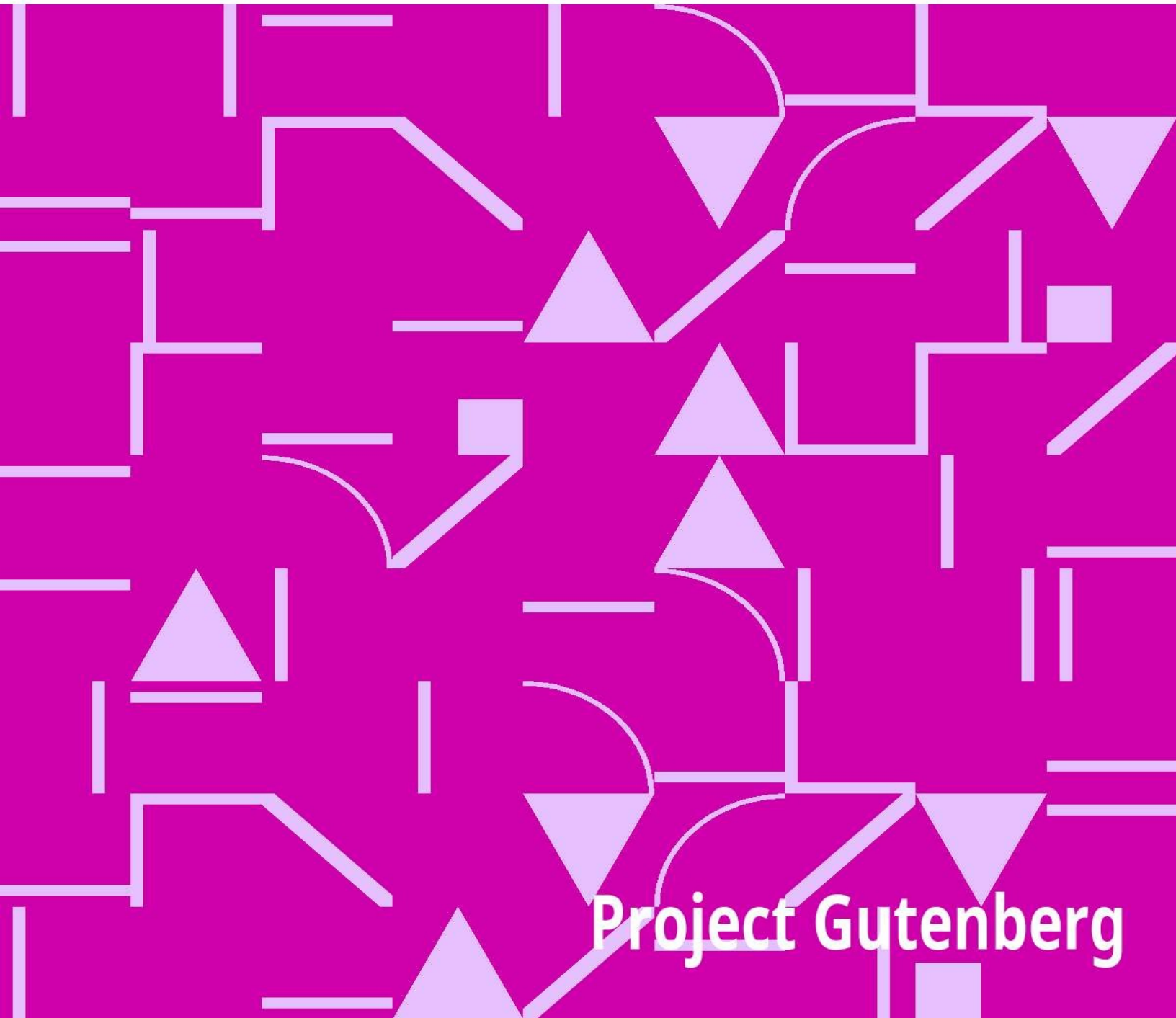
The Girl from Sunset Ranch; Or, Alone in a Great City

Amy Bell Marlowe



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THE GIRL FROM SUNSET RANCH

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"CAB, MISS? TAKE YOU ANYWHERE YOU SAY."
Frontispiece (Page 67).

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OR

ALONE IN A GREAT CITY

BY

AMY BELL MARLOWE

AUTHOR OF
THE OLDEST OF FOUR, THE GIRLS OF HILLCREST
FARM, WYN'S CAMPING DAYS, ETC.

Illustrated

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Made in the United States of America

The Girl from Sunset Ranch

CONTENTS

THE GIRL FROM SUNSET RANCH

CHAPTER I

“SNUGGY” AND THE ROSE PONY

“Hi, Rose! Up, girl! There’s another party making for the View by the far path. Get a move on, Rosie.”

The strawberry roan tossed her cropped mane and her dainty little hoofs clattered more quickly over the rocky path which led up from the far-reaching grazing lands of Sunset Ranch to the summit of the rocky eminence that bounded the valley upon the east.

To the west lay a great, rolling plain, covered with buffalo grass and sage; and dropping down the arc of the sky was the setting sun, ruddy-countenanced, whose almost level rays played full upon the face of the bluff up which the pony climbed so nimbly.

“On, Rosie, girl!” repeated the rider. “Don’t let him get to the View before us. I don’t see why anybody would wish to go there,” she added, with a jealous pang, “for it was father’s favorite outlook. None of our boys, I am sure, would come up here at this hour.”

Helen Morrell was secure in this final opinion. It was but a short month since Prince Morrell had gone down under the hoofs of the steers in an unfortunate stampede that had cost the Sunset Ranch much beside the life of its well-liked owner.

The View—a flat table of rock on the summit overlooking the valley—had become almost sacred in the eyes of the punchers of Sunset Ranch since Mr. Morrell’s death. For it was to that spot the ranchman had betaken himself—usually with his daughter—on almost every fair evening, to overlook the valley and count the roaming herds which grazed under his brand.

Helen, who was sixteen and of sturdy build, could see the nearer herds now dotting the plain. She had her father’s glasses slung over her shoulder, and she had come to-night partly for the purpose of spying out the strays along the watercourses or hiding in the distant *coulées*.

But mainly her visit to the View was because her father had loved to ride here. She could think about him here undisturbed by the confusion and bustle at the ranch-house. And there were some things—things about her father and the sad conversation they had had together before his taking away—that Helen wanted to speculate upon alone.

The boys had picked him up after the accident and brought him home; and doctors had been brought all the way from Helena to do what they could for him. But Mr. Morrell had suffered many bruises and broken bones, and there had been no hope for him from the first.

He was not, however, always unconscious. He was a masterful man and he refused to take drugs to deaden the pain.

“Let me know what I am about until I meet death,” he had whispered. “I—am—not—afraid.”

And yet, there was one thing of which he had been sorely afraid. It was the thought of leaving his daughter alone.

“Oh, Snuggy!” he groaned, clinging to the girl’s plump hand with his own weak one. “If there were some of your own kind to—to leave you with. A girl like you needs women about—good women, and refined women. Squaws, and Greasers, and half-breeds aren’t the kind of women-folk your mother was brought up among.

“I don’t know but I’ve done wrong these past few years—since your mother died, anyway. I’ve been making money here, and it’s all for you, Snuggy. That’s fixed by the lawyer in Elberon.

“Big Hen Billings is executor and guardian of you and the ranch. I know I can trust him. But there ought to be nice women and girls for you to live with—like those girls who went to school with you the four years you were in Denver.

“Yet, this is your home. And your money is going to be made here. It would be a crime to sell out now.

“Ah, Snuggy! Snuggy! If your mother had only lived!” groaned Mr. Morrell. “A woman knows what’s right for a girl better than a man. This is a rough place out here. And even the best of our friends and neighbors are crude. You want refinement, and pretty dresses, and soft beds, and fine furniture——”

“No, no, Father! I love Sunset Ranch just as it is,” Helen declared, wiping away her tears.

“Aye. ’Tis a beauty spot—the beauty spot of all Montana, I believe,” agreed the dying man. “But you need something more than a beautiful landscape.”

“But there are true hearts here—all our friends!” cried Helen.

“And so they are—God bless them!” responded Prince Morrell, fervently. “But, Snuggy, you were born to something better than being a ‘cowgirl.’ Your mother was a refined woman. I have forgotten most of my college education; but I had it once.

“*This* was not our original environment. It was not meant that we should be shut away from all the gentler things of life, and live rudely as we have. Unhappy circumstances did that for us.”

He was silent for a moment, his face working with suppressed emotion. Suddenly his grasp tightened on the girl’s hand and he continued:

“Snuggy! I’m going to tell you something. It’s something you ought to know, I believe. Your mother was made unhappy by it, and I wouldn’t want a knowledge of it to come upon you unaware, in the after time when you are alone. Let me tell you with my own lips, girl.”

“Why, Father, what is it?”

“Your father’s name is under a cloud. There is a smirch on my reputation. I—I ran away from New York to escape arrest, and I have lived here in the wilderness, without communicating with old friends and associates, because I did not want the matter stirred up.”

“Afraid of arrest, Father?” gasped Helen.

“For your mother’s sake, and for yours,” he said. “She couldn’t have borne it. It would have killed her.”

“But you were not guilty, Father!” cried Helen.

“How do you know I wasn’t?”

“Why, Father, you could never have done anything dishonorable or mean—I know you could not!”

“Thank you, Snuggy!” the dying man replied, with a smile hovering about his pain-drawn lips. “You’ve been the greatest comfort a father ever had, ever since you was a little, cuddly baby, and liked to snuggle up against father under the blankets.

“That was before the big ranch-house was built, and we lived in a shack. I don’t

know how your mother managed to stand it, winters. *You* just snuggled into my arms under the blankets—that's how we came to call you 'Snuggy.'"

"'Snuggy' is a good name, Dad," she declared. "I love it, because *you* love it. And I know I gave you comfort when I was little."

"Indeed, yes! *What* a comfort you were after your poor mother died, Snuggy! Ah, well! you shall have your reward, dear. I am sure of that. Only I am worried that you should be left alone now."

"Big Hen and the boys will take care of me," Helen said, stifling her sobs.

"Nay, but you need women-folk about. Your mother's sister, now—The Starkweathers, if they knew, might offer you a home."

"That is, Aunt Eunice's folks?" asked Helen. "I remember mother speaking of Aunt Eunice."

"Yes. She corresponded with Eunice until her death. Of course, we haven't heard from them since. The Starkweathers naturally did not wish to keep up a close acquaintanceship with me after what happened."

"But, dear Dad! you haven't told me what happened. *Do* tell me!" begged the anxious girl.

Then the girl's dying father told her of the looted bank account of Grimes & Morrell. The cash assets of the firm had suddenly disappeared. Circumstantial evidence pointed at Prince Morrell. His partner and Starkweather, who had a small interest in the firm, showed their doubt of him. The creditors were clamorous and ugly. The bookkeeper of the firm disappeared.

"They advised me to go away for a while; your mother was delicate and the trouble was wearing her into her grave. And so," Mr. Morrell said, in a shaking voice, "I ran away. We came out here. You were born in this valley, Snuggy. We hoped at first to take you back to New York, where all the mystery would be explained. But that time never came.

"Neither Starkweather, nor Grimes, seemed able to help me with advice or information. Gradually I got into the cattle business here. I prospered here, while Fenwick Grimes prospered in New York. I understand he is a very wealthy man.

"Soon after we came out here your Uncle Starkweather fell heir to a big property and moved into a mansion on Madison Avenue. He, and his wife, and the three girls—Belle, Hortense and Flossie—have everything heart could desire.

“And they have all I want my Snuggy to have,” groaned Mr. Morrell. “They have refinement, and books, and music, and all the things that make life worth living for a woman.”

“But I *love* Sunset Ranch!” cried Helen again.

“Aye. But I watched your mother. I know how much she missed the gentler things she had been brought up to. Had I been able to pay off those old creditors while she was alive, she might have gone back.

“And yet,” the ranchman sighed, “the stigma is there. The blot is still on your father’s name, Snuggy. People in New York still believe that I was dishonest. They believe that with the proceeds of my dishonesty I came out here and went into the cattle business.

“You see, my dear? Even the settling with our old creditors—the creditors of Grimes & Morrell—made suspicion wag her tongue more eagerly than ever. I paid every cent, with interest compounded to the date of settlement. Grimes had long since had himself cleared of his debts and started over again. I do not know even that he and Starkweather know that I have been able to clear up the whole matter.

“However, as I say, the stain upon my reputation remains. I could never explain my flight. I could never imagine what became of the money. Somebody embezzled it, and *I* was the one who ran away. Do you see, my dear?”

And Helen told him that she *did* see, and assured him again and again of her entire trust in his honor. But Mr. Morrell died with the worry of the old trouble—the trouble that had driven him across the continent—heavy upon his mind.

And now it was serving to make Helen’s mind most uneasy. The crime of which her father had been accused was continually in her thoughts.

Who had really been guilty of the embezzlement? The bookkeeper, who disappeared? Fenwick Grimes, the partner? Or, *Who?*

As the Rose pony—her own favorite mount—took Helen Morrell up the bluff path to the View on this evening, the remembrance of this long talk with her father before he died was running in the girl’s mind.

Perhaps she was a girl who would naturally be more seriously impressed than most, at sixteen. She had been brought up among older people. She was a wise little thing when she was a mere toddler.

And after her mother’s death she had been her father’s daily companion until she

was old enough to be sent away to be educated. The four long terms at the Denver school had carried Helen Morrell (for she had a quick mind) through those grades which usually prepare girls for college.

When she came back after graduation, however, she saw that her father needed her companionship more than she needed college. And, again, she was too domestic by nature to really long for a higher education.

She was glad now—oh! so glad—that she had remained at Sunset Ranch during these last few months. Her father had died with her arms about him. As far as he could be comforted, Helen had comforted him.

But now, as she rode up the rocky trail, she murmured to herself:

“If I could only clear dad’s name!”

Again she raised her eyes and saw a buckskin pony and its rider getting nearer and nearer to the summit.

“Get on, Rose!” she exclaimed. “That chap will beat us out. Who under the sun can he be?”

“HELEN CREPT ON HANDS AND KNEES TO THE EDGE OF THE BLUFF.”
(Page 14)

She was sure the rider of the buckskin was no Sunset puncher. Yet he seemed garbed in the usual chaps, sombrero, flannel shirt and gay neckerchief of the cowpuncher.

“And there isn’t another band of cattle nearer than Froghole,” thought the girl, adjusting her body to the Rose pony’s quickened gait.

She did not know it, but she was quite as much an object of interest to the strange rider as he was to her. And it was worth while watching Helen Morrell ride a pony.

The deep brown of her cheek was relieved by a glow of healthful red. Her thick plaits of hair were really sunburned; her thick eyebrows were startlingly light compared with her complexion.

Her eyes were dark gray, with little golden lights playing in them; they seemed fairly to twinkle when she laughed. Her lips were as red as ripe sumac berries;

her nose, straight, long, and generously moulded, was really her handsomest feature, for of course her hair covered her dainty ears more or less.

From the rolling collar of her blouse her neck rose firm and solid—as strong-looking as a boy's. She was plump of body, with good shoulders, a well-developed arm, and her ornamented russet riding boots, with a tiny silver spur in each heel, covered very pretty and very small feet.

Her hand, if plump, was small, too; but the gauntlets she wore made it seem larger and more mannish than it was. She rode as though she were a part of the pony.

She had urged on the strawberry roan and now came out upon the open plateau at the top of the bluff just as the buckskin mounted to the same level from the other side.

The rock called "the View" was nearer to the stranger than to herself. It overhung the very steepest drop of the eminence.

Helen touched Rose with the spur, and the pony whisked her tail and shot across the uneven sward toward the big boulder where Helen and her father had so often stood to survey the rolling acres of Sunset Ranch.

Whether the stranger on the buckskin thought her mount had bolted with her, Helen did not know. But she heard him cry out, saw him swing his hat, and the buckskin started on a hard gallop along the verge of the precipice toward the very goal for which the Rose pony was headed.

"The foolish fellow! He'll be killed!" gasped Helen, in sudden fright. "That soil there crumbles like cheese! There! He's down!"

She saw the buckskin's forefoot sink. The brute stumbled and rolled over—fortunately for the pony *away* from the cliff's edge.

But the buckskin's rider was hurled into the air. He sprawled forward like a frog diving and—without touching the ground—passed over the brink of the precipice and disappeared from Helen's startled gaze.

CHAPTER II

DUDLEY STONE

The victim of the accident made no sound. No scream rose from the depths after he disappeared. The buckskin pony rolled over, scrambled to its feet, and cantered off across the plateau.

Helen Morrell had swerved her own mount farther to the south and came to the edge of the caved-in bit of bank with a rush of hoofs that ended in a wild scramble as she bore down upon the Rose pony's bit.

She was out of her saddle, and had flung the reins over Rose's head, on the instant. The well-trained pony stood like a rock.

The girl, her heart beating tumultuously, crept on hands and knees to the crumbling edge of the bluff.

She knew its scarred face well. There were outcropping boulders, gravel pits, ledges of shale, brush clumps and a few ragged trees clinging tenaciously to the water-worn gullies.

She expected to see the man crushed and bleeding on some rock below. Perhaps he had rolled clear to the bottom.

But as her swift gaze searched the face of the bluff, there was no rock, splotched with red, in her line of vision. Then she saw something in the top of one of the trees, far down.

It was the yellow handkerchief which the stranger had worn. It fluttered in the evening breeze like a flag of distress.

"E-e-e-*yow!*" cried Helen, making a horn of her hands as she leaned over the edge of the precipice, and uttering the puncher's signal call.

"E-e-e-*yow!*" came up a faint reply.

She saw the green top of the tree stir. Then a face—scratched and streaked with

blood—appeared.

“For the love of heaven!” called a thin voice. “Get somebody with a rope. I’ve got to have some help.”

“I have a rope right here. Pass it under your arms, and I’ll swing you out of that tree-top,” replied Helen, promptly.

She jumped up and went to the pony. Her rope—she would no more think of traveling without it than would one of the Sunset punchers—was coiled at the saddlebow.

Running back to the verge of the bluff she planted her feet on a firm boulder and dropped the coil into the depths. In a moment it was in the hands of the man below.

“Over your head and shoulders!” she cried.

“You can never hold me!” he called back, faintly.

“You do as you’re told!” she returned, in a severe tone. “I’ll hold you—don’t you fear.”

She had already looped her end of the rope over the limb of a tree that stood rooted upon the brink of the bluff. With such a purchase she would be able to hold all the rope itself would hold.

“Ready!” she called down to him.

“All right! Here I swing!” was the reply.

Leaning over the brink, rather breathless, it must be confessed, the girl from Sunset Ranch saw him swing out of the top of the tree.

The tree-top was all of seventy feet from its roots. If he slipped now he would suffer a fall that surely would kill him.

But he was able to help himself. Although he crashed once against the side of the bluff and set a bushel of gravel rattling down, in a moment he gained foothold on a ledge. There he stood, wavering until she paid off a little of the line. Then he dropped down to get his breath.

“Are you safe?” she shouted down to him.

“Sure! I can sit here all night.”

“You don’t want to, I suppose?” she asked.

“Not so’s you’d notice it. I guess I can get down after a fashion.”

“Hurt bad?”

“It’s my foot, mostly—right foot. I believe it’s sprained, or broken. It’s sort of in the way when I move about.”

“Your face looks as if that tree had combed it some,” commented Helen.

“Never mind,” replied the youth. “Beauty’s only skin deep, at best. And I’m not proud.”

She could not see him very well, for the sun had dropped so low that down where he lay the face of the bluff was in shadow.

“Well, what are you going to do? Climb up, or down?”

“I believe getting down would be easier—’specially if you let me use your rope.”

“Sure!”

“But then, there’d be my pony. I couldn’t get him with this foot——”

“I’ll catch him. My Rose can run down anything on four legs in these parts,” declared the girl, briskly.

“And can you get down here to the foot of this cliff where I’m bound to land?”

“Yes. I know the way in the dark. Got matches?”

“Yes.”

“Then you build some kind of a smudge when you reach the bottom. That’ll show me where you are. Now I’m going to drop the rope to you. Look out it doesn’t get tangled.”

“All right! Let ’er come!”

“I’ll have to leave you if I’m to catch that buckskin before it gets dark, stranger. You’ll get along all right?” she added.

“Surest thing you know!”

She dropped the rope. He gathered it in quickly and then uttered a cheerful shout.

“All clear?” asked Helen.

“Don’t worry about me. I’m all right,” he assured her.

Helen leaped back to her waiting pony. Already the golden light was dying out

of the sky. Up here in the foothills the “evening died hard” as the saying is; but the buckskin pony had romped clear across the plateau. He was now, indeed, out of sight.

She whirled Rose about and set off at a gallop after the runaway. It was not until then that she remembered she had no rope. That buckskin would have to be fairly run down. There would be no roping him.

“But if you can’t do it, no other horsie can,” she said, aloud, patting the Rose pony on her arching neck. “Go it, girl! Let’s see if we can’t beat any miserable little buckskin that ever came into this country. A strawberry roan forever!”

Her “E-e-e-yow! yow!” awoke the pony to desperate endeavor. She seemed to merely skim the dry grass of the open plateau, and in ten minutes Helen saw a riderless mount plunging up the side of a *coulée* far ahead.

“There he goes!” cried the girl. “After him, Rosie! Make your pretty hoofs fly!”

The excitement of the chase roused in Helen that feeling of freedom and confidence that is a part of life on the plains. Those who live much in the open air, and especially in the saddle, seldom think of failure.

She knew she was going to catch the runaway pony. Such an idea as non-success never entered her mind. This was the first hard riding she had done since Mr. Morrell died; and now her thoughts expanded and she shook off the hopeless feeling which had clouded her young heart and mind since they had buried her father.

While she rode on, and rode hard, after the fleeing buckskin her revived thought kept time with the pony’s hoofbeats.

No longer did the old tune run in her head: “If I only *could* clear dad’s name!” Instead the drum of confidence beat a charge to arms: “I know I *can* clear his name!

“To think of poor dad living out here all these years, with suspicion resting on his reputation back there in New York. And he wasn’t guilty! It was that partner of his, or that bookkeeper, who was guilty. That is the secret of it,” Helen told herself.

“I’ll go back East and find out all about it,” determined the girl, as her pony carried her swiftly over the ground. “Up, Rose! There he is! Don’t let him get away from us!”

Her interest in the chase of the buckskin pony and in the mystery of her father’s

trouble ran side by side.

“On, on!” she urged Rose. “Why shouldn’t I go East? Big Hen can run the ranch well enough. And there are my cousins—and auntie. If Aunt Eunice resembles mother——

“Go it, Rose! There’s our quarry!”

She stooped forward in the saddle, and as the Rose pony, running like the wind, passed the now staggering buckskin, Helen snatched the dragging rein, and pulled the runaway around to follow in her own wake.

“Hush, now! Easy!” she commanded her mount, who obeyed her voice quite as well as though she had tugged at the reins. “Now we’ll go back quietly and trail this useless one along with us.

“Come up, Buck! Easy, Rose!” So she urged them into the same gait, returning in a wide circle toward the path up which she had climbed before the sun went down—the trail to Sunset Ranch.

“Yes! I can do it!” she cried, thinking aloud. “I can and will go to New York. I’ll find out all about that old trouble. Uncle Starkweather can tell me, probably.

“And then it will please father.” She spoke as though Mr. Morrell was sure to know her decision. “He will like it if I go to live with them a spell. He said it is what I need—the refining influence of a nice home.

“And I *would* love to be with nice girls again—and to hear good music—and put on something beside a riding skirt when I go out of the house.”

She sighed. “One cannot have a cow ranch and all the fripperies of civilization, too. Not very well. I—I guess I am longing for the flesh-pots of Egypt. Perhaps poor dad did, too. Well, I’ll give them a whirl. I’ll go East——

“Why, where’s that fellow’s fire?”

She was descending the trail into the pall of dusk that had now spread over the valley. Far away she caught a glimmer of light—a lantern on the porch at the ranch-house. But right below here where she wished to see a light, there was not a spark.

“I hope nothing’s happened to him,” she mused. “I don’t believe he is one of us; if he had been he wouldn’t have raced a pony so close to the edge of the bluff.”

She began to “co-ee! co-ee!” as the ponies clattered down the remainder of the pathway. And finally there came an answering shout. Then a little glimmer of

light flashed up—again and yet again.

“Matches!” grumbled Helen. “Can’t he find anything dry to burn down there and so make a steady light?”

She shouted again.

“This way, Miss!” she heard the stranger cry.

The ponies picked their way carefully over the loose shale that had fallen to the foot of the bluff. There were trees, too, to make the way darker.

“Hi!” cried Helen. “Why didn’t you light a fire?”

“Why, to tell you the truth, I had some difficulty in getting down here, and I—I had to rest.”

The words were followed by a groan that the young man evidently could not suppress.

“Why, you’re more badly hurt than you said!” cried the girl. “I’d better get help; hadn’t I?”

“A doctor is out of the question, I guess. I believe that foot’s broken.”

“Huh! You’re from the East!” she said, suddenly.

“How so?”

“You say ‘guess’ in that funny way. And that explains it.”

“Explains what?”

“Your riding so recklessly.”

“My goodness!” exclaimed the other, with a short laugh. “I thought the whole West was noted for reckless riding.”

“Oh, no. It only *looks* reckless,” she returned, quietly. “Our boys wouldn’t ride a pony close to the edge of a steep descent like that up yonder.”

“All right. I’m in the wrong,” admitted the stranger. “But you needn’t rub it in.”

“I didn’t mean to,” said Helen, quickly. “I have a bad habit of talking out loud.”

He laughed at that. “You’re frank, you mean? I like that. Be frank enough to tell me how I am to get back to Badger’s—even on ponyback—to-night?”

“Impossible,” declared Helen.

“Then, perhaps I *had* better make an effort to make camp.”

“Why, no! It’s only a few miles to the ranch-house. I’ll hoist you up on your pony. The trail’s easy.”

“Whose ranch is it?” he asked, with another suppressed groan.

“Mine—Sunset Ranch.”

“Sunset Ranch! Why, I’ve heard of that. One of the last big ranches remaining in Montana; Isn’t it?”

“Yes.”

“Almost as big as 101?”

“That’s right,” said Helen, briefly.

“But I didn’t know a girl owned it,” said the other, curiously.

“She didn’t—until lately. My father, Prince Morrell, has just died.”

“Oh!” exclaimed the other, in a softened tone. “And you are Miss Morrell?”

“I am. And who are you? Easterner, of course?”

“You guessed right—though, I suppose, you ‘reckon’ instead of ‘guess.’ I’m from New York.”

“Is that so?” queried Helen. “That’s a place I want to see before long.”

“Well, you’ll be disappointed,” remarked the other. “My name is Dudley Stone, and I was born and brought up in New York and have lived there all my life until I got away for this trip West. But, believe me, if I didn’t have to I would never go back!”

“Why do you have to go back?” asked Helen, simply.

“Business. Necessity of earning one’s living. I’m in the way of being a lawyer—when my days of studying, and all, are over. And then, I’ve got a sister who might not fit into the mosaic of this freer country, either.”

“Well, Dudley Stone,” quoth the girl from Sunset Ranch, “we’d better not stay talking here. It’s getting darker every minute. And I reckon your foot needs attention.”

“I hate to move it,” confessed the young Easterner.

“You can’t stay here, you know,” insisted Helen. “Where’s my rope?”

“I’m sorry. I had to hitch one end of it up above and let myself down by it.”

“Well, it might have come in handy to lash you on the pony. I don’t mind about the rope otherwise. One of the boys will bring it in for me to-morrow. Now, let’s see what we can do towards hoisting you into your saddle.”

CHAPTER III

THE MISTRESS OF SUNSET RANCH

Dudley Stone had begun to peer wonderingly at this strange girl. When he had first sighted her riding her strawberry roan across the plateau he supposed her to be a little girl—and really, physically, she did not seem much different from what he had first supposed.

But she handled this situation with all the calmness and good sense of a much older person. She spoke like the men and women he had met during his sojourn in the West, too.

Yet, when he was close to her, he saw that she was simply a young girl with good health, good muscles, and a rather pretty face and figure. He called her "Miss" because it seemed to flatter her; but Dud Stone felt himself infinitely older than this girl of Sunset Ranch.

It was she who went about getting him aboard the pony, however; he never could have done it by himself. Nor was it so easily done as said.

In the first place, the badly trained buckskin didn't want to stand still. And the young man was in such pain that he really was unable to aid Helen in securing the pony.

"Here, you take Rose," commanded the girl, at length. "She'd stand for anything. Up you come, now, sir!"

The young fellow was no weakling. But when he put one arm over the girl's strong shoulder, and was hoisted erect, she felt him quiver all over. She knew that the pain he suffered must be intense.

"Whoa, Rose, girl!" commanded Helen. "Back around! Now, sir, up with that lame leg. It's got to be done——"

"I know it!" he panted, and by a desperate effort managed to get the broken foot over the saddle.

“Up with you!” said Helen, and hoisted him with a man’s strength into the saddle. “Are you there?”

“Oh! Ouch! Yes,” returned the Easterner. “I’m here. No knowing how long I’ll stick, though.”

“You’d better stick. Here! Put this foot in the stirrup. Don’t suppose you can stand the other in it?”

“Oh, no! I really couldn’t,” he exclaimed.

“Well, we’ll go slow. Hi, there! Come here, you Buck!”

“He’s a vicious little scoundrel,” said the young man.

“He ought to have a course of sprouts under one of our wranglers,” remarked the girl from Sunset Ranch. “Now let’s go along.”

Despite the buckskin’s dancing and cavorting, she mounted, stuck the spurs into him a couple of times, and the ill-mannered pony decided that walking properly was better than bucking.

“You’re a wonder!” exclaimed Dud Stone, admiringly.

“You haven’t been West long,” she replied, with a smile. “Women folk out here aren’t much afraid of horses.”

“I should say they were not—if you are a specimen.”

