



What have they got that's so wonderful?
Their father is a loafer, and their
mother hasn't any pride, and they bring
their groceries home in a goat wagon.

Indian Swing

ROMA ROSE

My father heard through the Bank that they were going to reopen the Warrenby house, and when he told my mother she was all excited and pleased. "Let me see," she said, shaking back her sleeve ruffles and putting her forearms on the table, "that will be Ceelia, the granddaughter, won't it? I remember the time I saw her — she was ten and I was eight, and they served green ices. I've heard she has several children now. Arthur," she said to me, "I want you to be very nice to them. We'll have them over soon to a nice party on the lawn."

"How old are they — big enough to play baseball?" I asked, but my mother didn't know.

The Warrenby house was next to ours. It had an iron fence and an iron deer, and ours had a stone fence and a lily pond. But nobody had lived in the Warrenby house for as long as I could remember. My father didn't allow me to go in there because it was Private Property. Anyway, it was a dark spooky place with shutters on the windows.

The day they moved in I went over to see what size they were, but I didn't tell

my mother anything about going. I knew she wouldn't let me go so soon. When you're thirteen years old you have a pretty good idea of everything your mother is going to say — so you're careful.

The house was big and brown with a lot of porches, set in several acres of old trees and high weeds, with a big barn to match the house at the back. We had always lived in our house and never moved, but I knew right away that this was a funny way to move. The doors were open and there were packing cases piled inside, and barrels and all kinds of stuff, but nobody was around. Pretty soon I heard voices out by the barn and I went out and there they were, the whole family — a boy and a girl about my size, and three smaller ones with a lady, and up in a tree was a big man with black hair and a black mustache and a derby hat. He had been putting up a swing.

It was an Indian swing — just one long rope with a loop in the end to put your foot in. They had nailed some boards on the tree for a ladder. I watched the man stand on a high limb, put his foot in the loop and swing off, holding to the rope with his hands. He gave a big whoop and went higher than the eaves of the barn. It made my stomach squeeze, just watching. The next time he went even higher, and they all whooped. After he had swung a few times, he reached up and grabbed a branch above him and stood on the limb he had started from. He fastened the rope and climbed down the ladder. Then the girl went up and swung. She went high too.

It's the getting off that's hard about an Indian swing. You have to be ready to stop swinging and step back on the limb while you're still going high. You don't let the old cat die, or you can't reach the limb, and you're too high off the ground to get down. I found that out later, but that first day they didn't see

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me, so I didn't have to swing. I watched awhile, and went home.

About a week later, my mother went to call, and when she came home she told my father she wouldn't be at all surprised if they were the kind of people who kept goats. And do you know, it wasn't very long afterward that they got a goat. It was a little brown goat with long ears, and Mr. Griffith made a wagon for it out of a big box and painted it, and the goat used to pull James and Endicott around in it. The goat's name was Annabelle, and she didn't smell, either, the way my mother said she would. After the first time or two, I wasn't embarrassed when I watched Jasmine milk her. Jasmine wasn't ever embarrassed about anything. She would squirt some milk at me and laugh when I jumped back.

All of them but James could play baseball — even the mother and the father. James was only two. . . .

I helped them cut the tall grass for the ball diamond. The whole batch of them got out there, and in no time at all we had it fixed. The father, Mr. Griffith, was a wonderful hitter, but he always let Endicott be his runner. The mother wasn't bad, considering, and Jasmine was good for a girl. Not as good as Thurman or Humphry, of course. They made lots of noise, hollering and laughing and groaning when they played. It was fun, but it worried me, too, because I knew my mother wouldn't like the noise.

She didn't either.

One day we had to play eleven innings to work off a tie. I did pretty good — the best I ever had — and in the last inning I got caught between third and home and Mr. Griffith tried to tag me out. It was pretty close, but I got home safe, only I tore the knee out of my knickers. Mr. Griffith stood panting a minute, and then he said, as if he could

hardly talk, "I'll go — see — if — the bread's — done." He started slowly to the back porch. If he'd been a kid, I'd have thought he was sore, or something.

