



POLLY THE GRINGO

EVELYN
RAYMOND



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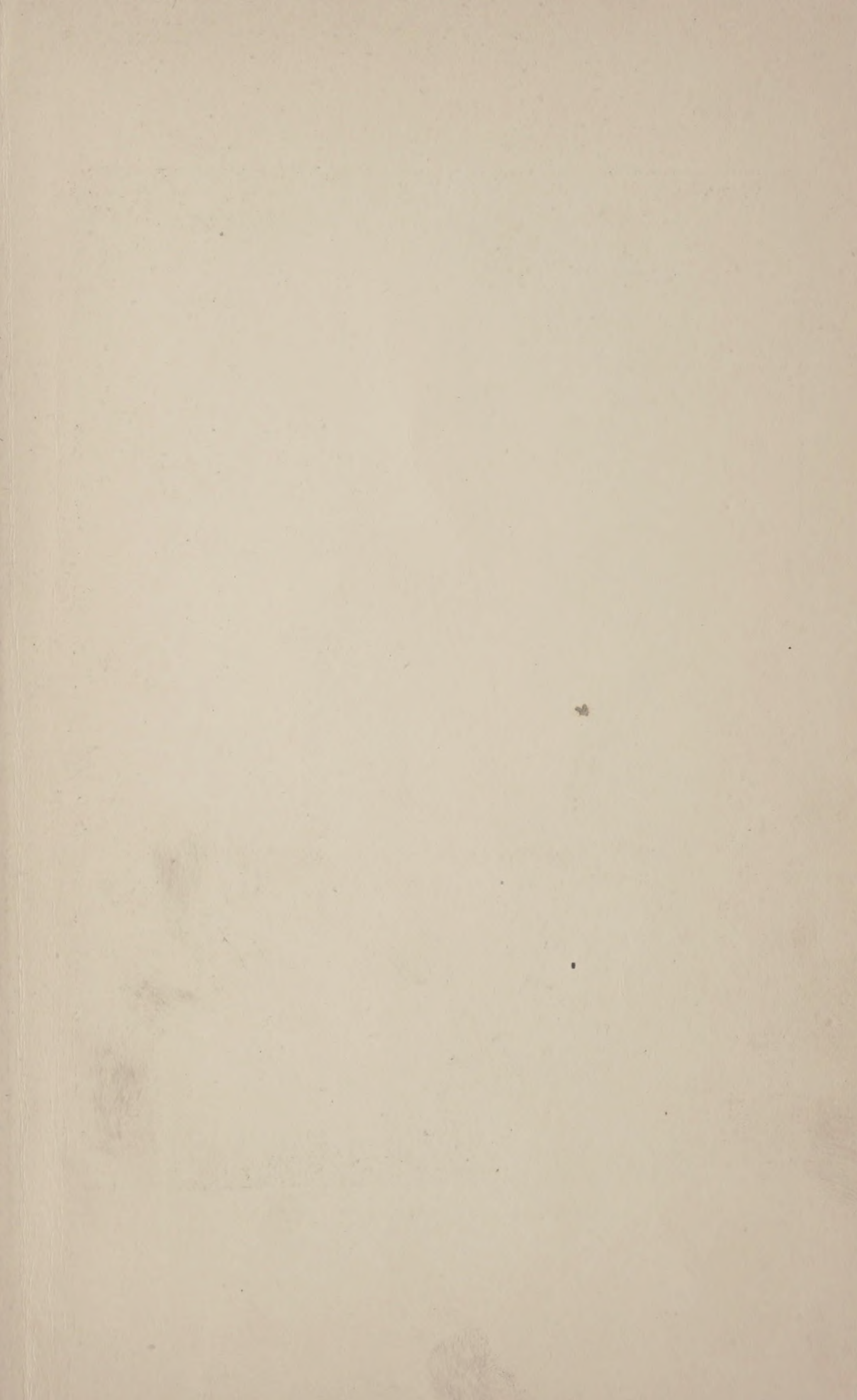
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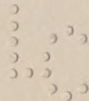
SHE HAD DISCOVERED THE CAPTAIN

POLLY, THE GRINGO

A STORY FOR GIRLS

BY EVELYN
RAYMOND

Author of
"A Quaker Maiden"
"The Whirligig," etc.



Illustrated by
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The Penn Publishing Company

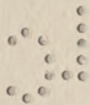
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Polly, the Gringo

CHAPTER I

ONE NEW YEAR LONG AGO

“IT will be a heart-break for your girl, brother Hiram,” expostulated Aunt Mercy, with a catch in her voice. Brushing a troublesome mist from her eyes she looked across at Roland leaning against the mantel for support. He was flushed, eager, trembling, and half-incredulous that the dream of his young life was really to come true.

Upon the opposite side of the wide hearth sat Captain Hiram Pancoast, master of the good ship Columbia, that day riding at anchor in Portland harbor. Though this old farmhouse on a New England hillside had been his boyhood's home and he had loved it, the active man had already tired of its quietude and longed to be away. A half-day had sufficed for the interchange of family news and gossip between his widowed sister, Mercy Hallock,

and himself, and five minutes had answered for the passage of a comfortable sum of money from his fat wallet to her slender one. He tarried for but one other meeting and, while waiting, had announced the fact which so disturbed his hearers.

“On the third of January, the day after to-morrow, we sail for California, and Roland will go with me. He shall have a chance to make a man of himself.”

Captain Hiram was a person of decision. None of his kin dreamed of thwarting his will, nor did the widow now; though in justice to one long dead she feebly protested:

“Margaret, your wife and his mother, meant to make a minister, or lawyer, or maybe doctor of him. She looked higher than having him a mere sailor or trader.”

A shadow fell across the seaman's bronzed face, but it quickly lifted, and a habitual cheerfulness took its place. There was no sign of wavering as he again remarked:

“We sail on the third. He can stay here until to-morrow afternoon, then take stage to Portland and the ‘Snug Haven’ tavern. I'll be there to meet him and take him aboard.”

“To-morrow! So soon!” exclaimed Roland, speaking for the first time since he heard his father’s plan for him.

“So soon?” echoed Aunt Mercy, in dismay. “Why, his things aren’t ready, and I can’t get them so in that short while. I’m only on his fifth pair of long stockings, and as for short socks—— You can’t really mean it, Hiram, not so quick!”

Captain Pancoast laughed in a hearty fashion that seemed to shake the low-raftered kitchen and set the polished brasses on the dresser a-rattle. Then he rose and swung across to the small-paned window to look out upon a most forbidding landscape. At least, it had grown forbidding to him now, accustomed as he was, during later years, to scenes far different. Yet something stirred at his heart as he gazed upon the familiar spot, which had changed not at all since his boyhood when he had loved it, as Roland loved it now, and yet had longed to leave it, even as Roland did.

With a curious mingling of emotions the lad joined his father and also gazed at the darkening landscape. He realized that he might never again see the sun go down be-

hind the mighty Rock which gave the farm its name and yet he was glad, so glad, to be going. Laying his hand affectionately upon the Captain's shoulder, he asked :

“Is there anything like this in California, father?”

“Thank fortune, no. And I was just wondering how four generations of our people ever managed to grub a living out of that boulder-strewn slope. Why, where you're going—— But, there! No use in talking. I'll leave you to see for yourself. It's a pity your Aunt Mercy is so set in her ways! Else I'd transplant her also to a valley I know and see her grow young again. Yet no Pancoasts, even the women of the family, ever said 'no' when they meant 'yes,' and she's true to her race. But, hello! There's a tidy craft heaving in sight. It makes the frozen hillside look almost gay. One of the neighbors, Roland?”

The boy turned an astonished face at the question. Though it was five years since the seaman's last visit, it was amazing that he shouldn't recognize his own child. To the brother the sister appeared just as she always

had, though, evidently, to her own father she was a stranger. This made Roland look again, as if with new eyes, at the girl approaching, while something like a spasm clutched his throat. Yes, that was Polly, his sister, his other self, and he was going away from her forever, maybe. With a gesture of dismay, unnoticed by his father, he laid his arm against the window-frame and dropped his face upon it.

Polly came steadily on over the rough, icy hill-road, which was uncommonly free from snow for a New England midwinter, and therefore bitterly bleak and uninviting. The Captain had hoped there might be sleighing for his brief visit and had anticipated this pleasure, unknown for years. His disappointment in the trivial matter may have been one reason for shortening his stay, since he was a man who felt he must have whatever he desired and have it at once. He had been rather cross—till Polly came.

She entered with a laugh and an interrupted song, pausing to pat Towser on the way and to caress a toddling kitten over which she had stumbled. She brought the

freshness of outdoors with her, and her scarlet cloak seemed to lighten the dim kitchen like a flame.

She held up to view a paper parcel and shook it gayly.

“Such good times as we’ll have with these, Aunt Mercy!” she exclaimed. “I wish Roland was here this minute. Miss Brown and I stayed after school and collected all these enigmas, puzzles, rebuses, and things, from a heap of old magazines she found. She was so kind; and she hopes it may rouse Roland’s interest in figures. He’s so clever that if he only would study the least little bit—— Where is he? Do you know?”

Mrs. Hallock nodded to the end of the great room, and Polly’s gaze followed her suggestion. Then in an instant she had discovered the Captain, and had reached his side, to half-smother him with loving embraces.

“Father! My father! My precious sailor father, come home at last! Oh! how good, how good!”

Then she stepped back, still holding fast his great hands, and the pair so long sepa-

rated gazed critically into each other's faces. Satisfied, at length cried Polly :

“ Oh ! you splendid Captain-father ! You're just exactly as I remember you—only more so ! Your hair hasn't grayed a bit, while—just look at Aunt Mercy's curls ! Snow white, almost, yet she not fifty. And let me tell you what old Aunt Winters says : ‘ Mercy Hallock's a deal prettier now she's ripe than she was when she was green. ’ And her dear hair is just lovely, I think, though I'm glad yours stays brown. At last you've come for good, haven't you ? ”

“ I hope it's for good, little daughter, though it's not to stay. ”

Polly's face clouded. It was the dream of her life to have her father living on the old farm, as it was that of Roland's to be elsewhere, yet she had hardly expected a favorable answer to her question. Captain Hiram Pancoast looked so young, in the light of the lamps which his sister now provided, that she realized he would not be content “ settled down ” ; not as yet. The only other sea captain whom she knew was Captain Silas Evans, a toothless octogenarian, once skipper of a

whaling vessel, now "marooned"—as he termed it—on an adjoining farmstead, where the most exciting adventures left him were the hunting of hens' eggs and his weekly ride to church.

"Well, if it's not to stay for always, I hope it is for a long, long time. I hope the Columbia will need a lot of 'overhauling,' and keep you this side the world all winter, at least," she continued, pushing a Pilgrim rocker to the fireside and motioning him to take it, while she drew her own stool beside it, determined to make the most of the present hour. In a few minutes, if Martha Simmons, the woman who "helped" at Rock Acre, did not return from her trip villageward, she would have to assist in the supper-getting; but these few minutes were rightly her own, as she saw by a glance at the old clock.

However, all household duties were presently banished from mind. As the captain settled his mighty bulk in the wide rocker he laid his hand on Polly's head, and shook his own negatively. All at once it seemed to him that Rock Acre was a desirable spot in which to tarry for a season, and it was this sunshiny

girl beside him who had altered his opinion. But it was not to be, and best tell her so without delay.

“No, child, not all winter, nor even all night. The team that fetched me up here will start back for town at nine o'clock. The ship didn't need much repairing, and I've 'tended to that first. I've just run up to say, 'How-de-do,' and 'Adios,' or 'Good-bye.' I've lived 'mongst the Californians so long now, I speak their way oftenest. Roland can come down on the stage, to-morrow, as I told your Aunt Mercy, and we sail the next morning.”

A sudden fear clutched at Polly's heart, but she put it aside, asking :

“Are you going to let brother travel down there to see you off? How delightful for him—if he's strong enough.”

“Roland sails with me. But what is that about strength? Isn't the boy well?”

Polly couldn't answer. The grip on her heart had grown so tight that she could hardly breathe, and she passed her father's question on for Aunt Mercy to answer if she chose, while in her own ears went ringing and

ringing the plain declaration : “ Roland sails with me.”

Mrs. Hallock interposed, keeping a watchful, sympathetic eye upon Polly’s white face :

“ Well, I don’t know that I can call him sick, exactly. But he—he coughs a good deal. More’n I wish he did, and I’ve tried all sorts of things to cure him. He’s too much like Margaret, in constitution, to stand the cold without suffering. That’s why he cares so little for his books—or for most things. In the winter time, Polly and I generally spare him all we can.”

Polly said nothing, but a reflection of her own fear now showed in her father’s face. Roland coughed ! The thought held a certain terror in it for this New Englander, as it has for many another. Roland’s mother, also, had coughed her way into her grave, and a poignant anxiety lest the son was already following her seized the father. But he rallied his courage and remarked :

“ Then I have come in the very nick of time ! From his few letters I judged the lad had no snap, no gumption ; but, maybe, all that came from his state of health. Well, California

will cure him. It's only the tough old knots, like you and me, Mercy, can stand this climate."

Mrs. Hallock swung the kettle round upon the crane. She still disdained a cook stove, using her hearth fire and "Dutch oven" for all culinary operations. She had just heard Martha come into the back kitchen and was already considering how fine a supper she could prepare, assisted by that capable helper. She answered absently:

"Yes, we can stand it. We're chips of the old block and our race has been long-lived. If father hadn't been killed by the fall of that tree he'd been living now, and mother—— No, no, Polly! You needn't do a hand's turn whilst your father's here. Hunt up Roland—I don't see where he's slipped to—I hope nowhere in the cold—and you three just sit and visit. Martha and me'll do everything and do it quick. Nine o'clock will be here before we know it, seems if!"

She was now far more intent upon the biscuit to be baked in the "tin kitchen" before the fire than upon the approaching separation of the children she had reared. A notable

housewife, she had always a store of good things in her larder ; and by the time the biscuits were ready a fat chicken pie had been re-heated in the oven ; tarts and preserves had been set out on the old dresser ; coffee “ settled ” with the freshest of eggs and “ trimmed ” with the richest of cream had sent its aroma through the great room ; potatoes had sizzled to a yellow-brown in the big “ spider ” ; and many other dishes for which Hiram had once a predilection had appeared as if by magic to grace his one home-feast.

Then Mercy gave the invitation to “ set up,” and Martha called the absent Roland to “ Come to supper, Roly ! ” the housemistress meanwhile bewailing the fact that she had no turkey, and inclined to blame the seaman for his home-coming without warning.

“ Being New Year’s, so, I suppose I’d ought to have had one, anyway. But we don’t pay much attention to holidays ’round Woodley. School kept ‘ in ’ just as usual and—— Well, you’ll just have to take ‘ pot luck.’ Martha, if you’ll please get some that fruit cake out the farthest stone crock—the loaf I baked when you was home, five years ago, Hiram—I

guess everything's ready and we may as well begin."

Roland had sauntered to his place, with that languid motion his father had attributed to indolence, but which now pained the observer as a sign of physical frailty; and all was "ready," indeed, except—appetite. That was strangely wanting. The Captain looked over the loaded table, recognized many old favorites among the viands, knew that in ordinary he could have done full justice to all, and marveled that he was not hungry. Roland's desires were always capricious and tonight nobody urged him. Aunt Mercy was troubled that her fine fare failed of due appreciation and spent her time in proffering first one dish, then another, only to have each declined. Martha, alone, did ample service with knife and fork, knowing that this was not the every-day household diet. As for poor Polly, commonly as brisk with her eating as her tongue, she was now both silent and indifferent; sitting with eyes riveted upon her brother's face and scarcely hearing the few comments of the others.

When her father was unable to longer

endure the sight of her misery, he demanded :

“ Well, little daughter ! Is this all the sunshine you can give me to carry on my long voyage t’other side the world ? Cheer up, my lass ! Cheer up, and cheer the rest with you. What ? Look so glum, just because a great strapping fellow like Roland, yon, is going to have the chance of his life ? By the time he’s half-way to the Straits he’ll forget he ever had a cough, or, maybe, a doting little sister. It’s not a funeral we’ve on hand, but a ‘ hail fellow well met,’ and a ‘ good voyage, mates !’ Why, if all goes well, who knows but I may make another tack around this coast, some fine day, and ship a first-class passenger named Polly ? Would you like that, my maid ? Think you could live thousands of miles away from Rock Acre and the good aunt who’s brought you up ? ”

For the first time something like a gleam of hope irradiated the desolateness of Polly’s mobile face. For the last hour she had not seemed nor even looked like herself, but now she turned toward the Captain and asked in a low, distinct voice :

“ Do you mean that, father ? May I go ? ”

Oh! say that I may go now, please—please—please!”

Roland leaned forward, eagerly, but the sailor's mind had gained another idea. It was that his boy had been petted into invalidism and that the best thing for both his children was to separate them, and completely.

Suddenly, there was the sound of wheels on the driveway without and he was glad of this excuse to evade an answer, as, rising he went to the door and called to somebody outside:

“That you, driver?”

“Aye, aye, Cap'n!”

“Well, you're ahead of time, but that's all right. When a man has to be hung as well get the job over with. Where's my togs? Good-bye, Mercy. Keep your eye on the north star and sail by her straight. Good-bye, Martha, girl, keep your skipper's sails a-flyin' and everything shipshape. Roland, to-morrow at stage-time I'll meet you. Wrap up for the trip and mighty soon after I'll sail you into warm waters. Polly—little Polly! God bless you! Some day—some day—you, too, shall come!”

Though she clung to him in desperation, mutely pleading an answer to her prayer to be taken then and there, and though his own eyes dimmed and his heart ached at sight of her misery, he put her firmly aside, hurried out of the house and slammed its door behind him.

For a moment after her father's departure Polly, or Margaret, Pancoast stood motionless and absorbed in her own thoughts. Then a sudden change came over her and turning toward her aunt she asked, apparently as cheerful as ever :

“Now, auntie, what can I do to help get him ready?”

CHAPTER II

BY THE MORNING'S STAGE

SURPRISED, yet pleased that the girl was putting so brave a face on the matter, Mrs. Hallock answered, gently :

“No, dear, don't you worry. We'll do no packing to-night. I shall be up early and will have all done before stage time. I always like to 'sleep' on any trouble, you know, and my morning thoughts are my clear ones. It'll come to me the minute I wake just what I should, or should not put in his trunk. You and Roland go to bed. Good-night.”

With unusual promptness Polly lighted her bedroom candle and started for the stairs. On account of its greater warmth, her brother occupied a room opening off this living-room, but the sister's chamber was wholly unwarmed. She had to break the ice in her pitcher of a morning, before she could bathe, and more than once the water had frozen so solidly that the pitcher had cracked in twain. Naturally, she lingered below stairs as long as possible,

shrinking from the cold above; yet, to-night, she not only hastened her "good-nights" but remained out of bed so long that her aunt, hearing her footsteps overhead, remarked to Martha:

"What can that child be doing, up in that chilly place so long! She'll about freeze and, at least, take a dreadful cold. She ought to be asleep. Just open the stair door and tell her I say so, please."

So Martha called upward:

"Say, Polly! Mis' Hallock, she says get right into them blankets to oncet, 'fore you catch your never-get-over-it. Hear?"

"Yes, Martha, I hear. I'm just ready. Good-night, good-night, everybody. Please don't let me oversleep in the morning."

Then the stair door closed and there was quiet in the chamber overhead. Meanwhile, the scarcely tasted supper was thriftily bestowed in cupboard and pantry, the "best dishes" carefully washed and put away, lights extinguished, and Aunt Mercy and Martha sought their own repose. Yet there was little sleep that night for any one beneath the farmhouse roof. Even Jonathan Wilson, the hired

man, who was rarely moved by any event, found himself restless over the excitement of the Captain's brief visit and Roland's departure. Like everybody else on the place he was fond of the lad and had done his own share of that pampering which the boy's father had deplored. In return, Roland had written for him the few letters Jonathan needed sent to his kinsfolk, had gone fishing with him on an occasional holiday, and been a patient sympathizer with the old fellow's various "complaints." It was Roland who had sent away for all the nostrums recommended by the many almanacs obtained at the one store of the village, nor did the kindly lad ever object to the farmer's waste of substance upon the same. Whereas, at every new bottle which Jonathan placed on the kitchen shelf, Aunt Mercy would remonstrate, and assure the deluded purchaser that :

"You're just slow-killing yourself with drugs, Jonathan Wilson, and I wish you'd quit. I've no mind to have anybody commit that sort of suicide on these premises, and I'd hate to see you taken off to the poor-farm when your working days are over, just because

you've spent the wages you'd ought to save on patent medicines. It's the 'hypo' ails you—nothing else."

Roland never talked in that manner. He always assured the "sufferer" that each and every remedy procured was a cure-all, else people wouldn't waste good money in advertising it; that Jonathan's cash was his own and that nobody save himself had any authority as to its spending. Even now there was a wonderful picture on Jonathan's table, illustrating the marvelous powers of a certain "Rheumasciaticolyptol," for which the farmer had counted out the price and intended Roland should write for on the very morrow. Now who would serve him in the matter?

Not Polly, who sniffed at his "complaints," saying that any man who could dispose of the amount of food Jonathan did "must be a well person," when she "knew all the time—'cause he'd told her often enough—that his back ached him fit to split the whole endurin' time, and if he hadn't got the lumbager, he'd like to know who in reason had!" Not Mrs. Hallock, who would simply

refuse. Not Martha, who wasn't clever with the pen; and, certainly, not the storekeeper, who had drugs of his own to sell. The more difficult of attainment the "Rheumasciaticolyptol" became the more Jonathan wanted it and the longer he lay awake pondering how the treasure might be secured; so it was really that many syllabled medicine which set things topsyturvy in that well-ordered household on a day when, if ever, calmness and an early activity were desirable.

This way it was. Having tossed all night, restless and wakeful, Jonathan at length fell sound asleep, and failed to wake at his usual hour of five o'clock. Martha habitually waited for him to descend and put fresh wood on the fire before she stirred; and Aunt Mercy waited until Martha began to cook the breakfast before she arose. This was, she felt "a lazy habit," but one expressly commanded by her good brother who was so generous to her and whom she dared not disobey; and though in ordinary even she was up before daylight she considered that she was wasting "half her lifetime in idleness."

Polly usually appeared in time for the

morning meal; and Roland—when he could no longer find excuse for delay.

It was six o'clock on that memorable second of January when Jonathan stumbled down the stairs, feeling the veriest of culprits, and wondering how he should ever make up that hour lost in oversleeping. With a deal more noise than ordinary, just because he so wished to be extra quiet, he fell over a chair, knocked his milk-pail off the rack, and in other ways so fully notified the family that he was "up" and it was time others were, that Aunt Mercy and Martha both sprang to their feet in dismay. Then the latter glanced at the clock, holding a lighted candle before its truthful face and indignantly denying its statement of the hour.

"Goodness! Mis' Hallock, you must ha' forgot to wind 'Grandpa' last Sabbath! He's gained much as a hull hour, 'cause Jonathan he just went clatterin' out, makin' noise enough to wake the dead."

Aunt Mercy tiptoed out to see for herself, "sh-h-ing" her hand-maid in a sibilant whisper not to disturb "Roly" in his adjoining room. But she answered below her breath, yet with utmost conviction:

“ ’Tisn’t ‘Grandpa’ to blame, it’s us. He’s kept the time exact to a minute ever since he set out to do it more’n a hundred years ago and he’s not beginning any foolishness at this late day. All is, we’ll have to hurry like lightning to get ’round. That stage comes at nine, for Hiram wouldn’t let me send the trunk down to the store where it starts from. He said he’d rather pay extra than make so much trouble. He’s free with his money, Hiram is, and always was. Polly is like him, but Roland—well, he doesn’t care enough for it even to be generous. Dear boy! How I shall miss him. And I’d best leave you to do everything about breakfast, but make it a good one. I’ll hurry and pack and we’ll let the children sleep till the last minute. My heart! I do dread their parting. It will about kill them both, for no brother and sister ever loved each other as they do, seems if.”

Out in the barn, at this moment, Jonathan was blinking and brushing his eyes as though he could not believe what they told him. For there, fully dressed, was Polly, busily grooming old Kate, whose manger was un-

duly heaped with hay and who was munching with surprised satisfaction a larger supply of oats than she had ever received at one "feed."

"For land's sake! What—why—I thought the barn was a-fire—how happens—where'd you get Mis' Hallock's best lantern? Un-safe——"

"It's all right, Jonathan. I had to have a light, but I've been careful. How much, how many, oats would you take with you for an all-day's ride?"

"Not a thimbleful! Wouldn't be such a goose as to take an all-day's ride, even in the summer time, let alone January weather. What you up before me doing my work for? Do you know you've give Kate oats enough already, in this one feed, to last her three-four days? You better run in and help your aunt. We've all overslept, this morning."

"But I mean it. Tell me, please. I don't want to hinder your work, far less do it myself. But I want to know. Is this bag big enough? It's twenty miles to Portland, isn't it?"

"It's twenty-odd goin' down, but it's forty-

thousand, seems if, coming up. Why? What fer? You haven't hired Kate to the stage driver, have you?" demanded the hired man, growing facetious in his relief from fear of the barn's burning. "She's no colt, Kate isn't. She's a good many years older'n you, an' it's time she was fit for something besides eating her head off in her stall. But, Polly, go in about your own affairs. It's dreadful distractin' to a man, feeble as I am, to have girls chatterin' round whilst I'm doin' my chores. It's too cold, too. You ain't used to such early risin'."

"Oh! yes, I am, Jonathan. You're not used to such late rising, you mean. The novelty is making you a—a trifle sharp, you know, and I don't want you to be anything but lovely this last morning."

Then and there, to the amazement of the farmer, the girl darted around to the rear of the stall where he stood and flung her arms about his neck, begging:

"You'll be good to everything on this dear old place, won't you, Jonathan? You'll be sure Aunt Mercy has everything she needs brought from the village and not let her get

cold running around the fields looking after things. Oh! if a body could only make two of themselves, so as to be in two places at once, how splendid that would be! And if ever I've hurt your feelings, teasing you about your appetite or your 'complaints,' you'll forgive it, won't you? We've lived together so long — Why, I can't remember Rock Acre without you, Jonathan. And I want to find you here, just the same faithful old grumbler when I come back. For I shall come back. I shouldn't go if I thought I wouldn't. Now, a last nice thing to do for me, please. You put into a bag, and fasten it tight, just as much food as Kate ought to have for a trip to Portland and write on a scrap of paper when and where she is to feed. I know about not watering when she's warm and all that; and now I'm going in."

Away sped the girl, leaving Jonathan so perplexed that he had to sit down on his milk-pail to ponder the matter. Finally, he decided that grief at parting with Roland had quite turned Polly's head.

"That's the A and Izzard of it, sure. If she was in her reg'lar senses she'd never get

up 'fore she's called and come out here. Not even to feed old Kate, who's her own property, so far forth as I understand it. Martha said, yesterday, that Cap'n Hiram wouldn't have her summonsed from school, even short as he meant to stay, 'cause he knew she'd hate to have Roly go. But I 'low he came far short the truth. Her head is certainly turned, and it's a pity, for she's a real likely creatur', Polly is. I shan't say a word to Mis' Hallock, though, of the child's queer actions. 'Twould only worry the good soul, and she's got her own troubles to bear. We all have. Whiteface! Get over, can't ye? Get over, I tell ye!"

Whereupon Whiteface meekly stepped to the furthest limit of her stall, while Jonathan deposited his milking-stool beside her and began his daily tasks.

Meanwhile, in the great kitchen, astonishment prevailed. In the first place, Polly—supposed to be still asleep—had come in from the barn smelling of hay, rosy of cheek, and sparkling of eye. Aunt Mercy had dreaded their moment of meeting, on that eventful morning, foreseeing the unhappiness of her

beloved niece, her almost daughter, whom she had cared for from her birth. But, instead of sorrow, there was the utmost cheerfulness in the girl's manner. She was full of little jests and merry remarks, causing even dull-witted Martha to watch her as if wondering what next.

Yet had either woman had more time for closer observation, she would have seen the jester grow suddenly serious as her eye fell upon this or that familiar object and her blue eyes fill with a suspicious moisture. The moisture never passed beyond the long, up-curling lashes nor Polly's control, save once. Then she had slipped, unseen, into the dark, disused parlor, and groped her way to a corner "what-not," where reposed a pile of old-fashioned daguerreotypes — new-fashioned they were then. By feeling she selected a certain one in an oval case, velvet covered, the finest of the lot. Holding it fast in both hands she bent her head above it and cried bitterly. Then she conquered her short-lived passion, dashed the tears from her eyes, thrust the case into her pocket, and returned to the living-room.

She reasoned thus :

“After all, it is ours—Roland’s and mine—more than it is any other person’s. Our mother’s picture, the only thing we have to show us what she was like. It seems like stealing to take it without asking, yet—I dare not tell. If I say one word, hint a thing, Aunt Mercy will prevent me. She is so afraid of father’s anger that she’d even tie me, if there was no other way to stop me. She’s Pancoast, too, the same firm race as his, and never yields a thing she sets her will to. Well, I also, am Pancoast ; and nothing shall prevent my making this one effort. If he says ‘No,’ a second time —— But he cannot ! He shall not ! He won’t wish to, when he understands. He didn’t know, he didn’t begin to guess what Roland and I are to each other. We seem but halves of one life. We can’t exist without each other, and father merely did not know. If they’d sent for me to come from school I shouldn’t have had to go as I shall now, for I could have explained everything. But—there’s no help. No use.”

Then, hearing Roland’s voice beyond the door she went swiftly to join him ; and

though now all observed her slightly reddened eyelids, such a condition was a far more natural one than the previous gayety. When they drew near to table, Polly ate little, but Roland's appetite was better than common. Delighted by this, Aunt Mercy plied him with all sorts of palatably unwholesome things and thus kept her attention away from his sister. Also, she was full of advice concerning his voyage, and especially in case of seasickness, till he laughingly protested :

“Don't, Aunt Mercy! You make me feel like a babe in arms, and you must take notice—to-day, I become a man! Why, I've heard father say that, over in that California, the boys often marry at sixteen or seventeen! and I'm almost as old, you know!” Here he shot a merry glance at his sister, who returned it with a little grimace and the assertion :

“They do that to get out of the army—the silly things! I'd rather be a soldier than a bridegroom before I was half-grown. And as for seasickness, I'll remember—I mean Roland will remember, that lemon juice is good. But how many times have you been seasick, you dear little farmer auntie? I thought

you were afraid even of a rowboat on our quiet river, and a sailing vessel—I wonder what the Columbia is like! I think I must have some of father's liking for the sea, for it just sets me a-thrill to think of that beautiful ship scudding before a 'spanking' breeze—a really nautical breeze always 'spanks,' I believe—picking up the waves like a good horse treading a smooth road—— Oh! it must be fine!”

“Margaret Pancoast! How can you, how dare you go on so, just as our boy is—is—going—going ——”

Poor Aunt Mercy's fortitude gave way entirely before the vivid picture Polly had presented, and that seemingly careless maiden grew suddenly white and wan. When her doting aunt called her “Margaret” the times were surely out of joint, and she felt she had now grieved her guardian's tender heart at the very moment when she would most gladly have brightened and comforted it. She swiftly left her place, and kneeling by Mrs. Hallock's chair bestowed upon the bowed head and shoulders the caresses she had been yearning to give, yet for private reasons would

not have dared to offer but under cover of this incident.

Then Aunt Mercy lifted her tear-wet face and smiled forgivingly.

“That is all right, dear. We are both over-excited and scarcely know what we are doing. Hark! I hear wheels! Can it be the stage already, I wonder! Have we delayed so long at table, or has it started earlier?”

Nobody answered her, and nobody needed to. A queer, square, leather-covered vehicle had drawn up at the door, and its driver had stepped to the ground, swinging his arms and vigorously slapping himself as if already chilled by this first, short stage of his journey.

Roland shuddered. He had vivid memories of rides in such old time coaches, with their swaying, rocking motion, jolting the unlucky passengers from front seat to back, and sometimes almost hanging them upon the strap which extended from door to door and formed a “back” for a middle seat. The smell of leather always made him ill, and he anticipated his full share of seasickness while still upon dry land.

Oddly enough, trifles can usurp the place of

weightier matters; and his anxiety whether he would have to ride backward almost deadened the pain of Roland's parting from his old home and life. Hastily kissing his aunt, and even the faithful Martha, he turned for Polly—but she was not there.

“I—I guess she couldn't bear to say good-bye, my boy! Don't mind—don't wait—let her get over it alone—it will be best—good-bye! Good-bye!”

The little trunk had been swiftly bestowed in the rack behind, and with a last wave of his hand toward the red farmhouse, Roland Pancoast stepped into the capacious conveyance and found himself its only occupant. Travelers were few at best, in that region: and, with a storm threatening, all who might have made the trip to Portland had remained at home.

With her apron over her head, Aunt Mercy went in and shut the door. Already she was questioning herself, with her acute New England conscience, if she had ever and always done her full duty by the boy who was gone. Had there been sharp reprimands where gentleness might have won? Had there been

neglect of his physical comfort, ever, even once and under the stress of household duties? Should it be her lot to look upon his handsome, dreamy face again?

Martha was also of New England but intensely practical; yet she penetrated the emotions of her employer and remarked:

“Better quit thinkin’ and finish your breakfast, Mis’ Hallock. You haven’t et a bite, scarcely, and you’ve no call to blame yourself. Roland’s own mother would never have slaved for him as you have. Take another cup of coffee, now do. Hey? What’s that, Jonathan? Didn’t you get through, either? Hungry yet?”

The hired man had reentered the house and was slowly turning over and over in his hands a bit of folded paper, as if puzzled what use to make of it. Though he was too “stiff j’inted” to do his own writing he was fully able to read that of others. This note he had found pinned to the barn door, one at the rear of the building that gave upon a short-cut to the curving turnpike beyond. He had stepped to that door, the better to obtain a last view of the departing coach and its beloved occu-

pant, and had thus promptly come upon the message plainly addressed to "Mrs. Mercy Hallock," but which Martha had hastily concluded was merely another "quack medicine dockymment"; for, as Jonathan made no reply and continued so absorbed in his own reflections, she snapped out:

"Don't bring any more of that silly kind of letter 'round here, yet awhile. Mis' Hallock, she can't be worried by plumb foolishness, and I haven't time to bother. Besides, I haven't on my readin' glasses and writin's no good to me without them. Your medicine orders'll keep, and I s'pose that's another you badgered poor Roly to fix for you, just as he was goin' away and all. Medicine! Humph! There ain't but twenty-seven bottles of your doctorin' stuff in the cupboard now and that ought to do you for one day—such a particular day as this—at least. If you want somethin' more to eat, say so, and have done with it. Don't stand twirling that paper as if you'd lost your wits. You give me the fidgets. Seen Polly? I wonder where she went to! She ought to try to eat, for I s'pose she'll go to school just the same. Mis' Hallock, did you

notice whether Polly went out, or up-stairs? And, oh! dear! If it ain't beginnin' to snow! and I meant to wash some bed-spreads to-day. And the sheets and things off Roly's bed."

Martha's tongue had run on, partly to divert her mistress, partly for the relief of her own overcharged heart, and wholly as a reproof to the peculiar behavior of Jonathan who still stood in the same spot, his eyes upon the floor, his hands twirling the letter he dreaded to deliver, and a distressed perplexity upon his honest face. His housemate now jostled past him, giving him a significant nudge to recall his wandering thoughts, and opening the outer door, called :

"Polly! Polly Pancoast! Come right straight in and eat your breakfast!" And when no answer came, exclaimed, in wonder :
"Why! Where is Polly?"

CHAPTER III

WHEN THE NIGHT CAME DOWN

“WELL, I can't make her hear, and I can't keep the table standing all day for anybody. It's snowing awful fast and come up terrible sudden, but likely there's good blankets in the stage, so Roly won't feel it much. I'll put a plate of food down on the hearth to keep hot for Polly, 'cause I s'pose the poor little thing has had to go off by herself, somewhere, to have her cry out. She'll feel the better for it, too. As for you, Jonathan Wilson, I wish you either would or wouldn't. Wake up, man, and tell, if you know, where's Polly?”

