

A Prairie Infanta

Eva Wilder Brodhead



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(cover)

A Prairie Infanta.—Frontispiece "THE DOCTOR SCOWLED OVER HIS
GLASSES AS HE LISTENED." See p. 79 *A Prairie Infanta*.—*Frontispiece*
"THE DOCTOR SCOWLED OVER HIS GLASSES AS HE LISTENED."
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A
Prairie Infanta

By

Eva Wilder Brodhead



Illustrated



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THE POWER OF CONSOLATION

A PRAIRIE INFANTA

CHAPTER ONE

THE POWER OF CONSOLATION

At the first glance there appeared to be nothing unusual in the scene confronting Miss Jane Combs as she stood, broad and heavy, in her doorway that May morning, looking up and down the single street of the little Colorado mining-town.

Jane's house was broad and heavy also—a rough, paintless "shack," which she had built after her own ideals on a treeless "forty" just beyond the limits of Aguilar. It was like herself in having nothing about it calculated to win the eye.

Jane, with her rugged, middle-aged face, baggy blouse, hob-nailed shoes and man's hat, was so unfeminine a figure as she plowed and planted her little vega, that some village wag had once referred to her as "Annie Laurie." Because of its happy absurdity the name long clung to Jane; but despite such small jests every one respected her sterling traits,—every one, that is, except Señora Vigil, who lived hard by in a mud house like a bird's nest, and who cherished a grudge against her neighbor.

For, years before, when Jane's "forty" was measured off by the surveyor, it had been developed that the Vigil homestead was out of bounds, and that a small strip of its back yard belonged in the Combs tract. Jane would have waived her right, but the surveyor said that the land office could not "muddle up" the records in any such way; she must take her land. And Jane had taken it, knowing, however, that thereafter even the youngest Vigil, aged about ten months, would regard her as an enemy.

Just now, too, as Alejandro Vigil, a ragged lad with a scarlet cap on his black head, went by, driving his goats to pasture, he had said "rogue!" under his breath. Jane sighed at the word, and her eyes followed him sadly up the road, little thinking her glance was to take in something which should print itself forever in her memory, and make this day different from all other days.

In the clear sun everything was sharply defined. From the Mexican end of town, —the old "plaza,"—which antedated coal-mines and Americanisms, gleamed the

little gold cross of the adobe Church of San Antonio. Around it were green, tall cottonwoods and the straggling mud-houses and pungent goat-corral of its people. Toward the cañon rose the tipple and fans of the Dauntless colliery, banked in slack and slate, and surrounded by paintless mine-houses, while to the right swept the ugly shape of the company's store. The mine end of the town was not pretty, nor was it quiet, like the plaza. Just at present the whistle was blowing, and throngs of miners were gathering at the mouth of the slope. From above clamored the first "trip" of cars. Day and its work had begun.

Alejandro's red cap was a mere speck in the cañon, and his herd was sprinkled, like bread-crumbs, over the slaty hills. But over in the Vigil yard the numberless other little Vigils were to be seen, and Jane, as she looked, began to see that some sort of excitement was stirring them. The señora herself stood staring, wide-eyed and curious. Ana Vigil, her eldest girl, was pointing. Attention seemed to be directed toward something at the foot of the hill behind Jane's house, and she turned to see what was going on there.

A covered wagon, of the prairie-schooner type, was drawn up at the foot of the rise. Three horses were hobbled near by, and a little fire smoked itself out, untended. The whole thing meant merely the night halt of some farer to the mountains. Jane, about to turn away, saw something, however, which held her. In the shadow of the wagon the doctor's buggy disclosed itself. Some one lay ill under the tunnel of canvas.

She had just said this to herself when out upon the sunny stillness rang a sharp, lamentable cry, such as a child might utter in an extremity of fear or pain. The sound seemed to strike a sudden horror upon the day's bright face, and Jane shivered. She made an impulsive step out into her corn-field, hardly knowing what she meant to do. And then she saw the doctor alighting from the wagon, and pausing to speak to a man who followed him.

This man wore a broad felt hat, whose peaked crown was bound in a silver cord which glittered gaily above the startled whiteness of his face. He had on buckskin trousers, and there was a dash of color at his waist, like a girdle, which gave a sort of theatric air to his gesture as he threw up his arms wildly and turned away.

The doctor seemed perplexed. He looked distractedly about, and seeing Jane Combs in her field, called to her and came running. He reached the fence breathless, for he was neither so young nor so slim as the man leaning weeping

against the wagon-step.

"Will you go over there, Miss Combs?" he panted. "There's a poor woman in that wagon breathing her last. They were on their way from Taos to Cripple Creek—been camping along the way for some time. Probably they struck bad water somewhere. She's had a low fever. The husband—Keene, his name is—came for me at daybreak, but it was too late. She seems to be a Mexican, though the man isn't. What I want you to do is to look after a child—a little girl of ten or twelve—who is there with her mother. She must be brought away. Did you hear her cry out just now?—that desperate wail? We'd just told her!"

"I guess everybody heard it," said Jane. Mechanically she withdrew the bolt of the gate, which forthwith collapsed in a tangle of barbed wire. Tramping over this snare, Jane faced the doctor as he wiped his brows. "I aint much hand with children," she reminded him. "You better send Señora Vigil, too."

As she strode toward the wagon, the man in the sombrero looked up. He was good-looking, in a girlish sort of way, with a fair skin and blue eyes. A lock of damp, yellow hair fell over his forehead, and he kept pushing it back as if it confused and blinded him.

"Go in, ma'am—go in!" he said, brokenly. "Though I do not reckon any one can do much for her. Poor Margarita! I wish I'd made her life easier—but luck was against me! Go in, ma'am!"

As Jane, clutching the iron brace, clambered up the step and pulled back the canvas curtain, the inner darkness struck blank upon her sun-blinded eyes. Then presently a stretch of red stuff, zigzagged with arrow-heads of white and orange and green, grew distinct, and under the thick sweep of the Navajo blanket, the impression of a long, still shape. The face on the flat pillow was also still, with closed eyes whose lashes lay dark upon the lucid brown of the cheek. A braid of black hair, shining like a rope of silk, hung over the Indian rug. Heavy it hung, in a lifeless fall, which told Jane that she was too late for any last service to the stranger lying before her under the scarlet cover.

Neither human kindness nor anything could touch her farther. "The tale of what we are" was ended for her; and from the peace of the quiet lips it seemed as if the close had been entirely free of bitterness or pain. Jane moved toward the sleeper. She meant to lay the hands together, as she remembered her mother's had been laid long ago in the stricken gloom of the Kansas farmhouse which had been her home; but suddenly there was a movement at her feet, and she stopped,

having stumbled over some living thing in the shadows of the couch, something that stirred and struggled and gasped passionately, "*Vamos! Vamos!*"

Such was the wrathful force of this voice which, with so little courtesy, bade the intruder begone, as fairly to stagger the well-meaning visitor.

"I want to help you, my poor child!" Jane said. And her bosom throbbed at the sight of the little, stony face now lifted upon her from the dusk of the floor—a face with a fierce gleam in its dark eyes, and clouded with a wild array of black hair in which was knotted and twisted a fantastic *faja* of green wool, narrowly woven.

"I ask no help!" said the child, in very good English. "Only that you go away! We—we want to be by ourselves, here—" suddenly she broke off, glancing piteously toward the couch, and crying out in a changed, husky voice, "*Madre mia! muerta! muerta!*"

A ray of sunshine sped into the wagon as some hand outside withdrew the rear curtain a little. It shot a sharp radiance through the red and orange of the Indian blanket, and flashed across the array of tin and copper cooking things hung against one of the arching ribs of the canvas hood. Also it disclosed how slight and small a creature it was who spoke so imperatively, asking solitude for her mourning.

Jane, viewing the little, desperate thing, seemed to find in herself no power of consolation. And as she stood wordless, with dimming eyes, there came from without a sound of mingling voices. Others were come with offers of service and sympathy. A confusion of Spanish and English hurtled on Jane's uncomprehending ear; some one climbing the step cried, "*Ave Maria!*" as his eyes fell on the couch. It was Pablo Vigil, a mild-eyed Mexican, with a miner's lamp burning blue in his cap.

Behind him rose the round, doughy visage of his wife, blank with awe. She muttered a saint's name as she dragged herself upward, and said, "Ay! ay! ay! the poor little one! Let me take her away! So you are here, too, Mees Combs. But she will not speak to you, eh? *Lo se! lo se!* She will speak to one who is like herself, a Mexican!"

She seemed to gather up the child irresistibly, murmuring over her in language Jane could not understand, "Tell me thy name, *pobrecita!* Maria de los Dolores, is it? A name of tears, but blessed. And they call thee Lola, surely, as the custom

is? Come, *querida*! Come with me to my house. It will please thy mother!"

It was not precisely clear to Jane how among them the half-dozen Mexican women, who now thronged the wagon and filled it with wailing exclamations, managed to pass the little girl from hand to hand and out into the air. Seeing, however, that this was accomplished, she descended into the crowd of villagers now assembled outside. There was a strange, dumb pain in her breast as she saw the little, green-tricked head disappear in the press about the doctor's buggy. She was sensible of wishing to carry the child home to her own dwelling; and there was in her a kind of jealous pang that Señora Vigil should so easily have accomplished a task of which she herself had made a distinct failure.

"If I'd only known how to call the poor little soul a lot of coaxing names!" deplored Jane, "Then maybe she'd have come with me. She'd have been better off sleeping on my good feather bed than what she will on those ragged Mexican mats over to Vigil's." Then, observing that two burros and several goats, taking advantage of the open gate, were now gorging themselves on her alfalfa, she proceeded to make a stern end of their delight.

Early in the morning of the stranger's burial, Mexicans from up the cañon and down the creek arrived in town in ramshackle wagons, attended by dogs and colts. She who lay dead had been of their race. It was meet that she should not go unfriended to the *Campo Santo*. Besides, the weather was fine, and it is good to see one's kinsfolk and acquaintances now and then. The church, too, would be open, although the *padre*, who lived in another town, might not be there. Young and old, they crowded the narrow aisles, even up to the altar space, where a row of tapers burned in the solemn gloom. Little children were there, also, hushed with awe. And many a sad-faced Mexican mother pressed her baby closer to her heart that day, taking note of the little girl in the front pew, sitting so silent and stolid beside her weeping father.

Jane Combs was in the back of the church. In their black *rebozos*, the poorest class of poor Mexican women were clad with more fitness than she. For Jane, weighted with the gravity of the occasion, had donned an austere black bonnet such as aged ladies wear, and its effect upon her short locks was incongruous in the extreme. No one, however, thought of her as being more queer than usual; for her sunburned cheeks were wet with tears, and her eyes were deep with tenderness and pity as they fixed themselves upon the small, rigid figure in the shadows of the altar's dark burden.

Upon the following day, as Miss Combs opened her ditch-gate for the tide of mine water which came in a flume across the arroyo, she saw the doctor and Mr. Keene approaching. They had an absorbed air, and as she opened the door for them the doctor said, "Miss Combs, we want you to agree to a plan of ours, if you can."

