

Willa Cather

Song of the Lark

PART I. FRIENDS OF CHILDHOOD

I

Dr. Howard Archie had just come up from a game of pool with the Jewish clothier and two traveling men who happened to be staying overnight in Moonstone. His offices were in the Duke Block, over the drug store. Larry, the doctor's man, had lit the overhead light in the waiting-room and the double student's lamp on the desk in the study. The isinglass sides of the hard-coal burner were aglow, and the air in the study was so hot that as he came in the doctor opened the door into his little operating-room, where there was no stove. The waiting room was carpeted and stiffly furnished, something like a country parlor. The study had worn, unpainted floors, but there was a look of winter comfort about it. The doctor's flat-top desk was large and well made; the papers were in orderly piles, under glass weights. Behind the stove a wide bookcase, with double glass doors, reached from the floor to the ceiling. It was filled with medical books of every thickness and color. On the top shelf stood a long row of thirty or forty volumes, bound all alike in dark

mottled board covers, with imitation leather backs.

As the doctor in New England villages is proverbially old, so the doctor in small Colorado towns twenty-five years ago was generally young. Dr. Archie was barely thirty. He was tall, with massive shoulders which he held stiffly, and a large, well-shaped head. He was a distinguished-looking man, for that part of the world, at least.

There was something individual in the way in which his reddish-brown hair, parted cleanly at the side, bushed over his high forehead. His nose was straight and thick, and his eyes were intelligent. He wore a curly, reddish mustache and an imperial, cut trimly, which made him look a little like the pictures of Napoleon III. His hands were large and well kept, but ruggedly formed, and the backs were shaded with crinkly reddish hair. He wore a blue suit of woolly, wide-waled serge; the traveling men had known at a glance that it was made by a Denver tailor. The doctor was always well dressed.

Dr. Archie turned up the student's lamp and sat down in the swivel chair before his desk. He sat uneasily, beating a tattoo on his knees with his fingers, and looked about him as if he were bored. He glanced at his watch, then absently took from his pocket a bunch of small keys, selected one and looked at it. A contemptuous smile, barely perceptible, played on his lips, but his eyes remained meditative. Behind the door

that led into the hall, under his buffalo-skin driving-coat, was a locked cupboard. This the doctor opened mechanically, kicking aside a pile of muddy overshoes. Inside, on the shelves, were whiskey glasses and decanters, lemons, sugar, and bitters. Hearing a step in the empty, echoing hall without, the doctor closed the cupboard again, snapping the Yale lock. The door of the waiting-room opened, a man entered and came on into the consulting-room.

“Good-evening, Mr. Kronborg,” said the doctor carelessly. “Sit down.”

His visitor was a tall, loosely built man, with a thin brown beard, streaked with gray. He wore a frock coat, a broad-brimmed black hat, a white lawn necktie, and steel rimmed spectacles. Altogether there was a pretentious and important air about him, as he lifted the skirts of his coat and sat down.

“Good-evening, doctor. Can you step around to the house with me? I think Mrs. Kronborg will need you this evening.” This was said with profound gravity and, curiously enough, with a slight embarrassment.

“Any hurry?” the doctor asked over his shoulder as he went into his operating-room.

Mr. Kronborg coughed behind his hand, and contracted his brows. His face threatened at every moment to break into a smile of foolish excitement. He controlled it only by calling upon his habitual pulpit manner. “Well, I think it would be as well to go

immediately. Mrs. Kronborg will be more comfortable if you are there. She has been suffering for some time.”

The doctor came back and threw a black bag upon his desk. He wrote some instructions for his man on a prescription pad and then drew on his overcoat. “All ready,” he announced, putting out his lamp. Mr. Kronborg rose and they tramped through the empty hall and down the stairway to the street. The drug store below was dark, and the saloon next door was just closing. Every other light on Main Street was out.

On either side of the road and at the outer edge of the board sidewalk, the snow had been shoveled into breastworks. The town looked small and black, flattened down in the snow, muffled and all but extinguished. Overhead the stars shone gloriously. It was impossible not to notice them. The air was so clear that the white sand hills to the east of Moonstone gleamed softly. Following the Reverend Mr. Kronborg along the narrow walk, past the little dark, sleeping houses, the doctor looked up at the flashing night and whistled softly. It did seem that people were stupider than they need be; as if on a night like this there ought to be something better to do than to sleep nine hours, or to assist Mrs. Kronborg in functions which she could have performed so admirably unaided. He wished he had gone down to Denver to hear Fay Templeton sing “See-Saw.” Then he remembered that he had a personal interest in this family, after all. They turned into

another street and saw before them lighted windows; a low story-and-a-half house, with a wing built on at the right and a kitchen addition at the back, everything a little on the slant-roofs, windows, and doors. As they approached the gate, Peter Kronborg's pace grew brisker. His nervous, ministerial cough annoyed the doctor. "Exactly as if he were going to give out a text," he thought. He drew off his glove and felt in his vest pocket. "Have a troche, Kronborg," he said, producing some. "Sent me for samples. Very good for a rough throat."

"Ah, thank you, thank you. I was in something of a hurry. I neglected to put on my overshoes. Here we are, doctor." Kronborg opened his front door-seemed delighted to be at home again.

The front hall was dark and cold; the hatrack was hung with an astonishing number of children's hats and caps and cloaks. They were even piled on the table beneath the hatrack. Under the table was a heap of rubbers and overshoes. While the doctor hung up his coat and hat, Peter Kronborg opened the door into the living-room. A glare of light greeted them, and a rush of hot, stale air, smelling of warming flannels.

At three o'clock in the morning Dr. Archie was in the parlor putting on his cuffs and coat-there was no spare bedroom in that house. Peter Kronborg's seventh child, a boy, was being soothed and cosseted by his aunt, Mrs. Kronborg was asleep, and the doctor was

going home. But he wanted first to speak to Kronborg, who, coatless and fluttery, was pouring coal into the kitchen stove. As the doctor crossed the dining-room he paused and listened. From one of the wing rooms, off to the left, he heard rapid, distressed breathing. He went to the kitchen door.

“One of the children sick in there?” he asked, nodding toward the partition.

Kronborg hung up the stove-lifter and dusted his fingers. “It must be Thea. I meant to ask you to look at her. She has a croupy cold. But in my excitement-Mrs. Kronborg is doing finely, eh, doctor? Not many of your patients with such a constitution, I expect.”

“Oh, yes. She's a fine mother.” The doctor took up the lamp from the kitchen table and unceremoniously went into the wing room. Two chubby little boys were asleep in a double bed, with the coverlids over their noses and their feet drawn up. In a single bed, next to theirs, lay a little girl of eleven, wide awake, two yellow braids sticking up on the pillow behind her. Her face was scarlet and her eyes were blazing.

The doctor shut the door behind him. “Feel pretty sick, Thea?” he asked as he took out his thermometer. “Why didn't you call somebody?”

She looked at him with greedy affection. “I thought you were here,” she spoke between quick breaths. “There is a new baby, isn't there? Which?”

“Which?” repeated the doctor.

“Brother or sister?”

He smiled and sat down on the edge of the bed.

“Brother,” he said, taking her hand. “Open.”

“Good. Brothers are better,” she murmured as he put the glass tube under her tongue.

“Now, be still, I want to count.” Dr. Archie reached for her hand and took out his watch. When he put her hand back under the quilt he went over to one of the windows—they were both tight shut—and lifted it a little way. He reached up and ran his hand along the cold, unpapered wall. “Keep under the covers; I’ll come back to you in a moment,” he said, bending over the glass lamp with his thermometer. He winked at her from the door before he shut it.

Peter Kronborg was sitting in his wife’s room, holding the bundle which contained his son. His air of cheerful importance, his beard and glasses, even his shirt-sleeves, annoyed the doctor. He beckoned Kronborg into the living-room and said sternly:-

“You’ve got a very sick child in there. Why didn’t you call me before? It’s pneumonia, and she must have been sick for several days. Put the baby down somewhere, please, and help me make up the bed-lounge here in the parlor. She’s got to be in a warm room, and she’s got to be quiet. You must keep the other children out. Here, this thing opens up, I see,” swinging back the top of the carpet lounge. “We can lift

her mattress and carry her in just as she is. I don't want to disturb her more than is necessary.”

Kronborg was all concern immediately. The two men took up the mattress and carried the sick child into the parlor. “I'll have to go down to my office to get some medicine, Kronborg. The drug store won't be open. Keep the covers on her. I won't be gone long. Shake down the stove and put on a little coal, but not too much; so it'll catch quickly, I mean. Find an old sheet for me, and put it there to warm.”

The doctor caught his coat and hurried out into the dark street. Nobody was stirring yet, and the cold was bitter. He was tired and hungry and in no mild humor. “The idea!” he muttered; “to be such an ass at his age, about the seventh! And to feel no responsibility about the little girl. Silly old goat! The baby would have got into the world somehow; they always do. But a nice little girl like that-she's worth the whole litter. Where she ever got it from-” He turned into the Duke Block and ran up the stairs to his office.

Thea Kronborg, meanwhile, was wondering why she happened to be in the parlor, where nobody but company-usually visiting preachers-ever slept. She had moments of stupor when she did not see anything, and moments of excitement when she felt that something unusual and pleasant was about to happen, when she saw everything clearly in the red light from the isinglass sides of the hard-coal burner-the nickel

trimmings on the stove itself, the pictures on the wall, which she thought very beautiful, the flowers on the Brussels carpet, Czerny's "Daily Studies" which stood open on the upright piano. She forgot, for the time being, all about the new baby.

When she heard the front door open, it occurred to her that the pleasant thing which was going to happen was Dr. Archie himself. He came in and warmed his hands at the stove. As he turned to her, she threw herself wearily toward him, half out of her bed. She would have tumbled to the floor had he not caught her. He gave her some medicine and went to the kitchen for something he needed. She drowsed and lost the sense of his being there. When she opened her eyes again, he was kneeling before the stove, spreading something dark and sticky on a white cloth, with a big spoon; batter, perhaps. Presently she felt him taking off her nightgown. He wrapped the hot plaster about her chest. There seemed to be straps which he pinned over her shoulders. Then he took out a thread and needle and began to sew her up in it. That, she felt, was too strange; she must be dreaming anyhow, so she succumbed to her drowsiness.

Thea had been moaning with every breath since the doctor came back, but she did not know it. She did not realize that she was suffering pain. When she was conscious at all, she seemed to be separated from her body; to be perched on top of the piano, or on the

hanging lamp, watching the doctor sew her up. It was perplexing and unsatisfactory, like dreaming. She wished she could waken up and see what was going on.

The doctor thanked God that he had persuaded Peter Kronborg to keep out of the way. He could do better by the child if he had her to himself. He had no children of his own. His marriage was a very unhappy one. As he lifted and undressed Thea, he thought to himself what a beautiful thing a little girl's body was, — like a flower. It was so neatly and delicately fashioned, so soft, and so milky white. Thea must have got her hair and her silky skin from her mother. She was a little Swede, through and through. Dr. Archie could not help thinking how he would cherish a little creature like this if she were his. Her hands, so little and hot, so clever, too, — he glanced at the open exercise book on the piano. When he had stitched up the flaxseed jacket, he wiped it neatly about the edges, where the paste had worked out on the skin. He put on her the clean nightgown he had warmed before the fire, and tucked the blankets about her. As he pushed back the hair that had fuzzed down over her eyebrows, he felt her head thoughtfully with the tips of his fingers. No, he couldn't say that it was different from any other child's head, though he believed that there was something very different about her. He looked intently at her wide, flushed face, freckled nose, fierce little mouth, and her delicate, tender chin—the one soft touch

in her hard little Scandinavian face, as if some fairy godmother had caressed her there and left a cryptic promise. Her brows were usually drawn together defiantly, but never when she was with Dr. Archie. Her affection for him was prettier than most of the things that went to make up the doctor's life in Moonstone.

