

A
FLICKERING
LIGHT

A NOVEL

JANE
KIRKPATRICK

Praise for
A Flickering Light

“Jane Kirkpatrick has done it again. *A Flickering Light* is as engaging, well researched, and finely written as her other best-selling historical novels. Her characters are real people with real temptations, and at the end of the novel, this reader wants to know what happens next.”

—LAURINE SNELLING, author of *One Perfect Day*
and the Blessing books

“Jane Kirkpatrick’s brilliance as a storyteller and her elegant artistry with the written word shine like a beacon in *A Flickering Light*. A master at weaving historical accounts with threads of story, Jane has that rare ability to take her reader on a journey through time. You nearly feel the ground move beneath your feet.”

—SUSAN MEISSNER, author of *The Shape of Mercy*

“Jane Kirkpatrick handles some very difficult issues and situations in *A Flickering Light*. Her attention to historical detail is greatly appreciated and defines her mark on this story. As the series continues, I will watch with great anticipation to see where this journey takes us.”

—TRACIE PETERSON, best-selling author of the Alaskan
Quest and Brides of Gallatin County series

“One of the marvels of this novel is Kirkpatrick’s uncanny ability to enter into the minds and hearts of many characters and inhabit them with authority, generosity of spirit, and wisdom. You’ll want to read slowly so you can savor each paragraph, each scene, each chapter.”

—K. L. COOK, author of *The Girl from Charnelle*,
winner of the 2007 WILLA Award for Contemporary
Fiction, and *Last Call*, winner of the Prairie Schooner
Book Prize in Fiction.

“The dilemma of being an independent, artistic woman in a conservative, strict society is brought to light with great empathy by Ms. Kirkpatrick’s compassionate recreation of Jessie Ann’s life as one of the first female photographers. What Ms. Kirkpatrick accomplishes with absolute grace through memorable imagery is recognizing and honoring the eternal plight of all soul-seeking women in the story of one young girl who was determined to follow her creative passion.”

—LAURIE WAGNER BUYER, author of *Spring’s
Edge: A Ranch Wife’s Chronicles*

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This book is a work of historical fiction based closely on real people and real events. Details that cannot be historically verified are purely products of the author's imagination.

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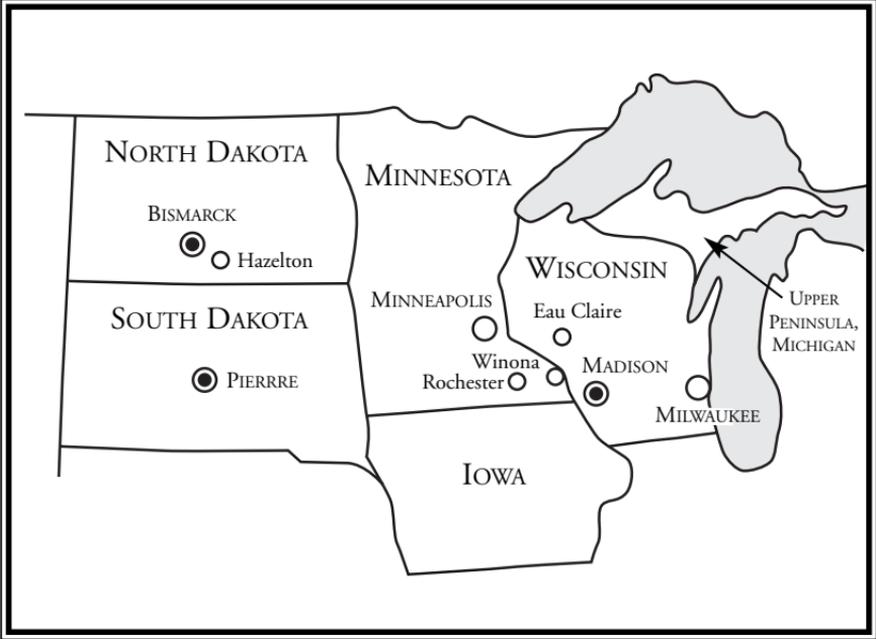
To the descendants of Jessie Ann.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

<i>Jessie Ann Gaebele</i>	a photographer's apprentice
<i>Lillian Ida Gaebele</i>	a seamstress and older sister to Jessie
<i>Selma Selena Gaebele</i>	a singer and younger sister to Jessie
<i>Roy William Gaebele</i>	a budding musician and younger brother to Jessie, nicknamed "Frog"
<i>William and Ida Gaebele</i>	parents of Jessie and owners of a drayage in Winona, Minnesota
<i>August Schoepp</i>	Ida Gaebele's younger brother
<i>*Voe Kopp</i>	friend of Jessie's
<i>*Jerome Kopp</i>	Voe's brother
<i>Frederick John "FJ" Bauer</i>	owner of Bauer Studio
<i>Jessie Otis Bauer</i>	wife of FJ and professional photo retoucher
<i>Russell, Donald (deceased), Winifred, and Robert</i>	children of FJ and Jessie Bauer
<i>Mrs. Otis and Eva</i>	Jessie Bauer's mother and sister
<i>Luisse</i>	FJ's younger sister
<i>*Daniel Henderson</i>	friend of Voe

<i>Herman Reinke</i>	FJ's North Dakota ranch partner
<i>Nic Steffes</i>	owner of Winona Cycle Livery and Dealer
<i>Lottie Fort</i>	milliner in Winona
<i>Ralph Carleton</i>	a Winona evangelist
<i>Mayo brothers</i>	physicians in Rochester, Minnesota
<i>*Miss Jones</i>	a speech and language specialist
<i>Mrs. Johnson</i>	owner of a photographic studio in Milwaukee, Wisconsin
<i>Henry and Mary Harms</i>	Harms family
<i>Marie Harms</i>	Milwaukee host for Jessie Gaebele

* Characters identified with asterisks are created from the author's imagination. The female photographers identified in the text are actual historical figures.

