

The Little Immigrant

Eva Stern

Table of Contents

<u>The Little Immigrant</u>	1
<u>Eva Stern</u>	1
<u>CHAPTER I</u>	1
<u>CHAPTER II</u>	3
<u>CHAPTER III</u>	6
<u>CHAPTER IV</u>	8
<u>CHAPTER V</u>	10
<u>CHAPTER VI</u>	12

The Little Immigrant

Eva Stern

This page copyright © 2002 Blackmask Online.

<http://www.blackmask.com>

- [CHAPTER I](#)
- [CHAPTER II](#)
- [CHAPTER III](#)
- [CHAPTER IV](#)
- [CHAPTER V](#)
- [CHAPTER VI](#)

Thanks to Robert Stern, great-grandson of the author, for donating this eBook.

CHAPTER I

NAH! Renestine, cannot you come with the skirt and let me lay it in your trunk? You are dreaming, dreaming all the time. My child, these things must be ready by midnight tonight.

The girl was thirteen years old and her mother was getting her possessions together to send her to America to join a sister who had already gone there and was married and now sent to have her little sister journey to the States, too.

Oh, Mutterchen, I do not want to go, burst out Renestine. I want to stay with you. I do not want to go.

Nah! Kindlein, stay then, said the mother, keeping her own grief away from her child.

Just then the door to the little room flew open and three excited girls of about Renestine's own age or perhaps one or two years older, bustled themselves inside.

Why, Renestine, you are not finished packing yet! We are ready and our trunks are roped and standing at the door for Laaskar to put on the post-wagon when he drives by on his way to the post-house tonight.

The speaker stopped confused seeing that Renestine was silent with no joy in her eyes and the mother sat quietly with flushed checks and said nothing.

What has happened? said the three girls in chorus. You are not going to back out, are you?

Still Renestine did not look up or make any sign that she was interested in the preparations for her arranged trip. Presently the mother spoke and her voice trembled.

Renestine has changed her mind and will remain at home.

Then the girls broke into a laugh and chided Renestine, saying she was a baby and would never see the ocean or go to America and ride in carriages. The mental picture was doing its work. Not ride in carriages and have pretty clothes and .learn to speak English? That was too much to refuse. Renestine raised her head, wiped the tears out

The Little Immigrant

of her eyes, brought the skirt neatly folded to her mother and said: Mutterchen, finish my trunk. I am going with Yetta, Selma and Polly to America.

The journey began and Renestine made the voyage over in a sailing vessel which took six weeks to make her port at Galveston, Texas, in the early fifties. The girls experienced days of seasickness when they thought it was better to die than to ride in carriages and were weary and homesick. But when, at last, they walked again upon land and were welcomed in Galveston by their relatives, all the melancholy hours were forgotten. The girls had separated into their different families on arriving at Hous/P>

The journey began and Renestine made the voyage over in a sailing vessel which took six weeks to make her port at Galveston, Texas, in the early fifties. The girls experienced days of seasickness when they thought it was better to die than to ride in carriages and were weary and homesick. But when, at last, they walked again upon land and were welcomed in Galveston by their relatives, all the melancholy hours were forgotten. The girls had separated into their different families on arriving at Houston, but frequently met just as they had before leaving their home town, and were observing everything with eagerness and getting their first impressions of America.

One balmy Sunday morning they took a walk and marveled much that Houston had so many houses and such large ones. While they walked they chatted and were merry. Finally, they noticed that a great many looked at them curiously, and some smiled. They were at last spoken to by an old lady, who reminded them that it was not customary for girls to walk in the middle of the street. This was a conceit that pleased them, to walk in the middle of the street just to see people walking on either side of them.

The ringing of the Sunday morning church bells was a startling sound and Paula exclaimed, as the three stood still listening: "Oh, listen to the music box!" Solemnly they walked on and wondered that the world was so large and full of beautiful things. It was a long time before Renestine realized that they had gone a great distance. "We will return now," she said. But when they turned to retrace their steps they found themselves in a wood of large, dark trees with heavy gray moss dropping from their branches and a solemn stillness over all. It was growing dusk, too, and the trees looked ghostly in the falling gloom.

"Do you know which way to go?" asked Yetta.

"Oh, come with me and I will show you," said Paula.

Trustingly they followed Paula. But the brave girl, after a half hour's vain effort, had to admit that she was puzzled herself and did not know how to get out of the wood. Yetta showed the nearness of tears, but Renestine set to work to extricate themselves. Before she had decided what to do they all three heard horses' hoofs trampling down bush-wood and dry twigs not far away. The riders, or whatever it was, came nearer until the girls saw a young man on horseback, a boy accompanying him. The horsemen reined in their horses and stopped when they saw the girls standing before them. The older man, who was about twenty-eight, asked how they came to be so far in the depth of the trackless woods. When they had told him, he dismounted, throwing the reins over his arm and leading his horse, he walked along by the side of the girls guiding them out of their difficulty; the boy followed on his horse which carried the saddle-bags containing the personal belongings of both of them. As they walked many questions were asked and answered and in a little time the woods were left behind and the girls were opening the gate of Renestine's sister's home. The young rescuer, after seeing them safely disappear in the doorway, got on his horse again and trotted off to his hotel, the boy following.