Keene tilted his chair restlessly. He looked as if life was regaining its poise with him, and his voice seemed quite cheerful as he said, "Well, it's about my little girl! I'm bound for a mountain-camp, and it's no place for a motherless child. Lola's a kind of queer little soul, too! My wife made a great deal of her. She was from old Mexico, ma'am. She was a *mestizo*—not pure Indian, you know, but part Spanish. Her folks were *rancheros*, near Pachuca, where I worked in the mines. I'm from Texas, myself. They weren't like these peons about here—they were good people. They never wanted Margarita to marry me." He laughed a little. "But she did, and the old folks never let up on her. They're both dead now. We've lived hither and yon around New Mexico these ten years past, and I aint been very successful; though things will be different now that I've decided to pull out for the gold regions!"

Keene paused with an air of growing good cheer. He seemed to forget his point. Whereupon the doctor said simply: "In view of these things, Mr. Keene would like to make some arrangement for leaving his daughter here until he can look round."

"And we thought of your taking her, ma'am," broke in Keene, with renewed anxiety. "Lola's delicate and high-strung, and I don't know how to manage her like my wife did. It'll hamper me terrible to take her along. Of course she's bright," he interpolated, hastily. "She was always picking up things everywhere, and speaks two languages well. And she'd be company for you, ma'am, living alone like you do. And I'd pay any board you thought right."

"'I WILL NOT GO WITH YOU!'" *A Prairie Infanta*
"'I WILL NOT GO WITH YOU!'"

Jane's pulses had leaped at his suggestion. She was aware of making a resolute effort as she said, "Wouldn't Lola be happier with the Vigils?"

"Her mother wouldn't rest in her grave," cried Keene, "if she knew the child was being brought up amongst a tribe of peons! And me—I want my child to grow up an American citizen, ma'am!"

"Take the little girl, Miss Combs," advised the doctor. "It'll be good for you to have her here."

"I've got to think if it'll be good for her," said Jane.

"If that's all!" chorused the two men. They rose. The thing was settled. "I'll go and tell the Vigil tribe," said Keene, "and send Lola's things over here right off." With a wave of the hand and a relieved look, he went down the road.

That night a boy brought to Jane's door a queer little collapsible trunk of sun-cured hide, thonged fast with leather loops. The Navajo blanket was outside. Jane surmised that Mr. Keene had sent it because he dreaded its saddening associations. A message from him conveyed the information that he expected to leave town early the next morning, and that Lola would be sent over from the Vigils.

All during the afternoon Jane waited with breathless expectancy. The afternoon waned, but Lola did not come. Finally, possessed of fear and foreboding, Jane set forth to inquire into the matter.

Upon opening the Vigil gate, she saw Lola herself sitting on the doorstep, looking over toward the little wood crosses of the Mexican burying-ground. The girl hardly noted Jane's approach, but behind her, Señora Vigil came forward, shaking her head at Jane and touching her lip significantly.

"She does not know," whispered the señora. "Her papa did not say good-by. He said it was better for him to 'slip away.' And me—I could not tell her! I am only a woman."

"You think—she will not want—to live with me?"

The other's face grew very bland. "She said to-day 'how ugly' was your house," confessed Señora Vigil. "And when you was feeding your chickens she cried out, '*Hola*, what a queer woman is yonder!' Children have funny things in their heads. But it is for you to tell her you come to fetch her away!" And the señora called out, "*Lolita, ven aca!*"

The girl looked up startled. "*Que hay?*" she asked, coming toward them apprehensively.

"Lola," began Jane, "your papa wants you should stay with me for a while. He—he saw how lonesome I was," she continued, unwisely, "and—and so he decided

to leave you here. Lola, I hope—I—" She could not go on for the strangeness in Lola's gaze.

"Is he *gone*—my father? But no! he would not leave me behind! No! no! *Dejeme! dejeme!* you do not say the truth! You shall not touch me! I will not—will not go with you!" She turned wildly, dizzily, as if about to run she knew not where; and then flung herself down before Señora Vigil, clasping the Mexican woman's knees in a frantic, fainting grasp.



A SACRED CHARGE



CHAPTER TWO

A SACRED CHARGE

Jane helplessly regarded the child's despair, while Señora Vigil maintained an attitude curiously significant of deep compassion and a profound intention of neutrality. With the sound of Lola's distraught refusals in her ear, Jane felt upon her merely the instinct of flight. She rallied her powers of speech and set her hand on the gate, saying simply, "I'm going. She better stay here."

But at this the señora's face, which had exhibited a kind of woful pleasure in the excitement of the occasion, took on an anxious frown.

"And the board-money?" she exclaimed, with instant eagerness.

"I guess it'll be all right. Mr. Keene said he'd send it every month."

The señora's eyes narrowed. "He said so! Ay, but who can say he shall remember? There are eight chickens to eat of our meal already. No, Mees Combs! The *muchacha* was left to you. It is a charge very sacred. Ave Maria! yes!"

Jane had closed the gate. "I can't force her," she repeated.

Señora Vigil, watching her go, fell a prey to lively dissatisfaction. "*Santo cielo!*" she thought. "What will my Pablo say to this? I must run to the mine for a word with him. It is most serious, this business!" And casting her apron over the whip-cord braids of her coarse hair, she started hastily down toward the bridge.

Lola, crouching on the ground, watched her go. It was very quiet in the grassless yard. The Vigil children were playing in the *arroyo* bed. Their voices came with a stifled sound. There was nothing else to hear save the far-off moaning of a wild dove somewhere up Gonzales cañon. The echo was like a soft, sad voice. It sounded like the mournful cry of one who, looking out of heaven, saw her hapless little daughter bereaved and abandoned, and was moved, even among the blessed, to a sobbing utterance.

Lola sat up to listen. Her father had spoken of going through that cañon from

which the low call came. Even now he was traveling through the green hills, regretting that he had left his child behind him at the instance of a strange woman! Even now he was doubtless deploring that he should have been moved to consider another's loneliness before his own.

"Wicked woman," thought the girl, angrily, "to ask him to leave me here—my poor papa!" She sprang to her feet, filled with an impetuous idea. She might follow her father!

There was the road, and no one by to hinder her. Even the hideous wooden house of the short-haired woman looked deserted. Lola, with an Indian's stealth of tread, crossed the bridge, and walked without suspicious haste up the empty street.

At the mouth of the cañon, taking heart of the utter wilderness all about, she began to run. Before her the great Spanish Peaks heaved their blue pyramids against the desert sky. Shadows were falling over the rough, winding road, and as she rushed on and on, many a gully and stone and tree-root took her foot unaware in the growing gray of twilight. Presently a star came out, a strange-faced star. Others followed in an unfamiliar throng, which watched her curiously when, breathless and exhausted, she dropped down beside a little spring to drink. The water refreshed her. She lay back on the cattle-tramped hill to rest.

Dawn was rosy in the east when she awoke, dazed to find herself alone in a deep gorge. Her mission recurred to her, and again she took the climbing road. Now, however, the way was hard, for it rose ever before her, and her feet were swollen.

As the day advanced it grew sultry, with a menace of clouds to the west. After a time the great peaks were lost in dark clouds, and distant thunder boomed. A lance of lightning rent the nearer sky, and flashed its vivid whiteness into the gorge. This had narrowed so that between the steep hills there was only room for the arroyo and the little roadway beside it. Before the rain began to fall on Lola's bare head, as it did shortly in sheets, the stream-bed had become a raging torrent, down which froth and spume and uprooted saplings were spinning.

In an instant the cañon was a wild tumult of thunder and roaring water, and Lola, barely keeping her feet, had laid hold of a piñon on the lower slope and was burying her head in the spiked branches. Wind and rain buffeted the child. The ground began to slip and slide with the furious downpour, but she held fast, possessed of a great fear of the torrent sweeping down below her.

As she listened to the crashing of the swollen tide, another noise seemed to mingle with the sound of the mountain waters—a sound of bellowing and trampling, as of a stampeded herd. A sudden horror of great rolling eyes and rending horns and crazy hoofs hurtled through the girl's dizzy brain. Her hands loosened. She began to slip down.

The rain had slackened when Bev Gribble, looking from his herder's hut up on the *mesa*, saw that his "bunch" of cattle had disappeared. Certain tracks on the left of the upland pasture exhibited traces of a hasty departure. That there had been a cloudburst over toward the Peaks he was as yet ignorant; nor did he discover this until he had caught his cow-pony and descended into the ravine.

The sun was shining now, and the arroyo was nothing more than a placid, though muddy stream. Its gleaming sides, however, spoke lucidly to Bev's intelligence, and he set the pony at a smarter pace in the marshy road.

"*Sus! Sus!*" said Bev to his pony, who knew Spanish best, being a bronco from the south. But Coco did not respond. Instead, he came back suddenly on his haunches, as if the rope on the cow-puncher's saddle had lurched to the leap of a steer.

Coco knew well the precise instant when it is advisable for a cow-pony to forestall the wrench of the lasso. But now the loop of hemp hung limp on the saddle-horn, and Gribble, surprised at being nearly thrown, rose in the stirrups to see what was underfoot.

A drenched thing it was which huddled at the roadside; very limp, indeed, and laxly lending itself to the motions of Gribble's hands as he lifted and shook it.

"Seems to be alive!" muttered the cow-puncher. "Where could she have dropped from? Aha! here's a broken arm! I better take her right to town to the doctor. Hi there, Coco!" He laid Lola over the saddle and mounted behind his dripping burden.

When the coal-camp came in sight on the green skirt of the plains, with the Apishapa scrolling the distance in a velvet ribbon, sunset was already forward, and the smoke of many an evening fire veined the late sky.

A man coming toward the cañon stopped at sight of Gribble. He was the store clerk going home to supper. He shouted, "Hullo, Bev! Why, what have you struck? Bless me, it's the little girl they're all hunting! She belongs to Miss

Combs, it seems. Her mother died here the other day. Found her up the cañon, eh? They been all ranging north, thinking she'd taken after her pa. Maybe she thought he'd headed for La Veta pass? Looks sure 'nough bad, don't she?"

Jane, when she heard the pony cross the bridge, ran to the door, as she had run so many times during the long, anxious day. She took the girl from Gribble without a word, and bore her into the house from which she had fled with so much loathing.

"Don't look so scared!" said Gribble, kindly. "It's only a broken bone or so." As this consoling assurance seemed not to lessen Jane's alarm, he went on cheerfully to say, "There isn't one in my body hasn't been splintered by these broncos! Tinker 'em up and they're better than new. Here's doc coming lickety-switch! He'll tell you the same."

But the doctor was less encouraging. "It isn't merely a question of bones," he said, observing his patient finally in her splints and bandages. "It's the nervous strain she's lately undergone. She's been overtaxed with so much excitement and sorrow. If she pulls through, it'll be the nursing."

Jane drew a deep breath. "She won't die if nursing can save her!" said she. Her face shone with grave sacrificial tenderness, in the light of which the shortcomings of her uncouth dress and looks were for once without significance.

"She's a good woman," said the doctor, as he rode away, "though she wears her womanhood so ungraciously—as a rough husk rather than a flower. All the same, she's laying up misery for herself in her devotion to this fractious child; I wish I'd had no hand in it!"

Jane early came to feel what burs were in the wind for her. Lola soon returned to the world, staring wonderingly about; but even in the first moment she winced and turned her face away from Jane's eager gaze. As the girl shrank back into the pillows, Jane's lips quivered.