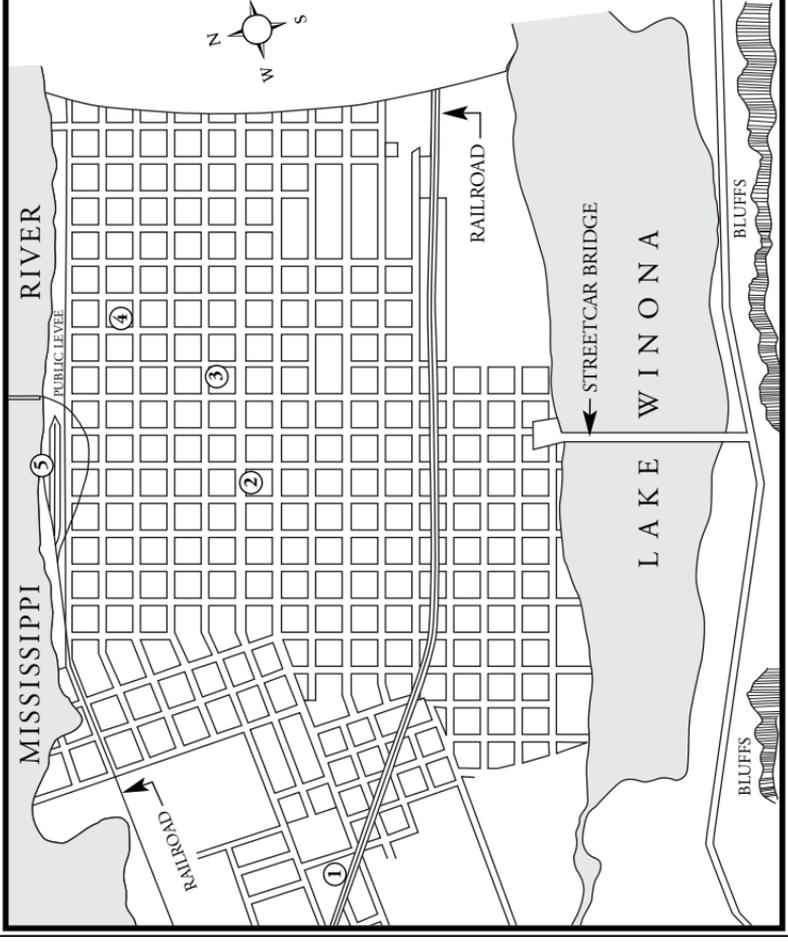
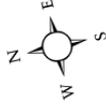


MAP OF
WINONA
MINNESOTA

PERIOD 1900

KEY

- ① **Bauer Home**
420 S. Baker
- ② **Gaebele Home**
579 W. Broadway
- ③ **Bauer Studio**
Fifth and Johnson
- ④ **Cycle Shop**
205-207 Main
- ⑤ **Railroad Station**
Front St.



Faith, hope and love are the three eternities.
To look up and not down, that is Faith;
to look forward and not back, that is Hope;
and then to look out and not in, that is Love.

—REVEREND EDWARD EVERETT HALE,
Woman's Home Companion, July 1907

The Truth must dazzle gradually
Or every man be blind—

—EMILY DICKINSON,
“Tell all the Truth but tell it slant”

Then you will know the truth,
and the truth will set you free.

—JOHN 8:32, NIV

Love...consists in...that two solitudes
protect and border and salute each other.

—RAINER MARIA RILKE,
Letters to a Young Poet



Subjects

In my favorite portrait of myself, I am wearing an opaque eyelet dress, layered, with the scalloped edges of the hemline barely whispering across the studio floor. The dress could have been worn for a christening, though its lavish detail would have stolen something from an event where the child ought to be the focus. The child, wearing a long, flowing white dress that could be handed down to brother and sister for each successive important day, that's what matters at a christening. The child is what people should gaze upon at such an event, not a mother or aunt or friend wearing a too-elegant eyelet dress.

It could be a wedding dress, but of course, it wasn't.

I find so few photographs of myself that I wish to share with others, but in this one I appear taller than my five feet two inches, as I've chosen a hat with ostrich plumes swept up in the back and high over my head. The plumes shade my eyes with dried berries that flow out onto the hat's white brim in a cornucopia of fruit. My hair, the color of oiled leather, is coiled up beneath the brim. (My little brother, Roy, says I have hair the color of the cow pies dotting the pasture on our grandparents' farm, but that's the nature of little brothers born in the new century, or at least was Roy's creative nature before the...event.) The milliner did splendid work, and the white of the felted hat brim brings the eye to the dress, which is what I wanted. The beauty of the dress is the real subject of the photograph.