Aunt Mercy had also risen and was now regarding the hired man with astonishment, wondering if it were grief at Roland's going which had so disturbed him. Then as she was about to speak to him, he roused himself from his abstraction, remarking :

“You needn't keep no breakfast warm for Polly Pancoast, Martha Simmons, and I'm guessin' where she is, though I don't for

surely know. This—this belongs to you, Mis' Hallock."

A presentiment of trouble made Aunt Mercy turn pale as she extended her hand for the letter, and she sat down again rather suddenly, the better to control the tremulousness which seized her. The others in the room watched her critically, Martha with keen curiosity and Jonathan with compassion; each certain of sharing in her news, since there were never any secrets in that simple, united household. The housemistress read the paper through once, twice, even a third time, and though there was consternation in her face there was, also, anger. Finally, she looked up and said:

"Listen, both of you, and advise me. Polly has run away. This is what she writes: 'Dearest Aunt Mercy: Please forgive me for doing this, but I had to go, and it was the only way. You would have stopped me if I had asked you. I have taken old Kate and shall ride her as far as the Corners, where the stage changes horses, and I shall keep right in sight of the coach till we both get there. Then I'll leave Kate and ask somebody to

send her home to you. She is mine and I make you a present of her if—if I don't have to come back. Father didn't understand about Roland and me, and I had no chance to explain. I am going to ask him to take me, also, to California, and I think—— Oh! he must say "Yes!" My heart aches at thought of leaving you like this, and in a way you will think wrong, but it would be quite broken if I had to give up Roland. Don't worry about me at all. I put on two dress skirts, this morning, and have tied the other waist and a change of underclothes in a bundle to the saddle. Kate will have plenty to eat, though Jonathan didn't fill a bag with oats as I asked him. I have one dollar. I think that will pay my fare to Portland and then father will see to everything. I will send you a little note when I get there, and so good-bye, good-bye. You will hardly believe that I love you as I do, since I run away from you. But—I had to. Dear as you are, as everybody is, my one brother is dearer than the whole world and only our father can compel me to leave him. Polly Pancoast.'"

As she finished reading and laid the letter

down Aunt Mercy scanned the faces of her two helpers to see how it had impressed them. Martha was angry, even more angry than her mistress. To her stern New England training there was no worse crime than turning one's back upon duty. Polly's duty had been to the aunt who had reared her, and in the line of obedience to her father's will that she should remain at Rock Acre, and the girl, so well "raised," had tossed duty aside like a feather. This was, in Martha's code, an unforgivable thing.

Jonathan's thought found prompt expression, as he said :

"I feared something like this. She even told me, but old simpleton that I was, I didn't really believe her. I thought her worry over Roly had just turned her head a mite. If I'd had the sense of a week-old kitten I'd have come right in to you with the whole business, right to oncet. Look out the window. It's snowing furious. The best thing to do is for me to hitch up to the pung and go fetch her back. Old Kate'll never keep up with Smith's fast horses and, now this storm's comin' on, he'll drive like Jehu. He'll likely have to take to

runners 'stead of wheels by the time he reaches the Corners, but I'll be smart enough to take them at the start. Poor little misjudgin' Polly! What is she but a slip of a child? even yet, and 'lowin' she's in the head class. Poor little lovin', sufferin' creatur'! Just look out the window, will you? Ever see it snow like that, before? Ugh! Roly, inside a warm stage, 'll be all right, but our girl a-horseback ——"

"Why on earth don't you start?" demanded Martha, fiercely, and with an entire change of front. "If I was goin' to rescue a perishin' child from a snow-storm I'd do it. I wouldn't stand lookin' out of no windows."

With which Miss Simmons whisked a couple of soapstones from the hearthside into the hot coals, seized a big shawl from the cloak closet, ran up-stairs for her own green-barege veil, brought out a pair of woolen overshoes and heated them, and all with a deft alacrity which utilized every movement and every second of time. She, also, kept a constant watch toward the carriage-house, and as the gray horse stepped between the shafts of the pung, gathered up the articles she had provided and

hurried to Jonathan's aid. She "hitched up" on her side the reluctant gray, who stoutly objected to leaving his stall in such a tempest, and was finished before the hired man's clumsier fingers had buckled half the straps required. These she snatched from him, commanding :

"Now button your coat, tie up your ears, put on your tufted mittens, and don't let the grass grow under your feet 'fore you get that silly Polly back into this warm house. The idee! Horseback ridin' in a January snow-storm, a Maine snow-storm!"

With a weak attempt at playfulness, Jonathan remarked, as he climbed into the pung and buried his feet in the straw-filled bottom :

"Don't consider this growin' weather, myself, but I'll try to keep down any crops that try to spring up. Chirk up Mercy Hallock, Martha," he finished with a grave face ; "this here is a mighty bad affair. I only hope it will end better than it looks now. Giddap, Gray! Giddap! Now you just stir your stumps the liveliest ever! Wish't I had a firecracker to throw under you to limber you up a speck!"

Though for a short distance there was what Jonathan called "mighty poor sleddin'," the snow accumulated so rapidly on the frozen road that before long the pung was spinning along at a fine rate, the gray horse stepping out as if trying to outrace the storm and certainly requiring no firecrackers to accelerate his speed. The anxious driver kept a sharp lookout ahead for any sign of a scarlet-cloaked girl riding a sorrel mare, but the flakes blinded him and, if there had been footfalls to discover, would promptly have hidden them. He met but one team and halted that to inquire :

"Seen anything of Polly Pancoast, a-horseback?"

"Mercy, no! Who'd go ridin' to-day?"

But Jonathan paused only long enough to hear the "No," then on again, trying to console himself with the reflection: "'Tain't as if she didn't know the way all right. It's a straight road and she's rid over it time and again. It's only that her poor little hands 'll get too numb to hold the bridle and Kate —— Get up, Gray! Can't you travel no faster 'n a snail?"

When the pursuer reached the Corners the stage had long been past there. Its driver had, as usual, changed horses, and had proceeded at his swiftest pace toward the end of his route. He had left the bulky coach at the tavern stable and had gone on with a sleigh. There had been no passenger except Roland, who had aroused considerable curiosity because of his departure for so distant a land as California. Nobody had arrived on horseback, "man, woman, nor child," and "nobody could if they didn't do it sudden. 'Twasn't so terrible cold, not yet, or it couldn't snow. But the storm was slacking up a bit and the mercury goin' down. 'Twould be zero before anybody knew it, and forty degrees below it by nightfall, likely."

At this stage of the innkeeper's remarks, Jonathan irritably ordered him to "shut up." "Don't keep talkin' an' stop my thinking, that way. Now, hark to me, and then say what's best to be done, if you know it." Accordingly, the other listened while Mr. Wilson made public the escapade which the family at Rock Acre had, with its reticent pride, desired to keep to itself. But in the

face of this fresh peril, let everybody be notified and everybody help in a search for the runaway girl. The innkeeper immediately offered his services and suggested that a house-to-house canvass be made along the only two roads possible for the passage of a team. It was probable that Polly would have been frightened by the storm and have sought shelter in some one of these scattered dwellings, which would explain why she had not arrived at the inn. So two teams were, presently, faced about toward the farm, one traveling the rougher "ridge-road," and the tavern-keeper returning along the lower, more level route by which the hired man had come. At every dwelling either passed, whether standing beside the roadway or back among the fields, inquiries were made, yet to all was the unvarying response—Polly had not been seen.

It was hours before Jonathan and his helper in the search met at Rock Acre, each hoping the other might bring good news or even that the girl might have reappeared by herself, only to face the sorrowful fact of her loss.

"Lost she is!" cried Martha, weeping

aloud. "We shall none of us ever see her happy face again! I know it. I feel it in my bones."

When her assistant began "to feel things in her bones," and to accept the worst as an established fact, Mrs. Hallock roused from her dazed inaction to take the lead of affairs. The snow had ceased to fall as the early nightfall came on, but the cold had become almost unbearable. Yet the men of that region were accustomed to below-zero weather and willingly organized themselves into a larger searching party, Jonathan having carried the news to the village, and for all the hours of that long, terrible night, neighbors went looking, probing, peering everywhere, in places both likely and unlikely. And at each halt, for warmth and refreshment at any farmhouse, sympathetic women made hot drinks and offered their best for the sustenance required; then sent their men folks again afield with the assurance: "You're certain to find her this time."

But Polly was not lost. There was a third road to the Corners, of which nobody had thought; a mere footpath over the ridge and

through the woods, where a sure-footed horse might pick its way, though no wagon could pass. Often in summer, or at that early spring-time when wild flowers bloomed in their depths, Polly had ridden patient Kate through these woods, and as she saw the stage disappearing before her down the pike, it came to her mind that by this same way she could cut off several miles of travel and surely reach the Corners before her brother did.

The idea no sooner occurred than it was acted upon, and all might have gone as planned had not the mare stumbled in a snow-hidden hole and lamed herself beyond all chance of further travel. Dismounting, Polly viewed Kate's injury with dismay, and with a growing sense of personal affront. Frantic at the delay, and by this hindrance the more determined to proceed, she berated her pet in tones that mild-eyed creature had never heard before.

“Oh, Kate! Had you no more sense than that? After traveling this wood-road till you ought to know its every root and stone, to go and do a thing like this! Try, dear; try, good old Katy! just try! Lots of people can

do things they think they can't, so why can't a horse? See if you can't hobble a little bit! Then you'll limber up as you walk and once we're out of the woods you can trot like everything! Try!"

The poor animal apparently understood and did "try," then cast an appealing glance at her young mistress and sank slowly down upon the fast whitening ground. Then Polly's heart misgave her for her own selfishness and she realized that the first thing to be done was to secure help and shelter for the mare. After that—to Portland, any way and how she might!

"I'll go to the wood-cutter's house at the end of this road. That comes out far beyond the Corners, where the other crossroads are at the Settlement. The stage turns off south before that place, but if I hurry maybe I can get back in time, because this is the short base of a triangle of roads, and the stage has to do two long sides while I do one little one. Glad I studied geometry and thought of that. Good-bye, Kate, old friend! If I can't come back myself, I'll send somebody. Lift yourself a little. I'll unsaddle you and put the blanket over you."

This was swiftly accomplished; the sagacious animal obeyed, realizing that her comfort was in question; and having covered the prostrate mare as securely as she could, Polly seized her own small bundle of clothing and started off at a swinging pace. She scarcely heeded the fast falling snow, until the road was fully hidden, then guided herself easily enough by the blazed trees on either side, as the woodmen did. Her exercise and her excitement kept her warm, and she was so accustomed to long walks and mountain-tramping that she felt little fatigue.

In due time she reached the Settlement, where was a cluster of rude shanties, occupied by the French-Canadian lumbermen who labored near by, and with one or two belonging to sailors from the coast, of kin to the choppers and occasional residents among them. With the fortune which sometimes favors the unwise, such a sailor was now on the point of departure for the very coast town as herself.

A rough little pony, hitched to an even rougher sled, stood before one of the shanties, and amid the group surrounding it, Polly recognized a man who had helped at the

haying on Rock Acre the summer past. Delighted at sight of a familiar face, the girl hurried to him and told her story, breathlessly; he comprehending the matter slowly, but finally, in full. His slowness irritated her, yet she restrained her impatience as well as she could and was rewarded when he said:

“Me understand. Sick horse, sorrel—broke—tail—Kate, good plougher, back in woods, hurt bad. Good. Ver’ good. I send. I fetch her here. I make her well. Then I take her the missus and get money. Hey?”

“Yes, yes. I’m sure Aunt Mercy will pay you for curing her if you can, and for trying to do so, any way. Now, may I depend on you? I want to get back to the Corners. I must meet the stage for Portland. My brother is in it and I—— We are going to California on the Columbia. You used to hear about my Captain-father when you worked for us, didn’t you?”

“Oui, yes,” answered Michel, absently, and with a questioning glance at Pierre, his brother, ready for departure. The falling flakes had turned the whole group into snowmen and dashed Polly’s red cloak with streaks

of white, but nobody heeded this at all. What they did heed was the chance of money, and after unspoken interrogation and reply, during which the Frenchmen's expressive gestures answered for words, Michel spoke again :

“ He go Portland, he, himself, Pierre, yon. He sail the next day on a ship. You go, the garcon go, and the capitaine—how much you ride alongside my Pierre? I driving to that Portland all seek. Eh? How much?”

For the space of a half-minute, no longer, Polly reflected ; then cried out : “ All I have. Every cent I have ! ”

“ Good. It is a bargain, oui, yes.”

Michel's wife came out and drew the girl into the cabin, brushing off the snow from the red cloak and offering the cup of coffee which had been prepared for her own departing men. She could speak English more fluently than her husband and assured Kate's mistress that already two lads were being sent back to find and attend the mare ; then she pointed to the pile of furs and blankets heating beside the red-hot box-stove and showed how comfortably one could make a twenty-mile drive wrapped in these. The horse was a good one,

Michel a careful driver, and Polly would be in Portland long before the rumbling old stage could reach the town. "Yes. Yes, indeed. To be sure."

Ten minutes later the trio were on the road, Polly bundled and wrapped till even Aunt Mercy would have been satisfied, could she have seen how slight were the girl's chances of suffering from cold. But beyond that the discomforts of the journey were sufficient punishment for all her wrong-doing—so the girl-traveler thought. The horse which had been pronounced fast might have been so, but he was not once allowed to test his own speed. Michel was "careful," indeed. It was a steady walk for twenty miles, over a route concerning which the Frenchmen were often in doubt and paused long to discuss. Often, after such discussion, they would retrace their way for some distance, then make a fresh start and pace forward again. Mostly, they were silent, and neither spoke a word to Polly, who began to feel, after some hours had elapsed, as if she had been journeying in this fashion all her life and should continue so to journey for an indefinite time.

Fortunately, as they neared the coast, the rigor of the atmosphere abated, so that even without their heaped-up furs they would have been quite comfortable ; and, at last, that memorable ride ended before a wooden tavern by the waterside where the Frenchmen disentangled themselves from their blankets and stepped out upon the ground.

Then Michel helped Polly from the sled and, baring his head to the night breeze, stood respectfully waiting. For what, she could not at first guess. Then it slowly dawned upon her that it was his fare he desired and, also—that he would never be satisfied with her one, solitary dollar. In reality, he would have been, but she did not know that, and there ensued for the farm-bred girl a very dark, unhappy moment. Was ever anybody so desolate, so forlorn ! The few poor lamps in the adjacent buildings served but to make the black night outside the darker ; and a distant lap, lap, lapping of water against an unseen boat keel, was the dreariest sound the wanderer had ever heard. But, it would never do to think of these things, else she should break down and appear

before her father in a condition not likely to win his approval of her scheme. Summoning all her pluck she turned toward Michel, saying :

“Of course, you will be paid. But, first, I must ask you to take me to my father’s ship, the Columbia. I’m a stranger here and can’t find it in this darkness.”

Michel put on his cap and looked at Pierre, who was already impatient to be within the tavern, and waited only till his brother should be rid of their now undesirable passenger. Between the two men there was a little talk in a language Polly could not understand, then Michel walked away, leading his horse, and Pierre nodded to the girl to follow him. She did so without fear, comprehending that he, as the sailor, would know best where to look for the Columbia : and this, in fact, was the case. After what seemed to her impatience an interminable walk along freight-stacked piers, among malodorous casks and boxes, they came at length to an open wharf, where a light swayed dimly on a pole, and where a dock-hand was putting the last touches of order to the deserted quay.

There Pierre halted suddenly, gazed all about him with a bewildered air and, finally, approached the dockman, asking a startled question.

This question Polly could only surmise, but the answer came with cruel distinctness :

“The Columbia, Hiram Pancoast, Captain? Why, land alive, lad! you’ve lost your job on that ship. The Columbia sailed out of this dock more’n five hours ago!”

CHAPTER IV

IN THE STRAITS

POLLY was a perfectly healthy girl, but she had, for that day, almost forgotten her own physical needs. She had eaten no breakfast, had but sipped at the coffee Michel's wife had proffered, and had declined to share in the rude lunch the Frenchmen had brought with them on the way. Lack of food and long exposure to cold produced a natural result, when added to the terrible news that her reckless journey had been made for nought.

The Columbia gone! Father and brother already at sea and beyond her reach, while she stood a stranger and penniless in this unknown town! With the full realization of her situation, courage failed, and turning suddenly faint and giddy, Polly sank down upon the planks and felt that she must certainly be dying. Her last conscious thought was that she had fully deserved her fate, though there was no comfort in this.

When she recovered her senses she was

lying on a bunk in a tiny cabin aboard some vessel. This fact was slow in penetrating her consciousness, but, as it did, a wild delight banished her former misery and she would have sprung to her feet, crying: "Father! Roland! Then it wasn't true that you had gone without me! Where are you? Come!"

Then she sank back on the pillow, wondering at her odd weakness and the queer sound of her own voice. Faint as this was, however, it had been sufficient to reach the ears of a gray-haired woman, outside the cabin door, who hastily entered, smiling and exclaiming:

"Well, if that isn't the best thing I've heard to-day! You poor little tuckered-out child! Waked up, at last, haven't you? And I hope good and hungry for your breakfast."

Polly stared and tried to smile in return, then anxiously asked: "Where am I?"

"On board the schooner Mary Ann, John Marshall, Captain. He's my husband, as fine as this craft which he named for me and that does me honor. Now, are you ready for something to eat?"

This unknown Mrs. Marshall was, evidently, the cheeriest of women. She was fine-looking,

decided in movement and gesture, yet seemed fairly to irradiate sunshine through the narrow place. Her gray hair rippled back from a broad white forehead, and above her clear gray eyes were delicately penciled brows, slightly darker in hue than her hair and giving a noticeable effect to her time-lined face. She was certainly far from young, yet her wide mouth opened over teeth wholesomely white and well-kept, and her whole manner evinced a vigor which the years had not dimmed. Also, though she was so alert and even brusque, she seemed the embodiment of kindness as well as strength, and Polly's lonely, loving heart went out toward her as if she were of kin. Remembering another well-loved gray-haired woman, mistakenly deserted, the tears rose in the girl's eyes, as she answered :

“Thank you, Mrs. Marshall, I—I believe I am, though I hadn't thought about that; and, first, will you tell me what has happened and why I am here?”

“Easy done, all that. However, just wait till I tell cook to fetch a tray and to let the Captain know. Mighty anxious he was about you, bless his heart!”

Then, going a few steps out of sight "Mrs. Captain," as her friends called her, gave some directions to an invisible cook, whistled a bar or two of a familiar sea-song, and returned. Her heavy footfall seemed to sway the vessel more than the water on which it rode, and was echoed by a lighter tread, as was her signal by a shriller whistle. After which, rolling and swaggering like a creature of utmost girth, there entered a bit of a man, faultlessly attired in nautical "togs," and a veritable dandy of the high seas.

Spick and span, in the most dapper of uniforms then obtainable, he hopped along toward Polly's berth, smiling, merry, cocking his small head to one side, making her think of a humming-bird grown suddenly human and flippant. In his cracked little voice he saluted her with exaggerated courtesy and demanded:

"Well, Lady Passenger! What's the orders? Anything this good town of Portland has to sell and you want it, I'm the man to buy! Slept like a top, didn't you? Who could help it on the Mary Ann? Captained by that other Mary Ann, the finest creature ever went through the Straits. Hungry, eh? Beefsteak?"

Lobster? Chicken patties? Oranges? Bananas? What's the ticket, Captain?"

His last question was abruptly addressed to his wife, who quietly assured him that the "order" had been given. Yet she beamed upon this absurd little man as if he were a veritable genius, whom she adored yet revered; and the gaze she turned upon Polly mutely appealed for confirmation of this faith. Fortunately, the girl had no reply ready nor, indeed, did any seem really expected; for laying her large hand upon her husband's small shoulder, the wife begged:

"While cook fetches the things, tell the child what happened."

"Nothing much, except that you fell down in a faint on the pier next mine and I happened to be jogging home to sleep. One of my crew was with you, though I didn't recognize him when first sighted, Pierre Faurot by name. He said you were a-chase of the Columbia, sailed by a friend of mine. Soon as he said 'Pancoast' it was all right. A stern chase is a long chase, but we'll overhaul Hiram at the Straits, if not before. You're with honest folks and the best woman ever trod a

deck. Don't you worry. Eat your mess, sleep your fill, and show your noble father a rosy pair of cheeks when he sights you. Heigho! Breakfast, already? At it, my hearty, and don't dare to leave a single crumb or my Mary Ann'll 'tend to your case. Nothing provokes that saint like seeing nice victuals spoiled."

With that the dapper Captain made another salute and hopped away, while Mrs. Marshall followed a cabin boy bearing a tray to the bunk side and prepared to feed her guest.

However, she was well pleased when Polly arose, asking for basin and towel, and promptly produced them, only bidding the girl make haste lest the hot food cool. Nor, although she was burning with curiosity, would the kind creature ask a question until the stranger's appetite was fully appeased. Then, sending the tray away, she drew Polly to a seat upon a settle beside herself and slipping an arm about the child's shoulders, exclaimed:

"Now, the whole business! Out with it, root and branch, beginning and end. How came sensible folks like the Pancoasts to send a slip of a thing like you, wild-wandering in

a strange town at nightfall and no provision made against mischance? That's not a bit like my idea of Cap'n Hiram. He's a long-headed man, thinks of everything can happen, even if he is as quick as a flash settling matters. It's 'this and now' with him. So however he sailed and left his girl behind, if he was expecting her, puzzles me."

Polly's eyes dropped and her cheek flushed. Her behavior had lost all of the romance with which she had surrounded it and now appeared in the plain, unflattering light of disobedience. She had done wrong and must suffer any punishment her flight from home entailed. After a moment's hesitation, she lifted her gaze to her questioner's kind face and told everything "from beginning to end," as she had been bidden. The effect of her story upon the listener was different from what Polly expected, for, in truth, the girl's absorbing love for her brother touched Mrs. Marshall's heart.

After a moment of consideration, she said :

"Of course, it will all be as Captain Marshall decides. We'll lay the case before him, as soon as we can. He's so busy now, getting

off, I hate to bother him—last of the cargo coming on—yet, if at all—then now—— Wait here. I'll be back in a minute. Can you write? But, of course, that's a silly question. There's writing things yonder, in that little swinging desk. Get a letter ready for your aunt, telling her you're with us and we are going to take you to your father. Then, if my captain so says, it'll be ready to send ashore by the last boat leaves, and can be mailed to your folks. And if he says you're to go back, instead of the letter, I advise you to step lively. No time for lagging when the Mary Ann sails."

Polly sped to the desk and wrote a hasty note, reproaching herself for her own mistaken conduct, yet honestly saying that she hoped she might be taken on the Mary Ann to find her father and brother. She concluded:

"I should do just the same thing, if I had to do it over again—I mean I should try to follow Roland—but I should do it differently. I hope you haven't worried too much and that I will be a much better girl when I come home again."

She had barely finished her task when Mrs.

Marshall's tread again shook the cabin, already swaying with a motion which, had Polly been wiser, she would have known betokened that the stanch schooner was well under way. The lady's face showed unfeigned pleasure, though some anxiety, and her terse command was :

“ Give me the letter ! Quick ! ”

In her relief and delight, Polly almost threw the folded and wax-sealed sheet into the outstretched hand awaiting it. For by that brief sentence she understood that it was only her message to Aunt Mercy which would travel to Woodley, and not herself.

“ I'm going to stay aboard the Mary Ann ! I'm going to follow Roland ! ” she cried to herself, skipping ecstatically about the little place and feeling as if these new seafaring friends were the kindest people in the world. Kind, indeed, they were and to prove real friends ; but the impetuous girl would have been hurt had she known in just what indifferent manner her fate had been settled.

To his wife's inquiries as to what should be done with their young guest the Captain had hastily and carelessly replied :

“Whatever you please. Don’t bother me. Take or leave her. Hold there, lads! you’re staving in the heads of them sugar barrels! Easy, now, easy! Out the way, Pierre, you lubber! Eh? What’s that? A letter to go ashore? Lively, then. Last boat’s off and so are we!”

A very different man was the Captain of the *Mary Ann* when on duty from the dapper little fellow of the earlier morning. So crisp, so energetic, and so masterful that even his biggest sailors forgot his diminutive size and obeyed him instantly, without question.

Thus it was that Mrs. Marshall herself really “decided” the matter she had said must be settled by her husband; as, indeed, she mostly did decide everything not connected with the navigation of the schooner; and the truth was that she as greatly desired the girl’s companionship on the long voyage before her as Polly desired to give it. She, also, sympathized with a sister’s love for a brother and believed that whatever his wish in the matter, Captain Pancoast would welcome his daughter when she reached him and make the best of the situation.

Thus, almost before she realized it, run-away Polly Pancoast was putting out to sea upon a journey which would take many, many days to accomplish. Down the eastern coast of both Americas, through the Straits of Magellan, or around "the Horn," and up the Pacific to the harbor of San Diego, lay the long, long way to that California land of which Captain Pancoast had told so much, and whither he and Roland were now bound.

A book might be written about that voyage, which began in midwinter and ended at midsummer, and upon which Polly saw so many wonderful things yet endured so many days of plain, monotonous sailing—wearying in their sameness, and making her often exclaim to Mrs. Marshall: "Oh! I do wish something would happen!"

"Well, deary! I should say that being becalmed for thirteen days at a time, landing at strange cities, seeing unknown races of people, diamonds rough from the mines and curious fruits and flowers, as well as riding out the toughest gale we ever experienced on any voyage—were a few 'things' to happen to a little country girl from the state of Maine!"

once returned Mrs. Captain, with a laugh at the other's long face.

“But it does seem as if we would never get there, and I'm afraid we won't find the Columbia after we do,” lamented Polly, now grown homesick and full of the forebodings which idleness aroused.

So her wise friend produced a quantity of muslin, cut out several garments and set the girl to stitching them into shape for her own personal use.

Now Polly disliked sewing, and though most New England girls are early taught that art she had not learned it. Her indulgent Aunt Mercy had preferred to do all necessary work of the kind herself, rather than enforce it upon her niece; and as a last protest against a disagreeable task the reluctant seamstress urged:

“It isn't right, seems to me, to use your cloth for my things. If we fail to find father right away, how shall I ever pay for it? That and my passage money together will amount to such a lot.”

“Humph! Don't you worry about payments, deary. Do your duty and trust to the

future to take care of itself. Where we are going you'll find neither thrifty aunts nor convenient shops to provide clothing, and you brought a short stock with you. Be thankful that things are going so smoothly just now that you have a chance to sew, for the 'happenings' you crave may be ahead of us yet. See. There is old Francisco, aft. Take your seam and sit with him. He'll give you another lesson, maybe, in that Indian gibberish of his, that you're so fond of learning and which may be of use to you yet. Indians! I hate the whole race!"

Mrs. Marshall sighed as she finished and a look of anxiety clouded her face that was usually so cheerful. Through all that long voyage Polly had never seen her appear so worried, and when she asked, affectionately laying her hand upon her hostess' arm :

"Is anything wrong, dear Mrs. Marshall? Have I offended you? Has anybody ——" the lady sighed again, then with an effort tossed aside her trouble, whatever it was, and answered, lightly :

"No, I'm a silly old woman, I guess. That ship we bespoke, going home —— Oh! dear!

I wish we were safely through the Straits, or that my Captain would round the Horn. It's the safer, I think, even with the head winds. But there! Many's the time John Marshall has sailed all safe between old Portland and new California, and why shouldn't he now? Go to Francisco, child, and add a new word or two to your list."

Polly obediently went, and now no longer reluctant to set her stitches quietly and neatly as she had been shown. Sewing was the peacefullest of tasks and her sensitive spirit had caught an undefinable trouble in the air.

To hear Mrs. Marshall sigh in that prolonged, apprehensive way was depressing enough; but also, ever since they had bespoken that homeward bound ship early in the morning, the Captain himself had been preoccupied and grimly attentive to the defenses of his own craft. Every movable article, not actually necessary for immediate use, had been sent below, the decks cleared, and the two guns made ready for action. The crew had received a supply of ammunition and been bidden to have their firearms in order. There was no playing of checkers, to while

away the hours of idleness, no jesting nor "skylarking," and but little conversation.

Francisco, alone, showed no added seriousness; but then he was always stolid and unmoved either by fear or pleasure, and his present impassiveness was a relief to the general gloom of the others. Indeed, in watching his nimble fingers fashioning the wonderful little baskets which he so continually made and for which, Mrs. Marshall had told her, he found a ready sale at any port they touched, she forgot that things were different from usual. She "exchanged teaching," as she expressed it, and had already become an adept at the common phrases of the Indian's own dialect. Indians, of another sort, had been familiar to her always. Many came down to the coast towns from the northern part of her native state and from the provinces above, and these had often hired themselves to help in the farm labor of Woodley. From them she had picked up a few terms which, however, were different from those Francisco imparted.

By and by, the wind increased so that the pieces of cloth on which Polly was sewing

blew about and prevented her working, and she grew benumbed with the cold. Francisco rose, too, rather suddenly, and at the same time she was called from below.

Running down into the cabin she asked :

“ Did you want me, Mrs. Marshall ? ”

“ Yes, Polly, I have something to tell you. We are entering the Straits, and we are likely to have rough times, not only with the contrary winds—which are dangerous enough—but from the Indians of the southern shore. There is among them a tribe of cannibals, who come out about the small vessels, like ours, in their canoes, waiting a chance to do us harm—if possible to overpower and capture us. The ship we spoke had trouble, but was too big to be in very great danger. We are a little craft and company, and I do wish my Captain had doubled the Cape rather than have tried this shorter passage to the Pacific. However, when he sets his will to do a thing—he does it without my interference. Do nothing, say nothing, to disturb him or attract his attention from whatever he is thinking of, even though he seems so glum and solemn as to frighten you. Once we

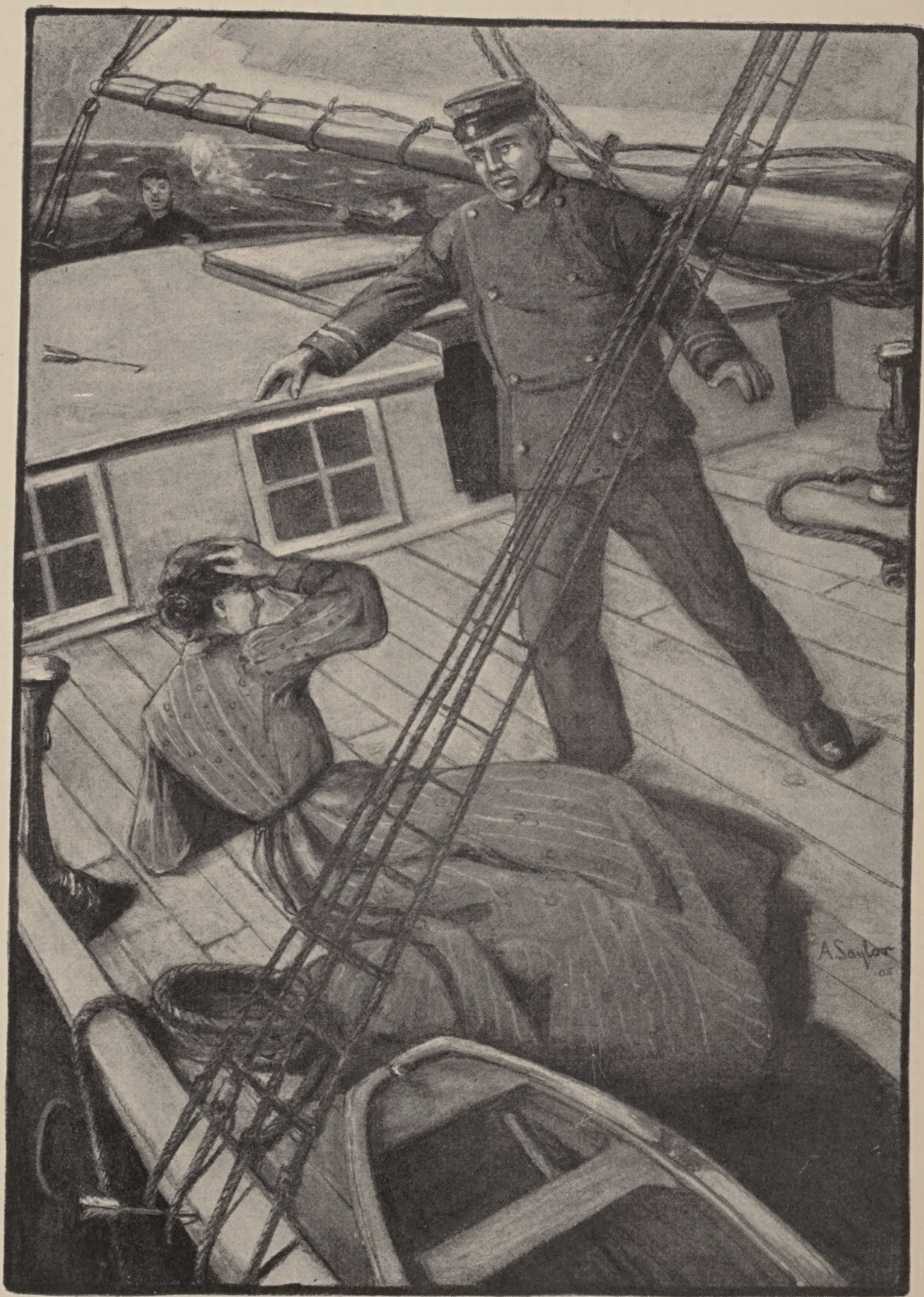
are safely past this dreadful three hundred miles of stress—hurrah for the blue Pacific! And soon after that—for Captain Hiram Pancoast and a blue-eyed boy named Roland!”

“Cannibals! O how horrible!” cried poor Polly, shivering in terror.

Of such creatures she had read, in that far-away schoolhouse which had now become to her almost like a dream; but that she, Polly Pancoast, a simple New England farm girl, should ever meet them face to face seemed impossible.

“There, there, daughter. Don’t look so frightened. We are in danger, and I thought it my duty to tell you; but we are neither molested and certainly not captured—yet. But, if worst comes to worst, remember your up-bringing and be true to your brave father’s race.”

“I—I—will,” faltered Polly, little dreaming how soon her heroism would be tested. For that which was foreboded came to pass. With the sunset of that first day in the rock-bordered Strait its waters were suddenly dotted with numberless canoes, which seemed actually to have risen from the waves.



AN ARROW STRUCK HER IN THE SHOULDER

Polly caught one glimpse and was ordered into bed ; but " Mrs. Captain " stayed on deck and took her station by her husband's side, refusing to leave him, and doing good service, indeed, by her keen watch on every point. Alas ! Her sharp eyes failed her once, and at a critical moment. A chance arrow sped from some canoe, astern in the gloom of a cloudy night, struck her fairly on the shoulder and felled her at her husband's feet.

He uttered one groan, then as if imbued with a giant's strength, the little man lifted the big woman and carried her to her own stateroom, where, summoned by his hasty call, Polly found him on his knees sucking the poison from the wound and looking as if he had received his own death-blow.

At the sight and his hurried explanation, all Polly's fear gave place to a fury of indignation.

" But she shall not die, dear Captain ! She shall not—not by the hand of an Indian ! "

Then, as if the word had given her inspiration, she sped out of the room to where old Francisco lay sleeping as calmly as if no dan-

ger existed—as, maybe, there did not for him—and roused him with a jerk.

“Up, Francisco! Quick—and save your mistress’ life!”

CHAPTER V

ARRIVALS

WHAT remained of that eventful voyage, Polly scarcely remembered. After what seemed to her an endless time of buffeting with head winds and guarding against savages, the staunch little Mary Ann sailed into the quiet Pacific and up toward the north and a safe harbor. There were brief necessary stoppings at various ports, but Captain Marshall kept a steadfast way to the haven he sought, and one sunny day entered the sheltered bay of San Diego.

When they dropped anchor, Mrs. Marshall seemed to realize the change in affairs and languidly asked, "Are we there?"