"Goose that I am!" she thought. "Of course my looks are strange to her! It'd be funny if she took to me right off. I aint good-looking. And her ma was real handsome!" For once in her life Jane sighed a little over her own plainness. "Children love their mothers even when they're plumb homely!" she encouraged herself. "Maybe Lola'll like me, in spite of my not being well-favored, when she finds how much I think of her."

As time passed, and Lola, with her arm in a sling, began to sit up and to creep about, there was little in her manner to show the wisdom of Jane's cheerful forecast. The girl was still and reserved, as if some ancient Aztec strain predominated in her over all others. She watched the Vigils playing, the kids gamboling, the magpies squabbling; but never a lighter look stirred the chill calm of her little, russet-toned features, or the sombre depths of her dark, long eyes.

Jane watched her in despair. "I'm afraid you aint very well contented, Lola," she said, one day. "Is there anything any one can do?" Lola was sitting in the August sunshine. A little quiver passed through her.

"I want to hear from my father," she said. "Has he—written?" Her voice was wishful, indeed, and Jane colored.

"I guess he's been so busy he hasn't got round to it yet," she said, lightly.

"I thought he hadn't," said Lola, quickly. "I—didn't expect it quite yet. He hates to write." Her accent was sharp with anxiety as she added, "But of course he sends the—board-money for me—he would remember that?" Evidently she recalled the Señora Vigil's questions and doubts on this subject, for there was such intensity of apprehension in her look that Jane felt herself full of pain.

"Of course he would remember it, my dear!" she said, on the instant; she consoled her conscience by reflecting that there was no untruth in her words. Although Mr. Keene had sent never a word or sign to Aguilar, it was measurably certain that he remembered his obligations.

"It'd just about kill that child to find out the truth," thought Jane. "She looks, anyhow, like she hadn't a friend on earth! I'm going to let her think the money comes as regular as clockwork! I d' know but I'm real glad he don't send it. Makes me feel closer to the little thing, somehow."

After a while the broken arm was pronounced whole again, and the sling was taken off.

"You're all right now," said the doctor to Lola, "and you must run out-of-doors and get some Colorado tan on your cheeks. *Sabe?* And eat more. Get up an appetite. How do you say that in Spanish? *Tener buen diente*, eh? All right. See you do it."

Lola stood at his knee, solemn and mute. She took his jests with an air of formal

courtesy, barely smiling. She had a queer little half-civilized look in the neat pigtails which Jane considered appropriate to her age, and which were so tightly braided as fairly to draw up the girl's eyebrows. The emerald *fajas* had been laid by. To garland that viny strip in Lola's locks was beyond Jane's power.

"What a little icicle it is!" mused the doctor. "If I had taken a thorn from a dog's foot the creature would have been more grateful!"

Even as he was thinking this, he felt a sudden pressure upon his hand. Lola had seized it and was kissing the big fingers passionately, while she cried, "*Gracias! mil gracias, señor!* You have made me well! When my papa comes he will bless you! He will pour gold over you from head to foot!"

"That's all right, Lola," laughed the doctor. "He'll have to thank Miss Jane more than me. She pulled you through. Have you thanked *her* yet, Lola?"

Lola's face stiffened. "But for her I should not have been tramped by the cattle—I should have been safe in my father's wagon!" she thought. "I—have not, but I will—soon," she said. "And your housekeeper, too, for the ice-cream, and other things."

Jane, in succeeding days, took high comfort in the fact that Lola seemed to like being out-of-doors, and apparently amused herself there much after the fashion of ordinary children. She had established herself over by the ditch, and Jane could see her fetching water in a can and mixing it with a queer kind of adobe which she got half-way up the hill. That Lola should be engaged with mud *casas* was, indeed, hardly in accord with Jane's experience of the girl's dignity; but that she should be playing ever so foolishly in a slush of clay delighted Jane as being a healthful symptom.

"What you making down yonder, honey?" she ventured to ask.

"I am making nothing; I am finished," said Lola. "To-morrow you shall see my work." Jane felt taken aback. It had been work, then; not simple play. She awaited what should follow with curious interest.

Upon the next morning Lola ran off through the alfalfa rather excitedly. After a little she reappeared, walking slowly, with an air of importance. She carried something carefully before her, holding it above the reach of the alfalfa's snatching green fingers.

It was a square pedestal of adobe, sun-baked hard as stone, upon which sat a

queer adobe creature, with a lean body and a great bulbous head. This personage showed the presence in his anatomy of an element of finely chopped straw. His slits of eyes were turned prayerfully upward. From his widely open mouth hung a thirsty mud tongue, and between his knobby knees he held an empty bowl, toward the filling of which his whole expression seemed an invocation.

"He is for you," said Lola, beaming artistic gratification. "He is to show my thanks for your caring for me in my broken-bonedness. He is Tesuque, the rain-god. You can let your ditches fill with weeds, if you like. You won't need to irrigate your *vega* any more. Tesuque will make showers come."

Jane trembled with surprised pleasure. The powers ascribed to Tesuque were hardly accountable for the gratification with which she received him.

"I'll value him as long as I live!" she exclaimed. "He—he's real handsome!"

"Not handsome," corrected Lola, with a tone of modest pride, "but *good*! He makes the rain come. In Taos are many Tesuques."

"I reckon it must rain considerable there," surmised Jane, not unnaturally.

Lola shook her head. "No. It's pretty dry—but it wouldn't rain at all, you see, if it wasn't for Tesuque!"

This logic was irresistible. Jane dwelt smilingly upon it as she set the rain-god on the mantel, with a crockery bowl of yellow daisies to maintain his state. Afterward, a dark, adder-like compunction glided through the flowery expanse of her joy in Tesuque, as she wondered if there was not something heathenish in his lordly enshrinement upon a Christian mantelpiece.

"Maybe he's an idol!" thought Jane. "Lola," she asked, perturbed, "you don't *pray* to Tersookey, do you?" Lola looked horrified.

"Me? *Maria Santissima*! I am of the Church! Tesuque is not to pray to. I hope you have not been making your worship to him. It is like this, señora: You plant the seed and the leaf comes; you set out Tesuque and rain falls. It is quite simple."

""HE IS TESUQUE, THE RAIN-GOD."" *A Prairie Infanta*
""HE IS TESUQUE, THE RAIN-GOD.""

Jane rested in this easy and convincing philosophy. She saw the joke of Lola's

advice to her not to misplace her devotions, and one day she repeated the story to the doctor, showing him the rain-god.

"Do you know," said the doctor, handling Tesuque, "that this thing is surprisingly well-modeled? The Mexicans can do anything with adobe, but this has something about it beyond the reach of most of them."

After this, a pleasanter atmosphere spread in Jane's dwelling. Lola often unbent to talk. Sometimes she sewed a little on the frocks and aprons, preparing for her school career. Oftener she worked in her roofless pottery by the ditch, where many a queer jug and vase and bowl, gaudy with ochre and Indian red, came into being and passed early to dust again, for want of firing. Jane found these things engrossing. She liked to sit and watch them grow under Lola's fingers, while the purple alfalfa flowers shed abroad sweet odors, and the ditch-water sang softly at her feet. As she sat thus one afternoon, Alejandro Vigil came running across the field, waving a letter.

"'Tis for you, Lolita!" he cried. "My father read the marks. It is from Cripple Creek!"

"Oh, give me! give me!" cried Lola, flinging down a mud dish.

Jane had taken the letter. "It's for me, dear," she said, beginning to open it. "I'll read it aloud—" She paused. Her face had a gray color.

Lola held out her hands in a passion of joy and eagerness. "What does he say? Oh, hurry! Oh, let me have it!"

Jane suddenly crushed the letter, and her eyes were stern as she withdrew it resolutely from Lola's reaching fingers.

"No, Lola, no!" she said, in a sharp tone. "I—can't let you have this letter! I can't! I can't!"



A TRUE BENEFACTRESS



CHAPTER THREE

A TRUE BENEFACTRESS

Lola's breath was suspended in amazement. Indignation flashed from her eyes. She dropped her hands and Jane saw the fingers clench.

"It is my father's letter—and you keep it from me? You are cruel!" said Lola, passionately.

Jane's eyes, set on the ground, seemed to see there, in fiery type, the words of the paper in her grasp. Those scrawling lines, roaming from blot to blot across the soiled sheet, had communicated to Jane no pain of a personal sort. So far, indeed, as their trend took her on the score of feeling, she might even have found something satisfying in Mr. Keene's news, since this was merely a statement of his financial disability. All along Jane had been dreading the hour when, instead of this frank disclosure of "hard luck," there should come to her a parcel of money. Not to have any money to send might conjecturally be distressing to Mr. Keene; but Jane felt that he would be able to endure his embarrassment better than she herself any question of barter respecting Lola.

The very thought of being paid for what she had so freely given hurt Jane. Without realizing its coldness and emptiness, her life had been truly void of human warmth before the little, lonely girl stole in to fill it with her piteous, proud presence. A happier child, with more childish ways, might not so fully have compassed Jane's awakening; for this had been in proportion to the needs of the one who so forlornly made plea for entrance. Having once thrown wide the door of her heart, Jane had begun to understand the blessedness that lies in generosity. Lola might never care for her, indeed; but to Lola she owed the impulse of loving self-bestowal, which is as shining sunlight in the bosom.

Mr. Keene wrote that the claim he had been working had proved valueless. He expected better luck next time; but just now he could not do as he had intended for Lola; and in view of his unsettled circumstances he thought it might be well if Miss Combs could place the girl in some family where her services would be acceptable.

"Life," he wrote, was at best "a rough proposition," and it would doubtless be good for Lola, who had sundry faults of temper, to learn this fact early. For the present she would have to give up all idea of going to school. Mr. Keene would be sorry if the prospect displeased his daughter, but people couldn't have everything their own way in this world.

Such words as these Jane instinctively knew would fall crushingly upon Lola, and leave her in a sorry plight of abject, hardening thought. Therefore, steeling herself to bear the girl's misinterpretation, she said, "Lola, your father wouldn't want you to see this letter. It's on business."

"Does he say I'm not to see it?" asked Lola.

Jane's brows twisted painfully. "No," she said, "but—"

Lola turned away. Every line of her figure was eloquent of grievance. She walked off without a glance to apprise her of the anguish in Jane's face. Slowly Jane went toward the house; whereupon Alejandro Vigil, who had continued an interested spectator, followed Lola to the ditch.

"If thou hadst wept, she would have given thee the letter," he suggested. "My mother, she always gives up to us when we weep loudly. A still baby gets no milk," said Alejandro, wisely, as he hugged his bare knees.

"I am no baby!" retorted Lola. Nevertheless her voice was husky, and Alejandro watched her anxiously.

"It's no good to cry now," he advised her. "She's gone into the house."

"*Tonto!* Do you think I want her to see me?" wept Lola. "She is hard and cruel. O my father!"

"Come over and tell my mother about it!" urged the boy, troubled. "You are Mexican like us, no? Your mother was Mexican? Come! My mother will say what is best to do."

Lola listened. She let herself be dragged up. An adviser might speak some word of wisdom. "Come, then," she agreed.

But Señora Vigil, on hearing the story, only groaned and sighed.

"These Americans have the heart of ice!" she said. "Doubtless there was money in the letter and she did not want you to know. Serafita, leave thy sister alone, or

I will beat thee! It will be best, Lolita, to say little. A close mouth catches no flies."

"I may not stay here with you?" asked Lola.