CHAPTER II

SEATED at her work table in her sitting room, Mrs. Bilter was putting the last stitches in a white Swiss dress that Renestine was to wear that night to a ball. The puff sleeve close to the shoulder was the last of the dainty dress to be put on. Mrs. Bilter took eager pleasure in dressing her pretty sister in the daintiest of gowns. When she looked up she saw her husband coming through the gate for his noon dinner. She put down her sewing and moved to meet him on the porch.

“Well, dear, how are you getting on with the ball dress?” For Mr. Bilter was as interested in his little sister-in-law as his wife was. “Renestine will have to look her prettiest to-night. There are some visiting young men in the town and they will be at the ball.”

They went in together and were received by old Aunt Mary, a colored family servant who was much respected and held in affection by the members.

“Dinnah jest put on de table, Missus.”

“Has Miss Renestine come home?”

“No'm. I's hasn't seen her; prehaps she's kept in fer not knowin' her lessons.”

Just then Renestine came in, her cheeks rosy and her large black eyes luminous with the exercise of walking home from school. She entered the dining-room laughing and sat down next to her brother-in-law.

“How were the lessons today, Renestine?” he asked, patting her hand that lay in his. “Arithmetic right?”

“No trouble at all. Oh, I am so glad that you both had the idea to send me to school, I love it. I love to be puzzled over a question and find it out for myself. I love to feel myself gaining knowledge and understanding many things that used to be dark and incomprehensible to me and that seem plain now. I rejoice that I am able to think and speak English,” and Renestine turned her head toward her sister and her eyes were moist. “You are very good to me, Aldine, and besides you are spoiling me with all the pretty dresses you make for me.”

“Oh, do come in right after dinner and look at your dress for to-night. It is just lovely with the little rosebuds around the shoulders,” said Mrs. Bilter.

It did not take long before the three were admiring the fluffy white dress and predicting its success at the ball.

Renestine hurried home after school and sat down by the side of her sister to help sew rosebuds on the flounces of the wide skirt. When the dress was finished Renestine took it to her room and pinned it up on the curtains of her bed to look at it and get the effect of it. Then she got out her little white satin slippers and began the ceremony of the toilette for the ball.

Carriages were coming and going before the brilliantly lighted Colonial house owned by the Good Fellowship Club. The colored drivers sat proud and erect on their boxes and held in their restive horses while their masters and mistresses alighted. Young dandies in ruffled shirts and flowered velvet waistcoats came on foot and sprang eagerly up the steps and vanished through the double doors swung back by colored attendants. Strains of music reached the street and ceased when the doors opened and shut and the sound of many voices in conversation and happy laughter burst upon the ear of the passer-by. Inside, all was gaiety and animation. Festoons of greens hung from the chandelier of kerosene lights and garlands and wreaths decorated the walls of the wide hall and rooms where there was dancing. In the ballroom five colored musicians were the orchestra and the leader “called out” the figures of the lancers and quadrilles. “Face your pardners,” he called out as the square dance was begun. Several sets of four couples were formed ready for the first strains of the lancers music and the prompter. “Forward all,” and all the couples advanced to the center. “Swing your pardners,” “balance corners,” the lady and gentleman faced to the right and took steps to the music. “Swing,” and they swung around.

The next figure was the “Grand right and left,” called out by the prompter and the couples circled around and after a large ring was formed by taking hands and going first to the right and then to the left, amid laughter the dance broke up.

Standing near the window on the porch were two young men. They were smoking cigars and commenting on the guests and the surroundings generally.

“There's a little Queen Esther with her black hair braided and folded over her shell pink ears. Look at her

The Little Immigrant

graceful walk. Do you see the one I mean?" asked the taller of the two men.

"Do you mean the one with the rosebuds on her gown?"

"Yes, the very one. She has the most beautiful black eyes I have ever seen."

"Yes, she is a beautiful girl," assented his companion.

"Where have I seen her before? I recognize those eyes."

"You are not captured, are you, Jaffray?"

"Well, I don't know." And they both laughed. "Let us go inside."

They threw away their cigars and went in.

"Miss Jewel, Mr. Starr would like to be presented to you, may I bring him to you?" Renestine looked up and found a friend speaking to her, but before she could answer the tall stranger was at her friend's elbow.

"This is a great pleasure for me," said the newly introduced guest. "But, Miss Jewel, it has been an impression of mine since I first saw you this evening that we have met before. Can you help me settle upon the place, time and occasion?"

"Why, no," laughed Renestine, showing two rows of small, white teeth that enhanced her charm.

"I am sure if we try hard enough we shall soon discover," Jaffray said. "May I sit down?" Renestine drew sideways to allow him to draw up a chair, her hoop skirt spreading her tarlatan flounces some space around her.

