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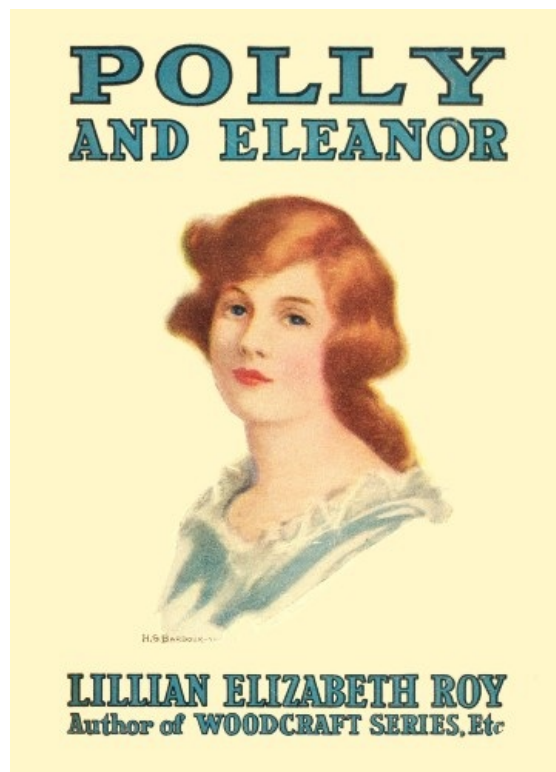
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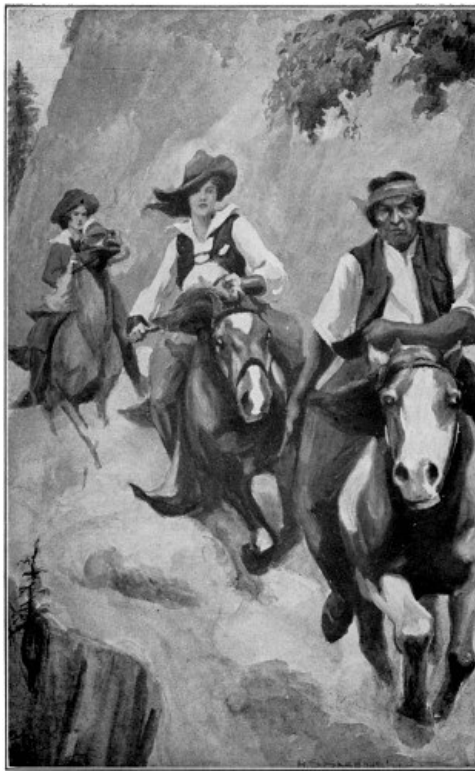
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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK POLLY AND ELEANOR ***





**POLLY AND ANNE FOLLOWED
THE GUIDE.**

Polly and Eleanor.

Frontispiece—(Page [21](#))

POLLY AND ELEANOR

BY

LILLIAN ELIZABETH ROY

Author of

**POLLY OF PEBBLY PIT, POLLY IN NEW YORK, POLLY AND HER FRIENDS
ABROAD, POLLY'S BUSINESS VENTURE.**

ILLUSTRATED BY

H. S. BARBOUR

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POLLY AND ELEANOR

CHAPTER I

[Pg 1]

ANOTHER TRIP TO TOP NOTCH

Six intensely interested individuals sat about the supper-table in the living room at Pebbly Pit Ranch-house, the evening of the day they rode to Oak Creek to file the claim on the gold mine. Sary, the maid-of-all-work, had the supper ready for the weary riders when they returned from their trip.

Having served the dessert, Sary went out to the barn to help Jeb, the foreman on the ranch, with the horses which had just come in from the long day's work. So the group about the table felt free to talk as they liked. But Polly Brewster and her friend Eleanor Maynard were almost talked out by the time they finished the last bit of Sary's delicious dessert; and Barbara Maynard tried her best to hide a yawn behind her hand, while Anne Stewart, the pretty teacher who was the fourth member in the party that spent a night in the cave, was eager to continue planning for the future of the mine, but Nature demanded rest after the three days' excitement.

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Finally, Polly turned to her father and said: "I wish we could see John's face when he reads that telegram!"

"If we had only dared word it plainly, there sure would be something queer to laugh at when John read it. But we had to cipher it, you know," chuckled Sam Brewster.

"I can't see why such foolish fear of talking about it is entertained by all you folks," declared Barbara, loftily.

"Can't you? Well, then, Bob, Ah'll tell you plainly that that message had to be camouflaged, as we are not taking any risks on having your claim jumped over night. If we sent a wire to John telling him plainly that you girls discovered a vein of gold on Top Notch Trail, every last rascal in Oak Creek would hit the trail before that message was delivered," replied Mr. Brewster.

"Even as it is, I suppose every one who can read the records at Oak Creek will start out at once, so as to stake new claims as near to Montresor's Mine as possible; perhaps they'll try to pick up some nuggets from your claim, as well," added Mrs. Brewster.

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"Then, when word spreads around the country—and such news always travels like lightning—every gambler and bunco man in Wyoming and Colorado will be seen camping on Top Notch Trail, each trying in his own way to wheedle money or gold-dust from the unwary ones," laughed Mr. Brewster.

"There now, Daddy! You've laughed, so I know your spell of worry is over with. Won't you tell us what made you so serious?" exclaimed Polly.

"Ah was trying to plan for the best way to avoid trouble over this claim; and at the same time

protect our own rights, and any rights Old Montresor's family might have in this rediscovery. That is why Ah insisted upon Simms being one of our party, to-morrow; and the sheriff with his stalwart son, too. They are both strong, trusty men, and with Simms, Jeb and myself, we ought to be able to hold our own in case of an argument up there."

"Oh, Mr. Brewster! Do you mean there is likely to be a fight, and *shooting*?" cried Barbara, horrified at the very idea.

"Not so that you-all can notice it—if we get there first. But let those claim-jumpers camp on our grounds first, and we-all may have to use gun-persuasion to move them on to safer ground." [Pg 4]

"Dear me, I think it is going to be more fun than a movie-picture play in the filming!" exclaimed Eleanor, her eyes shining with excitement.

"I hope we won't have the same kind of gun-play that we see in the wild-west films," hinted Anne Stewart, hitherto a listener.

"Would you rather remain here, Anne?" asked Barbara, with an eager expression as if to say: "I hope you do—then I will stay with you."

"I should say *no*! I wouldn't miss the picnic we are going to have, to-morrow, for anything in Colorado!" declared Anne, emphatically.

Mrs. Brewster laughed at the young teacher's vehement tones, and then turned to her husband with a suggestion.

"Sam, what do you think of sending Jeb on before, in the morning, to tell Rattle-Snake Mike he must act as guide and cook for us while we are on the mountain? He is the cleverest Indian anywhere about, you know."

"Just the thing, Mary! Ah'm mighty glad you-all thought of it. Jeb can ride on whiles we-all branch off at Bear Forks for the Old Indian Trail. Then Mike and Jeb can catch up with us." [Pg 5]

"I don't know about that, Sam," returned Mrs. Brewster, thoughtfully. "I'd rather see Jeb start from here about four o'clock, so Mike and he can meet us at five-thirty at the school-house."

"You must have some good reason for that," ventured Polly.

"Yes, Mike may hear about this claim and leave his cabin early, so as to act as guide to strangers who will be glad to pay him any price just to get him and his wonderful scouting experience."

"Right as usual, Mary! Ah'll run out, right now, and tell Jeb he'd better get to bed if he has to be up before four," exclaimed Mr. Brewster, starting for the bedroom over the barn where he knew Jeb would be.

"And we had better go to bed, too, so we can be up and have breakfast out of the way before the horses are brought to the door," suggested Mrs. Brewster, leading the way to the front door to look at the night sky.

"Why, it isn't eight o'clock," complained Barbara.

"No, but even that leaves us less than eight hours' sleep. After such exciting days as we have been through, we need a good full night's rest," replied Anne. [Pg 6]

"Chances are Nolla and I won't close an eye! What, with gold mines, and John, and the Latimer boys, and Ken Evans coming to town—and claim-jumpers, and everything!" laughed Polly.

"You mean that young stranger we met at Oak Creek?" asked Barbara, frigidly.

"Yes,—the one who looked so pleasant but forlorn," said Eleanor, sympathetically.

"His name was Kenneth Evans, you know, Bob," explained Polly, innocently.

Eleanor and Anne exchanged glances and smiled, for they understood that Barbara meant to be condemnatory in her manner; but Polly, in her very guilelessness, countered the city girl's disparagement.

"It's too bad we couldn't have had him come home with us," added Eleanor, teasingly, to Barbara.

"Dear me, Nolla! By the time I get you back to Chicago you will need a complete training in social behavior again!" declared Barbara, frowning at her younger sister.

But her remark merely called forth a merry laugh from the light-hearted girl. Mrs. Brewster then started the usual preparations for bed, and the group followed her example. [Pg 7]

For the benefit of any one who has not been fortunate enough to become acquainted with our western friends, in the first book of this series, we will introduce you while the girls are soundly sleeping.

Polly Brewster, a girl just past fourteen, was a true type of the honest, ambitious ranchers of the Rocky Mountains of Colorado. Her home, the extensive farm in the crater of an extinct volcano, was called Pebbly Pit because of the giant cliffs of colored stones guarding the entrance trail. This ranch was about eleven miles from Oak Creek, the mining settlement and railroad station for about a thousand inhabitants, where all shopping had to be done. The town was much like other

rough, half-civilized western settlements, consisting of a post office, a bank, the sheriff's office, and several saloons. A general store was maintained in connection with the post office, and here one must buy anything needed for house or farm. The Brewsters, being affluent ranchers, ordered their clothing, house-furnishings, and many tools or luxuries by mail, from illustrated catalogues. But the rough road from the ranch to the town post office, being hard going in a heavy ranch-wagon, often caused the Brewsters to forego a mail order on cosmopolitan stores rather than drive in and cart the goods home from Oak Creek.

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Polly had just completed her grammar course at the little Bear Forks' school-house where Anne Stewart had taught two years previous to this summer. Polly had never been elsewhere than at Oak Creek and now she yearned to attend High School in Denver.

Anne Stewart lived in Denver, and for the past year had been tutoring Eleanor Maynard, while the girl and her older sister Barbara boarded with Mrs. Stewart. The Maynard girls were from Chicago, but Eleanor, who was fourteen, was very delicate, so the doctor had recommended a high altitude for her.

Anne Stewart was helping her brother Paul through a college in Chicago, and during her visit to him, at the end of his first year, she met his friends—John Brewster who was Polly's older brother; Tom Latimer a promising young engineer from New York; and Pete Maynard who was a brother to Eleanor and Barbara. It was through this means that the Maynards heard of the Stewarts' home in Denver, and anxiously begged Anne to take the two girls into her home circle. As the salary offered for this privilege was so munificent, the young teacher eagerly accepted, and then found her youngest charge a lovable and merry girl.

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The two Chicago girls had returned home for a few months, but Eleanor could not stand the high winds and stubborn climate of Chicago, so the doctor again ordered her to spend a summer in the mountains of Colorado. In distraction, Mr. Maynard begged Anne Stewart to arrange everything, and thus it was that these two society girls came, with Anne, to board with Polly's family at Pebbly Pit ranch.

The Brewsters were considered very wealthy in land and cattle, to say nothing of the Rainbow Cliffs, for which a New York financier had offered them half a million dollars for part interest in mining them. But Sam Brewster could afford to refuse such destruction to his beautiful estate. Polly had never had city-made clothing, nor had she the slightest idea of city-ways, until the Maynard girls' advent to Pebbly Pit. But she had had years of thrilling experiences to her credit—experiences with wild-life of all kinds, of mountain-climbing, of adventures of other sorts, to say nothing about knowledge of farming and domestic animals. This outdoor life gave her abundant health, strength, and the beauty of a fine complexion, clear eyes, luxuriant glossy hair, and a graceful well-formed figure that was all the more attractive because of the charms her adolescence promised.

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That very day had been spent in Oak Creek in filing the claim to Montresor's Mine, and just as the party started for home, they had met the young stranger, Kenneth Evans, who sought Carew's Surveying Camp, which was known to be located near Yellow Jacket Pass. The youth was directed how to find Jake, the driver of Carew's wagon, and then he was invited to visit Pebbly Pit, on Sunday.

As Polly and Eleanor had predicted, they were so excited over the events that promised such thrills on the morrow, that they slept little that night, but tossed and talked most of the time. However, when the call sounded for them all to awake and dress for the mountain trip, it found that these two girls were fast asleep and loath to get up.

"Good gracious, Anne! My wrist watch says it's four o'clock! You don't suppose we have to get up at this awful hour?" complained Barbara, rubbing her eyes.

Anne was already up and hurriedly dressing. "Any one who is not ready to start when the man brings the horses around to the door, remains behind, you know."

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That brought Polly and Eleanor out of bed with a hop, as there was only a wooden partition between the two rooms, and Anne's words were plainly heard by them.

"If there was the least thing to do if I stayed here, I'd not go again for anything. But I should die of ennui if I had to be entertained by Sary for three whole days," grumbled Barbara.

The very idea of Sary, the "house helper," entertaining Barbara, for whom she felt such scorn, caused mirth in the adjoining room.

Eleanor called out: "More than likely Sary feels as glad to know that you're going, as we would be to have you stay behind."

"Come, come, Bob! You *must* get up and dress!" now urged Anne, as she finished her dressing and turned to leave the room.

The purple gleams of the western dawn shot the heavens of blue and gold, as Jeb brought the sturdy horses from the barn. He had given careful attention to the trappings and shoes of the various mounts, and finding each one in splendid condition, started for the house.

An unusual hubbub came from the living-room where baskets of food and outfits were waiting. The moment Jeb was hailed, however, the noisy girls ran out to look over their horses.

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"Why, Jeb! Isn't Noddy going this time?" asked Polly.

"Not ef you-all want her to keep any breath in her skin. Ain't she eena-most done up from that other trip?" retorted Jeb, who was the "general-man" on the ranch. Having been with the Brewsters since he was a boy of twelve, he felt that he was one of the family and he treated Polly as if she were a younger sister.

"Never mind Noddy, this time, Polly, but let Jeb jump into the saddle and start off. He'll never reach Mike's cabin if you keep on arguing about the burros," said Mrs. Brewster, coming out to call them to breakfast.

Jeb had gone on to secure the company of Rattle-Snake Mike, and Mr. Brewster sat impatiently on his horse, waiting to guide the party of women, when all but Barbara were ready; then she came out while still munching her tardy breakfast.

As the riders passed the Rainbow Cliffs, the rays of the rising sun gilded their peaks, and the girls exclaimed at the beauty of the stones as they reflected the myriad colors of a rainbow. Then on down through the Devil's Causeway and out on the Sand Trail, rode the adventurers, until they saw Jeb and Mike riding to meet them.

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"Mike says we-all ain't the fust ones to start up Grizzly Slide, this mornin'," said Jeb, the moment he was within hearing.

"U-um! Plenty fool go by!" grunted Mike.

Mike was an entirely new type to the city girls, and they studied him with interest. He was a swarthy-looking Indian; perhaps, as Mr. Brewster said, because he smoked himself brown. He always rode his famous Indian pony and carried an evil-looking gun, besides the revolvers in his belt. Another weapon he had, as evil but not quite so fatal to others as the gun—and that was his old pipe, as black as the Asiatic plague.

Mike was a descendant of a famous Chieftain, so he seldom noticed the miners or common natives about Oak Creek, but he considered himself an equal of educated people like the Brewsters. Hence his willingness to act as guide for this party, after he had refused tempting offers from the "scorned" early that morning.

"Now we'll turn off at the Forks and ride fast to meet Simms and his party," advised Mr. Brewster, when they reached the place where the trails forked.

"Mike says there's the old Indian Trail up the mountain, that cuts off half the distance to the Slide," called Jeb, from the front.

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"Him bad trail—no like Top Notch," warned the Indian.

"Whereabouts will we hit it, Mike?" asked Mr. Brewster.

"Onny Mike say—him secret Indian Trail," explained the red-man, ever faithful to his ancestors.

"Well, will we pass Pine Tree where we are to meet Simms and the sheriff?" added Mrs. Brewster.

"Na! him run away from Pine Tree. But him save half-day riding."

Mr. Brewster silently considered this possibility for a few moments, then turned to his wife, and said: "Mary, it seems most important just now for us to get to the cave before others reach it, as we must stake out additional claims adjoining the mine, in order to protect the rights of the girls. Of course, we must have Mike show us his secret trail, and I will go to escort the girls, but you and Jeb might ride on to Pine Tree to meet Simms' party. Then ride with them up along Top Notch Trail. We will all meet at Four Mile Blaze."

"I was about to suggest the same plan, Sam; but I won't need Jeb with me. I'm so used to this road that I am perfectly safe. It is the Trail that will be hazardous to a lone rider, when once the outlaws hear of this strike. But I will have Mr. Simms and the other men with me, so everything will be safe and all right," replied Mrs. Brewster.

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After a hasty good-by, Mrs. Brewster rode away, and the others in the party followed after Mike who led up a hitherto unknown trail to Grizzly Slide. It was so over-grown that no one but an Indian could ever find a way through; however, Mike was an adept in this line.

"I have been wondering if this could have been the trail Mr. Montresor discovered the day he approached his gold mine from the valley," said Polly, as she followed close at Mike's heels.

"You may have hit the nail on the head, Poll. It always has been a question whether Montresor was quite sane, because he insisted that he rode up a strange trail that was over-grown with jungle before he came upon the ravine that held his gold mine," added Mr. Brewster.

"Humph! Him good old scout," came from Mike.

"I'm glad to hear you say so, Mike, because I liked him so much!" sighed Polly, and tears filled her eyes at the memory of her old friend.

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"Patsy good scout, too. Solly dem dead," Mike added.

Conversation now became impossible, as Mike rode far in advance for some reason best known to himself, and the trail was so steep and rough that it took each rider all his attention to keep in the saddle. However, the flora and fauna were so interesting that the girls endured many a jar and jolt for the sake of seeing them.

Reaching Four Mile Blaze they found they had saved over half the distance it would have been to ride up over Top Notch Trail; and this pleased Mr. Brewster tremendously. He had just turned in his saddle to call out to the girls behind him when Mike held up a warning hand.

Every one looked at him to see what he had discovered. He grunted unpleasantly, and slid from his horse. He sprawled out on the ground and placed his ear close to the earth. Every one sat still, waiting to hear the report, or cause, of this unusual behavior.

The Indian listened attentively for a time, then got up and examined the trail along Top Notch, as far back as the blazed tree. There he placed his ear to the ground again, and listened for a longer time than at first. Then he got up slowly and crept about examining the bushes, the broken twigs, rocks, and even the grass.

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The girls watched him with intense interest, as Polly had told them of the wonderful scouting instinct Mike possessed, and now they were going to have it demonstrated to them. Having satisfied himself, Mike came over to Mr. Brewster and announced, abruptly:

"Tree miner gone aleddy—two tenderfut comin'."

"Three up there already! By the Great Horned Spoon! how did they do it?" cried Sam Brewster, aghast at the idea that perhaps they would have trouble when they reached Polly's mine.

"Maybe the three gone on ahead have no idea that we found gold up there. Maybe they are after pelts, or some other thing," said Anne Stewart.

Mike grinned complacently, for he had spoken.

"How do you know those three are miners, Mike?" asked Polly.

The Indian pointed to the ground where an imprint of a miner's boot was plainly seen. Only the miners at Oak Creek wore such spiked heels, the ranchers and other citizens being satisfied with heavy leather soles. The foot-print pointed towards the Slide—not away from it.

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"That's only one, Mike, and you said there were three!" exclaimed Anne, triumphantly.

"Tree hoss go by—see." Mike pointed out three different kinds of horse-shoe imprints.

"One hoss carry pack an' go lame. Two hoss all light."

"How do you know he is lame—and maybe he isn't packed," Eleanor said.

Mike sniffed derisively, and pointed at the lighter impression of one hind foot. Then he showed his admiring audience how a slight rip in a flour-sack allowed the contents to trickle down upon the ground at each limp the lame horse gave.

Mike now said to Mr. Brewster: "Dem go slow—lame hoss no go fas', mebbe jus' ahead."

"If we ride on we can catch up with them!" eagerly exclaimed Anne.

Mike shook his head and lifted a finger for silence. Then the girls heard a faint clip-clop of hoof-beats on the rocky trail leading along Top Notch.

"Two tenderfut 'mos' catch up. We-all wait an' talkee," suggested Mike, settling himself in his saddle to await the riders.

"Mike's right, because they will only follow us and find out where our claim is located, if we start on now," added Polly.

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Mr. Brewster shook his head. "Ah reckon you-all talk sense but Ah would offer an amendment to your plan: to have Polly and Anne take Jeb for an escort and ride on at once. Let the horses have their head and get to the cave as soon as you can. Hold the fort until we-all join you. We-all will see these two men and find out what they are after."

"Daddy, you must remember a grizzly bear lives in that cave. He may have been injured but he may not have died, the other night. I have my small rifle but Anne hasn't any weapon at all. As for Jeb—he's great on the farm, but for this work, huh! Then there are those three miners who are up ahead: they wouldn't hesitate to put two mere girls out of their way, if we interfered with their staking our mine or jumping our claims," said Polly.

Mike smiled and expressed his opinion. "Miss'r Brooser wait wid two ten'erfut, an' Mike go wid leedle leddies. Ef cabe hab trouble of grizzle er miner, Mike shoot."

"Good! And Ah'll wait for Simms and the others, and then come after you-all," agreed Mr. Brewster.

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"I won't go with Mike if there is any danger at the cave. I didn't come to the Rockies to be killed!" declared Barbara.

"Daddy, you must keep Eleanor and Barbara here with you and Jeb, and wait for mother and the

sheriff's men. Anne and I will go with Mike and see that our rights are protected," now said Polly.

"I have as much right to go with you, Polly, as Anne has. Why must I remain here with Bob?" demanded Eleanor.

"I know that, Nolla, but three of us will be too many—especially as Anne and you have no firearms. I may need Anne to help me load but you can't even do that. So it will be far better for us all if you remain here. Mike will not have to bother over so many of us, then," explained Polly.

"But everything may be safe at the cave, and all this worry about fighting may be a farce," argued Eleanor.

"In that case Mike will leave us safely there and come back to guide you-all to us. Once we are safe on that ledge with a pile of dry wood in front of the entrance to the cave, we can defy the whole country."

"All right! Hurry away and get on to that ledge before any more rascals steal a march on you. But be sure to send Mike back for us, the moment Anne and you arrive there and find everything is all right," replied Eleanor. [Pg 21]

So Mike spurred his broncho along the trail, while Polly and Anne rode after him. Soon they disappeared around the bend where giant pines formed a wall on either side of the narrow going.

CHAPTER II

[Pg 22]

THE CLAIM-JUMPERS

The moment the three had passed out of sight, Sam Brewster jumped from his horse and led him over to the great tree that caused the trail to turn aside and run around it. He looped the reins over his arm and placed his hands in his coat pockets. As he leaned against the tree-trunk nibbling nonchalantly at a sprig of grass, a tenderfoot would never have dreamed that his fingers were tensely held against the triggers of the revolvers hidden in his pockets.

Soon after Mr. Brewster had taken his stand where he could see the first appearance of any one coming up the trail, two riders approached eagerly scanning the large trees, in evident search of something. As they came to the giant tree where the rancher waited, both men started in surprise.

"How-dy, friends? Out early this morning, eh?" was the greeting the two amazed men received from the alert man at the tree. [Pg 23]

"Oh—oh, yes!" stammered one, plainly uneasy.

"Hoh, it's Sam Brewster of Pebbly Pit, ain't it?" said the other, also confused in his manner.

"Right you are, Hank. You see, when a man has to attend to the girls' gold mine, he has to be up right early to forestall the plans of any claim-jumpers who read the records at Oak Creek, yesterday, after we left there. That's why I got a possé to guard the place. I reckon, now, Hank, that your boss sent you-all on to help we-all up yonder, eh?" laughed Mr. Brewster, tantalizingly, as he recognized Hank to be the clerk at the filing office in Oak Creek.

The man Hank laughed also, but a discordant note rang through his forced merriment. "We-all ain't claim-jumpers, Mr. Brewster, but it seemed so quare to find Old Montresor's Mine hed ben found again, that Ah sez to my pal, here, 'How'd you-all like to run up to the Slide and have a squint at that cave?' An' havin' a day off, he reckoned he'd enjoy the trip. So here we-all are."

"Yes—so Ah see! Here you-all are. And Ah says to my girls and the possé, says Ah: 'There'll be a lot of fools start off at night-fall, to hit this trail to the Slide just out of dern-fool curiosity to have a squint at Old Montresor's Mine. But human nature is human nature, girls,' says Ah, so when they get that squint, they may forget one of the Ten Commandments and want to covet their neighbor's property. And seeing how they have lost a good night's sleep through climbing the Top Notch Trail just to arrive early to have that squint, they will sort of feel justified in stealing an acre, or so, of gold-land. That would make them break another Commandment; so Ah felt it a duty, Hank, to send on a regiment in advance, to save the souls of such curious sightseers." Sam Brewster never changed a muscle of his serious face nor did his voice have the slightest sign of any other feeling than a reverent desire to help his fellow-man. But the two men knew Sam Brewster by experience as well as from hearsay. [Pg 24]

"Right-o! Hank told me what a good man you war," said the miner who accompanied Hank. But his shifty eyes belied the tone.

Mr. Brewster smiled. "Yes. Ah did hate to see any one lose a good night's sleep and then get thus far only to be mistaken for claim-jumpers by the Sheriff's men up yonder. Of course, Hank and you-all aren't going to take such chances with the law." [Pg 25]

The miner glanced about uneasily but only saw two girls sitting on their horses a short distance away. Hank's face lowered, however, and he growled forth: "Ah don't see whose business it is

whether we break the Sheriff's law or not."

"Perhaps *you* don't see—but Ah do, Hank. And when the Sheriff says, 'Keep the trail free from all trespassers till my possé can take charge,' you know me—Ah'll see that his orders are carried out," returned Mr. Brewster sternly, his pockets moving suspiciously.

"You-all hain't got no orders, and thar hain't no possé up yander, neither, 'cause they hain't a-comin' till after Simms leaves," exclaimed Hank, unguardedly.

"Ah! So you and your man thought you'd get a lead on the Sheriff, eh?" laughed Mr. Brewster. "Oh, but you are an easy tenderfoot to stuff, Hank! Did you-all really believe such a story would have been told at Oak Creek if the possé planned to wait for morning? Why, man, that is just what they wanted to do—to catch a lot of rascals red-handed and clean Oak Creek out, once for all! How do you know that there is a real claim staked out up there—or whether it is the Sheriff's joke to land a ring of crooks?"

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Eleanor and Barbara were so interested in the way Mr. Brewster handled the two rascals without telling a direct falsehood that they sighed when the claim-jumpers backed their horses and withdrew to confer anxiously on what they had heard. But Sam Brewster interpolated with:

"If it is curiosity that brought you-all to lose a night's rest, pass right along and tell the Sheriff and Bill your yarn. They will not only let you take a squint at what you think is a mine, but they will pay you to remain and help arrest all the claim-jumpers who are already on the way."

Even as he spoke, Mr. Brewster saw the sly move of Hank as he tried to pull his gun from the holster; instantly a hand came from the rancher's pocket and brought to light a cocked revolver. The other man suddenly changed his mind when the bore of Brewster's gun was leveled so that the clerk could look right down into his grave if he made the slightest mistake in this outing of his.

But the miner became ugly; then he saw the other hand of Sam Brewster come from his pocket and he knew that he was a dead rascal too, if he made one false step. So his expression changed to a wily smile, and he said:

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"What you-all ha'r fur ef th' Sheriff's up thar guardin' th' precious mine?"

"Told to warn away any foolish town-clerks who might be heading straight to Kingdom Come! You know Bill likes to give every chump a loop-hole to save himself, if possible," retorted Mr. Brewster.

"We ain't lookin' fer no argyment with Bill ner the Shuriff, so we-all'll mosey back an' tell others we meet. Howsomever, you-all won't find it so easy to git rid of curious folks when that miner-gang gits ha'r. Ah happen to know who and how many are plannin' to come."

With that farewell, Hank turned his horse's head and led the way down the trail, slowly followed by the unwilling miner.

"Oh, Mr. Brewster! hadn't we better ride after Mike and the girls before the miners' gang gets here?" cried Barbara, fearfully.

Mr. Brewster laughed. "That was only a bluff of Hank's to make me ride along so he and his pal might follow us. I haven't the least doubt but that both of those cowardly rascals are hiding just out of sight where they can watch my every movement. Should we start to ride along towards the cave, they would follow and shoot us from the rear as sure as anything."

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In spite of his making light of Hank, however, Mr. Brewster kept a wary eye open for an ambushade. Nothing of moment happened, however, and Jeb was just saying: "Maybe we-all had best ride for the cave," when a shot rang out.

"Well!" gasped he, while the two girls trembled with fear.

"That sounded from Top Notch. It's either Simms and his party, or those rascals. In either case, it won't be cowardly in us to hide behind a clump of pines and await developments," suggested the rancher.

Mr. Brewster stationed Eleanor behind a close growth of young pine and handed her a small rifle. Barbara was hidden deeper in the forest, and then he and Jeb took their places behind a boulder whence they could watch the up-trail. With a revolver ready in each hand, they waited anxiously.

But his wise precautions were unnecessary this time, for Bill soon rode up, calling loudly as he came. Sam Brewster sighed with relief to find a group of Oak Creek's leading citizens with the Sheriff.

"Bill, did you-all shoot, a time back?" queried Mr. Brewster the moment the possé came up.

Bill laughed. "Ah'll explain in a minute. You-all see it wa'r this way: After you-all left for home, yesterday, it wa'r found how some low-down sneaks got wind of this claim and planned to ride up at once. It looked a lot like claim-jumpin', so we-all got together mighty quick and rode after them to spare the Lord any trouble in judgin' 'em. Also, we-all reckoned to save your party any nonsense over the gold, 'specially as thar wa'r four gals in it."

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"But three rascals got a lead on you," interrupted Sam.

"Yeh, three are at large somewhere, Ah reckon; but two of the worst ones out of that five are back yonder. Hank Johnson and his jail-bird pal are down on Four Mile Blaze. When we get the other three, we'll rid Oak Crick of five of its worst citizens."

"Rattle-Snake Mike came up with us, Bill. We rode up the Indian Trail—that's how we got here so soon. But Mike went on to the cave with Polly and her friend. They'll guard their claim, all right, unless those three interfere," said Mr. Brewster, with an anxious note in his voice.

"Ah reckon we'd better make for that cave, then! Thar may be some work cut out fer us thar," whispered Bill, seeing the two city girls now ride out from cover and come over to join the group. [Pg 30]

"Where's Mrs. Brewster?" asked Eleanor, anxiously.

"This is Bill's party—they left Oak Creek last night," explained Mr. Brewster.

"Then where is Simms and your wife?" asked Barbara.

"You see it will take the others much longer to ride up from Lone Pine than it took us to climb the trappers' trail, so they can't possibly arrive for some time yet. We-all just got here, and we left Oak Creek at midnight," explained one of the men, encouraging the two girls.

"But we-all stopped on the way and cooked breakfast and fed our hosses. Simms and his party will ride right up and ought to be ha'r pritty soon, now," said Bill.

"How about leavin' some one here at Four Mile Blaze to direct the Simms' party, while we-all ride on with Sam to hunt those three claim-jumpers," suggested one of the possé.

"Barbara and I will wait here with Jeb if you leave us each with a gun," offered Eleanor, eagerly.

Barbara gasped at the very idea, but Eleanor added: [Pg 31]

"We don't want to be mixed up in a fight with rascals, and we are safer here than up there."

"The gal's right, Sam. They'd onny be in the road if we-all have to chase them men," said Bill.

"But they can't shoot! Why give them any guns?" asked Mr. Brewster, anxiously.

"I just bet I could kill you at forty paces, if you were a claim-jumper and looked at me the way Hank looked at you!" declared Eleanor, emphatically.

The men laughed, and Bill wagged his head approvingly. "Ah say, Sam, let the gals take a crack at the Four Mile tree—and see."

"Well, even the sight of guns will make the villains respect us, even if we can't shoot!" added Barbara, who felt that the lesser of the two dangers would be to remain with Eleanor and Jeb where they now were.

After many instructions and warnings had been given to Jeb and the two city girls, Mr. Brewster spurred his horse on to ride after his companions who were already up the trail. But he had not far to go.

At the bend of the trail, where there was a small clearing, he saw the men standing up in their stirrups, intent on something ahead. He urged his horse up to join them, and just before reaching the group, he called out: "What's wrong?" [Pg 32]

The horses were tossing their heads, pawing the ground, and acting restive. Bill turned half-way around in the saddle and replied: "D'you-all smell anything, Sam?"

Mr. Brewster noticed then, that the men held faces up and were sniffing in different directions. He then sniffed carefully himself and exclaimed: "Smells like smoke."

But even as he spoke, the thought reached him: "A forest fire!" His face went white and he murmured a prayer to himself for Polly and Anne.

"Yeh, Sam. Comin' down from the Slide," was all Bill said.

"My Gawd, men! what shall we do?" cried one of the possé.

"We-all must ship them two gals an' Jeb down trail, right away, and then the rest of us'll ride up to see if anything kin be done to stop it. Mebbe it hain't got a headway yet," replied Bill.

But the two girls were now seen riding up the trail as fast as their horses could travel. Barbara rode first and Eleanor after her, shouting aloud in a frantic voice. The men waited fearfully to hear what new trouble assailed them.

Barbara almost ran down Mr. Brewster's horse in her blind fear, and when questioned, could not speak. Eleanor then rode up and looked so angry that she could scarcely explain. [Pg 33]

"Bob declared she heard noises behind us and on one side, and then, without giving me or Jeb any warning, she started her horse at a run, to come and meet you men. She cried that it would be safer with a crowd than alone with only Jeb and me and the rifles we knew nothing about. I had to ride after her to see that she reached you safely. Now I'll go back and keep guard again."

"Stop, Nolla! Although you are a brave little girl, it will be of no use to keep guard now. Jeb and you will have to ride down Top Notch Trail as fast as you can, and meet Simms who is coming up

with Mrs. Brewster. Send Simms and the men on to help us, but you three women take Jeb and go right on down. There's a forest fire." Mr. Brewster added the last portentous words in an awed voice.

"Oh, my goodness! Will we be hurt?" cried Barbara.

But Eleanor thought not of herself. She immediately cried: "Are Polly and Anne safe?"

"Polly—whar's she?" demanded Bill, suddenly realizing that the girl was not one of the party.

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"She went to the cave with Mike to watch there, in case any claim-jumpers tried to stake their ground," groaned Sam Brewster.

"Is the cave far from here?" added Bill, quickly.

"Not as far as Top Notch Trail," replied Eleanor, seeing a possible way for her to get to Polly and Anne.

"But some one ought to send Simms on to us and then ride on down trail to signal the forest-rangers' lookout so's they could come and help fight the fire," said another man.

"Can't Bob and I join Polly and Anne in the cave where we will be safe from any fire, and you send Jeb down to signal Simms and the forest-rangers?" asked Eleanor excitedly, seeing how urgent was the need for instant action.

"All right; take this young man for protection, and get to the cave as quick as you can. You gals wait in the cave till you-all hear from us again. Send Mike down trail to Jeb to hurry Simms and then escort Mrs. Brewster home. We're ridin' up yander to work," ordered Bill, authoritatively.

Eleanor turned her horse's head to a faint trail that she was sure would bring them to the cave. Barbara and the cow-boy followed, while Bill and his men urged the horses to their utmost up the steep Slide.

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"Thar's one good thing about this fire—it seems to be comin' down, and it don't travel near so quick that way, like-as-how it do when it goes upward. Mebbe we-all kin choke it in its first stages," explained Bill.

Eleanor and her two followers now reached the end of the little erosion made by a storm. Then the city girl found it really was no trail at all. They sat their horses looking helplessly about while Barbara began to whimper with fear.