My mother called it my "kept-woman dress." It was no such thing and it pained me to hear her say it. In time I came to know full well that I'd received favor, undeserved and accepted unwisely. But there are always misunderstandings in families, always sacrifices worthy of making too, no matter how strained they may seem at the time.

I'd seen the dress in Choate's window as I walked bundled up against Minnesota's blistering river winds. The dress spoke of spring and newness, something I longed for. I vowed to buy it. And so I did, saving twenty-five cents a week for six months before bringing it home one fine summer day. Of course, I'd asked the clerk to set it aside for me and put fifty cents down so they knew I was serious, that I'd keep my commitment.

In this photograph, I posed myself at the edge of a bench made to look like marble. Its molding can't be identified as something specific but suggests lush relief and gives interest to the eye, though not enough to take away from the true subject. Morning light radiates through the studio windows.

I'd painted a board white and set it just beyond the arc of the exposure so that the morning rays reflected against it and poured soft beams back onto the dress, keeping the area to my right in shadow. It seemed fitting with so much of my life a chase of shadow and light. Behind me I used the scenic drop of dark woods reflecting against a full moon shining. My face seems almost backlit by that sphere, a feature I hadn't anticipated. It fascinates me that I can set up a subject, think I have everything perfectly arranged, and then only afterward see things I had not noticed, little things, like spots of light that highlight the tips of my size-three black high-button boots or a moon giving unexpected brightness. It seems I turn reflective after the fact, surprised by what was always there that I failed to see.

I had wanted the soft natural light to raise the detail of the eyelet dress and the overskirt and emphasize the hours of work that must have gone into making it, to shade gently on my shoulders and maybe, just maybe, to bring into focus—something one might notice after prolonged viewing—the rings I'm wearing or the necklace.

I leaned slightly forward, no easy task given the whalebone corset that fit as close to me as soap to skin. I clasped my hands at my knees. At the last minute, I also decided not to look at the camera but to gaze away, toward something I couldn't quite name but knew I wanted.

I did not smile. There are times to smile and times to cry and times to be serene. I see sadness in my eyes.

Voe opened the shutter, exposed the film, then closed it, using my 3A Graflex. I developed the photograph myself.

I never intended to show the image to him.

But he saw it there among the other exposures of funeral flowers and family portraits made on New Year's Day. A child had jiggled on her father's lap, so that photograph was wasted, but I hated throwing the picture out because I did appreciate the family composition. The prints lay on the table outside the developing room, some of the edges beginning to curl because I'd wanted to save costs and didn't use the more expensive paper.

He wasn't supposed to be there, recovering from his illnesses and everything else.

His mustache twitched as his long fingers moved the photographs aside, then stalled at the one of me. He lifted it, adjusted his glasses, then lowered the print to catch my eyes. I couldn't tell if his smile was wistful or contained a certain sense of pride...for his part in my having produced such a precious photograph or my part in being willing to have myself as the subject. I didn't ask. Instead I pulled the picture from his fingers, careful not to touch him, and directed his attention elsewhere.

I could do that and discovered nearly too late that I often had to.

ONE



Doing the Right Thing

AGAINST THE MORNING DARKNESS, Jessie Ann Gaebele quietly lit the stubby candle. Its feeble light flickered in the mirror while she dressed. She pulled her stockings on, donned her chemise, debated about a corset, decided against it. She'd make too much noise getting it hooked. No one was likely to see her this morning anyway, and she'd be back before her mother even knew she'd left the house without it. She could move faster without a "German Bend," as ladies magazines called the posture forced by the stays and bustle. She guessed some thought it an attractive look for a girl in 1907, emphasizing a small waist and a rounded derrière. Jessie claimed both but had little time for either that morning, and timing mattered if she was to succeed. If Jessie didn't catch the moment, it wouldn't be for lack of trying.

She spilled the dark linen skirt over her petticoat, letting it settle on her slender frame. She inhaled the lavender her sister Selma insisted be added when they made their own soap, something they did more often now since they'd moved to Winona, Minnesota. Selma was prone to sensuous scents; sensuous music too, her husky voice holding people hostage when she sang.

Jessie looked at her sleeping sisters. The candlelight cast shadows on the tousled hair of Selma, her younger sister, and on the nightcap that Lilly, her older sister, always wore. ("It will keep you from catching vapors in the night," Lilly claimed.) Jessie pulled on the white shirtwaist. Even in sleep they reflected who they were when awake: Selma, dreamy and romantic; Lilly, organized and right. Always right. Jessie slept somewhere between them, literally. In life she guessed she had a bit of both of those girls' practices in her. Selma would approve of Jessie's morning goal for its dreamy adventure; Lilly wouldn't. But Jessie'd organized it as Lilly would, leaving little to chance. She'd walked the route, knew the obstacles. She anticipated what she'd find when she got there. If she could make it on time.

Luckily there were only five buttons down the back of her blouse, close to the high neck. She considered waking Selma to help her button them but decided against it. Selma would want the details and wake up Lilly, who would question her judgment. Jessie would not lie. Lilly would point out how ridiculous she was being, rising early and setting out for such foolishness when she had an important appointment in the day ahead. "*That* should be your emphasis," Lilly would say. She spoke as though *she* were Jessie's mother. Oh, she meant well; older sisters did. That's what her mother told her. But still, Jessie was tired of having every person in the family older than she considered wiser and worldlier too.