"Why, yes, indeed, now that I look at you, the woods, gray moss, three frightened young ladies; it was in the dusk of evening as I was riding from McKinney, all of that picture returns," he put his forefinger to his lips, and looked down at the floor in deep reflection.

For a moment Renestine was silent, then turned rosy red. "Oh, Mr. Starr, was it you who brought us out of the Wilderness and restored us to our families? You appeared at the most fortunate moment, we were really lost," and she laughed heartily. "You are a stranger here, Mr. Starr?"

"Not altogether. I have visited here before on business. Where I live it is lonesome for me and I take my vacations with much the spirit of a school boy. Shall we dance?"

The "Kiss Waltz" was a great favorite and the opening bars were beginning, "Hun" Williams, leader of the orchestra, putting a good swing into it. Renestine and Jaffrey glided with the rhythm of the music and danced until the last strains closed the tuneful composition. Throwing a lace scarf about her shoulders, Jaffray led Renestine to the balcony. The moon was bright as day and the early May dew brought out the fragrance of the jessamine and clematis climbing over the balustrade.

They stood for a time without speaking, feeling the spell of the Southern spring time.

"Is not this solemn beauty? Somehow it hurts, it is so beautiful," said Renestine quietly, her large eyes dreamy and full of softness.

"Ah, you have a poet's soul, Miss Jewel. Will you tell me something of your life? You were not born here?"

They were walking up and down the broad verandah and Renestine was telling him of the little mother so far away, parted from, perhaps never to be seen again. She was saying, "At last when the time came to say good-bye, I clung to my mother's form and in that moment could see my soul, bared, bruised, wounded and somehow the little girl passed with that parting and although I was but a few months younger than I am to-night, I am here just one year, I feel much changed and older." Her lids closed and Jaffray did not interrupt. "Mr. Starr, do you know of any experience more cruel than this parting of parents in Europe with their children to come to America? I think of it now so often. I think there cannot be in all life . . ."

Jaffray saw the tears in those wonderful eyes. "No, Miss Jewel, no. I know of nothing more humanly cruel! I, too, parted from my beloved mother and twin sister when a mere lad to cross the ocean to seek my fortune in America. A lad barely fifteen years of age, I had no idea of what I was going out to meet in the world when I took my small belongings and journeyed toward these shores. There were no friends, no relatives where I was going; all those were being left behind; but the spirit of adventure possessed me and I wanted more freedom to work out my destiny in and the parting had to be for me and I cannot tell you how I have suffered from homesickness for the beloved Mother and good sister, for the little home in the Rhine village where the terraces of grapes lay just back of our house; that never is forgotten, no matter how long one lives. We have a common bond of sympathy, may I hope it means a tie of friendship?"

She gave him her hand and shortly afterwards he led her back into the ballroom; but the music could not tempt

The Little Immigrant

them to dance again and, after seeing Renestine with friends, he said good-night and left.

It was near daylight when Jaffray smoked his last cigar and finally put out the light in his little room in the hotel and went to bed.

Jaffray paid frequent visits to Houston from McKinney, after he met Miss Jewel. Although Renestine was busy with her school work, her sister permitted her, like all the young girls, to accept the attentions of young men who wished to call or who invited her to social affairs.

Jaffray was some years older than Renestine and was aware that she was but a school girl, untutored in the ways of the world, even less than most girls of her age. But Renestine's modesty, her innocence, her beauty, appealed to him as no other woman's charms had done and thoughts of her took possession him. His stuffy little office in McKinney, in the long, narrow store where general merchandise was rather irregularly piled around in high wooden boxes, in barrels, and on shallow shelves, became a prison house and the weeks endless terms of sentence. It happened that he could not absent himself from duty oftener than once every month and then only from Friday to Sunday night. These days of freedom were now prized tenfold more dearly than if he had had his time free to do as he wished.

Heretofore it had been his dearest wish to employ his spare time with books, reading and studying to improve his mind and for the pleasure that books gave him. Now his thoughts refused to concentrate upon anything but Miss Jewel.

After some weeks of acquaintance there was an exchange of letters which grew into a long correspondence. Those were happy days for Jaffray! Eagerly he would look forward to the mail and from the receipt of each of Renestine's letters to the next he would be in a heaven all his own. He sent her songs and books of verse; he wrote long and throbbing letters, and Winter and Spring, Summer and Autumn were just one long summer day for him with the music of the birds overhead and the earth a garden of blossoms.

