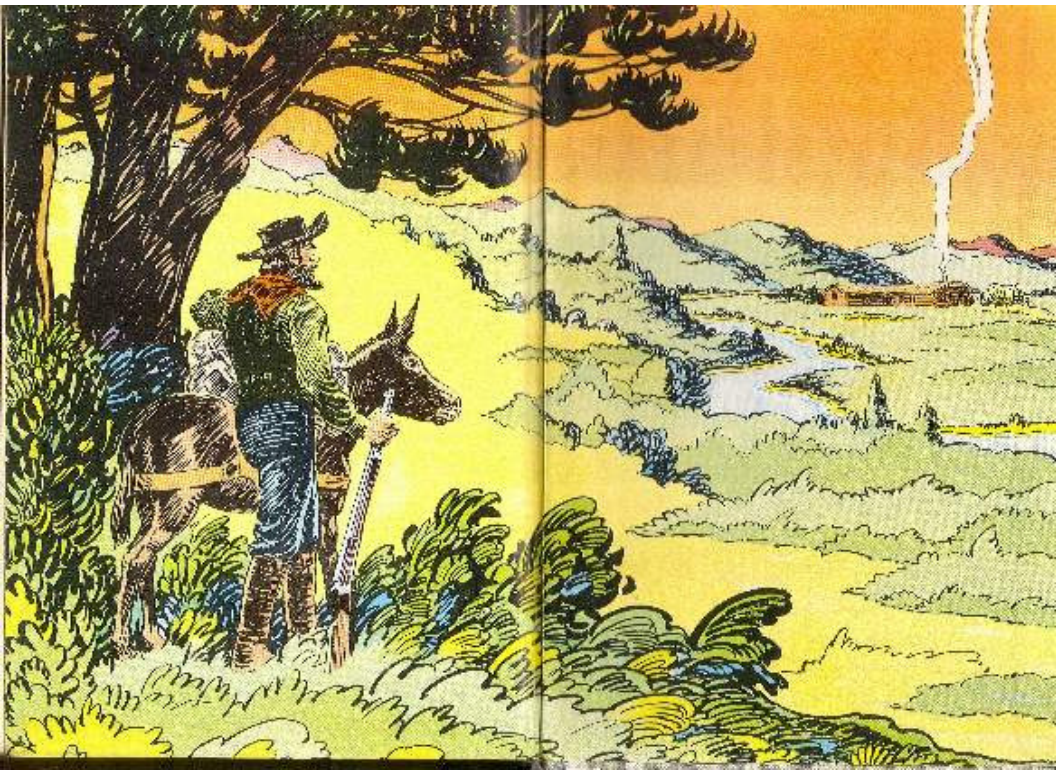
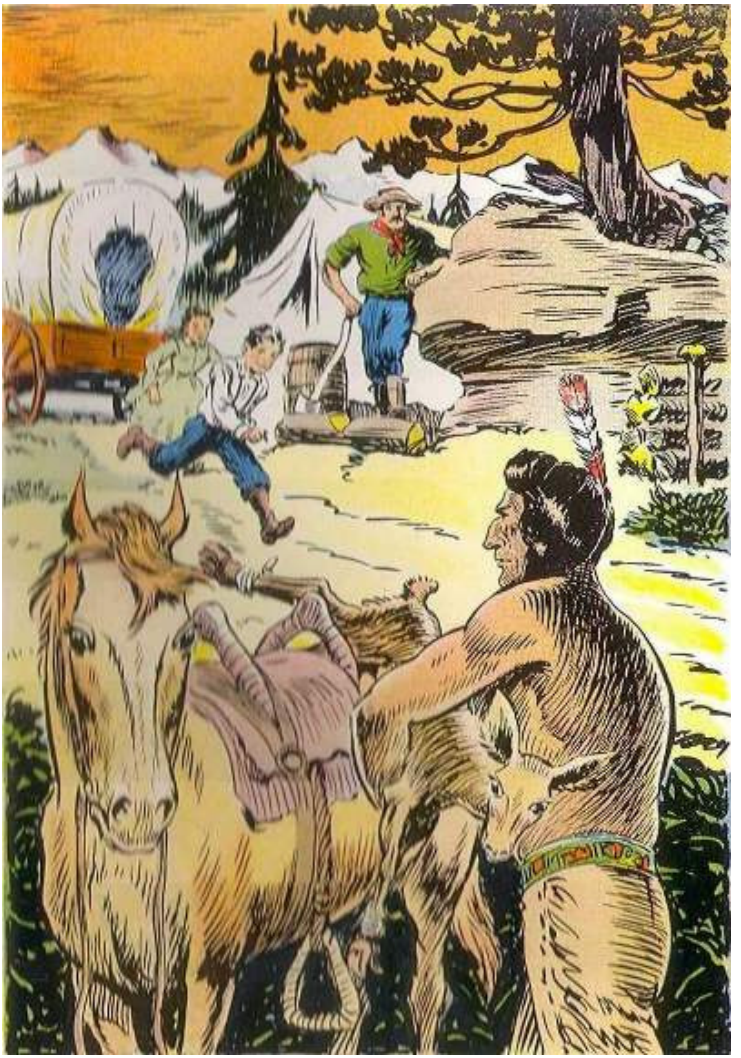
The SHINING MOUNTAINS

LULITA PRITCHETT





The Ute was already untying the elk

The Shining Mountains

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To
MY MOTHER
Who kept a little red diary

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Ma flicked them with the whip

Chapter One

CHERRY CREEK CAMP

There was great bustle and excitement in the camp on Cherry Creek that June morning, 1874. For three days the nine wagonloads of people that had come across the plains together had rested here on the outskirts of Denver while the men made inquiries about the country. Now the time was coming when the travelers must separate. Tomorrow the Reed family would go south toward Pike's Peak where they had heard there was good farm land. Will Yankee would take his family up Clear Creek to the town of Empire. Most of the young bachelors of the party were going with him to find work in the mines. The Crawfords intended to head northwest and keep right on going till they got across the Rocky Mountains to new country on the other side.

The children, bound to make every moment count, had been playing hide-and-seek among the cottonwoods, whooping and hollering like a bunch of Apaches. Out of breath, they dropped down on the warm sand to rest and grew suddenly solemn.

"This is the last day we'll be together," sighed thirteen-year-old Margie Crawford, hunching her knees under her chin and gazing with thoughtful brown eyes at a flock of wind clouds that scurried across the wide prairie sky. "Seems to me it's been about a year since we left Missouri, though I know it's only five weeks."

"Wisht we were all going to the same place," said Tom, her brother, half-heartedly rumpling up the fur of Ponto, the yellow shepherd pup. Tom was eleven and growing so fast that even the clothes which had fitted him when they left the farm looked a little skimpy now. His round freckled face was wistful. "Why'nt the rest of you persuade your folks to come with us over the range?"

"Not me!" declared Stowell Yankee, his cousin, sprawling his long length in the shade. "There ain't even a road! I don't see how you can get over."

"There's the beginnings of a road," argued Tom. "Mr. J. Q. Rollins is buildin' it. Pa found out about it from one of the workmen who was down for supplies."

"Oh, I guess we'll get over all right," said Margie. "Even if we have to make a road ourselves. Ma says when Pa sets out to do a thing he usually does it. And Uncle Henry Crawford and Hute Richardson are going with us to help."

"The Ute Indians live across the range," shivered little Janey Reed. "I've heard tell they're awful fierce.

Ain't you scared?"

"Naw," said Tom. "*I'm* not. Just the same we're goin' to have our pictures took case we do get scalped. Ma persuaded Pa, and we're goin' to Denver City soon as he gets home."

Pa had gone that morning to Mr. Heywood's ranch to drive in eight cows and heifers for which he had traded the hack and some extra horses. Hute and Uncle Henry had gone with him.

"Once when I was little I had my picture taken," said

Margie, “but I can’t remember much about it.”

“I’ve had two tintypes made,” remarked Cousin Mary Ann Yankee, wise in experience. She spread her skirts young lady fashion and continued, “They’re awful tiresome. You’ve got to sit and sit and pose and look pretty—”

“Oh dear,” cried the younger girl, suddenly mindful of her own looks, “has the wind got all the curl out of my hair?” Anxiously she examined a lock. She was accustomed to wear two long braids, but on special occasions like today she roached her front hair back with a comb and let the rest hang loose over her shoulders.

“It is tolerable straight,” admitted her cousin.

“And I did mean to look pretty!” wailed Margie. “I braided it tight as I could last night so it would be frizzed.”

“I don’t reckon the Utes ‘d want Margie’s hair.” Tom switched the subject back to Indians. “It’s just plain brown. But they’d go for red hair like mine and Danny’s. Uncle Henry said so. We may have to fight the Utes. I’d sooner fight an Indian than a grizzly bear. I’ve heard grizzlies are mean as mean! And the mountains are full of lions and carcajous and bobcats.”

Three-year-old Danny, the youngest of the Crawfords, had been playing with Tobe, the big gray striped cat that had come all the way from Missouri in the wagon train. Now he clambered into his sister’s lap and hid his tearful, puckered face in her dress.

“Tom, shame on you!” scolded Margie. “There, Danny, there! Don’t you care. Pa wouldn’t let anything hurt us!

Maybe we'll see some funny Indian papooses and we might get a bear cub for a pet. I read a story about a man once—"

"What do you s'pose the mountains look like close up?" Janey Reed interrupted curiously, peering through an opening in the trees toward the far blue wall of the range.

"Rocky, of course," said Stowell. "They're called the Rocky Mountains, aren't they?"

"I know a nicer name." Margie cradled the baby in her arms. Through dreamy eyes she studied the broken outline of the peaks and the mysterious shadow-creased ridges. "Old-time explorers used to call them the Shining Mountains. Pa read that in the *Missouri Republican*."

"They don't look shiny to me," said Stowell, sitting up and frowning.

"Well, anyway that's what the newspaper said. It was just quoting these old travelers. *They* thought the mountainsides were covered with crystals that sparkled so bright you could see them a long way off. And they believed there was gold and silver and precious stones almost anywhere you looked."

"Huh! Lots o' folks that came West to find gold got fooled. `Course there's some places like Empire—"

"I wish you were coming to Empire," interrupted Mary Ann. "I can't for the life of me see why Uncle Jimmy wants to cross the range. Nobody civilized lives over there!"

"Pa's got a roving disposition," explained Margie. How many times she had heard Ma say that! "I reckon all us Crawfords have a roving disposition. Honest, I'm dying to

see what's on the other side of those mountains. It was that piece in the *Missouri Republican* that made us want to come. The reporter was sent out here by the newspaper to learn about the country. He told what those old-time explorers thought and then he told how he climbed the range himself and looked down on the western slope. What he saw must have been grand! Of course, he couldn't begin to see it all. Pa says likely there are valleys and rivers nobody knows about—only the Indians and a few old trappers. I hunted in my geography and the whole northwest corner of Colorado Territory is just a blank space."

"We aim to find out what's there," added Tom. "Then we'll stake a claim in the best place and build a town all our own. You can come visit us and—"

"Yooo-hoooo!"

That was Ma calling. Tom scrambled to his feet. "Reckon Pa's back. Come on!"

Margie dumped Danny from her lap and reached her hand out to him. "We'd better run!" she advised. "Ma sounds like *hurry!*"

The three of them raced for the Crawford tent, the others following. Ma was waiting in her best blue poplin. Aunt Sally Yankee was there, too, and Mrs. Reed. Ma looked flushed and very determined about something. She was a small, plump person with a fair girlish face and eyes that could be as merry as Tom's. Today they weren't merry. They were dark and full of business.

"I've set out a snack to eat, children. As soon as you've

finished we're going to town."

"Where's Pa?"

"He hasn't come yet and I've no mind to wait. Now, eat your dinner, for you can't go unless you do."

"If you ask me," said Aunt Sally tartly, "I think this going to town is a lot of nonsense!" Aunt Sally was Ma's older sister and was given to speaking out. "At least, Maggie, you ought to wait till one of the men comes to drive for you."

Ma's head jerked up. "I can drive well enough, Sally. I've already hitched the mules to the small wagon, as you see. And I'm sure I can find the picture place. I saw it yesterday when I went with Jimmy to buy provisions."

"But in a strange town, and frontier, too!" Mrs. Reed's broad motherly face looked doubtful.

"Pa says Denver's settled now," declared Tom, trying to cram all his biscuit into his mouth at once.

"I'd wait for Jimmy if it wasn't for those clouds coming up," said Ma worriedly. "But good pictures can't be made unless the sun shines."

Aunt Sally folded her lips in a prim, severe line. "I'm sure *we're* going to need every cent we have to keep clothes on our backs, what with setting up housekeeping and all. To my notion it's a poor time to spend money on pictures."

Ma's chin trembled just a trifle and she said very fast, "No telling when we'll ever see a settlement again and I want the children's grandparents to have something to remember them by!" She talked as though they might never come back from over the mountains!

Aunt Sally and Mrs. Reed went off to get dinner for their own children. Danny was the only one of the Crawfords who displayed any interest in eating. Margie and Tom were so excited they had hard work to finish their meal.

"What's it feel like when they take your picture?" mumbled Tom easing down the last bite with a gulp of milk.

"Hurry, son! Wash your face! Margie, put on your buff muslin and you may wear your gold locket that's in the top of the trunk. Danny child, come here to me."

"What does a picture feel like?" persisted Tom, dipping a finger in the water and wetting a narrow streak on his forehead, then whisking the towel at a great rate so Ma wouldn't notice.

"Mercy me! We've no time to dawdle!" cried Mrs. Crawford. "Your clean shirt, son!"

At last they were ready. Flushed and breathless, they tumbled into the wagon and Margie held Danny on her lap. Ma caught up the reins and flapped them over the dusty backs of the mules.

"Get up, Jack! Get up, Joe!"

"Keep the puppy so he won't follow, will you, Stowell?" yelled Tom.

The wheels joggled over ruts. The team turned into the main road, heading for town at a lazy trot. Ma flicked them with the whip and they smartened their pace. They soon began to pass log shacks, neat frame houses, and here and there a picket fence. Dogs rushed out to bark at them. The houses became thicker and thicker. Many were of brick,

crowned with square cupolas and fronted with hopeful rows of cottonwood saplings.

Tom and Margie, who had seen nothing but prairie for days upon end, thought Denver City monstrous large. They felt important riding on the high seat with Ma, and sat very straight, gazing in awe at the tall, narrow, brick store buildings wedged in rows opposite each other. Even the mules stepped cockily, flopping their ears at the carriages that rattled by, and snorting in pretended alarm at a string of freight wagons.

"Easy, boys!" Ma tightened the reins.

Margie's alert eyes peered out from the blue tunnel of her sunbonnet. "Danny," she exclaimed, "I *wish* you'd sit still so I can see the sights!"

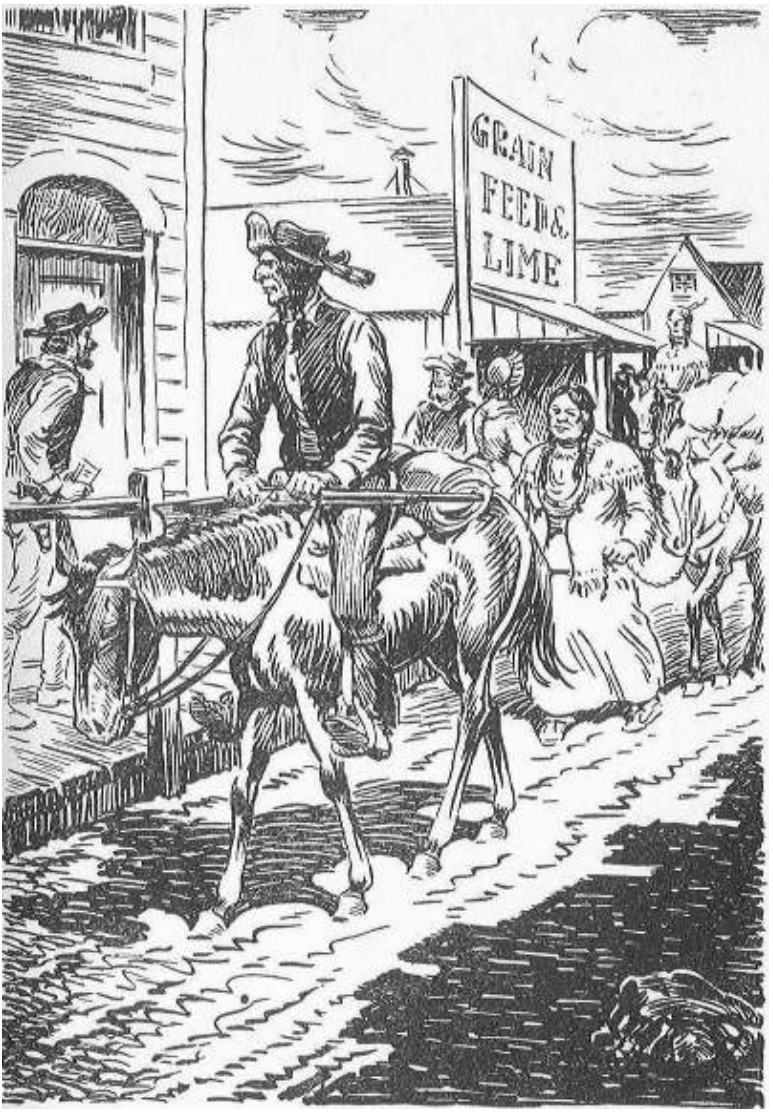
There were all kinds of people hustling along the board-walks: smoothly dressed city folk; miners in wool shirts and heavy boots; mule skinners in sweaty galluses.

"Oh, look, Ma!" cried Tom, pointing. "There's Indians!"

Margie turned to stare at the little band of mild-appearing Indians who trailed down the street. The men rode horses while the women traipsed cheerfully behind, leading ponies loaded with buckskin. Some wore bright blankets and others funny combinations of white people's clothes. Nobody paid them much attention.

"Do you s'pose they're Utes?" whispered Tom.

"If they are they don't look scary," said Margie, and found them far less interesting than a hairdresser's sign which advertised, "CHIGNONS, WATER CURLS, FRISETTES,



The men rode horses while the squaws traipsed cheerfully behind

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SWITCHES AND CURLS." She did wish she had curls!

Ma turned up a side street where the constant prairie wind whisked dust into their faces. "Now remember," she admonished, nodding with such vigor that the brown roses on her small ribboned bonnet jiggled, "when the man takes your pictures, look pleasant!"

"Yes'm!" chorused Margie and Tom, while Danny quit wriggling and clung to his sister, knowing that something very solemn was about to happen and not sure that he'd like it.

"And don't move an eyelash!"

"No'm."

"Here we are!"

Ma hitched the team in front of a dingy structure that bore a sign in weathered black letters, CLEE MORGAN, TRADER. In one corner of the fly-specked window was the additional information, BENJ. HUMKINS, FERROTYPE ARTIST. Ma marshaled her wide-eyed family to the door. With her hand on the knob she gave them final instructions: "Tom, for pity sake don't gawp! Margie, take off your sunbonnet and let me see if your hair's smooth. Danny, you musn't scratch those mosquito bites. And whatever else you do, children, try to look a credit to the family!"

They stood there half fearful to enter, feeling the pleasant warmth of the June sunshine, not knowing what waited for them inside. Ma swung open the door and they edged in. At first they couldn't see a soul. After the brilliance of out-of-doors the room seemed full of shadows. They stared

at the wooden counter and the shelves piled with a hodge-podge of blankets, hides, dusty bolts of calico, shiny trinkets, beads, boxes of cartridge shells, skinning knives, sacks of sugar. Then they saw a gaunt, black-bearded man seated cross-legged on a buffalo robe. He was making something from white buckskin, slashing at it with a gleaming knife. Scraps littered the dirty floor.

"Mr. Humkins?" quavered Ma, holding very tightly to Danny.

The man gave them a surly look and jerked his head toward the far end of the room, which was partitioned off by a couple of blankets hung across a pole.

A thin young fellow in threadbare coat immediately appeared from behind the blankets. "Ah yes, indeed!" He coughed politely, rubbing his hands in the eager manner of one who didn't have too many customers. "Come in! Come in!"

They stepped into the improvised studio, which had one ordinary window and one window in the roof.

"—a tintype apiece to send to their grandparents," Ma was explaining in a fluttery voice. "And could you make them right away? You see, we're going across the range."

"Across the range!" No wonder he was surprised. He soon knew they were from Missouri and were camping on Cherry Creek, and he acted so friendly that the family began to feel more at ease. After fussing over a big black box on a stand, he arranged a seat facing it.

"Now!" he said. "Who's first?"

Tom marched manfully to the seat

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Since Margie was the oldest, she started for the seat with fast-beating heart. At that moment loud jabbering and grunting could be heard in the trader's store.

Tom peeked through the crack of the curtains. "It's those Indians! Great geranium! You reckon they follered us?"

Margie darted to look.

"Don't mind them," said Mr. Humkins. "Just a little band of Arapahoes come to swap." He lowered his voice confidentially. "They won't venture in here for they're afraid of the camera. Morgan's lived with Indians so much he's about like them. He's very reasonable with the rent. Very! But most peculiar. That's his boy there—the tall one. Half Indian."

"Margie—" Ma reminded.

"Yes'm." The girl sat in the seat and let Mr. Humkins adjust a stiff metal brace to the back of her head. She couldn't have wriggled if she'd wanted to. The artist stuck his head under a black cloth and popped it out again.

"Now, you must be very still, or the picture will show a girl with half a dozen eyes and any number of fingers. Ah yes, indeed! And you want your mouth to be pretty. Say *besom*!"

Margie said *besom*. Mr. Humkins slipped the cap off the round glass front of the camera and began to count. He kept on counting. Margie stared straight ahead, holding her breath. When she'd held it so long she thought she couldn't stand it, he clapped the cap back on and cried, "There! Who's next?"

Tom, not to be outdone by a girl, marched manfully to the seat. “Aw,” he said when the ordeal was over, “I couldn’t feel a thing!”

Danny, fortified by the promise of sugar candy when they reached camp, had his turn.

“Please make two of each,” requested Ma.

Mr. Humkins retired to a cubbyhole to do the developing, and the Crawfords settled down to wait. Danny went to sleep. Margie and Tom amused themselves by looking through a stereoscope at a few dog’s-eared pictures on the table. Tiring of that, they fidgeted and peeped through the curtains.

The Indians wanted to prolong their swapping. They fingered everything. They grunted and chuckled. Grumpily, the trader hurried the business and ordered them to “Git!” He drove them all away except two half-grown boys. One was his own son, according to Mr. Humkins; the other was a smaller lad, darker and stockier. The trader’s black eyes held an odd gleam as he beckoned them to sit close to him on the floor. They squatted obediently, bending their heads to catch his low gutturals and to see what he was doing with his hands.

The room was close and hot. It smelled unbearably of hides and stale tobacco. Ma’s nose wrinkled. “You might open that window, daughter.”

Margie did. A strong gust of wind nearly knocked her down. It whipped across the room, flattening the curtains horizontally, scattering pictures, papers, and scraps of buckskin in every direction. It caught Margie’s blue sun-

bonnet from the peg where she had hung it and sent it sailing through the store to lodge by a molasses keg. Shutting the window with a bang she dived after her bonnet. Whack! She bumped smack into the tall Indian, who had stooped at the same instant to pick up something.

She sat down hard. "Oh!"

The boy rubbed his head. He laughed, a quick flash of white teeth, and handed her the bonnet. Margie, scrambling to her feet, thanked him. She regarded him with interest. He was jolly even if he was an Indian. His clothes were of buckskin, with long fringe decorating the neck and sleeves of the loose overshirt and dangling from the outside of the leggings. Bright beads gleamed on his moccasins. His dark hair, parted in the middle, was braided in two pigtails like a girl's.

The trader snapped out a sharp question. What a disagreeable man he was! The boy answered with a nod and a few rapid words. Hastily he tucked something in his belt; then he and his companion vanished through the door.

Margie went back to the little room. By and by Mr. Humkins came out of his cubbyhole with the finished tintypes.

"Did I look like that?" she wondered, gazing over Ma's arm at the solemn young face printed on the stiff black metal.

Ma hugged her and Tom and Danny all together and got out some money from her bag to pay the artist.

Glancing about for something in which to wrap the pic-

tures, he spied a scrap of buckskin under the table where the wind had blown it. “Not very clean,” he observed. “Morgan has been doing some figuring on it. But ‘tis soft and may serve better than paper.”

The Crawfords lost no time heading home. Before they reached Cherry Creek Pa met them on horseback. He rode up with a great dash and clatter, as straight as a cavalryman in his saddle, his blue eyes a-twinkle. Spy, the black silky-haired shepherd dog that had been with him all day helping drive the cattle, leaped to greet the mules.

“Pa!” shouted Tom. “We—”

“Oh, Jimmy—” Ma began in a flurry to tell him.

“Aha! Aha!” he cried with mock severity, turning his horse and traveling alongside them. “So the minute I’m gone, you’re off to the city! Hute and Henry were a-mind to send a scouting party after you, but I told them you’d show up come supper time.”

“Jimmy, I had their pictures made!”

“Ay Jonathan!”

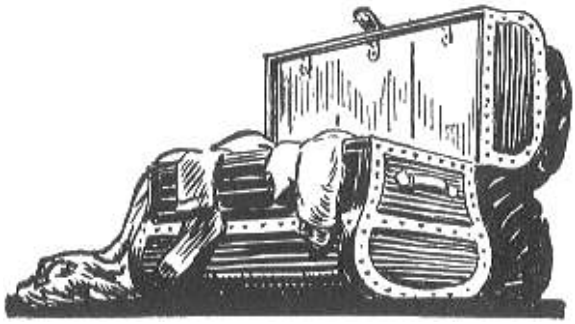
Ma had him stop then and there to look at them. He acted as pleased as could be and everyone tried to talk at once.

When they got to camp Ma straightway wrote a letter to her parents in Missouri. She made a neat packet of one set of the pictures, which with the letter she sent to the postoffice by Hute Richardson. The remaining pictures she wrapped in the rest of the buckskin and laid carefully away in the tray of the little tin trunk in the wagon.

The new cows had been put with the other cattle in a near-by corral. Everyone went to bed soon after supper. Once in the night Spy barked, but Pa, supposing she had heard some late traveler along the road, called her to the tent and made her be quiet.

It seemed no time at all till he was shouting, “Roll out, everybody!” Light was beginning to show in the east. Birds were singing in the cottonwoods. Breakfast was cooking over the crackling fires. Before the sun was up the tents were down. Margie climbed into the smaller wagon to pack the bedding.

“Ma! Come quick!” Her startled exclamation brought everybody running. “The trunk’s wide open and our pictures are gone!”



Chapter Two

THE TOP OF THE WORLD

"Gone! The pictures! Nonsense!" Ma climbed into the wagon. There was the trunk wide open and nothing apparently disturbed in the neatly packed tray. But the pictures were gone!

"Which one of you young ones has been meddling?" she asked crossly.

"Not me!"

"Nor me!"

"'Twasn't us, Aunt Maggie!"

"Oh Ma," cried Margie, "remember how Spy barked in the night? D'you reckon—?"

"I betcha some thief sneaked in and stole 'em!" chattered Tom.

Ma rummaged through the tray. Then she turned everything upside down again, bound to unearth the tintypes whether or no.

"Sure you put 'em in here?" Pa wanted to know.

"Of course I did!" Ma was vastly put out.

"Miss anything else?"

Ma shook her head. "I can't for the life of me see—"

"—why anyone would steal our pictures!" broke in Tom, his hair standing up every direction because Ma had been too busy to make him comb it. "Great geranium! I'd think a thief would've stole the money!"

"Or my gold locket," nodded Margie.

"Someone's been prowlin' around, all right," reported Hute. "There's blurry tracks in the sand, but the horses have tromped over 'em. Can't tell nothin'."

"I'll warrant it was some scoundrel after money and he got the pictures by mistake," growled Pa. "Just goes to show I ought to paid attention to the dog!"

"No use to waste any more time," said Aunt Sally brusquely. "What can't be cured must be endured. There's a heap more important things than pictures. I say we'd better be off before the sun gets blistering hot."

Ma could not be reconciled to the loss of the precious tintypes, and Margie and Tom went about with long faces. But the packing must be finished. There were a thousand things to do! At last the teams were harnessed and the wagons loaded.

"All aboard!" sang out Pa.

The Yankees and Crawfords would travel the same road that day, but the Reeds would turn south. The women kissed each other a tearful good-by. Little Janey clung to Margie desperately.

"I'll miss you dreadful!" she sobbed.

The wagons rumbled out of the camp ground together. Margie looked back at the deserted grove. How lonesome it seemed with the tents down and the fires quenched! At the fork of the roads the Reeds pulled out of the train. "Good-by!" everyone shouted. "Good luck!" The children called and waved till the green-brown prairie rose up be-

tween them.

Tom wanted to ride with Stowell, so Mary Ann climbed into the Crawford wagon, and she and Margie sat holding hands. Now that parting was so near it seemed as if they ought to talk about important things. But they could think of only commonplaces:

"There goes a rabbit."

"There's a burrowing owl."

"We're coming to a ranch."

The teams jogged along over a succession of low sandy hills. Mary Ann said, "We ought to have something to remember each other by. You give me a lock of your hair and I'll give you one of mine, and we'll keep them always as mementos."

The exchange was made with the aid of Ma's scissors. Margie, casting about for a place to put her memento, thought of her sketch book. It was a very special sketch book with a cross-stitched linen cover and a pocket in the back in which she kept her chiefest treasure, a red pencil. Pa and Ma had given her the book and pencil for her last birthday.

"Let's look at your drawings," urged Mary Ann.

Tenderly Margie turned the pages. More than half of them were already full. Then she said, "When I learn to paint"

"You ought to have lessons," interrupted her cousin with a superior nod. "How are you ever going to learn anything away off with the savages?"

"I don't know." Margie's chin lifted. "But I'll learn some way." She didn't want Mary Ann to see how she had worried

over that same question herself. If Pa hadn't taken a notion to come to Colorado Territory, he'd promised she could have painting lessons from Jody Havely in Sedalia. Jody could make all kinds of pictures—peaches spilled on a table, puppies in a basket, purple pansies.

Margie wanted to paint flowers and sunsets. Sometimes she wanted to so badly she ached inside. Giving up those lessons had been the hardest thing about coming West, though she'd resolved not to let Pa and Ma know.

She put her sketch book away in the little blue bag where she kept it. Some day she would paint pictures! Maybe she'd find the shining place where old timers said the rocks were solid gold and silver. Then she'd be rich enough to send and buy a whole bunch of brushes and a color box with all the colors in the rainbow. And if Pa and Ma were willing she could pay her fare back to Missouri where Jody could teach her.

She poked out her head from under the canvas side flap of the wagon to peer at the mountains. Yonder they stretched along the western horizon as far as eye could reach.

"Can you see any shine to them?" she asked earnestly.

"No, I can't," said her cousin. "Only those specks of snow on the peaks."

"Maybe they'll shine on the other side. Anyway I'm going to keep watching."

That night the travelers made their last camp together in the shadow of Table Mountain near the town of Golden. They could look straight up the wrinkled flanks of the foot-

hills.

"Shucks," commented Tom, "the mountains ain't as big as I thought they'd be!"

Hute Richardson roared with laughter. "Wait till you start climbin' 'em, young fellow," he advised.

In the morning when it came time to start Ma flung her arms around Aunt Sally and hid her face. Even Aunt Sally cried, though she pretended she'd got ashes in her eyes. No telling when any of them would ever see each other again! Margie hugged Mary Ann tight. In a burst of generosity Stowell gave Tom his Jew's harp, which had been the envy of the younger boy all the way across the plains. "Here, take it!" he said gruffly. "I'm tired playin' it anyhow."

The Yankees turned left into the Mount Vernon road, which would bring them to Bergen Park and Empire.

"Good-by!" they called. "Good-by!"

Then the Crawfords drove through Golden, turning right to follow along the base of the range for a mile or so. A lump as big as a walnut lodged in Margie's throat. Leaving the other wagons was almost worse than leaving the farm in Missouri, she reflected. She didn't mind sleeping on the ground and picking ants out of the sugar if Mary Ann and Janey had to do it too. And she could laugh at prickly pear in her shoes and sun blisters on her nose just to prove to Stowell that she wasn't any tenderfoot. But now—

The wheels creaked and the harness jangled. Pa drove the mule team to the lighter covered wagon while Uncle Henry drove four horses to the freight outfit. Hute rode Chief,

herding the thirty cows and the loose horses behind the plodding procession. Ma and Danny sat on the high board seat with Pa. Tom and Margie perched on the bedroll in the back. There wasn't much room to tuck in their feet what with being squeezed among sacks of flour and sugar, Missouri hams, the tin trunk, Ma's small brown rocking chair, the feather tick, Tobe and Ponto, and whatever else Pa hadn't been able to get into the freight wagon.

Tom plunk-plunked on the Jew's harp. Margie glanced at him. Maybe he felt as lonesome as she did. After all, they could have a lot of fun together. And there was the rest of the family and Hute and Uncle Henry. It wasn't any use to look back and wish for things. She straightened her shoulders resolutely.

"Who knows?" she exclaimed. "Maybe we'll have as grand adventures as Robinson Crusoe!"

She hung out of the wagon as far as she dared and was first to spy the gash in the ridge where the road bent west. Straight into the mountains!

"Yep," said Pa, "Golden Gate Canyon. Shortest way to Blackhawk, Rollinsville, and the top of the Divide."

He had to pay the tollkeeper who came out of a house to count their teams and stock. Then he headed Jack and Joe into the deeply-rutted, narrow shelf road.

"Jimmy," gasped Ma, "it's steep as the roof of a house! We'll never pull it!"

Pa gave Jack, the right mule, a light reminder with the whip. "Why, Maggie, this here's just a common hill. Wait

till you see some real grades."

Before the day was over even Pa had to admit that the road was "a leetle mite abrupt." The teams dripped sweat, and the fat cows Hute was driving wheezed along with their tongues out. The family had to walk to lighten the load. Tobe, the big gray cat, yowled his objections to leaving his comfortable spot on the bedroll.

"I s'pose you think you own this wagon," snorted Tom, "but you can walk as well as any of us. So there!"

Tobe had no intention of walking. Before he had come to live with the Crawfords he had belonged to a man who had taught him to ride on the backs of his farm mules. He leaped to a rock, watched his chance, and from there sprang onto Hute's horse just behind the saddle. The saddle blanket was long enough that he could catch an easy claw hold. Chief, the horse, jumped, but he was too hot to object much. Hute laughed and let the big cat be. After that Tobe often rode horseback, and Chief grew used to him and never flicked an ear.

When the teams stopped to rest, Tom and Margie blocked the wheels so the wagons would not slide back. The stream which trickled through the canyon bed was hardly worth looking at now, but Pa pointed out deep carved holes in the banks, and logs jammed up against rocks, and said he'd hate to be here in a cloudburst or a spring freshet. Chokecherry bushes showed fragrant creamy bloom on the south slopes. Margie took deep delicious breaths of sweetness. She found bluebells, wild roses, and dozens of flowers she didn't know.

He sprang onto Hut's horse

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She also discovered that many rocks did shine in the sunlight, though Pa said there was no silver or gold in them. Only mica, or fools' gold. Sometimes the canyon walls grew so steep she marveled how the pine trees could hold on.

Peggy's colt whickered and cut capers, and its mother whinnied anxious precautions. Spy, feeling responsibility for everything, trotted back and forth between the teams and the cows and roly-poly Ponto who *would* chase chipmunks and dig for woodchucks.

Toward night the road came out in a grassy meadow where Pa pitched the tent and let the stock feed. Margie fell asleep hearing the strange sound of the wind through the pines. "Almost like soft singing," she thought drowsily. Cherry Creek Camp, Denver, and the lost tintypes seemed a long, long way off.

The next day the road climbed steadily upward through country that grew more open. Noisy little streams, clear as crystal, romped down the cracks between the hills. How different, thought Margie, from the tepid sluggish Flat Creek in Missouri! Different, too, from the lazy meandering Cherry Creek of the plains.

"Oh, can't we go wading?" begged Tom and Danny.

Ma shook her head. "That water's like ice."

They began to travel through groves of quaking aspens whose leaves made a gentle rustle in the breeze. The cows snatched bites of grass as Hute prodded them along. Margie and Tom explored while the teams toiled slowly up the grade.

"How straight and white the aspen trunks are!" said the girl. "They look like mushroom stems. If I were a giant I'd pick some."

"Listen!" hushed Tom. "What's that?"

T-um—t-um—t-um—

A low thrumming noise like the distant muffled beat of a drum came to their alert ears. Cautiously they pushed through the brush.

"Look!" whispered Margie. "It's a gray bird as big as a chicken walking along that log. And every time he swells out those yellow spots on his neck he makes a noise."

"He's strutting," giggled Tom, "just like a turkey cock!"

Pa said the bird must be a grouse.

In the cool recesses in the trees Margie found dainty blue and white flowers on long slender stems. They smelled as sweet as the syringas that used to grow at home. She asked a passing freighter what they were.

"Them's columbines!" he told her.

Occasionally the Crawfords passed a diggings—a gray dump of rock with a miner's shack beside it. The third night they reached Rollinsville, which was only a handful of cabins. Pa found a man who had a garden. He bought some pieplant which Ma cooked into sauce. How good it tasted! And what appetites they had!

"I reckon we'll soon be beyond pieplant and everything else," sighed Ma.

Pa was impatient to reach the pass. The second day following, they came to Yankee Doodle Lake where the road

builders were camped. The lake was a deep round pocket in the rocks, and the wind lapped at the water, which looked green and cold. Above towered the last steep ascent of the range. The massive granite backbone of the continent, grim, forbidding, and barren of trees.

"Great geranium!" said Tom, awed. "D'you reckon we'll ever get over that, Margie?"

"Big enough for you?" teased Hute.

Pa was disappointed to learn that the pass was not yet open to travel, though forty men were hard at work. He and Hute and Uncle Henry pitched in to help the road crew. Luckily there was a cabin in which the family could have shelter, and Mr. Rollins offered them the hospitality of the camp. "I think in a day or two you can make the Big Hill," he told Pa. "We'll soon have some of those rocks out of the way and I'll pull you over with my oxen. Meanwhile, make yourselves comfortable."

"Comfortable!" grumbled Tom. "Huh! What's he call comfortable, I'd like to know! The mosquitoes are nearly eatin' me up!"

Danny's face was all red and bumpy. No wonder he was cross! The mosquitoes came in hordes night and day. Not even a heavy smudge affected them. The only way to find relief was to stand in the strong wind.

"Doesn't the wind ever stop?" asked Tom.

"Not up here, sonny," said a whiskered workman. "By jing, when it gits tired blowin' one direction it switches around and blows t'other. This here's jest a mild breeze, but

up there on the Big Hill it'll turn you wrong side out if you ain't keerful."

Everywhere a person stepped, the ground was damp and spongy. Dozens of miniature rivers trickled down from the snowbanks that hung over the ridge in great white scallops. Margie and Tom had a lively snowball fight.

"Whew! I—I'm all—out of breath!" panted Tom, dropping down on a rock.

Margie's head felt giddy and her heart was galloping against her ribs. "Reckon—it's—the altitude," she gasped. "Pa says the air's—awful—thin."

While she rested she gazed around her with interest. Back in Missouri it was already hot weather, and down on the plains it was summer, but here it was barely spring. Dozens of little silver-green leaves thrust up through the black soil like rabbits' ears. White snow lilies and creamy globe flowers bloomed everywhere. Pussywillows were just out—tiny fluffs of gray on bushes only a foot high.

"Wonder why the willows don't grow any taller?"

"Don't look to me as if they had much chance," said Tom. "Wind and snow and everything. Even the pine trees are runty and one-sided. Some of 'em crawl right on the ground."

"Poor things!" Margie remembered the tall proud evergreens of the lower hills.

On the third day a storm was brewing. A damp chill was in the air and thunderheads began rolling up. Pa determined to get over the range before the rain should break. "The road

isn't so bad," he assured Ma. "It's tolerable rough and there's a few rocks, but it'll be worse if it's wet."

"Road!" Ma said eloquently.

Pa grinned. "We'll take the small wagon first. Then the freight. Then the cattle. We'll all be over the pass and down to timberline and shelter before the clouds open up."

Ma didn't say another word as she helped Pa pack the things they had been using and rope the load as securely as possible. Margie bundled Danny into his jacket, buttoned her own brown serge coat higher under her chin. They all climbed into the wagon and said good-by to Yankee Doodle Lake. "Hold tight!" warned Ma.

The mules had their noses pointed straight for the roiled gray sky and they had to dig in their hoofs and cling like flies to the slanting earth.

"Anyhow," declared Margie, "I'd as soon fall off a mountain as stay back there with the mosquitoes!"

They reached the bad stretch where Mr. Rollins' crew was working. Hute and Uncle Henry who had already managed to get the freight wagon this far were waiting here to help Pa.

