

Walking the Line: A Story of Hardship, Hope, and Empowerment by Gigi Arnieri

Chapter 1: Home

The rock skipped down the road as it met the rubber toe of her shoe. The hot July sun burned the back of her neck, and cool sweat ran down her spine. The girl walked listlessly down the cracked street. She carried a plastic grocery bag in each hand, the weight of them swinging her pale arms at her sides. It had been three months since the accident; still Majorie awoke from her sleep, screaming and shaking at the reality of it all. But now was not the time to think about that.

She approached the cracked wooden steps of her house, picking the mail up out of the mailbox as she went, and turned the handle of the rusted screen door. It screeched awfully as it opened, the hinges moaning in protest. Stepping inside, she hastily made her way to the cramped kitchen. Majorie yanked the door of the refrigerator open. She shoved the perishables inside, eager to relieve them of the heat of the sticky summer air. They could not afford to replace the food if it spoiled.

Majorie tried to remember a time when this had not been a concern. Money had been tight for quite some time, ever since her father had gotten laid off a couple of months ago. But since the accident, the family had been drowned in bills they couldn't pay. Their income had dropped to just 20,000 dollars a year. The medical expenses were crippling. And every month a wave of payments came crashing down on them. Utilities, mortgage, phone bill.

Majorie recalled an incident last May, when their wounds were still fresh, and her mother had not yet absorbed the shock of losing her husband. She had been sitting at the kitchen table, doing the school work she had missed during her time in the hospital. All of the sudden, the light overhead started to flicker, and then went out altogether. Throughout the house, the other lights started to follow suit. After several minutes where they were bathed in only the bright spring sunlight pouring from the windows, her mother reached for the cordless. A heated conversation with the utility company revealed that they had failed to pay the lighting bill for the month. Her mother had to work two extra shifts to pay it off. Listening from the hallway, Majorie had realized for the first time the severity of their financial situation.

The sound of footsteps snapped her back to reality.

"Oh, you're home!" her mother said, descending down the carpeted staircase.

Majorie stared at her mother's face, the lines carved into her soft skin. You could tell that she had once been beautiful, but tragedy had aged her far beyond her years. She remembered the youthful grin that had once lit up her face. It had been three months since she'd seen her smile like that.

Her mother let out a sigh and busied herself with the mail on the counter. Majorie saw her mother's fingers tense around an envelope with red lettering across the front. *PAYMENT DUE*. She set the envelope aside and continued flipping through the pile. Glancing up, she noticed Majorie eyeing her.

"Go wash up, 'kay honey? I need you to help me make lunch before we go get your school supplies. The junior high just mailed out the list, and there's quite a few things for us to pick up."

I hope we can afford it all. Her mother didn't say this, but Majorie could tell from the worry on her eyes that she was thinking along those lines. Majorie stared uneasily at her mother.

"Sure Mom. I'll be right down."

Chapter 2: Impact

One month later

Majorie counted the tiles passing under her feet as her stride carried her down the hall. Her side hugged the lockers, keeping out of the path of the mob of teenagers streaming every which way through the cramped passage. In school, her simple, unglamorous appearance made her a target for ridicule, and she did her best to blend in with the crowd.

She turned the hall and stepped into a large room lit with harsh fluorescents. The cafeteria was crowded with long particle board tables. A few kids sat at them. Looking tired and tense as they picked at their food. *So this is 'The Breakfast Club'*, thought Majorie. The junior high provided a morning meal for kids whose families couldn't afford to feed them at home. Cleverly dubbed "The Breakfast Club", kids who partook were often cruelly casted as poor and lower class. Majorie had never been to the program before. However, a flyer had gone home the prior week advertising it, and Majorie's mother insisted she take advantage of the service. Majorie tentatively approached the sign in table. It was required that all kids participating sign their names on a list for school records. The list read *Friday, September 16th*. Hesitantly, she took the pen and inscribed *Majorie Sage* on the paper under the date. She walked the length of the table and selected a bagel from the food counter. She took a seat at an empty table and ate silently, keeping her gaze on the hard grey surface. The food was plain and tasteless. When she finished, she got up and politely thanked the cafeteria chaperone. She quickened her pace as she walked out the doorway, and melted back into the rushing crowd of kids.