CHAPTER III

TWO years went by and Renestine had been the bride of Jaffray Starr three months. Grown into womanhood, she was radiant; happy in her love and secure in the faith of her choice, she went forth from her sister's home full of hope and cheer. Renestine had had many suitors, had had much admiration. She could have become the wife of a young adoring banker; she had refused to listen to the suit of men of more substance than her husband; but because of the quiet manliness of Jaffray Starr, because of his keen intellect, because of his nobility of heart and generous nature, she gave her heart into his keeping, sure that she had made no mistake, and set out with him to share his fortune, whatever it would bring. They had been married and left at once for Jaffray's home at Jefferson, where he had a position in the County Clerk's office. Now they were settled and housekeeping. But it was a long, rough journey they had made from Houston to Jefferson. The railroads had not been built in that section of the country and travel was done by horse teams and in covered wagons. Two good colored servants accompanied them; old Josiah, who drove and took care of the rough work, and his wife; Caroline, to look after the "Missus" and do the cooking. Bringing out kettles and pans tucked away in the wagon, Josiah would build a brushwood fire and Caroline would cook the meals, rations for two weeks having been provided. When it was time to stop for a meal or to rest the horses, Josiah would be on the watch for a clear spring of water along the roadside, would draw up by the side of it and begin preparations for camping. It was not as much of a hardship as Pullman travelers would conclude. The wagons were fitted with springs which gave easily over rough roads and even had a fascination and romance, and in the cool of the evening when a stretch of smooth road lay before them it was delicious to feel the soft air blowing into their faces and to experience the exhilaration of the rapid motion of the wagon. There were also arrangements for comfortable beds.

Word had gone ahead that Jaffray was bringing home a bride and the people were alert to give her welcome. Jaffray never realized how much he was thought of until he came back a Benedict. Homes were thrown open to him and his young wife with offers to remain as long as they would, and all kinds of propositions made for their comfort and welfare.

"No, thank you, John or Tom or Buck," he would reply, kindly but firmly. "We shall go to the hotel until we can arrange a home. I have already rented a house and it won't take us long to get settled."

Nor did it. In a few weeks Jaffray and Renestine were occupying a small house, not far from the river that skirted the town, with Josiah and Caroline in charge.

"I do not see how anything can be prettier," said Renestine one day after they had been in their home about a week. She had just finished looping the pretty Swiss curtains at the windows of their living room. "I really do not," she continued, stepping back, her finger tips together, her head quizzically on one side. "Nothing can be sweeter or prettier than our home. Jaffray, have you noticed how dainty the chintz furniture is and how well it goes with the walls? I think I deserve commendation for that wall paper, Jaffray."

"Indeed, you do, my darling," returned Jaffray, pulling solemnly at his pipe and looking half amused, half serious, at his young wife. "Are you quite sure the pattern is large enough?" he said, laughing.

"Oh, you ungrateful man, you are making fun of me, I do believe. Come into the dining-room and have dinner. Caroline is just bringing it in."

Arm in arm, they stepped into a long, narrow room which went the width of the house, only excepting a little room off the main bedroom which was used for a dressing room.

The house consisted of a living room, a small hall and across from the living room, the bedroom. Back of the little room was a small porch and detached from the house, but connected by a covered walk, was the kitchen. The dining-room was a foot below the two front rooms, the kitchen joining it by the covered passage way. They could never explain why the dining-room was so arranged, but concluded that the owner had added it on at a later time. It was cosy and comfortable and became attractive under the deft fingers of Renestine. The little covered porch in front of the house was screened by running vines from the gaze of the street.

"Now for my book shelf!" exclaimed Jaffray, after he had smoked his afternoon pipe. "You must help me arrange them, Renestine. No real home without books, little girl."

Josiah brought in the large drygoods box, which he opened, and together Jaffray and Renestine took out the

The Little Immigrant

books, dusted them and placed them on the shelves built in one side of the wall. Among them were Byron,

Moore, Pope, History of the United States, Josephus, Irving's Life of Washington. It was late when the last one had been put away, and they were glad enough to rest in their rockers on the porch in the gloaming.

CHAPTER IV

THE day was hot and sultry. The chinaberry trees gave out their sweet flower fragrance, almost too sweet to breathe freely in, while their lacy leaves scarcely stirred. A great shady one grew in the corner of the paling-fence around the yard and close to the two-room living quarters for the negro servants. Aunt Caroline sat in the door combing her wiry hair with a curry comb, a jagged piece of broken mirror in her lap to guide her in her hairdressing; close by were a couple of rush-bottom chairs set face to face and holding across their seats a pillow with a mosquito netting pulled tight across the top of the backs. Every once in a while Aunt Caroline would twist her neck in the direction of the improvised bed and, finding nothing stirring, would resume her hair-brushing.

“Oh, Aunt Caroline,” rushed out of the air and a two-year-old little girl threw herself heavily against the old servant's knees, nearly dashing her toilet articles to the ground. Aunt Caroline started, raised her curry brush over her head and shook it hard at the child.

“My lands,” she said, in a low voice. “Whar you come from and making all dat noise and your sister lying dar asleep. Ain't you never swine to remembar what I's al'ays tellin' yer, not ter brash up against one like out de Sperrit world and nearly scare yer old mammy ter deeth? Ennyhow yer look tired; come heah in my lap and le' me rock yer.”

“May I have your looking glass, then, Aunt Caroline?”

“Look out, chile, you'll cut yerself! No. I's got to lay dis up on de shelf for mahself. Dis no lookin' glass fer a white chile. Now you come heah and get in my lap dis minute.”