Even courageous Eleanor began to quail at what would befall them if they were lost, when Mike suddenly appeared in the distance, climbing the steep slope before them. His broncho came on recklessly through the bushes and wild undergrowth until he was within speaking distance then he shouted:

"Mike hear shoots! Gals in cave alle-right. Mike smell fire. He go see who burn. Fin' tree bad miner—One gone happy hunting-groun',—two sleep f'm much fire-water. Tree hosses hobble on down trail." As he spoke he acted his words so that it was plain that he had found the three claim-jumpers who were dead drunk, and their mounts which were trying to break away in sheer fear of the fire.

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"Mike, Bill and Mr. Brewster said you were to leave us in the cave, if it is safe there, and then ride down trail to meet Jeb and go on to stop Simms' party. Warn the lookout on the forest-ranger's post and then come back to us, but Jeb is to ride home with the Missus!" exclaimed Eleanor, excitedly.

Mike frowned. "Indian no like squaw job!"

"That's just what I was going to say, Mike. Now if you will put us on the right trail, we three can find the way to the cave. We will stay there with the other girls, and let you do as you think best, *after* you send Jeb away to meet Simms," said Eleanor.

"Mike mus' tell Boss and Bill 'bout fire. Him eat down-hill, udder side Slide. No burn dis side."

Meantime, the Indian was leading the way to the trail that would bring the girls out at the ravine where the cave was. Once on the right trail, the youth whom Bill had sent with the girls, said he could keep to it without going astray.

Mike waited but a moment to assure himself that they would be safe along the trail, then he started his horse up the steep side. His keen Indian scout habits now stood him in good stead. He soon had the Sheriff's party tracked and was riding after them. His young broncho galloped along until the group of men bound for the Slide, were hailed by a war-whoop.

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Bill turned and saw the Indian close behind. He called a halt, and when the party stopped, the messenger was already in their midst.

"Fire up lodge-pole pine side. Eatin' down—dat way!" cried Mike, waving a hand at the side of the mountain away from them and the cave.

"Mike go see an' fin' tree miner. Dey hab big fight—two shoot one. Him dead. Udders drunk—gone 'sleep. Hosses tie up."

"Mike, you lead! Men fall in—we-all fight the fire first, then find the drunken miners and arrest them for manslaughter," ordered Bill, and thus the possé rode away.

CHAPTER III

[Pg 38]

AT CHOKO'S FIND

After losing the trail many times only to stumble into it again and again, and then slipping, sliding, or jolting down the steep side of the mountain where the timber-line ended near the cliff, Eleanor finally recognized the ravine where the cave was located.

"Oh, thank heavens! We're almost there," she cried, trying to find the easiest way down to the ledge.

Polly and Anne were sitting before the entrance to the cave, when they heard shouts and saw three weary riders coming along the rocky ledge that led to their refuge.

"Why—it's Nolla and Bob and a man!" exclaimed Polly, jumping up to run and meet the girls.

"What's wrong—any one hurt?" cried Anne, the moment she saw the faces of the girls.

Eleanor then told about the forest-fire, and where the men were. The more recent excitement had quite driven the story of Hank and his claim-jumpers from her mind. But Polly anxiously asked for her mother. [Pg 39]

"Oh, yes—Simms and the party hadn't arrived when we left Four Mile Blaze. But they will be all right, as Mike is gone to meet them. Then your mother and Jeb will ride back to warn the forest-rangers about the fire," explained Barbara.

"Why, no, Bob. Don't you remember, Mike said he would have to tell Polly's father about the drunken men and the fire, first," Eleanor corrected her sister.

"Well, I'm not worrying about mother because she knows too much to run into unnecessary danger; but father always wants to save everybody and everything from disaster, and so takes his life in his hands, over and over again," Polly worried.

"Mr. Brewster'll be all right with Bill around, Miss Polly," said the young man who had accompanied the city girls. "No one is allowed to run any risks for nuthin', when the Sheriff is there to stop 'em."

"I just hope Bill *will* keep father in bounds!" declared Polly.

Very little smoke reached the ravine, which was on the opposite side of the mountain from that where the fire raged, so the girls knew not how matters fared until late in the afternoon. Then, to their great relief, Mr. Brewster shouted a signal from the lodge-pole pine forest. [Pg 40]

Polly gave an answering call, and then ran along the dangerous ledge until she reached the place where the pine trees had been blown down the day of the blizzard. Here she could see the dim outlines of several riders as they waited for some evidence that they were on the right trail.

Before Polly could climb the slope to wave her hat, she saw Mike riding up behind the party and then go on before them down the trail leading to the cave.

Polly was kept busy with answering the girls who stood at the cave entrance, and in calling to her parents and friends who were approaching as fast as the down-trail would permit. When they rode near enough for Polly to see their faces, she recognized her mother and Jeb in the party; she thought they expressed great concern over something that must have happened to the party—or perhaps something that might happen.

"Well, Polly, you've had all day to dig the gold out of your mine; got it tied in bags for us to lug home?" called Mr. Simms, jocularly. [Pg 41]

"Mr. Simms, you needn't worry over that gold as long as there is something worse to trouble you. What is it?" answered Polly.

"Ha, ha, ha! Poll must be feeling lonesome; when she talks like this, it's a sure sign she needs jolly company," replied the lawyer.

"Maybe she thought we were chewed up by the grizzlies," added Mr. Brewster, forcing a gayety similar to that of Mr. Simms.

"What's the matter with you men? Is there any danger from the fire?" demanded Polly.

"No, the fire's burning over the down-slope on the other side. You know it won't come this way," returned Mrs. Brewster.

"Well, then—where are the other men? Did those drunken miners shoot any one?" persisted the girl.

"Don't bother with questions, Polly. Let us get some supper before we think of anything else," advised her mother.

Mike was soon busy unpacking the outfit for cooking, and Mrs. Brewster joined him to give any assistance he might need. Polly went over to her father to try and get more satisfactory information from him, regarding that day's experiences.

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"Did you say the miners who came up ahead of us to-day were in Bill's custody, Daddy?"

"Ah didn't say anything; but now Ah'll *tell* you-all that they are shipped safely to a place where they can do no harm."

"Oh! Did Bill go down the Trail with them?" continued Polly.

"No, Bill's man went down-trail to watch in case of any new trouble."

"See here, father! Out with your secret! What are you-all keeping from me?" asked Polly, anxiously.

"Good gracious, Poll! Can't a man feel riled after such a wearing day and with nothing to eat, without his women-folks asking plaguey questions?" cried Mr. Brewster, testily.

Polly was silenced for the moment, but she went out to the ledge where her mother was helping Mike, and there she began again.

"Mother, I know something unusual concerns you-all, so you may as well confide in me."

"I reckon the men are vexed because we lost all this day hunting up those wretched miners who must have accidentally set the fire going on the other side," was all the reply Polly received.

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Mike glanced up to look covertly at Mrs. Brewster and the inquisitive girl caught his expression.

"Even Mike is laughing at the poor way in which you are fencing with me. Now treat me as if I were sensible—not like a baby, or like Bob!" demanded Polly.

"Well, to tell the truth, Polly, I'm afraid to tell you everything. If those girls know they will go clean daffy," sighed Mrs. Brewster, passing her hand over a troubled brow.

"Mother! Did I go daffy when that blizzard carried Choko over the ledge—and what did I do up on Grizzly when the snow and ice covered the trail? Did I lose my nerve?"

At that moment Mr. Simms called out to Mike: "'Most done cookin', Mike? Ah want you-all to go with me to ketch a grizzly afore it is too dark to see him. Ah promised mah wife she should have a bear-skin rug this trip."

Mike looked at Mrs. Brewster who nodded for him to go. She calmly took the ladle and continued stirring the soup that the Indian had been attending to, then Mike hurried after Simms.

"There now—I know it is something serious and it is much better for me to *know* what may happen than to have it come upon me like a thunder-bolt," said Polly.

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"Well, then, keep on stirring this broth while I busy myself over the rest of the supper, and I'll tell you. Don't exclaim, or show any shock. It is important for us to keep cool," advised Mrs. Brewster, as she toasted some dry bread over the embers.

"I wasn't present when this occurred but father told me. The men found the miner who had been shot, and down the slope further on, they saw the forms of the other two. But the panic-stricken horses that had been hobbled and left to graze, were so frightened at the clouds of smoke and crackling fire, that a few of the men had to lead them back to a clear place. There they were tied securely to some trees.

"Your father, Bill, and one of his men, jumped down the steep sides where the fire was raging, and began to beat out the flames. They could see the two drunken miners just beyond the fire-line down the trail, but they seemed so overcome with whisky and smoke that they failed to respond to any shouts from the men, or to the fear of the on-driving fire.

"Our men had beaten out the ground-fire half-way to the miners, when a terrific rumbling sounded, as from a distance behind them. Bill's man was far in advance of the other two rescuers, and perhaps, the crackling on the ground and the raging fire in the trees overhead, deafened him to this other portentous sound.

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"Father, however, felt that it meant something more terrible than a fire, so he shouted to Bill and tried to warn the man. But a fit of coughing from inhaling the smoke, cut his call short. Bill then cried, 'Go on back, Sam—I'll get my man!'

"So your father managed to force his way back towards the Top Trail. There he saw a great white cloud swooping down from the peak of Grizzly Slide. He turned, screamed at Bill and waved his arms to warn them out of the track of the avalanche, if possible. Bill and his man saw this new danger and turned to climb back to safety.

"Father was leading, Bill a short distance behind him, and the man not far in the rear, when the first two heard a scream. They turned and saw the horse had stumbled and fallen. He tried to scramble to his feet before the onrush of the half-frozen earth and rock and snow could reach

him, but it caught and whirled him away on its crest.

"Father and Bill were thrown down with the shaking of the ground caused by the terrific slide, and several times they were almost sucked into the vortex caused by the overwhelming ever-growing stream. Had it not been for Mike who had heard the rumble and knew what it meant, both Bill and father would have been lost. But Mike threw out a rope that father caught and quickly wound about himself, while Bill clutched on to father's legs. Thus Mike dragged them up to the tree where he had bound himself. The horses are gone!"

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Mrs. Brewster seemed overcome at the recital of the awful ordeal the men had passed through, but Polly said encouragingly:

"Don't take on so, mother! 'All's well that ends well' and father and Bill are safe, you know."

"Oh, but this isn't all, Polly! Mike says when Grizzly starts an avalanche like that first one, the very force of its tearing away keeps on breaking away the ice-fields all around the peak. Another slide may come at any moment and pour down this side, you see. The men who had taken care of the horses when the others were fighting the fire were left stationed at the timber-line to watch. If they notice the faintest sign of another serious break on the peak, they are to signal a lookout left on the crest of this slope. And they in turn must warn Bill's son who was left sitting on top of this ledge. That is where Simms and Mike have gone now. There must have been a signal from Bill's boy to Simms."

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Mrs. Brewster looked at her daughter to see if she could bear the rest of the story. Finding Polly as calm as she herself was, she continued:

"Father said the experience Simms and he went through was mere child's play to what it might be should Grizzly loosen up and send down a slide on this side of the peak. Of course, the fire and smoke added to the horror on the other side, but the actual avalanche was not as tremendous because the slope was partly protected by the abrupt drop of thousands of feet from the peak to the valley, down which the greater flood must have rushed.

"This side is on the direct down-slope from the peak, with nothing to break a snow-slide, or to carry off the bulk of the débris.

"This morning, when I rode up with Simms' party, we met two old trappers who were coming down. They had passed Old Grizzly Slide yesterday, and they said there must have been an awful thaw going on under the surface-ice of the Slide, as the yawning chasm where you discovered the crevice the other day was frightful. It made even their courageous spirits tremble at sight of it. But they turned again and rode up with us, as they said they could be useful to Bill. They are up on Top Notch now, scouting for the first symptoms of a slide."

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Polly turned white as she heard the story, but she still had control of her voice, so she whispered: "Why don't we-all start down-trail to-night? Why lose time cooking supper, and have the men up there watching for the trouble?"

"Mike says we are safer in this cave than on the trail. It is impossible to go down the Indian trail at night, and Top Notch Trail is bad enough in the daytime, so that in the dark it is forbidding. He says this cave is high enough up on the ledge and near enough to the crest to escape most of the drift. The trash will be swept clear over the entrance and down into the ravine, while any snow or ice that might lodge up on the ledge before the cave will soon melt again. Then we can get away, when all is over."

Polly said nothing, but she was thinking seriously. Mrs. Brewster was grateful that her daughter could bear such awesome news without a tremor. So the two completed the supper, and were ready to serve it, when Sam Brewster rode down the ledge.

"Come on, Daddy! Just in time for a bowl of hot soup!" called Polly, gayly waving a ladle.

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Her mother admired the self-control the girl showed over any fear or danger, and followed the brave example set her. "Yes, Sam, if Simms wants to chase a bear in the twilight, let him! You will do far better to enjoy the supper."

So they sat down to eat toasted bread and soup, while Polly talked vivaciously and caused many a laugh from the unsuspecting girls. As the meager supper was almost finished, however, Mr. Brewster mentioned in a casual tone: "Girls, Ah expect John and his friends early to-morrow, you know. Mike is going down to meet them."

"Oh, yes! And won't we have exciting adventures to tell him!" exclaimed Anne, thinking only of John and his coming.

"Mrs. Brewster is going down with Mike, to meet the boys. So we-all thought you gals would like to ride down, too, instead of sitting up in front of this cave all day and night," continued Mr. Brewster.

"Why, how foolish! to kill the horses with all that climbing! Up to-day, down to-morrow, and up again the next day! No horse could stand that!" declared Anne, amazed at her host's suggestion.

"Well, Ah've been thinking you-all had best stay down, once you get there. This is no sort of life for women-folk, anyway. When John and Tom Latimer get here they can look after your mining interests better than you can yourselves."

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"But, Mr. Brewster, you haven't even seen the hole inside of that cave, where I followed after Polly the day we discovered the gold!" exclaimed Eleanor, greatly disappointed in Polly's father.

"Ah haven't had time, Nolla. What with the doings of the claim-jumpers and everything, Ah've had a full day. Besides, it looks as if we-all are going to have *some* time up here, and Ah'd feel a heap easier if you women were safe at home."

"Are there signs of other claim-jumpers coming up, Mr. Brewster?" asked Eleanor, anxiously.

"From what our scouts report, up on the Trail, we're going to have such a time, if we remain here, that we may not have another good opportunity to escape with our lives," returned the distracted man.

"Oh dear me! Can't we start now? I never want to see any claim-jumpers again!" cried Barbara, wringing her hands.

"Keep quiet, Bob! We'll do just as Mr. Brewster says, but your whimpering won't help any," said Anne. [Pg 51]

"Well, girls, I'm so eager to see John again, that I'm willing to ride down with Mike and mother," said Polly, acting her part perfectly.

"Oh, Polly! I don't want to go and leave the gold mine, but I want you to stay with me," cried Eleanor.

"Goodness me, Nolla! Don't you s'pose we can ride up again when the danger blows over? A lot of good the mine would do either one of us if a dozen claim-jumpers put lead through us all at one time!" laughed Polly, but feeling far from humorous.

"I suppose I'll just *have* to go, if all the rest of you do!" cried Eleanor, stamping her foot angrily.

So, after much arguing and explaining, it was decided that every one should be ready to start down-trail at the earliest streak of daylight.

That night the girls and Mrs. Brewster slept on the pine-beds—or at least the city girls slept, while Polly and her mother rested even as they waited for the first warning call from the guard, who sat by the fire that was started to keep away the wild beasts. [Pg 52]

The hours passed without any new signals, and at three o'clock Mike called out that he was ready to start. The girls demurred about getting up at that hour, but Polly was too energetic to give them any peace. So, shortly after three, the entire party started down Indian Trail, traveling as swiftly as possible.

"Now see here! why do all you men come down, too? I thought it was only the womenfolk who had to get out of the way!" exclaimed Eleanor, wonderingly.

"If, any claim-jumpers are about to stake out our land up there who is there left to stop them?" added Anne, suspiciously, when she saw the deep concern on every man's face as he rode single file down the path.

"Wall, now, seem' as we-all are well along the way down, Ah may as well tell you-all: thar hain't goin' to be no danger of any claim-jumpers staking your land if Old Grizzly knows anything about it. Thar war a turrible avalanche yesterday and a leetle one at suppertime; it looks like-es-how another powerful one will hit the trail any moment. That's why we-all air runnin' away as fast as our hosses kin go," explained Bill.

"Oh! Tell Mike to hurry!" cried Barbara.

"No fear but what we-all are as crazy to git down as you kin be, young leddy," said Bill, soothingly. [Pg 53]

After four hours' hard traveling, the riders came to a small park where Mike said they could rest and cook their breakfast, and feed the horses. From a certain spot on the clearing on this mountain-side, the peak of Old Grizzly Slide could be seen opposite them, dazzling in the sunshine.

"Well, the old rascal is still up there," declared Anne.

"But you-all can't say how soon its skirts will whisk and send down the trash that always ruins a forest," added Bill.

Even as he spoke, a strange sight was presented to the group who were admiring the sparkling peak. A great mist seemed to rise suddenly from its pinnacle, spreading out and obscuring the sun for a time. Then an ominous rumble echoed along the crest, and rolled down the slopes. The mist was suddenly sucked down by some tremendous force, and then a mighty tremor shook the ground where the escaped riders stood.

The horses seemed to know instinctively that there was some upheaval of nature taking place, for they quivered along their sensitive nerves and nosed the air questioningly. Several of the highbred animals pulled at their halters and, with drawn-back lips, snapped viciously at the air as if to warn away the destruction. [Pg 54]

"Oh, oh! Will it hit us?" wailed Barbara.

"No, we are safe on this opposite up-trail now. But a few hours delay in getting away this morning and we would have been caught in the drift," said Sam Brewster, wiping beads of cold perspiration from his brow.

"Daddy, you don't think that avalanche was on the side of our gold mine, do you?" asked Polly, plaintively.

"Pretty close to Choko's Find, Polly dear," said her father.

"Humph! Gol' all gone dis time!" added Mike, dramatically.

"Oh no! don't say that, Mike!" wailed Polly.

"Not *our gold mine!*" added Eleanor, with gasping breath.

"Mebbe no! Mike t'ink yes."

There fell a silence at that, and each one looked at the other, while the same thought passed through their minds: "If that slide buried Choko's Find again, where would they all have been had they remained in the cave?"

CHAPTER IV

[Pg 55]

JOHN AND HIS FRIEND ARRIVE

Nothing could have been done to avert the catastrophe on Grizzly Slide, so the adventurers finished their breakfast in silence. Mrs. Brewster seemed the only one who appeared grateful for their safety. Doubtless, the others felt a certain *sense* of thanks but they were so disturbed over the evident loss of the mine again, that it was paramount with them.

Having packed the camp dishes, Mike started on the trail again, silently followed by the rest. Not until they reached Bear Forks where the roads separated, was anything more said about the mine.

"Jeb can accompany the ladies to Pebbly Pit, while Ah ride on to Oak Creek to meet the train that will bring John and his friends. It doesn't look as if we-all can use their knowledge now, but we may as well talk things over seeing that like-as-how they will have had the long trip here," ventured Mr. Brewster, thoughtfully.

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"We-all ought to make up a crowd to go up and try to find Haywuth's body. Mebbe it will show when the snow's melted from the slope," added Bill.

"Sam, why don't you-all plan while on your ride to Oak Creek, to take Top Notch Trail the same time John and Tom take the expert up? The larger the party the less danger of accident, you know," suggested Mrs. Brewster.

"Are we going with them, mother?" Polly said, in a pleading tone.

"No, indeed, child! Aren't you cured with what happened this time?"

"'Lightning never strikes in the same place twice,' Mrs. Brewster," said Eleanor, hopefully.

"And you know, Maw, such a terrible slide has not occurred here-abouts in twenty years," quickly added Polly, dropping back into her ranch vernacular in her anxiety. "It may be another twenty years before such another slide happens."

"And we can get all the gold out of the cave that we need in a short time," Barbara reminded them.

This made the men laugh, as the girl's words showed how little she really understood the situation up on the peak.

"Well, we can talk things over better when the boys are present to advise us. Meantime, you-all ride home and rest up. Ah'll bring the boys along about night-fall," said Mr. Brewster.

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The inhabitants of Oak Creek had felt the trembling of the ground caused by the huge land-slide on Grizzly, and knowing that so many of their prominent citizens were there at the time, they were grouped about the public house anxiously talking over the chances for escape that might be had on the mountain-top.

At first sight of the returned men, a wild welcome rang out, not only from the families who feared their men-folks might never return, but also from the citizens who were genuinely glad to see Bill and his possé, and Simms and his boy, safely back.

After having had his hand shaken as if it were a pump-handle, Sam Brewster continued on to the station to await the train from Denver. As he sat on the edge of the horse-trough thinking over the recent thrilling experiences, he suddenly realized that if Polly had lost her mine again, she might also lose her desire to go away to school in the Fall. This seemed a happy thought, for he sat beaming at the old box-car until the whistle announced the over-due local.

Two handsome young men jumped from the rear platform the moment the train slowed down, and soon Mr. Brewster had one of them by both hands giving him a hearty welcome. [Pg 58]

"Now, Dad, try your muscle on Tom's arm. Mine has had enough for one day," laughed John, placing an arm affectionately over his father's shoulder.

With a young man on either side explaining why the expert was not with them, Sam Brewster walked down the street towards Simms' office. Both young men were eagerly talking so the older man had not told them about the avalanche.

"I was saying to John, what a different town this will be the moment we begin operations on Polly's claim," said Tom Latimer.

"As the train pulled in I tried to look at the station and streets through future glasses—seeing the rows of fine store-buildings and the thrift that always follows on the heels of a rich find," added John.

"We'll drop in Simms' office, boys, as I have to borrow his horses. I came on to meet you without bringing any mounts," said Mr. Brewster.

Both young men laughed heartily at this admission, and Tom said teasingly: "I suppose you were so excited over Polly's discovery of gold that you clean forgot we were city chaps who are not overfond of hiking over these trails." [Pg 59]

Simms was talking to the coroner about the witnesses to the death of Bill's man, and the newly arrived young engineers heard him say: "Sam Brewster was the other one who escaped that death."

"What's he talking about, Dad?" whispered John, anxiously, as he watched the officer take notes.

Then in as few words as possible, the boys were told all about the land-slide on Grizzly that had, most likely, buried Choko's Find under tons and tons of débris—maybe, hid it completely again for all time.

They sat in Simms' office talking over the plans for the morrow when a large party was to go up Top Notch. As they sat arranging who would be the best men to take, John interrupted the conversation:

"Isn't that Jeb riding along the road with two led horses?"

"Sure enough! Your mother must have remembered I had but one mount, and so Jeb was hurried here with extra horses for you," replied Mr. Brewster, running to the door and hailing his man.

On the way to Pebbly Pit, Tom rode alongside Mr. Brewster while John rode beside Jeb. The two latter riders had much to say to each other, for John had been Jeb's particular charge when the hired man first went to work at Pebbly Pit. Now John was a head taller than his erstwhile guardian, even if he was much the younger. [Pg 60]

Jeb acted very morose and absentminded; instead of giving sensible replies to John's questions about the avalanche, he would mutter and say inconsequent things. Finally John said:

"Well, it must have been a narrow escape, anyway."

"That's just it, John. Ef Ah don't run away from Pebbly Pit she'll git me!" returned Jeb, greatly troubled.

"I'm talking about that land-slide—what do *you* mean?" laughed John, beginning to understand that Jeb was worried over something other than the Grizzly experience.

"Wh—y—Ah'm meanin' that widder! It's leap-year, you know."

John had never heard about Sary, so he was unprepared to offer any advice, but he thought best to agree in everything with Jeb, concerning this particular one, and all "widders" in general.

"Ye-es—siree! That Sary kin ketch any man she starts out to trap. Ef she laid eyes on enny of them farm-hands at Pebbly Pit, like-as-how she has on *me*, they'd roll right over and eat from her han's. But, you see, John, Ah ain't a marryin' man, so Ah wants to escape." [Pg 61]

"Jeb, I have a plan! Suppose we get Tom to flirt with Sary and then let her understand she is fickle, so that you won't consider her for a mate," whispered John, thinking of the fun he could have by playing this joke on his friend.

Jeb gave John a scornful look that meant volumes. "D'ye think Sary would fall fer it? Ah tells you—all she ain't no fule. She kin see straight, an' she knows Tom Latimer ain't in her class."

Thus trying to plan for Jeb's peace and happiness, the two found they had reached the Rainbow Cliffs. Tom and Mr. Brewster were looking over the beautiful shining walls, and Tom sighed:

"You wouldn't have to waste one regret on Polly's loss of the gold mine, if you would but consent to let us sell a bit of these walls."

"Ah'm not worryin' over her loss of gold, Tom; it's glad Ah am that it turned out so. Now she won't coax to go away to some big school where Ah can't see her for six months."

Tom Latimer turned about in the saddle and sent Sam Brewster a keen look and thought: "*So that* is why he won't consent to these stones being mined and sold!" [Pg 62]

Then the four men rode up the wide trail that ran from the Cliffs to the house where they found a group of girls and women eagerly awaiting them. Polly ran down the road and caught hold of her brother's stirrup in her impatience to welcome him. John laughed and jumped from his horse, then gave his sister the kiss and hug she expected.

Anne Stewart stood on the porch watching this little by-play, and when the brother and sister slowly walked along, arm linked in arm, she smiled and sighed, then turned to greet Tom Latimer. But she did not see Mrs. Brewster's watchful eye quickly turn away from her when *she* turned from watching John.

As Tom Latimer was known to the Maynard girls and Anne, having met them at the College Prom the past year, he was warmly welcomed by them as well as by the Brewsters. Barbara felt an especial interest in him, as he was "one of her set" in society, and he had been invited to her home when her brother entertained a few of his college friends.

Polly now brought her brother up and introduced him to Eleanor and Barbara, but Anne was not there. [Pg 63]

"Wh-y—where did Anne go? She was here this minute?" cried Polly, looking around in amazement.

Mrs. Brewster had seen Anne steal away and she understood the reason. Now she quickly diverted attention by saying: "Of course you boys have heard about the awful land-slide?"

As it was so recent an event, it instantly absorbed all. Then Mr. Brewster told about the plans to ride up the Trail on the morrow and ascertain just how much damage had been done. John seemed to be as excited a talker as any one, but his mother saw him send many a searching glance around for some one he had not found.

She managed to reach his side without attracting the attention of the others, and slyly whispered: "Anne Stewart went out towards the Cliffs a moment ago. I saw her leave by the back pathway."

Then while every one was trying to make out the cloud-draped peak of Grizzly Slide, having had their attention directed to it by an exclamation from Mrs. Brewster, John backed away and ran behind the kitchen to the path that led to the Cliffs and Anne. [Pg 64]

Jeb found it necessary to fill the wood-box in the kitchen, and it was just after John had passed there that he stumbled up the stone walk. Sary stood in the doorway grinning sympathetically as she watched John dash away after Anne Stewart, when Jeb said:

"Lem'me get by wid this load of wood."

She smirked and said: "Ah, Jeb! Thar's nuthin' in the wurruld like young love, ain't it?"

Now Sary's would-be bewitching leer and her dangerous proximity to him, frightened Jeb worse than any Rocky Mountain avalanche ever, so that he forgot he held an armful of wood. He suddenly went lax in the muscles, dropped the wood, and turned to flee to his hay-loft where no Sary dared follow without a chaperone.

One stick of the wood fell upon Sary's toe, and not having "feet of brass or clay," she uttered a yelp of pain. Jeb never stopped to inquire what had caused that cry—whether of baffled love or shooting pains in a toe.

Sary limped over to a wooden chair and sitting there with her foot held tenderly in both hands, she rocked back and forth, threatening, in an undertone, all males but Jeb in particular.

"You-all jes' wait! Don't think Sary Dodd's a fule—cuz she hain't! Ah'll git you yit, so run away an' make-out like-es-how you are free and not lookin' to any female in pertickler!" [Pg 65]

Having thus unburdened her soul of its wrath against Jeb, the cook limped over to the stove to hang the kettle over the fire.

Supper was late that night, but no one noticed it. Sary had perfected a scheme she was going to try on Jeb, some day, soon, so she was all smiles and patience when the family gathered about the table.

"I see you set the table in the living-room, mother," remarked John, approvingly.

"Oh, we have wrought many changes this summer, John, but the best of all is the one whereby we eat out-of-doors when it is good weather. To-night we will eat here as it is too dark under the old oak," explained Mrs. Brewster, smiling.

Plans were now discussed for the trip to Top Notch the following morning, and it was decided that Jeb should go for Mike early, and secure his services as before.

"If such a crowd of men are going, I don't see why the owners of the mine can't go, too. We are as safe there, as here," grumbled Polly.

"Because we are going to make a three days' trip of this, Poll, and women-folk would not feel comfortable with such a lot of mixed men," explained John, pulling his sister's hair, lovingly. [Pg 66]

"Well, Polly and I are as good riders as any one of you, and seeing it is *our* mine, we ought to have *something* to say about it," added Eleanor, poutingly.

"I suppose you-all have forgotten that we invited that nice young stranger and his friend, Jim Latimer, over to spend this Sunday with us," now ventured Mrs. Brewster.

"Oh, that's so! The boy Kenneth who looks like Montresor!" Anne now added, understanding Mrs. Brewster's idea and abetting it.

"Kenneth Evans! Is it *this* Sunday he is coming?" asked Eleanor eagerly.

"We might be back on time for that; this is only Friday night, you know," persisted Polly, clinging to the hope of riding to Top Notch.

"No girl or woman is going—let that end the argument!" now said Mr. Brewster, with finality.

There was silence for a moment, then Polly laughingly said to Eleanor: "Nolla, you and I will ride over to visit some old friends of mine to-morrow. We will take our lunch and spend the day with them. As it is half-way on the Bear Forks road we might as well ride with our boys when they go."

"Polly, we plan to leave here before dawn so we can be on the climb when day breaks. Nolla and you will please remember to be fast asleep at that time. Good-night!"

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With these words, Sam Brewster got up and started to go to his room, but Polly would not allow her daddy to leave her in that frame of mind. So she ran over and jumped up to throw her arms about his neck in her usual fashion. What she whispered in his ear no one knew but he smiled and nodded his head in meek acquiescence.

"Poll—did he say we might go?" whispered Eleanor.

"No—he won't give in that far, but he said we could ride with them as far as Bear Forks, if we were up in time. I'm bound to wake up, so now I'm going right to bed," said Polly.

But Polly and Eleanor did not wake up in the morning until seven o'clock. The riders were far up along the trail by that time, so the girls had to make the best of the day.

When the men riders were well along the trail, Jeb motioned to Mr. Brewster that he wished to speak with him, so they permitted their horses to slow up and drop behind for a time.

"Ah'm thinkin', Mis'r Brewster, thet Ah'll have to give notice that Ah'm quittin' your ranch. Not what Ah've got any kick comin' about the fam'ly—thar never w'ar a nicer one. But Ah've got ta save mahself."

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"Jeb!" gasped Sam Brewster in unbelief. "You *couldn't* leave us! Why, man, you're one of the family."

"Yeh, Ah knows all that, Mis'r Brewster, but Ah jus' dasent stay where a female badgers my peace o' mind."

"Tell me what is wrong, Jeb, and Ah'll fix it if Ah can," anxiously promised Sam Brewster.

Jeb gazed wildly about for some one to explain for him, and in gazing, his eye rested on John. Big splendid John who had only been a little shaver when he went to Pebbly Pit to work.

"Oh John! Cain't you-all drop back and tell your Paw what ails me?" shouted Jeb, certain that John, who had been to college, could do anything.

John dropped behind his companions, and Sam Brewster hurriedly explained that Jeb seemed to have a queer belief that he would be done for if he remained at Pebbly Pit.

"Oh, did Jeb bother you about that story, Dad? Here, you ride on in my place, and let me get this thing straightened out."

Alone with Jeb, John said persuasively: "Now tell me all about it, Jeb—begin from the beginning."

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"Wall, seein' es how you-all is in love, mebbe you-all kin understand about this love-stuff.

"Now, yuh see, John, when that Sary Dodd come to Pebbly Pit es a widder, to help housework, she never cast an eye around fer a likely 'second' until that derved old dance at the school-house. It wuz that time when she perked up in all that borrered finery that she landed a rich ole bachelor-rancher on her ticket to dinner. But he gave one look and run. He never showed up again that night.

"Seein' like-es-how her partner vamoosed, she grabbed me to do the Grand March with her. Mebbe it w'ar the way Ah danced, that took her fancy. But whatever it w'ar, she's ben locoosed after me sence that night.

"Now, John, yuh know Sary ain't no prize-winner fer looks, en Ah knows a good looker when Ah seez one, cuz Ah hev sat and seen lots of pritty gals on the movie sheet in Oak Crick. Gosh! Some of them peaches Ah see'd would make yuh leave a stiddy job like Pebbly Pit. So Ah saved and *saved* till now Ah've got a tidy bit laid by fer some pritty gal, like them in the Movies.

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"Ef Sary Dodd knew Ah had money saved! Phew! She'd get at it whar Ah hid it in a hole under the barn-rafters, then she'd hold it out to tempt me, like-es-how yuh lead a balky cow to be milked.

But that is one thing Sary *don't* know!"

John laughed loud and long at the picture Jeb graphically sketched of Sary and himself, but the orator cared nothing for John's laughing. He was too concerned over his freedom.

"Sary's got some good points—yuh've got to hand it to her, even ef she hain't got a figger like Miss Anne's, and hair like Miss Polly's. But she can cook! Gosh, *cain't* she cook and clean. So ef it w'ar a housekeeper er a business partner Ah wanted, Ah couldn pick a better one than Sary Dodd.

"But yuh unnerstand me, John, don't yuh, when Ah says Ah wants something pritty sittin' afore the pianner to sing to me, or dressin' up in finery like Miss Bob's and playin' a lady? Ah've ben a hired man and worked on a ranch all mah life, but now Ah've got a bit saved up Ah kin go to the city and pick th' gal Ah wants.

"And lem'me tell yuh, John! In the Movies them gals what looks so pritty make *fine* farm-wives. Gosh, but one city gal with yaller curls hadn't a cent to live on when she met a feller what owned a little ranch in Arizony. They hooked up and she was that happy on the farm! She churned the butter and fed chickens and did all the chores. And he looked after the stock. Evenin's she played and sang fer him and he sat in a big arm-chair and smiled at her.

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"That's the kind of wife Ah wants, John—and how kin Ah sit and listen to Sary sing? Mebbe she kin *churn* better'n that one I saw in the Movies, but Ah bet a plugged penny that she cain't play a pianner!"

Jeb's tone was so emphatic at the last accusation of Sary's short-comings, that John almost rolled from his horse with laughter.

Now Jeb had said all that he had to say, so he waited patiently for John to get over his spasm of laughter. Then he looked at him as if to ask what had he to say about such positive evidence as he had brought forth, regarding the Movie girl making the best kind of a rancher's wife?

"Oh, Jeb! How I love your innocence!" gasped John, wiping his eyes on the back of his hand. "I shall certainly sue the Movies for betraying your trust and faith in womankind. For they sure did more than amuse you for your dime. You took for a solid fact, all the silly mush you saw on the screen as real life. But, it was *reel* life, Jeb, spelled with two 'e's' instead of the genuine r-e-a-l way.

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"Jeb, how'd you like to spend every nickel you've saved, on a girl with dyed hair, belladonna eyes, painted lips you could never kiss, blackened eye-lashes and eye-brows, and goodness only knows what else she puts on and takes off to look pretty in the pictures?"

Jeb listened with loose jaw and wide-opened eyes to this strange description of all the lady-loves he knew on the screen.

"Why, Jeb, these blonde Movie beauties have a different husband every few months. The ones who play star-leads make the biggest splash in the puddles, but the little ones try to mimic the big stars and get into all sorts of trouble. I haven't heard of but two or three who could treat a good husband decently. As for sitting at home playing and singing for you—ha, ha, ha! It costs about five hundred dollars each evening to entertain one of them.