So Jessie reached back and buttoned the blouse herself, then centered a beaded-buckle belt on her tiny fifteen-year-old waist. *Hat or no hat?* Going out in public without her hat would be too casual. Someone just might question what she was doing or, worse, remember and tell her mother. She could get by without the corset, but she'd best wear the hat.

She tossed a shawl around her shoulders, grabbed her shoes, then dropped one by mistake. She held her breath, hoping no one would wake. She blew out the candle and waited.

“Jessie?”

“Go back to sleep, Selma.”

“What are you up to?”

Jessie moved to her sister’s side of the bed and whispered, “Don’t wake Lilly, all right? It’s a secret. Can you keep a secret?” Her sister nodded. “I’m going on an adventure.”

“Can I come too?”

“Not this time. But I’ll tell you all about it after you get home from school. Just don’t tell, please? If Mama asks, just say you don’t know. Because you don’t.”

“Is it about a beau?”

“You read too many of those stories in *Woman’s Home Companion*. No boys. Nothing like that.”

“I better tell Mama.” She pushed the quilt back onto the empty space where Jessie had slept. “She won’t like you going off by yourself in the night.”

“No!” Jessie looked at Lilly to see if her loud whisper had awakened her. “It’s nothing. I’ll be back before breakfast.”

“All right. But you’ll tell me everything?”

“Everything necessary,” Jessie said.

Her sister settled back under the quilt, and Jessie picked up her shoe. She’d nearly crippled her adventure before it even started! She tiptoed past Roy’s room with special quietness, careful of the oak floor that creaked at a certain place near the head of the stairs. Roy had hearing like their mother’s. That woman could tell when any of them squabbled in the bedroom over a hairpiece even when she was outside in the yard, hanging up clothes on the far side of the house while the wind blew! Sadness bordered Jessie’s thoughts of her little brother like a photographic frame. Jessie slipped past his room, past her parents’ door, out onto the porch with the swing, and sighed relief.

Outside, Jessie inhaled the morning. Late March and the promise of an early spring. Not long before flowers would poke

their heads up through the crusty Minnesota ground. She heard a steamship whistle bawling its presence at Winona's docks along the Mississippi. The shawl would be enough to ward off the cold once she started walking, and the promised sun would warm her up when she stood still. Within an hour, dawn would offer up its gift but would wait for only a few seconds for Jessie to receive it. After that, the shapes she wanted to capture would change, and soon the snow would be gone, the city would stop the burning, and she'd have to wait another year. She had little time to spare. She couldn't be late today.

On the porch steps, she pulled on her high-button shoes over scratchy wool socks, then grabbed the heavy leather bag from behind the porch latticework, where she'd placed it the night before. Her uncle August Schoepp had given her the bag and its precious cargo just last year, she supposed in memory of their time at the St. Louis World's Fair. It was her treasure. She drew the strap over her shoulder, centered the weight on her right hip, then set off, holding the bag out to prevent the bruises it often left behind. The corset might have been a help to support her back against the bag, but it was too late to think of that now.

She set a fast pace on Broadway, liking the feel of the new concrete's solidness pounding up through her slender legs. She crossed the street, kept walking. Pigeons flew from the rooftop of the Winona Hotel. Pancakes of dirty snow exposed themselves in the shaded window wells. The clank of railroad cars connecting and departing at the repair yards broke the morning calm. Against the gas streetlights, fingers of elm and maple branches rose before her. There'd be buds on them before long, and the maple sap would drip like dark honey down the trunks, making a rich contrast of brown on black.

She turned the corner, walked several more blocks, then at the lamplight flickering in the bicycle shop's window, Jessie grinned. Mr. Steffes had remembered. He was not a founder of the city, but

he'd been around to see many of its changes while running his cycle livery and dealership and doing repair work on the side.

A bicycle leaned against the framed wall. Maybe he meant for her to just take it. It would certainly save time. But he might have left it for someone else. She'd better go in and check.

Jessie stepped inside, the small bell above the door announcing her arrival. She scanned the room. "Mr. Steffes? I'm here. Is the bicycle outside the one you meant for me to take?" The silence felt heavy. The shop smelled of saw dust, the kind brushed onto the wooden floors to soak up grease and oil. It was awfully cluttered. And still. "Mr. Steffes?" Jessie swallowed. "Remember? I left you a nickel for the use of the bicycle this morning. I said I'd come early." She stumbled over a bucket filled with rags. Maybe she could earn the five cents back by offering to clean up this place.

That thought made her cringe. Her mother would not be pleased to know she'd spent a nickel of her own hard-earned dollars from the book bindery on something frivolous like a bicycle rental, especially because she'd recently been released from the bindery. There was little money to spare with her father's illness, which the doctors couldn't name or fix. He had so much pain that they'd had to leave their Wisconsin dairy farm near Cream and move across the Mississippi into Winona, where the girls could find employment and they could be closer to the doctors. Her father eventually worked in the dray business and drove a team to make deliveries, but they all worried over him, her mother and brother and sisters, fearing he might have one of his episodes and suffer excruciating stomachaches that couldn't be stopped without laudanum and rest.