“I’m just ordinary. I spent four school terms in Denver, and I never rode there, so I kind of lost the hang of it.”

Dud Stone was becoming anxious over another matter.

“Are you sure you can find the trail when it’s so dark?” he asked.

“We’re on it now,” she said.

“I’m glad you’re so sure,” he returned, grimly. “I can’t see the ground, even.”

“But the ponies know, if I don’t,” observed Helen, cheerfully. “Nothing to be afraid of.”

“I guess you think I *am* kind of a tenderfoot?” he returned.

“You’re not used to night traveling on the cattle range,” she said. “You see, we lay our courses by the stars, just as mariners do at sea. I can find my way to the ranch-house from clear beyond Elberon, as long as the stars show.”

“Well,” he sighed, “this is some different from riding on the bridle-path in Central Park.”

“That’s in New York?” she asked.

“Yes.”

“I mean to go there. It’s really a big city, I suppose?”

“Makes Denver look like a village,” said Stone, laughing to smother a groan.

“So father said.”

“You have people there, I hope?”

“Yes. Father and mother came from there. It was before I was born, though. You see, I’m a real Montana product.”

“And a mighty fine one!” he murmured. Then he said aloud: “Well, as long as you’ve got folks in the big city, it’s all right. But it’s the loneliest place on God’s earth if one has no friends and no confidants. I know that to be true from what boys have told me who have come there from out of town.”

“Oh, I’ve got folks,” said Helen, lightly. “How’s the foot now?”

“Bad,” he admitted. “It hangs loose, you see——”

“Hold on!” commanded Helen, dismounting. “We’ve a long way to travel yet. That foot must be strapped so that it will ride easier. Wait!”

She handed him her rein to hold and went around to the other side of the Rose pony. She removed her belt, unhooked the empty holster that hung from it, and slipped the holster into her pocket. Few of the riders carried a gun on Sunset Ranch unless the coyotes proved troublesome.

With her belt Helen strapped the dangling leg to the saddle girth. The useless stirrup, that flopped and struck the lame foot, she tucked up out of the way.

With tender fingers she touched the wounded foot. She could feel the fever through the boot.

“But you’d better keep your boot on till we get home, Dud Stone,” advised Helen. “It will sort of hold it together and perhaps keep the pain from becoming greater than you can bear. But I guess it hurts mighty bad.”

“It sure does, Miss Morrell,” he returned, grimly. “Is—is the ranch far?”

“Some distance. And we’ve got to walk. But bear up if you can——”

She saw him waver in the saddle. If he fell, she could not be sure just how Rose, the spirited pony, would act.

“Say!” she said, coming around and walking by his side, leading the other mount by the bridle. “You lean on me. Don’t want you falling out of the saddle. Too hard work to get you back again.”

“I guess you think I *am* a tenderfoot!” muttered young Stone.

He never knew how they reached Sunset Ranch. The fall, the terrible wrench of his foot, and the endurance of the pain was finally too much for him. In a half-fainting condition he sank part of his weight on the girl’s shoulder, and she sturdily trudged along the rough trail, bearing him up until she thought her own limbs would give way.

At last she even had to let the buckskin run at large, he made her so much trouble. But the Rose pony was “a dear!”

Somewhere about ten o’clock the dogs began to bark. She saw the flash of lanterns and heard the patter of hoofs.

She gave voice to the long range yell, and a dozen anxious punchers replied. Great discussion had arisen over where she could have gone, for nobody had seen her ride off toward the View that afternoon.

“Whar you been, gal?” demanded Big Hen Billings, bringing his horse to a sudden stop across the trail. “Hul-*lo!* What’s that you got with yer?”

“A tenderfoot. Easy, Hen! I’ve got his leg strapped to the girth. He’s in bad shape,” and she related, briefly, the particulars of the accident.

Dudley Stone had only a hazy recollection later of the noise and confusion of his arrival. He was borne into the house by two men—one of them the ranch foreman himself.

They laid him on a couch, cut the boot from his injured foot, and then the sock he wore.

Hen Billings, with bushy whiskers and the frame of a giant, was nevertheless as tender with the injured foot as a woman. Water with a chunk of ice floating in it was used to reduce the swelling. The foreman’s blunted fingers probed for broken bones.

But it seemed there was none. It was only a bad sprain, and they finally stripped him to his underclothes and bandaged the foot with cloths soaked with ice water.

When they got him into bed—in an adjoining room—the young mistress of Sunset Ranch reappeared, with a tray and napkins, with which she arranged a table.

“That’s what he wants—some good grub under his belt, Snuggy,” said the gigantic foreman, finally lighting his pipe. “He’ll be all right in a few days. I’ll send word to Creeping Ford for one of the boys to ride down to Badger’s and tell ’em. That’s where Mr. Stone says he’s been stopping.”

“You’re mighty kind,” said the Easterner, gratefully, as Sing, the Chinese servant, shuffled in with a steaming supper.

“We’re glad to have a chance to play Good Samaritan in this part of the country,” said Helen, laughing. “Isn’t that so, Hen?”

“That’s right, Snuggy,” replied the foreman, patting her on the shoulder.

Dud Stone looked at Helen curiously, as the big man strode out of the room.

“What an odd name!” he commented.

“My father called me that, when I was a tiny baby,” replied the girl. “And I love it. All my friends call me ‘Snuggy.’ At least, all my ranch friends.”

“Well, it’s too soon for me to begin, I suppose?” he said, laughing.

“Oh, quite too soon,” returned Helen, as composedly as a person twice her age. “You had better stick to ‘Miss Morrell,’ and remember that I am the mistress of Sunset Ranch.”

“But I notice that you take liberties with *my* name,” he said, quickly.

“That’s different. You’re a man. Men around here always shorten their names, or have nicknames. If they call you by your full name that means the boys don’t like you. And I liked you from the start,” said the Western girl, quite frankly.

“Thank you!” he responded, his eyes twinkling. “I expect it must have been my fine riding that attracted you.”

“No. Nor it wasn’t your city cowpuncher clothes,” she retorted. “I know those things weren’t bought farther West than Chicago.”

“A palpable hit!” admitted Dudley Stone.

“No. It was when you took that tumble into the tree; was hanging on by your eyelashes, yet could joke about it,” declared Helen, warmly.

She might have added, too, that now he had been washed and his hair combed,

he was an attractive-looking young man. She did not believe Dudley Stone was of age. His brown hair curled tightly all over his head, and he sported a tiny golden mustache. He had good color and was somewhat bronzed.

Dud's blue eyes were frank, his lips were red and nicely curved; but his square chin took away from the lower part of his face any suggestion of effeminacy. His ears were generous, as was his nose. He had the clean-cut, intelligent look of the better class of educated Atlantic seaboard youth.

There is a difference between them and the young Westerner. The latter are apt to be hung loosely, and usually show the effect of range-riding—at least, back here in Montana. Whereas Dud Stone was compactly built.

They chatted quite frankly while the patient ate his supper. Dud found that, although Helen used many Western idioms, and spoke with an abruptness that showed her bringing up among plain-spoken ranch people, she could, if she so desired, use "school English" with good taste, and gave other evidences in her conversation of being quite conversant with the world of which he was himself a part when he was at home.

"Oh, you would get along all right in New York," he said, laughing, when she suggested a doubt as to the impression she might make upon her relatives in the big town. "You'd not be half the 'tenderfoot' there that I am here."

"No? Then I reckon I can risk shocking them," laughed Helen, her gray eyes dancing.

This talk she had with Dud Stone on the evening of his arrival confirmed the young mistress of Sunset Ranch in her intention of going to the great city.

CHAPTER IV

HEADED EAST

When Helen Morrell made up her mind to do a thing, she usually did it. A cataclysm of nature was about all that would thwart her determination.

This being yielded to and never thwarted, even by her father, might have spoiled a girl of different calibre. But there was a foundation of good common sense to Helen's nature.

"Snuggy won't kick over the traces much," Prince Morrell had been wont to say.

"Right you are, Boss," had declared Big Hen Billings. "It's usually safe to give her her head. She'll bring up somewhar."

But when Helen mentioned her eastern trip to the old foreman he came "purty nigh goin' up in th' air his own se'f!" as he expressed it.

"What d'yer wanter do anythin' like that air for, Snuggy?" he demanded, in a horrified tone. "Great jumping Jehosaphat! Ain't this yere valley big enough fo' you?"

"Sometimes I think it's too big," admitted Helen, laughing.

"Well, by jo! you'll fin' city quarters close't 'nough—an' that's no josh. Huh! Las' time ever I went to Chicago with a train-load of beeves I went to see Kellup Flemming what useter work here on this very same livin' Sunset Ranch. You don't remember him. You was too little, Snuggy."

"I've heard you speak of him, Hen," observed the girl.

"Well, thar was Kellup, as smart a young feller as you'd find in a day's ride, livin' with his wife an' kids in what he called a *flat*. Be-lieve me! It was some perpendicular to git into, an' no *flat*.

"When we gits inside and inter what he called his parlor, he looks around like he was proud of it (By jo! I'd be afraid ter shrug my shoulders in it, 'twas so small)

an’ says he: ‘What d’ye think of the ranch, Hen?’

“‘Ranch,’ mind yeh! I was plumb insulted. I says: ‘It’s all right—what there is of it—only, what’s that crack in the wall for, Kellup?’

“‘Sufferin’ tadpoles!’ yells Kellup—jest like that! ‘Sufferin’ tadpoles! That ain’t no crack in the wall. That’s our private hall.’

“Great jumping Jehosaphat!” exclaimed Hen, roaring with laughter. “Yuh don’t wanter git inter no place like that in New York. Can’t breathe in the house.”

“I guess Uncle Starkweather lives in a little better place than that,” said Helen, after laughing with the old foreman. “His house is on Madison Avenue.”

“Don’t care where it is; there natcherly won’t be no such room in a city dwelling as there is here at Sunset Ranch.”

“I suppose not,” admitted the girl.

“Huh! Won’t be room in the yard for a cow,” growled Big Hen. “Nor chickens. Whatter yer goin’ to do without a fresh aig, Snuggy?”

“I expect that will be pretty tough, Hen. But I feel like I must go, you see,” said the girl, dropping into the idiom of Sunset Ranch. “Dad wanted me to.”

“The Boss *wanted* yuh to?” gasped the giant, surprised.

“Yes, Hen.”

“He never said nothin’ to me about it,” declared the foreman of Sunset Ranch, shaking his bushy head.

“No? Didn’t he say anything about my being with women folk, and under different circumstances?”

“Gosh, yes! But I reckoned on getting Mis’ Polk and Mis’ Harry Frieze to take turns coming over yere and livin’ with yuh.”

“But that isn’t all dad wanted,” continued the girl, shaking her head. “Besides, you know both Mrs. Polk and Mrs. Frieze are widows, and will be looking for husbands. We’d maybe lose some of the best boys we’ve got, if they came here,” said Helen, her eyes twinkling.

“Great jumping Jehosaphat! I never thought of that,” declared the foreman, suddenly scared. “I never *did* like that Polk woman’s eye. I wouldn’t, mebbe, be safe myse’f; would I?”

“I’m afraid not,” Helen gravely agreed. “So, you see, to please dad, I’ll have to

go to New York. I don’t mean to stay for all time, Hen. But I want to give it a try-out.”

She sounded Dud Stone a good bit about the big city. Dud had to stay several days at Sunset Ranch because he couldn’t ride very well with his injured foot. And finally, when he did go back to Badger’s, they took him in a buckboard.

To tell the truth, Dud was not altogether glad to go. He was a boyish chap despite the fact that he was nearly through law school, and a sixteen-year-old girl like Helen Morrell—especially one of her character—appealed to him strongly.

He admired the capable way in which she managed things about the ranch-house. Sing obeyed her as though she were a man. There was a “rag-head” who had somehow worked his way across the mountains from the coast, and that Hindoo about worshipped “Missee Sahib.” The two or three Greasers working about the ranch showed their teeth in broad smiles, and bowed most politely when she appeared. And as for the punchers and wranglers, they were every one as loyal to Snuggy as they had been to her father.

The Easterner realized that among all the girls he knew back home, either of her age or older, there was none so capable as Helen Morrell. And there were few any prettier.

“You’re going right to relatives when you reach New York; are you, Miss Morrell?” asked Dud, just before he climbed into the buckboard to return to his friend’s ranch.

“Oh, yes. I shall go to Aunt Eunice,” said the girl, decidedly.

“No need of my warning you against bunco men and card sharpers,” chuckled Dud, “for your folks will look out for you. But remember: You’ll be just as much a tenderfoot there as I am here.”

“I shall take care,” she returned, laughing.

“And—and I hope I may see you in New York,” said Dud, hesitatingly.

“Why, I hope we shall run across each other,” replied Helen, calmly. She was not sure that it would be the right thing to invite this young man to call upon her at the Starkweathers’.

“I’d better ask Aunt Eunice about that first,” she decided, to herself.

So she shook hands heartily with Dud Stone and let him ride away, never appearing to notice his rather wistful look. She was to see the time, however,

when she would be very glad of a friend like Dud Stone in the great city.

Helen made her preparations for her trip to New York without any advice from another woman. To tell the truth she had little but riding habits which were fit to wear, save the house frocks which she wore around the ranch.

When she had gone to school in Denver, her father had sent a sum of money to the principal and that lady had seen that Helen was dressed tastefully and well. But all these garments she had outgrown.

To tell the truth, Helen had spent little of her time in studying the pictures in fashion magazines. In fact, there were no such books about Sunset Ranch.

The girl realized that the rough and ready frocks she possessed were not in style. There was but one store in Elberon, the nearest town, where ready-to-wear garments were sold. She went there and purchased the best they had; but they left much to be desired.

She got a brown dress to travel in, and a shirtwaist or two; but beyond that she dared not go. Helen was wise enough to realize that, after she arrived at her Uncle Starkweather's, it would be time enough to purchase proper raiment.

She "dressed up" in the new frock for the boys to admire, the evening before she left. Every man who could be spared from the range—even as far as Creeping Ford—came in to the "party." They all admired Helen and were sorry to see her go away. Yet they gave her their best wishes.

Big Hen Billings rode part of the way to Elberon with her in the morning. She was going to send the strawberry roan back hitched behind the supply wagon. Her riding dress she would change in the station agent's parlor for the new dress which was in the tray of her small trunk.

"Keep yer eyes peeled, Snuggy," advised the old foreman, with gravity, "when ye come up against that New York town. 'Tain't like Elberon—no, sir! 'Tain't even like Helena.

"Them folks in New York is rubbing up against each other so close, that it makes 'em moughty sharp—yessir! Jumping Jehosaphat! I knowed a feller that went there onct and he lost ten dollars and his watch before he'd been off the train an hour. They can do ye that quick!"

"I believe that fellow must have been *you*, Hen," declared Helen, laughing.

The foreman looked shamefaced. "Wal, it were," he admitted. "But they never got nothin' more out o' me. It was the hottest kind o' summer weather—an'

lemme tell yuh, it can be some hot in that man's town.

"Wal, I had a sheepskin coat with me. I put it on, and I buttoned it from my throat-latch down to my boot-tops. They'd had to pry a dollar out o' my pocket with a crowbar, and I wouldn't have had a drink with the mayor of the city if he'd invited me. No, sirree, sir!"

Helen laughed again. "Don't you fear for me, Hen. I shall be in the best of hands, and shall have plenty of friends around me. I'll never feel lonely in New York, I am sure."

"I hope not. But, Snuggy, you know what to do if anything goes wrong. Just telegraph me. If you want me to come on, say the word——"

"Why, Hen! How ridiculous you talk," she cried. "I'll be with relatives."

"Ya-as. I know," said the giant, shaking his head. "But relatives ain't like them that's knowed and loved yuh all yuh life. Don't forgit us out yere, Snuggy—and if ye want anything——" His heart was evidently too full for further utterance. He jerked his pony's head around, waved his hand to the girl who likewise was all but in tears, and dashed back over the trail toward Sunset Ranch.

Helen pulled the Rose pony's head around and jogged on, headed east.

CHAPTER V

AT BOTH ENDS OF THE ROUTE

As Helen walked up and down the platform at Elberon, waiting for the east-bound Transcontinental, she looked to be a very plain country girl with nothing in her dress to denote that she was one of the wealthiest young women in the State of Montana.

Sunset Ranch was one of the few remaining great cattle ranches of the West. Her father could justly have been called “a cattle king,” only Prince Morrell was not the sort of man who likes to see his name in print.

Indeed, there was a good reason why Helen’s father had not wished to advertise himself. That old misfortune, which had borne so heavily upon his mind and heart when he came to die, had made him shrink from publicity.

However, business at Sunset Ranch had prospered both before and since Mr. Morrell’s death. The money had rolled in and the bank accounts which had been put under the administration of Big Hen Billings and the lawyer at Elberon, increased steadily.

Big Hen was a generous-handed administrator and guardian. Of course, the foreman of the ranch was, perhaps, not the best person to be guardian of a sixteen-year-old girl. He did not treat her, in regard to money matters, as the ordinary guardian would have treated a ward.

Big Hen didn’t know how to limit a girl’s expenditures; but he knew how to treat a man right. And he treated Helen Morrell just as though she were a sane and responsible man.

“There’s a thousand dollars in cash for you, Snuggy,” he had said. “I got it in soft money, for it’s a fac’ that they use that stuff a good deal in the East. Besides, the hard money would have made a good deal of a load for you to tote in them leetle war-bags of yourn.”

“But shall I ever need a thousand dollars?” asked Helen, doubtfully.

“Don’t know. Can’t tell. Sometimes ye need money when ye least expect it. Ye needn’t tell anybody how much you’ve got. Only, it’s *there*—and a full pocket is a mighty nice backin’ for anybody to have.

“And if ye find any time ye want more, jest telegraph. We’ll send ye what they call a draft for all ye want. Cut a dash. Show ’em that the girl from Sunset Ranch is the real thing, Snuggy.”

But she had only laughed at this. It never entered Helen Morrell’s mind that she should ever wish to “cut a dash” before her relatives in New York.

She had filed a telegram to Mr. Willets Starkweather, on Madison Avenue, before the train arrived, saying that she was coming. She hoped that her relatives would reply and she would get the reply en route.

When her father died, she had written to the Starkweathers. She had received a brief, but kindly worded note from Uncle Starkweather. And it had scarcely been time yet, so Helen thought, for Aunt Eunice or the girls to write.

But could Helen have arrived at the Madison Avenue mansion of Willets Starkweather at the same hour her message arrived and heard the family’s comments on it, it is very doubtful if she would have swung herself aboard the parlor car of the Transcontinental, without the porter’s help, and sought her seat.

The Starkweathers lived in very good style, indeed. The mansion was one of several remaining in that section, all occupied by the very oldest and most elevated socially of New York’s solid families. They were not people whose names appeared in the gossip columns of the papers to any extent; but to live in their neighborhood, and to meet them socially, was sufficient to insure one’s welcome anywhere.

The Starkweather mansion had descended to Willets Starkweather with the money—all from his great-uncle—which had finally put the family upon its feet. When Prince Morrell had left New York under a cloud, his brother-in-law was a struggling merchant himself.

Now, in sixteen years, he had practically retired. At least, he was no longer “in trade.” He merely went to an office, or to his broker’s, each day, and watched his investments and his real estate holdings.

A pompous, well-fed man was Willets Starkweather—and always imposingly dressed. He was very bald, wore a closely cropped gray beard, eyeglasses, and “Ahem!” was an introduction to almost everything he said. That clearing of the bronchial tubes was an announcement to the listening world that he, Willets

Starkweather, of Madison Avenue, was about to make a remark. And no matter how trivial that remark might be, coming from the lips of the great man, it should be pondered upon and regarded with awe.

Mr. Starkweather was a widower. Helen's Aunt Eunice had been dead three years. It had never been considered necessary by either Mr. Starkweather, or his daughters, to write "Aunt Mary's folks in Montana" of Mrs. Starkweather's death.

Correspondence between the families had ceased at the time of Mrs. Morrell's death. The Starkweather girls understood that Aunt Mary's husband had "done something" before he left New York for the wild and woolly West. The family did not—Ahem!—speak of him.

The three girls were respectively eighteen, sixteen, and fourteen. Even Flossie considered herself entirely grown up. She attended a private school not far from Central Park, and went each day dressed as elaborately as a matron of thirty.

For Hortense, who was just Helen Morrell's age, "school had become a bore." She had a smattering of French, knew how to drum nicely on the piano—she was still taking lessons in *that* polite accomplishment—had only a vague idea of the ordinary rules of English grammar, and couldn't write a decent letter, or spell words of more than two syllables, to save her life.

Belle golfed. She did little else just now, for she was a creature of fads. Occasionally she got a new one, and with kindred spirits played that particular fad to death.

She might have found a much worse hobby to ride. Getting up early and starting for the Long Island links, or for Westchester, before her sisters had had their breakfast, was not doing Belle a bit of harm. Only, she was getting in with a somewhat "sporty" class of girls and women older than herself, and the bloom of youth had been quite rubbed off.

Indeed, these three girls were about as fresh as is a dried prune. They had jumped from childhood into full-blown womanhood (or thought they had), thereby missing the very best and sweetest part of their girls' life.

They had come in from their various activities of the day when Helen's telegram arrived. Naturally they ran with it to their father's "den"—a gorgeously upholstered yet small library on the ground floor, at the back.

"What is it now, girls?" demanded Mr. Starkweather, looking up in some dismay at this general onslaught. "I don't want you to suggest any further expenditures

this month. I have paid all the bills I possibly can pay. We must retrench—we must retrench."

"Oh, Pa!" said Flossie, saucily, "you're always saying that. I believe you say 'We must retrench!' in your sleep."

"And small wonder if I do," he grumbled. "I have lost some money; the stock market is very dull. And nobody is buying real estate. I—I am quite at my wits' ends, I assure you, girls."

"Dear me! and another mouth to feed!" laughed Hortense, tossing her head. "*That* will be excuse enough for telling her to go to a hotel when she arrives."

"Probably the poor thing won't have the price of a room," observed Belle, looking again at the telegram.

"What is that in your hand, child?" demanded Mr. Starkweather, suddenly seeing the yellow slip of paper.

"A dispatch, Pa," said Flossie, snatching it out of Belle's hand.

"A telegram?"

"And you'd never guess from whom," cried the youngest girl.

"I—I——Let me see it," said her father, with some abruptness. "No bad news, I hope?"

"Well, I don't call it *good* news," said the oldest girl, with a sniff.

Mr. Starkweather read it aloud:

"Coming on Transcontinental. Arrive Grand
Central Terminal 9 P.M. the third.

"HELEN MORRELL."

"Now! What do you think of that, Pa?" demanded Flossie.

"'Helen Morrell,'" repeated Mr. Starkweather, and a person more observant than any of his daughters might have seen that his lips had grown suddenly gray. He dropped into his chair rather heavily. "Your cousin, girls."

"Fol-de-rol!" exclaimed Belle. "I don't see why she should claim relationship."

"Send her to a hotel, Pa," said Flossie.

"I'm sure *I* do not wish to be bothered by a common ranch girl. Why! she was

born and brought up out in the wilds; wasn’t she?” demanded Hortense.

“Her father and mother went West before this girl was born—yes,” murmured Mr. Starkweather.

He was strangely agitated by the message. But the girls did not notice this. They were not likely to notice anything but their own disturbance over the coming of “that ranch girl.”

“Why, Pa, we can’t have her here!” cried Belle.

“Of course we can’t, Pa,” agreed Hortense.

“I’m sure *I* don’t want the common little thing around,” added Flossie, who, as has been said, was quite two years Helen’s junior.

“We couldn’t introduce her to our friends,” declared Belle.

“What a *fright* she’ll be!” wailed Hortense.

“She’ll wear a sombrero and a split riding skirt, I suppose,” scoffed Flossie, who madly desired a slit skirt, herself.

“Of course she’ll be a perfect dowdy,” Belle observed.

“And be loud and wear heavy boots, and stamp through the house,” sighed Hortense. “We just *can’t* have her, Pa.”

“Why, I wouldn’t let any of the girls of *our* set see her for the world,” cried Flossie.

Their father finally spoke. He had recovered from his secret emotion, but he was still mopping the perspiration from his bald brow.

“I don’t really see how I can prevent her coming,” he said, rather weakly.

“What nonsense, Pa!”

“Of course you can!”

“Telegraph her not to come.”

“But she is already aboard the train,” objected Mr. Starkweather, gloomily.

“Then, I tell you,” snapped Flossie, who was the most unkind of the girls. “Don’t telegraph her at all. Don’t answer her message. Don’t send to the station to meet her. Maybe she won’t be too dense to take *that* hint.”

“Pooh! these wild and woolly Western girls!” grumbled Hortense. “I don’t

believe she'll know enough to stay away."

"We can try it," persisted Flossie.

"She ought to realize that we're not dying to see her when we don't come to the train," said Belle.

"I—don't—know," mused their father.

"Now, Pa!" cried Flossie. "You know very well you don't want that girl here."

"No," he admitted. "But—Ahem!—we have certain duties——"

"Bother duties!" said Hortense.

"Ahem! She is your mother's sister's child," spoke Mr. Starkweather, heavily. "She is a young and unprotected female——"

"Seems to me," said Belle, crossly, "the relationship is far enough removed for us to ignore it. Mother's sister, Aunt Mary, is dead."

"True—true. Ahem!" said her father.

"And isn't it true that this man, Morrell, whom she married, left New York under a cloud?"

"O—oh!" cried Hortense. "So he did."

"What did he do?" Flossie asked, bluntly.

"Embezzled; didn't he, Pa?" asked Belle.

"That's enough!" cried Flossie, tossing her head. "We certainly don't want a convict's daughter in the house."

"Hush, Flossie!" said her father, with sudden sternness. "Prince Morrell was never a convict."

"No," sneered Hortense. "He ran away. He didn't get that far."

"Ahem! Daughters, we have no right to talk in this way—even in fun——"

"Well, I don't care," cried Belle, impatiently. "Whether she's a criminal's child or not; I don't want her. None of us wants her. Why, then, should we have her?"

"But where will she go?" demanded Mr. Starkweather, almost desperately.

"What do we care?" cried Flossie, callously. "She can be sent back; can't she?"

"I tell you what it is," said Belle, getting up and speaking with determination. "We don't want Helen Morrell here. We will not meet her at the train. We will

not send any reply to this message from her. And if she has the effrontery to come here to the house after our ignoring her in this way, we'll send her back where she came from just as soon as it can be done. What do you say, girls?"

"Fine!" from Hortense and Flossie.

But their father said "Ahem!" and still looked troubled.

CHAPTER VI

ACROSS THE CONTINENT

It was not as though Helen Morrell had never been in a train before. Eight times she had gone back and forth to Denver, and she had always ridden in the best style. So sleepers, chair cars, private compartments, and observation coaches were no novelty to her.

She had discussed the matter with her friend, the Elberon station agent, and had bought her ticket through to New York, with a berth section to herself. It cost a good bit of money, but Helen knew no better way to spend some of that thousand dollars that Big Hen had given to her.

Her small trunk was put in the baggage car, and all she carried was a hand-satchel with toilet articles and kimono; and in it likewise was her father's big wallet stuffed with the yellow-backed notes—all crisp and new—that Big Hen Billings had brought to her from the bank.

When she was comfortably seated in her particular section, and the porter had seen that her footstool was right, and had hovered about her with offers of other assistance until she had put a silver dollar into his itching palm, Helen first stared about her frankly at the other occupants of the car.

Nobody paid much attention to the countrified girl who had come aboard at the way-station. The Transcontinental's cars are always well filled. There were family parties, and single tourists, with part of a grand opera troupe, and traveling men of the better class.

Helen would have been glad to join one of the family groups. In one there were two girls and a boy beside the parents and a lady who must have been the governess. One of the girls, and the boy, were quite as old as Helen. They were all so well behaved, and polite to each other, yet jolly and companionable, that Helen knew she could have liked them immensely.

But there was nobody to introduce the lonely girl to them, nor to any others of

her fellow travelers. The conductor, even, did not take much interest in the girl in brown.

She began to realize that what was the height of fashion in Elberon was several seasons behind the style in larger communities. There was not a pretty or attractive thing about Helen's dress; and even a very pretty girl will seem a frump in an out-of-style and unbecoming frock.

It might have been better for the girl from Sunset Ranch if she had worn on the train the very riding habit she had in her trunk. At least, it would have become her and she would have felt natural in it.

She knew now—when she had seen the hats of her fellow passengers—that her own was an atrocity. And, then, Helen had "put her hair up," which was something she had not been used to doing. Without practice, or some example to work by, how could this unsophisticated young girl have produced a specimen of modern hair-dressing fit to be seen?

Even Dudley Stone could not have thought Helen Morrell pretty as she looked now. And when she gazed in the glass herself, the girl from Sunset Ranch was more than a little disgusted.

"I know I'm a fright. I've got 'such a muchness' of hair and it's so sunburned, and all! What those girls I'm going to see will say to me, I don't know. But if they're good-natured they'll soon show me how to handle this mop—and of course I can buy any quantity of pretty frocks when I get to New York."

So she only looked at the other people on the train and made no acquaintances at all that first day. She slept soundly at night while the Transcontinental raced on over the undulating plains on which the stars shone so peacefully. Each roll of the drumming wheels was carrying her nearer and nearer to that new world of which she knew so little, but from which she hoped so much.

She dreamed that she had reached her goal—Uncle Starkweather's house. Aunt Eunice met her. She had never even seen a photograph of her aunt; but the lady who gathered her so closely into her arms and kissed her so tenderly, looked just as Helen's own mother had looked.

She awoke crying, and hugging the tiny pillow which the Pullman Company furnishes its patrons as a sample—the *real* pillow never materializes.

But to the healthy girl from the wide reaches of the Montana range, the berth was quite comfortable enough. She had slept on the open ground many a night, rolled only in a blanket and without any pillow at all. So she arose fresher than

most of her fellow-passengers.