The bell signifying the end of her last class of the day rang out from the crackling loud speaker. Majorie gathered her things and let the tide of her peers carry her into the mass of students in the hallway. She walked down the hall and pushed open the cold smooth metal doors to the school. The cool September breeze hit her skin as she bounded down the concrete steps towards the sidewalk. She started home for the weekend, glad to be free of the judging stares and not-so-quiet whispers.

It had been hard, returning to school. Everyone knew her of course. She was that girl who lost her dad last May. The girl who missed the last two weeks of school because she was in the hospital. The girl who spent the whole summer shutting everyone and everything out. They all knew her. But no one reached out. Majorie was all alone; so she didn't mind the twenty minute walk from the school to her house. It was a time for her to reflect and be alone with her thoughts.

Walking casually down the street, her feet slapping rhythmically against the hard concrete, Majorie guided herself towards her house. As always, she tried to think of something, anything else as she crossed the train tracks on her way home. But she never could, and today was no different.

Her mind flashed back four months, to a treacherous stormy May evening. Rain poured relentlessly from the dark clouds above and beat deafeningly against the car. Majorie sat behind the mother in the back seat of her family's Honda, trying to make out the shapes of buildings through the

thick downpour splattering on the window. The windshield wipers whipped back and forth across the glass of the front window. Her dad was in the driver's seat, chatting idly to her mother, who was only half aware of any conversation at all due to the storm outside. The car rose and fell as it passed over the tracks. Suddenly, it jolted to a stop, jerking its passengers forward. Caught by her seatbelt, Majorie fell back into the curved upholstery of her street. She saw her mother's eyebrows knit as her father stepped on the gas. Three of the wheels turned futilely underneath them, but the back right wheel remained stationary. The tire had caught on a rail, just slight of the road. The back end of the car stuck out into the tracks.

"Stay here!" her father commanded the pair of them as he opened his door.

He stumbled in front of the car, rain pelting him like bullets from the sky. He grasped the handle and threw himself back into the car. His shirt clung to his chest, and raindrops covered the lenses of his glasses.

"It's hell out there. I can't see a thing!" Panting, he got back in the car and pulled out his phone. "I'm going to call 911."

911. *Emergency*, thought Majorie. A panic rushed through her, sending chills down her spine. No. This wasn't real. This couldn't be happening. She closed her eyes. Wake up. Wake up. Wake-

"Hello? Police? I need help." Her father spoke into the phone. "My car is on a railroad track and it won't move. I think the tire's stuck on a rail." He paused. "My wife and daughter are here too." Another pause. "No we can't get out. It's lightning and pouring rain." ... "There's no train coming now, but I can't get us off. You can't see two feet in front of you out there." ... "My name? John. John Sage." ... "Alright. Thank you. I will." Her father turned to face them. "They're sending help. An ambulance and tow truck will be here soon. Don't worry." He gave them a small smile. He was trying to be positive, for their sake, but Majorie could sense the fear in his expression.

They sat on the tracks for what felt like ages, holding hands, praying, waiting in angst. The sky grew darker, and the cruel storm drew on with vigorous force. Majorie squeezed her father's hand.

"Majorie?" He turned around and looked her in the eye. "We love you so, so much."

"Forever and always," her mother chimed in.

"I know," she replied. "And I love you guys t—"

DING! DING! DING! DING! DING! DING! DING! She was cut off by the ring of the train warning siren. The bell pierced the air, instructing all to get off the tracks. *But we can't*, thought Majorie. *We can't get off the tracks.* And then it hit her. *We can't get off the tracks! Oh no. Oh no. Oh no.*

"Honey?!" Her mother's voice shook as she cried out. Panic surged through her, and hot, frightened tears started down Majorie's face. The tracks began to vibrate and a rumbling more intense than even the storm outside shook her whole body. Majorie heard the familiar *Chugga! Chugga! Chugga!* of an engine. The blaring train horn sounded in the distance. Majorie held her father's hand in a crushing grip. She couldn't speak, couldn't breathe. The train roared like a waterfall. The sound flooded her head with relentless commotion. Louder, louder. It rushed on, water and metal. Everything pouring, beating down upon them, invading her thoughts and mind. The train called out. One last futile warning. The waterfall rushed, descended. Plummeted into nothing. Downward, downward. *CRASH.* The car spun around one hundred and eighty degrees, the front left side

slamming against the metal beast. Glass shattered, piercing the air with its own cry of pain. And Majorie knew nothing, felt nothing. The car tumbled, coming to a stop. And the girl was numb to the world around, her mind consumed by blankness. She had so little left, so slim a need to care. Her mind let go, her thoughts falling into darkness. No. She knew nothing, felt nothing, but her father's grip slackening in her hand.