"Alas, no, little pigeon!" mourned the señora. "In the cage where thy father has put thee thou must stay! But come and tell me everything. This shall be thy house when thou art in trouble!" and thus defining the limits of her hospitality, she made a gesture toward the mud walls on which strings of goat meat were drying in a sanguinary fringe.

Autumn fell bright on the foot-hills. The plains blazed with yellow flowers which seemed to run in streams of molten gold from every cañon, and linger in great pools on the flats and line all the ditches. Ricks of green and silver rose all along the Apishapa. Alfalfa was purple to the last crop, and an air of affluence pervaded everything.

The town was thronged with ranchers, coming in to trade; the mine had started up for the winter. Men who had prospected for precious metals all summer in the mountains now bundled their pots and pans and blankets back to shelter for the winter; the long-eared burros, lost in great rolls of bedding, stood about the tipples awaiting the result of their masters' interviews with the mine boss, concerning work and the occupancy of any "shack" that might still be empty.

Now, too, the bell of the red-brick school clamored loudly of mornings; and dark, taciturn Mexican children, and paler, noisier children from the mining end of town, bubbled out of every door. Seven Vigils obeyed the daily summons, clad, boy and girl, in cotton stuff of precisely the hue of their skin. Bobbing through the gate, one after another, they were like a family of little dun-colored prairie-dogs, of a hue with their adobe dwelling, shy and brown and bright-eyed.

Among them Lola had an effect of tropical brilliancy, by reason of the red frock with which Jane had provided her. There were red ribbons also in Lola's braided hair; and the girl, although still aware of bitter wrongs, was sensible of being pleased with her raiment. More than once on her way to school that first day she looked at the breadths of her scarlet cashmere with a gratified eye; and catching her at this, Ana Vigil had sighed disapprovingly, saying, "It is too good for every day—that dress."

"It isn't too good for me!" flashed back Lola. "My father can do what he likes!"

"True," said Ana, "since he has a gold-mine. But even if I were rich, I should fear that the saints might punish me for wearing to school my best clothes. I would wish to win their good-will by wearing no finery," said Ana, piously. She was a plump girl, with eyes like splinters of coal in her suave brown face; despite the extreme softness of her voice, these glittering splinters rested with no gentle ray on Lola.

Indeed, Jane's pride in having her charge well-dressed operated largely against the girl's popularity with others of her mates than Ana. Primarily Lola's air of hauteur provoked resentment; but hauteur in poor attire would have been only amusing, while in red cashmere it was felt to be a serious matter, entailing upon every one the sense of a personal affront. Lola's quickness of retort was also against her. The swift flash of her eye, the sudden quiver of her lip, afforded continual gratification to such as had it in mind to effect her discomposure.

"They do not love you too well, Lolita," said Ana Vigil, sadly. "They say you have a sharp tongue. They say you are too well pleased with yourself. Me, I tell you what I hear because I am your friend."

"So long a tongue as yours, Ana, weaves a short web!" growled Alejandro, with a masculine distrust of his sister's friendly assumptions.

"Lola knows if I speak truth," returned Ana, tranquilly.

Lola maintained an impassive front, but she was hurt. The little tricks and taunts of her schoolfellows tormented her deeply. She had lately relapsed into the stolid indifference native to her blood, and this was her best shield, had she only known it, although it, too, for a time left her open to attack. For when she encased herself in cold silence, and stalked home with lifted head and unseeing eyes, often a little throng of Mexican children would walk behind her, imitating her stately gait and calling mockingly, "*Ea! ea! See the madamisela! See the princess! She is sister to the king—that one! Vah! vah! vah!*"

And mingling their voices they would sing, "*Infanta! Infanta Lolita!*" until Lola, stung to rage, turned upon them wildly; whereat their delighted cries served to send her flying homeward.

"I guess not even Squire Baca's girls nor Edith May Jonas had better things than you," said Jane, unaware of all this. Her own garments remained things of the baldest utility, but the village seamstress was kept busy feather-stitching and beribboning articles for Lola's wear.

In these things Jane developed a most prodigal pride, freely expending upon them the little patrimony which had been put in the Trinidad bank against her old age. Her usual good judgment quite failed her; and she who, patternless and guideless, slashed brown denim fearlessly into uncouth vestures for herself, now had a pulse of trepidation at laying the tissue-paper model of some childish garment for Lola upon a length of dainty wool.

"Maybe," said Lola, "the others would like me better if my father didn't get me so many things."

Jane's eyes shone with a fierce light.

"Don't they like you?" she demanded, harshly.

"Didn't you hear them calling 'infanta' after me just now?"

"Infanta—is it anything *bad*?" Jane's voice was so wroth that Lola laughed.

"It means princess."

"Oh!" said Jane, mollified. "If it'd been anything *else*, I'd have gone straight down to see the marshal!" Lola flushed a little. She thought, "How kind she is! If I could only forget—about that letter!"

The dislike of the Mexican children abated with time. They even came to admire Lola's quickness. She went above them in class—yes! but also she went above the Americans! The little Mexicans, aware of a certain mental apathy, had not enviously regarded the exploits of the "smart" Americans. If these others "went up," what did it matter? All one could do if one were Mexican was to accept defeat with dignity, and reflect upon the fact that things would be different if Spanish and not English were the language of the school.

When Lola, however, one of themselves by reason of her color and her fluency in their idiom, displayed an ability to master those remorseless obscurities of spelling and arithmetic which had seemed sufficient to dethrone reason in any but a Saxon mind, then the peon children began to find some personal satisfaction in her achievements.

Whenever Lola went above Jimmy Adkins, the mine boss's boy, and Edith May Jonas, the liveryman's only daughter, every Mexican face recorded a slow smile of triumph. "'*Sta 'ueno!*'" they would whisper, watching Edith May, who upon such occasions was wont to enliven things by bursting into tears, and who

commonly brought upon the following day a note from her mother, stating that Edith May must be excused for missing in spelling because she had not been at all well and had misunderstood the word.

The next two years also mitigated much of the constraint which had marked Miss Combs's relations with Lola. After the episode of the letter, Lola never asked news of her father. Insensibly she came to understand that if he wrote at all he wrote seldom, and solely upon the matter of her expenses. And naturally she ceased clinging warmly to the thought of his love for her. His silence and absence were not spurs to affection, although she dwelt gratefully upon the fact that he should lavish so much upon her.

Jane's money was lessening, but none of Lola's wishes had as yet been baffled. The girl had a sort of barbaric love of brightness and softness; and one day, as she looked over some fabrics for which Jane, spurred by the approach of the vacation and the fact that Lola was to have a part in the closing exercises of school, had sent to Denver, the girl said suddenly, "How good my father is to me, *tia*!"

Long before, she had asked Jane what she should call her, and Jane had said, "Maybe you better call me aunt."

"I will do it in Mexican, then," said Lola. "It sounds more ripe." She meant mellow, no doubt. Now, as she fingered the pretty muslin, she seemed to gather resolution to speak of something which had its difficulties. "*Tia*," she pursued, "he is well off—my father?"

Jane's voice had rather a feigned lightness as she replied, "You have everything you want, don't you?" No one but herself knew that for some time she had been paying Mr. Keene a monthly stipend. He had written that Lola ought not any longer to be giving her services just for board. So great a girl must be very handy about a house; and as luck still evaded him, he confessed that Lola's earnings would considerably "help him out."

Jane had not combated his views. Many Mexican children younger than Lola earned a little tending the herds and helping about the fields. They were usually boys; but Jane did not dwell on this point. She had never clearly realized, on her own part, those distinctions in labor which appertain to the sexes; she had herself always done everything that had to be done, whether it were cooking or plowing. If she had any choice, it was for pursuits of the field. Therefore, without comment, she had accepted Mr. Keene's theories as just, and began to pay him

what he said would be "about right."

"Because," said Lola, "I want you to ask him something when you write. I am over fourteen now. There isn't much more for me to learn in this school. Señor Juarez and Miss Belton both tell me I ought to go to Pueblo. Edith May Jonas is going. I should like to study many things—drawing, for instance. They say I ought to study that. My mother always said she hoped I would have a chance to learn. And my father used to say, 'Oh, yes!' that he would soon have money for everything. And now he has! Will you ask him?"

Jane was dusting the mantel on which Tesuque still sat open-mouthed, with his bowl. The room had lost its former barren aspect. There was now a carpet, while muslin shades softened the glare of the Colorado sun and the view of the sterile hills. Geraniums bloomed on the window-sills, and some young cottonwoods grew greenly at the door. The scarlet Navajo blanket, which had been Lola's inheritance from the prairie-schooner, was spread across a couch, and gave a final note of warmth and comfort to the low room, now plastered in adobe from ceiling to floor. Everything that had been done was for Lola's sake, who loved warmth and color, as do all Southrons.

Tesuque alone, divinely invariable amid so much change, now seemed to wink the eye at Jane's uncertainty. For Jane knew that there was not enough money in the bank to pay for a year's schooling at Pueblo. So far she knew, yet she said simply, "I can ask him."

If Lola wanted to go to Pueblo, she must go. It would be a pity if Edith May Jonas should have better schooling than Lola, thought Jane. And as she pondered, it came forcibly to her that money need not be lacking; she could mortgage her house. She shut her eyes to all future difficulties which this must involve, and, upon a certain June day, set resolutely out to see if the doctor were willing to make the loan.

The doctor, sitting in the little office which he had built in the corner of his shady yard, scowled over his glasses as he listened.

"You're making a mistake," he said, having heard all, "to let Lola believe that her father is providing for her. I know you began it all with a view to charitable ends; but he who does evil that good may come sets his foot in a crooked path, of which none can see the close."

"I didn't want to see her breaking her heart."

"I know, but I do not believe it's ever well to compound and treat with wrong. If you'll be advised, you'll tell her the whole truth at once."

Jane sat bolt upright before him. Her arms were folded across her butternut waist, and under the man's hat a grim resolution seemed to be embodying itself.

"She wouldn't go to school at Pueblo if I told her—nor feel like she had any home—or anything in the world. And I aint going to tell her!"

"Miss Jane, Miss Jane, don't you see you're doing the girl a real injury in letting her regard you, her true benefactor, merely as the agent of her father's generosity? You have simply sustained and encouraged her worst traits. She wouldn't have been so exacting, so resentful, so easily provoked if she had known all along that she was only a poor little pensioner on your bounty. The lesson of humility would have gone far with her. No, Miss Jane, it wouldn't have hurt her to be humbled. It won't now!"

"I don't believe it ever does any one any good to be humbled!" maintained Jane, stoutly and with reason. "Especially if it's a poor, frail little soul that aint got no mother! I did what I thought best, though I can't afford it no way in the world! To prune and dress a lie aint going to make it grow into a truth!" She rose. "I guess I'll see if Henry Jonas'll be willing to take that mortgage!"

"I'm going to do it myself!" roared the doctor. "I don't want Jonas to own all the property in Aguilar!" Generosity and anger swayed him confusedly; but as he watched Jane trudging down under the Dauntless's tippie he became clear enough to register with himself a vow. "Lola has got to know the truth!" he declared. "Maybe it's none of my business, but all the same she's going to know it, and know it now!" And he got up, grimly resolute.