"Better get out now," he told the family. The calmness of his voice and the steady grip of his hands on the reins made his family think he was used to crossing the Continental Divide every day. "Maggie, you and the children climb on ahead and we'll join you before you can say Jack Robinson!"

"Jimmy, be careful!" Ma begged.

She and Margie each took one of Danny's hands and got a

fair distance before they had to sit down to rest. Tom struggled with Tobe. Ponto was obliged to use his own fat legs. Spy stayed with the teams. Ma didn't rest long. "We've got to keep going," she said. They toiled a few feet, fought for breath, toiled on. Margie thought she never would get her chest full of air again. She was beginning to feel dizzy and her ears roared. Back yonder what a time the men were having! Mr. Rollins had hitched two yoke of oxen to the small wagon, and Pa had hitched the mules and two teams of horses in front of them. The rocks in the way seemed as big as houses.

Fascinated, the family huddled on the hill to watch the mighty struggle. They heard the shouts of the men and the grunts of the straining animals. The wagon was standing almost on end.

"It's goin' to tip over!" screeched Tom.

"*Jimmy!*" cried Ma.

But the wagon did not tip over though it seemed at any moment it must. The men put big blocks of wood back of the wheels so the animals could rest a minute. A long rumble of thunder echoed down the ridge. Ma stiffened. She turned her face to the mountain.

"Come! We've got to get on!"

In short puffing jerks they advanced. Sometimes they crawled on hands and knees, boosting Danny along the best they could. The wind grew worse. It had a weird whistle as it cut past the bare granite.

"Hurry!"

They tried to. Their legs felt like wood. *Crash!* The thunder was so loud it nearly split their ears. Margie was afraid the whole sky was coming down! Great drops of rain splattered on the rocks. It turned to sleet. Danny began to cry when hard pellets hit his face.

"What *shall* we do?" Ma cast about for some place to find shelter.

By this time they had reached the top where the ground no longer tipped under them. They started down the other slope, so blinded by the driving storm that they could hardly walk.

"Ma, here's something—" Margie had to shout to make herself heard. Her feet had become tangled in an old piece of saddle blanket. Evidently she had happened on an abandoned road camp, for there were rocks blackened with fire, and there was a broken piece of running gear. What luck to find that blanket!

Ma seized it. "Here! Under this!"

They all hunched as close together as they could, pulling the cover over their heads. Tobe and Ponto squeezed in too. The wind increased in fury. Hail rattled on the granite. This wasn't a Missouri storm. It was a howling mountain blizzard. Not a tree or even a bush to break the terrific force of the gale.

Frightened, they clung to their frayed shelter. Chunks of ice as big as hens' eggs bounced on the ground and batted on the blanket. They stung through and hurt. White swordpoints of lightning played on the rocks and thunder cannonaded from the peaks. How cramped and cold everyone was. And

wet, too, where the water soaked through. Ponto whined. Tobe hissed and growled.

As abruptly as the storm had begun it ceased. They could hear it rumbling away along the divide. Margie poked her head out. “Well, did you ever! The sun’s shining!”

“G—g—great geranium!” Tom’s teeth were chattering.

“Wh—where’s the bottom of the mountain?”

“It’s covered with fog,” said Margie.

“We’re above the clouds,” said Ma. “Thank goodness we’re still alive! I hope your pa ‘ll come and find us pretty soon.”

“Above the clouds! Sa-ay—” Tom stood up, dropping the disgusted Tobe on a pile of hailstones. “It’s just like being on a desert island, only it’s awful cold.”

“We’re on the west slope now!” exclaimed his sister, whose eager curiosity could not be extinguished even by a blizzard on top of the world. “I wish I could see what’s under those clouds! What *do* you reckon we’ll find down there?”

Chapter Three

A WARNING

Ma and the children had to walk to keep from freezing. They started along the west trail, shivering in the wind that cut through their wet clothes like a knife. It was no more than a trail, though in some places rocks had been rolled aside, and farther down some of the timber that was beginning to show in dark spots through the clouds had been chopped out.

"Brrrr!" Tom slapped his arms around his shoulders. "Wisht—"

What he wished was never known, for at that moment came a deep familiar call: "Hooooooo—oo!"

It was Pa! Here came the mules bobbing over the skyline, and behind them the wagon. Pa was walking on the upper side of the team, guiding them with the reins. Hute Richardson was half a dozen strides ahead. The faces of both men lighted up with relief when they saw the family all safe and sound. And wasn't the family thankful to see them!

"Jimmy, you did get the wagon up!" marveled Ma.

"Ay Jonathan!" Pa was blowing as hard as the mules. His hat dripped water and his shoulders were streaked with rain. "Never knowed a storm could come so fast!"

Margie almost wanted to hug good old Jack and Joe who looked comically surprised to find themselves away up here! And she did pat the little wagon with its sway-backed white

cover, the wagon that had been house and home for so long. "Where's Uncle Henry?" she asked.

"Took the extra teams back," Hute told her. "We didn't need 'em on the last lap. Goin' to hitch 'em to the freight."

"Let's get down where there's some wood and build a fire!" shivered Tom. "I'm 'most froze."

"Be at timberline in three shakes now," promised Pa in the hearty tone he always used when he could see the family was mighty tired. He took a moment to study the steep rocky descent. "Safer, I reckon, for you-all to keep walkin'."

Ma was white around the mouth. "I declare to goodness, Jimmy Crawford, I've walked and carried this baby over most of the Rocky Mountains today and I intend to ride the rest of the way!" She set her foot on the hub and got into the wagon.

Pa shot a keen look at her and got into the wagon himself. "Climb was too much for you, Maggie!"

"I'm all right." Ma was bound not to give in. "But I aim to ride a piece."

"Ay, we'll make it. Giddap, boys!"

So Pa drove down the Continental Divide where no wagon had ever gone before and no wagon was ever supposed to go. Small Danny rode with Ma, but Tom and Margie scrambled over the rocks with Hute. Lots of places they had to hang onto the upper side of the wagon to keep it from tipping over. *Bumpity bang! Jolt! Cre-ea-eak!* How the wooden joints protested and how the mules grunted!

As the sun melted the clouds from the lowland, Margie

had her first glimpse of Middle Park. What a vast sweep of country! Not a house anywhere. Not even a friendly curl of smoke. Not a fence or a plowed meadow. Black forests and great wild valley and on beyond—more mountains. She felt a quick tug of lonesomeness. Would this strange new West ever be like home?

She didn't have the time to be lonesome long. *Spang! Clatter!* went the mules' hooves down a perpendicular break of rock.

"Wope! Wope!" cried Hute. "Hold 'er!"

Pa yanked on the lines just in time to keep the front wheels from bouncing over. They'd have surely been smashed. Hute brought rocks to fill the hole. One of them rolled down, hit Jack's heel, and made him kick. The sharp hoof laid open a wide gash across Hute's mouth. He staggered back and fell.

"Oh! Oh!" Margie ran to him.

Pa had to let the wagon over the drop before he could come. Ma jumped out too, and between them they tried to stop the bleeding. Luckily, they had reached the edge of timber and could make camp right there. "Get a fire!" ordered Pa. No joke to start a fire with wet wood. The frightened children scurried around, found dry limbs and cones under some thick branches, and finally got a blaze.

Hute's jaw was still bleeding. Pa looked gray and stern, and Ma was doing everything she knew. Silently Tom and Margie unhitched the mules, picketing them where they could find some feed. They got snow from a snowbank to

melt for water, then hovered by the fire and dried their clothes and Danny's. How cold it was! They could get only one side warm at a time.

It was nearly dark before Hute's jaw quit bleeding. He lay in a blanket pretty well done up. Ma went right to bed. The hard climb, the high altitude, and Hute's accident had been more than she could stand.

"You'll have to tend to things, daughter."

"'Course!"

Margie heated a rock for Ma's feet and made her a steaming cup of coffee. Footsore and feeling empty and a trifle dizzy herself, she shouldered her responsibilities pluckily. Supper to get. And then more beds to make. There'd be no tent to sleep in tonight. The tent was in the freight wagon. Pa and Tom were hunting firewood.

All at once there was a loud rattling of stones up on the ridge. To the surprise of everyone, here came Uncle Henry riding Chief and herding the cows and extra horses. He rode up to the fire. "Thought I better bring the critters over. Feed's pretty scarce around the lake—hullo! What's the matter? Well I be jiggered!" He unsaddled, picketed his horse, and pitched right in to help get supper.

He stayed all night and didn't tell them about the freight wagon till morning. By that time Hute was able to smile on the side of his mouth that wasn't bandaged and declared he was all right, though he could hardly manage any breakfast. Ma, on the other hand, felt worse and couldn't sit up without getting faint.

"Altitude," said Pa, beside himself with worry. "Got to get her down."

"Looks as if you can make it from here without much trouble," encouraged Hute. "You go on. Me and Henry'll go back and fetch the freight."

"Jim, the freight's stuck in the rocks," frowned Uncle Henry, hating like everything to tell his brother. "Rollins' crew and I tried to get it out yesterday, but its lodged pretty dog-goned deep and no tellin'—"

"We'll git it, Jim old boy! Leave it to us!" Hute put a hand on Pa's shoulder. "You got to go on down."

"Reckon you can manage?"

"Go 'long!" What a friend, that lanky young Missourian! "We'll catch up with you tomorrow or next day."

It seemed the only thing to do. "Think you can drive the stock, son?" Pa asked Tom gravely.

"Betcha!" The boy swelled with importance. "Me and Chief can do it. Chief bites their backs when they don't behave."

How Pa ever succeeded in getting the wagon down that mountain was more than Margie could have told. Ma, who had to lie on the bed in the back, said it was a wonder any of them ever reached Middle Park alive. And Pa said, "I wouldn't trade those mules for their weight in gold! No sir-ree!"

By late afternoon the wagon wheels were rolling through the soft grass of the valley land. In the warm mellow sunshine the country looked far different from the glimpses they

had had through the gray storm clouds yesterday. It was nicer than Margie had thought it would be. “Oh,” she cried as the wild meadow opened to her view, “just see the blue flowers!”

“I do believe they’re flags,” said Ma, who felt able now to sit on the seat with Pa. Her tired shoulders straightened. “The whole flat’s covered with them.”

“Wouldn’t this be a nice place for a house!” exclaimed Margie.

From then on, she and Danny played a game. They pretended they were going to build a lot of houses and tried to see how many spots they could find. “There by that tree!”

“Yonder on that little knoll!”

“Right at the edge of the creek so water’d be handy—”

“Pa,” she suggested, “why couldn’t we really build a house and live right here somewhere?”

“I believe this’d be good farm land,” said Ma with an anxious side look at her husband. “Jimmy, do we have to go any farther? Couldn’t we stop here, sure enough?”

“Why Maggie honey, this can’t hold a candle to what we’ll find yonder—I’ll warrant!” He waved an arm toward the west—toward those hump shouldered gray hills and that line of mountains, purple against the gold of the setting sun.

More mountains! Oh, dear! thought Margie. Would Pa have them cross another awful divide like Rollins Pass? There was only one consoling idea. Maybe some of those mountains would be the Shining Ones, shining with honest-to-goodness gold.

Pa acted as if he'd clean forgot about pitching camp and intended to drive all the way to that far range tonight. He didn't seem to see that the sky had changed from gold to crimson, from crimson to pale pink, and that dusk was settling down in the meadow. He was saying: "Ay Jonathan! I wouldn't be surprised if a railroad was built into this country some day."

"Never!" declared Ma. "Why Jimmy, how can you talk so? You know no train could ever climb what we've climbed!"

Just then Tom spurted alongside on his horse. "Say, aren't we never goin' to eat?" he asked. "The cows are hittin' for that meadow. I can't drive 'em!"

"Let 'em be!" said Pa. "Here's where we stop. Right under this whopping spruce tree. Whoa, boys! Whoa!"

The wagon bumped across a log, grated sideways over a rock, and groaned to a stop a few feet from the bank of a dashing, foaming creek. They all clambered out. Ma still looked peaked, but she wouldn't be waited on tonight and took charge of making camp, while Pa unharnessed and picketed the mules.

"Gagy!" wailed Danny. It had been a long, weary day for the little fellow.

"Yes, son, you shall have gravy," promised Ma, "soon as ever we can get a fire. Margie, you fetch some wood and I'll get out the frying pan."

Margie hurried to break dry pitchy limbs from an old fallen log. Ponto romped around her. He discovered a mouse hole and set up an excited barking. Spy stood nervously

whiffing the air. The girl dumped an armload of sticks on the ground and stooped to rumple the white ruff on the back of the dog's neck.

"What's the matter, Spy?"

The dog wagged her tail and whined. Margie stood on a tree root to try to peer over the rank growth of bushes. The light was dimming so fast that the meadow looked gray. A nighthawk, clipping through the twilight on keen curved wings, screeched a harsh cry.

"I don't see a thing to be scared of," said the girl. Nevertheless a feeling of uneasiness crept upon her. It was good to hear Pa jangling the harness as he hung it in a tree for the night, good to hear the contented snorts of the mules as they rolled in the lush grass.

"Daughter!"

"Coming, Ma."

"Lay the fire. Then run and fetch a pail of water from the creek. Don't fall in!"

Margie knelt to strike a match. The strong sulphur fumes made her cough, but the dry spruce needles blazed immediately. On top of these she placed twigs and sticks and soon had a good bed of coals for the frying pan.

Spy accompanied her to the creek standing beside her stiff-legged and wary, while the girl dipped the water. Margie couldn't help glancing apprehensively over her shoulder as she panted back into the circle of firelight. "Pa, there's something—"

Tom tumbled into camp, dragging his saddle behind him.

"The horses are actin' funny, Pa. Great geranium, do you s'pose it's Indians?"

"Indians!" Ma, who was mixing flour and water in a cup, looked up, startled.

"Nonsense!" said Pa. "If there's anything in the meadow it's a bear or a coyote." But he set his gun in plain sight against a tree.

"Mercy to goodness!" Ma clattered the tin plates and cups. "It'll be pitch dark before we get our camp made and I aim to be comfortable tonight! Tom, you go with your pa and help him cut a pile of nice soft spruce boughs. Margie, climb into the wagon and hunt out the blankets. Nobody gets a bite to eat till the beds are made."

The baby let out a howl.

"Nobody but Danny," Ma hastened to add.

Though they all were as tired as could be, it was surprising how fast they could work with the smell of venison tickling their nostrils.

"We must have struck a regular old camp ground," said Pa, picking up a long, crudely smoothed stick that was half rotted through. "This looks like a tepee pole. And here's a pile of deer hair where some Indian has been graining buckskin."

"There's a wide trail runs right through the grass yonder," remarked Tom. "I saw it when I picketed Chief."

"Where there's a trail there's travel. I'll warrant everyone who crosses the Park camps right here in this spot."

They made the first bed close under the giant spruce. By

the time Pa and Tom had cut enough small boughs from the thick undergrowth to form a fairly springy mattress when placed row upon row with the furry ends up, Margie had a canvas ready to spread. On top of that she arranged blankets, and last of all the tarpaulin to keep off the heavy dew.

"Now, let's hurry and fix a bed for Pa and me on the other side of the fire," chattered Tom. "Is that all the blankets there are, Sis? I reckon that breeze comes right off the snowbanks. Spy and Tobe'll have to have some cover too. Here, Spy, you can sleep on my saddle blanket."

But the dog, instead of coming to him, rushed into the shadows with a sharp warning bark. Pa snatched up his gun, and just at that moment came a hail through the darkness.

"Hullo, the camp!"

"Hello!" answered Pa.

Something splashed through the creek. The willows parted and a stumpy little old man shuffled into the firelight. Behind him plodded a small mouse-colored burro bearing a canvas-covered pack which rolled gently from side to side.

"Howdy," said the stranger, and seemed mightily embarrassed at the sight of women. He tugged at the brim of his shapeless hat, ducking his head as if trying to hide the round button of his nose in the shrubbery of gray whiskers that matted his chin. "Seen your fire. Allus like to know who's in the country."

"Mighty glad you came!" Pa set down his gun and advanced with outstretched hand. "I'm Crawford. Jim Crawford. Lookin' for good land to homestead. Judge

you're a prospector from the pick and shovel on your pack."

"Yep. Been scratchin' around these here hills considerable," admitted the old man. "Everyone as knows me calls me Pony. Pony Wilson." He surveyed the camp with a pair of keen blue eyes that seemed to take in every detail at once. "Never see a wagon track hereabouts afore!" he ejaculated. "Never reckoned—"

Danny had been sitting on the ground with his tin plate between his legs, busily mopping his bread in his gravy. Now he raised a sudden clamorous howl. The burro had eaten his bread. The donkey, flopping his ears forward, gazed at the squawling baby in mild astonishment.

"Hyar you, Music!" scolded the old man. "Ain't you ashamed o' yourself! Tell the little feller you're sorry!" He stroked the small creature's chin with his horny hand.

"Eee—aw! Eee—aw!" obliged the burro.

Danny stopped in the middle of a howl, his eyes as round as marbles.

"Now, show `em how you can shake hands," ordered the old man.

The burrow gravely proffered one dainty front hoof to his master.

"Oh, will he shake hands with me?" cried the delighted Tom.

"Shore he will!"

Ponto, who had sought refuge under Ma's skirts at the first indication of danger, now grew jealously brave and bounded forward with short vicious yelps. Everybody laughed, and

Ponto lay down with his head between his paws, looking very foolish.

Pony forgot his embarrassment. At Pa's hearty invitation he threw the burro's pack on the grass and accepted the plate which Ma heaped with food. He sat on a log by the fire, eating with his hunting knife. Danny made up with him immediately and insisted on perching on his knee and feeling of his whiskers. This pleased Pony, whose sunbrowned features crinkled. He held the child in the crook of one arm and told him about the fox that lived on the hill and the rabbit that had a hole under a big tree. Now and then he gave the sociable Music a bite of his biscuit.

"Is Pony your real name?" piped Tom, unable longer to smother his curiosity. "I never heard of anyone called Pony. But it's a mighty nice name," he added hastily, catching Ma's eye.

The old man chuckled. "Recollect I used to have another name. Seems like 'twas Elzy. But Pony suits me better. Runty horses is called ponies and I'm sorta runty built, you see. Then I allus liked to run pony races with the Injuns."

Danny had gone sound asleep so Ma bundled him off to bed. While Margie scraped the tin plates and Tom chopped kindling for morning, Pa questioned the visitor about the region to the west.

"The Ute Injuns lives here," Pony told him. "Thar's a big camp of 'em now a little ways on at the sulphur springs. Once in a while the 'Rapahoes sends a war party in to collect a few scalps."

"Thought the Utes stayed at White River reservation most of the time," said Pa.

"Winters," assented Pony. "Summers they come up here just like they used ter, and hunt and fish and fight the 'Rapahoes. By gonny, them two tribes hates each other! You see, a long time ago a Ute brave stole the 'Rapahoe chief's daughter and the 'Rapahoes snuck into the mountains for revenge. They caught the Utes at Grand Lake and drove 'em into the water and drowned a whole passel of 'em. Since then most every year both tribes manages to lift a few scalps. Why, I could tell you—" and he launched into a description of a bloody battle.

"Any white settlers?" Pa interrupted quickly.

"Thar be a ranch or two in the Park and mebby a couple of trappers' cabins along the Grand River. Feller by the name of Byers he's stuck up his claim at them hot sulphur springs, but he's in Denver mostly. Outside of those folks I don't know of no one except the miners at Hahn's Peak, and that's away on beyond."

Margie stopped sloshing the dish water to listen.

"I've heard tell there's a big bend in the Yampa River that's never been explored," Pa went on. "I've a mind to travel down that direction. Know anything about the country?"

"Yampy?" muttered the mountaineer.

"Yes. If it suits me that's where I aim to homestead."

Pony lit his pipe with the end of a burning brand from the fire. He jerked to his feet and stood staring off into the

darkness of the timber. “Wouldn’t go to the Yampy if I was you.”

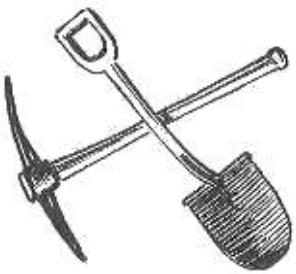
“You been there?”

The prospector nodded slowly. It seemed to Margie there was a flash of fear in his eyes. He drew a breath so sharp it whistled through his teeth. “‘Tain’t safe—that country.”

Pa appeared to grow a head taller. He straightened his shoulders. “Sort of reckon to have a look at it,” he said quietly.

“We’re not afraid of lions or bears or Indians,” put in Tom. “What else is there to be afraid of?”

Pony Wilson made no answer. Doggedly he loaded his pack upon the drowsing Music. “I’ll be gittin’ on,” he mumbled. With a cluck to the burro he stalked out of the firelight. “I’ve warned ye!” he flung back as he disappeared in the shadows. “Keep away from the Yampy!”



Chapter Four

A STRANGE DISCOVERY

"Well!" Tom broke the astonished silence. "Pony needn't to 've been so grumpy! We didn't do anything!"

Margie stood squeezing the dish rag in her hand. "Pa, what did he mean? About the Yampa?"

Pa laughed. But he sounded provoked instead of amused. "Shuckins! I'll warrant that old fellow's never been close to the Yampa. Mountain men get queer. Live alone too much."

"Jimmy, he knows something he didn't tell," Ma worried. "Did you see the look of him?"

"Yeah," Tom wagged his head, "an' he warned us to keep away."

Pa snorted. "If I'd listened to everybody who shelled out advice I'd still be back in Missouri plowing corn!"

He picked up a stick, and seating himself on a log, began to whittle. Margie knew he was troubled no matter what he said. She hung her dish cloth on a bush, turned the frying pan upside down on a convenient rock, and stood warming herself by the fire. The wind blew smoke in her eyes, so she turned her back to the blaze and tried to see beyond those gaunt tree shadows. Away off yonder to the west lay the mysterious country of the Yampa River. She shivered.

"Pony didn't say where he was going or anything. He might have told us that much. Pa, why *do* you s'pose—"

"Tut now!" Pa clicked his knife shut. "We'll think no

more about him. Son, where's that music maker of yours? Can't you start a good lively tune that we can all sing?"

"Betcha! Pony Wilson nor nothin' can't scare me!" Tom proudly fitted the Jew's harp against his lips and with one stubby finger twanged a note or two.

Just then, from the opposite hill, came a thin hair-raising yell: *Yip yip yip yip yee-ee-eeeee—*

The player's wind collapsed.

"Coyote," chuckled Pa.

"Wisht he'd do his singin' in the daylight," muttered Tom. "I'll start again."

"Hey get along, get along, Josey,
Hey get along, Jim along, Joe. . . ."

Pa led off in his strong baritone, and Ma joined in while she combed her brown hair and braided it for the night. Margie couldn't squeeze any sound out of her throat for the ache of homesickness that was suddenly there. She leaned over to hide her brimming eyes and fumbled with her shoelaces.

No sense at all to that little old song. But it brought up a picture of the dear cozy kitchen on the farm that she would never, never see again. She could hear wrinkled, black Aunt Frances humming it while she put away the highly polished pots and pans. She could even smell the wild crab apple blossoms just outside the open window. And there was Barbara Ellen, her chum, calling for her to come out and play in the soft summer dusk. . . .

Nothing soft about this Colorado air! The minute the sun

went down a chill went through her. And the mountain night was dreadfully big. Even music and singing couldn't make her forget where she was—west of the range. West of everything she knew.

Pa's blue eyes were looking at her. Margie tugged so hard at a shoelace that it broke. Deliberately she knotted it. And just as deliberately she swallowed hard and lifted her chin. Even before she'd been born Pa had wanted a little daughter to stand up by him and sing. Grandma Crawford had told her so. Well she would stand up by him. And she would sing! No matter what! "Play *Hold the Fort*, Tom," she suggested.

The blaze gradually died down. Pa threw a log on the embers so the fire would last well into the night, and the family retired, leaving on most of their clothes for added warmth, but taking off their shoes. Ma was already snuggled in the blankets with Danny when Margie crawled in beside them. Tom and Pa stretched out on the opposite side of the fire. The roar of the creek—the crackle of burning wood —

Everyone seemed to be asleep except Margie. What a miserable bumpy bed! It had as many peaks and bulges in it as the Continental Divide. She couldn't curl herself around all of them. She'd been in such a hurry to spread the covers that she'd failed to put down enough soft spruce tips to cover the woody ends. In final desperation she yanked the boughs out from under her and smoothing the canvas and the comforter back in place, lay down for another try at sleep. She didn't think the ground could be so hard, specially here where it was made of layers and layers of dry spruce nee-

dles.

Tired and cold and cross, she sat up again and tried to hollow a space to fit her hips and shoulders. Must be a rock in the way. No, it wasn't a rock because her fingernails scratched into it. And it couldn't be a root of the tree because it had square corners. Besides, it moved a trifle when she shoved against it.

"Margie," it was her mother's voice, "can't you settle down?"

"Oh, Ma!" The girl was on her knees, digging as hard as Ponto ever dug for a chipmunk. "I've found something! A box. Maybe it's buried treasure!" She whisked spruce needles all over the bed clothes in her excitement. "Tom! Pa!"

Tom came flying in his stocking feet. Pa took time to put on his shoes. Together they lifted the box, carrying it to the fire. It was made of heavy wood and was two-thirds as long as Pa's arm. It was at least a foot across and perhaps eight inches high. From the appearance of the gray mold that clung to it, it had been buried there ever so long. The lid stoutly resisted their efforts to pry it off.

"An old government ammunitions box!" said Pa.

"Whew, it's heavy!" panted Tom. "I'll bet it's full of gold. Did you hear that clinking noise when we set it down?"

"Here's the ax," chattered Margie. "Do hurry and open it, Pa."

With a splintering of boards most of the side finally came loose. Margie thrust her hand into the hole and pulled out a fistful of cold hard objects. The firelight glanced sharply

Most of the side finally came loose

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from half a dozen shiny surfaces.

"Great geranium!" exploded Tom.

"What is it?" Ma wanted to know from the shadows.

"Looking glasses! Little round looking glasses!"

Margie sat back on her heels and stared. She might have been holding a handful of bright bubbles that reflected from various angles the amazed expression of her face. "Looking glasses! Away off here!"

"That ain't all!" Tom probed deeper into the box. "Beads! Just see 'em!"

"Ay Jonathan! Guess it's pretty plain who hid this here."

"Who, Pa?"

"Why, an Indian trader. Reckon he thought he'd come back and get it, but he never did. Looks as if he had to leave the country in a hurry and couldn't bother with this."

"Betcha Injuns were chasin' him!" Tom momentarily deserted the center of interest to stand on one foot and hold the other to the fire.

"Maybe there's something else in the bottom. Let's dump everything out on this saddle blanket," urged Margie.

They emptied the box. Beads—red and blue and green, little and big—rolling in every direction; looking glasses—dozens of them just alike—flicking the fire back in their eyes. And that was all.

"Well, well," said Pa, "it's kind of curious. Better hop into bed now and look these things over in daylight. I'll hoist this blanket into the wagon so the porcupines won't eat it."

Margie couldn't help a twinge of disappointment. "Seems

as if there ought to be something else. Buried chests in stories are always full of pirate gold or jewels."

"Reckon we're too far west for pirates. Now skip for the covers, both of you."

"Sa-ay, it's cold!" Tom made a dive for his blankets and Pa immediately joined him, but Margie lingered, feeling once more inside the box. There was only the smooth grain of the wood and empty corners. With a sigh she gave up. As she withdrew her hand, a splintered edge of the cover snagged her wrist and she jerked back, toppling the box on its side.

Thud!

Such a faint sound, right under her. She set the chest straight and—*thud!* again. There was something—something stuck far back under that fragment of top that had refused to come loose. A hasty groping exploration revealed the fact that it was not round like a mirror nor small like a bead, and part of it was caught in the crack just enough to allow the rest to knock against the side. What could it be?

Fingers trembling with eagerness, Margie finally managed to pry it out. At first she thought it was a small black leather book with a queer gold catch on one side. That catch was evidently what had been mashed between the boards, for it was twisted out of shape. What an odd little volume! The pages seemed to be stuck together. There was only one groove where she could slip a thumbnail.

And then the book fell open—why it wasn't a book at all! There in her hands lay a neat hinged case with a square of

crimson velvet on the left half and on the other—of all things—a faded daguerreotype!

The rosy glow from the fire lighted up the face of a girl about her own age, and seemed to transform it from a gray and white impression to a living, smiling person. Margie was about to cry out. But Tom was already breathing heavily and Ma had closed her eyes. She threw a handful of twigs on the fire and in the quick blaze studied the picture. It had suffered little from being under the earth, for the box had been strong and tight.

The girl who looked out at her from the gold oval of the frame had a delicate lovely face. Her hair was parted in the middle and combed carefully behind her ears. Her hands were folded decorously in her lap, but a sparkle of fun seemed to dance in her eyes.

"You darling!" Margie breathed. "Who are you?"

The smiling lips did not answer. Hugging the picture close, she crept back into bed. "Maybe," she whispered, "maybe some day I'll find out."

Next morning she exhibited her find.

"Almighty strange!" Pa took it and turned it this way and that and scrutinized the leather case. "No telling how long the box has been buried. Maybe five, maybe a dozen years. The wood's so hard it wouldn't rot in a 'coon's age."

"There's no writing nor anything to tell about the picture," said Tom. "Wonder why it was in with a lot of looking glasses and beads. Betcha she was the old trader's daughter and he had so many beaver hides he couldn't carry his other

stuff."

"I think he was a young trader," said Margie, and this girl was his sweetheart back in the States. He hated like everything to part with her picture, but something terribly sudden happened and he had to hide it and flee for his life. Seems sort of funny," she added, "somebody steals our own pictures, then we find this one!"

They loitered over their breakfast making all kinds of conjectures. Ma didn't eat much. She sat with her big brown shawl around her shoulders. "I declare I can't seem to get warm," she sighed, "and my head's as heavy as lead. But I'll be better directly."

Pa peered at her anxiously over his coffee cup. "We'd best push on to those hot sulphur springs. Likely some of that water'd do you good, Maggie."

"But Hute and Henry—"

"No particle of use to wait for them. They'll get the freight over all right. Rollins 'll help 'em." Pa wouldn't let on that he was uneasy. Margie knew, though. She saw him go out in the meadow and frown up at the rocks and snow of the range. A mighty big mountain. And the freight was heavy. But his first thought must be for Ma.

By the time the sun was on the hillslopes the Crawfords had left the big spruce tree and were bumping along westward once more. No road to follow. Only a trail worn deep into the grass roots. Sometimes the right wheels were in it and sometimes the left. The box of beads and mirrors had been loaded in with the rest of the belongings.

"Might come in handy," said Pa.

The daguerreotype Margie had put in the bag with her sketch book. The sight of the sketch book had made her want to start right in drawing a dozen different things. But it was no use to try with the wagon rolling from side to side, sucking through mudholes or crunching over sagebrush.

Tom had a lively time driving the stock. Spot, the long, shambling red cow, was the worst of the lot. She bowed her neck, determined to go her own way through the wide luscious meadow. Margie kept a sharp eye for Indians. Every time she saw a stump through the trees she was sure it was an Indian and her heart did a flip-flop, though she told herself she wasn't afraid of Utes even if they did scalp Arapahoes now and then.

"What'll we do if we meet some Indians?" she asked Pa.

He flapped the reins encouragingly along the heaving backs of the mules. "Well, now," he said, "we'll treat 'em the very best we know. They're not much different from white folks. I reckon there's good ones, bad ones, and middlin' ones.

The day grew hot. The cows lost their friskiness. Tom reined his horse beside the wagon. "Pa, must be someone drivin' a herd of cattle ahead of us. The ground's all churned up with tracks."

"Buffalo," corrected Pa. "Mountain buffalo. Some folks call 'em bison. And those dust holes are where they've wallowed to get rid of the flies."

"I'd like to roll in one myself," exclaimed the boy, slap-

ping at the red welts on his face and wrists. “Maybe that’d fix these old mosquitoes. I thought we’d be rid of ‘em when we left Yankee Doodle Lake!”

The clouds of insect pests grew thicker. The deer flies fretted the stock almost beyond endurance and made Jack and Joe stamp and throw their heads. Pa rubbed a little chunk of saltside over their poor lumpy chests, which helped some.

Margie got out to walk awhile. She glanced back at the snow they had come across yesterday and wished she could have a handful. Danny, trotting beside her, pointed a dimpled fist.

“Hoppy grass!” he chortled, running after a red-winged grasshopper. A moment later when his sister looked for him, he was nowhere to be seen.

“Danny, where are you?”

A pair of chubby legs kicked out of a deep wallow and a dusty bundle wriggled into sight. “Fix ole skeeters,” he announced, shaking himself like a small dog.

“Danny! Oh, dirty!” Margie caught him up and brushed him off as best she could, but his pink calico dress was hopelessly bedraggled.

“Dirty!” he echoed, smearing his fist across his freckled face. “Me ride now.”

By noon they had reached a small meadow which curled back into the hills. A tiny stream wound through it, and beside this in the shadow of a scraggly bunch of alders they halted to rest.

"Buffalo stomping ground," Pa pointed out as he unhitched. "See where the critters have snagged their hair on the branches in scratching their backs. And the grass is all mashed down. I wouldn't stop here, only the mules are pretty tired and we're headed right to cross that hill yonder. I have an idea the big Ute camp is just over the other side."

The family ate their lunch hovered over a smudge. Gentle old Peggy joined the circle, sticking her nose gratefully into the smoke while her colt fussed and whickered at her heels. Tobe found a gopher hole and crouched in the weeds to watch it.

"If I can locate those buffalo I'll get some meat," Pa remarked. After dinner he threw his saddle on Monty, took his gun, and accompanied by Spy, rode toward the butt of the hill.

Ma lay down on the wagon sheet with her apron thrown over her head. "Margie, you might see if you could get Danny to sleep," she said wearily.

The girl settled herself in the shade of a bush and pulled her wide skirts over her ankles. She rocked the baby in her arms, whisking a leafy branch back and forth to keep away the mosquitoes. "Once upon a time there was a chipmunk," she began in a low singsong voice, unaware that Ponto, stretched in the grass behind her had found her blue sunbonnet and was bound to chew the strings off if he could. Danny's round little self grew limp with slumber and she too was drowsy. The monotonous drone of insects, the *chump, chump* of the grazing horses—

Suddenly she jerked awake. Tom was rushing into camp.

"Ma! Indians comin'!"

Ma jumped to her feet so fast she was dizzy and had to grab an alder branch to keep from falling. "Mercy, son. What a start you gave me! Indians 'll not hurt us." But she said swiftly to Margie, "Put Danny in the wagon. Cover him with my shawl."

Margie understood. Indians sometimes stole babies. And they liked red hair. More than once crossing the plains she and Ma had hidden Danny when roving prairie tribes had come to the wagon train. In haste she concealed him under the shawl, which was as big as a quilt, taking care he had space to breathe. He didn't wake up and she whirled to observe the two approaching horsemen.

"Just a couple of half-grown boys," breathed Ma, relieved.

Margie squinted intently. Something familiar about them—the lithe grace of the leader, the wiry chunkiness of his companion. They loped their ponies into camp and pulled up short.

"Why," gasped the girl, "you're—you're—"

"You're those 'Rapahoes we saw in Denver!" blurted Tom. "At the trader's!"

"Well, I never!" said Ma.

The Indians were startled, too, to recognize the white people. They exchanged a quick guttural and sat a moment in their stiff, skin-covered saddles, glancing about. Each carried a gun. Ponto dropped the sunbonnet, backed to a safe distance, and yelped at them. The leader saw the bit of blue

calico in the grass. He swerved his horse, and leaning far to one side, snatched it up and brought it to Margie. A grin flashed across his face as he slid to the ground.

"How!"

"Wherever did you come from?" she cried.

He waved an arm toward the east. "Come over mountains. Travel many sleeps."

"Hey, did you foller us clear from Denver City?" demanded Tom.

The Indian boy emphatically shook his head. "We come hunt maybeso," he declared. "See wagon track."

A wedge of suspicion entered Margie's mind. Strange they should come so far to hunt. There was plenty of game nearer to the plains. They'd traveled fast, for sweat streaked their horses. "I'd think you'd be afraid in Ute country," she frowned. "Or are the Utes and Arapahoes friends now?"

"Huh! No friends!" snorted the second Indian with a scornful curl of his lip. "Heap no friends!"

"What'd happen if they caught you?"

"No catch." A proud gleam came into the leader's dark eyes. "Me Running Whirlwind! Him Wasani." In spite of his boast his glance roved uneasily to the wooded slope above.

The second Indian boy had jumped off his horse to peer into the wagon. Indians had a great curiosity and always poked into everything they saw if they could. Margie knew that from her experiences crossing the plains. She didn't care if Wasani looked in the wagon, but it provoked her to have the two boys jabber back and forth in Indian which she

couldn't understand. They could talk English if they had a mind. There was something they didn't want the Crawfords to know.

"Like as not you're hungry," said Ma, and rummaged in the dinner box that still sat on the ground.

Running Whirlwind didn't seem to hear. His bright, beaded moccasins moved about in the dust. His restless gaze searched the hill. Meanwhile the Indian horses had gone down to water, dragging their braided hair reins. Ponto didn't like them and sprang at their heels, nipping with needle-like teeth. The snorting ponies broke into a run, crashing through the alder to join the Crawford stock that was fighting flies sixty yards down gulch. Running Whirlwind started after them. He brought up at a sudden sharp cry from Wasani.

"Utes!"

There was a drumming of hoofs over the hill, and a shrill wolf-keyed yell. Four copper-skinned horsemen raced down upon the camp. The Arapahoe lads were so swift to crouch behind the wagon that Margie doubted if they had been seen. But they would be in another minute! No chance to reach their horses and escape. Born enemies—Utes and Arapahoes! What would happen?

Chapter Five

UNWELCOME GUESTS

For a second the Crawfords stood rooted to the spot. Through Margie's mind flashed all the gruesome things she had ever heard about Indian warfare, and on top of these the bloody tales Pony Wilson had told. Then she saw Running Whirlwind and Wasani grip their old buffalo guns purposefully.

"What are you goin' to do?"

"We fight!"

"Nonsense!" snapped Ma. "Hide in that wagon. They haven't seen you."

"Catch us like rabbits!"

"Mind me!" Ma gave him a vigorous push.

"We won't let 'em find you!" panted Margie, pulling at his sleeve. "Hurry!"

For a brief instant he hesitated. Then with a shrug he hoisted himself over the end-gate. At his guttural command Wasani leaped up beside him.

"Under here!" With one flip Margie unfolded the shawl that covered her baby brother so it would conceal all three of them. But Danny, awakened by the commotion, let out a cry and came tumbling into her arms.

"Hush, baby, hush!" She took him and hid his face against her dress and plumped down at the back of the wagon in such haste that she bumped her head against the wagon bow.

Her heart was going lickety-thump!

Ma was ordering Tom, "Get on Peggy and find your pa!"

The dust rolled down the hill around the galloping horses. What if those four riders had glimpsed the Arapahoes! Even if they hadn't, the crude Indian saddles on the boys' ponies would make them suspicious. Luckily the ponies were half-hidden in the alders among the Crawford stock, and Margie hoped to goodness they would stay there.

The riders dashed into camp showing off with their horses. Maybe they were just curious. Maybe they'd be friendly. Pa had said there were good Indians—and bad ones and middling ones. None of these looked very good. The leader was a big, fat, greasy-skinned fellow with small gleaming eyes. He wore white man's trousers and a very dirty shirt of blue and white bed ticking.

Straight at Ma he drove his mount, plunging through the feebly smoking smudge and sending a cloud of ashes over everything. Barely in time, he wheeled, missed her by inches, and slid to a spectacular stop.

"Me Colorow!" He thumped his chest.

He was trying to scare them. Ponto scuttled under the wagon, growling shrilly. Ma stood her ground though every speck of color had gone out of her face. She put her hands on her hips and attempted to sound severe, but her voice seemed to come from a mile away. "What do you want?"

"Me Colorow!" repeated the Indian. "Beescuit!"

"Biscuit? I give you biscuit." Ma started for the lunch box.

Colorow rolled clumsily off his mount and waddled after

her. His three braves trailed behind. They were naked to the waist and each had a gun. Their roving black eyes saw everything. Margie spread her skirts wide, taking up as much room as she could in the hooped opening at the wagon's rear. Danny, who had risked a peek around his sister's arm, burrowed his head into her dress again, lustily expressing his dislike of the visitors. Colorow came to peer at him and poked a dirty finger in the tousled red hair. Margie snatched the child away.

Ma had had time to grab a cloth sack of leftover bread. "Here! Biscuit!" She thrust the bag under Colorow's nose and plucked Danny from Margie's arms.

The Ute leader grunted and crammed a generous piece of a flaky white morsel into his mouth. Then he stuffed the entire sack into the front of his shirt, despite the grumblings of his braves. Now he stood, staring insolently about him.