The windows grew gray. He heard a tramping on the attic floor, on the back stairs, then cries: "Give me my shirt!" "Where's my other stocking?"

"I'll have to stay till they get off to school," he reflected, "or they'll be in here tormenting her, the whole lot of them."

II

For the next four days it seemed to Dr. Archie that his patient might slip through his hands, do what he might. But she did not. On the contrary, after that she recovered very rapidly. As her father remarked, she must have inherited the "constitution" which he was never tired of admiring in her mother.

One afternoon, when her new brother was a week old, the doctor found Thea very comfortable and happy in her bed in the parlor. The sunlight was pouring in over her shoulders, the baby was asleep on a pillow in a big rocking-chair beside her. Whenever he stirred, she put out her hand and rocked him. Nothing of him was visible but a flushed, puffy forehead and an

uncompromisingly big, bald cranium. The door into her mother's room stood open, and Mrs. Kronborg was sitting up in bed darning stockings. She was a short, stalwart woman, with a short neck and a determined-looking head. Her skin was very fair, her face calm and unwrinkled, and her yellow hair, braided down her back as she lay in bed, still looked like a girl's. She was a woman whom Dr. Archie respected; active, practical, unruffled; goodhumored, but determined. Exactly the sort of woman to take care of a flighty preacher. She had brought her husband some property, too, — one fourth of her father's broad acres in Nebraska, — but this she kept in her own name. She had profound respect for her husband's erudition and eloquence. She sat under his preaching with deep humility, and was as much taken in by his stiff shirt and white neckties as if she had not ironed them herself by lamplight the night before they appeared correct and spotless in the pulpit. But for all this, she had no confidence in his administration of worldly affairs. She looked to him for morning prayers and grace at table; she expected him to name the babies and to supply whatever parental sentiment there was in the house, to remember birthdays and anniversaries, to point the children to moral and patriotic ideals. It was her work to keep their bodies, their clothes, and their conduct in some sort of order, and this she accomplished with a success that was a source of wonder to her neighbors.

As she used to remark, and her husband admiringly to echo, she "had never lost one." With all his flightiness, Peter Kronborg appreciated the matter-of-fact, punctual way in which his wife got her children into the world and along in it. He believed, and he was right in believing, that the sovereign State of Colorado was much indebted to Mrs. Kronborg and women like her.

Mrs. Kronborg believed that the size of every family was decided in heaven. More modern views would not have startled her; they would simply have seemed foolish-thin chatter, like the boasts of the men who built the tower of Babel, or like Axel's plan to breed ostriches in the chicken yard. From what evidence Mrs. Kronborg formed her opinions on this and other matters, it would have been difficult to say, but once formed, they were unchangeable. She would no more have questioned her convictions than she would have questioned revelation. Calm and even tempered, naturally kind, she was capable of strong prejudices, and she never forgave.

When the doctor came in to see Thea, Mrs. Kronborg was reflecting that the washing was a week behind, and deciding what she had better do about it. The arrival of a new baby meant a revision of her entire domestic schedule, and as she drove her needle along she had been working out new sleeping arrangements and cleaning days. The doctor had entered the house without knocking, after making noise enough in the hall

to prepare his patients. Thea was reading, her book propped up before her in the sunlight.

“Mustn't do that; bad for your eyes,” he said, as Thea shut the book quickly and slipped it under the covers.

Mrs. Kronborg called from her bed: “Bring the baby here, doctor, and have that chair. She wanted him in there for company.”

Before the doctor picked up the baby, he put a yellow paper bag down on Thea's coverlid and winked at her. They had a code of winks and grimaces. When he went in to chat with her mother, Thea opened the bag cautiously, trying to keep it from crackling. She drew out a long bunch of white grapes, with a little of the sawdust in which they had been packed still clinging to them. They were called Malaga grapes in Moonstone, and once or twice during the winter the leading grocer got a keg of them. They were used mainly for table decoration, about Christmas-time. Thea had never had more than one grape at a time before. When the doctor came back she was holding the almost transparent fruit up in the sunlight, feeling the pale-green skins softly with the tips of her fingers. She did not thank him; she only snapped her eyes at him in a special way which he understood, and, when he gave her his hand, put it quickly and shyly under her cheek, as if she were trying to do so without knowing it-and without his knowing it.

Dr. Archie sat down in the rocking-chair. "And how's Thea feeling to-day?"

He was quite as shy as his patient, especially when a third person overheard his conversation. Big and handsome and superior to his fellow townsmen as Dr. Archie was, he was seldom at his ease, and like Peter Kronborg he often dodged behind a professional manner. There was sometimes a contraction of embarrassment and self consciousness all over his big body, which made him awkward-likely to stumble, to kick up rugs, or to knock over chairs. If any one was very sick, he forgot himself, but he had a clumsy touch in convalescent gossip.

Thea curled up on her side and looked at him with pleasure. "All right. I like to be sick. I have more fun then than other times."

"How's that?"

"I don't have to go to school, and I don't have to practice. I can read all I want to, and have good things,"-she patted the grapes. "I had lots of fun that time I mashed my finger and you wouldn't let Professor Wunsch make me practice. Only I had to do left hand, even then. I think that was mean."

The doctor took her hand and examined the forefinger, where the nail had grown back a little crooked. "You mustn't trim it down close at the corner there, and then it will grow straight. You won't want it crooked when you're a big girl and wear rings and have

sweethearts.”

She made a mocking little face at him and looked at his new scarf-pin. “That’s the prettiest one you ev-ER had. I wish you’d stay a long while and let me look at it. What is it?”

Dr. Archie laughed. “It’s an opal. Spanish Johnny brought it up for me from Chihuahua in his shoe. I had it set in Denver, and I wore it to-day for your benefit.”

Thea had a curious passion for jewelry. She wanted every shining stone she saw, and in summer she was always going off into the sand hills to hunt for crystals and agates and bits of pink chalcedony. She had two cigar boxes full of stones that she had found or traded for, and she imagined that they were of enormous value. She was always planning how she would have them set.

“What are you reading?” The doctor reached under the covers and pulled out a book of Byron’s poems. “Do you like this?”

She looked confused, turned over a few pages rapidly, and pointed to “My native land, good-night.” “That,” she said sheepishly.

“How about ‘Maid of Athens’?”

She blushed and looked at him suspiciously. “I like ‘There was a sound of revelry,’” she muttered.

The doctor laughed and closed the book. It was clumsily bound in padded leather and had been presented to the Reverend Peter Kronborg by his

Sunday-School class as an ornament for his parlor table.

“Come into the office some day, and I'll lend you a nice book. You can skip the parts you don't understand. You can read it in vacation. Perhaps you'll be able to understand all of it by then.”

Thea frowned and looked fretfully toward the piano. “In vacation I have to practice four hours every day, and then there'll be Thor to take care of.” She pronounced it “Tor.”

“Thor? Oh, you've named the baby Thor?” exclaimed the doctor.

Thea frowned again, still more fiercely, and said quickly, “That's a nice name, only maybe it's a little-old fashioned.” She was very sensitive about being thought a foreigner, and was proud of the fact that, in town, her father always preached in English; very bookish English, at that, one might add.

Born in an old Scandinavian colony in Minnesota, Peter Kronborg had been sent to a small divinity school in Indiana by the women of a Swedish evangelical mission, who were convinced of his gifts and who skimped and begged and gave church suppers to get the long, lazy youth through the seminary. He could still speak enough Swedish to exhort and to bury the members of his country church out at Copper Hole, and he wielded in his Moonstone pulpit a somewhat pompous English vocabulary he had learned out of

books at college. He always spoke of "the infant Saviour," "our Heavenly Father," etc. The poor man had no natural, spontaneous human speech. If he had his sincere moments, they were perforce inarticulate. Probably a good deal of his pretentiousness was due to the fact that he habitually expressed himself in a book learned language, wholly remote from anything personal, native, or homely. Mrs. Kronborg spoke Swedish to her own sisters and to her sister-in-law Tillie, and colloquial English to her neighbors. Thea, who had a rather sensitive ear, until she went to school never spoke at all, except in monosyllables, and her mother was convinced that she was tongue-tied. She was still inept in speech for a child so intelligent. Her ideas were usually clear, but she seldom attempted to explain them, even at school, where she excelled in "written work" and never did more than mutter a reply.

"Your music professor stopped me on the street to-day and asked me how you were," said the doctor, rising. "He'll be sick himself, trotting around in this slush with no overcoat or overshoes."

"He's poor," said Thea simply.

The doctor sighed. "I'm afraid he's worse than that. Is he always all right when you take your lessons? Never acts as if he'd been drinking?"

Thea looked angry and spoke excitedly. "He knows a lot. More than anybody. I don't care if he does drink; he's old and poor." Her voice shook a little.

Mrs. Kronborg spoke up from the next room. "He's a good teacher, doctor. It's good for us he does drink. He'd never be in a little place like this if he didn't have some weakness. These women that teach music around here don't know nothing. I wouldn't have my child wasting time with them. If Professor Wunsch goes away, Thea'll have nobody to take from. He's careful with his scholars; he don't use bad language. Mrs. Kohler is always present when Thea takes her lesson. It's all right." Mrs. Kronborg spoke calmly and judicially. One could see that she had thought the matter out before.

"I'm glad to hear that, Mrs. Kronborg. I wish we could get the old man off his bottle and keep him tidy. Do you suppose if I gave you an old overcoat you could get him to wear it?" The doctor went to the bedroom door and Mrs. Kronborg looked up from her darning.

"Why, yes, I guess he'd be glad of it. He'll take most anything from me. He won't buy clothes, but I guess he'd wear 'em if he had 'em. I've never had any clothes to give him, having so many to make over for."

"I'll have Larry bring the coat around to-night. You aren't cross with me, Thea?" taking her hand.

Thea grinned warmly. "Not if you give Professor Wunsch a coat-and things," she tapped the grapes significantly. The doctor bent over and kissed her.

Being sick was all very well, but Thea knew from experience that starting back to school again was attended by depressing difficulties. One Monday morning she got up early with Axel and Gunner, who shared her wing room, and hurried into the back living-room, between the dining-room and the kitchen. There, beside a soft-coal stove, the younger children of the family undressed at night and dressed in the morning. The older daughter, Anna, and the two big boys slept upstairs, where the rooms were theoretically warmed by stovepipes from below. The first (and the worst!) thing that confronted Thea was a suit of clean, prickly red flannel, fresh from the wash. Usually the torment of breaking in a clean suit of flannel came on Sunday, but yesterday, as she was staying in the house, she had begged off. Their winter underwear was a trial to all the children, but it was bitterest to Thea because she happened to have the most sensitive skin. While she was tugging it on, her Aunt Tillie brought in warm water from the boiler and filled the tin pitcher. Thea washed her face, brushed and braided her hair, and got into her blue cashmere dress. Over this she buttoned a long apron, with sleeves, which would not be removed until she put on her cloak to go to school. Gunner and Axel, on the soap box behind the stove, had their usual quarrel about which should wear the tightest stockings, but they exchanged reproaches in low tones, for they

were wholesomely afraid of Mrs. Kronborg's rawhide whip. She did not chastise her children often, but she did it thoroughly. Only a somewhat stern system of discipline could have kept any degree of order and quiet in that overcrowded house.