The child, tired from play and romping around, lifted her arms to be taken up into her dear old mammy's lap. With her curly head pressed against Aunt Caroline's breast, she fell asleep in a little while and was resting there long after Aunt Caroline had stopped tilting her chair forward and backward—a way quite familiar to Southern nurses in lulling children to sleep. In a little while she had succumbed to the silent noon hour herself.

“Looka heah, nigger. What you mean holden dat chile in yer lap and you fast ter sleep? Wake up. Yer heah? Miss Tiny is comin!” Josiah shoved his brogan over Aunt Caroline's thinly shod foot and she jerked her head up with a start.

“Bless mah soul!” She looked around with a frightened appearance at the chairs with the mosquito netting over them and two blue gray eyes were looking up into hers and a little fist was being devoured.

“Here you are with the children,” said a low, sweet voice. “I've wondered if Lola was with you. Has the baby been asleep a long time, Aunt Caroline?”

“Yes'm. She jest now waken up. Ain't she purty, Miss Tiny? Just look at her little face looken like a cherub's. She shore is a buiful chile. Looks a hole lot like you wid her big eyes, on'y dey gray 'stead of black.”

“Let me take Lola from you and you lift the baby and bring her to the house.”

“Yes'm.” Aunt Caroline didn't lose an opportunity, however, to turn around to remark to Josiah, who was hoeing not far away, “Yer, Josiah, you jes come heah, suh, and tote dis chile up to de house. She too hebbly fer de Missus. You lubbering black nigger, you jes good fer nothin' nohow and doan you eber stamp on my foot agin! Go long, Miss Tiny, we will bring up de chillens!”

Jaffray was home for midday dinner. “I've bought a nurse girl for you, Renestine. Here is the bill of sale,” he said, handing a light blue paper to her. Renestine read: “A copper colored girl,” etc. When they were seated at the table Jaffray said: “I felt like a mean creature when I paid the money for that girl, but I knew we needed a nurse girl. Aunt Caroline can't cook and care any longer for the children too, so what was to be done? This slavery system is frightful, and mark my words, Renestine, the day will come when the darkies will be free. Where I was born on the Rhine, no one would believe for a moment that I would buy a human being. They would hate me as I hate myself for bartering in human flesh.”

“I know, I know, Jaffray. I remember when my sister used to send Josiah out in the morning to work, he would come back in the evening with his pay that he had earned in the blacksmith shop and give it to her, and Aunt Caroline would bring her money, too, that she had made by a hard day's, washing and ironing. Oh, yes, it is all wrong and dreadful, but we will treat them well and wait for the day to set them free!”

“It will not be long now. There are all sorts of rumors about Lincoln doing this 'and that.”

The Little Immigrant

“You mean about setting the negroes free?”

“Yes.”

“But how? People will not just let them walk away!

“Walk away! Oh, little woman, if it could be brought around that way the threatening clouds would not be so dark ahead! 'Just walk away.' The President is offering to find a way out. One is to 'compensate' owners out of Government funds for the release of their slaves; another is sending them to some warm country for colonization. Of course, he would ask Congress for an appropriation for this.”

For long hours they sat reading the latest news in the day's paper and discussing the war reports with a very solemn foreboding of coming events.

CHAPTER V

WHEN the Civil War broke out the women of the South blanched with the terrible ordeal before them, but never for one moment doubted but that their beloved ones would come out of it all victorious. To them it was not conceivable that a cause so plainly one of individual rights could be lost. Sacrifice upon sacrifice was cheerfully made, even gloried in by these wonderful women of the South in 1861 and to the bitter end. Delicately nurtured women denied themselves comforts, sleep, food and drink; they were reduced to personal hardships which were met and borne with a sublime fortitude.

When it was all over those families which had possessed wealth and culture were in the grip of poverty, and it was then that the spirit of Southern womanhood showed its divine strength. Facing family troubles with the courage of noble resignation, those women who had been educated—some abroad—and accomplished, became school teachers at five dollars a month for a pupil, and many a woman to-day bears gratitude in her heart for the sweet influence of these school teachers, which has gone with her into every clime, into every condition, and proved an unfailing guide to the uplands and the heights. Many became seamstresses, some governesses and others traveling companions. But wherever these gentlewoman went they carried refinement and ideals.

The heroism of the Southern women in the Civil War is an Epic in American History!

Renestine was the mother now of three little daughters. Jaffray had gone to Mexico to buy up horses, saddles and commissaries for the army. Caroline and Josiah were her bodyguards and, faithful servants, they saved her little anxieties and looked after the welfare of the children.