One man—whom she had noticed the evening before—was adjusting a wig behind the curtain of his section. He looked when he was completely dressed rather a well-preserved person; and Helen was impressed with the thought that he must still feel young to wish to appear so juvenile.

Even with his wig adjusted—a very curly brown affair—the man looked, however, to be upward of sixty. There were many fine wrinkles about his eyes and deep lines graven in his cheeks.

His section was just behind that of the girl from Sunset Ranch, on the other side of the car. After returning from the breakfast table this first morning Helen thought she would better take a little more money out of the wallet to put in her purse for emergencies on the train. So she opened the locked bag and dragged out the well-stuffed wallet from underneath her other possessions.

The roll of yellow-backed notes *was* a large one. Helen, lacking more interesting occupation, unfolded the crisp banknotes and counted them to make sure of her balance. As she sat in her seat she thought nobody could observe her.

Then she withdrew what she thought she might need, and put the remainder of the money back into the old wallet, snapped the strong elastic about it, and slid it down to the bottom of the bag again.

The key of the bag she carried on the chain with her locket, which locket contained the miniatures of her mother and father. Key and locket she hid in the bosom of her dress.

She looked up suddenly. There was the fatherly-looking old person almost bending over her chair back. For an instant the girl was very much startled. The old man’s eyes were wonderfully keen and twinkling, and there was an expression in them which Helen at first did not understand.

“If you have finished with that magazine, my dear, I’ll exchange it for one of mine,” said the old gentleman coolly. “What! did I frighten you?”

“Not exactly, sir,” returned Helen, watching him curiously. “But I *was* startled.”

“Beg pardon. You do not look like a young person who would be easily frightened,” he said, laughing. “You are traveling alone?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Far?”

“To New York, sir,” said Helen.

“Ah! a long way for a girl to go by herself—even a self-possessed one like you,” said the fatherly old fellow. “I hope you have friends to meet you there?”

“Relatives.”

“You have never been there, I take it?”

“I have never been farther east than Denver before,” she replied.

“Indeed! And so you have not met the relatives you are going to?” he suggested, shrewdly.

“You are right, sir.”

“But, of course, they will not fail to meet you?”

“I telegraphed to them. I expect to get a reply somewhere on the way.”

“Then you are well provided for,” said the old gentleman, kindly. “Yet, if you should need any assistance—of any kind—do not fail to call upon me. I am going through to New York, too.”

He went back to his seat after making the exchange of magazines, and did not force his attentions upon her further. He was, however, almost the only person who spoke to her all the way across the continent.

Frequently they ate together at the same table, both being alone. He bought newspapers and magazines and exchanged with her. He never became personal and asked her questions again, nor did Helen learn his name; but in little ways which were not really objectionable, he showed that he took an interest in her. There remained, however, the belief in Helen’s mind that he had seen her counting the money.

“I expect I’d like the old chap if he didn’t wear a wig,” thought Helen. “I never could see why people wished to hide the mistakes of Nature. And he’s an old gentleman, too.”

Yet again and again she recalled that avaricious gleam in his eyes and how eager he had seemed when she had first caught sight of his face looking over her shoulder that first morning on the train. She couldn’t forget that. She kept the locked bag near her hand all the time.

With lively company a journey across this great continent of ours is a cheerful and inspiring experience. And, of course, Youth can never remain depressed for long. But in Helen Morrell’s case the trip could not be counted as an enjoyable

one.

She was always solitary amid the crowd of travelers. Even when she went back to the observation platform she was alone. She had nobody with whom to discuss the beauties of the landscape, or the wonders of Nature past which the train flashed.

This was her own fault to a degree, of course. The girl from Sunset Ranch was diffident. These people aboard were all Easterners, or foreigners. There were no open-hearted, friendly Western folk such as she had been used to all her life.

She felt herself among a strange people. She scarcely spoke the same language, or so it seemed. She had felt less awkward and bashful when she had first gone to the school at Denver as a little girl.

And, again, she was troubled because she had received no reply from her message to Uncle Starkweather. Of course, he might not have been at home to receive it; but surely some of the family must have received it.

Every time the brakeman, or porter, or conductor, came through with a message for some passenger, she hoped he would call her name. But the Transcontinental brought her across the Western plains, over the two great rivers, through the Mid-West prairies, skirted two of the Great Lakes, rushed across the wooded and mountainous Empire State, and finally dashed down the length of the embattled Hudson toward the Great City of the New World—the goal of Helen Morrell’s late desires, with no word from the relatives whom she so hoped would welcome her to their hearts and home.

CHAPTER VII

THE GREAT CITY

Helen Morrell never forgot her initial impressions of the great city.

These impressions were at first rather startling—then intensely interesting. And they all culminated in a single opinion which time only could prove either true or erroneous.

That belief or opinion Helen expressed in an almost audible exclamation:

“Why! there are so many people here one could *never* feel lonely!”

This impression came to her after the train had rolled past miles of streets—all perfectly straight, bearing off on either hand to the two rivers that wash Manhattan’s shores; all illuminated exactly alike; all bordered by cliffs of dwellings seemingly cut on the same pattern and from the same material.

With clasped hands and parted lips the girl from Sunset Ranch watched eagerly the glowing streets, parted by the rushing train. As it slowed down at 125th Street she could see far along that broad thoroughfare—an uptown Broadway. There were thousands and thousands of people in sight—with the glare of shoplights—the clanging electric cars—the taxicabs and autos shooting across the main stem of Harlem into the avenues running north and south.

It was as marvelous to the Montana girl as the views of a foreign land upon the screen of a moving picture theatre. She sank back in her seat with a sigh as the train moved on.

“What a wonderful, wonderful place!” she thought. “It looks like fairyland. It is an enchanted place——”

The train, now under electric power, shot suddenly into the ground. The tunnel was odorous and ill-lighted.

“Well,” the girl thought, “I suppose there *is* another side to the big city, too!”

The passengers began to put on their wraps and gather together their hand-luggage. There was much talking and confusion. Some of the tourists had been met at 125th Street by friends who came that far to greet them.

But there was nobody to greet Helen. There was nobody waiting on the platform, to come and clasp her hand and bid her welcome, when the train stopped.

She got down, with her bag, and looked about her. She saw that the old gentleman with the wig kept step with her. But he did not seem to be noticing her, and presently he disappeared.

The girl from Sunset Ranch walked slowly up into the main building of the Grand Central Terminal with the crowd. There was chattering all about her—young voices, old voices, laughter, squeals of delight and surprise—all the hubbub of a homing crowd meeting a crowd of friends.

And through it all Helen walked, a stranger in a strange land.

She lingered, hoping that Uncle Starkweather's people might be late. But nobody spoke to her. She did not know that there were matrons and police officers in the building to whom she could apply for advice or assistance.

Naturally independent, this girl of the ranges was not likely to ask a stranger for help. She could find her own way.

She smiled—yet it was a rather wry smile—when she thought of how Dud Stone had told her she would be as much of a tenderfoot in New York as he had been on the plains.

"It's a fact," she thought. "But, if they didn't get my message, I reckon I can find the house, just the same."

Having been so much in Denver she knew a good deal about city ways. She did not linger about the station long.

Outside there was a row of taxicabs and cabmen. There was an officer, too; but he was engaged at the moment in helping a fussy old lady get seven parcels, a hat box, and a dog basket into a cab.

So Helen walked down the row of waiting taxicabs. At the end cab the chauffeur on the seat turned around and beckoned.

"Cab, Miss? Take you anywhere you say."

"You know where this number on Madison Street is, of course?" she said, showing a card with the address on it.

“Sure, Miss. Jump right in.”

“How much will it be?”

“Trunk, Miss?”

“Yes. Here is the check.”

The chauffeur got out of his seat quickly and took the check.

“It’s so much a mile. The little clock tells you the fare,” he said, pleasantly.

“All right,” replied Helen. “You get the trunk,” and she stepped into the vehicle.

In a few moments he was back with the trunk and secured it on the roof of his cab. Then he reached in and tucked a cloth around his passenger, although the evening was not cold, and got in under the wheel. In another moment the taxicab rolled out from under the roofed concourse.

Helen had never ridden in any vehicle that went so smoothly and so fast. It shot right downtown, mile after mile; but Helen was so interested in the sights she saw from the window of the cab that she did not worry about the time that elapsed.

By and by they went under an elevated railroad structure; the street grew more narrow and—to tell the truth—Helen thought the place appeared rather dirty and unkempt.

Then the cab was turned suddenly across the way, under another elevated structure, and into a narrow, noisy, ill-kept street.

“Can it be that Uncle Starkweather lives in this part of the town?” thought Helen, in amazement.

She had always understood that the Starkweather mansion was in one of the oldest and most respectable parts of New York. But although *this* might be one of the older parts of the city, to Helen’s eyes it did *not* look respectable.

The street was full of children and grown people in odd costumes. And there was a babel of voices that certainly were not English.

They shot across another narrow street—then another. And then the cab stopped beside the curb near a corner gaslight.

“Surely this is not Madison?” demanded Helen, of the driver, as her door was opened.

“There’s the name, Miss,” said the man, pointing to the street light.

Helen looked. She really *did* see “MADISON” in blue letters on the sign.

“And is this the number?” she asked again, looking at the three-story, shabby house before which the cab had stopped.

“Yes, Miss. Don’t you see it on the fanlight?”

The dull light in the hall of the house was sufficient to reveal to her the number painted on the glass above the door. It was an old, old house, with grimy panes in the windows, and more dull lights behind the shades drawn down over them. But there really could be no mistake, Helen thought. The number over the door and the name on the lamp-post reassured her.

She stepped out of the cab, her bag in her hand.

“See if your folks are here, Miss,” said the driver, “before I take off the trunk.”

Helen crossed the walk, clinging to her precious bag. She was not a little disturbed by this strange situation. These streets about here were the commonest of the common! And she was carrying a large sum of money, quite unprotected.

When she mounted the steps and touched the door, it opened. A bustle of sound came from the house; yet it was not the kind of bustle that she had expected to hear in her uncle’s home.

There were the crying of children, the shrieking of a woman’s angry voice—another singing—language in guttural tones which she could not understand—heavy boots tramping upon the bare boards overhead.

This lower hall was unfurnished. Indeed, it was a most unlovely place as far as Helen could see by the light of a single flaring gas jet.

“What kind of a place have I got into?” murmured the Western girl, staring about in disgust and horror, and clinging tightly to the locked bag.

CHAPTER VIII

THE WELCOME

Helen would have faced almost any peril of the range—wolves, a bear even, a stampede, flood, or fire—with more confidence than she felt at this moment.

She had some idea of how city people lived, having been to school in Denver. It seemed impossible that Uncle Starkweather and his family could reside in such a place as this. And yet the street and number were correct. Surely, the taxicab driver must know his way about the city!

From behind the door on her right came the rattle of dishes and voices. Putting her courage to the test, Helen rapped on the door. But she had to repeat the summons before she was heard.

Then she heard a shuffling step approach the door, it was unlocked, and a gray old woman, with a huge horsehair wig upon her head, peered out at her.

“Vot you vant?” this apparition asked, her black eyes growing round in wonder at the appearance of the girl and her bag. “Ve puys noddings; ve sells noddings. Vot you vant—eh?”

“I am looking for my Uncle Starkweather,” said Helen, doubtfully.

“Vor your ungle?” repeated the old woman.

“Mr. Starkweather. Does he live in this house?”

“‘S’arkwesser’? I neffer heard,” said the old woman, shaking her huge head. “Abramovitch lifs here, and Abelosky, and Seldt, and—and Goronsky. You sure you god de name ride, Miss?”

“Quite sure,” replied the puzzled Helen.

“Meppe ubstairs,” said the woman, eyeing Helen curiously. “Vot you god in de pag, lady?”

To tell the truth this query rather frightened the girl. She did not reply to the

question, but started half-blindly for the stairs, clinging to the bag with both hands.

Suddenly a door banged above and a quick and light step began to descend the upper flight. Helen halted and looked expectantly upward. The approaching step was that of a young person.

In a moment a girl appeared, descending the stairs like a young whirlwind. She was a vigorous, red-cheeked girl, with dark complexion, a prominent nose, flashing black eyes, and plump, sturdy arms bared to her dimpled elbows. She saw Helen there in the hall and stopped, questioningly. The old woman said something to the newcomer in what Helen supposed must be Yiddish, and banged shut her own door.

“Whaddeyer want, Miss?” asked the dark girl, coming nearer to Helen and smiling, showing two rows of perfect teeth. “Got lost?”

“I don’t know but what I have,” admitted the girl from the West.

“Chee! You’re a greenie, too; ain’t you?”

“I reckon so,” replied Helen, smiling in return. “At least, I’ve just arrived in town.”

The girl had now opened the door and looked out. “Look at this, now!” she exclaimed. “Did you come in that taxi?”

“Yes,” admitted Helen.

“Chee! you’re some swell; aren’t you?” said the other. “We don’t have them things stopping at the house every day.”

“I am looking for my uncle, Mr. Willets Starkweather.”

“That’s no Jewish name. I don’t believe he lives in this house,” said the black-eyed girl, curiously.

“But, this is the number—I saw it,” said Helen, faintly. “And it’s Madison Avenue; isn’t it? I saw the name on the corner lamp-post.”

“*Madison Avenyer?*” gasped the other girl.

“Yes.”

“Yer kiddin’; ain’t yer?” demanded the stranger.

“Why—— What do you mean?”

“This ain’t Madison Avenyer,” said the black-eyed girl, with a loud laugh. “Ain’t you the greenie? Why, this is Madison *Street!*”

“Oh, then, there’s a difference?” cried Helen, much relieved. “I didn’t get to Uncle Starkweather’s, then?”

“Not if he lives on Madison Avenyer,” said her new friend. “What’s his number? I got a cousin that married a man in Harlem. *She* lives on Madison Avenyer; but it’s a long ways up town.”

“Why, Uncle Starkweather has his home at the same number on Madison Avenue that is on that fanlight,” and Helen pointed over the door.

“Then he’s some swell; eh?”

“I—I guess so,” admitted Helen, doubtfully.

“D’jer jest come to town?”

“Yes.”

“And told the taxi driver to come down here?”

“Yes.”

“Well, he’ll take you back. I’ll take the number of the cab and scare him pretty near into a fit,” said the black-eyed girl, laughing. “Then he’s sure to take you right to your uncle’s house.”

“Oh, I’m a thousand times obliged!” cried Helen. “I *am* a tenderfoot; am I not?” and she laughed.

The girl looked at her curiously. “I don’t know much about tender feet. Mine never bother me,” she said. “But I could see right away that you didn’t belong in this part of town.”

“Well, you’ve been real kind to me,” Helen said. “I hope I’ll see you again.”

“Not likely,” said the other, shaking her head.

“Why not?”

“And you livin’ on Madison Avenyer, and me on Madison Street?”

“I can come down to see you,” said Helen, frankly. “My name is Helen Morrell. What’s yours?”

“Sadie Goronsky. You see, I’m a Russian,” and she smiled. “You wouldn’t know it by the way I talk; would you? I learned English over there. But some folks in

Russia don’t care to mix much with our people.”

“I don’t know anything about that,” said Helen. “But I know when I like a person. And I’ve got reason for liking you.”

“That goes—double,” returned the other, warmly. “I bet you come from a place far away from this city.”

“Montana,” said Helen.

“I ain’t up in United States geography. But I know there’s a big country the other side of the North River.”

Helen laughed. “I come from a good ways beyond the river,” she said.

“Well, I’ll have to get back to the store. Old Jacob will give me fits.”

“Oh, dear! and I’m keeping you,” cried Helen.

“I should worry!” exploded the other, slangily. “I’m only a ‘puller-in.’ I ain’t a saleslady. Come on and I’ll throw a scare into that taxi-driver. Watch me.”

This sort of girl was a revelation to Helen. She was frankly independent herself; but Sadie Goronsky showed an entirely different sort of independence.

“See here you, Mr. Man!” exclaimed the Jewish girl, attracting the attention of the taxicab driver, who had not left his seat. “Whadderyer mean by bringing this young lady down here to Madison Street when with half an eye you could ha’ told that she belonged on Madison *Avenyer*?”

“Heh?” grunted the man.

“Now, don’t play no greenie trick with *me*,” commanded Sadie. “I gotcher number, and I know the company youse woik for. You take this young lady right to the correct address on the avenyer—and see that she don’t get robbed before you get her there. You get in, Miss Morrell. Don’t you be afraid. This chap won’t dare take you anywhere but to your uncle’s house now.”

“She said Madison Street,” declared the taxicab driver, doggedly.

“Well, now *I* says Madison Avenyer!” exclaimed Sadie. “Get in, Miss.”

“But where’ll I find you, Sadie?” asked the Western girl, holding the rough hand of her new friend.

“Right at that shop yonder,” said the black-eyed girl, pointing to a store only two doors beyond the house which Helen had entered. “Ladies’ garments. You’ll see me pullin’ ’em in. If you *don’t* see me, ask for Miss Goronsky. Good-night,

Miss! You'll get to your uncle's all right now."

The taxicab driver had started the machine again. They darted off through a side street, and soon came out upon the broader thoroughfare down which they had come so swiftly. She saw by a street sign that it was the Bowery.

The man slowed down and spoke to her through the tube.

"I hope you don't bear no ill-will, Miss," he said, humbly enough. "You said Madison——"

"All right. See if you can take me to the right place now," returned Helen, brusquely.

Her talk with Sadie Goronsky had given her more confidence. She was awake to the wiles of the city now. Dud Stone had been right. Even Big Hen Billings's warnings were well placed. A stranger like herself had to be on the lookout all the time.

After a time the taxicab turned up a wider thoroughfare that had no elevated trains roaring overhead. At Twenty-third Street it turned west and then north again at Madison Square.

There was a little haze in the air—an October haze. Through this the lamps twinkled blithely. There were people on the dusky benches, and many on the walks strolling to and fro, although it was now growing quite late.

In the park she caught a glimpse of water in a fountain, splashing high, then low, with a rainbow in it. Altogether it was a beautiful sight.

The hum of night traffic—the murmur of voices—they flashed past a theatre just sending forth its audience—and all the subdued sights and sounds of the city delighted her again.

Suddenly the taxicab stopped.

"This is the number, Miss," said the driver.

Helen looked out first. Not much like the same number on Madison Street!

This block was a slice of old-fashioned New York. On either side was a row of handsome, plain old houses, a few with lanterns at their steps, and some with windows on several floors brilliantly lighted.

There were carriages and automobiles waiting at these doors. Evening parties were evidently in progress.

The house before which the taxicab had stopped showed no light in front, however, except at the door and in one or two of the basement windows.

“Is this the place you want?” asked the driver, with some impatience.

“I’ll see,” said Helen, and hopped out of the cab.

She ran boldly up the steps and rang the bell. In a minute the inner door swung open; but the outer grating remained locked. A man in livery stood in the opening.

“What did you wish, ma’am?” he asked in a perfectly placid voice.

“Does Mr. Willets Starkweather reside here?” asked Helen.

“Mr. Starkweather is not at home, ma’am.”

“Oh! then he could not have received my telegram!” gasped Helen.

The footman remained silent, but partly closed the door.

“Any message, ma’am?” he asked, perfunctorily.

“But surely the family is at home?” cried Helen.

“Not at this hour of the hevening, ma’am,” declared the English servant, with plain disdain.

“But I must see them!” cried Helen, again. “I am Mr. Starkweather’s niece. I have come all the way from Montana, and have just got into the city. You must let me in.”

“Hi ’ave no orders regarding you, ma’am,” declared the footman, slowly. “Mr. Starkweather is at ’is club. The young ladies are hat an evening haffair.”

“But auntie—surely there must be *somebody* here to welcome me?” said Helen, in more wonder than anger as yet.

“You may come in, Miss,” said the footman at last. “Hi will speak to the ’ousekeeper—though I fear she is abed.”

“But I have the taxicab driver to pay, and my trunk is here,” declared Helen, beginning suddenly to feel very helpless.

The man had opened the grilled door. He gazed down at the cab and shook his head.

“Wait hand see Mrs. Olstrom, first, Miss,” he said.

She stepped in. He closed both doors and chained the inner one. He pointed to a hard seat in a corner of the hall and then stepped softly away upon the thick carpet to the rear of the premises, leaving the girl from Sunset Ranch alone.

This was her welcome to the home of her only relatives, and to the heart of the great city!

CHAPTER IX

THE GHOST WALK

Helen had to wait only a short time; but during that wait she was aware that she was being watched by a pair of bright eyes at a crevice between the portières at the end of the hall.

“They act as though I came to rob them,” thought the girl from the ranch, sitting in the gloomy hall with the satchel at her feet.

This was not the welcome she had expected when she started East. Could it be possible that her message to Uncle Starkweather had not been delivered? Otherwise, how could this situation be explained?

Such a thing as inhospitality could not be imagined by Helen Morrell. A begging Indian was never turned away from Sunset Ranch. A perfect stranger—even a sheepman—would be hospitably treated in Montana.

The soft patter of the footman’s steps soon sounded and the sharp eyes disappeared. There was a moment’s whispering behind the curtain. Then the liveried Englishman appeared.

“Will you step this way, Miss?” he said, gravely. “Mrs. Olstrom will see you in her sitting-room. Leave your bag there, Miss.”

“No. I guess I’ll hold onto it,” she said, aloud.

The footman looked pained, but said nothing. He led the way haughtily into the rear of the premises again. At a door he knocked.

“Come in!” said a sharp voice, and Helen was ushered into the presence of a female with a face quite in keeping with the tone of her voice.

The lady was of uncertain age. She wore a cap, but it did not entirely hide the fact that her thin, straw-colored hair was done up in curl-papers. She was vinegary of feature, her light blue eyes were as sharp as gimlets, and her lips were continually screwed up into the expression of one determined to say

“prunes.”

She sat in a straight-backed chair in the sitting-room, in a flowered silk bed-wrapper, and she looked just as glad to see Helen as though the girl were her deadliest enemy.

“Who are you?” she demanded.

“I am Helen Morrell,” said the girl.

“What do you want of Mr. Starkweather at this hour?”

“Just what I would want of him at any hour,” returned the Western girl, who was beginning to become heartily exasperated.

“What’s that, Miss?” snapped the housekeeper.

“I have come to him for hospitality. I am his relative—rather, I am Aunt Eunice’s relative——”

“What do you mean, child?” exclaimed the lady, with sudden emotion. “Who is your Aunt Eunice?”

“Mrs. Starkweather. He married my mother’s sister—my Aunt Eunice.”

“Mrs. Starkweather!” gasped Mrs. Olstrom.

“Of course.”

“Then, where have *you* been these past three years?” demanded the housekeeper in wonder. “Mrs. Starkweather has been dead all of that time. Mr. Willets Starkweather is a widower.”

“Aunt Eunice dead?” cried Helen.

The news was a distinct shock to the girl. She forgot everything else for the moment. Her face told her story all too well, and the housekeeper could not doubt her longer.

“You’re a relative, then?”

“Her—her niece, Helen Morrell,” sobbed Helen. “Oh! I did not know—I did not know——”

“Never mind. You are entitled to hospitality and protection. Did you just arrive?”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“Your home is not near?”

“In Montana.”

“My goodness! You cannot go back to-night, that is sure. But why did you not write?”

“I telegraphed I was coming.”

“I never heard of it. Perhaps the message was not received. Gregson!”

“Yes, ma’am,” replied the footman.

“You said something about a taxicab waiting outside with this young lady’s luggage?”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“Go and pay the man and have the baggage brought in——”

“I’ll pay for it, ma’am,” said Helen, hastily, trying to unlock her bag.

“That will be all right. I will settle it with Mr. Starkweather. Here is money, Gregson. Pay the fare and give the man a quarter for himself. Have the trunk brought into the basement. I will attend to Miss—er——?”

“Morrell.”

“Miss Morrell, myself,” finished the housekeeper.

The footman withdrew. The housekeeper looked hard at Helen for several moments.

“So you came here expecting hospitality—in your uncle’s house—and from your cousins?” she observed, jerkily. “Well!”

She got up and motioned Helen to take up her bag.

“Come. I have no orders regarding you. I shall give you one of the spare rooms. You are entitled to that much. No knowing when either Mr. Starkweather or the young ladies will be at home,” she said, grimly.

“I hope you won’t put yourself out,” observed Helen, politely.

“I am not likely to,” returned Mrs. Olstrom. “It is you who will be more likely —— Well!” she finished, without making her meaning very plain.

This reception, to cap all that had gone before since she had arrived at the Grand Central Terminal, chilled Helen. The shock of discovering that her mother’s sister was dead—and she and her father had not been informed of it—was no small one, either. She wished now that she had not come to the house at all.

“I would better have gone to a hotel until I found out how they felt toward me,” thought the girl from the ranch.

Yet Helen was just. She began to tell herself that neither Mr. Starkweather nor her cousins were proved guilty of the rudeness of her reception. The telegram might have gone astray. They might never have dreamed of her coming on from Sunset Ranch to pay them a visit.

The housekeeper began to warm toward her in manner, at least. She took her up another flight of stairs and to a very large and handsomely furnished chamber, although it was at the rear of the house, and right beside the stairs leading to the servants’ quarters. At least, so Mrs. Olstrom said they were.

“You will not mind, Miss,” she said, grimly. “You may hear the sound of walking in this hall. It is nothing. The foolish maids call it ‘the ghost walk’; but it is only a sound. You’re not superstitious; are you?”

“I hope not!” exclaimed Helen.

“Well! I have had to send away one or two girls. The house is very old. There are some queer stories about it. Well! What is a sound?”

“Very true, ma’am,” agreed Helen, rather confused, but bound to be polite.

“Now, Miss, will you have some supper? Mr. Lawdor can get you some in the butler’s pantry. He has a chafing dish there and often prepares late bites for his master.”

“No, ma’am; I am not hungry,” Helen declared. “I had dinner in the dining car at seven.”

“Then I will leave you—unless you should wish something further?” said the housekeeper.

“Here is your bath,” opening a door into the anteroom. “I will place a note upon Mr. Starkweather’s desk saying that you are here. Will you need your trunk up to-night, Miss?”

“Oh, no, indeed,” Helen declared. “I have a kimono here—and other things. I’ll be glad of the bath, though. One does get so dusty traveling.”

She was unlocking her bag. For a moment she hesitated, half tempted to take the housekeeper into her confidence regarding her money. But the woman went directly to the door and bowed herself out with a stiff:

“Good-night, Miss.”

“My! But this is a friendly place!” mused Helen, when she was left alone. “And they seem to have so much confidence in strangers!”

Therefore, she went to the door into the hall, found there was a bolt upon it, and shot it home. Then she pulled the curtain across the keyhole before sitting down and counting all her money over again.

“They got *me* doing it!” muttered Helen. “I shall be afraid of every person I meet in this man’s town.”

But by and by she hopped up, hid the wallet under her pillow (the bed was a big one with deep mattress and downy pillows) and then ran to let her bath run in the little room where Mrs. Olstrom had snapped on the electric light.

She undressed slowly, shook out her garments, hung them properly to air, and stepped into the grateful bath. How good it felt after her long and tiresome journey by train!

But as she was drying herself on the fleecy towels she suddenly heard a sound outside her door. After the housekeeper left her the whole building had seemed as silent as a tomb. Now there was a steady rustling noise in the short corridor on which her room opened.

“What *did* that woman ask me?” murmured Helen. “Was I afraid of ghosts?”

She laughed a little. To a healthy, normal, outdoor girl the supernatural had few terrors.

“It *is* a funny sound,” she admitted, hastily finished the drying process and then slipping into her nightrobe, kimono, and bed slippers.

All the time her ear seemed preternaturally attuned to that rising and waning sound without her chamber. It seemed to come toward the door, pass it, move lightly away, and then turn and repass again. It was a steady, regular——

Step—put; step—put; step—put——

And with it was the rustle of garments—or so it seemed. The girl grew momentarily more curious. The mystery of the strange sound certainly was puzzling.

“Who ever heard of a ghost with a wooden leg?” she thought, chuckling softly to herself. “And that is what it sounds like. No wonder the servants call this corridor ‘the ghost walk.’ Well, me for bed!”

She had already snapped out the electric light in the bathroom, and now hopped

into bed, reaching up to pull the chain of the reading light as she did so. The top of one window was down half-way and the noise of the city at midnight reached her ear in a dull monotone.

Back here at the rear of the great mansion, street sounds were faint. In the distance, to the eastward, was the roar of a passing elevated train. An automobile horn hooted raucously.

But steadily, through all other sounds, as an accompaniment to them and to Helen Morrell’s own thoughts, was the continuous rustle in the corridor outside her door:

Step—put; step—put; step—put.

CHAPTER X

MORNING

The Starkweather mansion was a large dwelling. Built some years before the Civil War, it had been one of the “great houses” in its day, to be pointed out to the mid-nineteenth century visitor to the metropolis. Of course, when the sightseeing coaches came in fashion they went up Fifth Avenue and passed by the stately mansions of the Victorian era, on Madison Avenue, without comment.

Willets Starkweather had sprung from a quite mean and un-noted branch of the family, and had never, until middle life, expected to live in the Madison Avenue homestead. The important members of his clan were dead and gone and their great fortunes scattered. Willets Starkweather could barely keep up with the expenditures of his great household.

There were never servants enough, and Mrs. Olstrom, the very capable housekeeper, who had served the present master’s great-uncle before the day of the new generation, had hard work to satisfy the demands of those there were upon the means allowed her by Mr. Starkweather.

There were rooms in the house—especially upon the topmost floor—into which even the servants seldom went. There were vacant rooms which never knew broom nor duster. The dwelling, indeed, was altogether too large for the needs of Mr. Starkweather and his three motherless daughters.

But their living in it gave them a prestige which nothing else could. As wise as any match-making matron, Willets Starkweather knew that the family’s address at this particular number on Madison Avenue would aid his daughters more in “making a good match” than anything else.

He could not dower them. Really, they needed no dower with their good looks, for they were all pretty. The Madison Avenue mansion gave them the open sesame into good society—choice society, in fact—and there some wealthy trio of unattached young men must see and fall in love with them.