Mrs. Kronborg's children were all trained to dress themselves at the earliest possible age, to make their own beds, — the boys as well as the girls, — to take care of their clothes, to eat what was given them, and to keep out of the way. Mrs. Kronborg would have made a good chess player; she had a head for moves and positions.

Anna, the elder daughter, was her mother's lieutenant. All the children knew that they must obey Anna, who was an obstinate contender for proprieties and not always fair minded. To see the young Kronborgs headed for Sunday School was like watching a military drill. Mrs. Kronborg let her children's minds alone. She did not pry into their thoughts or nag them. She respected them as individuals, and outside of the house they had a great deal of liberty. But their communal life was definitely ordered.

In the winter the children breakfasted in the kitchen; Gus and Charley and Anna first, while the younger children were dressing. Gus was nineteen and was a clerk in a dry-goods store. Charley, eighteen months younger, worked in a feed store. They left the

house by the kitchen door at seven o'clock, and then Anna helped her Aunt Tillie get the breakfast for the younger ones. Without the help of this sister-in-law, Tillie Kronborg, Mrs. Kronborg's life would have been a hard one. Mrs. Kronborg often reminded Anna that "no hired help would ever have taken the same interest."

Mr. Kronborg came of a poorer stock than his wife; from a lowly, ignorant family that had lived in a poor part of Sweden. His great-grandfather had gone to Norway to work as a farm laborer and had married a Norwegian girl. This strain of Norwegian blood came out somewhere in each generation of the Kronborgs. The intemperance of one of Peter Kronborg's uncles, and the religious mania of another, had been alike charged to the Norwegian grandmother. Both Peter Kronborg and his sister Tillie were more like the Norwegian root of the family than like the Swedish, and this same Norwegian strain was strong in Thea, though in her it took a very different character.

Tillie was a queer, addle-pated thing, as flighty as a girl at thirty-five, and overweeningly fond of gay clothes-which taste, as Mrs. Kronborg philosophically said, did nobody any harm. Tillie was always cheerful, and her tongue was still for scarcely a minute during the day. She had been cruelly overworked on her father's Minnesota farm when she was a young girl, and she had never been so happy as she was now; had never

before, as she said, had such social advantages. She thought her brother the most important man in Moonstone. She never missed a church service, and, much to the embarrassment of the children, she always "spoke a piece" at the Sunday-School concerts. She had a complete set of "Standard Recitations," which she conned on Sundays. This morning, when Thea and her two younger brothers sat down to breakfast, Tillie was remonstrating with Gunner because he had not learned a recitation assigned to him for George Washington Day at school. The unmemorized text lay heavily on Gunner's conscience as he attacked his buckwheat cakes and sausage. He knew that Tillie was in the right, and that "when the day came he would be ashamed of himself."

"I don't care," he muttered, stirring his coffee; "they oughtn't to make boys speak. It's all right for girls. They like to show off."

"No showing off about it. Boys ought to like to speak up for their country. And what was the use of your father buying you a new suit, if you're not going to take part in anything?"

"That was for Sunday-School. I'd rather wear my old one, anyhow. Why didn't they give the piece to Thea?" Gunner grumbled.

Tillie was turning buckwheat cakes at the griddle. "Thea can play and sing, she don't need to speak. But you've got to know how to do something, Gunner, that

you have. What are you going to do when you git big and want to git into society, if you can't do nothing? Everybody'll say, 'Can you sing? Can you play? Can you speak? Then git right out of society.' An' that's what they'll say to you, Mr. Gunner.”

Gunner and Alex grinned at Anna, who was preparing her mother's breakfast. They never made fun of Tillie, but they understood well enough that there were subjects upon which her ideas were rather foolish. When Tillie struck the shallows, Thea was usually prompt in turning the conversation.

“Will you and Axel let me have your sled at recess?” she asked.

“All the time?” asked Gunner dubiously.

“I'll work your examples for you to-night, if you do.”

“Oh, all right. There'll be a lot of 'em.”

“I don't mind, I can work 'em fast. How about yours, Axel?”

Axel was a fat little boy of seven, with pretty, lazy blue eyes. “I don't care,” he murmured, buttering his last buckwheat cake without ambition; “too much trouble to copy 'em down. Jenny Smiley'll let me have hers.”

The boys were to pull Thea to school on their sled, as the snow was deep. The three set off together. Anna was now in the high school, and she no longer went with the family party, but walked to school with

some of the older girls who were her friends, and wore a hat, not a hood like Thea.

IV

“And it was Summer, beautiful Summer!” Those were the closing words of Thea's favorite fairy tale, and she thought of them as she ran out into the world one Saturday morning in May, her music book under her arm. She was going to the Kohlers' to take her lesson, but she was in no hurry.

It was in the summer that one really lived. Then all the little overcrowded houses were opened wide, and the wind blew through them with sweet, earthy smells of garden-planting. The town looked as if it had just been washed. People were out painting their fences. The cottonwood trees were a-flicker with sticky, yellow little leaves, and the feathery tamarisks were in pink bud. With the warm weather came freedom for everybody. People were dug up, as it were. The very old people, whom one had not seen all winter, came out and sunned themselves in the yard. The double windows were taken off the houses, the tormenting flannels in which children had been encased all winter were put away in boxes, and the youngsters felt a pleasure in the cool cotton things next their skin.

Thea had to walk more than a mile to reach the Kohlers' house, a very pleasant mile out of town toward

the glittering sand hills, — yellow this morning, with lines of deep violet where the clefts and valleys were. She followed the sidewalk to the depot at the south end of the town; then took the road east to the little group of adobe houses where the Mexicans lived, then dropped into a deep ravine; a dry sand creek, across which the railroad track ran on a trestle. Beyond that gulch, on a little rise of ground that faced the open sandy plain, was the Kohlers' house, where Professor Wunsch lived. Fritz Kohler was the town tailor, one of the first settlers. He had moved there, built a little house and made a garden, when Moonstone was first marked down on the map. He had three sons, but they now worked on the railroad and were stationed in distant cities. One of them had gone to work for the Santa Fe, and lived in New Mexico.

Mrs. Kohler seldom crossed the ravine and went into the town except at Christmas-time, when she had to buy presents and Christmas cards to send to her old friends in Freeport, Illinois. As she did not go to church, she did not possess such a thing as a hat. Year after year she wore the same red hood in winter and a black sunbonnet in summer. She made her own dresses; the skirts came barely to her shoe-tops, and were gathered as full as they could possibly be to the waistband. She preferred men's shoes, and usually wore the cast-offs of one of her sons. She had never learned much English, and her plants and shrubs were her

companions. She lived for her men and her garden. Beside that sand gulch, she had tried to reproduce a bit of her own village in the Rhine Valley. She hid herself behind the growth she had fostered, lived under the shade of what she had planted and watered and pruned. In the blaze of the open plain she was stupid and blind like an owl. Shade, shade; that was what she was always planning and making. Behind the high tamarisk hedge, her garden was a jungle of verdure in summer. Above the cherry trees and peach trees and golden plums stood the windmill, with its tank on stilts, which kept all this verdure alive. Outside, the sage-brush grew up to the very edge of the garden, and the sand was always drifting up to the tamarisks.

Every one in Moonstone was astonished when the Kohlers took the wandering music-teacher to live with them. In seventeen years old Fritz had never had a crony, except the harness-maker and Spanish Johnny. This Wunsch came from God knew where, — followed Spanish Johnny into town when that wanderer came back from one of his tramps. Wunsch played in the dance orchestra, tuned pianos, and gave lessons. When Mrs. Kohler rescued him, he was sleeping in a dirty, unfurnished room over one of the saloons, and he had only two shirts in the world. Once he was under her roof, the old woman went at him as she did at her garden. She sewed and washed and mended for him, and made him so clean and respectable that he was able

to get a large class of pupils and to rent a piano. As soon as he had money ahead, he sent to the Narrow Gauge lodging-house, in Denver, for a trunkful of music which had been held there for unpaid board. With tears in his eyes the old man—he was not over fifty, but sadly battered—told Mrs. Kohler that he asked nothing better of God than to end his days with her, and to be buried in the garden, under her linden trees. They were not American basswood, but the European linden, which has honey-colored blooms in summer, with a fragrance that surpasses all trees and flowers and drives young people wild with joy.

Thea was reflecting as she walked along that had it not been for Professor Wunsch she might have lived on for years in Moonstone without ever knowing the Kohlers, without ever seeing their garden or the inside of their house. Besides the cuckoo clock, — which was wonderful enough, and which Mrs. Kohler said she kept for “company when she was lonesome,”—the Kohlers had in their house the most wonderful thing Thea had ever seen—but of that later.

Professor Wunsch went to the houses of his other pupils to give them their lessons, but one morning he told Mrs. Kronborg that Thea had talent, and that if she came to him he could teach her in his slippers, and that would be better. Mrs. Kronborg was a strange woman. That word “talent,” which no one else in Moonstone, not even Dr. Archie, would have understood, she

comprehended perfectly. To any other woman there, it would have meant that a child must have her hair curled every day and must play in public. Mrs. Kronborg knew it meant that Thea must practice four hours a day. A child with talent must be kept at the piano, just as a child with measles must be kept under the blankets. Mrs. Kronborg and her three sisters had all studied piano, and all sang well, but none of them had talent. Their father had played the oboe in an orchestra in Sweden, before he came to America to better his fortunes. He had even known Jenny Lind. A child with talent had to be kept at the piano; so twice a week in summer and once a week in winter Thea went over the gulch to the Kohlers', though the Ladies' Aid Society thought it was not proper for their preacher's daughter to go "where there was so much drinking." Not that the Kohler sons ever so much as looked at a glass of beer. They were ashamed of their old folks and got out into the world as fast as possible; had their clothes made by a Denver tailor and their necks shaved up under their hair and forgot the past. Old Fritz and Wunsch, however, indulged in a friendly bottle pretty often. The two men were like comrades; perhaps the bond between them was the glass wherein lost hopes are found; perhaps it was common memories of another country; perhaps it was the grapevine in the garden-knotty, fibrous shrub, full of homesickness and sentiment, which the Germans have carried around the world with

them.

As Thea approached the house she peeped between the pink sprays of the tamarisk hedge and saw the Professor and Mrs. Kohler in the garden, spading and raking. The garden looked like a relief-map now, and gave no indication of what it would be in August; such a jungle! Pole beans and potatoes and corn and leeks and kale and red cabbage—there would even be vegetables for which there is no American name. Mrs. Kohler was always getting by mail packages of seeds from Freeport and from the old country. Then the flowers! There were big sunflowers for the canary bird, tiger lilies and phlox and zinnias and lady's-slippers and portulaca and hollyhocks, — giant hollyhocks. Beside the fruit trees there was a great umbrella-shaped catalpa, and a balm-of-Gilead, two lindens, and even a ginka, — a rigid, pointed tree with leaves shaped like butterflies, which shivered, but never bent to the wind.

