



Willa Cather
The Song of the Lark

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The 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.

III.

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, brick 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,