WISE IMPULSES



CHAPTER FOUR

WISE IMPULSES

The next day was the last of the school term, and it afforded the doctor an opportunity for carrying out his resolve. There was a base of sound reason in his purposed action. It might give the girl pain, indeed, to hear what he felt impelled to tell her; it is not pleasant to have a broken bone set, yet the end is a good one. The doctor felt that Lola's mind held a smoldering distrust of Jane, which not even the consciousness of Jane's love could dispel.

The girl, without directly formulating so strong a case against Jane, obscurely held her accountable for that division from her father which she deplored. Doubtless it was affection which had caused Jane to ask Mr. Keene to leave his child behind. Affection also might have jealously deterred Jane from giving Lola her father's infrequent letters. But affection cannot excuse what is unworthy; and Lola's thoughts ran vaguely with a distrust which did something to embitter the wholesome tides of life.

"I am right to put an end to Miss Combs's unwise benevolence," thought the doctor, as he tied his horse outside the schoolhouse.

Throngs of white-frosted girls were chattering about the yard. Rows of Mexican children squatted silent and stolid against the red walls, unmoved by those excitements of closing day which stirred their American mates to riotous glee. The wives of the miners and town merchants were arriving in twos and threes. Gaunt Mexican women, holding quiet babies in their looped *rebozos*, stood about, hardly ever speaking.

Señora Vigil, more lavishly built than the rest of her countrywomen and gayer of port than they, moved from group to group, talking cheerfully. Jane also awaited the opening of the schoolhouse door, watching the scene with interest and having no conception of herself as an object of note, in her elderly black bonnet and short jean skirt.

Presently Señor Juarez, the Mexican master, appeared. The bell in the slate dome rang loudly, and the throng filed indoors. There was the usual array of

ceremonies appropriate to occasions like this. Small boys spoke "pieces," which they forgot, being audibly prompted, while the audience experienced untold pangs of sympathy and foreboding. Little beribboned girls exhibited their skill in dialogue, and read essays and filed through some patriotic drill, to which a forest of tiny flags gave splendid emphasis at impressive junctures.

Then Edith May Jonas, solemn with anxiety and importance, rose to sing. She was a plain, flaxen-haired girl, with a Teutonic cast of feature and a thin voice; but every one, benumbed with speechless admiration of her blue silk dress, derived from her performance an impression of surpassing beauty and unbounded talent.

"*Caramba!* but she is like a vision!" sighed Señora Vigil in Jane's ear. "Look at Señora Jonas, the mother! Well may she weep tears of pride! She is a great lady—Señora Jonas. Just now she have condescended to say to me, 'Ow-de-do?' and me, I bow low. '*A los pics de V. señora!*' I say. *Ay Dios!* if I but had a child with yellow hair, like the Señorita Edith May! *Que chula!*"

"Sh!" breathed Jane. "There's my Lola on the platform!"

Lola had grown tall in the past year. She was fairer than the Mexicans, although not fair in the fashion of Edith May, but with a faint citron hue which, better than pink and white, befitted the extreme darkness of her hair and eyes. She wore a dress of thin white, and around her slender neck was a curious old strand of turquoise beads which had been found carefully hidden away in the Mexican trunk. There was an air of simple reserve about her which touched the doctor. She was only a child for all her stately looks, and he began to hate his task.

Lola read a little address which had been assigned to her as a representative of the highest class. She read the farewell lines almost monotonously, without effect, without inflection, almost coldly. Yet as he listened, the doctor had an impression of vital warmth underlying the restraint of the girl's tone—an impression of feeling that lay far below the surface, latent and half-suspected.

"There is something there to be reckoned with," he decided. "But what? Is it a noble impulse which will spring to life in rich gratitude when I tell her my story? Or will a mere hurt, passionate vanity rise to overwhelm us all in its acrid swell? I shall soon know."

In the buzz of gaiety and gossip which succeeded the final reading, he approached Lola and beckoned her away from the crowd. She came running to

him smiling, saying, "Señor!"

"I want to say something to you, my dear. Come here where it's quiet." The doctor was finding the simplicity and trustfulness of her gaze very trying. "Lola," he continued, desperately, "I—you must listen to me." Just at this point something struck against his arm, and turning irritably, he saw Jane.

"What's all this?" said she, placidly. "What are you saying to make my little girl so wide-eyed? Remember, she has a fierce old guardian—one that expects every one to 'tend to his own affairs!" Jane spoke jestingly, but the doctor knew he was worsted. Jane had been watching him.

"But, *tia*!" interposed Lola, "the doctor was just going to tell me something very important!"

"He was maybe going to tell you that you are going to Pueblo next fall! Yes, honey, it's all fixed!" She turned a joyous, defiant face on the doctor, who cast his hands abroad as if he washed them of the whole affair; while Lola, beaming with pleasure, rushed off to tell the news to Señor Juarez.

"You'll regret this!" said the doctor, somehow feeling glad of his own failure.

"Well, *she* won't!" cried Jane, watching Lola's flight with tender eyes.

"Sometime she is going to find out all this deceit!" he added.

"I know," said Jane. "I know. And then she'll quit trusting me forever. But if I'm willing to stand it, nobody else need to worry." With this tacit rebuke she left him, and thereafter the doctor respected her wishes.

A month or so after Lola's departure northward, Jane's solicitude was enlivened by an event of startling importance. She was notified by the Dauntless Company that two entries, the fourth and fifth east, had entered her property, in which she had never suspected the presence of coal, and that the owners were prepared to negotiate with her suitable terms for the right of working the vein in question.

When the matter of royalties was settled and several hundred dollars paid to Jane's account for coal already taken out, she had a sudden rush of almost tearful joy. Every month would come to her, while the coal lasted, a determinate sum of money. She regarded the fact in a sort of ecstasy, and resolved upon many things.

First she banished from her house the shadow of the mortgage. Then, glowing

with enterprise, she proceeded to extend and embellish her property in a way which speedily set the town by the ears, and aroused every one to dark prophecies as to what must happen when her money should all be gone, and nothing left her but to face poverty in the palatial five-room dwelling now growing up around the pine homestead of the past.

Lola liked adobe houses; and fortunately Enrique Diaz, the blacksmith, had a fine lot of adobes which he had made before frost, and put under cover against a possible extension of his shop, "to-morrow or some time after a while." These Jane bought, and deftly the chocolate walls arose in her *vega*, crowned finally with a crimson roof, which could be seen two miles off at Lynn. There was a porch, too, with snow-white pillars, and an open fireplace, all tiled with adobe, in which might blaze fires of piñon wood, full of resin and burning as nothing else can burn save driftwood, sodden with salt and oil and the mystery of old ocean.

Then, after a little, there arrived in town a vaulted box, in which the dullest fancy might conjecture a piano. Greatly indeed were heads shaken. If doom were easily invoked, Jane would hardly have lived to unpack the treasure and help to lift it up the porch steps.

"*Por Dios!*" gasped Ana Vigil. "It must have cost fifty dollars! And for what good, señora?"

"Lola's taking music-lessons," said Jane. "Her and Edith May Jonas is learning a duet. I want she should be able to go right on practising."

"Ah!" said Ana, innocently. "She will not say your house now is 'ugly,' will she? And you, señora, shall you get a longer dress and do your hair up, so she will not say of you like she did, 'How queer'?"

Jane looked at Ana. Surely she could not mean to be ill-tempered—Ana, with a face as broad and placid as a standing pool? No, no, Ana was too simple to wish to pain any one! Yet as Jane dwelt upon Ana's queries, it came slowly to Jane that certain changes in herself might be well.

She obeyed this wise, if late, impulse, and when Lola came home in June she had her reward. The girl cried out with surprise as she beheld on the platform at Lynn that tall figure in a soft gray gown, fashioned with some pretensions to the mode, but simple and dignified as befitted Jane's stature and look. There was a bonnet to match, too elderly for Jane's years, and of a Quakerish form. But this

was less the cause for the general difference in Jane's aspect than the fact that her brown hair, parted smoothly on the broad, benignant brow, now had its ends tucked up in a neat knot.

"*Tia! tia!*" exclaimed Lola, herself glowing like a prairie-rose, as she dashed out of the train. "What have you done? You are good to look at! Your hair—oh, *asombro!*"

But when the white burros of the mail wagon, wildly skimming the plains, brought them in sight of the new house, Lola's joy turned white on her cheeks, and she clutched Jane's arm.

"*Tia*—our house! It is gone—gone!"

Then was Jane's time to laugh with sheer happiness, to throw open gate and door and usher her guest into the old room where Tesuque sat and the Navajo blanket still covered the couch as of yore, and nothing was altered except that now other rooms opened brightly on all sides, and in one a piano displayed its white teeth in beaming welcome.

Lola's blank face, whereon every moment printed a new delight, was to Jane a sight hardly to be matched. The satisfaction grew also with time, as the piano awoke to such strains as Lola had mastered, and people strolled up from the village ways to listen, and, to Jane's deep gratification, to praise the musician. The Mexicans came in throngs, filling the air with a chorus of "*Caspitas!*" and "*Carambas!*" None of them called Lola "*Infanta*" nowadays unless it were in a spirit of friendly pleasantry; and she herself had lost much of the air which had brought this contemptuous honor upon her childish head.

"She is Mexican—yes!" they nodded to one another, deriving much simple satisfaction from the circumstance. For was it not provocative of racial pride that one of their compatriots should be able to make tunes—actual tunes!—issue from those keys which responded to their own tentative touches merely with thin shrieks or a dull, rumbling note?

"Lolita is like she was," remarked Alejandro Vigil to his sister on the morning of the Fourth of July, as they wandered around the common beyond the *arroyo*.

This space of desert had an air of festive import, for unwonted celebrations of the day were forward. A pavilion roofed with green boughs had been built for the occasion, on the skirts of an oval course which was to be the ground of

sundry feats of cowboy horsemanship, and of a foot-race between Pedro Cordova and the celebrated Valentino Cortés. There would be music, also, before long. Already the sound of a violin in process of tuning rang cheerfully through the open. The Declaration of Independence was to be read by the lawyer, who might be seen in the pavilion wiping his brow in anticipation of this exciting duty. A tribe of little girls, who were to sing national airs, were even now climbing into the muslin-draped seats of the lumber-wagon allotted them.

It was to be a great day for Aguilar! People from Santa Clara and Hastings and Gulnare were arriving in all manner of equipages. Mexican vehicles made a solid stockade along the west of the track. In the upper benches of the pavilion were ranged the flower and chivalry of the town—the families of the mine boss, the liveryman, the lawyer, the schoolmaster and several visiting personages. Jane, in her gray gown, was among them; beside her sat Lola, with Edith May Jonas.

"And did you think going away to school would make her different?" inquired Ana of her brother. "What should it do to her, 'Andro? Make her white like Miss Jonas? *Vaya!* Lola is only a Mexican!"

"She is not ashamed to be one, either!" cried Alejandro, accepting Ana's tacit imputation of some inferiority in their race. "And she is white enough," he added, regarding Lola as she sat smiling and talking, with the boughy eaves making little shadows across the rim of her broad straw hat.

"Who said she was ashamed?" asked Ana, with suspicious suavity. "You hear words that have not been spoken. I tell you of your faults, *hermano mio*, because I love you!"

Alejandro turned off in a sulk, and, leaving Ana to her own resources, went toward the place where the ponies and burros were tethered. It was comparatively lonely here, and Alejandro began to make friends with a disconsolate burro who was bewailing his fate in a series of lamentable sounds.