This morning Thea saw to her delight that the two oleander trees, one white and one red, had been brought up from their winter quarters in the cellar. There is hardly a German family in the most arid parts of Utah, New Mexico, Arizona, but has its oleander trees. However loutish the American-born sons of the family may be, there was never one who refused to give his muscle to the back-breaking task of getting those tubbed trees down into the cellar in the fall and up into the sunlight in the spring. They may strive to avert the

day, but they grapple with the tub at last.

When Thea entered the gate, her professor leaned his spade against the white post that supported the turreted dove-house, and wiped his face with his shirt-sleeve; somehow he never managed to have a handkerchief about him. Wunsch was short and stocky, with something rough and bear-like about his shoulders. His face was a dark, bricky red, deeply creased rather than wrinkled, and the skin was like loose leather over his neck band—he wore a brass collar button but no collar. His hair was cropped close; iron-gray bristles on a bullet-like head. His eyes were always suffused and bloodshot. He had a coarse, scornful mouth, and irregular, yellow teeth, much worn at the edges. His hands were square and red, seldom clean, but always alive, impatient, even sympathetic.

“MORGEN,” he greeted his pupil in a businesslike way, put on a black alpaca coat, and conducted her at once to the piano in Mrs. Kohler's sitting-room. He twirled the stool to the proper height, pointed to it, and sat down in a wooden chair beside Thea.

“The scale of B flat major,” he directed, and then fell into an attitude of deep attention. Without a word his pupil set to work.

To Mrs. Kohler, in the garden, came the cheerful sound of effort, of vigorous striving. Unconsciously she wielded her rake more lightly. Occasionally she heard

the teacher's voice. "Scale of E minor...WEITER, WEITER!..IMMER I hear the thumb, like a lame foot. WEITER...WEITER, once...SCHON! The chords, quick!"

The pupil did not open her mouth until they began the second movement of the Clementi sonata, when she remonstrated in low tones about the way he had marked the fingering of a passage.

"It makes no matter what you think," replied her teacher coldly. "There is only one right way. The thumb there. EIN, ZWEI, DREI, VIER," etc. Then for an hour there was no further interruption.

At the end of the lesson Thea turned on her stool and leaned her arm on the keyboard. They usually had a little talk after the lesson.

Herr Wunsch grinned. "How soon is it you are free from school? Then we make ahead faster, eh?"

"First week in June. Then will you give me the 'Invitation to the Dance'?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "It makes no matter. If you want him, you play him out of lesson hours."

"All right." Thea fumbled in her pocket and brought out a crumpled slip of paper. "What does this mean, please? I guess it's Latin."

Wunsch blinked at the line penciled on the paper. "Wherefrom you get this?" he asked gruffly.

"Out of a book Dr. Archie gave me to read. It's all English but that. Did you ever see it before?" she asked,

watching his face.

“Yes. A long time ago,” he muttered, scowling. “Ovidius!” He took a stub of lead pencil from his vest pocket, steadied his hand by a visible effort, and under the words:

“LENTE CURRITE, LENTE CURRITE, NOCTIS EQUI,” he wrote in a clear, elegant Gothic hand, — “GO SLOWLY, GO SLOWLY, YE STEEDS OF THE NIGHT.”

He put the pencil back in his pocket and continued to stare at the Latin. It recalled the poem, which he had read as a student, and thought very fine. There were treasures of memory which no lodging-house keeper could attach. One carried things about in one's head, long after one's linen could be smuggled out in a tuning-bag. He handed the paper back to Thea. “There is the English, quite elegant,” he said, rising.

Mrs. Kohler stuck her head in at the door, and Thea slid off the stool. “Come in, Mrs. Kohler,” she called, “and show me the piece-picture.”

The old woman laughed, pulled off her big gardening gloves, and pushed Thea to the lounge before the object of her delight. The “piece-picture,” which hung on the wall and nearly covered one whole end of the room, was the handiwork of Fritz Kohler. He had learned his trade under an old-fashioned tailor in Magdeburg who required from each of his apprentices a

thesis: that is, before they left his shop, each apprentice had to copy in cloth some well known German painting, stitching bits of colored stuff together on a linen background; a kind of mosaic. The pupil was allowed to select his subject, and Fritz Kohler had chosen a popular painting of Napoleon's retreat from Moscow. The gloomy Emperor and his staff were represented as crossing a stone bridge, and behind them was the blazing city, the walls and fortresses done in gray cloth with orange tongues of flame darting about the domes and minarets. Napoleon rode his white horse; Murat, in Oriental dress, a bay charger. Thea was never tired of examining this work, of hearing how long it had taken Fritz to make it, how much it had been admired, and what narrow escapes it had had from moths and fire. Silk, Mrs. Kohler explained, would have been much easier to manage than woolen cloth, in which it was often hard to get the right shades. The reins of the horses, the wheels of the spurs, the brooding eyebrows of the Emperor, Murat's fierce mustaches, the great shakos of the Guard, were all worked out with the minutest fidelity. Thea's admiration for this picture had endeared her to Mrs. Kohler. It was now many years since she used to point out its wonders to her own little boys. As Mrs. Kohler did not go to church, she never heard any singing, except the songs that floated over from Mexican Town, and Thea often sang for her after the lesson was over.

This morning Wunsch pointed to the piano.

“On Sunday, when I go by the church, I hear you sing something.”

Thea obediently sat down on the stool again and began, “COME, YE DISCONSOLATE.” Wunsch listened thoughtfully, his hands on his knees. Such a beautiful child's voice! Old Mrs. Kohler's face relaxed in a smile of happiness; she half closed her eyes. A big fly was darting in and out of the window; the sunlight made a golden pool on the rag carpet and bathed the faded cretonne pillows on the lounge, under the piece-picture. “EARTH HAS NO SORROW THAT HEAVEN CANNOT HEAL,” the song died away.

“That is a good thing to remember,” Wunsch shook himself. “You believe that?” looking quizzically at Thea.

She became confused and pecked nervously at a black key with her middle finger. “I don't know. I guess so,” she murmured.

Her teacher rose abruptly. “Remember, for next time, thirds. You ought to get up earlier.”

That night the air was so warm that Fritz and Herr Wunsch had their after-supper pipe in the grape arbor, smoking in silence while the sound of fiddles and guitars came across the ravine from Mexican Town. Long after Fritz and his old Paulina had gone to bed, Wunsch sat motionless in the arbor, looking up through the woolly vine leaves at the glittering machinery of

heaven.

“LENTE CURRITE, NOCTIS EQUI.”

That line awoke many memories. He was thinking of youth; of his own, so long gone by, and of his pupil's, just beginning. He would even have cherished hopes for her, except that he had become superstitious. He believed that whatever he hoped for was destined not to be; that his affection brought ill-fortune, especially to the young; that if he held anything in his thoughts, he harmed it. He had taught in music schools in St. Louis and Kansas City, where the shallowness and complacency of the young misses had maddened him. He had encountered bad manners and bad faith, had been the victim of sharpers of all kinds, was dogged by bad luck. He had played in orchestras that were never paid and wandering opera troupes which disbanded penniless. And there was always the old enemy, more relentless than the others. It was long since he had wished anything or desired anything beyond the necessities of the body. Now that he was tempted to hope for another, he felt alarmed and shook his head.

It was his pupil's power of application, her rugged will, that interested him. He had lived for so long among people whose sole ambition was to get something for nothing that he had learned not to look for seriousness in anything. Now that he by chance encountered it, it recalled standards, ambitions, a

society long forgot. What was it she reminded him of? A yellow flower, full of sunlight, perhaps. No; a thin glass full of sweet-smelling, sparkling Moselle wine. He seemed to see such a glass before him in the arbor, to watch the bubbles rising and breaking, like the silent discharge of energy in the nerves and brain, the rapid florescence in young blood-Wunsch felt ashamed and dragged his slippers along the path to the kitchen, his eyes on the ground.

V

The children in the primary grades were sometimes required to make relief maps of Moonstone in sand. Had they used colored sands, as the Navajo medicine men do in their sand mosaics, they could easily have indicated the social classifications of Moonstone, since these conformed to certain topographical boundaries, and every child understood them perfectly.

The main business street ran, of course, through the center of the town. To the west of this street lived all the people who were, as Tillie Kronborg said, "in society." Sylvester Street, the third parallel with Main Street on the west, was the longest in town, and the best dwellings were built along it. Far out at the north end, nearly a mile from the court-house and its cottonwood grove, was Dr. Archie's house, its big yard and garden

surrounded by a white paling fence. The Methodist Church was in the center of the town, facing the court-house square. The Kronborgs lived half a mile south of the church, on the long street that stretched out like an arm to the depot settlement. This was the first street west of Main, and was built up only on one side. The preacher's house faced the backs of the brick and frame store buildings and a draw full of sunflowers and scraps of old iron. The sidewalk which ran in front of the Kronborgs' house was the one continuous sidewalk to the depot, and all the train men and roundhouse employees passed the front gate every time they came uptown. Thea and Mrs. Kronborg had many friends among the railroad men, who often paused to chat across the fence, and of one of these we shall have more to say.

In the part of Moonstone that lay east of Main Street, toward the deep ravine which, farther south, wound by Mexican Town, lived all the humbler citizens, the people who voted but did not run for office. The houses were little story-and-a-half cottages, with none of the fussy architectural efforts that marked those on Sylvester Street. They nestled modestly behind their cottonwoods and Virginia creeper; their occupants had no social pretensions to keep up. There were no half-glass front doors with doorbells, or formidable parlors behind closed shutters. Here the old women washed in the back yard, and the men sat in the front

doorway and smoked their pipes. The people on Sylvester Street scarcely knew that this part of the town existed. Thea liked to take Thor and her express wagon and explore these quiet, shady streets, where the people never tried to have lawns or to grow elms and pine trees, but let the native timber have its way and spread in luxuriance. She had many friends there, old women who gave her a yellow rose or a spray of trumpet vine and appeased Thor with a cookie or a doughnut. They called Thea "that preacher's girl," but the demonstrative was misplaced, for when they spoke of Mr. Kronborg they called him "the Methodist preacher."

Dr. Archie was very proud of his yard and garden, which he worked himself. He was the only man in Moonstone who was successful at growing rambler roses, and his strawberries were famous. One morning when Thea was downtown on an errand, the doctor stopped her, took her hand and went over her with a quizzical eye, as he nearly always did when they met.

"You haven't been up to my place to get any strawberries yet, Thea. They're at their best just now. Mrs. Archie doesn't know what to do with them all. Come up this afternoon. Just tell Mrs. Archie I sent you. Bring a big basket and pick till you are tired."

When she got home Thea told her mother that she didn't want to go, because she didn't like Mrs. Archie.

"She is certainly one queer woman," Mrs. Kronborg assented, "but he's asked you so often, I

guess you'll have to go this time. She won't bite you.”

After dinner Thea took a basket, put Thor in his baby buggy, and set out for Dr. Archie's house at the other end of town. As soon as she came within sight of the house, she slackened her pace. She approached it very slowly, stopping often to pick dandelions and sand-peas for Thor to crush up in his fist.