Majorie found tears rolling down her cheeks. She stared up at the sky, the beautiful blanket of blue that had betrayed her with treacherous darkness. There were so many times that she'd screamed at it with resentment, tossing her questions out into the universe. *Why us? Why him? Why?!* Questions no one could answer. She continued home in a silent march, lost in her thoughts.

Chapter 3: Charity

Majorie awoke the next morning to a brilliant sun streaked sky. She climbed out of bed, the springs of her mattress creaking and moaning as she did. Walking sleepily across her room, she went to her dresser for clothes, selecting worn faded jeans and a black camisole. She draped an oversized baby pink knit cardigan over her shoulders. It dropped down to her thighs, encompassing her like a blanket. She shuffled through the hallway, stopping in the bathroom to run a brush through her long straight hair. She clambered down the rough carpeted stairs, rubbing the sleep out of her eyes. In the kitchen, she wrote a note to her mother.

MOM-

GOING FOR A WALK. BE HOME SOON. I'LL PICK UP SOME GROCERIES ON THE WAY.

She took ten dollars from the collective food funds jar on the counter, and headed out into the bright sunlight of the early morning. The loose gravel from the pavement crackled under her feet. She began down the road, letting her legs guide her to the store. She bought her groceries and walked out into the wide busy parking lot.

The silhouette of a thin, disheveled woman disappearing into a building across the street caught her eye. The sign above the establishment read *Food & Shelter*. Curious, she crossed the road and approached the glass door, staring at the 'Volunteers Welcome' sign taped to the front. She grasped the handle of the sturdy door. The metal felt cool and firm in her hand. She pulled, and let herself into a brightly lit room with smooth hardwood floors and warm cream colored walls. A soft thick rug covered most of the floor. A chime rang out. She turned to see the instrument hanging from the door above her head. People lay sleeping on plush couches and mattresses along the walls. Others sat in comfortable chairs around long wooden tables. They cradled steaming bowls of soup in their hands.

The young woman she had seen coming in approached a counter near the back of the room. Another woman, older than the one at the counter, came around from behind a wall behind the counter to greet her. She had a gentle, motherly nature about her, and her smile as she approached the woman radiated warmth. It was obvious that she had played a role in the design of the building. She wore a thin cream sweater that almost matched the walls precisely

She greeted the young woman and listened intently to her. Majorie watched from the front of the room as she nodded in understanding, and invited the woman behind the counter.

"It's a homeless shelter kid," a voice behind her said.

She turned around to see an older man staring at her. She drew back, startled by his gaze on her. He smiled and his eyes twinkled.

"No need to be scared. Hi, I'm George," he said, holding out his hand to her. She took it hesitantly and shook.

"Majorie," she offered.

"May-joor-ieee," he said, trying it out on his tongue. He gave a laugh. "I like that one."

He smiled again, and this time she returned it. The old man gestured for her to sit down beside him.

Taking a seat on the soft rug, she asked "Who's that woman up there?" She stared at the cream woman. She was now interacting with the people in the shelter, taking their bowls if they were done, talking to them with animate expression.

"Who her?" he asked, looking in the direction of her gaze. "Oh that's Jessa. 'Runs the place. She's a real doll. Hell! A homeless shelter modeled like a living room!" George chuckled again. "Who would've thought of that?" He sighed and smiled at her. "Anyway, she takes in rundown people like me who don't really have any place to go. Fixes us up with some food, a nice warm bed. She's a real saint if you ask me."

Majorie smiled, glancing idly at the clock.

"Oh!" She jumped a bit, glancing at the time. "I should get going; my mother's expecting me home. It was nice meeting you."

"Why it was nice meeting you too," he exclaimed.

She heaved herself up and started towards the door, leaving him at the wall.