And the girls understood this, too—right down to fourteen-year-old Flossie. They all three knew that to “pay poor papa” for reckless expenditures now, they must sooner or later capture moneyed husbands.

So, there was more than one reason why the three Starkweather girls leaped immediately from childhood into full-blown womanhood. Flossie had already privately studied the characters—and possible bank accounts—of the boys of her acquaintance, to decide upon whom she should smile her sweetest.

These facts—save that the mansion was enormous—were hidden from Helen when she arose on the first morning of her city experience. She had slept soundly and sweetly. Even the rustling steps on the ghost walk had not bothered her for long.

Used to being up and out by sunrise, she could not easily fall in with city ways. She hustled out of bed soon after daybreak, took a cold sponge, which made her body tingle delightfully, and got into her clothes as rapidly as any boy.

She had only the shoddy-looking brown traveling dress to wear, and the out-of-date hat. But she put them on, and ventured downstairs, intent upon going out for a walk before breakfast.

The solemn clock in the hall chimed seven as she found her way down the lower flight of front stairs. As she came through the curtain-hung halls and down the stairs, not a soul did she meet until she reached the front hall. There a rather decrepit-looking man, with a bleared eye, and dressed in decent black, hobbled out of a parlor to meet her.

“Bless me!” he ejaculated. “What—what—what——”

“I am Helen Morrell,” said the girl from Sunset Ranch, smiling, and judging that this must be the butler of whom the housekeeper had spoken the night before. “I have just come to visit my uncle and cousins.”

“Bless me!” said the old man again. “Gregson told me. Proud to see you, Miss. But—you’re dressed to go out, Miss?”

“For a walk, sir,” replied Helen, nodding.

“At this hour? Bless me—bless me—bless me——”

He seemed apt to run off in this style, in an unending string of mild expletives. His head shook and his hands seemed palsied. But he was a polite old man.

“I beg of you, Miss, don’t go out without a bit of breakfast. My own coffee is

dripping in the percolator. Let me give you a cup," he said.

"Why—if it's not too much trouble, sir——"

"This way, Miss," he said, hurrying on before, and leading Helen to a cozy little room at the back. This corresponded with the housekeeper's sitting-room and Helen believed it must be Mr. Lawdor's own apartment.

He laid a small cloth with a flourish. He set forth a silver breakfast set. He did everything neatly and with an alacrity that surprised Helen in one so evidently decrepit.

"A chop, now, Miss? Or a rasher?" he asked, pointing to an array of electric appliances on the sideboard by which a breakfast might be "tossed up" in a hurry.

"No, no," Helen declared. "Not so early. This nice coffee and these delicious rolls are enough until I have earned more."

"Earned more, Miss?" he asked, in surprise.

"By exercise," she explained. "I am going to take a good tramp. Then I shall come back as hungry as a mountain lion."

"The family breakfasts at nine, Miss," said the butler, bowing. "But if you are an early riser you will always find something tidy here in my room, Miss. You are very welcome."

She thanked him and went out into the hall again. The footman in livery—very sleepy and tousled as yet—was unchaining the front door. A yawning maid was at work in one of the parlors with a duster. She stared at Helen in amazement, but Gregson stood stiffly at attention as the visitor went forth into the daylight.

"My, how funny city people live!" thought Helen Morrell. "I don't believe I ever could stand it. Up till all hours, and then no breakfast until nine. *What* a way to live!

"And there must be twice as many servants as there are members of the family —— Why! more than that! And all that big house to get lost in," she added, glancing up at it as she started off upon her walk.

She turned the first corner and went through a side street toward the west. This was not a business side street. There were several tall apartment hotels interspersed with old houses.

She came to Fifth Avenue—"the most beautiful street in the world." It had been

swept and garnished by a horde of white-robed men since two o'clock. On this brisk October morning, from the Washington Arch to 110th Street, it was as clean as a whistle.

She walked uptown. At Thirty-fourth and Forty-second streets the crosstown traffic had already begun. She passed the new department stores, already opening their eyes and yawning in advance of the day's trade.

There were a few pedestrians headed uptown like herself. Some well-dressed men seemed walking to business. A few neat shop girls were hurrying along the pavement, too. But Helen, and the dogs in leash, had the avenue mostly to themselves at this hour.

The sleepy maids, or footmen, or pages stared at the Western girl with curiosity as she strode along. For, unlike many from the plains, Helen could walk well in addition to riding well.

She reached the plaza, and crossing it, entered the park. The trees were just coloring prettily. There were morning sounds from the not-far-distant zoo. A few early nursemaids and their charges asleep in baby carriages, were abroad. Several old gentlemen read their morning papers upon the benches, or fed the squirrels who were skirmishing for their breakfasts.

Several plainly-dressed people were evidently taking their own "constitutionals" through the park paths. Swinging down from the north come square-shouldered, cleanly-shaven young men of the same type as Dud Stone. Helen believed that Dud must be a typical New Yorker.

But there were no girls abroad—at least, girls like herself who had leisure. And Helen was timid about making friends with the nursemaids.

In fact, there wasn't a soul who smiled upon her as she walked through the paths. She would not have dared approach any person she met for any purpose whatsoever.

"They haven't a grain of interest in me," thought Helen. "Many of them, I suppose, don't even see me. Goodness, what a lot of self-centred people there must be in New York!"

She wandered on and on. She had no watch—never had owned one. As she had told Dud Stone, the stars at night were her clock, and by day she judged the hour by the sun.

The sun was behind a haze now; but she had another sure timekeeper. There was

nothing the matter with Helen's appetite.

"I'll go back and join the family at breakfast," the girl thought. "I hope they'll be nice to me. And poor Aunt Eunice dead without our ever being told of it! Strange!"

She had come a good way. Indeed, she was some time in finding an outlet from the park. The sun was behind the morning haze as yet, but she turned east, and finally came out upon the avenue some distance above the gateway by which she had entered.

A southbound auto-bus caught her eye and she signaled it. She not only had brought her purse with her, but the wallet with her money was stuffed inside her blouse and made an uncomfortable lump there at her waist. But she hid this with her arm, feeling that she must be on the watch for some sharper all the time.

"Big Hen was right when he warned me," she repeated, eyeing suspiciously the several passengers in the Fifth Avenue bus.

They were mostly early shoppers, however, or gentlemen riding to their offices. She had noticed the number of the street nearest her uncle's house, and so got out at the right corner.

The change in this part of the town since she had walked away from it soon after seven, amazed her. She almost became confused and started in the wrong direction. The roar of traffic, the rattle of riveters at work on several new buildings in the neighborhood, the hoarse honking of automobiles, the shrill whistles of the traffic policemen at the corners, and the various other sounds seemed to make another place of the old-fashioned Madison Avenue block.

"My goodness! To live in such confusion, and yet have money enough to be able to enjoy a home out of town," thought Helen. "How foolish of Uncle Starkweather."

She made no mistake in the house this time. There was Gregson—now spick and span in his maroon livery—haughtily mounting guard over the open doorway while a belated scrubwoman was cleaning the steps and areaway.

Helen tripped up the steps with a smile for Gregson; but that wooden-faced subject of King George had no joint in his neck. He could merely raise a finger in salute.

"Is the family up, sir?" she asked, politely.

"In Mr. Starkweather's den, Miss," said the footman, being unable to leave his

post at the moment. Mr. Lawdor was not in sight and Helen set out to find the room in question, wondering if the family had already breakfasted. The clock in the hall chimed the quarter to ten as she passed it.

The great rooms on this floor were open now; but empty. She suddenly heard voices. She found a cross passage that she had not noticed before, and entered it, the voices growing louder.

She came to a door before which hung heavy curtains; but these curtains did not deaden the sound entirely. Indeed, as Helen hesitated, with her hand stretched out to seize the portière, she heard something that halted her.

Indeed, what she heard within the next few moments entirely changed the outlook of the girl from Sunset Ranch. It matured that doubt of humanity that had been born the night before in her breast.

And it changed—for the time being at least—Helen’s nature. From a frank, open-hearted, loving girl she became suspicious, morose and secretive. The first words she heard held her spell-bound—an unintentional eavesdropper. And what she heard made her determined to appear to her unkind relatives quite as they expected her to appear.

CHAPTER XI

LIVING UP TO ONE'S REPUTATION

"Well! my lady certainly takes her time about getting up," Belle Starkweather was saying.

"She was tired after her journey, I presume," her father said.

"Across the continent in a day-coach, I suppose," laughed Hortense, yawning.

"I *was* astonished at that bill for taxi hire Olstrom put on your desk, Pa," said Belle. "She must have ridden all over town before she came here."

"A girl who couldn't take a plain hint," cried Hortense, "and stay away altogether when we didn't answer her telegram——"

"Hush, girls. We must treat her kindly," said their father. "Ahem!"

"I don't see *why*?" demanded Hortense, bluntly.

"You don't understand everything," responded Mr. Starkweather, rather weakly.

"I don't understand *you*, Pa, sometimes," declared Hortense.

"Well, I'll tell you one thing right now!" snapped the older girl. "I've ordered her things taken out of that chamber. Her shabby old trunk has gone up to the room at the top of the servants' stairway. It's good enough for her."

"We certainly have not got to have this cowgirl around for long," continued Hortense. "She'd be no fit company for Flossie. Flossie's rude enough as it is."

The youngest daughter had gone to school, so she was not present with her saucy tongue to hold up her own end of the argument.

"Think of a girl right from a cattle ranch!" laughed Belle. "Fine! I suppose she knows how to rope steers, and break ponies, and ride bareback like an Indian, and all that. Fine accomplishments for a New York drawing-room, I must say."

"Oh, yes," joined in Hortense. "And she'll say 'I reckon,' and drop her 'g's' and

otherwise insult the King's English."

"Ahem! I must warn you girls to be less boisterous," advised their father.

"Why, you sound as though you were almost afraid of this cowgirl, Pa," said Belle, curiously.

"No, no!" protested Mr. Starkweather, hurriedly.

"Pa's so easy," complained Hortense. "If I had my way I wouldn't let her stay the day out."

"But where would she go?" almost whined Mr. Starkweather.

"Back where she came from."

"Perhaps the folks there don't want her," said Belle.

"Of course she's a pauper," observed Hortense.

"Give her some money and send her away, Pa," begged Belle.

"You ought to. She's not fit to associate with Flossie. You know just how Floss picks up every little thing——"

"And she's that man's daughter, too, you know," remarked Belle.

"Ahem!" said their father, weakly.

"It's not decent to have her here."

"Of course, other people will remember what Morrell did. It will make a scandal for us."

"I cannot help it! I cannot help it!" cried Mr. Starkweather, suddenly breaking out and battling against his daughters as he sometimes did when they pressed him too closely. "I cannot send her away."

"Well, she mustn't be encouraged to stay," declared Hortense.

"I should say not," rejoined Belle.

"And getting up at this hour to breakfast," Hortense sniffed.

Helen Morrell wore strong, well-made walking boots. Good shoes were something that she could always buy in Elberon. But usually she walked lightly and springily.

Now she came stamping through the small hall, and on the heels of the last remark, flung back the curtain and strode into the den.

“Hullo, folks!” she cried. “Goodness! don’t you get up till noon here in town? I’ve been clean out to your city park while I waited for you to wash your faces. Uncle Starkweather! how be you?”

She had grabbed the hand of the amazed gentleman and was now pumping it with a vigor that left him breathless.

“And these air two of your gals?” quoth Helen. “I bet I can pick ’em out by name,” and she laughed loudly. “This is Belle; ain’t it? Put it thar!” and she took the resisting Belle’s hand and squeezed it in her own brown one until the older girl winced, muscular as she herself was.

“And this is ’Tense—I know!” added the girl from Sunset Ranch, reaching for the hand of her other cousin.

“No, you don’t!” cried Hortense, putting her hands behind her. “Why! you’d crush my hand.”

“Ho, ho!” laughed Helen, slapping her hand heartily upon her knee as she sat down. “Ain’t you the puny one!”

“I’m no great, rude——”

“Ahem!” exclaimed Mr. Starkweather, recovering from his amazement in time to shut off the snappy remark of Hortense. “We—we are glad to see you, girl——”

“I knew you’d be!” cried Helen, loudly. “I told ’em back on the ranch that you an’ the gals would jest about eat me up, you’d be so glad, when ye seen me. Relatives oughter be neighborly.”

“Neighborly!” murmured Hortense. “And from Montana!”

“Butcher got another one; ain’t ye, Uncle Starkweather?” demanded the metamorphosed Helen, looking about with a broad smile. “Where’s the little tad?”

“‘Little tad’! Oh, won’t Flossie be pleased?” again murmured Hortense.

“My youngest daughter is at school,” replied Mr. Starkweather, nervously.

“Shucks! of course,” said Helen, nodding. “I forgot they go to school half their lives down east here. Out my way we don’t get much chance at schoolin’.”

“So I perceive,” remarked Hortense, aloud.

“Now I expect *you*,’Tense,” said Helen, wickedly, “have been through all the isms and the ologies there be—eh? You look like you’d been all worn to a

frazzle studyin'."

Belle giggled. Hortense bridled.

"I really wish you wouldn't call me out of my name," she said.

"Huh?"

"My name is Hortense," said that young lady, coldly.

"Shucks! So it is. But that's moughty long for a single mouthful."

Belle giggled again. Hortense looked disgusted. Uncle Starkweather was somewhat shocked.

"We—ahem!—hope you will enjoy yourself here while you—er—remain," he began. "Of course, your visit will be more or less brief, I suppose?"

"Jest accordin' to how ye like me and how I like you folks," returned the girl from Sunset Ranch, heartily. "When Big Hen seen me off——"

"Who—*who*?" demanded Hortense, faintly.

"Big Hen Billings," said Helen, in an explanatory manner. "Hen was dad's—that is he worked with dad on the ranch. When I come away I told Big Hen not to look for me back till I arrove. Didn't know how I'd find you-all, or how I'd like the city. City's all right; only nobody gets up early. And I expect we-all can't tell how we like each other until we get better acquainted."

"Very true—very true," remarked Mr. Starkweather, faintly.

"But, goodness! I'm hungry!" exclaimed Helen. "You folks ain't fed yet; have ye?"

"We have breakfasted," said Belle, scornfully. "I will ring for the butler. You may tell Lawdor what you want—er—*Cousin* Helen," and she looked at Hortense.

"Sure!" cried Helen. "Sorry to keep you waiting. Ye see, I didn't have any watch and the sun was clouded over this morning. Sort of run over my time limit—eh? Ah!—is this Mr. Lawdor?"

The shaky old butler stood in the doorway.

"It is *Lawdor*," said Belle, emphatically. "Is there any breakfast left, Lawdor?"

"Yes, Miss Belle. When Gregson told me the young miss was not at the table I kept something hot and hot for her, Miss. Shall I serve it in my room?"

“You may as well,” said Belle, carelessly. “And, *Cousin* Helen!”

“Yep?” chirped the girl from the ranch.

“Of course, while you are here, we could not have you in the room you occupied last night. It—it might be needed. I have already told Olstrom, the housekeeper, to take your bag and other things up to the next floor. Ask one of the maids to show you the room you are to occupy—*while you remain*.”

“That’s all right, Belle,” returned the Western girl, with great heartiness. “Any old place will do for me. Why! I’ve slept on the ground more nights than you could shake a stick at,” and she tramped off after the tottering butler.

“Well!” gasped Hortense when she was out of hearing, “what do you know about *that*?”

“Pa, do you intend to let that dowdy little thing stay here?” cried Belle.

“Ahem!” murmured Mr. Starkweather, running a finger around between his collar and his neck, as though to relieve the pressure there.

“Her clothes came out of the ark!” declared Hortense.

“And that hat!”

“And those boots—or is it because she clumps them so? I expect she is more used to riding than to walking.”

“And her language!” rejoined Belle.

“Ahem! What—what can we do, girls?” gasped Mr. Starkweather.

“Put her out!” cried Belle, loudly and angrily.

“She is quite too, too impossible, Pa,” agreed Hortense.

“With her coarse jokes,” said the older sister.

“And her rough way,” echoed the other.

“And that ugly dress and hat.”

“A pauper relation! Faugh! I didn’t know the Starkweathers owned one.”

“Seems to me, *one* queer person in the house is enough,” began Hortense.

Her father and sister looked at her sharply.

“Why, Hortense!” exclaimed Belle.

“Ahem!” observed Mr. Starkweather, warningly.

“Well! we don’t want *that* freak in the house,” grumbled the younger sister.

“There are—ahem!—some things best left unsaid,” observed her father, pompously. “But about this girl from the West——”

“Yes, Pa!” cried his daughters in duet.

“I will see what can be done. Of course, she cannot expect me to support her for long. I will have a serious talk with her.”

“When, Pa?” cried the two girls again.

“Er—ahem!—soon,” declared the gentleman, and beat a hasty retreat.

“It had better be pretty soon,” said Belle, bitterly, to her sister. “For I won’t stand that dowdy thing here for long, now I tell you!”

“Good for you, Belle!” rejoined Hortense, warmly. “It’s strange if we can’t—with Flossie’s help—soon make her sick of her visit.”

CHAPTER XII

“I MUST LEARN THE TRUTH”

Helen was already very sick of her Uncle Starkweather’s home and family. But she was too proud to show the depth of her feeling before the old serving man in whose charge she had been momentarily placed.

Lawdor was plainly pleased to wait upon her. He made fresh coffee in his own percolator; there was a cutlet kept warm upon an electric stove, and he insisted upon frying her a rasher of bacon and some eggs.

Despite all that mentally troubled her, her healthy body needed nourishment and Helen ate with an appetite that pleased the old man immensely.

“If—if you go out early, Miss, don’t forget to come here for your coffee,” he said. “Or more, if you please. I shall be happy to serve you.”

“And I’m happy to have you,” returned the girl, heartily.

She could not assume to him the rude tone and manner which she had displayed to her uncle and cousins. *That* had been the outcome of an impulse which had risen from the unkind expressions she had heard them use about her.

As soon as she could get away, she had ceased being an eavesdropper. But she had heard enough to assure her that her relatives were not glad to see her; that they were rude and unkind, and that they were disturbed by her presence among them.

But there was another thing she had drawn from their ill-advised talk, too. She had heard her father mentioned in no kind way. Hints were thrown out that Prince Morrell’s crime—or the crime of which he had been accused—was still remembered in New York.

Back into her soul had come that wave of feeling she experienced after her father’s death. He had been so troubled by the smirch upon his name—the cloud that had blighted his young manhood in the great city.

“I’ll know the truth,” she thought again. “I’ll find out who *was* guilty. They sha’n’t drive me away until I have accomplished my object in coming East.”

This was the only thought she had while she remained under old Lawdor’s eye. She had to bear up, and seem unruffled until the breakfast was disposed of and she could escape upstairs.

She went up the servants’ way. She saw the same girl she had noticed in the parlor early in the morning.

“Can you show me my room?” she asked her, timidly.

“Top o’ the next flight. Door’s open,” replied the girl, shortly.

Already the news had gone abroad among the under servants that this was a poor relation. No tips need be expected. The girl flirted her cloth and turned her back upon Helen as the latter started through the ghost walk and up the other stairway.

She easily found the room. It was quite as good as her own room at the ranch, as far as size and furniture went. Helen would have been amply satisfied with it had the room been given to her in a different spirit.

But now she closed her door, locked it carefully, hung her jacket over the knob that she should be sure she was not spied upon, and sat down beside the bed.

She was not a girl who cried often. She had wept sincere tears the evening before when she learned that Aunt Eunice was dead. But she could not weep now.

Her emotion was emphatically wrathful. Without cause—that she could see—these city relatives had maligned her—had maligned her father’s memory—and had cruelly shown her, a stranger, how they thoroughly hated her presence.

She had come away from Sunset Ranch with two well-devised ideas in her mind. First of all, she hoped to clear her father’s name of that old smirch upon it. Secondly, he had wished her to live with her relatives if possible, that she might become used to the refinements and circumstances of a more civilized life.

Refinements! Why, these cousins of hers hadn’t the decencies of red Indians!

On impulse Helen had taken the tone she had with them—had showed them in “that cowgirl” just what they had expected to find. She would be bluff and rude and ungrammatical and ill-bred. Perhaps the spirit in which Helen did this was not to be commended; but she had begun it on the impulse of the moment and she felt she must keep it up during her stay in the Starkweather house.

How long that would be Helen was not prepared to say now. It was in her heart

one moment not to unpack her trunk at all. She could go to a hotel—the best in New York, if she so desired. How amazed her cousins would be if they knew that she was at this moment carrying more than eight hundred dollars in cash on her person? And suppose they learned that she owned thousands upon thousands of acres of grazing land in her own right, on which roamed unnumbered cattle and horses?

Suppose they found out that she had been schooled in a first-class institution in Denver—probably as well schooled as they themselves? What would they say? How would they feel should they suddenly make these discoveries?

But, while she sat there and studied the problem out, Helen came to at least one determination: While she remained in the Starkweather house she would keep from her uncle and cousins the knowledge of these facts.

She would not reveal her real character to them. She would continue to parade before them and before their friends the very rudeness and ignorance that they had expected her to betray.

“They are ashamed of me—let them be ashamed,” she said, to herself, bitterly. “They hate me—I’ll give them no reason for loving me, I promise you! They think me a pauper—I’ll *be* a pauper. Until I get ready to leave here, at least. Then I can settle with Uncle Starkweather in one lump for all the expense to which he may be put for me.

“I’ll buy no nice dresses—or hats—or anything else. They sha’n’t know I have a penny to spend. If they want to treat me like a poor relation, let them. I’ll *be* a poor relation.

“I must learn the truth about poor dad’s trouble,” she told herself again. “Uncle Starkweather must know something about it. I want to question him. He may be able to help me. I may get on the track of that bookkeeper. And he can tell me, surely, where to find Fenwick Grimes, father’s old partner.

“No. They shall serve me without knowing it. I will be beholden to them for my bread and butter and shelter—for a time. Let them hate and despise me. What I have to do I will do. Then I’ll ‘pay the shot,’ as Big Hen would say, and walk out and leave them.”

It was a bold determination, but not one that is to be praised. Yet, Helen had provocation for the course she proposed to pursue.

She finally unlocked her trunk and hung up the common dresses and other garments she had brought with her. She had intended to ask her cousins to take

her shopping right away, and she, like any other girl of her age, longed for new frocks and pretty hats.

But there was a lot of force in Helen's character. She would go without anything pretty unless her cousins offered to buy it themselves. She would bide her time.

One thing she hid far back in her closet under the other things—her riding habit. She knew it would give the lie to her supposed poverty. She had sent to Chicago for that, and it had cost a hundred dollars.

"But I don't suppose there'd be a chance to ride in this big town," she thought, with a sigh. "Unless it is hobby-horses in the park. Well! I can get on for a time without the Rose pony, or any other critter on four legs, to love me."

But she was hungry for the companionship of the animals whom she had seen daily on the ranch.

"Why, even the yip of a coyote would be sweet," she mused, putting her head out of the window and scanning nothing but chimneys and tin roofs, with bare little yards far below.

Finally she heard a Japanese gong's mellow note, and presumed it must announce luncheon. It was already two o'clock. People who breakfasted at nine or ten, of course did not need a midday meal.

"I expect they don't have supper till bedtime," thought Helen.

First she hid her wallet in the bottom of her trunk, locked the trunk and set it up on end in the closet. Then she locked the closet door and took out the key, hiding the latter under the edge of the carpet.

"I'm getting as bad as the rest of 'em," she muttered. "I won't trust anybody, either. Now for meeting my dear cousins at lunch."

She had slipped into one of the simple house dresses she had worn at the ranch. She had noticed that forenoon that both Belle and Hortense Starkweather were dressed in the most modish of gowns—as elaborate as those of fashionable ladies. With no mother to say them nay, these young girls aped every new fashion as they pleased.

Helen started downstairs at first with her usual light step. Then she bethought herself, stumbled on a stair, slipped part of the way, and continued to the very bottom of the last flight with a noise and clatter which must have announced her coming long in advance of her actual presence.

“I don’t want to play eavesdropper again,” she told herself, grimly. “I always understood that listeners hear no good of themselves, and now I know it to be a fact.”

Gregson stood at the bottom of the last flight. His face was as wooden as ever, but he managed to open his lips far enough to observe:

“Luncheon is served in the breakfast room, Miss.”

A sweep of his arm pointed the way. Then she saw old Lawdor pottering in and out of a room into which she had not yet looked.

It proved to be a sunny, small dining-room. When alone the family usually ate here, Helen discovered. The real dining-room was big enough for a dancing floor, with an enormous table, preposterously heavy furniture all around the four sides of the room, and an air of gloom that would have removed, before the food appeared, even, all trace of a healthy appetite.

When Helen entered the brighter apartment her three cousins were already before her. The noise she made coming along the hall, despite the heavy carpets, had quite prepared them for her appearance.

Belle and Hortense met her with covert smiles. And they watched their younger sister to see what impression the girl from Sunset Ranch made upon Flossie.

“And this is Flossie; is it?” cried Helen, going boisterously into the room and heading full tilt around the table for the amazed Flossie. “Why, you look like a smart young’un! And you’re only fourteen? Well, I never!”

She seized Flossie by both hands, in spite of that young lady’s desire to keep them free.

“Goodness me! Keep your paws off—do!” ejaculated Flossie, in great disgust. “And let me tell you, if I *am* only fourteen I’m ’most as big as you are and I know a whole lot more.”

“Why, Floss!” exclaimed Hortense, but unable to hide her amusement.

The girl from Sunset Ranch took it all with apparent good nature, however.

“I reckon you *do* know a lot. You’ve had advantages, you see. Girls out my way don’t have much chance, and that’s a fact. But if I stay here, don’t you reckon I’ll learn?”

The Starkweather girls exchanged glances of amusement.

“I do not think,” said Belle, calmly, “that you would better think of remaining

with us for long. It would be rather bad for you, I am sure, and inconvenient for us."

"How's that?" demanded Helen, looking at her blankly. "Inconvenient—and with all this big house?"

"Ahem!" began Belle, copying her father. "The house is not always as free of visitors as it is now. And of course, a girl who has no means and must earn her living, should not live in luxury."

"Why not?" asked Helen, quickly.

"Why—er—well, it would not be nice to have a working girl go in and out of our house."

"And you think I shall have to go to work?"

"Why, of course, you may remain here—father says—until you can place yourself. But he does not believe in fostering idleness. He often says so," said Belle, heaping it all on "poor Pa."

Helen had taken her seat at the table and Gregson was serving. It mattered nothing to these ill-bred Starkweather girls that the serving people heard how they treated this "poor relation."

Helen remained silent for several minutes. She tried to look sad. Within, however, she was furiously angry. But this was not the hour for her to triumph.

Flossie had been giggling for a few moments. Now she asked her cousin, saucily:

"I say! Where did you pick up that calico dress, Helen?"

"This?" returned the visitor, looking down at the rather ugly print. "It's a gingham. Bought it ready-made in Elberon. Do you like it?"

"I love it!" giggled Flossie. "And it's made in quite a new style, too."

"Do you think so? Why, I reckoned it was old," said Helen, smoothly. "But I'm glad to hear it's so fitten to wear. For, you see, I ain't got many clo'es."

"Don't you have dressmakers out there in Montana?" asked Hortense, eyeing the print garment as though it was something entirely foreign.

"I reckon. But we folks on the range don't get much chance at 'em. Dressmakers is as scurce around Sunset Ranch as killyloo birds. Unless ye mought call Injun squaws dressmakers."

“What are killyloo birds?” demanded Flossie, hearing something new.

“Well now! don’t you have them here?” asked Helen, smiling broadly.

“Never heard of them. And I’ve been to Bronx Park and seen all the birds in the flying cage,” said Flossie. “Our Nature teacher takes us out there frequently. It’s a dreadful bore.”

“Well, I didn’t know but you might have ’em East here,” observed Helen, pushing along the time-worn cowboy joke. “I said they was scurce around the ranch; and they be. I never saw one.”

“Really!” ejaculated Hortense. “What are killyloo birds good for?”

“Why, near as I ever heard,” replied Helen, chuckling, “they are mostly used for making folks ask questions.”

“I declare!” snapped Belle. “She is laughing at you, girls. You’re very dense, I’m sure, Hortense.”

“Say! that’s a good one!” laughed Flossie. But Hortense muttered:

“Vulgar little thing!”

Helen smiled tranquilly upon them. Nothing they said to her could shake her calm. And once in a while—as in the case above—she “got back” at them. She kept consistently to her rude way of speaking; but she used the tableware with little awkwardness, and Belle said to Hortense:

“At least somebody’s tried to teach her a few things. She is no sword-swallower.”

“I suppose Aunt Mary had some refinement,” returned Hortense, languidly.

Helen’s ears were preternaturally sharp. She heard everything. But she had such good command of her features that she showed no emotion at these side remarks.

After luncheon the three sisters separated for their usual afternoon amusements. Neither of them gave a thought to Helen’s loneliness. They did not ask her what she was going to do, or suggest anything to her save that, an hour later, when Belle saw her cousin preparing to leave the house in the same dress she had worn at luncheon, she cried:

“Oh, Helen, *do* go out and come in by the lower door; will you? The basement door, you know.”

“Sure!” replied Helen, cheerfully. “Saves the servants work, I suppose,

answering the bell."

But she knew as well as Belle why the request was made. Belle was ashamed to have her appear to be one of the family. If she went in and out by the servants' door it would not look so bad.

Helen walked over to the avenue and looked at the frocks in the store windows. By their richness she saw that in this neighborhood, at least, to refit in a style which would please her cousins would cost quite a sum of money.

"I won't do it!" she told herself, stubbornly. "If they want me to look well enough to go in and out of the front door, let them suggest buying something for me."

She went back to the Starkweather mansion in good season; but she entered, as she had been told, by the area door. One of the maids let her in and tossed her head when she saw what an out-of-date appearance this poor relation of her master made.

"Sure," this girl said to the cook, "if I didn't dress better nor *her* when I went out, I'd wait till afther dark, so I would!"