"I'll go, Jim," Mrs. Griffith said real quick. "Let me go."

He kept on walking, and waved back at her to stay where she was. He didn't look around.

Mrs. Griffith stood there with her hand out and her mouth ready to say something, but she didn't say it. We went ahead with the game after that — there wasn't much more because my run had won for our side.

Then Mrs. Griffith called, "Are you all right, Jim?"

He came to the kitchen door. "Sure, it's all right. It was just done. I took it out. Let's eat the extra loaf."

We all piled into the kitchen. He was sitting in a rocking chair, and on the table was a heap of fresh-baked loaves of bread. The kitchen smelled so wonderful that you never noticed that it was hot in there. I guess there isn't anything that smells so good as baking.

They baked twice a week — Tuesday and Saturday — and each time they made a fat round loaf that they always ate right away while it was hot, along with their tea. I always tried to be there on baking days.

When we had tea at our house, it was for company, and we had pink cakes and fancy sandwiches and nuts and bonbons. But the Griffiths had tea every day, just plain tea and homemade bread and jam. My mother would have had a fit if she'd seen how I stuffed myself with that hot bread.

On this day we argued about the ball game, and Humphry showed with the broom how his mother had swung at a shoestrapping pitch, and they all howled and laughed, just as if she weren't their mother at all.

Afterward Jasmine and her mother and Humphry did the dishes and put away, and I helped. Nobody asked me to, but I just wanted to. While we were doing it, Mr. Griffith held James and Endicott on his lap in the rocking chair, and Thurman read aloud from *Treasure Island*. That's when I heard my mother calling me. I didn't know how long she'd been calling—we'd been making so much racket I couldn't have heard her.

I went home and my mother and father were at the table. She saw the hole in my pants, but she didn't say anything—she acted as if I weren't at the table.

"Just what," she said to my father, "does that man *do*, besides play games and shout all day long?"

That's the first time I'd noticed, but Mr. Griffith didn't seem to have any job.

I don't know why I never thought of it before, because all the men I ever heard of worked at something or other, except Jake White, and even he helped out at the freight office when he was sober enough. My father went to the Bank every day—sometimes on Sundays and holidays too.

My father passed my plate to me, full of food, and I knew I'd better eat some of it, but I wasn't hungry after all that hot bread. I wished I could sit up and say Mr. Griffith was inventing some wonderful machine, or was writing a book, or something like that. And then I began to wonder why he *didn't* do anything, and I began to be ashamed for him, as if he were my own father, not doing anything. But maybe he was going to get a job right away. I'd ask Humphry what his father did.

"—like typical white trash," my mother was saying.

My father leaned back and lit his cigar. "Well, they probably won't be around too long," he said. "I hear the taxes on that place are in arrears. They'll probably lose it and move away."

"That big strapping man!" my mother said. "And she came from such a good family. It's a shame. You'd think she'd have enough pride—but I always say a man is what his wife makes him. All those children too. The old colonel would turn over in his grave if he knew what they're doing to the place."

"I think I'll go down to the Bank for an hour or two," my father said, making a lot of smoke and then getting up. "Arthur," he said from the door with a scowl, "you were late. You go to your room when you finish. And I don't want you hanging around next door. You've got a home, you know."

From upstairs I could see the light on in the kitchen over at the Griffiths'. They were probably all sitting around, still reading *Treasure Island* with their taxes in arrears, while my father was down at the Bank working.

I sat watching their light and wondering if they had enough money to pay the taxes. I hoped they did have, because I didn't want them to move away, but it didn't look to me as if they had much money. They didn't have any cook or any maid, and they ate in the kitchen at a big table, and even the boys had to set the table and help do the dishes and sweep the floor afterward. They had asked me to stay for supper at their house, but I never did eat there, except the bread and jam. Now I was glad I hadn't, because they were so poor. Anyhow, my mother wouldn't have let me, because she wasn't going to ask them to eat at our house. They weren't our kind of people.

I worried about the taxes and Mr. Griffith's being a loafer. I didn't go over to their house for a couple of weeks. I heard them, though. They made a lot of noise, and when I'd hear Mr. Griffith, I'd wish he had a job.