Renestine made their little shoes by shaping cloth after their worn ones and sewing them together with pieces of soft cardboard for soles. She made coffee by drying beets, and flour by drying potatoes. Her practical little head was resourceful for any emergency. She felt sad at the separation from her husband, and her large black eyes were mournful but not tearful. To be and doing was her spirit. In spare moments she sat down to her tambourine to do crewel work on a tapestry picture. It was a large subject—The bard Ossian playing his harp to Malvino. Ossian seated on the front of some brown rocks, Malvino seated before him, her hands folded across his knees, full of tender regard for the gentle musician. This work was her pastime and recreation. She selected the worsteds and worked her needle out and in, shading and coloring and outlining with the skill of an artist in paints. Three years she worked on this picture, almost to the end of the war, almost as long as Penelope worked on her task awaiting Ulysses' return.

In the meantime Jaffray paid short visits to his family and made them as comfortable for periods of his absence as he had it in his power to do. Texas was too far away to be the theatre of battles during the conflict, so that no real harassing of the families by the invading Northern soldiers took place, but her people suffered privations and danger just as much as her sister states and perhaps more after the war was over and the reconstruction period set in.

In 1870 the town of Jefferson was thrown into a panic by the murder one night of a "carpet-bagger." Carpet-bagger was a name given to those men who came into Southern towns after the war to stir up the people, and particularly the darkies, against the authorities. It was necessary for Washington to send troops to Jefferson to restore order.

A stockade was built up on the hill near the new home of Jaffray, for he had found his first little house too small for his growing family, and into this stockade some of Jefferson's prominent citizens were thrown and kept until they could prove their innocence of the charges brought against them, namely, that they had knowledge of the murder of the carpet-bagger. Those were trying days. Jaffray had returned from Mexico in impaired health, which had been caused by the impure drinking water in the country and also the intense heat there. The doctors told him he had to take a long rest.

Things were going badly in the town, military law was established and all men found implicated in the disturbance were drastically punished. The war had reduced the prosperous store holder to penury, there was little money left to circulate among the people and Jefferson was demoralized in its business, civic and social life.

The Little Immigrant

General Buell, commanding the military occupation, asked as a favor to be put up at Jaffray's house, as it was one of the largest in the town and near the camp. Jaffray consented. So General Buell and his wife came to live with Renestine and Jaffray, and afterwards one or two other officers and their wives joined General Buell. This was a courageous thing for Jaffray to have done, for, with the spirit existing in the town at that critical time, not many residents would harbor the Yankees. It was so dangerous that one night, when the General wished to retire to his rooms across the broad hall, he turned to Jaffray and said:

“Jaffray, put out the lamps before I cross over.”

Kerosene lamps were in use and Jaffray put out the light before the officer walked from the sitting room across to his own rooms. In politics Jaffray was a Republican and he had the courage to live up to his convictions in a community that was enraged against Lincoln and his party. But the Republicans stood for free men, whatever color or creed, and Jaffray championed their doctrines. For him humanity, justice and liberty was the breath of his nostrils. This passion for men's rights he had inherited from a long line of ancestors reaching back into the mists of “In the beginning.” He was an Israelite.

Renestine was glad to accept this change in their lives, as she realized that Jaffray's affairs were not prosperous and with the assistance of her servants she could help him very well, particularly as he was not in robust health. Whatever situation faced her she met it with high courage and a spirit to do. Their devotion was deep and with their little family they were happy and contented. Sorrow had not spared them, however, for their baby daughter had contracted whooping cough and died a few months before. Jaffray grieved deeply for the little child and Renestine was almost overcome. But she straightened up her beautiful head, like a flower after the storm has passed, and comforted her husband.

CHAPTER VI

JAFFRAY was now Postmaster of Jefferson. The city had resumed its normal life and gained in population and wealth. The streets were filled with wagons loaded with bales of cotton brought from as far away as 250 miles by ox teams, which took three weeks.

Jefferson was at the head of navigation on an arm of the Red River. Steamboats came up once or twice a week and the cotton was shipped to New Orleans and from that city to the mills in the East. When the boats arrived the scene on the levee was a very animated one. Negroes would fix large bill hooks into the bagging around the cotton bales and load them into drays. Some of them worked singing, as sailors do when they haul and pull.

Sometimes the captains of the larger steamboats would issue invitations to the families for a soiree, when the excitement would fill society for days. The ladies would dress in their silks and laces and the men spruce up in their frock coats and flowered waistcoats and cross the gang plank into the kerosene-lighted steamboats and dance until morning. Those were red letter days for Jefferson. As a matter of etiquette, when the steamboat was loaded and about to start back, everybody would be at the levee to wave good-bye. The side paddle would turn and the hospitable captain would be up in the pilot house, waving his cap in return until the churning side-wheel carried him around the bend.

New houses were dotting the town here and there, some of them large and handsome with spacious grounds. Kerosene oil lamps were put up to light the streets and an "Opera House" was built, where many a stock company came to play in tragedy or comedy. Shakespeare's plays were the favorites of the community and Jaffray and Renestine went often to the theatre, accompanied by their two daughters, who were in their advanced school-day years and able to appreciate it. There were two little sons added to their family circle; they remained asleep in their trundle beds with old Aunt Caroline watching over them, as she had watched over the little daughters. Josiah had died right after the war was over, but he lived to see his people freed and schools opened where they could be taught to read and write—a precious privilege. He had said to Aunt Caroline just before his last illness: "Thanks be to God that He has set the colored folks free, but thanks be to Him mosen for gibbin' me a good marsa and missus who gibbs me my close, my vittles and my me'cine."