"Ha, *bribon!*" he said, pinching the burro's ears. "What is the use of wasting breath? *Sus, sus, amigo!*" The burro began to buck and Alejandro stepped back. As he did so he saw approaching him from behind the wagons a man in tattered garments, with a hat dragged over his eyes, and a great mass of furzy yellow beard.

"Here, you!" said this person. "Oh, you're Mexican! *Ya lo veo—*"

"I HOPED YOU'D BE ABLE TO LEND ME A HAND." *A Prairie Infanta*
"I HOPED YOU'D BE ABLE TO LEND ME A HAND."

"Me, I spik English all ri'!" retorted Alejandro, with dignity. "Spik English if you want. I it onnerstan'."

"I see. Well, look here!" He withdrew a folded paper from his pocket. "I want you to take this note over to that lady in the gray dress in the pavilion. *Sabe* 'pavilion'? All right! Don't let any one else see it. Just hand it to her quietly and tell her the gentleman's waiting."

Alejandro took the note reluctantly. Why should he put himself at the behest of this *vagabundo* who impeached his English? The man, however, had an eye on him. It was an eye which Alejandro felt to be impelling. He decided to take the note to the lady in gray.

Jane, as Alejandro smuggled the paper into her hand, caught a glimpse of the writing and felt her heart sink. Lola and Edith May Jonas were whispering together. They had not noticed Alejandro.

"The man is waiting," said the boy, in her ear.

Jane touched Lola. "Keep my seat, dear," she said. "Some one wants to speak to me." And she followed Alejandro across the field.

Alejandro's *vagabundo* came forward to meet her with an air of light cordiality. His voice was the voice which had greeted her first from the steps of the prairie-schooner in which Lola's mother lay dead.

"It's me!" conceded Mr. Keene, pleasantly. "In rather poor shape, as you see. It's always darkest before dawn! You're considerable changed, ma'am—and to the better. I would hardly have known you. Is that girl in the big white hat Lola? Well, well! Now, ma'am I'll tell you why I'm here."

He proceeded to speak of an opportunity of immediate fortune which was open to him, after prolonged disaster, if only the sum of five hundred dollars might be forthcoming. A friend of his in Pony Gulch had sent him glowing reports of the region. "All I want is a grub-stake," said Mr. Keene, "and I'm sure to win!"

"I haven't that much money in the world!" said Jane.

Keene sighed. "Well, I hoped you'd be able to lend me a hand, but if you can't,

you can't! There seems to be nothing for me but to go back North, and try to earn something to start on. I guess it'd be well for me to take Lola along. She's nearly grown now, and they need help the worst kind in the miners' boarding-house where I stay up in Cripple. I told the folks that keep it—I owe 'em considerable—that I'd bring back my daughter with me to assist 'em in the dining-room, and they said all right, that'd suit 'em. Wages up there are about the highest thing in sight. Equal to the altitude. And it'll give me a chance to look round."

Jane was staring at him. "You would do that?" she breathed. "You'd take that delicate girl up there to wait on a lot of rough miners? I've worked for her and loved her and sheltered her from everything! She's not fit for any such life! She sha'n't go!"

Keene had been touched at first. At Jane's last assertion, however, he began to look sulky.

"Well, I guess it's for me to say what she shall do!" he signified. "I guess it's not against the law or the prophets for a daughter to assist her father when he's in difficulties. And Lola'll recognize her duty. I'll just go over yonder to the pavilion, ma'am, and see what she says."



DESTINY PRESSES



CHAPTER FIVE

DESTINY PRESSES

Jane stood confounded. Her aghast mind, following Mr. Keene's project, seemed to see him rakishly ascending the pavilion steps, among a wondering throng, and making way to Lola as she sat, happy and honored, with her friends. Jane had a sharp prevision of Lola's face when her father should appear before her, so different from the tender ideal of him which she had cherished, so intent upon himself, so bent upon shattering with his first word to his child all those visions of unselfish kindness and generosity which had made her thoughts of him beautiful.

Lola would go with him. She would rise and leave her home, friends and happy prospects to follow him to whatever life he might judge best, however rough, however wild. In ordinary circumstances Jane could not deny to herself that this course would be the right course for a daughter; that such an one would do well to succor a father's failings, to add hope to his despondency and love to the mitigation of his trials. But Mr. Keene was not despondent, nor were his trials of a sort which might not easily be tempered by something like industry on his own part. He was frankly idle. He loved better than simple work the precarious excitement of prospecting—an occupation which, except in isolated and accidental instances, cannot be pursued to any good save with the aid of science and capital.

Camp life might not be bad for Mr. Keene; but that it would be good for a girl so young and sensitive to every impression as Lola, Jane doubted.

"I got to consider what's best for her," thought Jane, while Keene himself was beginning once more to sympathize with the silent misery in her face.

"I never had no idea you thought so much of Lola!" he exclaimed. "She wasn't the kind of child a stranger'd be apt to get attached to. I hope you don't think I'd do anything mean? That isn't my style! All is, I'm her father, and a father ought to have some say-so. Now aint that true, Miss Combs?"

Jane was thinking. "Would three hundred dollars help you out?" she demanded.

"I've got that much. I've been saving it toward Lola's schooling next year."

"What, have you been sending her to pay-school?" Keene looked surprised, and unexpectedly his eyes began to dim. "I'd have been a better man if I'd had any luck," he said, with apparent irrelevance.

Jane made no moral observations. She did not point out that a man's virtue ought not to depend altogether on his income. She said simply, "Will that much do?"

Mr. Keene, controlling his emotion, said it would, and they parted upon the understanding that they should meet at Lynn two days later, for the transference of the fund.

Then Jane plodded wearily back to the pavilion, and mutely watched the cowponies rush and buck around the course. She beheld Valentino Cortés, a meteoric vision in white cotton trousers, girdled in crimson, flash by to victory amid the wild "*Vivas!*" of his compatriots. She saw the burros trot past in their little dog-trot of a race.

But although she essayed a pleased smile at these things, and listened with enforced attention to the speeches and the music, there were present with her foreboding and unrest. For usually the Dauntless pursued no vigorous labor in summer, but merely kept the water out of its slope and "took up" and sold to various smelters such "slack" as it had made during the winter. There would be no royalties coming in to Jane, since no coal would be mined; and presently it would be September, and no money for Lola's school.

So Jane's cares were thickening. Not only did the mine soon enter on its summer inactivity, but worse befell. The mine boss came one day to tell Jane that, because of a certain "roll" in the east entries, it was deemed inadvisable farther to work these levels.

"The coal over there makes too much slack, anyhow," said the mine boss, "so we intend hereafter to stick to the west." Whereupon, unaware of leaving doom behind him, he went cheerfully away.

Jane's horizons had always lain close about her. She had never been one to scent trouble afar off. To be content in the present, to be trustful in the future, was her unformulated creed. And now, as she mused, it came to her swiftly that she need not despair so long as she had over her head a substantial dwelling. This abode, in its mere cubhood, had afforded her financial succor. It would be queer if such

an office were beyond it now. Only this time the doctor must not be approached; his reasoning before had been too searching.

Jane therefore wrote to a lawyer in Trinidad, authorizing him to obtain for her a certain amount of money. She felt assured of the outcome of this letter, but presently there came a reply which stupefied her. The lawyer wrote that there happened to be in court a suit concerning the boundaries of an old Spanish land grant, which, it was claimed, extended north of the Purgatory River, and touched upon her own and other neighboring property. The lawyer wrote that matters would probably be settled in favor of the present landholders, but that, so long as litigation pended, all titles were so clouded as to make any questions of loans untenable.

Jane felt as if a ruthless destiny were pressing her home. She looked at Lola, and her heart sank at the girl's air of springlike happiness and hope. Must these sweet hours be broken upon with a tale of impending penury?

Lola of late had seemed gentler, and the silent, stony moods were leaving her, together with her childish impulse toward sudden anger. So much Jane saw. Lola herself was sensible of a changing sway of feeling which she did not seek to understand. To read of a noble deed brought swift tears to her eyes in these days of mutation, and stirred her to emulative dreams.

She did not know what power of action lay in her; but there seemed to be some vital promise in the eager essence of spirit which spread before her such visions of beautiful enterprise. Lola did not realize how favorable to ripening character was the atmosphere in which she lived. She could not yet know how she had been impressed by the simple page of plain, undramatic kindness and generosity which Jane's life opened daily to her eyes.

One day Jane spoke to her sadly.

"Lola," she said, "I'm afraid there won't be enough money to send you away to school this year."

"But papa never denies me anything, *tia*."

"I know, dear."

"How funny you say that! Is—has he—lost his money, *tia*? You're keeping something from me!"

"Lola," said Jane, in a moved voice, "I don't know a great deal about your father's means. I can't say they're less than they were; but there's reasons—why I'm afraid you can't—go to Pueblo this coming fall. No, Lola—don't ask me any questions—I can't speak out! I've done wrong! I can't say any more!" and to Lola's surprise she hurried out of the room.

Never before had Lola witnessed in Jane such confusion and distress. The sight bewildered and troubled her so sorely as for the moment to exclude from mind the bearing upon her own future of Jane's ambiguous, faltering words. Something was surely amiss; but the girl as yet fully realized only one fact—that tia, always so steadfast and strong and cheerful, had gone hastily from the room in the agitation of one who struggled with unaccustomed tears. Lola hesitated to follow Jane. Some inward prompting withheld her.

"She is like me," mused the girl. "She would rather be alone when anything troubles her. I will wait. Maybe she will come back soon and tell me everything."

Outside it was as dry and bright as ever. The Peaks stood bald and pink against the flawless sky. Over in the Vigil yard Lola saw the smaller Vigil boys lassoing one another with a piece of clothes-line, while, dozing over her sewing, Señora Vigil herself squatted in the doorway. Propped against the house-wall, Diego Vigil sat munching a corn-cake and frugally dispersing crumbs to the magpies which hovered about him in short, blue-glancing flights.

Diego was two years old—quite old enough to doff his ragged frock for the "pantalones" which his mother was still working upon, after weeks of listless endeavor. The señora's thread was long enough to reach half-way across the yard, and it took time and patience to set a stitch. For very weariness the señora nodded over her labor, and made many little appeals to the saints that they might guide aright the tortuous course of her double cotton.

"Life is hard!" sighed the señora, pausing over a knot in her endless thread. "Ten children keep the needle hot. Ay, but this knot is a hard one! There are evil spirits about."

She laid down her work to wipe her eyes, and, observing two of her sons grappling in fraternal war at the house corner, she arose to cuff each one impartially, exclaiming, "*Ea, muchachos!* You fight before my very eyes, eh? Take that! and that!" Waddling reluctantly back to her sewing, she saw Lola standing in the white-pillared porch of the big adobe house beyond, and a gleam

of inspiration crossed the señora's dark, fat face.

"She shall take out this knot," thought Señora Vigil. "Señorita!" she called. "Come here, I pray you! There is a tangle in my thread and all my girls are away!"