If Pa would only come! Margie strained to catch a glimpse of him returning through the brush of the hill, but not even Tom was in sight.

Colorow spied the rich plaid wool of Ma's shawl behind Margie, and his eyes glinted. "Heap catchum blanket!" he declared, reaching for it.

Under that shawl lay the two Arapahoes, tribal enemies of the Utes! Their grandfathers had scalped each other, and their fathers. And now—?

"Oh no! You can't. Look! Look here!" Just in time she thought of the box of beads and looking glasses that was wedged in right there by her feet. Lifting and panting she got it into the sunlight, but it was too heavy for her. Down it

crashed to the ground, bottom side up. There was a crack and tinkle of broken glass and wild spattering of red, blue and green beads everywhere.

"Hah!" The three braves pounced upon them. Colorow vacillated.

"You like beads?" Margie jumped from the wagon, snatched up a handful and let the bright beads sift through her fingers. "And looking glasses! See!" The sun shot bright lights from the shiny surfaces. She flashed them tantalizingly before him.

He caught his reflection in one. With a pleased grunt he shouldered the other Indians aside and squatted by the heap of trinkets. He trickled the pretty ornaments from one hand to the other, admiring them like a child. He tried this looking glass and that, twisting his features into every sort of ridiculous expression, and when he tired of that he thrust the little round glasses into the faces of the others and they all grimaced and laughed. Apparently he had forgotten about the shawl.

Ma and Margie exchanged hopeful glances. Surely Tom had reached Pa by now, and it wouldn't take the two long to come back. Not when Pa found out there were Indians bothering about. Danny had cried himself out and now clung to his mother, wide-eyed and still. Ponto whimpered. If the Utes would only keep themselves amused a while longer!

Margie listened with all her ears for the sound of galloping hoofs. Mosquitoes sang around her. The creek gurgled through the grass. The horses down in the alders swished their tails. She cast a nervous glance over her shoulder. The

Arapahoes must lie still. They mustn't even breathe. Their enemies were right there within a yard or two.

The Utes were beginning to tire of their present occupation and they'd soon be ready for something else. An argument arose as to the possession of the beads and mirrors. Colorow promptly settled the matter by scooping the treasure into the box and making off with it. Halfway to his horse he paused.

Margie held her breath. "Go on! Go on!" She wished so hard that she almost said the words aloud. Why didn't Pa hurry?

"He's coming back," Ma whispered. "Mercy to goodness!"

The Indian's greedy eyes once more surveyed the rich brown fabric of the shawl. "Colorow catchum blanket!" he insisted.

"You leave that shawl be!" Ma bristled. "And take yourselves off! Hear?"

He didn't intend to be stopped by a plump little woman in calico. "Heap good blanket!" he grunted, and thudded on.

That knife in Colorow's belt—was it a scalping knife? Margie flung herself into the wagon and sat hard on the end of the shawl. How huge the Indian looked! Three times as big as she. And his coarse features were set in a self-satisfied smirk. He knew she couldn't stop him, the great big bully. Her cheeks grew hot as fire. Till now she'd been scared, scared almost to pieces. But suddenly she wasn't frightened one speck. She was plain angry! As he caught at the shawl

she landed a wallop with the flat of her palm smack in his ugly face.

A gasp from Ma. An astonished grunt from the Indian. No telling what might have happened if, at that instant, there hadn't come a loud halloo from the meadow. Pa! He was racing at top speed with Tom pounding behind him on old Peg and the colt doing its best to keep up.

Colorow glared at Margie so fiercely that she quaked every time she remembered it afterward. However, he relinquished the idea of the blanket, and grabbing the box to him, with a disastrous crunching sound of the biscuit in his shirt, got up on his pony.

Pa looked perfectly splendid when he dashed into camp, blue eyes flashing at sight of Ma's white face. "What's going on here?" he demanded, riding straight up to the Ute leader. "What's that you've got?"

"It's all right, Jimmy," Ma interposed hastily. "We— we gave him that box. Tell them all to go away."

"Nothing wrong, Maggie?"

"Just send them off!"

"Yes, Pa! Please!"

Spy was sniffing around the wagon. The dog knew there were strangers there. She'd call attention to the Arapahoes, sure as anything! Besides, the shawl had slipped a little. Margie gave it a sidewise pull and to her consternation saw a portion of a beaded moccasin appear. Though it was quickly withdrawn, one of the Utes might have seen it.

The leader was looking at Pa, and more especially at the

She landed a wallop smack in his ugly face

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shiny-barreled gun in Pa's hand. "Me Colorow!" he stated.

"Me Big Jim," returned Pa in an equally forceful tone.

The Indian eased the box into a more comfortable position, balancing it on the neck of his pony. "Heap prend!" he observed.

"*Prend*", thought Margie. "I s'pose he means friend. But he isn't our friend. I know. Oh, I wish they'd go!"

Pa seemed in no hurry to be rid of them. Why did he have to ask all about the Indian camp and the trail over the hill? He couldn't know that every minute spelled danger. At last she heard him say, "You hunt buffalo? Big herd over that ridge."

The younger braves evidenced interest and they finally all started off. Before they had gone a dozen yards Pa spied the Arapahoe horses which just then wandered into view.

"These yours?" he called.

Ma gestured toward him futilely.

"Whatever is the matter, Maggie?"

"Those horses—" Margie began, but dared not say another word.

The Utes paused, jabbering among themselves. If Pa hadn't been there—if he hadn't carried his gun so handy—One of the braves fell out of line, caught the horsehair bridles of the Arapahoe ponies, and led them away.

Margie leaned against the wagon, feeling queer and shaky. She made sure the Utes were out of sight before she gave the signal. "There! They've gone. You can come out now."

The blanket humped abruptly into two mounds and the Indian boys sprang from their hiding place.

"Bless me, what's this?" cried her father.

Everybody tried to talk at once. Tom's voice soared above the rest.

"'Rapahoes," he explained. "We rode so fast I couldn't tell you. The minute I said Indians—"

"Arapahoes!"

"An' I betcha there'd have been a reg'lar battle if we hadn't hid 'em quick. Great geranium, old Colorow looked mean!"

"He tried to take the shawl, Pa," Margie chattered, "and I s-slapped him!"

"Well I be drawed!" Pa's face was a study.

"You see," she hurried on, "the 'Rapahoes are sort of friends. Leastwise we saw 'em in Denver. And we couldn't let 'em get scalped!"

Pa's keen gaze rested on the Indian lads. "What you young uns figure to do in Ute country?"

"Maybeso hunt," Running Whirlwind answered guardedly.

Pa shook his head. "'Tisn't likely."

"Maybeso fight," came the next suggestion.

"Hmp!" Pa was not convinced.

"I'm sorry the Utes took your horses," Margie interrupted. "Whatever will you do?"

"We getum back," Running Whirlwind assured her. "Little Bear say so."

"Bear?" She glanced hastily about her.

"Little Bear here," explained the boy. He pulled a small talisman from under his shirt where he had worn it on a buckskin thong. It appeared to be tarnished silver, but it hardly resembled a bear, very dumpy at best, with a round knob for a head and an oblong one for a body.

"Oh, I see," said Margie. " It's a charm. Like the rabbit's foot Aunt Frances used to have. But of course it can't talk."

"Bear talk," the boy stated solemnly. "All Indians know."

Wasani pointed to it and muttered.

"What's he say?" asked the girl.

"He say Little Bear save our lives."

Danny, clambering at his sister's knee, lifted chubby hands for the dangling "pretty," but the Indian swung it beyond his reach and with a swift motion thrust the buckskin loop over Margie's head.

"Good medicine," he said hurriedly. "You keep. Colorow heap bad Indian."

Wasani looked at his companion as if he had lost his senses. "No! Running Whirlwind keep!" he urged. His brown fingers grasped at the trinket and his eyes were sharp with anxiety. "Willow Woman no like. Willow Woman your mother. Little Bear good medicine for Running Whirlwind!"

"Hah!" declared the other with a proud lift of his head. "Running Whirlwind old enough to look out for himself. Besides, moccasins carry sign of bear. Just as good medicine." He pointed to the pattern on his toes. It evidently represented a bear's foot with three very sharp blue claws attached to a triangle of red. Then he took Margie's hand and

closed it over the silver talisman. “White girl heap brave. Running Whirlwind give!”

Before Margie could stammer her thanks the two of them were vanishing down the draw. She fingered the strange token curiously. With the hem of her dress she tried to rub off the scratches that marred its smoothness. Maybe with fine sand she could polish it. There was one deep pitted mark that would always be there.

“Good medicine,” frowned Tom, hooking his chin over her shoulder, “What did he mean—good medicine?”

“I s’pose that’s the Indian way of saying good luck,” said his sister. “If I wear it, Pa, do you think it really could—”

“Never was a charm that amounted to shucks.” Pa weighed the metal in his hands and looked uncommon thoughtful. “A body makes his own luck most generally accordin’ to how he squares up and faces things that come.”

“Anyhow Running Whirlwind believed he was giving me something nice,” said Margie. “Guess I’ll wear it just for fun.”

“Not with that dirty cord, I hope,” Ma said primly. “There’s a ribbon in my trunk. When we get settled—”

“Sooner we get started the sooner that ‘ll be.” Pa began to hitch the mules and Tom rounded up the stock. Tobe leaped back of his saddle to ride with him. Margie put the Little Bear in her pocket, wadding her handkerchief on top to be sure not to lose it.

What a long hot pull to the top of the divide! And when they reached it there was nothing to see but more mountains ahead—gray with sagebrush on one side, and black with

timber on the other. None of them was the least bit shining, reflected Margie. The trail led down a long twisting gulch which was like a crooked green trough, a wide dusty trail worn by many pony hoofs. Spy sniffed the air uneasily. Tobe's whiskers twitched. The afternoon lengthened toward night. Bunches of gray clouds appeared above the hill opposite, while the sun grew dull and reddish behind a film of haze.

"The day's been a weather breeder," exclaimed Ma. "Too hot. We can expect rain."

They dropped into a little pocket of a valley and saw the river, and across the river gray scarred bluffs, and on the side of the sagebrush flat, a town of tepees. The tepees were made of hides smoked a rich reddish brown, and they had poles sticking out of their tops like bristles of broom straws.

"Must be eighty or a hundred lodges," Pa estimated.

"Will it be safe to camp near Indians?" worried Ma.

"Every bit as safe as if we were back in Missouri," said Pa largely. "Giddap, Jack! Giddap, Joe!"

Campfires winked through the dusk. Ute children ran and laughed and played. A horse nickered. Everything seemed peaceful enough, but just the same Tom kept plenty close to the wagon. "Hope Colorow isn't here," he muttered.

Margie squirmed. Had Colorow returned from hunting? Maybe he was watching them right this minute. She'd heard that an Indian never forgot. And she'd slapped him! Slapped Colorow! "He deserved it," she thought uncomfortably, "but I wish I hadn't done it!"

Chapter Six

PA HAS A HANKERING

The arrival of the wagon was heralded by the barking of dogs and the excited screeching of Indian children. The Ute camp swarmed out to meet the newcomers. Braves on their ponies, women scuttling along, half-naked youngsters.

"Mercy to goodness!" Ma squeezed Danny so tightly that he wriggled.

"Nothing to worry about," assured Pa. "They're just curious. See that old fellow on the pinto horse? He must be the chief from the fancy bead work on his shirt. I'll ask him where's a good place to camp." He stopped the team and raised a hand, palm open, in sign of greeting. The Indian lifted his hand in answering sign and brought his pony up to the wagon.

"How!"

"How!" said Pa. "We come long way." He swung an arm toward the range. "Squaw, papooses heap tired. Like to sleep now. You show us good place?"

One of the Indian's eyes was a cloudy white, but his good eye, bright and black, gleamed at them in apparent interest. He had a broad, kindly face, and the two braids that hung down the front of his shoulders jiggled energetically as he motioned to the western end of the valley which tapered toward a canyon. "Heap rocks." His square brown hands showed how the rocks were shelving and would be shelter

from the rain that would "maybeso heap come down."

Pa thanked him and drove on. The Indians followed. Thank goodness Colorow wasn't among them. Chattering and pointing, they watched the Crawfords pitch camp. Pa whistled unconcernedly. He didn't seem to mind if the whole Ute nation observed him. Tom made out he didn't care either and stamped off to the river for a bucket of water. But Margie glanced nervously over her shoulder as she started a fire to cook supper. So many pairs of prying eyes! So many strange, dark faces! Ma kept close track of Danny. Spy backed under the rocks, whimpering, while Ponto made short snarling sallies toward the ugly little Indian dogs. Tobe took refuge in the wagon.

"Beescuit! Beescuit!" begged the women, and one bolder than the rest came to show Ma a tiny red-faced papoose slung in a cradleboard on her back. "Beescuit for papoose!" she insisted.

"Why, it's only just born!" exclaimed Margie. "It couldn't eat a biscuit if it had to!"

Anyhow there was no bread. Colorow had taken it all. And there was not much meat and mighty little else.

"I'll have to stir up something," said Ma, "but Jimmy, we can't feed the whole country!"

Even Pa was stumped. The old Ute chief disappeared for a time. When he came back he fetched a slim Indian youth of about fifteen.

"Me Yarmony," spoke the chief. "Thees Pawinta, son of my brother. Bring pish. Heap good!"

Pish. Fish, of course. The boy had a nice catch of speckled trout strung on the forks of a willow. He had doubtless hooked them for his own family's supper, but he grinned and thrust them at Pa.

"Well now, that's mighty fine!" boomed Pa. "Mighty fine!"

The trout were cold as ice and neatly cleaned, so that even Ma's particular eye could find no fault. Yarmony got off his horse and uttered a few positive grunts. Magically the circle of brown faces melted away till only a choice few of the braves remained. These solemnly seated themselves about the fire and waited for Ma to cook the fish.

Pa tried to converse with the visitors. "That country over yonder—trails—where go?"

Yarmony nodded, held up two fingers, and went through a series of motions with his hands. "Mountains," he finished. "Heap yonder."

"Yes, I've heard of the Rabbit Ear peaks," said Pa. "You know big bend of Yampa River? What's down there?"

The black eyes around the circle remained impassive. Pa attempted in various ways to make the Utes understand, but by the time the crisp trout had gone down willing throats he knew little more than he had at the beginning.

After supper Yarmony produced a curious long clay pipe. He crushed a bit of dried bark into the bowl, lighted it with a stick from the fire, and drew upon it. He passed it to Pa, who had to take it though he didn't much like to, and he in turn gave it to a brave named Two Feathers. Thus it proceeded

ceremoniously around the group.

The fragrance of the smoke was pleasant. Tom, who had stuck right at Pa's elbow all evening went sound asleep sitting up. Margie didn't believe she could ever close her eyes for thinking of Colorow. She made up her mind to stay awake all night and listen and watch. Pa had fastened one end of the tarpaulin to the side of the wagon and had pegged the other to the ground to make a sort of tent.

Margie, kneeling on the blankets to help Ma peel the draggled dress from the slumbering Danny, felt something drop from her pocket. The Little Silver Bear. It made her remember Running Whirlwind and Wasani, and she wondered where they were and if she'd ever see them again. The charm she put in her blue bag for safekeeping, along with her sketch book and the daguerreotype.

The shadows of the Indians grew suddenly long upon the canvas. They were padding off to their tepees. Pa banked the fire and the family went to bed. The river galloped through the canyon . . . the breeze flickered the flames of the dying fire. . . . Mountains heap yonder . . . trails—where go? . . . Yarmony won't. . . .

There was a loud boom of thunder, and white cracks of lightning. Margie, pulling the quilt over her head, dug deeper into her warm nest. It must be the middle of the night and it was raining to beat the band. The spray came sweeping under the wagon sheet and the blankets on the outer edge were soon sodden. She inched a little closer to Ma and curled into a tight ball.

By morning the storm had passed. The warm sun streamed

into the valley. Margie's clothes, which she had put under the first layer of bedding, felt clammy and one shoe was full of water. She emptied it disgustedly, and slipping on the other, hopped to the fire where Tom's clothing had already reached a comfortable steamy stage.

Pa strode up from the flat where he had gone to see about the stock. "Looks as if those Arapahoe boys got their horses back," he announced. "They sneaked into the valley under cover of the storm and stampeded the Ute herd. Leastwise I reckon that's who it was. A bunch of braves have lit out after 'em."

"I hope the boys get away!" cried Margie.

"It's a wonder our stock didn't stampede with the rest."

"Running Whirlwind and Wasani wouldn't take our horses. We're their friends!"

Pa looked stern. "It's all right to make friends," he said, "but I'm afraid those boys aren't here for any good. Remember, we're going to have to live among the Utes."

They ate their breakfast standing up around the fire, turning first one side, then the other till their clothes dried on them. In daylight they could see a lot of things they'd missed last night. A cloud of steam was rising across the river.

"That's the hot sulphur spring," said Pa. "The water might do you good, Maggie. If you say so we'll ride over there."

Ma glanced at the swollen river and shook her head. "I feel fit as a fiddle," she declared positively. Margie helped her dump the rain water out of creases in the tarpaulin and spread the blankets on bushes in the sun.

Pa got out his gun. "I look for Hute and Henry today," he

said. “Reckon I’d better go and get a deer so we’ll have something to eat.”

He saddled Monty and struck up the ridge. From the keen light in his blue eyes Margie knew he intended to see over that ridge, and she wished she could go with him. But she had to be content with exploring close to camp. She and Tom climbed the shelving rocks, finding a woodchuck den and some swallows’ nests. Tom picked up a big owl feather and stuck it in his hat. They craned their necks to see down the steep lichen-crusted walls of the canyon to the river that dashed itself to white foam against the boulders. They discovered a cold sulphur spring in a hollow of the hill and lay down on their stomachs to sample it.

“Phooey!” sputtered Tom. “Tastes like an old rubber boot.”

Pa came back the middle of the afternoon with a fat deer slung across his saddle.

“Oh, what’s over the ridge?” cried Margie.

“A mighty big country!” Pa began to dress out the deer. “Son, you been keeping track of the cattle? As I came down the hill I couldn’t see Spot.”

“If she ain’t the beatinest!” grumbled the boy. “Come on, Margie, help me find her.”

They peered into thickets and behind clumps of trees. No Spot. Margie climbed a rock and scanned the brush below. The Indian camp was in plain view. Lazy feathers of smoke rose from the fires over which women were puttering. Suddenly the whole camp flocked out to meet half a dozen returning braves who were driving a bunch of horses before

them. Some of the stolen stock, no doubt. What had happened to Running Whirlwind and Wasani? Had the Utes captured them? She watched anxiously a few minutes. "Guess they got away," she said aloud, her spirits rising.

Just then her quick eyes caught a movement in the sagebrush at the eastern end of the valley. A wagon drawn by four horses was joggling slowly along the trail. The freight outfit! Following were two strangers on horseback and a pack animal. Down the hill she plunged.

"Tom! Tom!"

He answered from a short distance below. "Come here, Sis. Quick! Spot's got a calf!"

"Oh, Tom, the freight wagon's coming! And somebody else—"

"The wagon!" Tom abandoned the calf. They slid and tumbled down the hill, shouting and waving. By the time they reached camp, Big Hute Richardson had driven in and was wrapping the reins around the brake handle. "You-all ain't been scalped yet, I see."

How good to hear his long Missouri drawl! And he could grin even though that cut on his lip still looked mean. Uncle Henry leaped over the wheel and tossed Danny in the air. Then he took Margie by her elbows and lifted her high too, as if she were still a little girl!

"Ay Jonathan, I'm glad you got in!" said Pa. "Have any more trouble?"

"Only tipped over twice."

"I hope the stove wasn't broken!" cried Ma.

"Not a bit." Hute wiped the sweaty harness stains from the

near-wheeler with a handful of cool grass. “Set it up for you right away. Think maybe we lost that keg of molasses, though.” He pulled a long face and looked at Tom, his eyes twinkling.

“Aw, you’re jokin’!” Tom lit into him with joyful fists.

“Who’s this?” Pa saw the two horseback riders. For the first time Margie really took a good look at the strangers.

One of them had long brindle hair that reached to his shoulders, and he made a great business of jerking his head to show it off. He was short and wiry, and his buckskin coat was shiny with dirt and grease. In the holster on his thigh was a big yellow-handled gun. His companion was a lean, gaunt-faced fellow with a faded red bandana around his neck and a snakeskin band around his hat.

“We met these gents at the joinin’ of the Berthoud trail,” said Hute. “If I recollect, this is Mr. Sam Thompson, and t’other—”

“Pleased to meetcha!” broke in the long-haired one. “This here’s my pardner. Answers to the name of Bigfoot.”

“That’s right,” agreed the lean individual. “Bigfoot’s what they call me.” He stuck out his feet to observe their proportions pridefully. Having established his identity, he dismounted and began to tug at the cinch straps. All further conversation he left to Sam.

“Mebby you’ve heard o’ me,” remarked the long-haired fellow, also dismounting. “They call me Ute Sam or the Terror of Salt Lake!”

“Why?” demanded Tom. “`Cause you look like a wild man?”

Hute laughed, and Pa turned red with embarrassment. Ute Sam glared around him. He dragged his gun from its holster and exhibited a row of notches in its yellow handle. “Them’s why!” he swaggered.

“Ay Jonathan!” Pa winked at Tom.

The boy winked back to show that Sam didn’t have him fooled either. “I betcha—” he confided to Margie privately, “I betcha that’s all bluff.”

The strangers made themselves right at home. Bigfoot helped Pa put up the tent, but Sam sprawled comfortably with his head on his saddle and looked on. “I’d lend a hand,” he explained, “only this time o’ night I git kind of a crick in my back.”

“Huh!” snorted Tom under his breath. “Crick nothin’!”

Hute and Uncle Henry set the stove up and wired a length of pipe between two trees so the wind wouldn’t blow it over. Ma hovered about the small range, wiping off the dust. “‘Tisn’t hurt a mite,” she said. “It’s just as good as ever.” Her eyes began to sparkle. She climbed into the wagon and when she backed out she had something hidden under her apron. “Surprise!” she laughed. “Three guesses what we’re going to have for supper.”

“Dried apple pie,” guessed Pa promptly, feeling sure that he knew everything in that wagon.

“Watermelon,” hazarded Tom.

“Goosey!” reproved his sister. “Watermelons don’t grow this side of Missouri, and besides it’s the wrong season.”

“Just the same,” he let out a tremendous sigh, “wisht it was.”

Margie squinted at the object under Ma's apron. "Oh, I know! Muffins! Ma's brought the muffin iron!"

This was no ordinary pan. There were eight depressions for batter—each a different shape. It was hard to tell exactly what some of them were meant to be. But anyone could recognize the apple and the peach. And there was a fat oak leaf—or maybe it was a cabbage—and a scalloped rosette. Very best of all was the pear. There was always a scramble for the pear when Ma started the bread around, piping hot.

Pa had a funny look on his face. "Why, I thought we left that in Missouri," he said.

Ma flushed. "I know we decided most of the cooking pots were too heavy to bring, but I couldn't bear to leave this, Jimmy. So I wrapped it in the feather bed."

Pa threw back his head and roared.

"We had to give up so many things," faltered Ma. "I thought if I could just bring this and my little wooden bowl and the brass kettle to cook pickles in—"

Pa sobered instantly. "I'm mighty glad you did, Maggie! I can't think of anything I'd rather have right now than honest-to-goodness muffins."

It was almost dark when Tom remembered about Spot. Hute went with him to help drive her and the new calf down.

"That's the start of our herd," said Pa. "We can't run any risks of wolves or coyotes."

When they came back the coffee pot was sending out spurts of fragrant steam and Ma was calling, "Get your plates, everybody. The meat's done to a turn and the muffins—" She opened the oven door and lifted them out with a

flourish.

"I got the peach," discovered Margie a minute later. "What 'd you get, Tom?"

"Oh, nothin'." The boy looked aggrievedly at Ute Sam. Sam had the pear. Taking a luscious bite of it, he wiped the back of his hand across his mouth before he replied to Pa's query.

"Oh, we're jest moseyin' around, Bigfoot an' me. Doin' a little prospectin'," he said vaguely. "You aim to take up a claim hereabouts?"

"We haven't decided," Ma said, giving Pa a quick glance. "Seems to me this might be a nice place to settle. When the road's finished other folks 'll be coming. It's a natural place for a town, don't you think, Jimmy?"

Pa stood up, his back to the fire, his blue eyes dreamy with distance. "There's better beyond," he said. "That Yampa country, now—"

Yampa. The very word sent a prickle of foreboding through Margie. She laid the last bite of her muffin on her cold tin plate and stared into the dark gash of the canyon. "Keep away from the Yampy!" Pony Wilson's warning beat sharply upon her memory.

"Oh Pa, not there!" Her voice sounded small and frightened in the silence that had fallen. "There must be lots of other places."

He didn't seem to hear her. "Yes sir," he was exclaiming, "we're still headed west. I've got an almighty hankering to see into the Yampa Valley!"

Chapter Seven

TRAILS WEST

There was no use arguing with Pa. Nothing would do but that he must go on to the Yampa. Margie thought he had surely caught a glimpse of the Shining Mountains from the top of the ridge and next day at breakfast she asked him. He laughed and said he wasn't looking for mountains so much as green valleys and pasture land.

"But I reckon to find most anything out yonder," he added. "Ay Jonathan!"

Hute volunteered to go with him on horseback to spy out the country. Uncle Henry said somebody had better stay here at Hot Sulphur Springs to take care of the family, and he'd do that.

"We'll get everything in shape today," planned Pa, "and tomorrow at crack of dawn Hute and I'll pull out."

All morning the men worked to make the camp more comfortable. And Margie helped Ma fix a poke of provisions for Pa and Hute to take with them. When everything was done Hute and Uncle Henry got on their horses and rode across the river to see the sulphur spring. Ute Sam and Bigfoot were already over there. Pa chopped kindling, while Tom and Margie piled it back under the rocks and Ma and Danny picked up chips.

"Here comes an Indian!" said Margie suddenly. "It's one of those who was with Colorow the other day."

Ponto yapped at him and Spy hid under the rocks and growled. The Ute was a shrewd-looking fellow with high cheek bones and close-set black eyes.

"What's that tied back of his saddle?" cried Tom.

"Elk calf, I reckon," said Pa.

"Poor thing!" Margie was indignant. "It'll be dizzy with its head hanging upside down. Make him let it loose, Pa!"

But the Ute was already untying the elk. "Me Jokum. Swap for shug!" he demanded, and set the hot, panting little creature on the ground.

It was smaller than a tame calf and had only an inch or two of tail. Its coat was reddish brown. Though it tried to stand, its long legs were wobbly and its front knees buckled. The children rushed to help it.

"Poor little feller," crooned Tom.

They put their arms around it and stroked its soft ears. The baby whimpered, nuzzling their hands and wrinkling his pointed black nose.

"Shug!" repeated the Indian.

"Oh yes, Pa! Let's swap!" Tom was all enthusiasm.

"What's shug?" puzzled Margie.

"Sugar, I reckon," said Pa. "Think we could spare a little, Maggie?"

"After we hauled it clear from Denver City?" protested Ma. "What in creation do we want with an elk critter?"

"He'd make a jim-dandy pet!" begged Tom. "Look how he bunts against me!"

"We could eat molasses instead of sugar on our cornmeal

mush," suggested Margie. "I wouldn't mind a speck. Please let's swap with the Indian, Ma. We'll take good care of the elk!"

"Seems like two dogs and a cat—" began Mrs. Crawford, and abruptly stooped to pat the elk. After all, her children wouldn't have many playfellows away off here in the mountains. She went to the sack in the wagon, dipped out some sugar, and tied it in a clean cloth. This she gave to the Ute. He snatched it and tied it on his saddle. Then he whirled, grabbed the calf, and was going to sling it back on his horse.

"Wope! Drop that elk!" Pa ordered.

Jokum's black eyes gleamed. He aimed to have the elk and the sugar both! Pa picked up a stick of firewood and started for him. The Indian took one look at the white man's sturdy six feet and purposeful blue eyes. He let go the calf, vaulted onto his pony, and made off. Ponto chased him to the edge of the trees and swaggered back.

"Guess that 'll learn him!" exclaimed Tom.

"'Twouldn't have done not to keep a bargain once we made it," Pa said slowly.

"What'll we do if he comes while you're gone?" worried Ma.

"Pshaw, he won't." Pa stuck the ax in the chopping block. "But I'll go have a talk with Yarmony." He strode off to the Ute camp.

"Now I know what an Indian giver is," observed Margie. "Anyhow I'm glad we have the baby elk. What'll we name him?"

Tom wanted to call him Jokum after the Indian. “Here, Jokum! Look, Jokum! See, I bet he knows his name already!”

Spy bounded out of hiding and came wagging her tail. She sniffed at the calf curiously and sat down, ears cocked at an interested angle. “One more thing for me to look after,” her patient dog eyes seemed to say.

“He’s hungry,” said the practical Margie. “He’s got to have milk. Let’s drive Spot over here and make the calf divide.”

It took strenuous efforts to get the rangy cow into camp. And then she didn’t like the elk. The rolling whites of her eyes were as slick and round as onions. Margie looped a rope around her neck and tried to make her stand while Tom managed the elk.

“Nice Spot. Good old Spot,” he soothed.

“Maaaa!” said her silly little calf standing spraddle-legged in the weeds.

“Hold her, will you? How’d you expect me—hey!”

Spot hooped her tail, jerked the rope loose, and lumbered off to see about her offspring.

“Oh, well, go on then!” said Margie disgusted. She picked splinters of hemp out of her palms. “We’d better try Peggy.”

“Yep.” Tom’s face was red and his hair tumbled. Even though the elk was a baby, he was hard to manage.

The mare was gentle enough, but she was too tall for Jokum to reach. And when the children tried to boost him, the colt got in the way and kicked and squealed and butted.

"What in geranium we goin' to do?" puffed Tom.

"Maybe the elk 'll drink out of a pan," said Ma. "Here's a little milk I saved from morning."

They offered it to their new pet.

"Go on, drink!" wheedled the boy. "Don't be a ninny!"

The calf braced his legs and blew through his nose. No amount of tugging and pushing could persuade him.

"Here, open your mouth!" Margie dabbled her finger coaxingly in the milk.

Danny squatted beside her like a frog and dipped his own fist into the pan, testing its contents with a rosy tongue when he thought no one was looking.

"We'll have to pour it down his throat," she decided. "You hold him, Tom."

The boy got a good grip and pried the small stubborn jaws apart. "Now!"

Spang!

One upward toss of Jokum's head spun the tin from Margie's fingers, landing upside down. Right on Danny!

"Waugh!" bellowed Danny as he sent the surprising hat clattering.

Milk every place! In their eyes, down their necks, all over their clothes. Spy scuttled one way and the pup the other. Ma gathered the baby into her arms and mopped his face on her apron. "There, there now."

Margie knelt down in the dust to wipe her own flushed face on the hem of her dress. Tom let go the elk and began to laugh. He whooped and hollered and rolled on the grass.

And Jokum was still hungry.

"There's always a way," declared Ma. She hunted up an empty bottle from the wagon, filled it with the remaining milk, and cut a short piece of hollow quill from Tom's owl feather to insert in the cork. The end of the quill she wrapped with a soft rag. "Here, Jokum," she said.

A tantalizing drop of milk splashed on the small black nose.

"Say, look at him grab!" cried Tom. "He knows how to work that all right!"

Just then Hute and Uncle Henry came back, Pa also a few minutes later. Ma pitched into getting supper. For the rest of the evening everyone was too busy to pay much attention to the elk, but Tom hollowed a round nest in the pine needles so it could sleep warmly, and covered it with his own jacket.

Next morning at daybreak Pa and Hute set out on their trip of exploration. Tom was sound asleep, but Margie smelled the smoke from the fire, heard the jingle of Monty's bridle ring, and sat up in time to see the two men swing away through the dawn. They'd have to cross the river and climb the hill; then they'd just keep heading west, west to the Yampa. She was wide awake and cold. She might as well get up and dress.

What a long day that was! Uncle Henry chopped more wood, Tom played with Jokum, and Ma got at the mending. Seemed as though for once she was glad to see those holes in Danny's stockings.

Margie fetched her blue bag and took out her sketch book. She thought maybe she'd draw a picture of a mountain and send it to Janey Reed in a letter. Oh, bother, she'd forgot! Middle Park was beyond the reach of stage coaches and mail. She'd draw a little anyway just to keep her hand in. For a time she worked frowningly. The lines wouldn't go right. If she only had someone to show her how! Discouraged, she laid aside the sketch book and opened the old daguerreotype. The girl in the picture smiled out at her. "I wish you were real," sighed Margie. "What fun we could have together. I wonder, oh, I wonder who you are!"

In the bottom of the bag was the Little Silver Bear. She tried again to polish off the scratches. "Good medicine," Running Whirlwind had called it. But Pa had said it didn't amount to shucks. Pa had said something else too, "A body makes his own luck most generally accordin' to how he squares up—"

Bow-wow-wow-wow! Spy roused the camp. Ponto, who had been snoring in the sun, scrambled to his feet and rushed at a small yellow Indian dog that trotted out of the edge of the trees. The strange dog was short-legged, dirty, and cross, but he had the distinction of wearing bead earrings. He snapped viciously at fat Ponto.

Behind him came a grinning Indian woman. Her moccasins slipped through the grass as noiselessly as two mice. She was about as tall as Margie and much stockier. A blanket was folded about her like a shawl; a skirt of blue and white striped bed ticking reached to her ankles. Her coarse

black hair hung loose to her shoulders and she was constantly shaking it out of her way.

"Me Yarmony's squaw," she said with a shy glance at Ma. "Me Singing Grass."

Ma smiled a welcome. "Singing Grass. What a pretty name!"

"White squaw heap lonesome maybeso."

"Yes, me heap lonesome. Glad Singing Grass come. Here, sit in the little rocker." Ma pulled forward the small brown chair that had been unpacked from the wagon.

The Indian woman's grin widened. She touched the chair and when it rocked, laughed like a child. After amusing herself a moment she announced, "Make white woman moccasins."

"Moccasins for me?"

The Ute nodded vigorously. She had with her a piece of soft white buckskin, which she spread flat on the ground and motioned for Ma to place one foot on. Tom and Margie watched her cut and fit the material. She shaped it with a sharp knife and then, folding the two edges toward the top of the foot, sewed them up the middle with sinews.

"You like beads?"

"Why, yes," said Ma.

"Ute squaw no beads." Singing Grass pointed to her own plain toes. "White squaw—" She nodded and set to work.

Where had those beads come from? Perhaps from the box Margie had found in the pine needles—that box which Colorow had appropriated. The girl gathered courage to ask,

"Where's Colorow?"

The squaw's face lost its smile. She sewed stolidly. "No here."

Well, that was something to be thankful for!

During the next two weeks Singing Grass was a frequent visitor. Other women came with her to marvel at the stove and point and giggle at the rocking chair. Among them was a very old Indian woman with white hair and a face criss-crossed with wrinkles. She huddled in her shawl at the edge of the trees muttering squeakily.

"What does she say?" inquired Ma after her efforts at friendliness had failed.

"She say," admitted Singing Grass with a show of reluctance, "she live here heap snows. Thees Utes' dirt. No like whites come."

"Tell her," said Ma, "the country is big enough for whites and Indians too."

But the very old woman looked on with eyes that never lost their suspicion. Ma found out she had had seven children and when Yarmony's wife asked her where they were, she pointed up.

One day Margie and Tom saw her sneak down to the river and throw a basketful of pine tips in a crevice in the cliff. Against the rocks leaned a weathered papoose board. "Do you s'pose that's a grave?" whispered Margie.

Besides making the whole family moccasins, Singing Grass showed them how to jerk meat Indian fashion. She cut it in strips, placed it on a rack of branches, and left it to dry in

the smoke and sun. In return Ma gave her biscuit, sugar, and a length of blue calico.

By now Jokum had become an established member of the family. Ponto romped with him, while Spy kept a wary eye upon the two foolish young things. The elk finally learned to drink from a pan, though he always stuck his nose to the very bottom and emerged blowing and wheezing with milk up to his ears.

The third week passed. No sign of Pa or Hute. Even Uncle Henry began to be uneasy.

"They're sure to be back this sundown," Ma would say anxiously each evening. "You children climb up on the rocks and holler if you see them coming."

Tom and Margie went up to the rocks so often that they wore a trail through the grass. From the top they could look a long distance—clear beyond the Ute camp and across to the big ridge. They could watch the Utes going back and forth to the hot spring, which Yarmony said was "heap good medicine." The women tied the smallest children to the horses so they wouldn't fall off in the river. The water was high with melting snow from the range, and the scrubby little ponies had to swim hard to get to shore. Ma would never think of tying Danny to a horse and turning the critter loose in that swift current!

One evening Margie saw a black speck moving against the skyline. "Here they come!" she shouted and flew to the river bank. The whole family dropped their work and hustled after her. Any minute now they'd hear Pa's long "Hooooo—*oo!*"

and Monty's shrill nicker to the horses in the meadow. Any minute—But there was no sound except the boom of the water through the canyon, the *slap slap* of a willow branch that dragged in the near ripples, the thin shivery call of a coyote from the hill. Darkness came.

"Reckon you saw that coyote," said Uncle Henry.

Empty with disappointment they stumbled back to camp. Margie couldn't go to sleep that night for thinking about things—that mysterious Yampa country, Pony Wilson's warning. Why didn't Pa and Hute come?

Chapter Eight

ON TO THE YAMPA

Though Pa and Hute were missing, Ute Sam and Bigfoot usually managed to be around at mealtime. They spread their hands to the Crawfords' fire and smacked their lips over "woman's cookin'." For a few days they disappeared and the family were hopeful of being rid of the nuisances, but they turned up again.

"Like a couple of bad pennies," Uncle Henry growled.

They had been to see Grand Lake. Mention of the lake made Margie remember Pony Wilson's tale of the big fight the Utes and Arapahoes had had there long ago. And that made her think of the two Arapahoe boys, Running Whirlwind and Wasani. What had become of them? Had they gone back to Denver City?

Ute Sam was full of big stories. He told how they'd caught trout in the lake. "Couldn't get 'em to bite any kind o' bait so we took Bigfoot's red bandana and held it right over the water and them dinged fish like to jerked it out of our hands! They was cur'ous I reckon, and they'd cotch their teeth in the cloth and we'd have half a dozen of 'em floppin' at one time."

"Huh!" scoffed Tom. But he tried the scheme— privately—that very afternoon. Ponto and Jokum went with him.

Ma was too busy to miss him. First she made mulligan

stew, which she preferred to cook in the Dutch oven rather than on the stove. Margie helped her dig a hole, build a fire in it, and when the ground was well heated, rake out the brands and bury the Dutch oven under hot coals and dirt where the stew could simmer for hours. Then the two of them with Danny went to hunt wild strawberries.

When suppertime came Ma called, "To-om! Tom!"

Jokum and Ponto bolted out of the brush and romped up to her. A small sheepish figure sidled after them.

Margie eyed him in amazement. "Goodness sake! Where's your shirt?"

"I—I lost it."

"Lost it!" Ma looked a lot like Aunt Sally right then.

"It caught on a—a snag in the river."

"River!" Ma gave him a frightened shake. "Tom Crawford, you didn't go swimming in that dangerous high water!"

"No'm." Tom rubbed fiercely at his eyes. "I was tryin' to catch fish the way Ute Sam said. I borrowed Uncle Henry's red bandana and tied it on a pole, but it wouldn't work and I fell down in the mud and got all dirty. Ute Sam came along and he asked me why didn't I wash my shirt the way the cowboys do."

"Go on!"

"So I—I did."

"And you dropped it in the water?"

"No'm. Not exactly."

"Thomas!"

The boy gulped and plunged ahead miserably. "I tied the

shirt to the pole the way Sam told me and held it out in the ripples. He said cowboys always let the current do their washing. And it was doing fine till some driftwood came down."

"Your best blue shirt!"

Tom looked down and dug a hole with his shoe. "Anyhow I saved the bandana. Maybe the shirt'll lodge some place in the canyon where I can get it."

"Don't let me hear of you going into that canyon," Ma said sharply, "what with the water so swift! Better by far to lose the shirt. And I guess that's punishment enough. I washed your other shirts today and they're still damp. You can hang one across that log to dry. Margie can lend you her sacque."

The sacque was a long overblouse made to be worn with a skirt. It had pink and white stripes and was amply flared. "Aw—" Tom backed away, "I don't hafta wear that, do I?"

"Thomas!"

Shamefacedly he donned it. The peppermint tails fluttered gaily. Margie giggled as she bent to uncover the Dutch oven.

"Go on. Laugh!" He gave her arm a resentful push. The stick in her hands slipped, jarred loose the iron cover, and an avalanche of dirt poured into the steaming stew.