The relation of the household servants to the Southern family was that of trust and affection after their liberation. In advanced years, like old Aunt Caroline, the younger servants saved them unnecessary steps and their days were happy and peaceful.

Near the home which Renestine and Jaffray occupied almost touching the porch was a huge oak tree spreading wide shade around it. Here the children played; or, if it was a rainy day, they carried their precious dolls and drums into the latticed summer house built for ornamentation and use in very hot weather, where woodbine and honeysuckle ran along its diamond-shaped walls and hung thick and colorful in great waves. Jaffray loved his home and spared nothing that would make it comfortable and attractive.

His days were very arduous now, as he had to learn the methods of a government position. It appealed to him, though, for it was a pursuit which required reading up on rules, laws and regulations, and his bent was for books and instruction from them. While his days passed in attending to the business of the Post Office, his nights were given to study and self-improvement. He was never satisfied with what he achieved; to learn and to know more and more was his ruling passion. Many citizens now called upon him for advice. He would be asked to speak when a new building was opened or a public movement was on foot. They knew him to be generous and full of civic pride. He belonged to the Board of Aldermen and at one time was offered the office of Mayor. He had the confidence and respect of all the inhabitants of the town and his politeness and gentleness were the qualifications which made them love him.

He was a tall, spare figure, with black, well-set eyes, black hair, now showing thin at the temples and somewhat bald; he had a short black beard and moustache and his carriage was upright and dignified. He could be stern, even severe, when things aroused his anger, and nothing could touch his temper quicker than underhand dealings or a mean act. But his whole being was steeped with love of his kind and sympathy with the poor.

In the early days of Jefferson he and a friend bought a deed for a cemetery and presented it to the Jewish community. His home was opened to social and political gatherings where his friends were sure of a warm

The Little Immigrant

welcome. Renestine was always the center of attraction of these social affairs. She was proud of her husband and flushed with happiness when she saw him surrounded by admiring groups of men.

At this time a new influence came into their lives. It was a fine old Frenchman, who had drifted down to Jefferson from Alabama, where he had been a professor of piano teaching. His name was D'Archais, and by degrees they learned his history. But the immediate result of their meeting was to give their two little daughters, now eight and ten years old, to him to be instructed in music.

The history of this new friend was a romantic one. During the time of Louis Philippe he left Paris. His property and title had been taken by the revolutionists for he was an aristocrat, a Count, and he found that he was safer with the ocean between him and his beloved Paris.

He landed in Mobile, Alabama, and used his accomplishments of painting and music as a means of gaining a livelihood. For many years he worked in his profession and accumulated enough to lay aside. This he invested in cotton which was destroyed in a warehouse by fire. It was hard, but he began all over again and in the meantime married a widow with a daughter. This step-daughter won his complete affection, and when she married he devoted himself to her two children, a girl and a boy. It was because of these two children that he came to Jefferson, where they were then living.

The music teacher was 70 years old when he came into the lives of Jaffray and Renestine; a polished, grand old man of kingly soul and manners. The little daughters quickly learned to love their dear old teacher and all his life time he was their dear friend.

Jaffray was much impressed by this gentle nobleman and was glad to have the privilege of his friendship for himself and his family. He found that he was easily tired in these days and welcomed nightfall when he could sit on the porch in the twilight of summer and feel the peace of evening creep on apace. Often Mr. D'Archais would join him and chat about travel and the fall and rise of political parties in France.

"I left France after the fall of Louis Philippe," he said, "and came to America. My property was confiscated and I arrived here penniless. A friend of mine had gone to Mobile, Alabama, some years before, and I resolved to follow him. I began life over again and took a position in a young ladies' academy there to teach piano. I had taken lessons from renowned musicians in Paris, the same as taught Napoleon's sister, Pauline, and this was my only means now of making a living.

"I did very well, lived comfortably and saved a little besides, so that when the war broke out I had invested in cotton which was in a warehouse waiting to be sold. A large fire destroyed the warehouse with its contents, leaving me penniless once more, as there was not a dollar of insurance on it.

"In the meantime my friend had died leaving his family—wife and daughter—in my care. I decided to carry out his wish on his deathbed and married his wife soon after. His daughter became my joy and happiness. She was docile, *ma foi*, so perfect, that in a few years, when she married, I was irreconcilable." Here the music master would stop, let his face drop into his big, white, soft hands for a moment and then go on with his story. "She died three years after her marriage, leaving two children, a boy and a girl. These children were adopted by people here in this state and I followed. Jefferson was recommended to me as a good place to begin a class in music. I am not sorry I came as I have made friends and in my old age I can look forward to peace and a few devoted pupils to brighten the days." Many times during his recital he would exclaim: "Mon Dieu, mon dieu, I have seen many trials and tribulations."