Helen heard this, too. But she was a girl who could stick to her purpose. Criticism should not move her, she determined; she would continue to play her part.

"Mr. Starkweather is in the den, Miss," said the housekeeper, meeting Helen on the stairs. "He has asked for you."

Mrs. Olstrom was a very grim person, indeed. If she had shown the girl from the ranch some little kindliness the night before, she now hid it all very successfully.

Helen returned to the lower floor and sought that room in which she had had her first interview with her relatives. Mr. Starkweather was alone. He looked more than a little disturbed; and of the two he was the more confused.

"Ahem! I feel that we must have a serious talk together, Helen," he said, in his pompous manner. "It—it will be quite necessary—ahem!"

"Sure!" returned the girl. "Glad to. I've got some serious things to ask you, too, sir."

"Eh? Eh?" exclaimed the gentleman, worried at once.

"You fire ahead, sir," said Helen, sitting down and crossing one knee over the other in a boyish fashion. "My questions will wait."

“I—ahem!—I wish to know who suggested your coming here to New York?”

“My father,” replied Helen, simply and truthfully.

“Your father?” The reply evidently both surprised and discomposed Mr. Starkweather. “I do not understand. Your—your father is dead——”

“Yes, sir. It was just before he died.”

“And he told you to come here to—to *us*?”

“Yes, sir.”

“But why?” demanded the gentleman with some warmth.

“Dad said as how you folks lived nice, and knew all about refinement and eddication and all that. He wanted me to have a better chance than what I could get on the ranch.”

Mr. Starkweather glared at her in amazement. He was not at all a kind-hearted man; but he was very cowardly. He had feared her answer would be quite different from this, and now took courage.

“Do you mean to say that merely this expressed wish that you might live at—ahem!—at my expense, and as my daughters live, brought you here to New York?”

“That begun it, Uncle,” said Helen, coolly.

“Preposterous! What could Prince Morrell be thinking of? Why should I support you, Miss?”

“Why, that don’t matter so much,” remarked Helen, calmly. “I can earn my keep, I reckon. If there’s nothing to do in the house I’ll go and find me a job and pay my board. But, you see, dad thought I ought to have the refining influences of city life. Good idea; eh?”

“A very ridiculous idea! A very ridiculous idea, indeed!” cried Mr. Starkweather. “I never heard the like.”

“Well, you see, there’s another reason why I came, too, Uncle,” Helen said, blandly.

“What’s that?” demanded the gentleman, startled again.

“Why, dad told me everything when he died. He—he told me how he got into trouble before he left New York—’way back there before I was born,” spoke Helen, softly. “It troubled dad all his life, Uncle Starkweather. Especially after

mother died. He feared he had not done right by her and me, after all, in running away when he was not guilty——”

“Not guilty!”

“Not guilty,” repeated Helen, sternly. “Of course, we all know *that*. Somebody got all that money the firm had in bank; but it was not my father, sir.”

She gazed straight into the face of Mr. Starkweather. He did not seem to be willing to look at her in return; nor could he pluck up the courage to deny her statement.

“I see,” he finally murmured.

“That is the second reason that has brought me to New York,” said Helen, more softly. “And it is the more important reason. If you don’t care to have me here, Uncle, I will find work that will support me, and live elsewhere. But I *must* learn the truth about that old story against father. I sha’n’t leave New York until I have cleared his name.”

CHAPTER XIII

SADIE AGAIN

Mr. Starkweather appeared to recover his equanimity. He looked askance at his niece, however, as she announced her intention.

“You are very young and very foolish, Helen—ahem! A mystery of sixteen or seventeen years’ standing, which the best detectives could not unravel, is scarcely a task to be attempted by a mere girl.”

“Who else is there to do it?” Helen demanded, quickly. “I mean to find out the truth, if I can. I want you to tell me all you know, and I want you to tell me how to find Fenwick Grimes——”

“Nonsense, nonsense, girl!” exclaimed her uncle, testily. “What good would it do you to find Grimes?”

“He was the other partner in the concern. He had just as good a chance to steal the money as father.”

“Ridiculous! Mr. Grimes was away from the city at the time.”

“Then you *do* remember all about it, sir?” asked Helen, quickly.

“Ahem! *That* fact had not slipped my mind,” replied her uncle, weakly.

“And then, there was Allen Chesterton, the bookkeeper. Was a search ever made for him?”

“High and low,” returned her uncle, promptly. “But nobody ever heard of him thereafter.”

“And why did the shadow of suspicion not fall upon him as strongly as it did upon my father?” cried the girl, dropping, in her earnestness, her assumed uncouthness of speech.

“Perhaps it did—perhaps it did,” muttered Mr. Starkweather. “Yes, of course it did! They both ran away, you see——”

“Didn’t you advise dad to go away—until the matter could be cleared up?” demanded Helen.

“Why—I—ahem!”

“Both you and Mr. Grimes advised it,” went on the girl, quite firmly. “And father did so because of the effect his arrest might have upon mother in her delicate health. Wasn’t that the way it was?”

“I—I presume that is so,” agreed Mr. Starkweather.

“And it was wrong,” declared the girl, with all the confidence of youth. “Poor dad realized it before he died. It made all the firm’s creditors believe that he was guilty. No matter what he did thereafter——”

“Stop, girl!” exclaimed Mr. Starkweather. “Don’t you know that if you stir up this old business the scandal will all come to light? Why—why, even *my* name might be attached to it.”

“But poor dad suffered under the blight of it all for more than sixteen years.”

“Ahem! It is a fact. It was a great misfortune. Perhaps he *was* advised wrongly,” said Mr. Starkweather, with trembling lips. “But I want you to understand, Helen, that if he had not left the city he would undoubtedly have been in a cell when you were born.”

“I don’t know that that would have killed me—especially, if by staying here, he might have come to trial and been freed of suspicion.”

“But he could not be freed of suspicion.”

“Why not? I don’t see that the evidence was conclusive,” declared the girl, hotly. “At least, *he* knew of none such. And I want to know now every bit of evidence that could be brought against him.”

“Useless! Useless!” muttered her uncle, wiping his brow.

“It is not useless. My father was accused of a crime of which he wasn’t guilty. Why, his friends here—those who knew him in the old days—will think me the daughter of a criminal!”

“But you are not likely to meet any of them——”

“Why not?” demanded Helen, quickly.

“Surely you do not expect to remain here in New York long enough for that?” said Uncle Starkweather, exasperated. “I tell you, I cannot permit it.”

“I must learn what I can about that old trouble before I go back—if I go back to Montana at all,” declared his niece, doggedly.

Mr. Starkweather was silent for a few moments. He had begun the discussion with the settled intention of telling Helen that she must return at once to the West. But he knew he had no real right of control over the girl, and to claim one would put him at the disadvantage, perhaps, of being made to support her.

He saw she was a very determined creature, young as she was. If he antagonized her too much, she might, indeed, go out and get a position to support herself and remain a continual thorn in the side of the family.

So he took another tack. He was not a successful merchant and real estate operator for nothing. He said:

“I do not blame you, Helen, for *wishing* that that old cloud over your father’s name might be dissipated. I wish so, too. But, remember, long ago your—ahem! —your aunt and I, as well as Fenwick Grimes, endeavored to get to the bottom of the mystery. Detectives were hired. Everything possible was done. And to no avail.”

She watched him narrowly, but said nothing.

“So, how can you be expected to do now what was impossible when the matter was fresh?” pursued her uncle, suavely. “If I could help you——”

“You can,” declared the girl, suddenly.

“Will you tell me how?” he asked, in a rather vexed tone.

“By telling me where to find Mr. Grimes,” said Helen.

“Why—er—that is easily done, although I have had no dealings with Mr. Grimes for many years. But if he is at home—he travels over the country a great deal—I can give you a letter to him and he will see you.”

“Thank you, sir.”

“You are determined to try to rake up all this trouble?”

“I will see Mr. Grimes. And I will try to find Allen Chesterton.”

“Out of the question!” cried her uncle. “Chesterton is dead. He dropped out of sight long ago. A strange character at best, I believe. And if he was the thief ——”

“Well, sir?”

“He certainly would not help you convict himself.”

“Not intentionally, sir,” admitted Helen.

“I never did see such an opinionated girl,” cried Mr. Starkweather, in sudden wrath.

“I’m sorry, sir, if I trouble you. If you don’t want me here——”

Now, her uncle had decided that it would not be safe to have the girl elsewhere in New York. At least, if she was under his roof, he could keep track of her activities. He began to be a little afraid of this very determined, unruffled young woman.

“She’s a little savage! No knowing what she might do, after all,” he thought.

Finally he said aloud: “Well, Helen, I will do what I can. I will communicate with Mr. Grimes and arrange for you to visit him—soon. I will tell you—ahem! —in the near future, all I can recollect of the affair. Will that satisfy you?”

“I will take it very kindly of you, Uncle,” said Helen non-committally.

“And when you are satisfied of the impossibility of your doing yourself, or your father’s name, any good in this direction, I shall expect you to close your visit in the East here and return to your friends in Montana.”

She nodded, looking at him with a strange expression on her shrewd face.

“You mean to help me as a sort of a bribe,” she observed, slowly. “To pay you I am to return home and never trouble you any more?”

“Well—er—ahem!”

“Is that it, Uncle Starkweather?”

“You see, my dear,” he began again, rather red in the face, but glad that he was getting out of a bad corner so easily, “you do not just fit in, here, with our family life. You see it yourself, perhaps?”

“Perhaps I do, sir,” replied the girl from Sunset Ranch.

“You would be quite at a disadvantage beside my girls—ahem! You would not be happy here. And of course, you haven’t a particle of claim upon us.”

“No, sir; not a particle,” repeated Helen.

“So you see, all things considered, it would be much better for you to return to your own people—ahem—*own people*,” said Mr. Starkweather, with emphasis.

“Now—er—you are rather shabby, I fear, Helen. I am not as rich a man as you may suppose. But I—— The fact is, the girls are ashamed of your appearance,” he pursued, without looking at her, and opening his bill case.

“Here is ten dollars. I understand that a young miss like you can be fitted very nicely to a frock downtown for less than ten dollars. I advise you to go out to-morrow and find yourself a more up-to-date frock than—than that one you have on, for instance.

“Somebody might see you come into the house—ahem!—some of our friends, I mean, and they would not understand. Get a new dress, Helen. While you are here look your best. Ahem! We all must give the hostage of a neat appearance to society.”

“Yes, sir,” said Helen, simply.

She took the money. Her throat had contracted so that she could not thank him for it in words. But she retained a humble, thankful attitude, and it sufficed.

He cared nothing about hurting the feelings of the girl. He did not even inquire—in his own mind—if she *had* any feelings to be hurt! He was so self-centred, so pompous, so utterly selfish, that he never thought how he might wrong other people.

Willets Starkweather was very tenacious of his own dignity and his own rights. But for the rights of others he cared not at all. And there was not an iota of tenderness in his heart for the orphan who had come so trustingly across the continent and put herself in his charge. Indeed, aside from a feeling of something like fear of Helen, he betrayed no interest in her at all.

Helen went out of the room without a further word. She was more subdued that evening at dinner than she had been before. She did not break out in rude speeches, nor talk very much. But she was distinctly out of her element—or so her cousins thought—at their dinner table.

“I tell you what it is, girls,” Belle, the oldest cousin, said after the meal and when Helen had gone up to her room without being invited to join the family for the evening, “I tell you what it is: If we chance to have company to dinner while she remains, I shall send a tray up to her room with her dinner on it. I certainly could not *bear* to have the Van Ramsdens, or the De Vornes, see her at our table.”

“Quite true,” agreed Hortense. “We never could explain having such a cousin.”

“Horrors, no!” gasped Flossie.

Helen had found a book in the library, and she lit the gas in her room (there was no electricity on this upper floor) and forgot her troubles and unhappiness in following the fortunes of the heroine of her story-book. It was late when she heard the maids retire. They slept in rooms opening out of a side hall.

By and by—after the clock in the Metropolitan tower had struck the hour of eleven—Helen heard the rustle and step outside her door which she had heard in the corridor downstairs. She crept to her door, after turning out her light, and opening it a crack, listened.

Had somebody gone downstairs? Was that a rustling dress in the corridor down there—the ghost walk? Did she hear again the “step—put; step—put” that had puzzled her already?

She did not like to go out into the hall and, perhaps, meet one of the servants. So, after a time, she went back to her book.

But the incident had given her a distaste for reading. She kept listening for the return of the ghostly step. So she undressed and went to bed. Long afterward (or so it seemed to her, for she had been asleep and slept soundly) she was aroused again by the “step—put; step—put” past her door.

Half asleep as she was, she jumped up and ran to the door. When she opened it, it seemed as though the sound was far down the main corridor—and she thought she could see the entire length of that passage. At least, there was a great window at the far end, and the moonlight looked ghostily in. No shadow crossed this band of light, and yet the rustle and step continued after she reached her door and opened it.

Then——

Was that a door closed softly in the distance? She could not be sure. After a minute or two one thing she *was* sure of, however; she was getting cold here in the draught, so she scurried back to bed, covered her ears, and went to sleep again.

Helen got up the next morning with one well-defined determination. She would put into practice her uncle’s suggestion. She would buy one of the cheap but showy dresses which shopgirls and minor clerks had to buy to keep up appearances.

It was a very serious trouble to Helen that she was not to buy and disport herself in pretty frocks and hats. The desire to dress prettily and tastefully is born in most girls—just as surely as is the desire to breathe. And Helen was no

exception.

She was obstinate, however, and could keep to her purpose. Let the Starkweathers think she was poor. Let them continue to think so until her play was all over and she was ready to go home again.

Her experience in the great city had told Helen already that she could never be happy there. She longed for the ranch, and for the Rose pony—even for Big Hen Billings and Sing and the rag-head, Jo-Rab, and Manuel and Jose, and all the good-hearted, honest “punchers” who loved her and who would no more have hurt her feelings than they would have made an infant cry.

She longed to have somebody call her “Snuggy” and to smile upon her in good-fellowship. As she walked the streets nobody appeared to heed her. If they did, their expression of countenance merely showed curiosity, or a scorn of her clothes.

She was alone. She had never felt so much alone when miles from any other human being, as she sometimes had been on the range. What had Dud said about this? That one could be very much alone in the big city? Dud was right.

She wished that she had Dud Stone’s address. She surely would have communicated with him now, for he was probably back in New York by this time.

However, there was just one person whom she had met in New York who seemed to the girl from Sunset Ranch as being “all right.” And when she made up her mind to do as her uncle had directed about the new frock, it was of this person Helen naturally thought.

Sadie Goronsky! The girl who had shown herself so friendly the night Helen had come to town. She worked in a store where they sold ladies’ clothing. With no knowledge of the cheaper department stores than those she had seen on the avenue, it seemed quite the right thing to Helen’s mind for her to search out Sadie and her store.

So, after an early breakfast taken in Mr. Lawdor’s little room, and under the ministrations of that kind old man, Helen left the house—by the area door as requested—and started downtown.

She didn’t think of riding. Indeed, she had no idea how far Madison Street was. But she remembered the route the taxicab had taken uptown that first evening, and she could not easily lose her way.

And there was so much for the girl from the ranch to see—so much that was new and curious to her—that she did not mind the walk; although it took her until almost noon, and she was quite tired when she got to Chatham Square.

Here she timidly inquired of a policeman, who kindly crossed the wide street with her and showed her the way. On the southern side of Madison Street she wandered, curiously alive to everything about the district, and the people in it, that made them both seem so strange to her.

“A dress, lady! A hat, lady!”

The buxom Jewish girls and women, who paraded the street before the shops for which they worked, would give her little peace. Yet it was all done good-naturedly, and when she smiled and shook her head they smiled, too, and let her pass.

Suddenly she saw the sturdy figure of Sadie Goronsky right ahead. She had stopped a rather over-dressed, loud-voiced woman with a child, and Helen heard a good deal of the conversation while she waited for Sadie (whose back was toward her) to be free.

The “puller-in” and the possible customer wrangled some few moments, both in Yiddish and broken English; but Sadie finally carried her point—and the child—into the store! The woman had to follow her offspring, and once inside some of the clerks got hold of her and Sadie could come forth to lurk for another possible customer.

“Well, see who’s here!” exclaimed the Jewish girl, catching sight of Helen. “What’s the matter, Miss? Did they turn you out of your uncle’s house upon Madison Avenyer? I never *did* expect to see you again.”

“But I expected to see you again, Sadie; I told you I’d come,” said Helen, simply.

“So it wasn’t just a josh; eh?”

“I always keep my word,” said the girl from the West.

“Chee!” gasped Sadie. “We ain’t so partic’lar around here. But I’m glad to see you, Miss, just the same. Be-lieve me!”

CHAPTER XIV

A NEW WORLD

The two girls stood on the sidewalk and let the tide of busy humanity flow by unnoticed. Both were healthy types of youth—one from the open ranges of the Great West, the other from a land far, far to the East.

Helen Morrell was brown, smiling, hopeful-looking; but she certainly was not "up to date" in dress and appearance. The black-eyed and black-haired Russian girl was just as well developed for her age and as rugged as she could be; but in her cheap way her frock was the "very latest thing," her hair was dressed wonderfully, and the air of "city smartness" about her made the difference between her and Helen even more marked.

"I never s'posed you'd come down here," said Sadie again.

"You asked was I turned out of my uncle's house," responded Helen, seriously. "Well, it does about amount to that."

"Oh, no! Never!" cried the other girl.

"Let me tell you," said Helen, whose heart was so full that she longed for a confidant. Besides, Sadie Goronsky would never know the Starkweather family and their friends, and she felt free to speak fully. So, without much reserve, she related her experiences in her uncle's house.

"Now, ain't they the mean things!" ejaculated Sadie, referring to the cousins. "And I suppose they're awful rich?"

"I presume so. The house is very large," declared Helen.

"And they've got loads and loads of dresses, too?" demanded the working girl.

"Oh, yes. They are very fashionably dressed," Helen told her. "But see! I am going to have a new dress myself. Uncle Starkweather gave me ten dollars."

"Chee!" ejaculated Sadie. "Wouldn't it give him a cramp in his pocket-book to

part with so much mazouma?”

“Mazouma?”

“That’s Hebrew for money,” laughed Sadie. “But you *do* need a dress. Where did you get that thing you’ve got on?”

“Out home,” replied Helen. “I see it isn’t very fashionable.”

“Say! we got through sellin’ them things to greenies two years back,” declared Sadie.

“You haven’t been at work all that time; have you?” gasped the girl from the ranch.

“Sure. I got my working papers four years ago. You see, I looked a lot older than I really was, and comin’ across from the old country all us children changed our ages, so’t we could go right to work when we come here without having to spend all day in school. We had an uncle what come over first, and he told us what to do.”

Helen listened to this with some wonder. She felt perfectly safe with Sadie, and would have trusted her, if it were necessary, with the money she had hidden away in her closet at Uncle Starkweather’s; yet the other girl looked upon the laws of the land to which she had come for freedom as merely harsh rules to be broken at one’s convenience.

“Of course,” said Sadie, “I didn’t work on the sidewalk here at first. I worked back in Old Yawcob’s shop—making changes in the garments for fussy customers. I was always quick with my needle.

“Then I helped the salesladies. But business was slack, and people went right by our door, and I jumped out one day and started to pull ’em in. And I was better at it——

“Good-day, ma’am! Will you look at a beautiful skirt—just the very latest style—we’ve only got a few of them for samples?” She broke off and left Helen to stand wondering while Sadie chaffered with another woman, who had hesitated a trifle as she passed the shop.

“Oh, no, ma’am! You was no greenie. I could tell that at once. That’s why I spoke English to you yet,” Sadie said, flattering the prospective buyer, and smiling at her pleasantly. “If you will just step in and see these skirts—or a two-piece suit if you will?”

Helen observed her new friend with amazement. Although she knew Sadie could be no older than herself, she used the tact of long business experience in handling the woman. And she got her into the store, too!

“I wash my hands of ’em when they get inside,” she said, laughing, and coming back to Helen. “If Old Yawcob and his wife and his salesladies can’t hold ’em, it isn’t *my* fault, you understand. I’m about the youngest puller-in there is along Madison Street—although that little hunchback in front of the millinery shop yonder *looks* younger.”

“But you don’t try to pull *me* in,” said Helen, laughing. “And I’ve got ten whole dollars to spend.”

“That’s right. But then, you see, you’re my friend, Miss,” said Sadie. “I want to be sure you get your money’s worth. So I’m going with you when you buy your dress—that is, if you’ll let me.”

“Let you? Why, I’d dearly love to have you advise me,” declared the Western girl. “And don’t—*don’t*—call me ‘Miss.’ I’m Helen Morrell, I tell you.”

“All right. If you say so. But, you know, you *are* from Madison Avenyer just the same.”

“No. I’m from a great big ranch out West.”

“That’s like a farm—yes? I gotter cousin that works on a farm over on Long Island. It’s a big farm—it’s eighty acres. Is that farm you come from as big as that?”

Helen nodded and did not smile at the girl’s ignorance. “Very much bigger than eighty acres,” she said. “You see, it has to be, for we raise cattle instead of vegetables.”

“Well, I guess I don’t know much about it,” admitted Sadie, frankly. “All I know is this city and mostly this part of it down here on the East Side. We all have to work so hard, you know. But we’re getting along better than we did at first, for more of us children can work.

“And now I want you should go home with me for dinner, Helen—yes! It is my dinner hour quick now; and then we will have time to pick you out a bargain for a dress. Sure! You’ll come?”

“If I won’t be imposing on you?” said Helen, slowly.

“Huh! That’s all right. We’ll have enough to eat *this* noon. And it ain’t so Jewish,

either, for father don’t come home till night. Father’s awful religious; but I tell mommer she must be up-to-date and have some ’Merican style about her. I got her to leave off her wig yet. Catch *me* wearin’ a wig when I’m married just to make me look ugly. Not!”

All this rather puzzled Helen; but she was too polite to ask questions. She knew vaguely that Jewish people followed peculiar rabbinical laws and customs; but what they were she had no idea. However, she liked Sadie, and it mattered nothing to Helen what the East Side girl’s faith or bringing up had been. Sadie was kind, and friendly, and was really the only person in all this big city in whom the ranch girl could place the smallest confidence.

Sadie ran into the store for a moment and soon a big woman with an unctuous smile, a ruffled white apron about as big as a postage stamp, and her gray hair dressed as remarkably as Sadie’s own, came out upon the sidewalk to take the young girl’s place.

“Can’t I sell you somedings, lady?” she said to the waiting Helen.

“Now, don’t you go and run *my* customer in, Ma Finkelstein!” cried Sadie, running out and hugging the big woman. “Helen is my friend and she’s going home to eat mit me.”

“*Ach!* you are already a United Stater yet,” declared the big woman, laughing. “Undt the friends you have it from Number Five Av’noo—yes?”

“You guessed it pretty near right,” cried Sadie. “Helen lives on Madison Avenyer—and it ain’t Madison Avenyer *uptown*, neither!”

She slipped her hand in Helen’s and bore her off to the tenement house in which Helen had had her first adventure in the great city.

“Come on up,” said Sadie, hospitably. “You look tired, and I bet you walked clear down here?”

“Yes, I did,” admitted Helen.

“Some o’ mommer’s soup mit lentils will rest you, I bet. It ain’t far yet—only two flights.”

Helen followed her cheerfully. But she wondered if she was doing just right in letting this friendly girl believe that she was just as poor as the Starkweathers thought she was. Yet, on the other hand, wouldn’t Sadie Goronsky have felt embarrassed and have been afraid to be her friend, if she knew that Helen Morrell was a very, very wealthy girl and had at her command what would seem

to the Russian girl “untold wealth”?

“I’ll pay her for this,” thought Helen, with the first feeling of real happiness she had experienced since leaving the ranch. “She shall never be sorry that she was kind to me.”

So she followed Sadie into the humble home of the latter on the third floor of the tenement with a smiling face and real warmth at her heart. In Yiddish the downtown girl explained rapidly her acquaintance with “the Gentile.” But, as she had told Helen, Sadie’s mother had begun to break away from some of the traditions of her people. She was fast becoming “a United Stater,” too.

She was a handsome, beaming woman, and she was as generous-hearted as Sadie herself. The rooms were a little steamy, for Mrs. Goronsky had been doing the family wash that morning. But the table was set neatly and the food that came on was well prepared and—to Helen—much more acceptable than the dainties she had been having at Uncle Starkweather’s.

The younger children, who appeared for the meal, were right from the street where they had been playing, or from work in neighboring factories, and were more than a little grimy. But they were not clamorous and they ate with due regard to “manners.”

“Ve haf nine, Mees,” said Mrs. Goronsky, proudly. “Undt they all are healt’y —*ach! so* healt’y. It takes mooch to feed them yet.”

“Don’t tell about it, Mommer” cried Sadie. “It aint stylish to have big fam’lies no more. Don’t I tell you?”

“What about that Preesident we hadt—that Teddy Sullivan—what said big fam’lies was a good d’ing? Aindt that enough? Sure, Sarah, a *Preesident* iss stylish.”

“Oh, Mommer!” screamed Sadie. “You gotcher politics mixed. ‘Sullivan’ is the district leader wot gifs popper a job; but ‘Teddy’ was the President yet. You ain’t never goin’ to be real American.”

But her mother only laughed. Indeed, the light-heartedness of these poor people was a revelation to Helen. She had supposed vaguely that very poor people must be all the time serious, if not actually in tears.

“Now, Helen, we’ll rush right back to the shop and I’ll make Old Yawcob sell you a bargain. She’s goin’ to get her new dress, Mommer. Ain’t that fine?”

“Sure it iss,” declared the good woman. “Undt you get her a bargain, Sarah.”

“*Don’t* call me ‘Sarah,’ Mommer!” cried the daughter. “It ain’t stylish, I tell you. Call me ‘Sadie.’”

Her mother kissed her on both plump cheeks. “What matters it, my little lamb?” she said, in their own tongue. “Mother love makes *any* name sweet.”

Helen did not, of course, understand these words; but the caress, the look on their faces, and the way Sadie returned her mother’s kiss made a great lump come into the orphan girl’s throat. She could hardly find her way in the dim hall to the stairway, she was so blinded by tears.

CHAPTER XV

“STEP—PUT; STEP—PUT”

An hour later Helen was dressed in a two-piece suit, cut in what a chorus of salesladies, including old Mrs. Finkelstein and Sadie herself, declared were most “stylish” lines—and it did not cost her ten dollars, either! Indeed, Sadie insisted upon going with her to a neighboring millinery store and purchasing a smart little hat for $1.59, which set off the new suit very nicely.

“Sure, this old hat and suit of yours is wort’ a lot more money, Helen,” declared the Russian girl. “But they ain’t just the style, yuh see. And style is everything to a girl. Why, nobody’d take you for a greenie *now*!”

Helen was quite wise enough to know that she had never been dressed so cheaply before; but she recognized, too, the truth of her friend’s statement.

“Now, you take the dress home, and the hat. Maybe you can find a cheap tailor who will make over the dress. There’s enough material in it. That’s an awful wide skirt, you know.”

“But I couldn’t walk in a skirt as narrow as the one you have on, Sadie.”

“Chee! if it was stylish,” confessed Sadie, “I’d find a way to walk in a piece of stove-pipe!” and she giggled.

So Helen left for uptown with her bundles, wearing her new suit and hat. She took a Fourth Avenue car and got out only a block from her uncle’s house. As she hurried through the side street and came to the Madison Avenue corner, she came face-to-face with Flossie, coming home from school with a pile of books under her arm.

Flossie looked quite startled when she saw her cousin. Her eyes grew wide and she swept the natty looking, if cheaply-dressed Western girl, with an appreciative glance.

“Goodness me! What fine feathers!” she cried. “You’ve been loading up with

new clothes—eh? Say, I like that dress."

"Better than the caliker one?" asked Helen, slily.

"You're not so foolish as to believe I liked *that*," returned Flossie, coolly. "I told Belle and Hortense that you weren't as dense as they seemed to think you."

"Thanks!" said Helen, drily.

"But that dress is just in the mode," repeated Flossie, with some admiration.

"Your father's kindness enabled me to get it," said Helen, briefly.

"Humph!" said Flossie, frankly. "I guess it didn't cost you much, then."

Helen did not reply to this comment; but as she turned to go down to the basement door, Flossie caught her by the arm.

"Don't you do that!" she exclaimed. "Belle can be pretty mean sometimes. You come in at the front door with me."

"No," said Helen, smiling. "You come in at the area door with *me*. It's easier, anyway. There's a maid just opening it."

So the two girls entered the house together. They were late to lunch—indeed, Helen did not wish any; but she did not care to explain why she was not hungry.

"What's the matter with you, Flossie?" demanded Hortense. "We've done eating, Belle and I. And if you wish your meals here, Helen, please get here on time for them."

"You mind your own business!" cried Flossie, suddenly taking up the cudgels for her cousin as well as herself. "You aren't the boss, Hortense! I got kept after school, anyway. And cook can make something hot for me and Helen."

"You *need* to be kept after school—from the kind of English you use," sniffed her sister.

"I don't care! I hate the old studies!" declared Flossie, slamming her books down upon the table. "I don't see why I have to go to school at all. I'm going to ask Pa to take me out. I need a rest."

Which was very likely true, for Miss Flossie was out almost every night to some party, or to the theater, or at some place which kept her up very late. She had no time for study, and therefore was behind in all her classes. That day she had been censured for it at school—and when they took a girl to task for falling behind in studies at *that* school, she was very far behind, indeed!

Flossie grumbled about her hard lot all through luncheon. Helen kept her company; then, when it was over, she slipped up to her own room with her bundles. Both Hortense and Belle had taken a good look at her, however, and they plainly approved of her appearance.

“She’s not such a dowdy as she seemed,” whispered Hortense to the oldest sister.

“No,” admitted Belle. “But that’s an awful cheap dress she bought.”

“I guess she didn’t have much to spend,” laughed Hortense. “Pa wasn’t likely to be very liberal. It puzzles me why he should have kept her here at all.”