"Churn? Did you say she looked so cute in a big bungalow apron churning the butter on a vine-clad porch? Didn't the porch open right out on a little pasture and tidy barnyard, where her devoted husband could stand admiring her? Was it a dear little one-and-a-half story vine-clad house painted white, with green wooden shutters?"

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"Uh, huh! Just so! Did you see that gal, John?" eagerly asked Jeb.

"Jeb, the Movies use that same little house and painted scenery for every farm-picture they make. Sometimes a deserted wife hangs to the post of the porch and plans to kill herself. Or sometimes it is the husband who hears how his head man ran away with his foolish little wife. But, Jeb, never believe anything you see in the Movies, for they have turned more heads than you can count, by their subtle ways. Everything always ends right in the Movies, but it is seldom so in real life.

"Now do you want my best advice, Jeb?"

"Ah shore do, John, cuz you-all knows what's what!"

"Then listen, Jeb, and think things over well before you leave Pebbly Pit and take your money away to spend on a pretty Movie gal.

"You say that Sary is a right smart cook and houseworker. You admit that she is thrifty, and will save that money you've got hidden away in the barn.

"Now look at that good-fer-nothing Bill Dodd she married! In less than a year she had him working on a ranch that she saved up for. Didn't she keep him at it until it was most paid up? If he hadn't gone with the flu, that ranch'd been paid for in another year.

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"Sary isn't so feeble, neither. She can save twenty more ranches before she cripples up. Any man who has ambition would make no mistake in choosing Sary. Now I believe Sary would make a big man of you, Jeb.

"She may not dye her hair or paint her face, but she's got a square look, and we-all know what sound stock she comes of. There isn't a better family in all Colorado than the Morson's. And Sary Morson is all there! She has sterling qualities that will last after beauty and singing is worn thread-bare.

"Of course she isn't anything like Anne Stewart—there never was any girl like her! But you make a big mistake if you go away to find a pretty girl, all dolled up like the Movie Queens, for your wife. She'd take all your money and laugh at you the next moment.

"I've lived in big cities, Jeb, and seen a lot of the ways of pretty girls who dress up and pose for the boys, but not one of that kind is worth a shake. Take it from me, Jeb, you'd be happy and contented if you had a ranch of your own, and a sensible wife to make you toe the mark. You're too easy for any other sort, Jeb, although you figure that you need an ideal. Not so, my man!"

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Jeb heaved a mighty sigh as if he was passing on his rainbow dreams forever. Then he turned sorrowful eyes on John.

"Wall, Ah cain't fergit that pooty gal in a hurry, even when Sary heaves in sight wid a heaped plate of puddin' fer me. Ah s'pose Ah'll hev to let *her* marry me, er git out to onct. Sence yuh've ben talkin', Ah have a sort of weakenin' fer her capable ways, and shore ez shootin', she'll grab the first chanst Ah gives her to know the wust, because this is leap-year."

John shouted with laughter again, and Tom Latimer turned back his horse to ask what the joke was about.

"Nothing that concerns little boys like you, Tom," laughed John, as he winked at his friend.

"But I feel sure I can be of help to Jeb as well as to you, John," insisted Tom.

"No, Mis'r Tom. It's all over," sighed Jeb, in a funereal tone. "Ah've made up mah mind to take the med'cine, er beat it!"

With that, Jeb spurred his horse on and joined his master, leaving John to merely hint at the great trouble that almost disrupted the household at Pebbly Pit. "Now, thank Heavens, I have saved the ranch from ruin, and united two hearts that ought to beat as one, hereafter!"

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Tom laughed. "I'm glad you confessed to your profession. I'll be wary of your match-making, in the future."

"But you have to find matches before you can make them," laughed John.

"You are so blind that you only see one pretty girl at Pebbly Pit, whereas there are four!" exclaimed Tom, smilingly.

"Four! Anne Stewart is one, and Miss Maynard may *consider* herself lovely enough for a match—I don't. But mother and Sary will never consent to your including them in your match-making."

"Hah! I thought so! You are so blind over Anne Stewart, that you fail to see how your own little sister is growing up to be a stunning miss. Why, she will be a beauty at twenty, for she is on the high-way there already."

"Tom!" gasped John. "Wh-y—Polly is only a child!"

"That's what all brothers think of their pretty sisters. Some day, a fine young fellow will think differently, and you'll want to club him. But the trouble is, that Polly will think exactly as the handsome man thinks, and she will not listen to her big brother's advice to remain a little girl."

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"Besides Polly, there is Eleanor Maynard. She, too, is a fine girl and will grow to wonderful womanhood. Now, John, take more notice of your 'little' sister, for she is what we boys call a 'peach.'"

"Ha, ha, ha! I've never heard you say so much about a girl in my life! If I didn't *know* better, I'd say you were half-way in love with Polly, yourself. But I know what a quitter you are whenever there is a girl in the party," laughed John.

Tom flushed slightly but made no reply. Before John could tease him any further, the party reached Four Mile Blaze. Mike tolled off the riders, and warned each one to give strictest attention to the going as one misstep meant a crippled horse or a serious accident.

From there on, the men rode through the lodge-pole forest to avoid the great mass of débris formed of rocks, earth, and torn-up trees that obstructed the old trail. Simms felt sure his man had escaped in some miraculous manner, after the avalanche swept him from his feet. But seeing the mountains of wood-trash that were washed down from the peak and piled up everywhere, he lost faith.

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Still he and his men were bound to make the most of the least hope, so they sought thoroughly over the side where the two miners had been discovered, that day. Nothing but trees, rocks, and earth piled in toppling heaps on the steep slope of the mountain were seen, however.

While Simms and Bill sought over every foot of ground for their missing friend, Mike led Sam Brewster and his two engineers, down the opposite slope, to a blaze that told them they were going towards the cave. But the nearer they came to the claim, the greater was the destruction of the forest. Finally they could see where the ledge had been, but so massed up was the trash that

had been swept down and over the side, that it was impossible to reach the ravine.

Mike chuckled: "Him unner alla trees on Grizzly Sly—him yaller insides safe nuff!"

"You're right, Mike," laughed John. "If the gold is in that spot it is safe enough for a long time to come."

"I think this slide was the luckiest thing that ever happened to the girls," ventured Tom Latimer, thoughtfully.

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"Why?" anxiously demanded Mr. Brewster, visions of his darling being carried away to school uppermost in his mind.

"When we are ready to bore for the gold, this trash will be an easy thing to burn and clear away. Meantime, it keeps off all claim-jumpers or thieves who need a little hard yellow metal."

"But you must admit that it is a tough proposition to mine here," said Mr. Brewster. "A land-slide is apt to happen any moment and bury all the apparatus. All previous efforts will be wiped out and you must begin all over again. Then consider the difficulty of transportation, from this peak down the long trail, and over miles of rough country to the Oak Creek railway."

"Hoh! a mere bagatelle, Mr. Brewster, when gold weighs in the other scale. Why, men will dig through the earth for gold! See what happened in Alaska. Once men found gold to be had for the pain and privation they would be forced to endure, they gladly gave up home, loved ones,—all—for the lust of gold.

"And see what that drive did for Alaska. Railroads opened, cities founded, people settled there, and all because men fought with odds against finding buried gold!"

"We wouldn't have to worry over this out-of-the-way mine if father would consent to have his cliffs utilized," hinted John.

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"Not with my consent!" retorted Sam Brewster.

"Well, come on, Mike. Let's pitch camp and get something to eat," said John, resignedly.

"It's not that I have any silly sentiment over the cliffs, my boys—don't mistake me there. But I have a serious reason for refusing to coin money out of that beauty—at least for a few years to come."

"If I guess the truth about it, will you admit it to me some day?" quizzed Tom Latimer, his eyes twinkling.

"No, sir! Not even to my wife—it's *my* secret!"

CHAPTER V

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POLLY AND ELEANOR VISIT THE BEAVERS

After breakfast the four girls asked each other what there was to do. They had had so much excitement all week, that the simple life palled on them.

"It's exactly like drinking milk after you have been kept on spice-beer for a long time," laughed Eleanor.

"Well, Nolla and I have an invitation to spend the day with friends of mine. We can ride over there any time," said Polly.

"Then for goodness' sake, come on! I'll be asleep again if we don't do something," exclaimed Eleanor.

"All right, I'll saddle Noddy and you can have Choko. We will have to harness them ourselves now that Jeb is away, and the other hands are working on the ranch."

"You're not going far, are you?" asked Anne, suspiciously.

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Polly laughed. "Not as far as we went yesterday."

Mrs. Brewster had been told where Polly planned to take Eleanor, and she smiled approvingly. A nice luncheon was packed up and placed in the panniers of the burros, and the three grownups stood and watched the two girls ride down the trail to Rainbow Cliff.

As they went, Eleanor said: "Did you mention the name of your friends? I forgot, if you have."

Polly laughed. "Maybe I told you, but I don't remember now. Anyway, you wouldn't know them if I did tell you their names."

"But what do you call them when you address them?"

"I always call the old one 'Grandfather,' but he has a large family that I never bother with. *He* is our friend.

"This family lives and does queer things that no city folks ever dream of," added Polly.

"Something like that Halsey woman, eh?" laughed Eleanor, who had heard from Sary about the disobedient children.

"The Beavers are too polite to force their company on us. And as we may not care to eat as they do, I decided to bring lunch, which we can enjoy by ourselves," explained Polly. [Pg 83]

Noddy and Choko now reached the trail leading up the pine-tipped crest of the mountain back of Pebbly Pit, and were soon climbing through a veritable wilderness of sage-brush and aspens.

"My, what a place to live in!" said Eleanor, surprised.

"It's not far, now," returned Polly.

Shortly after this, Polly turned Noddy from the old trail and plunged into a thicket of aspens.

"Good gracious! How can they ever find their own home?" wondered Eleanor, gazing at the closely growing aspen trees.

"They know everything! And Noddy knows the way by this time, too, as I like to come here and spend the day. Besides there are blazes on the large trees to guide one."

Noddy came out of the aspen grove after a time and then followed a mountain-stream up-trail for half a mile or so, before turning to look at her rider.

"Oh, you wise little Noddy. How did you know I wanted to stop here?" laughed Polly, patting the burro affectionately.

Noddy flicked back her long ears in approval of such words and petting, but Eleanor's cry made the burro listen intently. [Pg 84]

"Polly! What a dreadful place to live in! Surely no one exists in this lonesome wilderness, do they?"

"Mr. Beaver is clearing away the aspens just as fast as he can, but as soon as they are all cut down, he will move the whole family to some other dense grove, as they live on aspens, you know."

"What—what! I didn't understand you!" cried Eleanor.

Polly laughed as she pointed to a pond made by a dam crudely built across the stream. It was rough and queer looking, but it answered its purpose very well.

Eleanor saw half a dozen conical shaped huts built of mud in a row across the dam, then she stared at both sides of the stream, up and down, but no other habitation could she see. On the opposite bank several large trees had been felled and a quantity of aspens had been cut down and piled in confusion on the edge of the water.

"Do your ranchers live near here?" asked she.

"I didn't say they were ranchers, Nolla."

"Well, woodcutters, or what you call them!" [Pg 85]

"Yes," laughed Polly, "they are woodcutters and live in those mud huts."

"What?" cried Eleanor again.

"S-sh! Not so loud or you will frighten them away!"

"Polly—impossible! What *do* you mean anyway?"

"The beavers live there until the family grows too large, then they either build another story to the house, or start a new colony where aspens can be had in plenty. As there are so many young aspens here in perfect security, for the beavers, Grandfather Beaver remains here."

"Oh, Polly! You mean they are *real beavers*!" gasped Eleanor.

"Yes, and I knew you would love to see them at work, but we have to keep very quiet if we want them to come out."

"Tell me about them—quick—before we have to go away," begged Eleanor, eagerly.

"We won't have to go, but we have to keep quiet. You see they must have been cutting aspens over there, when they heard us coming and so they made a dive for safety. They are now hiding in the huts."

"What can we do to coax them out again?"

"We'll lead the burros to the park to graze, and we'll come back and sit quietly on this rock to watch for them." [Pg 86]

So the two burros were taken to a small nearby clearing where buffalo grass offered a juicy repast for them. Having hobbled them to keep them from straying, Polly led the way back to the beaver-dam.

"If you were over there to examine those cut aspens you would find each one about eighteen inches long and about one and a half inches thick. The beavers always build near an aspen grove, as it is their food, but not finding a grove near the water, they have to swim up or down until they reach what they need. That is why you find their huts on water," explained Polly.

"But I've heard they are water animals."

Before Polly could reply, a sleek head bobbed up from the water near one of the huts and Eleanor gasped with surprise. The beaver swam to the opposite bank where the trees had been cut down. He climbed quickly out of the stream and started to roll a heavy log over the ground until it splashed down into the pond. He then jumped after it and continued rolling and pushing it along till he reached the dam. Instantly, more beavers came out from the huts and assisted in towing the log to their dam of aspens.

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"Oh, oh, Polly!" whispered Eleanor in excited astonishment, but Polly held her finger over her lips in warning.

"I do believe they plan to build a new dam further up-stream, Nolla. If that is so, we will have something worth while to watch for during the next few days. Just now they are repairing the old houses for the Winter, and that log is to be a bulwark about which green cuttings of willow and young aspens can be woven as a partial strainer for the water. The débris that thus collects in the chinks between the cuttings, makes the dam firmer and yet more flexible than a solid structure would."

Just then, the sound of a falling tree made Eleanor jump and look across the stream.

"Other industrious beavers cutting down another tree," explained Polly.

"How do they ever do it, Poll?"

"If you watch, you will see that beaver go to work."

Not one beaver appeared, but four that hurried to the bank and moved the newly cut tree into the water. One of the four dragged the tree with its branches still on, into the mid-stream where, catching a heavy branch between his teeth, he steered it to the row of huts.

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Directly back of the first one, swam the other three, each dragging a section of tree to deposit on the dam, where an old beaver was hard at work. As soon as the first beaver reached the huts, the old fellow gave a peculiar call that brought out a score or more of workers. They all went to their tasks as if drilled by a master.

"My old Grandfather is not there this morning, or that other boss would not be taking his place," whispered Polly.

Eleanor had been using her eyes to good advantage and now called to Polly anxiously. "Look a'there, Polly! Those beavers are eating the tree!"

"They're not eating it but are cutting it down. Now you watch and you will see how they do it."

The tree in question, stood on the shore and was about six inches in diameter and about sixteen feet in height. The boss of another group of beavers tested the tree by placing his fore-paws against the trunk and spreading out his hind legs as a bracer. He sat upon his tail and took a deliberate bite from the bark. No wonder Eleanor thought he was eating the tree!

After gnawing at one side, he thumped the ground with his extended tail and ran away. Other beavers took his place and began cutting in much the same manner. Then the boss beaver, who was superintending the work, pushed the workers away and showed them how to work in a better way. This done, the boss thumped the ground with his tail—just as a policeman strikes the walk with his night-club—and the cutters went back to work.

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Suddenly the boss thumped the ground repeatedly and the cutters ran to a safe distance. A moment later, the tree began swaying and crashed down into the pond. It had been so cut and planned that labor and time would be saved by throwing it directly into the stream.

It was towed down into the general harvest-pile and left for other colonists to saw into required shape and length for the additions to their huts.

Soon after this, a number of beavers came forth and swam to the extreme upper end of the pond. Here they climbed up on the bank and disappeared from sight in the aspen-covered forest.

"Where are they going?" asked Eleanor, anxiously.

"We'll soon find out!" declared Polly.

As Polly spoke, a beaver swam along the bank and scrambled out quite near the spot where the two girls sat quietly watching. He sniffed and then plunged back to hurry to the huts where he must have reported the result of his trip. Immediately after, the boss commanded him to lead the way, and both returned to the place for a thorough investigation.

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The scout brought his boss up the bank and sniffed. Polly and Eleanor were quivering with excitement, as they saw the beavers making for the trail.

"Let's see what is wrong?" whispered Polly, cocking her rifle in case of emergency.

"Oh, don't do that!" cried Eleanor, catching hold of Polly's arm.

"Stop! Let go—that is how accidents happen. You drag on one's arm and the trigger, all ready to fire, is pulled accidentally. I know what I am about, so you need have no concern."

Eleanor felt chagrined and meekly followed Polly after this. They crept through the woods without making a sound.

The two beavers reached the clearing where Noddy and Choko were grazing, and the moment the boss saw the burros, he turned and snapped at the foolish scout that had brought him this journey for naught! But the subdued laughter from the girls made the beavers rush pell-mell into the pond to wonder whether burros could laugh like that!

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On the way back to their rock of observation, Polly said, "Beavers are slow and awkward on land so that the agile panther, the alert wildcat, or wolves and bears, form a constant menace to them. Because of their unwieldy and short legs, they cannot escape quickly, but in water they are wonderful swimmers, so, water being necessary to their safety, they build their huts on the dams that will not bear up other wild animals. If their dams were constructed solidly, the beavers would soon be extinct, as forest savages would crawl over and glut on the helpless prey."

"Didn't you say we could follow those other ones that went up-stream?" asked Eleanor.

"Yes, come on," replied Polly, leading the way for some distance before seeing a sign of a beaver again. Then suddenly, she clutched hold of Eleanor's arm.

"Ah, there's Grandfather, hard at work!"

"Where—which?" cried Eleanor, eagerly.

"The one with a limp and a twisted back!"

The girls had reached a place where the stream widened and here they found a great number of beavers at work. Some cutting, some dragging, others swimming with aspens, willows and alders, and all ordered about by an old crippled beaver.

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But despite his twisted back and decided halt in gait, he moved about quicker than the others, showing them where to place, how to saw, when to cut the aspens, and other important details of construction.

"There are a lot of pines, Polly—why doesn't he use them?"

"A beaver doesn't like the smelly, pitchy wood, so they never cut them unless they have to clear a roadway from an aspen grove to the stream of water."

"Then they ought to use all those trees already down. There are lots that have been felled by forest fires, I guess."

"There again they show their wisdom," explained Polly. "A beaver never cuts dead wood as it dulls and injures his teeth. And dead wood does not last like live trees, either."

At this moment, Grandfather Beaver seemed to sniff a familiar as well as a doubtful presence. He lifted his nose high and thumped his tail for an assistant. Leaving commands with this beaver, the Grandfather went into the stream and swam away.

Eleanor was sorry to lose sight of him, but almost before she could speak, the old fellow rose laboriously from the water just in front of her. He waited, sniffing anxiously, but found a stranger with his friend, so he half-slid back into the stream.

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Polly made strange sounds and ran down towards him. To Eleanor's amazement the old fellow actually expressed joy at seeing a friend. He emitted peculiar sounds and Polly stood a few feet away uttering queer sounds, too. Then he sent her a look of love—if there ever was one—and after this welcome he slid back into the water to continue the work as overseer.

"Polly Brewster—I never in all my life!" gasped Eleanor.

Polly laughed as she watched her beaver join the workers and scold them for laziness while he was absent visiting a friend.

"Let's get the burros, now, and I'll show you a place where we can lunch while I tell you how Grandfather and I got to know each other so well," suggested Polly.

As the girls rode along the up-trail, Polly told the story.

[A]"A few years ago, while out adventuring, I found this colony of beavers. I wanted father to come with me and see them, but he was too busy that year.

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[A] A true story.

"The following Summer, however, he came and we sat on the same rock where you and I sat today.

"We had to wait for ten minutes or more, before a beaver came out of his hut in the dam. It was not as large or strong a dam, then, as now. The beaver was anxious to reach a spot in the aspen grove where we could hear the other beavers at work.

"To reach the grove, he had to come up out of the stream and cross some land to the other pond. Just as he climbed up from the water, he sniffed danger. He was directly opposite us and we could see everything very plainly.

"Father lifted his rifle slowly and very carefully, and I looked intently to see what it was that he saw.

"On a bough of a tree almost directly over the beaver, I saw a lithe serpentine thing twitching as if a snake was trying to curl up. But I knew it wasn't a snake. It must be the long tail of a panther who was crouching for a leap, but I could not distinguish a body back of the foliage of the tree.

"The beaver stood uncertain of action for a moment, and as he turned to dive again to safety, the mountain-lion sprang. At the same instant, father pulled the trigger. But the panther landed almost on top of the beaver's back, while the shot must have grazed his head, making him rage furiously.

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"The beaver, who was on the verge of the stream, fought valiantly with teeth and his powerful strength, but the lion had the upper hold on him. Slowly the two squirmed and rolled, the beaver trying to drag his enemy into the stream, and the panther fighting to keep his prey on land.

"'Father—shoot—shoot! Even if you kill the beaver!' I yelled, as I closed my eyes from the awful sight.

"But daddy already had taken aim and even as I spoke, he pulled the trigger. This time his shot took effect for we saw the beast loose his hold on the beaver and roll over writhing in agony.

"Father rushed along the bank and crept over the beaver-dam to the other side. Then he put the lion out of pain with a third shot, and stooped to examine the beaver.

"We always take a doctor's pocket-case when going on a trip, and father now took it out, so I knew the beaver was not dead.

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"'Poll, try to come over here and bring a pan, sheath-knife, and some hartshorn from the pack.'

"I did as I was told, and stood helping father when the beaver came too—after getting a big whiff of hartshorn. We washed the torn flesh with water, and father poured on something from a bottle that made the old fellow squirm, but he sensed that we were helping him and he offered no resistance.

"Well, Nolla, when we were done with our surgical work, you just ought to have seen that beaver's gratitude shining from his round eyes.

"When he had recovered sufficiently to start for home, father swam beside him. And it was well he did for the poor fellow could not have made it alone. Father towed him across the pond and left him on the dam. There, the boss (for he was the boss of the colony) made a strange sound and instantly, a score of beavers came out.

"Meantime, father had left him alone while I stood a distance away and watched the scene eagerly. As many beavers as could get near him, managed to roll and push him up on the dam where he lay stretched out.

"Father did not think the poor thing would recover, but I thought he would, so we went back the next day, but he had disappeared.

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"We wished we could find out in some way, whether our friend was recovering or whether he had died and was buried by his family. So father decided to creep out on the dam and investigate. I went, too, and no sooner had we tried to make the same queer sound the Grandfather had made that day, than a beaver poked his nose out of a hut and sniffed. Quickly he disappeared again, but in a few moments, he came out and stood quite close to us making queer sounds at us. He was not afraid, so we took it that he was reporting on the health of our friend.

"We did not see Grandfather again that Summer, so early last Spring I went to visit my colony, and there was my friend, bossing things as usual. But his back was crooked and he had to walk with a lame twist, so I suppose that lion injured his backbone.

"I made a queer sound and he listened. He recognized me and swam over to thump his tail on the ground in front of my rock. I was so delighted that I rushed home and brought father over. Then you should have seen that beaver! He squirmed, and barked, and thumped his tail. It was like the meeting of a long-lost friend. Father was so impressed by the incident that he went to Denver and secured permission from the Government Land Survey Office to establish a permanent reserve here for the beavers. Now they have law protection and may rest unmolested by hunters or trappers."

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"Oh, Polly! It's just like a fairy tale, but much more interesting. What became of the nasty panther?" cried Eleanor.

"He's stretched on our living-room floor—that skin by the fire-place. We had an awful time lugging the beast home, but I was determined to walk on his head every chance I got, so we swung him on a pole and managed to induce the horses to be reasonable about the dead creature."

By the time Polly had concluded her story, the burros reached the bluff where the girls camped

and prepared luncheon. This day of closer intimacy for the two girls, sealed a life-long friendship between them. Neither girl had ever had a chum of her own age, and now they found so much to admire and respect in each other that their companionship continued without the usual envy, quarrels or jealousies so common in school life between school-mates.



**THE PANTHER WAS ABOUT TO
LEAP UPON THE BEAVER.**
Polly and Eleanor. *Page 94.*

CHAPTER VI

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THE GIRLS ENTERTAIN GUESTS

During the absence of Polly and Eleanor from Pebbly Pit, that Saturday, Mrs. Brewster made preparations for the entertainment of the young visitors who were expected on the morrow. So many days that week had been wasted in riding about the country that the pantry was almost bare. Chickens were killed and dressed, pies baked, and other delectable viands made ready for Sunday's dinner and tea.

No word had come from the scouting party on Grizzly Slide, but Mrs. Brewster said she had no idea of hearing from them until they had completed their investigations and returned home. Polly and Eleanor were well tired out when they reached the house, after their visit to the beavers, and made no demur when early bed was suggested to them.

Sunday was a glorious day and the girls bustled around rearranging the living-room, and seeing that the hammock with its cushions and the wicker porch chairs, were invitingly placed. Their own appearance had been seriously discussed so that both girls felt suitably dressed when the time came for the young surveyors to arrive.

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Eleanor had loaned Polly one of her prettiest organdies, and had arranged her really beautiful hair becomingly. Silk stockings now encased Polly's shapely limbs, and her new low shoes looked twice as well with the sheen of silk above them.

Eleanor wore a dress similar to the one Polly had on, and tried to appear as like her as possible, so that no unfair advantage should arise from appearances. Barbara smiled scornfully at what she considered "childishness" in Eleanor. "Why should she want to have Polly look as well as she could? And why bother, anyway, to dress up for a nobody like Kenneth Evans? Of course, it would be all right for Jim Latimer—if he were at home—but not in the wilderness. Chances were that the boys would wear everyday working clothes." But all her "cold water" failed to dampen the spirits of the girls.

The hour for the boys' expected appearance came and went but no sound of horse-hoof was heard echoing from the rocky trail that led past the Cliffs.

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"Why! It is now eleven, and they were to be here at ten-thirty," remarked Eleanor, hearing the old clock strike the hour.

"Are you sure that that foolish-looking boy understood he was to tell Jim about coming here

Sunday?" asked Barbara, feeling rather pleased that the girls felt fidgety over the nonappearance of their company.

"He wasn't foolish-looking at all! In fact I never saw such a fine head with such intelligence as he had," retorted Eleanor.

"Come on, Nolla, let's walk down to the Cliffs and sit up on the 'Guards' where we can see the trail all the way to Bear Forks," suggested Polly, jumping up from the chair.

"All right! we may meet them before we get there," added Eleanor.

"You two certainly are acting silly over a mere boy you know nothing about!" snapped Barbara, who felt peeved at losing the targets for her sarcasm.

The only reply given this parting shot was a merry laugh. Both girls skipped blithely along the path and were soon out of sight where the roadway ran behind the steep banks of the terrace. [Pg 102]

"Now that we are out of the way of Bob's eyes and tongue, let's go slower or we'll spoil our shoes," said Eleanor, stopping to see if any dust showed on her shiny toes.

"And we won't climb the high Guards, but just sit on the ledge nearest the trail," added Polly.

The Sunday dinner hour at Pebbly Pit was usually at one o'clock, so everything was ready and waiting just before that time. But no visitors appeared, and Mrs. Brewster sent Anne down the road to see if the girls and boys were visiting the Causeway and other unusual features of Rainbow Cliffs.

"Oh, Anne! Are you alone?" called Eleanor, when she saw the messenger coming from the house.

"Yes—are you?" returned Anne, shading her eyes from the sun, as she looked up at the ledge.

"Come on up," Polly called, leaning over the rocks.

Anne soon joined them and looked around. "Where do you suppose those boys can be?"

"That's just what we want to know. I'm sure we were plain enough in telling that boy that he was to come over with Jim Latimer for Sunday—weren't we?" demanded Eleanor. [Pg 103]

"I thought it was plain enough, but Bob declares that the boy was too stupid to understand a simple invitation. She is in her glory because every one is disappointed," said Anne.

"I wouldn't let her see me feeling bad for anything!" exclaimed Polly, stiffly. "But I do wish they would come, because I wanted to find out if he ever knew *any one* like our Old Man Montresor."

"Look! See way over there—out on the Bear Forks road?" now exclaimed Eleanor, pointing away towards the distant trail.

"Sure enough!" breathed Anne, with relief.

"But there are three, and we only expected two. Who can the other one be?" added Polly.

"Maybe they are not our company, at all, but some ranchers riding that way," suggested Eleanor, fearfully.

"Ranchers seldom ride that trail, and never on Sundays. Now look!" said Polly.

The three horses had stopped and soon, one rider was seen going along the trail to Oak Creek, while the other two turned in at the gulch trail and disappeared under the giant over-hanging rocks. [Pg 104]

"Hurrah!" shouted Eleanor, waving her sun-hat wildly about her head.

"I reckon our company is coming, after all," said Polly, smiling with satisfaction.

"I'll run back and tell your mother, Polly, as it will be at least half an hour before they can reach the house," said Anne, happy also that Barbara was to be silently contradicted.

"Don't dally around here, girls, when your company joins you," advised Anne, turning around, after she had started down the cliff-side.

"I reckon we'd better go back with you—mother can be the first to say how-dy to them," ventured Polly, looking like a stage-struck amateur at her first appearance before the public.

"See here, Polly Brewster! Don't you go back on *me*! I wouldn't have Bob watching us meet those boys and then laughing at us afterwards, for anything in the world! We'll stay right *here* and get acquainted before we go to the house to be teased and made to feel uncomfortable," declared Eleanor, who knew her sister only too well.

"I guess Eleanor's right, Polly; it struck me that that nice young boy was rather shy with strangers, so you will be doing him a great favor if you get acquainted here and then bring him to the house to meet the rest of us," admitted Anne, then she ran down the steep sides of the rocks. [Pg 105]

Now and then the waiting girls had glimpses of the two riders as they rode along the winding trail past the Cliffs. And Jim Latimer also caught a glimpse of the girls as he happened to pause, to point out the Rainbow rocks to his friend. Instantly he pulled off his wide sombrero and waved

it gayly at his young hostesses. Then both boys spurred their horses eagerly onward.

Eleanor and Jim felt perfectly at ease as they met and shook hands, but it was evident that Polly and Kenneth Evans were not accustomed to social ways or behavior, for both acted rather awkward at this meeting. However, Eleanor generally fitted into any breach, and now she unconsciously steered the would-be friendly craft of the four past the reefs of self-consciousness into the haven of youthful reciprocity.

"We thought you were *never* coming—it's past one o'clock you know, and we looked for you at eleven," said she, catching Jim by the sleeve and leading the way to the road where the two horses were waiting.

"We expected to be here at half-past ten, or eleven at the latest, but it is a long story to tell, and we ought to explain to your mother at the same time," replied Jim, throwing the bridle over his arm and starting to walk beside Eleanor. [Pg 106]

Naturally, Kenneth and Polly followed, but Eleanor turned around every other moment to include them in her vivacious conversation about the land-slide and the fears that Choko's Find was lost.

"Oh, but say! What a ripping chance we missed, Ken, by not being one of the party on the Slide, eh?" cried Jim, enviously.

"I'd like to be one of the party up there now. Just fancy the opportunities one would have for seeing how much he knows about engineering," replied Kenneth.

"Maybe we can fix it so mother'll allow us to show you the way up. I'd love to go again," ventured Polly, enthusiastically, as she forgot herself in the absorbing subject of the gold mine.

"Ken and I have to be back at camp to-night! That's the worst of being hired!" grumbled Jim.

"It's that, or being fired!" retorted Kenneth, laughingly.

Youth needs little to laugh at, so the four took this little speech as a cue to laugh loud and long. It attracted Barbara's attention. She had been trying to read, but now she got up to frown at the gay young people she saw climbing the road to the house. Anne also heard the laughter and hurriedly called to Mrs. Brewster: "They're almost here—come right out." [Pg 107]

So the visitors found a pleasant welcome awaiting them as they reached the porch. Immediately after greeting the ladies, the boys apologized for their lateness. Jim then acted as spokesman.

"We feared we would not be able to be here, at all, as the Boss of our Crew forbid any one taking out a horse to-day. Jake has charge of the horses, you know, and he was instructed not to pass one mount.

"Maybe the boys weren't furious! as we always take Sundays to ride to Oak Creek. It's the only off day we get. But Carew said we had a long move to make to-morrow, and his horses had to be fresh for the trip.

"Gee! I felt like thundering about camp, as I had looked forward to this visit ever since Ken told me about how he met you folks, and all. Now we both were all fixed ready to make an early start in the morning, and there would be no horses!

"Ken and I stole out late last night and tried to bribe Jake with goodies, then with money, and lastly I remembered tobacco! I agreed to hand over a big bag of Cut Plug and a tin box of cigarettes if he would loan us his two wagon-horses. These he could use as they were not included in the ban on the crew horses. [Pg 108]

"But Jake is a wily fellow and wanted to see our tobacco first. He knew that neither of us used it and he doubted our having any!"

Jim chuckled at this, and Ken smiled sympathetically. The ladies also smiled as an interested audience will. Then the narrator continued:

"Ken and I knew where Jake kept the store of tobacco that he always sold to the other surveyors, so we fixed up a little scheme. We left more than enough money to pay for what we took and then hurried back to Jake with the gift of tobacco.

"I wish you could have seen him scratch his head in bewilderment when he saw us hand over the star brand of tobacco he kept in stock! Still he refused to say whether we could start early in the morning, and then I got good and mad. If it wasn't for Ken, here, kicking me in the ribs, I'd have spilled the beans!"

Every one laughed at Jim's slangy way of describing his interview with Jake, but he was full of his subject and would not be laughed out of countenance.

"Ken and I were getting ready to go to sleep, when Jake crept under our tent flap and pulled my foot to attract attention. [Pg 109]

"There were three other surveyors in our tent, and Jake did not wish them to hear what was going on. The lights were out, so we were not seen as we slid under the canvas and joined the driver over by the trees where no one could hear us whisper.

"You fresh boys!" was the first thing Jake said.

"Then he laughed deep down in his throat, and said; 'Ah kin bet on you boys, ef Ah lets you-all have mah team to-morrer,—you-all shore will come back in time?'

"I eagerly promised everything, and he added: 'Ah sold a lot of tobakker to some one Ah don't know, but it doesn't matter who the smoker is, 'cuz now Ah got mah money and tobakker, too! It's 'cuz that feller is so smart that Ah feels shore the Boss won't get wind of mah hosses bein' lent. 'Course Ah hez a right to use mah waggin-team ef Ah likes, but Carew is strick and might get on his high-boss ef he learned Ah sent two of his men on an errent.'

"I was so sure no one would ever know we rode the horses if he would *only* loan them to us, that I agreed to anything.

"Then he said: 'Wall, now, Ah left one of the crew's tripods over at Bear Forks line to-day when Ford took an observation. Ah've got'ta go fer it to-morrer—er find some good-natured feller who will go fer me. Ah've got'ta get a heap of work done, to-morrer, and it looks well-nigh impossible fer me to get that tripod!'

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"I caught on at once, and turned to Ken and said: 'Why, Jake, I will get that tripod for you. But I'd hate to walk so far as Bear Forks line, all alone, you know.'

"That made Jake laugh softly and he said: 'Ef you-all will find that tripod fer me, Ah'll lend you-all the hosses fer the day.'

"So that is how we got away from camp, but we have been hunting everywhere for that old tripod and haven't seen a shadow of it. While looking for it along the line that Ford surveyed this week, we lost our way and had to have that rancher show us the way back to Bear Forks trail. That's why we are so late."

"Well, now that you are here, suppose you brush up and get ready for dinner. I've had it waiting this hour and a half," said Mrs. Brewster, leading the way over to the pump.

"And maybe we aren't ready to do justice to your cooking! We haven't had a crumb since supper last night, because we dared not ask the cook for sandwiches, and we left camp before breakfast-time. Jake said we might not be permitted to hunt up his tripod for him if any one learned he was giving us his horses for the trip," explained Kenneth.

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"Oh, you poor boys! Do hurry, then, and join us at table over under the oak, yonder!" exclaimed Mrs. Brewster, hasting to bring out towels and brushes for her young visitors.

The dinner was a great success, both from a culinary and also from the social points of view. While thoroughly enjoying the home-cooking, the boys talked of their work and adventures in the mountains. Jim had been with the survey crew all summer, but Kenneth had but just arrived. So Jim had a store-house filled with recent thrilling experiences and escapes.

Close-up encounters with bears, rattle-snakes, and land-slides, were passed off as mere trifles by him. But the problems of getting enough good things to eat, now and then a dance at some school-house, or finding a pretty girl one could talk to—these were awful!