Jaffray was always sorry to see Mr. D'Archais leave; his personality and story were romantic and picturesque. Long into the shadows of the night he would sit watching the stars come out one by one, thinking of the troublous life of the nobleman and simple music teacher.

In the Autumn Jaffray took to his bed utterly worn out and grew very ill, so ill that the family doctor felt a great deal of concern about his symptoms. He instructed that Jaffray be kept very quiet on a low diet and stimulants, to be given every few hours. This treatment benefited Jaffray so that he was able to sit up in a favorite arm chair now and then and listen to Charles Dickens' story, "Our Mutual Friend," then running as a serial in Harper's Magazine, read to him by his little gray-eyed daughter now ten years old.

At the close of the reading one morning he said: "What a great man! I'd rather die to-day and leave behind me the fame of Charles Dickens than live to be a hundred years old."

Much encouraged by Jaffray's condition, Renestine took fresh hope and went about her daily occupation with more energy. She knew Jaffray's tender affection for his children and when on his good days he had been made

The Little Immigrant

comfortable in his big arm chair the two young daughters, Lola and Ena, and their little brothers, Lester, Andrew and Frank, were allowed to come into his room and be near him, the infant son Frank resting in his arms, Lola standing by like a little mother watching over them all.

Other days he would look out of the window and watch the big oak tree standing near, with its leaves turning brown, shaking in the wind. Winter was turning the vines on the summer house into lifeless twists of runners and bending the rose hushes until the petals were strewn about the ground.

It was not until the first week in November that Renestine noticed that Jaffray was not as strong as usual. He kept to his bed now altogether, and his great heart seemed to speak to her of what was uppermost there—the parting; after only thirteen years of wedded life the end had come. His little Queen Esther with the rosebuds on her gown!

In his last moments he said to a friend: “What does it matter whether a man lives a little longer or not? It is only the loved ones he leaves that matter.”

At his death the city closed the places of business by proclamation of the Mayor, and the long line of followers at his bier to the little cemetery he had given testified to the love his fellow men bore him.

Renestine was crushed. Her five children were to be lived for, of course, but how could she face the long years before her? She was young, inexperienced, unused to the world and its ways. She was overwhelmed by her fate. The assets of a generous man at his death are debts and some friends. Had it not been for the advice and devotion of a few friends, Renestine would have gone down in the black waters that were now surging around her. The Post Office was looked after until she could find strength in body and mind to assume the duties of Post Mistress to which she was appointed. When she entered the door that first morning it was as a broken spirit without any idea of what she was about to undertake. The task was serious and exacting, she realized, but how to grasp its thousand details? Her master would be the U. S. Government, an uncompromising, stern and bloodless one.

Not many years before, this little woman was an immigrant child, landing with timid step on strange soil. To-day she was ushered into the important office of Government Mail and Money matters, one of the most responsible positions in the country.

With her usual courage and determination to learn, Renestine set about the long figures of quarterly returns and register reports, money order and stamp reports, making up and distributing mail, prompt deliveries and sending out of mail. Her pride in her new life responded to the demands made upon her and she went forward. Unafraid now, for she had a grasp of the difficulties, she bent her work. She pored over her monthly and quarterly returns in the quiet of night, and over and over again she wrote and figured until she understood and could make them out correctly. She was encouraged by her friends, and complimented by the bankers and merchants in the city for her successful efforts.

The first year was a long trial to Renestine. Her children were young and needed her care and guidance as well as the new occupation. But the little mother was all the busier when she returned home in the evening. With a divine strength to perform and serve, she labored.

The education of each child was followed patiently, eagerly, unceasingly, by her. Music and languages, besides the fundamentals, were to be given to each.

The bodies were clothed by her flying fingers at night. What a boon ready-to-wear would have been to this little mother. Not a boy's garment could be had unless it was the handiwork of the household.

One evening, many years afterward, Renestine returned to her home with her sixteenth commission in her hand. She had served the public of Jefferson faithfully and efficiently and the people had honored her. During these years her elder daughter had married but only lived a year after her marriage. This was another searing sorrow and for many days seemed to consume her. Now her second daughter was about to become the wife of a noble man who had long wished to wed her and take her back with him to make their home in New York City.

This evening she sat in the midst of her little family and recalled many scenes of her life. She was still a young woman, forty-eight, and she intended sending her resignation to Washington. She was about to leave Jefferson and follow her daughter to New York where there were better opportunities for the advancement of her three sons.

The following day she went with her prospective son-in-law and her daughter to pay a farewell visit to Mr. D'Archais at his little two-roomed house. The old man rose with his arms outstretched to meet them and his “little girl” was soon enclosed in them. On parting he turned to her soon-to-be husband and said:

The Little Immigrant

“Make her happy. Make my little girl happy,” and held his hand affectionately in his own.

So it was that Renestine, the little immigrant girl, became a superb woman of deeds, a wonderful American mother whose grandchildren have fought in this last war to win democracy for the world!

THE END