A horrified gasp went up from the family. Ma didn't say a word but she was very cross. She marched to the bushes with head held high, emptied out the stew for the dogs, and came back to beat up a mess of flapjacks.

It was a poor time for Ute Sam and Bigfoot to show up.

Unaware of the fate of the mulligan, they rode into camp and sat a moment on their horses, sniffing hungrily. Tom, who had been ordered to tend the flapjacks, stood by the stove, his red face matching the bright stripes of his blouse.

"Say, sonny," drawled Sam, "did I ever tell you how the cowboys do their cookin'?"

Tom looked up, his eyes smarting from the smoke. He happened to see Tobe settled on a log, tail curled around his feet. Abruptly he left the cakes to grow black on the edges and lifted the big gray cat in his arms. Fondling it, he slunk closer to the visitors.

"Yes sir," Ute Sam loosened one foot from the stirrup, "I must tell you how them cowboys—Whoa! Wh— whoa!" He made a frantic grab at the saddle horn. His horse had gone crazy. It reared and bucked and kicked. Margie glimpsed a gray furry ball just back of the saddle—a ball with round yellow eyes and bristled whiskers. *Yeowrr-r-r-r-r!* sputtered the indignant cat, hanging on with four sets of razor-sharp claws. Ute Sam's saddle blanket was so skimpy that the cat's claws hadn't any place to fasten except the horse's hide. The mustang thought a swarm of yellow jackets had settled on his back. With a frenzied squeal he took the bit in his teeth and hit for yonder.

"Whoa!" yelled Bigfoot. "Whoa!" And he gave chase on his own horse.

"What in creation!" Ma turned, too late to observe particulars.

Tom tucked his gleeful face into the pink and white collar

and scraped the burned cakes into the fire. “Seemed as if Sam’s horse got scared at something.”

“Look!” Margie pointed to the flat. “The horse has bucked Sam off. Bigfoot’s stopping to see if he’s hurt.”

“That’s not Bigfoot,” squinted the boy. “He went after the horse. That’s—why, that’s Pa! And Hute! Hurrah!”

The travelers were back safe and sound! Pa brought Ute Sam to camp with him to have some supper. Sam’s brindle hair was snarly with dirt and bits of grass and he looked mighty glum. But that didn’t matter. And it didn’t matter when Bigfoot trailed in an hour later with the runaway horse and had to have fresh cakes and hot coffee cooked for him.

“Finest country in the world!” Pa declared every little while. “Can’t wait for you folks to see it.”

“Did you run into Colorow?” Margie asked.

“Nary an Indian.”

“Didja see—kerchoo! Didja see the Yampa River?” The pink and white sacque had vanished and Tom appeared, a trifle mussed, but in man’s attire.

“Tom Logan, “ Ma shook her head at him, “you’ve got on a damp shirt. Go in the tent, take it off this instant, and go to bed.”

“Didja, Pa?” the boy retreated as slowly as possible.

“Ay Jonathan! And I nailed up my claim notice right at the Big Bend!”

“What kept you so long?” Uncle Henry wanted to know.

“Missed the place we were huntin’ for and came out away below—almost to Brown’s Hole. Big country in there that’ll

be settled some day. But the Yampa's my choice. Ay Jonathan! Mineral springs—dozens of 'em—no telling how valuable. We found a great big bubbling one."

"It shore smelled awful," Hute put in, "but it was right pretty to look at."

"Then we waded to the south bank of the river," Pa went on, "and heard something that like to fooled us both. Sounded just like a steamboat going *chug-achug*, *chug-achug*. The stream was too small for navigation and when we looked around we saw a spring spouting water ten feet high and making that noise. In the edge of it was a pile of shiny stones." He fished one out of his pocket, the size of a small potato, and passed it around. "Looks to me like silver."

Ute Sam hefted the chunk in his hand. "Never heard of findin' silver that-a-way," he mumbled. "Still, I dunno."

"Plenty of room in the Big Bend," Pa declared, beaming about him. "It'd be a good start for any man to take up land there. Why don't the rest of you boys come down and mark off claims next to mine?"

"Reckon I will," nodded Uncle Henry.

Hute frowned. "The more I see of these here mountains the more I begin to think Missouri is good enough for me."

Ute Sam got to his feet and stretched. "If I was honin' for land I'd take you up, Crawford. But me an' my pard is prospectors an' we're plumb cur'ous about them Rabbit Ears. Ho-hum! We'll be hittin' the hay." And he and Bigfoot slouched off to their blankets.

The fire burned low. Tobe strolled in, his eyes yellow orbs of flame. Still Pa talked on in glowing terms about the new country to the west. "That silver interests me," he exclaimed. "Where'd I put it?"

"Ute Sam had it last," Margie remembered.

"Must've dropped it in his pocket without thinking. I'll get it from him come mornin'."

But in the morning Ute Sam and Bigfoot were gone.

"Sneaked off mighty quiet," muttered Hute. "Jim, I bet my hat those lousy coyotes have gone to jump your claim!"

"Fiddlesticks!" grunted Pa. "They don't want land. What they're after is gold."

"Or silver," said Uncle Henry significantly.

"But Pa's already nailed up his claim notice!" broke in Tom.

"This isn't Missouri," growled his uncle. "Fellow's got to live on a place to hold it here. Got to build a cabin and plow ground. Then he better hit for a land office and make a filing. If you take my advice, Jim, you'll head for the Yampa pretty quick."

Pa refused to be greatly concerned. Nonetheless, he hurried preparations for moving on.

"Seems as though we've got more than we had to start with," Ma sighed when they tried to crowd their possessions back into the two wagons. "I declare, I don't know where to put everything."

When the packing was at last done, Uncle Henry drove the freight wagon across the stream. Spy swam after it.

"All aboard!" Pa climbed onto the seat of the second wagon and made ready to follow. Margie grabbed Ponto, and Tom held Tobe as the mules plunged into the river and the wheels wobbled over boulders.

Hute, with Spot's young calf flung across his saddle, drove the loose stock into the water. The colt raced back and forth along the bank, excited, and afraid to wet its feet, but Peggy struck out with the others. By and by, with a squeal, the colt splashed after her, treading its hoofs frantically till it reached firm ground again.

"Wait!" shrilled Tom. "We've forgot Jokum!"

"Sit down!" roared Pa.

The baby elk had trotted out of the willows and stood on the bank looking after the wagons.

"But we can't leave him!"

"Maybe he'll follow us," said Margie. "Here, Jokum. Come on, Jokum! Look, I believe he's going to try it!"

"He'll drown," choked Tom.

"No, he can swim. See!"

Breathlessly they watched the little brown head which was all that was visible above the rapid water.

"Current's got him. It's pullin' him to the canyon!"

"No, he's making it!" cried Margie. "Come on, Jokum. Come on. He's almost safe—he is!"

The wagon was hardly up the bank before the boy was out and running to fling his arms around the dripping huddle on the grass.

"He's so tired, Pa, he'll have to ride."

"Shuckins, son, don't see how—" Pa began. But somehow the small orphan was wedged in, and nobody minded that he was very wet.

After a hard climb they topped the ridge. Margie tried to imagine that some of those mountains far ahead were shining. The country opened into wide sagebrush flats. Beside the river long-leafed cottonwoods were a cool inviting green, and in the marshy meadows pink shooting stars and blue flags made carpets of glowing color. A band of antelope flashed out of view. Jack rabbits skittered to right and left.

When they stopped at noon by a spring hole Uncle Henry found horsetracks in the mud. "Ute Sam and Bigfoot travelin' right ahead of us! Jim, I don't like it!"

Pa was a little bothered, but all he said was, "Shuckins, they'd come this way if they were goin' to the Rabbit Ears. You and Hute are bound to hunt for trouble."

On the second day the Crawfords turned toward a range of timbered mountains on their left. The river had disappeared some miles back through a rocky wedge of its own carving.

"Got to strike that pass," said Pa. "I'm satisfied this is the Gore Range. If so, I understand a road was cut through here nineteen years ago."

"Shore, you an' me saw old choppin's when we crossed before," Hute nodded, bringing his horse alongside, "but now big trees have grown up right in the middle of where the road was."

"I thought our wagon was the first to come into the Park," said Ma.

"Sir George Gore had a lot of two-wheeled carts to carry his outfit," Pa explained. "He was an Irish lord who hunted for three years through the Rockies just for sport. An old scout in Denver City told me about him."

Though Gore Pass was not so high as Rollins Pass, it was very steep and rocky in places and the men had to hew a way through the thick brush and timber. At last the wagons reached the valley land on the other side. There came a day when Pa rejoiced, "Here we are on the headwaters of the Yampa River. Ay Jonathan! A few more miles and we'll be home!"

Home. How could that word ever mean anything except a snug white farmhouse at the end of the lane? The country grew wilder the farther they journeyed. If Sir George Gore had ever traveled here, the passage of years had blotted out his road. Sometimes the bear and elk and even the deer did not trouble to run.

Uncle Henry became more cheerful. "I've been watching sharp," he said. "If Ute Sam and Bigfoot had come this direction I'd have seen some sign. You were right about `em Jim. And I'm some relieved!"

Hute Richardson didn't say much these days. He was growing restless. "Reckon you-all could get along without me now?" he asked one night.

They were camped beside a blunt spire of stone that pointed into the sky like a giant finger. Pa stood with his back to it, looking into the fire. "Sure you won't change your mind and take up a claim?" he urged.

"Not me, Jim. I'm a sociable critter and I've got to live where there's folks." He hesitated. "Feller offered me a job driving a freight team back to Missouri if I get to Denver City by the twenty-fifth."

"Hoped you'd feel a call to stay."

Big Hute glanced up. He and Pa had been friends from boyhood. "If you need me, Jim—"

"Shuckins!" Pa slapped him on the back. "You go right ahead. Henry and I can make it from here. And when you see the folks in Sedalia—" He drew a lock of coarse black hair out of his pocket and grinned, "—well, just show 'em this Indian scalp."

Tom's eyes bugged out.

"Shame on you, Jimmy!" scolded Ma. "You know that's the forelock of that buffalo you shot. And thank goodness it's nothing worse!"

"Just for a joke," Pa insisted mildly, somewhat subdued.

Ma shook her head. "We'll all write letters home and Hute can take them."

Margie began a note to Barbara Ellen. Words were hard to think of. Hute was going away. Big good-natured Hute. How could they ever get along without him? She hadn't felt so lonesome since the wagon train had split up. A salty tear splashed on the sheet of paper. She wiped it away with a hasty hand and gripping her pencil began to decorate the page with drawings. A quick deft stroke or two showed Colorow on his horse; the wagon with Pa and all of them trying to pry it out of the mud; Jokum; and last of all the

Finger Rock.

"Your cheeks and nose look chapped, daughter," Ma observed at bedtime. "Better rub some deer tallow on them."

In the morning Hute took the back trail to the settlements, but the Crawfords pushed on.

That afternoon Margie and Tom had an experience they would long remember. They had run ahead of the wagons and before they realized it were out of sight and sound of the family. There was a strange commotion in the brush. Margie felt Tom's sudden wild grab at her arm. "What—what are they?"

Ten, twenty, thirty, forty hairy gray bodies loped out of the brush and across the flat. Long, great-muscled animals with red tongues lolling out over gleaming fangs. For they were wolves, big timber wolves. Instinct warned the children not to move. Anyhow, they were too frightened to run or cry out.

Like stones they stood, Tom and she, while the pack kept swinging past so close they could hear the animals pant. On the trail of something, the wolves ran in a wide arc, paying no more attention to the children than if they had been stumps; and in a moment had vanished in the pines.

When the bushes had stopped shaking, the boy and girl dared to breathe. They scurried for the wagons as fast as their trembling legs could take them. After that they stuck close to Pa.

Without Hute their progress was slower. The job of herding the stock fell back on Tom. The valley widened,

grew deeper, too—or else the mountains on either side grew taller. Pa hardly knew whether to struggle through the willows and tangled grass of the bottom land or force a way over the rocks and through the groves of the hills. He tried both, and gradually they neared their goal.

"Couple more days!" he encouraged. Then, "One more day!" And at last, "Tonight! We're sure to be there tonight! See, yonder against the mountains the river makes a big bend to the west. Think of the hay that 'll cover these meadows some day—acres and acres! Think of the cattle that 'll graze on these slopes. Giddap, Jack! Giddap, Joe!"

Pa's excitement was catching. In spite of all their forebodings about the Yampa country, the family were so eager to see over the next ridge that they didn't even pause for supper. But Danny had no mind to starve. He raised such a howl for "gagy" that Pa had to stop long enough to build a little fire, and Ma had to mix up some flour, water, and salt and call it gravy.

The shadow of the mountain swooped down to cover them, and on the hump of the opposite range the sun's rays were red gold.

"We'll make it," Pa kept saying. "Let's push on!"

They left the freight wagon and hitched the horses in front of the mules. The last half mile Pa drove right down the middle of the river. The Big Bend! The mysterious place of the Yampa! Scree-ee-eech—scrape— jolt! went the wheels over the boulders. Beaver slapped the water with their tails and dived out of sight. Kingfishers scolded. The teams

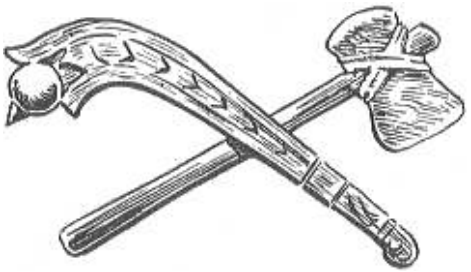
lurched up the bank and came to a heaving stop.

"Home!" Pa said huskily.

Ma gripped her hand over his that held the reins and they just sat there in silence, looking. The valley was broad, sloping up to gentle hills and shouldered about by tall mountains. Fingers of meadow land reached back into purple gulfs of obscurity. The river, reflecting the glow from the sky, was a wide golden road dividing the dusk. Yonder to the left myriads of tiny pools nestled in the shadows like bright fallen clouds. From the tall grass rose the quaking of wild ducks settling for the night.

"Ours," Pa said in an awesome voice. "Ours, by the grace of God."

The long lonesome cry of a killdeer sent a prickle of apprehension through Margie. Pony Wilson's warning thrummed through her memory: "Keep away! Keep away!" Her anxious brown eyes tried to pierce the twilight. What was there here in this valley to be afraid of?



Chapter Nine

WHERE IS DANNY?

"Well, here we are at the Big Bend," exclaimed Tom next morning, munching his breakfast with relish, "an' nothin's happened to us yet!"

The Crawfords were camped on the south side of the river. In the sparkle of sunlight the valley certainly didn't look like a place to be afraid of. It was every bit as wide and green and inviting as Pa had pictured it.

"What's that funny white hill yonder?" Tom wanted to know.

"Spring formation," Pa told him. "There's a cave that goes away back under the rocks. Down a quarter of a mile by the river is that Steamboat spring where Hute and I found the silver. No telling how many different springs there are. And I don't doubt they'll all be valuable some day. We'll look them over soon, but now I mean to get settled on my claim."

The claim, he explained, was across the Yampa, three-quarters of a mile farther west. He and Uncle Henry took the teams and hurried back to fetch the freight wagon. While they were gone Margie and Tom explored. They could not go very far down the flat without getting into mud. So they poked through the willows and cottonwoods and came to a big dead tree with something in its top that was too large for a hawk's nest.

"It's a little platform!" exclaimed Margie.

Tom was examining a queer stubby limb. “Geranium, Sis! Here’s a—a—oxbow! It’s been sawed in half and the ends driven into the tree trunk. To hang meat on maybe. D’you s’pose Ute Sam and Bigfoot—”

“They didn’t have oxen,” said his sister. “Besides these things are years old. Look, Tom, there’s been a ‘dobe house here!”

Not much of it was visible now, for the rain and snow had melted the mud bricks, but the south wall stood perhaps four feet high and in it were small rectangular holes.

“To shoot through, I betcha,” said Tom. “Musta been a fort, and that platform in the trees was a place for a lookout. Who d’you reckon—”

“Maybe Sir George Gore.” Margie wondered if Pony Wilson knew about this old fort, and if it had anything to do with the mystery which for her seemed to hang about the Yampa.

As soon as Pa and Uncle Henry came with the freight outfit they broke camp, drove the loose stock across the river, and forded with the wagons. The redtop grass on the north side was as high as the mules’ backs. The teams plowed through willow clumps and mowed down whole gardens of flowers—harebell, heath, and red paintbrush. There were three noisy little creeks to cross before Pa reached his claim site. The last one he called Soda Creek because the white rocks around the springs near it seemed to be crusted with soda.

The mules splashed through a trout hole and came to a

stop on a wide grassy bench at the foot of a small hill. "Here's where I figured to build," Pa said. "High and dry above the river, yet plenty sheltered, and handy for—" Abruptly he halted. Then his face turned a queer greenish white. He jumped over the wheel and took great strides to the cottonwood tree where his claim notice had been nailed. Only a shred of the paper was left. Nearby were the ashes of a campfire, and in the soft dirt were tracks. Pa looked at them with eyes that gleamed like blue steel.

"They've beat us! Plumb fooled us!"

The anxious family gathered around him. Uncle Henry dropped the lines and came running to scowl at the tracks. "Ute Sam and Bigfoot! The measly skunks! Must 've took a short cut from Rabbit Ears."

"And now I bet they're larrupin' to the land office to make a filing," cried Margie. "Oh, Pa!"

"They've stole your claim, Jim!"

"Not yet!" Pa's voice was like a whiplash. "This land's mine and by thunder—"

"What you goin' to do, Pa?" shrilled Tom, dodging out of his way. "You goin' to foller 'em?"

"Aye! I'm goin' to beat 'em to the land office!"

"Jimmy—" Ma clutched at him.

He went right on dragging his saddle out of the wagon. "A little sack of grub, Maggie. And Tom, you catch up Monty."

"Ashes are still warm," said Uncle Henry. "The scoundrels haven't much start of you. With a good horse—"

Things happened mighty fast for a while. In no time Pa

was ready. Before he mounted he cut a piece of paper out of his notebook and wrote in large determined letters: “I hereby claim for homestead 160 acres with this tree as center. James Harvey Crawford.” And he tacked it up where the other notice had been ripped away. He stuck his pistol in his belt, wrung Uncle Henry’s hand, and kissed the family good-bye—all but Tom whom he patted on the shoulder, man to man. “Take good care of your ma, son,” he said, and was gone.

They watched him cross the river, pause a moment by the Steamboat spring, and hurry on. A dark speck on the hill, and then only the trees and the yellow afternoon sunshine. How big and empty the valley seemed without him! Margie blinked hard.

“Might as well unload, I reckon,” muttered Uncle Henry.

“Yes,” said Ma, though she just stood there and stared at the spot where Pa had disappeared, as if she could watch him all the long way Outside.

“Look,” Tom discovered, “Sam and Bigfoot forgot their frying pan and coffee pot and a blanket!”

“Shore must ‘ve left in a hurry.” Uncle Henry began to circle the camp, studying the ground and slowly widening his arc. “Uh-huh!” He stooped behind a bush to pick up a couple of empty cartridge shells. “Somebody shot at ‘em from here.”

“Shot at them!” gasped Margie.

Tom hastily looked behind him. “Great geranium! Who do you reckon—”

"Some Ute tryin' to scare 'em out of the country. The Indians never had any use for 'em."

"Then maybe Sam and Bigfoot aren't aiming to jump our claim after all," said Margie hopefully.

"Hmp! They won't give up a good silver prospect that easy," growled her uncle.

"Do you s'pose that Indian's still around?" asked Tom, when they had gone to tell Ma.

"I haven't time to s'pose!" said Ma, tying an apron around her with a jerk. "We've got to eat and sleep whether or no!" And she set everyone to work.

It took the rest of the afternoon to unload and make camp. They didn't set up the stove, for Ma said she'd as soon cook over an open fire till they could get a cabin built.

Next morning Uncle Henry suggested that they go and find the mineral springs. Hunting them was fun. No matter if they were all worried, they couldn't stay gloomy with the birds singing and the sky so blue and the breeze so sweet. The first spring they found was a big one only a few yards from camp. Thick red mud coated the stems of the rushes that grew around it. The water was lukewarm and through it rose chains of bubbles that broke with a *pfft!* at the surface.

"Tastes pretty good," remarked Tom, lifting some water in his hands to his mouth. "What makes that rusty color on everything?"

"Iron stain," explained Uncle Henry. "I'll warrant that water'd build good red blood."

He and Ma went on toward the river, but Margie and Tom

Uncle Henry had to grab her by the arms and pull

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lingered to play Follow The Leader. What sport to leap from mound to mound, with the earth under their feet as springy as new hay mows! They took turns at trying to figure a dry passage among the multitude of little pools and miniature reed-grown hills. There were so many tiny streams hidden by clumps of rank sedges that they had to watch carefully.

Jokum and Ponto thought they ought to go every place the children did. First thing, the pup fell in a spring and crawled out whimpering and plastered with bluish-white mud. He shook himself and sulked off to roll in the grass.

Jokum had a better time. He waded around on his long legs, sniffed the salty grass and licked a sprig of it. It tasted so good that every day from then on he came back and ate some. The wild herds of elk and deer liked it too, for their trails were everywhere.

"I haven't stepped in once," whooped Tom, landing on a particularly shaky knob of earth while half a dozen small green frogs jumped out of his way.

"Neither have I. Ugh!" Margie had miscalculated a bunch of greenery for solid footing and had sunk in jelly-like mud up to her waist. The water was ice cold! Uncle Henry had to grab her by the arms and pull, and she scrambled out, shivering and crestfallen. She was a worse sight than Ponto!

Ma was half-cross, half-laughing. Tom was more interested in the spring. "Look at the bubbles!" he cried. "The fresh water's driving off the mud already."

"Believe you've found the best spring of all, Margie!" said her uncle. "We'll come and taste it when it clears. Now

you'd better hustle into something dry."

"First she's going to take a bath in the big sulphur spring by the river," said Ma decisively.

"Bathe *in a spring?*"

"It's warm and I think it's been hollowed out some. Maybe the Indians piled the rocks around it. Come, I'll get towels and soap. Tom and Henry can take Danny and go up Soda Creek awhile."

When Margie looked at the sulphur pool she said, "Why, it's boiling! It's bubbling all over like a big tea kettle. I'll be scalded!"

"It's not hot," assured Ma. "Try it."

The girl peeled off her clothes and dabbed her toes experimentally in the blue-green water. "It's smelly all right," she observed, wrinkling her nose. To her surprise she soon began to find the tang of it rather salty and pleasant. With right good will she set to work scrubbing and emerged clean and rosy-faced, feeling as fit as a fiddle.

After lunch, Uncle Henry and Tom went to hunt good building timber, and Margie wandered down by the river to see if she could glimpse the Steamboat spring on the other side. She walked through the bushes, pausing often to listen. Pretty soon she heard *chug-achug, chug-achug, chug-achug*. Stepping out on the dry round tops of the boulders, she gazed curiously at the white rocks opposite. They were hollowed and worn as old bones, and out of them opalescent streams of water purled into the river. In one place a plume of foam shot into the air at regular intervals. "That's the

Steamboat spring," she exclaimed aloud. "And that's where the silver is."

She almost wished Pa had never found it. Then Ute Sam and Bigfoot wouldn't have come bothering. Where were the two scoundrels now? Would Pa get Outside to the land office in time to save his homestead? Soberly she started back to camp. Once she whirled to peer behind her with a sudden queer feeling that she was being watched. Maybe that Indian who had shot at Sam and Bigfoot—

Ma was stirring the fire under a pot of beans. She greeted Margie with frightened eyes. "Where's Danny?"

"Why, isn't he here? I haven't seen him since noon."

"I was sure he went with you."

They looked at each other, faces blanched.

"Dann—ee! Danny!" Ma hunted furiously in the wagons and under them.

Margie ran to the creek and searched up and down the bank, under the bushes and over the logs and even in the shallow pools. "He's not here," she panted. "Maybe he's fallen in the springs."

A frantic investigation among the rushes revealed nothing. "Maybe in those rocks on the hill. Danny! Come, baby!"

"He might have tried to follow Tom and Henry." Ma wrung her hands.

"Or he might have gone to sleep under a sagebrush somewhere," said Margie.

"All the time since noon—"

Tom and Uncle Henry returned and joined the search. The

fire Ma had been tending burned to ashes. Margie began with the wagons and looked everywhere again. “Danny! Oh, Danny!”

Stumbling and splashing along the edge of the big pond beyond the sulphur spring, the girl was startled by a sudden voice. Not the piping baby lisp her ears were listening for, but a man’s gruff voice:

“Wal, thar’s no use yellin’ any more.”

There was a stumpy old man with a shrubbery of gray whiskers, a round button of a nose and snapping blue eyes. Pony Wilson! And in his arms fast asleep was Danny.

Margie couldn’t say a word for a minute. She just held out her hands for the baby, but the prospector stalked by her and on to camp. She found her voice. “Here he is! Here he is!”

Ma came running and caught her youngest to her and wiped the corner of her apron across his peaceful dirty face. She held him so tight that his eyes came open.

“Is he all right?” panted Margie.

“He’s all right!” rumbled Uncle Henry. “Thanks to this stranger.”

“He ain’t any stranger!” shouted Tom. “He’s Pony Wilson! Where’d you come from, Pony? How’d you get here? Where ‘d you find Danny?”

“Hmp!” was all the reply the prospector gave. He’d been in water up to his waist and his shoes oozed with moisture when he moved. Maybe that’s what made him so grumpy. He didn’t even answer Ma when she asked him to stay to supper, but turned to shuffle away.

It was Danny's howl of alarm that stopped him. "Me too!" insisted the child, kicking to get down. "More donkey!"

"Where's the donkey?" said Margie.

"Dere!" Danny waved a chubby arm toward the river.

"Mought as well tell you," growled Pony, scraping his feet in the dirt. "I took the baby. I've had him all afternoon. But he's all right, ain't he?"

"You took him?" they gasped.

"Seen him playin' around the sulphur spring, kind of lonesome-like, so I toted him across the river to visit Music. Knowed you wouldn't let him come if I was to ask you, though I never aimed to git you scared."

"You carried him across the river?" Ma began to get frightened all over again.

"He brunged me pickaback!"

"I was keerful as could be. Ole Pony knows." The prospector rubbed his nose and went on haltingly, "I had a little feller of my own, oncet. Injun trader stole him."

He thrust his chin into his ragged collar and stumped away without even hearing the repeated invitation to supper.

"Poor Pony," murmured Margie. "Who'd ever have thought—"

"He's goin' back across the river," frowned Tom. "Wonder where he lives. He had nerve tellin' us to stay away from the Yampa and then comin' here himself. I'd just like to know—"

Uncle Henry spent the following morning up Soda Creek

chopping logs. While he was gone Pony came leading Music, the burro. Danny gave a joyous whoop and galloped to meet him. The old man set the child on the donkey, glancing at Ma uneasily. "Reckoned mebby the little feller'd like to ride around a bit," he suggested. His manner was still gruff and suspicious. He made it plain that he had come to please the baby and no one else.

But Music seemed glad to see people. He lifted his soft muzzle and said "Eee-haw! Eee-haw!" and offered his hoof to shake hands. Tom and Margie skipped around him and petted him and fed him wild peavines. Jokum thought he was being left out, so he stamped off to eat salt grass. Ponto chased his tail till he was dizzy and nobody paid any attention to him.

"Say, Pony," Tom remembered, "why'd you tell us to stay away from the Yampa?"

The old fellow tugged at his shapeless hat. "Didn't want you pesterin'!"

"We're not pesterin'!"

"Them other two was."

"You mean Ute Sam and Bigfoot?" asked Margie. "Are you the one that shot at 'em?"

A twinkle appeared in Pony's eyes. "Jest aimed a shot or two above their heads. They shore went a-flyin'!" The twinkle faded. The leathery face grew glum again. "You lookin' fer gold, mebby?" His words were weighted with distrust.

"No," said the girl. "If we'd wanted to mine we'd have

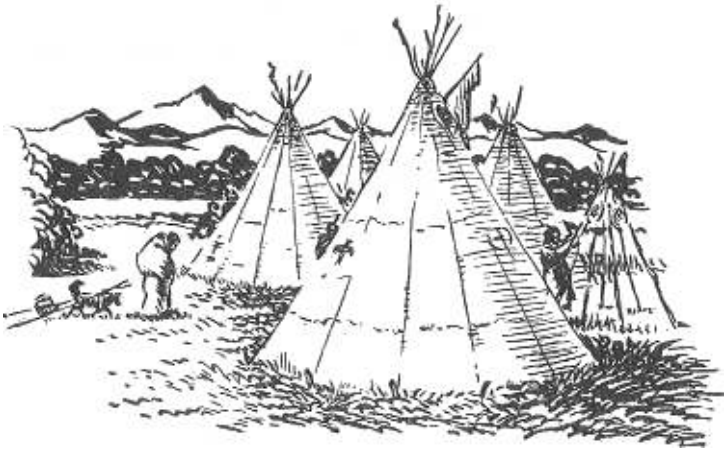
gone to Empire or Central City. We're just going to live here and raise cattle and make a town some day. I—I *hope* we can!"

"Hmp," grunted the prospector, "if that's all you come fer—" His horny fingers crumpled and uncrumpled the hem of Danny's dress, slowly, as if they were feeling for something back through the years.

Uncle Henry came in for noon. He had taken a short cut over the hill. "There's a fresh pony track on the point," he said, furrowing his brows.

"Indian?" Ma reached for Danny.

"Unshod track, anyway. Someone's spying on us."



Chapter Ten

THE PROSPECTOR'S SECRET

"Pony track, huh?" The old prospector straightened. His eyes were keen and bright again. The Crawfords weren't hunting gold. They just wanted to live here, and he wasn't one to say they couldn't have all the land they wanted—if land was what they craved. He'd even help 'em. Come to think of it, it 'd be nice to see another smoke in the valley besides his. "I'll have a look at that track," he said. "Ute scout, likely. Injuns have as much curiosity as antelope."

He returned an hour or so later to report two sets of tracks that led on down the river toward lower country. "The Utes 'll all be driftin' this direction as it gits toward fall. Nothin' to pester about."

Uncle Henry went back to his log-chopping mightily relieved. Pony disappeared for a time. When he returned again he had an ax of his own.

"Aim ter show you how to make the chips fly," he declared sourly. "What you know about cuttin' cabin timber?"

From then on he took charge of the house building. "Ain't goin' ter have no worthless sway-backed shanty in my valley," he grumbled. "Ruther pitch in and see it built right."

Uncle Henry was glad enough to have help and good-naturedly followed the old fellow's sharp orders.

Gradually Pony's grumpiness wore off. Anyone could see he liked having people to talk to; and he liked the kind of

gravy Ma made almost as well as Danny did. He brought his blankets and slept at the Crawford camp. “I got a cabin across the river in them thick spruces on the hill,” he said, “but I can’t be trottin’ back and forth all the time.”

“I don’t see any cabin.” Tom stared through the deepening dusk. They had had their supper and were squatted by the fire. Ma was putting Danny to bed in the tent, and Uncle Henry had gone to make sure the stock in the meadow was all right.

“It’s hid,” Pony told him, puffing contentedly on his pipe. “After I found out Thurston was a double-crosser I felt easier up thar in the timber by myself.”

“Who’s Thurston?” asked Tom.

Pony’s lip curled with contempt. “Injun trader. Crooked as a ram’s horn! But we never knowed we’d run onto anyone like that—me and little Billy.”

“Who’s B—” Tom began, but stopped at a dig from Margie who whispered:

“That’s his little boy, of course.”

“Nope,” Pony held his pipe in his hand, forgetting to draw on it, “we never knowed. Reckon I hadn’t ought to have brought a baby only three years old into the mountains, but what else could I do? Cinthy—” He stared into the fire so long that his listeners feared he would forget to go on, “—Cinthy, she was took off with fever in Denver City and that left just him and me. And then there was the map the wounded Frenchman had made fer me.”

Tom and Margie waited with breathless attention. At last,

Pony might divulge the real mystery of the Yampa.

"It would have been a sight better if the map had been put on a big piece of paper, but when I met up with the Frenchman I didn't have nothin' except my little black notebook. He had to draw it the best he could in that. Wal, Billy and me we follered the directions and got deeper and deeper into the mountains. "Twarn't so easy to figger out them lines the Frenchman had made when he was so turrible weak, and it took us most all summer to find the Yampy Valley. When we did finally hit the right place we seen there was another white man here. His name was Thurston and he had a stock of goods to swap with the Injuns fer pelts. He had fixed up an old 'dobe fort that somebody had built five or six years before and was livin' in that."

"Oh, I know—across the river!" Margie broke in, and then bit her lip for fear the interruption might put an end to Pony's talkativeness. He merely nodded, and went on:

"Thurston he wanted us to share his shelter, and we done it fer a time. I never mentioned about the map, but I don't doubt he seen me studyin' over it. He begun watchin' me like a hawk, pretendin' all the time he was my friend. I soon see'd he was a rascal. The Injuns never liked him neither because he tried to outsmart 'em. They sort of took to me, though, account of Billy, I guess. When I'd go huntin' I'd leave him at the Ute camp and the women 'd take the best kind of care of him. Me and the little feller quit the 'dobe and put up our tent on the hill, and you betcha I slit that map out of my notebook and hid it. I thought the trader 'd pull his

freight pretty soon; then after he went I could go and easy find the gold!"

Gold! Tom and Margie exchanged significant glances.

"But he kept a-stayin' and I did too. It was gittin' along late in the fall. The Utes begun to pack their lodges and drift fer lower country. I knowed it was time fer us to be goin' too. And then it happened."

In high suspense his audience leaned forward. "What happened?"

"The last I can remember the sun was shinin' and I was by the tent playin' with Billy. And when I come to, it was snowin' to beat all and I was jouncin' along on a pole litter behind a Ute pony. And little Billy was gone!"

"Gone!"

Pony's fingers squeezed his cold pipe. "Gone," he whispered.

The tea kettle gurgled merrily. In the tent Ma hummed a slumber song to Danny.

"Yarmony told me it had been three sleeps since he found me knocked cold. Thurston had took Billy and lit out in a hurry. Half a dozen Ute braves had follered him. Seems he'd tricked 'em out of some furs. In three-four days they come back and said Thurston had joined up with a 'Rapahoe war party in Middle Park. Yarmony's braves had hard work to escape with their hair, but they did.

"It began to snow hard and the Injuns started for White River, takin' me along and nursin' me the best they knew. Time I was able to travel the snow was three foot deep in the

mountains and more comin'. Couldn't git into the Yampy till spring and when the breakup did come I hit fer the east slope and the 'Rapahoes, drat 'em! Even give 'em my blanket and the saddle off my horse to tell me where Thurston and the boy went and they sent me on a wild goose chase. Don't never trust no 'Rapahoe!

"Twelve years I've hunted fer Billy. Been everywhere a-lookin. And I allus end up in the Yampy. Got a feelin' the little feller `ll turn up here some day."

"Twelve years," murmured Margie, her voice husky with sympathy. "He wouldn't be little now, Pony. He'd be two years older than I am."

For some moments they sat in uncomfortable silence, then Tom switched the subject. "Did you find the gold?"

Pony roused. "Not yet. But I'm hot on the trail of it! I'll find it afore snow flies. If I hadn't lost that map—"

"Oh, Pony!"

"Yep. Thurston took it."

"I thought you'd hid it!" exclaimed Margie.

"And so I had. But I reckon Thurston was too smart fer me."

"Couldn't you remember what it looked like?"

"Seemed so. Though there must be something I fergot. The Frenchman was turrible sick, and his drawing was confused-like at the end. Injuns had killed his pardners and wounded him bad, but he got away. When I happened on his camp in the foothills he was that weak he couldn't git himself a drink of water. I took care of him, and before he cashed

in, he give me a little buckskin wallet chuck full o' nuggets and made me a map to show where he'd found 'em."

"Looky here!" He extracted a yellowish pebble the size of his thumbnail from a small bag that was worn smooth and black from much handling. As he did so something dropped to the ground.

Tom pounced upon it. "What's this?"

"That thar's the claw of a grizzly bear I killed one time," Pony told him, tucking it back in the wallet.

"He must have been a whopper!"

Pony nodded. His gaze was on the gold. "This here's one of the very nuggets the Frenchman gave me. Purty, ain't it? I had to use the rest fer grubstakes. The Frenchman said they just shoveled 'em up like that!"

"Say, let's go find that place!" Tom was ready to start right then.

"Shore, we'll find it! And when we do you young uns 'll have a share." Pony put away the nugget and shoved the buckskin bag back into his pocket. "Dunno why Thurston never took my wallet while he was stealin' the map."

"What was the map like, near as you can remember?" persisted the boy.

The prospector smoothed a place in the dirt and drew several lines with a stick. "Here's the river. And this here's a tributary comin' in from the northeast. And this is a mountain."

"What's that little circle?" asked the girl.

"That's where the Frenchman and his pardners had their

camp the night before they come onto the gold. I found the two cottonwood forks and the alder pole that they'd swung their canvas over for a tent; and I found where one of `em had cleaned his rifle and gone off and forgot his hickory gun rod. Just like the Frenchman said.

"You see they was restin' fer noon by a stream that emptied into the Yampy, when one of the men shoveled up some gravel and got a long string of gold in his pan. 'Course they begun to work right up the creek. They found out the gold come from a small dry gully a short distance above, and they follered this up till they seen a rim of rock crossing the gulch. Right thar they dug a hole to bed rock and got the richest kind of nugget gravel. Only half a day's travel from camp."

"Show me how to pan, Pony," cried Tom. "I'll pan everywhere!"

"I'll help too," promised Margie. "Beginning tomorrow we'll look in every gulch."

But Pony shook his head. "The gold 'll wait. First off we've got to git a roof over your heads."

So they all worked hard at building the cabin. "We'll face her south," said Pony. He knew just how to notch the logs at each end to make the corners fit together, and he knew the best-sized timbers to lay slantwise from the ridgepole. Uncle Henry finished the roof with slabs of spruce bark. "They'll do awhile," said Pony, "but you'll have to put dirt on thar afore winter." He showed Tom and Margie how to daub the cracks on the outside with sticky white clay from the springs. He supervised the setting up of the stove and the wiring of the pipe. Then he considered his job done.

"Isn't it nice to have a real house!" Margie exclaimed. The floor was dirt, the windows had no glass in them, and the door was only a hole with a deerskin hung over it at night; but the family felt snug as could be inside four walls once more. Uncle Henry thought details could wait and shifted his attention to building a harness shed and corral. So Ma and Margie turned carpenter and manufactured an odd-looking table of split poles, with one side nailed to the wall. Tom made some shelves and a bench.

"We ought to have a housewarming," said Margie. "Oh, Ma, let's! We can put on a tablecloth and invite Pony to dinner. I'll pick a bouquet and we can open the trunk and wear our best dresses. My buff muslin and your blue poplin with the darling polonaise!" She paused, eyes shining.

Ma looked at her in some bewilderment. "There wouldn't be a speck of use—"

"Just for fun! Play as if all the neighbors are coming!"

Ma gazed over the sagebrush. A long way to neighbors. Nobody knew how much she missed them.

"Can we, Ma?"

"Why yes, I guess so. I'll make raisin pudding for dinner."

"Whoopee!" shouted Tom.

They all sat down on the floor to unpack the old tin trunk. It was as much fun as opening a Christmas package. Out came a few precious books. Out came the buff muslin and the blue poplin.

"Your pa, I declare!" sniffed Ma. "Look where he's packed his bullet mold and reloading tools—right in with my bonnet!"

"Here's the mustache cup," said Tom, "and the bottles of extract. They can go on my shelves." He unstoppered each one to sniff the fragrance. "What's this?"

"Careful!" warned Ma. "That's the strong ammonia your pa brought."

Tom took a cautious whiff. He blinked. He sneezed. Hastily he punched back the stopper. "Whew! Like to knocked me over."

"Set it on the shelf with the rest of the bottles," said Ma, "where it won't get broken."

Margie found the almanac and hung it on a nail. "Now if we only had some pictures—oh, I know!"

She dived into her sketch bag for the old daguerreotype, propping it in front of the bottles. The girl in the frame still smiled her sweetest. "Wish we had those tintypes somebody stole in Denver City. Anyhow here's the Little Silver Bear."

"Me bear!" demanded Danny, reaching.

"Oh no, precious. You'd lose it."

"Me bear!" Danny began to cry. He'd fallen in a patch of nettles this morning and his arms and legs were splotched with blisters. He had a right to be cross!

Margie had intended to put the bear on the shelf for ornament but she tucked it back in the bag. "Look, there's Pony. Run and tell him we're going to have a party!"

The baby toddled off. With flying fingers Margie undid the apron she wore and slipped the buff muslin over her head. Fastening a button here and there she dashed out to surprise Pony. "You're invited to the party!" she cried gaily.

"Ginger and bear's grease!" The prospector backed away.

He looked scared. Furtively his gaze slid from the girl in her wrinkled finery to the cabin door through which he could see the edge of the blue and white tablecloth. "Foofaraws and women's fixin's," he muttered and scuttled for the willows.