“He says it is his duty,” scoffed Belle. “Now, you know Pa! He never was so worried about duty before; was he?”

These girls, brought up as they were, steeped in selfishness and seeing their father likewise so selfish, had no respect for their parent. Nor could this be wondered at.

Going up to her room that afternoon Helen met Mrs. Olstrom coming down. The housekeeper started when she saw the young girl, and drew back. But Helen had already seen the great tray of dishes the housekeeper carried. And she wondered.

Who took their meals up on this top floor? The maids who slept here were all accounted for. She had seen them about the house. And Gregson, too. Of course Mr. Lawdor and Mrs. Olstrom had their own rooms below.

Then who could it be who was being served on this upper floor? Helen was more than a little curious. The sounds she had heard the night before dove-tailed in her mind with these soiled dishes on the tray.

She was almost tempted to walk through the long corridor in which she thought she had heard the scurrying footsteps pass the night before. Yet, suppose she was caught by Mrs. Olstrom—or by anybody else—peering about the house?

“*That* wouldn’t be very nice,” mused the girl.

“Because these people think I am rude and untaught, is no reason why I should display any *real* rudeness.”

She was very curious, however; the thought of the tray-load of dishes remained in her mind all day.

At dinner that night even Mr. Starkweather gave Helen a glance of approval when she appeared in her new frock.

“Ahem!” he said. “I see you have taken my advice, Helen. We none of us can

afford to forget what is due to custom. You are much more presentable."

"Thank you, Uncle Starkweather," replied Helen, demurely. "But out our way we say: 'Fine feathers don't make fine birds.'"

"You needn't fret," giggled Flossie. "Your feather's aren't a bit too fine."

But Flossie's eyes were red, and she plainly had been crying.

"I *hate* the old books!" she said, suddenly. "Pa, why do I have to go to school any more?"

"Because I am determined you shall, young lady," said Mr. Starkweather, firmly. "We all have to learn."

"Hortense doesn't go."

"But you are not Hortense's age," returned her father, coolly. "Remember that. And I must have better reports of your conduct in school than have reached me lately," he added.

Flossie sulked over the rest of her dinner. Helen, going up slowly to her room later, saw the door of her youngest cousin's room open, and glancing in, beheld Flossie with her head on her book, crying hard.

Each of these girls had a beautiful room of her own. Flossie's was decorated in pink, with chintz hangings, a lovely bed, bookshelves, a desk of inlaid wood, and everything to delight the eye and taste of any girl. Beside the common room Helen occupied, this of Flossie's was a fairy palace.

But Helen was naturally tender-hearted. She could not bear to see the younger girl crying. She ventured to step inside the door and whisper:

"Flossie?"

Up came the other's head, her face flushed and wet and her brow a-scowl.

"What do *you* want?" she demanded, quickly.

"Nothing. Unless I can help you. And if so, *that* is what I want," said the ranch girl, softly.

"Goodness me! *You* can't help me with algebra. What do I want to know higher mathematics for? I'll never have use for such knowledge."

"I don't suppose we can ever learn *too* much," said Helen, quietly.

"Huh! Lots you know about it. You never were driven to school against your

will.”

“No. Whenever I got a chance to go I was glad.”

“Maybe I’d be glad, too, if I lived on a ranch,” returned Flossie, scornfully.

Helen came nearer to the desk and sat down beside her.

“You don’t look a bit pretty with your eyes all red and hot. Crying isn’t going to help,” she said, smiling.

“I suppose not,” grumbled Flossie, ungrateful of tone.

“Come, let me get some water and cologne and bathe your face.” Helen jumped up and went to the tiny bathroom. “Now, I’ll play maid for you, Flossie.”

“Oh, all right,” said the younger girl. “I suppose, as you say, crying isn’t going to help.”

“Not at all. No amount of tears will solve a problem in algebra. And you let me see the questions. You see,” added Helen, slowly, beginning to bathe her cousin’s forehead and swollen eyes, “we once had a very fine school-teacher at the ranch. He was a college professor. But he had weak lungs and he came out there to Montana to rest.”

“That’s good!” murmured Flossie, meaning bathing process, for she was not listening much to Helen’s remarks.

“I knew it would make you feel better. But now, let me see these algebra problems. I took it up a little when—when Professor Payton was at the ranch.”

“You didn’t!” cried Flossie, in wonder.

“Let me see them,” pursued her cousin, nodding.

She had told the truth—as far as she went. After Professor Payton had left the ranch and Helen had gone to Denver to school, she had showed a marked taste for mathematics and had been allowed to go far ahead of her fellow-pupils in that study.

Now, at a glance, she saw what was the matter with Flossie’s attempts to solve the problems. She slipped into a seat beside the younger girl again and, in a few minutes, showed Flossie just how to solve them.

“Why, Helen! I didn’t suppose you knew so much,” said Flossie, in surprise.

“You see, *that* is something I had a chance to learn between times—when I wasn’t roping cows or breaking ponies,” said Helen, drily.

“Humph! I don’t believe you did either of those vulgar things,” declared Flossie, suddenly.

“You are mistaken. I do them both, and do them well,” returned Helen, gravely. “But they are *not* vulgar. No more vulgar than your sister Belle’s golf. It is outdoor exercise, and living outdoors as much as one can is a sort of religion in the West.”

“Well,” said Flossie, who had recovered her breath now. “I don’t care what you do outdoors. You can do algebra in the house! And I’m real thankful to you, Cousin Helen.”

“You are welcome, Flossie,” returned the other, gravely; but then she went her way to her own room at the top of the house. Flossie did not ask her to remain after she had done all she could for her.

But Helen had found plenty of reading matter in the house. Her cousins and uncle might ignore her as they pleased. With a good book in her hand she could forget all her troubles.

Now she slipped into her kimono, propped herself up in bed, turned the gas-jet high, and lost herself in the adventures of her favorite heroine. The little clock on the mantel ticked on unheeded. The house grew still. The maids came up to bed chattering. But still Helen read on.

She had forgotten the sounds she had heard in the old house at night. Mrs. Olstrom had mentioned that there were “queer stories” about the Starkweather mansion. But Helen would not have thought of them at this time, had something not rattled her doorknob and startled her.

“Somebody wants to come in,” was the girl’s first thought, and she hopped out of bed and ran to unlock it.

Then she halted, with her hand upon the knob. A sound outside had arrested her. But it was not the sound of somebody trying the latch.

Instead she plainly heard the mysterious “step—put; step—put” again. Was it descending the stairs? It seemed to grow fainter as she listened.

At length the girl—somewhat shaken—reached for the key of her door again, and turned it. Then she opened it and peered out.

The corridor was faintly illuminated. The stairway itself was quite dark, for there was no light in the short passage below called “the ghost-walk.”

The girl, in her slippers, crept to the head of the flight. There she could hear the steady, ghostly footstep from below. No other sound within the great mansion reached her ears. It *was* queer.

To and fro the odd step went. It apparently drew nearer, then receded—again and again.

Helen could not see any of the corridor from the top of the flight. So she began to creep down, determined to know for sure if there really was something or somebody there.

Nor was she entirely unafraid now. The mysterious sounds had got upon her nerves. Whether they were supernatural, or natural, she was determined to solve the mystery here and now.

Half-way down the stair she halted. The sound of the ghostly step was at the far end of the hall. But it would now return, and the girl could see (her eyes having become used to the dim light) more than half of the passage.

There was the usual rustling sound at the end of the passage. Then the steady "step—put" approached.

CHAPTER XVI

FORGOTTEN

From the stair-well some little light streamed up into the darkness of the ghost-walk. And into this dim radiance came a little old lady—her old-fashioned crimped hair an aureole of beautiful gray—leaning lightly on an ebony crutch, which in turn tapped the floor in accompaniment to her clicking step—

"Step—put; step—put; step—put."

Then she was out of the range of Helen's vision again. But she turned and came back—her silken skirts rustling, her crutch tapping in perfect time.

This was no ghost. Although slender—ethereal—almost bird-like in her motions—the little old lady was very human indeed. She had a pink flush in her cheeks, and her skin was as soft as velvet. Of course there were wrinkles; but they were beautiful wrinkles, Helen thought.

She wore black half-mitts of lace, and her old-fashioned gown was of delightfully soft, yet rich silk. The silk was brown—not many old ladies could have worn that shade of brown and found it becoming. Her eyes were bright—the unseen girl saw them sparkle as she turned her head, in that bird-like manner, from side to side.

She was a dear, doll-like old lady! Helen longed to hurry down the remaining steps and take her in her arms.

But, instead, she crept softly back to the head of the stairs, and slipped into her own room again. *This* was the mystery of the Starkweather mansion. The nightly exercise of this mysterious old lady was the foundation for the "ghost-walk." The maids of the household feared the supernatural; therefore they easily found a legend to explain the rustling step of the old lady with the crutch.

And all day long the old lady kept to her room. That room must be in the front of the house on this upper floor—shut away, it was likely, from the knowledge of most of the servants.

Mrs. Olstrom, of course, knew about the old lady—who she was—what she was. It was the housekeeper who looked after the simple wants of the mysterious occupant of the Starkweather mansion.

Helen wondered if Mr. Lawdor, the old butler, knew about the mystery? And did the Starkweathers themselves know?

The girl from the ranch was too excited and curious to go to sleep now. She had to remain right by her door, opened on a crack, and learn what would happen next.

For an hour at least she heard the steady stepping of the old lady. Then the crutch rapped out an accompaniment to her coming upstairs. She was humming softly to herself, too. Helen, crouched behind the door, distinguished the sweet, cracked voice humming a fragment of the old lullaby:

"Rock-a-by, baby, on the tree-top,
When the wind blows, the cradle will rock,
When the bough breaks, the cradle will fall,
Down will come baby——"

Thus humming, and the crutch tapping—a mere whisper of sound—the old lady rustled by Helen's door, on into the long corridor, and disappeared through some door, which closed behind her and smothered all further sound.

Helen went to bed; but she could not sleep—not at first. The mystery of the little old lady and her ghostly walk kept her eyes wide open and her brain afire for hours.

She asked question after question into the dark of the night, and only imagination answered. Some of the answers were fairly reasonable; others were as impossible as the story of Jack the Giant Killer.

Finally, however, Helen dropped asleep. She awoke at her usual hour—daybreak—and her eager mind began again asking questions about the mystery. She went down in her outdoor clothes for a morning walk, with the little old lady uppermost in her thoughts.

As usual, Mr. Lawdor was on the lookout for her. The shaky old man loved to have her that few minutes in his room in the early morning. Although he always presided over the dinner, with Gregson under him, the old butler seldom seemed to speak, or be spoken to. Helen understood that, like Mrs. Olstrom, Lawdor was a relic of the late owner—Mr. Starkweather's great-uncle's—household.

Cornelius Starkweather had been a bachelor. The mansion had descended to him from a member of the family who had been a family man. But that family had died young—wife and all—and the master had handed the old homestead over to Mr. Cornelius and had gone traveling himself—to die in a foreign land.

Once Helen had heard Lawdor murmur something about “Mr. Cornelius” and she had picked up the remainder of her information from things she had heard Mr. Starkweather and the girls say.

Now the old butler met her with an ingratiating smile and begged her to have something beside her customary coffee and roll.

“I have a lovely steak, Miss. The butcher remembers me once in a while, and he knows I am fond of a bit of tender beef. My teeth are not what they were once, you know, Miss.”

“But why should I eat your nice steak?” demanded Helen, laughing at him. “My teeth are good for what the boys on the range call ‘bootleg.’ That’s steak cut right next to the hoof!”

“Ah, but, Miss! There is so much more than I could possibly eat,” he urged.

He had already turned the electricity into his grill. The ruddy steak—salted, peppered, with tiny flakes of garlic upon it—he brought from his own little icebox. The appetizing odor of the meat sharpened Helen’s appetite even as she sipped the first of her coffee.

“I’ll just *have* to eat some, I expect, Mr. Lawdor,” she said. Then she had a sudden thought, and added: “Or perhaps you’d like to save this tidbit for the little old lady in the attic?”

Mr. Lawdor turned—not suddenly; he never did anything with suddenness; but it was plain she had startled him.

“Bless me, Miss—bless me—bless me——”

He trailed off in his usual shaky way; but his lips were white and he stared at Helen like an owl for a full minute. Then he added:

“Is there a lady in the attic, Miss?” And he said it in his most polite way.

“Of course there is, Mr. Lawdor; and you know it. Who is she? I am only curious.”

“I—I hear the maids talking about a ghost, Miss—foolish things——”

“And I’m not foolish, Mr. Lawdor,” said the Western girl, laughing shortly. “Not

that way, at least. I heard her; last night I saw her. Next time I'm going to speak to her—Unless it isn't allowed."

"It—it isn't allowed, Miss," said Lawdor, speaking softly, and with a glance at the closed door of the room.

"Nobody has forbidden *me* to speak to her," declared Helen, boldly. "And I'm curious—mighty curious, Mr. Lawdor. Surely she is a nice old lady—there is nothing the matter with her?"

The butler touched his forehead with a shaking finger. "A little wrong there, Miss," he whispered. "But Mary Boyle is as innocent and harmless as a baby herself."

"Can't you tell me about her—who she is—why she lives up there—and all?"

"Not here, Miss."

"Why not?" demanded Helen, boldly.

"It might offend Mr. Starkweather, Miss. Not that he has anything to do with Mary Boyle. He had to take the old house with her in it."

"What *do* you mean, Lawdor?" gasped Helen, growing more and more amazed and—naturally—more and more curious.

The butler flopped the steak suddenly upon the sizzling hot plate and in another moment the delicious bit was before her. The old man served her as expertly as ever, but his face was working strangely.

"I couldn't tell you here, Miss. Walls have ears, they say," he whispered. "But if you'll be on the first bench beyond the Sixth Avenue entrance to Central Park at ten o'clock this morning, I will meet you there.

"Yes, Miss—the rolls. Some more butter, Miss? I hope the coffee is to your taste, Miss?"

"It is all very delicious, Lawdor," said Helen, rather weakly, and feeling somewhat confused. "I will surely be there. I shall not need to come back for the regular breakfast after having this nice bit."

Helen attracted much less attention upon her usual early morning walk this time. She was dressed in the mode, if cheaply, and she was not so self-conscious. But, in addition, she thought but little of herself or her own appearance or troubles while she walked briskly uptown.

It was of the little old woman, and her mystery, and the butler's words that she

thought. She strode along to the park, and walked west until she reached the bridle-path. She had found this before, and came to see the riders as they cantered by.

How Helen longed to put on her riding clothes and get astride a lively mount and gallop up the park-way! But she feared that, in doing so, she might betray to her uncle or the girls the fact that she was not the “pauper cowgirl” they thought her to be.

She found a seat overlooking the path, at last, and rested for a while; but her mind was not upon the riders. Before ten o’clock she had walked back south, found the entrance to the park opposite Sixth Avenue, and sat down upon the bench specified by the old butler. At the stroke of the hour the old man appeared.

“You could not have walked all this way, Lawdor?” said the girl, smiling upon him. “You are not at all winded.”

“No, Miss. I took the car. I am not up to such walks as you can take,” and he shook his head, mumbling: “Oh, no, no, no, no——”

“And now, what can you tell me, sir?” she said, breaking in upon his dribbling speech. “I am just as curious as I can be. That dear little old lady! Why is she in uncle’s house?”

“Ah, Miss! I fancy she will not be there for long, but she was an encumbrance upon it when Mr. Willets Starkweather came with his family to occupy it.”

“What *do* you mean?” cried the girl.

“Mary Boyle served in the Starkweather family long, long ago. Before I came to valet for Mr. Cornelius, Mary Boyle had her own room and was a fixture in the house. Mr. Cornelius took her more—more philosophically, as you might say, Miss. My present master and his daughters look upon poor Mary Boyle as a nuisance. They have to allow her to remain. She is a life charge upon the estate—that, indeed, was fixed before Mr. Cornelius’s time. But the present family are ashamed of her. Perhaps I ought not to say it, but it is true. They have relegated her to a suite upon the top floor, and other people have quite forgotten Mary Boyle—yes, oh, yes, indeed! Quite forgotten her—quite forgotten her——”

Then, with the aid of some questioning, Helen heard the whole sad story of Mary Boyle, who was a nurse girl in the family of the older generation of Starkweathers. It was in her arms the last baby of the family had panted his weakly little life out. She, too, had watched by the bed of the lady of the mansion, who had borne these unfortunate children only to see them die.

And Mary Boyle was one of that race who often lose their own identity in the families they serve. She had loved the lost babies as though they had been of her own flesh. She had walked the little passage at the back of the house (out of which had opened the nursery in those days) so many, many nights with one or the other of her fretful charges, that by and by she thought, at night, that she had them yet to soothe.

Mary Boyle, the weak-minded yet harmless ex-nurse, had been cherished by her old master. And in his will he had left her to the care of Mr. Cornelius, the heir. In turn she had been left a life interest in the mansion—to the extent of shelter and food and proper clothes—when Willets Starkweather became proprietor.

He could not get rid of the old lady. But, when he refurnished the house and made it over, he had banished Mary Boyle to the attic rooms. The girls were ashamed of her. She sometimes talked loudly if company was about. And always of the children she had once attended. She spoke of them as though they were still in her care, and told how she had walked the hall with one, or the other, of her dead and gone treasures the very night before!

For it was found necessary to allow Mary Boyle to have the freedom of that short corridor on the chamber floor late at night. Otherwise she would not remain secluded in her own rooms at the top of the house during the daytime.

As the lower servants came and went, finally only Mrs. Olstrom and Mr. Lawdor knew about the old lady, save the family. And Mr. Starkweather impressed it upon the minds of both these employés that he did not wish the old lady discussed below stairs.

So the story had risen that the house was haunted. The legend of the “ghost walk” was established. And Mary Boyle lived out her lonely life, with nobody to speak to save the housekeeper, who saw her daily; Mr. Lawdor, who climbed to her rooms perhaps once each week, and Mr. Starkweather himself, who saw and reported upon her case to his fellow trustees each month.

It was, to Helen, an unpleasant story. It threw a light on the characters of her uncle and cousins which did not enhance her admiration of them, to say the least. She had found them unkind, purse-proud heretofore; but to her generous soul their treatment of the little old woman, who must be but a small charge upon the estate, seemed far more blameworthy than their treatment of herself.

The story of the old butler made Helen quiver with indignation. It was like keeping the old lady in jail—this shutting her away into the attic of the great house. The Western girl went back to Madison Avenue (she walked, but the old

butler rode) with a thought in her mind that she was not quite sure was a wise one. Yet she had nobody to discuss her idea with—nobody whom she wished to take into her confidence.

There were two lonely and neglected people in that fine mansion. She, herself, was one. The old nurse, Mary Boyle, was the other. And Helen felt a strong desire to see and talk with her fellow-sufferer.

CHAPTER XVII

A DISTINCT SHOCK

That evening when Mr. Starkweather came home, he handed Helen a sealed letter.

“I have ascertained,” the gentleman said, in his most pompous way, “that Mr. Fenwick Grimes is in town. He has recently returned from a tour of the West, where he has several mining interests. You will find his address on that envelope. Give the letter to him. It will serve to introduce you.”

He watched her closely while he said this, but did not appear to do so. Helen thanked him with some warmth.

“This is very good of you, Uncle Starkweather—especially when I know you do not approve.”

“Ahem! Sleeping dogs are much better left alone. To stir a puddle is only to agitate the mud. This old business would much better be forgotten. You know all that there is to be known about the unfortunate affair, I am quite sure.”

“I cannot believe that, Uncle,” Helen replied. “Had you seen how my dear father worried about it when he was dying——”

Mr. Starkweather could look at her no longer—not even askance. He shook his head and murmured some commonplace, sympathetic phrase. But it did not seem genuine to his niece.

She knew very well that Mr. Starkweather had no real sympathy for her; nor did he care a particle about her father’s death. But she tucked the letter into her pocket and went her way.

As she passed through the upstairs corridor Flossie was entering one of the drawing-rooms, and she caught her cousin by the hand. Flossie had been distinctly nicer to Helen—in private—since the latter had helped her with the algebra problems.

“Come on in, Helen. Belle’s just pouring tea. Don’t you want some?” said the youngest Starkweather girl.

It was in Helen’s mind to excuse herself. Yet she was naturally too kindly to refuse to accept an advance like this. And she, like Flossie, had no idea that there was anybody in the drawing-room save Belle and Hortense.

In they marched—and there were three young ladies—friends of Belle—sipping tea and eating macaroons by the log fire, for the evening was drawing in cold.

“Goodness me!” ejaculated Belle.

“Well, I never!” gasped Hortense. “Have *you* got to butt in, Floss?”

“We want some tea, too,” said the younger girl, boldly, angered by her sisters’ manner.

“You’d better have it in the nursery,” yawned Hortense. “This is no place for kids in the bread-and-butter stage of growth.”

“Oh, is that so?” cried Flossie. “Helen and I are not kids—distinctly *not*! I hope I know my way about a bit—and as for Helen,” she added, with a wicked grin, knowing that the speech would annoy her sisters, “Helen can shoot, and rope steers, and break ponies to saddle, and all that. She told me so the other evening. Isn’t that right, Cousin Helen?”

“Why, your cousin must be quite a wonderful girl,” said Miss Van Ramsden, one of the visitors, to Flossie. “Introduce me; won’t you, Flossie?”

Belle was furious; and Hortense would have been, too, only she was too languid to feel such an emotion. Flossie proceeded to introduce Helen to the three visitors—all of whom chanced to be young ladies whom Belle was striving her best to cultivate.

And before Flossie and Helen had swallowed their tea, which Belle gave them ungraciously, Gregson announced a bevy of other girls, until quite a dozen gaily dressed and chattering misses were gathered before the fire.

At first Helen had merely bowed to the girls to whom she was introduced. She had meant to drink her tea quietly and excuse herself. She did not wish now to display a rude manner before Belle’s guests; but her oldest cousin seemed determined to rouse animosity in her soul.

“Yes,” she said, “Helen is paying us a little visit—a very brief one. She is not at all used to our ways. In fact, Indian squaws and what-do-you call-’ems—

Greasers—are about all the people she sees out her way."

"Is that so?" cried Miss Van Ramsden. "It must be a perfectly charming country. Come and sit down by me, Miss Morrell, and tell me about it."

Indeed, at the moment, there was only one vacant chair handy, and that was beside Miss Van Ramsden. So Helen took it and immediately the young lady began to ask questions about Montana and the life Helen had lived there.

Really, the young society woman was not offensive; the questions were kindly meant. But Helen saw that Belle was furious and she began to take a wicked delight in expatiating upon her home and her own outdoor accomplishments.

When she told Miss Van Ramsden how she and her cowboy friends rode after jack-rabbits and roped them—if they could!—and shot antelope from the saddle, and that the boys sometimes attacked a mountain lion with nothing but their lariats, Miss Van Ramsden burst out with:

"Why, that's perfectly grand! What fun you must have! Do hear her, girls! Why, what we do is tame and insipid beside things that happen out there in Montana every day."

"Oh, don't bother about her, May!" cried Belle. "Come on and let's plan what we'll do Saturday if we go to the Nassau links."

"Listen here!" cried Miss Van Ramsden, eagerly. "Golf can wait. We can always golf. But your cousin tells the very bulliest stories. Go on, Miss Morrell. Tell some more."

"Do, do!" begged some of the other girls, drawing their chairs nearer.

Helen was not a little embarrassed. She would have been glad to withdraw from the party. But then she saw the looks exchanged between Belle and Hortense, and they fathered a wicked desire in the Western girl's heart to give her proud cousins just what they were looking for.

She began, almost unconsciously, to stretch her legs out in a mannish style, and drop into the drawl of the range.

"Coyote running is about as good fun as we have," she told Miss Van Ramsden in answer to a question. "Yes, they're cowardly critters; but they can run like a streak o' greased lightning—yes-sir-ree-bob!" Then she began to laugh a little. "I remember once when I was a kid, that I got fooled about coyotes."

"I'd like to know what you are now," drawled Hortense, trying to draw attention

from her cousin, who was becoming altogether too popular. “And you should know that children are better seen than heard.”

“Let’s see,” said Helen, quickly, “our birthdays are in the same month; aren’t they, ’Tense? I believe mother used to tell me so.”

“Oh, never mind your birthdays,” urged Miss Van Ramsden, while some of the other girls smiled at the repartee. “Let’s hear about your adventure with the coyote, Miss Morrell.”

“Why, ye see,” said Helen, “it wasn’t much. I was just a kid, as I say—mebbe ten year old. Dad had given me a light rifle—just a twenty-two, you know—to learn to shoot with. And Big Hen Billings——”

“Doesn’t that sound just like those dear Western plays?” gasped one young lady. “You know—‘The Squaw Man of the Golden West,’ or ‘Missouri,’ or——”

“Hold on! You’re getting your titles mixed, Lettie,” cried Miss Van Ramsden. “Do let Miss Morrell tell it.”

“To give that child the center of the stage!” snapped Hortense, to Belle.

“I could shake Flossie for bringing her in here,” returned the oldest Starkweather girl, quite as angrily.

“Tell us about your friend, Big Hen Billings,” drawled another visitor. “He *does* sound so romantic!”

Helen almost giggled. To consider the giant foreman of Sunset Ranch a romantic type was certainly “going some.” She had the wicked thought that she would have given a large sum of money, right then and there, to have had Big Hen announced by Gregson and ushered into the presence of this group of city girls.

“Well,” continued Helen, thus urged, “father had given me a little rifle and Big Hen gave me a maverick——”

“What’s that?” demanded Flossie.

“Well, in this case,” explained Helen, “it was an orphaned calf. Sometimes they’re strays that haven’t been branded. But in this case a bear had killed the calf’s mother in a *coulée*. She had tried to fight Mr. Bear, of course, or he never would have killed her at that time of year. Bears aren’t dangerous unless they’re hungry.”

“My! but they look dangerous enough—at the zoo,” observed Flossie.

“I tell ye,” said Helen, reflectively, “that was a pretty calf. And I was little, and I

hated to hear them blat when the boys burned them——”

“Burned them! Burned little calves! How cruel! What for?”

These were some of the excited comments. And in spite of Belle and Hortense, most of the visitors were now interested in the Western girl’s narration.

“They have to brand ’em, you see,” explained Helen. “Otherwise we never could pick our cattle out from other herds at the round-up. You see, on the ranges—even the fenced ranges—cattle from several ranches often get mixed up. Our brand is the Link-A. Our ranch was known, in the old days, as the ‘Link-A.’ It’s only late years that we got to calling it Sunset Ranch.”

“Sunset Ranch!” cried Miss Van Ramsden, quickly. “Haven’t I heard something about *that* ranch? Isn’t it one of the big, big cattle and horse-breeding ranches?”

“Yes, ma’am,” said Helen, slowly, fearing that she had unwittingly got into a blind alley of conversation.

“And your father owns *that* ranch?” cried Miss Van Ramsden.

“My—my father is dead,” said Helen. “I am an orphan.”

“Oh, dear me! I am so sorry,” murmured the wealthy young lady.

But here Belle broke in, rather scornfully:

“The child means that her father worked on that ranch. She has lived there all her life. Quite a rude place, I fawncy.”

Helen’s eyes snapped. “Yes. He worked there,” she admitted, which was true enough, for nobody could honestly have called Prince Morrell a sluggard.

“He was—what you call it—a cowpuncher, I believe,” whispered Belle, in an aside.

If Helen heard she made no sign, but went on with her story.

“You see, it was *such* a pretty calf,” she repeated. “It had big blue eyes at first—calves often do. And it was all sleek and brown, and it played so cunning. Of course, its mother being dead, I had a lot of trouble with it at first. I brought it up by hand.

“And I tied a broad pink ribbon around its neck, with a big bow at the back. When it slipped around under its neck Bozie would somehow get the end of the ribbon in its mouth, and chew, and chew on it till it was nothing but pulp.”

She laughed reminiscently, and the others, watching her pretty face in the

firelight, smiled too.

“So you called it Bozie?” asked Miss Van Ramsden.

“Yes. And it followed me everywhere. If I went out to try and shoot plover or whistlers with my little rifle, there was Bozie tagging after me. So, you see when it came calf-branding time, I hid Bozie.”

“You hid it? How?” demanded Flossie. “Seems to me a calf would be a big thing to hide.”

“I didn’t hide it under my bed,” laughed Helen. “No, sir! I took it out to a far distant *coulée* where I used to go to play—a long way from the bunk-house—and I hitched Bozie to a stub of a tree where there was nice, short, sweet grass for him.

“I hitched him in the morning, for the branding fires were going to be built right after dinner. But I had to show up at dinner—sure. The whole gang would have been out hunting me if I didn’t report for meals.”

“Yes. I presume you ran perfectly wild,” sighed Hortense, trying to look as though she were sorry for this half-savage little cousin from the “wild and woolly.”

“Oh, very wild indeed,” drawled Helen. “And after dinner I raced back to the *coulée* to see that Bozie was all right. I took my rifle along so the boys would think I’d gone hunting and wouldn’t tell father.

“I’d heard coyotes barking, as I thought, all the forenoon. And when I came to the hollow, there was Bozie running around and around his stub, and getting all tangled up, blatting his heart out, while two big old coyotes (or so I thought they were) circled around him.

“They ran a little way when they saw me coming. Coyotes sometimes *will* kill calves. But I had never seen one before that wouldn’t hunt the tall pines when they saw me coming.

“Crackey, those two were big fellers! I’d seen big coyotes, but never none like them two gray fellers. And they snarled at me when I made out to chase ’em—me wavin’ my arms and hollerin’ like a Piute buck. I never had seen coyotes like them before, and it throwed a scare into me—it sure did!

“And Bozie was so scared that he helped to scare me. I dropped my gun and started to untangle him. And when I got him loose he acted like all possessed!

“LET’S HEAR ABOUT YOUR ADVENTURE WITH THE COYOTE, MISS MORRELL.”
(Page 180.)