And, as Lola came across the field, she added, "I am dead of loneliness, Lolita. Ana and Benita and Ines and Marina and Alejandro are gone up the Trujillo to the wedding-party of their cousin, Judita Vasquez. To-morrow she marries the son of Juan Montoya. *Hola!* She does well to get so rich a one! He has twenty goats, a cow and six dogs. His house has two rooms and a shed. They will live splendid! It is to be hoped these earthly grandeurs will not turn Judita's thoughts from heaven!" The señora shook her head cheerfully. "My Ana told Judita she ought to be thankful so plain a face as hers should find favor with José Montoya. My Ana is full of loving thoughts! She never lets her friends forget what poor, sinning mortals they are!"

"Indeed, no!" agreed Lola, feelingly, while she smoothed out the thread.

"Take a stitch or two that I may be sure the cotton is really all right!" implored the señora. "Yes, truly Ana is a maid of rare charms. When she marries I shall be desolate!"

"Is there talk of that?" asked Lola, with interest. Ana was now sixteen, and was nearly as heavy as her mother, and much more sedate. In true Mexican fashion the look of youth had left her betimes, and her swarthy plumpness had early hardened and settled to a look of maturity to which future years could add little.

"There is Juan Suarez," said the señora, in a mysterious whisper, "and if I would I could mention others; for, as you know, Lolita, my Ana is very beautiful."

Lola maintained a judicious silence, and the señora continued placidly, "Though she is my child, I am bound to admit it. Her nature is a rare one, too. And when suitors throng about her she only shakes her head. She is lofty. She will not listen. 'No, *caballeros*,' she says, 'I have regarded your corral. It is too empty.' And one by one they go away weeping, the poor caballeros! She is cruel, my Ana, being so beautiful! Me, I own it—though my heart aches to see the caballeros shedding tears!"

Lola, finding her own face expanding irresistibly, bent lower over Diego's small trousers. The picture of Ana, standing disdainful among the sorrowing caballeros

and waving off their pleas with an imperious hand, was one to bring a smile to lips of deadliest gravity. Ana, with her hands on her broad hips, short and thick as a squat brown jug with its handles akimbo,—Ana, with her great clay-colored face and tiny, glittering eyes, with her thick, pale lips and coarse, black hair,—surely none but a mother could view in Ana such charms as bedewed Señora Vigil's eyes only to think of!

"To see unhappiness is a very blade in my heart!" sighed Señora Vigil, recovering herself. "Do not make the thread short, Lolita! No, no! I shall have to thread the needle again before the week is out, if you do. Ah, yes! I wept much the day when you were lost, and Bev Gribble, the vaquero, brought you home on his horse. 'Twas long ago. And now you are grown tall and can play the piano. Shall you go on fretting your poor head with more schooling, *chiquita*?"

"DO NOT MAKE THE THREAD SHORT LOLITA!" *A Prairie Infanta*
"DO NOT MAKE THE THREAD SHORT LOLITA!"

At this question Lola's mind sharply reverted to the distressing scene which had by a moment preceded her neighbor's summons. There had been in Jane's words a broken, yet oddly definite, assertion of impending poverty. She had spoken of the unlikelihood of another year in Pueblo for Lola, and the girl for the first time began to realize this fact with a sinking of the heart. Her voice had a tremor as she said hesitatingly, "I'm afraid I can't go back to Pueblo this fall."

"Not go back? The Jonas señorita goes back! Why not you? Has thy father lost money? I am thy friend, Lolita. Tell me!"

"I can't tell what I don't know, señora. I don't know if he has lost money. *Tia* only said that—that I mightn't go back to school. She didn't say why, but she will, no doubt."

Señora Vigil's eyes narrowed. She recalled certain rumors long afloat in town as to Jane's extravagance, and the inability of her means to such luxuries as pianos. Also, although half-consciously, the señora's inner memory dwelt upon that corner of her back yard which it had been Jane's sad fortune to take away.

The señora was not unkind or vindictive, but she had a mouse-trap sort of mind which only occasionally was open to the admittance of ideas, but which snapped fast forever upon such few notions as wandered into it. Having once accepted the belief that Jane was not averse to snatch at any good in her way, even if it belonged to another, the señora found herself still under the sway of this opinion.

"The big house of Mees Combs has cost too much!" she asserted. "Where has the money come from? From the coal? Some, perhaps, yes; but for all of the great house, ah, it cannot be! Every one has been saying there was not enough coal in her tract to pay for what she has done; and new debts press, doubtless. What could be easier than to take the money of thy father? I tell you, Lolita, that you cannot go to school because Mees Combs has had to use your money to pay them! Eh, but your father will be mad! He is not working himself to a bone that strangers should build themselves fine houses! My Pablo said a little time ago that people said your father's riches were going astray. Me, I did not listen. Now I know he spoke true." The señora's tongue wagged on in a diatribe of accusation and pity.

Lola let the sewing fall. Against her stoutest effort there prevailed a vivid remembrance of Jane's manner and statements, of Jane's self-impeachment and agitation, and, try as hard as she could to forget them, the words which Jane had used kept coming to mind. "I have done wrong!" Had not Jane said this? Had she not covered her face—could it be *guiltily*—and gone away?

"No," said Lola, hoarsely, half to herself, half to her hearer, "it isn't true! You make mistakes, Señora Vigil! Do you hear? You make mistakes!"

"Alas, for thy soft heart!" moaned the señora. "Thou art changed much! Me, I would not be hard on Mees Combs, though her sin is clear. Who am I to judge? Nay, even I try to forget that me she has also despoiled; that she took a corner of our back yard, and plants corn in it to this day! I am all for forgiving. But the saints are not so easy!" said the señora, unconscious of any disparagement to the saints, and referring merely to a judicial quality in them.

Lola was not listening. She had a burning wish to escape from the soft buzzing of the señora's words, which, a velvety, sting-infested swarm, whirled around her bee-like, seeking hive and home.

"Don't think I believe anything against *tia*!" she heard herself saying sternly, as the gate slipped from her impetuous hand and she rushed away, the quarry of emotions which no speed, however swift, could outdistance.



BEWILDERING SATISFACTION

CHAPTER SIX

BEWILDERING SATISFACTION

Lola found herself walking up the cañon, between the rocky hills beside the dry *arroyo*. Summer dust whitened the road, and rose to her tread in alkaline clouds. It was warm, too, under the remorseless Colorado sun, but nothing touched Lola. She was struggling with a thing that was half anguish and half anger, and that lifted upon her a face more and more convincing in its ugliness.

It seemed impossible to doubt that Jane had indeed worked the wrong of which Señora Vigil accused her—although Jane's own word, and no word of the señora's, bore this conviction to Lola's breast. Jane had faltered in the trust which she had assumed, and now, confronted with the embarrassment of facing Lola's father in a plain confession of her delinquency, she hesitated and was miserable and afraid and reluctant. Rather than state her situation she would even keep Lola from school.

"It isn't that I care for that!" throbbed Lola. It was not the stoppage of her own course, indeed, although this was a misery, but the loss of trust in all humanity which distrust of Jane seemed to the girl to inflict upon her. If Jane were not true, none could be; and the suspicion and unrest rioted back again to the bosom which belief in Jane and the world had softened and calmed.

There was nothing to do. Lola's father could easily repair Jane's shortcoming, but not without having an explanation of the facts of the case. The facts of the case he must never know. Even in her pain and indignation, Lola never made a question of this.

"Suppose it is true!" thought the girl, suddenly overcome by a new tide of feeling. "What am I blaming her for? She would never have fixed the house or bought things for herself! She did it all for me. And although I would rather have gone to school than have the piano, am I to blame *tia* for not knowing this? She never thought where she was coming out. She just went on and on. And now that there is no more money, she is frightened and sorry and ashamed. She has done everything for me—even herself she has fairly made over to please me. Poor *tia*!

Oh, ungrateful that I am to have been thinking unkindly of her!"

Suddenly all the bitterness left her, like an evil thing exorcised by the first word of pitying tenderness. Tears stole sweetly to her eyes. Peace came upon her shaken spirit. The day had been full of strange revelations; and now it showed her how good for the human heart it is to be able to pity weakness, to love, to forbear and to forgive.

In the strange peacefulness which brooded over her she walked home between the piñon-sprinkled hills, where doves were crooning and the far bleating of an upland herd echoed among the barren ridges. She reflected quietly upon meeting Jane without a hint of any shadow in her face, but in such sunniness of humor as should gladden and reassure. And Jane would never dream of the dark hour which had visited her child. She would never know that any slightest thought, unnurtured in affection, had risen to cast between them the least passing shadow; although from Lola's heart might never pass away that little, inevitable sense of loss which those know whose love survives a revelation of weakness in one believed to be strong.

As she came in sight of the hollow roof of the Dauntless she saw the doctor riding toward her.

"Hello!" he said. "What have you been doing up the cañon? Building Spanish castles?"

"Watching Spanish castles fall," said Lola, smiling. "What would you do," she went on lightly, "if you had planned something worth while, and it became impossible?"

The doctor looked down at her young, questioning face. It was grave, although she spoke gaily, and looked so mere a slip of girlhood with her brown throat and cheek and lifted black-lashed eyes.

Unexpectedly the doctor remembered when he, too, had meant to do things that should be "worth while." He thought of Berlin and Vienna and Paris, and the clinics where he had meant to acquire such skill as, aiding his zeal, should write him among the first physicians of his day. And here he was, practising among a few Mexicans and miners, tending their bruises, doling them out quinine, and taking pay of a dollar a month from every man, sick or well, enrolled on the mine books, and frequently getting nothing at all from such as were not therein enrolled. Never a volume of his had startled the world of science. Surgery was

bare of his exploits. Medical annals knew him not. All he had thought to do was undone by him; and yet here he was, contented, happy and healthy in a realm of little duties. In so unpretentious a life as this he had found satisfaction; and for the first time it came upon him that thus simply and calmly satisfaction comes to the great mass of men who have nothing to do with glory or hope of glory.

"When great things become impossible, what would you do?" said Lola, tossing back her long, braided hair.

"I would do little things," said the doctor, with whimsical soberness.

An unusual equipage was turning in from the Trinidad road—an equipage on which leather and varnish shone, and harness brasses flashed, while the dust rolled pompously after it in a freakish fantasy of postilions and outriders. The driver made a great business of his long whip. The horses were sleek and brown. Altogether the vehicle had a lordly air, easily matching that of the individual sitting alone on the purple cushions—a man whose features were not very clear at the distance, although the yellowness of his beard, the glitter of his studded shirt-front, and whole consequential, expansive effect recalled to the doctor's mind an image of the past, less ornate, indeed, and affluent, but of similar aspect. He narrowed his eyes, staring townward over Lola's head, and wondering if yonder princely personage might not in very truth be Lola's father.

But the girl's eyes were bent upon the ground. She did not see the equipage or the man on the purple cushions.

"You do little things?" she said, raising her eyes gravely to the doctor's. He had always seemed to her the man who did great things. "I will try," she added, seriously.

While she talked with the doctor the world seemed to Lola a pleasant place, with a golden light on its long levels and a purple glamour on its hills. And after he had left her, she went with a light heart down the unpaved street that she had lately traversed in unseeing bitterness. The very hum of the mine cars was full of good cheer; children splashed joyously in the ditch; magpies gossiped; the blacksmith-shop rang with a merry din of steel.

Set emerald-like in the yellow circle of the prairies, the green young cottonwood grove about Jane's house shone fresh and vivid. At the white gate a carriage waited—a strange carriage which Lola scrutinized wonderingly as she approached. With delighted eyes she noted the purple cushions and the satin

coats of the horses. Who could have come? Whose voice was that which issued from the house in an unbroken monologue, genial, laughing, breathless?