"What made him act like that, Ma?" cried the disappointed Margie.

"He's lived alone so long. We'll have to make allowance."

The four of them had to eat dinner by themselves, for Uncle Henry had put a couple of biscuits in his pocket and gone hunting. Ma smiled her gallant best from the little brown chair at the head of the table, but Pa's place was empty. It was time he was back from Outside. Why didn't he come?

After dinner the fine dresses were silently folded back in the trunk and the tablecloth was put away. Margie was wondering how she could spend the long lonesome afternoon, when came Pony shuffling along the trail with Music at his heels. He looked ashamed and tugged at his hat apologetically. "Mebby you'd like if I showed you the Frenchman's camp," he offered.

They all went with him, even Ma, Danny, and the pets. He took them to the very spot by the river where he had found the hickory gun rod and the cottonwood forks. Margie tried to seem interested, but her anxious thoughts kept going back to Pa, Ute Sam, Bigfoot, and the long, long miles from Outside to here. When Ma said it was time to go home and get supper, she was more than ready.

They saw Uncle Henry coming up from below and waited for him. He had shot three big gray birds.

"Sage chickens," said Pony. "One of 'em's an old rooster."

"What's the matter with Jokum?" exclaimed Margie. "He keeps pointing his ears up the valley and sniffing."

"The dogs smell somepin too," observed Tom.

"Mebby a bear," said Pony and did not hurry his plodding pace.

"Maybe it was Pa!"

"I betcha!"

The children raced past the sulphur spring and the iron spring. "Pa!" they shouted. "Here we are!" Up the trail to the little flat they panted. Only the cabin and the quiet willows and the basking hill.

"Pa—" First to reach the door, Margie halted with an exclamation of dismay. "Everybody come quick! Someone's been in the house and it wasn't Pa!"

Chapter Eleven

TOM PLAYS A JOKE

"Great geranium!" Tom slid to a stop beside Margie. His red hair stuck up like the hackles on Spy's neck. "Somebody's dumped everything out of the trunk! Right in the middle of the floor!"

Ma arrived, flushed and anxious. She pushed past the children. "What in creation?"

"Indian, I'll warrant!" growled Uncle Henry.

Ma looked to see if the money was gone from the hiding place in the back pocket of the trunk lid, and drew a relieved breath when she found it was still there. She stooped to whisk through the disordered pile of clothing and keepsakes. "Thank goodness, they didn't steal Jimmy's nice shirt!"

"Or my buff muslin," said Margie snatching up the beloved dress and brushing off the dust.

"I can't miss anything from the trunk," frowned Ma. "And they didn't steal blankets."

"Nor grub—far as I can see," Tom reported.

"Ammunition's all here in the corner," said Uncle Henry. "Seems like Indians would have helped themselves to that."

"What could they have been after?" puzzled Ma.

Pony had not come in the house. He had been snooping around the bushes as busily as the dogs, reading sign. He called the Crawfords outside. "Same unshod pony tracks I seen hereabouts afore. Thought I trailed 'em out of the val-

ley, but they must've circled back to fool us. Here's where the horses was tied to this limber branch, and I reckon the owners jumped on 'em and skeedaddled when they heard us comin'." His whiskers stood out like tufts of thistles and his blue eyes crackled with indignation. "Fool me, huh? Come a-sneakin and a-snawpin' around my valley, will they? Ginger and bear's grease! I'll show 'em! I'll ketch 'em and salt their hides!"

He set off on the fresh trail, bent half double to see the tracks in the dimming light. Music patiently followed. Uncle Henry and Tom hurried up on the hill to take a look over the country. Margie and Ma repacked the tin trunk for the second time that day. What had the prowlers expected to find there? Who were they? Would they come back? "I wish Pa was here," thought the girl, troubled. He'd been gone for days and days. Weeks. Seemed as if he'd had time to go clear to Missouri and back. What was keeping him?

Pony didn't show up that night. Tom and Uncle Henry came in after dusk.

"There's a lot of Indians on the mesa above Soda Creek," announced the boy. "We saw 'em putting up their lodges."

"Forty tepees anyway," corroborated Uncle Henry. "Likely part of the same band of Utes that were camped at Hot Sulphur. Must have been some of them got in the cabin."

"I hope Colorow stayed in Middle Park," murmured Margie fervently.

Next morning the Crawfords expected Indian visitors

right away, so Ma made an extra lot of biscuit. She had on her old scrub-day dress, and her hair was pinned into a tight determined knot. “We’ve a sight of work to do to get ready for Sunday!” she said. “There’s baking and washing and ironing.”

“Washing!” Margie looked her surprise. “But Monday’s wash day. And Tuesday’s ironing day! This is only Saturday.”

Ma was busy sorting clothes. “Tom, you fill the boiler. Your Uncle Henry’s made a fire outside to heat the water. Margie, you may rip off the comfort tops.”

“We just washed ‘em when we were in Hot Sulphur,” protested the girl.

“No matter. I don’t doubt they need it again.”

Ma was worried. This was a sure sign. And not on account of Indians or prowlers either. It was Pa she was anxious about. Margie wished Ma could sit down and fold her hands and worry. The family would have a heap easier time. Ma always had to pitch into the hardest work she could think of and the rest of them had to pitch in with her.

Margie sat down to clip the knots in the comforters. Through the door she watched for Indians. Uncle Henry brought an armload of wood for the stove but Ma told him to put it on the fire outside.

“The oven’s just right for baking,” she said. “While the water heats I’ll mix up a cake.”

“Cake!” Tom was in such haste to empty the last bucket of water into the boiler that he sloshed most of it on himself.

Margie began to clip in earnest. “I’ll be through in a shake and I’ll grease the tins!”

The cake was the one bright prospect of the day. The Crawfords hadn’t had cake since the coal oil had spilled on the sugar. They’d had to throw away so much sugar that Ma had been precious sparing of it ever since.

“I’ll add the vanilla when it’s time,” said Tom, who considered everything upon his shelves with a proprietary air.

“Danny help too!” The baby scooped dirt off the floor with Ma’s best spoon and sifted it on Ponto, who was in everybody’s way. Tobe dozed by the stove, half an amber eye on the pup.

“There’ll be plenty for everyone to do.” Ma added a pinch of this and a handful of that to the mixture in the bowl. “Shoo, Jokum! Can’t somebody get this elk out of here!”

“What’s he got in his mouth?” cried Margie.

“The almanac! He’s eating it!” Tom made a grab.

“Catch him! Don’t let him out!”

It would have been better if they hadn’t blocked the door, for Jokum had a mind to play. Around the small room he cavorted, doing wholesale damage to Ma’s neat housekeeping. Ponto crawled behind the woodbox while Tobe took refuge on top of the table. The elk shook the almanac and dared anyone to try to get it. He ducked and dodged. He was as slippery as a fish. His hair was short, and his tail was short, and he didn’t stay still long enough for anybody to get hold of his ears. When the booklet was finally rescued it was all torn and slobbery. Jokum didn’t care! The print had had a

nice flavor. He clattered off to the meadow, shaking his mischievous head and making an exaggerated business of chewing a scrap of paper.

"Scat!" scolded Ma. "Cats on the table! Such goings on! Scat!"

Tobe shot from the cabin, a ball of outraged fur and whiskers.

"Mercy to goodness, I'll be thankful when we have a door we can shut!" Ma emphasized her words with jerky disgusted stirrings of the cake.

"Fix it today," promised Uncle Henry, looking in just then. By the way, here comes your company."

Margie took a quick survey from the window. She recognized Two Feathers, one of the braves who had eaten trout with the Crawfords at Hot Sulphur Springs. The Indian Jokum was with him, and a couple of other braves. Those last two—where had she seen them before? A little yellow fuzz-tailed colt ran among the ponies. It didn't seem to belong for every time it came near Two Feathers' mare the horse laid back her ears.

Ma handed Margie the spoon and picked up Danny. "Go on with the cake," she directed.

The table was near the door, and the girl could watch the Indians while she stirred. Two Feathers seemed to be the leader. He wore a gorgeous red flannel shirt, a pair of soiled and torn pantaloons, and a white man's hat ornamented by a band of calico. The hat and the shirt proclaimed his superiority. The other men were bareheaded and naked to the waist.

"How!" greeted Uncle Henry.

"How!" They slid off their ponies and crowded around the door. "Beescuit! Beescuit!"

Ma distributed her biscuit, which rapidly disappeared.

The visitors saw the white crystals of sugar that crusted the measuring cup. "Shug!" they loudly insisted.

Of a sudden Margie recollected where she had seen those other two Indians. They had been with Colorow at that memorable first meeting. She was sure of it! If Uncle Henry hadn't stood right there, tall and sturdy, she might have been a little bit afraid.

"Shug!"

They reached for the cup. Ma snatched it up and held it behind her, bound not to give a drop of the precious sweetening to any begging Utes.

"Pour the batter into the pan now, daughter," she said by way of diversion.

The Utes watched sharply while Margie held the bowl in the crook of one elbow and prepared to empty it.

"Wait!" cried Tom, who had been standing by the table for the last ten minutes popping the cork in and out of the vanilla bottle. He measured a brown drop into the dough. The Indians in the doorway caught the sweet tantalizing fragrance.

"Utes smell um," suggested Two Feathers, grabbing for the bottle.

Tom clung to his property. "Shall I, Ma?"

Mrs. Crawford nodded. Anything to make the bothersome guests forget about the sugar!

He thrust the bottle under Two Feathers' nose

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The boy went the rounds, and the Indians sniffed and snuffed with loud pleasure. Their eyes grew as big and glittery as Tobe's when he rolled in the catnip back in Missouri.

"Let `em try the lemon too," whispered Margie, "and the rose." She had a hard time to keep from laughing, the Utes acted so funny. They screwed their eyes shut, wrinkled their big brown noses, grunted, pushed each other.

Tom was plenty willing to pass the other extracts. That innocent look in his eyes should have warned Ma.

"Smell um more!" insisted the fascinated Utes.

"Wee-el—" the boy produced a fourth bottle that he had kept hidden under his arm— "I might let you smell this."

Too late Ma saw what he was up to. Before she could collar him he thrust the bottle under Two Feathers' nose and suddenly withdrew the cork. The full strength of Pa's ammonia struck the astonished fellow's nose. He staggered back, coughing and strangling. His head hit the door frame and his hat with the calico band rolled in the dirt. He sputtered and wheezed. He doubled against the wall. His hands clawed at his throat and nostrils. His eyes streamed tears. He sneezed and gulped and gasped.

"Haw!" shouted Tom

Even Uncle Henry had to chuckle.

The other Indians were startled and pressed around their comrade to see if he was really hurt. They talked in short suspicious grunts. The harder Tom laughed, the glummer they grew. They didn't like whites to make fun of Indians. As soon as Two Feathers could get his breath he snatched up

his hat, dashed the tears from his cheeks, and waved the braves to their ponies.

"No fool um Ute!" he choked, climbing upon his horse and giving it a wrathful kick in the ribs.

"Oh, son, why did you?" cried Ma.

"Aw, I just meant to have a little joke," said Tom unrepentantly, weighing the ammonia bottle in his hands and gazing at it with eyes that still enjoyed the commotion it had caused. "They forgot the sugar, didn't they?"

"Two Feathers was mad as a hornet." Margie's brows puckered. "And I wouldn't trust that fellow Jokum. And you know something else? Those other two were friends of Colorow's!"

"Colorow's!" Tom's satisfaction dissolved. He looked mighty uncomfortable. "Honest, I didn't mean to make 'em mad."

Ma considered a moment. "Son, maybe you'd better run after Two Feathers and give him some sugar."

The boy hung his head. "Aw, Ma, I couldn't catch up with him. He's on horseback!"

"Reckon there's no need," said Uncle Henry. "No use to make that brave think he's too important. When he comes again we'll give him sugar and coffee too. That'll square things."

"I don't know—" hesitated Ma.

"Want me to put the bench outdoors to set the tub on?" offered Tom. "Hadn't we better start washin'?" He dragged at the bench, but before he could get it to the door there came a loud hail from the direction of the springs.

"What now, for pity sakes?" exclaimed Ma.

They all rushed out to see. Up the trail moved a strange procession: first a half-grown Indian lad, limping badly; then Pony Wilson, leading a buckskin mare that had a very lame foot; then the faithful flop-eared Music. Pony had his gun in hand and when the boy slowed, he poked him in the ribs with the barrel.

"Got one of 'em!" he yelled. "T'other slipped away but I reckon this here varmit can tell you why for he busted into your trunk. Git along thar!"

The proud set of those young shoulders, the lean grimness of that face—

"Running Whirlwind!" cried the amazed Margie. "Why, for mercy sake!"

At the sound of his name the boy stiffened. He didn't look at the Crawfords but stared out beyond at the hill.

"Was it you busted into our trunk?" blurted Tom.

"Shore it was." Pony wagged his head. "Same tracks. What you know about him?"

"We met him in Middle Park," Ma explained.

"He's 'Rapahoe and I had to ride like sixty to get Pa so Colorow wouldn't scalp him," added Tom incoherently.

"'Rapahoe!" Pony snorted. "I wouldn't trust a 'Rapahoe as fur as from me to you. What's he doin' in Ute country?"

"An' why'd he dump things out o' our trunk, I'd like to know?" said Tom.

The Indian boy hunched on the ground, clasping his injured leg. His only answer was a scornful curl of the lip that could not quite hide a twinge of pain.

"Whatever am I thinking of!" Ma bestirred herself. "That poor boy hurt and all of us just standing around!" In no time she had his moccasin off and was rolling up the buckskin trouser to disclose an ankle, swollen and puffy and beginning to turn purple.

"If he's an Injun I'm a carcajou!" snorted Pony. "Look at the whiteness of his skin under his pants leg."

"Me Arapahoe!" stated the boy pridefully. "But my father is Clee Morgan, the white trader."

"Hmp! Half Injun is worse 'n all Injun! I wouldn't go fussin' with him, ma'am. Likely he ain't as bad off as he makes out. I'll wager he can move spry enough when ole Pony Wilson gives him an invite to vamoose!"

"Look! There's Wasani hidin' behind that service bush," cried Tom.

"Come out o' thar!" ordered the mountain man, throwing his rifle to his shoulder and sighting along it. "I've got the drop on you. Put down that gun!"

Seeing he had ventured too close in his anxiety for his friend, Wasani reluctantly lowered his weapon and trudged over to stand beside Running Whirlwind. His sullen black eyes darted from one to another of the group.

"Gimme that buffaler gun!" grunted Pony.

Wasani clutched the gun and backed away.

"Let him be," said Uncle Henry. "He won't bother."

"Margie, run and get hot water and some clean cloths," directed Ma.

The girl dashed into the cabin. She was just in time to snatch the cake out of the oven—a little brown, but not quite

burned. When she returned with the teakettle and bandages, Ma was saying:

"—a pretty bad sprain. He'll have to stay right here till his leg's better."

"Anyway he couldn't travel on such a lame horse," put in Tom.

Pony turned so red Margie was afraid he might explode. "Ginger and bear's grease! 'Rapahoes ain't safe, I tell you. Lemme run the two of 'em clean out o' the country!"

"You'll do nothing of the kind!" said Ma flatly, wringing out hot cloths and laying them against the swelling.

Pony glared down his nose. He kicked the chopping block with one stubby boot. "You'll be wishin' you'd took my advice. If the Utes finds these 'Rapahoes here—wal, when you git into trouble you needn't holler fer help 'cause I won't be nowhere in hearin'. I'm a-goin to Hahn's Peak to prospect!"

Chapter Twelve

MA WASHES EVERYTHING

Ma paid scant attention to Pony's grumpy departure. She knelt in the grass and did a thorough job of bandaging. The Indian boy relaxed under the gentleness of her fingers. A queer expression softened his stern young face.

Wasani had gone to fetch his horse, a blaze-faced black which had been hidden in the willows, and now leading it up beside Running Whirlwind, he jabbered anxiously in Arapahoe. It was plain that Wasani wanted to get away from this place and he thought the two of them could ride his horse back to the shelter of the hills and trees. Uncle Henry favored that idea. He was for packing the boys off at once. "They can soon cross to North Park and very likely find some of their own tribe," he argued. "If they stay here they'll be in danger from the Utes and so will we."

Uncle Henry was too much like Pa to have a thought for himself. Margie knew he was mindful only of Ma and the family and the trust Pa had put upon him. The Ute camp was less than half a mile away, barely out of sight above the hill. From it came the faint odor of burning meat and the occasional snarl of fighting dogs. This was Ute country. Arapahoes had no business to be here. Arapahoes were born enemies of Utes. Between the tribes was nothing but blood and warfare.

Ma split the bandage and tied it. "There!" she said to

Running Whirlwind. “You must stay quiet.”

“Now see here, Maggie—” frowned Uncle Henry.

“A week or two!” Ma got up and switched her skirts for all the world like Aunt Sally.

“Won’t do, Maggie. I tell you, he’s Arapahoe.”

“I don’t care if he’s Hottentot. He’s only a boy not much older than my Tom. And here he stays till that ankle’s well!”

Wasn’t that just like Ma! She had the habit of taking care of people who were sick or in trouble. Back in Missouri she’d helped Grandpa and Grandma raise seven orphans and it looked now as if she was ready to begin raising these two Indians. She didn’t even seem to remember that they were the very ones who had sneaked into the cabin last night and turned the trunk upside down.

But Uncle Henry did and he demanded an explanation. They wouldn’t say a word. Wouldn’t even tell why they were prowling around Ute country. Uncle Henry had small use for anyone who couldn’t answer a straight question. He went back to his sawing and hammering. He was making a door. “It’s my notion,” he growled, “we’d better ‘ve let Pony have his way with ‘em.”

Running Whirlwind made an effort to get up, went gray with the pain. The white woman was right. It would be many a day before he could bear weight on that bad ankle.

Tom sprang to help him. After all, when a fellow was hurt— “Will the Utes scalp us all if they find you here?” he asked, lending a sturdy shoulder for the Indian boy to lean on.

Running Whirlwind's somber gaze sought Margie. "Where Little Bear?"

"Little Bear—oh yes! Danny cried for it and I had to put it out of sight, but it's right in the cabin in my blue bag."

"Good. Utes no find Arapahoes." He straightened his shoulders.

Wasani nodded. "Little Bear good medicine."

Ma spread a blanket in the shed behind the harness trappings and there the injured lad took up his quarters. He could see anyone who might happen by, yet not be seen. Wasani left his gun with his comrade. Running Whirlwind's own had been lost in his fall from the horse. Wasani then hid the two ponies in the thick willows where there was plenty of grass, and made a poultice of moss and mud for the buckskin mare's lame leg.

"I didn't remember you had a buckskin horse," said Tom.

"Ute pony." Wasani knew very little English, but he could make lively talk with his hands. A spark of enjoyment kindled in his eyes as he told how he and Running Whirlwind had sneaked into the enemy camp at Hot Sulphur that night of the storm when "Utes heap sleep." How the two of them had found ropes, saddles and a blanket apiece, had slipped off to the river bank where the horses grazed, and had taken the first two they could catch. They had stampeded the others to prevent pursuit.

"Buckskin heap good running pony," he concluded, and after hiding the Indian saddles he returned to squat beside Running Whirlwind.

Ma went back to the business of washing. “Tom, more firewood!”

“I don’t think Indians ever wash,” sighed Tom. “It’d be kind of nice to be an Indian.”

“Margie, take the stick and punch those clothes.”

“Yes’m.”

The girl divided her attention between the mesa trail and the harness shed. More Utes were sure to come begging biscuit any time. There were some women now! What if they should go poking into the shed or notice the dogs sniffing around? But they didn’t even stop at the cabin. Holding their shawls about them they scurried on to the springs to scoop red and yellow clay into willow baskets lined with pitch.

Singing Grass was the only one who paused. Slowly she padded toward the house. Her broad brown face was shadowed with uneasiness. She told Ma, “Two Feathers heap sick. Maybeso die. White man’s smell-water heap bad!” She showed with her hands how his women were making him a sweat house. The medicine man, she said, was trying to drive out the evil spirit that had hold of him. The clay was to paint the faces of some of the braves who would hold a ceremony so “sick Injun heap get well.” She hastened to join the other women.

“I don’t see how one smell of ammonia could make anybody sick,” fussed Ma.

“It couldn’t.” Uncle Henry threw down his hammer and stalked up to the Ute camp. He came back snorting. “The rascal’s just putting on. Nothing wrong with him, though

he's lying on the ground groaning and making a great to-do. Claims the whites knocked him over. I told him a cup of sugar would cure him and he'd better quit yowling like a papoose and come to the cabin to get it. I don't think Yarmony's paying him much attention, but some of the others are. Colorow for one."

So Colorow was in the Yampa Valley! Tom wished mightily he'd never thought of that ammonia. Margie wished Pa was home. If Colorow and Two Feathers and some of those mean Utes got together—

The day grew hot as the washing continued. The Arapahoes stayed quietly in the shed. Nothing happened. After noon Wasani went to hunt Running Whirlwind's gun and to get a deer. The lazy clouds were like dabs of whipped egg white in the deep blue bowl of the sky. A humming bird zinged past the corner of the cabin on invisible wings. A bumblebee wallowed noisily in a clump of wild asters under the wash bench.

What was keeping Pa? He'd been so sure he could beat Sam and Bigfoot to the land office. But had he? Whoever made the first filing would have right to this land. That was the law. Maybe the Crawfords would have to move on somewhere else. Pony said the country got drier and flatter the farther west one went. He said too, there wasn't any valley anywhere as fine as this. Margie looked at the cabin snuggled there under the hill. It was their house. They'd built it. Their fingerprints were in the clay daubing. Who'd ever have thought they could feel so at home in this Yampa Valley?

The last tubful of clothes was being rinsed, and the bushes on the flat were abloom with petticoats, aprons, stockings, and comfort tops when Uncle Henry announced, "The door's finished. "Who's going to help me hang it?"

"Me!" cried Tom.

"And me!" Margie was glad enough to stop wringing and squeezing for a minute.

Even Ma had to come and help hold the pine panel while Uncle Henry nailed heavy harness leather to the house logs for hinges.

"There!" He wiped his hands on his trousers. "That'll keep the critters out soon as I make a fastening."

Spy's ears pricked to attention. She marched to the edge of the creek. Must be some more Utes, thought Margie, too tired to care much. Then from up the valley came a long halloo, deep and penetrating and like no other halloo that ever was. It broke through the dull drowsiness of the afternoon and set the echoes ringing, "Hoo-oo-oo-*oo*!"

"Pa! It's Pa, sure 'nuff!"

She dashed for the creek, jumped from stone to stone, cleared the willows, took a sagebrush at one leap regardless of ripping her skirts, and flung herself joyously at a dear familiar figure on horseback.

"Oh, Pa!" Lifting herself in one stirrup she threw her arms around his neck. Her heart was singing such a glad song that it came up in her throat and almost choked her.

He kissed her and boosted her up behind him on Monty. "Everyone all right?"

"We thought you'd never come! Oh, did you save the

claim?"

Pa laughed. It was good to hear him laugh. "You betcha boots!" he said. "But I had to go clean to Denver City to get the Inspector."

"Inspector?" The name had a chilling sound.

A shambling strawberry roan now caught up with Monty. Riding him was a plump pompous little man with clipped yellow mustache and pale blue eyes.

"Higginbee, this is my daughter Margie," said Pa.

"How-de-do." The dignitary raised his yellow eyebrows and then clamped them together in an impressive frown.

Afterward Margie learned this was merely a habit of his, but now conscious of her flying hair, her undignified position astride the horse and a torn bit of trimming that looped from her petticoat, she flushed with embarrassment. "Wish I could warn Ma," she thought.

But there was not the slightest chance. The horses were already splashing across the creek, and there was Tom, chagrined that Margie had beaten him, but bound to get in the first word about the cabin.

"We built her, Pa!" he shouted. "Lookit!"

"Ay Jonathan!"

And here came Ma running. "Jimmy! Oh, Jimmy!"

Pa forgot the Inspector and everything else as he swung off Monty and caught his wife in his arms.

"Jim, you old horsethief!" boomed Uncle Henry, barging up with Danny on his shoulder.

"Didja beat Ute Sam and Bigfoot?" yelled Tom to make himself heard above the dogs that were barking and jumping

about. “Didja, Pa?”

“Yessireebobtail! I made a short cut and got ahead of the rascals. And I took a piece of the metal from the Steamboat spring to show an expert, and he said it wasn’t silver at all. Just a coating of some other minerals deposited on sticks and stones by the water. I told our two friends when they came straggling in and they felt mighty foolish. The silver was all they ever wanted.

“You filed the claim?” cried Ma.

“The best I could without a survey. It’s fixed so nobody can take it away from us now, unless the Government decides it wants it.”

“The Government!”

“Because of the mineral springs,” said Pa, looking suddenly weary. “Maggie, this is Mr. Higginbee, the inspector who’s come to report on things.”

Ma saw the stranger for the first time. Her hands, red from being in the hot water, flew to her hair, then tugged at her sleeves. “How—how do you do?”

“How-de-do.” The Inspector removed himself joint by joint from his horse. He smoothed his rumpled black vest, felt of his sunburned nose.

Mustering a smile, Ma tried to sound hospitable. “You must be tired and hungry. Come right up to the cabin.” She turned to lead the way.

“Pa, the Gov’ment wouldn’t take our homestead, would it?” Tom tried to match his stride to his father’s.

“We found the springs,” argued Margie, clinging to him on the other side. “At least nobody knew about ‘em but Pony

Wilson and the Indians."

"The Government has to look into such things," said Pa. "Springs like these 'll be valuable some day, and they need to be taken proper care of. We can do that, ay Jonathan! And I don't make any doubt but we can keep them.

"You've found us washing," Ma apologized to the Inspector. "I don't usually wash on Saturday, but I was anxious to have things clean before Mr. Crawford came, and tomorrow being Sunday—"

"Madam," said the representative of the Government, rubbing his cramped muscles, "this is Sunday."

"Sunday!" echoed Ma faintly.

"Sunday!" gasped Margie and Tom.

"Lost track of a day somewhere, I reckon," muttered Uncle Henry. "Sure as I'm born, I thought this was Saturday!"

"I never in my life!" Ma was flustered to pieces. It was her pride that the first day in the week was always carefully observed no matter if they were away off in the mountains. Saturdays they baked and scrubbed; Sundays they dressed in their clean best, listened to chapters from the family Bible, and sang hymns to the windy accompaniment of Tom's Jew's harp. After that the family were allowed to go walking and to hunt snail shells and gather flowers—but never, never to go fishing!

"And we've washed everything in the house and made a door and even baked a cake!" said Margie in a shocked tone, feeling that they were mortally disgraced.

Pa began to chuckle. Uncle Henry threw back his head and roared. Tom rolled on the ground and made cackling sounds.

Margie looked at Ma, Ma looked at Margie, and before they knew it they were laughing too. Inspector Higginbee was the only one who didn't crack a grin. He was trying to blow his scorched nose without losing any more skin, and the effort made him grunt.

Pa sobered. "We haven't had any dinner, Maggie. Could you fix us a little something while I unsaddle?"

"I'll set out a snack right away!"

Nobody had time to think about Running Whirlwind hidden in the shed. Pa threw the saddles on the ground and got the tin wash pan and some soap for his guest.

"Do the best you can by the Inspector," he whispered to the family. "Whether we get to keep this homestead depends on him."

Such scurrying around! "It's lucky we have the sage chicken," said Ma. "We'll fry some of that. Put on the tablecloth, daughter, and Tom, you run and get the milk jar out of the cold spring."

In record time she called the two men to eat.

"You'll find my wife knows how to cook," declared Pa proudly.

Inspector Higginbee jabbed his fork into the meat and sliced off a thin piece. A peculiar expression came over his face as he tasted it. Pushing it to one side of his plate, he took a gulp of coffee and reached for a biscuit.

Pa looked queer too when he tried the meat, but he attacked it valiantly.

"What's the matter?" faltered Ma. "Isn't it all right?"

"It's a mite bitter," Pa was reluctant to confess, "and a

mite tough. Must have been an old sage rooster."

Ma turned abruptly to the stove, a tired quiver on her lips.

"But the gravy's fine," Pa hastened to add. "Have another spoonful of gravy, Inspector."

The silence grew uncomfortable till Pa remembered, "I've got a surprise! One of you fetch the bundle that's tied on my saddle." He took it from Tom, carefully undid the cord, and removed the canvas wrapping. Something red and white, something with a blue square in one corner—

"Oh! Oh!" cried Margie. "A flag! A great big one!" She seized hold of one end to help shake out the folds.

"Isn't that a dandy?" said Pa pridefully.

"Geranium!" jubilated Tom. "Thirteen stripes and thirty-seven stars!"

"It'll look pretty good flying over our little cabin," exclaimed Pa, "won't it, Maggie?"

"'Deed it will, Jimmy." Ma brushed a quick hand across her eyes. Then she felt the fine bunting appreciatively "Where—?"

"Hute Richardson got hold of it some place and sent it to Hot Sulphur by a man who claims he's goin' to settle there. Reckon Hute felt sort of bad to leave us. He knew I'd be ridin' out after mail and provisions. I met up with the man and he was glad enough to be rid of the bundle.

"I'll cut a flag pole this very afternoon," promised Uncle Henry.

They hated to have to fold the flag and put it away on the shelf, but there were a million things to be done before night. The Inspector rested a while; then he and Pa went off to see

the near-by springs. Ma set to work at once to baste the comfort tops back on the cotton.

"With an extra bed to make we'll need all our cover to-night. Under the circumstances I hope the Lord 'll forgive me for sewing on Sunday."

Margie and Tom emptied the tubs and gathered in the clothes. The sun sank into the west. Ma carried her work to the door where she could see better.

"Here they come back," announced Tom.

"Mercy on us!" Ma basted for dear life. "Daughter, you run and show them the iron spring you found. Keep them away from here a minute longer till I can finish this."

The girl hurried to meet the two men, Jokum capering at her heels. Pa had paused and was looking across the soft green rush-grown pyramids. His shoulders sloped wearily. Margie knew why when she heard the Inspector's crisp businesslike voice:

" . . . feel it my duty to recommend that the Government reserves these springs."

Chapter Thirteen

GOOD MEDICINE

Margie stood stunned. Lose the springs? Lose their homestead here in this Yampa Valley? Stumbling forward, she tugged at Pa. He put an arm around her and was silent. The sunset clouds were a great gold goosequill stuck in the purple inkpot of the hills. The big ponds among the rushes were bright with the color of the sky. A muskrat left a furrow of ripples as he swam. Jacksnipe dabbled in the shallows.

Pa stood there bareheaded, the little hill and the cabin behind him, and all the wide dusky beauty of the Yampa in front of him. He had come clear across the plains from Missouri to find just this. Maybe some place there were Shining Mountains. To Pa, the lush valley and the staunch friendly hills were enough.

"Oh, Pa—"

Patting her shoulder, he tried to sound hopeful. "Maybe Mr. Higginbee 'll change his mind come morning. No need to worry your Ma and the rest of them tonight."

Ma would have known right off there was something wrong if she hadn't been so busy. Wasani had brought in a deer, which Running Whirlwind was helping him skin at the edge of the willows. Pa was surprised to see the Arapahoe boys. He soon knew most that had happened that day and the day before. The emptied trunk was nothing to worry about, he said. Indians all had a bump of curiosity. He examined

Running Whirlwind's ankle and agreed with Ma that the boys should stay till it was healed.

"But we'll have to keep 'em hid," Tom declared. "The Utes always scalp 'Rapahoes, and they might scalp us too."

"Tut! We'll do no hiding," said Pa firmly. "Yarmony must be told about the boys. He's fair-minded and'll see they come to no harm."

"Colorow's here in the valley," Margie told him. "I don't think Yarmony could make him mind, and he can be mean, Pa."

"And Two Feathers told him about the ammonia." Tom had been hoping nobody would remember the ammonia and here he'd blurted it himself. Now the whole story had to come out. Pa didn't say much, but the Inspector asked a lot of questions and fiddled with his top vest button. In daylight he was an important official, but at night he was only a plump, little, bald-headed man away off in an unheard-of place called Yampa Valley.

Somewhere across the sagebrush an owl was hunting mice —*wh-who-wh-whoo*. And over by the cave a family of coyote pups raised an eerie chorus to the moon—*yee-ee-eeeeee-yip yip yip yip!*

The Inspector cleared his throat. "You think there's danger from the Indians, Crawford?"

Pa's blue eyes studied him briefly. "No! Supper about ready, Maggie? I'll fetch those boys."

Supper was eaten outdoors around a campfire. The table inside was too small to accommodate nine! The Arapahoe

boys stayed in the shadows apart from the others, and no one could get a word out of them. Margie washed dishes while Ma made beds. Uncle Henry sat by the fire making a pulley for the flagpole which he had cut and peeled and fixed ready to set up in the morning. The Inspector hunched opposite him.

Margie finished the dishes and carried the water a few yards away to empty. A moment she stood, well out of the circle of light, to look up at the mountains. She had a feeling that they stretched close protective arms into the darkness. Yet they couldn't keep the Inspector from taking away Pa's claim. Anxiety sharpened her senses, made the very sagebrush that caught at her skirts seem precious.

Down there in the blacker shadow rushed the river, and mingled with it, she imagined she could hear the rumbling voices of the springs—the *chug-chug* of the steamboat, the noisy boil of the big sulphur spring, and the tinkling ripple of the dozens of small pools hidden in the rushes. She had a sudden fancy that if she went and knelt by one of them and listened to the soft prick of the bubbles as they reached the surface she could understand their speech. The warm iron spring was a few yards yonder and she knew the way so well she could travel it even in the night without fear of splashing into holes.

Yielding to impulse, she moved forward.

At the edge of the rushes a faint sound halted her—like a boot scraping on gravel. She tried to muffle her pounding pulses. Someone was standing there ahead! She could just

make him out. An Indian, sure! Intending to steal quietly to the cabin and tell Pa, she backed a step.

Wham! The dish pan hit a bush, and a voice came out of the blackness:

"Daughter?"

"Yes, Pa!"

She went and stood beside him. A long moment they looked down into the inky blur of the cottonwoods, their thoughts locked together.

"I understand the Government's attitude," muttered Pa, "but I believe they'd be glad enough to let us go ahead here if they only knew how we felt. Ay Jonathan! I'm willing to give everything to the building of this country; I'll fight for it and I'll do all in my power to lay foundations for a town that the future 'll be proud of. But—" His hands dropped to his sides and he finished hopelessly, "Higginbee's a hard man to talk to."

This time it was the girl who comforted. "Maybe when he sleeps over it, Pa—"

Margie spent a chilly night in spite of the hot rocks tucked at her feet. Ma had given the Inspector the big comforter from their bed. While she tossed and twisted, she could hear him snoring to the stars outside. Tom and the Arapahoe boys and the men had spread their blankets by the fire. Ponto scratched at his own scrap of cover, couldn't fix it to suit him, whined, and nosed under the quilt beside Margie. She let him stay, for he was like a warm round ball.

It seemed to her she had just got her eyes screwed shut when the shrill whinny of a horse woke her up again. Dawn had come. She could hear the crack of willows and the clump of hoofs. Something was the matter with that horse. It kept whinnying and lunging back and forth. Sharp coltish squeals added to the din. Now the dogs from the Indian camp lent their racket. Spy rushed from camp with a bark that sent Ponto scrambling from his nest. The pup had dragged the cover half off Margie and she roused reluctantly.

Then came a sound that brought her upright, wide awake. It was a savage yell, followed instantly by Pa's booming, "Hey, you!"

She and Ma reached the window at the same moment. Out from the willows shot a long-legged yellow colt, and behind it limped Running Whirlwind's buckskin mare. After them rode an Indian whose red shirttails flapped about his bare brown legs. Two Feathers! Plain enough what had happened! The colt that for several weeks had been an orphan in the Ute band of ponies had discovered its mother when the Ute herd had gone to the creek to drink. Its squeals had been sufficient to attract anyone. Two Feathers had come to see what the fuss was about and of course had recognized the mare as one of the horses that had been stolen from the Hot Sulphur camp.

Catching the quilt about her shoulders, Margie rushed to the door just in time to see Pa in undershirt and trousers knock the gun from Running Whirlwind's hands. At the same time Uncle Henry thrust out an arm to collar Wasani.

After them rode an Indian

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"Here, what's all this?" shouted Pa.

Two Feathers slid from his horse and confronted the group, black eyes snapping. "Hah!" he cried. "'Rapahoes no good! Steal ponies."

"That true?" Pa turned to the boys.

"Colorow take ours so we take theirs," shrugged Running Whirlwind.

"'Rapahoes no good. Me catch um!"

"This boy hurt," Pa explained. "Must stay here till can travel. Big Jim make talk with Chief Yarmony."

Two Feathers grabbed for Running Whirlwind's gun that still lay on the ground a few yards away, but Pa stepped in his way. "Wope! Get on back to your tepee."

The Indian's eyes glittered. Squatting on his heels he scratched in the earth with one long finger. "Utes' dirt!" he grunted. "'Rapahoes no good! Whites heap no good! One sleep—go!"

Pa was not to be badgered. He took a threatening step toward the Indian and ordered, "Clear out!"

The Ute flung onto his horse and departed, driving the buckskin and the colt ahead of him. On his way through the willows he added Wasani's blaze-faced black to his find. When he had splashed across the creek, two cocoon-like bundles which had been motionless beside the cold ashes of the fire, stirred to life. Tom rolled out of the smaller one. "Is he gone?"

Inspector Higginbee poked his head out of the other. His eyes peered over the rim of the comforter like two pale blue

suns that were swiftly shoved above the horizon by a length of red flannel underwear. “Will he—will he come back?”

“You bet he’ll come back!” said Uncle Henry grimly. “With reinforcements. Jim, we better contrive to send these Arapahoes packing.”

“Yes, we go.” Running Whirlwind picked up his gun. He would pay no attention to that swollen ankle. He would walk straight and sure as he had always done.

“They’ve got your horses!” said Tom.

“We get horses!” Running Whirlwind forced a small grin. Once before he had boasted so, and had made good that boast, but now uncertainty darkened his face. The minute he bore his weight on the bad leg it crumpled like a blade of grass. He had to sit down a minute and breathe fast.

Pa ran his fingers through his rumpled hair and took a deep lungful of the crisp morning air. “Easy, lad. No use to holler before we’re hurt. I’ll go talk to Yarmony. Everything ‘ll be all right.

The sun had reached the valley now. From the medley of sounds that floated down from the little mesa, the Ute camp was fully roused. Pa struck off through the brush, but inside fifteen minutes returned, stamping the dew from his boots and shaking his head.

“Ay Jonathan! You can’t hurry an Indian. Yarmony was in his lodge not ready to make talk. I left word for him to come here soon as he could.”

The milking was done and breakfast was over before any Utes appeared. A bunch of them came riding down from the little mesa. Their faces were daubed grotesquely with red

and yellow and they all had guns.

"Where Little Bear?" Wasani put the sudden question to Margie, lurking distrust in his eyes.

"The sign on my moccasins—that is enough!" said Running Whirlwind sharply.

Pa gave a quick uncertain glance at the boys' guns.

"Arapahoes no shoot." Running Whirlwind leaned his weapon against the cabin and folded his arms proudly. Wasani thought his friend had lost his senses. But with grim loyalty he too put down his gun, folded his arms, and made his face impassive.

Ma, holding Danny tight, stepped beside Pa.

"There's Colorow!" whispered Margie.

"And Two Feathers!" Tom wanted to follow the Inspector who had dived inside the cabin, but determination not to show yellow made him stay where he was.

Two Feathers was the leader. Colorow merely looked on. The young Ute had hideous red claw marks of clay on his cheeks and a yellow circle painted on his forehead. He leaped off his pony, stamped up to Pa, and again demanded:

"Utes catch 'Rapahoes!"

"Where Yarmony?" countered Pa. "Big Jim powwow with Yarmony."

"Here he comes now!" cried Margie.

The one-eyed chief rode slowly over the crest of the hill and drew rein several yards distant. Bright stripes of beads adorned his buckskin shirt and strips of otter fur gleamed richly in his braids. Pa explained patiently about the

Arapahoe boys. The old Ute's broad face remained as expressionless as wood. He spoke at last:

"Me so high—" He measured with his hand. "'Rapahoes kill father, kill mother, kill heap Utes." He dropped his chin onto his breast and nothing could move him from his silence.

Quick to seize the advantage, Two Feathers strutted forward. Once more he scratched in the black loam with his bony finger. "Utes' dirt! Sun here" (pointing obliquely to the east to fix a time perhaps an hour distant). "Whites go!"

Pa looked him in the eye. "No! Whites stay!"

Two Feathers whipped his horse about and shouted something to his companions. They galloped off. Only Yarmony was left, humped on his pony.

"Big Jim take squaw—go Denber City," he advised, and withdrew to the edge of the cottonwoods.