"And Majorie?" he began.

She turned in the doorway, her eyebrows raised in question.

"I hope to see you back here sometime."

She smiled at him. "I think you can count on that." She turned around and walked out the door, the chimes crying out in her wake.

Chapter 4: Hope

The next Saturday, Majorie visited the shelter again. The familiar chime announcing her entry felt like an exclamation of welcome. When she walked through the door, she saw George on his spot of rug, sitting against the wall and beaming at her.

"Hi Majorie!" he called out.

At the sound of her arrival, Jessa looked up from the man she had been talking to. She spotted the girl from across the room.

“Excuse me,” she said quietly to the man. She walked over to the pair with a smile.

“Who you got there George?” she asked playfully.

The old man looked up at her. “Why this here is Majorie. May-joor-ieee.” The girl giggled.

“Like ‘pearl’?” Jessa asked Majorie.

“Yes ma’am. It’s the Greek translation. I was born in June. It’s my birthstone,” Majorie answered her. Majorie suddenly started to feel a little shy, standing there in front of Jessa. She became very aware of the fact that she was a stranger to all but George, while Jessa seemed to know everyone.

“Well Majorie, I think it’s time we put you to work.”

Majorie breathed a sigh of relief to herself. She could see how Jessa would come to be a part of a service like the shelter. She was warm and welcoming, and almost instantly put you at ease. She followed Jessa through the room, to the back, where she beckoned Majorie behind the counter. She took her behind the wall to reveal a back room filled with supplies. Blankets, pillows, soup cans, aspirins. On a table she saw blank nametag pins next to a label maker. Majorie spelled out her name while Jessa typed it into the machine. A few minutes later the two walked out of the back room carrying blankets, pillows, and sheets.

“Alright honey. I want you to help me change the linens on these beds. C’mon I’ll introduce you to everyone.”

Together they stripped the beds of the dirty laundry and fitted them with new bedding. They chatted as they worked, Jessa passing stories about people who came through the shelter, Majorie telling her about life with her mother at home. Her father came up from time to time, but Jessa sensed her discomfort and didn’t prod.

She was introduced to a multitude of people at the shelter. Some had been there on and off for years. Some, like Majorie, had just recently stumbled upon the establishment. Either way, Jessa knew all their names, and treated them like old friends.

After they finished changing the sheets, Jessa went up and sat on the counter.

“Alright everyone!” she exclaimed, getting the attention of the shelter. “Listen up. As most of you probably know now, this is my friend Majorie,” she said, gesturing to Majorie standing in the corner of the room. “..And she is going to sing for you all.”

Majorie looked at Jessa in confusion and desperation. Jessa’s caramel eyes were sparkling with excitement, and a grin was spread wide across her face.

“You’ll be fine,” she told Majorie. “They all adore you, and they could use something like this.”

Majorie contemplated this for a second. She bit her lip, thinking. “Alright. I’ll do it.” *Not like you gave me much of a choice.* She stepped up to the counter and racked her brain for a melody. She remembered one her father used to sing to her as a child to calm her when she awoke from a nightmare.

She closed her eyes and envisioned him. He held her tight, rocking her back and forth in his arms, swaying her to the music.

Come to me, my sweet sweet dear. Safe in my love, you have nothing to fear. Come, come, now don’t be afraid. With the angels at your side it will all be okay.

Now don't you dare worry. Now don't you forget-With the Lord as your guide, there is no need to fret.

I'll hold you here. I promise I won't leave you. You're my one and my only. I love you and I need you. You're my one and only. I promise I won't leave you.

The end of her lullaby was choked by tears as Majorie sang the last line. They danced silently down her cheeks. Her father had promised not to leave her, yet it had still happened. Why should she tell the same to these poor strangers when she couldn't keep that promise? Then Jessa's voice spoke in her head. *They could use something like this.* Majorie recognized the hope that the song instilled. Stronger than sadness or fear. It gave the people something to look forward to; something to live for.

Warm gentle arms wrapped around her as Jessa embraced her. She held her tight and spoke in a whisper, her mouth inches from Majorie's ear.

"Thank you. That was beautiful."

Majorie looked at her gratefully.

"You talked about God in that song. Do you go to church?" Jessa asked.