It was his wife's custom, as soon as Dr. Archie left the house in the morning, to shut all the doors and windows to keep the dust out, and to pull down the shades to keep the sun from fading the carpets. She thought, too, that neighbors were less likely to drop in if the house was closed up. She was one of those people who are stingy without motive or reason, even when they can gain nothing by it. She must have known that skimping the doctor in heat and food made him more extravagant than he would have been had she made him comfortable. He never came home for lunch, because she gave him such miserable scraps and shreds of food. No matter how much milk he bought, he could never get thick cream for his strawberries. Even when he watched his wife lift it from the milk in smooth, ivory-colored blankets, she managed, by some sleight-of-hand, to dilute it before it got to the breakfast table. The butcher's favorite joke was about the kind of meat he sold Mrs. Archie. She felt no interest in food herself, and she hated to prepare it. She liked nothing better than to have Dr. Archie go to Denver for a few

days-he often went chiefly because he was hungry-and to be left alone to eat canned salmon and to keep the house shut up from morning until night.

Mrs. Archie would not have a servant because, she said, "they ate too much and broke too much"; she even said they knew too much. She used what mind she had in devising shifts to minimize her housework. She used to tell her neighbors that if there were no men, there would be no housework. When Mrs. Archie was first married, she had been always in a panic for fear she would have children. Now that her apprehensions on that score had grown paler, she was almost as much afraid of having dust in the house as she had once been of having children in it. If dust did not get in, it did not have to be got out, she said. She would take any amount of trouble to avoid trouble. Why, nobody knew. Certainly her husband had never been able to make her out. Such little, mean natures are among the darkest and most baffling of created things. There is no law by which they can be explained. The ordinary incentives of pain and pleasure do not account for their behavior. They live like insects, absorbed in petty activities that seem to have nothing to do with any genial aspect of human life.

Mrs. Archie, as Mrs. Kronborg said, "liked to gad." She liked to have her house clean, empty, dark, locked, and to be out of it-anywhere. A church social, a prayer meeting, a ten-cent show; she seemed to have no

preference. When there was nowhere else to go, she used to sit for hours in Mrs. Smiley's millinery and notion store, listening to the talk of the women who came in, watching them while they tried on hats, blinking at them from her corner with her sharp, restless little eyes. She never talked much herself, but she knew all the gossip of the town and she had a sharp ear for racy anecdotes—"traveling men's stories," they used to be called in Moonstone. Her clicking laugh sounded like a typewriting machine in action, and, for very pointed stories, she had a little screech.

Mrs. Archie had been Mrs. Archie for only six years, and when she was Belle White she was one of the "pretty" girls in Lansing, Michigan. She had then a train of suitors. She could truly remind Archie that "the boys hung around her." They did. They thought her very spirited and were always saying, "Oh, that Belle White, she's a case!" She used to play heavy practical jokes which the young men thought very clever. Archie was considered the most promising young man in "the young crowd," so Belle selected him. She let him see, made him fully aware, that she had selected him, and Archie was the sort of boy who could not withstand such enlightenment. Belle's family were sorry for him. On his wedding day her sisters looked at the big, handsome boy—he was twenty-four—as he walked down the aisle with his bride, and then they looked at each other. His besotted confidence, his sober, radiant face,

his gentle, protecting arm, made them uncomfortable. Well, they were glad that he was going West at once, to fulfill his doom where they would not be onlookers. Anyhow, they consoled themselves, they had got Belle off their hands.

More than that, Belle seemed to have got herself off her hands. Her reputed prettiness must have been entirely the result of determination, of a fierce little ambition. Once she had married, fastened herself on some one, come to port, — it vanished like the ornamental plumage which drops away from some birds after the mating season. The one aggressive action of her life was over. She began to shrink in face and stature. Of her harum-scarum spirit there was nothing left but the little screech. Within a few years she looked as small and mean as she was.

Thor's chariot crept along. Thea approached the house unwillingly. She didn't care about the strawberries, anyhow. She had come only because she did not want to hurt Dr. Archie's feelings. She not only disliked Mrs. Archie, she was a little afraid of her. While Thea was getting the heavy baby-buggy through the iron gate she heard some one call, "Wait a minute!" and Mrs. Archie came running around the house from the back door, her apron over her head. She came to help with the buggy, because she was afraid the wheels might scratch the paint off the gateposts. She was a skinny little woman with a great pile of frizzy light hair

on a small head.

“Dr. Archie told me to come up and pick some strawberries,” Thea muttered, wishing she had stayed at home.

Mrs. Archie led the way to the back door, squinting and shading her eyes with her hand. “Wait a minute,” she said again, when Thea explained why she had come.

She went into her kitchen and Thea sat down on the porch step. When Mrs. Archie reappeared she carried in her hand a little wooden butter-basket trimmed with fringed tissue paper, which she must have brought home from some church supper. “You'll have to have something to put them in,” she said, ignoring the yawning willow basket which stood empty on Thor's feet. “You can have this, and you needn't mind about returning it. You know about not trampling the vines, don't you?”

Mrs. Archie went back into the house and Thea leaned over in the sand and picked a few strawberries. As soon as she was sure that she was not going to cry, she tossed the little basket into the big one and ran Thor's buggy along the gravel walk and out of the gate as fast as she could push it. She was angry, and she was ashamed for Dr. Archie. She could not help thinking how uncomfortable he would be if he ever found out about it. Little things like that were the ones that cut him most. She slunk home by the back way, and again

almost cried when she told her mother about it.

Mrs. Kronborg was frying doughnuts for her husband's supper. She laughed as she dropped a new lot into the hot grease. "It's wonderful, the way some people are made," she declared. "But I wouldn't let that upset me if I was you. Think what it would be to live with it all the time. You look in the black pocketbook inside my handbag and take a dime and go downtown and get an ice-cream soda. That'll make you feel better. Thor can have a little of the ice-cream if you feed it to him with a spoon. He likes it, don't you, son?" She stooped to wipe his chin. Thor was only six months old and inarticulate, but it was quite true that he liked ice-cream.

VI

Seen from a balloon, Moonstone would have looked like a Noah's ark town set out in the sand and lightly shaded by gray-green tamarisks and cottonwoods. A few people were trying to make soft maples grow in their turfed lawns, but the fashion of planting incongruous trees from the North Atlantic States had not become general then, and the frail, brightly painted desert town was shaded by the light-reflecting, wind-loving trees of the desert, whose roots are always seeking water and whose leaves are always talking about it, making the sound of rain. The

long porous roots of the cottonwood are irrepressible. They break into the wells as rats do into granaries, and thieve the water.

The long street which connected Moonstone with the depot settlement traversed in its course a considerable stretch of rough open country, staked out in lots but not built up at all, a weedy hiatus between the town and the railroad. When you set out along this street to go to the station, you noticed that the houses became smaller and farther apart, until they ceased altogether, and the board sidewalk continued its uneven course through sunflower patches, until you reached the solitary, new brick Catholic Church. The church stood there because the land was given to the parish by the man who owned the adjoining waste lots, in the hope of making them more salable—"Farrier's Addition," this patch of prairie was called in the clerk's office. An eighth of a mile beyond the church was a washout, a deep sand-gully, where the board sidewalk became a bridge for perhaps fifty feet. Just beyond the gully was old Uncle Billy Beemer's grove, — twelve town lots set out in fine, well-grown cottonwood trees, delightful to look upon, or to listen to, as they swayed and rippled in the wind. Uncle Billy had been one of the most worthless old drunkards who ever sat on a store box and told filthy stories. One night he played hide-and-seek with a switch engine and got his sodden brains knocked out. But his grove, the one creditable

thing he had ever done in his life, rustled on. Beyond this grove the houses of the depot settlement began, and the naked board walk, that had run in out of the sunflowers, again became a link between human dwellings.

One afternoon, late in the summer, Dr. Howard Archie was fighting his way back to town along this walk through a blinding sandstorm, a silk handkerchief tied over his mouth. He had been to see a sick woman down in the depot settlement, and he was walking because his ponies had been out for a hard drive that morning.

As he passed the Catholic Church he came upon Thea and Thor. Thea was sitting in a child's express wagon, her feet out behind, kicking the wagon along and steering by the tongue. Thor was on her lap and she held him with one arm. He had grown to be a big cub of a baby, with a constitutional grievance, and he had to be continually amused. Thea took him philosophically, and tugged and pulled him about, getting as much fun as she could under her encumbrance. Her hair was blowing about her face, and her eyes were squinting so intently at the uneven board sidewalk in front of her that she did not see the doctor until he spoke to her.

“Look out, Thea. You'll steer that youngster into the ditch.”

The wagon stopped. Thea released the tongue, wiped her hot, sandy face, and pushed back her hair.

“Oh, no, I won't! I never ran off but once, and then he didn't get anything but a bump. He likes this better than a baby buggy, and so do I.”

“Are you going to kick that cart all the way home?”

“Of course. We take long trips; wherever there is a sidewalk. It's no good on the road.”

“Looks to me like working pretty hard for your fun. Are you going to be busy to-night? Want to make a call with me? Spanish Johnny's come home again, all used up. His wife sent me word this morning, and I said I'd go over to see him to-night. He's an old chum of yours, isn't he?”

“Oh, I'm glad. She's been crying her eyes out. When did he come?”

“Last night, on Number Six. Paid his fare, they tell me. Too sick to beat it. There'll come a time when that boy won't get back, I'm afraid. Come around to my office about eight o'clock, — and you needn't bring that!”

Thor seemed to understand that he had been insulted, for he scowled and began to kick the side of the wagon, shouting, “Go-go, go-go!” Thea leaned forward and grabbed the wagon tongue. Dr. Archie stepped in front of her and blocked the way. “Why don't you make him wait? What do you let him boss you like that for?”

“If he gets mad he throws himself, and then I

can't do anything with him. When he's mad he's lots stronger than me, aren't you, Thor?" Thea spoke with pride, and the idol was appeased. He grunted approvingly as his sister began to kick rapidly behind her, and the wagon rattled off and soon disappeared in the flying currents of sand.

That evening Dr. Archie was seated in his office, his desk chair tilted back, reading by the light of a hot coal-oil lamp. All the windows were open, but the night was breathless after the sandstorm, and his hair was moist where it hung over his forehead. He was deeply engrossed in his book and sometimes smiled thoughtfully as he read. When Thea Kronborg entered quietly and slipped into a seat, he nodded, finished his paragraph, inserted a bookmark, and rose to put the book back into the case. It was one out of the long row of uniform volumes on the top shelf.

"Nearly every time I come in, when you're alone, you're reading one of those books," Thea remarked thoughtfully. "They must be very nice."

The doctor dropped back into his swivel chair, the mottled volume still in his hand. "They aren't exactly books, Thea," he said seriously. "They're a city."

"A history, you mean?"

"Yes, and no. They're a history of a live city, not a dead one. A Frenchman undertook to write about a whole cityful of people, all the kinds he knew. And he got them nearly all in, I guess. Yes, it's very interesting.

You'll like to read it some day, when you're grown up.”

Thea leaned forward and made out the title on the back, “A Distinguished Provincial in Paris.”

“It doesn't sound very interesting.”

“Perhaps not, but it is.” The doctor scrutinized her broad face, low enough to be in the direct light from under the green lamp shade. “Yes,” he went on with some satisfaction, “I think you'll like them some day. You're always curious about people, and I expect this man knew more about people than anybody that ever lived.”

“City people or country people?”

“Both. People are pretty much the same everywhere.”

“Oh, no, they're not. The people who go through in the dining-car aren't like us.”

“What makes you think they aren't, my girl? Their clothes?”

Thea shook her head. “No, it's something else. I don't know.” Her eyes shifted under the doctor's searching gaze and she glanced up at the row of books. “How soon will I be old enough to read them?”