"Where's my horse?" Inspector Higginbee burst from the cabin.

Nobody paid any attention to him.

"There's Maggie and the children," Uncle Henry reminded Pa. "Those Indians are twenty to one, Jim."

"Is there goin' to be a fight? Tom cried.

Pa's gaze sought the tree on which he had nailed his homestead notice. "I'm not the kind to run," he muttered.

In this crisis it was Ma who stood staunchly by him. "The Utes are just aiming to frighten us," she declared, though her cheeks were pale. "We'll face them out. Let me try some biscuits and sugar."

"Where's my horse?" bellowed the Inspector, dragging his saddle off the saw log and tripping over the cinches.

"Yonder it goes," snapped Uncle Henry. "Those pesky Indians are drivin' off all our horses. They're gettin' ugly, Jim. And here they come again."

"Margie—" Ma flew into the cabin, "—this pan. Dip it full of sugar. Give it to Two Feathers."

The girl dashed out with the pan in time to see the Ute rascal swoop toward the Inspector with a yell of glee, snatch his hat and clap it on top of his own calico-banded head piece. The little man stood petrified. The only thing about him that could move was his eyebrows, and they worked up and down at a great rate. Two Feathers curvetted back, his eye glittering on the Inspector's red tie.

"Here!" Margie panted. "Sugar for you! See, sugar!"

One moment she thought he was going to accept it; then his fist shot out. *Plank!* It hit the pan. The sugar rained in a white shower upon the ground. Margie sprang away and fell over a long pine pole at the edge of the woodpile. She sat up unhurt, but thoroughly frightened. When an Indian wouldn't take sugar—!

There was tense silence. Pa was standing there at his wits' end. Ma was clinging to Danny. Everywhere were half-naked braves with paint smeared on their faces. What was going to happen?

The girl clutched the pole, her fingernails digging nervously into the soft peeled surface. Suddenly she remembered something. The pole was for the flag. The flag! She scrambled into the house and out again, shaking the creases from the Stars and Stripes as she ran.

"Pa!"

He snatched at her idea. “The shovel, Tom! That new rope—”

He had a hole dug by the time Uncle Henry had the halyards on the homemade pulley. The Utes, as curious as could be, watched while the contraption was set up. Two Feathers, finding that he was no longer the center of attention pulled in his horse and watched also. When the pole was solid, Margie threaded the rope through the holes in the flag’s muslin binding. At a tug from Tom the flag began to ascend.

The Indians muttered among themselves. Slowly the flag crept up the pole, a breeze catching at its folds and billowing it lazily. Pa removed his hat and so did Uncle Henry. The eyes of the Arapahoes lifted from the faces of their enemies to the gracious furls of bunting. Even Inspector Higginbee tore his gaze from the Indians. A grasshopper crackled through the awed stillness. A hawk circling overhead craned its neck and screamed. Pa began to talk:

“White man Utes’ brother! Flag—” he groped for words they would understand—”good medicine! Protect—”

“Pull her up, Tom,” whispered Uncle Henry.

“She’s stuck,” muttered the boy.

“Rope’s kinked a little. Here, let me at it.”

But the halyards refused to work. Strenuous efforts only made things worse. The Stars and Stripes stood at half-mast and would go neither up nor down. The peeled pole was slick as grease even Tom could not climb it.

It was then that Yarmony got off his horse and stepped forward with great dignity. “Injun fix um!” He summoned

his nephew Pawinta. The young Ute cooned up the slick pine, removed the knots and kinks, and sent the flag to the top, spreading in the wind. The white people cheered and even the Indians, having helped in the raising, acted pleased. All but Two Feathers and Colorow, who drew off to themselves.

"Sing!" cried Pa, and his deep bass led off:

"My country, 'tis of thee,"

Tom's boyish falsetto soared,

"Sweet land of liberty,"

Voices quavered at first from stress of excitement, but grew steady as eyes were fixed on the red, white, and blue.

"I love thy rocks and rills
They woods and templed hills—"

They sang as they had never sung before. The Indians, impressed by this ceremony, listened solemnly. Yarmony seemed fascinated by the symbol that floated above him. He stood shading his one eye against the sun and nodding slowly. When the strains of the anthem faded away, he turned to Pa with the gravity befitting a great chieftain.

"Good medicine!" he grunted. "Big Jim, Yarmony's white brother."

He spoke a brief word or two to his followers, some of whom went to drive the Crawford horses back to pasture.

"We can stay!" whooped Tom, dancing a jig. "Everything's hunkydory!"

"Yes," said Pa, "we can stay, unless the Government—"

Margie's gaze fell from the glory of the sunlight on the Stars and Stripes—to the Inspector.

Chapter Fourteen

JOKUM

The Utes brought their women and papooses to the cabin. All morning a cluster of them squatted around the base of the flagpole, brown faces upturned, black eyes marveling at the Red, White and Blue lines that straightened to the breeze above them. Ma found enough biscuit or cake to go around for all. The two Arapahoes stayed to themselves, and no one bothered them. The Inspector sat on the chopping block wiping his bald head, which glowed from the heat of the sun like a polished radish. After a time the younger braves went to the flat by the river to match horse for horse in races, while the old men watched them. The day had taken on a gala air. When noon rolled around, Pa invited Yarmony and his wife to eat at the table in the house.

The Inspector refused to join them; so he and Tom and Uncle Henry ate outside. The rest of them drew around the table. Singing Grass knew well enough how to manage her knife, but she was puzzled about her fork. When Pa served the venison steak she looked at the tin plate with sparkling eyes and started in on the meat with her capable brown fingers. Yarmony nudged her. He had seen his white friends use their forks when he had eaten fish around their campfire at Hot Sulphur Springs. Picking up a piece of meat in his fingers, he impaled it on the tines and lifted it in triumph to his mouth.

His wife, chuckling in delight, did likewise. And Ma, looking hard at Pa, picked up a piece in her own dainty fingers, gravely stuck it on the fork, and ate it. Margie choked and had to go to the water pail for a drink.

A short time after Yarmony and Singing Grass had gone Pawinta brought the Arapahoe boys' own horses and own trappings. He looked upon the strange youths with interest and lingered to ask questions about their country. Though he couldn't understand much Arapahoe and they knew only a few words of Ute, the three of them were soon jabbering like magpies. What a hodgepodge of English, Indian, and sign language! When Tom grew tickled at their queer twisted speeches, they joined in his laughter.

Now that the excitement was over and Pa had made his peace with Yarmony, he thought of the Inspector. "We'll go and have a better look at the springs, Higginbee," he said. "I want to take you across the river."

"No need." The Inspector stood up. He folded his handkerchief carefully and put it in his hind pocket; then he took it out again, rumpled it, and wiped his bald spot. His wilted blue eyes looked at Margie.

"You're a spunky young miss," he said. "D' you like to live here?"

"Oh yes, sir!"

"Hmp! I wouldn't live in this tarnation wilderness for anything on earth!"

"It won't be wilderness long," cried the girl. "Other people `ll be coming and Pa says—"

"I'm an honest man and I always pay my debts." The Inspector drew himself up with what dignity he could. "I've lost my hat, but thanks to you I've still got my scalp." He smoothed his fringe of hair affectionately. "I'll see to it that the Government allows your father's claim."

"Oh, th-thank you, sir!"

"I don't want any thanks," said Mr. Higginbee sourly. "I want a hat. And I want to get to Denver City."

Pa, jubilant at the turn luck had taken, gave the Inspector his own hat and found an old one to wear. Tom and Uncle Henry caught the Inspector's horse and hitched the teams to the wagons. Pa had decided Uncle Henry had better go with him to haul in provisions for winter. Ma got the money from the trunk for him to take.

"You won't be afraid to stay by yourselves, will you, Maggie?" he asked anxiously. "Tom and Margie can tend to the milking."

"No, Jimmy, we won't be afraid." And Ma looked at the flag.

The valley seemed very quiet after the excitement of the last two days. With the men gone, Ma and her family would have had a lonesome time of it if the Arapahoe boys hadn't been there. Wasani shouldered the duty of supplying them with meat. While he was off with his gun, Running Whirlwind rested in the shade of the cabin. The swelling was slow to go out of his ankle, though Ma bathed it often in hot vinegar and insisted that it not be used.

Tom and Margie invented games the Indian lad could join in, but more often they sat cross-legged in the warm grass and listened to him tell about the arrow makers and the buffalo hunters, about Thunder Bird, White Owl, and Painted Porcupine. Sometimes he made picture writing.

"Why don't we write that way?" exclaimed Tom. It's a heap more fun than to fool with spelling!"

They amused themselves hours at a time writing messages to each other in the smooth dirt of the path. Margie wrote the most elaborate ones. Tom got tired waiting for her.

"Hurry up," he fidgeted. "You don't have to draw so many flowers and things."

"Yes I do!" she insisted. Tom didn't know how her fingers tingled to make pictures. All the pages of her sketch book were full, and the red pencil was worn to a stub. She'd used every scrap of paper she could find. She'd even decorated the peeled places in the cabin logs where the bark had scuffed off. Let Tom poke fun at her! Some time she aimed to be a real artist. If only she had a teacher!

The Utes caused no trouble though they came often to stare up at the Stars and Stripes. Several days after Pa and Uncle Henry had gone, Pony Wilson made his appearance. The children were busy carrying small round boulders from the creek to line each side of the trail when they looked up and saw him.

"Why hello, Pony!" cried Margie.

"Huh!" He took time to glare at the Arapahoes before he cocked his eye at the gently rippling banner above. "That

flag done the trick. If you hadn't brung it jest when you did you'd have had trouble with them Utes."

"How'd you know? I thought you went to Hahn's Peak!"

"Jest happened to be up on the hill," he replied crossly. "Feller can't help seein' things that goes on, can he, if he's got eyes in his head? If the Injuns had started somepin I'd have come tearin' down here, but I seen you was makin' out pretty good."

He didn't stay long. When he had clumped away, Running Whirlwind asked, "Why he hate us so?"

"I guess because the Arapahoes sheltered the man who stole his baby boy. That was over twelve years ago. He never did find his little lost son."

Running Whirlwind frowned. "Many nights around the campfire I listened to old men tell stories, but I never hear of any white papoose."

The subject was dropped, for at that moment Singing Grass came padding down the trail. She brought Ma a platter of spruce bark heaped with the biggest, reddest wild raspberries Margie had ever seen. And so fragrant! Ma was mightily pleased, though she washed them so much nearly all the color was gone by the time she let the family eat them.

Another day the woman brought some meaty white roots and showed Ma how the Utes pounded them into meal by rubbing between two rocks. Yampa roots, she called them. They were about the size of a man's finger and tasted quite like parsnips. Margie sniffed the pungent fragrance.

"I know," she nodded. "The flowers are those flat lacy

The squaw wanted the family to stay and eat

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white ones that grow on tall stems in the meadows. We can find lots more."

Ma used the meal to thicken soup and boiled the whole tubers like ordinary vegetables, seasoning them with salt and butter. The family smacked their lips over them. Meat, bread, and dried foods did get tolerable monotonous.

"Next year we'll have a garden," said Ma.

Singing Grass told them where there were more raspberries. So one morning Ma got on old Peggy's broad back. She took Danny in front of her, with Tom and Margie on behind, and they all rode half a mile up the creek. Jokum and the dogs tagged along. Chipmunks scampered away to their holes, cheeks bulging, and robins scolded sharply from the alders. The raspberries hung right over the water. They were so ripe many of them fell off and floated away, while those that Ma and the children gathered mashed down in their buckets and never would fill the pails.

The sun was noon high when the berry pickers started home. They took a short cut across the sagebrush mesa. There was a smell of fall in the air, and splashes of red and yellow could be seen on the hillslopes. The smoke from the Indian camp spread in a thin haze over the valley.

Ma stopped a minute at Yarmony's lodge to show Singing Grass the berries. The squaw wanted the family to stay and eat. She was roasting a woodchuck in the ashes with its hair still on, and she had a big kettle of water with a few whole coffee berries floating on the surface. The kettle she had brought from the Agency at White River.

The other squaws were busy at their own fires. One of them had boiled some deer ribs. She emptied them onto the low bushes to drain off the soup and screeched loudly for her family to come and help themselves.

Singing Grass, raking the woodchuck out of the ashes, began to scrape off the singed hair. “Heap good!” she urged.

Ma looked at the blackened carcass. Suddenly she was in a mighty big hurry to get home.

When they reached the cabin, Wasani was there dressing some young grouse he had shot. Running Whirlwind was helping him. Margie jerked off her sunbonnet and flung herself down in the shade. Her wrists burned with briar scratches. She laid them against the cool grass and spread out her fingers, stained with red juice.

“Wish I had some paint this color. I’d make a picture of that round hill by the cave. It’s just covered with red bushes.”

“Aw,” said Tom, “who’d want a picture of that hill when you can see it any time by lookin’ across the river?”

“It won’t always be pretty. I’d like to remember it the way it is. In a few weeks the leaves ‘ll all be gone.”

“Yes, snow come before another moon,” nodded Running Whirlwind. “Arapahoes must travel.”

“Rest as long as you can,” counseled Ma. “Your foot’s not very strong.”

“Oh, don’t go yet!” Margie envisioned the long lonesome cold months ahead.

“My mother, Willow Woman, watching for me.”

"And your father at the trading post?" she added slowly.

"Yes, he watching too."

"Stay a long time!" begged Tom. "It's only September. We haven't done half what we were going to."

The days went by, warm and golden. Frost came nearly every night to silver the grass, and the wind in the aspen leaves sang a song different from the summer song. Running Whirlwind could walk almost as well as ever. He and Wasani listened to the wind, grew restless. Yet they lingered. Sometimes Pony's blunt question, "What they doin' here in Ute country?" came buzzing like a bothersome bumblebee into Margie's mind. And sometimes she remembered the emptied trunk.

Pawinta, the Ute boy, came visiting one afternoon. "Yarmony heap hunt, he said, looking wistfully toward the mountains. He explained that the chief and his best hunters had gone to a lake near the Rabbit Ears to find a strange creature reported to have horns larger than an elk and a great long nose.

"Moose," guessed Ma.

"Wisht we could go to the Rabbit Ears." Tom gazed at the range with almost as much longing as Pawinta.

"Let's explore Woodchuck Hill," suggested Margie. "We've never been very far up."

"All right. Let's!"

The Indian boys were willing enough. Since Pawinta had been all over that hill, he took the lead. Jokum and the dogs were commanded to stay at home because they always ran ahead and flushed the game. The elk wouldn't mind, and

when Tom threw a stick at him the tear ducts of his eyes flashed angry red.

"Here, Jokum!" Ma enticed him back with a sprinkle of salt in a tin pan. "You and Ponto and Spy can go fishing with Danny and me down to the Deep Hole."

The five youngsters climbed through the sagebrush and the paper-dry rosin weeds. They stopped to investigate a knoll of curious white rocks where a mineral spring had once been.

"Look!" yelled Tom.

A long, gray, striped cat with monstrous tail shot into a hole under a bush. "That's Tobe! Here, Tobe! Here, Tobe! What's the matter with him?"

"He hasn't been home since Ma scolded him for getting on the table," said Margie. "I guess he's just gone wild."

No amount of coaxing could make the cat come out. They had to leave him and go on up the hill. An old gray-nosed grandfather woodchuck sat on a rock to watch them. He had his mouth so full of grass that he made a funny mumble when he tried to bark.

"Fix warm nest for winter," explained Running Whirlwind.

Pawinta chose the trail up the hollow between the shoulders of the mountain. He and the Arapahoes could read every mark in the dust as easily as Margie could read words in a primer.

"Here mouse," said Wasani, pointing to tiny lacy imprints. "And here deer come down. Get scared. Run that way."

Tom found a porcupine's tracks. It was easy to tell them

by their fine checkered pattern. Easy to recognize the marks of a coyote's pads too, because they were like a dog's, only a little longer and a little narrower. Pawinta discovered the biggest track, bigger even than their own. He stopped them with a quick sign of warning, his eyes a-sparkle.

"Bear! We find!"

Margie and Tom were not very certain they wanted to, but they followed their friends cautiously through the thicket of service bushes. Pawinta suddenly halted and beckoned. There, a few yards away, sat a roly-poly black bear; short legs sprawled lazily in front of him. With his forepaws he hugged a service bush and with his tongue lapped the sweet blue-black berries into his mouth. He grunted and guzzled in deep pleasure, wagging his furry head. Even when Tom stepped on a stick that made a loud *crack!* he didn't seem much alarmed. He merely waddled across the gulch with a casual backward glance and stopped at the next good berry bush.

"Make fat for winter," said Running Whirlwind. "When cold come, he find den. Sleep till spring."

Wasani murmured something in Arapahoe.

"Huh?" said Tom.

"He talk to bear," explained Running Whirlwind. "Bear heap wise."

"Good medicine," nodded Pawinta. "Utes—bears— same family. Many snows ago Utes were bears."

Running Whirlwind listened respectfully. "I not know about that, but I have hear the old men tell how bears can take care of friends against enemies and can even maybeso

bring back life. All Indians know bears have magic in many ways." He looked down at the sign on his moccasins.

The three boys were so solemn that Tom and Margie didn't dare smile. They ate some berries and started back. Pawinta left them at the point of the hill to cut across to the Ute camp.

"Ma's home," said Tom. "I hear her rattling pans."

"Mercy, that can't be Ma!" Margie flew for the cabin as the din continued. "It's Jokum! Somebody left the door open and —oh, my goodness!"

The room was a sight. Everything that was loose was on the floor, and some things not intended to be loose. Jokum had had a delightful afternoon. He had started down the river with Ma but had been scolded for wading through the best trout holes and so had come sulking home. He'd been busy every minute since. A dozen puppies couldn't have done more. Bedding was scattered all over! Ma's white comforter lay torn on the woodbox. Blankets were dragged behind the stove. Freshly ironed clothes had been pulled off their nails and mauled and trampled on. Kettles, dented tin plates, shoes, dried apples, corn meal—all in a mess! When Margie saw him he was standing on his hind legs so as to chew the frilled paper off the top corner shelf. One jerk and everything came crashing about his head—extract bottles, mustache cup, keepsakes, album—

"Shoo! Scat! Get out of here!"

Jokum grabbed the nearest object, which happened to be a hinged black leather case with crimson velvet lining, and skittered for fresh air and safety.

"Oh, *oh!*" Margie made a desperate lunge, but missed. "He's got the daguerreotype! Catch him!"

Tom and the Indian boys gave chase. He wrinkled his impudent nose, flirted his ridiculous tail and managed to keep just beyond their reach. When they had to stop for breath, he watched them with mischievous eyes and chewed the red velvet.

Wasani finally fooled him and snatched the picture.

"Oh, give it here!" Margie was so winded she could barely gasp.

The Indian wiped his fingers on the front of his buckskin shirt before handing her the case. The girl of the picture still smiled. Thank goodness she wasn't hurt! The glass wasn't even broken. But the velvet lining was all torn loose.

"Jokum, I could skin you!"

"Can't you stick it back?" said Tom.

She tried with a paste of flour and water. "It'll never look so nice," she mourned. When she had done the best she could, she laid the case on the table to dry, weighting it down with the iron.

Tom was gathering up the broken bottles. The cabin would smell of extracts for a long time to come. Margie began to dust off bedding and put things back in their places. Ma came before she was half through. Pony Wilson was with her, and Danny was riding the little gray burro.

"It's a long jog fer a little feller. Glad me an' Music jest happened by."

"Did the Arapahoe boys go hunting?" Ma called. "I saw them riding up the valley. We've got more meat now than

we can take care of."

Margie stood in the door, the fragments of the mustache cup in her hands. "I don't know. They didn't say anything."

Tom squeezed past her, started to take a step down the trail, made a surprised leap instead to one side. "Hey!" He bent over, hands on knees, to stare at something.

Margie went to see. "Why it's picture writing scratched in the dirt! There's two people on horseback, and that line with lots of peaks in it must be mountains."

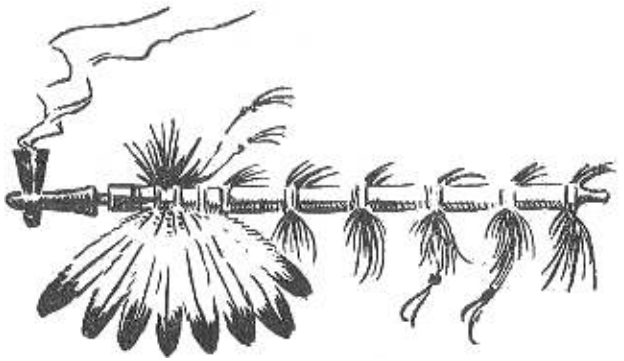
"Yes, and those triangles are tepees."

They stared at it a moment in silence.

"Running Whirlwind drew it," Margie said at length. "I guess—I guess it means he and Wasani have started back to the Arapahoe camp."

"Yep. Their saddles and blankets are gone. Aw geranium!"

"Why didn't they tell us they were going?" cried the girl, vexed with disappointment.



Chapter Fifteen

SWAP PONY FOR PAPOOSE

The Arapahoes had caught their horses and gone as strangely as they had come.

"It's funny they'd start so late in the day," fretted Margie.

"At least they might've said good-by!" scowled Tom.

Ma looked over at the banks of Soda Creek where the silver willow leaves rippled in the fall breeze. "I guess it's time those boys left," she said. "Yes, it's high time."

"I warned you not to trust no 'Rapahoes," grunted Pony Wilson. "Sneaked in on you and now they're sneaking out. You better hunt around and see what's missin'."

"Goodness sake, Pony, they wouldn't take anything!" Margie pushed back her dark tumbled hair and gazed wistfully up the valley. "They were nice even if they were Indians. I wonder if we'll ever see 'em again."

Ma stepped into the topsy-turvy kitchen. "What in creation!"

"Just Jokum," sighed her daughter. "Look, Ma, what he did to the daguerreotype." She brought the little black square case to the better light at the door. "Look how he tore—"

But a horny hand plucked the picture from her. Pony Wilson stood staring at the girl in the oval frame. His stubby fingers trembled.

"Cinthy!"

Margie's eyes widened. "Cinthy—" she repeated. "Why, that's, that's—"

"—my Cinthy," nodded Pony, moistening his dry lips. "Little Billy's maw."

"Oh, Pony, you—your wife!"

"Great geranium!" gaped Tom.

"Where'd you git this?"

"It was in the box of looking glasses."

Everybody began to explain. Pony shook his head in bewilderment. "I dunno," he said, "I dunno how it got *there.* It was in my pocket that time I was knocked out of my senses, and it was gone when I come to."

His thumbnail pried at the lining. A flush of excitement was on his cheeks.

"Don't!" cried Margie. "I just got it pasted."

"The map. That's where I hid the map the Frenchman give me! I'll shore find the gold with that to go by."

"I don't see any map," said Tom.

"It's—gone."

"You reckon Jokum swallered it? Or it might've dropped on the ground somewhere." Tom began a swift search.

Pony shook his head. "No use lookin'. 'Course it ain't where I put it! 'Course Thurston took it out these many years gone! He must've guessed what I done with it. That's why he stole the pi'ture. Though how come it got buried in that box. Cinthy—"

He stood a long time, ears deaf to all they said, eyes hazy

with the distance of things long past. Then he stumbled away, the daguerreotype still in his hand.

Cinthy. Poor little long-ago Cinthy. And poor Pony. Margie couldn't think of him as ever being young and eager and in love. Twelve years of living in the mountains alone or with the Indians must have changed him a lot. But he'd always loved his Cinthy. Margie had a moment of understanding. Now she could guess why he'd shunned the inside of their house and women's fixin's. They'd reminded him too sharply of his girl wife who had died.

"Haven't things happened the strangest?" she murmured. "If I hadn't found that buried box, and if we hadn't come to Pony's valley—"

"Yeah," grumbled Tom, "and if old Thurston hadn't stole the map out of the picture—" He gave a gusty sigh. "Listen to Spot mooing her head off. Come on, Margie, we might as well go and milk."

Calling the dogs, they trudged to the meadow to drive in the cows. No patter of moccasins beside them. No Running Whirlwind and Wasani to startle the peaceful herd with wolf-keyed yells. Margie heard the squeak of halyards and glanced back at the cabin. Ma was taking down the flag for the night. Pa was mighty particular about proper respect to the nation's emblem. The naked pine pole pointing into the red autumn sunset had a lonesome look. The squatty log house seemed very small under the vast hollow of the sky.

"There's not another white family in all this Yampa Valley," she thought with a shiver, "and now there's only Ma

and Tom and Danny and me."

A coyote slunk out on the ridge and sent the dogs a jeering challenge. She ran to catch up with Tom. When they had finished milking and were hurrying home, they saw a little bunch of Indians riding down the mesa trail. One was big and fat, and another wore a red flannel shirt. Colorow and Two Feathers! Why were they coming to the flat now?

Margie and Tom hurried to the cabin as hard as they could, milk sloshing out of the pails all over them. Ma was making biscuit at the split pole table. She hadn't heard hoofbeats because of the crackle of a green branch in the fire.

"Ma. Colorow—"

Gravel sprayed in the path. The ponies were sliding to a stop. Indians had caused Ma no uneasiness since the day of the flag raising, but one glance at these told her they were bent on trouble. The gun stood in the corner, empty. No time to load. Buckskin legs were flickering toward the door. The dogs were no help—Ponto was just a pup, and Spy was scared to death of Indians. Ma's eyes went to Danny playing on the bed in the corner. She gripped the bread dough hard.

"Tom, take the water pail. Pretend you're going to the creek. Run get Yarmony.

"Oh, Ma, Yarmony's gone to the Rabbit Ears!"

Yarmony gone! Ma had one awful blank moment. That was why these renegades had come now. They knew there was not a soul to stop them. Superstition for the flag had kept them away in daytime, but now they meant mischief.

A dark bulk filled the doorway.

"Margie," Ma's voice sounded squeezed, "you and Tom set the other end of the table."

"Don't let on you're frightened!" That's what she was trying to say. Colorow came and stood shoulder to shoulder with the little woman in blue calico.

"When Big Jim come?"

Ma didn't give an inch. She peered out the window as if she expected to see Pa any moment. "What do you want?" she said.

Two Feathers pushed into the room, sniffing. Unfortunately, the smell of the extracts that had soaked into the ground from the broken bottles was still strong. It reminded him of his humiliation. He glared about. His glittering gaze stopped at Danny's diminutive red head. "Catchum papoose!" he stalked forward. "Make heap good Ute!"

Margie was ahead of him. She snatched Danny and whirled around the corner of the table.

Tom doubled his fists. "You leave my little brother alone!"

Colorow grunted and made an imperious gesture. Two Feathers was acting too important. Colorow would do the talking. Two Feathers sullenly drew back. Other braves crowded into the room. The fat Ute planted his weight solidly on his broad moccasins, folding unctuous hands across his middle. He considered Danny.

"Swap pony for papoose," he proposed.

Ma had to try twice before she could speak. "No!"

Colorow held up one hand with the fingers spread,

meaning he offered five ponies.

Ma shook her head and energetically kneaded the dough to keep down her fear.

Then Colorow held up both hands, gesturing three times. That meant thirty. Thirty ponies he was offering for Danny! But he didn't really mean it. He was making big talk just to show off. He knew well enough he could take what he wanted when he was ready.

Ma gathered Danny into her own arms and threw her apron up over him. He was too frightened to cry.

"Money!" Colorow next demanded. He was enjoying himself! The white woman was scared, he could tell.

"Me heap poor," Ma quavered, "but make biscuit, give Utes sugar!"

"White squaw in Denber city got heaps money."

Ma glanced around her helplessly.

Margie knew there was no money in the house. Ma had sent it all with Pa. She racked her brain for something that would do instead. Maybe the Little Silver Bear. Frantically she dug in her blue bag, gave the charm a hurried rub to try to make it shine.

"Here! Silver—like money!"

Colorow reached for it, gave a surprised snort, and yanked his hand away. His black eyes started from the fat folds of his face.

"It's—it's good medicine," stammered Margie.

A strange stillness hung over the room. The teakettle gurgled on the stove. Outside, kildeers cried above the

marshes. A calf bawled in the meadow.

Margie held the charm to the failing light from the window. “See? Silver. Like money,” she repeated, her voice jumping with her heart

Danny chose this time to let out a screech. Colorow’s gaze darted to the wisp of red hair that showed above Ma’s apron.

Margie thrust the small talisman at the Ute. “Oh, please—”

The renegade fell back. His braves tumbled through the door. Two Feathers gave a wild yell and used the window for his exit. Colorow’s shoulders that had been so haughty a minute ago hunched like an old man’s. He mumbled, made quick signs with his fat brown hands, watched the Little Bear. He backed off, always watching. His moccasins scuffed along on the trail. Horses’ hoofs pounded.

The Indians had vanished like smoke before the wind. Ma sank into the rocker and rocked and hugged Danny and wiped her eyes on the hem of her apron.

“Whew!” whistled Tom.

Margie leaned against the door frame to steady her trembling muscles. Stupidly she stared at the Little Silver Bear. Just an odd grayish chunk of metal. It wasn’t sensible that this could send the Indians pegging. But it had.

“I’m beginning to believe it *is* magic!” She laughed hysterically.

Ma got up to rescue the milk from the pup.

“Gagy?” wailed Danny who had put up with enough for one day and thought it was time to eat.

"Yes, son. We're going to have supper now." Ma stroked the red hair. "We've a great deal to be thankful for. A very great deal!"

Thay had still more reason to be thankful that night, for Pa and Uncle Henry got home just at dark. The family rushed out with the lantern to meet them. The teams pulled through the willows, the wheels sighed to a dripping stop.

"Jimmy!"

"Pa!"

"Where's Uncle Henry?"

Pa leaped from his seat, laughing and hugging them all around. His face was prickly with whiskers and his clothes smelled of campfire smoke. "Henry's here all right. And we've got a surprise for you. Someone from Missouri."

"Missouri!"

"Oh, Pa, is it Hute Richardson?" squealed Margie.

"No'm, it's jes' me," declared a humble voice, as a grinning black boy emerged from the shadows into the circle of yellow lamp light.

"Why, it's Darky Dave from Grandfather's," called Tom.

"Yassuh, tha's right!" The young Negro snatched off his floppy hat which was sizes too large for him and ducked his head in salutation. His white teeth showed in a wide arc. "Howdy, Miss Maggie! Howdy, Miss Margie! Well suh, Mistah Tom!"

"Why, Dave!" Ma could hardly believe her eyes. "Mercy sakes how'd you get away out here in Colorado?"

"Your brother Fred brought him," said Pa.

"Fred!"

"Yes, he came west last month with a wagon train, all set to make his fortune in the mines. I stopped to see the Yankees at Empire and they told me. He figured Dave would be a big help."

"Yassum. But he say I eats more 'n what I'se wuth. So he trabel off and tell me to stay with Mistah Will at Empire."

"Fred's bound to go wherever there's new gold excitement," explained Pa. "And food's out of sight in these mining towns. Will didn't know what to do with Dave, so I said I'd take him. Tell you, I'm mighty glad to have him. He's a good worker."

"But Jimmy—" Ma took Pa aside. "I don't see how we can—"

"He'll fit in. We'll need all the help we can get; and then winter may catch us before we're ready. Got any supper for hungry tramps?"

Ma conjured up a meal in no time. "The biscuits are warmed over," she apologized, "and they're not very good. Colorow was bothering."

That word Colorow reminded Margie of the Little Silver Bear. What had she done with it? She felt in her pocket. Not there. Had she put it on the table? Ma hadn't seen it. It wasn't on the shelf, nor in the blue bag. It didn't seem to be anywhere!

Chapter Sixteen

PREPARATIONS FOR WINTER

What had become of the Little Silver Bear?

Margie hunted for it high and low. The family turned in and helped her. They shook the bedding, looked in the bottom of the woodbox, searched every crack and corner of the cabin.

"Maybe Danny threw it somewhere. Or Jokum carried it off," suggested Ma. "Or maybe it bounced out of your pocket when you were running to meet Pa."

Margie spent a whole morning looking through the grass beside the trail and lifting the yellow cottonwood leaves that the wind had tossed there. She found nothing but beggars' lice, the small prickly seed pods of wild forget-me-nots, and had to spend the rest of the day picking them off her stockings and dress.

"It's bound to turn up somewhere," comforted Ma. "We'll all keep our eyes open. Anyhow it's nothing valuable."

But the Little Silver Bear never did come to light. The days rolled into weeks. The hills were mottled gold. A few grasshoppers still crackled through the warm dry weeds, and here and there small ragged purple asters squinted at the sun. Down in the marshes among the brown sedges muskrat houses the size and shape of haymows were to be seen.

The surface of the ponds was never quiet. Sleek swimmers left trails through the green scum. Young mallards and teals

stood up on the water and flapped their wings. The mud was patterned with tracks of mink, beaver and otter. Along the river were many freshly gnawed white stumps where the bank beaver had felled cottonwoods.

Yarmony pointed these out to Pa and shook his head. "Heap snow come," he warned. "Beaver know." He also showed Pa the yellow jackets' nests built high in the trees instead of low in the bushes.

Pa knew he must drive the cattle some place else to winter. They were fat and fine now, but before long their feed would be covered to a depth of three or four feet if Yarmony was right. The Indian told him of a deep valley or Hole in the cedar country to the southeast where, he said, the snow was light and the herd could forage during the cold season. He and Pa rode over on horseback to see it. They were gone three days. On their return, Pa made plans to drive all the stock to this sheltered spot before the storms set in. Uncle Henry agreed to winter with the cattle for part interest in them, and Dave was willing to stay with him. They planned to build a small cabin and lay in a good supply of provisions.

"We can graze the cattle here for a while yet," Pa said, "and I reckon we can put up enough hay to keep one cow all winter."

"Isn't it too late for haying?" asked Uncle Henry.

"It's tolerable late, but I've a mind to try. They say there's a heap of nourishment in this dry grass."

So, while Pa and Uncle Henry took the teams and went back Outside for more provisions, Dave set to work in the

meadow up Soda Creek cutting the wild hay with the hand scythe. Dave didn't mind the Indians, and the Indians paid little attention to him. Early and late he swung the scythe with such skill that the small park was soon dotted with respectable haymows.

The rest of them caught trout to salt down in a jar. And Ma made cottage cheese and butter which she packed away in buckets and in the tall two-quart cans that had been brought from Missouri. Even if one cow stayed, milk and cream would be precious in the winter. Nights were so cold now that food would keep a long time.

Margie and Tom climbed the trail up Woodchuck Hill and gathered fruit to dry and to make into jam. They picked service berries so ripe and sweet that the pink juice oozed out of them. They picked chokecherries, shiny and black, and ate almost as many as they picked; then had to munch a handful of haws to take the pucker out of their mouths. When they started home, they always sat down under the last shade bush to rest before they crossed the sagebrush.

Their world was ablaze with color. How Margie did long for paints to paint the waxy crimson of scrub oaks, the red of mountain ash, the cream of frosted brake ferns. She had tried mixing red and yellow clay with water and daubing it on her drawings. It didn't work at all. Neither did berry juices. A shame to let so much beauty go to waste! Every tiny bush that nobody noticed in summer was a glowing candle flame. The mountains, gold with aspens, almost looked like the Shining Ones nowadays.

But this shine would not last. Pretty soon the wind would blow the trees bare. She sighed. Were there really Shining Mountains somewhere and would she ever find them? Pony Wilson vowed he'd never seen any.

A little gray garter snake on his way to the rocks for winter slipped across the trail, rustling the leaves that lay like flakes of hammered sunshine on the brown earth. A striped chipmunk was busy hoarding rose apples in an old hollow stump. Robins, plump and complacent in their dull fall plumage, scolded from the heavy-laden bushes, and noisy flocks of blackbirds winged overhead.

One morning Dave came running back to the cabin, his eyes rolling in fright. "Dar's somebody on de hill keeps a-whistlin' at me," he declared. "'Deed Miss Maggie, they is. Ah answered him some, but he don't come in sight."

"Now, Dave," scolded Ma, "you know it couldn't be anyone."

"Yassum." He shifted uneasily, refusing to go back till they all went with him. As they reached the meadow, not a sound disturbed the autumn stillness except the murmur of the creek.

"There," said Ma. "You see? Shame on you, Dave. And such a big boy too."

Just then an eerie whistle pierced the silence—a whistle that began on a thin high note and grew in volume till it filled the tiny valley. The dogs broke into staccato barks and bounded excitedly into the woods.

"What's that?" gasped Ma.

"Look!" cried Tom. "Over there coming out of those trees—a big bull elk. I betcha that's what did it."

The elk was a scarred old leader with a mighty spread of horns. He was little concerned about dogs or people, but raised his head to answer the challenge that came from the opposite ridge—the leering whistle of a younger bull.

"Look out, Miss Maggie!" yelled Dave suddenly. "They's elk everywhere! Laws-a-mercy!"

The dogs had frightened the herd of elk. Cows, calves, yearlings crashed through the quaking aspen straight toward the huddled group.

"Run!" shrieked Margie, but there was no chance. Great long-legged snorting critters were coming right at them, faster than stampeding cattle. One minute Dave and the Crawfords thought they'd surely be trampled. But the next, the herd parted and lunged by on each side, so close they could have touched them.

Often after that the family heard the wild buglers challenging each other across the hills.

Pa and Uncle Henry returned with the wagons. They unloaded sack after sack of flour, meal, and sugar, till Ma exclaimed:

"Jimmy, we can't begin to use all that!"

"Eight months. That's a long time. Once the range is snowed up there'll be no getting out till spring."

Pa had brought other things too—a bolt of calico, blankets, yarn, ammunition, shoes. Before he had left he had drawn paper patterns of their feet to be sure to get the right sizes.

Ma frowned when she saw Margie's new shoes.

"Why, those are boys'!"

"Good and sensible," said Pa.

Margie tried them on. They were stub-toed and heavy, not at all the neat, fashionable cloth top footgear she had been expecting.

"Pshaw now," Pa was sorry if they didn't suit, "I figured they'd be the very thing."

Margie blinked hard. She clumped around the room. "They—they fit all right. Anyway there'll be no one but Pony and the Indians to see 'em."

The ugly shoes were only half her disappointment. She had hoped Pa would think to fetch a drawing pad, a new pencil, and maybe—maybe a box of colors.

The mail he had brought was some comfort. Margie had two letters. Taking a pin out of the bib of her apron she opened them carefully. The first was from her cousin Mary Ann Yankee and was written with painstaking flourishes. She scanned the page, reading bits aloud. School had started in Empire. Mary Ann had a new mohair dress, "very becoming."

The second was from Barbara Ellen, her chum in Missouri. This Margie read to herself, poring over each page with eager interest. Barbara Ellen was going to the Seminary in Sedalia this winter. Rissy Mosby was there too, was doing her hair up, and could talk of nothing but beaux. They were all invited to a Sociable. Barbara Ellen had got the letter Margie had sent by Hute Richardson and had showed it to

Jody Havely. “She said your drawings were real good, Margie! Oh, do come back to Sedalia. I miss you a lot!”

Margie felt a warm rush of pleasure at Jody Havely’s praise. If she just could go back to Missouri and take lessons! She shut her eyes to imagine what she’d be doing if they hadn’t come West. She’d be going to the Seminary, and of course she’d have been invited to the Sociable. Seemed almost as though she could hear the jolly chatter of the young people and smell fresh cup cakes.

But when she opened her eyes, there were the mountains. And the vast autumn stillness. Tears of homesickness blinded her. Here she was away off in Yampa Valley, a place that wasn’t even on the map. Why had they come so far? Why hadn’t they stopped in Empire with Uncle Will’s family?

She heard Tom whistling cheerfully. He vowed he didn’t care about school and such. And Pa was too busy to think of the Missouri he had left. She stole a look at Ma, who was seated on the chopping block reading a letter from Grandmother.

“Think of it!” There was a catch in Ma’s laugh—“They’re shaking the peaches down to the hogs, and we can’t have *one!*”

Ma might joke about peaches, but peaches weren’t what she was wishing for so much as people—neighbors dropping in, chicken dinners, quilting bees, singing in the church down the lane. . . .

Margie stood up. She glared at her shoes. She’d wear ‘em

and like ‘em! And she wouldn’t let a soul know how much she’d wanted a color box.

Now that the provisions were in, Pa and Uncle Henry went to work on the cabin. To the ringing of ax, hammer, and saw, another room was added. Puncheon floors were laid, and the real glass windows, which Pa had brought in the last load (“Ay Jonathan, without breaking a one!”) were fitted into the square holes that had been left for them. Bed frames were built, too, with slats of wood to hold the grass mattresses. Last of all, a thick layer of dirt was tamped down on the roof.

“That ought to keep the cold and snow out,” said Pa.

Dave continued to work with the hay. Uncle Henry dragged in so much wood that the cabin could hardly be seen above the piles around it. Margie and Tom helped him stand it up like tepee poles to shed the snow. Pa took his gun and went out to get the winter’s meat. He started on Monty early one morning, returning at sunset. He had a bulgy wet gunny sack tied behind his saddle. It was filled with silver-scaled fish.