This was almost the first coherent sentence she had spoken since that dark night when she had sunk down wounded at her husband's side, and Polly heard it with unspeakable thankfulness. Only for the briefest intervals of sleep and refreshment she had not left her hostess' room, but now she bounded up the

steps and hurried to the captain with the joyful news :

“ Oh ! Captain Marshall ! She is awake—she knows—she knows ! ”

Busy as he was, and even more stern than usual because of the great trouble that had befallen him, the little man's manner altered instantly, and happiness fairly shone from his small weather-beaten face as he clutched the girl's shoulder, demanding :

“ Say it again ! She ‘ knows ’ ? Mary Ann has come to herself ? ”

“ Yes, yes. Oh ! come and see for yourself. I am so glad ! I am so glad ! ”

“ Well, daughter, I believe you ; and I tell you now, my dear, that if my wife recovers it is your care that's saved her. God bless the day that sent you aboard the Mary Ann ! ”

“ Oh, no ! Not I but Francisco —— ”

“ Francisco ! Humph ! Nursing, not Indian gibberish and herb drinks has done the business. If—it is done ! ” he finished, in an altered tone, looking down upon the wasted woman who had already fallen asleep again. Had Polly been less truthful he would have doubted that the invalid had ever roused, for

she lay now, as she had ever since her injury, apparently unconscious of her surroundings, her white lids closed and her hands resting limply on the blanket.

Tears rose to Polly's eyes then, for it came over her in a flash that this journey ended, her own search was to begin. How should she, could she undertake it, alone in a strange land, penniless and friendless? That Captain Marshall's plan was to proceed immediately to Honolulu she had heard. Thence he would go to Alaska and take on a great number of native Indians with their skin canoes, enough to crowd his vessel, and with them return for the otter hunting. He was both owner and supercargo of the *Mary Ann*, as was Captain Pancoast of the larger vessel, the *Columbia*, and because of some past service rendered the Mexican government Captain Marshall had obtained permission to carry on this hunting, the proceeds of which were making him a wealthy man.

That he would be separated from his beloved wife, Polly did not believe, nor that he would bother about her own future. She was both right and wrong.

A physician was promptly secured and carried to the stateroom where Mrs. Marshall lay; and his verdict was that the lady would be as comfortable there as anywhere else in the world. The Mary Ann was really her home, and the sea air was the best of tonics. As for nursing, the doctor knew of a most capable and experienced woman who would gladly assume charge of the invalid, in view of the large salary Captain Marshall offered. But, in making all these arrangements for his wife, the grateful Captain did not forget his young passenger. When all was again ready for departure he called her to him and bade her "pack her chest with all the dainty garments" she had made for herself under Mrs. Marshall's directions. This "all" was not so many as the good man fancied, but to such as it was he added a sum of money sufficient to procure suitable clothing for her new life in a new land.

"You'll be wanting summer togs, down here at this jumping-off place, and Señora Ysidro will see to getting them for you. No, no, hush! Say nothing about debt! That is all on our side. And don't look so serious.

I can't take you on another cruise, lest you miss your father, if he puts in here. I've inquired and he's likely due in a little while. Till then, you'll stay at the ranch of the Ysidros', and Doña Dolores—Mrs. Ysidro—will make you happy. You could not find a better guardian, now that my Mary Ann is unfitted for your care. I will take you to your new home, myself, in half an hour. Be ready."

There was an attempt at playfulness in the Captain's movements and smiles, mingled with his most businesslike manner, as he imparted this information, but poor Polly's lips were sealed. Going to her own little room she put her few belongings together, her heart too heavy for the relief of tears, and her thoughts far away on a bleak New England hillside. It was strange, she felt, that now she had had her own way and followed her father and brother, she should think oftener of home and gentle Aunt Mercy than of them. Home! It wouldn't be bleak, just then. Five months had passed since she had looked out through frost-dimmed panes upon a wind-swept orchard, that now would be pink with bloom

above that delightfully green sward—which had just that tint of green at no other time of year. The robins must have come, and it might be were already nesting beneath the south porch, as they had done ever since she could remember. Jonathan would be ploughing for corn and Aunt Mercy pottering about the sheltered garden on the sunny side of the house, looking after her sage-bed, her peony clumps, and the yellow daffodils which grew so well in the corner beyond the lean-to. But here—she could see nothing but sand across this blue bay, with here and there a strange, unknown tree lifting a stunted head. There wasn't a tree anywhere in sight which could compare with the old maple by the barn gate, beneath which she and Roland had swung—so high that their feet touched branches away up toward its top. Would Aunt Mercy leave the old swing hanging, now her “children” were gone? There, there. This wouldn't do. Thinking was sorrowful business, and there was the Captain calling, in a tone intended but failing to be gay: “All ashore! Them that's going!”

With a hasty gathering of last belongings

and one forlorn glance about the narrow place which had sheltered her so long, Polly hurried to Mrs. Marshall's side. Oh! if those dear, kindly lips could only open to speak a farewell word! But no. The one sentence which had proved recovery possible was all that had come to comfort the anxious watchers, and already Polly was superseded.

An elderly, prim-looking woman was swaying in a rocker beside the invalid's bed and regarding the girl's outburst of grief with evident disfavor. She promptly terminated the interview by saying:

"There. Never fuss over a sick person like that. She may possibly comprehend and be distressed. The Captain is calling again. You'd best make haste."

Without further word to anybody and only a silent hand-clasp for such of the crew as gathered to bid her good-bye, Polly obeyed, climbed over the side of the now beloved Mary Ann, and stepped into the little boat which was to carry her ashore. And there fresh disappointment awaited her, for with great reluctance Captain Marshall informed her that a business message just received

would preclude his attending her to her destination, but that the driver who would accompany her was an Easterner and had been entrusted with final directions. He had, already, seen the Ysidro family and prepared them for her coming. They were friends of her father's and—— “Good-bye, good-bye, my daughter! If ever you need a home, remember there's one always ready for you aboard the Mary Ann. You've been a sight of comfort to me, little girl, and if your father won't have you, I will! Good-bye, good-bye.”

The little man's voice was more absurdly shrill and piping than ever, and there was a misty look about his twinkling eyes quite unsuited to so able a seaman: nor did he trust himself to a further look at the white faced girl whom he helped ashore at the wharf below the bluff on which the city was built.

As for her, Polly scarcely realized when she was loaded into a curious wagon, already nearly filled with merchandise procured from the hold of the Mary Ann and purchased by the household to which she was, also, “consigned.” This wagon had no springs, and its body rested directly upon the axles. Its sides

were of leather stretched upon slender uprights, and its wheels were solid circular blocks of wood, several inches thick and as many feet in diameter, and with openings in the centres for the axles. The vehicle was drawn by oxen, with a primitive sort of yoke to which and the wagon were attached strips of soft hide.

Polly's seat was upon a pile of blankets at the rear end, and before her loomed sugar barrels, and boxes and bales of stuff, effectually preventing any forward view of the landscape. At first, she feared she would be crushed by the rolling of the barrels, which were jolted about by the rude wagon, or else be deafened by the horrible screeching of the ungreased wheels. Finding that neither of these things happened, she faced about and studied what could be seen from the rear.

“Sand, sand, sand! If this is a town, where are the sidewalks? And not a spear of grass anywhere. But—did anybody ever see such sunshine as this? O, it's wonderful! And the birds—the ground is alive with them. My! That's a funny one!” cried Polly aloud, fancying that the driver so screened from

sight by the barrels would also be deafened by the squeaking wheels.

Like the firing of a revolver came the sudden remark, "Road-runner."

"Do you mean the bird?" shouted Polly, thankful for any words, and especially for the familiar New England accent of the man's voice.

"Yep."

"I should think it was!" she returned, more closely observing the curious little creature which sped along at the right and in advance of the wagon, its long tail up-slanted and apparently intent upon keeping just a certain distance ahead of the oxen. "Why doesn't it fly away or turn out?"

"Natur'," came the concise explanation from the front.

Yet even as she was watching so intently, there was a quick dive of the runner into a roadside thicket, the tail tilting so high that it seemed the bird had turned a complete somersault.

Polly laughed, and in laughing lost much of that homesick dread which had possessed her. Instantly, there was a responding laugh

from the driver's seat, and inspired by this the girl got upon her feet, steadying herself upon an uneasy barrel, and peered forward. Then she called, "May I come over there by you?"

The man, who had been slouching forward, his elbows on knees and chin on hands, leaving the oxen to their own guidance, slowly straightened himself and replied, "Sure!"

The vehicle stopped so suddenly that Polly nearly followed the road-runner's example and turned a somersault, but righted herself in time and laboriously made her way through the mass of goods before her to the uncovered board where Luther Dow sat, chewing his ever-present quid of tobacco and ruminating upon many things. A man of lightning-like speech and snail-like action, homely, and rudely attired in faded jeans, he was yet to prove an important personage in Polly's life. Even at the present moment, and with no encouragement on his part, she felt "as if she must hug him, just because he had come from the east."

But, of course, she did not do this, nor did he make any more of his abrupt replies to her

running comments on the queer things they passed. But he did vouchsafe one further word, when they came to the old Mission grounds, and Polly's amazement at the mighty cactus hedge aroused her many questions and exclamations.

"Indians," said Luther, and said no more.

After this she, also, relapsed into silence and the road wound on and on through the rich valley, past the arroyo, or river of sand, such as she had read about in her father's infrequent letters, and which she recognized as such from his description. It was all widely different from anything she had known, but what impressed her most and roused again that homesickness she had partly conquered, was the unbroken stretch of land. With no houses anywhere in sight, and but a few trees, it seemed at that first glimpse the dreariest spot on earth.

Then, suddenly, the team turned southward upon a trail winding through a canyon and upward upon the level mesa. Here the road became a mere track across the plain toward a distant group of buildings, to which Luther silently pointed, leaving Polly to infer, if she

chose, that it was the Ysidro ranch she beheld, and her home for the immediate future.

She watched the buildings grow in size as they drew nearer to them and saw that they were of the same adobe mud, or bricks, which had been pointed out to her in the town itself; and unadorned, as they were, by tree or shrub, they suggested a prison.

Yet when at length the oxen had crawled to the entrance of the rancheria all was changed. Passing under an arched gateway, the wagon entered a great enclosed square, or court, teeming with life and green with a luxuriant vegetation. In its centre played a mighty fountain, and about this, under the shade of palm-trees, were various groups of people—so numerous, indeed, that the newcomer felt she must have arrived at the time of a “party,” or other unusual gathering.

However, this was but the ordinary household of the wealthy ranchero, Don Santiago Ysidro, and was composed of his own immediate family, with the many Indian servants and Mexican vaqueros. Children were everywhere, and as Luther drove into the court, one cried, shrilly, “Hola! the Gringo!”

“Pst-t! Silence, discourteous!” warned a lady, who instantly approached the wagon and extended a welcoming hand, bidding Polly, “Buen’ dias!” in the gentlest of voices and with the kindest of smiles.

“Good-morning,” returned the stranger, “and am I speaking to Mrs. Ysidro?”

“Of a truth, yes, and proud of the honor, Señorita Polly Pancoast.”

At this a tall youth stepped forward, bowed with what seemed an exaggerated humility, and would have assisted the visitor to the ground. But she had leaped over the wagon box, unaided, before he had regained the upright, and she encountered an expression of such astonishment upon his face that her own flushed in confusion.

However, there was such cordiality in Señora Ysidro’s manner that Polly’s heart lightened and she clasped the extended hands of her hostess, exclaiming:

“Oh! Mrs. Ysidro, they tell me you are a friend of my father’s! And I thank you for taking me in till he comes.”

“En verdad, but that is nought. It is I who am grateful for the so great pleasure of

receiving the little Señorita. But come, but come away into the shade out of the glare of this too bright sun, is it not? In the cold New England it shines not thus, they say," and placing her arm about the stranger's waist, the mistress of the rancho drew her guest to a wide seat beneath a pepper-tree, around whose slender trunk were climbing and blooming vines unlike anything Polly had ever seen.

Yet even here penetrated that half-amused, half-derisive cry: "The little Gringo! Behold the Gringo!" and again a flush darkened the wanderer's cheek.

Seeing which, Doña Dolores called: "Quedito! Silencio, heart's dearest! But come, see the new sister arrived to share our home and bid her welcome. Tell her, niño, that 'Gringo' is no word of reproach, but only that name by which all are known who come from the land of the Americanos. But come, instante!"

At the admonition a beautiful boy slipped out from a group of other lads and turning a somersault, or a succession of them, thus arrived at the bench where his mother and Polly

sat. The girl thought she had never seen so charming a child and, for the sake of his loveliness, promptly forgave him the nickname he had called her. Indeed, she was soon to learn, as her hostess informed her, that this was the common term used to distinguish the easterners, or "Americanos" from the native Californians, and in no sense insulting.

With a profound obeisance similar to that of his brother, Jose, the graceful little fellow held out a rather grimy hand and bestowed upon his new acquaintance a stare as full of admiration as her own. Smiling till all his pearly teeth were visible he bade her "Welcome," and still left his hand resting cozily within her own.

Well pleased, Doña Dolores drew her son to her and pressed his shoulders affectionately; then kissing his mud-streaked forehead she pointed to the fountain and pushed him gently toward it. The boy flashed back the merriest of smiles, ducked his head to escape an imaginary blow, then turned a handspring backward and rejoined his mates.

"He has but just now learned it, that vaulting, and he is of it the most proud," com-

mented the mother, by way of explanation, and rising as she spoke. Then she added: "But I am the negligent one, I. After the dusty ride the fresh water and the siesta. Yes. That should be. Found you not the wagon tedious, indeed?"

"I found it rather—jolty and squeaky," admitted Polly, following the lady across the court to the low-roofed dwelling-house on its further side, and beneath a wide veranda into a suite of cool, dimly-lighted rooms. She had not realized how great was the heat without until this grateful coolness greeted her, and she sighed in content at the change.

At the end of the suite was a little chamber, plainly but sufficiently furnished, and containing a big, most inviting bed. There was no carpet on the bare floor, though a bit of a rug was spread beside a little prayer-desk in one corner. A picture of the Madonna and Child hung over the bed's head, and a silver crucifix stood upon the desk.

The tiny trunk which Captain Marshall had procured for his charge had already been placed in the room, though it had arrived only with herself on the queer rickety wagon,

and now, touching a bell which hung suspended near the door, Doña Dolores summoned a maid to attend the guest.

It was an Indian woman who came, and it seemed to Polly that there was something familiar about her face, though she had never seen it before, and she was studying the servant's features while Mrs. Ysidro gave a few directions in Spanish to her. To each of these directions a respectful assent was given, with curtseys innumerable, and then the mistress smilingly withdrew.

Immediately, Polly was taken in hand by the maid, her frock unbuttoned and slipped off, her yellow curls attacked by a brush and herself prepared as if for a night's rest. Then another servant entered, bearing a can of warm water, which she emptied into a tiny tub, and withdrew.

The intention was obvious, and the little New Englander, now Gringo, who had not indulged in a daylight nap since she could remember, promptly followed the custom of this new land, taking her dip and her sleep as naturally as the rest of that southern household.

When she awoke the sun was setting and the light curtain fluttered before the window in a gentle breeze. She felt wonderfully refreshed and inspirited and sprang up to find Juana, the Indian woman, sitting erect and watchful at the foot of the bed. Then the puzzling resemblance was solved. The woman looked like Francisco, the Indian on Captain Marshall's boat.

"Why, Juana!" cried Polly. "Have you been here all the time?"

"Si. Of course. Why not?" answered the servant, briefly. Then she rose and reexamined the three frocks, which she had spread out on a settle and which constituted Polly's entire stock. The two dark ones which she had brought from home had been supplemented on the voyage, and by Mrs. Marshall's then active fingers, by a third one of coarse white muslin, such as is used for bedding, and upon this Juana's choice eventually fell. Yet she handled it with a fine disdain that sent a flush of anger to its owner's cheek, remembering how "pretty" "Captain Mary Ann" had considered it.

However, she controlled her speech if not

her thoughts, determined to avoid a quarrel with this copper-skinned creature who looked so like Francisco, and who now proceeded to dress her as if she had been a baby. This was a fresh affront to her independent spirit and trouble might finally have ensued had there not fallen upon her ears a wild uproar of sounds which banished every other sense than hearing—the neighing of countless horses, the shouts of excited men, and at the end the sharp report of firearms. With a white, frightened face, she turned to her grim attendant, who merely nodded and remarked :

“They have arrived. Si. Yes.”

CHAPTER VI

AN EVENING'S ENTERTAINMENT

AT Juana's direction, Polly left her room by a door which gave directly upon the broad, vine-wreathed veranda, and found herself in the midst of a large company of people, sitting or standing about, and all chattering in the cheerfullest of voices, but in what, to the stranger, seemed a curious language.

For a moment nobody noticed the "little gringo," but while she waited, shy and hesitant, a girl disengaged herself from a group of other young folk and advanced with outstretched hand, saying :

"The daughter of Señor Pancoast, is it not? Tia Dolores bade me watch for you and make you known to our friends. I am Felicidad Castro and I live here at Santa Rosa."

Then followed introductions on every side and Polly was made the object of more attention than she had ever received in her life. Instantly she reflected that her father must be a very great man among these Californians,

since they treated his daughter with such respect; and when a few of the ladies made open comment upon her "beauty," comparing her blond fairness with the darkness of their own children, the sensible New Englander felt strangely flattered and elated.

"It's like a wonderful fairy world and I feel like its princess—being so waited upon and called so beautiful. But there, I know I'm not that, else I'd have heard something about it before now," she thought.

Yet, after a moment, those who had so frankly admired her apparently forgot her and returned to their conversation with their neighbors, as if no interruption had occurred. Then she further observed that the manner of these Californians toward each other was even more deferential and flattering than it had been toward her, and her vanity died a sudden death.

Even while she was observing this, Felicidad had left her and rejoined her mates without inviting Polly to accompany her and this made the stranger feel sadly out of place and alone. But just then a voice behind her said:

"You are to come with me, Señorita Polly

Pancoast, if you will so condescend. La madre will have you to sit beside herself at the supper which is served. Si. Me permite?"

The invitation was accompanied by a series of bows and the touch of the lad's hand to his heart, as well as a languishing glance of admiration which disturbed the recipient of the courtesies far more than brusque rudeness would have done. Blushing, poor Polly felt as if she had suddenly stepped out of childhood into womanhood without knowing how to behave properly in the new state. Then she rallied her courage and, disdaining Jose's proffered arm thankfully accepted the guidance of his hand, finding it difficult to thread her way through the various groups without inconvenience to some. And when they had gained the entrance of the great supper-room she paused and demanded :

"Do tell me what all this means? I waked hearing shouting and shooting and the Indian woman only said: 'They have arrived.' Is it a party? Or a minister's 'donation'? Or what?"

"A 'donation'—that might be a giving—

but I know it not. A 'party'? Maybe so. It is for the rodeo first, and afterward the merienda. What felicity! That you have come in time for both. Last year the good Capitan also gathered the berries with us and made much mirth for all with his quaint stories of the other ocean. En verdad, he is our friend. We of Santa Rosa are proud to have friendship with honorable Americanos, los gringos, si. It is from them we get our cloths, our shoes, and dresses for the women, our blankets, our sugars—ah! Of many things we are the debtors to the ships and the sailors. But the merienda! Ah! Grow the red strawberries in your country, Señorita?"

"Why, of course. But, please—don't call me that 'Señorita.' It makes me feel so strange to myself. I've never been anything but just plain Polly, and—sometimes—Margaret. That's my real name, though I rarely hear it. You're no bigger than my Roland, and nobody at home would think of 'Mistering' or 'Señoring' him. I'd like to call you Jose, if I might. There are so many things I must ask about, of you, or somebody, and I couldn't waste time saying what that other

girl called you as we passed her on the piazza :
'Señor Jose Crisostimo Maria Antonio Ysidro.'
And are all those names really yours?"

The boy threw back his handsome head and laughed as unaffectedly as Roland might have done, and in that laughter Polly forgot his mannerisms, which seemed to her so absurdly "affected" but which were, in reality, as natural to him as her own simplicity to her.

"She is a tease, that Inez! But you will see, en verdad. Once I laughed—shame to my rudeness—when she tried to fling the riata like a man and failed. Her little wrists were too small and she—but she has the temper, si! She is always of the regret that she was not the son of her mother and not the daughter. You will love Inez. She is all fire and tenderness. To her mother, the invalid, no one so gentle, and the father—dead of an Indian's arrow when she was so high. But, la madre! She calls. Caramba! I did forget for what I was sent, and it is the fault—if fault can be in so charming——"

Here the lad made another of his profound salutations, again laying his hand upon his heart, and looking into Polly's face with an

absurd mimicry of admiration. For Polly recognized, instantly, that it was but a mimicry of the manner of his elders and that, in reality, he didn't care "a Continental," as Jonathan would have expressed it, "for her or any other girl."

But she could see Doña Dolores beckoning to them and that the entire company was on the way to the table; and wondering where so many could be seated or if there would be enough of food to "go around" she now hastily made her own way to her hostess' side and slipped into the place adjoining hers.

Even while her attention was distracted by the care of seating her other guests, the lady found time for a word and a smile to Polly, who appreciated both and showed that she did by saying:

"Thank you, Mrs. Ysidro, for being so good to me."

Thereafter the little gringo had neither loneliness nor any other feeling save that of wonderment, for in truth the scene was to her a picture of "fairy-land." Candles innumerable, augmented by the picturesque hanging lamps, cast a radiance almost dazzling over

the beautifully-spread table, with its plate and glass—of priceless value, since it had been brought long before from far-away Spain and could never be replaced. Charming women in evening dress, such as Polly had never before seen; and men in short knee-breeches and deerskin leggings, enriched by gold or silver lace, a sash knotted about the waist and surmounted by a jacket and vest gayly decorated with buttons of the same glittering gold. As for the young folks, they were but smaller editions of their elders, though the girls were, invariably, in white. But, alas! white with such a difference from the stranger's own attire, with its long sleeves, its high neck, its ungraceful big skirt—made "to grow in"—and suggesting now, even to its once proud owner, nothing so much as a nightgown.

She was clever enough to note this at once but no longer felt annoyed, for her eyes and her ears were open to the novelty of her situation and her one thought, after each fresh surprise: "Oh! if Roland, or dear Aunt Mercy could only see this!"

There seemed almost as many servants as guests, and these were mostly Indians, Mis-

sion trained and lifetime members of the household, though here and there a Mexican moved among them, deft, solicitous, and as talkative as his fellows were silent. Since even that big table would not accommodate all the visitors, many of the gentlemen perched in the deep embrasures of the windows or walked about, carrying their cups with them and attended by the servants with trays and dishes.

As for the food itself, it was all strange to Polly, so disguised with spices and sauces were the great roasts of beef, the chickens, the fish and the game, and she wondered what that famous cook, Mrs. Hallock, would have thought of the repast. For bread there were tortillas, or little cakes of meal, while the favorite dish of all seemed to be something called tamales, and which Doña Dolores had the secret of providing all the year round—in and out of season. These were made of corn and minced chicken, highly seasoned with pepper, and boiled in corn husks and even the absorbed Polly found time to taste and enjoy one, though it seemed to her that the “hot” feeling would never again leave her unaccustomed palate.

The talk about her was all of the rodeo, an event to take place on the morrow, and for which the visiting rancheros had assembled at Santa Rosa; but Polly got little idea of its meaning until, the supper over and the guests betaking themselves out of doors, the girl who had been pointed out to her as Inez Peralta suddenly appeared beside her, saying:

“Please come with me. I want to know you. I like you even already in truth, yes, why not? I am in love with los gringos—so clever and alert. I shall sail me to that Boston, on the other side the world, some day, when my mother is well. Come to see her. The dearest, most beautiful in all the world. En verdad. Si.”

Polly looked around into the gayest, merriest of girlish faces, which might be “foreign” indeed in its coloring and type, but was wholly natural and familiar in its mischievousness and good fellowship. Her answer was an outstretched hand and the exclamation:

“And how I do like you! I did the moment I saw you and heard you teasing that Jose. You—you’re just like a girl—any girl—from Woodley! Oh! I am so glad!”

They were arm and arm about each other's waists, in an instant, exchanging confidences at breakneck speed, and the more freely on Polly's part, because this was the first girl of her own age with whom she had spoken since her last day in Miss Brown's school. Finding an empty bench in a far corner of the court Inez drew her new friend down beside her and asked :

"How came you to our California, you? With no madre nor padre nor—nor any of your family? Because that is what dear Doña Dolores told me when she sent me to you—that you had none, none now, save yourself. Are you not afraid, you?"

"Not now. I was—but not enough afraid to keep me from doing a—a dreadful thing. Did Mrs. Ysidro tell you, also, that I was a—a runaway?"

"No, indeed no. She told me but this: that you were lovely—which I could see for myself; that you were alone—as I am, save for the poor madre; that you were unlike Felicidad—for which, gracias! and that you were to stay at Santa Rosa until the Capitan, the sobrecargo of that fine Columbia, returns.

He buys our hides and tallow, yes, that generous sobrecargo and he pays la madre over price because—because she, too, is alone. Oh! yes. We all love that Mistaire Pancoast, el Capitan, at San Pablo. Si. En veritas.”

This was sweet praise to Polly's ears and drew from her without reservation the whole story of her coming to California and, indeed, of all her life. When she paused for breath only, Inez exclaimed :

“I see it! I see it! The queer hard mountains close at hand—think of living amid the snow, like that! I see the little tia, the aunt, with the white curls and the cap upon them. I see the so funny Jonatan and the sharp-tongued Marta—yes, yes! I see it all! And some day, when you go back and madre mia is well, I will go with you. As strange that to me cold country as this so warm one to you. But, hark! What is that? Fun is going! Come, come, come quick! Instante!”

With a bound Inez was away, dragging Polly with her and meeting Jose searching for them, also on the alert for something unusual that was happening. Swiftly, in his curious mingling of Spanish and English,

and now without any unnecessary flourish, he informed the girls that Tomas, the head cook of the establishment, had demanded his periodical whipping and that Don Santiago was to administer it publicly, for the amusement of his guests and the proud satisfaction of Tomas.

“He asked to be whipped!” cried Polly, amazed and indignant.

“Si. But why look like that? It is his own desire. He is the best cook for leagues around—trained at the Mission, serving at Santa Rosa here, since ever Doña Dolores was married. Twice in the year comes our Tomas to the master with the rope in hand and implores the flogging. Let Don Santiago refuse, what of that? It is Tomas must be whipped or no more good dinners will be on the long table. You ate the supper now. Was it not fine? But I, to me never yet was the so funny sight, though often I have longed for it. Never before it happened with the Peraltas at Santa Rosa. No. Haste, haste.”

Everywhere there was laughter and mirthful expectation, and the guitars and violins which had kept up a running accompaniment

of music from one side or the other, suddenly were silent. Even the random popping of firearms into the air, or the tests of sharpshooting, such as had saluted Polly's ears on her awakening, were no longer heard from the vaqueros' quarters, all of the men hurrying forward to witness the absurd spectacle about to take place.

After a moment, Don Santiago strode forward from the veranda into an open space in the centre of the court which had been deserted to give room for the whipping; and at the same instant from the detached kitchen on the north side marched Tomas, clad only in his breech cloth and with his arms folded upon his breast. Instinctively there was a hush, then a murmur of admiration, as the two men faced each other, magnificent types of widely differing races. Then said Señor Ysidro, curtly:

"Is it necessary, Tomas, my friend?"

"Si. The evil one is in me. Drive him out."

Then the rancho raised his whip, and there was such a mighty swishing through the air that Polly shuddered and hid her face

on Inez' shoulder who, daring as she was, yet shivered a little; though she forced herself to look on at what had promised to be "fun," but now suggested tragedy.

However, there was no real tragedy about the affair, save in the outward bearing of the opposing men. Don Santiago took excellent care to make his heaviest blows fall where the cloth upon his servant's body was thickest, and to waste all their vigor by a preliminary flourish. Twenty was the number of lashes administered, and had been determined by the chastised Indian himself; he apparently firmly believing that without this symbol of the white man's authority over him he would be inspired to do not only execrable cooking but, maybe, far worse.

He adored the Ysidro family but, as he himself often said, he was still "an Indian," that is, "an enemy"; but he now, as the whipping ceased, felt that he was secured from his own treachery for another half-year, and instead of feeling humiliation in his punishment, was thankful that there were so many witnesses to his subjugation.

As the last stroke fell, Señor Ysidro bowed

courteously to his cook, who returned the salutation by dropping his chin on his breast and emitting an indescribable grunt. Then he turned upon his heel and stalked away to his own place, while the hubbub of voices and laughter immediately broke forth on every side; and when Polly gained courage to lift her head and look about her, her host was exclaiming, in relief:

“Buen’! That is over and done with. May good result!”

The chill of the night air soon drove all within doors, and as Inez left her to attend her mother, Polly found herself once more alone and the object of amused criticism from one group of young people with Felicidad as its centre. These were older than herself and more full of “airs,” as the New England girl pronounced them, than their elders whom they imitated, and she felt with a sinking heart that if she were to be a housemate of Miss Castro for any length of time she might have many uncomfortable moments. She wished it might be the frank, lovable Inez instead, then rebuked herself for being envious, thinking:

“It’s only because they have all such pretty manners, Polly Pancoast; and you are as ‘plain as a pipe-stem,’ and know it, and are jealous, that you notice such things. Why shouldn’t that Felicidad—whose name means ‘happiness,’ and who looks as fretful as—as Martha on a wet wash-day—why shouldn’t she stick to those old friends and leave me alone? Maybe I’d do the same under the same circumstances, though if I’d ever been in danger of it I shan’t be after this lesson. The way she looks at my clothes makes me feel—horrid! Poor Mrs. Marshall, bless her dear heart! thought she was making this frock so beautiful, and said it would ‘wear like iron,’ and would ‘last me for years by letting tucks out of the skirt.’ I guess she was right. It will ‘last for years’ without any wear or tuck-letting if I can help it. And I’m glad Captain Marshall gave me that money. I hated to take it, I felt so independent, but I’m beginning to find out that grown-up people do know more—or, at least, as much as I do! That’s lesson number two, Miss Margaret! and ——”

Leaning her tired head against the door-

frame and avoiding the critical glances of Felicidad and her friends simply by looking at the floor, Polly smiled at her own self-reproval and was startled when a hand was laid on her shoulder and a gentle voice inquired :

“Can you tell me your thoughts, niña mia? They were amusing ones, were they not? For you were smiling at yourself, though your blue eyes long for the sleep which shall keep them bright. Most of the other children are abed, and you are at liberty to go, also, if you choose. Shall I send Juanita to you? She is Juana’s child, a little maid of your own age, and I am her fond comadre.”

“Thank you, Mrs. Ysidro, I shall be glad to go. At home I would have been sent long ago, not ‘permitted’ as you say. But I don’t need anybody to help me. I can wait upon myself. I have done so always, if I can find my room.”

The lady smiled, held up a finger, and in answer to this summons Juanita came to them, stepping noiselessly over the bare boards in her moccasined feet and turning upon Doña Dolores a look of loving admiration; and

when that lady laid a caressing touch upon the Indian maid's smooth head a flush of happiness stole over the servant's face which transformed its plainness into something like beauty.

“Juanita, while the Señorita Margareta Pancoast remains at Santa Rosa, and may the time be long! you are to serve her as you would serve me—out of your good heart. Good-night, both, and good sleep.”

Polly wondered what a “comadre” was; also how Mrs. Ysidro had learned her real name; how that watchful hostess managed her untiring look out for everybody's comfort and happiness as she seemed to do, yet kept that quiet, dignified manner of entire leisure; and how there was going to be room in one house for so many people to sleep.

Juanita proved even more insistently helpful than her mother, Juana, had been earlier in the day, and rendered her services so eagerly that Polly could but accept them as freely as they were offered. It was odd to have somebody else brush out her curls at bedtime, and to have her clothing removed and put away; but stranger still to feel herself

respectfully prevented from kneeling at her bedside for her prayers, while she was as firmly propelled to the little cushion before the prayer-desk.

Her Puritan training was startled by the idea of praying before a crucifix, yet, when she would have risen to her feet again, one glance at the face of the Indian maid restrained her.

Juanita stood with bowed head and closed eyes, rapidly telling her beads from the rosary hanging about her neck, which was her christening gift and now her dearest earthly possession.

“I can't hurt her feelings and, after all, I know it's the same God we both worship;” thought Polly, and finished her devotions in a broader spirit of charity than she had ever known before.

After that followed a night of dreamless slumber, undisturbed by the late hours of the grown up guests, with their music and gayety, or the occasional sharp-shooting of some ambitious vaquero. Juanita shared her new mistress' chamber, sleeping on a mattress spread on the floor before the door, so that

any one entering would have had to step upon or over, her prostrate body. But the window was wide open, so that it must have been from custom, not for protection, that this spot was chosen by the attendant, who made no sound until she heard Polly stirring in her bed. Then she was instantly upon her feet, ready for any service and responding with a grave, pleased smile to the gay "good-morning" the gringo gave her.

"Buen' dias! I will the bath prepare," said Juanita, vanishing as she spoke.

"Well, these Californians certainly mean folks to keep clean!" cried Polly, running from her bed to the rear window and looking out to the wide mesa surrounding the house, where the greenness of the spring-time had not yet been parched by the summer heat.

For a moment she saw only the glorious landscape, then suddenly became aware that somebody was speaking near by; and leaning over the sill discovered the woman, Juana, in earnest conversation with—— Could it be Francisco?

Some words of Captain Marshall's flashed into her mind as she recognized that it was

her old shipmate, although his face was turned from her. The Captain had said :

“That long-legged F’risco never goes ashore except at San Diego and then on a mischief-errand. He’s all right and straight to me, because once I happened to save his life when he was set upon by a parcel of drunken Greasers. He followed me back to the Mary Ann and he’s never quit her since, only for trouble. Somebody, some white man, some time and in some place, has done him an injury, and he’ll keep that grudge and nurse it into a wicked revenge—that’s certain. An Indian’s an Indian, Mission raised or otherwise. Can’t trust ’em no more’n the rattlesnakes they have lived amongst.”

Juana was pleading with Francisco, or seemed to be doing so, and producing no effect ; for as he slipped stealthily away from her, keeping close in the shadow of the adobe, she clasped her hands and shook her head as if in despair. Nor did she lift her keen eyes to the casement where Polly watched, though she passed close beneath it, reentering the house. Was Francisco on a “mischief-errand” now ? And what was he to Juana ?

CHAPTER VII

THE RODEO

BEFORE Polly had finished dressing, an operation much sooner accomplished had she been allowed to manage it unaided, but seriously delayed by her objections to Juanita's well meant attentions, there was a merry: "Buen' dias!" at the second window, which opened on the porch, and there was Inez looking as fresh as the brilliant morning itself.

"Good-day, good-day! How is it you say it?" returned Polly running to greet the girl, who met her half-way by leaping over the sill and skipping across the floor. She was already in riding costume, a jaunty velvet cap resting on her dark hair and her long skirt gathered over her arm, revealing dainty little breeches and leggings beneath. It was the girl's desire to "be as free as a boy" in her movements and her pleasure would have been to discard the skirt entirely. This she was not permitted to do, for the Californians were

sticklers for propriety and a mannish girl was a thing wholly unknown.

“Why, Inez! How sweet you look! What a lovely habit! Are you going riding? Surely, oh! surely, you aren't going away, to that San Pablo where you live?” cried Polly, distressed at the thought of losing this lively companion.

“Going home, already? Is it that you ask? Why, indeed no! We have but just come, and it is months we stay at Santa Rosa, la madre and I. Doña Dolores would be heart-broken if we called only to tarry the night. The dear comadre! I couldn't grieve her like that. En verdad, indeed, no. You amaze me. In your country do people, the guests, the friends, arrive and depart between the setting and the rising of the sun? Eh?”

Polly's face lengthened. “I'm afraid they do, sometimes. Why, my own dear father, Captain Pancoast, who hadn't seen any of us in five years and whom I've followed away around two oceans, nearly, just to get acquainted with, so to speak, he—he stayed but a half day and—and Aunt Mercy was thankful for even that much of a visit.”

“What a shame! It was an insult, a what you call it? a *disgracia*! Well, I would not have followed anybody who treated me like that, I! But, no matter. I am not now of so great mind to visit that Boston town, for it must be of a cold-hearted people they make it. Yet you, *querida mia*, you are not of the cold blood, ah! no! For already we have the great love to each other, is it not?”