Suddenly, as she mounted the porch steps, a persuasion of familiarity in those light accents overcame her. Could it be that her father had come at last? That, after all her waiting, she was to see him and talk with him and sob out on his breast her appreciation of his long labors in her behalf, his kindness, unselfishness and goodness?

She forgot that she had sometimes been hurt at his silence and absence. Her childhood swam before her; she recalled the sweetness of her mother's face, and in that memory he who awaited her in Jane's sitting-room gathered a graciousness which exalted him, as if he, too, had been dead and was alive again.

The talk broke off at her impetuous entrance. Upon a chair sat a man with a round and ruddy face, with bright blue eyes and a curling spread of yellow beard. Lola hesitated. She doubted if this richly arrayed, somewhat stout man could be the slim, boyish-looking father she remembered. Then the unalterable joyousness of his glance reassured her, and she rushed forward crying, "Oh, it's you! It's you!"

She had not noticed Jane, who sat opposite, mute and relaxed, like one in whom hope and resolution flag and fail; but Jane's deep eyes followed Lola's swift motion, and her look changed a little at the girl's air of eager joy. As she saw Lola fling herself upon his breast and cling there, she winced, and her heart yearned at the sight of a love which she had somehow failed to win with all her efforts, and which now she should never win, since Lola was about to leave her forever.

The hour so long dreaded by Jane seemed surely to have come at last—the hour of her child's departure. Forth to life's best and brightest Lola would go, as was meet. Happiness illimitable awaited the girl she had cherished. It was right that this should be so; yet, alas for the vast void gray of the empty heart which Lola would leave behind!

"Well, this is a kind of surprise!" said Mr. Keene, holding his daughter away for a better sight of her radiant face. "You are taller than I expected. She's got real Spanish eyes, aint she, Miss Combs? Like her mother's. The Keenes are all sandy. I'm not sure I'd have known you, Lola."

"Oh, papa, you've been away so long! You've been kind and good to me—yet—"

"We'll have to let bygones be bygones," declared her father, gratified to learn that she had thought him good and kind—for this point had rather worried him. "I've felt at times as if I hadn't done you just right."

"Don't say so, papa!"

"Well, I won't," agreed Mr. Keene, willingly. "Only I'm glad to find you haven't cherished anything against me for leaving you like I did. When I persuaded Miss Jane to take you, I couldn't foresee what hard luck I was going to strike, could I?" As he paused he caught Jane's eye upon him in a significance which he did not understand.

"She doesn't know," said Jane, in a sort of whisper, indicating Lola, whose back was toward her.

"Doesn't know what?" asked Mr. Keene, unwitting and bewildered. "Of course she doesn't know all I suffered, what with taking up one worthless claim after another month in and out—if you mean that! Why, I actually thought one time of giving up prospecting and settling down to day's work! Yes'm! It was sure enough that grub-stake you gave me last Fourth of July that brought me my first luck! I put it right into Pony Gulch and my pick struck free-milling ore the first blow! Some of the stuff runs ninety dollars to the ton and some higher. I've already had good offers for my claim from an English syndicate, but I haven't decided to sell. Seems queer it should be such a little while ago that I called you out of that pavilion, Miss Jane, and told you what a fix I was in! You remember you said you hadn't the money—and then afterward you turned in, real friendly, and raised me what I needed."

Lola exclaimed, "You were here in town on the Fourth of July? O papa! Why didn't I see you? Oh—what—"

"You came near enough to seeing me," laughed Mr. Keene, "and to going away with me, too! I'm glad things happened like they did. That boarding-house was no place for you, Lola. I realize it now! But I was pushed to the wall. But for Miss Jane's helping me out, I'd have had to take you away, sure enough! She told you, didn't she?"

"Told me? Told me what?"

"Why, about my idea of getting you that situation up in Cripple? They needed help bad up in the boarding-house where I lived, and I'd made 'em a promise to

fetch you. It was easy work in the dining-room, and right good pay."

"And—and—*tia* fixed it—so—you decided to leave me here?"

"That's what she did! I'm mighty glad of it, too, for I see you're not cut out for any such work. I'm not forgetting what I owe Miss Jane. She's been a good friend to us both. I was sorry to hear down in Trinidad about your mortgaging your house that time, Miss Combs. Yes, I'm downright ashamed to think I've let you pay me month by month for Lola's services, when really you were out of pocket for her schooling and all. But I didn't realize how things were, and now we'll level things up."

"My services!" Lola sprang to her feet. Everything was clear enough now. No need to summon charity for Jane's shortcomings! No need to overlook, to palliate, to forgive! Jane's fault had been merely too lavish a generosity, too large a love. There had been no question with her of property. She had simply given everything she had to a forsaken, ungrateful child—home, food, raiment, schooling.

These were the facts. The flood of unutterable feeling which swept over Lola as the knowledge of it all flashed upon her was something deeper than thought, something more moving than any mere matter of perception. A passionate gratitude throbbed in her heart, confused with a passionate self-reproach. She desired to speak, but somehow her lips refused utterance. She trembled and turned white, and stood wringing her hands.

"I was always a generous man," said Mr. Keene, lost to his daughter's looks in pleasant introspection, "and I mean to do right by you, Miss Combs. You'll find I'm not ungrateful. Lola'll always write to you, too, wherever we are. I'm thinking some of Paris. How'd that suit you, Lola? A person can pick up a mighty good time over there, they say. And bonnets—how many bonnets can you manage, Lola? Why, she looks kind of stunned, don't she, Miss Combs?"

Jane was gazing at the girl. She knew well with what force the blow so long averted had fallen at last. In her own breast she seemed to feel the pain with which Lola had received her father's revelations.

"Lola," she cried, leaning forward, "don't feel so, my lamb! I'm sorry you had to know this. I tried hard to keep it from you. But it's all out now, and you must try to bear it. Your father don't realize—he hasn't meant to hurt you. He's fond of you, dearie. And he's going to take you to foreign lands, and you can see all the

great pictures and statues, and have a chance to learn all the things you spoke of—designing and such. Don't look so, my child!"

Mr. Keene began to feel highly uncomfortable. Evidently, in his own phrase, he had "put his foot into it;" he had said too much. He had disclosed fallacies in himself of which Lola, it seemed, knew nothing. And now Lola, who had received him with such flattering warmth, was turning her face away and looking strange and stern and stricken.

Nor did Miss Combs seem fairly to have grasped the liberality of his intentions. She, too, had a curious air of not being exalted in any way by so much good fortune. She appeared to be engaged solely in trying to reconcile Lola to a situation which Mr. Keene considered dazzling.

Altogether it was very disturbing, especially to a man who did not understand what he had done to bring about so unpleasant a turn. He was about to ask some explanation, when Lola said slowly, "And you, *tia*, you have done so much for me that you have nothing left? Is that so?"

"I don't need much, Lola. I'll be all right. Don't you worry."

"You won't mind living here alone and poor?"

"She won't be poor, Lola," interpolated Mr. Keene. "Haven't I said so? And you can come and see her, you know. Everything will come out all right."

Lola turned a little toward him, and he was glad to see that her eyes were soft and gentle and that the stern look had disappeared. "Yes," she said, "it will come out all right for *tia*, because I shall be here to see that it does."

She caught her breath and added, "You couldn't think I should be willing to go away and leave her like this? Even if I hadn't heard how much more she has done for me than I dreamed? For I have been ignorant till now of many things; but I shouldn't have forgotten that she loved me and had reared me and cared for me when there was no one else. No, father, no! And now that you have let me find out what I owe her, do you think I sha'n't remember it always with every beat of my heart? Oh, yes—although I can never repay her for all she has suffered in keeping me from knowing things which would have hurt me too much when I was little and—and could not make allowances—as I can now. My home is here. My heart is here, father. You must let me stay!"

She had taken Jane's hand and was holding it closely—that happy hand which

for very blessedness and amazement trembled more than her own. And so holding it, she cried, "*Tia*, you want me to stay, don't you? Say yes! Tell him I may stay! It is my home where you are. And oh, how different I will be!"

Jane, listening, could only press those slender, clinging fingers in speechless comfort, and look up silently into the imploring eyes of her child—eyes filled with tears and love. A moment of silence ensued. Then, clearing his throat suddenly, Mr. Keene rose and walked to the window.

"Lola," he said presently, turning to face the two others, "I don't blame you one bit. Miss Jane's done a heap more for you than I had any notion. 'Tisn't only that she's done all you say, but she's raised you to be a girl I'm proud of—a right-minded, right-hearted girl. I never thought how it would look for you to be willing to rush off at the first word and leave behind you the person you owed most to in the world! But I'm free to say I wouldn't have liked it when I come to think of it. I wouldn't have felt proud of you like I do now. Knocking around the foot-hills has shaken me up pretty well, but I know what's right as well as any man. There's things in my life I'd like to forget; but they say it's never too late to mend. And I have hopes of myself when I see what a noble girl my daughter's turned out."

""TIA, YOU ARE A LADY OF FORTUNE!"" *A Prairie Infanta*
""TIA, YOU ARE A LADY OF FORTUNE!""

He put his handkerchief away and came and stood before them, adding, "I haven't had a chance to finish my other story. When Miss Jane gave me that grub-stake she didn't know, I reckon, that half of anything I might strike would belong to her—that in law, grub-stakes always means halves! But I never had any intention of not dealing fair and square. So when I said she wasn't going to be poor, I meant it! For half 'the Little Lola' belongs to her. And if she's willing, I'll just run the mine for the next year or so, and after that we can talk about traveling."

Mr. Keene, during the past hour, had been made sensible of certain deficiencies in himself. No one had accused him or reproached him, yet he felt chagrined as he saw his own conduct forcibly contrasted with the conduct of a different sort. But now, as his daughter sent a beaming glance toward him, his spirits rose again, and he began once more to regard himself hopefully, as a man who, despite some failings, was honest in the main, and generous and well-meaning.

"Oh, how glad I am!" said Lola. "*Tia, tia*, do you hear? You are a lady of fortune

and must have a velvet gown! And, oh, *tia*, a tall, silver comb in your hair!" She dropped a sudden kiss down upon the smooth, brown bands, and added in a deeper tone, "But nothing, nothing, can make you better or dearer!"

Jane smiled uncertainly as if she were in a dream. Could this unlooked-for, bewildering satisfaction be indeed real, and not a visionary thing which would presently fade? She looked about. There was actuality in the scene. The cottonwoods rustled crisply, Alejandro Vigil was calling to his dog, and the tinkle of his herd stole softly upon her ear. The great hills rose majestic as of old upon the glorious western sky; the plains stretched off in silvery, sea-like waves to the very verge of the world. And hard by many a familiar thing spoke of a past which she knew; pots of geraniums, muslin shades and open piano. There, too, was Mr. Keene, sitting at ease in his chair; there was Lola, bending over her in smiling reassurance. And finally, there was Tesuque himself regarding her from his shelf in an Olympian calm which no merely mortal emotion could touch or stir. Tesuque's little bowl was still empty, but in his adobe glance Jane suddenly grew aware how truly her own cup overflowed.

[THE END]



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Transcriber's Notes

Page [43](#): Changed Sanish to Spanish:
(who knew Sanish best, being a bronco from the south).

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