When dinner was out of the way, the four young people started to walk to Rainbow Cliffs, as that was the show-spot of all the countryside. Having so many unique features and winding walks made it a delightful place for quiet little chats or tête-à-têtes.

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"I never saw anything like those great masses of color," said Kenneth, as they drew near the sparkling walls.

"I told Ken when we rode past here to-day, that Tom wanted your father to sell out the cliffs on a royalty basis, but he refused to. Now that Tom is here again with John, and the gold mine is caved in with that land-slide, maybe he will listen, eh?" asked Jim, eagerly.

Polly shook her head. "I don't believe he will, but we can't find out why he is so stubborn about it."

"Jim, I don't believe our gold mine has caved in, at all. It's only temporarily buried, up there. If there is any way it can be located again, I'm going to insist upon having it worked!" declared Eleanor.

"Why? You don't need the money," laughed Jim.

"How do you know what I need!" retorted Eleanor. "Polly and I need money this Fall, as we are going to go away to school together—somewhere. And she can't go unless she has her own money, 'cause her father won't consent to her leaving home, but her mother will—so she will have to have her own money to get away with, see?"

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"No, I don't see that that will work," Kenneth interpolated.

"Why not? If Mr. Brewster finds Polly is going, anyway, he will soon enough give his consent," argued Eleanor.

"I never said I would go away to school with you, Nolla, although I should like it better than going alone. And I'm sure I couldn't *think* of leaving home if Daddy objected to it," said Polly seriously.

"Oh, well, I know you won't, but a lot of money of your very own will help coax him to our way of thinking," explained Eleanor.

"You seem to think your mine will turn out money in time for you to spend it this Fall," ventured Kenneth, amusedly.

"Why, of course it will, if we can get at it through that land-slide," returned she.

"Other mines take from one to ten years to prepare for and operate. If you do the thing right, and have engineers plan for the apparatus to work the ore, you won't be spending that gold this year," added Jim.

"No! Then what good will it do Polly or me? I have a fine idea that I want to perfect right away, and it needs money. I haven't even told Polly a word of it, as I must see how much money we get from the mine before I mention it." [Pg 114]

"But once your mine begins to pay it will keep on paying for ever so long. You can plan to spend all the money you can possibly use, if the mine has any kind of vein in it," said Kenneth, soothingly.

"I believe in taking a 'bird in the hand instead of the one in the bush,' and here is a fortune right on this wall!" said Jim, pointing at the jeweled cliffs.

He picked up a handful of the colored lava-stones and showed them to Kenneth. "Do you know, Ken, that I wouldn't be one bit surprised but what that new patent your father got out for cutting rare gems would work on these to some good."

"I never thought of that! Maybe it would. If only he could come here to investigate and try his machine on the jewels."

"Why not send him a small box-full of the stones and let him experiment on them with the model he has in father's office?" asked Jim, eagerly.

"If Polly will give us some—I will send them on with a letter of explanation," returned Kenneth. [Pg 115]

"Of course! Take all you want. Every one is welcome to them," said Polly, breaking off a cluster of fresh stones from the wall.

"What are you talking about, Jim? I heard Bob say something about a new patented machine that would make millions out of these Cliffs, but what do *you* mean?" asked Eleanor.

"I guess we were both speaking of the same idea," replied Jim. "You see, my father is financing the wonderful patent Ken's father invented. Dr. Evans is a great inventor, and every once in a while he has a big idea. That was how he planned the vacuum sweepers, and the self-stop on the victrolas. He has lots of unusual patents granted him, and now he has this idea patented."

"He can cut a stone so that it surpasses any hand-cut jewel for facets and beauty, by merely dropping the material into the feeder on the machine and letting it cut out the jewel in a few moments. The size of stone wanted can be regulated by a screw. And the small bits of refuse left after making large jewels, can be cut into sparkling chips."

"My father and Uncle George incorporated the company that is financing this cutting machine. Now they can try out this lava and see if it is hard enough to cut brilliantly." [Pg 116]

"Wouldn't it be lovely to have Ken's father use these lava jewels in his company, and let Nolla and me have the royalty to send us to school?" ventured Polly, wistfully, looking at the distant peak where her gold mine seemed lost for the present.

Jim and his friend were selecting the finest specimen of the lava as Polly spoke, so they made no reply. Her eyes traveled along the Top Notch Trail and finally came back to the Cliffs at home. She watched the boys gather the stones and suddenly remembered Kenneth's likeness to Montresor.

"Oh, Kenneth! I 'most forgot to ask you something!" cried she.

Ken stood up and looked at her with a broad smile. As he waited thus, she was struck by the singular look that was so like her old friend's.

"That gold mine we told you boys about, was first found and staked by a white-haired man who called himself Montresor. He lost it again in just the same way as we did—a land-slide buried it and his stakes, and no one could locate it again."

"Then he died and left his claim to me. I always believed he had one, but every one else laughed at him and said he was crazy. Father was good to him after the mine was lost, and took his part when folks jeered. When he died, Daddy paid for the funeral and has the certificate where he is buried. But we never learned who he was, except the fact that he came from the East, although we advertised a lot." [Pg 117]

"Just the day you arrived in Oak Creek, Mr. Simms, our lawyer, read a letter which Old Man Montresor left. It was written to a wife and child, but there was no name or address on it. Then I heard how father spent lots of money trying to identify the dear old man and trace his relatives but to no account."

"When we first saw you, we-all were impressed with your resemblance to our old friend. So now I want to ask you if there ever was any one in your family who went to the Klondike and was reported lost there?"

"Wh-y, ye-es, there is some such story in our family, but I do not know the exact truth about it. And we seldom discussed it as mother always felt badly afterwards.

"As far as I can understand it, my mother's only brother Peter was a clever mining engineer in the East, but he was too ambitious to be contented with his income. Mother says it was his wife who wanted to spend money like water, who finally urged him to try his luck in Alaska—and he left home to seek wealth in the Klondike. [Pg 118]

"He placed all the money he had in the bank for his family, and left Aunt Ada and my Cousin Gail with sufficient to live on if they were economical. But my Aunt was not content with a simple home and a meager income, and thought to add to her comfort and wealth by starting a fine boarding-house.

"She knew nothing about the business, however, and soon lost all the money she had been left with and then she ran in debt. When her investment was sold out, she came to us for help. She and Cousin Gail lived with us for two years; then Aunt Ada had pneumonia and died. She begged us to adopt Gail as she had never heard from Uncle after he wrote to her to send him money to get out of Nome. But she had none, so she never told mother about this letter; we would have helped poor Uncle.

"As it was a year since he wrote that letter, and he was in wretched health while in the far North, mother felt sure that he had succumbed to the cold and his discouragement. Aunt Ada left a note in which she said that Gail and I were to share like brother and sister in anything Uncle Peter left us. [Pg 119]

"But mother always laughed at the idea that there would be any wealth coming to us from the Klondike. She said the only precious legacy we could claim in the gold-fields of Alaska was the untiring energy and earnestness Uncle was sure to use wherever he went or whatever he did. But she wrote to the postmaster at Nome and received word that her brother was dead.

"Gail was always delicate, and a year after her mother died, she, too, took sick and was gone in a week's time. So mother tried to forget her dear brother after these sad experiences, and it is only at rare intervals that any one mentions his name to her."

When Kenneth finished telling his story, Polly asked eagerly: "But you haven't told us your uncle's name—nor your mother's maiden name. Was it Montresor?"

"Oh no! Just a plain New England name—mother is called Priscilla Amesbury, and my uncle was Peter Amesbury. I never heard of a Montresor in our family, either. But that doesn't say the old gentleman couldn't have chosen an assumed name, you know." [Pg 120]

Eleanor and Polly were plainly disappointed that the names of the Klondike uncle and the hero of Polly's life, were not the same. Jim laughed when he saw the girls' evident regret.

"Any one would think you two girls were anxious to share your gold-mine with the heir of old Montresor. Now what is there to hinder me from claiming the old man as *my* uncle and telling you he is a twin-brother of my father's? That will make me the heir to that mine."

"We wouldn't believe you, because you haven't one bit of resemblance to this friend Polly knew, but Kenneth has. That is why it may turn out that Montresor really was his uncle," said Eleanor.

As the sun went down back of Rainbow Cliffs, the two boys regretfully said good-by. Mrs. Brewster planned for them to come and spend the following Sunday at Pebbly Pit with John and Tom there, provided the crew was not too far removed for the trip.

The boys promised to send word by mail, as Jake rode to Oak Creek two or three times a week, and could mail a note from them if they were to be within riding distance.

"We might even find a way to lose the valuable transit and then have to come and hunt for it," laughed Kenneth, as they got into their saddles for the return ride. [Pg 121]

"But you didn't find the tripod! What will Jake say?" asked Polly, anxiously.

"We'll let you know next Sunday," laughed both the boys.

That night when Jake smuggled his two horses back to the corral with the crew's mounts, he turned to the boys and said:

"Whar did you-all leave it?"

"Leave what?" asked Jim, wonderingly.

"Why, mah tripod, yuh coyote!" grinned Jake, winking at Kenneth.

"Oh, yes! Well, Jake, I had to leave it at Pebbly Pit because it was so heavy, but I'll go back for it next Sunday!"

"Nah, yuh won't, eider—some one else brought in th' tripod and ha'r it 'tis!" With that Jake displayed the article wanted.

"Who found it? No one could take a horse," exclaimed Jim, perplexed.

Then Jake leaned over and whispered in his ear: "The Boss hisself! He rode to Yaller Jacket to

spend Sunda' with his wife, yuh know, an' what shoul' he do but come acrost the tripod whar Ah left it fer you boys to pick up! Mebbe Ah didn't get hail on Pagoda!"

CHAPTER VII

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SEVERAL MOMENTOUS LETTERS

Monday and Tuesday passed very slowly to the anxious girls, and on Wednesday they began looking for the return of their scouting party. Polly figured that three days would prove ample time in which to investigate the conditions and determine whether or not the mine could be worked—providing it was found again. But in such a dreadful wilderness of torn-up trees, and washed out earth, where mile after mile of mountain-land had changed its appearance, who could hope to locate a tiny square of ground that had been staked as the wonderful mine? And with giant trees uprooted and tossed along the current of the land-slide, how could any one expect the insignificant wooden stakes to remain to mark the place?

Then Wednesday also passed without a sign of the returning engineers; so on Thursday, Mrs. Brewster told the girls they would have to drive into Oak Creek for supplies and the weekly mail.

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This would be a break in the dull routine of waiting impatiently for news from the Peak, and all four of the girls willingly complied with the order. Two strong horses were hitched to the ranch-wagon, and the gay party drove away, leaving Mrs. Brewster waving her hand as they rumbled down the road past the Cliffs.

The colored stones reminded Polly of Kenneth's story, and she turned to Eleanor and said: "I wonder if he wrote home to ask his mother about her brother?"

"Even if he did it will be fully a fortnight before he can have an answer. But we ought to get a letter to-day, telling us whether the boys are coming over Sunday, or not," replied Eleanor.

"Yes, I know; I thought we'd stop at the post office first of all," answered Polly.

The girls enjoyed the wonderful drive along the trail that ran to Oak Creek, and having reached their destination, left the team tied to the post in front of Mr. Simms' office, for they purposed having a good time.

Anne and Barbara went to the store where they could buy candy, while Polly and Eleanor ran to the post office. To their surprised delight, they found Kenneth Evans there. He was reading a telegram and did not see the girls until he had finished.

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"Oh—hullo! I never expected to see you here," exclaimed he, seemingly too excited to remember that he had not met them since Sunday.

"I wired mother last Monday—sent it in by Jake, you know. And told her to reply so I could get her answer to-day. The Boss let me off because I finished my work on the old line yesterday. So I came to town myself for the message."

Kenneth acted so elated that Polly and Eleanor wondered what news he had received to make his eyes sparkle like stars and his face to flush in a way that made him positively handsome.

"Isn't it great, though? And just think, if it hadn't been for you girls, I never would have known it!"

"Known what? What have we done that is so great?" asked Eleanor, laughingly.

"Why, the mine, don't you know!"

"What about it?" cried both girls at once, thinking that news of some moment from the engineers had reached Oak Creek before they arrived there.

"Why, the mine—you know, my uncle's mine!"

"Your uncle's!" again the girls gasped in astonishment.

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"Of course—didn't Polly tell me all about her old friend Montresor? Here, read my mother's night letter to me." And Kenneth placed the yellow sheet in Eleanor's hand.

She read aloud to anxious Polly: "One branch of family has a Montresor—two generations back the name was used as surname. Brother was christened Peter Miles Montresor Amesbury. Disliked name Montresor, dropped it when young. Every one forgot about it. Am sending letter with photograph of Peter. Show Polly. Wire results. Father may come west. Love, Mother."

"Oh, oh! how wonderful!" cried Polly, catching Kenneth's hands delightedly.

"I'm glad, too, Ken, but I shall have to contest any of your claims to my mine," laughed Eleanor.

"Your father ought to be told about the land-slide. Maybe he is coming west to look over the claim, but he won't be able to see anything," remarked Polly.

"No, I think Dad plans to come west to look at your Cliffs. I told him in my telegram just what they were, and sent on the box of jewels. When he gets them he will try out his invention and if it cuts them properly, then he may come here to see your family."

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"Oh! You didn't waste any time attending to things, did you?" said Eleanor, with keen amusement at Kenneth's business methods.

"No, I never waste time on *anything* that's worth while. And, by the way, Jim and I are coming over to Pebbly Pit again on Sunday—your mother invited us, you know."

Both girls laughed, and they caught the youth up. "Ah, you must think Pebbly Pit is worth while, then?"

"Why, I do! You don't suppose I'd ride 'way over there if I was bored, do you?" replied Kenneth, earnestly.

Eleanor laughed this time, but Polly felt he was in too serious a mood for laughter. So she said: "I'm glad you liked us. We'll tell mother you are coming again. That is one reason we drove to Oak Creek—to get the letter."

"I'm afraid it will be our only chance to see you-all again, as our crew moves from Brushy Creek to Silver Creek, and after that we go to Buffalo Park. The Boss says we will have about three weeks' work there, and then go across the desert to work along the Lincoln Highway, until we reach the other lines, completed last year by Carew's men."

"He doesn't know whether we shall be dismissed then, or sent on to tie up a few other little jobs before the summer ends. However, it looks as if Jim and I will be too far away to ride over for the day then. It will take us a day and night to cross the desert and over several mountain peaks to reach you."

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Eleanor listened delightedly to this innocent youth, and as he concluded she squealed with amusement: "Oh, don't you love it!"

"Love what?" asked Kenneth, never having heard this extravagant expression so favored by city misses.

"Love *you*, of course!" retorted Eleanor, laughing.

Polly frowned at this admission, and Kenneth blushed, for he had never before been told so publicly that a pretty girl loved him! Eleanor doubled over laughing, and gasped: "Oh, you two adorable babes!"

Further conversation was made impossible now, by Barbara and Anne coming in. They immediately joined the three young people, and Anne asked: "Did you get the mail, Nolla?"

"No, we never thought of it. Ken has such an exciting telegram that we forgot everything else."

Anne waited to hear no more, but went to the window and inquired for her mail and for that of the family at Pebbly Pit. A bulky package was handed out, and caused Polly to exclaim at its size.

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"Why, I never knew so many letters to come at one time."

"That's because no one's been here to get it for more than a week," returned Anne.

Barbara had not forgotten the yellow sheet in Kenneth's hand, however, and now asked what the news was that had so thrilled the girls.

She was given the telegram to read, and having mastered the contents she looked daggers at poor Kenneth; "I suppose you will expect my sister to share her mine with you, now."

Eleanor instantly interpolated: "Your sister wouldn't think of keeping a mine that belongs to some one else. I'm thankful we had the use of it that night when the panther and bear wanted to get at us. And again the day of the avalanche! I'm much obliged to Ken for his cave hotel!"

Barbara sneered unpleasantly and walked away. Kenneth said nothing, but when she had gone he turned to the girls and said: "We were thinking more of knowing for a certainty whether Uncle Peter was still alive, or whether your Montresor is my mother's brother. I almost forgot there was gold in that mine."

The girls assured him that that was exactly what they believed he was anxious to know, and that the gold was the least of all things to be considered.

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Having spent two hours in the Moving Picture Hall, and completing all the shopping, the girls started back to Pebbly Pit. Kenneth Evans had said good-by and gone on his way, so there was now no side interest for Polly and Eleanor as they drove the obedient horses homeward.

Barbara and Anne were reading their letters, and the two younger girls on the front seat whispered confidences to each other. Anne suddenly exclaimed, as she finished reading a type-written letter:

"Well, of all things! How did they hear of *me*?"

Eleanor half turned around and asked: "What's the matter?"

"Mother inclosed a letter that came from New York. She thought it might be important, so she slipped it inside the one she was just going to mail to me," murmured Anne, vaguely, studying the dense forest as they drove past.

"Well, that's nothing to wonder about," said Eleanor.

Anne glanced at the letter again: "No, but the contents is."

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"Maybe it's one of those proposals of marriage—you know; the kind where a lonely bachelor, rich, well-bred, perfect in every respect (except his bald head, glass eye, toothless gums, and palsy) wishes acquaintance with sweet young miss—object matrimony!" Eleanor said, jokingly.

"Eleanor Maynard! How very unladylike of you!" cried her sister, shocked at her levity.

"I'm only saying what you can read in the paper any day," argued Eleanor, still laughing at her joke.

"This *is* a proposal, but not that kind. It comes from a well-known gentleman in New York City," said Anne.

Polly was so astonished that she pulled in the horses and suddenly halted them without being aware of it. Eleanor and she turned square about and gazed at Anne questioningly. Barbara couldn't say anything as she was at sea for words.

"For goodness' sake!" exclaimed Eleanor, at last.

"Wh-y—I wanted to live with you in Denver this winter!" complained Polly. Then remembering John and his evident preference for Anne, she added severely: "Does John know about this man?"

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Anne laughed gayly. "No, and that is the only thing that makes me feel unhappy. I'd accept at once, if New York wasn't so far away, or if I had never met John."

Although Anne spoke in a jocular tone when mentioning John, she blushed most bewitchingly at her acknowledgment.

Eleanor had been keenly studying Anne's face, and now she exclaimed: "Ha! you didn't tell us what *sort* of a proposal! It may be a mason who wants to hire you to carry a hod up the ladders."

As the very idea was so ridiculous, every one laughed, and that broke the tension. Then Anne admitted: "I felt like squaring myself with you, Nolla, for your hint that I was answering ads. in the *Matrimonial Mirror*."

"Well, then, is it for a hod-carrier?" insisted the irrepressible Eleanor.

"Almost as good; it is for a teacher to carry learning up into young ladies' brains at a fashionable seminary in New York."

"What? never!" declared Barbara.

"Of course—why not?" replied Anne.

Eleanor and Polly were silent, but they thought a lot. But Barbara said: "Because you can never fill a position in a fashionable young ladies' school in New York. You know nothing of social life."

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"Bob, I'll have Polly dump you from the wagon if you can't be half-way decent to us. Ever since Polly and I discovered Old Man Montresor's gold mine, you've been as mean as a bear with a sore head. Now stop it, or I'll—I'll do something *awful* to you!"

Eleanor was angry! And she looked daggers at her sister as she spoke, but she knew there was nothing she could do but patiently allow Barbara to say unkind words to others, as was her habit.

Polly now spoke. "Anne, is there anything that you'd *rather* do than go East to teach school?"

Anne caught her meaning and mentally thanked her, but audibly she said: "Not just yet, Polly. You see, my brother Paul has two years still to put in at college, and little mother has to be cared for, as well. This offer is so tempting that I could not refuse it without considering everything that concerns me. In two years' time, I could not only rejoice that Paul is through, but that because of my increased income, mother will have something laid by for her use in the future."

"Well, then," sighed Polly, resignedly, "I'll give up my hopes of paradise! I did so want to go to school in a big city this year." As she urged the horses on their way, the young driver felt the tears well up in her eyes, but she refused to brush them away.

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Eleanor saw and understood. She quietly took her own handkerchief and dabbed her friend's wet eyes. Then placed her hand on her shoulder. Not a word was spoken.

"Polly, dear, I'm not going to do a thing until after I have pondered this step well. I shall have to write the principal for added information, and before I hear again, I will know whether it is wise for me to accept the offer or not," exclaimed Anne.

The rest of the drive was concluded in silence, each girl having much to think over. When the horses were turned over to the man who took Jeb's place in his absence, and the girls were on the porch, Mrs. Brewster noticed their unusual quiet.

"Anything wrong, girls?" asked she.

"No—only Kenneth's uncle is our Montresor, he thinks," said Eleanor, rocking violently back and forth in the wicker chair.

This so surprised Mrs. Brewster that she began a rapid cross-examination until she had all the facts. However the very telling about Kenneth's story enabled Polly to change her thoughts of future trouble, so that she felt much better over the school question before very long. [Pg 134]

Anne's momentous letter was the next important topic of conversation, and Mrs. Brewster listened to the news with an enigmatical expression on her face. When Anne finished telling about it, the elder woman spoke.

"I thought perhaps you would be planning to take a course in Domestic Science. But going to New York to continue your school teaching would lead me to believe that you propose making that the principal object of your life."

"But you must remember, Mrs. Brewster, I am not alone in the world. I have my mother and younger brother to consider. If I fail Paul now, he will have to stop his college education half-way. I simply *have* to keep on supplying him and mother with means, until he is through. Then he can help me in caring for mother," explained Anne, diffidently.

"You might marry a young man who had ample means to take care of both your mother and brother," suggested Barbara.

"Oh, Bob! you know Paul would never take money that way, when I had such a dreadful time in even persuading him to let me loan him his educational expenses from my own salary!" exclaimed Anne, flushing uncomfortably when the subject of her marrying a wealthy man was mentioned. [Pg 135]

"If your brother knows you plan to go to New York just to earn more money for him, he may refuse to take any aid from you," ventured Mrs. Brewster.

"That is my only concern just now. Of course, I shall take mother with me to keep house for us both, but Paul must complete his studies in Chicago, so he must believe there was another reason for my choosing New York other than the mere increased salary offered me."

"It seems a difficult thing for you to do—to find a plausible reason for going so far East," added Mrs. Brewster.

"Now *I* know a good one;" spoke up Eleanor, suddenly. "I am crazy to spend a winter in New York, but Bob won't give up her social season at home, and mother wouldn't think of spending the time in New York just to oblige me. As Anne has always been found to be so helpful to me, in everyway, I shall insist upon going to New York this Fall and choosing her as my companion while there. Naturally her mother wants to go, too, and so we will decide to keep house in one of those cute little three-room-and-kitchenette apartments. Then Anne has so much time on her hands that she decides to fill in by going to this seminary for certain hours. How's that for a plot!" [Pg 136]

"Oh, it's lovely—all but your being able to go East," replied Barbara, sarcastically.

The others laughed at both plotter and objector, for it sounded so visionary. But once Eleanor had the idea in her mind she mulled it over and over until it really appeared feasible to her.

The others talked of the mine, of Kenneth's father and the invention for cutting jewels, of everything that concerned any interest in their lives, while Eleanor sat and planned her new idea.

"Now listen to me, folks—I've got everything ironed out smooth for Anne's going. I am expected to remain in Denver all this winter and attend school there. Live with Anne and her mother. These are Mother's orders to the doctor—and he ordered them on to Daddy. I know all about it, because Barbara and Mother planned a big campaign to try and marry Bob off sure pop this year! —" [Pg 137]

"Nolla! I *will* not sit here quietly and listen to you tell such dreadful stories. You know very well that you are too delicate to live in Chicago where the climate does not agree with you," Barbara cried.

"Tut, tut! We are all old friends here, Bob, and no one will squeal on you about family skeletons. Anne knows as much about this arrangement as you or I do; and Polly, or her mother, are not interested enough to repeat what I say," giggled Eleanor; then she continued her outlines: "Hence, it matters little whether the eager student (that's me) lives in Denver, New York, or Timbuctoo, as long as she is in 'safe hands' and out of society's way.

"Now Anne Stewart and her mother have absolutely 'safe hands' for such as me; so there will be little argument and no difficulties in convincing mother or Bob to have the doctor say that I must go East with Anne. Convincing Dad of this need, will be the only obstacle. But I shall play upon the fact that he can visit me quite often in New York, whereas he never comes West on business. He can fly across country from Chicago on the Twentieth Century and be in New York in the morning. [Pg 138]

"Yes, Anne, considering all things, I believe it will be New York for my schooling this Winter, instead of Denver."

Eleanor wagged her head wisely as she finished speaking, and her hearers began to wonder if she really meant what she said. Anne rather liked the suggestion of having Eleanor go East with

her, and Polly sat mute, wishing some one would persuade her mother that it was the only thing to do for her, too.

Sary came in at this point to say that supper had been waiting so long, that it was all sizzled up in the pan.

"My goodness! I forgot we hadn't had supper!" laughed Eleanor, jumping up and catching Polly by the arm to whirl her away.

Once out of hearing, she whispered quickly: "Don't say a word to any one about this New York plan of mine—if I go, you go, too; for we are a second 'Ruth and Naomi' you know!"

Polly smiled, but she knew her friend's suggestion for her going, too, would have no backing from any one at *her* home.

Saturday dawned and every one at Pebbly Pit was on the lookout for the adventurers, as they surely would not remain on the mountain over another Sunday! But it was late in the afternoon when the clip-clop of horses' hoofs rang out over the crater of the ranch. Then the riders were seen passing the Cliffs, and soon they were at the door.

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Such a babble of voices and questions asked, would have deafened any one not concerned in the meeting. But every one, even Sary, had a heart interest in the returned scouts, and no one took the trouble to bottle up their rejoicing.

Several farm-hands were present, so the horses were sent off to the barn and Jeb was allowed a rest period. Of course, the men were hungry, and every one turned to the well-laden table.

While eating an early supper, John and Tom were called upon to give expert opinions about "Choko's Find" Mine.

"As you must know, Tom and I did the job up well while we were up there. That is why we remained so long. We've got the plan worked out and we also took photographs of the entire surroundings so that investors can see exactly what the difficulties will be," explained John.

"Oh, then we haven't lost it!" cried Polly and Eleanor together.

"You couldn't lose it unless Old Grizzly split the whole side of the mountain open and washed the gold down into the bottom. But the land-slide makes the mining more difficult in the beginning; once things are going, it will make no difference, excepting that there is always the danger of fresh avalanches wreaking the same havoc this one has done," said Tom Latimer.

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"Well, I always had a theory that I believe will prove to divert a great deal of slide that does the damage, in a case like this one. And since looking around up on Top Notch, I'm sure my idea will work," ventured John.

"All I can say to that is, if you have such a theory it will prove more valuable than Kenneth Evans' father's patent device for cutting lava jewels from Rainbow Cliffs!" laughed Eleanor.

"What's that?" demanded John, while Tom Latimer wondered how this Chicago girl ever had heard of Dr. Evans' machine that his father was financially interested in.

Then Polly and Eleanor had the "speaker's chair" and they told all about Kenneth, his father's patents, and Old Man Montresor's relationship to him.

"Why then, if this lad is the direct heir to Montresor, he must inherit the mine!" declared John.

"Not according to law, because Polly was left the claim, but we had to discover it all over again under a new claim, you see," explained Eleanor, anxiously.

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"That will make a fine little problem in law, I'm thinking," laughed Tom, shaking his head.

"It would if all concerned could not agree, but *we* all intend to agree—Ken said so!" exclaimed Polly, emphatically.

"Oh—you-all know this 'Ken' so well, eh?" teased John.

"Of course! And he is the nicest boy—as nice as Jim Latimer, anyway," retorted Eleanor.

Every one laughed, and Tom said: "Well, after paying my kid brother such a left-handed compliment, I feel I must continue my work on that mine problem."

"Give us a chance to finish our reports, won't you, before you tell us you gave away your interests, or launched us all in a will-contest," added John, laughingly. Then he continued:

"Now this is what we have to say about Choko's Find: The pyramids of trash now covering that area of Top Notch can be readily cleared away. We set fire to certain parts and opened a way to the ravine. There we found the old gulch literally filled in with rocks, earth and roots, so that we could not get through to find the cave. But we brought home bits of gold ore, just the same."

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John rolled the nuggets across the table, and the girls gazed with bated breath at what they believed had been buried forever under the land-slide.

"We have much to tell you about this, so let's go to the living-room to talk," suggested Mr. Brewster, rising.

"POLLY-ELEANOR COMPANY, INC."

The girls were impatient to hear about the plans Mr. Brewster and the two engineers had decided upon, but Mrs. Brewster smiled knowingly, as if she had already been told the secret. Mr. Brewster was morose and silent, looking more as if he was compelled to consent to something as a just and fair man, rather than from preference and desire.

"Now don't you girls ask too many questions if you are displeased or delighted at what we tell you," began John, nodding to Tom to proceed with his story.

Having promised not to interrupt the important conference, the girls sat expectantly smiling at the chair-man of the meeting.

"I have to preface our report on Choko's Find, by telling you-all about a little company that was incorporated in New York several months ago. Father wrote me all about it.

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"Dr. Evans is a very clever inventor, as you now know, and having this unusual device for cutting stones by machine, he called on father's law firm to secure a patent on it for him. Latimer Brothers make a specialty of patents, you know.

"Well, the doctor had but little money for the costs, and father saw a great fortune in the invention if it was properly financed. So articles of agreement were drawn up, that Latimer Brothers were to pay all costs of getting the machine on the market, and for this they were to share in the stock of the company.

"This was done and when the papers were ready and the shares of stock divided between the principals, an injunction was served on Dad by a tricky company in New York which claimed prior rights to the patent. This has held up everything so that Dr. Evans is not sure whether he will ever realize anything out of his invention or not. Of course, we are fighting the legality of Ratzger & Wriggley's injunction and claims.

"Having risked all his little bank account on the outcome of this idea of his, the doctor now hasn't a cent to bless himself with. That is why Kenneth Evans was sent to work this summer, to earn his own keep.

"Fortunately, Dad had a letter from Jim, who was out in the mountains with a government survey crew, in which it said that they were short a few good men and two young apprentices such as he himself was. Kenneth and Jim attended the same school at home, so Dad telephoned Dr. Evans about the opening. That is how Ken happened to come West.

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"Now I hear that the Courts uphold Dr. Evans in his right to the patent, and the company can go on with their plans. If they can find suitable material to mine and without too much expense for apparatus, they will start in at once with a close corporation. But should they find it will take great capital to mine the right kind of stones, the original members of the company may have to sell half of their rights, to get sufficient money to launch the work. Do you girls follow me as far as I have explained?"

"Oh, yes, it's clear as day," replied Eleanor, impatiently.

"Do you grasp the thing, Polly?" asked John.

"I don't understand anything about stocks and corporations but I do understand what Tom has said, so far," returned Polly.

"Well, then, all right; I'll proceed," said Tom.

"When I first visited at Pebbly Pit with John, I saw the wonderful colored stones of Rainbow Cliffs and begged Mr. Brewster to allow me to send on samples of them to father, as I was sure they were just what Dr. Evans sought for his machine to cut. But I could not make my friend, here, see any advantage in adding more money to his bank account. So I had to leave without having won my plea.

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"But I wrote father and told him all about the great store of unmined stones located in plain view at the Cliffs. Later, when the injunction stopped all progress in the work, I almost forgot Rainbow Cliffs again.

"But now that the 'Evans Jewel Cutter' is protected, and the owners are looking for material to manufacture, the Rainbow Cliffs are in the foreground again for negotiation.

"Then came the surprising telegram from Oak Creek, informing John about the gold mine claimed by Polly. As we were told to reach Oak Creek without delay, we started without sending word to the folks at home about our leaving our summer work. And now this is what we have planned regarding Choko's Find.

"If father's firm, Mr. Brewster, and all the friends everywhere, could scrape together all the money they had, it would not be sufficient to carry out the work at Choko's Find. The conditions are such that every precaution must be taken to avoid, in the future, any danger from new land-

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slides. The lay of the land where the gold is hidden, is such that the vein may not run deep into the mountain—it may be merely a surface deposit in the cave. In this case, the real vein may be hidden so deep that it would need the boring down into great depths to find the metal. All this will take time and money.

"That means that Polly and Eleanor will have to sacrifice the greater interest in their mine to secure capital with which to work it. Or they can sell the claim for cash—or they can arrange to be paid a royalty on all the ore metal mined. Where it is possible, it is always best to retain a controlling share of stock in the company formed.

"John and I have pictures on hand and plans and engineering reports of Top Notch and the claim. We also secured the specimen of gold that you have there. I will tell you the thrilling experiences we had in getting at the deposit, when I finish this plan.

"To transport the ore from the mine to some station on the railroad, will necessitate a spur being built from Oak Creek, or a new line being run from the mainline at Denver over to Bear Forks. In either case, it will cost a mint to build and run such a railway because of the long tunnels that will have to be cut through the mountains, and the lack of other traffic over a new road.

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"Even a sort of switch-back railway running from the mine to the valley will cost us more money than we can get together. So we would have to take in outside capital to supply the needs. OR ___"

Here Tom Latimer paused to impress his hearers with what he was about to say. Mr. Brewster moved uneasily in his arm-chair, but every one else was intensely interested.

"The Polly-Eleanor Company can sell certain stock in their mining company to Sam Brewster. He, or his company that owns and works Rainbow Cliffs, can furnish capital to build and work things in connection with the mines.

"The Evans' Jewel Cutting Company will be harvesting such rich returns from Rainbow Cliffs, that it will be able to supply all the capital needed to carry out the vast projects on Top Notch. And the voting stock in *both* companies will be held by interested parties who can appreciate the fact that neither company can take advantage of the other without both failing. It will be to the good of all concerned to see that everything connected with both mines, is done on the level and to the best of every one's ability.

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"Of course it will take a year or two before we can be ready to drill down through that cave for the ore, but we can start in on Rainbow Cliffs without any delay and begin to reap the rewards of investment at once. In the case of Mr. Brewster agreeing to have his Cliffs mined for the stones, and the Polly-Eleanor Company agreeing to combine with Evans' Jewel Company for mining their gold, both can erect plants on the same land, and use the same railroad for carrying their products to the outside world. That will save a great expense because the cost of building and maintaining railroads and buildings, will be divided by two."

Tom finished and John eagerly asked: "What do you-all think of our great idea? Of course, Montresor's heirs ought to hold an interest, but should they be Kenneth and his mother, it will simplify matters for all."

That started such a babel of voices that Sam Brewster got up and left the room. But no one noticed his absence, as all were too interested in planning for the fabulous wealth they conjured up in their thoughts.

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After more than an hour of animated discussion and explanation, it was decided to await the decision of the mechanics in the East who would experiment on the stones from Rainbow Cliffs. A box of the stones would be expressed at once, and a letter from John to Mr. Latimer would explain everything.

"What does father say to this, mother?" asked Polly.

"He says that, as the ranch is legally mine, he has no vote in the matter."

"Oh nonsense! Even if he did deed Pebbly Pit to you for a wedding gift, you always do everything to please him," declared John.

"Yes, but he refuses to say what he thinks is best in this matter," added Mrs. Brewster.

"Well, seeing that so much hinges on his willingness to coöperate with us," announced John, impatiently, "I am going to say exactly what I have felt to be the real cause of his disapproval of turning the Cliffs into money."

Mrs. Brewster glanced anxiously from the window to see if her husband could hear what was said, but Sam Brewster had evidently wandered away from the porch as he was not to be seen.

"Father told Tom and me, while on Top Notch, that he really had no personal objections to having the stones mined from Rainbow Cliffs, but all unsightly machinery and the riff-raff of miners that would be necessary in such work, must be kept out of sight of the house. He explained that most of the working ends of the project could be stationed back of the cliffs down in the Devil's Causeway, and the road that would have to run to Bear Forks trail for the conveyance of the stone, could be cut through in back of the 'Guards' and 'The Imps' of the cliffs.