Then with an ecstatic hug of the promptly responding Polly, Inez held the other off a bit and regarded her worn frock with disfavor. It was one of those brought from Woodley, and a sea trip of several thousand miles had not improved its appearance. Yet it was not of the faded gown Inez thought, but that there was a mistake in wearing it that morning. Her reproof was, however, administered to Juanita, who seemed half-frightened and wholly humbled by the torrent of words, few of which Polly could understand.

Then, by the way she had entered and almost as swiftly, the lively girl departed and Juanita followed, but more sedately.

Left alone, Polly made brief work of finishing her toilet and had set about making the



INEZ DREW HER FRIEND INTO THE SALON

bed, after the careful industry in which she had been reared, when the two returned, Juanita carrying another habit of Inez', and its owner staring in surprise at the nimble-fingered easterner.

“Caramba! Why do you do that? Is it not a task for her?” pointing to the Indian maid, demanded the heiress of San Pablo. Then, forgetting this unimportant matter in the larger one, commanded: “Put on the habit, at once. It will suit you as it does me. En verdad. Behold. We are of the same height, of the same figure, we. How good!”

Petted and caressed as if she were the bestower, not the recipient of a favor, the little gringo found herself whirled out of her own gown and petticoats and into the things Inez had procured. Both the white-faced girls were shrieking with laughter over each stage of the proceedings, while even the phlegmatic Indian maid smiled now and then; and when the change of costume was finished, Inez drew her amazed friend into the great salon where was the only mirror the house contained and where were already assembled many guests, awaiting the breakfast summons.

Posing the blushing Polly, who again found herself a centre of too much observation, Inez bade her lift her eyes and behold herself reflected "in all her beauty."

Shamefaced, but curious, the victim of Inez' caprice obeyed and scarcely recognized herself, her appearance was so altered by the clothes she wore. Then again she was hurried away, awkwardly tripping over her long skirt and vainly trying to lift and carry it as gracefully as the Californian did; and it was not until they reached the breakfast room and a table expressly arranged for the younger visitors that she found opportunity to ask:

"But, Inez dear, what is it all for? Why do you wish me to wear this rig?"

"Why? For the rodeo, *en veritas*, sweet silly one. As for me, I mean to be as near the vaqueros and their operations as I am allowed—a little nearer, if nobody is looking. Ah! the rodeo that I have longed for all my life but have been kept a child from until now. Oh! to be a man for this one day! And I should be, for am I not the only child of my mother and she a widow? Ah! What a pity!"

“Inez Peralta! You disgrace your family!” warned Felicidad from the head of the table, then bestowing a cold though perfectly courteous “Good-morning” upon Polly, who was more chilled by the salutation than she would have been by the absence of it.

“Hola! I forgot nothing I should remember, Cousin Felicidad. It is you yourself forget that the good Dios gave to women their hearts, to use them in the happiness of others. Also, where there is so much ‘family’ in one’s head there is little fun in one’s life. For me—I will the fun keep, and it is a poor family, en verdad! that cannot keep itself. No matter. Each to her taste and—serve me my coffee, please, fair Señorita, lest I come serve myself!”

Others joined those already at breakfast, each coming and leaving without ceremony, and all eager for the day’s event; and after a scanty meal—for who could eat when there was something so much better to do?—the two girls hurried out of doors, where already was great excitement and a louder hubbub of voices than ever.

“Now, for our horses! Jose! Mateo! Vin-

cente! Send a vaquero with Cremo, please! And what's for Polly, the guest?" cried Inez, beckoning to her hostess' sons and to her cousin, Felicidad's brother, who came reluctantly, loath to leave the more interesting talk of the men to serve a pair of insignificant girls. However, the invariable courtesy required of Californian lads toward women prevented the gloomy Vincente from revealing what he really felt, and with a vaquero leading a small piebald horse he approached Polly and bowed so profoundly that his sombrero swept the ground, as he said:

"At your service, Señorita. It was Don Santiago himself selected Nineto for your use, to-day, and forever while you remain our most honored guest. Me permíte?"

Polly had already become accustomed to what she termed the "flourishy manners" of her new acquaintances, but she failed to understand why Vincente should stoop and hold his open palm so near the ground and her own foot, as if waiting for something further than the simple "Thank you" she had spoken. Also, she looked with dismay at the antics of the pretty "calico pony" which the vaquero

held by its bridle and vainly attempted to keep quiet for her to mount. All her life she had been in the habit of riding, but never an animal wilder than old Kate, whose gentle amble was as safe as Aunt Mercy's Pilgrim rocker.

Hesitating, she glanced at Inez, for whom Jose was offering a similar service to Vincente's, saw the girl's foot lightly rest upon the lad's hand as with a spring she vaulted into her saddle upon Cremo's back. A copy-book maxim flashed into the easterner's mind: "When in Rome do as the Romans do"; and the surprise at her hesitancy visible upon her escort's face roused her pride. Not for anything now would she let that arrogant youth suspect that she was afraid! The beautiful Nineto looked wicked enough for any misbehavior, but, "I can't break my neck but once!" thought Polly, and followed Inez' example.

"Why! how easy that was!" she exclaimed, as she touched the saddle and Nineto, for the instant, stopped fidgeting. "Easier than a horse-block or a manger," she added, but had time for no more, for Nineto suddenly leaped forward like an arrow.

Crema, also, had galloped out to the plain beyond the buildings, where were gathered a great number of horsemen, with a rapidly increasing party of women, all finely mounted and the latter apparently as much at home in their saddles as were their husbands and brothers. Indeed, in those early California days, everybody rode, and as a matter of course; walking, even for short distances, being the exception to this custom.

These rancheros and their ladies were mostly but spectators of the rodeo, a few participating in it merely for the sport, and their equipments were in rich contrast to those of the vaqueros by whom the real work was done. About the latter, or their horses, was no useless article, everything not required for the strenuous task in hand being dispensed with.

The air was full of excitement and enthusiasm, and even Crema's swift pace taxed Inez' patience as she made her way to the furthest limit of the space allotted to the onlookers. Turning she was delighted to find Polly close behind her and exclaimed:

"Oh! I'm so glad you're a good rider. I thought you looked afraid of Nineto and,

Caramba! that boy, Vincente, was so cross I knew he'd never bother to hunt up another horse. He's a beauty, is he not? Si. En verdad. But not like Cremo, my pet, my heart's dearest, my darling!"

With that the girl leaned forward and stroked Cremo's yellow mane as caressingly as if the animal had been a human being and, in truth, a "heart's dearest."

"I—I was afraid," gasped Polly, as Nineto once more began that uncomfortable curvetting about which had rendered mounting so difficult, but which Inez now remarked was "nothing but his childishness." Adding, by way of encouragement: "Be sure that Don Santiago sees for himself what horses are given to the women, though most everybody has her own. Nineto is a silly little thing, proud of his good looks and high of the spirit. Yes, yes, indeed. But a thoroughbred—— Ah! one can always depend on a thoroughbred, two-footed or four. Skittish in time of peace, but true as steel in a time of need. Ah! yes!" concluded this dainty philosopher of fourteen.

"True as preachin'," affirmed a rough voice

behind the girls, and so suddenly that even the self-poised Inez started slightly, though she would not look around nor betray by any curiosity that she was herself aught but "thoroughbred."

Polly had no such proud scruples and shrieked; at which Nineto made a prodigious spring into the air, for nothing at all but his own coltish whims, and in the rebound whirled about to face the intruder. From sheer strength and fright his rider stuck to her saddle and was rewarded by a gruff guffaw and the observation:

"Make a rider. Easier than a California wagon."

"Oh! Luther Dowie! How you frightened us!" cried Polly.

"You!" corrected Inez, still motionless and controlling Cremo to an attitude of marble. In her heart the little Californian resented the attendance of this plain eastern hireling when his place should have been filled by somebody who liked "fun." La madre had arranged that her adventurous child should not be unattended on this exciting day, but—an old man who jerked his words out as if they hurt

him and who was so stupidly uninteresting! Why should a girl be left to him?

But this Luther, so like the familiar "hired man" of a Woodley homestead, was the very guardian Polly would have chosen. If he did jerk out his words they were plain "Yankee" and to the point. Besides, she meant to gain from him the information concerning her father and brother, as to their present whereabouts and plans, which she had not yet obtained from others. Luther was himself also a gringo and she was sure must be the Captain's friend. In her satisfaction, Polly turned a beaming face upon him, exclaiming: "Oh! I am so glad you have come with us! I want to ask you ——"

"Chito! Behold! They start!" interrupted the eager Inez, pointing her whip toward the groups of men now separating from the general crowd and with a long, easy lope guiding their horses into the uplands about the rodeo ground, to bring in the great herds of wild cattle roaming there. Other men were leading a few cabestros, or tame cattle, to the parada, or stand, a short distance from the circular space allotted for the rodeo. These

cabestros had spikes inserted in their horns to which other unruly beasts could be fastened by ropes, if need arose, and were themselves used to inspire the untamed herds with confidence.

The cattle of many different owners were in the herd to be rounded up that day, and several of the rancheros had brought their own vaqueros and cabestros, each establishing his own parada; and for a time it seemed to Polly that the affair was a great ado about nothing at all. As the animals were gathered into the rodeo, the herders rode in pairs among them, quietly selected the creatures which bore their own ranch-brand, and drove them to their respective paradas. Uneasy at first, the wild things gradually became contented, as more and more of their pasture-mates joined them, and Polly would have turned to Luther with her own questions had he been able to give her so much as one glance.

He was not. All his attention was centred on the rodeo and he was evidently expectant of something livelier to come. Then, suddenly, a grunt of satisfaction escaped him and the little easterner's gaze followed his. An

unruly bull had darted from the herd and back toward the hills from whence he had come; while in pursuit of him galloped two vaqueros. Although the bull had the advantage of the start, the horses were fleetier than he and, gaining upon him, one of the men leaned forward, caught the creature by the tail, urged his horse to a greater speed, and with a jerk releasing his hold, sent the captured beast rolling over and over upon the ground. When it regained its legs the animal was completely subdued and gave no further trouble. It had been an exciting moment, and had established the vaquero's skill.

"Oh! the fine colliar!" cried Inez, clapping her hands. "I hope there will be many, many wild ones like that to capture, and ah! If I were a man—to ride like that!"

"Settled that critter's hash!" commented Luther in equal delight.

Polly did not share their sentiment. To her this rodeo seemed a cruel, brutal thing. As the vaqueros brought in the unmarked cattle they were clipped and branded with hot irons in the symbol of the rancho to which the rodeo "judge" decided each be-

longed. The lowings of the cows over their tortured calves, the bleatings of the latter, and the pitiful licking of their babies' wounds by the bovine mothers; the often dangerous outbreak of some ferocious wild bull, rushing with lowered head and ominous bellowings upon the vaquero who pursued him; with the frequent colliars—all these things distressed the unaccustomed easterner, till, tiring of the scene which on account of the fine horsemanship displayed was so fascinating to Inez, she asked Luther: "Will they ever finish? How long will it take to look at all those cattle? How many are there? More than in the whole dear old state of Maine, it seems to me!"

"Five six thousand. Three days," was his concise answer.

"Three—whole—days! How horrible!"

"Like skinnin' eels. Nothin'—once used to it."

Disgusted with his indifference, Polly turned upon Inez, demanding, "How long must I stay here?"

"Guay! See! See! A-ah!"

The girl was leaning forward over Cremo's

head, intently gazing into the distance, her hand upraised for silence, and her mobile face white with terror.

A belated party of vaqueros had been slowly approaching from the south, driving their own cabestros with them, and preceded by their employer, who rode apart attended by a single companion, a slender lad in exaggerated trappings, a burlesque copy of the Don beside him. Thus much Polly had already observed with an idle interest, glad of any diversion from this rodeo business which she so disliked. For a moment she had forgotten them, but following Inez' gaze now saw that the two foremost riders had gained the large company about the rodeo ground, that the youthful caballero was even more extravagantly attired than at first appeared, and that—there was trouble!

For an instant the little gringo could only guess at what this trouble might be. She stared intently, trying to discover why that furious wild steer, those flying lassos, and the crowding horsemen should be mingled in one such undistinguishable mess.

Another second, and the astonished Nineto

was being hurried forward at breakneck speed, his rider rising in her stirrup as if thus to hasten him, while her face grew deathly white, and it seemed as if her heart had ceased to beat.

There was the pounding of heavy hoofs behind her, but Polly did not hear them, and so mad was her onrush that even those wild riders, gathered about a prostrate man, opened their ranks to admit her as one who had a prior right. With a gesture, she waved them all aside, and went down upon her knees beside the youth whom she had ridiculed, clasping him in her arms and calling to him in an agony of grief:

“Roland! Roland! My brother!”

CHAPTER VIII

A STRANGE REUNION

“DON’T, Polly! Sweetheart, beloved of my soul, querida mia! The boy isn’t—he can’t be—he shall not be—be hurt! Not much, oh! not much! Ah! poor sister, thus to find your brother!” wailed Inez, who had come to the spot almost as quickly as the other and who was now trying to draw her friend away. For not only she but all who looked on the white, bruised face of the motionless lad believed that he was dead.

Then both the girls were quietly but firmly put aside and Luther bent above the injured Roland, examining him with a skill and rapidity which seemed professional. Soon he rose and remarked:

“Alive. House. Immediate.”

Willing hands promptly made a stretcher of somebody’s blanket and four men taking the corners of this, Roland was gently but swiftly carried to the house, where Doña Dolores, upon the veranda, saw them coming,

foreboded disaster, and instantly prepared for it.

Arm in arm, Polly and Inez paced silently beside the stretcher, with eyes fastened upon the lad's unconscious face. But even in her anxiety the little gringo marvelled afresh at her hostess' readiness and composure, hearing her speak in cheerful tones and seeing the couch made ready for the injured person, whoever that might be.

Upon one of the horses always in waiting at the stables she had already dispatched a servant into the town to summon a doctor, who would lose no time in responding to any call from Santa Rosa. Meanwhile, Luther's big, but no longer awkward, hands were busily stripping from his patient his unfamiliar and, doubtless, uncomfortable clothing, and his expression as he did so was one of amused contempt.

"Turkey-fowl, aping a peacock," he remarked to anybody who chose to hear; dropping the gay sash, the decorated leggings, and the heavily be-buttoned vest, from the tips of his fingers to the floor as if they were the veriest rags instead of being, as they chanced,

the richest of their sort their owner could procure.

As yet she did not know this and resented Luther's manner hotly. Then she remembered how gentle was his handling of the injured boy and how promptly he had hurried to her side upon the rodeo ground. Indeed, when the doctor arrived he approved all that the ranchman had done and gave it as his opinion that Roland would eventually recover, although his long time of unconsciousness added a grave feature to the case.

"How did it happen? What hurt him?" he asked of Luther, who only shook his head in ignorance.

Nobody ever did know, exactly. Roland's inexperience and the too elaborate accoutrements of his untried horse had their share in the matter. There had been some sudden jumble of other horses, cattle, and men, and Roland had been thrown from his saddle to the ground. The cut of a horseshoe upon his temple showed how narrow had been his escape from instant death, and the marvel of it.

During all the rest of that great rodeo, in which he had anticipated taking a conspicu-

ous part, though in wholly another fashion, the lad lay motionless on his bed in the most remote chamber of the big dwelling, attended by an almost equally silent Luther, who rarely left the room, and by Polly who would not have left it at all, had not Doña Dolores insisted that she should.

Once she asked the faithful nurse how he came to know so much about sickness, and he answered tersely, "Part natur', part love."

"What do you mean?"

"Brother once. 'Bout his size. Run over. Haycart. Laid months. I studied with the doctor. Might have made one myself—if he hadn't got well."

"Then he did get well!" cried the sister of this other "brother," eagerly. "But you shouldn't have given up the doctor-business. I know you would have been a fine one."

"No. 'Jack-of-all-trades,' no shakes in none. Tried every way of earnin' a livin', 'cept preachin'. Sailor, soldier, cobbler, farmer, tinker——"

"Rich man, poor man, beggar man, thief; doctor, lawyer, merchant, chief," quoted Polly with a sudden rebound of spirits, due to her

companion's unusual talkativeness. And as if in echo to her own outburst there came a faint sigh from the bed. So faint, indeed, that the girl held her breath to listen, while Luther leaned forward smiling in satisfaction, yet holding up his hand for silence, which only the sick boy might break.

Polly's glances flew from Luther's face to Roland's and back again, in mute entreaty; breathless, radiant, she was now perfectly certain that all would be well; and when, after a brief interval and for the first time, Roland turned restlessly upon his pillow, seeking for himself a comfortable position and dropping into another but quite different slumber from that of the long hours past, the wise old "Jack-of-all-trades" leaned back in his chair and nodded his grizzled head in great content.

"Is he all right?" questioned Polly's lips, yet without a sound, and again Luther nodded. Then out of the room crept the overcharged sister and away to her own chamber, there to throw herself on the bed and to sob herself to sleep in the reaction of her feelings, though she had meant only "to

have her cry out for she couldn't keep in any longer."

There Inez found her. Inez the faithful, no longer a tease but the tenderest, most sympathetic of friends. It was she who had learned the good news—just from one inquiring glance at Luther as she paused on the sick room threshold and peeped in—then spread it through the household.

"O hala, hala! Sweetheart, Polly-Margareta! The joy that has come! The brother recovers, yes! And so quick, so swift that he, also, shall of the merienda share. Si. En verdad. In truth. Yes. I know it, I feel it——"

"O Inez! Don't tell me that you 'feel it in your bones'! That's what Martha does, and the things she 'feels' that way are never nice!" cried Polly, springing up, wonderfully refreshed by her much needed sleep and so happy that she could not possibly keep still. Even when Juanita entered, bringing some new and daintily fashioned garments which Señora Ysidro had had prepared for her young guest's use, during Polly's days of watching, she could scarcely pause in her

excitement to examine them. Not until Inez finally caught and held her in a chair did she listen and comprehend what her friend demanded of her.

“Wait. You shall the bath and the dressing first. Not once again to Roland’s side till you are—as you should be. See? The pretty, pretty frock? Of palest blue, to so well suit your fair skin and yellow hair. Blue like your eyes and, maybe, the brother’s, is it not? Since, of the same northern color are his curls also. Or were. The pity! To shave and cut locks so beautiful! But that Luther, the nurse, he would with his ugly razor, yes, though I made him keep them every one in a little Indian basket for you, the sister. It was upon me the fitting was made and I long to see myself in you. Juanita! To your duty!”

Protest was useless; and beside, there was great attraction for the girl in the new clothes so thoughtfully provided and a desire to look her best when her precious invalid should so far recover as to recognize her. Touched by the generous kindness of these Californian strangers, tears came to Polly’s eyes again,

but only tears of gratitude which hurt nobody; and she exclaimed with fervor:

“That wonderful Doña Dolores! Was there ever anybody else like her! She thinks of everything, of everybody. If I live forever I can never repay her, never! She truly is the most wonderful, splendid woman in the world!”

“Save one, madre mia! What Doña Dolores is Señora Peralta was—and more!” returned the loyal daughter of an adored mother, with equal earnestness. “But, extravagant! There may be others just the same. Why not? It is a big, big world, Padre Gonzalez says, and we are in but one small corner of it. He knows. He is wise. He is of the travel many times. Even to Spain—Spain where my forefathers lived—has that good padre sailed and what he says I believe. So, if so big, in this world there must be more than two all-ready, noble women, and we should not be of the narrow mind—we. Not I, who belong to a great family. Not you who have been in the school taught. Ah! I would so quickly that ‘old family,’ of which Felicidad so prates,

give for one year at the 'school, where one learns to read the writing and write the reading, even like a Mission padre. Happy Polly-Margareta! that you are so wise, you, yourself."

"Wise? I?" cried Polly, in amazement, yet suddenly divining that the secret grief of this gay Inez might be her own want of book learning.

For there were no schools save those at the Missions, which were for the Indian neophytes, and which no patrician Californian would attend. Such knowledge and accomplishments as they themselves possessed mothers imparted to their daughters. Also, they trained their children to be notable housewives, so that no matter how large the establishment, its mistress might have an eye and hand ready for any part of it or any duty that arose. But books? Of what use were they? Even Don Santiago, said to be the very wealthiest ranchero in all that region, could neither read nor write, though he was an excellent man of business, so far as his dealings with the outside world required. Inez had already told Polly of the immense

treasures of gold and silver which her host kept in an upper chamber of his unusually lofty house, and that this was stored in baskets in amounts which even he did not know. Except when the ships came in and the goods they brought were purchased there was little need for money, because almost everything required for the maintenance of the household was raised at Santa Rosa.

A few moments later, when Juanita had finished her little mistress' toilet and they were ready to leave the room—departure having been somewhat delayed by Inez' continual and frankly expressed admiration of her friend's altered appearance—Polly clasped her arms about the other's neck and said :

“ It is very little I know, darling Inez, even though I have been at school all my life. But what I do know, mayn't I teach you? I'm sure we can get books somewhere, and you're so bright that, even if my father comes for me very soon, you'll be able to learn a lot of things. How to reckon accounts and read English, for of course, I couldn't help you in the Spanish —— Wouldn't you like that? Wouldn't it be ' fun ' or better? ”

“Oh! Polly! Will you? Can you? And listen—listen you, heart’s dearest! If you love my dear comadre, my godmother Doña Dolores, as you say, why then the surest way to make her glad and prove your love is to teach Mateo with us. Even Jose, maybe! Who can tell? That boy has some of the brains, is it not? And if Don Santiago is so rich and so ignorant of the account-keeping—why, the blessing that would be! Oh! I am so glad, so glad!”

“But—but—I’m no schoolma’am!” cried Polly, aghast at the expectations so unwittingly aroused. “I’m only a beginner myself and I should be afraid ——”

Impulsive Inez drew back, chilled and disappointed. Utterly without self-consciousness herself, and always eager to share her own benefits with anybody who would, she could not comprehend the modest hesitation of the easterner.

However, at sight of Inez’ changed expression, hesitation vanished and Polly said: “I’ll do it, if they wish, and the very best I can. Only what I don’t know that I can’t teach. Now, let’s hurry to my Roland!”

Thus what might have been a first quarrel between the two impulsive girls was avoided, and the little gringo stood committed to a course which, she reflected with a smile, would have surprised Miss Brown, the Woodley school-teacher, as greatly as it did herself.

When the girls presented themselves at the sick-room door, coming on tiptoe and mutely questioning if they might enter, Luther, at first, failed to recognize Polly. So different was her bright, rested face from the careworn one she had borne away, and so transformed her attire that his own tired eyes seemed to deceive him into thinking her some unknown mate of the merry Inez. Till seeing him look so cheerful, despite his physical weariness, she stole in and laying her cheek against his own and clasping her arms about his neck she begged him in a whisper :

“Do go and take some rest yourself, you precious man! I’m sure that Inez and I can take care of Roland. I’ve had such a beautiful sleep and I want you to have one, too.”

“Why—Polly! You?” he whispered in return.

“I, and none other. A case of fine feathers making fine birds, you see. And aren't they fine?” she further asked, softly stepping back, spreading her fluffy skirts and curtsying in the most approved Californian manner.

At which Inez laughed, then, frightened by the sound she made, vanished—to spread the good news that there was to be a real school at Santa Rosa for anybody who should choose to attend, and that the brilliant instructor would be—Polly, the gringo!

“For behold, she knows it all, that wise maiden. Si. En verdad. Has she not herself in the far away and larger schools been taught, she? Ah! the great brains of her head. Ah! she could out of it have reckoned, if she had not hated the cruelty, and would not look; she could have reckoned how many cattle were in that great rodeo and of each herd how many to their owners. Si. Yes. En verdad. That she could, Polly-Margareta, the Wise!”

“Guay! I believe it not, I!” said Vincente, strolling up. “A girl, muchacha! doncellita! It is not of the nature, no.”

“It may not be of the nature, but it is of

the truth!" retorted Inez, whirling about. "And upon the merienda we begin it. Why wait? Comes el Capitan, the father, and away goes my Polly Pancoast. The hurt one is improved. He has sighed. He has slept. Of his own will, not because of old Luther, the nurse. He will upon the merienda, also, go. And what Polly-Margareta cannot tell us the brother Roland he will impart. Because—he, also, is of that glorious sex—hombre, mankind!"

With a mocking curtsey she left the lads to ponder her news and each in his way to rejoice in it. Jose of honest thankfulness, because of late—alas! only of late! he had begun to covet learning. Even with a possible, rather, a probable, conscription into the army facing him, he had felt that to understand what lay between the covers of books might be of benefit to himself and to his father, whom he adored. It chafed him to find that all of the gringos who came to California could read. Why, he had once found that short-spoken Luther Dowie with a strange volume in his hand, out of which he seemed to be getting no end of amusement.

And when Jose had asked the name of the book, the man had answered :

“ Don Quixote. Your own kind.”

“ Don Quixote ” was certainly Spanish, and Jose had immediately spoken to Padre Gonzalez about it, the very first time he met him thereafter, but the padre had suggested the Book of Prayers as the better reading, and Jose had let the matter lapse. Now he would learn, even of a girl, since needs must.

Meanwhile, in the cool chamber where Roland had so peacefully enjoyed a health-giving sleep, Polly was leaning over him, watchful of each beloved feature and, incidentally, listening to the noises which drifted through the open windows. After a time she heard voices close at hand. They sounded familiar, and she listened. Suddenly she sat up straight. Francisco again, she was sure of it! And now, forgetful of any suspicion against him she crept lightly to the window, intent upon giving him a nod of welcome, in case he should happen to look up and see her.

He did see her, but as her sunny face appeared in the casement, a word escaped his lips which his one-time pupil heard and

which changed her expression into one of terror. As before, Juana was with him, but the woman no longer stole away. On the contrary she gazed earnestly at the little gringo and held up her clasped hands, as if entreating help.

Francisco stared, unmoved. With just such an expression had he beheld the threatening savages harassing the little Mary Ann on her perilous trip through the Straits. Then he stalked openly away, an ugly blot on the fair landscape, so Polly thought, though she instantly forgot him again, as the dearer sight for which she longed awaited her upon the bed. With another long drawn sigh, as one awakening out of a night's slumber, Roland turned upon his pillows, healthfully stretched his limbs, and exclaimed: "Hello!"

Then as his sister flew toward him, adding quickly and in a natural tone: "Why, Polly! Am I late?"

"Oh! you darling, darling, darling! Late? No, you're not late, not anything but just perfectly, wholly everything beautiful, precious, and delightful that can be! Oh! I have you again! I didn't lose you! I didn't come for

nothing, after all! And I feared—— Oh! my Roland, my brother!”

Alas! the unwise little sister! Her heart was so full of conflicting emotions that she utterly forgot all the caution Luther had tried to instil into her mind during the days just passed; and could that faithful nurse have heard her he would have despaired of the result. The doctor had said, and Luther knew, that the patient's complete recovery depended upon his having perfect quiet when his consciousness returned.

Roland closed his eyes again, his pallor deepened, and he became again so motionless, that Polly's delight died in a remorseful fear. A fear which held her, also, motionless, and thus, it may be, gave the weak boy's strength a chance to rally. For after a little time, he again opened his eyes and asked, though in a much weaker voice than before:

“Polly? Are you Polly?”

“Yes, yes. Just Polly—who forgot. Who always did forget what she should remember. Don't say I've made you worse, please, please, my darling!”

“Where are we? What has happened?”

Then out came the whole story; from the moment of his departure from Woodley till the present one, though to her credit it was that there were no words wasted in the narrative, and that she spoke so slowly and distinctly that everything was understood without questioning.

Also, though she was extremely curious to hear all that had befallen her brother, she would not allow him to talk further then. The main fact of his appearance at the rodeo had been earlier explained by Don Miguel Mercado, the owner of Las Palmas, in whose company Roland had arrived at Santa Rosa. Captain Pancoast had placed his son with this gentleman and friend, immediately upon the landing of the Columbia at San Diego, and had added instructions that the lad should learn the business of cattle-farming in all its branches. He had given the boy a large sum of money and, with his own caponera of horses and a vaquero to attend them, had set off northward to visit the various ranchos where he transacted his affairs. Nothing further had been heard from him or would be, it was probable, until the time of collecting the season's

supply of hides and tallow, for which he was now negotiating.

To have found Roland left behind, and now on the road to recovery and their old, close companionship, was joy enough for Polly; but, oh! how their tongues would fly, comparing notes of their separate voyages and upon this new, wonderful country.

In a little while Luther returned, shook his head at Polly's nursing, ordered her away, and proceeded to feed and watch the still weak lad himself. And it was while sadly wandering out of the court, to some quiet place beyond the buildings where she "could think things over," that the girl found herself followed by Juana.

Vexed that her desired solitude should be disturbed, Polly turned about to retrace her own steps and, since she must have society, whether or no, to seek that more congenial than this sad-eyed Indian woman.

"Why do you follow me so, Juana?" she demanded, rather sharply.

But the other begged pardon so humbly for her intrusion, and yet so persistently remained, that Polly felt there was something deeper in

the incident than she had at first supposed. Remembering again the dreadful word she had heard on Francisco's lips, she suddenly caught Juana's arm and asked :

“ Why did you look at me so imploringly, when you were under the window? What is Francisco, the mischief-maker, doing here, at Santa Rosa? And what is he to you?”

“ My brother. Son of my mother, but in his heart always a hater of better men. Hear me, Juana. Doña Dolores, my mistress, comadre of my own Juanita, is in danger. To me, though I beg of her, will she not listen. To you—— Is it not but just now I have heard that you are wise as the padres who read in the books? And of wisdom she, my beloved one, has much respect. Go to her. Tell her that what Juana has warned—that is true. At once she, and all must prepare. To-day, the laughter, the music, the feasting; mañana—to-morrow, the awful—desolation. Go. Implore. As the sun shines, what I have said that I abide by.”

Then drawing over her head the shawl that had been a gift of her mistress, the Indian woman slipped away, leaving Polly fright-

ened, even appalled by her manner, yet merely guessing at what that manner meant. Mischief of some sort. That was surely true; but not the horrible thing which flashed through her mind, only to be rejected as impossible.

However, no harm could come of doing as Juana had asked, and she hoped that Señora Ysidro would be more explicit on the subject than her servant had been.

So she sought her hostess and repeated what the Indian had said, adding:

“And I do wish, dear Doña Dolores, that you would tell me what this dreadful thing is she fears. She made me all creepy and goose-fleshy, and I guess—I guess I don’t like Indians, anyway, Mission-raised or heathen!”

Doña Dolores’ fine face had clouded, at hearing Juana’s message, and now laying her hand gently upon Polly’s head she seemed half-inclined to confide her perplexity to the bright eyed pleader. Then she restrained the inclination, forcing herself to laugh lightly, and saying:

“Why seek for unknown trouble, Margarita, who are but a child? Juana is a timid woman. Believe me. Si. Yes, yes, en verdad.”

CHAPTER IX

THE MERIENDA

THE merienda was but a great picnic in which almost all the families for a long distance around united. The ground was the gently sloping side of the near-by mountain, where were enormous patches of wild strawberries, and the social Californians made the gathering of this delicious fruit the occasion for a jolly annual "camping-out."

Streams of pure water flowed down the slopes, trees were plentiful, and storms unknown; so that many households remained in camp for the entire summer, nature's vacation time in that region as it is elsewhere. Temporary dwellings of all sorts were erected, from the basket-woven, tule-thatched huts of the Indian tribes to the canvas tents brought by shipboard from "the other ocean"; and now that the rodeo was over the assembled guests of Santa Rosa set forth, at once, for their holiday.

Wagons, such as had brought Polly to the

rancho, were loaded with mattresses, bedding, and all sorts of cooking utensils; for this luxurious people disdained "roughing it" even on a picnic. Ladies carried their wardrobes, or sufficient portions of them, to render themselves always able to appear freshly gowned and attractive, and were attended by servants in plenty to fulfil all their requirements.

But, as Roland still remained weak and lifeless, the doctor decided that he should delay joining the picnickers for a few days longer, and Polly would not leave him. Doña Dolores could not be induced to forsake her home, save that she promised to ride out to the camp as often as she could, and this would mean but a few hours' absence from Santa Rosa at any one time. For reasons she did not explain to her friends she felt this year the need of some clear headed person always at hand, and Polly was delighted to find that she was herself to be put in charge during these occasional absences.

"Oh! I am so thankful you will trust me, dear Mrs. Ysidro. It is only a little beginning of things to do for you, but I hope that many, many more will follow. You do not know

how grateful I am to you for your goodness to Roland and me. Only for you he must have died, and ——”

“None die but as the dear God wills, *niña mia*. We must remember that—no matter what comes to us. Things do not ‘happen’ in this world, though we say so in our unthinking fashion. For myself, I think that silly Juana has disturbed me too much with her talk. She is never at peace when that brother, Francisco, comes to Santa Rosa. Yet they were raised by the same good padre, though so unlike—unlike as those two plants, yonder, *en verdad*. The white calla, drinking all the water one can give it, to return us for our care its perfect blossoms—that is my faithful Juana; but the cactus beside it, drinks nothing and changes not. That is Francisco. As for Maro, her husband, he is—may I be forgiven my uncharity! he is all bad Indian.”

“Does he live at Santa Rosa, *Doña Dolores*?” asked Polly, wondering which of the many Indians dwelling there he might be.

“No. *Gracias a Dios*! No. Such as he ‘live’ nowhere. They but roam the good

earth, seeking what they may devour, like their brothers—the coyotes. At the creation there were many creatures put upon the land, and most of them were noble or had the nobility hidden in them. Si. In truth, two had neither goodness nor even decency, but were permitted of our Maker as afflictions upon us, His other children. Why? I know not. For our chastening, as I said. Who can tell?”

Polly had never heard her hostess speak with such fervor of dislike toward anybody, and she knew there must be some good cause for it. Hoping for an explanation she asked, “Who are the ‘two’?”

“The coyote and the bad Indian. Have I not the cruel rope-wounds seen upon my Juana’s shoulders? Was not one of her little children killed before its mother’s eyes because it chanced, like any teething baby, to cry aloud when its unnatural father would sleep? Ah! I shudder at the name of Maro, the Hawk. But ’tis many months since he has set his wicked, stealthy foot on this dear rancho, and God forbid that it should ever travel this way again. Enough. But alas!

that I who would be wise should have talked thus unwisely. Be not afraid, querida, only—be on guard. When the shadow of Maro, the Hawk, flits across our threshold—speed you for the nearest friend you can. But come! It is time for sleep, en verdad; and 'tis only because so many dear ones have this day left us that Santa Rosa seems so deserted and forlorn. Like the house of burial. But that Inez! The gay one! It is her absence makes the court so still. Wait. I will fetch my guitar, I, myself. And I will make soft music for the sick brother, that shall charm him into the sleep which cures. At once; now. Yes."

Polly had never heard her hostess play, but was not surprised to learn that she could do so. Indeed, she considered Doña Dolores to be as near perfection as any mortal could be, and the frequent wish of her heart was that dear Aunt Mercy could see and know this new friend into whose care her "troublesome but precious child" had now come.

The music which followed had the effect Señora Ysidro desired; it took the sharpness from the recent talk while yet leaving it un-

forgotten. She wished to put Polly upon her guard against possible danger, yet shrank from stating openly the fear which haunted Juana, and, indeed, Doña Dolores herself.

Roland fell asleep and Polly dreamed beautiful, ambitious dreams, listening to the gentle tinkling of the guitar and the sweet Spanish "Lullabys" the player chanted; so that seeing these young things so peaceful and content, Doña Dolores went early to her own bed, determining to ride to camp on the morrow and forget all forebodings of evil.

And when the day rose she did as she had planned, taking a vaquero for escort. This left Polly and Roland practically alone, with a few servants, mostly women. Since the rodeo was over most of the employees of the rancho took a brief vacation; some in the near-by town, some hunting in the mountains, and some following their employer to the camp.

Luther was "down with the rheumatiz" and his lugubrious expression reminded the easterners of their own Jonathan when afflicted with a similar "complaint"; though

Luther bore his suffering silently, which the other never did.

Juana and another Indian woman, with a boy or two, were in charge of the kitchen, Tomas having gone to the merienda to further astonish his master's friends by his wonderful cookery; and Juanita remained behind only so long as her new mistress did; then she, too, would away to the hills.

A few vaqueros were in their usual quarters, to attend to the crops in the fields and such horses as were left in the home corrals, though most of the animals had been ridden to the camp or turned out to pasture where they would. There was still at hand Nineto, the pretty piebald pony; and Jose's own pet black, Nito, which—as a special compliment—he had offered for Roland's use, so soon as he was again able to ride.