"No, not since the funeral for my dad. I haven't even been in a church since then."

"Try this one." Jessa pulled out a folded flyer from her pocket. "Here. The address is at the bottom." She handed it to Majorie and glanced at the clock. "Why don't you start heading home honey? It's getting late."

"Yeah, okay. Thank you for everything Jessa." Majorie looked her deeply in the eye before turning towards the door. "And thank you for this," holding up the flyer and calling out above the chimes as she opened the door.

As she walked across the street back towards her home, Majorie thought of her former parish, and the painful memories that were associated with that chapel. She told herself to hope, to look ahead and find consolation and positivity in this church. She promised herself it'd be alright, and that things were going to turn out okay. She looked ahead for a brighter tomorrow. And she could at least hope for that.

Chapter 5: Sanctuary

Majorie decided to go to the church the following day, on the Sabbath. Her mom had to work that morning, so she was all alone when she awoke. She prepped herself and carried out her usual morning routine before heading to the church. She looked at the flyer Jessa had given her the day before. Though she had never been to that church, she recognized the road it was on and navigated her way to the building.

When she approached the church, she gasped. It was nothing like the one she had attended before. The massive structure towered over her, and grand stained glass windows showed vivid interpretations of scripture readings. Two massive wooden doors stood firmly amongst the brick and glass, beckoning Majorie to explore the depths behind them. She opened the door and let herself into the bright, spacious, sunlit church. She could hear people raising their voices in worship in the chapel.

She walked the hall parallel to the church where the mass was going on. To her right, a small

door bore a plaque reading 'Grotto'. She turned the knob and stepped inside. The sight before her took her breath away. She was standing in a small room illuminated with hundreds of glowing candles. They lined the walls, standing humbly, side by side in their radiant domain.

Majorie swelled with sentimentality, stepping forward towards a basin filled with sand. Amongst the dirt, long thin candles stood independently sticking up. She picked one up with shaking hands and lit it with the flame from a candle in the grotto. She used her long candle to light a prayer candle in the grotto and blew out the long one.

She closed her eyes and knelt in front of the sanctuary. *Dad, she thought. I miss you. I feel you watching over me when I'm struggling. Thank you for being there for me.* By this point Majorie could not hold back her tears. She recited the musical pact she had solidified with her father so long ago. *Your my one and only. I will never leave you. I'm always by your side. I love you and I need you.* She got up and wiped her eyes.

"Bye Daddy. I love you," she said in a whisper. She turned and left the grotto, leaving her grief behind her. Walking down the hall, she noticed a poster pinned up on the wall.

DO YOU WANT TO RAISE AWARENESS OR BETTER UNDERSTAND THE ROOT CAUSES OF POVERTY? ARE YOU WONDERING WHAT YOU CAN DO TO MAKE AN IMPACT IN THE LIVES OF THOSE STRUGGLING AROUND YOU? Then come attend the Catholic Campaign for Human Development BUILDING COMMUNITY: PUT TWO FEET OF LOVE IN ACTION Poverty Education and Awareness Seminar. You'll learn about the root causes of poverty and how you can take action in your community to help ease the burden of financial struggle. 10 am Sunday, October 9th at Saint Gemma Galgani Roman Catholic Church in the Multi-purpose Center.

Majorie examined the poster. It seemed like fate that she might stumble upon it. She took a flyer from the stack on the table below the poster, and tucked it away in the pocket of her jacket. *October 9th, she thought. Two weeks from now. Two weeks and I can help our situation. Two weeks. She could survive till then, with precautions taken. Two weeks until she would know how to help her mother. Majorie could barely wait.*

Chapter 6: Vulnerability

To Majorie, October 9th couldn't have come slower. She waited in eager anticipation. Her original plan to go alone was revoked when her mother found the flyer on Majorie's nightstand while changing her sheets. She was insistent on going with her.

"This is a family issue, Majorie," she said as she confronted her about the flyer that night. "We have to face this together. This could be a great learning opportunity for the both of us."

Majorie's excitement only escalated as the day approached. She had gushed to George and Jessa about it at her latest visit to the shelter, telling them all about the dynamics of the concept. Since the family had no computer anymore, she couldn't research the CCHD or Two Feet of Love in Action. Her mother would catch her trying to find out more about it in the paper, scanning the pages meticulously for any information.