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"He then said that there was but one condition he exacted from any one who was interested in

the plan, and that was that no undue influence would be brought to bear upon Polly to increase her desire to leave home for a higher education. His consent will be willingly given, and he will aid us in every way to a successful issue if Polly agrees to remain at home and give up her plan to go away to school."

As this unexpected ultimatum was given, every one gasped, and Polly cried: "Oh, no! Father didn't say that, did he?"

John remained silent, and Polly began to cry pathetically, as her chief delight in having found Choko's Find, was the fact that she would have enough money of her own to not only go to High School, but also to go through one of the large women's colleges. Even if her father refused to finance such an educational ideal, she would have had her own income to draw upon.

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"Now wait a moment, Poll, before you lose all hope!" exclaimed John, quickly glancing from Anne to his mother, and then back to his sister.

"I asked father if he would agree to your having a private teacher live at Pebbly Pit to educate you, as you craved to be. He is more than willing to consent to this, as it is not the education or money he begrudges you, but the need of your going away from home to get it. Now isn't that fine?"

"Where can we find a teacher who will bury herself in this crater just to teach one girl?" demanded Polly, wiping her eyes.

"W-h-y—I thought perhaps——" John stammered uncomfortably, then gathered courage to add: "Miss Stewart liked it at Bear Forks one year, and she has been teaching Eleanor for two years. She may agree to teach *you* this year for a tempting salary."

"Anne has had an unusual offer to teach a seminary class in New York," said Mrs. Brewster, without any sign of partiality for any one or any plan.

"Oh!" remarked John.

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But Tom Latimer eagerly added: "We can offer Miss Stewart a better salary for her time than any New York school can, if she will agree to stay here and help us win our way to Rainbow Cliffs."

Before Anne could reply, Polly cried: "But I don't *want* any teacher to live here and educate me! Can't you see that I want to go out, OUT—somewhere, anywhere, away from this volcanic pit where I have been buried for fourteen years!"

Once Polly freed herself of the reticence of speaking of her own ideals and longings for experience, she almost volleyed forth her words, so that every one sat astonished at her eloquence.

"When John went away to school I was awfully lonesome for he used to take me everywhere he went, and we had good times.

"Father and mother were good—but they don't know what the girl of to-day craves! It isn't that we girls are brought up so differently from our parents, or that they get modern ideas into their heads from mixing with society girls or from reading of them. *It is in the air we breathe*—the desire to come out of swaddling clothes and take a stand for our individual rights! Every girl has the germ of self-expression in her somewhere, and if it is starved and choked by conventionalities and parental bonds, she is bound to find an outlet for her energy in some unprofitable way. If folks would only SEE that girls, to-day, are capable of accomplishing what the *boys* of to-day are doing, and then give us a chance, there won't be so many slatterns and silly women-folk in the future.

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"I learned all I could get out of Bear Forks' school-books, but it wasn't half enough for me. Now I am going to go to High, or leave home to work somewhere. I will not stay here to eat my heart out over the outside world and what it is doing. I may be awfully disappointed when I get acquainted with folks, outside, but at least I want the opportunity NOW, just as my brother John has it.

"Mother and father took it as a matter of course, that their boy must go to college and carve a career for himself. But their girl ought never to dream of such foibles—she must remain at home and learn to sew and cook and do all the household chores! If any sort of a decent rancher comes along who wants to marry, then I must thank him and tie myself down to take care of his socks and buttons, and rear a fine family!

"No, *no*, NO! I tell you I just won't *do it*!" Polly fairly screamed out the last words and stamped her foot vehemently, as she stood declaring what she thought of such a life.

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Mrs. Brewster hid her face in a handkerchief—whether she was weeping or trying to hide her gratification at hearing her daughter assert her rights in such a positive manner, no one knew.

"W-h-y—Polly Brewster! You are positively unladylike in your manner of speaking of marriage and a future husband!" objected Barbara, shocked.

Polly turned on her, as the proverbial worm turned:

"Pooh! What do *you* know about real life! You—a silly selfish moth! All you can think of is money, clothes, beaus!

"You can't see a spider without fainting, and you mince about the moment you hear John or Tom are near. You're not a woman of *to-day*! You're a manufactured specimen of the past generation. Thank goodness, such as *you* are on the wane; and even modern men who are looking for mates—not helpless weights upon their backs—select them from the business world where girls are climbing to the top of the ladder as fast as conditions will permit them to.

"Don't *you* sit there with your powdered face and crimped-up hair and tell me I am unladylike! You never thought of being the lady your sister is, and certainly I wouldn't say that you can hold a candle to *me*! I was brought up by a lady, and I call myself as thorough a one as any of your society friends!"

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"Oh, Polly—dearest!" Eleanor squealed, running over and squeezing her friend in her arms so that she gasped. Then releasing her, said: "I never heard anything so glorious in my life! Not even the suffrage leader in Chicago, when she was stumping for 'Votes for Women,' was ever as thrilling as you!"

"Polly, you are right! A girl has as good a right to her individual expression in life as any man has. I will champion your cause, henceforth, and even try to convince your father that he is narrow-minded in his selfishness about tying you to his heels," declared Anne Stewart, bravely throwing down the "glove" to every one.

Eleanor now transferred her hugs and admiration to Anne, and Mrs. Brewster lifted her face from the screen of a handkerchief to look at John.

Tom Latimer and John exchanged looks, then turned to Mrs. Brewster. John was the first to speak.

"Mother, it looks as if 'Polly-Eleanor Company' are going to incorporate themselves in spite of all we can do to claim their shares of stock."

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"I haven't a doubt but that the 'Polly-Eleanor Company,' is bound to succeed in any venture of life," replied Mrs. Brewster.

"Mother, you don't blame me for wanting to get away from you?" cried Polly, running over to her mother.

"Dearest, I would be a poor mother if I expected to have my children hang about my neck to remind me that I ought to be petted and worked for, just because I claimed the right of being their parent! Every noble parent is only too willing to judiciously assist a child in finding his or her own niche in life.

"I have known for a long time that you would realize how stunting this ranch-life is to your unfolding aspirations. For me, it embraces all that I love and have, but for you two ambitious children of my younger days, it would be a veritable grave.

"I feel exactly as Anne does about this step—try your own wings, dear child, and wisely select your own walk in life. No father or mother can live your life for you, but they can guide and warn you away from snares and pitfalls. When a child has cast aside its 'swaddling clothes,' as you said, it must stand alone.

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"I have argued this out with your father, many times this past year, but he clings fondly to the belief that you are too young to leave home; and he has persisted in holding you in the material concept, instead of realizing that you are purely mental and must feed your mental hunger with proper nourishment.

"I had another argument with him this evening, after his return from the Slide. He expected to convince me that everything would go to ruin if the Cliffs were worked and you were allowed to go away to school. But I turned the tables: I convinced *him* that he was standing in your light of a future glory by keeping you limited in your realization of an ideal. That only a family disaster and your unhappiness, must result from such old-fashioned views.

"He finally agreed that if you and the others, here, said that a higher education was what his girl craved and needed, he would withdraw all objections—once for all. That is why he left us—to discuss and settle this momentous question. Polly, you have won!"

Polly flung her arms about her mother's neck and wept softly: "But poor father! At what costs have I won?"

"S-sh! Don't let any one hear you weaken now. This is the moment of your triumph, and you must not look back lest you be turned to a 'pillar of salt,'" whispered her mother.

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"Then father *did* agree to have Polly go to school?" asked John, curiously.

"Yes, if you-all agreed that it was for the best."

"And are we to have the Cliffs if the stone proves valuable?" eagerly added Tom Latimer.

"Having waived his right to keep Polly at home, he says we can turn the whole crater upside-down if we like," said Mrs. Brewster, smilingly. "But I wouldn't goad him, too far, just now. We have won such a mighty victory, that you haven't the faintest idea of what it means to the vanquished. It is doubtful if we can know anything definite about the Cliffs for the next two or three weeks, so let us not speak of it until then."

"But, Mrs. Brewster, if Anne goes to New York to teach, and takes her mother, where will Polly stay? I've been thinking how fine it will be to have her live with me in Chicago," said Eleanor, eagerly.

"Why—Eleanor Maynard! You can't invite strangers to your mother's home! It may not be convenient to have any one there this winter," objected Barbara.

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"Well, don't borrow trouble, Bob! It's father's home as well as mother's, and I can ask a friend to stay with me if I like."

"I wouldn't think of ever going to your home, Nolla dear. I'd love to know your father from all you tell me, but I never would stay in that house," declared Polly, quickly.

"We have several weeks to discuss a school for Polly," remarked Mrs. Brewster, rising to go out and seek her husband.

"I'd love to be with Anne," ventured Polly, wistfully.

"Maybe you will, dear. Don't say any more about it, now, but trust to your dear mother's wisdom and ways. Whatever is best for you, she will see that it is brought about," replied Anne, thus winning a grateful smile from John.

Barbara now went to her room, as she felt the company was not appreciative of her presence, and was too attentive on Polly. Polly and Eleanor went over to incidentally ask Tom Latimer about certain details in Evans' patent, and more especially what did he know about Kenneth Evans. As both girls were acquainted with Jim Latimer, they had not the same curiosity to hear any one talk about him.

But John took advantage of this trio tête-à-tête to hurry Anne out of the room. Quite naturally, they took the path that ran about the side of the house, where the rose-climbers cast heavy shadows in the moonlight. Thence they walked, arm in arm, along the crater-trail where it led to the Cliffs.

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CHAPTER IX

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JEB'S SUNDAY NIGHT OFF

Jim Latimer and Kenneth Evans made their appearance much earlier on Sunday morning, than they had on the previous one. When greetings with his brother, and the family at Pebbly Pit were over, Jim explained: "The Boss lifted his ban on using the horses, when he found his men grumbling all week over their wretched Sunday."

Of course, the two new arrivals were interested in hearing all about the gold mine and its present condition, not only because there might be a possibility that Kenneth's uncle was the Montresor who first discovered the vein of ore, but also because Polly and Eleanor were such good pals, and they deserved something big like a gold mine! Which goes to show that youth needs no time or preparation to discover and appreciate any desirable qualities of mind and soul.

Barbara was in her element that Sunday, as John escorted Anne wherever they went, and the two younger girls had Jim and Kenneth for companions. So, quite naturally, Tom Latimer fell to her lot. As she had been carefully trained to make the most of any opportunity offered, especially with a rich and desirable young man for the prize, she used every art to captivate Tom. But the young man was sensibly educated and wondered why really good-looking girls should act as silly as Barbara did on this occasion.

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He felt embarrassed at having to look at her from time to time, as she was powdered and rouged as she would have been for a ballroom in the city, and poor Tom thought that, perhaps, she had some loathsome irruption on her face that necessitated this covering of the natural skin. Consequently he managed to keep his eyes turned away that the girl might not feel too unhappy over her trouble.

But Barbara thought her cavalier was so effected that he could not look at her without feeling her powers of beauty and attraction; so she posed and minced her way as she fondly believed into Tom's plastic heart. Had she but known the truth!

A merry family group sat down, at noon, to the delicious dinner served under the giant oak-tree. And Mr. Brewster, as affable as if he had not been tried by a family-court the night previous, asked the younger boys how their survey-work was progressing.

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"Oh fine! We have lots of fun in camp, and when we go out on a section the work is so interesting!" exclaimed Kenneth.

"With such a large crowd of men, I suppose you two boys are considered more as kids who are to be teased and imposed upon, eh?" asked Tom Latimer, having read his brother's letters about the crew.

"That's the best part of the crowd—they seem to forget that we both are tenderfeet and years

younger than they are. Ken and I are treated exactly like any of the older men in the crew," replied Jim.

"Yes, we are paired off with certain groups to rain-proof the canvas tents, to act as commissary agents, and to share in all the chores the others do. Just because Jim has a rich father and because I have to work for a living, makes no difference to them. Caste and wealth counts as nothing out in these wilds. It is what a fellow stands for and can prove that is his introduction and guarantee of manliness," added Kenneth.

"Did your crew move to a new line, as you thought they would?" asked Eleanor.

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"Yes, we are now at Silver Creek, but we only have another week's work to do there. Then we move on to the next section which will be near Buffalo Park. Isn't that the place where you said Old Montresor had a cabin?" said Jim.

"Yes, and it is a lovely spot. I've been there, and I promised Nolla I'd ride there with her some day," returned Polly.

"Oh, I say, girls! Wouldn't it be great to have you-all ride up while we camped there? You could make up a party of it, couldn't you?" asked Kenneth, eagerly.

"And we'd get Old Carew to give you a *regular* party! The men in our crowd are gentlemen from different parts of the States, and they would help us entertain," added Jim.

"I think it would be a treat, Mrs. Brewster, for all of us. John and I would join the picnickers," now said Tom Latimer.

"Say, would you really, Tom?" cried Jim, delightedly.

"Sure thing. If Mr. and Mrs. Brewster approve."

John looked at his mother. "It will be dandy, Mother, if you and Dad will go, too."

"Father and I wouldn't go, John, if Tom and you will escort the girls," returned Mrs. Brewster.

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"Oh, but we couldn't think of going, Mrs. Brewster, unless you chaperoned us among so many men!" exclaimed Barbara. Then when she saw Tom Latimer looking at her she modestly drooped her head.

Tom was thinking: "Of all the empty-headed vain creatures it ever was my misfortune to meet, she takes the cake!"

"That needn't trouble you, girls. If you will come on a Saturday and spend Sunday at camp with us, we will have the Boss's wife there to act as hostess. Mrs. Carew always spends Sundays at camp—unless the Boss rides down to town to visit her. Sometimes she brings the school teacher from Oak Creek, or other ladies who enjoy the novel life in a survey camp," explained Jim, enthusiastically.

"Do let's go, Anne! Can't we say yes?" said Eleanor, eagerly.

"How long will both of you boys be here?" Anne asked of John.

"We planned to wait until we hear, one way or the other, regarding the stones we sent to New York, and about the financing of Choko's Find. Perhaps Dad and Dr. Evans might even come out and look the ground over for themselves, before answering my letter," said John.

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"Then we could safely arrange to go next Sunday, or the Sunday after?"

"Oh, yes, we will be home for a month, most likely."

John's voice betrayed his satisfaction that such was to be the case, and Anne smiled faintly, because she could not control her own pleasure in hearing him say so. Mrs. Brewster and Tom Latimer exchanged glances of understanding but no one else saw them.

So it was decided that if Mrs. Carew was to visit her husband over the following week-end, and the weather permitted, the young folks would form a party to ride up to Buffalo Park on Saturday. With this pleasure in view, the two boys went back to camp in the early afternoon, the distance being so far from Pebbly Pit, that it would be quite dark before they reached camp.

After they had gone, Polly and Eleanor wandered around at a loss for something to do. Being Sunday, their sports were limited to a quiet time. So they decided to visit the corrals and see Noddy and Choko, as the burros had been neglected by their riders during the past few days of the excitement over gold.

They were passing the wagon-house, when Polly caught hold of Eleanor's arm for silence. Both girls listened and distinctly heard a man speaking in dramatic tones. The voice was not recognizable, although Polly had not heard of any new hand having been hired.

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"Ef Ah wasn't shore we-all'd be happy, Ah never would be h'ar askin' fur yor hand an' heart." Then there was a pause.

A low mumbling followed, and then the voice again cried:

"Ef you-all w'arn't my match, Ah'd go away and nary trouble this ranch agin. But folkses kin see

we-all w'ar made fer each other. Even John says so!" Then sounded another jumble of incoherent words.

"Who under the sun is it? A couple who are in love with each other?" wondered Eleanor, aloud, as she turned to Polly.

"Whoever it is, they are behind the wagon-shed. Let's creep up to the harness loft and see who it is. There isn't another woman on the farm beside Sary, and I'm sure I saw her in the house, when we left there."

Polly led the way up the ladder to the loft, and then they crept carefully across the floor until she reached the wide loft-window. This she opened quietly and tilted the slats so they could look down in the yard behind the barn.

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There sat Jeb with a few loose pages from a pamphlet in his hands. He was memorizing the words, and as he did so he mumbled them.

Every time he had mastered a certain paragraph, he would stand up, strike a pose, and declaim in an unnatural voice, to the pig-sty that was not more than twenty feet away from the sheds.

Suddenly Polly clapped a hand over her mouth and rocked back and forth. Instantly Eleanor wanted to know what the joke was.

"Oh, oh! I know now where Jeb got that paper book. It was advertised in our Farm Journal as being the most complete education on how to propose gracefully to a woman that man ever could find. I just bet Jeb sent for it, one day, when he asked me to address an envelope for him. He must be practicing to ask some Oak Creek girl to marry him."

Both girls now smothered their laughter, for the idea of simple little Jeb in love with some one was too funny for words. He seemed terribly in earnest, however, as he stood up again and declared his love, and beat his breast and pretended to tear at his hair:

"Ef you-all refuse me Ah shall end mah wretched existence! What is life widdout love? Oh, beuchus maiden—' no, no, Ah musen't call her '*maiden*' er she'll knock me down," murmured Jeb, scratching his head in perplexity.

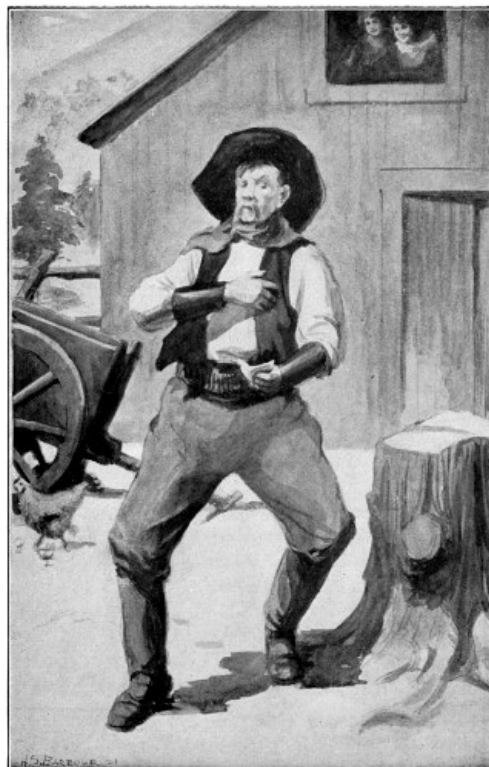
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His audience almost choked with laughter, but he suddenly brightened up again and said to himself: "Yeh, that's it! She'll like thet." Then he began again with one hand over his heart and the other tearing at the thin covering of hair on his head, "Ef you-all refuse me Ah shall end this wretched life—' no, *no!* Ah shall end this wretched EXISTENCE! What is life widdout love? Oh, beuchus *widder*, will you-all be mine?"

As Jeb spoke his last lines, he smirked to himself and said: "Thar now, Jeb! That'll fetch her, er John's all wrong."

Polly and Eleanor looked at each other in consternation. Who was the widow—and what had John to do with this proposal?

Jeb was placing the little paper book in his breast pocket when the girls looked out again. Then he picked up the bucket of swill and ran over to feed the pigs. His audience, up in the loft, heard him still reciting various love-thrilling lines to himself, as the pigs grunted and snorted and ate their supper. But Eleanor said they'd better get away before Jeb found them.



Polly studied her brother's face keenly, during supper, but John seemed as free from guile as any babe. So after the table was cleared, she went up to him and whispered: "Did you tell Jeb to propose to any widow you know?" [Pg 171]

"Why?" John's eyes twinkled with fun.

"Because he was behind the shed all afternoon, reciting impassioned lines he had learned in a paper book. We heard him say that that would fetch the widow or you wasn't as wise as you seemed to be."

John laughed loudly, and merely murmured: "We ought to be on guard to-night, lest Jeb commit some folly. Better watch him, Polly, and see where he goes, eh?"

"He never goes anywhere on Sunday nights. He sits on the terrace by the crater and smokes his pipe."

"Well, he is safe there, but if you see him come by, all togged out in his church clothes, let me know and I'll see that he comes to no harm. He may be a bit off, you know," John lightly tapped his head as he spoke.

"Oh, I hope not. Jeb is such a *good* hand. Father would never know what to do without him. Perhaps we'd best tell father of your suspicions," cried Polly, deeply concerned. [Pg 172]

"No, no! Don't bother father. I'll take care of Jeb. You just see that he keeps quiet, to-night, wherever he goes to smoke his pipe."

Innocent Polly then sought for Eleanor, who had been called to the kitchen by Sary. Polly found her giving a plaid ribbon and a corsage nosegay to Sary. But it developed that the maid had higher aspirations than ribbon and flowers.

"Miss Nolla, Ah see'd a figgered dress a-hangin' from the hook in yur room, one day. No one never wears it, an' Ah wuz wonderin' ef it was yur's, er Miss Bob's, er Miss Anne's?"

"Oh, that is a striped dimity that mother must have packed by mistake. It happens to be one of *hers*, so we hung it back in the corner till we go home again."

"Ah s'pose yur Maw woulden mind much ef she lent it to me fer to-night—eh?" hinted Sary.

"I don't suppose mother will ever think of it again, as it is last year's style, anyway. I'll take the risk of *giving* it to you, Sary, if you promise never to let Bob know where it went."

"Oh, Ah shore will promise, Miss Nolla! And Ah kin tell you-all Ah'll be the happiest gal in the West, to-night!" Sary said, giggling like a veritable school-girl. [Pg 173]

Polly watched her depart with the coveted dress over her arm, then she turned to Eleanor. "All the help are going crazy, it seems to me!"

About half an hour later, Sary was seen stealing from the kitchen door, and tip-toeing over the brick pathway towards the "Second-best" hammock that always swung behind the lilac bushes. It was a nice little retreat for any one wishing to take a nap on a sultry afternoon, but Polly had never known Sary to have a weakness for swinging.

"Do you know, Nolla, if I didn't have to watch for Jeb, I'd just love to follow after Sary and see what she is up to," said Polly to Eleanor, as both girls sat alone on the porch steps.

"Jeb! Why, I saw him come from the barn all dressed up in his church clothes. He turned down the Shrubbery Walk," replied Eleanor.

"Did he have his pipe?" asked Polly, anxiously.

"No, he looked around at every step as if to make sure no one was following him."

"Dear me! I promised John I'd keep my eye on him!" cried Polly, distressed beyond words.

"What's the matter? I can show you where he went," said Eleanor, comfortingly.

So she led Polly to the place where Jeb had left the road and turned down to the shrubbery walk. The two girls walked over the soft sod that gave forth no sound, and quite suddenly came upon a scene that caused Eleanor to crush her handkerchief into her mouth to choke her laughter, while Polly stood speechless. [Pg 174]

Sary sat in the hammock, one foot used to propel herself gently back and forth. The newly-acquired striped dress was such a tight fit for her rubicund form, that it cracked ominously every time the wearer took a deep breath. But the short-coming of the two fronts over her ample bosom was camouflaged with the plaid ribbon and many pins. The corsage bouquet was tucked high under her chin where it would show most.

It was not very dark as yet, so the girls could see how dreadfully white Sary seemed to be, and her lips were startlingly crimson. Suddenly Eleanor guessed the truth.

"She's gone and used Bob's powder and rouge! Oh, how funny!"

Then, before either one of the accidental eaves-droppers could say another word, Sary perked her head sideways, like a hen does when it hears a strange sound. She quickly frizzed up her hair by ruffing it backwards, and patted the ribbon on her waist-front, then gently used her foot again to propel the hammock back and forth.

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Gradually it dawned upon Polly and Eleanor what all this meant! They could see Jeb coming from behind the lilac bushes, some ten feet away from the swinger. He seemed ill at ease, and loosened his stiff collar, pulled down his vest, and cleared his throat several times.

"Oh, Poll! He's going to propose to the 'widdler'!" whispered Eleanor, burying her face in Polly's back to stop the spasm of laughter.

Polly was too hypnotized to reply, or move, and Jeb soon was heard to say: "Sary, Ah cum 'cuz you-all invited me to be compny t'night."

"So Ah did, Jeb. Won't you-all sit in th' hammick beside me?" came from Sary, coyly.

"It broke thru, last season, Sary, an Ah mended it. But Ah ain't shore it'll hol' enny more'n you." However, Jeb moved two or three feet nearer the hammock.

"It's a fine evenin', Jeb," suggested Sary, as seriously as if the weather was the subject uppermost in her mind, just then.

Jeb gazed up and around as if to verify Sary's statement, then admitted, slowly: "Yeh, it 'pears to be fine."

Silence reigned for several moments, then Sary said very sweetly (Eleanor whispered to Polly that she must have had a mouthful of honey), "Ah shore am glad to see you, Jeb. Won't you-all sit down on this stool?"

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The girls then saw that Sary had provided the three-legged milk-stool for her visitor. But it was too close to Sary for Jeb's peace of mind. He reached out very warily and caught hold of one leg of the stool, and pulled it towards him. Then he sat gingerly on the edge of it.

But Sary was determined to carry off a captive that night, or waste all of her ammunition in the attempt.

"Ah jes' loves to swing, but Ah cain't tech the ground easy when Ah'm sittin' back. Would you-all mind swingin' me, Jeb?"

Jeb got up slowly from his stool and took hold of the upper end strands of the hammock. He pulled it back and forth a few times, while Sary smiled alluringly up at him. Then he cleared his throat and began to speak.

"This world was made fur love. Oh, what woul' arth be widdout de flowers of love to perfume our way?" Jeb coughed.

Now this was just the sort of romance Sary had always *dreamed* of but never heard before, and she sighed heavily as her visitor coughed. If Jeb needed encouragement, she was not the one to disappoint him!

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He gave the hammock a strong tug as he began another line. Sary had to catch hold of the edges to prevent herself from being thrown backward.

"Man wuz not made to live alone. Th' Good Book says so. What so glorious ez a sweet bride waitin' t' welcome a man after a hard day's labor? What man is thar what woul'den give his wealth of all Crows-see-us fer love?"

Jeb pronounced the unfamiliar word very carefully, but Sary had never heard of Crœsus, so it mattered not how Jeb said it. But Polly and Eleanor were clasping each other tightly now, to keep from making a sound that would ruin the entertainment.

Again Jeb cleared his throat with difficulty and pulled at the hammock as if he was trying to drag a whale from the deep sea. Sary uttered no complaint, however, even though her neck almost snapped at each sudden jerk. She was wise enough to realize that the momentous time had come for Jeb. He might never again summon courage, if he failed to-night!

Without further warning, then, Jeb began his memorized lines, and as he progressed with the "love sonnet" he unconsciously swung the hammock higher and higher.

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"Ef Ah wuzn't shore we-all w'ar made fur each other Ah wooden be ha'r beggin' fur yur heart an' hand."

A long and mighty pull on the hammock almost landed Sary out in the grass, but she clung like a vise to the hempen ropes.

"Enny one kin see we-all w'ar made fur each other, oh darlin' of mah heart! Soul of mah soul!" Jeb coughed violently as he remembered he was two paragraphs ahead in his speech. Now he couldn't remember what went just before that "soul of my soul!" but he knew the tragic part to perfection, so he skipped all that went before and ended with:

"Ef you-all refuse me, Ah shall end this wretched existence in life widdout love! Oh, beauchus maiden" (strangling as he realized he should have said "widder" and now utterly confounded, he said): "Oh, Sary! be mah widder widdout mah love—NO, Sary, be mah wife widdout my widder. Oh, Sary, Ah don't know what Ah——"

In his frenzy, Jeb yanked on the hammock so manfully that the mended strands suddenly sundered and Sary was unexpectedly thrown into her suitor's arms.

Such an unforeseen accident, however, found Sary ready with presence of mind to meet the emergency. She flung her powerful arms about Jeb's slender form and smacked him heartily on the lips. The dramatic lover then trembled and gasped for breath. How to get away safely was all he could think of. But Sary, as tenacious in her hold as "ivy on the sturdy oak," managed to calm her lover's fears.

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"Oh, Jeb! *What* a wooer you-all do make! Ah never dreamed a man could talk so wonderful!" Sary sighed and placed her head down upon Jeb's shoulder.

Now had Jeb accepted this sweet praise and been satisfied therewith, his wooing need not have ended so abruptly, but manlike, he wanted to hear added words of flattery about himself, so he sat down on the three-legged stool, and drew the over-willing Sary upon his knee.

"Ah forgot to say half what is in mah soul, Sary," he began, as his lines came back to him. "Oh, Ah must tell you-all what joy you fill me wid, when you consent to listen to mah cause——"

In leaning back to emphasize his speech with an out-flung arm, Jeb lost his balance, and the stool being treacherous on its three legs, promptly turned over and sent both lovers from ecstasy down to earth. As Sary and Jeb managed to get upon their feet, they thought they heard sounds of smothered laughter and scampering feet over the brick walk, but when they got from behind the lilac bushes to reconnoiter, everything between the kitchen and the Shrubbery Walk was silent as the tomb.

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CHAPTER X

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A TRIP TO BUFFALO PARK

Word was received through Jeb, who met Jake at Oak Creek, that Mrs. Carew would spend the week-end at Camp to welcome the party from the ranch; so the young folks at Pebbly Pit eagerly prepared for the trip to Buffalo Park. The panniers were packed with luncheon for the riders, besides the cakes and home-made pies which Mrs. Brewster sent to the boys in camp.

At dawn on Saturday morning, the party started, Mrs. Brewster watching them ride down the trail until they disappeared back of Rainbow Cliffs. Then she went back to attend to her household duties.

Polly rode Noddy as usual, and Eleanor had Choko. The other four members of the party rode horses, but one extra burro, Nigger, was taken to carry the luggage. The trail from Bear Forks across the mountain-side was very rough, being seldom used; most riders, going to Buffalo Park, took the old worn trail that ran from Silver Creek.

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Finally, the going was found to be so steep that it was deemed best to attach the pack-burro to John's horse, by means of a rope. This would necessitate the burro following after John's horse instead of wandering away in the maze of forest trees.

But sometimes, these little burros get stubborn when they are made to follow in the rear of a horse, and it was so with Nigger. He acted like a sulky child, and made the girls laugh at his contrary behavior. He seemed to have lost all individual ambition, and made John's horse drag him at the unusually hard places in the trail.

They had been climbing steadily for two hours and hoped soon to reach the clearer trail that ran direct to Buffalo Park. But the trees grew so closely together, now, that they offered obstructions in every direction the horses went. Sometimes it was even necessary for the riders to dismount and follow after the horses to eliminate the extra width caused by stirrups and legs.

Nigger's panniers were packed with food, cooking utensils to use while on the trail, and rifles. This bulky roll projected over a foot on either side of him, often creating a "blockade" in the narrow going between trees.

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John's horse, being unable to read blazes as easily as his rider could, would choose the wrong turn now and then, sulkily followed by Nigger. Then the horse would come to a spot impossible to pass through and would decide to back out. Nigger, with his clumsy pack and grouchy manner, stood and fairly laughed at such times. Polly and Eleanor enjoyed these funny experiences thoroughly; but John felt annoyed, as he wished to appear his best before Anne, and how can a young gallant impress his lady-love favorably when his horse is making a fool of itself?

While Nigger and Snowball (John's horse was white) were engaged in disentangling themselves from one of these snarls, the other riders went ahead. Finding John was not immediately behind,

they halted and turned to watch him get his two steeds straightened out and going again.

All was serene once more and Snowball started briskly up the trail, but unfortunately, she went about a tree on one side of the trail while Nigger insisted upon choosing the other side. Both were suddenly yanked up when the tie-rope tautened about the tree, so that John was almost thrown out of the saddle. Neither beast would give in but tugged stubbornly to make the other

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waive his right of way, until finally, John had to jump down again, and compel Snowball to walk back and around the tree on the right side, where the burro waited.

Nigger stood with neck stretched and his mouth half-open, while his eyes gleamed impishly. John roared at the expression on the burro's face, as true to a malicious grin as ever a human could produce it. Then they resumed the climb.

But Nigger had found a new way to tantalize Snowball. He would step upon a stone and allow it to trip him. This would make his pack strike the tree on the side he rolled. Then the tree, resisting the impact, would slew him back again. Naturally, every time he performed this way, Snowball was unceremoniously yanked up too, and this sudden stopping interfered with John's conversation with Anne.

After Polly had laughed herself weak over Nigger's clever performances, she called to John. "No use! You'll have to give Nig his freedom! He'll land Snowball in kingdom come if you keep him tied."

So wise little Nigger was freed once more, and thereafter he walked as circumspectly as any good burro should. But the going was better, too, with the trail running through miles and miles of dark green forests, patterned here and there with golden stretches of mesa and parks.

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"Are you sure you know the trail, Polly?" asked John, as he gazed about at the unfamiliar path.

"Oh, yes, I've gone this way lots of times when Mr. Montresor lived in the cabin where Carew's men are now camping."

"Well, if it is much farther, then I say we'd best halt for something to eat."

"I will second that motion whether it is far or near. We had best have a bite, as we will have to wait for the crew's dinner-time when we arrive in camp," added Tom Latimer.

So the riders dismounted and hastily prepared a luncheon. When they were ready to proceed on the way, Nigger found his pack much lighter than before, so he, too, was delighted to have had the humans stop for lunch.

It was past noon before the visitors reached Carew's Camp, but once there, they were given a hearty welcome by every one. Cooke had been mixing and stirring viands ever since the breakfast had been cleared away, and now he was ready to smile satisfactorily at results, for he was going to give these guests a rare meal that day.

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Mrs. Carew was a Chicago lady and, for once, Barbara was happy, as she found her hostess knew several people that the Maynards felt were exalted enough to be classed "in their set."

As soon as their section master gave them the afternoon's vacation, Jim Latimer and Kenneth appropriated Polly and Eleanor, and the four started off on fresh horses from the corral, for an excursion.

Jim wanted to ride to one of the peaks where they had surveyed that week, and show the girls the far-off desert that stretched for miles and miles between Buffalo Park and the Lincoln Memorial Highway.

The trail was well defined, as the crew had traveled it twice a day that week, and had worn down cactus and sage-brush.

The four finally reached the pinnacle where the gray expanse of sand could be seen stretching out to meet the blue sky on the horizon, and Jim laughingly remarked: "Ken and I came near finding a sandy grave there the other day."

"How?" eagerly asked the girls.

"Why, we were sent with our superior, to tie up a line at the edge of the desert down there, and having done so, one of the crew saw a fine little bit of water and a few trees growing about it, not more than half-a-mile from where we were working.

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"We concluded it would make an admirable place to rest and have lunch, and give the horses a good drink, too, at the same time. So we all started over the sand to enjoy the unusual oasis.

"Well, we kept on going and going, but the darn old oasis seemed as far away as ever. Suddenly, I thought I was going queer in my head, because it slowly vanished like mist. I rubbed my eyes and called on Ken to verify the fact. Then you should have heard the men swear! Phew!"

Both boys laughed as they recalled the irritation of the men who found they had been riding for a mirage—And lunch farther off than ever.

"However, we saw a gigantic boulder of lava and sand rear its head from the desert a short distance off, so we decided to make for that and see if there was a crevice in its side where we might find shelter from the baking sun.

"We left the horses hobbled while we scrambled up its sides to look for any projection that would cast a shadow for us.

"The men separated when we started to climb, but we all met at the top without having found any shade. The wind that blew across the desert, was comparatively cool, however, so we sat on the uncomfortable spikes of lava and planned where we might have something to eat. [Pg 188]

"Ken turned to speak to me, and a great mass of shale broke away from his feet and rolled down the steep sides of the crag. But he managed to catch himself from slipping. Then we began breaking off fragments of shale and tried to see who could throw it the farthest out on the desert. We laid wagers, and one of the party said he would go down, after a bit, and mark the ones that were prize-winners. That made us laugh as no one would ever be able to find any individual chunk of shale out on that wild place.

"The breeze that had been blowing rather too strong, now became stronger, and then Prang, who was in charge of us, that day, shaded his eyes with a hand and stared off at the horizon. We all gazed in the same direction, but we were not experienced enough to know what it was he saw.

"My God, boys! slide down this crag as fast as you can—that's a storm blowing across the sands. It will hit us in a few moments. Grab the horses or they'll bolt and we'll all be lost on the desert!"

"Gee! didn't we get down those awful sides. Ken slid more than half-way down, then he lost his grasp on the side. His back and arms are all scraped now, from the way he rolled the rest of the way." [Pg 189]

The girls sympathized with Ken, but he laughed away the thought that he had been too tender to stand such a test.