“You never saw the like! I was crossing that big creek two miles up when Monty shied and there the water was alive with grayling. Running up to spawn, I reckon. I took the gunny sack from under my saddle and filled it in a jiffy. We’ll have to call that stream Fish Creek.”

Ma was glad to get the grayling and started right away to salt it down as she had done with the trout. “They’ll make a nice variety in winter.”

“Ay Jonathan, the Lord’s doing His best to provide for us!” Pa’s voice was gruff. “I’ve had good hunting too.”

He had killed eight elk on the slopes of Storm Mountain. These were packed in and hung up on the back of the cabin to freeze. Pa cured out the hides so they could be put down on the new puncheon floors for a carpet. Ma and Margie laid them carefully with the hair all the same way so they could be easily swept.

By now the trees were nearly all bare. The song birds had gone and the woodchucks had holed up. The big pond in the marsh was as quiet as a looking glass. But the iron spring boiled harder than it ever had.

"Storm a-comin'," said Pony Wilson.

The Utes packed up their lodges, and with tepee poles dragging behind their ponies, took the worn trail down the valley.

"Heap snow," warned Yarmony, measuring as high as his shoulders. "Big Jim, Big Jim's squaw and papooses come with Utes."

"Big Jim not afraid of snow," said Pa, and bade them good-by.

Pony Wilson pulled out a day or two later. He came by the cabin to give Margie the old daguerreotype. "Cinthy she was jest a girl and she liked young uns. Reckon she'd be happier here," he mumbled. "`Sides, I don't need no pi'ture to remember her."

"I'll love her, Pony," said Margie around the lump in her throat. "But you'll be back next spring!"

"I dunno. Useter think these old hills had somepin fer me, but now—I dunno."

He came by the cabin to give Margie the old daguerreotype

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"Good-by, Pony! Good-by!" she called and waved as long as she could see his stumpy figure trudging ahead of the little mouse-colored burro.

Soon after he had left, Pa and Uncle Henry packed provisions into the Hole, and built a cabin there. On the eighteenth of November they rounded up the cattle and horses and started them for the winter range. Spy and Ponto helped to drive them. Only Lil, a white cow with horns and a mean eye, was left to furnish milk to the family. She stood in the corral mooing mournfully for the herd. A small shed had been built for her, and the hay had been hauled in close and put up in a neat stack.

Pa went with Uncle Henry and Dave to make sure they reached the Hole all right. He came home afoot, getting in on the eve of the thirtieth just ahead of a hard snowstorm. The dogs had stayed with the cattle.

That night a band of elk bedded down in the valley all around the cabin. Some of the calves got lost from their mothers and bawled so much the family couldn't sleep. In the morning the herd moved west toward the lower country, and Jokum, who had been restless and uneasy for the last week, went away with them.

Tom tried to call him back. "Here, Jokum! Here, Jokum!"

The young elk paused, puzzled what to do.

"There wouldn't be much here for him to eat in winter," Ma reminded gently. "We'll have to let him go, son."

Tom gulped, disappeared around the house, and came in after a while with a suspicious streak or two on his cheeks.

All day the snow fell in wet flakes as big as feathers, which the wind caught and piled in drifts. When Pa went to the creek for water his tracks sifted full before he could come back, and he had to break a new trail.

"This'll close the passes," he said, "till spring."

Margie pressed her nose against the east window pane and looked out at the driving storm with wide, anxious eyes. Snowed in more than a hundred miles from any town! Locked up inside a strange white world!

Chapter Seventeen

A WHITE WORLD

The storm continued for several days. Occasionally Margie and Tom, from their lookout posts at the windows, could catch a glimpse of the gray sky and see the wind whip the snow into fuzz along the ridge of Woodchuck. The same wind sniffed hungrily around the cabin. Ma cut up an old suit of underwear to make weatherstrippings for the door.

Pa brought in some pieces of red spruce and with the saw and the ax went to work on something.

"Oh, I know!" cried the boy. "It's going to be a sled! Can I help make it, Pa?"

The two of them were so engrossed that they didn't seem to hear the doleful howls of the timber wolves. With the coming of winter the fierce gray hunters ranged close in daytime as well as at night.

But Margie heard them howling plainly enough.

"Ooooo!" she shivered, putting down the wristlet she was starting to knit and hitching her stool closer to the stove. "I wish they'd go on off!"

"Listen!" said Ma. "What's that scratching?"

Margie jumped up to open the door a crack. A gust of wind swept into the room along with something else that was gray and furry.

"Why, it's Tobe!"

The storm had driven the big cat home. Wild as a lynx, he

darted behind the stove and crouched, growling. For a long time he stayed there, lashing his tail and glaring with ferocious green eyes. But gradually he slipped back into his old habits and would rub against Margie's legs or lie on the elk rug and purr like forty bumble bees. And Danny could ruff his hair and pull his tail without the slightest danger of being clawed.

The Crawfords soon discovered that other friends had stayed to brave the cold. Tiny feathered visitors wearing jaunty black caps came calling through the cottonwoods:

"Chickadee-adee-adee!"

Margie made a peephole in the frost on the window glass, through which she watched them swing on the under side of the tree twigs and peek into cracks in the bark with bright bead eyes. She fetched a generous piece of suet, and bundling into her things tramped around through the snow to nail it by her window, where all bird folk who came to feast could be seen and enjoyed from the inside of the cabin.

The chickadees soon had company. A blue jay, discovering the treat, scattered the smaller birds with a raucous "Ja-ay! Ja-a-ay!" He landed on the sill with a flaunt of his rakish topknot and gobbled all he could. Then he crammed his bill full and flew off, only to be back in a minute for more.

"The greedy rascal!" snorted Tom. "He's taking three times his share and hiding it in the crotch of that dead stump."

At last the storm cleared, leaving a world of dazzling

beauty. Every tree wore a white hood and every bush a trailing gown of brilliants. The sun went down in a red blaze of splendor. Pa banked the fire well to keep the cabin cozy, but by morning the water in the pail had ice on it.

Toward noon Tom and Margie put on their warmest things, wrapped their feet and legs in gunny sacks, and hurried out to play. They shuffled to the shed to visit Lil, then stumped to the creek to see what they could see.

"Come on, let's go to the iron spring," suggested Tom, plunging off the trail into the soft snow. "Whoopee! Look how deep it is. Clear above my knees."

He scooped a handful into Margie's face and was off. She took after him. Laughing, tumbling, and falling over their awkward leggings they waded down the incline. Reaching the iron spring, they decided to go farther. The white slope of the hill that had been clean and unmarred the night before was scribbled with trails.

"All the critters in creation must have been playin' tag around here last night," commented Tom. "What do you s'pose made these funny lookin' marks?"

"A rabbit!" cried Margie. "And there he goes!"

"Humph, from his tracks you'd think his front feet were headed one way and his hind feet another. Say, d'you see that pair of eyes moving yonder?"

"Eyes? That's a weasel! It's after the rabbit. Throw something!"

They caught up handfuls of snow and slung them, and the long lean hunter popped into a hole under some willows

with a flick of his black-tipped tail.

"I thought weasels were brown and yellow," said Tom. "Those we saw last summer were."

"Guess they change their coats winter time so they can look like the snow. Anyhow we saved one rabbit. Let's go on."

Steam was rising from the sulphur spring and from the warm pools in the edge of the river. Margie and Tom stood on the bank watching the dark stream ripple past and disappear under the ice some distance away. A burst of clear, bell-like notes startled them. They saw a plump slate-gray bird bobbing up and down on a round boulder. He hopped right into the water, picked a periwinkle off the river bottom, and resumed his cold perch with another snatch of song. Tom and Margie could hardly believe their eyes. They thought all the song birds had gone. Besides, none of them could walk around under water without even getting his feathers wet!

"Maybe he's a duck," said Tom doubtfully.

"Ducks don't sing. Look how the funny little fellow keeps curtsying! He doesn't care a jot if it is snowy. I'm glad he's here!"

Margie gathered a bouquet of the tight pink winter buds that dangled from the alders.

"Whew," panted Tom. "It's some job to buck this snow. Let's rest a minute."

"Too cold. My breath's freezing on my eyelashes and my fingers are about to break off. Come on, I want to get home."

It seemed miles to the cabin. When they finally reached it they were too weary and numb to take off their things. Ma had to unbutton their coats and peel off the frozen gunny sacks. And when their toes and fingers began to warm up, my, how they hurt!

Pa said the queer little song bird must have been a water ouzel. He put aside the partly finished sled and began that very day to make them each a pair of skis, quartersawing and turning the wood carefully. When those were done, Margie and Tom could walk on top of the snow. Pa cut them each a long pole to balance with and after some practice they could go almost anywhere—skim down the hills like the wind and climb up again by tacking, which meant zigzagging.

The snowshoes Pa made for himself were fully eleven feet long. He greased them well and tried them out thoroughly before he undertook the trip to Hot Sulphur Springs. Several other families had moved into Middle Park and once a month one of the men went to Georgetown for the mail. He had agreed to bring the Crawford mail too. Ma hated to have Pa go, but he said it would be easier traveling in winter than in summer and he'd be back in no time. So early one morning he struck off.

The first week in December was gone. Ma had Tom carry in a piece of frozen elk and lay it on the woodbox to thaw so she could make mince-meat. The smell of raisins and spices was a reminder that Christmas was not far off. Tom humped in one corner of the cabin with his back to everybody, whittling on something. Ma sat in the low rocker by the

window and took fine stitches on a bit of white which she hid under her apron when she got up to stir the mince-meat.

Margie perched on the edge of the table by the front window and started a boot pincushion for Ma like the one she had seen on the tree at the Sunday school last year. She had to cut two boots of cardboard just alike, cover them each with goods, and whip them together. Then she tacked a cord crisscross up the front so the boot would appear to have lacings. Pins could be stuck all around the edge. She kept her blue sketch bag handy so she could hide her work if Ma came too close.

It seemed to her as though the Little Silver Bear ought to be in that bag. Strange how it had got lost. Remembering the Little Bear made her think of Running Whirlwind and Wa-sani and things that had happened last summer. There'd been something mysterious about those Arapahoe boys. Why had they ever risked coming into Ute country? Why had they emptied Ma's trunk and left so suddenly?

She got up to hunt a needle and some thread on the shelf. The old daguerreotype confronted her. She carried it to the table, propping it where she could visit with the picture girl.

"Cinthy," she whispered, "It's the strangest thing about you, too. How did you ever get in with all those beads and looking glasses? And you and Pony—goodness sake, I never dreamed! You'd know about Pony's map. Did Thurston really get it?"

Cinthy kept smiling but gave no answer. Margie bent closer over her work as the early winter dusk settled down.

"Time to stop now," said Ma. "It's getting too dark to see."

Tom sidled toward his own private box with his hands behind him and chanted,

"I know something I won't tell,
Three little Injuns in a peanut shell!"

Christmas was in the air. Margie didn't feel very Christmasy inside. How could she away off here in Yampa Valley? No jolly sleigh bells jingling on the roads. No roads even. No little church in the lane to hold a Christmas tree and a rustling happy crowd of people.

However, when Pa came back from Hot Sulphur bringing precious letters and papers and two exciting looking packages from Grandma, she did begin to feel a tingle of anticipation. One package was put away on the shelf to be the object of delightful conjectures till the proper time came to peer into it. But the other Ma opened at once, for it was marked "Popcorn & Sundries."

"Goody! Now we can have popcorn balls!" cried Tom.

He and Pa went up on the hill and cut a small thick-furred spruce tree. Ma and the others dressed it in snowy popcorn strings and paper cornucopias filled with taffy. To add to the decorations Margie got out the bright red and yellow leaves she had pressed last fall. On Christmas Eve the tree was very brave and gay. Its fragrance filled the whole cabin. Now it was time for the presents.

Pa lifted a mysterious package that had been hidden among the branches and with a wide grin handed it to

Margie. A new sketch book, a box of colors, a real camel's hair brush!

"Oh! *Oh!*" she gasped.

The family crowded around, as delighted as she. "I wanted to give it to you right off when I fetched it with the last load of provisions," said Pa, "but Ma thought best to wait."

So bursting full of happiness was Margie that she could only stutter. All the rest of the evening she felt as though there were a bright warm candle burning inside her. She had another gift besides, a collar which Ma had trimmed with featherstitching. There were surprises for everyone. For Tom, the sled—all finished—and a brand new knife with three blades. For Danny, a homemade jumping jack whose joints jiggled wondrously. The boot pincushion was just what Ma had been wanting! And Pa liked the hat marker Margie had embroidered for him so well that he had her fasten it on the leather headband right away. Tom had carved a miniature boat for each of them out of cottonwood bark.

"To hold pins or nails," he said, beaming modestly at the family's praise.

Grandma had sent the young folks a pencil apiece, a pair of warm mittens, and some pretty colored pictures.

That night when the Crawfords made cheer in a lonely land was one long to be remembered. Margie, opening the door to let in Tobe, looked up at the stars through the frosty air. How close they hung! And she thought there was one larger and brighter than the others—surely the Star of Bethlehem. The cat paddled in to curl up behind the stove.

Margie shut the door and dropped down on the elk skin at Ma's feet. Outside snowy mountains and stillness. But inside, Christmas and singing and Pa's deep voice reading on and on, "And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field keeping watch over their flock by night." . . .

On New Year's Day Margie started a diary. Pa had given her a little red book, and Tom a little blue one. She resolved to have something interesting to write every single night. This was not always easy for not much happened that could be called eventful. The January days dragged by with wearisome sameness. There was the ordinary routine of household duties —cooking and patching, washing and ironing.

Margie patched when Ma set her at it, pushing the needle back and forth with impatient fingers while she kept an eye on the window through which the white world beckoned her to come skiing. Usually the stitches were far too straggling to suit Ma and had to be taken out and done over.

"If your grandmother should see them! And you almost a young lady!"

Margie made her first light bread under Ma's careful direction. That went down in the diary as one item of importance.

Tom soon grew tired of writing in his blue book and gave it up. "All I do is chop wood one day and clean out the cow shed the next," he grumbled. "I can remember that."

School lessons were not neglected. Pa gave Tom and Margie examples to do. He stood them up and had them spell, picking out words from the *Rocky Mountain News* and from *Frank Leslie's Weekly* which he had brought in at Christmas. He set them copies to write over and over again: "Procrastination is the thief of time." "The chains of habit are too slight to be felt until they are too strong to be broken."

Many an hour Margie worked with her beloved colors. She painted the knob of hill on the other side of the river as she remembered it with a circlet of autumn red, and made a try at the mountain across the west end of the valley, which Pa had named Elk Mountain because a band of elk were wintering on its far slope.

"Everything I do is dauby," she sighed. "I wish I had someone to show me!"

Ma peered at the row of pictures tacked across the cabin wall. "I think they're pretty good, don't you, Jimmy?"

"They look first rate to me," Pa agreed. "I'd like our Margie to have painting lessons. It would be just the thing if she could make a visit to Missouri."

"Oh, Pa!"

"But that'll have to wait," he amended with a shake of the head. "We've got to raise cattle first and sell them to make money. Maybe in two or three years—"

Two or three years. An eternity!

Toward the first of February Pa took a trip to the winter range to see how the cattle were getting along. He blacked

under his eyes with charcoal and wore Ma's heavy green veil to keep from getting snowblind. While he was gone, the snow piled so heavily on the roof that it had to be shoveled off twice.

On the seventeenth of February Tom let the ax slip and cut his toe and had to stay in with his foot bandaged up for nearly a whole week. He amused himself by playing "camping out" with Danny, draping the tarpaulin over the bench for a tent, and —pretending that the water pail in the corner was a spring. When he grew tired of that, Margie went outdoors and began to model something in the snow where he could watch her from the window. "Guess what I'm making," she called.

"A Noah's Ark," he shouted back. "Make the animals too."

"What's this?" she asked a few moments later after a breathless interlude of pushing and patting and rolling.

"Giraffe," he giggled. "Anyone could tell that by the broomstick neck. And that's an elephant. Stick another piece of kindling in to make the trunk longer."

"That's all I'm going to do now," said Margie, taking off her wet mittens and shaking her cold fingers.

"Oh, make a bear," he mouthed through the glass.

"All right, just one more then."

She made a short heavy body, added a thick head, and stuck on rounding ears. But the sun came out and soon all the statues had melted into shapeless knobs. The giraffe had lost his neck and the bear looked no more like a bear than had

Running Whirlwind's little silver charm.

A thaw had set in. Every day the surface snow melted enough to freeze at night into a crust of ice that stayed hard and firm for two or three hours the following morning.

"Whee, I can walk on top of it!" she shouted. "I can even jump and it won't break through!" She danced up the hill and along the ridge. Lifting her arms like wings, she raced for the valley. It felt so good to run. Her feet were as light as feathers, and she could go right over the crests of the tallest drifts!

Before she knew it she was away down the river by the Frenchman's camp where Pony had once taken them. There was the ledge by which the unfortunate gold seekers had put up their tent, and all around were white hills that humped into the intense blue of the sky like the snow creatures she had modeled around her Noah's ark. They looked to be asleep, with their heads between their paws, waiting for spring.

Suddenly a thin piping note floated to her from the branches of the cottonwoods. Hardly crediting her ears, she searched the boughs overhead with eager eyes.

"I was sure," she spoke aloud, "sure I heard—"

A bird with a rusty red breast hopped into view, preened his feathers as if from the long flight, and cocking his head down remarked. "Chiriup! Chiriup!"

"It is! It is!" Her voice skipped with gladness. She danced a jig right there on the snow. "Welcome home, Mr. Robin! I guess you know spring's on the way! And when it does come, I've a feeling 'most anything can happen!"

Chapter Eighteen

THE YAMPA'S CHILDREN

"You sure it was a robin, Sis?"

Tom stood on one foot in the doorway, peering wistfully into the branches of the big cottonwood by the creek. "Maybe it was just a flicker."

"I guess I know a robin!"

"They sound sort of alike sometimes," persisted the boy. "The flickers have been makin' a fuss all day up in the scrub oaks. Seemed as if they were tryin' awful hard to sing."

"This was a robin. He hopped so close I could see his red breast. I'm afraid he's made a mistake and come too early. Oh, Ma, will he freeze tonight?"

"He'll find a warm place in some spruce tree," said her mother. "Spring 'll soon be here."

Spring! It was only a whisper under the ice of the creek, and a promise in the swelling of the quaking aspen buds.

On the heels of the thaw came a heavy snow. For a night and a day the wind howled around the cabin in a most disagreeable temper, as much as to say, "Maybe you people think winter is nearly over. Brr-rr-rr! I'll show you!"

But Margie, tramping along behind Pa when he went to feed the cow, made a face at the storm. "You can't fool me! The pussywillows are almost out!" She broke a bouquet of long slender willow shoots and stuck them in a can of water. The heat of the house soon made the fat brown sheaths burst

and the silver pink catkins appear.

"See, Danny, just like a lot of soft kittens!"

The storm sneaked back to the peaks and the sun came out again. How eagerly the Crawfords watched for each sign of the changing season! Margie found more and more of interest to chronicle in her diary. On the fourth of March Tom heard a blackbird, and that same day Margie discovered some tiny fresh green plants around the iron spring. A few brown patches began to show on the low hills.

"Ay Jonathan, I'm glad to see those!" rumbled Pa. "The cow's 'most out of hay."

"We can feed her what corn meal's left," said Ma, "till the grass begins to grow."

Yes, the hills were waking up after their long sleep. Some days were so warm Margie didn't need a coat outdoors. The ice on the streams melted. Soda Creek began to rise, and the voice of the river grew louder. Wherever the snow vanished, sprigs of green came into sight. On the twenty-fifth of March, Margie's fourteenth birthday, she went for a walk, sinking almost to her shoetops in the spongy earth. She didn't care, for she found the first flowers—miniature white blossoms no bigger than the head of a pin, each with a dark speck of center. They grew in a cluster the size of her thumb on one side of a short stem that barely lifted them above the mud. "Salt and pepper flowers," she called them. Later she learned they were turkey peas.

"You darlings!" she whispered, and loved them more than gorgeous summer blossoms because they looked so brave

thrusting up beside a snowbank. The buttercups appeared at almost the same time, golden heads snuggled sleepily against the ground. One day the flat was only a drab strip of earth; the next it was a fragrant yellow carpet.

"Doesn't the air smell nice?" said Margie. "Come on, Tom, let's go up on the hill and see if we can't find some more flowers in those bare spots."

The snow was still so deep in places they had to use skis to reach the ridge, but once there, they cached their skis and went poking about afoot. The rocks were warm, and the trickles of moisture that threaded down their sides had made the green and orange lichens as brilliant as fresh paint.

"Chipmunk!" they both cried at once.

There he was on the limb of a service bush, his small sharp pixie face peering at them from the maze of twigs. He took time to chatter a saucy remark before he scampered down into a hole with impertinent jerks of his tail.

"And there's Grandpa Woodchuck too!" shrilled Tom. "Howdy, old fellow!"

The 'chuck blinked solemnly down from the warm ledge where he was stretched out taking his first spring sun bath.

"Must feel good to get the kinks out of your joints after sleepin' all winter!"

"Let's not bother him," said Margie. "He's so comfortable. Let's find some rocks with lichens on 'em to take home and set by the door. There aren't any flowers up here yet."

She used her ski pole to pry up a chunk of pudding stone that had weathered from the big slab and was half buried in

the soil. But she let it drop back in a hurry. "Tom! Come here!"

"What's the matter?"

"Under that rock. Look!"

Excitedly she pried up the slab again. There was a tangled gray-brown mass that wriggled a little.

"Great gee-ranium! It's snakes!"

They stopped to examine the ball of tails and heads. "Just harmless baby garter snakes," said Margie. "Must be twelve or fifteen. They haven't waked up yet."

"Let's take 'em and show Ma!"

"All right. We can hang 'em over my ski pole and carry it between us. Here, you hold that end."

One by one they disentangled the reptiles, took them by their cold limp tails, and strung them across the long stick. Most of the snakes were very obliging and stayed draped, but two or three, livelier than the rest, kept falling off. Margie and Tom had to stop and pick them up a dozen times before they got to the cabin.

"Oh, Ma! Look what we found!"

Mrs. Crawford, expecting to see a new kind of flower or perhaps a twig in leaf, came to the door with Danny at her skirts. At sight of the twitching burden on the pole, her smile froze to an expression of horror.

"Mercy on us!" She grabbed the baby. "Take those snakes away from here! Take them straight away!"

"But Ma, they're kind of pretty—"

"Take them away this instant!"

Ma's tone sounded too cross to meddle with. The two were obliged to carry their finds down by the pond and dump them in the rushes.

"Maybe they'll stay around till they grow up," Tom said hopefully.

Pa laughed when he heard about the snakes, but after a look at Ma's set face he abruptly changed the subject. He had been down the valley that day to see how the snow was melting. "It's terrible slow." He shook his head. "I fed the finish of the hay this evening. And that corn meal isn't going to last Lil very long. I'll be mighty thankful when the grass begins to grow."

"It won't be long now," encouraged Ma.

"When the grass begins to grow." That became the undercurrent of all their thoughts. Would those white ridges of ice never dissolve from the meadows? To the impatient family the season seemed to have come to a standstill.

Yet, overhead things were happening. Long silky catkins shimmered on the faintly greening aspen limbs, and made distant groves gleam like gossamer. Through the crystal air came the throb of bird wings. In the depths of the blue appeared tiny black wedges that grew larger as they dropped toward the river—wild geese, whose strident honking mingled with the loud quack of ducks settling on the pond. Blackbirds teetered on the cottonwoods, trilling a gladsome symphony that lasted from dawn till dark. On the first of April the sand-hill cranes flew out of the south, long legs trailing behind them, long necks stretching this way and that.

And on the fifth of April the cow ran out on the hill for the

first time. The grass had started to come! To celebrate, the Crawfords unpacked the flag that had been put away during the winter, and ran it up the pole. The bunting eased gently into the breeze as if it were glad to feel the sun again, and the family cheered.

"Geranium! Betcha that fresh green grass tastes just like custard pie to Lil," rejoiced Tom. "I'd 'most like to try it myself."

"Pony Wilson told me about a plant called bears' cabbage that is good to eat," remembered Margie. "He said it had sprangly leaves and a flower that was like a fuzzy purplish ball."

The bears' cabbage was easy to identify and they gathered a whole pailful, being careful not to get other plants mixed in. It shrank when cooked till there was only a saucerful. "That all there is?" said the disappointed Tom. "Say, I could eat a bushel!"

They pulled lots of little wild onions too. These couldn't get mixed up with anything else!

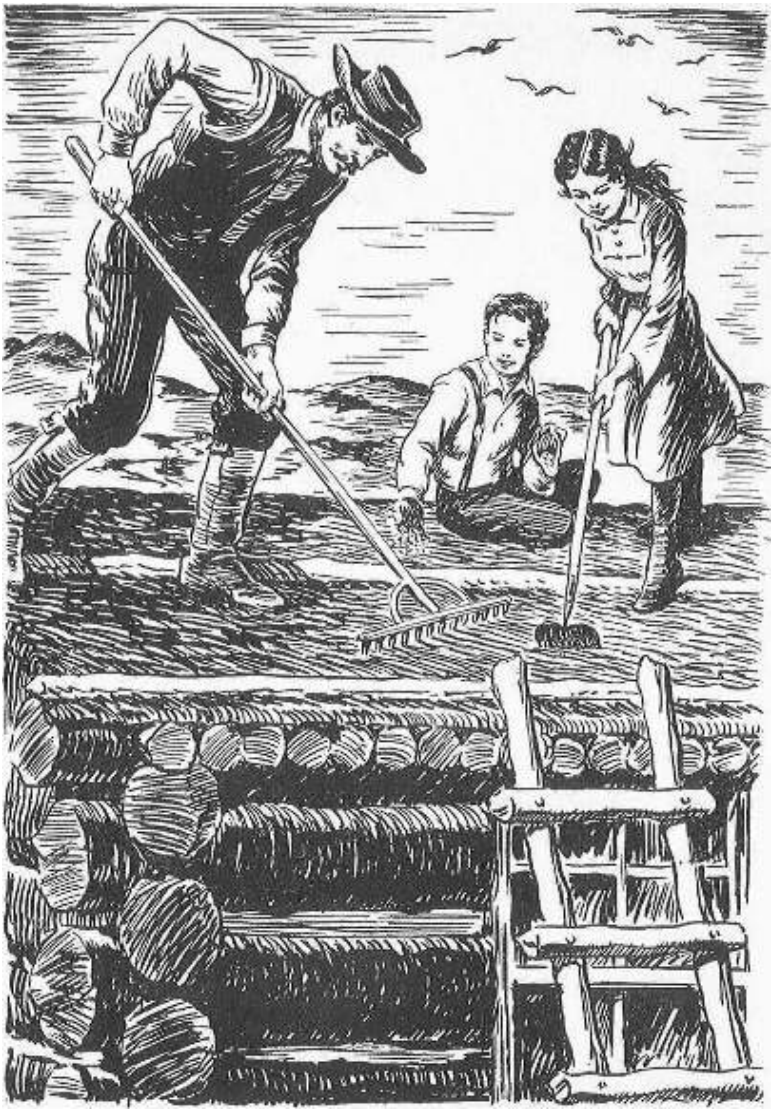
"Almost time to plant a garden," declared Ma one morning, getting out the packages of seed that Pa had brought in the wagon last fall.

"Ground's still too wet to dig," said Pa.

"The roof's dry." Margie had a sudden inspiration. "Why can't we plant radishes and lettuce there?"

"On top of the house?" demanded Tom.

"Why not? There's plenty of dirt and the roof's almost flat."



This was fun—planting the garden on the house

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Ma thought they'd better not try it. "You go to digging around up there and the dirt 'll cave in," she warned.

"Tut," said Pa. "We won't dig deep." And he climbed the ladder to rake the soil. Tom and Margie dropped the seeds, patting them down with the hoe. This was fun— planting the garden on the house!

"Wisht the roof was bigger and we could make the whole garden here," said Tom. "How long 'll it be before the radishes are ready to eat?"

"Not very long," Pa chuckled. "From the looks of those black clouds I think it's going to rain. That 'll give 'em a good start."

Thunder rumbled across the hills. The first thunder of the year. As exciting as the long roll of drums! For so many months the Crawfords had heard only the dry whisper of snow and the wail of the winter wind. Now the rocks shouted echoes and the rain came down with a rush of noise like the beat of a million gray wings. Great wet drops slanted across the windows of the cabin and spattered on the outside walls.

"I'm glad I've got a roof over me!" Margie hugged herself. "The water's just pouring down."

"Sa-ay," Tom felt the top of his head, "Some of it's leakin' in here! Where's the bucket?"

"Leaking over here, too," said Pa. "I'll put this pan under it."

Spat spat, spickety spat drummed the rain faster and faster on the tin.

"Ooooo!" Margie jumped. "It's raining down my neck. I'll get the stew kettle."

"Mercy on us! The whole house is leaking!" cried Ma. "The roof's just like a sieve. That garden!"

Margie, who had suggested the garden, felt very crestfallen as she dashed here and there with pots and pans. Meanwhile Pa and Ma rolled up the already mud-spotted bedding and covered it with the tarpaulin.

"Oh, dear!" she panted. "I didn't know a little raking 'd make the roof act like this!"

"Likely it would've leaked anyhow with all this water," said Pa, draping his jumper over the sack of flour. "Ay Jonathan, it's getting worse. We might as well be outdoors."

The only dry place in the cabin was under the table. Danny and Tobe were first to take refuge there, but were soon joined by the rest of the family.

"A pretty how-de-do!" scolded Ma. "A garden, indeed!"

For half an hour the rain pelted down. Though it made a muddy mess of the cabin, it did some good, for it hurried the melting of the snow in the valley. Drifts that had been as tall as a house miraculously disappeared, and in their places sprang fragile yellow dogtooth violets. Everywhere tender shoots of green came peeking through the carpet of matted dry grass and last year's leaves. Here under the bushes were spring beauties, like a sprinkling of pink stars on slender red stems, and there at the hill's edge were clusters of sweet early bluebells, bluer than the deep Colorado sky.

In a couple of weeks the ground was dry enough for Pa to

dig a real garden. He and Ma selected a spot a short distance up the gulch where they thought frost would not come. First the sagebrush had to be grubbed out. Pa didn't know whether anything would grow in this soil or not, but he had laid in different kinds of seeds to try— turnips, carrots, peas, beets, watermelons, squash, and even a few apple and peach seeds. He worked with the shovel and the hoe, pausing now and then to stoop and crumble the fragrant black loam in his fingers. "Looks rich and fine!" said Pa.

Tom made the rows while Ma and Margie dropped the seed—oh, so carefully! Even Danny helped to tramp the soil over them. While they were busy in the garden, a visitor came to the cabin. The Crawfords didn't know it till they trailed down the gulch at dinner time and heard a noise in the house.

"What's that?" said Ma sharply.

Margie reached the door a bound ahead of everybody else. There in the middle of the room lay a great brown creature nearly as big as Lil. He was chewing thoughtfully on a dented tin plate.

"Jokum!"

The elk had come home after a whole long winter away! He had grown so much Margie hardly knew him, but he still had the same mischievous bright brown eyes. The family crowded into the doorway. He got up and shook his head proudly as much as to say, "See my spike horns? Aren't they wonderful?"

"You old pie biter!" Tom rushed to throw his arms around

the shaggy neck.

"Careful, son," cautioned Pa. "He may be scary now."

But the elk was as tame as ever. He felt right at home and the looks of the rooms showed he'd been waiting for the family some time. Nobody had the heart to scold!

"Isn't he smart to come back?" bragged Tom. "After he's been with the wild herd too."

"What makes his horns so fuzzy?" said Margie.

"They're in the velvet stage," Pa explained. "The rascal will probably rub them on everything we have."

"Isn't he the nicest!" crooned Tom.

"Yes, Jokum, you are nice," laughed Ma, giving him a pat, "but you don't fit in a house. Shoo out of here, now, so I can take stock of the damage."

The elk was soon a regular member of the family again. He slept beside the west wall of the cabin in a hollow of soft dirt. Every morning before sun-up he clattered off to the meadows. But if Tom called, "Here, Jokum!" he would come bounding. He liked to follow Margie and Tom wherever they went, and when they played tag or hide-and-seek with Danny, he leaped and swerved around them and tried to play too.

Pa decided it was high time to bring the cattle and horses from the winter range; so he set out one morning for the Hole. On the eleventh of May he returned with Dave, Uncle Henry, and the stock. Margie and Tom climbed on top of the cabin to watch them come down the hill. The river was too high to cross that night. It was not quite so high next morn-

ing and the men managed to swim the herd in safety.

"There's Spy and Ponto!" cried Tom.

The modest little black and white shepherd paddled to shore, shook herself, and came wriggling and grinning to greet the family. Ponto lurched out of the water, a lanky yellow streak, and hurled his wet excited self upon his friends, yelping like three dogs.

"Heah you, Ponto!" chuckled Dave. "That ain' no way to act!" But he added, "Reckon he feels like jubilatin' jes' like me! Great day in de mawnin'! Ain't I happy!"

They were all happy that night, as they sat around the stove and talked. Ma, because the family was together again and there would once more be an abundance of milk and butter; Pa, because the stock had wintered through so well; and Uncle Henry and Dave, because the burden of responsibility was lifted from their shoulders. Only one member of the household found the cabin crowded. Tobe, the big gray cat, set the boisterous Ponto in his place with a smart rap of one paw; then stalked out of the house. Margie, hunting for him next morning, found him on the rocky knoll where he had lived last summer and where he apparently intended to take up his solitary abode again.

While she was on the hill she looked down the valley and saw a slow cavalcade moving up the deeply grooved trail. The Indians were returning to their summer hunting grounds. She ran to the cabin to break the news. "The Utes are coming! Let's get out the biscuit!"

When the Indians straggled into view on the slope above

the springs, who should be with them but Pony Wilson and his faithful burro, Music.

The Yampa valley was calling her children home again.

"Howdy! Howdy!" the old prospector danced the laughing Danny into his arms. "Knowed you wouldn't fergit me! Looky here, little feller, what I brung ye!" He fished in his pocket for a handful of rattlesnake buttons. His eyes sparkled under their shaggy brows as he looked about him. "I come back fer one more try at that gold. Figgered to go to Breckenridge this year, but shoo! The old Yampy—somehow I can't keep away from her."

"We haven't forgot about helping you hunt your mine," piped Tom. "I was thinkin' I might go and find it today. Geranium, I'm goin' to have me a silver-mounted saddle with my share. What you goin' to buy first?"

"Wal, reckon I'll git me one o' them b'iled shirts to start on," mused the prospector.

Colorow and his renegades were not with the Indian band, for which everyone was thankful. Yarmony was glad to see his white friends. He'd thought sure the heavy snow would get them. Pawinta had made a bow and arrow for Tom and Singing Grass brought Ma a handful of creamy pulp on a smooth clean rock.

"What is it?" asked Margie, sniffing. "It smells like quaking aspen wood, sweet and bitter."

The woman nodded vigorously, showing by signs how she had scraped the juicy white pulp from the trunk of a young tree after peeling off the outer bark.

"Heap good!" she urged and dipped in with one finger.

Ma took the pulp to be polite and gave the Utes biscuit. They squatted in front of the cabin. After a lengthy visit they journeyed on to the mesa to pitch their tepees. It seemed good to see the friendly smoke curling up from their fires again.

Pony made temporary camp with the Indians till the river should get low enough to wade, but he spent most of his time riding Danny on Music, pausing often to lie down and drink from the iron spring.

"Ain't no water in the world better 'n that thar," he proclaimed. "Been thirsty ever since I left. Reckon shore, I'll find the gold this time. And mebby," he squinted into the sun, "you know, I got a cur'ous feelin' little Billy may come walkin' in here some of these days lookin' fer me."

Little Billy. Lost twelve years. Poor Pony!

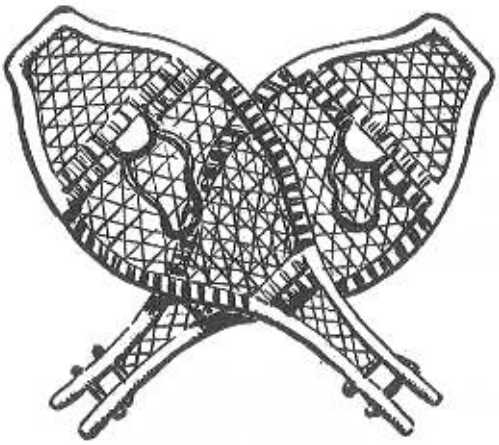
The valley, which for so many months had been hushed under white drifts, now hummed with activity. Every dawn new birds joined the joyful chorus in the cottonwoods. Every sunny noon the buzz of bees grew louder among the chokecherry blooms. The leaves on the quaking aspens were the size of squirrels' ears, big enough to make a small chatter as the breeze wandered through them.

One morning, less than a week after the arrival of the Utes, Pa brought in two horses and persuaded Ma to ride with him up Soda Creek to hunt for a cow that had strayed. Danny begged to go and was boosted up in front of Ma. When they had gone, Margie flew at the task of washing the breakfast

dishes. Tom, mindful of his mother's parting admonition to "be a good boy and help your sister with the cleaning up," dawdled with the dishtowel, between energetic twangs at his Jew's harp, and thankfully retired down the trail when Margie said, "That's all but the kettles now." For Uncle Henry and Dave were building a big corral in the flat and he was afraid he might miss something!

Margie scoured the remaining pots and hung them on their nails in a neat row. "Now to catch up with my diary," she thought, as she took the small red leather book from its shelf and carried it to the door, intending to sit on the step and write. But she didn't even open the diary. She just stood and stared at something on the step. Something that gleamed in the sun. A familiar knobby chunk of metal.

"Why," she gasped, "it's the Little Silver Bear!"



Chapter Nineteen

THE MAP OF THE GOLD

The long-lost Little Silver Bear!

Margie snatched it up. It was real! How had it come there? Tom had gone out that door only a minute ago and he hadn't seen it. Someone must have left it on the step while she'd been clattering the kettles. A buckskin thong dangled from it. Winding that on her fingers, she dashed around the cabin. Not a soul. The dogs had gone with Pa and Ma, so they weren't here to help her. Jokum was down by the iron spring. She saw his ears cocked toward a clump of service berry bushes on the little hill and she made for that, long braids bobbing, feet stumbling over her apron.

A sudden scramble in the leaves, a pair of laughing black eyes, a flash of white teeth. "How!"

If a stalk of sagebrush had turned to a human being before her eyes, Margie wouldn't have been a speck more astonished.

"Running Whirlwind! Where'd you come from?"

The boy leaped out of hiding and chuckled. "Come long way over mountains."

"Where's your horse?"

"Too much snow on range to bring horse. Bring Little Bear."

"B-but—" Margie blinked to make sure she wasn't just dreaming. Was this long lean lad in buckskin really Running

Whirlwind? She looked from him to the Little Bear and back again. “Where on earth did you get this?”

“Wasani take Little Bear when we go away.”

“But I had it after that. I know I did! I showed it to Colorow!”

“Wasani slip back after dark. Take Little Bear because he think our bad luck start when I give it to you. We not gone very far. My leg was hurting. He not tell me he get Little Bear till we are many sleeps away.”

“That was the night Pa and Uncle Henry and Dave got in,” remembered Margie. “I reckon Wasani sneaked in the cabin while we were all outside to meet the wagons. Goodness sake!” She sat down on the ground to collect her giddy senses. “Where’s Wasani?”

“He not come this time. Little Bear and me bring this.” He carefully took a torn, yellowed piece of paper from the pocket of his broad leather belt and handed it to her.

Wondering, she unfolded it. The paper was so old it felt soft like worn-out muslin, and the edges of it crumbled in her fingers. She frowned at the faint pencil lines on the wrinkled surface. “What is it?”

“The map.”

“What map?”

“The map of the gold.”

She sat gazing at it foolishly. The map of the gold— could this be Pony Wilson’s map?

“Oh, where’d you find it?”

“Elk find it, that time he get in the cabin and try to eat the

picture."

"You mean it was really in the old daguerreotype? Then Thurston never got it after all, for that's just where Pony put it!"

Running Whirlwind went on to explain how Wasani had seen the paper when he grabbed the picture from the elk and had hidden it in his shirt.

"How'd he know about Pony's map?"

"Many things I have to tell you." The boy folded his long legs in the grass beside her. She could hardly yet believe this was Running Whirlwind, could hardly believe what her ears were hearing about the map—Pony Wilson's map! She studied the paper with eager interest but could not make head nor tail of it.

"Oh, do tell me!" she cried, settling her skirts impatiently.

"A new man is at the trading post," he began, choosing his words slowly. "All winter I have lived there. His wife took trouble to teach me how to speak English better."