"Let it go Majorie," she would say to her. "It's coming soon enough. October 9th will be here before you know it."

And finally it was. On October 9th, Majorie woke up to the arrival of the early morning sun peeking out over the horizon. She and her mother walked to the church together. Majorie walked quickly, trying to keep up with her mother's long stride. They arrived at a quarter till. Majorie had planned this to allow time for her mother to see the grotto.

Her mother drew in a breath as she entered.

"Oh, it's beautiful." Majorie watched as her mother lit a candle and prayed. The lights danced off her eyes as they glistened with tears. She prayed to her husband.

Majorie saw her mother's vulnerability in the moment. She sometimes forgot that her mother had lost someone the day of the crash also. After the accident, her mother had taken over the family's affairs. She was the rock that had kept a roof over their heads. While Majorie was still unable to get out of bed from the grief weighing her down, her mother had had to go to work and provide for the family, while carrying that grief around inside of her. She realized in that moment how strong and amazing her mother was. When her mother got up to leave, she saw no trace of the vulnerable woman on her knees, and Majorie smiled at the composure she employed. Her mother, the rock, through and through.

Chapter 7: Poverty

After they had finished in the grotto, Majorie and her mother walked down the long thin hallway to the Multi-purpose Center. It was a massive, lofty room. It had been set up like a lecture hall for the seminar. A tall middle aged man sat at a table at the front of the room, looking at a computer connected to a projector. He was well dressed in a button down shirt and tie, and he wore sensible leather loafers. They took their seats in a row towards the front of the set-up. About twenty people were there, spread throughout the seating, most independent of each other. The man up suddenly looked up from his laptop and walked around the table. He greeted them.

"Hi everyone. My name's David," he began. He sighed and continued. "Five years ago I got laid off. The recession hit, and I couldn't find work. I lost everything. They took away my house, my car. I was homeless, and I had exactly seven hundred dollars to my name. I bounced from shelter to shelter, staying at one place for a few days before moving on. To say the least, I was in a dire situation. I thought things were never going to get better. But, through the charitable works of others, and social outreach programs like the Catholic Campaign for Human Development, I was able to get back on my feet. I can stand here today in front of all of you and confidently say I am a happy, successful man, free from poverty."

Majorie couldn't believe that this man, who looked so far from any image of poverty she could conjure, was once in the same boat that her and her mother were constantly on the verge of falling into. He continued.

"What you need to understand is that poverty has different levels. There are extreme cases like my own, but many people living in poverty aren't necessarily homeless, hungry people. In fact, the simple definition of being in poverty is not having enough money to meet *basic needs*. Food, water, shelter, clothing-just to name a few. You may not be starving on the street, but you could still be living in poverty. And that is where the idea of poverty is plagued by a popular misconception. Don't let the stereotype fool you."

He paused to let the concept sink in. Majorie looked over at her mother. She was completely focused on David, her eyes narrowed and her brow furrowed in concentration.

“Now, there is a wonderful organization out there whose aim is to help those who fall or are in danger of falling below the poverty line.”

David pointed a remote at the projector screen. A chart popped up. On one side it listed the number of members in a family, on the other it showed the income poverty line for each family size.

“Take a moment and look at this chart. These are the poverty lines. Now look at which one applies to you. How many people make a yearly income that’s less than twice the amount of your line? Go on, raise your hands. I’ll give you a second.” About half the audience raised their hands. “You,” he said, pointing into the crowd for emphasis, “are considered *close* to the poverty line. And this organization can help you too.

This initiative is a faith based program called the Catholic Campaign for Human Development. They are backed by Pope Francis. They have created a term to simplify the direct ways to identify and eradicate poverty on both a short term and long term basis. Put two feet of love in action.” He said these words slowly, putting emphasis on every word. Majorie was zoned in, not wanting to miss any of it.

“The two ‘feet’ represent the ideas for short term and long term eradication. The first of these feet is social justice. That is the long term idea. It deals with identifying and getting to the bottom of the root causes of poverty, supporting those in poverty to be empowered to make a change in their communities, and advocating for change in social structure. You can be a part of a social justice movement by helping to educate others like I am doing for you today. I would not be standing here in front if you had it not been for this organization. They inspired me to take something away from my experience and use it to the benefit and education of others.”