It was a beautiful morning when Doña Dolores rode away to the merienda, for her first brief outing of a day with her friends, and she was in the happiest of spirits, as were the brother and sister whom she parted from in the shady, flower-embowered court.

“Ah, my dears,” she cried, as eagerly as a

girl, "can there be any evil in a world so lovely as this? No. Indeed, I cannot believe it. Truly, if there were any treachery in any human heart, for very shame to be so black a thing on this sunshiny day it would creep out and die. Give thanks, my children, that the good God has spared you to each other and be happy together. All that is in the house is at your will, and I shall be back in time for the evening meal. If not—then when the same dear Dios wills. Adios! Adios!"

"Is she not the most beautiful, gracious woman who ever lived?" cried Polly, enthusiastically, and with a moisture in her eyes from her excess of feeling.

To her surprise, her brother did not respond with the same depth of sentiment, though he answered:

"Yes, she's handsome and—and good, I guess. But say, Polly——"

"Say what, dear?"

"Hmm. Is there anybody around, do you think? I've never had a chance to say a dozen words to you alone, before. Either that plaguey Luther——"

“Roland Pancoast! Such a tone—when that man saved your life!” interrupted the girl, reproachfully.

“Oh! I guess I wasn’t in such great danger. You always were a fusser, you know; and as for the doctor and Dowie—it’s to their credit to make a big ‘case’ out of nothing, and then claim they worked a wonderful cure.”

At this strange speech and at sight of the lad’s perturbed countenance, Polly was so astonished that she kept silence, scarcely believing her own eyes and ears. Then she exclaimed:

“Roland Pancoast, what is the matter with you? Do you feel worse?”

The lad made an impatient gesture, opened his lips—thought better of the words he would have spoken—and, finally demanded:

“Polly, have you any money?”

This was practical and natural. The pair had always received the same small “allowance,” and Roland had enjoyed the spending of both portions. The question relieved the anxious sister of her fear that her brother’s brain might be affected.

“No, dear. Not a cent. I wish I had. Why? Do you need money?”

“Do I need it? Polly, I must have it. I—I—am in—debt!”

“In—debt! How horrible! How can you be? Didn't father give you any money when he went away?”

Roland flushed and turned over on the cushions she had spread beneath a palm-tree for his use. He did not wish her to see his face, at that moment, and murmured something about the sunlight in his eyes, but he did not answer, otherwise.

Polly adored Roland and had done her utmost to spoil him, but that did not prevent her being angry with him on occasion, and she reckoned this as a warrantable one. Her retort was prompt and contemptuous.

“It isn't the sunshine that hurts you—it's my eyes. You're afraid to look into them. You've been doing something foolish, Roland Pancoast, and that's what makes you act so queer. Don't try to work your self-reproach off by saying ill-natured things of your good doctor or your faithful old Luther-nurse. Debt! I never heard of a Pancoast owing any-

body anything before—except—except——
Why! I suppose I'm in debt myself! And I'd forgotten the dreadful thing until this very moment. Why, the very clothes I have on are not paid for and——”

The effect upon Roland of this was to make him whirl over and spring up with an energy he had not shown before since his accident.

“You don't say so! Well—then you certainly can't blame me. It must be in the air of this California to make sensible people act extravagantly. Yes, sir! That's it! It's the air—nothing else. That's why the Californians all bow and scrape to each other, calling one another 'heart's dearest,' when they are really enemies, and signing a letter with 'I kiss your feet,' when they'd be the last people on earth to do such a thing. Oh! I—I wish I'd never come! I'd give forty years of this horrid California for one of dear New England!”

“Look here, Roland,” said Polly, “there's something beneath all this talk that's got to come out. First, I'll explain just what my debt is and how it happened—though that, of

course, was simply because I ran away. Captain Marshall gave me that passage on the Mary Ann and would simply never listen when I spoke of father's repaying him when they met. Then he made me feel that they were such friends that the mention of payment for such a matter as that would be an insult. Of course, I tried to 'work my way' by doing whatever I could for both the Captain and his wife, but I couldn't do much. They didn't need me, that is, not until she was hurt there in the Straits. After that I could nurse her and wait on her while she was helpless, and I did it. I was glad to do it; but, when we got here and I hadn't the right sort of clothes, that dear Captain made me take money and give it to Doña Dolores, and she has spent it for me. I consider that a debt, though Captain Marshall insisted that I'd earned it, and more, taking care of his wife. I shall ask father to pay him that back, anyway, even if he doesn't pay for the trip. Now, you confess. And, darling, please forgive me for being so sharp a minute ago. It's a case of a beam in my own eyes and a mote in yours, I guess. Oh! how little anybody

does ever understand herself! Do you forgive me?"

"'Course. Don't mention it," said Roland, magnanimously; again stretching his long body on the cushions she heaped for him. "We're both in the same fix, you see, and it's a shame. Polly, our father, Captain Hiram Pancoast, is a very rich man! He had no right to treat me as he did. Señor Miguel Mercado is an old bachelor and a great many men, mostly young ones like me——"

"Roland! You're no 'man'! You're only a boy, rather overgrown."

"'Gracias!' In this country men are men at my age. Well, let that pass. I—I've changed. I've developed since I left Woodley——"

"Indeed! I should think you had! I wish Aunt Mercy could hear you orate! And please don't talk anything but 'Yankee' to me. 'Gracias'—nonsense! Plain 'thank you' is best for us. But, dear, I don't want to be cross again and surely you know, all our lives it has been so, that I sympathize with you in everything. Tell me about your debts and, maybe, I can think a way out."

“Oh! Polly, if you could! You always had the better head of the two. And I do care a lot for you—even if I have changed. I don’t suppose people, even the closest friends—as we were——”

“As we are, Roland! Don’t say ‘were’—as if all our splendid happy times were past. As we are, Roly, as we are!”

Touched by the honest distress in her eyes, Roland sat up and drew her down upon the cushions beside him. Then she cuddled against him, just as she used to when they had climbed upon a haymow in the old barn at Rock Acre—to dream the dreams of what might be in their future. Neither had ever dreamed of just such a future as this, but it had come, was now their present—as the wiser Polly reflected—and they ought to make the most of it.

“Now, Roly,” she said. “Out with the trouble and let’s ‘lay the ghost.’”

“I’m afraid it’s too real to be a ghost, Polly, dear. Though our father is rich he didn’t leave me as much money as—as I wish. I was going to say again, ‘as he should have done,’ but I suppose he thought he was

treating me generously. He only didn't remember the difference between New England 'raising' and that of this country. I had to dress like the other men here. Polly, I simply had to! There was no other way unless I let myself be the laughing stock of the whole crowd. And I couldn't do that, you know."

"Maybe you couldn't, Roly. But I think if those silly boys had jeered at me it would have only made me prouder and more bent upon living my own way."

"Possibly. You've never been tempted, as I was, and I expect you would have asked the cost of things first. I didn't. Father was so kind to me all the time of our voyage, and when he left me seemed so proud and ambitious for me. I didn't know how much I really loved him till that last evening when he bade me good-bye, and said I was to 'make a man of myself' and forget the molly-coddling I'd always had. My cough was cured by the sea air and there was no reason why I shouldn't be a very successful ranchero. If I learned the business, he would buy a rancho and stock it for me.

“I tell you, Polly, he made me feel about ten inches taller and a deal more manly than I ever had before. And yet—the very next day I—was an ass!”

Polly's soft hand stole to her brother's lips and rested there in warning. Then she said:

“I've heard Aunt Mercy say that the first step to wisdom was to recognize one's own folly. Roland, do you know that, viewed from this distance, I begin to see that our plain spoken Aunt Mercy was a smart woman. Next? The debt?”

“I went to a Mexican store in the town and one of the other young men——”

“Boys!” interrupted Polly.

“Well, then, boys—selected a saddle for me, and a sombrero and—all the rest of the things. Polly, do you know how much my sombrero cost? My hat, you know?”

“No, I don't know, but I think it suits you about as well as it would—let me see, Deacon Lysander Griffin! Sombreros belong to dark people, not fadey-out white-haired ones. Honest, though! when I saw you with it on, and how neatly Jose had had the vaquero mend it for you I didn't wonder

your head was a little top-lofty. You are the very handsomest, dearest boy in the world. Except—when you aren't either a plain boy nor neither a real man. When you're just Roly Pancoast, you're as nice as you—need be. Go on about the sombrero that the horses trampled so."

It was small wonder that Roland was somewhat conceited, since this sister, who was so clever to detect humbugs, alternately flattered and reproved him in such fashion. But, at heart, he was afraid of the effect his confidence would have upon her, for she, as well as he, had been reared to think a dollar meant one hundred cents, and a full one hundred cents' worth of value must be received for its expenditure. As for hats, at Woodley he had worn none costing more than a few dimes; but this sombrero —

"Polly, that hat you pretend to despise cost one hundred dollars, and I got it below price! Just through the friendliness of one of the young señors."

Polly sprang up and away from him as if he had struck her, so shocked and amazed was she. When she could speak, she demanded :

“ Say it again ! I—I don’t think I heard you right.”

“ I paid over one hundred dollars for my sombrero. I paid one hundred and fifty for my saddle. I—I dare not tell you the rest. Our father left me five hundred dollars and supposed, indeed said, it would last me for a whole year or, at least, until he came again. Out of it I was to buy my horses—he has a whole dozen or more of his own, with a vaquero to look after them while he trades along the coast—yet he expected me —— ”

“ Wait, Roland. Don’t speak one word against our father. He is right. He is always right. Whether he were or not—that is nothing to us. We are not to question what he does, but to obey him. I haven’t obeyed him and I—I lie awake many an hour regretting it. I will try by all my future to prove my repentance to him, and now—though I have found you, whom I didn’t think I could live without, it doesn’t make up. Roland, I believe nothing—nothing ever makes up for wrongdoing. The only thing we can, either of us do now, is to try to get back to the simple life of duty and honest dealing that we learned at

Rock Acre. Now, don't let's beat about the bush, but face exactly the amount you—we both owe. How much is it?"

"Five hundred dollars, for my part."

"Oh!" gasped Polly, turning fairly faint at the enormity of the sum. "You mean—you really mean—that you have spent one thousand dollars since you have been in California?"

Roland, already terribly worried over his affairs, now seemed to see them in even a clearer and more painful light. He dropped his face in his hands and his hands upon his knees.

Polly said no more. Motionless, despairing, feeling herself, and Roland—dearer than herself, utterly and eternally disgraced, she sat upright on the cushions, gazing steadily through the gateway of the court, out upon the wide, sunlit plain, with eyes that, for a time, saw nothing but a mental picture of her offended father's face and the horrified one of gentle Aunt Mercy. How ill had her "beloved children" rewarded their upbringing!

Then, suddenly, she was upon her feet, her face pallid with terror, her eyes distended, her hand pointing through the gateway.



"LOOK ROLAND! OH, LOOK," SHE CRIED

“Look, Roland! Oh, look,” she cried.

As he leaped to a place beside her and saw what held her so rigid, his own heart sank and a terrible faintness assailed him.

There were Indians approaching, a great company of them, it seemed, all mounted yet moving stealthily, as if on evil bent. And suddenly, as if she heard it but newly spoken at her very side, there echoed in Polly's memory the fateful word which had dropped from Francisco's lips, the terrible thing that was facing them at that instant, of which Juana had warned in vain—a “Massacre”!

That was what it meant, the word she had heard in the Indian's own tongue, with all its attendant horrors. For an instant, Polly Pancoast felt as if she were already dead.

CHAPTER X

FROM PERIL TO SANCTUARY

ONLY for an instant. Then there flashed before her inner sight a vision of her own deserted home upon a distant, peaceful hillside, with Aunt Mercy's gentle face framed in its doorway. It was not to die that she had run away from all that; not to fill Aunt Mercy's motherly eyes with a keener anguish still! Die? She was yet alive, and Roland ——

Clutching his arm she whispered: "The horses! We must ride to save ourselves,— and the others!"

Roland had spoken truth when he said that he had "changed," had "developed," since he sailed away from Portland harbor. Polly had jeered at the sort of "change" which he had boasted, but he was now to prove her judgment wrong. Patted and shielded at home on account of his supposed delicacy, he had accepted the cossetting without question, and the more readily because he so disliked

cold and the rigors of a New England climate. Here, in the warmth and sunshine, his whole nature expanded and ambitions for other things than versifying and dreaming awoke within him. For the first time thrown with lads who were of his own age, yet esteemed themselves as men, he was roused to emulation of them. Unfortunately, as he had confessed to Polly, his first ambition had been to be like them in the matter of clothes; but this was a natural mistake for an strictly raised youth when given the command of money. The five hundred dollars his father had left him had then appeared an inexhaustible sum, and it had come to him so easily that he did not think, until too late, how difficult might be the obtaining of a second similar amount. It is the easiest thing in the world to learn extravagance, as many another beside poor Roland has found out; but now all these troubles and worries—concerning what had suddenly shrunk into the smaller things of life—were forgotten.

It was a new Roland who conquered the faintness which, during a moment, had turned him giddy and laid a reassuring hand on the

quivering one of his sister, and even at that supreme instant she looked at him in surprise.

“Don’t you be afraid, Polly dear! Nothing shall hurt you while I’m alive. This way.”

She had believed that he had hitherto enjoyed his new surroundings without much observation of them and, indeed, it had been an old trial that he “dreamed his way” through life without seeing any of its details. Now she found that he had made a keener use of his eyes than she had, for he pointed out a shortcut to the close-walled corrals, one of which she had not known, and as instantly led her along it.

This was across the court and screened from the sight of the Indians, and they gained the paddocks unobserved. Then said Roland, in a whisper:

“Find Luther. In the end room of the ‘quarters.’ Creep along the wall. He’ll know what’s to be done for the people here. I’ll have the horses saddled by that time and we can get away by that little gate behind. The buildings will screen us for a minute or so and then—we must keep our start. It’ll be

a ride for other lives beside our own—but we'll win!"

The usually deliberate Roland had never spoken with such rapidity nor authority, and he had not lost an instant, nor wasted one movement in getting the spirited horses out of their corral without noise and their heavy saddles upon their backs. Even while she sped on her way to Luther, lying on the bed in his own room, the sister wondered how her brother had become such an adept or knew so certainly where to find things. She did not then know how another of the boy's new aspirations had been to ride as the Californians rode—as if born in the saddle: nor how faithfully he had practiced during his stay at Las Palmas. At the rodeo accident his own horse had been so injured that it was promptly shot, and he was thankful beyond expression that Jose's kindness had left him one in its stead so swift as the beautiful Nito. Upon the creature's fleetness depended many lives that day.

Passing the kitchen door Polly reined up for the briefest instant, beckoned to Juana, pointed to the eastward, and rode on again—

leaving all behind to what fate might be. As for her, she now had but one thought—Doña Dolores and her sons! Even Inez ceased to be of greatest importance, remembering the beautiful and gracious woman whose home was threatened and whose life in peril.

“How—quiet—they—step!” Polly managed to say to Roland, under her breath, noticing the softened footfalls of the sagacious animals they had now safely ridden beyond the limits of the great court.

“They—know!” returned Roland, also whispering. Then, adding as quietly: “Now—for it! Straight southeast to that break in the hills. The Indians ’ll see us in a minute—but don’t you see them! Don’t look back—not once! Ride—ride—ride!”

Polly cast one terrified glance at her idol’s face, saw it set and stern till it seemed the face of a stranger, or that portrait of their great ancestor who died at Bunker Hill, then fixed her eyes on the foothills where, all unconscious of peril, idled and laughed the new friends whom she had learned already so to love.

Nineto proved the swifter horse of the two,

or, it may be, the more tractable under a stranger's hand. His little hoofs seemed to pick up and throw off the distance with increasing, rather than lessening, speed; intuitively selecting the grassiest route as if he understood that silence was even better than haste. But they had long since passed out of the hearing, if not of the sight of the Indians, who, apparently, had not pursued them, and Polly's courage deepened, seeing her goal draw nearer. Then, forgetting Roland's command that she should "not once look back" she glanced around, meaning to nod congratulations on their success thus far, and—he was nowhere in sight!

With a cry of alarm, she wheeled Nineto around and frantically scanned the landscape. Nobody was visible in any direction, not even an Indian. It was as if the mesa had opened and engulfed her brother, whom she was sure she had heard directly behind her only a moment before.

Then, in despair, she reflected. Had she heard him? Would it have been possible to do so, unless he were close at her side, on that soft sward over which she rode? Was it not

the dainty pounding of Nineto's small hoofs which she had fancied the heavier ones of Nito? Well, wherever he was, she must find him! and resolving this, and now unconscious of any danger to herself, she began to retrace her way. Slowly, at first, peering intently everywhere over the sunlit plain; then swiftly—as she dwelt upon the peril he was in.

But, all at once, something bade her stop. Roland was hers, her very own. She had already followed him over many waters, and should anything again separate them, now that she had found him?

Yes, something might—something should. Something deep down in her own heart, beneath its loving and its suffering, higher than its highest, profounder than its utmost depths. In that distant camp amid the hills were many hearts to break—hers was but one. There were mothers, sons and brothers—Oh! could any be so dear as Roland? Juana's warnings, so persistently uttered, yet so disbelieved in by her mistress and master—especially disregarded by him—had foretold a general uprising of her race. Polly had but vaguely comprehended this rumored trouble,

nor had Doña Dolores felt justified in burdening her young guest with anxieties at which her own husband laughed; but now the girl realized the peril which threatened all those gay people yonder, so helpless and unprotected.

“It isn’t Santa Rosa alone that must suffer. It’s everybody—if they aren’t told in time,” she thought.

Then duty won. Duty which, at that dark moment when she so longed to follow her brother, she hated with all her vehement might—yet must obey. And now her own fair face took on something of that resemblance to their brave ancestor, which she had seen on Roland’s a little while before, and Nineto was sharply wheeled around again—to face the foothills—away from Roland and his fate, no matter what it might be.

Things were at their loveliest and liveliest at that memorable merienda, everybody doing the utmost to make Señora Ysidro’s brief stay a delightful one and to banish from her brow that faint cloud of anxiety which rested there.

It was this anxiety which made her so often look away toward the spot where lay her beloved home, and thus be the first to see a far-

spent, piebald pony totter up the slope. As she ran to meet him, a half-fainting girl slipped from the saddle, made a last step forward, and extending her imploring hands, cried hoarsely :

“The Indians! Roland—Santa Rosa —— Quick! quick!”

Though her heart sank like lead, Doña Dolores put aside her own fear and soothed the tortured Polly, while Inez—white with sudden terror—rushed to the near-by spring and brought water for the needed draught, though her hands shook so that she spilled more than she saved. Alas! She, poor child, knew what an Indian’s arrow meant! and might not that which had bereft her of one parent claim the other, also?

Never was merienda “broken” so swiftly; and Polly was mistaken in believing the merry-makers to be unprotected. All the men had firearms, of some sort, carried from habit or for the hunting to be enjoyed upon the mountains as a variety to the berry gathering. With Don Santiago in command forces were promptly disposed.

Some of the gentlemen with their vaqueros

and other servants were to escort the ladies and children to the Presidio, and place them under the small garrison of soldiers there established. Or if, by some mischance unable to reach this point, to shelter them at the Mission on the way. Don Santiago and the rest would hurry to Santa Rosa, trusting to be in time to prevent much mischief, and confidently assuring everybody that :

“ A half-dozen white men can conquer a hundred redskins—dastards that they are.” Also, to Polly, he said, laying his hand caressingly upon her head : “ ’Tis the little gringo has done the brave deed this hour ! Bless the day she came to California ! ”

Then, leaving her flushed and grateful, as well as comforted by his own confidence, he rode away at the head of a goodly company, nor did he know that his beloved Dolores, attended only by the reluctant Tomas, followed him at a distance to their home.

A few servants remained to collect the tents and belongings of the picnickers, find and harness the wandering oxen, and drive the clumsy wagons toward the town, hoping to reach a spot of safety unmolested.

Señora Peralta was carefully placed in one of these wagons, made comfortable as it might be with mattresses and cushions ; and with her rode Inez and Polly, much against the latter's will. Even at the last she protested earnestly that she must go back to Santa Rosa and her brother, if he were there, or to follow him wherever he might be.

But Inez so pleaded for her company and was so terrified, not only on her own but her mother's account, that Polly again put self aside and consented to do as she was asked. Doña Dolores had been appealed to earlier but had decidedly opposed the little gringo's return to the rancho, saying :

“ If all is well there, you can be of no use, while to little Inez who loves you, you may be of comfort the unspeakable, is it not? When it is a question of ‘ I ’ or ‘ another ’ to be pleased, choose ‘ another. ’ It shall be well with Roland, brave lad. En verdad. He will be found—doubtless at the post of duty. It was the thought of the undefended women and sick Luther made him leave you—I know that. It is as if I heard him so declare. I, with my own ears. Si. Be comforted, niña

nia. We will soon meet and in happiness again. While, besides, at the Mission is the good padre, so wise, so gentle, and so fearless. You will be safe there. It is sanctuary. And the duty now—is to the orphaned Inez and the frail, trembling mother. Adios!”

There was “comfort unspeakable” to the sister herself in this suggestion concerning Roland. She had believed that some accident had befallen him, that he had fallen into some hidden gully on that wide mesa and so been lost to sight; that he was suffering somewhere on that trail from the rancho; and that if she might but retrace it she would yet be in time. But the longer she pondered Doña Dolores’ words the truer they seemed, and with an outburst of pride, she caught Inez’ hands, exclaiming:

“Oh! Inez! My Roland is the bravest boy in this whole world! I see—I understand everything! Why he bade me ‘not look back—not once.’ I thought it was because he would not have me see the Indians and lose my courage at the sight. But it wasn’t, it wasn’t! That dear, splendid hero—hero, Inez!—knew that it needed but one to carry

the news to the hills and that I could do it as well as he. But if he stayed at Santa Rosa he might help to save it and its people. That's why. Oh! how could I have been so blind and faithless before? That's why he looked so like our great-grandfather in the picture. Oh! Inez! To be the sister of a hero! Cannot I bear anything, anything, now, knowing that? Can any fate be grander?"

"Well, yes, I think so. En verdad. Si. It is fine. It is of the nobleness most noble. But for me, I, myself, I think that to be a heroine one's self—that is better than just being sister to a hero. It was you, after all, Polly-Margareta, who was the bravest this day. But for you—I might have lost my precious madre, also!"

"Nonsense, Inez!" cried Polly, sharply, disdaining credit which she felt was due wholly to her beloved brother, although she would have enjoyed this approbation had it not been at his expense. "If I hadn't been there to do the easier thing and just ride to the hills, he would have come himself. No harm would have happened to you or your mother, in any case."

“ Was it such a small thing, then? Were you not of the breath exhausted when you arrived? Was not the pretty Nineto almost dead with the urging, and you with the grieved excitement and the self-sacrifice? For do I not know, as if I had heard the two voices speaking within you, in your heart, how one bade you go back to the lad you loved, and one to the strangers of another country? Ah! Polly, he may be the hero, *en veritas*, but you are the—heroine! Ah! *heroína mia!* But the love I have for you!”

The wagon made its way unmolested, and it was like entering another world when they passed into the Mission grounds and were welcomed by Padre Gonzalez as if they were expected guests.

Then after Señora Peralta had briefly told her story and asked for refuge the good priest's manner grew even more cordial, though there was an anxiety in his fine eyes which even his courtesy could not hide.

Summoning an Indian woman, a neophyte of the Mission, who was a superintendent of all the other women there resident, he directed

her to convey their guests across the way to the long building behind that mighty hedge of cacti, which Polly had observed upon her arrival at the town. Within the enclosure, bounded on all four sides by this same impenetrable thicket of prickly pear, the refugees found ample quarters and felt that it would be an adventurous savage, indeed, who would try to pierce that spine-bristling stockade. They were assigned to one big chamber, though beds for each one's separate use were soon brought in. To the beds were added the other simple furnishings required, and another neophyte served them with beans and pieces of beef broiled on a spit. For the señora there was tea, and as soon as they had refreshed themselves with food all sought and found the further refreshment of sleep.

“Oh! It seems as if all I saw this morning was a dream!” cried Polly, as she lay down. “I don't worry a bit now. It is so quiet and peaceful here.”

“Yes. Under the care of God's own one may safely rest,” answered Señora Peralta, from her couch beside the window. “Sleep now, my children both; for I feel that to me

has this day been given another daughter, si. Heaven bless and reward her!"

Polly's heart thrilled with gratitude that she had found so much affection in this strange land, and closing her eyes she was almost instantly asleep. After great excitement there is apt to be a corresponding exhaustion, and for several hours she did not again move. Then, she awoke from a confused dream in which she fancied that Miss Brown's school-bell was ringing and that she was late, while Deacon Lysander Griffin accused her of some great crime which she must go and confess before the Sunday congregation.

"I'm sorry! Oh! I'm sorry! I didn't mean ——" she cried, hastily rising.

"Oh! there is plenty of time, yet, if you loiter not. One wouldn't anger the dear padre by tardiness, is it not? And the vesper service is so sweet. Hasten, for madre mia has already gone."

It was only Inez standing beside her, her kerchief over her head, and her feet impatiently tapping the floor of beaten earth.

"Listen, the bells! Are they not of the

sweetest, holiest music, si? From over seas they came on a big ship that could never suffer shipwreck, no matter how wild the storm, because of the holy bells of God. Away in that dear Spain, where I hope some day to go, the pious ones gave their gold and silver to make the bells, which should be rung in the wilderness to call the heathen Indians to worship. And the first thing, the very first thing the holy padre did, was to hang them in a tree-top and ring, ring, ring them—that the savages might hear. That was long, long ago, before even we, the Californians, came to our country. When there were only a few padres and soldiers here, beside the Indians. Now—— But haste! We shall be late!”

Polly tried to “hasten” as she was bidden, but everything “bothered.” Her curls tangled and there was no brush to straighten them and she discovered, in dismay, how soon and how completely she had learned to depend upon the little maid, Juanita, for the services which, at home, she had always rendered herself. And while she blundered through her simple toilet, Inez gave her fur-

ther bits of history concerning this, and the other missions which she so loved and venerated, so that the little gringo was in a most awed and serious mood when she crossed the road and entered into the white-walled church.

The roomy building was well filled, and most of the kneeling worshipers were neophytes, or Christianized Indians. Men and women, with little children, and all of them so devout, that she rubbed her eyes to stare at them again. Could it be possible that these were of the same race which had come out of the wilds to ravage and destroy such homes as Santa Rosa?

With a shudder of apprehension, that she had not thought would torment her again in "Sanctuary," the Puritan-trained New Englander bowed her own head; and though she understood not a word of the service going on about her, she did understand the spirit of devotion which actuated it, and offered her silent petitions with a fervid simplicity which would have satisfied even Deacon Lysander himself.

CHAPTER XI

A LONG LETTER HOME

“WELL, nobody else has come to the Mission, and I believe the whole thing was just a scare. Si. En verdad. Or else, maybe, the Indians were making one of their—their ‘raids’ is it? for more horses. That’s the worst of horses in California! One has them and one has them not. To-day is the corral full. To-morrow it is empty. Why? Because the Indians, they also, love to ride and mind not that they steal to do so. Remember pretty Blanco, madre mia? How he was in his corral at sunset and at sunrise he was gone? Well, that is how it has been this yesterday. Behold how the sun shines! Could it be so bright and yet look on evil? We shall hear the news that is good. Si. En veritas. Instante.”

So chattered Inez, happily and hopefully, to chase the look of care from the face of her mother whom she so loved. They had passed a quiet night. At least, she and Polly had

slept as soundly as if there were no anxiety in the world; and had not waked even when the silver-toned bells which Inez delighted to hear rang for matins.

Doña Eulalia, on the contrary, had not slept at all. During the night she had heard the soldiers, always on guard at the Mission, pacing to and fro; women who were commonly so silent at their rest-time talking earnestly, even if in low tones; and at the early service which she had attended had seen the padre's manner one of keen distress. And now she had small appetite for the well-prepared breakfast which had been placed before them.

“The Indians would not raid the horses at this time, *niña mia*. There are fewer at any rancho, or in the town, than at other seasons. Like you, it seems incredible to me that wickedness should be abroad under God's pure sunshine—but I fear. Ah! here comes the padre himself, and we shall have news.”

Entering, the priest gave them the salutation of peace, then courteously inquired for the health of his guests, though he already saw the answers to his questions in the ruddy cheeks of the two girls and the pallid ones of

the señora. His heart sank as he regarded her, for she looked so frail and wasted that he doubted if she ever left the Mission alive. In any case, he meant to detain her as long as possible, for San Pablo was the loneliest of the ranchos thereabout, and she without male relatives to share it with her. Trusted servants she had, indeed; yet—who was trustworthy now? questioned the disappointed padre.

“Your news, good padre? your news, please!” entreated Señora Peralta, as soon as the salutations were over; and her old friend saw that kindness rendered a prompt and truthful answer necessary. Else, he would have spared her all he could of the painful details she demanded.

“Prepare then, my daughter, to meet and hear it courageously. The sadder is my tale because of the perfidy of one whom I had felt was truly a Christian. It was the boy, Vincente, who betrayed his guardian; and it was for gold—gold, the accursed!—that Tomas carried on the treachery. What has an Indian use for gold? Nothing. Nothing. Yet——”

“Oh, my father! was anybody killed? Was it a—a ‘massacre’ as Francisco said?”

implored Polly interrupting. "My brother, the light-haired gringo—is he—is he ——"

Padre Gonzalez turned his pitying eyes upon her and forgave the interruption. Also, a smile came to his stern lips because he could answer her cheerfully.

"The youth of fairness like your own, si? He is well. He has but now brought a message and returned. He it is that seemed, they say, to bear a charmed life. Rather a life protected of the good Dios for the sake of many people. There was a fight. There are many dead lying unabsolved, unburied on the mesa. A score of red men, my poor wild children, for whom I myself would have died. And three vaqueros, who were toiling in the fields. When they saw the danger coming they started for the rancho but somebody—who shall say what one?—fastened the entrance between them and their weapons and they fell where they rode. But they were hurrying to their duty, to the defense of their master's property, and they died without sin. Vincente had boasted of the gold and Maro had heard. What Maro hears he turns to evil; for, alas! he is not among the dead!"

Doña Eulalia was startled by her priest's vehemence, and might have thought it sinful, had she not remembered that there is an anger which is righteous. Waiting a moment till he had recovered himself and said a prayer for his own forgiveness, she begged his news.

Santa Rosa was in ruins and, for the present, the family would remove to the Presidio ; perhaps, to remain there until their home was rebuilt. The rescuing party had been in time to prevent much loss of life to the people of the rancho, though their dead numbered four, and among these Juana, the faithful, whose warnings if they had been heeded might have averted the disaster. Also, and this was mainly due to Roland's efforts, the marauders had been disappointed of their plunder and it was in revenge for this that they had fired the buildings.

In the *mêlée* Vincente, unhappily covetous lad, had been wounded and, fearing death, had confessed to his uncle that, for the sake of a share in it, he had disclosed the hiding-place of the uncounted wealth stored in the low attic between ceiling of the living-room and the roof. This attic could be entered

only by a trap-door in this ceiling and the rope ladder used in ascending and descending was hidden where none but Señor Ysidro knew. Failing the ladder, access to the treasure could be had but by breaking the roof and this had been the course attempted.

Here it was that Roland's old schoolboy habit of tree-climbing stood him in good stead, for he had not lost a second in mounting to the tiles and wrestling with the would-be robber there crouching. Jose had promptly followed, and others had joined them, with the result that though his home was devastated the money with which to rebuild it was saved for Don Santiago. Concerning that struggle upon the convex tiles, Padre Gonzalez waxed eloquent and Polly listened with sisterly pride.

"But what could have tempted our poor Vincente?" asked Doña Eulalia, in amazement.

"What, my daughter, but the evil one—in the form of gold? The silly, misguided lad reasoned thus: that since a man could be so careless of his wealth as Don Santiago he would take the loss of it with equal careless-

ness. If detected in the robbery the Indians would escape punishment because they were so ignorant of right or wrong; and if they betrayed his share in the matter family pride would prevent Señor Ysidro from noticing it further than by a private reprimand. But Vincente relied upon the fidelity of Tomas—the real planner of the outbreak; and through him upon Francisco—then upon Maro, the Hawk.”

Francisco's part had, indeed, been an uncertain one. He had warned Juana, his sister, of what was transpiring among the neighboring redskins, and she had pleaded with him that if he chose, if he was not a coward at heart, he could prevent it.

But, in truth, that was just what the fellow was—an avaricious coward. He feared Maro, whom he looked upon as a great, if wicked, warrior, and he craved gold. He had been but a go-between until it was too late, and he saw then that by his own weakness Juana had come to her death. He had now disappeared.

“Well, my daughter, the end of the unhappy business is that the Indians have been

driven back, beaten, to their rancheria and will be peaceful for a time. The Don was right: a few determined white men are more than a match for many times their number of my wild children. The fair-haired gringo, Señor Pancoast, will do what more he may be able for the Ysidros, then return to his home at Las Palmas, to continue as his father wished him. All the rancheros will be in perpetual guard—and I—ay de mi! I must to the burials of the dead.

“As for you, honored lady and beloved children, consider this House of God your home for a long time to come. It is better so. And when el Capitan returns he shall find his daughter, our brave little gringo! glowing with health and grown in the wisdom. Adios, my children all. Adios.”

There was nothing to do but accept the situation, and to Doña Eulalia this was the one spot where she could be most at rest and in peace, concerning the future of her darling child. She had always intended that, in case of her death, Inez should live with the Ysidros. Doña Dolores was the friend of a lifetime and the comadre, godmother, of the girl.

The relation between godparents and their godchildren's families was always closer, even, than between those akin by blood; and Doña Eulalia had had no fear concerning Inez' future.

However, this present arrangement was well; and while the girls found their new existence monotonous there were still some novelties about it which were most interesting to Polly, at least. Also, finding that she could write, Padre Gonzalez provided her with pen and paper and she began a long letter to Aunt Mercy, which she meant to forward by the first eastern bound ship of which she could hear. Thus she wrote, Inez eagerly watching every movement, then trying herself to copy upon another sheet the curious, difficult characters which her companion inscribed so easily. Also, she learned her alphabet and made such progress that, almost before her young instructor knew it, she was spelling words of one syllable and ambitious for those of two.

But this is what Polly wrote to Aunt Mercy.

After describing all that had befallen her-

self and Roland since they left Woodley, she resumed :

“ And now, dear Aunt Mercy, you will understand how I, even I, Polly Pancoast, happen to be living at a Mission. Sweet Doña Dolores wouldn't like that word 'happen' and I know you won't. Yet it seems just 'happen'—not as if all this strange story could have been planned for, as she believes. Oh! I can hardly wait for you to know that lovely woman! Except you, dearest, I believe she is the noblest one in the world. I never saw anybody, beside you, so unselfish. It is as if you were twin sisters in your souls, though she had been raised a Roman Catholic and you a Congregationalist. Maybe it isn't what dear Deacon Lysander would call 'orthodox' to say that I suppose it's the same God—Dios—you both love. And you'll be surprised, too, to see that word 'dear' written before the Deacon's name. I wasn't so fond of him when I was at home as I am now, away from it. Oh! dear! Looking back on them it seems as if every single person in Woodley township was adorned with a halo, like the pictures on the white walls of this

Mission. I love them all, now I can't be with them—which sounds silly but is the truth.

“There are thousands of cattle and horses belonging to the Mission just as there are to the ranchos, and there are almost as many Indians—the converted ones, not the uprisers—to take care of them. Indeed, I don't believe a Californian could count anything except by the thousand. Inez cannot imagine how we got along with just seven cows, though I tell her we had lots more of nice milk and butter and cheese than they have here. Well, the good Padre Gonzalez has let his Indians have a 'temescal' and last night they used it. A 'temescal' is a hole, or cave, dug in the side of a hill, with a little hole in the top for the smoke to go out. There is a pool of water close by, and what do you think they did? Why, they made the hottest kind of fire they could and heated great stones in this cave and then a great many of them, men and women, went in and sat around the fire till they were about roasted, or par-boiled I guess is better. Then when they had perspired until there wasn't any more perspire left in them out they ran into the night air—it's always cool

here at night, you know—and plunged into the pool and danced about in it and had the wildest fun ever was. But when somebody gave a signal, out they came again and ran dripping to their quarters as gay as—as I didn't think Indians could ever be.