"Well, most of us got down and had caught our horses before the sand-storm struck us, but two of our crowd had to stumble through the terrific storm that blinded them. Had we not kept on calling and shouting to direct them, they would have wandered away and been buried.

"It was an awful experience, but now that it is over, I'm glad we had it. I will have *something* to brag about when I'm at college, this Fall."

Ken laughed. "I'd rather not brag than to go through such a hair-raising time again."

"Do both of you boys intend going to college?" asked Eleanor.

"Yes; we've gone through school together since we were little shavers. And that's quite a record for boys in New York, where folks are always moving from one district to another," replied Jim.

"I believe your brother Tom said you were going to Yale?" continued Eleanor. [Pg 190]

"We will, if we pass the tests. I'm sure Ken will, but I'm not so sure of myself."

"Now—don't belittle yourself. You know you will pass," added Kenneth.

"I'm sorry you both will be away from home, because Polly and I expect to attend school in New York this Winter," remarked Eleanor.

"Me? School in New York?" cried Polly, astonished.

"Why, yes, of course! Didn't you know what was in my mind when I decided I would like to go to New York with Anne Stewart?"

"But that doesn't mean *I'm* going there!" exclaimed Polly.

"Of course you are. I don't want to go without you, so I shall scheme to win your folks over to my way of thinking."

"Well, all I can say, is this: If you win them over to see how important it is for me to go to school in New York, you are a wizard—that's all!" declared Polly, laughingly.

"Your laugh sounds dubious, but I'll show you, pretty soon."

"Now, if you two girls should find yourselves in New York, we will have our folks meet you and pilot you through the wilderness. It's worse than out here on the mountains, you know," laughed Jim. [Pg 191]

"In case I don't pass for college, I won't mind so much, as long as you girls will be in the city to console me," added Kenneth, gallantly.

They laughed. "We won't waste much time consoling any one, I can tell you," added Polly.

"No; Polly and I are going to study some profession, you know, and begin business as soon as we complete our education."

"What?" exclaimed Jim, surprised to hear such young girls plan for a business life.

"Yep! Polly is just daffy over interior decorating, and since she showed me all her magazines and other books on it, I am crazy about it, too."

"But you don't have to study *that!*" declared Kenneth.

"That shows how little a man knows about it. Why, not only must a decorator—a real one, we mean—know all about periods in architecture and furnishings of all kinds, but she must know at a glance, whether an object is genuine antique or a counterfeit," explained Eleanor, glad to impress her male friends with her understanding of what is essentially a woman's profession.

"Besides that," added Polly, "a good interior decorator must know the name of a painter of pictures,—whether an old master or a modern artist. Not an engraving or etching shown but the good decorator ought to be able to say who did it, and name its date. [Pg 192]

"There are lots of counterfeit antique china sold to-day, but a good decorator can tell instantly whether it is real antique or not.

"Besides china and pictures, one must be able to name a rug—its qualities and value, at a glance. As for draperies and wall-hangings, well! It all has to be thoroughly learned," said Polly.

"I always thought a man took up interior decorating just because he happened to have been an upholsterer or fresco painter. I never knew there was any studying to be done, first," said Jim.

"You didn't, eh! Well then, let me tell you this much; Polly and I intend to use our money from the mine, to put us both through school in New York. Any other city would do, I suppose, only Anne Stewart will be there, and I never can study under any one else! So I have to attend class in New York," Eleanor spoke with the greatest assurance that all she said had already been agreed to by Polly's family.

"Then when Polly and I have had a year or two with Anne, we will take a special course in some one of the best schools on the subject. This course finished, we propose going to Europe to study Italian, French, Spanish, and English periods and styles. If we have an extra year or so, to spare, we might go to Japan and Egypt, as I just adore those two lands." [Pg 193]

"W-h-y! Eleanor! You never mentioned a word of this to me before! Who told you we could go?" gasped Polly.

Eleanor laughed merrily. "You big innocent! Why, *I* just told you *myself*—that we were going abroad."

"If I ever manage to break away from Pebbly Pit after the awful speech I made recently, I'll be lucky, and let New York or Europe alone!" laughed Polly.

"You never would have had gumption to speak as you did, Polly, if it hadn't been for my training you. This is what I have done to you—you are growing to be more independent of others."

Eleanor smiled self-complacently at Polly, but the latter retorted: "I owe you nothing on an exchange, Nolla, because you must admit that I have filled you up with ideas you never dreamed of before you came to the ranch!" [Pg 194]

"Shake, old girl!" laughed Eleanor, holding out her hand.

"But about New York—girls. It would be great if you can fix it. Ken and I will be home every holiday, and perhaps we can run down from New Haven, now and then, over Sundays," remarked Jim, eagerly.

Eleanor held up an assuring hand, as she nodded her wise little head knowingly and said: "Leave it to Nolla, boys!"

They laughed and agreed that there was no one else that could arrange affairs any better!

Polly sat mute, for she wondered if it ever would come true—what Eleanor had planned about Europe. In her wildest fancies she had never dared allow her thought to outline *such* possibilities. But here was a harum-scarum friend who seemed to get everything she wanted by merely saying, "We must have it, you know!"

"I guess we'd better be starting back to camp," suggested Kenneth, looking up at the sun.

"Yes, it will take us fully an hour, riding down," agreed Jim.

So they helped the girls into their saddles, and soon all four were having a good time going back to Buffalo Park.

CHAPTER XI

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A WILD-WEST COUNTY FAIR

That same night while at supper, Mrs. Carew asked her guests if they had ever visited one of the western celebrations.

"Polly says she has, but we have never seen one," replied Anne, eagerly.

"Well, Oak Creek is going to have its annual fair, or celebration, two weeks from Monday. It generally lasts for three days, and they have all sorts of stunts there. You-all must be *sure* to go."

"The Boss says we can have a day off and go, too!" declared Jim.

"I wish it would happen to come on the day you girls go," added Kenneth, anxiously.

"We'll try and plan it that way. Maybe we will go to each day's show," quickly said Eleanor.

"Maybe you can find out from Mrs. Carew what day her husband thinks we can have," ventured Jim, in a whisper.

Eleanor nodded; then she turned to John and told him what they wanted to know from Mrs. Carew. [Pg 196]

Thus it was learned that the survey Crew was to be given Tuesday *and* Wednesday—as it would take almost half a day to travel to Oak Creek, and another half day to get back to camp. The boys gave a wild hurrah when they heard this good news, and immediately planned to start from camp directly after midnight Monday so as to enjoy a full day at the fair.

After good-bys were said, and the Pebbly Pit party were ready to start on the homeward trail, Jim whispered to Polly and Eleanor, "Now don't forget! Ken and I have a date with you two at the Fair, Tuesday and Wednesday."

And the girls laughingly promised to make a note in their social calendar book.

The two weeks intervening between the visit to Buffalo Park, and the celebration at Oak Creek, passed rapidly, for John and Tom had a new excursion planned for each day. Of course, Polly and Eleanor were members of these picnics, so they almost forgot about the fair until a day, or so, before the time.

"We-all attend the fair, you know, and take our camp outfit with us," said Mr. Brewster, at supper on Sunday evening. [Pg 197]

"Aren't there any restaurants where we can dine?" asked Barbara.

"Well, there is Snake-Bill's place where you get hash piled up with your pie and odds or ends, all on an inch-thick dish. Then there is the Rocky Mountain Cafie—as every one calls it,—but ladies are not welcome, there. Neither of these places will appeal to you girls, Ah'm sure," explained Sam Brewster.

"Oh, no! They have no idea of what it is like, Sam," declared Mrs. Brewster, holding up both hands in horror at the very idea.

"Will we start early in the morning?" now asked Eleanor, wondering if they would be on time to keep their engagements.

"Oh, we will leave here about one or two o'clock," replied Mr. Brewster, nonchalantly.

"One or two!" cried Barbara, aghast, thinking he meant A. M.

"Yes, then we will arrive about four or five. By the time we have the tents pitched and everything in tip-top working order, it will be suppertime. There won't be so much going on the first night, you know, but we will be there for Tuesday's early games."

"Oh, my goodness! You don't mean we shall camp over night?" exclaimed Barbara. [Pg 198]

"Of course! We could never travel back and forth each day, as it is a long ride and tough roads for the horses to pull a heavy ranch-wagon," returned Mr. Brewster.

"I don't see why you won't have automobiles out here! It would not cost much to have a Ford, or some other cheap affair, but the convenience and time you'd save—my!" said Barbara.

"An auto! Can you see us driving a car over such awful roads as there are for miles around Oak Creek? To say nothing of the wild trails that go to Pebbly Pit and other far-off ranches," said John.

"Whenever there is a rain, or in winter, the roads are impassable, you know, Bob," added Mrs. Brewster. "I'd love to have a car just for fun, but there is no pleasure in riding it around the farm where I know every foot of ground. And excepting on our own land, there are no decent roads."

"I never thought of that!" admitted Barbara.

"So we make the best of things, and ride to the fair in a wagon that will hold a village of people," concluded Polly.

"I think it will be heaps of fun to camp right in town where crowds of other folks are camping," said Eleanor, giggling. [Pg 199]

"It is. You never know who your next-door neighbor is going to be," laughed Polly. "Once, we camped right next to a horse-thief who was wanted by the sheriff. My, but we had an exciting time when he crawled into mother's bed and hid!"

"Polly! You forgot to say that this happened while we were at the fair and he was driven from his own tent," hastily added Mrs. Brewster, while the others laughed heartily at Polly's omission.

At these yearly events, every workhand on a ranch went to the fair, whether the cattle starved or not. But with Mr. Brewster's help, it was so planned that half of them went from Monday morning until Tuesday noon, and then the other half went from Tuesday noon until Wednesday night. In

this way each side had plenty of time to spend their hoardings, and to drink all the "Sure Death" whisky that could be had in Oak Creek.

The great ranch-wagon rumbled away Monday noon, and a gay party it carried, too. The tents were tightly rolled and tied to the sides, while rolls of bedding and hampers of food were stacked under the high front seat. Hard wooden seats were clamped to each side for the travelers to sit upon.

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Tom Latimer and John kept every one laughing, so that no one complained of the uncomfortable seats that seemed to grow harder the nearer the travelers came to Oak Creek.

Then the party drew near their objective. But such a different Oak Creek from its usual sleepy appearance! The entire countryside, outside of the settlement proper, was dotted with canvas tents, and campers were running back and forth. Just to the right of the town stood a vast tent, like a circus canvas; and in line with it were several smaller ones.

"That larger one is where all the exhibits are shown and where the contests take place, such as eating pan-cakes, shoveling coal, testing mining tools, and other tame games," explained John.

"Do they bust the bronchos there, too?" asked Eleanor.

"No, that, and the trick riding, is done out in the ring," replied Mr. Brewster.

While the men pitched the tents and carried the folding cots from the wagon, Sary unpacked her meager cooking outfit, and Mrs. Brewster arranged the hampers in a safe place in her tent. Eleanor and Polly stood watching the crowds of incoming ranchers drive by, all on the lookout for a good camping-site.

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"I do hope the boys from Buffalo Park will be in time to find a place near us," whispered Polly.

"Yes, but it looks now, as if there wouldn't be an inch of room left after to-night," returned Eleanor.

Mr. Brewster then joined them. "Well, girls, want to go with me to have a look over the fair-grounds? To-morrow you will be escorted by younger chaps, I suppose; but they won't be able to explain things any better than I can."

"Oh yes, Daddy! Let's go," cried Polly, eagerly.

As it was all new to Eleanor, she also wanted to go, so the three found a way between the tents that had sprung up, since they drove in from the trail and had selected their own site.

Every one was merry and good-natured, and many a joke was exchanged between people who might be master and servant at home, but at the Celebration, they all were equals.

Mr. Brewster pointed out where the races would take place, and where the wild horse-breaking generally was held. He told Eleanor that a purse of five hundred dollars was always made up by collections, and given to the man who was able to tame the worst outlaw horse of the year.

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Then the girls were taken to the booths where refreshments were served. Sam Brewster ordered three ice-cream cones and three sodas. He also bought two boxes of candy for the girls.

"Let's have ice-cream sodas instead of soda and cones," suggested Eleanor.

"They can't mix ice-cream sodas, out here," explained Polly. "So we buy cones and mix our own when we want a New York drink."

Eleanor laughed. "Isn't that funny! It's just as easy!"

So they emptied their cones into their soda water and stirred the drink with a spoon. But Eleanor learned that the western people would do certain things their way, and no one could convince them that it was much easier to accomplish the task a different way.

The cots were hard as rocks but every one fell asleep without complaints that night, and in the morning the mad babel of sounds roused the campers without alarm clocks. As Tuesday was a great day at the fair, no time was lost by stealing an extra wink. Breakfast out of the way, the entire party started for the Fair Grounds.

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"I wonder where the boys are?" whispered Polly.

"We'll never find them in this mob," returned Eleanor.

"They said we were to meet at the Bridal Contest—but where is that?" wondered Polly.

"Let's ask Tom Latimer; we'll tell him Jim is going to be there at ten o'clock."

Tom heard the girls and laughed: "But why at the Bridal Contest tent? Why not at the coal-heaving contest?"

"Perhaps the boys thought there wouldn't be such a crowd at the Bridal," ventured Polly, guilelessly.

Tom and Eleanor laughed, and the former said: "Well, I'll see that you two get there in ample time for the Bridal."

Long before ten o'clock, John and Anne had disappeared, and that left Tom to the sweet mercy of Barbara. He clung desperately to Polly and Eleanor until it was time to take them to the Bridal Contest, and then he begged Mrs. Brewster to take care of Barbara while he was absent with the girls.

Mrs. Brewster understood that Tom did not care for the young lady's company, and she said in a low tone: "I would feel easier if I thought those four young people had a sensible head to look after them in this great multitude, Tom." [Pg 204]

Tom looked at her, but she seemed innocent of any hidden meaning; so he replied fervently: "If you will tell Polly this, I will be only too happy to be the 'head' they need."

So Tom really acted as "Official Guide" that day and, incidentally, paid all the bills for the young celebrators. This suited Jim and Kenneth, all right, as they were puzzling how to make a big splash in the puddle before these two girls, and yet escape bankruptcy.

The Bridal Contest was a strange sight. Any couple who wanted to marry in haste, could secure a special license at this booth and be married forthwith. And to every pair so married, the managers of the fair presented a twenty-dollar gold piece, that more than defrayed the costs of the ceremony. To say the Bridal Booth was a failure, would be rank envy and jealousy on the part of any single cow-boy or woman that attended the fair—and failed in securing a mate.

The girls watched while three pairs were married, and in each case, the bride was a stranger in Oak Creek, while the groom was a newly-fledged rancher who needed a housekeeper worse than he needed his freedom. [Pg 205]

As the other contests were scheduled for eleven, the four young people, following after their Official Guide, went the rounds. Not one sight missed them that day, and they turned weary bodies towards the camp that night, thinking of but one thing—the cot-beds that awaited them.

Wednesday was the day when the races took place. Not only the broncho busting, but horse-racing and other events of the kind. A novelty was offered this year, by having several Nebraska cow-boys race on steers. The people for twenty miles around Oak Creek, had seen bull fights, wild steer breaking, and all sorts of horse-racing, but never had they witnessed a steer race.

It proved very exciting, as the men who rode the animals were gayly trapped out and made a great noise when the race started. Their shouting and wildly waving hats, added no little to the frenzy of the steers. One animal tripped and threw his rider, and another balked outright and began to stampede. Finding he could not dislodge the encumbrance that clung to his back, he suddenly threw himself and rolled.

Every one screamed, but the rider was alert and the moment the steer touched the earth, he was up on his feet, bowing and smiling. A wild cheering greeted him, but he had no claim to the prize, as that went to the rider who won the race. [Pg 206]

Polly and Eleanor became well-acquainted with Jim and Kenneth during those two days at the fair, and when it was time to say good-by, the boys felt as if they were losing two old chums.

"We have to ride across the desert to-morrow, you know," explained Jim, regretfully.

"That's so! where will you work next?" asked Tom.

"From Rabbitt's Ear Inn to the Highway," said Kenneth.

"And when will you be back again? When can you come to Pebbly Pit again to visit us?" asked Eleanor.

"We may not be there again this summer, as our work now leads away from this section. In fact, the Boss says, if the cold does not come too early to interfere, he wants to finish his survey all along the other side of the desert, this year," explained Kenneth.

"Oh pshaw! then we won't have any more good times," said Eleanor, poutingly.

"But we will when we all meet in New York," reminded Jim.

Tom looked from one to the other, for here was news! [Pg 207]

"Never mind that, Tom—it's a secret with us!" laughed Eleanor.

"I'm sure it must be, for John never said a word about it to me. And if you girls were going with Anne Stewart, he would have told me," replied Tom.

"You know the old adage, 'Plans of mice and men go astray,' but it did not say 'Plans of girls and mice.' So my plan will come out fine, you-all wait and see!"

"Yes, I reckon we *will* wait!" laughed Polly, incredulously.

CHAPTER XII

NOLLA'S PLANS DEVELOP

The days passed joyously at Pebbly Pit, until John and Tom declared they must return to their work beyond Denver. They had been postponing their departure, because John had confided to his chum, that Anne was waiting to hear definitely about the school in New York City, and upon her going there depended many other important things.

Tom smiled knowingly to himself, as he was sure one of the "many things" to John was his proposal to Anne. Every one felt more or less interested in the expectant letter, and when it finally arrived, Anne had a circle of anxious friends waiting to hear the verdict.

"Well, I've been accepted and I am to report at the address in New York on September twenty-fifth," said Anne, hastily scanning the short note.

"Hurrah! That means we go with you!" shouted Eleanor, catching hold of Anne and dancing her about.

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Polly looked very glum. "Anne, how does your going effect my school plans?"

"You can talk about school some other time, Polly, but Tom and I have to start back to camp tomorrow, and I want to know from Anne just how her going effects *me*?" demanded John, looking her in the eyes.

Anne smiled bravely back at him and said: "Just what I told you. I must help Paul complete his college course, then I will be free to sign other agreements."

"Meanwhile, I am to go on plodding through classes and camp without knowing whether or not I am ever going to be rewarded!" grumbled John, so discouraged that every one felt sorry for him.

"One doesn't plod through studies or work, for mere reward. Polly says she wants to study for the love of it, and Eleanor wants to go into business for the love of *that*! It is the only way one can succeed," ventured Mrs. Brewster, more to fill up an embarrassing gap in the conversation than for anything else.

John turned sullenly and stamped away. He continued down the trail to the Cliffs and was soon lost to sight. The girls then coaxed Anne to come away with them as they had a plan to ask her about.

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Mrs. Brewster waited until every one was gone his or her way, then she ran after her son. No one knows what was said or done, then or during the day but that night, as they all sat at supper, John stood up and smiled.

Jeb was just passing with a basket of newly laid eggs, and Sary was leaning over Mr. Brewster's back with a deep dish of milk-toast that she expected to place before him. John coughed significantly, and Sary stopped to listen.

"I'm going to announce good news to you-all, to-night. I finally persuaded Anne to promise to be my wife, someday. So she goes to New York City as my fiancée, and I will study hard and do everything possible to be worthy of her, for she is a brave girl!"

Sam Brewster half arose to congratulate the two young people, but Sary's dish was in the way. He bumped his head and the dish slid from her hands.

Sary threw up both hands in dismay—there was the milk-toast spattered all over the ground! But a laugh from her mistress caused her to look in the direction the family-group were gazing. She saw Jeb standing as if rooted to the grass, his lower jaw sagging as he frowned at a basket of broken eggs upon the ground.

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Sary threw her inspiration into the double breach caused by maid and man. "Thar goes th' supper an' them eggs, but tush! Trifles don't count none when a man hez sech fine news ez John an' Jeb hes. Come right over here, Jeb, an' spring *yur* secret now that John hes split his'n to the fam'ly!"

Jeb scuffled his feet and sheepishly hung his head. One foot unconsciously stirred the yolks of the broken eggs. But Sary was not a woman to stand for such shyness when it cast reflections on her ardent manner in which she described how Jeb rose to the bait temptingly hung before his very nose.

She forgot milk-toast and all else in this final bout with her unwilling lover. She hurried over and nudged him sharply in the ribs, then whispered in a stage tone:

"G'wan now, Jeb! Spruce up an' tell 'em like-ez-how this air goin' to be a double trick! John an' Miss Anne, me an' you—see!"

Polly and Eleanor laughed appreciatively, and Mrs. Brewster smiled for she had had suspicions. But Sam Brewster was so amazed, that he leaned back in his chair and puffed for breath. To think that Jeb could ever have summoned enough courage to propose to a woman—but let that woman be an Amazon like Sary, was past his comprehension!

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He could not get over it, and later, his wife confided: "I actually believe that Sary made this match for herself. Jeb could never have stood the strain of making love, had not Sary met him *more* than half-way."

That evening when John and Anne were talking confidentially about the future, John said: "Mother, I haven't a ring for Anne and I want her to have it before she goes to New York, so I propose going to Denver and buy it for her before I go back to work."

"And I thought, Mrs. Brewster, that it would be a good plan to see an agent about renting our house for a year or two. If mother and I live in New York, there is no sense in closing the place when we can rent it for enough to pay taxes and upkeep."

"I think you are perfectly right there, Anne, and the sooner you place it in good hands, the better. When did you think of running up to town?" said Mrs. Brewster.

"Well, you see, mother, Tom and I should have joined our men long ago, but one thing or another kept us on here. Now that all is settled for two years at least, I want to get away and plunge into work so I will be ready for Anne when she comes back," said John.

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Mrs. Brewster smiled. "Will you go to Denver to-day?"

"To-night! Why, it is eight o'clock! But I could take the noon train when it goes back from Oak Creek, and Anne might go with me."

"That's what I thought you could do, but your evident impatience made me wonder if you had an air-route you could travel by."

John laughed, and Anne placed her arm about her future mother-in-law. Then the talk veered to Polly and her future education. John and his fiancée had a hard task in convincing Mrs. Brewster that it was best for Polly to accompany the Stewarts to New York, to school; but finally, when all three returned to the house, a resigned look was upon Mrs. Brewster's face. But not a word was said at that time.

The next morning, every member of the family accompanied John and Anne to Oak Creek, and gave them a merry send-off to Denver.

"It's only for a few days, you big sillies!" laughed Anne, as she leaned from the little car-window to answer many questions from her friends on the platform.

"True, but think of all that can happen in a few days! Jeb may jilt Sary and elope with Barbara—I've seen her casting jealous eyes at Sary, lately! Then Tom Latimer may suddenly find he is in love with——" but Barbara choked further words from Eleanor at this point, by shaking her viciously from the rear.

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The others had to laugh at Eleanor's teasing, but her sister was furious. "I simply will not stand this treatment, so now! You can act like fools and farmers, but I am a *lady!*"

So saying, Barbara wheeled and marched defiantly over to the box-car station. She entered and remained there until the train had disappeared around the bend. Then she came forth with a victorious look upon her face. No one asked her what caused the change of expression, and soon the incident was forgotten for the day.

Tom Latimer was unusually quiet on the homeward drive, and when he had assisted Eleanor to alight from the great wagon, he whispered for her ears alone: "Who were you going to have me propose to, Nolla?"

She sent him a mischievous look and whispered back "Polly."

He laughed softly and pinched her arm, but she noted that the rich red color flushed his face suddenly, and she wondered, precociously, whether she had accidentally touched upon a secret spot hidden in his heart? The very fact of such a discovery made her defy, silently, the possibility of any one ever daring to confess love to *her* Polly. "No indeed! Polly and she were cut out for business only."

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But the disquieting thought that a fine chap like Tom Latimer might be in love with simple wonderful little Polly, made Eleanor zealous in her plans for carrying her friend off to a New York school. No one knew that she had already started the machinery going for her own benefit, but they were soon to find out that this fun-loving girl was as persistent and persevering as one could find anywhere, when she had a pet problem to work out.

The evening after John and Anne had gone to Mrs. Stewarts, in Denver, Barbara asked a favor of her host. The very manner in which she asked it, surprised every one at table. "Mr. Brewster, I have an important errand to do at Oak Creek, to-morrow, and I want you to allow Jeb to drive me in."

"To-morrow! Why, we just got back from there."

"Yes, I know, but it could not have been done to-day, so I have to go in to-morrow."

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"Jeb has to superintend the mowing of our first crops to-morrow, if it is clear. Maybe Tom will drive you in if it is so urgent."

Barbara turned imploring eyes on Tom Latimer. Then Eleanor spoke up: "I, too, must go in as I expect a telegram from Chicago."

Her sister scowled at her, but she seemed surprised as well. She stammered: "What have *you* to wire for?"

"Ah! Is that what you did? Let's see—you managed it this noon, while we were watching the train depart, didn't you? You were in that station just long enough!" exulted Eleanor, grinning at Barbara daringly.

But her sister would not be drawn into an argument this time, and Eleanor decided that it must be something important, indeed, when Bob would not snap back at her. There *had* been times at home when Barbara had secrets that she feared others to share, then she would keep her peace with Eleanor.

"Unless it is a personal matter that needs your presence in Oak Creek, Alec Hewitt will look after it. He goes to and from the post office every day, and often brings our mail or messages for us," said Mrs. Brewster, hoping to spare the horses another hard day's work. [Pg 217]

"I have to be there myself, as I may have to decide on a very important personal matter," returned Barbara, slightly embarrassed.

So it was settled that Tom Latimer would ride with the three girls to Oak Creek on the following morning. This would spare the wagon team the trip and at the same time take the place of any other pleasure ride that might have been planned.

Polly was at a loss to understand why such secrecy should exist between these two sisters—Bob refusing to confide in Eleanor, and Nolla smilingly keeping her own counsel, about the important errands.

As Eleanor had suspected, Barbara went directly to the box-car where the telegrams were received. But to the latter's disappointment, there was one only—and that one was for Eleanor Maynard!

"Are you sure you did not get the name wrong—I am to hear surely, to-day, about something very urgent!" complained Barbara.

"This is mine, all right, Bob, for I expected it. If you like, you can read it now that I know what it says," and Eleanor tendered the yellow sheet to her sister.

Barbara snatched it and read in angry surprise: [Pg 218]

"Your wire received. Expect me Saturday. Will visit there for a week.

Love to you both,
FATHER"

"How dare you ask father to come here? How do you know the Brewsters want him? And besides, there is no place for him to use as a sleeping-room!" she managed to say in her fury.

Polly and Tom had been sitting outside on a truck but they could not help hearing Barbara's words. Polly smiled up at her companion. Then Eleanor was heard saying:

"No need to rear up like a mad rattler, Bob. I have a nice little plan under way, but it now needs Daddy's persuasive powers to perfect it. I wired him twice this past week, but no one knew of it. If you wired for money or something else, he likely will bring it with him on Saturday."

The very coolness of Eleanor's reply caused Barbara to lose her self-control and she retorted: "Pooh! I wouldn't think of asking father for anything. You can't patronize me this time, Eleanor Maynard. I am waiting for word from mother! There!" [Pg 219]

"From mother! why she is in Newport for the Season."

"You mean she *was* there. *Now* she is one of a very select party of the best New York society that is camping at Mrs. Van Alstyne's wonderful bungalow in the Muskoka Woods. And I trust *I*, too, will soon be a member of that circle!"

"Oh, ho! So that is your little game, eh! Well, Bob, I heartily wish you luck. You haven't any idea how quiet and enjoyable Pebbly Pit will be with you away from it!" retorted Eleanor.

With this parting shaft, the younger sister walked out, and found Tom with Polly over by the watering trough where the seven wardrobe trunks had offered such a fine table surface for the gamblers on the day the Chicago girls came to Oak Creek. As she felt sure these two friends had not overheard the conversation between Barbara and herself, there was no need in explaining, as yet.

Barbara failed to appear, however, and finally Eleanor went to the door to call her. Her impatient words were arrested by hearing the operator at the telegraph instrument, read a message aloud. [Pg 220]

"Wire with news received. Have arranged for you. Plenty of marriageable men in party. Do not oppose anything father wants. Win his consent and money for visit. Nolla will be all right there with Anne. Father now back at bank. Write him immediately. Do not waive your rights on mine. We will fight if necessary. It means a fortune for you. Wire me minute you have news. Big affair on next week.
MOTHER."

Eleanor managed to slip away without Barbara's seeing her. And so elated was the elder sister over her mother's message, that she failed to find any omission in the telegram. But Eleanor realized that her mother did not mention her love for her daughter—it was all about society,

money, and graft!

But her mother's message could not throw cold water over Eleanor; because of the fact that her father would be with her the end of that very week! This was good news enough for any one, so she ran over to Polly, waving her message.

"Just think! Daddy is coming to visit us at Pebbly Pit. Won't it be fun for him to sleep in the barn with John and Tom?"

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"Oh, he never could, Nolla!" gasped Polly.

"Why not? He is no better than the boys, here!"

"But—well, I'm sure father won't like him to. We must plan somewhere else for him," replied Polly.

"I'll tell you—all a secret, if you won't tell any one. I got Daddy to hurry here on purpose to *meet* John and Tom. I believe he will do something about the mine and the Cliffs if he hears the plans from the boys. You know, his bank makes big investments at times. But don't let Bob know this, for anything in the world!"

Tom looked pleasantly surprised at the suggestion. He had forgotten all about Mr. Maynard's connection with a flourishing bank.

"Won't it be nice to have your father meet my father," remarked Polly, thinking not so much of finances as of hospitality.

"Yes, and I hope he won't interfere with Bob's plans to join mother in the North Woods. If only we could get *rid* of her right off, what a fine time we could have with Dad here!" Eleanor sighed.

Polly never could understand the lack of love and family pride between these two sisters, but then she had never seen how many families there are, where husband and wife have opposite tendencies and ideals; it inevitably followed that the children showed these antagonistic qualities in their behavior to each other.

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Having replied to their telegrams, both sisters were ready to ride back to the ranch. But Tom suggested that they visit the Movies where a great society drama was being shown. This pleased the girls, and soon they were following the hair-breadth escapes of an unscrupulous society impostor, and the wreck he had made of a young damsel's faith.

As they filed from the low-ceiled, ill-smelling theater, Eleanor laughed and said: "That's the kind of life Bob wants! If she ever had a fortune of her own, she would have to fend off just such rascals. Watch me wasting my life trying to catch a husband—Pouf!"

Tom laughed merrily for he liked the bluntness of this girl, but he was surprised at the flush Barbara manifested as she wondered if this astute sister of hers could have heard that message read: "Mother mentioned 'a fortune' and 'marriageable men.'" But Eleanor's expression was as innocent as a babe's just then.

That evening after supper, Eleanor drew Polly out to the terrace, which was isolated at that time, and shared her plans with her.

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"I was afraid to let you, or any one, know what I was doing, so I just went ahead and did it!"

Polly manifested no surprise at these words, as she expected to hear much more, so she patiently waited. Eleanor seemed at a loss, for once in her lifetime, to know how to tell her story without having it condemned by this upright conscientious friend.

"I wrote mother just after we discovered the mine, and told her how unhappy Barbara was in this forgotten corner of the earth. You see, I wanted mother to send for her at once, and I was anxious to help Bob relieve us of her company. But I never dreamed that Bob was as anxious to get away, as we were to have her go!"

"Oh, Nolla! we are not anxious to have her go—don't say that!" remonstrated Polly.

"Well, you know what I mean—everything will be so nice with no one to be forever finding fault and nagging at one!"

"Maybe she wouldn't nag so much if you did not tease her so! Nolla, you *know* you are so clever that you have no patience with Bob's slowness in getting things," replied Polly, unconscious of the fact that she had found the very root of the trouble between the sisters.

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"Anyway, Bob is on the high road to a society camp in the East, and we will be able to go our own sweet way without her. But I brought you out here to confess what I did! I wired father all about the mine, and the Cliffs, and the Latimers and all—and also told him that the doctor thinks a winter in New York will harden me splendidly. I wired the doctor to tell him that this was true, and he *must* tell father so.

"Well, I heard from Daddy; he balked at first—said it was rank foolishness for any doctor to recommend the beastly climate of New York City in preference to the West with its dryness. I had to calm him on that point, and then I told him that Anne and her mother were going to New York and I wanted to go with them. He knows how I hate the teas, and bridge, and parties mother is always giving Bob, so I told him how wretched I always was in winter, without friends or any one

to talk to—as mother and Bob were always too busy with social duties.

"Father hates these duties as much as I do, and he says mother has no right to give all her time to Bob and never see me from one week's end to another. So he was vulnerable in that spot. When I told him how he could visit me in New York once a month, and spend several days going around with me, he just caved in. And, Polly, I am sure he will agree to my going with Anne.

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"To-day, after I got his wire, I waited till Bob was out of the way, then I sent a message to Anne, to tell her to be on the lookout for Dad who was coming here on Saturday. I said it would be so nice for him to ride down from Denver with John and her. And maybe John could explain the financing of the two companies to him.

"I sent the second wire to Dad telling him to be sure and meet Anne at the Denver Terminal at noon, on Saturday, as she would be expecting him. So now I have all my irons in the fire and they're getting red-hot, too!"

As Eleanor concluded, Polly laughed at her funny expression but remarked, "It would be terrible if your irons got so hot that they melted before you could use any one of them, wouldn't it?"

CHAPTER XIII

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RIGGLEY & RATZGER OF NEW YORK

Every day that week was crowded with events for the people at Pebbly Pit, and never had so many telegrams passed through the hands of the amazed agent at Oak Creek. First there were those sent by Barbara and Eleanor, and the replies to them. Next day the two girls telegraphed anew from Oak Creek, and these had replies which were forwarded by Alec Hewitt who passed Brewster's ranch. Following these, came a telegram from Anne, saying she had heard from Mr. Maynard and would meet him as planned. Then there came one from Mr. Latimer's office in New York to Tom, saying that Dr. Evans and Mr. Latimer had started for the West on Thursday, on the Limited. Probably they would reach Pebbly Pit on Sunday or Monday. Closely following that message, came one to Mr. Brewster from New York, signed Riggley & Ratzger, Lawyers, to the effect that "they had been appointed the representatives for the company that was formed to make jewels from lava-stone, and they would take great pleasure in visiting Pebbly Pit on Saturday or Sunday, in order to inspect the Rainbow Cliffs. They might be induced to make an offer for the ranch."

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The latter suggestion caused Sam Brewster to laugh as he had not done since he heard his Polly was determined to go to school. "What do you think of such sublime fools, Maw?" chuckled he, handing the telegram across the table as they sat on the porch.

"Why, I don't understand. If Evans and Latimer are on their way here, why do they need representatives? Isn't Tom's father a real good lawyer in New York?" said she.

"Sure, but the names alone give me an idea that they are crooks—listen: Riggley and Ratzger. Doesn't it make you think of all queer kinds of fish that one finds in big cities?" laughed her husband.

Tom came from the barns about this time, and Mrs. Brewster turned to tell him the latest news about the seekers of lava-stones. In corroboration of his wife's words, Sam Brewster held out the telegram.

Tom took it in trembling hands, for he had heard of the men whose names were signed to the message. Then he glanced at the signatures and that broke his amazed spell of silence.

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"Why! Mr. Brewster, how dare they plan to visit here?" he shouted, his face as red as a poppy.

"Oh, do you know them?" wondered Mr. Brewster.

"Know them? Why, man alive, *they* are the same two rascals who served the injunction on father and Dr. Evans, and then they tried to steal the patent. They fought in Court, but lost their case. When they appealed, the Court sustained the first verdict, so they had no choice but to give up. I wonder what game they are coming here for?"

Mr. Brewster considered. "Tom, I wouldn't be surprised if they came here, not knowing your folks are, also, coming. Maybe they hope to get first shot at this proposition of Rainbow Cliffs and in this way, make your father pay a fabulous price for the stone."

"Some crooked deal like that, you may be assured. But I can't understand how they ever heard of Rainbow Cliffs and this ranch? There has been a leak, somewhere, in Dad's organization," said Tom, emphatically.

