dead leaves and snow-banks the delicate arbutus unfolds its simple blossom, answering some heavenly call for color. So, too, this other flower of womanhood.

Jennie was left alone, but, like the wood-dove, she was a voice of sweetness in the summer-time. Going about her household duties, she was content to wait, without a murmur, the fulfilment of that process for which, after all, she was but the sacrificial implement. When her duties were lightest she was content to sit in quiet meditation, the marvel of life holding her as in a trance. When she was hardest pressed to aid her mother, she would sometimes find herself quietly singing, the pleasure of work lifting her out of herself. Always she was content to face the future with a serene and unfaltering courage. It is not so with all women. Nature is unkind in permitting the minor type to bear a child at all. The larger natures in their maturity welcome motherhood, see in it the immense possibilities of racial fulfilment, and find joy and satisfaction in being the hand-maiden of so immense a purpose.

Jennie, a child in years, was potentially a woman physically and mentally, but not yet come into rounded conclusions as to life and her place in it. The great situation which had forced her into this anomalous position was from one point of view a tribute to her individual capacity. It proved her courage, the largeness of her sympathy, her willingness to sacrifice for what she considered a worthy cause. That it resulted in an unexpected consequence, which placed upon her a larger and more complicated burden, was due to the fact that her sense of self-protection had not been commensurate with her emotions. There were times when the prospective coming of the child gave her a sense of fear and confusion, because she did not know but that the child might eventually reproach her; but there was always that saving sense of eternal justice in life which would not permit her to be utterly crushed. To her way of thinking, people were not intentionally cruel. Vague thoughts of sympathy and divine goodness permeated her soul. Life at worst or best was beautiful – had always been so.

These thoughts did not come to her all at once, but through the months during which she watched and waited. It was a wonderful thing to be a mother, even under these untoward conditions. She felt that she would love this child, would be a good mother to it if life permitted. That was the problem – what would life permit?

There were many things to be done – clothes to be made; certain provisions of hygiene and diet to be observed. One of her fears was that Gerhardt might unexpectedly return, but he did not. The old family doctor who had nursed the various members of the Gerhardt family through their multitudinous ailments – Doctor Ellwanger – was taken into consultation, and he gave sound and practical advice. Despite his Lutheran upbringing, the practice of medicine in a large and kindly way had led him to the conclusion that there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamed of in our philosophies and in our small neighborhood relationships. "So it is," he observed to Mrs. Gerhardt when she confided to him nervously what the trouble was. "Well, you mustn't worry. These things happen in more places than you think. If you knew as much about life as I do, and about your neighbors, you would not cry. Your girl will be all right. She is very healthy. She can go away somewhere afterward, and people will never know. Why should you worry about what your neighbors think. It is not so uncommon as you imagine."

Mrs. Gerhardt marveled. He was such a wise man. It gave her a little courage. As for Jennie, she listened to his advice with interest and without fear. She wanted things not so much for herself as for her child, and she was anxious to do whatever she was told. The doctor was curious to know who the father was; when informed he lifted his eyes. "Indeed," he commented. "That ought to be a bright baby."

There came the final hour when the child was ushered into the world. It was Doctor Ellwanger who presided, assisted by the mother, who, having brought forth six herself, knew exactly what to do. There was no difficulty, and at the first cry of the new-born infant there awakened in Jennie a tremendous yearning toward it. This was *her* child! It was weak and feeble – a little girl, and it needed her care. She took it to her breast, when it had been bathed and swaddled, with a tremendous sense of satisfaction and joy. This was her child, her little girl. She wanted to live to be able to work for it, and rejoiced, even in her weakness, that she was so strong. Doctor Ellwanger predicted a quick recovery. He thought two weeks would be the outside limit of her need to stay in bed. As a matter of fact, in ten days she was up and about, as vigorous and healthy as ever. She had been born with strength and with that nurturing quality which makes the ideal mother.

The great crisis had passed, and now life went on much as before. The children, outside of Bass, were too young to understand fully, and had been deceived by the story that Jennie was married to Senator Brander, who had died. They did not know that a child was coming until it was there. The neighbors were feared by Mrs. Gerhardt, for they were ever watchful and really knew all. Jennie would never have braved this local atmosphere except for the advice of Bass, who, having secured a place in Cleveland some time before, had written that he thought when she was well enough it would be advisable for the whole family to seek a new start in Cleveland. Things were flourishing there.

Once away they would never hear of their present neighbors and Jennie could find something to do. So she stayed at home.