I sat around on our porch and read and fooled around, and then one day, when I

was out at our gate sitting on the fence, I saw Humphry and Jasmine coming home with Annabelle and the wagon full of groceries. They waved and hollered, and I got off the fence and walked to their gate.

"Where you been, Art?" Humphry asked. "You ought to see the tree house we built."

"Did your father help you?"

"Sure. It was his idea. Why?"

"Oh, I just wondered. I thought maybe he was away." That was a lie.

"Away where?" Jasmine said. She didn't sound as friendly as usual.

"Oh, I don't know. Away working maybe."

"He's not going to go away for a long time," she said. "A year or two."

"What does he do when he goes away?"

For the first time, hope began to rise in me. Maybe he was an explorer. I don't know what made me think that.

"He's a mining engineer," Humphry said proudly. "He goes to South America and places."

"He does?" I shouted. A mining engineer — that was a good thing to be. A big strong man with black hair and a moustache and muscles in his arms, and he made big mines for taking out gold and silver, so everything was all right. "Can I go up in the tree house?" I asked eagerly.

It was a good tree house, and we had some crackers and apples up there, but I didn't stay very long because I wanted to go home and tell my mother that Mr. Griffith was a mining engineer.

My mother wasn't much impressed. In fact, she gave me the idea that she thought it was worse than ever, to be loafing around home. She would think, she said, that there was a good deal of opportunity for a man who was trained for such specialized and useful work. I explained that he was taking a vacation of a year or two, but I could tell that it

sounded peculiar, with the taxes on the house in arrears. That's not the way for a man to do.

I went over sometimes, anyhow, when I didn't have anything to occupy my time. They didn't play baseball so much any more, because now they had a croquet set. It was a good game too. There's a lot of tricks to it. Once in a while I got them to play baseball. Mr. Griffith would umpire. We didn't need it, but he didn't play because he was so much better than the rest of us, I guess. I didn't talk loud over there any more, so my mother wouldn't hear me and know I was there. She and my father never did actually forbid me to go over, but I caught on that they didn't want me to.

I was there one day when my mother came over, all dressed up like she was going someplace. She right away said she just wanted to speak to Mrs. Griffith, and they stood under a tree and talked, but the kids listened, and I heard too. She wanted to know if Jasmine could come over the next day and help serve at a big tea at our house.

"For Armenian Relief, you know," my mother said. "I expect about a hundred people, and I wondered if Jasmine would like to help carry out the teacups and pass plates of sandwiches." She was very nice and polite, as if she was asking a favor. "If she could wear a white apron —"

Mrs. Griffith said, "Well, I think we'd better ask Jasmine. Do you suppose you could use our silver tea service? It's a very large one."

"I remember it," my mother said. "It's such a remarkably handsome set. But —"

"I'd like very much to have you use it. It's the one that is rather famous in a small way. My great-grandfather brought it from England and it's been used to pour for General Lee. We unpacked and polished it, because we're going to sell it."

My mother was shocked. "You're not going to sell such a valuable set as that!" she exclaimed. "Why, I remember when I was a little girl—"

"Yes, we've decided to," Mrs. Griffith said. She stood straight with her hands at her sides. She was kind of a short little woman, not nearly as nice-looking as my mother, and I think she had on one of Jasmine's dresses, or else maybe it was her dress but Jasmine wore it sometimes. Her hair was faded and plain, but she looked different when she laughed or smiled. "It would be nice if you could use it before it goes out of our hands."

"Well," my mother said, and bit her lips for a minute while she was thinking, "in that case — it's very generous of you. I've always admired it so much. I wonder —" she smiled when there wasn't any reason to — "how much you're asking for it. I hadn't thought of it, but I might be interested myself."

"We're asking a good deal," Mrs. Griffith said. "Three hundred dollars."

My mother looked surprised. "Oh, as much as that?"

"Yes, I'm sure we can get that for it. Would you like to see it?"