“Soon enough, soon enough, little girl.” The doctor patted her hand and looked at her index finger. “The nail's coming all right, isn't it? But I think that man makes you practice too much. You have it on your mind all the time.” He had noticed that when she talked to him she was always opening and shutting her hands.

“It makes you nervous.”

“No, he don't,” Thea replied stubbornly, watching Dr. Archie return the book to its niche.

He took up a black leather case, put on his hat, and they went down the dark stairs into the street. The summer moon hung full in the sky. For the time being, it was the great fact in the world. Beyond the edge of the town the plain was so white that every clump of sage stood out distinct from the sand, and the dunes looked like a shining lake. The doctor took off his straw hat and carried it in his hand as they walked toward Mexican Town, across the sand.

North of Pueblo, Mexican settlements were rare in Colorado then. This one had come about accidentally. Spanish Johnny was the first Mexican who came to Moonstone. He was a painter and decorator, and had been working in Trinidad, when Ray Kennedy told him there was a “boom” on in Moonstone, and a good many new buildings were going up. A year after Johnny settled in Moonstone, his cousin, Famos Serrenos, came to work in the brickyard; then Serrenos' cousins came to help him. During the strike, the master mechanic put a gang of Mexicans to work in the roundhouse. The Mexicans had arrived so quietly, with their blankets and musical instruments, that before Moonstone was awake to the fact, there was a Mexican quarter; a dozen families or more.

As Thea and the doctor approached the 'dobe

houses, they heard a guitar, and a rich barytone voice-that of Famos Serrenos-singing "La Golandrina." All the Mexican houses had neat little yards, with tamarisk hedges and flowers, and walks bordered with shells or whitewashed stones. Johnny's house was dark. His wife, Mrs. Tellamantez, was sitting on the doorstep, combing her long, blue-black hair. (Mexican women are like the Spartans; when they are in trouble, in love, under stress of any kind, they comb and comb their hair.) She rose without embarrassment or apology, comb in hand, and greeted the doctor.

"Good-evening; will you go in?" she asked in a low, musical voice. "He is in the back room. I will make a light." She followed them indoors, lit a candle and handed it to the doctor, pointing toward the bedroom. Then she went back and sat down on her doorstep.

Dr. Archie and Thea went into the bedroom, which was dark and quiet. There was a bed in the corner, and a man was lying on the clean sheets. On the table beside him was a glass pitcher, half-full of water. Spanish Johnny looked younger than his wife, and when he was in health he was very handsome: slender, gold-colored, with wavy black hair, a round, smooth throat, white teeth, and burning black eyes. His profile was strong and severe, like an Indian's. What was termed his "wildness" showed itself only in his feverish eyes and in the color that burned on his tawny cheeks.

That night he was a coppery green, and his eyes were like black holes. He opened them when the doctor held the candle before his face.

“MI TESTA!” he muttered, “MI TESTA,” doctor. “LA FIEBRE!” Seeing the doctor's companion at the foot of the bed, he attempted a smile. “MUCHACHA!” he exclaimed deprecatingly.

Dr. Archie stuck a thermometer into his mouth. “Now, Thea, you can run outside and wait for me.”

Thea slipped noiselessly through the dark house and joined Mrs. Tellamantez. The somber Mexican woman did not seem inclined to talk, but her nod was friendly. Thea sat down on the warm sand, her back to the moon, facing Mrs. Tellamantez on her doorstep, and began to count the moon flowers on the vine that ran over the house. Mrs. Tellamantez was always considered a very homely woman. Her face was of a strongly marked type not sympathetic to Americans. Such long, oval faces, with a full chin, a large, mobile mouth, a high nose, are not uncommon in Spain. Mrs. Tellamantez could not write her name, and could read but little. Her strong nature lived upon itself. She was chiefly known in Moonstone for her forbearance with her incorrigible husband.

Nobody knew exactly what was the matter with Johnny, and everybody liked him. His popularity would have been unusual for a white man, for a Mexican it was unprecedented. His talents were his undoing. He

had a high, uncertain tenor voice, and he played the mandolin with exceptional skill. Periodically he went crazy. There was no other way to explain his behavior. He was a clever workman, and, when he worked, as regular and faithful as a burro. Then some night he would fall in with a crowd at the saloon and begin to sing. He would go on until he had no voice left, until he wheezed and rasped. Then he would play his mandolin furiously, and drink until his eyes sank back into his head. At last, when he was put out of the saloon at closing time, and could get nobody to listen to him, he would run away-along the railroad track, straight across the desert. He always managed to get aboard a freight somewhere. Once beyond Denver, he played his way southward from saloon to saloon until he got across the border. He never wrote to his wife; but she would soon begin to get newspapers from La Junta, Albuquerque, Chihuahua, with marked paragraphs announcing that Juan Tellamantez and his wonderful mandolin could be heard at the Jack Rabbit Grill, or the Pearl of Cadiz Saloon. Mrs. Tellamantez waited and wept and combed her hair. When he was completely wrung out and burned up, — all but destroyed, — her Juan always came back to her to be taken care of, — once with an ugly knife wound in the neck, once with a finger missing from his right hand, — but he played just as well with three fingers as he had with four.

Public sentiment was lenient toward Johnny, but

everybody was disgusted with Mrs. Tellamantez for putting up with him. She ought to discipline him, people said; she ought to leave him; she had no self-respect. In short, Mrs. Tellamantez got all the blame. Even Thea thought she was much too humble. To-night, as she sat with her back to the moon, looking at the moon flowers and Mrs. Tellamantez's somber face, she was thinking that there is nothing so sad in the world as that kind of patience and resignation. It was much worse than Johnny's craziness. She even wondered whether it did not help to make Johnny crazy. People had no right to be so passive and resigned. She would like to roll over and over in the sand and screech at Mrs. Tellamantez. She was glad when the doctor came out.

The Mexican woman rose and stood respectful and expectant. The doctor held his hat in his hand and looked kindly at her.

“Same old thing, Mrs. Tellamantez. He's no worse than he's been before. I've left some medicine. Don't give him anything but toast water until I see him again. You're a good nurse; you'll get him out.” Dr. Archie smiled encouragingly. He glanced about the little garden and wrinkled his brows. “I can't see what makes him behave so. He's killing himself, and he's not a rowdy sort of fellow. Can't you tie him up someway? Can't you tell when these fits are coming on?”

Mrs. Tellamantez put her hand to her forehead.

“The saloon, doctor, the excitement; that is what makes him. People listen to him, and it excites him.”

The doctor shook his head. “Maybe. He's too much for my calculations. I don't see what he gets out of it.”

“He is always fooled,”-the Mexican woman spoke rapidly and tremulously, her long under lip quivering.

“He is good at heart, but he has no head. He fools himself. You do not understand in this country, you are progressive. But he has no judgment, and he is fooled.” She stooped quickly, took up one of the white conch-shells that bordered the walk, and, with an apologetic inclination of her head, held it to Dr. Archie's ear. “Listen, doctor. You hear something in there? You hear the sea; and yet the sea is very far from here. You have judgment, and you know that. But he is fooled. To him, it is the sea itself. A little thing is big to him.” She bent and placed the shell in the white row, with its fellows. Thea took it up softly and pressed it to her own ear. The sound in it startled her; it was like something calling one. So that was why Johnny ran away. There was something awe-inspiring about Mrs. Tellamantez and her shell.

Thea caught Dr. Archie's hand and squeezed it hard as she skipped along beside him back toward Moonstone. She went home, and the doctor went back to his lamp and his book. He never left his office until

after midnight. If he did not play whist or pool in the evening, he read. It had become a habit with him to lose himself.

VII

Thea's twelfth birthday had passed a few weeks before her memorable call upon Mrs. Tellamantez. There was a worthy man in Moonstone who was already planning to marry Thea as soon as she should be old enough. His name was Ray Kennedy, his age was thirty, and he was conductor on a freight train, his run being from Moonstone to Denver. Ray was a big fellow, with a square, open American face, a rock chin, and features that one would never happen to remember. He was an aggressive idealist, a freethinker, and, like most railroad men, deeply sentimental. Thea liked him for reasons that had to do with the adventurous life he had led in Mexico and the Southwest, rather than for anything very personal. She liked him, too, because he was the only one of her friends who ever took her to the sand hills. The sand hills were a constant tantalization; she loved them better than anything near Moonstone, and yet she could so seldom get to them. The first dunes were accessible enough; they were only a few miles beyond the Kohlers', and she could run out there any day when she could do her practicing in the morning and get Thor off her hands for an afternoon.

But the real hills—the Turquoise Hills, the Mexicans called them—were ten good miles away, and one reached them by a heavy, sandy road. Dr. Archie sometimes took Thea on his long drives, but as nobody lived in the sand hills, he never had calls to make in that direction. Ray Kennedy was her only hope of getting there.

This summer Thea had not been to the hills once, though Ray had planned several Sunday expeditions. Once Thor was sick, and once the organist in her father's church was away and Thea had to play the organ for the three Sunday services. But on the first Sunday in September, Ray drove up to the Kronborgs' front gate at nine o'clock in the morning and the party actually set off. Gunner and Axel went with Thea, and Ray had asked Spanish Johnny to come and to bring Mrs. Tellamantez and his mandolin. Ray was artlessly fond of music, especially of Mexican music. He and Mrs. Tellamantez had got up the lunch between them, and they were to make coffee in the desert.

When they left Mexican Town, Thea was on the front seat with Ray and Johnny, and Gunner and Axel sat behind with Mrs. Tellamantez. They objected to this, of course, but there were some things about which Thea would have her own way. "As stubborn as a Finn," Mrs. Kronborg sometimes said of her, quoting an old Swedish saying. When they passed the Kohlers', old Fritz and Wunsch were cutting grapes at the arbor. Thea gave them a businesslike nod. Wunsch came to

the gate and looked after them. He divined Ray Kennedy's hopes, and he distrusted every expedition that led away from the piano. Unconsciously he made Thea pay for frivolousness of this sort.

As Ray Kennedy's party followed the faint road across the sagebrush, they heard behind them the sound of church bells, which gave them a sense of escape and boundless freedom. Every rabbit that shot across the path, every sage hen that flew up by the trail, was like a runaway thought, a message that one sent into the desert. As they went farther, the illusion of the mirage became more instead of less convincing; a shallow silver lake that spread for many miles, a little misty in the sunlight. Here and there one saw reflected the image of a heifer, turned loose to live upon the sparse sand-grass. They were magnified to a preposterous height and looked like mammoths, prehistoric beasts standing solitary in the waters that for many thousands of years actually washed over that desert;-the mirage itself may be the ghost of that long-vanished sea. Beyond the phantom lake lay the line of many-colored hills; rich, sun-baked yellow, glowing turquoise, lavender, purple; all the open, pastel colors of the desert.

After the first five miles the road grew heavier. The horses had to slow down to a walk and the wheels sank deep into the sand, which now lay in long ridges, like waves, where the last high wind had drifted it. Two

hours brought the party to Pedro's Cup, named for a Mexican desperado who had once held the sheriff at bay there. The Cup was a great amphitheater, cut out in the hills, its floor smooth and packed hard, dotted with sagebrush and greasewood.

On either side of the Cup the yellow hills ran north and south, with winding ravines between them, full of soft sand which drained down from the crumbling banks. On the surface of this fluid sand, one could find bits of brilliant stone, crystals and agates and onyx, and petrified wood as red as blood. Dried toads and lizards were to be found there, too. Birds, decomposing more rapidly, left only feathered skeletons.