“Living in a Mission is teaching me some things I couldn't have learned at Miss Brown's school, or even at the Academy at Portland. For one thing, I should have expected to starve to death, if I had to fix flour for bread as the mahalas, or squaws, do it here. They have a metate, or flat stone; not very large, set upon three legs, one shorter than the others, so that the stone slants from one end to the other. There is a little rim on the metate to keep the wheat from rolling off, and with another smaller stone the poor patient mahala crushes the grain for her bread or cakes. They powder the red peppers that way, too, after they are dried; and though I'm beginning to like it better than at first, I do wish I could have one dish of something that hadn't pepper in it. I think my tongue has become quite callous already.

“Of course, for the Mission family, proper,

there is a little better kind of mill. Two large, heavy stones, with a sort of hopper in the top where they pour the wheat. A burro turns the upper stone round and round and the flour falls onto a platform beneath. If the mahala or the burro doesn't get the stuff fine enough at first they have to do it over and over again, till they get it right, as you made me with that one stocking I knit once, and that nearly drove me crazy, I hated it so. I'm sure I never could be a mahala or a burro. I haven't the patience; and, by the way, Padre Gonzalez says there is some talk of somebody—rather indefinite, it seems to me—but, maybe, sometime, there will be a real grist mill! Where people can get as much as an arroba of flour at one time. Think of it! With all their money, not to have real mills ages ago! An arroba is a weight of twenty-five pounds. It's a new word I've learned and I do love to air my Spanish. I hope, dearest auntie, that you are duly impressed, and when you read this letter to Jonathan, please lay particular emphasis on my foreign language. Blessed old Jonathan! If I could think of some great

remedy in use here I'd tell him about it, but I can't think of anything now except rattlesnake oil and that's too creepy to suggest. The Indians like it though. I wonder if they use it to 'dress' their grasshoppers with! for I'm told the grasshopper is the delight of an Indian epicure.

"It is almost time for the matanzas, and I'm more interested in that than in anything else. Because it's the time when—if ever—my dear father should come to this place. But—I'll write more about that some other time. Inez has just come to me in great excitement. There is to be a conscription for the army and Jose Ysidro, and Vincente Castro—who's all well again—are expecting to be drafted. They hate it. There is no war and to be in the army is, they think, the worst fate a young Californian gentleman can endure. I must go and hear about it and will write some more—some time. In any case, this letter has been a great many days on the 'quilting frame,' but I shall finish it very fast, as soon as I hear of a ship that will carry it. I've rather been waiting to hear of Captain Marshall being in port. His voyages on this

ocean are not so very long, I guess, and if he takes it I know he will do so straight to your own dear hands. Then he will tell you all about your runaway, far better than she can write. So, good-bye, for now."

There was a break of many days before Polly resumed her letter, though the writing of it was a great pleasure to her and seemed almost like having a talk—though a one-sided talk—with her far away aunt. But, at last, came a day when she found leisure to continue it, and she did so, seated at a little table under the date palms in the garden. Inez was with her, of course. They were inseparable and Polly felt that she could not have loved an own sister better than she did this little Californian, whose life just now was shadowed by a coming grief.

"Dearest auntie, I've laid this aside for so long that it seems a fresh letter I'm beginning. Doña Eulalia has been very ill. She is so, still, and Padre Gonzalez has told me that he cannot believe she will be with us long. Inez knows this, at last, and her courage under her sorrow is wonderful. We have both watched the señora and waited upon her almost en-

tirely. She likes our attention better than that of the Indian women here, although they are devoted to her and would do all in their power for her. But she cannot forget that they are Indians, still, and that it was by one of their race that her husband was killed.

“She is better, to-day; that is, she is not suffering so much, though her sweet face has grown painfully thin and wan. It brings the tears to my eyes just to look at her when she is asleep, but Inez never cries. She scolded me for doing it, lest it should grieve her mother and said: ‘I won’t weep now. There will be time enough for tears—afterward.’ But there! I mustn’t let myself get thinking about her or I shan’t be able to see to write.

“The matanza is over. The matanza is the killing time and, to me, it is a dreadful one. It is as bad as if all the farmers and butchers in Maine had had one general slaughtering day. The Mission has a large herd of cattle which are paid by the rancheros as ‘tithes’ out of their own stock. ‘A tenth of the increase of the cattle belongs to the Lord,’ Padre Gonzalez told me, and I couldn’t help wondering if the Lord liked to have His por-

tion paid in the blood of helpless creatures. But then—I'm only a girl and many, many things puzzle me.

“ But the padre asked us to go and see the matanza, as I was so interested in everything about California, and we went. They put fifty cattle into a corral, and a vaquero lassoed one by its horns and led it out of the corral to the spot where they wanted it. Then another vaquero came up and lassoed it by its leg. Then the man on the horse made it take a sudden leap—the horse seemed to know just what was expected of it—and the poor, rope-caught creature was thrown to the ground. Next the vaqueros tied the animal's legs all together in a bunch, leaving their riatas with one end fastened to their saddles and the other on the fallen steer and the horses standing as firm as a rock with the ropes drawn taut. Then —— But I can't write about the next part. They killed the beast, that is all; and after it hundreds more. But I was interested to know about the hides and tallow, for that is my father's business, the horrid stuff he deals in and makes his money out of. It takes two days to kill and 'try out' fifty cat-

tle, and there were many, many days of the work. They stretch the skins out on the ground to dry, and they 'try out' the fat in great pots. There are two kinds of fat, it seems. The outside fat, next the skin, is what they put, when it is half cooled, into bags made of the skins—some of them—and sold to father and other supercargoes for tallow. He buys the skins, or hides, too, and that is the cargo he carries all the way to New England. There is an inside fat which is finer, and that the people here use as we use lard at home. It brings a good price and but very little of that 'doubles the Cape.' They throw the horns away, or give them to any supercargo who will carry them off. Father, they say, does take a great many to Boston. I don't know what they do with all the meat, though the Indians eat a great deal of it. I suppose at Woodley they would make it into 'dried beef,' for Luther Dowie cures enough for his own use even here. But they either don't have much salt or don't know how to use it as they do the red pepper, so lots of things go to waste. I think it would worry you, the waste that goes on in this country.

“ I wrote all this about the matanza because I want you and Miss Brown to know that I am trying to learn all I can, even of unpleasant things.

“ Besides, I wrote about the matanza, partly, to tell you why I am worried. Our father should have been here long ago. Especially he should have been at the matanza, because the supercargoes of the different ships always arrange beforehand with the cattle owners for their hides and tallow, sometimes a year ahead. If they don't come and claim their property, why, the rancharo or padre doesn't wait for them. The first supercargo that comes gets it, and the one who bargained finds nothing left for him. There is a lively competition among the different ship-people, I hear, and they say that father is one of the liveliest buyers 'on the coast.'

“ People are getting worried about him. Other people besides Roland and I. They think I don't know it or overhear their remarks to one another, but I've picked up enough of their Californian talk to understand; and we have settled it, my brother and I, that if nothing is heard from father

very soon we will start 'up-country' to look for him. That is, I have settled it, though Roland is inclined to object. Anyway it seems as if I couldn't wait any longer to let him know what I did—run away—to ask his forgiveness, and to try to prove to him by my actions that I am sorry and willing now to obey him in everything. When I see Inez grieving for her mother yet saying nothing—I begin to think of father and what I should feel if I never saw him again. I ——”

There was another sudden break in this lengthy epistle, and then an abrupt conclusion.

“Dearest auntie. This is my postscript. Padre Gonzalez has just told me of a ship that sails for the Atlantic this very day. He is sending letters of his own by the ship's captain, a stranger, and not dear Captain Marshall, as I had hoped would carry this, and tells me to finish and seal it at once. He will dispatch it with his own mail, and so, in a terrible hurry at last, with a thousand and one things to say yet —— Good-bye, good-bye, my dear, darling, precious Aunt Mercy Hallock, of Rock Acre Farm, Woodley, Maine!

I needn't send any love in the letter—that is already with you. Polly.”

Thus the epistle ended in a way that would cause the recipient on the “other coast” many an hour of anxiety, but Polly did not think about that until it was too late, and the letter had gone. For wise as she was striving to become, Polly Pancoast was still but a girl, and sometimes a very thoughtless, if greatly loving, one.

CHAPTER XII

NATURAL TEARS AND MYSTERIOUS LAUGHTER

SOME further time had passed when, in answer to a summons sent by a passing messenger, Luther Dowie appeared at the Mission to see Polly. Already he foreboded what her business with him might be, for she had hinted at it on their last meeting, but he was not one to meet trouble half-way, and calmly waited for her to begin. She did so with some hesitation, deprecating disapproval; but finally, out came the matter in a great hurry:

“Luther, I’m going to find my father. Roland will go with me—I hope.”

Luther continued to chew the bit of herbage which he held between his lips, without remark, his gaze fixed on the prickly-pear hedge inside of which they stood.

“Why don’t you say something—anything?” demanded Polly, her heart sinking at his apparent want of sympathy.

“That’s a ticklish job,” he observed, and he pointed to the cacti spines.

“Well, what of it? We aren’t trying to break through it, are we?” asked the little gringo of this taller one, who seemed so like “home folks” that she turned to him naturally in trouble.

“Same thing,” he replied, sententiously.

“Do you mean that it will be just as difficult to find him?”

He merely nodded, affirmatively.

“But difficulties won’t stop me. I hope they won’t stop Roland.”

Luther could express a great deal without saying a word. Now, by the simple lifting of his eyebrows and his inquiring gaze he demanded the whole story; and it showed how readily the pair understood each other that Polly immediately answered the look, at the same time pushing a small garden seat toward him. She knew that he had walked a long way to see her, declaring that for a man as rheumatic as he that exercise was easier than riding. He accepted the chair without thanks, considering that his doing so was equivalent; then he turned the pea-cod over and again waited, calmly.

Polly dropped on the ground at his feet

and clasped her hands upon his knee, saying :

“There’s something wrong about father’s not coming. I can see that all his friends think so, and he has a great many here. Hasn’t he?”

“Yep.”

“I’ve thought it all out. I can ride. I can ride much better than I could when I was at home, and I’m sure Señor Ysidro will lend me Nineto. If Roland will only go—— We can ride up north over all the roads by which he would come and—and find him.”

“Might come by sea. Few head-winds that way,” commented the gañan, or ploughman, with an extravagant waste of words.

“If he were coming by sea he would have been heard from. That man whom Roland saw, that other captain, said the Columbia was still at Yerba Buena, waiting orders to come south. Oh! I know all about it. I found a rough map in Padre Gonzalez’ library and it showed that place away up at the north and this so far down the coast. The man said that nowhere, at any port, had there been word

of my father and—Luther! I can't bear it! I cannot!"

The other said nothing—in words. He simply laid his rough hand on Polly's drooping head and stroked it awkwardly. In his own heart he felt, as his neighbors did, that harm had in some way befallen the jolly Captain Pancoast whom everybody liked. Also, he comprehended how the runaway girl was doubly unhappy because of her disappointment at confessing her fault—if fault it had been to follow her kin. Luther was not so sure about that as he was of some other things. If this impulsive child did put her plan into action there was nobody on that side the continent who had a right to forbid her. Roland was older, but of his authority there was question. Besides, if Polly started on her "wild goose chase," the boy was certain to join her in the quest. He might object now, but he would never stay behind if she departed. There was another matter he decided then and there but, for the present, kept to himself.

"I hate to leave Inez, knowing, as the doctor says, that her mother cannot live long;

but my father is dearer than anybody except Roland—— And—— Why, what?"

It was not the hour for any service, yet at that moment, the bells in the church tower began to toll, very slowly and gently, a few strokes at a time—then a pause: and on again, and again. The women busy about the great house within the court fell on their knees where they chanced to be and bowed their heads in prayer.

Luther, also, uncovered his grizzled pate and reverently covered his face with his hand, while through Polly's heart shot a keen pain of sympathy for one she loved.

"Poor Inez! It is the Passing Bell. Doña Eulalia's sufferings are over," she thought. Then memory reminded her how she had heard just such solemn tollings in that distant village where she was born and again she realized that, all the world over, human nature is the same in its joys and in its griefs.

But there also came, though without rejoicing, the reflection that now she was set free from her self-imposed duty of sharing Inez' sick-room watch. The orphan would at once be taken in charge by Doña Dolores at the

Presidio, whither she, too, would doubtless be expected to go. But her mind was made up to a far different course, and unless it was impossible to carry it out she should not give it up.

Yet for that day, at least, she must put her own affairs aside. So, rising from the ground where she had waited until the bells ceased to toll, she whispered to Luther that she would see him again as soon as she could, begged him to help her in her trouble by planning her trip for her and by persuading Roland to "a right way of mind," and softly crept into the house and to Inez.

"Poor little creatur'! She's a full orphan herself by this time, I misdoubt. 'Tisn't in reason but what there's some harm happened the Captain. Yet who can blame her for wanting to find out for certain, or find him—alive—as she looks to do? Poor little gringo girl!" thought the close-mouthed Luther.

In due time, Inez alone went with her comadre to stay at the Presidio. To all invitations, even entreaties, that she would share this safe home, Polly had returned a decided if piteous refusal, though she consented to a few days' visit, saying:

“ I came to California, by myself, to find my father. I must still find him if—he is alive. If he is not, and so beyond hearing all I want to say, I must find that out, too. I shall start alone, on my own feet, if I am not allowed to go in a better way. It isn't, dear Doña Dolores, that I do not love you and appreciate all that you are doing for a stranger ——”

“ Never a stranger to me or mine, niña mia,” interrupted Señora Ysidro, reproachfully, “ but the new daughter I have found, such as the good Dios might have sent to make me glad.”

Polly caught the lady's hand and kissed it; but there was no alteration in her decision.

“ That is so sweet of you to say, señora; and if my father were here I would never want to go away. I would like to send for Aunt Mercy and have our own home here, and have my darling auntie get warmed through and through, just once in her life. I remember her best as shivering with the cold of a New England winter, and though our summers were delightful—ugh! but it was bitter at New Year! I'd like to have her bask in this sunshine till, for once, she was

nicely comfortable and cozy. Maybe all that will come true—when we find father.”

“Caramba! As for me, I, myself, would enjoy of that coldness a breath on this so sultry morning!” returned Doña Dolores, with fervor. “And as for that ride up the hot coast—ah! my child! Abandon the plan for the present. Si. Put it aside and trust to the good Dios that all is well.”

Polly flushed. She disliked this continual contention for the plan she had formed and considered right and she hated to go against the wishes of this kind friend. The height of summer heat was then upon that land, with the parching dryness that saps all moisture from everything and that would grow worse and worse until the autumn rains. But the cool nights made Polly forget the scorching days and her anxiety gave her no rest.

“Yes, dear señora, it is terribly hot just now, I know that, though I do not mind it in these nice thin clothes you got for me. That reminds me, I want to know how much they cost, if you please? That is, how much more there is to pay for them, so that I can tell my father and ask him to return it to you.”

Even Inez, sitting silently beside her beloved gringo, whose arm clasped her fondly, started from her sorrowful abstraction at this question. The discussion of pecuniary affairs—— Why, what had young girls to do with such matters? Did not one's attire come as naturally as their feathers came to birds? Was it not of the rudeness, the discourtesy, indeed, to ask for a reckoning of money? En verdad. Si. So Inez had always thought, accepting all her simple yet beautiful garments with no more care concerning them than she had about the sunshine which warmed her or the flowers that made her glad.

Even Señora Ysidro was, for an instant, perplexed. She had always been accustomed to help her husband with "accounts," intending to relegate this duty to her son Jose as soon as he was fitted to perform it; but those were large affairs. As for this small business of the little gringo—she remembered now. That other capitan, of the name Marshall, who was the friend of her friend, el Capitan Pancoast, why, yes! He had given her money and said it was for the child, Polly.

For clothes? Had it been for them he meant it? Would she not of her own free will and expense provided for any stranger within her gates who was in need? Surely, surely. And Polly-Margareta had sorely needed. For her, she herself, there was the opinion concerning that Tia Mercy in the cold New England! The woman must be of the nature to match the land where she lived, else no child belonging to her, as this sunny faced gringo, would have been so impoverished of the wardrobe as was her small guest. No. Indeed, no. But the reckoning—— Well, if the troubled Polly-Margareta wished to hold it in her own possession—— To be sure she should.

“Wait, *niña mia*. I will return,” observed the *señora*, after thus much reflection on the subject; and, going into another room for a moment, presently came back, carrying a small purse of Mexican stamped leather. This she opened upon Polly’s lap and laughingly counted from it the whole amount she had received from Captain Marshall—twenty-five dollars of American gold.

“Now behold! Is it correct, my wise little maiden of the book-learning, yes?”

Polly gazed at the coins, amazed. Then asked in an awed whisper, "Was all that left?"

"All left, is it? To be sure. Certainly. Without doubt. Why? Is it not sufficient?" exclaimed Doña Dolores, with more spirit than Polly had ever seen her show and with such a color deepening on her cheek that the easterner saw she had offended. Inez, also, gave her a hasty nudge; for the little Californian knew what the other girl did not: that her hostess would on no account have touched the money she held in trust for the stranger, and that the question the latter had asked had seemed an imputation upon the señora's honesty.

"Sufficient! Oh! It makes me rich! It makes everything possible. It takes away the last obstacle against our going to find father. Oh! you darling lady! Captain Marshall did not tell me how much there was, but I don't see how you could, how you possibly could, have bought me all you did yet had so much remaining. I had wondered how we should buy food along the way, in case the fruits and berries were not enough;

but this makes me feel so safe and happy. I understand now what Jonathan meant when he used to say that 'your money is your best friend.' Without it one is so helpless, I guess. Yet, here have I been all this long time and had not a cent before—and, oh! I don't know! Things are so puzzling and life is so—so hard!"

Doña Dolores was but half-mollified and wholly surprised. "Life hard!" So had said the sunny one, yet—— As she looked up Inez shot her a comprehending glance—of warning, of patience, and of things to be explained. So the generous señora smiled again. One could always understand her beloved godchild, who was of the same people and habit. And, in any case, Polly had meant no affront and she was, herself, already ashamed of her fleeting vexation. Hark! there was the bugle sounding! It was difficult for the men in uniform, but always the children loved to see the soldiers at their drill. The soldiers—— Ah! In the mere word was suggestion of fresh trouble for herself. But put it aside—the "bridge" need not "be crossed" just yet; and the gay sight

might bring a smile back to the sober lips of the darling Inez.

Polly carefully bestowed her purse in a safe place behind a pillow of the bed, thereby arousing another exchange of glances between her friends, and followed them beyond the ramparts to the plain before the Presidio where the soldiers were forming in ranks for their daily practice.

To themselves this practice was most tiresome, though it formed an important feature of their monotonous day; and from the shade where an officer courteously placed her and where other refugees at the fort joined her, the once busy mistress of a great rancho compassionately watched the manœuvres of the guard.

“Oh! but it is the dreary, idle life—this army! If there were war, a mother might give her son to the good cause. Si. For one’s country much can be done and suffered. En verdad. But to live like this, ants in a hill without the industry of ants—wearing away manhood and ambition and all that makes life worth living in an endless round of—nothing at all! The conscription — I

hear there is a fresh one to be made immediately," remarked Señora Ysidro to another mother near.

"Si. But, in truth, there may be fewer to conscript than the fine government requires. What prevents our sons from departing to safer places and till safer times, is it not? I, for I, myself, would furnish the fleetest horses and the fattest purses. Si. En verdad," returned the mother with conviction, and not caring one whit if the whole garrison overheard.

"The great General has already one hundred, maybe two hundred good soldiers at Sonoma, is it not? This then is number in plenty to capture the Indians which molest. If the gringos come in force sufficient—as some say they will—to take our California from our own government, of what use then a few men more or less? They are a great people, los gringos. A man whispered to his neighbor and his neighbor to me, of a truth, that the 'Squad of Ten' to capture and draft our sons is marching upon us even now. Well, then, I have a plan, I. Listen. If one could pay money to purchase immunity, that were well.

But no. One's only son and no other—upon that will the General insist. I have a plan, I."

Señora Ysidro, also, "had a plan." If this were true that she had heard, if the "recruiting squad" were already marching southward toward her home, it was full time that her plan should be tested. Also, it was a plan which might help Polly, the little gringo, to attain her own desire. It would make an excuse, and a reasonable one, for the departure of those whom she would rather not have found when called for.

A sudden smile, amused and brilliant, overspread the mobile features of the lady of Santa Rosa, and courteously bidding her neighbor on the bench "Adios," she rose and bade the two girls follow her. To Polly she was especially kind, beaming upon her with that strange smile and saying, enigmatically:

"The little daughter of an eastern village—rancheria, pueblo, what you will, si? She, the unknown, to thwart the mighty government which lords the California republic! Niña mia, the little one, the innocent Fair-Hair,

against the grizzled veteran! My hand upon it, querida, the Fair-Hair wins!"

When they had reentered her rooms at the Presidio, Doña Dolores made all haste to dispatch messengers for several persons: her husband; her son, Jose; Vincente; Luther Dowie; and Ronald Pancoast. Moreover, she was so impatient for the return of these messengers and the appearance of those whom she had summoned by them that she could not content herself with her drawn work and a quiet seat by the palm shaded window, but must needs pace the long apartment restlessly, thereby heating herself uncomfortably and greatly surprising the little maids who watched her. Yet all the time her face so sparkled with mischief that Inez, whispering to Polly, asked:

"Can you not now believe what all the old women say about my comadre? That when she was of our age, querida, she was the merriest one in California? That at all the fandangoes and fiestas, it was she, Dolores Martinez, who set every one to laughing, and that where she passed all tears were dried. Ah! But what can it be now, at this late day when

she is the mother of big sons, that should make her so gay?"

But to them the señora vouchsafed no explanation until hours later, when those for whom she had sent arrived and gathered to a sort of council in the big room where, with lighted candles and drawn curtains, she eagerly awaited them.

Don Santiago was as much in the dark as anybody, and, wearied by his day's supervision of the rebuilding of his home, was inclined to resent her gayety. After the affectionate salutation with which he greeted her, he asked:

"But what is the mystery, querida mia? Not since the destruction of Santa Rosa, our dear home, have I seen you look like this. It is as if all sorrow and anxiety had passed from you and left you but a girl again. Yet homeless, so to speak ——"

"Here, Jose. At my side, close. Let me have all of you I can and when I can. Ah! my son, my son! Are you not worth many, many homes to me—to us? And what would any home, even Santa Rosa again as it was, be worth without our boy? Eh? Answer me that, if you can, sweetheart," cried this hith-

erto dignified matron, seating herself upon a settee and drawing Jose down beside her. Then she pushed Polly forward, who blushed and stared and could scarcely believe her ears when she heard the señora demand—of anybody who chose to reply: “And is not this the dainty little conspirator, this little gringo from that state of Maine? Who sails over two big oceans, and, daring baby that she is! defies a mighty government? What shall be done to her? What punishment is fit for such as she, save this—and this—and this?”

At each repetition of the word, Polly was caught against the mother’s breast and kissed and kissed again: while the astonished audience stared and wondered if the beautiful woman had suddenly lost her good sense.

Not so good Luther Dowie. He had not been a silent, close observer of humanity for so long without understanding something of its workings. Doña Dolores was caressing Polly, but the love in her eyes was for Jose. In fact, then, she was using Polly to benefit Jose. How? Ah, he understood!

“Humph!” he said tersely. “Fine body-guard for Polly.”

CHAPTER XIII

THE SENORA'S PLAN

DONA DOLORES laughed, and so gaily that the others laughed with her, though without understanding why. Then she held out her hand to Luther Dowie, and this action was in itself surprising to Don Santiago.

But the gañan showed no hesitation in returning the hand clasp, bowing as courteously as a Californian might have done, smiling so brightly that his rugged face was transformed, and remarking only :

“Thank you. I'm responsible. At once.”

With that he went away, nodding to all the company present and leaving his mistress to explain the riddles which they two, alone, understood. She did this now, though in a roundabout fashion, prolonging to the utmost her delight in puzzling the others, yet sure that she would meet with no opposition in the end.

“The good son of our uncle Briones lives at Yerba Buena?” she asked of her husband.

“Certainly. You have long known that, querida. Porque?”

“Yes; and of the mighty General he is the friend. Of a friendship so close, en verdad, that they are but brothers with differing names. Am I still right?”

Señor Ysidro nodded, yet still puzzling what was in his clear-headed wife’s mind. Something to the point, and to their mutual happiness, he was sure.

“Buen’. Brothers in heart can influence one another. If in anything one seems to go against the General, the friend, our uncle, has but to speak the word and all is well. Now from the north sends out this great man to conscript our Jose, our Vincente,—many more. To the north departed the good father of our Polly-Margareta. Comes he again? Not yet. Buen’, I say. Then to seek him ride our beloved little gringos whom none can conscript. Well, then, for escort, our children go too. Is it courtesy to let a guest depart alone? In truth, no. No, indeed, no. But if one rides toward the conscripting guard, one cannot so be accused of disloyalty to one’s Republic. Si?”

“Tate! Softly, querida mia!” warned Don Santiago, amused by his wife’s ingenuity. “One should love one’s country, one’s government—that is true.”

“One’s country, yes. If in danger, then let the conscript take its course. But one adores one’s son! Between a government and a son I do not hesitate. Let us go on. Though one rides toward the ‘squad’ one need not necessarily meet it, eh? This California is wide and its roads many. The easiest road is by the coast, from Mission to Mission, and that way will travel the ‘squad.’ From Mission to Mission will ascend Polly-Margareta, commandress of a party—some might call them rebels. When the ‘squad’ is at one Mission, our children are at another. They will be looking always for a missing Capitan, and in good time they will find him. Then the joyful return—everybody safe, not one forced with the army and still not one disloyal. Save this sweet small gringo from the state of Maine, who so innocently frustrates the designs of a mighty, patriotic government. For Polly-Margareta, Viva!”

Don Santiago had nothing to oppose to this

fine scheme of his wife's. He hated the conscription of his son into an idle army as completely as she did and, now that there was so much to be done in the restoration of their home, felt that he needed Jose more than ever. As for Vincente, penitent and tractable as he had been since the "outbreak," he was of a temperament to be influenced for evil if forced into a life of idleness. His guardian now intended to purchase a near-by rancho for his nephew and place him at the head of it, feeling that to be in a position of trust might "keep him straight," as Luther expressed it.

Luther himself had shown that he did not intend to be left out of any affair in which Polly and Roland were interested and, even if he had but small faith that they would ever find Captain Pancoast, he would superintend the party of young searchers and their quest with trustworthiness and zeal.

Therefore, Señor Ysidro promptly lent his aid. He had Padre Gonzalez prepare certain letters to be presented to Señor Briones in case of need, though if all went well Jose would introduce himself and his companions in per-

son. If, as might be, Captain Pancoast had been captured by the Indians anywhere in Alta California, Señor Briones could easily procure a searching party of soldiers from his friend, the General, to look for him. Señor Ysidro also told Luther to take his best wagon and fit it up for the two girls, or anybody who might be found ill—meaning, of course, the missing American—or who might become so on the long journey. For this road which the young gringos might have to traverse numbered several hundred miles, and it was well to be prepared for any emergency. Also, into the gañan's capacious wallet the rancho stuffed such a quantity of gold as made Polly's eyes widen and her own small supply look humble, indeed.

Luther smiled over the "best" wagon, remembering the sort of vehicles in which easterners travel, but it was a very comfortable affair, after all, when the capable Yankee had finished with it. He not only cushioned it with mattresses, but arranged a seat for his passengers; and he continued the skins with which its sides were stretched so that they crossed the top and made a rude kind of

“carryall.” He selected two pairs of the finest oxen in the herd, to draw the wagon on alternate days, and the easiest horse for his own use in riding beside and guiding them.

The three youths started upon their own fine mounts, and to Polly and Juanita were assigned Nineto and Inez’ own Cremo, as being the only part in the cavalcade she was permitted to take. She had earnestly pleaded to join the party, but Doña Dolores had refused to let the girl out of her sight. For a time, at least, the orphan would require the tenderest, gentlest attention, and the possible hardships of the trip were not for her. Juanita was sent, as a matter of course. No young señorita of the lady’s own class would be permitted to undertake such a journey, as this unusual one of Polly’s, unattended, and the little gringo must not be less cared for. Indeed, she was heartily thankful for this arrangement.

Though she had implicit confidence in Luther and was delighted to have him in charge of the party, as he had silently decided he should be on that morning in the Mission garden when she first told her intention, she

felt that another girl, even an Indian, would be "lots of company" for herself. As she said to Inez :

"It won't be like having you, dear, but Juanita will be a deal better than nobody. Maybe, she'll talk more when we are alone together, and anyway, I like her. I'm sorry for her, too, and the things she sees by the way may help her to forget ——"

Startled at what she was about to say, Polly abruptly paused, and Inez gently finished her sentence for her: "You were going to say 'forget her mother,' but nothing could ever do that I think. It never could me—and Nita's human, like the rest of us."

"Forgive me, darling. I'm such a wretched blunderer ——"

"You're a good, sympathetic friend, Polly-Margareta, and I shall miss you—oh! How I shall miss you!"

Stroking the dark head resting against her shoulder, the other resumed :

"Roland will be so interested in the other boys that he'll not care much for my society. I mean, of course, I shall be just as sure of his loving me and all that, but boys' talk is more

interesting to him. Then that good Luther— Well, you know how few his words are; and I mean to get Juanita to teach me a lot more Indian sentences, so that I can surprise my father when I find him. Think! His little Polly Pancoast, born and brought up—so far as she's got 'up'—in a New England village has already learned a deal of 'Californian' besides the Indian stuff. Won't he be astonished?"

"You feel so sure to find him, Polly! I wish—I wish you wouldn't count on it so much. Things that one wants most are the things one doesn't get—it seems to me. There was I praying and praying for la madre yet—she went away. And——"

"You must pray for me, Inez, dearest. Will you? I shall love to think of you at matins or vespers kneeling over in the old church and saying your prayers for me. As I will for you. I can't to any pictured person, no matter how good, but I can in the simple way I've been taught, and it's the same Dios, Inez, darling! Just the same. You're to comfort dear Doña Dolores, you know; for under all her cheerfulness I know

her heart aches for ruined Santa Rosa, and that no other home will ever be quite the same to her as that was. And Felicidad—maybe she will grieve and worry about her brother, for she is anxious about him, I think—so you will have her to cheer, also. Oh! You'll have plenty to do, Inez. You're to fill all those sheets of paper with writing; they shall be letters to me to read after I get back. And I'll write to you, very, very often. I'll get Padre Gonzalez to give me paper and things and if we meet anybody coming this way I'll send you whatever I have written, whether 'much or little, or if the person will carry it."

"Of course, he'll carry it! Would anybody be so rude as to refuse a favor like that? And it will be lovely, lovely! I shall be on the watch all the time."

The last hour passed so swiftly that Inez declared it had been but a moment. Polly had secured her writing materials from the kind priest who, in common with everybody else, had come to see the start from the Presidio, where the travelers had met for the purpose. Even the once scornful Felicidad

had held the little gringo lovingly in her arms, for an instant, and had kissed her sunny curls with real affection; finding thus an opportunity to whisper into the ear they shaded:

“I will try to take your place in cheering our Inez, Polly-Margareta; and if, sometimes, I haven't been as—as cordial, is it? as I should, please forgive it. I do not forget, I, how it was your brother, Don Roland, who fought for my Vincente when the Indians turned against him, thinking he had—he had defrauded them. That awful day! I shall remember it forever. Si. And in the Mission I will add my prayers to Inez' and Tia Dolores' for the safety of the perilous trip you make.”

Polly returned the affection, in sudden self-reproach that she had not earlier understood the nature of this proud, spoiled señorita, and with a tear she could not quite repress, turned hastily away and was swung into the wagon by Don Santiago's arms. Then he deposited Juanita on the seat beside her, Luther cracked his whip, and the cavalcade started.

“Vivas!” rent the air and, by a pre-arrangement of the three departing lads, a squad of soldiers fired a farewell salute. Then the shouts and the reports died away and, turning about upon her hide-covered board-seat, Polly caught a last glimpse of her friends. Doña Dolores, no longer gay with an unusual sprightliness, but once more the placid, dignified matron whose smile was still cheerful though her heart ached with foreboding concerning this long journey through a sparsely settled country upon which she had sent her beloved son.

Then they all vanished in a blur, and Polly brought her tearful gaze back to her immediate surroundings. Until then she had scarcely observed how fine an appearance the little caravan presented.

Of all the party about her, Luther alone looked natural. He had not exchanged his worn sombrero for a better one nor added any holiday feature to his attire. He bestrode his horse with the familiar stoop of shoulder with which he always rode, his clothes were faded to a uniform tint of dull blue, and he was still chewing his

peas-cod as if it were a most delicious morsel.

“G’lang!” he chirruped to his oxen before the wagon, and, without turning about, reached back and swung his long goad about the legs of the led pair, hitched to the wagon’s rear.

To better exhibit their present magnificence, the three youths dashed widely down the street leading to the trail beyond the town, then wheeling at a signal and riding swiftly back again, to wheel once more and caracole about the wagon, shouting and cheering one another, and behaving wholly as boys will, no matter in what part of the world, when setting out upon a season of adventure in congenial company.

The Santa Rosa lads were richly equipped in trappings provided by Senor Ysidro; and lest his ward, or apprentice, should be one whit behind his comrades, Señor Mercado had presented Roland with an even choicer outfit than theirs. If his clothing had astonished Polly at their reunion on the hapless rodeo ground, she was now so amazed that her brother appeared a stranger.

His gold laced knee-breeches were of velvet, met at the knee by botas, or leggings, of the same dark blue, yet of the softest kid and exquisitely stamped in graceful designs. A heavy silken cord of crimson, finished with tassels of mingled gold and silver, was also wound about the knee and glittered in the sun. His long vest of the same blue velvet was resplendent with golden buttons and his short crimson jacket was gold embroidered. His sombrero was worth even more than that for which he had incurred his first debt, and he now wore it with a graceful, rakish sort of charm which made even Luther "open his eyes." His poncho, or cloak, was of blue broadcloth, trimmed on the edges and about the collar with bullion fringe. His saddle was silver embroidered and his bridle of finest horse-hair made in links, and these links joined by mountings of silver. His saddle was of the most elaborate Mexican style and its various parts of stamped leather nearly covered his horse. His stirrups — Well, they made Polly exclaim, indignantly :

"Those stirrups alone are heavy enough to

tire any horse, without putting anything sillier above them!"

At which Luther chuckled and inquired: "Meaning which? Boy or clothes?"

"Both!" cried the sister, yet so good naturedly that the flush which had risen to Roland's cheek faded away.

"Well, these aren't 'debt' fixings, little sister. They're all a present from that generous gentleman, Don Miguel Mercado. I wouldn't like to guess what they cost, only this I know—they're far handsomer and costlier than those I left behind. I don't know what I can ever do for him to repay him."

"Duty. G'lang. So—so-o—so-o-o!" commented the gañan, whether to boy or oxen he did not explain.

Then they struck into a faster and steadier pace. By midday Luther intended to reach a valley he knew, where all the hot summer through a stream of living water sparkled in the sunshine or played at hide and seek beneath the overhanging bushes. Polly had already learned the difference between "living streams" and arroyos, though both were rivers.

The latter were mere rivers of sand during most of the year, and so dry-looking it was difficult to believe they could ever change into fierce torrents.

But, indeed, everything in this new land was wonderful to the little gringo, whose eyes found so much to look at and study that they began to ache. The glare of the unshaded trail added to their discomfort and, to rest them, she dropped her head upon Juanita's shoulder and closed her lids.

She awoke with a start. The wagon had stopped; and though she had intended riding for a good bit of the way upon the pretty Nineto, Polly had not once left her seat until now they had reached the shadowy cañon where the noon rest and repast were to be made.

"Why! Why—where are we?" she demanded, springing to her feet and then finding herself swung down to the ground by Luther's strong arms.

"At the Golden Tavern!" answered that amused person, pointing to the multitudes of wild poppies which, though so late in the season, still lingered in this cool, moist ravine.