They went into the house, and I went along. This was the first time I'd been in the dining room. It had dark red curtains, but no rug on the floor. There were two chairs in front of the fireplace, both of them with their seats worn out, and there were some big dark shiny cupboards with piles of dishes in them. On the table was the biggest teapot and the biggest tray I ever saw. The teapot was on a stand, and you just tipped it without having to lift it when you wanted to pour the tea. There were some other silver dishes too.

My mother admired it, and she ran her hand over the wood of one of the cupboards and admired it, too, and the dishes and she said she'd have to talk to

my father about the tea set. She invited Mrs. Griffith to the tea too.

"I just don't see how you can part with it," my mother said, and Mrs. Griffith said, "We never use it." They kept talking, and I went on out.

Next morning the first thing, my mother sent me over to tell Mrs. Griffith we'd take the tea set. I don't know where the kids were, but I went to knock at the back door, and through the screen I could see Mrs. Griffith sitting on Mr. Griffith's lap in the rocking chair. I didn't know whether to knock or not. There was a washtub full of clothes and soap-suds on two chairs, and a boiler on the stove running over once in a while making the smell of steam. Mrs. Griffith had her head against his chin, and they were just sitting there.

I made some noise with my feet and then I knocked. She got up real quick and started shaking the ashes out of the stove while she said, "Come in."

I never saw a grown woman sit on anybody's lap before.

"My mother said to tell you that she'd like to buy the tea set, and she has a check over at the house," I said all in one breath.

"Oh, thank you, Arthur," she said. "We'll send it right over."

"I'll take it," Mr. Griffith said, getting up.

"No. The children can," she said. "They can make two trips. Humphry can carry the pot."

"I'll take it," Mr. Griffith said again.

"You can't carry it, Jim. It's heavy. It's too far."

"I'll take it in the wagon."

"Then I'll go with you," she said. She smoothed her hair up on each side with her hands.

I stood there, but they didn't notice me.

"Celia, girl," Mr. Griffith said. He put

his arm around her and tipped her face up with his other hand under her chin. "We made our decision a long time ago. This is the only way we can buy time. Let's not make an occasion of it. I'll just take the thing over."

She looked up at him for quite a while. "You won't mind — too much?" she asked him. "Taking it over?"

"I mind — but not too much," he said. He pinched her cheek. "Do you mind?"

"No. I'm glad we have it to sell."

"I'll help carry it," I said. I didn't see much point in all this talk about who was going to carry it.

We put each piece in a gray bag with a drawstring, and laid them carefully in the wagon. Annabelle pulled it and I walked beside Mr. Griffith over to our house. I knew what my mother was going to say later about bringing it over in the goat wagon. She said it, too. She told several people, and every time she told it I felt old and sad. But, of course, it did look funny for a man to be selling his wife's things and delivering them in a goat wagon. Even if he was a mining engineer. Especially if he was.

Jasmine served at the tea. She hardly looked at me when she passed me. She looked pretty that day — not the way she usually did. She looked like a stranger. Like a girl, instead of one of the kids you played with. That was partly because she was getting older. She'd had her birthday about a month after I had mine, and she was fourteen, too. She was the oldest of them, but Humphry was as tall as she was.

I was in high school and had long trousers myself.

That's the first day I ever noticed she was prettier than Elaine Carpenter. Elaine was sort of my girl. Of course, it wasn't anything serious, but I used to write notes to her in school and stand around and talk to her. She had smooth

curly hair and a small face without any bones showing in it. But Jasmine's face had plenty of room for her mouth and her eyes, and her forehead. Her dress fitted her right and she was a regular young lady, all at once.

She could change fast, though. The very next Saturday I was over at their house, and she was tearing around with the boys playing one-legged tag, and she and Humphry got into an argument and nearly had a fight. After that they decided to play follow-the-leader, and she was leader. The first place she took us was on top of the barn, and she slid down to the eaves and jumped off into a pile of hay. Humphry was next, and he did it, and then Thurman. When it was my turn, I had some trouble working my way along the ridgepole. I wasn't allowed on top of roofs — it's bad for the shingles to climb around on them — and I wasn't sure I could slide down and jump off. It took me so long that Endicott was right behind me almost pushing me, and the others were down below hollering at me.