Prickles of uncertainty clustered at her temples. This morning's ride was important too, important for Jessie. If somehow her mother found out she'd spent the money, she'd just have to convince her that it was for a worthy cause—though how she'd do that she wasn't sure. When she tried to explain this recent pull on her,

this desire that came over her, the words came out as flat as a knife and not nearly as sharp.

She'd deal with that later. Jessie pushed her spectacles up on her nose, set her shoulders, and took a forward step, moving past the shadow ghosts of bicycles and what appeared to be one of those new ringers washers in need of repair. Her skirt caught on a bicycle seat. When she straightened, she saw a sliver of light, a thin string that marked the bottom of a back room door. Had it just come on? "Mr. Steffes, I don't mean to bother you, but it's Jessie Gaebele and I was hoping I could just—"

She heard a groan, then what sounded like scuffling followed by a thump.

She readied herself for someone to come charging through the door. When that didn't happen, she listened to her throbbing heart, swallowed, then pushed the door open to face this complication of her day.



F. J. Bauer yanked at the heavy drapes, the purple velvet loosening splinters of dust to shimmer in the sunlight. He preferred white lace-hemmed sheer covers for the windows, but Mrs. Bauer suffered from headaches, and the light, well, the light could touch them off. She wasn't in the room now though, so he relished the dawn's washing in. He listened for the train that clicked the tracks beside his home; he could set his watch by it. He placed the ties to hold back the drapes. As he turned, he adjusted his spectacles and scanned the latest books he'd purchased, encased behind glass. He'd treat himself to reading when he returned home that evening if he wasn't too tired.

A sound down the hall moved him toward the nursery in their house at 420 South Baker Street. He'd built a new photographic studio on the corner of Fifth and Johnson in 1895, and it was one of the finest. Everyone told him that. A two-story white clapboard

structure with a studio room that captured natural light. He'd wanted to build family quarters into the studio, but Mrs. Bauer had objected. Work should be separate from family, she'd said, though how a man was to do that he didn't really understand. He did this work *for* his family. The home they lived in was comfortable but nothing as fancy as what his friend Watkins had built; but then, FJ lacked that man's resources to both solicit and promote. He shook his head. Confound that Watkins for marrying into good fortune!

FJ's wife, Jessie Anzina Otis Bauer, whom he called Mrs. Bauer at her insistence, sometimes worked with him in the studio, mostly retouching photographs. He had thought she'd be good with customer complaints, something his impatience aggravated. She was a comely woman with intense blue eyes that gave her a nearly romanesque beauty, though her slender frame belied anything robust. He had hoped she'd help with developing photographs too. But the chemicals frightened her, she said, and the flash lights she pronounced "dangerous," the flamed powder exploding before the shutter closed. She preferred the quiet isolation of the dark retouching room, erasing the wrinkles of an autocrat who wished to look younger than his years, or using a brush stroke to add sparkle to a mother's tired eyes. After he built the new studio, she'd urged him to set up a retouching room in the house so she never had to come to the studio at all, but so far he'd resisted that. After all, wasn't she the one who wanted work separated from family?

What he had liked best about his old studio was its closeness to his children. He could hear the boys' laughter and petty arguments as Russell and Donald made noises with their wooden horses. A pang of memory shot through him at the thought of his boys, but he set it aside. He passed the water closet door. He'd have to get it fixed and felt a little shameful for having lost his temper when Mrs. Bauer locked the door and wouldn't come out when he asked. Instead, approaching the nursery now, he focused on the comforting chattering sounds that came from two-year-old Winifred. She'd be suckling at her mother's breast.

He hesitated at the nursery door. He wanted to run his hand over his only daughter's silky hair, tie a bow into her curls himself, exchange a few words now that Winnie had begun talking a streak. But Mrs. Bauer preferred that such intimacies as nursing or diaper changing be accomplished without his presence. Mrs. Bauer also wished to wean the girl, but it was FJ who'd convinced her to wait a bit longer. "What could be better for a child's health than her mother's milk?" he'd told her. He recalled the conversation.

Mrs. Bauer had raised her eyebrow in warning. "Russell," she said. They were at the table, and their eight-year-old ate his egg while they spoke.

"Yes ma'am?"

"She was speaking *of* you, not *to* you, Son," FJ told him, then persisted. "Cow's milk will do when they're older, but if you can give the child life's fluid from your own body, you ought to. At least until she's three. *Bitte.*" Russell had giggled; FJ's wife had blushed, then turned to him with narrowed eyes, his pleading in German falling on deaf ears, or so he'd thought.

He was all for scientific advancements, and the pasteurized milk developed by Halsey nearly twelve years previous probably added to the nutrition of the liquid. At least that's what some proposed. But it wasn't in wide use, and there could be problems. Chemicals did cause problems. He was well aware of that, having endured his first attack of mercury poisoning the year Donald was born.

Brought back to the present by that terrible memory, that deep crevasse of yearning that sucked his breath away, he gasped, seeking to fill the loss. He wondered if Mrs. Bauer thought of Donald while she suckled Winnie. Maybe that was why she wished to stop. He hadn't considered that before. It would be three years this October.

On impulse, he opened the nursery door. A child's quilt lay over his daughter's head and his wife's breast as the child nursed in the muted room. A small lamp reflected Mrs. Bauer's eyes, which opened with a start.