“Oh!” cried Polly, rubbing her eyes and gazing about her in ecstasy at the masses of yellow bloom, the great palm-like ferns, and the lovely wild lilac which made the spot a veritable garden.

“Permit me, *companera mia!*” cried a voice behind her, and there was Jose bowing to the earth and holding toward her a magnificent bunch of the glowing poppies. “It was of these that the first Spaniards—my ancestors—sailing by beheld and gave from them the name to our country—‘Land of Fire.’ Gold to gold!” he finished, gallantly, touching a poppy to her sunny curls.

Polly swept him an answering curtsey, as profound and graceful as even Felicidad might have accomplished, which showed that she was fast acquiring the customs of her California friends. Also, as Inez or Felicidad would have done upon receipt of such a pretty compliment, she touched her lips to the flower and thrust it into her frock.

Then somebody whistled, and facing about she beheld Roland staring at her and, apparently, as much amazed by her manner as she had been by his adoption of the Californian dress.



"GOLD TO GOLD!" HE FINISHED, GALLANTLY

But Polly was not to be dashed by any brotherly comment and gaily kissed her finger tips to him, also, remarking :

“ Thank you for that tribute to my improvement, Roly dear ! And now, Juanita, let's help get dinner. ‘ Men ’ are so clumsy, you know ! ”

For the title “ Man ” which her brother claimed sat illy upon him just then, his lively enjoyment of the whole situation was so exceedingly boyish and immature. He and Vincente were already foraging in the baskets of provision and making a sad mess of their contents, scrambling for good things in the most undignified manner.

“ All right, Miss Gringo ! Only be quick, and be sure you portion out enough ! ” he returned, dropping down upon the ground where she was now spreading a white cloth and affecting to tremble with eagerness. “ I was never so hungry in my life ! ”

“ Nor I ! ” added Vincente, struggling for a tortilla Juanita had unearthed.

“ As for me, behold ! I famish. I die ; ” whimsically wailed Jose, throwing himself prone before her and dramatically closing his

eyes. He opened them rather suddenly, finding the hottest kind of a stuffed pepper thrust between his lips, while his jolly little "campanera"—or "comrade," as Polly was to be known and to prove during all that trip, mischievously observed :

"That especial favor was because you were the only one, Señor Ysidro, to remember my love for flowers !"

Jose swallowed the pepper without flinching while Luther laughed as the young folks had never heard him do before. Indeed, he was like another boy himself just then, and entered into the fun of that hour as if there were no care in the world and no prospect of sorrow to the young easterners he now loved so dearly.

It was the merriest of meals, and after it was over the two girls washed their few dishes in the pool below the spring, Juanita protesting against Polly's share of the labor and the latter insisting upon performing it.

"We are equals, Nita dear. Indeed, you are more than that to me, since you are an Indian princess—— Ah ! I know ! Doña Dolores told me how your grandfather was king of his

tribe!—a princess come into your own kingdom!” cried the easterner, sweeping her arm about to include the wide country.

Dinner over and the heat still continuing intense, all the party except Polly stretched themselves out for a nap. She, already refreshed by her sleep in the wagon, was wide awake and eager to explore the cañon. It was a beautiful green cleft through a sun-parched mesa, and, though unseen, the sound of the near-by sea and its saline fragrance were pleasant to her and she wandered further from her friends than she realized having done. She was still anxious to go on, for :

“It seems as if I might get a glimpse of the ocean if I kept on, and it looks as quiet and safe a place as the pasture at Rock Acre. Just a few rods further, to the point beyond that next curve—then if I don’t see the water I’ll go back.”

The “point” she sought was walled in by mighty blocks of granite, shrouded at the top by the chaparral and scrubby pines; while the cañon itself had suddenly shrunk to the narrowest of passages. Yet there, indeed, lay a glimpse of peacock-blue water, gleaming in

the sunlight, and Polly breathed a sigh of satisfaction that she had not abandoned her search for it before.

There was not room to sit down nor, indeed, anything but the most jagged of rocks about her, and the girl rested from her tramp by leaning against the stones and gazing through the aperture upon the sea she loved, thinking :

“I must be a true daughter of a sailor, for I delight in the ocean—in either one. I didn't know that at home, where I'd never seen anything bigger than the river; but now, if father will let me sail with him as Mrs. Marshall sails with her Captain—how I shall enjoy it! But father—— Where is he? Shall I ever see him again? It's a relief to be looking for him, actually on the way to him, yet ——”

A little shiver of foreboding made her close her eyes, as if to shut out unwelcome thought; but the next instant a soft swift sound of something rushing through the air made her open them again.

There at her feet, lodged upright in a cleft of the boulder by which she stood, was an Indian arrow.

In affright she cast one hasty glance upward, seeing nobody on the heights, where, indeed, nobody could have been seen because of the screening shrubs, then seized the arrow and turned and ran back at her swiftest pace over the route she had come.

At the temporary camp all were still sleeping save Juanita, who sat awake and motionless, her dark eyes full of brooding and her heart of grief. She was worse than orphaned now with her mother gone and her evil father powerful to claim her if he so chose. It was of him she was thinking when, panting from her haste, Polly lightly touched her and held up the arrow to view, scarce understanding why she had snatched it from the rock. But the effect of it upon Juanita was to make her spring up and recoil in horror, clasping her hands behind her, while her brown face grew ashen white.

CHAPTER XIV

WHERE IS CAPTAIN PANCOAST

THEN, while Polly was still staring and mutely asking an explanation, Juanita snatched the arrow away, ran with it to the wagon, and hid it beneath the mattress on the bottom. Coming back she pleaded :

“Say nothing, señorita mia. Let the sleeping dog lie. He can be roused when needed. Si. En verdad.”

Though she quoted the maxim in Spanish Polly understood sufficiently well to know that the incident were better not mentioned to their companions. Indeed, it had thrown her, as well as Nita, into a mood far different from the mirthfulness of the midday meal, and she was glad when Luther rose and remarked :

“Jogging. Fifteen miles.”

She did not know that he had been wide awake and an observer of what had passed between herself and Juanita concerning the arrow, nor that he had recognized its signifi-

cance as promptly as the latter had done. But he had, and fully agreed with the Indian maid in letting that uncanny "dog" lie.

They were soon upon the road again, both the girls now riding their pretty horses and Luther upon the wagon seat, resting from the obnoxious saddle exercise. The three lads were as gay as ever and, fretting at the slower pace of the oxen, made constant detours to this side or that, each emulating the horsemanship of his comrades and all accomplishing many feats that seemed wonderful to Polly.

To throw a handkerchief upon the ground and, retracing one's course, to ride past and pick it up again without more effort than stooping from the saddle was a very ordinary deed of the two Californians; but when, after many fruitless efforts, Roland finally succeeded in doing the same, their generous "Vivas!" rang in the air and Polly's sisterly pride grew great, indeed.

Sometimes, the girls followed the lads for a short distance out of the beaten track; yet neither of them, since the arrow incident, felt comfortable beyond sight of the wagon; and

as for hours at a time they met nobody else upon the road the trip grew monotonous and fatiguing; so that everybody was glad when, turning once more away from the coast, along which their route had lain for awhile, they came in sight of the Mission where they were to halt for the night.

In general character this one was so like that where Polly had dwelt for a time, and the padre who came to the gate to greet them was so like the good Padre Gonzalez, that Polly felt instantly at home; though Roland found time to whisper, as they entered the cloister: "Imagine Deacon Lysander putting up at this tavern!"

"Taverns" for the accommodation of all travelers were what the hospitable Missions practically were in those days; and situated as they were, about thirty miles apart, they furnished convenient stopping places for persons passing up and down along the coast of the great Republic. So that Roland's term was not so far amiss, though an accidental one.

The padre in charge welcomed the boy as if he were a dear child, long absent and ardently longed for; calling him "My little son,"

and assigning to him the best of everything the place afforded. Indeed there was something indescribably winning about the young gringo when he chose to exert himself, as he now happened to do; and his manner and striking beauty were supplemented by such rich attire that, all unknowing whom he might be, the padre made the very natural mistake of considering him a much more important personage than he was.

Roland's imitative nature made him, also, readily fall into the way of speech which confirmed this impression; and when at the first opportunity he asked, "Do you know anything about Captain Pancoast, of the Columbia?" the answer came with considerable spirit: "No—but I wish I did! Here have I been keeping my hides and tallow for him and letting other buyers go, because of my word given that to him they should accrue and to none other. Caramba! And they are spoiling on my hands. The man is either a villain or some mischance has befallen him. Are you, too, among the rancheros he has robbed of a good market?"

"I am no ranchero at all," replied Roland,

promptly, and would have added much more, had not Polly rushed forward and catching hold of the old padre's hand, exclaimed :

“ Oh ! don't say hard things of that precious man, good sir ! He is our father and we fear—we fear—— We have started to find him. Help us, if you can ! ”

Greatly puzzled, the kind hearted priest looked from one to the other of this fair haired pair, noticing their resemblance now, yet wondering at the characteristic Californian attire which both of them wore. All the other gringos he had met had kept their eastern habit of dress and were readily recognizable by it. But the indignation vanished from his manner which now became one of utmost gentleness and compassion :

“ Forget the idle speech, my daughter. Doubtless, the good Capitan has his own reasons for delay and will come again when he so pleases. If he comes—— Well, then he is the honorable señor. He will of the loss make good that our Mission has suffered. Si. En verdad. He will never defraud the house of God. Always, hitherto, I found him more than generous and many a night has he passed

here, beguiling the hours with tales of that far land whence he comes with his rough speech and big heart. Ah! dear to me is el Capitan! Believe me."

"But—you speak of danger to him. What danger can there be? I never heard of him being ill or ——"

Laying his hand in blessing upon her head he reproved her gently, as Doña Dolores would have done, saying:

"Have no fear, niña mia. Our times are in the hand of the good Dios. To Him the care—to us the prayer. To your knees, niña, and pray."

Then summoning the mahala who had charge of the young Indian girls, he sent her and Juanita away; but Luther, who was as usual silently studying the scene about him, observed an expression of profound pity steal upon the padre's face as he watched the child depart, and his own forebodings found confirmation.

Striding to the side of his host he propounded the terse inquiry, "Dead?"

"Dead or dishonest," answered the padre, as if the terms were equivalent; and taking

his breviary in hand began to pace the cloister, intent upon the book and nothing else.

Luther's temper rose. For some time he stood watching the absorbed padre, who noticed him no more than the pillars of the cloister till his anger forced expression, a wordy one for him. Shaking his fist at the cleric's retreating back, he ejaculated :

“No such thing, you old man in petticoats! He's alive and'll come back to thrust your libels down your slick old throat. You—you—I——”

“Eh? Did you speak? What is it, at your service, my son?” said the padre, wheeling about so suddenly that he caught Luther in the very act of the threatening fist and the insolent speech.

“Eh? Oh! nothin'. Nothin' worth mentioning. I merely said—I think it's a neat night.”

“En veritas,” replied the priest, calmly, with a twinkle in his eye; and before he had made the next turn in his monotonous walk the irate gañan had disappeared.

When one's worst suspicions are confirmed by the opinion of others the first result is,

commonly, anger. Luther felt exactly as the padre did—but he hated to do so. He had grown to love the two young gringos as if they were his own children and fiercely resented anything which should grieve them. Feeling decidedly flushed, and exceedingly foolish when he recalled that twinkling eye, he strode outside the building and contemplated the landscape, gleaming under the rays of an unclouded moon. But the sight instead of pacifying him appeared to add to his discomfort, for he glowered at the outspread beauty as if he would wither up the whole scene by one scorching glance.

“Shame. Burning shame. United States. Shall be yet.”

Which those who knew him well could have interpreted to mean: “This is too beautiful a land to belong to anybody except the United States, and we’ll own it yet!”

Then he went to bed and forgot all his perplexities in sleep.

All of his party save one, also, slept; even Polly, whose heart was so heavy when she lay down that she confidently assured herself she should not be able to close her eyes that

night. Nature took care about that. In less than five minutes after her head touched the pillow, her quiet breathing told Juanita that her little mistress' troubles were over for a time.

Not so her own. Though she lay down on the cot prepared for her beside Polly's, she remained gazing through the open casement till the moonlight waned and daylight came. After that, for a time, she slept dreamlessly, but was already awake when a message came that Polly should awake and prepare for another day's journey toward the north.

After matins and breakfast were over and the travelers assembled before the Mission gateway, the gringos were treated to a fresh surprise. Instead of the horses upon which they had ridden the day before, others were saddled ready for their use, and in place of the led oxen—which now were hitched to draw the wagon—another pair were tied.

“Why, where is Nineto?” asked Polly of Jose, who merely shrugged his shoulders and answered by a negative gesture. Nor was Cremo anywhere visible, and the two Californians were already mounted upon superb

beasts, but of a color and size wholly unfamiliar to the easterner.

Finding everybody else inclined to ignore her questions, she put them to Juanita, who answered below her breath, as if fearful of giving offense :

“They will be sent home. I know not how. That would be a discourtesy to ask. At every stage of our long journey there will always be the best of entertainment, the freshest horses, the ‘well-come’ and the ‘safe-depart’—to and from every Mission or rancho where we may lodge. En verdad! Men would be contemptuous, else. Is it not so in the gringo land?”

“No. I’m ashamed to say it isn’t. It’s ‘pay’ there for any service, no matter how small. Oh! I love this big-hearted California; and I’d like to live here always, if it weren’t for the Indians! Oh! Nita, dear Nita! I didn’t mean to say that! For you are not of the sort of Indians I fear. Forgive me, please; oh! please forgive me!”

“It is naught,” returned the other, submitting to, but not reciprocating, the caresses the repentant Polly lavished upon her. Deep

in her heart lay such a love for the yellow-haired "señorita" that she would herself have endured any pain to have spared that dear one suffering; but she was too humble-minded to offer an outward demonstration of her affection.

One other experience proved the same here that it was to be elsewhere. For the entertainment of the entire party and the supply of fresh horses and oxen, there was no payment expected nor received. Hospitality of the most unlimited sort was the law of the land, and the utmost an independent person, such as these gringos, could do was to leave some small sum at the Missions for the padres' charitable use.

It was an enlightened Polly who set out upon her second day's journey, and that day's incidents were of the same monotonous kind as of the previous one. This time there was no mysterious arrow to startle one's composure, and even the flowers and birds by the way began to assume a familiar, almost fatiguing appearance.

The night was passed at another Mission, and here there was neither news, fears, nor

abuse of the missing Captain. There was only the same question in the mouths of the padre and his other passing guests: "Where is Captain Pancoast?"

Evidently, their father was a widely known person, and his disappearance was arousing much comment: but the more he was discussed the more anxious his children became and the more determined in their search. The gayety of the first day's start had vanished altogether. There was an occasional outbreak of nonsense upon the part of the three lads, but gradually there had come over them all the consciousness that it was, indeed, a matter of life and death upon which they were engaged, and an unusual sobriety had fallen upon the spirits of even the young Californians.

It was not until the evening of the third day that anything occurred to arouse especial interest. They had proceeded duly north, had met a few horsemen riding southward, had exchanged the casual salutations of such accidental meetings, and had finally reached the next Mission where they were to pass the night.

They were so late that the evening service was over and the lights extinguished; but it was never too late for hospitable doors to open and wayfarers be admitted. Especially, when they came as these did with the blessing of brother priests and the introduction of such well known rancheros as Señor Ysidro and Don Miguel Mercado.

Luther's ox-team had lumbered away toward a corral and he had already made ready for his own rest in the matted wagon—his usual sleeping place—when Jose came running back out of the refectory, still mumbling his morsel of bread and fiercely excited.

“Well?” demanded the gañan, testily; for his rheumatism had once more developed from his uncongenial exercise on horseback or in the jolting, springless wagon, and he longed for repose.

“Well? It's anything but ‘well,’ amigo mio!” cried the excited Jose. “They're after us! We've got to cut and run—Vamos—depart—clear out—skipit, eh? What is it you gringos call—but retreat at once; in good form, if may be, but retreat, anyhow!”

Thus saying the lad swallowed his final

crumb and putting his hands to his lips imitated the bugle call of "Assembly."

Luther forgot his rheumatism and sprang to his feet.

"You don't say! When—where—how?"

"Si. En verdad. Ciertamente. There is a man in yonder has just come from the Mission and pueblo above and it's there my fine 'Squad of Ten' sojourn this night. They have reached further south than we thought at San Diego; and to keep the straight road now is for Jose Ysidro and Vincente Castro to run their heads into the noose. En veritas. Well then, what?"

"Do as you said—Vamos! Is it not to the right of us, beyond the rancheria of these Mission Indians, that there lies the rancho of your father's friend, Señor Pico?"

This was such an unusually lengthy speech for Luther to make that Jose stared. However, the speech contained the sound advice which tallied with his own opinion, and he promptly acted upon it. Thus it was that instead of settling themselves to another night of slumber, two excited youths rode silently away across the plain, mounted upon

the fleetest of horses. These had been hastily selected from the padre's choicest corral, without any actual spoken word of permission, but by a tacit understanding between owner and borrowers. Of course, the padre was a loyal citizen of the Republic and a conscientious churchman; therefore, he could not openly aid in the flight of Jose and Vincente. Yet it is known upon authority that it was he who suggested to his vaquero:

"It is well that the sons of my beloved patrons should inspect my fine caponera in the green paddock. Mañana—to-morrow, little son. Remember—mañana. Adios. Pax vobiscum."

"Si, padre. I hear, I comprehend," answered the vaquero, and was at the corral when the Mission clock struck twelve. Midnight. Well, then, one minute after midnight it is morning, and one obeys orders when those honorable, the master's guests, are helped to saddle and mount and speed on their way. Thus let it be.

So hasty was their departure, or so untoward the hour, that the departing lads could not bid their beloved little "companera" farewell,

nor assure her that they would rejoin the party she "commanded" so soon as they felt secure in doing so.

It was a very serious group which rode away northward on the morning after this event. Roland was lonely without his friends, who had been so great an addition to the company, even if of late they had fallen under the spell of anxiety which held the three easterners, and Polly missed their possible protection in case of need. Luther and Juanita were scarcely more quiet than usual, but to Polly the whole atmosphere seemed oppressed with some undefinable trouble; so that when the road once more turned toward the coast, she announced her intention of riding ahead and by herself, though not beyond sight of the others.

She did not ask Juanita to ride with her, and the latter did not offer to do so. The fact was that Polly wished to do a bit of hard thinking and to piece together, if she could, the stray bits of news she had overheard at the last Mission.

"The sight of the big, peaceful blue ocean will do me good, folkses!" she called at departure from them. "I'm getting as blue as

—as that gentian yonder and not half so pretty. But I'll come back as gay as the poppies—if I can."

"Ugh!" grunted Luther, feeling that some comment was necessary, and that this was the briefest possible.

He, also, was profoundly thinking. The news which Polly had vaguely understood was quite clear to him. Captain Pancoast had left Yerba Buena (San Francisco) for the south and he had not since been heard from. Several other travelers had been molested by Indians which, upon report, the General in command had promptly subdued by a troop of soldiery. So far as known, no white men had been killed; but—— Where was Captain Pancoast? A vaquero had accompanied the Captain, but he had also disappeared; as had the caponera of fine horses with which the supercargo started.

"Hmm. I wish that little Yellow-Hair was safe back in Woodley township, where she belongs!" was the conclusion of Luther's soliloquy.

Polly's thoughts had, also, strayed homeward, and her "plans" were no more definite



A WOUNDED PELICAN, LYING ON THE SAND

than when she had loped away from the others toward the shore. She still kept them in sight and from time to time waved her hand in signal that all was well. But when her horse's feet touched the beach at that low point for which she had aimed, she forgot everything else at sight of a wounded pelican lying on the yellow sands.

The horse she had been loaned that day was, like all the others she had used, as gentle as it was swift—having, indeed, been selected by her last host for those very qualities; and she did not hesitate to leap down and bend over the injured bird, hoping to do it some good.

Alas! it was done to its death which, ignorantly, Polly hastened, by withdrawing from its breast a big, feathered arrow.

“Oh! who could have been so cruel!” cried the girl, springing to her feet as the pelican gasped its last and glancing indignantly around. It was a wide, open space where she stood. There was neither shrub nor mighty boulder to hide the archer whose aim had been so true, and the only person in sight was a brown-robed Franciscan priest, pacing sedately northward, his cowl over his

shaven head and his bowed back toward her. He walked but slowly, as if the sun-scorched sands were already painful to his bare feet, and to his observer appeared as innocently harmless as the dead pelican. Polly had now grown familiar with such wayfarers, who rarely rode the horses they owned but journeyed to and fro upon their errands of mercy, sustained only by their own devotion and the stout staff they sometimes carried.

“The poor padre! Whoever shot that arrow might have hurt him!” cried Polly, aloud. “I’ll take it with me—though I hate to touch it again—the wicked weapon of death. But Juanita will know of what tribe it comes. She is wise in the lore of her own race. I fancy—yes, it is! It’s like that other one I pulled from the rock that first day of our trip! Queer! I wonder what it means—if anything!”

The little gringo had learned to mount as easily as to dismount and with no more assistance, and now put her hands to her saddle and swung herself into it. Strangely enough she had not felt the slightest personal fear nor guessed that the arrows had any significance

for herself: also it was strange that as she now turned back to rejoin her companions the plans she had been unable to decide were instantly settled.

“Go to San Carlos. There find what ye seek.”

“Why—what? That was as plain to me as if somebody had spoken it in my very ear! San Carlos. The Mission I have most wanted to see, where the great Junipero Serra, the father of all the Missions, died and was buried. I am to tell dear Doña Dolores, who venerates his memory, that I knelt by his grave—if one can find it—and said my prayers for her. San Carlos! That is still, they say, a long way off: but we’ll make no unnecessary stops till we get there. To San Carlos and my father!”

Not thinking what she held and excited by what she felt was an inspiration, Polly waved the stained arrow aloft, and cried aloud, as if already her friends could hear and understand: “To San Carlos! At San Carlos we shall find him!”

Then suddenly, straight down upon the trail before her, as if in answer to her jubilant shout, fluttered and fell another arrow!

CHAPTER XV

ON AN UNFAMILIAR PLAIN

AGAIN, though startled and with her horse shying, Polly's first emotion was of anger rather than fear; and retaining her hold upon her bridle rein she slipped to the ground, secured this third trophy of somebody's skill and, remounting, galloped to the point where the rest of the party awaited her. Just there was a fork in the trail, and Luther had no intention of letting his beloved "Yellow-Hair" take the wrong turning. Moreover, as the journey was prolonged and his rheumatic bones gave him continual trouble, he improved every opportunity of resting, even for a moment.

As she neared them Polly called, "See? We're getting quite a collection of them, aren't we?" and held the two arrows up to view.

"Ugh!" grunted Luther, indignantly, while his eyes filled with an angry light.

Roland's spirited horse had been curveting

about, restless under his new rider, but now came under control sufficiently to admit of the lad's taking the arrows from his sister's hand and examining them critically. After a few seconds, he cried:

“Look here! There's a picture on them! A sort of hieroglyphic! Indian writing—seems as if one were a continuation of the other! Heigho! This is interesting. Who shot them? Who shot them?”

“How do I know? The pelican was dying on the sands when I found it and there was nobody but a Franciscan friar in sight. The second one fell from the skies, I guess. It is really the third one, for though we didn't speak of it before, one was shot at me, or close to me, that very first day we started, in the cañon where we picnicked so merrily. I brought it back to Nita and she hid it in the wagon. She wished me not to tell and so I didn't—— Why, Juanita, child! What are you doing?”

The little maid had run up and snatched the arrows from Roland, had carefully examined their points and now, with a strength that seemed extraordinary for one so slight, she

deftly broke the tough shafts squarely above the tips. The latter she plunged into the ground and pressed down with her heel. The arrows she returned to Ronald, bowing humbly, but saying merely: "I was compelled. The pelican died, is it not? Si."

"You mean that the points—are—poisoned?" faltered Polly, now turning very white and for the first time realizing the extreme peril in which she had been placed.

Juanita gravely nodded. She, also, was pale and her eyes were full of perplexity, but she did not show the same consternation as on the occasion of that first arrow shooting. Also, she was regarding the marked shafts very intently, so that Roland asked:

"Is it writing, as I thought? Can you read it for us? Do you know to what tribe they belong? For see! they are as alike as peas in a pod."

"I know not your peas in a pod, save such as Señor Luther chews," answered Juanita, simply, while a smile went round at the gañan's expense.

"But the makers of that particular sort of arrow—do you know them?" persisted Roland.

“Si. En verdad.” Then, for a moment, she seemed inclined to give no further information; yet bracing herself to an unpleasant duty, she glanced into Polly’s eager eyes and answered: “They are of—Maro, the Hawk. Behold. The hawk’s feather,” she finished, gingerly touching the plumes of the arrow as he again held it toward her.

“Maro, the Hawk! This unhappy little mahala’s wicked father! Better no father at all than such as he!” thought the easterner, and slipped a loving arm about her friend’s waist. Then to divert Nita’s thoughts inquired, “Can you read the ‘writing,’ dear?”

For reply, the Indian maid ran to the wagon, brought back the first arrow which had come to them, and placed it with the other two, so that the three formed a continuous line and the drawings fitted into one another. Then she interpreted:

“The trail. The forest. The cañon of rocks—not what you saw, dear señorita, but another—distant—wild—almost impassable. Through the cañon a river. Around the river trees. It is a solitude. Few know it save the Great Spirit, who made it, or the wise padres,

His children. Beside the river, under the river, all about the river—that for which men wrestle and fight. See! the battle—the cruel end—the victory. But—the victory costs much. The arrows are not sent to kill—yet. They are to guide, whether to good or ill, I know not. That is beyond me. The writing is not finished. More will come, will fall about you, Daughter-seeking-the-lost-father. Beware that none touches your fair flesh, else to you will come the pelican's fate.”

With her hands hanging straight at her side, her dark head thrown back, and her face inspired, Juanita had developed an eloquence undreamed of; and, for a moment after she had ceased speaking, none of the others stirred.

Then Polly laid her hand upon the girl's shoulder and said earnestly :

“ Whether ‘ for good or ill,’ as you say, we cannot tell who sends these feathered messages, but for one thing I am thankful, and that is that you are with us. Juanita, from this on you take command of this search! Say, tell me, quick! Where first?” and eager to know whether the same thought would

come to this other girl which had come to her, she bent forward and peered into Juanita's face.

"San Carlos," came the instant and firm response.

Polly clapped her hands, though something like awe crept into her expression. She had never heard of the modern theories concerning the impression upon a sympathetic mind of one's own thought, and Nita's answer savored of the marvelous. However, she felt certain now that the expedition would better be guided by the Indian maid than by any of themselves, and herself made a little obeisance toward the young leader. Then she playfully ordered Luther and Roland to :

"Salute your General Juanita, comrades! And then to our—forward march!"

Roland swept his gracefulest bow and Luther pulled his forelock, grimly smiling, and inwardly reflecting that on such a "wild goose chase one might as well be led by an Indian—a good Indian—as an ignorant, precious Yellow-Hair from the state of Maine."

Juanita received the salutations of her "subordinates" with the same sad serenity

which always marked her bearing. There was no elation in her manner, though a little flush dyed her cheek when, at midday, halting for refreshment, Luther proffered this terse request:

“Plan. Order. Immediate.”

But she obeyed him instantly and the program she sketched was so simple they all wondered none had thought of it before. They were to proceed to San Carlos at greatest speed. Arrived there they would, doubtless, find some fresh arrow-letters awaiting them. This would be so whether the sender of the same were friend or foe. At San Carlos they would stock the wagon with sufficient provision to last them for a long time. Equipped with everything necessary, they were then to push on into the wilderness—whither the hieroglyphics pointed. At the end of the “painted road,” Juanita believed, would be found that which they sought—news of Captain Pancoast.

“Good enough. Agreed,” said Luther, and none objected.

They traveled as swiftly as possible now and, by Juanita’s suggestion, mainly at night,

resting during the heat of the day, though as they moved northward this grew gradually less. There was still sufficient moonlight left to guide them and, in any case, the road was direct and unshaded. On such few nights as they camped to sleep, when even anxious Polly became so drowsy and tired that a stop was necessary, Juanita taught them how to protect themselves from the rattlesnakes with which the country abounded.

A circular piece of ground would be cleared of all brush and dry verdure and the rubbish piled about the circumference. When all were ready to "turn in," this border would be lighted and burned, and they could all rest securely behind their rim of fire. Juanita, also, utilized the hated reptiles as food, roasting portions of their flesh for her own and Luther's enjoyment, though Polly and her brother could not be induced to taste what the gañan declared were "regular tidbits."

"You're welcome to my share of them!" returned Roland, with a shudder of disgust.

"Beats chicken," said Luther, and helped himself to another piece.

Indeed, it was wonderful how wise Juanita was in forest lore. Yet she had never before traveled further from the Mission where she was born than Santa Rosa or some other neighboring rancho, accompanying Doña Dolores upon a visit. Now by racial instinct, perhaps, she knew always in which direction to proceed, no matter how dense the timber they penetrated. She permitted no waste of time by following longer or more familiar routes but, guiding herself by "the trees and the flying birds" as she explained it, she led them due northeast to the point they sought. Polly would have liked better to keep near the coast, within sight of the blue ocean, but one or two objections had been received with such surprise by their new "commander" that the other regretted having such desires. After all, Nita was right. If she were to lead—she should be left to do so according to her own judgment.

In fact she brought them to San Carlos long before they could have reached it by the beaten track; and now ensued a day of hurried preparation for the last, most important stage of their journey. Now, also,

came into use the goodly sum of money which Don Santiago had given to Luther. Urged by Roland the gañan invested in enough provision to last the party for "a lifetime," as the thriftier purchaser protested; and he supplemented the food by various camping-out comforts such as could be procured at Monterey, where the San Carlos Mission was situated. These were crude, at best, but made the young gringo feel very rich and important.

They made every possible inquiry, also, concerning the missing Captain; but always with the same result. He had been due at this place long before. He had made business engagements which he had failed to keep. He had been known to leave Yerba Buena with a fine caponera of horses and an Indian vaquero to help manage them. He owned the horses and intended to ride them, one after another, as they recruited from a day under the saddle, till he reached San Diego and his final point of departure for the east. His ship was still at Yerba Buena, awaiting his direction to sail south along the coast.

Another story was that his departure from that town had not been for the south. That he had been entrusted with some important secret business by the padre of the Mission Dolores, near Yerba Buena, and the Captain's strong personal friend. That with his vaquero and caponera he had ridden east, directly into the wilderness and among a tribe of often hostile Indians, to transact that business. That he had not returned nor since been heard from, and that the padre was distressed beyond measure because he had dispatched the sailor to his death.

At San Carlos, also, as Juanita had predicted and while the two girls were inspecting the Mission, there waiting the completion of Luther's purchases, another arrow fell before them; but this time at the feet of Juanita herself.

"Well, this is the strangest thing. Once more there is nobody in sight, save another priest who is doubtless a brother of this house. But I'm getting used to these messages from the sky, and I can't believe an enemy sends them. See, Nita, see! The picture is clearer than ever. There is—— Isn't that square

meant for a house? Is it this house? And those jiggle marks—they are what you called trees in the other drawings. There are arrows pictured, too. Even I can see that, and they all point one way—to the east—for there's a rising sun! It surely means that! If it were possible I should think the arrows were all sent by some friendly Indian. Only an Indian could do that sort of drawing, I guess; and there's nobody—— My Indian acquaintances are few. Old Francisco—but there! Nobody has seen him since—— Oh! I forgot, again. I'm always forgetting that you're anything except my own dear Nita."

Juanita showed neither offense nor surprise. Her surprise, indeed, would have been to find their arrow-guides failing them at this important point of their journey. It was nearing its end. Of that she was positive and that this suspense in which her little señorita had lived during all these past weeks would soon be over. At the pictured "cañon of rocks" that which they sought would be found. Whether the finding would mean happiness or sorrow—that, even this far-sighted little mahala could not foretell. Neither did she

incline to Polly's faith that the arrow-guides were kindly meant. For that reason she had advised Luther to add to his stock of provisions a couple of guns, and had begged from a neophyte some bows and arrows for herself and Polly. With this primitive weapon she was an adept, her mother having insisted upon her early learning the use of it for self-defense against her father—if need arose. Polly had asked to be taught this real, native archery, and why not the lessons now?

Therefore, it was a well-equipped party which left Monterey that evening. No longer dependent upon chance hospitality and, indeed directing their course toward the northeast, where few such chances would offer, their heavily loaded wagon creaked noisily over the rough way, the plentiful grease which Luther applied to the axles seeming only to pitch the squeaking in a shriller key.

“Truck. Nonsense. Simpletons. Whole pack. Wild gooser 'n ever,” grumbled the ploughman, as his clumsy vehicle struck a tree-root and was with difficulty extricated thence.

At which Roland laughed and Polly joined

him, though she now fretted over every trivial delay. Was she not on the last stage toward her beloved father?

“I know it! I feel it—not ‘in my bones,’ for that means trouble, but in my heart! Why should I be so happy, all at once and without any reason, if it isn’t that I am so near my father that I can almost see him.”

“‘Cup and lip,’” quoted Luther, sententiously.

“But there’s to be no ‘slip’ in this case. There is to be just the greatest joy and the best of times for every single body. Heigho! What’s this? A road? A trail? It certainly looks like one! Does anybody live beyond this forest I wonder?”

To avoid the difficult passage through the trees Luther had now turned his team toward the edge of the forest, where a clearing offered easier progress. The last oxen he had procured were not as satisfactory as the others had been, and he must make the best of every smooth bit of road, even if in so doing he did go against the advice of their girlish guide.

But he need not have feared offending her

then, though it was she who had directed him to travel straight through the woods. She, with Polly, was now examining the new-found trail, and after a moment, raised her hand to him, pointing eastward.

“You mean you want to go that way, Juanita?” asked Roland.

“Si. It is the road.”

“All right. Trot along it, Luther, my friend! Obey orders, you know!” cried the lad, laughing at Luther’s dismayed, or perplexed face. The night was fast settling down, and though a belated moon would still give them light, the man felt that there would be less danger of rheumatism under shelter of the big trees than on that wide, open plain. He had not meant to leave the proximity of the forest with its protecting warmth, but merely to creep along beside it.

Juanita had now taken the last arrow sent them and was examining it afresh. Then she showed to Polly a certain spot upon it which meant nothing to the little gringo but was evidently convincing to the Indian girl. Her expression showed that yonder lay their own trail, coincident with that one crossing the

mesa they had reached; and without delay she now rode forward by herself.

Polly galloped after her, nor did Roland linger; all three wishing to see whither the road led, and forgetting poor Luther, left behind with his stubborn oxen and his heavy wagon.

Greatly disturbed, he lumbered after them. He feared danger to his Polly and meant to keep her in sight if that were possible. The child's unreasonable happiness was making her careless. Who knew to what that road led? Who knew if the mesa were as smooth as it looked, or if it were seamed with cañons, as many another he knew? If Polly's horse, a fresh and unknown one that very evening—if it should stumble and fall and her leg be broken, or it should run away——

A thousand and one possibilities of ill passed through Luther's mind, and made him drive so recklessly that he would have been ashamed to have had anybody see him. Mounted on a good horse himself, he goaded and guided his oxen with contradictory orders, with sharp slashes of his whip, with grunts and groans innumerable.

“G’lang! Plague take an ox, anyway!” he cried at last.

He had his wish and at once. For the first time in his extended experience he saw oxen run away. With an awkward but mighty leap forward the ungainly animals left him and his horse behind, the rude wagon rolling and swaying behind them, in danger of immediate upsetting—with destruction of all its contents.

Probably never before in that great solitude was such a racket heard. The bellowing of the now wholly maddened animals, whose frenzy fed upon itself; the horrible screechings and moanings of the wooden wheels; the yells of the gañan, whose horse could now barely keep up with the oxen and was itself in a panic of fear—all this may more easily be imagined than described.

With a mutual impulse the three riders, who had heard the din from afar, paused, wheeled about, and galloped backward to learn the cause.

Then—a sudden silence, more startling, if possible, than the uproar had been. A hush so instant and complete that Polly shuddered

with apprehension and exclaimed: "Indians! They've killed him!"