“So what are they root causes of poverty?” he challenged the crowd. “People can be put into poverty for a number of reasons. Low income, or lack of a job at all is a major issue. Social justice campaigns can fight to raise the minimum wage. The CCHD gives grants to grassroots organizations that build community. Some of these organizations focus on the creation of jobs within a community, or training in certain fields to qualify people to get jobs in different industries.

There are plenty of other root causes. Lack of insurance, affordable housing, medical care. These problems need to be addressed and tackled with long term solutions, and I encourage you to put forth an effort to be a part of this outreach. I can tell you it is a truly rewarding deed.”

Majorie smiled at this. A spark was igniting in her mind and already her brain was generating ideas of how she could help.

“Now the other foot,” he said, gesturing to the screen that now showed an image of two feet filled with the key points that each ‘foot’ represented, “is charitable works. This refers to more short term fixes-meeting the basic needs. Emergency shelter, food and clothing donations, monetary assistance. These are things that everyone one of you could go out into your community and do tomorrow. Volunteer at a homeless shelter, rid your closet of old clothes, take a few cans of food to the local pantry. Do something. These are charitable works. Don’t feel like this stuff is beyond your control. Feel empowered. Feel obligated by your holy faith and your duty as *human beings* to build your community up. Just don’t let suffering happen in your own backyard. Quite honestly if you wanted to do that I don’t think you would be here listening to me talk right now.”

He paused. He continued on for about an hour or so, reaping ideas from the audience for social justice movements, and more thoroughly explaining the concepts. The attendees hung on to his every word. Majorie was astounded. She had such a clear understanding. David was gifted with an amazing capability to effortlessly put things into perspective. Majorie couldn't wait to tell Jessa all about what she had learned at the seminar.

"Thank you for giving me your time today. I hope you have gained some insight on poverty and realize how incredibly easy it is to make an impact within your own community." David smiled at them and gave the group a dismissive nod. Chairs scraped against the floor as people started up from their seats. A wave of chatter filled the air.

"That was really something," Majorie commented to her mother.

"Honey, thank you so much for discovering this," her mother replied. Majorie looked at her mother and beamed excitedly. The smile that had been vacant for so long since the crash now lit up her mother's face.

Chapter 8: Grounded

The next day after school, Majorie took her mother to the homeless shelter to meet Jessa and volunteer. They got along instantly, and Majorie realized that she had been drawn to Jessa because she so reminded her of the lighter side of her own mother. She and her mother told Jessa all about the seminar and the information she'd learned. Jessa beamed at them as she told her about the two 'feet' of love. She had the idea to print out paper footprints for volunteers to right their names on and stick on the wall, representing their charitable works.

Majorie walked over to a familiar spot along the wall.

"Hey! Look who it is!" George cried out at her approach. She grinned at him and sat down beside the old man. "See you brought your momma in. She and Jessa could be twins; they're just like each other.

She turned thoughtfully and stared at him, head cocked. "George? Do you ever think of trying to move on? You know-find your own place, get a job. Something?"

He sighed. "Yeah well...I don't know hon'. I just take it day by day, and hope I live to see another one. This place? This is my home." He paused and smiled at her tranquilly.

"This is my home," he repeated to himself in a low voice, looking into the distance. She grasped his hand and squeezed in comfort. She got up and walked back over to her mother and Jessa.

It was all coming together in Majorie's mind. They had been hurt. They had had something so important to them taken away. They had been left with nothing, forced to start from scratch. They had been victims of tragedy, but they were not going to be victims of poverty. Majorie saw the potential, saw the opportunity.

She wasn't going to accept the lifestyle that had been laid out for her. She could change her life, and could make an impact in the lives of people around her; people like George who didn't feel there were any options left. She could do as David did, and make people aware of the issues, of the root causes that tortured people into poverty. She could do this with her own two hands. She finally understood what it meant to put two feet of love into action. *She* would be the change, and *she* would

be empowered. For the first time since losing her father, Majorie felt that things were looking up. She looked at her mother and Jessa, laughing and talking like old friends, and Majorie knew. With love, hard work, and support, she would be able to survive, and plant her feet on the ground without the fear of her world caving in.