After a little reconnoitering, Mrs. Tellamantez declared that it was time for lunch, and Ray took his hatchet and began to cut greasewood, which burns fiercely in its green state. The little boys dragged the bushes to the spot that Mrs. Tellamantez had chosen for her fire. Mexican women like to cook out of doors.

After lunch Thea sent Gunner and Axel to hunt for agates. "If you see a rattlesnake, run. Don't try to kill it," she enjoined.

Gunner hesitated. "If Ray would let me take the hatchet, I could kill one all right."

Mrs. Tellamantez smiled and said something to Johnny in Spanish.

"Yes," her husband replied, translating, "they say

in Mexico, kill a snake but never hurt his feelings. Down in the hot country, MUCHACHA,” turning to Thea, “people keep a pet snake in the house to kill rats and mice. They call him the house snake. They keep a little mat for him by the fire, and at night he curl up there and sit with the family, just as friendly!”

Gunner sniffed with disgust. “Well, I think that's a dirty Mexican way to keep house; so there!”

Johnny shrugged his shoulders. “Perhaps,” he muttered. A Mexican learns to dive below insults or soar above them, after he crosses the border.

By this time the south wall of the amphitheater cast a narrow shelf of shadow, and the party withdrew to this refuge. Ray and Johnny began to talk about the Grand Canyon and Death Valley, two places much shrouded in mystery in those days, and Thea listened intently. Mrs. Tellamantez took out her drawn-work and pinned it to her knee. Ray could talk well about the large part of the continent over which he had been knocked about, and Johnny was appreciative.

“You been all over, pretty near. Like a Spanish boy,” he commented respectfully.

Ray, who had taken off his coat, whetted his pocketknife thoughtfully on the sole of his shoe. “I began to browse around early. I had a mind to see something of this world, and I ran away from home before I was twelve. Rustled for myself ever since.”

“Ran away?” Johnny looked hopeful. “What

for?"

"Couldn't make it go with my old man, and didn't take to farming. There were plenty of boys at home. I wasn't missed."

Thea wriggled down in the hot sand and rested her chin on her arm. "Tell Johnny about the melons, Ray, please do!"

Ray's solid, sunburned cheeks grew a shade redder, and he looked reproachfully at Thea. "You're stuck on that story, kid. You like to get the laugh on me, don't you? That was the finishing split I had with my old man, John. He had a claim along the creek, not far from Denver, and raised a little garden stuff for market. One day he had a load of melons and he decided to take 'em to town and sell 'em along the street, and he made me go along and drive for him. Denver wasn't the queen city it is now, by any means, but it seemed a terrible big place to me; and when we got there, if he didn't make me drive right up Capitol Hill! Pap got out and stopped at folkses houses to ask if they didn't want to buy any melons, and I was to drive along slow. The farther I went the madder I got, but I was trying to look unconscious, when the end-gate came loose and one of the melons fell out and squashed. Just then a swell girl, all dressed up, comes out of one of the big houses and calls out, 'Hello, boy, you're losing your melons!' Some dudes on the other side of the street took their hats off to her and began to

laugh. I couldn't stand it any longer. I grabbed the whip and lit into that team, and they tore up the hill like jack-rabbits, them damned melons bouncing out the back every jump, the old man cussin' an' yellin' behind and everybody laughin'. I never looked behind, but the whole of Capitol Hill must have been a mess with them squashed melons. I didn't stop the team till I got out of sight of town. Then I pulled up an' left 'em with a rancher I was acquainted with, and I never went home to get the lickin' that was waitin' for me. I expect it's waitin' for me yet."

Thea rolled over in the sand. "Oh, I wish I could have seen those melons fly, Ray! I'll never see anything as funny as that. Now, tell Johnny about your first job."

Ray had a collection of good stories. He was observant, truthful, and kindly-perhaps the chief requisites in a good story-teller. Occasionally he used newspaper phrases, conscientiously learned in his efforts at self-instruction, but when he talked naturally he was always worth listening to. Never having had any schooling to speak of, he had, almost from the time he first ran away, tried to make good his loss. As a sheep-herder he had worried an old grammar to tatters, and read instructive books with the help of a pocket dictionary. By the light of many camp-fires he had pondered upon Prescott's histories, and the works of Washington Irving, which he bought at a high price from a book-agent. Mathematics and physics were easy

for him, but general culture came hard, and he was determined to get it. Ray was a freethinker, and inconsistently believed himself damned for being one. When he was braking, down on the Santa Fe, at the end of his run he used to climb into the upper bunk of the caboose, while a noisy gang played poker about the stove below him, and by the roof-lamp read Robert Ingersoll's speeches and "The Age of Reason."

Ray was a loyal-hearted fellow, and it had cost him a great deal to give up his God. He was one of the stepchildren of Fortune, and he had very little to show for all his hard work; the other fellow always got the best of it. He had come in too late, or too early, on several schemes that had made money. He brought with him from all his wanderings a good deal of information (more or less correct in itself, but unrelated, and therefore misleading), a high standard of personal honor, a sentimental veneration for all women, bad as well as good, and a bitter hatred of Englishmen. Thea often thought that the nicest thing about Ray was his love for Mexico and the Mexicans, who had been kind to him when he drifted, a homeless boy, over the border. In Mexico, Ray was Senor Ken-ay-dy, and when he answered to that name he was somehow a different fellow. He spoke Spanish fluently, and the sunny warmth of that tongue kept him from being quite as hard as his chin, or as narrow as his popular science.

While Ray was smoking his cigar, he and Johnny

fell to talking about the great fortunes that had been made in the Southwest, and about fellows they knew who had “struck it rich.”

“I guess you been in on some big deals down there?” Johnny asked trustfully.

Ray smiled and shook his head. “I've been out on some, John. I've never been exactly in on any. So far, I've either held on too long or let go too soon. But mine's coming to me, all right.” Ray looked reflective. He leaned back in the shadow and dug out a rest for his elbow in the sand. “The narrowest escape I ever had, was in the Bridal Chamber. If I hadn't let go there, it would have made me rich. That was a close call.”

Johnny looked delighted. “You don' say! She was silver mine, I guess?”

“I guess she was! Down at Lake Valley. I put up a few hundred for the prospector, and he gave me a bunch of stock. Before we'd got anything out of it, my brother-in-law died of the fever in Cuba. My sister was beside herself to get his body back to Colorado to bury him. Seemed foolish to me, but she's the only sister I got. It's expensive for dead folks to travel, and I had to sell my stock in the mine to raise the money to get Elmer on the move. Two months afterward, the boys struck that big pocket in the rock, full of virgin silver. They named her the Bridal Chamber. It wasn't ore, you remember. It was pure, soft metal you could have melted right down into dollars. The boys cut it out with

chisels. If old Elmer hadn't played that trick on me, I'd have been in for about fifty thousand. That was a close call, Spanish.”

“I recollect'. When the pocket gone, the town go bust.”

“You bet. Higher'n a kite. There was no vein, just a pocket in the rock that had sometime or another got filled up with molten silver. You'd think there would be more somewhere about, but NADA. There's fools digging holes in that mountain yet.”

When Ray had finished his cigar, Johnny took his mandolin and began Kennedy's favorite, “Ultimo Amor.” It was now three o'clock in the afternoon, the hottest hour in the day. The narrow shelf of shadow had widened until the floor of the amphitheater was marked off in two halves, one glittering yellow, and one purple. The little boys had come back and were making a robbers' cave to enact the bold deeds of Pedro the bandit. Johnny, stretched gracefully on the sand, passed from “Ultimo Amor” to “Fluvia de Oro,” and then to “Noches de Algeria,” playing languidly.

Every one was busy with his own thoughts. Mrs. Tellamantez was thinking of the square in the little town in which she was born; of the white church steps, with people genuflecting as they passed, and the round-topped acacia trees, and the band playing in the plaza. Ray Kennedy was thinking of the future, dreaming the large Western dream of easy money, of a

fortune kicked up somewhere in the hills, — an oil well, a gold mine, a ledge of copper. He always told himself, when he accepted a cigar from a newly married railroad man, that he knew enough not to marry until he had found his ideal, and could keep her like a queen. He believed that in the yellow head over there in the sand he had found his ideal, and that by the time she was old enough to marry, he would be able to keep her like a queen. He would kick it up from somewhere, when he got loose from the railroad.

Thea, stirred by tales of adventure, of the Grand Canyon and Death Valley, was recalling a great adventure of her own. Early in the summer her father had been invited to conduct a reunion of old frontiersmen, up in Wyoming, near Laramie, and he took Thea along with him to play the organ and sing patriotic songs. There they stayed at the house of an old ranchman who told them about a ridge up in the hills called Laramie Plain, where the wagon-trails of the Forty-niners and the Mormons were still visible. The old man even volunteered to take Mr. Kronborg up into the hills to see this place, though it was a very long drive to make in one day. Thea had begged frantically to go along, and the old rancher, flattered by her rapt attention to his stories, had interceded for her.

They set out from Laramie before daylight, behind a strong team of mules. All the way there was much talk of the Forty-niners. The old rancher had been

a teamster in a freight train that used to crawl back and forth across the plains between Omaha and Cherry Creek, as Denver was then called, and he had met many a wagon train bound for California. He told of Indians and buffalo, thirst and slaughter, wanderings in snowstorms, and lonely graves in the desert.

The road they followed was a wild and beautiful one. It led up and up, by granite rocks and stunted pines, around deep ravines and echoing gorges. The top of the ridge, when they reached it, was a great flat plain, strewn with white boulders, with the wind howling over it. There was not one trail, as Thea had expected; there were a score; deep furrows, cut in the earth by heavy wagon wheels, and now grown over with dry, whitish grass. The furrows ran side by side; when one trail had been worn too deep, the next party had abandoned it and made a new trail to the right or left. They were, indeed, only old wagon ruts, running east and west, and grown over with grass. But as Thea ran about among the white stones, her skirts blowing this way and that, the wind brought to her eyes tears that might have come anyway. The old rancher picked up an iron ox-shoe from one of the furrows and gave it to her for a keepsake. To the west one could see range after range of blue mountains, and at last the snowy range, with its white, windy peaks, the clouds caught here and there on their spurs. Again and again Thea had to hide her face from the cold for a moment. The wind

never slept on this plain, the old man said. Every little while eagles flew over.

Coming up from Laramie, the old man had told them that he was in Brownsville, Nebraska, when the first telegraph wires were put across the Missouri River, and that the first message that ever crossed the river was "Westward the course of Empire takes its way." He had been in the room when the instrument began to click, and all the men there had, without thinking what they were doing, taken off their hats, waiting bareheaded to hear the message translated. Thea remembered that message when she sighted down the wagon tracks toward the blue mountains. She told herself she would never, never forget it. The spirit of human courage seemed to live up there with the eagles. For long after, when she was moved by a Fourth-of-July oration, or a band, or a circus parade, she was apt to remember that windy ridge.

To-day she went to sleep while she was thinking about it. When Ray wakened her, the horses were hitched to the wagon and Gunner and Axel were begging for a place on the front seat. The air had cooled, the sun was setting, and the desert was on fire. Thea contentedly took the back seat with Mrs. Tellamantez. As they drove homeward the stars began to come out, pale yellow in a yellow sky, and Ray and Johnny began to sing one of those railroad ditties that are usually born on the Southern Pacific and run the

length of the Santa Fe and the “Q” system before they die to give place to a new one. This was a song about a Greaser dance, the refrain being something like this:-

“Pedro, Pedro, swing high, swing low,
And it's allamand left again;
For there's boys that's bold and there's some that's
cold,
But the gold boys come from Spain,
Oh, the gold boys come from Spain!”