“He wanted to run wild,” proceeded Helen. “He yanked me over the ground at a great rate. And all the time those two gray fellers was sneakin’ up behind me. Crackey, but I got scared!

“A calf is awful strong—’specially when it’s scared. You don’t know! I had to leave go of either the rope, or the gun, and somehow,” and Helen smiled suddenly into Miss Van Ramsden’s face—who understood—“somehow I felt like I’d better hang onter the gun.”

“They weren’t coyotes!” exclaimed Miss Van Ramsden.

“No. They was wolves—real old, gray, timber-wolves. We hadn’t been bothered by them for years. Two of ’em, working together, would pull down a full-grown cow, let alone a little bit of a calf and a little bit of a gal,” said Helen.

“O-o-o!” squealed the excited Flossie. “But they didn’t?”

“I’m here to tell the tale,” returned her cousin, laughing outright. “Bozie broke away from me, and the wolves leaped after him—full chase. I knelt right down ——”

“And prayed!” gasped Flossie. “I should think you would!”

“I *did* pray—yes, ma’am! I prayed that the bullet would go true. But I knelt down to steady my aim,” said Helen, chuckling again. “And I broke the back of one of them wolves with my first shot. That was wonderful luck—with a twenty-two rifle. The bullet’s only a tiny thing.

“But I bowled Mr. Wolf over, and then I ran after the other one and the blatting Bozie. Bozie dodged the wolf somehow and came circling back at me, his tail flirting in the air, coming in stiff-legged jumps as a calf does, and searching his soul for sounds to tell how scart he was!

“I’d pushed another cartridge into my gun. But when Bozie came he bowled me over—flat on my back. Then the wolf made a leap, and I saw his light-gray underbody right over my head as he flashed after poor Bozie.

“I jest let go with the gun! Crackey! I didn’t have time to shoulder it, and it kicked and hit me in the nose and made my nose bleed awful. I was ‘all in,’ too, and I thought the wolf was going to eat Bozie, and then mebbe *me*, and I set up

to bawl so't Big Hen heard me farther than he could have heard my little rifle.

"Big Hen was always expectin' me to get inter some kind of trouble, and he come tearin' along lookin' for me. And there I was, rolling in the grass an' bawling, the second wolf kicking his life out with the blood pumping from his chest, not three yards away from me, and Bozie streakin' it acrost the hill, his tail so stiff with fright you could ha' hung yer hat on it!"

"Isn't that perfectly grand!" cried Miss Van Ramsden, seizing Helen by the shoulders when she had finished and kissing her on both cheeks. "And you only ten years old?"

"But, you see," said Helen, more quietly, "we are brought up that way in Montana. We would die a thousand deaths if we were taught to be afraid of anything on four legs."

"It must be an exceedingly crude country," remarked Hortense, her nose tip-tilted.

"Shocking!" agreed Belle.

"I'd like to go there," announced Flossie, suddenly. "I think it must be fine."

"Quite right," agreed Miss Van Ramsden.

The older Starkweather girls could not go against their most influential caller. They were only too glad to have the Van Ramsden girl come to see them. But while the group were discussing Helen's story, the girl from Sunset Ranch stole away and went up to her room.

She had not meant to tell about her life in the West—not in just this way. She had tried to talk about as her cousins expected her to, when once she got into the story; but its effect upon the visitors had not been just what either the Starkweather girls, or Helen herself, had expected.

She saw that she was much out of the good graces of Belle and Hortense at dinner; they hardly spoke to her. But Flossie seemed to delight in rubbing her sisters against the grain.

"Oh, Pa," she cried, "when Helen goes home, let me go with her; will you? I'd just love to be on a ranch for a while—I know I should! And I *do* need a vacation."

"Nonsense, Floss!" gasped Hortense.

"You are a perfectly vulgar little thing," declared Belle. "I don't know where you

get such low tastes."

Mr. Starkweather looked at his youngest daughter in amazement. "How very ridiculous," he said. "Ahem! You do not know what you ask, Flossie."

"Oh! I never can have anything I want," whined Miss Flossie. "And it must be great fun out on that ranch. You ought to hear Helen tell about it, Pa."

"Ahem! I have no interest in such things," said her father, sternly. "Nor should you. No well conducted and well brought up girl would wish to live among such rude surroundings."

"Very true, Pa," sighed Hortense, shrugging her shoulders.

"You are a very common little thing, with very common tastes, Floss," admonished her oldest sister.

Now, all this was whipping Helen over Flossie's shoulders. The latter grinned wickedly; but Helen felt hurt. These people were determined to consider Sunset Ranch an utterly uncivilized place, and her associates there beneath contempt.

The following morning she set out to find the address upon the letter Mr. Starkweather had given to her. Whether she should present this letter to Mr. Grimes at once, Helen was not sure. It might be that she would wish to get acquainted with him before he knew her identity. Her expectations were very vague, at best; and yet she had hope.

She hoped that through this old-time partner of her father's she might pick up some clue to the truth about the lost money. The firm of Grimes & Morrell had been on the point of paying several heavy bills and notes. The money for this purpose, as well as the working capital of the firm, had been in two banks. Either partner could draw checks against these accounts.

When the deposits in both banks had been withdrawn it had been done by checks for each complete balance being presented at the teller's window of both banks. And the tellers were quite sure that the person presenting the checks was Prince Morrell.

In the rush of business, however, neither teller had been positive of this. Of course, it might have been the bookkeeper, or Mr. Grimes, who had got the money on the checks. However it might be, the money disappeared; there was none with which to pay the creditors or to continue the business of the firm.

Fenwick Grimes had been a sufferer; Willets Starkweather had been a sufferer. What Allen Chesterton, the bookkeeper, had been, it was hard to say. He had

walked out of the office of the firm and had never come back. Likewise after a few days of worry and disturbance, Prince Morrell had done the same.

At least, the general public presumed that Mr. Morrell had run away without leaving any clue. It looked as though the senior partner and the bookkeeper were in league.

But public interest in the mystery had soon died out. Only the creditors remembered. After ten years they were pleasantly reminded of the wreck of the firm of Grimes & Morrell by the receipt of their lost money, with interest compounded to date. The lawyer that had come on from the West to make the settlement for Prince Morrell bound the creditors to secrecy. The bankruptcy court had long since absolved Fenwick Grimes from responsibility for the debts of the old firm. Neither he nor Mr. Starkweather had to know that the partner who ran away had legally cleared his name.

But there was something more. The suspicion against Prince Morrell had burdened the cattle king's mind and heart when he died. And his little daughter felt it to be her sacred duty to try, at least, to uncover that old mystery and to prove to the world that her father had been guiltless.

Mr. Grimes lived in an old house in a rather shabby old street just off Washington Square. Helen asked Mr. Lawdor how to find the place, and she rode downtown upon a Fifth Avenue 'bus.

The house was a half-business, half-studio building; and Mr. Grimes's name—graven on a small brass plate—was upon a door in the lower hall. In fact, Mr. Grimes, and his clerk, occupied this lower floor, the gentleman owning the building, which he was holding for a rise in real estate values in that neighborhood.

The clerk, a sharp-looking young man with a pen behind his ear, answered Helen's somewhat timid knock. He looked her over severely before he even offered to admit her, asking:

"What's your business, please?"

"I came to see Mr. Grimes, sir."

"By appointment?"

"No-o, sir. But——"

"He is very busy. He seldom sees anybody save by appointment. Are—are you acquainted with him?"

“No, sir. But my business is important.”

“To you, perhaps,” said the clerk, with a sneering smile. “But if it isn’t important to *him* I shall catch it for letting you in. What is it?”

“It is business that I can tell to nobody except Mr. Grimes. Not in detail. But I can say this much: It concerns a time when Mr. Grimes was in business with another man—sixteen years or more ago and I have come—come from his old partner.”

“Humph!” said the clerk. “A begging interview? For, if so, take my advice—don’t try it. It would be no use. Mr. Grimes never gives anything away. He wouldn’t even bait a rat-trap with cheese-parings.”

“I have not come here to beg money of Mr. Grimes,” said Helen, drawing herself up.

“Well, you can come in and wait. Perhaps he’ll see you.”

This had all been said very low in the public hall, the clerk holding the door jealously shut behind him. Now he opened it slowly and let her enter a large room, with old and dusty furniture set about it, and the clerk’s own desk far back, by another door—which latter he guarded against all intrusion. Behind that door, of course, was the man she had come to see.

But as Helen turned to take a seat on the couch which the clerk indicated with a gesture of his pen, she suddenly discovered that she was not the only person waiting in the room. In a decrepit armchair by one of the front windows, and reading the morning paper, with his wig pushed back upon his bald brow, was the queer old gentleman with whom she had ridden across the continent when she had come to New York.

The discovery of this acquaintance here in Mr. Grimes’s office gave Helen a distinct shock.

CHAPTER XVIII

PROBING FOR FACTS

Helen sat down quickly and stared across the room at the queer old man. The latter at first seemed to pay her no attention. But finally she saw that he was skillfully “taking stock” of her from behind the shelter of the printed sheet.

The Western girl was more direct than that. She got up and walked across to him. The clerk uttered a very loud “Ahem!” as though to warn her to drop her intention; but Helen said coolly:

“Don’t you remember me, sir?”

“Ha! I believe it *is* the little girl who came from the coast with me last week,” said the man.

“Not from the coast; from Montana,” corrected Helen.

“But you are dressed differently now and I was not sure,” he said. “How have you been?”

“Very well, I thank you. And you, sir?”

“Well. Very. But I did not expect to see you again—er—*here*.”

“No, sir. And you are waiting to see Mr. Grimes, too?”

“Er—something like that,” admitted the old man.

Helen eyed him thoughtfully. She had already glanced covertly once or twice at the clerk across the room. She was quite bright enough to see between the rungs of a ladder.

“*You* are Mr. Grimes,” she said, bluntly, looking again at the old man, who was adjusting his wig.

He looked up at her slily, his avaricious little eyes twinkling as they had aboard the train when he had looked over her shoulder and caught her counting her money.

“You’re a very smart little girl,” he said, with a short laugh. “What have you come to see me about? Do you think of investing some of your money in mining stocks?”

“No,” said Helen. “I have no money to invest.”

“Humph. Did you find your folks?” he asked, turning the subject quickly.

“Yes, sir.”

“What’s the matter with you, then? What do you want?”

“You *are* Mr. Grimes?” she pursued, to make sure.

“Well, I don’t deny it.”

“I have come to talk to you about—about Prince Morrell,” she said, in a very low voice so that the clerk could not hear.

“*Who*?” gasped the man, falling back in his chair. Evidently Helen had startled him.

“Prince Morrell,” she replied.

“What are you to Prince Morrell?” demanded the man.

“I am his daughter. He is dead. I have come here to talk with you about the time —the time he left New York,” said the girl from Sunset Ranch, hesitatingly.

Mr. Grimes stared at her, with his wig still awry, for some moments; then the color began to come back into his face. Helen had not realized before that he had turned pale.

“You come into my office,” he snapped, jumping up briskly. “I’ll get to the bottom of this!”

His movements were so very abrupt and he looked at her so strangely that, to tell the truth, the girl from Sunset Ranch was a bit frightened. She trailed along behind him, however, with only a hesitating step, passing the wondering clerk, and heard the lock of the door of the inner office snap behind her as Mr. Grimes shut it.

He drew heavy curtains over the door, too. The place was a gloomy apartment until he turned on the electric light over a desk table. She saw that there were curtains at all the windows, and at the other door, too.

“Come here,” he said, beckoning her to the desk, and to a chair that stood by it, and still speaking softly. “We will not be overheard here. Now! Tell me what you

mean by coming to me in this way?”

He shot such an ugly look at her that Helen was again startled.

“What do *you* mean?” she returned, hiding her real emotion. “I have come to ask some questions. Why shouldn’t I?”

“You say Prince Morrell is dead?”

“Yes, sir. Nearly two months, now.”

“Who sent you, then?”

“Sent me to you?” queried Helen, in wonder.

“Yes. Somebody must have sent you,” said Mr. Grimes, watching her with his little eyes, in which there seemed to burn a very baleful look.

“You are mistaken. Nobody sent me,” said Helen, recovering a measure of her courage. She believed that this strange man was a coward. But why should he be afraid of her?

“You came clear across this continent to interview me about—about something that is gone and forgotten—almost before you were born?”

“It isn’t forgotten,” returned Helen, meaningly. “Such things are never forgotten. My father said so.”

“But it’s no use hauling everything to the surface of the pool again,” grumbled Mr. Grimes.

“That is about what Uncle Starkweather says; but I do not feel that way,” said Helen, slowly.

“Ha! Starkweather! Of course he’s in it. I might have known,” muttered the old man. “So *he* sent you to me?”

“No, sir. He objected to my coming,” declared Helen, quite convinced now that she should not deliver her uncle’s letter.

“The Starkweathers are the people you came East to visit?”

“Yes, sir.”

“And how did *they* receive you in their fine Madison Avenue mansion?” queried Mr. Grimes, looking up at her slily again.

“Just as you know they did,” returned Helen, briefly.

“Ha! How’s that? And you with all that——”

He halted and—for a moment—had the grace to blush. He saw that she read his mind.

“They do not know that I have some money for emergencies,” said Helen, coolly.

“Ho, ho!” chuckled Mr. Grimes, suddenly.

“So they consider you a pauper relative from the West?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Ho, ho!” he laughed again, and rubbed his hands. “How *did* Prince leave you fixed?”

“I—I have something beside the money you saw me counting,” she told him, bluntly.

“And Willets Starkweather doesn’t know it?”

“He has never asked me if I were in funds.”

“I bet you!” cackled Grimes, at last giving way to a spasm of mirth which, Helen thought, was not nice to look upon. “And how does he fancy having you in his family?”

“He does not like it. Neither do his daughters. And one of their reasons is because people will ask questions about Prince Morrell’s daughter. They are afraid their friends will bring up father’s old trouble,” continued Helen, her voice quivering. “So that is why, Mr. Grime’s, I am determined to know the truth about it.”

“The truth? What do you mean?” snarled Grimes, suddenly starting out of his chair.

“Why, sir,” said Helen, amazed, “dad told me all about it when he was dying. All he knew. But he said by this time surely the truth of the matter must have come to light. I want to clear his name——”

“How are you going to do *that*?” demanded Mr. Grimes.

“I hope you will help me—if you can, sir,” she said, pleadingly.

“How can I help more now than I could at the time he was charged with the crime?”

“I do not know. Perhaps you can’t. Perhaps Uncle Starkweather cannot, either. But, it seems to me, if anything had been heard from that bookkeeper——”

“Allen Chesterton?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Well! I don’t know how you are going to prove it, but I have always believed Allen was guilty,” declared Mr. Grimes, nodding his head vigorously, and still watching her face.

“Oh, have you, Mr. Grimes?” cried the girl, eagerly, clasping her hands. “You have *always* believed it?”

“Quite so. Evidence was against my old partner—yes. But it wasn’t very direct. And then—what became of Allen? Why did he run away?”

“That is what other people said about father,” said Helen, doubtfully. “It did not make him guilty, but it made him *look* guilty. The same can be said of the bookkeeper.”

“But how can you go farther than that?” asked Mr. Grimes. “It’s too long ago for the facts to be brought out. We can have our suspicions. We might even publish our suspicions. Let us get something in the papers—I can do it,” and he nodded, decisively, “stating that facts recently brought to light seemed to prove conclusively that Prince Morrell, once accused of embezzlement of the bank accounts of the firm of Grimes & Morrell, was guiltless of that crime. And we will state that the surviving partner of the firm is convinced that the only person guilty of that embezzlement was one Allen Chesterton, who was the firm’s bookkeeper. How about *that*? Wouldn’t that fill the bill?” asked Mr. Grimes, rubbing his hands together.

“If we had such an article published in the papers and circulated among his old friends, wouldn’t that satisfy you, my dear? Then you would do no more of this foolish probing for facts that cannot possibly be reached—eh? What do you say, Helen Morrell? Isn’t that a famous idea?”

But the girl from Sunset Ranch was, for the moment, speechless. For a second time, it seemed to her, she was being bribed to make no serious investigation of the evidence connected with her father’s old trouble. Both Uncle Starkweather and this old man seemed to desire to head her off!

CHAPTER XIX

“JONES”

“Isn’t that a famous idea?” demanded Mr. Grimes, for the second time.

“I—I am not so sure, sir,” Helen stammered.

“Why, of course it is!” he cried, smiting the desk before him with the flat of his palm. “Don’t you see that your father’s name will be cleared of all doubt? And quite right, too! He never *was* guilty.”

“It makes me quite happy to hear you say so,” said the girl, wiping her eyes. “But how about the bookkeeper?”

“Who—Allen?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Well, we couldn’t find him now. If he kept hidden then, when there was a hue and cry out for him, what chance would there be of finding him after seventeen years? Oh, no! Allen can’t be found. And, even if he could, I doubt but the thing is outlawed. I don’t know that the authorities would take it up. And I am pretty sure the creditors of the old firm would not.”

“That is not what I mean,” said Helen, softly. “But suppose we accuse this bookkeeper—*and he is not guilty, either*?”

“Well! Is that any great odds? Nobody knows where he is——”

“But suppose he should reappear,” persisted Helen. “Suppose somebody who loved him—a daughter, perhaps, as I am the daughter of Prince Morrell—with just as great a desire to clear her father’s name as I have to clear mine—— Suppose such a person should appear determined to prove Mr. Chesterton not guilty, too?”

“Ha, but we’ve beat ’em to it—don’t you see?” demanded Mr. Grimes, heartlessly.

“Oh, sir! I could not take such an apparent victory at such a cost!” cried Helen, wiping her eyes again. “You say you *believe* Allen Chesterton was guilty instead of father. But you put forward no evidence—no more than the mere suspicion that cursed poor dad. No, no, sir! To claim new evidence, but to show no new evidence, is not enough. I must find out for sure just who stole that money. That is what dad himself said would be the only way in which his name could be cleared.”

“Nonsense, girl!” ejaculated Fenwick Grimes, scowling again.

“I am sorry to go against both your wishes and Uncle Starkweather’s,” said Helen, slowly. “But I want the truth! I can’t be satisfied with anything but the truth about this whole unfortunate business.

“It made poor dad very unhappy when he was dying. It troubled my poor mother—so *he* said—all her life out there in Montana. I want to know where the money went—who got it—all about it. Then I can prove to people that it was not *my* father who committed the crime.”

“This is a very quixotic thing you have undertaken, my girl,” remarked Mr. Grimes, with a sudden change in his manner.

“I hope not. I hope I shall learn the truth.”

“How?”

He shot the question at her as from a gun. His face had grown very grim and his sly little eyes gleamed threateningly. More than ever did Helen dislike and fear this man. The avaricious light in his eyes as he noted the money she carried on the train, had first warned her against him. Now, when she knew so much more about him, and how he was immediately connected with her father’s old trouble, Helen feared him all the more.

Because of his love of money alone, she could not trust him. And he had suggested something which was, upon the face of it, dishonest and unfair. She rose from her seat and shook her head slowly.

“I do not know how,” Helen said, sadly. “But I hope something may turn up to help me. I understand that you have never known anything about Allen Chesterton since he ran away?”

“Not a thing,” declared Mr. Grimes, shortly, rising as well.

“It is through him I hoped to find the truth,” she murmured.

“So you won’t accept my help?” growled Mr. Grimes.

“Not—not the kind you offer. It—it wouldn’t be right,” Helen replied.

“Very well, then!” snapped the man, and opened the door into the outer office. As he ushered her into the other room the outer door opened and a shabby man poked his head and shoulders in at the door.

“I say!” he said, quaveringly. “Is Mr. Grimes——”

“Get out of here, you old ruffian!” cried Fenwick Grimes, flying into a sudden passion. “Of course, you’d got to come around to-day!”

“I only wanted to say, Mr. Grimes——”

“Out of my sight!” roared Grimes. “Here, Leggett!” to his clerk; “give Jones a dollar and let him go. I can’t see him now.”

“Jones, sir?” queried the clerk, seemingly somewhat staggered, and looking from his employer to the old scarecrow in the doorway.

“Yes, sir!” snarled Mr. Grimes. “I said Jones, sir—Jones, Jones, Jones! Do you understand plain English, Mr. Leggett? Take that dollar on the desk and give it into the hands of *Jones* there at the door. And then oblige me by kicking him down the steps if he doesn’t move fast enough.”

Leggett moved rapidly himself after this. He seemed to catch his employer’s real meaning, and he grabbed the dollar and chased the beggar out into the hall. Grimes, meanwhile, held Helen back a bit. But he had nothing of any consequence to say.

Finally she bade him good-morning and went out of the office. She had not given him Uncle Starkweather’s letter. Somehow, she thought it best not to do so. If she had been doubtful of the sincerity of her uncle when she broached the subject nearest her heart, she had been much more suspicious of Fenwick Grimes.

She walked composedly enough out of the building; but it was hard work to keep back the tears. It *did* seem such a great task for a mere girl to attempt! And nobody would help her. She had nobody in whom to confide—nobody with whom she might discuss the mystery.

And when she told herself this her mind naturally flashed to the only real friend she had made in New York—Sadie Goronsky. Helen had looked up a map of the city the evening before in her uncle’s library, and she had marked the streets

intervening between this place where she had interviewed her father's old partner, and Madison Street on the East Side.

She had ridden downtown to Washington Arch; so she felt equal to the walk across town and down the Bowery to the busy street where Sadie plied her peculiar trade.

She crossed the Square and went through West Broadway to Bleecker Street and turned east on that busy and interesting thoroughfare. Suddenly, right ahead of her, she beheld the shabby brown hat and wrinkled coat of the old man who had stuck his head in at the door of Mr. Grimes's office, and so disturbed the equilibrium of that individual.

Here was "Jones." At first Helen thought him to be under the influence of drink. Then she saw that the man's erratic actions must be the result of some physical or mental disability.

The old man could not walk in a straight line; but he tacked from one side of the walk to the other, taking long "slants" across the walk, first touching the iron balustrade of a step on one hand, and then bringing up at a post on the edge of the curb.

He seemed to mutter all the time to himself, too; but what he said, or whether it was sense, or nonsense, Helen (although she walked near him) could not make out. She did not wish to offend the old man; yet he seemed so helpless and peculiar that for several blocks she trailed him (as he seemed to be going her way), fearing that he would get into some trouble.

At the busy crossings Helen was really worried. The man first started, then dodged back, scouted up and down the way, seemed undecided, looked all around as though for help, and then, at the very worst time, when the vehicles in the street were the most numerous, he darted across, escaping death and destruction half a dozen times between curb and curb.

But somehow the angel that directs the destinies of foolish people who cross busy city streets, shielded him from harm, and Helen finally lost him as he turned down one of the main stems of the town while she kept on into the heart of the East Side.

And to Helen Morrell, the very "heart of the East Side" was right in the Goronsky flat on Madison Street. She had been comparing that home at the same number on Madison Street with that her uncle's house boasted on Madison Avenue, with the latter mansion. The Goronsky tenement was a *home*, for love

and contentment dwelt there; the stately Starkweather dwelling housed too many warring factions to be a real home.

Helen came, at length, to Madison Street. She had timed her coming so as to reach Jacob Finkelstein's shop just about the time Sadie would be going to dinner.

"Miss Helen! Ain't I glad to see you?" cried Sadie. "Is there anything the matter with the dress, yet?"

"No, Miss Sadie. I was downtown and thought I would ask you to go to dinner with me. I went with you yesterday."

"O-oo my! I don't know," said Sadie, shaking her head. "I bet you'd like to come home with me instead—no?"

"I would like to. But it would not be right for me to accept your hospitality and never return it," said Helen.

"Chee! you must 'a' had a legacy," laughed Sadie.

"I—I have a little more money than I had yesterday," admitted Helen, which was true, for she had taken some out of the wallet in the trunk before she left her uncle's house.

"Well, when you swells feel like spendin' there ain't no stoppin' youse, I suppose," declared Sadie. "Do you wanter fly real high?"

"I guess we can afford a real nice dinner," said Helen, smiling.

"Are you good for as high as thirty-fi' cents apiece?" demanded Sadie.

"Yes."

"Chee! Then I can take you to a stylish place where we can get a swell feed at noon, for that. It's up on Grand Street. All the buyers and department store heads go there with the wholesale salesmen for lunch. Wait till I git me hat!" and away Sadie shot, up the tenement house stairs, so fast that her little feet, bound by the tight skirt she wore, seemed fairly to twinkle.

Helen had but a few moments to wait on the sidewalk; yet within that short time something happened to change the entire current of the day's adventures. She heard some boys shouting from the direction of the Bowery; there was a crowd crossing the street diagonally; she watched it with some apprehension at first, for it came right along the sidewalk toward her.

"Hi, fellers! See de Lurcher! Here comes de Lurcher!" yelled one ribald youth,

who leaped on the stoop to which Helen had retreated the better to see over the heads of the crowd at the person who was the core of it.

And then Helen, in no little amazement, saw that this individual was none other than the man whom she had seen driven out of Fenwick Grimes's office. A gang of hoodlums surrounded him. They jeered at him, tore at his ragged clothes, hooted, and otherwise nagged the poor old fellow.

At every halt he made they pressed closer upon the "Lurcher." It was easy to see why he had been given that name. He was probably an old inhabitant of the neighborhood, and his lurching from side to side of the walk had suggested the nickname to some local wit.

Just as he steered for the rail of the step on which Helen stood, half fearful, and reached it, Sadie Goronsky came bounding out of the house. Instantly she took a hand—and as usual a master hand—in the affair.

"What you doin' to that old man, you Izzy Strefonifsky? And, Freddie Bloom, you stop or I'll tell your mommer! Ike, let him alone, or I'll make your ears tingle myself—I can do it, too!"

Sadie charged as she commanded. The hoodlums scattered—some laughing, some not so easily intimidated. But the old man was clinging to the rail and muttering over and over to himself:

"They got my dollar—they got my dollar."

"What's that?" cried Sadie, coming back after chasing the last of the boys off the block. "What's the matter, Mr. Lurcher?"

"My dollar—they got my dollar," muttered the old man.

"Oh, dear!" whispered Helen. "And perhaps it was all he had."

"You can bet it was," said Sadie, angrily. "The likes of him wouldn't likely have *two* dollars all at once! I'd like to scalp those imps! That I would!"

The old man, paying little attention to the two girls, but still muttering about his loss, lurched away on his erratic course homeward.

"Chee!" said Sadie. "Ain't that tough luck? He lives right around the corner, all alone. And he's just as poor as he can be. I don't know what his real name is. But the boys guy him sumpin' fierce! Ain't it mean?"

"It certainly is," agreed Helen.

"Say!" said Sadie, abruptly, but looking at Helen with sheepish eye.

“Well, what?”

“Say, was yer *honest* goin’ to blow seventy cents for that feed I spoke of up on Grand Street?”

“Certainly. And I——”

“And a dime to the waiter?”

“Of course.”

“That’s eighty cents,” ran on Sadie, glibly enough now. “And twenty would make a dollar. I’ll dig up the twenty cents to put with your eighty, and what d’ye say we run after old Lurcher an’ give him a dollar—say we found it, you know—and then go upstairs to my house for dinner? Mommer’s got a nice dinner, and she’d like to see you again fine!”

“I’ll do it!” cried Helen, pulling out her purse at once. “Here! Here’s a dollar bill. You run after him and give it to him. You can give me the twenty cents later.”

“Sure!” cried the Russian girl, and she was off around the corner in the wake of the Lurcher, with flying feet.

Helen waited for her friend to return, just inside the tenement house door. When Sadie reappeared, Helen hugged her tight and kissed her.

“You are a *dear*!” the Western girl cried. “I do love you, Sadie!”

“Aw, chee! That ain’t nothin’,” objected the East Side girl. “We poor folks has gotter help each other.”

So Helen would not spoil the little sacrifice by acknowledging to more money, and they climbed the stairs again to the Goronsky tenement. The girl from Sunset Ranch was glad—oh, so glad!—of this incident. Chilled as she had been by the selfishness in her uncle’s Madison Avenue mansion, she was glad to have her heart warmed down here among the poor of Madison Street.

CHAPTER XX

OUT OF STEP WITH THE TIMES

“No,” Sadie told Helen, afterward, “I am very sure that poor Lurcher man doesn’t drink. Some says he does; but you never notice it on him. It’s just his eyes.”

“His eyes?” queried Helen, wonderingly.

“Yes. He’s sort of blind. His eyelids keep fluttering all the time. He can’t control them. And, if you notice, he usually lifts up the lid of one eye with his finger before he makes one of his base-runs for the next post. Chee! I’d hate to be like that.”

“The poor old man! And can nothing be done for it?”

“Plenty, I reckon. But who’s goin’ to pay for it? Not him—he ain’t got it to pay. We all has our troubles down here, Helen.”

The girls had come down from the home of Sadie again, and Helen was preparing to leave her friend.

“Aren’t there places to go in the city to have one’s eyes examined? Free hospitals, I mean?”

“Sure! And they got Lurcher to one, once. But all they give him was a prescription for glasses, and it would cost a lot to get ’em. So it didn’t do him no good.”

Helen looked at Sadie suddenly. “How much would it take for the glasses?” she asked.

“I dunno. Ten dollars, mebbe.”

“And do you s’pose he could have that prescription now?” asked Helen, eagerly.

“Mebbe. But why for?”

“Perhaps I could—could get somebody uptown interested in his case who is able

to pay for the spectacles."

"Chee, that would be bully!" cried Sadie.

"Will you find out about the prescription?"

"Sure I will," declared Sadie. "Nex' time you come down here, Helen, I'll know all about it. And if you can get one of them rich ladies up there to pay for 'em—Well! it would beat goin' to a swell restaurant for a feed—eh?" and she laughed, hugged the Western girl, and then darted across the sidewalk to intercept a possible customer who was loitering past the row of garments displayed in front of the Finkelstein shop.

But Helen did not get downtown again as soon as she expected. When she awoke the next morning there had set in a steady drizzle—cold and raw—and the panes of her windows were so murky that she could not see even the chimneys and roofs, or down into the barren little yards.

