

Clara & Edna Ferber

waiting to be moulded into men and women? How soon too many of the children who have been spoiled, homes graduate at maturity in the divorce court, fall or insane asylum.

Men are trained to a trade. Mothers and all who have to do with the training of children should also be trained. There is a vocation.

This helpful book of 278 pages is a real home-friend for all mothers, especially young mothers.

CHAPTER XVII—(Continued)

When the green car stopped before the Old Folks' Home, I was in terrific mood. I had bathed, donned clean linen and a Dutch-necked gown. The result was most soul-satisfying. My spirits rose unaccountably. Even the sight of Von Gerhardt, looking troubled and dour, did not quiet them. We darted away, out along the lake front, past the toll gate, to the bay road stretching in two plaques, one above the other. The water was alive with swift-moving motor cars swarming like twentieth-century pilgrims toward the mecca of cool breezes and comfort. The lights of the automobiles, comfortable family cars; trim little roadsters; noisy runabouts; No. 1 boat-buffers; the hum of the engine, the hum of the motor, had indeed descended upon the world. There was only a hum, a rush, a roar, as car after car swept on.

"Home" homes nestled among the trees near the lake. Through the branches one caught occasional gleams of silvery water. The rustle of cool air, the hair, slid down between my collar and the back of my neck, and I was grandly content.

"Even though you are going to sail away, and even though you have the grump, and refuse to talk, and scowl like a jabbawjock, this is as good a time as any to tell you that I love you!"

"Behute!" Von Gerhardt's tone was solemn.

Would you be faintly interested in knowing that the book is finished? "So? That is well. You were wearying yourself thin over it. It was then quickly perfected."

"I groaned. 'I turn cold when I think of it. The last chapters got away from me completely. They lacked punch, and I know it. Von Gerhardt considered that a moment, as I wickedly had intended that he should. Then—"The punch? What is it?"

"Obligingly I elucidated. 'A book may be written in flawless style, with perfect punctuation, but it lacks that pillar and climax, and a lot of it may be as good as dead. It lacks that pillar and convincing quality poetry, which never have been written. It may be as good as dead, but it will live as a classic. You will never see it advertised on the book review page of the Saturday papers, nor will it be so absorbed in its contents that he will be taken past his corner.'"

Von Gerhardt looked troubled. "But the literary value? Does that not enter?"

"I don't aim to contribute to the literary uplift," I assured him. "All my life I have cherished my own ambitions. One of them is to write a successful book, and the other to learn to whistle through my teeth—this way, you know, as the gamblers do it. But I still have hopes of the book."

Whereupon Von Gerhardt, after a moment's stiff suppression, went to one of his heart-warming roars.

"Thanks," said I. "Now tell me the important news."

His face grew serious in an instant. "I'm not sure, but I think I can tell you more about the book. Not so flippant, however, small one. The time is just what I can deceive me with your nonsense."

"Surely you would not have me take myself seriously! That's another debt I owe my Irish forefathers. They could laugh at me in the very teeth of a potato crop failure. And let me tell you, that takes some sense of humor. The book is my pet, my pride, my life. I will not let it be under a drug, with a knot or two taken in my belt. But I'll squeeze a smile out of the corner of my eye. If it succeeds, I'll succeed. Oh, Ernst, if it succeeds!"

"Then, Kinchen?"

"That it means that I may have a little bit of jam on my bread and butter. It won't mean money—at least, I don't think it will. A first book never does. But it will mean something sold to stand on. It will be a real beginning—a breathing space—time in which to accomplish something else, and to enjoy the freedom of my own freedom from this treadmill."

"Stop!" cried Von Gerhardt, sharply. "Then, as I stared in surprise, I do ask your pardon, but I am again running. But in me there is a queer vein of German superstition that disapproves of air castles. Such ein-bilden, we call it."

"The lights of the pavilion twinkled just ahead. The green car poked its nose up the path between rows of empty machines. At last it drew up, panting, before a macabre and queerly smart, cream-colored runabout. We left it there and walked up the light-flooded path.

We found a table within the glow of the pavilion lights, but still so near the lake that we could hear the water splashing and the clatter of the sand. A waiter brought things to eat, and we made brave efforts to appear hungry and hearty, but my high spirits were frankly distraught. One of the women singers appeared suddenly in the doorway of the pavilion, then stole down the path toward the waiting machine. There in the darkness I buried my shamed face in my hands and prayed for the tears that would come.