I finally slid down and jumped, but I hurt myself some and felt sick for a while. The others were sympathetic, but Jasmine just said:

"What's the matter — was it too high for you?"

What could I say? Besides, I couldn't think very well right then. All these kids had been climbing on and jumping off high things all their lives, I guess, and they weren't afraid of anything. They weren't afraid of going into the attic in the night without a light. They didn't run past billboards after dark.

Anyway, I sat on the porch until I could walk better. Mr. Griffith was reading to Mrs. Griffith while she peeled some apples. Humphry pretended to be my butler — he was always kidding me about being rich — called me "mildord," and dusted off a place for me to sit, and

brushed imaginary pieces of lint off my clothes. He kept it up for weeks, being my butler, in fun, of course. But Jasmine wasn't in fun.

When we played anything, she always tried her best to beat me. When she did, she'd give me a hard flat look, as if I were some miserable specimen that was barely human. Or else when I'd come over she wouldn't come out and play at all. As I say, though, the rest of them were friendly enough, but I didn't go over much that winter. I was busy at school. I had other friends besides them, anyway.

One Saturday afternoon I ran into Humphry at the library and we walked home together. He asked me in, so I came. It was almost time for the bread to come out of the oven—I could smell it as soon as I got on the back porch. We gathered around and ate the extra loaf, but Mr. Griffith wasn't there.

I thought maybe he had gone off to South America or somewhere on a job, so I asked and Mrs. Griffith said he was in bed. It wasn't even dark yet.

"What's the matter?" I asked. "Is he sick?"

"He's resting," she said, and right away I thought, just the way my mother would say it, *I don't know what he's been doing to make him tired.*

Humphry and I played checkers on the kitchen table. They had a big black stove that sat in the wall with a big curved tin roof sticking out over the stove, and they had painted flowers on it. Over the stove they had painted, "God Bless Our Cook." It was warm and nice, and quiet, for once, in the kitchen. The rest of the house wasn't warm at all.

Mrs. Griffith looked tired that day, her face kind of drawn and old-looking. It made me feel that I'd like to do something for her, but there wasn't anything I could do, of course. And then Jasmine

came into the kitchen. I guess she had just taken a bath and got dressed up, and she looked so pretty, her hair soft and her skin rosy underneath. She sat down and started to read, and I let Humphry get into the king row. I wasn't interested in the checkers any more. She didn't look up or say anything. She just ate hot bread and butter with sugar sprinkled on it and turned the pages in her book, and afterward I went home.

The next day I came back, and the next. I hung around a lot, and one night about dark when we were playing out, I hid with her in a game of run-sheep-run. We hid in the barn. I could see the outline of her beside me, and I could hear her breathe. I moved closer and I could smell the warm smell of her hair. I could hear me breathing, too. I reached out and touched her, and she threw my hand off with a jerk.

"Jasmine"—I meant to whisper, but my voice didn't work right and I said it out loud—"don't you like me?"

"Sh-h-h!" she said.

"But don't you like me?"

I heard her breathe some more. "Certainly," she said, without whispering.

"Why shouldn't I?"

"Would you go with me to the dinner dance at the club on St. Patrick's Day?" I'd been thinking about asking her, but I knew I ought to ask Elaine Carpenter. The Carpenters and my folks were good friends, and Elaine expected me to ask her. I had a new suit, and this was the first year that I'd been old enough to go. I was in the Younger Set now.

"We don't belong to the club," Jasmine said, moving away from me.

"I know. But we do. I'll take you." I would send her flowers to wear, and I'd take her in a taxi. She'd never been to the club. She would think it was swell, with a big orchestra and colored lights and the dance cards with a little pencil

fastened on a string. Maybe she would let me kiss her that night, because she'd had such a good time.

"Why do you bother?" she said, suddenly, angrily. "Do you think I don't know how you feel about us? You're ashamed even to have your folks know you come over here. You think you're too good for us."