But Juanita, leaning over her saddle, searched the distance keenly and answered: "No. The plain is empty."

"Then where is Luther?" demanded Roland, spurring forward.

CHAPTER XVI

RANCHO SOLEDAD

OTHER ears beside those of Roland and the girls had heard that amazing racket where was usually an utter silence. Two restless lads had rushed to saddle and stirrup and galloped out upon the plain, glad of anything to break the monotony of an idleness which fretted them.

“Sounds like an earthquake! Si!” cried one, leaning forward and peering intently into the distance.

“Like a thousand earthquakes rolled into one. Ciertamente. Sin duda. Guay! Vamos!” answered Vincente, following.

“But Tia Monica? Should not one of us, her nephews, stay to protect? In case the Indians ——” asked Jose, still without checking his own speed.

“Tia Monica, indeed! She of the brave heart and strong will? Who has lived at Rancho Soledad alone, with none of her kin,

since ever she was widowed? Of what use to her, Jose amigo, of two runaway youngsters like us? Eh?" demanded Vincente, promptly.

"Of little use, en verdad. But you, as for you, it is as if you wearied for that conscription you escaped," said Jose.

He had now gained the side of his cousin and the two were loping swiftly toward the spot whence, they fancied, the strange sounds to have come.

"En veritas. I weary of anything so quiet and piously ordered as the household of Tia Monica. The woman is a saint and belongs in a convent, not ruling a Rancho Soledad. Ah! to be master of it! With its thousands upon thousands of finest cattle in the Republic and its swarms of workers under one's command! That were a life worth living—for a man. But for a woman, like our Tia Monica ——"

"Hold, son of my heart!" warned Jose, laughing. "Is it not of you, yourself, she would the heir make? Si. So I believe. So you will see. Ah! Look, look! Yonder are others? Caramba! But I know them, I know them! The gringos, the gringos!"

If they had ridden swiftly before, their horses now fairly flew over the mesa, heedless of possible pitfalls, and in a very brief time the young Californians had reached the spot where the others had halted above a yawning hole in the ground. Into this unseen pit had blundered the runaway oxen, the heavy wagon, and poor Luther, all in one heap.

There was a second of hesitation while delight at this unexpected meeting with their old companions found expression, then all the lads had dismounted and set about the work of rescuing the gañan.

The hole was neither large nor deep enough to be very dangerous had it not been that the mixture of animals and unyielding wood within it made Luther's position perilous. He was held down by the entanglement of his harness with that of the oxen; and the blow he had received had at first so dazed and confused him that he could make no effort on his own behalf.

The voices near him roused his wandering senses and with a desperate effort he ordered: "Straps!"

"The straps! He wants us to cut the

straps!" cried Polly, always quick to comprehend her old, short spoken friend.

Then all the lads leaped down beside the gañan and in a twinkling had set him free. It was they who helped him to the solid ground above, where the two girls petted and fussed over him with question and comfort, till he grew like himself again. Oddly enough, his first return of their attentions was a laugh; at which they also laughed, though rather hysterically, since the transition from fear to mirth was so sudden.

"I said—'Plague take!' and—it did!" explained Luther, patting Polly's hand.

"Why—but—how came you there? Didn't you see the hole? It's big enough and the moonlight clear—are you sure none of your bones are broken? Do you think you could stand up if you tried?" she asked, waiting for no replies to the inquiries.

"Ugh! Might. Shan't try. None broke—all ought to be. Hark! Worse 'an a rodeo."

There seemed pandemonium in the pit. Leaving their own horses at freedom or for the girls to hold, the three lads had leaped down

again that they might set the struggling animals at liberty, when they would, doubtless, get themselves up to the higher ground. But the twelve floundering legs and the four sharp horns endangered the rescuers themselves, and their shrieks of warning mingled with their commands to the imprisoned beasts well nigh rivaled the din of the half-hour before. Presently, there was a mighty struggle of Luther's horse, and the boys scrambled to safety, whither the sagacious animal instantly followed them.

Not so the oxen. They had exhausted all their ambition in running away and now remained inert and stupid as only oxen could be. At which Luther, now rising and peering at them, shook his fist threateningly, crying:

"You would, would you? Now stay there. Ruther you would 'an not," and having thus relieved his mind relapsed into his customary silence.

Then he sat down and let events shape themselves. What thoughts ran through his mind at that moment are better not transcribed. Sufficient to say that he called himself all kinds of names, and affirmed that he "didn't

care a continental" about anything or anybody in this world.

The young people held a brief consultation, and in a few words the Californians explained that they were staying at the Rancho Soledad—rightly named Solitude, since it was the extremest one of that unsettled interior. That it belonged to their aunt, Doña Monica Juarez, the widowed sister of Jose's father and Vincente's mother. That she was one of the proudest of the old Californians and also the most independent and respected. That she was a woman of great piety and exacted the best behavior from all connected with her rancho, which was an immense estate, worth—nobody could even guess how much. That hearing fresh rumors of the "Squad of Ten," the lads had left the house of Señor Pico, to which they had first retreated after leaving their companions, and had come to Soledad.

The boys declared that the first thing now to be done was to ride back to the rancho and secure help. Vincente himself volunteered to remain with Luther and the imprisoned oxen, while Jose would escort Roland and the girls to his aunt's house. There they should

rest and repair before proceeding—if proceed they still intended to do.

“Why, it’s like a story out of a book, our finding you like this, dear Jose! or rather, your finding us! We should have been in trouble, indeed, if you hadn’t appeared. And oh! I have so much to tell you! So many things have happened, and not the strangest is that Juanita here is now our ‘commander’ and is leading us straight to our father,” cried Polly, joyously.

The meeting with their comrades had added to the confidence she already felt; that now they were indeed fast approaching a happy end of their long journey.

Jose was not so sanguine, yet it was not his nature to spoil anybody’s pleasure, and he listened with so much of sympathy that the girl was freshly encouraged. Juanita was silent, as usual, but her face was peaceful, even cheerful; and altogether the incident of Luther’s breakdown had not seriously depressed anybody except himself.

Whatever hesitation the strangers may have felt at imposing themselves upon Señora Juarez’ hospitality was quickly banished by

her cordial reception of them. Indeed, their coming to her isolated home was a delightful break in the monotony of her life which, save for its being such a busy one, would have been extremely lonely.

Visitors were rare at Soledad, yet there were many chambers always in readiness for the possible guests, and for the maintenance of her large household of servants her larders were full as those of some great hostelry.

The family had finished their last meal of the day hours earlier, yet, almost before the young gringos had washed and freshened themselves, a bountiful supper was spread for them, in which both their hostess and Jose joined, he laughingly declaring that he was always hungry, and she with a delicate courtesy which would not permit the guests to sup alone, lest they should feel themselves to be causing trouble. Even Juanita was now a sharer of Polly's meals, though her humility made her partake of them sitting a little apart—"below the salt"—as it were.

Then came rest; Polly complaining somewhat of the enforced delay in their journey, yet determined to make the most of the de-

lightly inviting bed, with its wonderful lace trimmings.

“I’m almost afraid to touch them,” she laughed.

Then with one of her far away, exalted looks, Juanita replied :

“Ere we sleep again we shall know—what is to know. Between now and another moon-rise will come the end. En verdad. I behold it.”

Had not Polly been so healthfully tired and sleepy she might have been startled by the other’s rapt expression. As it was, for that moment, nothing seemed to matter so much as a chance to shut her eyes and forget everything. Juanita was often seeing visions, and most of them came true. That this one now foretold would be a happy one agreed with the little gringo’s own sentiment and—she needn’t stay awake to think about it a—minute—longer! With a delicious long drawn sigh of content, her head sank into the soft pillows, and that was all she knew for many hours.

When she awoke much had been settled. The broken wagon had been hauled to the

outbuildings and pronounced by the resident blacksmith as unfit even for repair. The hilarious oxen had been so subdued by their own wildness that Luther eagerly presented them to anybody who would take them.

“Stupids. Never again,” he remarked.

“Turn them loose. What’s a pair more or less?” demanded Vincente, on behalf of Tia Monica.

At this juncture, while the gañan stood perplexed and speculative, Roland led Juanita forward, saying:

“Our little ‘commander’ has a word on this subject. She declares we shall need no wagon nor could we use one if we had. The road on the guide-arrows crosses a stream, a river, now swollen by the melting snows of the mountains. We couldn’t get a wagon through it. It’s doubtful if we can get through it ourselves. Eh? Is that right, Nita?”

“En verdad. Si. Behold. Upon our window ledge when the sun rose lay this other arrow. It is the fifth,” she added, counting her brown finger tips in confirma-

tion of her words. "And see? All who look will understand!"

They crowded around her, the lads most interested, and the stranger vaqueros craning their necks while she pointed to the extreme end of the drawing on this last, polished shaft. There was a wavering line which might signify a river and there were the same hieroglyphics which had heretofore been translated as "trees."

"We are to cross a river into a forest. Then we have reached our goal. Is that it, Nita?"

"Si. Señor Pancoast. In truth. But the flood—that troubles me, I know not——"

"It doesn't trouble me," said a clear, strong feminine voice. "When so many difficulties have been overcome why fear a muddy river? I will manage the flood."

It was Doña Monica who spoke, standing close behind the group, and appearing so queenly of bearing that it seemed perfectly natural she should be able to "manage the flood" as she asserted.

Exchanging a few words with one of her men she walked away beside him, inviting

her guests to accompany her, and leading the way to the threshing ground, or hora. This was a circular piece of land, made smooth and hard by water beaten into it, and enclosed by a tight fence. A large quantity of the newly harvested grain had been placed in the hora and four manadas of wild mares turned in upon it—a hundred of the animals in all. Three vaqueros, mounted upon powerful horses, drove the mares round and round upon the grain, shouting and urging them on till they grew dizzy. Then the motion was reversed, the mares driven the other way, and these operations kept up until the grain was threshed from the chaff.

To the eagerly observant Polly, the primitive method was wonderfully interesting and she was ready, as usual, with her many questions had not something in her hostess' manner made her pause to see what next. Indeed, Doña Monica would have been surprised that anybody should be ignorant of California customs, and she had other things on hand.

The gringos already knew that a manada

meant a band of twenty-five wild mares, under custody or leadership of a stallion, who captained his company with military precision. While the companies toiled the four-footed captains waited in a near-by corral; but as soon as the labor was accomplished the animals were set free and immediately each stallion took command of his own manada and led it to its own pasture. Each band kept to itself, and if any mingling was attempted a fierce equine battle soon settled matters.

The vaquero whom Señora Juarez had consulted now ordered the threshing stopped, and a messenger was dispatched to Luther to have everything he wished to carry with him in readiness within the next half-hour. Then the manadas and their captains were let out of the hora and all driven away toward a point where trees showed there must be flowing water.

The hostess and her guests, as well as her nephews, followed the herd of horses, though leisurely and at their ease; the lady asking the gringos about their own country with as much surprise and eagerness as they felt

about hers. Also, concerning their father, she was sympathetic and hopeful.

“Of a surety, you will find him and at once. I have lived among the Indians all my life and though there are evil ones there are also good. The writing on the arrows—you may trust it. If there should be trouble, you have but to fire the guns and—— Behold! the red men vanish. They love not the powder, they. Si. En verdad; and they are like the coyotes—brave only when unseen, as a rule. As a rule, I say, for there are noble exceptions;” and here she laid a gentle touch upon Juanita’s shoulder, who blushed and swept the lady a graceful curtsy.

The ground now sloped suddenly down into a valley and a sound of rushing water, louder even than the tramping of the many hoofs, told them they had reached the “flood.” A moment later they beheld it, and Polly’s heart sank. It was a madly raging torrent she beheld, and how could anybody cross it?

Turning she looked into the equally dismayed face of Luther, who had quietly ridden up on a fresh and powerful horse. His own of the day before, though but little used, was

injured by his fall and was to be left behind. For Roland and the girls were their own, saddled and waiting—but with as light a harness as possible. There, too, were Vincente and Jose, who were not to be left out of any adventure going, and Polly's spirits rose. They were smiling and unconcerned as if perfectly sure that their wise Tia Monica could conquer any obstacle which presented—even this one of Nature's.

Hark! The vaqueros' shouts were deafening now! The manadas and their captains were being marshaled into a line, as it were, and—into the rushing water! Recoiling, at first, the vaqueros—who did not hesitate for an instant to do what they desired the manadas to do—compelled the creatures to press forward through the flood, which seemed to part and give way before this concerted onrush.

“Why! the river seems astonished at their impudence! See! It actually recoils upon itself—as if asking: ‘How dare you?’” cried Polly, from her saddle, into which she had been promptly swung.

The mass of horses had won to the other

side, the vaqueros, riding above and below the struggling bands, preventing them from being forced down stream or out of the ford.

Now, from the further bank back they came! the bed of the river already flattened and hardened by their many hoofs; and with fresh shoutings and goadings, on this hither side, were once more formed into the wedge-like mass which would best stay the water's rush.

"Red Sea!" murmured Luther, with gaping mouth and staring eyes. "America. Must be. United States."

"Now, ready! Adios! Adios, all!" cried Señora Juarez, clapping her hands in signal. "Together—now!"

Once more, for the third time and toward the further bank, the four manadas dashed; and close behind them, side by side, followed the six riders of the searching party.

Polly closed her eyes and let her pony guide himself, or be guided by his close pressing neighbor on either side; for Roland had seen to it that her position in the rank was, with Juanita's, at the protected centre.

"Viva!" "Hooray!" "The Star-Spangled Banner!" "Viva! viva!"

The calico pony quivered through all its muscles, drew a deep breath, and shook itself, as if in joining in the shouts which announced arrival on the bank, safe and practically dry.

Then Polly opened her eyes, heard the manadas already retreating to their home and the mingled remarks of her companions on their exciting passage. Also she felt a light touch on her arm and realized that Juanita was directing her gaze toward a point in the bordering forest.

Rubbing her eyes, to see more clearly that which they beheld but refused to credit, she saw in the dim distance a figure strangely familiar, yet since it was discovered then and there, also awe-inspiring.

Standing beside a fallen tree trunk, with bowed and cowl-covered head, calmly awaiting their approach was a brown-robed friar.

Who, and from whence, was he?

CHAPTER XVII

HOW IT ALL CAME RIGHT

WITHIN a rude shelter which was half dug-out, half tepee, a man lay upon his bed of boughs watching a certain point of the tree-shaded entrance. When the sunshine touched that point he knew that it was midday. At midday another man would come, would thrust an earthen jar of water and a small quantity of food within the opening, and would go away again. But not till he had paused to put one unvarying question and receive one unvarying answer.

After that, nothing would happen except the occasional visit of some woodland creature, curious to see what other sort of creature this was that lay so still and for so long in one dark place. None of these visitors had offered harm to the prostrate man, not even a wildcat which, being itself a coward, he had managed to frighten away by cries and thrusts of a broken stick.

The man had one companion, without which he believed he should have died or gone mad. This was a beautiful red squirrel, that had been wounded even as the man had been, and had crept into the hut to find that silence and secrecy which all hurt wildings crave. Instead, it had found the man, who cared for it and cured it, shared his coarse food with it, and won its close affection. It was safe now, cuddled within the blanket beside its friend and waiting for that division of the day's food which always followed its midday appearance.

The division was scrupulously exact and the squirrel's portion was eaten with better appetite than the other's.

This day the division was delayed. Both the human being on the bed and his keen-eared housemate knew that the bringer of the food still lingered outside; and until he was gone both were on guard and watchful. After a little time, a shadow blotted out the ray of sunshine and again the question was repeated: "Will you tell?"

"I will not! I'll die sooner!"

The voice which at first had gruffly hurled

these words at the tormentor had now, after all these weeks, grown weak and thread-like, but had lost none of its decision.

“Then die! I return no more. You and your secret perish together. I am the last left in this rancheria and I, too, now depart. For to-morrow’s bread look to yourself. Adios.”

The mockery of the farewell elicited nothing but a contemptuous smile from the hearer and now, more noisily than in ordinary, Maro, the Hawk, strode away through the forest, leaped into his canoe and vanished down the river: vanished to his own death, it may be, since he was never seen again.

It was Captain Hiram Pancoast, owner and supercargo of the good ship Columbia, who lay thus in the most dilapidated hut of the deserted rancheria from which, because of their depredations, the general in command at Yerba Buena had banished its Indian inhabitants. Theirs was the tribe to which Maro, the Hawk, belonged; and the rancheria had been his most frequent residence, if residence a person can be said to possess whose life is spent in the saddle, and who knows not

from one night to the next where he will sleep.

Always upon the fleetest horses, obtained only he knew how, this evil father of the gentle Juanita had flashed, as it were, from end to end of California, leaving destruction behind him. He was all the more dangerous because that he was, also, "educated," and had been at the Mission, where he was reared the brilliant protégé of its padre. The good man had hoped to make a tribal missionary of his pupil, but had been bitterly disappointed; and it was now because of loyalty to the confidence of this same priest that Captain Pancoast lay disabled and, perhaps, dying in an isolated dug-out.

But evil does not always prosper; and at about the same time when Doña Monica's manadas returned to their interrupted threshing, Maro's light craft passed by the point where those had landed who were to frustrate all his schemes.

As the two girls stared at the distant cleric the others of their party rode up, and Roland inquired: "What do you see?"

"A holy man. At least, he wears the garb

of such," answered Polly, unwittingly hitting upon the fact of the case. "I'm not afraid of the padres, meet them where I may, even in this deserted wilderness; and, who knows? Possibly, the poor creature is in need of help. See! He just stands still. He doesn't go on. He seems to be—he is waiting for us. Let's hurry to him!"

Urging her pony forward as fast as it was possible to do over that rough forest trail, she gained the side of the motionless friar and saluted him with the familiar, respectful: "Buen' dias, padre!" of the Californians.

There was no answer in words and there needed none, for the pretended priest tossed aside his cowl and, instead of the emaciated features and shaven head of the real Franciscan, revealed the countenance of Francisco, the Indian.

"Fran—cis—co! What does this mean?" half-shrieked, half-gasped the astonished little gringo.

He did not answer, but looked fixedly at Juanita, who seemed to understand his glance to mean that he would speak with her apart. Well, he was her own kin, the blood brother

of her mother, and though influenced for ill by Maro, her father, yet—they were in his power! In a flash she realized this and the wisdom of agreeing to any reasonable demand he might make. Besides, she was still in the company of these brave white faces who would not see her harmed. Therefore, she motioned the others to remain where they were while she went forward a little and heard in private what Francisco had to say.

The conference did not last long; and when Nita returned from it her face was radiant with happiness. Riding once more to Polly's side she raised her clasped hands toward heaven and exclaimed:

“Gracias a Dios! It is the end—and it is good! Si. En verdad. Come.”

Francisco was already striding forward at the swift pace of those who have been reared in the open, and owing to the undergrowth which hindered them, his followers could only keep him in sight, and that with difficulty. And now, strangely enough, it was Juanita who talked, while chatterbox Polly listened like one in a dream.

“It was because of the kindness on the great

ship, that Mary Ann, he does it. Because, too, he is of the same race as my mother, Juana, and of the family of chiefs. Maro, the Hawk, he feared, but tried to dissuade of the uprising. From Maro, he learned what now is. Oh! but this day is good! This day there is no cloud over the sun! This day in that happy land where she now dwells, does the slain Juana look down and bless her child, and, because of this good deed he does, bless also the son of her mother, Francisco beyond! On, on, on!"

She held them all rapt by her own exaltation of spirit, and thrilling with alternate hope and fear, the young gringos rode after her, speechless, but straining ear and eye for whatever might appear.

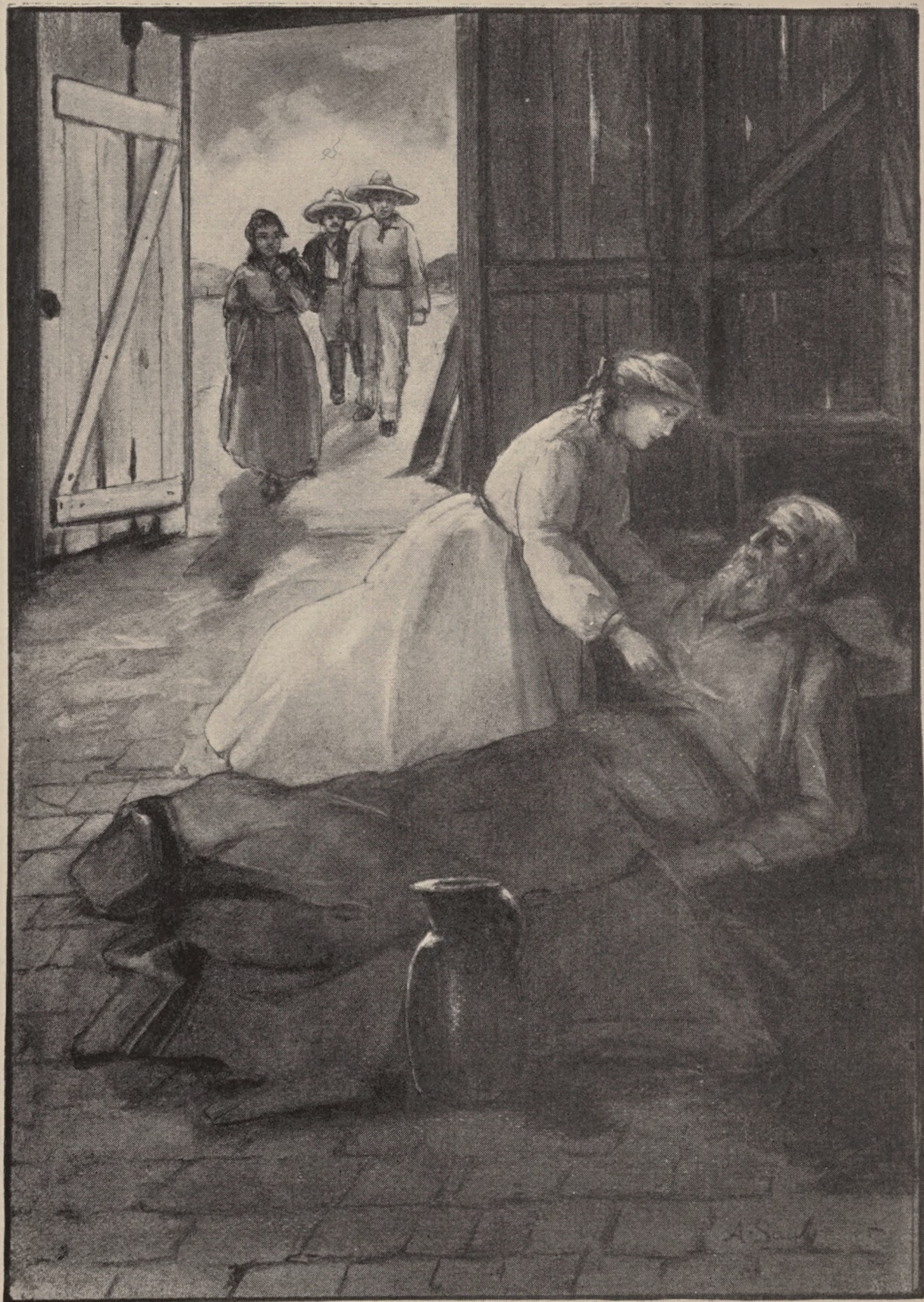
When the forest grew less dense and they arrived at the deserted rancheria Francisco paused, and pointing toward a certain dwelling awaited what discovery they should make within. At the first glimpse it seemed impossible to all that there should be anything left alive in such a weed-grown desolate spot, where was nothing but ruin and decay. The disappointment was in proportion to the

former expectation, and Roland was convinced that Francisco had brought them to this place but to show them where Captain Pancoast had died. With a groan he dropped his head on his breast and covered his eyes with his hands.

Not so Polly. Her faith in the goodness of God was too strong. What this desolation and that pointing hand of old Francisco meant she did not understand, but she meant to follow its direction. It must mean happiness. It should mean nothing else. She would prove it — Oh! she must, she must!

Slipping from her saddle, and by a gesture restraining the others from following, she sped over the weedy spaces till she reached the branch-screened tepee and saw the fresh footprints about. Somebody had been there that very day. A broken blossom newly withered told that. Somebody who might be within, who might be—her father!

The thought was a prayer in itself, and parting the branches she passed within. Another instant and she was on her knees, stroking a dear gray head, clasping thin hands which had once been so strong, bedewing with her tears



FATHER! FATHER! WAKE UP! I'VE COME

and kisses a beloved face that she knew, though now so sadly changed.

“Father! Father! Wake up! I’ve come! I—Polly! Father—father!”

The sleeper moved, but did not open his eyes, and a bright-eyed squirrel darted from somewhere about his person, gazed at this unknown intruder, and vanished into the forest from whence it had come. Its work was done.

Frightened because he did not at once respond to her, Polly again touched her lips to her father’s forehead, but lightly, daintily, as if now afraid to wake him; and at length aroused, he murmured, drowsily:

“Enough, greedy bunny. You had your share;” then suddenly opened his eyes and—could not believe what they revealed.

“Pol-ly! My—little—daughter—Margaret!” he gasped.

“Yes, father, darling father! Your own loving, naughty, runaway, bad little Polly, from Rock Acre farm, Woodley township, State of Maine! Followed you all around two oceans and away up the length of this big, wonderful California and found you at

last! Never to leave you nor let you out of my sight again —— Never, never, never! And Roland—Roland is here —— ”

Here he was, indeed, putting his sister hastily aside while he, too, bent over the prostrate man and added his caresses to hers, nor was ashamed of them, even if he were a “man” who should not be demonstrative.

Others, also, came crowding: faces familiar yet long grown unfamiliar; Santa Rosa faces, Woodley faces—his children —— The emotion was too great for the wasted frame to bear, and again the once stalwart seaman’s eyes closed in an overpowering faintness.

“Clear out. Give him air. Water! Water, somebody! Quick!” ordered Luther, peremptorily taking charge of affairs and banishing everybody from the overcrowded hut.

It was Polly who caught up the earthen jar, now empty, and ran with it to a stream near by, where the water babbled over a shallow bottom and caught itself in a little pool where the sparkling fluid had cooled to an icy depth. There she filled her jar, and there, half-consciously, because they were so pretty,

grasped a handful of the shining pebbles and sped back to her father's side.

The faint had been but temporary, and the fresh air which Luther had forced into the hut, by tearing away the obstructing branches and using one as a broom to stir the stagnant atmosphere, had already restored his patient. So that it was a perfectly sane and comprehending person who smiled upon his daughter, entering, drank eagerly of the water she held to his lips, yet fixed a searching glance upon the pebbles in her hand. Instantly, surprise at her presence in California gave place to a newer and absorbing amazement. Catching the stones away, he held them up to the light, scrutinized them afresh, and almost shouted :

“It's true! It's true! There is gold in California, and my Polly has found it!”

They thought he was delirious: and it was not until his tale was told that they understood; and then the wonder of the truth so held them that they could only murmur over and over the words which he reiterated :

“What the padre said is true. There is GOLD in California, and Polly, the gringo, has found it!”

At length there came from Luther a prodigious groan. Also the characteristic and patriotic observation: "United States must have it!"

Polly cared nothing for the gold. She cared only to hear how her father came to be just there and in such plight: and by degrees, after he had eaten of the fine tortillas which the ever-hungry Jose produced from his pocket, he was able to tell them. As usual, rumor had been both correct and incorrect in its reports about him. He had left Yerba Buena at the time everybody expected him to do, in order to keep his business engagements at various points along the coast. He had spent the last night with the padre of the Mission Dolores and had by him been entrusted with a very large sum of money, to be conveyed to a certain rancho whose owner contemplated a trip to Spain. The money was intended for the purchase of a chime of bells and rich ecclesiastical furniture, suitable for the most important Mission church in this new Hispania-California. He had, also, been made the confidant of a secret—namely: that there was gold to be dug out

of the native hills, and where it was to be found. This secret he had sacredly promised never to divulge, until such time as it might be discovered by others. Indians had brought occasional nuggets to the padre, who fearing the effect of their discovery upon them had worked upon their ignorance and superstition by assuring them that if they themselves delved for the precious metal they and theirs would be accursed.

“And so, in truth, they would be. Gold used for aught but good is its own curse, and in the hands of these wild children of mine would work miseries untold. A few beads, a little knowledge of good and evil, a steady leading toward heaven, as much innocent happiness and as little pain as may be—that is the plan of the good Dios for His red-skinned children,” concluded the padre, sincere in his own convictions.

Alas! Sitting at leisure in the cool of the day and making these confidences to the gringo Captain who had proved so true a friend, the padre had not reckoned upon his unglazed windows nor the listening ears of a spy.

But the spy was there; Maro, the Hawk; observant of the comings and goings of this el Capitan who had of his own self not only much money but stores of such things as an ambitious chieftain likes. Horses? The caponera of Captain Pancoast was the finest ever ridden out of Yerba Buena. Accoutrements? were they not priceless? Cloths and blankets, and those strange long weapons which were noisier than arrows and more fatal. Others, his brothers of the tribe, feared the new weapons; but not Maro, the Hawk.

When the Captain rode away on his trip, it was not the vaquero he had engaged who rode with him to manage the horses. Another had been substituted in his place. Also, at a lonely point upon the road, vaquero and horses disappeared into the wilderness, leaving him at the mercy of whoever might wish him ill.

Realizing treachery and seeing that at any hazard, he must place in the possession of the rancharo for whom it was designed the churchly wealth he carried in his saddlebags, he pushed forward across country and

arrived in time. Disposing of his dangerous trust, and his Yankee pluck inspiring him, back he rode to the scene of his servant's disappearance and there—an arrow struck him.

The shot had not killed him, but it had made him unable to move; and gradually losing consciousness for a time, he had awakened in the deserted hut of Maro, the Hawk, and had lain there helpless ever since.

“It has seemed as if half my life had passed since that day; and not once has some red-skinned villain failed to ask me: ‘Where is the padre’s money? and where is the money in the ground?’ and always I have answered: ‘I will not tell.’ Like most such avaricious creatures Maro has overreached himself. He was, also, too cautious with his greed; else, he would sooner have stopped me on my solitary ride to the rancho, or he would have bethought him of the cross-trail I took. But, no! He supposed that a gringo learns nothing from this California save foolhardiness. As for that other—the gold in the ground. Was it not

here, beside his own rancheria, in the very stream from which he drank, that that which he coveted lay? And Polly has found it! My Polly! But—found it for naught. The oath, the promise which binds the father also binds the child. Binds all who are here. I have given my word. All who love me must add theirs to it. Then—I guess, we'd better go home. Home! I wish it might be to Woodley township this very night! I'd hunt up Lysander Griffin and get him to go a-fishin'. I feel like a boy again, and I say, Luther Dowie, gringo yourself, how do you think Lysander would like to fish in Polly's stream?"

"First-rate. Will, too. United States, yet."

Wherein the gañan proved a better prophet than he knew, for among the first "Argonauts" who came to California seeking gold, in the years which followed, was Polly's fellow townsman, the thrifty deacon.

Meanwhile, Juanita had obeyed a signal of the gañan's and opened his saddle-bags; wherein she found such a store of eatables that soon a substantial dinner was spread

outside the hut, where the ground was promptly cleared of rubbish and where the shade was deepest. "Willing hands make light work," and were ever hands so willing as these?

Vincente and Jose themselves carried the Captain out into the beneficent fresh air which he had longed for and that seemed at once to renew his vigor, though happiness aided, also, in swiftly restoring his strength; and while all gathered around him, plying him with the daintiest morsels and with draughts from the wonderful gold-bearing stream, they gave the solemn promise he exacted to keep the padre's secret—till the right time came for its revealing. There, too, all that had as yet been unexplained was made clear.

After the dispersement of his followers from this rancheria Maro had returned to it bringing the wounded Captain and a few Indians whom he could depend upon to carry out his will. This had been done to keep his victim alive till time and suffering had forced him to reveal where he had hidden the padre's gold and that other "secret" which Maro had not fully

understood. He would never believe but that his prisoner had kept this wealth for himself and was convinced that he had buried it somewhere, during his lonely ride across the country. Whenever Maro was absent from his village, some other Indian conveyed the scanty portion of food and the jar of water to the sick man's hut, propounded the inquiry he had been taught to utter in a parrot-like manner, and receive the reply. Had that reply ever been different and in accord with Maro's wishes, that person would have been instantly notified by the swiftest messenger; but, at last, wearying of their lonely idleness, the few congenial spirits he had kept about him had openly revolted and deserted. Then he, too, as recorded, paid his last visit to his victim and disappeared.

"But Francisco? How happens it that you have come to wear the habit of a padre? Was it you who shot all those arrows? Did you ever mean to hurt me with them? Was it you who did the—the hieroglyphics? and how long have you known this about my father, where he was and how to find him?" cried Polly, going to the sailor, who sat apart

silent, and taking no part in anything they did.

“Polly! Polly! You’re a regular Yankee for questions!” warned Roland, shaking his finger at her.

But she was not dissuaded. Heaping Francisco’s hands with food she motioned Juanita to her side, and it was the latter who gained, by signs and glances in good part, the information everybody wished and Polly demanded.

Her old “shipmate” of the *Mary Ann* had been astonished at finding her a member of the Santa Rosa household, for having left the schooner as soon as it touched port, he had not learned what became of the little passenger. In time he had heard of the search for the over-due Captain, and from words Maro had dropped guessed of his whereabouts. He had verified these words by a visit to the rancheria, had himself viewed the prisoner through the doorway of the hut, and had returned south. There he found the search-party setting out and had followed it to the end. He had chosen to do this in his own mysterious way and had guided it by the

painted arrows, each of which he had discharged from some undiscovered point.

Further than this, he had reflected that, since the outbreak at San Diego, the sight of an Indian would arouse fear in the gringos' minds, but that of a priest would inspire a corresponding confidence. Therefore, he had "borrowed"—how he would not disclose—the habit of a friar, and would return it when its mission was accomplished.

"He is sorry for many things, and he would some good still do. Hear me—of this his plan, I speak. Among the trees beside the river we forded lie many canoes, left by their makers to decay. We are to carry el Capitan thither upon his blanket and in safety all recross the stormy water. The horses may swim—or drown. Who cares? At the Rancho Soledad the sick man will lie and grow strong, then follow his own will to go elsewhere.

"The arrow that palsied and did not kill was tipped with a poison which Francisco can cure. Of a great medicine-man he learned this herb and in this forest we reenter it grows abundant. If the cure he concludes, then of

the good Dios and the kind gringos will there not be pardon for Francisco—for the red man, blood brother of Juana? Is it so? We listen. Let the little señorita speak.”

“Oh! yes, yes, yes! That is fine—fine—fine! Let Francisco keep his promise and we will forgive every red man in the world, for any wrong thing ever done, even your poor father, Nita dear—even Maro, the Hawk!”

THE END

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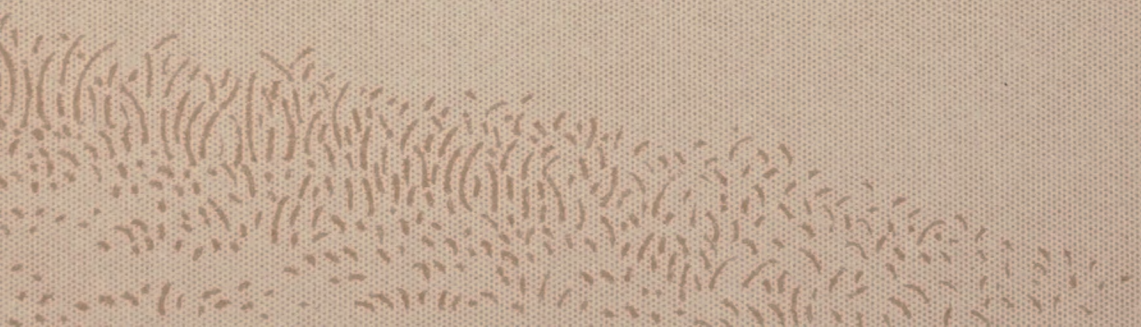
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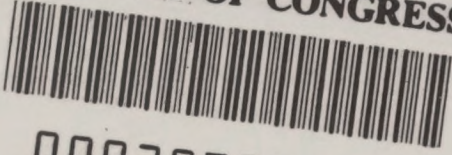
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