

five. He was very little." And tears filled soft-hearted Frau Greta's eyes as she thought of the little waif who had come and gone so strangely and so sadly. It was all quite incomprehensible to her and mein herr, and they could only sigh, "It was strange. He was so very little."

He had come with his mother over the prairie late one November afternoon. They rode in a very old and dilapidated spring wagon, drawn by rough, bony horses. The north wind blew cruelly across the barren prairie, and they were thinly clad. Even Herr Louie in his great coat with cap and scarf would not have cared to ride far in that icy wind, and in an open wagon, too! It was too cruel.

The mother had asked for shelter over night. They were from a claim "out West." The crops had failed that year. Still she and her husband had thought to try again—it would surely be better another year. But lately he had been taken sick and died, leaving her and the boy alone. Aided by a neighbor she had buried him in a corner of their claim and there left him. They would have starved or frozen—she and the boy—out there alone, so they started for the east in their old spring wagon.

Two stragglers, they were, from the great army of men, women and children which each year wheels back to eastern friends. Westward they have gone, lured by hopes of homes of their own, or drawn by the indefinable charm of the "West." All they have, seldom much, is expended on the new home. Then comes a crop failure. To stay means to starve. So, penniless, they desert the solitary little sod shanties and turn sadly eastward.

Frau Greta had taken the chilled little mother and her boy and warmed and fed them. The mother was small and thin, with sad, dark eyes, and a tired, white face. She had a bad cough and held her hand to her head as if in pain. Frau Greta made her a hot drink—"goot for coughs"—and led her away to the best and warmest room in the house.

But when morning came she was moaning

and tossing in delirium. Herr Louie donned his great coat and set out for the distant village for the doctor, while his good hausfrau did what she could for the sufferer. Then followed long days full of pain and fevered dreams for the little mother who never once roused from her delirium. Frau Greta was a tender nurse and moved quietly and tirelessly about her many duties, coming often to the sick bed to soothe with her soft German gutturals, the wilder wanderings of the poor, unsettled brain.

And the boy? All day long he hovered anxiously about the sick room in his still, quiet way. When the mother was left for a while by the busy nurse, he would creep close to the bed and sit there silent, holding a thin, tired hand in his own. Then the sick one would be more quiet and, perhaps, sleep a little. Sometimes, at the bidding of motherly Frau Greta, he would go to play with Anton and little Greta, but his presence served only to stop the noisy play of the German children who seemed never to weary of staring at him with big, wide-open blue eyes. There was a sharp contrast between those eyes and his dark ones; between their fat cheeks and his thin little face; between their noisy play and his quiet ways. The little Teutons could not understand him, so they would sit staring silently until he stole away again to his mother.

The doctor came often, and at each visit shook his head more ominously. She was failing; it could not be long. Early in December the end came, very gently and quietly. Frau Greta tenderly folded the thin little hands over the tired breast, dropping soft tears on the white face now delicately beautiful. "Poor little hands," she murmured. "So small, so thin. They were not meant for farm. Und now they rest."

Three tall cottonwoods—the only trees for miles, save a few stunted willows where the creek ran—grew on a hill-top near Herr Louie's house. Beneath them he and his hired man dug a grave in the frozen earth and there buried her.

The boy watched silently, but did not cry. Only he trembled a little when they threw