"You're talking silly," I said. I put my hand on hers, easy and slow, like I was coming down on a butterfly. She didn't move. My blood was tingling in my arms, and my hand on hers was throbbing as if it were something separate from the rest of me and terribly alive. "I think you're wonderful," I said. "I think your whole family is grand." I didn't know if I meant it or not, but I knew that's what I had to say.

"Do you, Art?" She sounded as if she almost believed me, but not quite.

"Why else do you suppose I hang around your house?" All I could think of now was getting her to say she'd go. Too many times she had taken my measure with that flat look, too many times she'd known that I was afraid to do what she could do without a blink. This time I had to win. "I want you to go, Jasmine." I was laying it on. "I want to take you."

"Well," she said, and I could tell now that she wanted awfully to go, by the way she took a quick breath and squeezed my hand, "I'll ask my folks. I'll see what they say."

"Oh, they'll say yes. They know I'll take good care of you." My heart was pounding and I was so excited that my face and ears were burning. By some kind of figuring, I thought I had won this time — had made her say yes.

But I didn't feel so good about it when I had to tell my folks.

When I'd been sitting there beside her in the dark, I had some wild and crazy thoughts about all the things I'd like to

do for her, and when I was old enough and had my own money, I'd buy her everything she'd want. And back of wanting to buy her everything, I couldn't help thinking that I'd have to do that because she might not like me enough just for myself. Maybe none of the whole family liked me enough — just for myself. They thought I was skinny and scared of things, instead of sensible and cautious the way we were at my house. I wanted them to like me. When I was with them, I liked them better than I did my own folks. But when I was away from them, I would think, *What have they got that's so wonderful? Their father is a loafer, and their mother hasn't any pride, and they bring their groceries home in a goat wagon.*

So, after I told my folks that I was going to take Jasmine to the dinner dance, I began to worry. My father gave me a talk about good judgment and choosing friends, and then he said, "But now you've committed yourself, Arthur, and you'll have to go through with it. A man's word must be as good as his bond."

My mother said she probably wouldn't have a party dress, and the other girls would have long dresses, and Jasmine would feel very out of place. And it was true. I would be embarrassed, too, if she came in just an ordinary dress. I wished I hadn't asked her to go.

I hoped her folks would say she couldn't go. Then I could take Elaine Carpenter. She would have the right kind of dress, and the other fellows would want to dance with her, and she'd be friendly with the other girls at the club. It would be fun to go with Elaine.

But her folks said Jasmine could go. They said it was very nice of me to ask her, so there wasn't any way I could get out of it. No way at all.

I was purposely late going after her the night of the dance. I had her flowers

in a box, and I hoped they'd got together a decent dress for her. I walked in their drive, all but dragging my feet. I saw there were more lights on than usual. I thought they must be making a fuss over Jasmine tonight. I knocked at the kitchen door and heard somebody coming down the stairs to answer.

It was Mrs. Griffith. She looked at me blank as a post before she said, "Why, hello, Art. You're all dressed up."

"Is Jasmine ready?"

"Jasmine isn't here just now," she said, quickly and nervously brushing her hair up with her hands. "Did you want something special? Won't you come in?"

"Well," I said, beginning to get sore, "this is the night of the dinner dance at the club, and I—"

"Jasmine's gone into town," she said, not paying any attention to what I said. "She went to the drugstore. She'll be back soon. Would you like to wait, or is there something I can do?" She stood there fingering the ruffle on her apron and her eyes kept moving fast from one thing to another without seeing it. "She's gone for some medicine," she said.

"Oh," I said. "Is somebody sick?" Here I was with the flowers, and it was time to go, and Jasmine wasn't even here. When you do go out of your way to be nice to some people, I thought, they don't appreciate it.

Mrs. Griffith rubbed her hand up and down her face and then she laced her fingers in front of her. "Yes," she said firmly, and with an effort at calmness, "Mr. Griffith is—very sick." A tremor passed over her face and right afterward she tried to smile. "He's—very sick. He's"—she put her fist in front of her mouth—"he's been quite sick for several days, but tonight he's worse."

I stared at her. "He is?" I said stupidly. I laid the box of flowers on the kitchen table. I wasn't mad any more. She

looked so frail and twitchy, I wondered if it would be all right if I took hold of her hands and held them steady. "I'm awfully sorry," I said. "I didn't know."