CHAPTER XII

Bass was no sooner in Cleveland than the marvel of that growing city was sufficient to completely restore his equanimity of soul and to stir up new illusions as to the possibility of rehabilitation for himself and his family. "If only they could come here," he thought. "If only they could all get work and do right." Here was no evidence of any of their recent troubles, no acquaintances who could suggest by their mere presence the troubles of the past. All was business, all activity. The very turning of the corner seemed to rid one of old times and crimes. It was as if a new world existed in every block.

He soon found a place in a cigar store, and, after working a few weeks, he began to write home the cheering ideas he had in mind. Jennie ought to come as soon as she was able, and then, if she found something to do, the others might follow. There was plenty of work for girls of her age. She could live in the same house with him temporarily; or maybe they could take one of the fifteen-dollar-a-month cottages that were for rent. There were big general furnishing houses, where one could buy everything needful for a small house on very easy monthly terms. His mother could come and keep house for them. They would be in a clean, new atmosphere, unknown and untalked about. They could start life all over again; they could be decent, honorable, prosperous.

Filled with this hope and the glamor which new scenes and new environment invariably throw over the unsophisticated mind, he wrote a final letter, in which he suggested that Jennie should come at once. This was when the baby was six months old. There were theaters here, he said, and beautiful streets. Vessels from the lakes came into the heart of the city. It was a wonderful city, and growing very fast. It was thus that the new life appealed to him.

The effect which all this had upon Mrs. Gerhardt, Jennie, and the rest of the family was phenomenal. Mrs. Gerhardt, long weighed upon by the misery which Jennie's error had entailed, was for taking measures for carrying out this plan at once. So buoyant was her natural temperament that she was completely carried away by the glory of Cleveland, and already saw fulfilled therein not only her own desires for a nice home, but the prosperous advancement of her children. "Of course they could get work," she said. Bass was right. She had always wanted Gerhardt to go to some large city, but he would not. Now it was necessary, and they would go and become better off than they ever had been.

And Gerhardt did take this view of the situation. In answer to his wife's letter he wrote that it was not advisable for him to leave his place, but if Bass saw a way for them, it might be a good thing to go. He was the more ready to acquiesce in the plan for the simple reason that he was half distracted with the worry of supporting the family and of paying the debts already outstanding. Every week he laid by five dollars out of his salary, which he sent in the form of a postal order to Mrs. Gerhardt. Three dollars he paid for board, and fifty cents he kept for spending money, church dues, a little tobacco and occasionally a glass of beer. Every week he put a dollar and a half in a little iron bank against a rainy day. His room was a bare corner in the topmost loft of the mill. To this he would ascend after sitting alone on the doorstep of the mill in this lonely, foresaken neighborhood, until nine o'clock of an evening; and here, amid the odor of machinery wafted up from the floor below, by the light of a single tallow candle, he would conclude his solitary day, reading his German paper, folding his hands and thinking, kneeling by an open window in the shadow of the night to say his prayers, and silently stretching himself to rest. Long were the days, dreary the prospect. Still he lifted his hands in utmost faith to God, praying that his sins might be forgiven and that he might be vouchsafed a few more years of comfort and of happy family life.

So the momentous question was finally decided. There was the greatest longing and impatience among the children, and Mrs. Gerhardt shared their emotions in a suppressed way. Jennie was to go first, as Bass had suggested; later on they would all follow.

When the hour came for Jennie's departure there was great excitement in the household.

"How long you going to be 'fore you send for us?" was Martha's inquiry, several times repeated.

"Tell Bass to hurry up," said the eager George.

"I want to go to Cleveland, I want to go to Cleveland," Veronica was caught singing to herself.

"Listen to her," exclaimed George, sarcastically.

"Aw, you hush up," was her displeased rejoinder.

When the final hour came, however, it required all of Jennie's strength to go through with the farewells. Though everything was being done in order to bring them together again under better conditions, she could not help feeling depressed. Her little one, now six months old, was being left behind. The great world was to her one undiscovered bourne. It frightened her.

"You mustn't worry, Ma," she found courage enough to say. "I'll be all right. I'll write you just as soon as I get there. It won't be so very long."

But when it came to bending over her baby for the last time her courage went out like a blown lamp. Stooping over the cradle in which the little one was resting, she looked into its face with passionate, motherly yearning.

"Is it going to be a good little girl?" she cooed.

Then she caught it up into her arms, and hugging it closely to her neck and bosom, she buried her face against its little body. Mrs. Gerhardt saw that she was trembling.

"Come now," she said, coaxingly, "you mustn't carry on so. She will be all right with me. I'll take care of her. If you're going to act this way, you'd better not try to go at all."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.