“What are you doing?” she demanded.

At her words, Winnie pulled the nine-patch from her head and sat up. Mrs. Bauer grabbed at the wool and pulled it over herself. “Papa!” His daughter lifted her arms to him. The gesture warmed him. She would give up mother’s milk to have him hold her.

Mrs. Bauer pulled her daughter’s arms down. “Papa has to go to work,” she said. She still clutched the cloth over her shoulder and breast, covering herself. “Don’t you.” It was not a question.

“I wanted to say good morning. To you both,” he said.

“You wanted to please yourself,” she said, though under her breath.

Was she right? Was such a wish so terrible? He decided against defending. “I’m sorry I intruded,” he said. “I was thoughtless.”

“Yes. You were.”

He backed out as Mrs. Bauer pushed Winnie back to nurse, pulling the cloth over them both. But Winnie resisted. “Papa!” She yanked the quilt and wailed.

“See what you started?”

He closed the door, stood outside it. Winnie cried, calling for him, screaming. He didn’t know whether to go in and rescue his wife from his daughter’s temper or the other way around. Either way, there’d be a fury to pay when he returned home. He lifted his hand to the glass doorknob, then heard her say to him through the closed door, “I’ll take care of this, Mr. Bauer. No need for you to fret or disrupt your busy day.” Her sarcasm melted over him like icy snow and left him just as cold.

He walked on down the carpeted stairs to the kitchen, turned on the gaslight, and fixed himself hot coffee and toast with marmalade, working to put the incident behind him. While he ate, he scanned the *Republican-Herald* for his ad. They’d gotten it correct this time. He wiped up the crumbs from the daisy-dotted oilcloth and cupped them in his palm, dumped them into the wastebasket. He surveyed the plate rail, each item tidy in its place. No clutter in

this kitchen. He heard no more cries from upstairs. She'd settled Winnie down. He donned his bowler, buttoned his coat, lifted his cane, and stepped outside. His morning had begun.

As he walked, he could smell smoke from the fires set at the base of the bluffs, burning shrubs away. The flames moved up the face in a kind of dance, back and forth in a mesmerizing amber weave. If he were closer, he'd hear the licking and spitting as they hit patches of snow and were doused at the top of the ridge. It was a rite of spring to see the fires light up the night, a tradition on the bluffs, which rose nearly six hundred feet above Lake Winona. The predictability of seasonal displays calmed him.

He reviewed his day ahead. Several portrait sittings were scheduled. He thought of the clients as he walked toward his studio. He enjoyed that part of his work most, the staging and cajoling people into a level of comfort so they could be captured on film. People read his *Republican-Herald* ads, saved their money, got the family "attired," arrived, and then turned all shy or nervous about having scheduled themselves for something they suddenly defined as frivolous or self-indulgent. The Germans, his own people, were the worst, not wanting to "waste" money and yet loving the results once he got them past their frugality and focused them on family.

It was up to him to give them reasons to sit before a stranger, staring at a lens that would capture this moment in time. He wondered if they thought the photograph would somehow hold them hostage, so they could never be different from what the photograph revealed. He assured them they could be and insisted that photographs are just a slice of their life meant to stir the memory, not to carve the image into eternal stone. "Years from now, when the children are grown, you'll be so pleased you took this time. The same money put into your house or into your horse won't have memories nearly as fond as what this photograph will bring. And this return comes with a fine wooden frame and nothing you have to clean up after." They'd laugh, then, and settle down.

They didn't know about the creativity needed to use light or to pose a subject or to decide how long to expose the film. Even the backdrop he chose put its mark on the photograph. Things not really there could be made to seem so. A woman's hard-worn years carved against her face could be softened; a man's natural scowl could be lessened with the right angle. Every child had beauty with the right light, the right pose. These were tricks of the trade: the use of sunlight and setting mixed with time.

Sometimes the photographs could also reveal qualities in people and in relationships that he wouldn't even notice until after the film was developed. How far apart a wife and child stood from the husband and father. The way a father's hand reached out to a child with a bit of grime still beneath his fingernails; the surprising evidence of a mother's presence. Once he'd photographed a toddler barely able to stand, and so the mother had squatted behind the studio chair, seeming to hide while stabilizing the child for the duration of the exposure. When he pulled the photograph from the developing solutions, he'd seen her shadow, just a hint of her being there behind the girl. It said so much about a parent's wish to give protection and strength to a child without always being seen.

Protection. The German poet Rilke had described love as two solitudes come together to protect, border, and salute each other. He'd loved Donald that way; he had. He'd bordered Donald, saluted his son's efforts. He just hadn't protected him.

He put the memories away, and at Fifth Street he walked up the steps and turned the key to his studio door, coming in the front the way his clients did. He paused for a moment to look at the photographic display in the bay window. The year that Donald was born, the gold medal he'd won for his portrait work had been stolen right out of the lobby. The police never found it, and they'd made him think it was his own fault for posting such a valuable piece right where others could see it. But confound it, what was the point of receiving recognition if one couldn't show it off just a little?

His other awards—announced on paper and framed—helped adorn some of the portrait work, the eyes of the subjects gazing out at him. It was good work he did. He could be proud of it even if his judgment resulted in the gold medal's loss. A businessman had to announce his accolades. They engendered confidence in clients. Burying the praise in a safe? What would be the point in that?