Her hands kept moving frantically. I took a step closer to her. I could see down on the top of her head. I wanted to help her, but I didn't know how. I wished she wouldn't smile at me again because I knew it was hard for her. She didn't need to do that with me. I felt that I was tall and strong, and that she needed me. Her face was worn-looking as she brushed her hair up with the back of her hand.

"Is he—I mean, is it dangerous?" I finally asked.

She took a breath. I could see her holding herself together. "Yes, Artie. We've known . . . ever since we've been here, of course. That's why we came. His heart has been getting worse. But I didn't think it would be so soon." Her face crumpled up and tears started. I put my arms awkwardly around her shoulders and she leaned her forehead against me.

"He always seemed so strong," I said. "And he played with the kids all the time."

"He wanted it that way. He didn't want it any other way."

We stood like that for a few minutes. Then she straightened up.

"I'll be all right now. I'm all right when I'm with him and the children."

"You've known it all the time—and you didn't say anything? You've never told anyone?"

I still couldn't picture him being sick, with his black hair and his black mustache and talking and laughing and jumping his checkers over the board with his big hand. I couldn't imagine him dying.

"The children were so little," she was saying. "Jasmine—of course, Jasmine

knew. But we didn't tell the others. We decided it would be better — happier, if they didn't know."

Jasmine knew it all the time. And her mother. And *he* knew. And they'd gone right ahead, being happy.

My heart began to swell up until it felt thick all through my chest. I wished I was a man already, and could be the father here and help them and take care of them all when they would need somebody. I wished I belonged here with them.

"If there's anything I can do," I said, "anything — ever —"

She looked me straight in the eyes. "Thank you, Arthur. I know you mean it. I wouldn't have told you, otherwise." She reached up and mussed my hair, hard, and then she went over and shook the stove.

My head was full of thoughts about all of them, and their courage and the way they lived. I thought of the first day I saw Mr. Griffith, swinging high in the Indian swing with all the kids watching and whooping. And then I knew that if it had been my father, he'd have been at the bank day and night fixing up money so that when he died all that would be left would be piles of stocks and bonds and mortgages and insurance to remember him by.

We heard Jasmine coming on the porch. She was hurrying and she had a little package in her hand.

"Here it is, mother," she said at the door. "How is he?"

"He's resting, dear," Mrs. Griffith took the package and was going out before Jasmine saw me there.

"Artie, I'm sorry," she said. "I was getting ready when father got sick —"

"I know. Would you like to wait awhile and go later?"

"No," she said. "I couldn't go tonight. I . . . couldn't. Why don't you go on?"

It's not so very late. You could get there in time. I have to set out supper for the kids, and besides — well, my father isn't feeling very well tonight." She took off her coat and turned to hang it on a hook. She knew about him all this time and never told anybody.

"Would I be in the way if I stayed? Maybe there's something I could do — bring in some coal, or run errands or —" I couldn't think of any way they'd really need me. If they thought I was in the way in the house, I would go sit outside and watch the lights of the house and wait. I would stay near them. I'd just sit quietly outside and watch the lights.

"You mean you're not going to the dinner dance?" She turned around, surprised, as if that hadn't occurred to her. I shook my head. Why should I go there, without Jasmine, when her father was sick and her mother had told me how it was, and had leaned her head against my chest and cried?

Jasmine's eyes were on me, big and clear, and her lips were parted and tremulous. I couldn't look away and I didn't want to. I heard a piece of coal move in the stove, and I heard the teakettle start to sing, but we hadn't moved. Still looking at her, I took off my coat and hung it beside hers.

"We'd better set the table," she said, going to the cupboard. "You get the plates. And, Artie," she said, turning to me with her hands full of knives and forks, "you'll set a place for yourself, won't you? We'd like you to stay."

It may seem like a little thing, but it made me proud when she said that. And I've been proud of it ever since. Because she didn't mean me just to have a place at the table. She meant a place in their lives. I was just a kid, but I knew that was the real thing.