"Well, let's decide now, before they come, what is best for us to do. If they get here before your father and Evans, we must not give them any idea that we expect other guests, nor must we say that we suspect them of foul play. We must give them rope enough with which to hang themselves."

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Here Mrs. Brewster interpolated: "We may serve all of our friends a good turn by receiving these strangers with the same western welcome that we extend to every one. But let us not give any one else here a hint of what we now know."

Tom agreed that this was a wise plan, so no one suspected there was an under-current of excitement running in the elder Brewsters' and Tom's thoughts, during the time that must elapse before the New York "representatives" could arrive at Pebbly Pit.

Meanwhile, Mr. Maynard met Anne and John in Denver, and the three took the noon local for Oak Creek. Polly and Eleanor were busy helping Barbara pack her five trunks to have them ready for the ranch-wagon to take to the station on Saturday, when Tom offered to drive in and meet the train from Denver. This done, and Tom on his way, the two girls wondered what next they could do until the return of the party from Oak Creek.

"I say! Let's run to the Cliffs and watch for the first glimpse of Daddy," suggested Eleanor.

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"And I'll take some doughnuts to eat in case we get hungry," added Polly.

Fortified with a bag of these delectable balls, the two girls hastened away. Barbara was all sweetness and generosity, now that she was sure of going to join her mother in a fashionable camp. And many fine bits of underwear, or dresses fell Sary's way, when Barbara went through her wardrobe, and discarded the things she felt would be too ordinary-looking in such an exclusive "set" as she was about to join.

Sary refused nothing, carrying everything thrown to her, in her arms as carefully as if she were holding a new-born babe. On the first trip she made through the kitchen in order to reach her private domain, she stopped before Mrs. Brewster and held out the lace-trimmed underwear.

"Mis Brewster, Ah never did think Ah would have sech fine troosos fer my marritch. When Ah married Bill Ah didn't have nawthin' but a new cambric dress and a sun-bunnet. But this marritch will be the reel thing, what with all the stuff I'm k'lectin, already."

"You are fortunate, Sary, to be on hand just as Miss Bob's trunks are cleared out," remarked her mistress.

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"Yeh, and d'ye know what?" Sary leaned over to whisper confidentially. "Yeh see Ah'm not lettin' anythin' she gives me lay around one minute, 'cause she may change her mind. And ef she once saw *what* a heap she is throwin' away, she might think Ah was gettin' too much!"

Mrs. Brewster laughed at Sary's wily ways, and replied: "Well, I'll spare you from all the work as long as you are gathering plums from Bob's orchard. I hope you can fill a whole trunk, Sary."

But an unforeseen outgrowth of all these donations was sure to happen. Once Sary had watched the trunks hoisted up in the ranch wagon, and realized that there would be no more "pickin's" for her, she ran to her room and began sorting and gloating over the mass of cast-off clothing. And so mesmerized was she with pictures of herself adorned in the dresses that were made for the form half her girth that Mrs. Brewster found it impossible to coax her back to the kitchen.

Having the Saturday's baking to do, as well as to prepare the dinner for extra ones that night, she went to the door to ask Polly and Eleanor to come in and help her. But the two girls were not in sight.

There was but one hope left! She must do as clever generals did in battle, when the fight seems to go against them—strategy.

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She hurried to Sary's door which was closed and locked.

"Oh Sary! I remembered something that I wished to ask you about several times this past week. Did Jeb give you the engagement ring yet?"

Not a sound came from within for a few moments, then the key turned and Sary's amazed face appeared in the doorway. The floor and bed were covered with finery, each piece spread out full length.

"Ah clean fergot all about it. Is Miss Anne got her'n?"

"Oh, yes! John went to Denver with her to choose the stone."

"Kin Jeb git a ring in Oak Crick, d'ye s'pose?"

"Mercy no! Oak Creek hasn't any jewelry shop, you know."

Sary was lost in thought for a time, and this was Mrs. Brewster's opportunity. "I've been wondering how it would do to hint to Jeb that it would make a lovely trip if he were to accompany you to Denver for a day, and let you select your own ring."

"Oh!"

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The one word breathed in a scarcely audible sound plainly expressed Sary's ecstasy. Her great hands were loosely clasped before her as her eyes turned ceiling-ward.

"Of course with the house full of company for a few days it will be impossible to think of such a thing, but Bob is going away the first of the week, and then John and Tom leave; next Miss Anne

goes back to Denver to see about sending her stuff to New York, or selling what she really won't need, and then you will have time to take such a trip. I will see that Jeb realizes that it is his privilege to do this for you."

"Oh, Mis Brewster, what kin Ah ever do fer you?"

"Well, you can begin to repay me for my kindness by coming out to help me with Saturday's work. And while we are doing that I will plan with you what had best be said and done."

Sary felt that there was a cunning here that she was not able to cope with, but she could not resist the temptation to talk and plan about an engagement ring for herself, so she bravely turned her back on the array of finery, and stoically followed her mistress.

Meantime Polly and Eleanor climbed the cliffs and sat where they could see the Bear Fork's trail in the distance. Polly was sure they would see the great ranch-wagon the moment it came around the bend. [Pg 234]

They had not been seated there more than twenty minutes before Eleanor craned her neck and gazed earnestly at two dots that seemed to be crawling along the trail. Polly turned and gazed also.

"Why, it's two horsemen! I wonder if Jim and Ken can be thinking of visiting us over Sunday,—because Mr. Latimer is coming, you know," exclaimed Eleanor, joyfully surprised.

"They wouldn't be arriving Saturday afternoon, as they wouldn't be able to leave camp until Sunday," added Polly.

Both girls shaded their eyes with their hands but neither could make out the forms of the riders. They were mere specks on the white trail. But the girls held their breath when the horsemen turned from Bear Forks trail and rode in under the precipice that overhung the entrance to Pebbly Pit.

"Whoever it is, they are coming here," said Polly.

"I wonder if it could be Mr. Latimer and Dr. Evans—they may have arrived in Oak Creek sooner than they expected," ventured Eleanor. [Pg 235]

"We can watch better from this point than anywhere else, and when they pass the Rainbow Cliffs, we can see who they are," now said Polly.

So they watched impatiently until the riders came from under the hanging walls of rock, and rode again along the top of the shale that covered a wide area between the ravines and the Cliffs.

This great stretch of shale was very treacherous going, as on the both sides were deep gulches, or erosions, made by floods from thaws and storms. An abandoned trail ran quite close to one of these ravines but the land-slides of shale had compelled the people at Pebbly Pit to break out a new and safer trail through the middle of the field. To strange eyes, the old trail on the edge of the gulch, was the harder and easier going, but every one coming to the ranch knew the center-trail to be the one always used. Strangers seldom visited Pebbly Pit, and never without a member of the ranch family, or a neighbor to escort them.

When the two horsemen reached the branching of the trails, they halted, and the girls saw them ponder. One man motioned with a hand at the rough trail running over the top of the shale in the middle of the area, but the other seemed to argue that the edge-trail was the best one to take. [Pg 236]

"Oh dear! I hope they won't take that slippery one!" cried Polly, in tense nervousness.

"I wish we could yell and warn them!" exclaimed Eleanor, half-rising from her seat.

"They'll never hear us at this distance, but we might run along the top-trail and beckon them to climb up there."

"But, Polly, by the time we reach the shale they will be almost at the Rainbow Cliffs," objected Eleanor.

"Yes, I know, but it seems awful to sit here and watch them ride over that dangerous road."

"To relieve our minds, we can go down as far as possible and meet them when they ride out at Rainbow Cliffs," suggested Eleanor.

So the two girls scrambled down from their high point of observation, and started along the rock-ribbed road that led past the Cliffs. They had not gone far along this trail, however, before Polly saw Jeb riding down from the corrals.

"If I could only get Jeb's attention, he could ride fast and warn those men of their danger," Polly said, thinking aloud.

"Let's both scream at the top of our lungs and see if he can hear us." [Pg 237]

So the two girls stood out on the edge of a huge boulder and, making megaphones of their hands, shouted again and again. The depression made by the crater that lay between the Cliffs and the corral, acted as a hollow tube, so Jeb finally wheeled around and tried to locate the call. When he saw the girls, he immediately started to meet them as no one on the ranch would shout that way

for fun.

It took ten minutes for Jeb to cover the circuitous path and join the girls, and when they had hastily explained the cause of their concern, he replied: "Gosh! Ah was told to hang a sign on that flat cliff to warn folks offen the bad trail!"

"Well, you didn't, so now race down the good trail and try to make the men hear you," demanded Polly.

Jeb spurred his horse at that, and was soon out of sight, but Polly and Eleanor continued in the same direction, to see if all turned out well for the riders.

Having reached and passed the last spur of the Rainbow Cliffs, and then climbing the steep ascent to the top-trail, they finally came to a rise whence the whole shale-field could be seen. But not a sign of horsemen could be seen. Jeb, riding like mad, right across the loose shale in reckless risk of breaking his broncho's legs, was the only man visible. [Pg 238]

Eleanor turned and looked in wonderment at Polly, but when she saw the look of horror on her friend's face, she caught at her arm.

"Polly! What do you think has happened?"

"Oh, Nolla! I fear they are down in that gulch! Most likely the shale started sliding under their horses' hoofs, and before they realized their danger, they were swept along over the top!"

"Oh, mercy! Polly—never that! Why they will be killed!"

Polly never said a word but watched Jeb as he reined in his horse. Jumping from the saddle and hobbling the animal, he very carefully crawled over the apparently safe surface between himself and the ravine.

"Now I'm sure that's what happened, Nolla, or Jeb wouldn't try to get over there. He's going to see just how bad things are."

"Poll, we'd better run as fast as we can, and get things ready at the ranch. Your father ought to know this, so he can hitch a cart to two strong horses and drive there to help carry the men to the house."

"Nolla, I fear there will be nothing left to carry away. Once the shale starts to slide down that gulch, it goes like the wind and buries everything under its weight and bulk." [Pg 239]

"All the same, I will feel that I am doing something to help—let's go!"

So Polly and her companion turned and ran back along the Rainbow Cliffs trail, until they reached the spot whence they had called to Jeb. They stopped for a moment to catch their breath, and while straining their eyes towards the house, saw Mr. Brewster just leaving it.

His horse was waiting at the block, so both girls instantly began shouting to attract his attention. He had been hearing, and turned to see what might be wrong in the direction of the Cliffs. When he saw the two girls wildly beckoning him to come, he sprang into the saddle and galloped the horse over the intervening space to meet them.

Their story was told in a few words, and Sam Brewster immediately surmised who the riders were. He told the girls to go on to the house and tell Mrs. Brewster to be ready with emergencies, in case either of the travelers were found. Then he turned his horse and galloped to the barns where he called several of the men to help in the rescue work.

Polly and Eleanor would have preferred to go back to the shale-fields and watch the men, but they had to go where they could be of most service in the case. [Pg 240]

"Where shall we put them, mother, if father brings both back to the house?" asked Polly.

"There is only one thing we can do, and that is to prepare the cots in the harness-room for them. It is in times of need, like this, that I wish we had a large house."

Down on the shale-fields, Jeb had crept to the edge of the gully and peered over. Far, far below, where the stream roared over the rocks and down waterfalls like a miniature Niagara, he saw one horse doubled up in an unnatural heap. He surmised at once, that it was dead. But half-way up he spied hoofs protruding from the shale, and to this spot he tried to make his way.

As he thought, the rider was still entangled with the stirrups of the horse and could not jump free when the accident had occurred.

By dint of working down, clinging like lichen to the shale surface, Jeb reached the animal whose hoofs stuck pathetically upward. He carefully scraped away the shale and exposed the head of a man. He could not say whether the victim was alive or dead, and he dared not dig away more shale, just then, or the whole side would begin to move again. Having cleared the head so the man could breathe, if possible, he looked anxiously around for the second rider. Not a sign of him was seen from the place where Jeb clung. [Pg 241]

Believing that one live man was worth two dead ones, Jeb returned to the task of unearthing the one he had found. Every slab of shale was slowly removed, meanwhile Jeb watched the loose sides above him for the least intimation that it might slide again. But so careful was he, that the

body was uncovered without the surrounding shale being disturbed. Jeb felt of the man's heart and found a very slight pulsation there. He was alive!

But how to get his feet free from the leather on the horse, and how to carry the big heavy fellow up that treacherous side? Jeb never lost his presence of mind, nor did he ever feel unduly excited over what he thought could not be helped; had he known what a fatalist was, he would have told you that that is what *he* was.

He sat perfectly still, because the unwary movement of a single muscle might move that mountain-side down upon him, but he could *think* and what could hinder him from doing it? As if the very discovery that he was superior in that way, to the senseless shale all about him, made him master of the situation, so he smiled and patiently waited.

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"'Cuz Ah knows Polly and Miss Nolla'll get word to Mis'r Brews'er an' he'll know what to do fer us." So he sat and waited.

It's all well enough to say, "Oh, he wouldn't do anything else. Any one could have waited!" But how many would have waited in that same situation, without a qualm of fear, or without doubting the simple assurance that the master of the ranch would know best what to do to help?

As if to reward this faith, Jeb soon heard voices shouting back and forth above his head, and after a time, he saw the noose of a stout rope falling down in his direction.

He grinned. "Ah never thought of *that!*" murmured he.

"Jeb," came the deep tones of Mr. Brewster from above, "try to fix this safely around you, and then see if there is anything down there that you can do. Shout up if you want help, and we will try to let another man down to work with you."

Jeb soon had the rope about his body, and feeling free to dig, went to work to pull the unconscious man out of the saddle. The side that the dead horse had fallen upon pinned the man's one leg down so securely that Jeb could not manage to extricate it without help. So he held on to the body he had thus far brought out from the shale, and then called up to his master.

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"Ah cain't git his left laig out from the sturrup! This dead hoss is too heavy fer me to shove over. Ef some one'll come down an' use a crow-bar Ah reckon we-all kin manage it all right."

With all the tension and doubt of being of any use in this accident, Mr. Brewster could not help thinking of Jeb's way of asking assistance—as if he was in the kitchen of the house and told Sary to come downstairs to entertain him.

Another man was lowered by means of a second rope, and as he came opposite the dead horse, he called a halt on the pulley above. With his crow-bar, he worked just as carefully as Jeb had done in loosening the shale about the body. But the moment Jeb found he could extract the crushed foot from the side that had been buried in the stone, the other man ceased prodding, as one little prod too many might turn the whole loose lava upon them again.

"Lower another rope fer the stranger!" shouted the hired man. And soon the limp body was drawn slowly up to safety.

"What about the other one, Jeb?" shouted Mr. Brewster.

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"Reckon he went on down, 'cuz his hoss is down thar. Shall Ah go on down and see?"

"No! we-all can get down from the Devil's Causeway, without taking any risks on this loose wall. Better see if you-all can find any papers or wallet in the panniers of that horse."

Jeb then felt and brought forth a fine leather bag shaped like a knap-sack. But he was not aware that most lawyers and professional men in cities use similar bags. Then the word was given to hoist, and both men were soon up beside the unconscious stranger.

While Mr. Brewster used first-aid on the stranger, several men of the party started for the cleft back of the Cliffs from which one could get down in to the gulch. In fact, it was the great flood of water that ran from the back of the Cliffs that caused this deep washout, or gully.

Having taken hold of the unknown man and suddenly turned him so that he hung limply over the back and shoulders of his carrier, Mr. Brewster started his horse across the shale, and then turned in on the Cliff trail. The sooner the unconscious man was treated the better, thought the ranch-man.

Jeb and his men were left to help the others who, after having carefully picked a way over the shale, would search in the gulch for any signs of the second man.

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By the time the would-be rescuers reached the place where the dead horse was seen doubled up, moans attracted their attention to a clump of buffalo grass that had forced its way up beside the stream.

There, almost hidden by great bowlders that had caught the drift of shale as it swept down from the top of the ravine, they found the second rider. As the horse was more than forty feet above this spot, they figured that the man must have shot from the saddle when all were precipitated over the top, and landed as if by a miracle in this comparatively safe niche made by the rocks.

The moment the man heard human voices he tried to attract their attention, but they had already

heard and planned how best to reach him. He could not move, as those limbs which had not suffered fractures, were rendered helpless by the weight of shale pinning them down. His chest was free, however, and in spite of the gashes and bruises all over his face and neck, he could breathe easily.

"Ah reckon we-all had better carry him up the gulch to the Devil's Causeway, and git out by that route," suggested one of the men.

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"Yeh! Let's call to Jeb to go back and meet we-all at the Cliffs so's we kin put him acrost one of the hosses."

In half an hour, therefore, Mr. Ratzger, the senior member of the law firm of Riggley and Ratzger, of New York, was carried in front of the Rainbow Cliffs and placed in Jeb's arms, while another man led Jeb's horse carefully towards the ranch-house.

"Ah, so these are Rainbow Cliffs, are they! Shall I ever forget them? Had Riggley listened to my advice we both would now be sitting in our comfortable office-chairs in New York. But no! he must needs try to force gold from a stone-wall!" As Ratzger sighed, Jeb remarked philosophically: "Ef *you*-all'd rather be sittin' at home than a galavantin' round places where money kin be found, Ah b'lieves it's the onny reason you-all is spared whiles your friend is locoosed."

Ratzger had never heard the term "locoosed" so he was not quite sure what Jeb meant. But he was thankful that he had life enough left even to suffer with the broken arms and legs; for a trifle like that was not to be scorned when he might have been done for completely even as he feared old Riggley was.

CHAPTER XIV

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THE VICTORY

Serenely oblivious of all the excitement that had been caused at Pebbly Pit by the accident, Tom Latimer drove Mr. Maynard and the happy betrothed pair back to the ranch. John and Anne sat on the back seat while Mr. Maynard sat beside Tom. Finding that John and his fiancée needed no assistance from him in entertaining themselves, Tom gave his full attention to the banker from Chicago.

Hence, by the time they reached Rainbow Cliffs, Mr. Maynard was like the blood-hound when he scents a new trail—he was more than anxious to join these energetic men in financing the vast projects so well described by young Latimer.

At the Cliffs Mr. Maynard placed a hand on the lines in order to stop the horses. He gazed and gazed, as if he saw the great walls covered with gold dollars instead of colored stones. Then he sighed and smiled at Tom.

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"This promises to be the luckiest thing I ever did—sending Nolla to Pebbly Pit for her health!"

"And wait until you see Nolla! My, but she is rosy and roly now. And besides, Mr. Maynard, she is a born financier. I *love* to listen to her plan and then see her work out her own schemes. She has one on the carpet at present, and I verily believe she will pull it off!" exclaimed Tom, very much interested in his subject.

"Yes, that girl of mine is worth more to me than any gold-mine or other treasure in the world."

"Oh, really! Well, this time 'listening fools heard some good of themselves'," laughed a merry voice from a crevice in the wall, and immediately afterwards, Eleanor sprang out, with Polly close upon her heels.

The horses were stopped until Eleanor and her father had done with their hugging, and then she remembered to introduce him to Polly.

"The very best chum in the world, Daddy, and so we have sworn never to be separated—not even for money, business, or love!" cried the happy girl, maternally patting Polly on the head as she spoke.

Eleanor sat upon her father's knee and Polly sat upon the floor of the wagon, as they proceeded on their way, but when John called to his sister and asked what had been doing in his absence, she jumped up suddenly and exclaimed.

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"Oh! we forgot all about the two men who came this morning and fell over the edge of the gulch!"

Then followed an excited and graphic description of the two New York lawyers who came to Pebbly Pit to buy the Cliffs. When John heard the names, he whistled and looked at Tom.

"Well, even providence is on your side, Polly, for those two men are the rascals who tried to steal Evans' patent rights in the little machine that cuts the jewels. So this is the way they were received at Pebbly Pit, eh?" Tom mused silently after that, but John and Mr. Maynard asked all sorts of questions until they reached the house.

In these isolated mountain ranches, almost every intelligent man can set broken bones, and take care of minor troubles; a doctor living in a town ten to twenty miles away, needs plenty of time to reach a ranch, in cases of illness, and during that time a patient must suffer agonies or be helped by home-aid. Thus, Mr. Ratzger had his bones set by Mr. Brewster and his assistants, and was left neatly bandaged upon a cot in the harness-room. But the other patient seemed past the simple aid from the ranchers, so Jeb had to ride to Oak Creek for a doctor to come and try to save this life.

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With all the sudden advent of excitement and work, the thought of Anne's engagement ring had not entered into any one's mind, but once the household had quieted down again, and Mr. Brewster could sit on the porch and mop his weary brow, John smiled knowingly at his fiancée.

Mrs. Brewster caught the look and interpreted it instantly: "Oh, Anne, dear! We never asked you to show us the symbol!"

"Yes, yes, Anne! Let me look!" cried Eleanor, jumping up from the grass where Polly and she had thrown themselves.

Anne, with an embarrassed laugh, held forth her left hand and displayed a beautiful solitaire. "Ahhs!" and "Ohs" and other exclamations of admiration pleased John and Anne mightily, and both felt that this mundane life was really a Paradise.

With one accord it had been agreed to postpone the talk of Rainbow Cliffs and Choko's Find until after supper that evening. By that time the doctor would have arrived and expressed an opinion about the injured Riggley, and see if Ratzger was doing nicely under the home-treatment given him.

"Because it makes me feel rather guilty to talk over our future plans about this big combination, when we know that not far off are two men so fearfully injured on account of this very fortune," added Mrs. Brewster, when she heard the business talk would not take place at once.

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"As long as I am here and having such a wonderful rest, I would just as soon wait for Latimer and Evans to put in an appearance, before we discuss finances," said Mr. Maynard.

"We'll have enough talk left over to warm up for them," remarked Tom, whimsically.

"And we want to get you first, Dad, and see how much money you will put in. When there are too many men about to talk to at once, the force of our arguments will be scattered," declared Eleanor, nodding her head wisely.

Every one laughed—the first hearty laugh since the accident on the shale-fields. And every one felt much better for that laugh.

"I tell you what, boys, isn't this girl of mine a born business-brain?" added Mr. Maynard fondly patting Eleanor on the head.

"Sure! That's why I am going to run the business end of Polly's and my company, while she supplies all the ideals and plans for the work," asserted Eleanor.

"What's this? Something new on your old Dad?" asked her father.

"Not *very* new; only since I came here and met Polly." Eleanor squirmed away from Polly's warning nip on the arm, and added: "You see, Dad, I am bound to go with Anne when she starts for New York to school—that has all been settled between us, hasn't it?"

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Mr. Maynard smiled indulgently as if to concede any proposition to this child, and Eleanor continued with more assurance:

"And Polly, having all her hopes of attending school in Denver blasted by Anne and her mother going on to New York, now has decided that the only thing for her to do is to go with us to New York. It is a wonderful opportunity for her, too, as she is as determined to take up Interior Decorating for a profession, as I am. And where on earth can one find such store-houses of valuable lore on the subject, as right in New York!"

Mr. Brewster cleared his throat preparatory to an objection but Eleanor kept right on talking fast and loud in order to drown him.

"After figuring the whole plan out, Polly and I find that we need a few years more of regular school under Anne's tuition; then a few years of a special course of decorating in a first-rate school in New York—then, if we are not *too* old, we will go abroad for a visit to the art galleries in Europe. But we may have to give that delightful trip up and turn right into work, as we must not wait until old age cripples our abilities. So you see——"

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"Nolla, let me say a word, won't you?" began Polly, seeing her father's expression.

"No, Poll, not now! I have said all I want to tell Dad about our future business connections, and it may influence him somewhat in going into our mine company. But now that he knows just what I shall do from now on, we can leave them to discuss matters while we go in and look over your wardrobe and see what you will need before going to New York."

So saying, Eleanor dragged Polly up from her seat on the grass and, by dint of winks and tugs, made her understand that it was best for all concerned if they were well out of hearing.

Tom, John, and Mr. Maynard laughed heartily at Eleanor's speech and manner of getting Polly away from an evident discussion. Mrs. Brewster and Anne exchanged concerned glances, but Sam Brewster moodily stared for a few minutes away at Rainbow Cliffs. Then quite suddenly, and to the great amazement of every one present, he laughed and said, "To think the new woman has acquired such power that centuries of accepted habit is set aside and the male has to fall in line *in the rear*. Look at me! I have been the Great Mogul in this family and in all Oak Creek, too, until my baby girl begins to talk plainly and then she quietly pushes me out of my place and steps into it.

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"And look at Eleanor Maynard! Talks like an experienced business potentate of forty—yet she is only fourteen. Oh, I tell you what, friends, we are living in a strange time!" And Sam Brewster laughed again, a queer-sounding laugh this. Every one sat still and dreaded to say a word. In a few moments, he continued:

"Here's a wonderful freak of nature, been standing over there for ages untold; and I settle down beside those Cliffs because I can see there will be something in them for my children in days to come. But then, without warning, my baby grows suddenly up and rears her head, and declares 'Those Cliffs must furnish me with money to go away from here. I am of the new order of things, and I must be well prepared to meet my fate!' So she packs her kit and scampers off to New York to imbibe the higher education for women.

"Meantime, her poor lonesome father remains behind in Pebbly Pit and takes charge of the complete blasting of his precious Rainbow Hopes. Ah well! Ah trust Polly will never regret going to New York with you-all!"

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As Sam Brewster sighed and got up to walk away, his wife remarked quietly: "Any one would think, Sam, that Polly was your very own personal property. If you could but remember that she has a mother who loves her devotedly and is silently breaking her heart right now, so that the child may follow her own life-line without foolish barriers placed in her pathway!"

Mr. Brewster sent a startled glance at his wife and then hurried away to the barns. But Mr. Maynard said fervently: "There spoke the true mother, Mrs. Brewster. That is what we are parents for, I firmly believe—that we may help the next generation to a higher and firmer foothold on progress. If only there were more mothers like you!"

Then John crept over and flung his arm over his mother's shoulders. "Yes, Mr. Maynard—she is great. And we shall live to call her 'blessed,' for this temporary parting from Polly will soon be a dream of the past, and both father and mother will laugh at this talk!"

Drawing Polly into the house, Eleanor whispered: "I know just what you are going to say, Goody-good! You were ready to explode because you had not told me any such things as I pretended you had. But, don't you see, I had to take lots of things for granted to put the plan over in a few seconds? Suppose I had started out with turning to you every few moments for approval, where would we have ended."

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"That's what *you* think, Nolla, but let me tell you this much right here"—and Polly planted her feet firmly and lifted her head upon her proud neck, until Eleanor stood admiring her independence—"I can talk for myself, every time! Don't ever quote me again in any thing that I ever said or did. You may think it is all right because you win out on those grounds, and simply because you never have been taught properly by your mother. But *I* know better and I won't accept any victory won on any other basis than a clear conscience. Ask Anne Stewart whether she does not agree with me on this point. Now let me tell you, that much as I had yearned to go to New York with you-all I cannot go because you took my personal rights from me. I love you and I was crazy to leave home to go to school, but I will never consent to have any one say or act for me, in any way, when I am perfectly able to do so for myself."

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"Oh, Poll! I don't mean it that way—don't you know I only did it to help you out?" cried Eleanor aghast at the turn in events.

"Who asked you to help me out?" demanded Polly, her blue eyes emitting sparks of fire.

"Why—wh—y—you see I had to win your father over!"

"But *who* told you so? You know very well that it was your own pride in your ability to *talk* that made you take the bit between your teeth. But you will learn now, that I intend driving my own steed, and will not allow others to whip my mount!"

Eleanor was silenced as she began to review the very recent talk she had given out on the terrace. Polly was right!

"It hurts me to tell you this, Nolla, but it is best that we have a clean slate from this night on. You are awfully clever and witty, too, but you do exaggerate something terrible! I cannot sit tamely by and accept all the things you say of me and our plans. Why, we scarcely said a dozen words about college and Europe!"

"But I did it all for your sake," was all Eleanor could offer in self-defense.

"That's just it! I *will not* have any one say they had to tell lies to help me along. If I can't paddle my own canoe through the rapids, I can go ashore. But I will balk every time another tries to turn me from the course I know to be my true one. So there!"

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"Polly dearest! Do you mean that after all I have done to get Dad here and win your father's consent to your going, that you refuse to leave home—just because I colored my words a bit too vividly?"

"You can color your words as rashly and with as vivid colors as you choose, Nolla, but I say that when you begin to infer that the coloring is of *my* choosing and that I am in hearty sympathy with the way you win out in matters, then I will balk and if necessary, deny it in the future. I *hate* color when it is daubed on falsely!"

Eleanor stood self-conscious of her mistakes, and Polly sent her one sorry look and then walked into her room. Eleanor did not dare follow as she was too awed by her friend's honest speech. And she admired Polly all the more for daring to tell her the unvarnished truth about her proclivity to prevaricate.

"It always was my weak spot," grumbled Eleanor to herself, as she walked slowly to the kitchen to see if Sary was there to keep her company. But the big cool kitchen was empty, so the girl sat down in the wooden chair and thought.



**"WHO ASKED YOU TO HELP ME OUT?" DEMANDED
POLLY.**

Polly and Eleanor* *Page 257

"If I had had a different training maybe I wouldn't be so ready to lie," murmured Eleanor. Then, suddenly sneering at herself she added: "Poor fish! Can't even accept what you know is a fact without trying to blame it on some one else. You've scorned Bob for being such a fool, but here you are, ten times worse, because you have wits enough yet you pervert the use of them. Eleanor Maynard, I just feel as if I wanted to give you the biggest hiding you ever heard of!"

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As she knew of no way in which to inflict this punishment upon herself, she cried instead. From a prolonged snuffle that caused her to wipe her eyes on her dimity sleeves, she began to weep freely. And finally, heart-broken sobs shook her slender frame. By this time her eyes and nose were rivers of salt-water and the poor girl had no handkerchief. Just when she felt compelled to turn up her skirt to use the ruffle of her white petticoat, Anne came in.

"Why, Nolla! What has happened?"

"Oo-h, Anne—I lost my handkerchief!"

"Is that all, darling! Here use mine—It's clean. But don't cry over a trifle like that. It is sure to be somewhere about the place."

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Before Anne could dry the flooded eyes and hold the bit of white linen at Eleanor's nose, the girl broke into a merry laugh—so close were tears and laughter in Eleanor's makeup.

"Oh, oh—Anne! I didn't mean *that* that was what made me *cry*! But I am so disgusted with myself—that is why I am weeping. If some one would only whip me soundly, I would feel *so* much better!"

"Oh, I see! you're crying because you are so selfish, eh?"

Eleanor looked up astonished. "Selfish—no, I want to be thrashed, you know."

"And because you cannot get what you think you want, you sit out here and weep! Oh come, Nolla! come out on the terrace and let your Dad see how happy you are!"

The very illumination that came with Anne's unexpected words choked the sobs in Eleanor's throat, and she meekly followed Anne to the pump where cold water was dashed upon her red eye-lids. As she dried her face on a clean towel that hung back of the door, she thought: "Yes, sir! Even in howling for a licking I was fooling myself into believing I was doing the right thing! Oh, Nolla, Nolla! how much you have to change your old ways of thinking and talking before you can feel as honest and wise as Anne Stewart or Polly!"

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COMINGS AND GOINGS

It was very late when the doctor reached the ranch, that night, and having examined the still unconscious man, pronounced his opinion to the men who had accompanied him from the house.

"It's a bad concussion on the brain, I believe, following a slight fracture of the skull. He has suffered internal injuries, too, from the slight examination I can make here. But we can do nothing for him under these conditions. He ought to be in a hospital in Denver where an operation could take place."

"Would it be a risk to try and carry him there?" asked John, anxiously.

"He won't suffer during the trip, if that is what you mean, as he is unconscious of physical pain. And the sooner he could be operated upon the better. He will slowly pass away if left like this," returned the doctor.

"But to-morrow's Sunday, John, and no trains run to Denver until Monday noon," said Tom Latimer. [Pg 263]

"There's the morning milk-train, you know," suggested the doctor. "If I explained the case, they would gladly take these men on and turn them over to the physicians at Denver."

"Then we'd have to get them in to Oak Creek to-night," added Mr. Brewster.

"You'd have to fix up some sort of hammocks in the wagon to spare the poor fellows any jolts. If it can be done, I will wait and ride back with them," said the doctor.

"We'll turn the ranch inside out and upside down in order to help in any way," hastily asserted Mr. Brewster. Then turning to Jeb, who stood watching the scene, commanded him.

"Jeb, get out the truck wagon—the one with the chestnut posts on either side—and hook up four of our best horses. While Jeb is doing that, we will get the two hammocks from the girls and fix up some sort of mattress in each. These hammocks can swing from the posts. I'll go with the doctor and see that no little thing is overlooked."

"John and I thought of going in, Mr. Brewster, and if three are going, you would not have to take this trip to-night," said Tom. [Pg 264]

"W-ee-ll I would rather not use myself up in riding all night without being able to do any good to any one, if you young men will go in my place," Sam Brewster sighed.

"An' Ah'll drive the four hosses, cuz, yuh know, it's no joke seein' ahead of th' hosses' noses along that trail in th' dark," announced Jeb, in a matter-of-course tone.

"Jeb, if you would! It will be a great relief to know you are driving—you are such a wizard with a four-in-hand," exclaimed John, smiling suddenly at Jeb.

"Wha—Ah hed no idee you-all didn't know Ah was goin' t' do th' drivin'," returned Jeb, surprised at the others for their lack of comprehension.

It was twelve o'clock that night when all was ready and the great wagon lumbered past the ranch-house. The women were all grouped on the porch, silently praying for the safe transportation of the unfortunate schemers from New York.

"Ah don't suppose we will really know why these men came West until Latimer or Evans gets here to explain," said Mr. Brewster, as the remaining members of the family went indoors.

"Didn't you look through the papers in that leather bag?" asked Mr. Maynard of his host. [Pg 265]

"No, not when Ratzger came to and told us who they were. I handed the bag to him and felt I had no right to pry into his secrets—especially as he acted so fearful of the contents of the wallet."

"I suppose they hired those horses from Oak Creek," ventured Mrs. Brewster.

"Doubtless; and I told John to make sure and then ask Ratzger what had best be done to settle for them. If the men have ample means they can pay the damages, but if they haven't, I will pay for them myself," explained Mr. Brewster.

"I don't see why you should! You had nothing to do with their hiring, nor with anything connected with this accident," said Mr. Maynard.

"No, but folks hereabouts stick together more or less, and if one has a loss, the others generally help out. Now I can spare twenty horses from my corral sooner than have a friend in Oak Creek think I had something to do with his loss of two good saddle horses."

"If every one thought and acted like that, Mr. Brewster, we would bring in the millennium without delay," Mr. Maynard remarked.

"Ah feel happy to state that Ah will never defer the coming of that same millennium by any trifle like a few horses given away to a less fortunate friend." [Pg 266]

All that evening Polly and Eleanor were as cordial and chummy as ever to observers, but no one knew that the two girls had changed places. Only Anne knew that Eleanor had been in the kitchen weeping, and even she did not know the cause of the tears. She fancied there had been a girlish quarrel between the friends but that would soon be made up again. So she paid no further attention to the case.

Eleanor felt humbled by the frank truth spoken by Polly, and realizing that it was absolutely as her friend had stated, she tried to impress upon Polly that she was repentant and would never again do or say a thing that might offend. Hitherto Eleanor had taken for granted that she was more experienced in every way than her simple little friend of the ranch; and without meaning to take the upper hand, had actually assumed that position, until she had reached the point where Polly rebelled against this friendly leadership.

But after the fearless speech from Polly that afternoon, Eleanor comprehended how far behind she really was in this warfare between egotism and *egoism*. She began to understand that the first expressed stubbornness and selfishness which eventually would result in unhappiness for all concerned; while egoism meant exactly what Polly was trying to demonstrate for herself—that upright fearless stand for Truth, and the sacrifice of everything that interfered with the perfect working out of the highest good.

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Hence, without meaning to do so, and in fact, never realizing that it was so, Polly took the lead in everything after that day. When with her friend, Eleanor seldom exaggerated and never took the aggressive attitude again. And with others, she seemed to be developing a quieter and more lovable disposition. But her family and friends declared it was due to the fact that she was outgrowing her tom-boy habits.