Inside, he hung his hat on the oak rack at the end of the mirrored bench, straightened his tie, then walked to the appointment ledger on the desk in the reception room.

He hoped the first appointment, set for nine, would be on time. The light made all the difference.

He adjusted his glasses, checked his schedule book, and frowned. At ten, he had appointments with two women who might become camera assistants. A flash of annoyance crossed over his mind. Mrs. Bauer had made those arrangements. She ought to have known it wasn't the best time of day for an interview, not when the sunlight was so necessary for his work. Interviews should be late afternoon. He tapped with his pencil. He'd have to pull the heavy drape up against the glare and then lower it for the portrait sitting at eleven. He had another scheduled at one, another at two, then planned to work in the developing room until closing. Well, perhaps Mrs. Bauer felt the harsh light of late morning wouldn't be good for a sitting but would work fine to decide if two ladies ought to be hired to assist him.

He didn't want to hire any help. His former assistant, Risser, had taken over the studio while FJ spent an extended time in North Dakota; then that arrangement soured. FJ had returned to find things deteriorated. A fire had damaged the reception room and destroyed many of the valuable glass plates in his Grove collection, from which he had numerous requests for prints. It was a terrible loss, though fortunately he'd stored the Charles Tenney collection plates at home, and some of the Grove plates in the middle of the sets of negatives were salvageable. FJ took back the studio, and

Risser went on to become competition, opening his own studio just blocks away. FJ had trained the man for four years, though he'd say he had come with skills. Risser claimed his brother had a photographic business in St. Louis where he'd apprenticed, but FJ always wondered if he hadn't just been some itinerant tramp photographer anyway. Risser had left him faster than a grease splat could ruin a man's good shirt.

Perhaps Mrs. Bauer thought women would be less likely to leave once trained. But he'd lost other women he'd trained when they moved on to be assistants elsewhere. He settled on hoping for washer girls who wanted jobs with a little less scrubbing involved. Maybe this time he'd have more mature women rather than those with starry eyes for photography. The latter could be more annoying than helpful.

He bristled remembering the *Republican-Herald's* story that urged "young women possessed of a well-ordered and dependable camera, an artistic taste, a deft hand, and a wide acquaintance" to increase their dress allowances by creating "society booklets" for their friends. They offered no competition to him. His objection was to the idea that the mere possession of a camera could turn someone into a professional, a creative artist. What nonsense. The photographic business was about so much more than that.

What he'd advertised for was someone he could train who could take over the studio when the poisoning hit again. Someone reliable, someone who could learn to develop, to take pictures, yes, and schedule portraits, but mostly to work the chemicals. He intended to photograph as he could. It was just the chemicals that destroyed. Mrs. Bauer could have done it if she chose to; she'd had minimal exposure through the years and wouldn't be at risk the way he was, though he'd told her not to hold the chemical-laden brushes in her mouth while she made a pencil correction on the film. No telling what such chemicals might do. If she were here, the children could be with him through the day too. It would be a family affair. He supposed that was the other reason the interviews

annoyed him. Mrs. Bauer could but wouldn't. Mrs. Bauer had her ways.

Mrs. Bauer's father had been a traveling photographer, and she "knew the business," as she often told him. Or she'd poke at him with, "If Papa were here, he'd say . . .," or, "If Papa were still alive, he'd want you to . . ." Not-so-subtle reminders that it was Mrs. Bauer's father who had gotten FJ started in the business and that, at his death in 1894, it was her father's estate that had allowed the studio to be built.

Now that he thought of it, it was probably a marvel that she'd listened to him about not weaning Winifred. She so seldom did follow his advice.

He stepped into the office, seeking a cigar. Mrs. Bauer didn't like him to smoke, and he didn't. He chewed them instead. He opened the small tobacco box, pulled a cigar from it, and bit into the end, letting the thin paper caress his tongue, the tart taste of the tobacco refreshing. He looked at the ledger again. Mrs. Bauer had written in her fine hand *Jessie Gaebeler, Voe Kopp* on the appointment book. He chewed the tiny flavorful flecks. Good German names. Jessie Gaebeler. He ought to be able to remember that one at least, Jessie being his wife's first name too.

He heard the bell in the reception room. His clients were here. He inhaled, put aside the cigar. He hoped the young women he'd be interviewing afterward would be on time. Tramp photographers often weren't timely, always stopping to shoot a bird or some lake scene. He was a studio portrait maker, and he prided himself on punctuality and professionalism.

Studio work and an artist's eye required discipline and timing and paying attention to the light. Always, one must pay attention to the light.



Mr. Steffes had a gash on his head as wide as Jessie's eyeglass lens, which she pushed back on her nose as she bent to him, perspiration

working against her. “Mr. Steffes, what’s happened? Please wake up, please!” Her heart pounded and her hands fluttered over him, wondering where to touch him to offer help. His eyes were closed, and she looked around for a clean rag to wipe his forehead of the blood, keep it from settling in the pool of his eyes. Head wounds bled fiercely. Her father had fallen once and struck his head. But though a bucket of blood had spilled around him, making them all rush and worry, there’d only been a tiny gash when the bleeding stopped. She wouldn’t assume the worst.