"You do speak better!" Margie nodded a decisive head. "But go on. What happened to Clee Morgan, the other trader?"

"I tell you about that pretty soon. Now I tell you a story." The laughter was gone from his face. He fixed grave eyes upon the far hills and began:

"Many snows ago, a man had a trading post here on the Yampa River. He was a man who spoke with a forked tongue."

"Thurston," said Margie. "Pony told me about him."

The Arapahoe nodded. "One time a prospector with a little boy came into the valley to hunt a mine. The trader knew there was a map to the gold, and tried every way to get it. A bad Ute was a friend of his. `Here is a big box of beads and looking glasses,' Thurston told him. `I give it to you for a present, and you do something for me. Go and get the little black book from the prospector. When you bring it to me I give you something else.' The Ute did not know what a book was, but the trader showed him it was a square shape—so big—and he told him it had black buckskin outside.

"So the bad Indian sneaked behind the prospector one day and knocked him down and felt in his pockets. He found what looked like little black book. And he thought he steal the rest of white man's things for himself. First he take little bag. It had yellow rocks in it, and a big grizzly claw. That claw made him afraid, and he could not drop the bag quick enough. He trembled because he knew the Bear was protecting the prospector, and he ran to his lodge. When he looked down at his hands he was still carrying the little black book. He threw it in with the presents the trader had given him and pounded on the top. Then he got on his horse with the box and whipped the pony. It was hard to carry the box when he was riding so fast, but he was greedy and did not want to lose the beads and looking glasses. He made camp in Middle Park where he thought the spirit of the Bear could not find him.

"That night before dark he climbed a hill to look around and saw Arapahoe war party. He sure the Bear sent Arapa-

hoes after him. He hide the box in the spruce needles under big tree where he think he come back and get it some time. But he never come back, for he was a coward and he knew that even his own people, the Utes, not like him."

Margie drew a quavering breath. "So the box stayed hid till I found it," she said in an awed tone. "What became of the prospector's little boy?"

Running Whirlwind's fingers played with a dry twig, shredding the fiber under the bark. "When the trader had waited long time for the bad Ute to bring him the map of the gold, he went to the Indian's lodge to learn why he not come. Then he saw fresh pony tracks headed east up the valley. The Ute had run away.

"Then the trader hurried to the prospector's tepee. He found the man on the ground—dead, he thought. And there was the little boy beside him, crying. Thurston began to be afraid, for he knew this prospector was good friend of the Ute tribe. When the Utes came and found their friend lying there, and saw the trader's footprints they would think the trader had killed him and would try to take his hair. But Thurston was not so mean that he wanted to leave little papoose there. So he took him on his horse and escaped to Middle Park, when he joined Arapahoes and went over the range with them."

"Poor little baby!" murmured Margie. "After that what became of him?"

Running Whirlwind tossed the twig at a chipmunk. "The plains know much they do not tell," he answered slowly. "The man Thurston changed his name, traveled

north—away off—and stayed for many snows. Then he came back and traveled south. He stopped to trade with some Apaches and saw the bad Ute that he had bribed to get the map a long time ago. The Ute told him what he had done with the little black book from the prospector's pocket.

"Now the trader was very happy, for he believed he could dig up the box and find the map. Then he could get much gold. So many war parties were in Middle Park that summer and the next that he not like to go there; so he built a little trading post and waited. Last spring when snow melted, he was ready to cross the mountains when a sickness came upon him. He think he send two Arapahoe boys to get the map and bring it to him."

"You and Wasani," supplied Margie.

"He drew us a picture to show where the trails went and where the bad Ute said he had buried the box. He was drawing it for us on a piece of buckskin that day I saw you in Denver City."

"When we came to have our tintypes made?" frowned Margie. "I didn't see any white man except Mr. Humkins and Clee Morgan."

An odd look came to Running Whirlwind's face, but he went on, "Remember how the wind blew everything when you opened the window? It blew that little piece of buckskin out of my hands. I grabbed what I thought was it, but when I got outside it was the wrong piece. We not like to tell the trader because he very cross. We come back after you go and ask the picture man. He say he wrap your tintypes in a piece

of buckskin with writing on it. So we find your camp and hide and see your mother put the tintypes in the trunk. When it get night—"

"Forever more!" exclaimed Margie. "So you're the ones that stole our pictures!"

He smiled ruefully. "I bring them back now." He took a buckskin packet out of the pocket in his belt and gave it to her. She opened it, and there were the small heavy squares of tin which were their pictures—hers and Tom's and Danny's. Three anxious little faces.

The Crawfords had been pretty solemn that day, for who knew but they'd be scalped when they got in the mountains? It seemed ages since those pictures had been taken. Tom's round freckled face had begun to lengthen out and Danny had lost some of his baby chubbiness, and she—why she was fourteen—almost grown up! Wouldn't Ma be pleased to get the tintypes back! Margie examined the smudgy markings on the buckskin wrapping. "Was this the drawing the trader made to show you about the box?"

"Not all of it. The part we needed most had been cut off."

"That's so. Ma used it to wrap the pictures she sent to Missouri so they wouldn't get scratched. What did you do then?"

"We thought maybeso we find the box anyhow, so we traveled up Clear Creek and over mountains to Middle Park. The drawing showed us that much was right, and we knew the box was under a big spruce tree by a trail. We hunted long time. Then we saw wagon tracks and came where you had camped and saw a hole where you had dug up something.

We knew it must be the box."

"Why didn't you come right straight and tell us?"

"The trader made us promise not to tell anyone. He said it would be great thing for two Arapahoe boys to sneak into enemy country and fool Utes. He told us Arapahoe chief would be heap proud of us. We vowed we would not come back without the map."

"That's why you rummaged through our trunk after we came down here!"

"Yes. How could we know that the bad Ute had made a mistake and instead of the little black book had got the—what you call it?"

"Daguerreotype," said Margie. "And of course you didn't know. Nobody but Pony knew that the map had been cut out of the book and hidden behind the lining of the daguerreotype."

"Do you remember," went on Running Whirlwind, "that time you made Wasani and me hide in the wagon?"

"Well, I should say I do! Colorow nearly scared us out of our senses."

"You gave the box of looking glasses and beads to Colorow. After that we not know if he have the little black book or if you found it first and put it away in your things. Many days we spied on the Ute lodges and trailed Colorow. Very slow and careful we had to be, but we could not see the little black book. So we followed your tracks down here."

"How funny and mixed up everything has been!" exclaimed Margie. "If Jokum hadn't broken the daguerreotype, Wasani never would've found the map."

"No, we not look for just a little folded paper like that. But Wasani has sharp eyes. He showed me the paper after you had gone in the cabin, and we saw it was the map. So we left right away to take it to the trader."

"And you didn't even say good-by!"

"We not want to answer questions. But I knew I would come back some time."

"How did you learn that story," said Margie after a space, "about Pony and the map and the bad Ute?"

Running Whirlwind grew very sober. "The trader Thurston was sick last winter. Before he went to the spirit land, he called me to him and told me all this. And there was something else."

"Was it about Billy?"

The boy nodded. "He tried hard to tell me, but the shadow people were calling him."

Silence fell upon them. In the rocks a woodchuck scolded. Margie smoothed a patch of earth with the side of her hand, traced a meaningless design, erased it. "You said Thurston used a different name. What was it?"

"Morgan."

"Morgan! Why that's your father's name!"

"Yes."

"You mean Thurston and Clee Morgan were the same man? Was Thurston your father?"

He bent his head in shame, but jerked it up again, his chin stern. "I never knew him till he came to the Arapahoe camp three snows ago and then the chief told me. I lived with him two years at the trading post. He very good to me. He gave

me a gun and taught me many things. When I brought the map to him last fall he very sick. For many sleeps I took care of him. I know he sorry for all the meanness he did."

"Don't feel bad. Please don't. I'm sure none of it was your fault."

"I must make up for it all I can. He try to tell me something about that Billy. I think he want me to bring him to Pony. But I not know where he is."

"Never mind. We'll find him somehow. Why, when Pony gets the gold from his mine he can hire a hundred scouts to go all over the country and hunt for Billy. I wonder which way north is on this map."

"Can you read it?" he asked anxiously.

"Not very well. But just wait till Pony sees it! Come on, let's hurry and find him!"

She thrust the tintypes into her own pocket and looped the thong of the Little Bear around her neck for safekeeping. Running Whirlwind took the map. They raced for the Indian mesa where the prospector still had his camp. Yarmony sat in front of his lodge by a wisp of fire. If he was surprised to see the Arapahoe he made no sign, but gave him greeting:

"How!"

What a different reception this year from last! Now the white girl's friend was Yarmony's as well. Running Whirlwind stood straight and respectful and said, "How!"

"Where's Pony?" panted Margie.

Yarmony's one keen eye fastened on the Little Silver Bear which swung against the calico yoke of her apron. His dusky face that could be so expressionless became strangely ani-

mated. He stood up and called Singing Grass. She came hurrying. She touched the Little Silver Bear with her plump brown fingers, touched it awesomely and jabbered fast throaty words.

"Where you get?" demanded Yarmony.

"From Running Whirlwind." Margie gave the charm an impatient twitch. "But oh, where's Pony?"

The old chief looked over their heads at the hills as if he saw something they could not see. "Gone there!" He waved an arm west.

The two young folk sped down the river trail. Uncle Henry and Dave were still in the flat working at the corral. Margie shouted to them that she was going to find Pony. Uncle Henry looked astonished to see Running Whirlwind and called something that she didn't wait to hear. Tom's eyes bulged out. He tumbled off the finished part of the fence and ran after them.

"Hey, wait! Zat you, Running Whirlwind? Wa-ait!"

They had to stop long enough to explain so he wouldn't burst with curiosity. Then they all dashed on to find Pony. It was hard to keep up with Running Whirlwind. He traveled with the swift springy step of a forest creature as he followed the broad shoe-prints of a man and the sharp deep scallops made by a burro's hoofs. Down the river, over the bluff, past the Frenchman's camp.

"Po—ny!" Margie shouted. "Yoo-hoo!"

Through the sagebrush, along the rocky side hill. "Po—ny!"

"There he is!" The Indian boy was first to spy him seated

on a cottonwood log in the gully, smoking his pipe and resting. His pick and gold pan lay beside a trickle of water. Music, the burro, grazed near.

In an avalanche of loose dirt and stones the three slid down the gravel bank. The Little Silver Bear bobbed out and caught on a bush. Margie yanked it loose and held it to keep it from swinging.

"Pony!" she squealed.

"Hullo! What's a-chasin' ye?"

"We've got it! We've got it!" whooped Tom.

The prospector recognized Running Whirlwind. His nose crinkled in dislike. "Wal, I see one o' them pesky 'Rapahoes has come back."

"Oh, Pony, he's brought the map! Look!"

The old man didn't seem to hear. He tamped the "smokin'" into his pipe. "Pesky 'Rapahoes!" he grunted. "They better not—"

"Pony, look!" Margie took the yellowed paper that Running Whirlwind thrust into her grasp and held it for him to see. "Look! The map of the gold!"

He stared at the crumpled sheet without understanding.

"The map you hid in the back of the picture. Now you can find the mine you've been looking for so long!"

""You know, the drawing the Frenchman made for you," prompted Tom.

"The—map—?" Gradually the words took meaning. Eagerness spread like a warm candle glow on the old man's weathered face. "Ginger and bear's grease!" He took the paper and peered at it closely. "How come you to—"

"Oh, Pony, which direction must we start?"

He spread the fragile sheet upon his knee. A long time he studied the faint lines, whispering words through dry lips, "Here's the crick—that dead tree—" The little group stood around him, their hearts thumping loudly. When he got up and clambered to the rim of the gully, they followed. He referred again to the drawing, wiped the back of his hand across his sweaty forehead and sat down on a rock suddenly, as if all the strength had gone out of his knees.

"No use."

What a gulf of hopelessness in those words!

"No use!" echoed Margie.

"All these years I been thinkin' thar must be some part o' the map I fergot, but it's jest like I remembered it. I don't know no more 'n I did."

"Aw-w-w," groaned the disappointed Tom.

"The Frenchman that give it to me was purty sick and I guess he never quite finished it. The lines goes jest this fur and stops."

"Did you look hard? Maybe I can see—" Margie let go the Little Silver Bear which she had been tightly clutching and taking hold of the map bent her head close to his. Her quick movement sent the charm swinging forward on its string. The prospector jerked back. His whole frame stiffened. His eyes fixed on the odd talisman. He reached out a gnarled hand to touch it—slowly and hesitantly—as if he were afraid.

"Pony! Don't look like that!" begged the alarmed Margie. "Whatever is the matter?"

Chapter Twenty

LITTLE BEAR HEAP TELL UM

"Where'd you git that?"

Pony Wilson acted as if he saw a ghost. His voice was a harsh whisper. Margie frowned down her nose at the charm.

"Running Whirlwind gave it to me. I had it all last summer. Didn't you see it?"

"How could he?" demanded Tom. "You kept it put away all the time."

Pony wasn't looking at the Little Bear now. He was sitting hunched down inside his faded shirt, staring vacantly at the ground.

Margie regarded him with growing concern. "What is it, Pony?"

"That thar. It was his plaything—little Billy's—"

"Your little son Billy? Oh, Pony—"

"His plaything," husked Pony. "He wore it on a string around his neck the day he was stole. No Injuns ever would have took it from him. They'd have been afeared to. Thurston done that. Traded it to the 'Rapahoes fer some Injun to wear. Got a-plenty fer it too, I'll warrant." He drooped his head in his hands. "Billy he'll never come back to me now."

"I don't know why you say that!" cried Margie. "What has a silly charm got to do with Billy coming back? What's the difference if Thurston did trade it to the Indians? Or if the

baby only lost it and some Arapahoe picked it up? That's prob'ly what happened. Babies are always losin' things."

"This here was tied through a hole in his shirt so's he couldn't lose it."

Margie felt mighty sorry for the old prospector. She dropped down beside him and patted his arm. "Oh, Pony, dear Pony, we all wish we could help you find your Billy. What makes you think the Little Silver Bear—"

"'Tain't silver," he muttered. "It come from that spoutin' spring across the river. Reckon it's only a rock or more likely, a couple rocks stuck together and coated with mineral."

"Just like what Pa found, I betcha," nodded Tom.

"When I first fished it out," went on Pony, "I figgered it was silver too, but it didn't test right with a sulphur match and I soon see it wasn't. When the Utes got sight of it they made a big fuss account of its funny shape. They claimed it was a sign from the Bear. Yarmony told me it was good medicine, and so jest fer fun I hung it around Billy's little neck. He liked to play with it. The Injuns 'd come and sit and look at it and talk about it. When Billy was stole, Yarmony said long as the Little Bear was with him he'd be all right, and some day the Little Bear 'd lead him home to the Yampy. I come to think so too. All these years I been a-hopin'. But now he'll never come back."

Margie had been thinking with puckered brows. "Running Whirlwind," she demanded, "did your mother, Willow Woman, ever tell you where she got the Little Bear?"

The tall lad shook his head. “No, but I think—”

Pony’s attention shifted to him. “‘Rapahoe!” he snorted. “‘Rapahoe!” He lurched to his feet and shook his fist in the boy’s face. “The sneakiest Injuns ever! They knowed where my Billy was, but they wouldn’t tell me—his own paw. Set me on a false trail. You’re one of ‘em. Git out o’ here! Git, I tell ye!”

Running Whirlwind stood a moment stock-still. The muscles in his jaws built tight white mounds. His hands clenched at his sides. Swiftly he wheeled and went crashing through the bushes.

“Oh, don’t go off!” Margie plunged after him. The blaze of anger in his eyes, the stubborn set of his head—Pony shouldn’t have made him mad! Pony didn’t know Running Whirlwind had come on purpose to help him. Would the Indian boy go clear away across the range, as he had gone before, without another word?

“Oh, wait!”

She rushed through the bushes, tripped on a loose shoe string and skated on her elbows to land in a prickly clump of Oregon grape. Her mouth and eyes were full of dust. Dizzily she sat up and coughed and wiped her heated face on her apron.

Tom came to her. “Pony’s gone off too,” he complained. “If he don’t look the queerest! Kind of dazed like. He even left his gold pan and pick. I brought ‘em. And here’s the map.”

“A lot of good it is!” said his sister crossly.

He shook his fist in the boy's face

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"Well, it's not my fault."

Margie jerked at her shoe string. "Oh dear, when I got the Little Silver Bear back this morning I had a feeling something nice was going to happen. But everything's gone wrong!" She held the small charm stiffly in front of her and glared at it.

"Maybe the Indians think you're good medicine but I think you're bad medicine! So there!"

Tears of disappointment filled her eyes. Pony had counted on the charm's bringing Billy back. And it hadn't. No telling where the little lost boy was. Pony had counted on finding the gold too. She looked over the chunk of metal at the hills. Somewhere in them was the hidden mine. She felt resentment at those hills. They lay like lazy animals with their backs humped into the sky. That long one with the round head—she could almost see its sides breathe. Her blurred vision blended the small charm in her hand with the mountains beyond. She straightened suddenly and blinked hard.

"Tom! Look!"

"Look at what?"

"The Little Bear!"

"Well, I am!"

"Now, look over at that long mountain. Do you see what I see?"

He screwed his brows into a knot. "I don't see nothin'."

"They're alike—the Bear and that hill! They're 'zactly the same shape. And the scratches—look, Tom!" She was so excited her words tumbled over each other. "The scratches

are the same as the gullies on that hill!"

"Aw, they couldn't be," said Tom, grabbing the charm.

"They could if somebody made 'em! That deep scratch on the Little Bear's shoulder is just like the first gully between the round hill and the long one. And that pitted place on the Little Bear—you know what I think? I think it was put there to *show where the gold is!*"

"Geranium!" Tom squinted through one eye and then the other. "It does sorta look like—but who'd 've done it?"

"The Frenchman was the only one who knew where the gold was," Tom reminded, "and he up an' died before Pony ever found the Little Bear in the Steamboat spring."

"I don't care. It's a map plain as can be. And I betcha," she jumped to her feet, "I betcha anything if we go to that gully and hunt, we'll find the lost mine!"

"Wouldn't hurt to try. Say, if we could dig out a hatful of nuggets and surprise Pony—" Tom jammed the useless paper map into his pocket and picked up the prospector's gold pan and pick. "Come on, let's go over to that mountain."

Margie hastily knotted her shoelace. "We'll never get there if we walk. We'd better go and catch up some horses. Besides, we have to find Running Whirlwind."

"That's so," said Tom. "Hurry!"

They started back toward home and had not gone far when they saw Running Whirlwind stalking to meet them. His face was somber, his eyes deep and black. He had fought down his anger and was determined to see the business

through. “I come back,” he said with a despairing shrug of his shoulders, “but I not know what to do!”

Tom and Margie each caught him by an arm and hustled him along. Breathlessly they explained.

The Indian boy’s features lighted. “Hah! Little Bear! It is a true sign! We find that gold and maybe Pony not hate me.”

Pa and Ma were not home yet, and Uncle Henry and Dave had hitched up the mules and gone to haul more logs; so there was nobody to ask a lot of questions. Grabbing a couple of bridles from the shed, Tom ran to the flat to catch Chief and Monty. They didn’t want to be caught. “Bring a little salt!” he yelled.

Margie dashed into the cabin to get some in a pan. As she brushed by the shelf in the corner, the daguerreotype caught her eye. Something made her pause. It seemed almost as though the girl in the frame called out to her.

Margie was so long appearing that Tom came to get the salt himself. “Say, what makes you look so funny?”

“Nothing. I was just—” Her voice trailed off as she followed him through the door.

They caught the horses and piled on bareback, Running Whirlwind on Chief and Tom and Margie on Monty. Running Whirlwind carried the gold pan and the small pick.

“That hill’s farther ‘n I thought,” commented Tom when they had been riding for more than an hour. “We ever goin’ ter get there?”

“It’s coming closer,” encouraged his sister. “Don’t you remember, the Frenchman told Pony the mine was half a

day's journey from their camp by the river."

"It not take us half a day," said Running Whirlwind. "We travel faster. Those prospectors walk, I think, and stop often to pan. We ride."

On they pushed, following one of the many game trails while the sun climbed high. None of them had ever been this far down valley before. A little band of antelope flicked away over a rise. A badger waddled to his hole and backed in hissing. A pair of wide-winged hawks made shadows on the sagebrush. The hill began to look different. It seemed to flatten out, and the adventurers could not decide which of two gulches corresponded to the right groove on the Little Bear. Anxiously they hurried on.

After another hour they reached the first gulch. "There's water running down it," frowned Margie. The Frenchman told Pony a dry gulch."

"That little bit of stream will dry up in another moon," said Running Whirlwind.

"Geranium, it's getting' hot!" Tom passed his sleeve across his red face.

"Tell you what," said Margie, "let's pan some sand at the mouth of each gulch and see which has gold in it. That's the way the old prospectors did."

They tied Chief and Monty in the shade and fell to work. Running Whirlwind scooped sand into the pan and squatted by the water. Tom thought he knew all about how to wash gold—hadn't he watched Pony? —and he kept telling the others what to do. He found it wasn't so easy when his turn

came. The pan was so heavy to roll that his arms got tired and his shoulders ached. But he kept manfully at his job.

Three pairs of eyes watched every shift of the sand expecting to see fat yellow nuggets come into view.

"Gold's heavy. It'll go to the bottom," panted Tom. "Got ter keep spillin' this other stuff a little at a time. Got ter keep shakin'."

At last after endless maneuverings they reduced the gravel to a thin layer of fine silt.

"Do you see anything?" asked Running Whirlwind.

"Gold's awful hard to notice sometimes." Tom leaned so close his nose was almost in the pan.

"Shake it around again," advised his sister. "We ought to find at least one nugget if there were as many of them as the Frenchman said."

Not even the faintest glimmer of gold!

Margie slapped with muddy hands at the mosquitoes that whined around her ears. "Must be the other gulch. Or else we didn't pan right. Let's just hunt for the prospect hole. It ought to be easy to see."

"I go up that far gulch," suggested Running Whirlwind. "You go this one."

They got on their horses again and searched another hour. Tom and Margie looked their eyes out. No sign of a hole. The gully they were following frayed into a dozen miniature furrows.

"No use to go any farther," said Tom. "Nothin' here."

"No, might as well go find Running Whirlwind. I reckon

he's found it."

But Running Whirlwind had not. "No hole here," he declared positively when they joined him.

Aching with disappointment, the three got off their horses and flopped down to rest in the shade of some aspens. They'd tried so hard! They'd all wanted so much to find Pony's gold for him! Indifferently Margie let the mosquitoes bite. Her face was itchy and blistered anyway from sunburn. She should have worn a sunbonnet. Ma was always telling her. There was a wicked red line down one arm where a rose bush had scratched her. She wouldn't have minded anything if only they'd found the gold. She'd been so sure the marks on the Little Bear were a map. Maybe they weren't. Maybe it was just happenstance that the charm and the hill were the same shape.

"Wisht we had some dinner," said Tom. "Must be 'way after noon. Pa'll be comin' to hunt us pretty soon."

Running Whirlwind took a strip of jerky out of his pocket and whittled some for each of them. The dry smoked deer meat made them thirsty, so they dragged themselves over to a trickle of water to get a drink. Since this stream was even smaller than that in the first gulch, they had to hunt to find a place deep enough to dip their cupped hands.

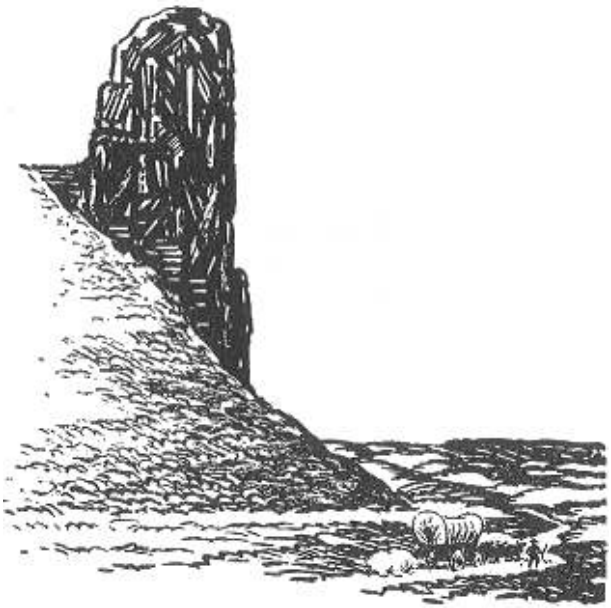
"Here's a little pool," called Tom.

The thread of water moved slowly over a rock bench and dribbled into a round dark basin. When Margie and Tom had slaked their thirst, Running Whirlwind lay flat and put his lips to the pool. Margie stared at the reflection of his face, framed in the dark oval of the rocks. To her mind came a

blurred remembrance of something—

At that moment a shadow fell upon the wall of the gulch. Looking up, she saw Yarmony on the rim above. Yarmony with shining otter fur bound in his braids and a marvel of beadwork on his breast. He rode his pony down to them. Singing Grass followed on her pinto.

"How!" He raised his hand in grave greeting. His one gleaming eye fixed itself expectantly on the small charm that Margie wore. "Little Bear heap tell um!" He paused as if to listen. The breeze stirred the aspens. A green-tailed towhee flirted under the bushes with a note of husky question. "Little Bear maybeso tell um more!"



Chapter Twenty-one

THE SHINING MOUNTAINS

Margie, Tom and Running Whirlwind had stumbled to their feet.

"How'd you know we were here?" blurted out Tom.

"Yarmony see."

Singing Grass edged her pinto close to Margie, leaned down to stroke the Little Bear. Under her breath she was chanting a guttural strain that must have been a song of pleasure, for her broad face fairly glistened.

"Many snows Injun wait," Yarmony said. "Bear heap know. Bear tell white girl."

Margie gave her tumbled hair one vehement shake to get it out of her way. She gripped the Little Bear with both her hands. Her pulses were going faster, faster to keep up with her racing thoughts. She rocked forward on her toes.

"Yes, Little Bear did tell me. How Yarmony know?"

"Yarmony heap fix um!"

"You mean—you mean you made these scratches on the Bear?"

The Ute nodded. "Show where white men dig," he explained.

"Great geranium!" Tom struck his fist in his hand. "'Course the Injuns 'd know where the gold was! Why 'n't we think of that before?"

"Many snows ago white men come here. Utes no like. Run

um off. Afraid too many whites come, taking hunting grounds. Chiefs make powwow. Utes no must tell where yellow rock."

"Then," said the girl, "all these years while Pony has hunted so hard, you knew! I thought Pony was your friend!"

"Heap prend!" The chief made wide gestures. "Him same like Injuns." He fell back into a jumble of Ute.

"He say," interpreted Running Whirlwind, able to read the sign language if he did not understand all the words, "Pony one time fight big grizzly that go after Yahmonite. Save chief's life."

"Betcha that's where Pony got that bear claw he carries," said Tom.

Yarmony went on, "Pony heap prend. Injun want-um find yellow rock. But Utes all make powwow—" His coppery face was earnest. "Yarmony feel heap bad. Tell Little Bear about yellow rock. Bear heap wise. Maybeso tell Pony."

Fearing he had not made himself clear, he attempted further enlightenment. He had wanted to show Pony the gold, but had not dared betray his promise to his tribe. He had felt greatly troubled. When Pony had found the odd silver rock in the spouting spring, Yarmony had felt that the powerful Spirit of the Bear had sent an answer to his problem. He had been able to see what his white friend had not seen—that the strange rock was meant to be a little bear.

Besides, he had noticed that the charm and the hill where the men had dug for yellow stones were "heap much same"—two humps, one little and one big. So he had shaped the charm to an even closer likeness. (He showed with his

hands how it had taken much slow, patient work with a very hard flint.) Finally, he had traced the line of the gulch and made a little hole, to mark where the gold was.

Margie wondered how he had done all this without Pony's knowing. Then she remembered that Billy had often been left to the care of the Ute women while his father went hunting. And of course Billy always wore the charm. Yarmony had had opportunity a-plenty to carry out his plans.

Twelve years the Little Bear had kept the secret which today she had blundered on. But where was the gold?

"You sure this is the right place?" Tom asked Yarmony dubiously.

"Heap here!" The chief pointed to the ground. "Little Bear speak true."

"But there ain't any prospect hole."

"Must have been filled up," said Margie. "We better try panning right here."

Running Whirlwind grabbed the gold pan. "We find some of those nuggets to show Pony!"

Yarmony and his woman went back to the rim of the gulch where the breeze was cooler, and settled themselves to watch.

There was not enough water in the little pool to make the washing of the sand easy. But Running Whirlwind worked with feverish care. Finding Pony's mine meant a lot to him. It meant a debt of honor partly paid. Hadn't he promised himself to make up to Pony for the meanness Clee Morgan, the trader, had done him? Hadn't he, Clee Morgan's son, vowed a mighty vow?

The sun tilted westward. The shadows inched longer.

"Do you see any gold?" cried Margie.

"Naw," gulped Tom, "not even a—a smidgeon!"

Running Whirlwind stirred the sand with his finger. He shook his head.

"Then the Frenchman and his party must have got it all!" Margie couldn't keep her chin from trembling. What a day of disappointments! Monty and Chief pawed and whinnied for someone to come and untie them. Up on the rim of the gully Yarmony and Singing grass were talking in uneasy tones.

Suddenly the woman was beside her, tugging at her sleeve and grunting a string of Ute. "You come!" she urged.

Margie looked at her dully.

"You come!" Singing Grass gave her words a sharp accent of command. She pulled the girl roughly by the arm.

Margie was obliged to follow her up the bank. At the top Yarmony stood rigid peering at something in the valley below. She looked where he pointed and saw two figures moving slowly along the trail. One was a small mouse-colored burro, half-hidden under a pack; the other was a stumpy little man who walked with a peculiar, shuffling gait.

"Why, it's Pony! Where's he going?"

The Indians were silent.

Margie's gaze grew intent. "You don't think—you don't think he's going away—*for good?*"

She didn't need an answer. The lump in her own throat told her. Pony *was* going away from the valley. And he was

never coming back. The measured defeat in his steps, the tired stoop of his shoulders—

She flung herself on Singing Grass's pinto that stood near, and give it a whack with the flat of her hand. The wiry pony spurted down the hill. A jackrabbit dived out of the way. A chipmunk flattened against a bush with a squeak of terror. She reined up across the trail in front of the old prospector.

"Pony, you're not—you're not—"

"Eh?" He hadn't even heard her coming. In his eyes was the look of far bleak deserts and barren hills. West he was headed, beyond the things he knew; beyond the friendly green mountains, and the talking river.

"Oh, Pony, you're not going away!"

"Yep, I'm a-driftin'."

"We'll be dreadful lonesome! Danny'll cry for you."

"He'll fergit."

"He loves you almost best of anyone. He'll cry himself sick."

Dogged silence.

She tried a new tack. "And there's the Frenchman's mine."

What wouldn't she have given to be able to say, "We've found it for you, Pony! What you've been looking for so many years. Bushels of nuggets! I can take you right and show you!" But to have to tell him they'd found the mine and there was nothing in it; that the Frenchman and his partners had taken it all—

Tears ran down her cheeks. "Oh Pony, we've been trying awful hard to help you. B-but we couldn't find any gold."

"Thar, lass. Twarn't meant fer ole Pony. 'Sides, what would I want of gold now? Used ter want it fer Billy."

Billy. Year after year Pony had trudged back to the Yampa with the springtime, believing that some day his little lost son would come to him; believing in a Bear charm because the Indians did. Now the charm had appeared in the Yampa, but it hadn't brought Billy. Pony's faith was broken. The spark was gone from his eyes. He shuffled his feet.

"Wal, I'll be gittin' on."

Margie's heart ached with pity. If only the Little Bear were really true magic! Her fingers clasped it so hard that the buckskin thong pulled on her neck. Billy's plaything. The words Pony had spoken that very morning crowded back into her mind: "No Injuns ever would have took it from him. They'd have been afeared to!" Suppose nobody had ever taken it from Billy—not even the mean trader. Suppose—

She rolled off the pinto and grabbed the drab shoulders and shook them "Wait!" she gasped. "Oh Pony, you've got to listen to me!"

To Margie it seemed an endless distance from the trail to the rim of the gulch. A moment ago when she had persuaded Pony to come with her she had felt pretty sure. But now, toiling up the slope with him stalking beside her, his breath coming in agitated gulps, she began to be afraid. What if she were wrong? With one hand she led the pinto and with the other she gripped Pony's arm.

Above them were four people watching. Tom and Running Whirlwind had climbed up to see what all the

commotion was about. And there was Yarmony, stolid as an old pine tree, and beside him Singing Grass. Her squat body rocked back and forth as she chanted singsong words.

Pony leaped ahead of his guide, sweeping the waiting group with his flashing eyes.

"You said—he—you told me—"

"Yes, Pony!"

"Where's he at? Where's my Billy?"

Margie's knees felt as shaky as jelly, but this was no time to hesitate. She went to Running Whirlwind and drew him toward Pony.

The prospector recoiled. "What you bringin' that 'Rapahoe to me fer? I want my son!"

"Wait, Pony," Margie caught his frayed sleeve, hanging on to it: "you *must* let me tell you!"

Yarmony nodded ponderously.

Singing Grass edged nearer, her moccasins making a faint *scuff, scuff*, through the short brush.

Margie's words came like small wind flurries. "When Thurston took your little Billy, he left him with the Arapahoes. He gave him to a woman named Willow Woman to take care of."

She felt the boy stiffen, and sent him a reassuring look.

"I expect Billy was so cute and nice the squaw didn't want to give him up; so when his real father came looking for him she hid him away. He grew up with the Arapahoes and became fine and straight and tall, like Running Whirlwind here."

"Great geranium, Sis! You don't mean—"

"Yes, I do!" cried Margie, and with a quick movement she clasped the lad's hand over Pony's. "Running Whirlwind isn't an Indian at all. *He's Billy!*"

There was a moment of astonished silence all around.

Pony jerked back. "That's not him!"

Running Whirlwind's face had paled beneath its tan. He opened his lips but no sound came. His hands fell to his sides.

Singing Grass darted to him. Seizing his left wrist, she turned the palm uppermost.

"Thees Beelly!" she grunted in positive tones, and her brown fingers traced the faint white line of a three-cornered scar. "Papoose heap hurt um."

A strange look came over Pony. He took a hesitant step forward and bent close to stare. The stillness was so deep Margie could hear the thin trickle of the water into the pool below.

"I recollect," he quavered. "Little Billy fell on the tent pin and gashed up his hand. And I brung him to Yarmony's squaw—"

The breeze rustled the quaking aspen leaves. Music shoved a soft nose against his master and stomped impatiently. And Pony Wilson's knotted fingers closed around the boy's.

"Son," he whispered. "Son!"

The cool of evening was settling upon the Yampa Valley. Uncle Henry and Dave were fishing down by the Deep Hole.

The big trout bit better just about dark. From her seat on the chopping log by the woodpile, Margie could see the Indian fires twinkling on the mesa. The Utes had made their camp closer to the cabin this year. White-vested swallows wheeled and coasted through the golden foam of sunset. A kildeer ran along the trail to the iron spring, teetered on spindling legs, and then rose above the rushes with a piercing cry.

"They ought to be comin' now," squinted Tom, who was perched beside his sister. "We've had supper an' everything! It'll soon be dark."

"Twelve years," said Pa, pausing in his thoughtful pacing back and forth. "Ay Jonathan, son, they'd have a lot to talk about. You did right to slip off and leave them by themselves."

"I'm glad we left Monty and Chief so they can ride home," said the boy. "Yarmony and Singing Grass didn't mind if we came with them."

"If we'd only found the gold everything would have turned out just like a story," sighed Margie.

"I think enough's happened for one day." Ma sat in the doorway with a shawl over her shoulders and Danny curled in her lap.

"Say, Sis," demanded Tom, "how'd you know—"

"I didn't for sure. I guessed, and I was scared to pieces maybe I was wrong!"

"What made you guess?"

"Well, this morning when I went into the cabin to get salt for the horses, I saw Cinthy's picture and it struck me all at once how much Running Whirlwind looked like her. I

thought it must be just my imagination. Then this afternoon when we stopped to drink at that little pool I saw Running Whirlwind's reflection in the water. With that frame of rocks around his face he made me think of Cinthy again. But I was so tired I didn't trust my eyes."

"But when you knew Pony was lightin' out—" prompted the boy.

"Why, I had to take the risk. I reckoned nothing would make him stay `cept Billy. And if Running Whirlwind was Billy—"

"Seems we should 've seen right off that boy wasn't an Indian," commented Pa.

"Oh, I don't know," said Ma. "He has black hair and eyes and a naturally dark complexion, and he's burned by the sun."

"He did look a little different from Wasani," remarked Margie, "but we thought that was because he was only half-Indian."

At that moment Jokum, who was grazing by the springs, lifted his head and cocked his ears toward the valley trail. Two bobbing black specks were visible for a second on the sky line, then vanished in the nearer bushes.

"Here they come!" yelled Tom, and ran to meet them. Margie hung back, feeling a strange embarrassment. The prospector was in the lead. He was riding Chief, and Running Whirlwind was on Monty. Music trotted patiently behind. Danny, struggling out of Ma's lap, made a beeline for Pony. There was plenty of spring to the old mountaineer's knees now as he swung from the saddle and tossed the

baby in his arms.

"Show `em what we got, son!" he exulted. What a world of concealed tenderness was in that last word.

Running Whirlwind, smiling broadly, grounded Monty's reins and unknotted Pony's old red bandana which he had been carrying. They all pressed around him to see what was in it.

"Just looks like three or four little pebbles," muttered Tom.

"Why," gasped Margie, "is it—are they—"

"Gold!" shrilled Pony. "She's thar, shore as shootin'!"

"Gold!" they chorused.

"But *we* didn't find any. I don't see—"

"A small rock slide had come down there," explained Running Whirlwind. "We not dig deep enough. You know that pool where we drank? That was the prospect hole filled up with rocks. Father and I—" he colored and repeated the words huskily, "Father and I drained it with his shovel and found these. We all go back tomorrow."

"And you young uns are to share in it," declared Pony. "You can be thinkin' what you want."

"A silver-mounted saddle!" whooped Tom. "And a barrel o' syrup!"

Everybody laughed.

"And you, lass, what for you?" asked the prospector. "Dancin' school, I'll warrant!" He beamed at her as if that were the finest thing he could offer.

"Oh, Pony—" for all the pent-up yearnings of the past

year tumbled breathlessly from Margie's lips—"*would* you mind if I took painting lessons instead?"

"Paintin' lessons!" Pony looked puzzled.

"Yes. You know—learn how to make pictures! Columbines and roses and red leaves and sunsets and trees and horses. And I could make a picture of you, Pony!"

"Ginger and bear's grease!"

"How you going to learn painting when there isn't any teacher here?" demanded Tom. "There isn't anybody but us and the Utes."

"There's Jody Havely in Missouri!" Margie's words tripped over each other. "Pa, last winter you said I could go back to Missouri when we raised enough cattle and made enough money. You did say so, Pa!"

"Ay Jonathan!" Pa nodded.

"Now, maybe with my share of the mine—oh Ma, you wouldn't care if I—"

Ma looked down, slowly smoothing out the frill of her apron. "I don't know but it would be a good thing for you to visit the kin in Sedalia a while," she said. "My mind's been on it considerable. You're a young girl just growing up and you ought to be with civilized folks and have advantages. Maybe brother Fred will be going home this summer or next fall on the steam cars. You could travel with him. Your pa could take you as far as Denver City."

"Oh, Ma!"

"Meanwhile, we can send a little of the gold out to Georgetown when the wagon goes for provisions and get

some alpaca to make you a new dress so you'll be ready."

Margie threw her arms around her mother. "You do understand! And couldn't we send some gold to get another drawing pad and pencils and a color box? I've used up all I had. Things happen every day that I want to remember on paper. I'll sketch them the best I can; then, when I really learn how in Missouri, I can come home to the dear old Yampa and make a sort of picture history of the country—Indian tepees, the mud fort across the river, our log cabin—"

Her dreams mounted on wings, only to spiral back to earth at an anxious thought. "Maybe," she said, "there won't be enough gold to pay my fare all the way across the plains to Sedalia."

Pony snorted. "Don't you pester your head about that, lass. I'll tell you, there's hatfuls of nuggets! Enough to take you clean to Africky if you want! Plenty for paintin' and dancin' and whatever you like. Ole Pony ain't forgittin'. If it hadn't been for you—And Danny's to have his share, too. You betcha!"

Margie took a rapt breath of the cool sweet air. Her gaze traveled over the friendly green mounds of the springs, over the willows and sagebrush of the valley to the gold-misted mountains.

"How shining they are!" she exclaimed in awe. "I didn't know that even a sunset could make them look like that."

Pa put his big warm hand on her shoulder. "I reckon," he said gently, "it's happiness in a body's eyes that really makes things shine."