VIII

Winter was long in coming that year. Throughout October the days were bathed in sunlight and the air was clear as crystal. The town kept its cheerful summer aspect, the desert glistened with light, the sand hills every day went through magical changes of color. The scarlet sage bloomed late in the front yards, the cottonwood leaves were bright gold long before they fell, and it was not until November that the green on the tamarisks began to cloud and fade. There was a flurry of snow about Thanksgiving, and then December came on warm and clear.

Thea had three music pupils now, little girls whose mothers declared that Professor Wunsch was “much too severe.” They took their lessons on

Saturday, and this, of course, cut down her time for play. She did not really mind this because she was allowed to use the money-her pupils paid her twenty-five cents a lesson-to fit up a little room for herself upstairs in the half-story. It was the end room of the wing, and was not plastered, but was snugly lined with soft pine. The ceiling was so low that a grown person could reach it with the palm of the hand, and it sloped down on either side. There was only one window, but it was a double one and went to the floor. In October, while the days were still warm, Thea and Tillie papered the room, walls and ceiling in the same paper, small red and brown roses on a yellowish ground. Thea bought a brown cotton carpet, and her big brother, Gus, put it down for her one Sunday. She made white cheesecloth curtains and hung them on a tape. Her mother gave her an old walnut dresser with a broken mirror, and she had her own dumpy walnut single bed, and a blue washbowl and pitcher which she had drawn at a church fair lottery. At the head of her bed she had a tall round wooden hat-crate, from the clothing store. This, standing on end and draped with cretonne, made a fairly steady table for her lantern. She was not allowed to take a lamp upstairs, so Ray Kennedy gave her a railroad lantern by which she could read at night.

In winter this loft room of Thea's was bitterly cold, but against her mother's advice-and Tillie's-she

always left her window open a little way. Mrs. Kronborg declared that she "had no patience with American physiology," though the lessons about the injurious effects of alcohol and tobacco were well enough for the boys. Thea asked Dr. Archie about the window, and he told her that a girl who sang must always have plenty of fresh air, or her voice would get husky, and that the cold would harden her throat. The important thing, he said, was to keep your feet warm. On very cold nights Thea always put a brick in the oven after supper, and when she went upstairs she wrapped it in an old flannel petticoat and put it in her bed. The boys, who would never heat bricks for themselves, sometimes carried off Thea's, and thought it a good joke to get ahead of her.

When Thea first plunged in between her red blankets, the cold sometimes kept her awake for a good while, and she comforted herself by remembering all she could of "Polar Explorations," a fat, calf-bound volume her father had bought from a book-agent, and by thinking about the members of Greely's party: how they lay in their frozen sleeping-bags, each man hoarding the warmth of his own body and trying to make it last as long as possible against the on-coming cold that would be everlasting. After half an hour or so, a warm wave crept over her body and round, sturdy legs; she glowed like a little stove with the warmth of her own blood, and the heavy quilts and red blankets

grew warm wherever they touched her, though her breath sometimes froze on the coverlid. Before daylight, her internal fires went down a little, and she often wakened to find herself drawn up into a tight ball, somewhat stiff in the legs. But that made it all the easier to get up.

The acquisition of this room was the beginning of a new era in Thea's life. It was one of the most important things that ever happened to her. Hitherto, except in summer, when she could be out of doors, she had lived in constant turmoil; the family, the day school, the Sunday-School. The clamor about her drowned the voice within herself. In the end of the wing, separated from the other upstairs sleeping-rooms by a long, cold, unfinished lumber room, her mind worked better. She thought things out more clearly. Pleasant plans and ideas occurred to her which had never come before. She had certain thoughts which were like companions, ideas which were like older and wiser friends. She left them there in the morning, when she finished dressing in the cold, and at night, when she came up with her lantern and shut the door after a busy day, she found them awaiting her. There was no possible way of heating the room, but that was fortunate, for otherwise it would have been occupied by one of her older brothers.

From the time when she moved up into the wing, Thea began to live a double life. During the day, when

the hours were full of tasks, she was one of the Kronborg children, but at night she was a different person. On Friday and Saturday nights she always read for a long while after she was in bed. She had no clock, and there was no one to nag her.

Ray Kennedy, on his way from the depot to his boardinghouse, often looked up and saw Thea's light burning when the rest of the house was dark, and felt cheered as by a friendly greeting. He was a faithful soul, and many disappointments had not changed his nature. He was still, at heart, the same boy who, when he was sixteen, had settled down to freeze with his sheep in a Wyoming blizzard, and had been rescued only to play the losing game of fidelity to other charges.

Ray had no very clear idea of what might be going on in Thea's head, but he knew that something was. He used to remark to Spanish Johnny, "That girl is developing something fine." Thea was patient with Ray, even in regard to the liberties he took with her name. Outside the family, every one in Moonstone, except Wunsch and Dr. Archie, called her "Thee-a," but this seemed cold and distant to Ray, so he called her "Thee." Once, in a moment of exasperation, Thea asked him why he did this, and he explained that he once had a chum, Theodore, whose name was always abbreviated thus, and that since he was killed down on the Santa Fe, it seemed natural to call somebody

“Thee.” Thea sighed and submitted. She was always helpless before homely sentiment and usually changed the subject.

It was the custom for each of the different Sunday Schools in Moonstone to give a concert on Christmas Eve. But this year all the churches were to unite and give, as was announced from the pulpits, “a semi-sacred concert of picked talent” at the opera house. The Moonstone Orchestra, under the direction of Professor Wunsch, was to play, and the most talented members of each Sunday School were to take part in the programme. Thea was put down by the committee “for instrumental.” This made her indignant, for the vocal numbers were always more popular. Thea went to the president of the committee and demanded hotly if her rival, Lily Fisher, were going to sing. The president was a big, florid, powdered woman, a fierce W.C.T.U. worker, one of Thea's natural enemies. Her name was Johnson; her husband kept the livery stable, and she was called Mrs. Livery Johnson, to distinguish her from other families of the same surname. Mrs. Johnson was a prominent Baptist, and Lily Fisher was the Baptist prodigy. There was a not very Christian rivalry between the Baptist Church and Mr. Kronborg's church.

When Thea asked Mrs. Johnson whether her rival was to be allowed to sing, Mrs. Johnson, with an eagerness which told how she had waited for this moment, replied that “Lily was going to recite to be

obliging, and to give other children a chance to sing.” As she delivered this thrust, her eyes glittered more than the Ancient Mariner's, Thea thought. Mrs. Johnson disapproved of the way in which Thea was being brought up, of a child whose chosen associates were Mexicans and sinners, and who was, as she pointedly put it, “bold with men.” She so enjoyed an opportunity to rebuke Thea, that, tightly corseted as she was, she could scarcely control her breathing, and her lace and her gold watch chain rose and fell “with short, uneasy motion.” Frowning, Thea turned away and walked slowly homeward. She suspected guile. Lily Fisher was the most stuck-up doll in the world, and it was certainly not like her to recite to be obliging. Nobody who could sing ever recited, because the warmest applause always went to the singers.

However, when the programme was printed in the Moonstone GLEAM, there it was: “Instrumental solo, Thea Kronborg. Recitation, Lily Fisher.”

Because his orchestra was to play for the concert, Mr. Wunsch imagined that he had been put in charge of the music, and he became arrogant. He insisted that Thea should play a “Ballade” by Reinecke. When Thea consulted her mother, Mrs. Kronborg agreed with her that the “Ballade” would “never take” with a Moonstone audience. She advised Thea to play “something with variations,” or, at least, “The Invitation to the Dance.”

“It makes no matter what they like,” Wunsch replied to Thea's entreaties. “It is time already that they learn something.”

Thea's fighting powers had been impaired by an ulcerated tooth and consequent loss of sleep, so she gave in. She finally had the molar pulled, though it was a second tooth and should have been saved. The dentist was a clumsy, ignorant country boy, and Mr. Kronborg would not hear of Dr. Archie's taking Thea to a dentist in Denver, though Ray Kennedy said he could get a pass for her. What with the pain of the tooth, and family discussions about it, with trying to make Christmas presents and to keep up her school work and practicing, and giving lessons on Saturdays, Thea was fairly worn out.

On Christmas Eve she was nervous and excited. It was the first time she had ever played in the opera house, and she had never before had to face so many people. Wunsch would not let her play with her notes, and she was afraid of forgetting. Before the concert began, all the participants had to assemble on the stage and sit there to be looked at. Thea wore her white summer dress and a blue sash, but Lily Fisher had a new pink silk, trimmed with white swansdown.

The hall was packed. It seemed as if every one in Moonstone was there, even Mrs. Kohler, in her hood, and old Fritz. The seats were wooden kitchen chairs, numbered, and nailed to long planks which held them

together in rows. As the floor was not raised, the chairs were all on the same level. The more interested persons in the audience peered over the heads of the people in front of them to get a good view of the stage. From the platform Thea picked out many friendly faces. There was Dr. Archie, who never went to church entertainments; there was the friendly jeweler who ordered her music for her, — he sold accordions and guitars as well as watches, — and the druggist who often lent her books, and her favorite teacher from the school. There was Ray Kennedy, with a party of freshly barbered railroad men he had brought along with him. There was Mrs. Kronborg with all the children, even Thor, who had been brought out in a new white plush coat. At the back of the hall sat a little group of Mexicans, and among them Thea caught the gleam of Spanish Johnny's white teeth, and of Mrs. Tellamantez's lustrous, smoothly coiled black hair.

After the orchestra played "Selections from Erminie," and the Baptist preacher made a long prayer, Tillie Kronborg came on with a highly colored recitation, "The Polish Boy." When it was over every one breathed more freely. No committee had the courage to leave Tillie off a programme. She was accepted as a trying feature of every entertainment. The Progressive Euchre Club was the only social organization in the town that entirely escaped Tillie. After Tillie sat down, the Ladies' Quartette sang,

“Beloved, it is Night,” and then it was Thea's turn.

The “Ballade” took ten minutes, which was five minutes too long. The audience grew restive and fell to whispering. Thea could hear Mrs. Livery Johnson's bracelets jangling as she fanned herself, and she could hear her father's nervous, ministerial cough. Thor behaved better than any one else. When Thea bowed and returned to her seat at the back of the stage there was the usual applause, but it was vigorous only from the back of the house where the Mexicans sat, and from Ray Kennedy's CLAUQUEURS. Any one could see that a good-natured audience had been bored.

Because Mr. Kronborg's sister was on the programme, it had also been necessary to ask the Baptist preacher's wife's cousin to sing. She was a “deep alto” from McCook, and she sang, “Thy Sentinel Am I.” After her came Lily Fisher. Thea's rival was also a blonde, but her hair was much heavier than Thea's, and fell in long round curls over her shoulders. She was the angel-child of the Baptists, and looked exactly like the beautiful children on soap calendars. Her pink-and-white face, her set smile of innocence, were surely born of a color-press. She had long, drooping eyelashes, a little pursed-up mouth, and narrow, pointed teeth, like a squirrel's.

Lily began:-

“ROCK OF AGES, CLEFT FOR ME, carelessly the maiden sang.”