No clean rags anywhere. She lifted her skirt and with her teeth tore a section from her white petticoat, then pressed the cloth against his head, wiping gently but hoping to keep his eyes clear. She rolled him to his side because that had seemed to help with her father’s pain. She wished he’d moan again or say something, anything. She’d have to leave him to go get help. The other businesses wouldn’t be open yet, but she could ride the bicycle to the hospital and tell them that Mr. Steffes had fallen. Jessie could let them rush to him while she rode off to finish her task.

Abandon him? She’d never do that.

She looked through the dirty window. There was still the right light, the dawn just now opening its eyes over the city. That moment between the darkness and when morning pulled itself up into the face of the sky made for the finest exposures.

She looked at Mr. Steffes and silenced the dawn of her desire. There’d be no photography this morning. Lake Winona would shake itself of night without her setting up her camera to capture the flames flickering and dancing their way up the slopes to Bluffside Park, burning out in a puff of snowmelt at the top. There’d be another day. Next year, she supposed. The annual bluff burn was nearly finished. She took a deep breath. She knew the right thing to do here, and she would do it.

She scanned the room, looking for some way to put pressure on the wound, to halt the bleeding while she went for help. She

already had blood on her white shirt waist sleeves, but that didn't matter. She stood up, hands on her narrow waist, thinking. She felt her belt. She removed it, lifted his head, hooked the buckle over the cloth, and buckled it. It would have to do. She pushed against her knees, stood, rushed toward the door.

A groan and then, "Miss...Gaebele?"

She turned back. "O h, Mr. Steffes, I'm so glad you're awake. You've hit your head."

"Someone hit it for me," he said. He pushed to get himself to sitting, wobbled. She offered assistance. He reached to feel his face, then felt the cloth against his head, fingered the beads on the buckle.

"I didn't see anyone here," Jessie said. "Nor see anyone leave. I think...that is, I think you fell."

"The floor tripped me up?" he questioned. He tried to turn his head and moaned again. "There're the culprits," he said. He pointed to an anvil that he must have stumbled over and the sharp corner of a bench that had broken his fall. "Them's what did it." He nodded toward the bench, an act that caused him to gasp again. "Came up behind me, I'd say." He tried to smile at her then.

"Are you well enough for me to leave you to go get help?"

He started to nod, stopped himself. "Take the bicycle—oh, you needed it this morning." He looked up at her with tears in his eyes. "I've ruined your adventure. I have no phone. Your mother, your clothes, all spackled with blood. What will she say?"

His words dipped and dived, flying like bats.

"Oh, she'll find words," Jessie told him as she straightened her hat. "Don't you worry about that. Just sit still now, promise?"

She hated to leave him, but she had to. She noted the camera bag where she'd set it when she made her way through the cluttered shop, then stepped onto the bicycle, wishing she had a pair of those special women's trousers lady bicyclists in the magazines wore, and pedaled off.

The doctor's residence was closer than the hospital, so she went there and told him what had happened. He said he'd join her shortly as he pulled his breakfast napkin from beneath his chin. Jessie returned, riding over the boarded streetcar tracks, raced in to Mr. Steffes, then kept up a steady stream of conversation with the shop owner, one of his eyes seeming to float away from the center. He looked like he might doze. She butressed him with pillows from his narrow cot, kept him sitting upright. His Thomas clock struck nine just as the doctor arrived. She waited for instructions, but when none came, she accepted the belt the doctor handed her as she told him what she knew and described what ministrations she'd performed.

The doctor told her she'd done the right things, handling the "blood without fainting," as she backed her way toward the door. But Mr. Steffes kept saying how grateful he was and how fortunate that she had been coming so early and how he might not have lived without her, a fact he exaggerated. Jessie figured he'd later realize that he wouldn't have been there so early nor stumbled in the dim light if she hadn't wanted to rent the bicycle at that hour. She waited for what she thought to be a proper time, then asked if it would be all right if she left. It wasn't just the appointment edging her toward the door; it was the accident and her part in it.

"Do you want me to call your parents?" the doctor asked. "About the blood on your blouse?"

She looked down. "No, that's all right."

"You run along then, Miss Gaebele," the doctor said.

"Do what the doctor tells you," she told the bicycle shop owner. And with that she reached for her shawl, pushed up her spectacles, grabbed her camera bag, and backed out the door.

The sun felt warm now, and the big clock on the courthouse clanged the three-quarter hour. She turned backward, holding her hand to her hat to stare at the clock. Nine forty-five? Where had the time gone? She'd have to prepare a double explanation now

because she didn't have time to make it home before her interview, and she'd barely make Mr. Bauer's studio. She'd have to do the interview without her corset and with bloodstains on her blouse. What businessman would hire someone so disheveled?

She walked her fast pace toward Johnson Street, where she was to meet her friend Voe Kopp, all the while wondering if she didn't need a little bit more each of Lilly's organizational bent and Selma's capacity to adapt if she was to accomplish her dreams. She prepared an explanation for the bloody sleeves, an account she hoped would meet her mother's muster and the critical eyes of F. J. Bauer, the photographer. The loudest voice she heard as she raced along was Lilly's: "How could you risk losing a necessary job the whole family needs for something as frivolous as a photograph?" Jessie didn't have an answer for that.