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coming to the edge of the walk as I stepped from the automobile. "Was you expectin' the landlady?"

"I don't know just whom I expected. I'm nervous, think and you startled me. Dr. Von Gerhardt was taken back for a moment, weren't you, Doctor?"

Von Gerhardt laughed ruefully. "Frankly, yes. It is not early. And visitors at this hour."

"What in the world is it, Blackie? I put in. 'Don't tell me that Norberg has been seen with one of his Swedish aspirators at this time of night.'"

Blackie struck a match and held it for an instant so that the flare of it illuminated his face as he lighted his cigarette. There was no laughter in the deep-set black eyes.

"What is it Blackie?" I asked again. The horror of what Von Gerhardt had told me made the prospect of any lesser trial the welcome relief it seemed.

"I got 't talk to you for a minute. Praps Von Gerhardt'd better hear it, too. I telephoned you an hour ago. Tried to get you, but you weren't in. Waited here ever since. Got a parlor, or something, where a guy can talk."

I led the way indoors. The first floor seemed deserted. The hall and friendly boarding-house parlor was unoccupied, and one dim gas jet did duty as illumination.

"Bring in the set pieces," muttered Blackie, as he turned two corners and jets flaring high. "This parlor just yells for a funeral."

Von Gerhardt was frowning. "Mrs. Orme is not well. She has been having a shock—some startling news—concerning—"

"Her husband?" inquired Blackie, curiously.

I started up with a cry. "How could you know?"

A look of relief came into Blackie's face. "That being a little, now listen, kid. An' w'en I get through, remember I'm there with the little helpin' mitt. Have a cigarette, Doc?"

No, said Von Gerhardt, shortly. Blackie's strange black eyes were fastened on my face, and I saw an expression of pity in their depths as he began to talk.

"I was up at the Press Club tonight. Dropped in for a minute or two, like I always do on the rounds. The place sounded kind of still, you know, the steps, and I wondered where all the boys was. Looked into the billiard room—nothin' doin'. Poked my head out at the bar, nothin' there. Went into the read' room—empty. Well, I steered for the dining room, an' there was the bunch. An' just as I come in they give a roar, and I started to investigate. Up against the fireplace with one hand in his pocket, and the other hanging careless like on the mantel, stood a man—stranger to me. He was a kind of low, and quiet, but his off his words like a Englishman. An' the boys, they was starin' with their eyes, an' their mouths, and their hands, and their feet, and their hips an' cigars go dead in their hands, while he talked. Talk! Sa-a-y, girl, that guy, he could talk the leads right out of the book. He was a good talker, catch his name. Tall, thin, neatly lookin' chap, with the whitest teeth you ever saw, an' eyes—well, his eyes was a good lookin' blue. He had a little fine ash over the red, just walth' for a sudden pull 't make 't glow."

"Peter?" I moaned, and buried my face in my hands. Von Gerhardt put a quick hand on my arm. But I shook it off. "I'm not going to faint," I said. "I'm not going to faint. I don't do anything silly. I want to think. I want to—"

"Go on, Blackie."

"Just a minute," interrupted Von Gerhardt. "He knows where Mrs. Orme is living?"

"I'm coming 't that," returned Blackie, tranquilly. "Though for the moment, I'm not sure. I didn't don't know. I told him later that she was takin' a vacation up at her folks' in Michigan."

"Where a New York Press Club button, this guy did. I asked one of the boys standin' on the outer edge of the fire, and he said, 'He was a good talker, but he only says: 'Shut up Blackie! Listen. He's seen every darn thing in the world.' Well, I listened. He was 'cragin' the watermelon. He was just talkin'. Seems like he'd been war correspondent in the Boer war, and the Spanish-American, an' Gaius, and he was a good talker. He had any big words, either, an' I thought his eyes looked somethin' like those of the Black Cat up on the mantel just over her head. He was a good talker, when the electric lights is turned on inside the ugly thing. Well, every time he showed signs of stoppin', one of the boys would say, 'He was a good talker, but he only says: 'Shut up Blackie! Listen. He's seen every darn thing in the world.' Well, I listened. He was 'cragin' the watermelon. He was just talkin'. 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