Sunday morning was far spent before the family met under the oak trees for their first meal. Seeing how late it was, Mrs. Brewster and Sary decided to have but two meals that day—a combination breakfast and lunch and a good dinner and supper about five o'clock. The very unusual break in the habits of other Sabbaths, and the various causes that led to such a change, kept every one lounging quietly about the house and porch.

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Mr. Maynard took advantage of the restful hours, to ask Barbara just how much money she needed to defray her expenses in camp, with her mother. And in spite of her mentioning an exorbitant sum, he silently wrote out the check for her.

Barbara had expected rebellion and so was prepared to argue that she needed a new wardrobe for such a select gathering, but finding her father had offered no resistance, she wished she had demanded much more. Had she but known that the only reason he gave her what she wanted, was the qualm of conscience he felt. He was really glad to have his daughter so eager to join her mother in the East, so that he would be relieved of the nagging and unhappiness he was always subjected to when his wife and oldest daughter were with him.

But there was a sub-conscious reason, too, for his ready writing of the check. He was as eager to have Eleanor live with Anne and her mother in New York, as the girl was to go there. And this unexpected plan might meet with various objections from his wife if she dreamed of the extra cost it would be. As he seldom came to an open quarrel with Mrs. Maynard, he considered he was placating both wife and daughter by extending this generous sum of money for their pleasures. Should they offer strenuous objections against Eleanor's plan to live in New York, he would have one cudgel, at least, to use against them.

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The sinking sun was bathing Rainbow Cliffs in a glory of color before the echo of the lumbering ranch-wagon was heard sounding across the crater. Then every one ran out upon the terrace to watch the home-coming of the weary boys.

"Was everything all right?" anxiously asked Mrs. Brewster, thinking of the two poor sufferers.

"Oh yes; the hammocks served splendidly, but poor Ratzger groaned continually because of the pain in his limbs," sighed John.

"And we had an awful job carrying them from the wagon to the milk-train. They both are corpulent men, you know," added Tom.

"The docter went along widdem, to Denver," observed Jeb. "Gosh! Ah wisht Ah wuz a doctor, en Ah'd have gone, too. It wuz a free ride fer him, yuh-know."

The humor of the remark made every one smile, and Jeb gazed from one to the other to find out just where he had been witty.

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"Never mind, Jeb; you and Sary are going to Denver, you know, for that ring," whispered Mrs. Brewster, aside to Jeb.

"It ain't the same. Sary'll tote me aroun' jest whar she wants to go, en Ah have t' trot behin' her like a poodle!" grumbled Jeb.

Mrs. Brewster understood immediately. It was the call of freedom to the male who is soon to be shackled, to have one last fling. So she whispered back: "I'll see that you get a few days off for a nice visit there all by yourself. Perhaps we can arrange to have you go with the girls and look after their luggage on their way to New York."

At this unexpected offer of bliss, even if it was lonesome, Jeb grinned and shuffled away to drive

the horses to the barns.

As Jeb had to make another trip to meet the train on Monday noon at Oak Creek, he was only too glad when Tom announced that he was going, too, to meet his father and Dr. Evans.

John and Anne found so much to say to each other before the separation came, that they were not to be seen all that day. Polly felt sure she would find them seated on the Imps at the Cliffs, if she wanted to take the trouble to walk there. But she didn't.

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Mrs. Brewster and Eleanor were together, talking over many pleasant secrets, or at least Polly thought they must be pleasant from the smiling countenance on her friend. Now and then she caught such words as "you know all about such things, Nolla," or Eleanor might say "she will be on top of the heap, if I know it, Mrs. Brewster," so it was evident that she, Polly, was the subject of their conversation. But Polly herself, felt little concern about it all, as she saw the forlorn expression on her father's face as he went about his ranch-duties. Finally she decided upon taking a radical step.

She went to the room where she found her meager wardrobe displayed in every country-like detail. So this was what Eleanor was planning—a conquest made with fine clothes such as she had!

"Mother," she began; "I have changed my mind about going to school. I have decided to remain here with father and you."

"Oh, Poll! You just can't!" cried Eleanor.

"Why this sad countenance, daughter, if you believe you will be happier here than away?" countered Mrs. Brewster.

"Because I am as miserable as Daddy about leaving."

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Mrs. Brewster laughed merrily, albeit she felt no joy in her soul. "Then the sooner we dispel this gloom by packing you off, the better. I haven't the slightest doubt but that you will wonder at your present attitude, the moment John and Tom have gone. Once let every young person leave us here all alone for the long solitary winter, and you will eat your heart out to think that you could have been so mistaken as to refuse this wonderful opportunity to make something of yourself and your wealth."

Polly knew in her heart that her mother spoke the truth, but she never dreamed what it cost that mother to speak cheerily as she did about her only girl's going—in fact, almost persuading her to go. For that wise mother had heard the yearnings in Polly's voice the day she spoke so daringly of all her ambitions and of her future. And she understood that this transitory spell of regret was merely the contagion of Mr. Brewster's woe-be-gone thoughts and behavior.

"I'll get after Sam, and that good and plenty!" thought Mrs. Brewster to herself, as she watched Polly with keen understanding.

"Poll, your mother says Anne is to get every last dud you need in the swellest shops in New York. Because you and I will have plenty of money for our future, and we must dress up to our station. Your mother said our success in business would be influenced, to a great extent, by our careful consideration of apparel. She is right."

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"But, mother, you said to me, one time, that clothes should never occupy a woman's mind," Polly said, wonderingly.

"I was right in saying so. I do not believe in having anything so perishable as dress occupying anybody's mind. But that does not mean that you should become careless of your appearance nor wear cheap and vulgar apparel. I always felt that an individual expresses his own position in life by the clothes he selects and wears. It is generally a key to one's character. You will find that any one who has slip-shod apparel, is careless in everything else in life, and one who dons gaudy attire—cheap and destructible—will soon show you how small a nature he has. The same with well-selected refined apparel; one garbed in the best, no matter how many seasons they may have to wear the articles, will prove reliable and conscientious in other ways.

"Oh, I never dreamed this would end up in a sermon!" Mrs. Brewster suddenly laughed, and then she whisked from the room.

The new arrivals came at sun-down, and every one was eager to welcome Tom's father, and his friend Dr. Evans. Both men were made to feel at home, and as the dinner had been kept waiting for the past half-hour, Sary lost no time in shouting for every one to "setdown."

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Smiles on every face, was the rule at that meal, and no one dreamed that Mrs. Brewster had given her spouse the worst "Dressing down" he had had since they were married. He laughingly referred to it later on, and confessed that now he knew where Polly got her "woman's rights" idea, so unexpectedly betrayed the day she stood up for herself.

POLLY AND ELEANOR START OUT

"Now let us hear all about those two strangers from New York?" Mr. Brewster reminded his new guests, as they strolled away from the table.

"Well, it was as much a shock for us to find that they had been here and were now at a hospital in Denver, as it was for you to learn who they were," replied the doctor.

"I suspected some crooked work last week, but I must say that I never thought they would come out here on such a meager chance," added Mr. Latimer. "You see, it was this way: I had a rascal employed in my office as clerk, but I never knew that he was in constant touch with Riggley & Ratzger—in fact was their stool-pigeon. He was a clerk in our offices just to get daily information about patents. And thus the other firm got hold of many tips.

"When the Court upheld us in our rights, and this firm of crooks tried in other ways to get that valuable patent and model, this clerk Brown made an accurate blue-print of the drawing we always kept locked in our safe. Then when he heard of our success in cutting the lava-jewels from the material sent us from Pebbly Pit, he did everything to locate this ranch. [Pg 276]

"Had we wasted any time in planning to come West and meet you people here, I doubt not but that Riggley & Ratzger would have had a new scheme to hold us up. But we moved so swiftly after hearing from Kenneth and Tom, that they had to catch breath to keep up in the race.

"I am convinced that they hurried here with no set plans about the future—they wanted to get a hold on this place so as to try and bar us from immediate work, or perhaps, to make a fortune out of us by selling their option to us. They never dreamed that Latimer had a son right here, and that there was a deeper cause for our meeting you all than mere business reasons. Had either of these lawyers known about Montresor and that mine, they would not have spent so much time and money to get here to outwit us.

"It is fortunate that the doctor kept those letters at home where Brown could not read and copy them for his firm of rascals. But, to tell the truth, that was one reason why Dr. Evans was so anxious to meet you-all. We want to hear everything about the old man and that claim." [Pg 277]

As Mr. Latimer finished speaking, Dr. Evans said: "If you will pardon me, a moment, I have here a photograph taken of my brother-in-law just before he left for the Klondike. Perhaps you will recognize something in the face to assure us it was your Montresor."

The doctor took out his large flat pocket-book and removed the card-photograph wrapped in tissue paper. This was passed to Sam Brewster, who needed but a glance to tell him that the pictured face was the same man that he had defended so valiantly to others.

Polly ran over to her father's side and took the picture. "Oh, you dear old friend—it is our Old Man Montresor, sure enough, but his hair was white when we knew him!" she exclaimed.

She impulsively kissed the senseless card, and every one smiled sympathetically, even though there was a suspicion of moisture in most eyes.

"I am so glad to find that he had good friends, somewhere, even though he was too proud to let any one know about his relatives. And Ken! I'm so glad to know that he, and you people, will all come in on Choko's Find—or to be exact, it is Montresor's Mine," said Polly. [Pg 278]

"That's going to be a fine tangle in law, Polly," remarked Mr. Latimer. "You see, Montresor made you his sole heiress, so the mine is yours, not only by inheritance, but also by rediscovery after it was lost in the first land-slide.

"We stopped at Simms' office to-day—that is what made us late—and learned, without a doubt, that the two claims are the same. As it now stands, Polly and her friends are claim-jumpers on the same claim that Montresor bequeathed to Polly a few years ago. And should you all go to law over the tangle, the State of Colorado would benefit, in-as-much as the costs of an endless suit would fill the State coffers." Mr. Latimer laughed at the picture of such a thrilling law-tangle for his unraveling.

"But we are not going to law, and if that gold is mine so that no one else has any right to say what I can, or cannot do with it, I shall do what I always planned to do with it—even before Nolla and I found it again. I made up my mind that if ever one of dear old Montresor's relatives appeared I would go halves. And if they wanted the whole thing—then they could take it, rather than fight for it. So now I am going to give half to your wife, right off, Doctor, and my other half I will divide with the girls who were with me when we located it again." Polly was magnificent in her earnest generosity. [Pg 279]

"Why, Miss Polly, my wife would never accept half of it. Ken wrote something of what you told him, and Mrs. Evans told me to be sure to tell you that you *cannot* give half away. Besides, the fact that I will have so many friends willing to invest money in this device of mine, is better than all the gold in the Rockies. The jewel-cutter is now an assured success, and it will turn out dollars like a sausage grinder turns out that toothsome breakfast meat."

Every one laughed at the doctor's funny comparison, and he continued: "However, let us hear from Tom and the others, how they managed to get down into the cave if it was buried under such mountains of trash."

"Oh, yes, John! You promised to tell us the moment Mr. Latimer and the doctor arrived," cried Eleanor, eagerly.

So without preamble, John began: "When Mike had made a temporary camp for us on Top Notch, he tried to show Tom and me just where the cave had been. But none other than a clever Indian scout could ever have found one familiar sign anywhere. Even Mike had to hunt and dig and trail around, again and again, before he gave a war-whoop.

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"To cut it short, I will say, we found that the ravine upon which the cave opened, was completely filled with trash and, in fact, there were many feet of earth and timber on top of the ledge so that it would need a great deal of digging and blasting before we could hope to enter that cave again.

"But Tom and I had not been lazy during the time Mike was seeking for some sign to locate the cave. And after we learned how impossible it was to enter the mine at that side where the girls had gone in, Tom and I took scientific observations with our instruments, and finally, after tiresome days, found a rushing river that gushed from some underground source.

"We immediately remembered the pit Polly had told us of, and the rushing sound of waters she had heard when leaning over the edge of the pit, so we decided that here we had found the outlet.

"We could not determine how far the river traveled underground from the pit, until it came out in the open again, but we got Mike to come with us, and, daring fellow that he is, he crept into the tunnel that hooded the stream. We tried to dissuade him from taking such a risk, but he grinned and said: 'Mike like fun.'

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"When he returned, half an hour later, he made us understand that we might follow quite safely. My! But that was some thrill, eh, Tom?" laughed John, shivering delightfully at the reminiscence.

Tom laughingly admitted that it was a "hair-raiser" and John continued: "We managed to cling to the narrow ledge of rock that was less than a foot above the turbulent water, and even that must have been submerged most of the time, as it was damp and slippery. Mike said the recent landslide had had some effect on lowering the water-line of the river and that was what left the rock exposed.

"We crept slowly along this foot-hold and soon realized that we were nearing some suction-hole. Mike explained that it was the very tube that rose to the rocky floor where Polly knelt that day. I couldn't see where this journey was going to benefit us, but Mike knew.

"Reaching the tube that slanted upwards, so that we could see roots and stubborn vines growing out of its rocky walls, we also discovered that we had a flat space of more than six feet square on which we were standing. Now Mike demonstrated what he proposed doing. All our threats, persuasions, and anger, left no impression. He smiled.

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"He made us understand that he was about to scale the wall by means of those roots and vines. Should he miss and fall, the rope he tied about his body would keep him from being swept down into the current. He gave us the end of the rope to fasten to our waists. When he arrived at the top, he would draw us up, one after the other.

"He managed to land on top, but I'll have to tell you-all some other time, all that happened before we reached the underground cave where the gold was shining from walls and ceiling. It is exactly as Polly described it, and we picked up a number of nuggets that were found in the dust of ages on the stone floor, and then tried to take scientific observations. Tom took a flash-light of the cave, and we had it developed, but it was not a howling success. Still, it shows something of the interior.

"When we got back to open air again, we noticed the vast mountain-top that sat down upon that gold-mine. This would have to be removed if we mined from the top. But I believe we can manage to work in through that tunnel and secure the gold by means of lifts in that tube. This is a matter of discussion. The gold is there and it can be gotten out, just so long as Old Grizzly will behave."

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There was a general chorus of sighs when John had concluded his story, and as technical matters were taken up by the men, and in this the girls were not interested, they wandered away to enjoy the twilight.

During the days that followed, Barbara left Pebbly Pit, with no regrets on her part, and not very many on the part of her summer companions. She was not in her rightful place on a ranch, and every one was honest enough to admit it. But now she was going to join "her own" and she was happy.

Tom and John were the next to leave the happy circle at the ranch. But not until all plans about the incorporating of the two companies were perfected. Each man present at that meeting, signing up liberally to supply the money to launch the two big enterprises.

The evening before John and Tom were to go back to their engineering work with their old Crew, Polly and Eleanor were out on the terrace with Tom, talking eagerly of the plans made for mining the ore from Choko's Find. From this subject it was quite natural for the girls to launch the subject of their anticipated winter in New York City.

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"I suppose you two girls will see quite a little of Jim and Ken, when you arrive in New York," ventured Tom, wistfully (or so it seemed to romantic Eleanor).

"They said so; Jim says New Haven is not so far from New York but that the two of them—I mean the boys not the cities," laughed Polly—"may be able to visit us every week-end. That will be great fun for us, won't it, Tom?"

"I suppose so. I wonder if John would care for you to see so much of the two boys as you plan to," replied Tom, suggestively.

"Oh, John won't care! Why should he?" retorted Polly.

"Why *shouldn't* he? He's your brother and you are growing up to be a young lady, Polly; you must think of appearances, you know," said Tom.

Polly laughed merrily. "Why, Tom! One would think you were concerned about my future, the way you preach. Just like Daddy does."

Eleanor interpreted the speech to suit herself and watched Tom's expression closely. Tom frowned at Polly's laugh and bit his lip to restrain himself from further preachings. [Pg 285]

"Besides," added Polly, in a few moments, "Jim is your own kid brother, and Ken is his pal. You-all say Ken is a jewel of a boy, so why should I worry about appearances' sake when I am with them?"

Tom refused to reply to her question, and Polly quickly forgot his strange remark. But Eleanor thought over various little incidents of the past few days, and finally decided to make a radical move for Tom.

"I'm going indoors, for a minute, children—will you excuse me?" said she, starting to leave the two alone.

"With the greatest of pleasure!" declared Tom, laughingly, to Eleanor.

Eleanor tossed her saucy head and winked at Tom as she ran away. Tom flushed and wondered just what Eleanor thought or what she had tried to make him understand by that wink.

The moment Eleanor had gone Tom turned to Polly and said: "Shall we walk to the Cliffs and have a last look at the jewels in this glorious moonlight?"

"Oh no!" cried Polly, nervously, as she glanced at Tom's facial expression, and thought of the tremble in his voice as he spoke.

"All right, then; but I thought you would want to remember just how they looked, to-night. When you are in that crowded city of rush and hustle, it would be a pleasant memory." [Pg 286]

"Eleanor and I are going to get a snap-shot of them, to-morrow, after you boys are gone," explained Polly, in a matter-of-fact tone.

Tom smothered a sigh and was trying to think of some other excuse to coax Polly away from the nearness of the house, when Mr. Maynard and Mr. Latimer strolled over to join the two young people. Polly turned to them with a smiling welcome but Tom gnashed his teeth in impatience at their untimely intrusion.

The two men immediately began speaking of the projects for the incorporated companies and demanded so much of Tom's attention that Polly managed to glide away and go back to the house. This ended Tom's first attempt at romance with Polly, and it was evident that he disliked the interruption.

After Mr. Maynard, Mr. Latimer, and Dr. Evans had gone, it was Anne Stewart's turn to say good-by. She was going to Denver to see that her mother wound up all their private affairs, and there she would await the coming of Eleanor and Polly.

After Anne had gone, Mrs. Brewster took Polly and Eleanor to her room and sat down to have a confidential talk with the girls. To her surprise Polly found all her ranch-dresses and other apparel bundled up in a loose roll with a rope tied about it. [Pg 287]

"Why, mother! How can I take my clothes to New York that way?" asked she, having studied the bundle wonderingly for a time.

Mrs. Brewster laughed. "You're not. These are going to some poor ranchers' children over at Yellow Jacket Pass."

"But, mother!" gasped Polly. "I haven't anything left to wear in New York!"

"That's what I wish to tell you about, Polly. Now listen to what I have already told Eleanor who knows about these things better than we do."

Then Mrs. Brewster proceeded to instruct Polly as Eleanor had suggested previously.

"I know how foolish it appears to you, Polly, to give much thought to clothes, because at home on the ranch it matters so little what the style is. But once you are in New York, or any other large city where all kinds of people are to be found, your appearance makes a great difference. You are not to take any of your home-made ranch clothes with you, Polly—not even on the train after you leave Denver. I am going to purchase a neat tailor-made suit at Denver for you to wear, and your old suit I shall bring back home. [Pg 288]

"When you reach New York Anne and Eleanor have my orders to attend to your shopping the very first thing. I want you to go to the very best and most exclusive shops on Fifth Avenue above Forty-second street for all you need—and many accessories that you think you do not need, Polly.

"Remember this, dear, the tag of the maker of your apparel is not the only important mark of an exclusive shop—the principal mark is the cut and style, and these high-grade shops turn out hats, coats and gowns which the other shops endeavor in vain to imitate. That is why one can be recognized in a way by the clothes they wear. And that is why I insist upon your having the best.

"Another thing I know to be true, is this: Girls at school (and I feel sure the girls at your exclusive school in New York City will do so) judge others by the maker of their clothes. You will have no heart-aches if your clothes have the best maker's name inside. It sounds small, Polly, but it really is a serious matter when you come in contact with small-minded girls or adults.

"Anne carries the check-book, Polly, and Eleanor carries the social experience in dressing as becomes a young lady of the best society. You must remember you are that and so you must never be ashamed of your apparel. When one is so clothed that one need not think of dress, or any apology for what they have on, one is at ease and forgets about such trifles. That is one good argument for having the best, Polly—one forgets oneself."

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Polly listened to her mother's wise remarks with serious expression, but Eleanor sat and nodded her head approvingly whenever Mrs. Brewster made a point that pleased the girl. When Mrs. Brewster paused for a moment, Eleanor spoke eagerly.

"My! Won't I just make the gold from Choko's Find mine fly when I select the wardrobe for our Polly!"

"You can't spend something you never had," laughed Mrs. Brewster.

"But we *will* have it, some day, soon," retorted Eleanor.

"Well, then, I'll spend it when we get it, not till then!" exclaimed Polly, practically.

"There speaks the logical one," laughed Eleanor.

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"Polly will have more than enough in the bank to defray all bills while in New York, Nolla, without borrowing from the mine."

At last came the day when Polly had to say good-by to her beloved pets on the ranch. Dear little Noddy followed her about and would not be separated from her. It was as if the burro knew her beloved mistress was leaving home. And so heart-broken was Polly to realize that she would not see her Noddy again for almost a year, that she took the woolly head in her arms and kissed the cold nose in a fond farewell.

Eleanor stood by and dabbed her eyes with her fist at sight of such affection, but she had to laugh when Noddy tried to return that kiss. Her red tongue was long and supple and Polly was taken by surprise when it curled about her ear.

And then at last! Well, Sary refused absolutely to be left at home when she found Jeb was going with the family to help Polly carry the bags. "What," she exclaimed to Mrs. Brewster the night before, "you-all mus' think Ah'm empty-headed to let Jeb go t' Denver alone. Ah've hearn say how gals go about them streets lookin' fer a handsome young beau! No-siree! Ef Jeb goes, Ah goes too!" And she went!

Sary furnished endless amusement to the Brewster group as the train sped on its way from Oak Creek to Denver. Polly was the only one in the circle who paid little attention to the excited woman, for Polly had all she could do to keep down her own nervous excitement because of the wonders of the first train-ride she had ever had.

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"Ah d'clar' to goodness, Missus Brewster, is this business runnin' away?" exclaimed Sary, after the local had started from Oak Creek.

Mrs. Brewster sat in front of Sary who, with Jeb, occupied the last seat in the coach. The chosen seat was Jeb's plan; although he did not explain to any one that he figured out it would be much better to be near the door in case one had to make a quick exit. Trains *did* run off their tracks, and also there might be a collision. He had heard folks talking of these dreadful accidents.

When Sary addressed her mistress with a tone of anxiety in her voice, Mrs. Brewster turned her head and smiled reassuringly as she replied:

"Oh, no, Sary! The train hasn't really started to go, as yet. Wait until we get past these little local stations, then you shall see."

"Wall, Ah don't know ez Ah wants to ride any faster. Ef the driver could slow up a bit we-all could enjoy the country views better," said Sary.

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Eleanor giggled and nudged Polly but Polly turned a serious face to her friend. "Nolla, I think the same as Sary—I'd rather go slower."

"Good gracious, Polly, are *you* frightened, too?" exclaimed Eleanor.

"No, but I want to remember every inch of this grand country if I am to stay in New York for many months, you see."

Eleanor understood, and left Polly to her silent work of impressing her mind with the views she wished to remember, later; Sary would provide enough entertainment for Eleanor during the trip to Denver.

"Jeb, what you-all clutchin' at my arm like-as-how you are?" now asked Sary, in no weak or tender voice.

"Ah ain't clutchin' nothin', Sary!" was Jeb's defense of his manhood.

"Ah don't know what you call it, then. Sit up like a regular traveler, Jeb, and don't slump in the seat like-as-how your head wants to duck from some crash," declared Sary, heroically trying to lift Jeb's courage by gripping his coat collar and hoisting him almost out of his badly fitting coat.

Eleanor smothered a laugh but said nothing to disturb the vaudeville she was enjoying. Mr. and Mrs. Brewster were talking earnestly about the future of their daughter. [Pg 293]

Suddenly Polly cried thrillingly: "Oh, look, everybody! We're coming to a torrent, and the train won't slow up!"

Sary instantly turned to the window and saw what seemed to be an unavoidable end of all earthly things, so she half rose from the seat and grabbed Jeb in her ample embrace. "Ef we go, we goes together, Jeb!"

Her voice, never soft and melodious, now rose above the whistle of the engine just as it reached the high bridge over the stream. Jeb's small head was completely hidden by the unexpected protection thrust upon him, but Eleanor had no idea of thus missing the pleasure of watching Jeb's face when the train should cross the bridge.

"Look—look, Jeb and Sary! We're riding over the water!" she cried.

Thus induced, Sary left Jeb's head to its fate and quickly sought the cause of Eleanor's excitement. The amazing experience of being on a vehicle that glided directly over a rushing stream of water while there was no apparent land to uphold the vehicle, held Sary and Jeb spell-bound.

When the train reached land, once more, and was steaming along its way, Sary sighed audibly and whispered to Jeb: "Did you-all ever know sech doin's went on when one traveled?" [Pg 294]

But Jeb was too surprised to make a sound. He sat and stared from the small window of the car without even having heard his fiancée's words.

The conductor had passed through the car many times since the Brewster family boarded the train, and when the last local station had been left behind and he had punched all the tickets of the passengers on that trip, he entered the car and sat upon the arm of the seat just opposite Sam Brewster, in order to converse with the man every one about Oak Creek knew so well.

Having no stops to make for a long stretch, and the track running on a level line for many miles, the engineer increased the speed of his engine with corresponding results in Sary's anxiety. She stepped over Jeb's obstructing feet and made madly for the conductor, taking that worthy man quite by surprise.

"See here, Mr. Boss, Ah ain't going to pay fer no ticket to ride on a runaway injun! It's your job to get up front and see what's ailin' this car. Ef it's locoed you'd better cut loose from th' injun—come along!"

And before the amazed conductor or Mr. Brewster could resist or explain, Sary had the man by the shoulder and was actually lifting him along the aisle towards the door. [Pg 295]

"Hi, there, Sary! Stop that!" shouted Sam Brewster, jumping up and trying to rescue the poor victim from Sary's mighty hold.

"Ain't it so, Mister Brewster? We-all paid good money fer this joy-ride, an' we-all ain't got nothin' from it but jumpin' nerves, so far!"

Every one but the poor conductor laughed heartily at Sary's complaint. But Mr. Brewster persuaded Sary to loose her prisoner and let him collect his scattered senses; when the shaken man was able to once more think reasonably, he gave Sary one look and disappeared from that coach, nor did he venture his head inside the door again, until he had to take up all the tickets.

The eventful trip finally ended when the local pulled into Denver station; the Brewster party lost no time in leaving the train and threading a way through the crowds at the waiting-room. They were to go directly to Anne Stewart's house where luncheon would be waiting for them.

"Well, friends! glad to see you!" called Anne, as she welcomed the travelers. "Come right in and meet mother."

Introductions over, Mrs. Stewart led the way to the cozy little dining-room where the table was ready-spread for the luncheon. [Pg 296]

"I didn't pretend to provide much, Mrs. Brewster," explained Mrs. Stewart, "because, you see, the house is rented furnished for two years and I could not leave a pan full of soiled dishes and crumbs of food about for my new tenant to clear away. Of course, the lady is an old neighbor of mine, and would understand how hurried we are to-day in order to get off on the afternoon train

for New York; still I never like to do things wrong."

"Now see here, Miss Stewart," declared Sary who had over-heard the remark, "you-all jes' go along to the cars an' leave me to do up the work."

"No, Sary, this is your great holiday in Denver," contradicted Mrs. Brewster, "and Jeb wants to fit that engagement ring on your finger, you know; after lunch, you get away with Jeb and see the city while I do up the dishes and help Mrs. Stewart dress and get ready to leave."

That was a merry although hurried luncheon. Immediately after the cake and tea were finished, Jeb and Sary started away to hunt the ring; but many were the admonitions sent after them as they left the door, to be on hand at the railway terminal to see Polly and her friends off for New York. [Pg 297]

Mrs. Brewster and her husband cleared away the remains of the luncheon while Mrs. Stewart and Anne completed their packing and dressed for the long trip to the East. Everything in connection with the lease and the inventory of furniture had been attended to before this day, so there were really no errands or work left to be done at the last.

Finally Mrs. Stewart locked the door and gave the key to a next-door neighbor who had offered to keep it until the tenant called for it; then good-bys were said to the congregated friends of Anne and her mother's, and at last the party started for the station where the New York train was scheduled to leave at five o'clock.

"Dear me, I do hope Sary and Jeb will be there on time," sighed Mrs. Brewster, with a worried frown.

"Don't worry about them, Mah, because I'll say they have been waiting for us this last hour," laughed Sam Brewster.

"Sary wouldn't give Jeb a moment's peace until she got that ring," added Anne Stewart, laughingly, "and once she had it she would never give him another moment's peace until she had shown it to every one of us!" [Pg 298]

"Anne's right, mother," giggled Polly, nodding her head wisely.

And so it turned out. When the Brewster party reached the station in Denver, and before Sam Brewster could seek for his two servants Sary shouted so that every one at that end of the building heard her.

"Here we-all be, Mr. Brewster! Jeb an' me's be'n lookin' out fer you-all this last hour! Come right on, and see mah ring!"

Eyes turned in the direction of the voice and there stood Sary, perched upon one of the benches in order to look over the heads of the people who stood about in groups or who kept going and coming through the station. She was waving her hand wildly to attract the attention of her party. Eleanor laughed so hysterically at the sight that she could hardly stand, but Polly dragged her along after the others until they reached Sary and Jeb.

"Ah d'clar' to goodness, folks! This city is one big camp, all right!" vouchsafed Jeb, his eyes wide enough to pop at the great adventure.

"Don't you-all go talkin' of sech things, Jeb, when we-all got more important things to do," was Sary's scathing criticism, as she gave Jeb a shove to quiet him. "Here—jest you-all look at this diamond! Three times bigger'n Anne Stewart's! Pull off that glove, Anne, and le's see mine and your'n side by side!" exclaimed Sary, eagerly. [Pg 299]

Anne laughed but complied with the challenge. Two hands were compared—a small white hand with polished nails and with a sparkling diamond shining upon the third finger of the left hand, and a large-boned red hand with stubby nails on the fingers, but one finger displaying a great Rhinestone set so high that it would have been a menace had Sary tried to use her fist on an enemy. Jeb stood by grinning widely at the praise bestowed upon him for his choice of the largest stone in the department store.

"Cost some cash, that stone, eh Jeb?" chuckled Sam Brewster.

"Bet chure life, Boss!" was Jeb's snappy reply.

Eleanor now pulled Sary's head down in order to whisper into her ear. "Sary, when you get back to Pebbly Pit, Mrs. Brewster will give you a pile of finery I left for your trousseau. You will be delighted to get the laces and other trimmings for your hope-box."

"Ah, Nolla, won't ah, jest! An' when Ah comes to Noo York to see you-all, you won't know me in my fine togs!" was Sary's eager reply. [Pg 300]

"Oh! were you expecting to come, Sary?" Eleanor asked.

"Shure thing, Nolla. Onct Ah'm married Ah'm goin' to travel every year!" exclaimed Sary.

"New York's a long way off from here, Sary," ventured Eleanor.

"Oh, Ah don't mean to say Jeb an' me'll go thar fust. Ah'm goin' to figger on takin' a side trip to Chicargo fust, you know. Mebbe you kin fix it so's we-all kin visit your maw whiles we-all stop at

that town, Nolla. An' nex' time we-all kin go on to Noo York, like-as-how Ah said."

Eleanor caught her breath at this astounding news. The picture of Barbara and her mother receiving Sary and Jeb proved too much for her risibles and she laughed merrily as she replied to Sary's announcement.

"Sary, if Jeb and you *would* honor our house with a visit, I'd tell Daddy to look after you-all. But you must let me know, first, so my father can meet you two and see that you are shown about in true style."

"Nolla, that Ah will, when we-all get time to go thar. Ah says to mahself, jest the other day, Ah ain't never had no fun or chanct to better mahself, Ah says: 'Sary Dodd, when you get Jeb you plan to go about like-as-how Anne Stewart is doin'.' Nolla, thar ain't nuthin' like a bit of travel to polish folks up, is thar now?"

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"You're right, Sary! Just exactly right," laughed Eleanor.

But Sam Brewster was now heard calling Eleanor that the train was ready and the gates were opened, so Sary caught Jeb by his sleeves and followed after the others when the entire group started for the New York train.

One would think, to hear Sary's excited tones, that she was about to take the long, long journey from which there is no returning; but once Anne Stewart and her charges were aboard the long Pullman train, the ones who remained behind stood upon the platform waiting for the girls to find their compartments and open the windows in order to converse until the last moment.

Sam Brewster went over to a guard and asked several questions, then he hurried back and said to his party: "We can go aboard for a few minutes, as the train will not pull out for seven or eight minutes. Do you care to see how Polly will be located for the trip?"

With motherly concern Mrs. Brewster followed her husband, and in order to be experienced when that trip east was to be taken, Sary dragged Jeb after the Brewsters.

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"Wall, suh!" breathed Sary, when Eleanor demonstrated where the beds were hidden, and what the push buttons were for, and how the window shades ran up or down on springs! She could hardly believe her eyes when she was told about the convenience of modern traveling.

"All out not going East!" came a loud call from the colored porter at the end of the Pullman, so Sam Brewster turned and hugged Polly until she almost choked.

"Come out, Sary—bring your man!" ordered Sam Brewster in a harsh tone, madly dabbing his eyes with a fist, as he left Polly to her mother.

"Jeb, Jeb! Come along—er we-all'll get taken along the trip!" cried Sary, excitedly, trying to force Jeb ahead of her as she stumbled out of the Pullman after Mr. Brewster.

The sight of big Sary urging little Jeb out to safety was so funny that every one had to laugh in spite of tears at the parting, so that Sary actually accomplished a great thing—she turned the sadness at Polly's leaving her parents into a merry laughing scene for every one.

Once the four who were to remain behind were on the platform again, the four in the Pullman gazed from their windows. Polly suddenly remembered one last order about her ranch-home.

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"Paw, don't you or Jeb ever forget to do for Noddy just what I would do if I was home," was her choking command.

"No danger, Poll! Little Noddy will be my own pet charge, now. It's all Ah will have at the old crater to tell me about you!" called Sam Brewster as the conductor signaled the engineer to start the engine.

At this crucial moment Jeb remembered an important letter with which he had been intrusted. He made a wild search in his pockets and as the train slowly pulled away from the Brewster group, he found it. He gazed distractedly at the car window where Polly's face was flattened against the wire-netting, then instant action possessed him. His faculties began to exert themselves.

"Hey, there! Mister Conductor, stop that car 'cause Ah got a big fat letter for Polly!" Jeb shouted with all the power his small frame could produce in such a hurry, but the conductor heard him not.

"Stop that car! Oh, jumpin' rattle-snakes—won't you-all stop that car?" His yearning was pitiful but the car cared naught.

"Here, here, Jeb! what is the matter with you-all?" called Mr. Brewster, just as Jeb took a long breath and planned to sprint after the train.

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"It's a good-by letter a friend left with me for Polly, Mr. Brewster, an' now Ah done gone and clean forgot it!" wailed Jeb.

"Too late now, Jeb. We'll change the address and send it on to her New York hotel. It will reach her almost as soon as she gets there," explained Mrs. Brewster.

"Yeh! Wall now, Ah wouldn't have believed that." So Jeb placed the letter that Polly never received in his coat pocket and lost it that same evening in the excitement of catching the local

out of Denver.

Consequently, when the New York train pulled slowly out of the Denver Terminal, with Polly and her companions on board trying to get a last look of dear ones left on the platform of the station, the only glimpse to be had of Mr. and Mrs. Brewster was their squirming desperately, now this side, now that, of Sary's ponderous form. And Sary, who had planted her bulk unexpectedly in front of them, held her arm high above her head, and slowly waved her hand in farewell back and forth in the rays of the sun. But her gaze was not following the moving train. Instead it was riveted, like a bird hypnotized by a serpent, upon a 10 carat rhinestone engagement ring that sparkled from the *index* finger of her red right hand.

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The last coach of the train vanished and the two Brewsters sighed. Then they saw Sary still waving her hand, oblivious of all else about her. Jeb stood gaping at her queer actions wondering if she might be "off in her head." But the smile on his master's face reassured him. As Mrs. Brewster murmured, "Sary, that's all!" the proud possessor of the ring came to earth again.

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