This—nor a much heavier—rain would not have ordinarily balked Helen. She was used to being out in all winds and weathers. But she actually had nothing fit to wear in the rain.

If she had worn the new cheap dress out of doors she knew what would happen. It would shrink all out of shape. And she had no raincoat, nor would she ask her cousins—so she told herself—for the loan of an umbrella.

So, as long as it rained steadily, it looked as though the girl from Sunset Ranch was a sure-enough "shut-in." Nor did she contemplate this possibility with any pleasure.

There was nothing for her to do but read. And one cannot read all the time. She had no "fancy-work" with which to keep her hands and mind busy. She wondered what her cousins did on such days. She found out by keeping her ears and eyes open. After breakfast Belle went shopping in the limousine. There was an early luncheon and all three of the Starkweather girls went to a matinée. In neither case was Helen invited to go—no, indeed! She was treated as though she were not even in the house. Seldom did either of the older girls speak to her.

"I might as well be a ghost," thought Helen.

And this reminded her of the little old lady who paced the ghost-walk every night—the ex-nurse, Mary Boyle. She had thought of going to see her on the top floor before; but she had not been able to pluck up the courage.

Now that her cousins were gone from the house, however, and Mrs. Olstrom was

taking a nap in her room, and Mr. Lawdor was out of the way, and all the under-servants mildly celebrating the free afternoon below stairs, Helen determined to venture out of her own room, along the main passage of the top floor, to the door which she believed must give upon the front suite of rooms which the little old lady occupied.

She knocked, but there was no response. Nor could she hear any sound from within. It struck Helen that the principal cruelty of the Starkweathers' treatment of this old soul was her being shut away alone up here at the top of the house—too far away from the rest of its occupants for a cry to be heard if the old lady should be in trouble.

"If they shut up a dog like this, he would howl and thus attract attention to his state," muttered Helen. "But here is a human being——"

She tried the door. The latch clicked and the door swung open. Helen stepped into a narrow, hall-like room, well furnished with old-fashioned furniture (probably brought from below stairs when Mr. Starkweather re-decorated the mansion) with one window in it. The door which evidently gave upon the remainder of the suite was closed.

As Helen listened, however, from behind this closed door came a cheerful, cracked voice—the same voice she had heard whispering the lullaby in the middle of the night. But now it was tuning up on an old-time ballad, very popular in its day:

"Wait till the clouds roll by, Jennie—
Wait till the clouds roll by!
Jennie, my own true loved one—
Wait till the clouds roll by."

"She doesn't sound like a hopeless prisoner," thought Helen, with surprise.

She waited a minute longer and, as the thin yet still sweet voice stopped, Helen knocked timidly on the inner door. Immediately the voice said, "Come in, deary. 'Tis not for the likes of you to be knockin' at old Mary's door. Come in!"

Helen turned the knob slowly and went into the room. The moment she crossed the threshold she forgot the clouds and rain and gloominess which had depressed her. Indeed, it seemed as though the sun must be ever shining into this room, high up under the roof of the Starkweather mansion.

In the first place, it was most cheerfully papered and painted. There were pretty,

simple, yellow and white hangings. The heavier pieces of old furniture had gay “tidies” or “throws” upon them to relieve the sombreness of the dark wood. The pictures on the walls were all in white or gold frames, and were of a cheerful nature—mostly pictures of childhood, or pictures which would amuse children. Evidently much of the furnishings of the old nursery had been brought up here to Mary Boyle’s sitting-room.

Helen had a glimpse, through a half-open door, of the bedroom—quite as bright and pretty. There was a little stove set up here, and a fire burned in it. It was one of those stoves that have isinglass all around it so that the fire can be seen when it burns red. It added mightily to the cheerful tone of the room.

How neat everything appeared! Yet the very neatest thing in sight was the little old lady herself, sitting in a green-painted rocker, with a low sewing-table at her side, wooden needles clicking fast in her fleecy knitting.

She looked up at Helen with a little, bird-like motion—her head a bit on one side and her glance quizzical. This, it proved, was typical of Mary Boyle.

“Deary, deary me!” she said. “You’re a *new* girl. And what do you want Mary to do for you?”

“I—I thought I’d come and make you a little call,” said Helen, timidly.

This wasn’t at all as she expected to find the shut-in! Instead of gloom, and tears, and the weakness of age, here were displayed all the opposite emotions and qualities. The woman who was forgotten did not appear to be an object of pity at all. She merely seemed out of step with the times.

“I’m sure you’re very welcome, deary,” said the old nurse. “Draw up the little rocker yonder. I always keep it for young company,” and Mary Boyle, who had had no young company up here for ten or a dozen years, spoke as though the appearance of a youthful face and form was of daily occurrence.

“You see,” spoke Helen, more confidently, “we are neighbors on this top floor.”

“Neighbors; air we?”

“I live up here, too. The family have tucked me away out of sight.”

“Hush!” said the little old woman. “We shouldn’t criticise our bethers. No, no! And this is a very cheerful par-r-rt of the house, so it is.”

“But it must be awful,” exclaimed Helen, “to have to stay in it all the time!”

“I don’t have to stay in it all the time,” replied the nurse, quickly.

“No, ma’am. I hear you in the night going downstairs and walking in the corridor,” Helen said, softly.

The wrinkled old face blushed very prettily, and Mary Boyle looked at her visitor doubtfully.

“Sure, ’tis such a comfort for an old body like me,” she said, at last, “to make believe.”

“Make believe?” cried Helen, with a smile. “Why, *I’m* not old, and I love to make believe.”

“Ah, yis! But there is a differ bechune the make-believes of the young and the make-believes of the old. *You* are playin’ you’re grown up, or dramin’ of what’s comin’ to you in th’ future—sure, I know! I’ve had them drames, too, in me day.

“But with old folks ’tis different. We do be har-r-rking back instead of lookin’ for’ard. And with me, it’s thinkin’ of the babies I’ve held in me ar-r-rms, and rocked on me knee, and walked the flure wid when they was ailin’—An’ sure the babies of *this* house was always ailin’, poor little things.”

“They were a great trouble to you, then?” asked Helen, softly.

“Trouble, is it?” cried Mary Boyle, her eyes shining again. “Sure, how could a blessid infant be a trouble? ’Tis a means of grace they be to the hear-r-rt—I nade no preacher to tell me that, deary. I found thim so. And they loved me and was happy wid me,” she added, cheerfully.

“The folks below think me a little quare in me head,” she confided to her visitor. “But they don’t understand. To walk up and down the nursery corridor late at night relaves the ache here,” and she put her little, mitted hand upon her heart. “Ye see, I trod that path so often—so often——”

Her voice trailed off and she fell silent, gazing into the glow of the fire in the stove. But there was a smile on her lips. The past was no time to weep over. This cheerful body saw only the bright spots in her long, long life.

Helen loved to hear her talk. And soon she and Mary Boyle were very well acquainted. One thing about the old nurse Helen liked immensely. She asked no questions. She accepted Helen’s visit as a matter of course; yet she showed very plainly that she was glad to have a young face before her.

But the girl from Sunset Ranch did not know how Mrs. Olstrom might view her making friends with the old lady; so she made her visit brief. But she promised to come again and bring a book to read to Mary Boyle.

“Radin’ is a great accomplishment, deary,” declared the old woman. “I niver seemed able to masther it—although me mistress oft tried to tache me. But, sure, there was so much to l’arn about babies, that ain’t printed in no book, that I was always radin’ them an’ niver missed the book eddication till I come to be old. But th’ foine poethry me mistress useter be radin’ me! Sure, ’twould almost put a body to slape, so swate and grand it was.”

So, Helen searched out a book of poems downstairs, and the next forenoon she ventured into the front suite again, and read ta Mary Boyle for an hour. The storm lasted several days, and each day the girl from the West spent more and more time with the little old woman.

But this was all unsuspected by Uncle Starkweather and the three girls. If Mrs. Olstrom knew she said nothing. At least, she timed her own daily visits to the little old woman so that she would not meet Helen in the rooms devoted to old Mary’s comfort.

Nor were Helen’s visits continued solely because she pitied Mary Boyle. How could she continue to pity one who did not pity herself?

No. Helen received more than she gave in this strange friendship. Seeking to amuse the old nurse, she herself gained such an uplift of heart and mind that it began to counteract that spirit of sullenness that had entered into the Western girl when she had first come to this house and had been received so unkindly by her relatives.

Instead of hating them, she began to pity them. How much Uncle Starkweather was missing by being so utterly selfish! How much the girls were missing by being self-centred!

Why, see it right here in Mary Boyle’s case! Nobody could associate with the delightful little old woman without gaining good from the association. Instead of being friends with the old nurse, and loving her and being loved by her, the Starkweather girls tucked her away in the attic and tried to ignore her existence.

“They don’t know what they’re missing—poor things!” murmured Helen, thinking the situation over.

And from that time her own attitude changed toward her cousins. She began to look out for chances to help them, instead of making herself more and more objectionable to Belle, Hortense, and Flossie.

CHAPTER XXI

BREAKING THE ICE

As for Floss, Helen had already got a hold upon that young lady.

“Come on, Helen!” the younger cousin would whisper after dinner. “Come up to my room and give me a start on these lessons; will you? That’s a good chap.”

And often when the rest of the family thought the unwelcome visitor had retired to her room at the top of the house, she was shut in with Flossie, trying to guide the stumbling feet of that rather dull girl over the hard places in her various studies.

For Floss had soon discovered that the girl from Sunset Ranch somehow had a wonderful insight into every problem she put up to her. Nor were they all in algebra.

“I don’t see how you managed to do it, ’way out there in that wild place you lived in; but you must have gone through ’most all the text-books I have,” declared Flossie, once.

“Oh, I had to grab every chance there was for schooling,” Helen responded, and changed the subject instantly.

Flossie thought she had a secret from her sisters, however, and she hugged it to her with much glee. She realized that Helen was by no means the ignoramus Belle and Hortense said.

“And let ’em keep on thinking it,” Flossie said, to herself, with a chuckle. “I don’t know what Helen has got up her sleeve; but I believe she is fooling all of us.”

A long, dreary fortnight of inclement weather finally got on the nerves of Hortense. Belle could go out tramping in it, or cab-riding, or what-not. She was athletic, and loved exercise in the open air, no matter what the weather might be. But the second sister was just like a pussy-cat; she loved comfort and the warm

corners. However, being left alone by Belle, and nobody coming in to call for several days, Hortense was completely overpowered by loneliness.

She had nothing within herself to fight off nervousness and depression. So, having caught a little, sniffly cold, she decided that she was sick and went to bed.

The Starkweather girls did not each have a maid. Mr. Starkweather could not afford that luxury. But Hortense at once requisitioned one of the housemaids to wait upon her and of course Mrs. Olstrom's very carefully-thought-out system was immediately turned topsy-turvy.

"I cannot allow you, Miss, to have the services of Maggie all day long," Helen heard the housekeeper announce at the door of the invalid's room. "We are not prepared to do double work in this house. You must either speak to your father and have a nurse brought in, or wait upon yourself."

"Oh, you heartless, wicked thing!" cried Hortense. "How can you be so cruel? I couldn't wait upon myself. I want my broth. And I want my hair done. And you can see yourself how the room is all in a mess. And——"

"Maggie must do her parlor work to-day. You know that. If you want to be waited upon, Miss, get your sister to do it," concluded the housekeeper, and marched away.

"And she very well knows that Belle has gone out somewhere and Flossie is at school. I could *die* here, and nobody would care," wailed Hortense.

Helen walked into the richly furnished room. Hortense was crying into her pillow. Her hair was still in two unkempt braids and she *did* need a fresh boudoir cap and gown.

"Can I do anything to help you, 'Tense?" asked Helen, cheerfully.

"Oh, dear me—no!" exclaimed her cousin. "You're so loud and noisy. And do, *do* call me by my proper name."

"I forgot. Sure, I'll call you anything you say," returned the Western girl, smiling at her. Meanwhile she was moving about the room, deftly putting things to rights.

"I'm going to tell father the minute he comes home!" wailed Hortense, ignoring her cousin for the time and going back to her immediate troubles. "I am left all alone—and I'm sick—and nobody cares—and—and——"

“Where do you keep your caps, Hortense?” interrupted Helen. “And if you’ll let me, I’ll brush your hair and make it look pretty. And then you get into a fresh nightgown——”

“Oh, I couldn’t sit up,” moaned Hortense. “I really couldn’t. I’m too weak.”

“I’ll show you how. Let me fix the pillows—*so!* And *so!* There—nothing like trying; is there? You’re comfortable; aren’t you?”

“We-ell——”

Helen was already manipulating the hairbrush. She did it so well, and managed to arrange Hortense’s really beautiful hair so simply yet easily on her head that the latter quite approved of it—and said so—when she looked into her hand-mirror.

Then Helen got her into a chair, in a fresh robe and a pretty kimono, while she made the bed—putting on new sheets and cases for the pillows so that all should be sweet and clean. Of course, Hortense wasn’t really sick—only lazy. But she thought she was sick and Helen’s attentions pleased the spoiled girl.

“Why, you’re not such a bad little thing, Helen,” she said, dipping into a box of chocolates on the stand by her bedside. Chocolates were about all the medicine Hortense took during this “bad attack.” And she was really grateful—in her way—to her cousin.

It was later on this day that Helen plucked up courage to go to her uncle and give him back the letter he had written to Fenwick Grimes.

“I did not use it, sir,” she said.

“Ahem!” he said, and with evident relief. “You have thought better of it, I hope? You mean to let the matter rest where it is?”

“I have not abandoned my attempt to get at the truth—no, Uncle Starkweather.”

“How foolish of you, child!” he cried.

“I do not think it is foolish. But I will try not to mix you up in my inquiries. That is why I did not use the letter.”

“And you have seen Grimes?” he asked, hastily.

“Oh, yes.”

“Does he know who you are?”

“Oh, yes.”

“And you reached him without an introduction? I understand he is hard to approach. He is a money-lender, in a way, and he has an odd manner of never appearing to come into personal contact with his clients.”

“Yes, sir. I think him odd.”

“Did—did he think he could help you?”

“He thinks just as you do, sir,” stated Helen, honestly. “And, then, he accused you of sending me to him at first; so I would not use your letter and so compromise you.”

“Ahem!” said the gentleman, surprised that this young girl should be so circumspect. It rather startled him to discover that she was thoughtful far beyond her years. Was it possible that—somehow—she *might* bring to light the truth regarding the unhappy difficulty that had made Prince Morrell an exile from his old home for so many years?

Once May Van Ramsden ran in to see Belle and caught Helen going through the hall on her way to her own room. It was just after luncheon, which she and Belle had eaten in a silence that could be felt. Belle would not speak to her cousin unless she was obliged to, and Helen did not see that forcing her attentions upon the other girl would do any good.

“Why, here you are, Helen Morrell! Why don’t I ever see you when I come here?” cried the caller, shaking Helen by both hands and smiling upon her heartily from her superior height. “When are your cousins going to bring you to call upon me?”

Helen might have replied, truthfully, “Never;” but she only shook her head and smilingly declared: “I hope to see you again soon, Miss Van Ramsden.”

“Well, I guess you must!” cried the caller. “I want to hear some more of your experiences,” and she went on to meet the scowling Belle at the door of the reception parlor.

Later her eldest cousin said to the Western girl:

“In going up and down to your room, Miss, I want you to remember that there is a back stairway. Use the servants’ stairs, if you please!”

Helen made no reply. She wasn’t breaking much of the ice between her and Belle Starkweather, that was sure. And to add to Belle’s dislike for her cousin, there was another happening in which Miss Van Ramsden was concerned, soon after this.

Hortense was still abed, for the weather remained unpleasant—and there really was nothing else for the languid cousin to do. Miss Van Ramsden found Belle out, and she went upstairs to say “how-do” to the invalid. Helen was in the room making the spoiled girl more comfortable, and Miss Van Ramsden drew the younger girl out into the hall when she left.

“I really have come to see *you*, child,” she said to Helen, frankly. “I was telling papa about you and he said he would dearly love to meet Prince Morrell’s daughter. Papa went to college with your father, my dear.”

Helen was glad of this, and yet she flushed a little. She was quite frank, however: “Does—does your father know about poor dad’s trouble?” she whispered.

“He does. And he always believed Mr. Morrell not guilty. Father was one of the firm’s creditors, and he has always wished your father had come to him instead of leaving the city so long ago.”

“Then he’s been paid?” cried Helen, eagerly.

“Certainly. It is a secret, I believe—father warned me not to speak of it unless you did; but everybody was paid by your father after a time. *That* did not look as though he were dishonest. His partner took advantage of the bankruptcy courts.”

“Of—of course your father has no idea who *was* guilty?” whispered Helen, anxiously.

“None at all,” replied Miss Van Ramsden. “It was a mystery then and remains so to this day. That bookkeeper was a peculiar man, but had a good record; and it seems that he left the city before the checks were cashed. Or, so the evidence seemed to prove.

“Now, don’t cry, my dear! Come! I wish we could help you clear up that old trouble. But many of your father’s old friends—like papa—never believed Prince Morrell guilty.”

Helen was crying by this time. The kindness of this older girl broke down her self-possession. They heard somebody coming up the stairs, and Miss Van Ramsden said, quickly:

“Take me to your room, dear. We can talk there.”

Helen never thought that she might be giving the Starkweather family deadly offence by doing this. She led Miss Van Ramsden immediately to the rear of the house and up the back stairway to the attic floor. The caller looked somewhat

amazed when Helen ushered her into the room.

“Well, they could not have put you much nearer the sky; could they?” she said, laughing, yet eyeing Helen askance.

“Oh, I don’t mind it up here,” returned Helen, truthfully enough. “And I have some company on this floor.”

“Ahem! The maids, I suppose?” said May Van Ramsden.

“No, no,” Helen assured her, eagerly. “The dearest little old lady you ever saw.”

Then she stopped and looked at her caller in some distress. For the moment she had forgotten that she was probably on the way to reveal the Starkweather family skeleton!

“A little old lady? Who can *that* be?” cried the caller. “You interest me.”

“I—I—Well, it is an old lady who was once nurse in the family and I believe Uncle Starkweather cares for her——”

“It’s never Nurse Boyle?” cried Miss Van Ramsden, suddenly starting up. “Why! I remember about her. But somehow, I thought she had died years ago. Why, as a child I used to visit her at the house, and she used to like to have me come to see her. That was before your cousins lived here, Helen. Then I went to Europe for several years and when we returned the house had all been done over, your uncle’s family was here, and I think—I am not sure—somebody told me dear old Mary Boyle was dead.”

“No,” observed Helen, thoughtfully. “She is not dead. She is only forgotten.”

Miss Van Ramsden looked at the Western girl for some moments in silence. She seemed to understand the whole matter without a word of further explanation.

“Would you mind letting me see Mary Boyle while I am here?” she asked, gravely. “She was a very lovely old soul, and all the families hereabout—I have heard my mother often say—quite envied the Starkweathers their possession of such a treasure.”

“Certainly we can go in and see her,” declared Helen, throwing all discretion to the winds. “I was going to read to her this afternoon, anyway. Come along!”

She led the caller through the hall to Mary Boyle’s little suite of rooms. To herself Helen said:

“Let the wild winds of disaster blow! Whew! If the family hears of this I don’t know but they will want to have me arrested—or worse! But what can I do? And

then—Mary Boyle deserves better treatment at their hands."

CHAPTER XXII

IN THE SADDLE

The little old lady “tidied” her own room. She hopped about like a bird with the aid of the ebony crutch, and Helen and Miss Van Ramsden heard the “step—put” of her movements when they entered the first room.

“Come in, deary!” cried the dear old soul. “I was expecting you. Ah, whom have we here? Good-day to you, ma’am!”

“Nurse Boyle! don’t you remember me?” cried the visitor, going immediately to the old lady and kissing her on both cheeks.

“Bless us, now! How would I know ye?” cried the old woman. “Is it me old eyes I have set on ye for many a long year now?”

“And I blame myself for it, Nurse,” cried May Van Ramsden. “Don’t you remember little May—the Van Ramsdens’ May—who used to come to see you so often when she was about so-o high?” cried the girl, measuring the height of a five or six-year-old.

“A neighbor’s baby *did* come to see Old Mary now and then,” cried the nurse. “But you’re never May?”

“I am, Nurse.”

“And growed so tall and handsome? Well, well, well! It does bate all, so it does. Everybody grows up but Mary Boyle; don’t they?” and the old woman cackled out a sweet, high laugh, and sat down to “visit” with her callers.

The two girls had a very charming time with Mary Boyle. And May Van Ramsden promised to come again. When they left the old lady she said, earnestly, to Helen:

“And there are others that will be glad to come and see Nurse Boyle. When she was well and strong—before she had to use that crutch—she often appeared at our houses when there was trouble—serious trouble—especially with the babies

or little children. And what Mary Boyle did not know about pulling young ones out of the mires of illness, wasn't worth knowing. Why, I know a dozen boys and girls whose lives were probably saved by her. They shall be reminded of her existence. And—it shall be due to you, Little Cinderella!"

Helen smiled deprecatingly. "It will be due to your own kind heart, Miss Van Ramsden," she returned. "I see that everybody in the city is not so busy with their own affairs that they cannot think of other people."

The young lady kissed her again and said goodbye. But that did not end the matter—no, indeed! The news that Miss Van Ramsden had been taken to the topmost story of the Starkweather mansion—supposedly to Helen's own room only—by the Western girl, dribbled through the servants to Belle Starkweather herself when she came home.

"Now, Pa! I won't stand that common little thing being here any longer—no, I won't! Why, she did that just on purpose to make folks talk—to make people believe that we abuse her. Of course, she told May that *I* sent her to the top story to sleep. You get rid of that girl, Pa, or I declare I'll go away. I guess I can find somebody to take me in as long as you wish to keep Prince Morrell's daughter here in *my* place."

"Ahem! I—I must beg you to compose yourself, Belle——"

"I won't—and that's flat!" declared his eldest daughter. "Either she goes; or I do."

"Do let Belle go, Pa," drawled Flossie. "She is getting too bossy, anyway. *I* don't mind having Helen here. She is rather good fun. And May Van Ramsden came here particularly to see Helen."

"That's not so!" cried Belle, stamping her foot.

"It is. Maggie heard her say so. Maggie was coming up the stairs and heard May ask Helen to take her to her room. What could the poor girl do?"

"Ahem! Flossie—I am amazed at you—amazed at you!" gasped Mr. Starkweather. "What do you learn at school?"

"Goodness me! I couldn't tell you," returned the youngest of his daughters, carelessly. "It's none of it any good, though, Pa. You might as well take me out."

"I've told that girl to use the back stairs, and to keep out of the front of the house," went on Belle, ignoring Flossie. "If she had not been hanging about the front of the house, May Van Ramsden would not have seen her——"

“’Tain’t so!” snapped Flossie.

“*Will* you be still, minx?” demanded the older sister.

“I don’t care. Let’s give Helen a fair deal. I tell you, Pa, May said she came particularly to see Helen. Besides, Helen had been in Hortense’s room, and that is where May found her. Helen was brushing Hortense’s hair. Hortense told me so.”

“Ahem! I am astonished at you, Flossie. The fact remains that Helen is a source of trouble in the house. I really do wish I knew how to get rid of her.”

“You give me permission, Pa,” sneered Belle, “and I’ll get rid of her very quickly—you see!”

“No, no!” exclaimed the troubled father. “I—I cannot use the iron hand at present—not at present.”

“Humph!” exclaimed the shrewd Belle. “I’d like to know what you are afraid of, Pa?”

Mr. Starkweather tried to frown down his daughter, but was unsuccessful. He merely presented a picture of a very cowardly man trying to look brave. It wasn’t much of a picture.

So—as may be easily conceived—Helen was not met at dinner by her relatives in any conciliatory manner. Yet the girl from the West really wished she might make friends with Uncle Starkweather and her cousins.

“It must be that a part of the fault is with me,” she told herself, when she crept up to her room after a gloomy time in the dining-room. “If I had it in me to please them—to make them happier—surely they could not treat me as they do. Oh, dear, I wish I had learned better how to be popular.”

That night Helen felt about as bad as she had any time since she arrived in the great city. She was too disturbed to read. She lay in bed until the small hours of the morning, unable to sleep, and worrying over all her affairs, which seemed, since she had arrived in New York, to go altogether wrong.

She had not made an atom of progress in that investigation which she had hoped would bring to light the truth about the mystery which had sent her father and mother West—fugitives—before she was born. She had only succeeded in becoming thoroughly suspicious of her Uncle Starkweather and of Fenwick Grimes.

Nor had she made any advance in the discovery of the mysterious Allen Chesterton, the bookkeeper of her father's old firm, who held, she believed, the key to the mystery. She did not know what step to take next. She did not know what to do. And there was nobody with whom she could consult—nobody in all this great city to whom she could go.

Never before had Helen felt so lonely as she did this night. She had money enough with her to pay somebody to help her dig back for facts regarding the disappearance of the money belonging to the old firm of Grimes & Morrell. But she did not know how to go about getting the help she needed.

Her only real confidante—Sadie Goronsky—would not know how to advise her in this emergency.

"I wish I had let Dud Stone give me his address. He said he was learning to be a lawyer," thought Helen. "And just now, I s'pose, a lawyer is what I need most. But I wouldn't know how to go about engaging a lawyer—not a good one."

She awoke at her usual time next morning, and the depression of the night before was still with her. But when she jumped up she saw that it was no longer raining. The sky was overcast, but she could venture forth without running the risk of spoiling her new suit.

And right there a desperate determination came into Helen Morrell's mind. She had learned that on the west side of Central Park there was a riding academy. She was *hungry* for an hour in the saddle. It seemed to her that a gallop would clear all the cobwebs away and make her feel like herself once more.

The house was still silent and dark. She took her riding habit out of the closet, made it up into a bundle, and crept downstairs with it under her arm. She escaped the watchful Lawdor for once, and got out by the area door before even the cook had crept, yawning, downstairs to begin her day's work.

Helen, hurrying through the dark, dripping streets, found a little restaurant where she could get rolls and coffee on her way to the Columbus Circle riding academy. It was still early when the girl from Sunset Ranch reached her goal. Yes, a mount was to be had, and she could change her street clothes for her riding suit in the dressing-rooms.

The city—at least, that part of it around Central Park—was scarcely awake when Helen walked her mount out of the stable and into the park. The man in charge had given her to understand that there were few riders astir so early.

"You'll have the bridle-path to yourself, Miss, going out," he said.

Helen had picked up a little cap to wear, and astride the saddle, with her hair tied with a big bow of ribbon at the nape of her neck, she looked very pretty as the horse picked his way across the esplanade into the bridle-path. But there were few, as the stableman had said, to see her so early in the morning.

It did not rain, however. Indeed, there was a fresh breeze which, she saw, was tearing the low-hung clouds to shreds. And in the east a rosy spot in the fog announced the presence of the sun himself, ready to burst through the fleecy veil and smile once more upon the world.

The trees and brush dripped upon the fallen leaves. For days the park caretakers had been unable to rake up these, and they had become almost a solid pattern of carpeting for the lawns. And down here in the bridle-path, as she cantered along, their pungent odor, stirred by the hoofs of her mount, rose in her nostrils.

This wasn't much like galloping over an open trail on a nervous little cow-pony. But it was both a bodily and mental relief for the outdoor girl who had been, for these past weeks, shut into a groove for which she was so badly fitted.

She saw nobody on horseback but a mounted policeman, who turned and trotted along beside her, and was pleasant and friendly. This pleased Helen; and especially was she pleased when she learned that he had been West and had "punched cows" himself. That had been some years ago, but he remembered the Link-A—now the Sunset—Ranch, although he had never worked for that outfit.

Helen's heart expanded as she cantered along. The sun dispelled the mist and shone warm upon the path. The policeman left her, but now there were other riders abroad. She went far out of town, as directed by the officer, and found the ride beautiful. After all, there were some lovely spots in this great city, if one only knew where to find them.

She had engaged a strong horse with good wind; but she did not want to break him down. So she finally turned her face toward the city again and let the animal take its own pace home.

She had ridden down as far as 110th Street and had crossed over into the park once more, when she saw a couple of riders advancing toward her from the south. They were a young man and a girl, both well mounted, and Helen noted instantly that they handled their spirited horses with ease.

Indeed, she was so much interested in the mounts themselves, that she came near passing the two without a look at their faces. Suddenly she heard an exclamation from the young fellow, she looked up, and found herself gazing straight into the

handsome face of Dudley Stone.

“For the love of heaven!” gasped that astonished young man. “It surely *is* Helen Morrell! Jess! See here! Here’s the very nicest girl who ever came out of Montana!”

Dud’s sister—Helen knew she must be his sister, for she had the same coloring as and a strong family resemblance to the budding lawyer—wheeled her horse and rode directly to Helen’s side.

“Oh, Miss Morrell!” she cried, putting out her gauntleted hand. “Is it really she, Dud? How wonderful!”

Helen shook hands rather timidly, for Miss Jessie Stone was torrential in her speech. There wasn’t a chance to “get a word in edgewise” when once she was started upon a subject that interested her.

“My goodness me!” she cried, still shaking Helen’s hand. “Is this really the girl who pulled you out of that tree, Dud? Who saved your life and took you on her pony to the big ranch? My, how romantic!

“And you really own a ranch, Miss Morrell? How nice that must be! And plenty of cattle on it—Why! you don’t mind the price of beef at all; do you? And what a clever girl you must be, too. Dud came back full of your praise, now I tell you ——”

“There, there!” cried Dud. “Hold on a bit, Jess, and let’s hear how Miss Morrell is—and what she is doing here in the big city, and all that.”

“Well, I declare, Dud! You take the words right out of my mouth,” said his sister, warmly. “I was just going to ask her that. And we’re going to the Casino for breakfast, Miss Morrell, and you must come with us. You’ve had your ride; haven’t you?”

“I—I’m just returning,” admitted Helen, rather breathless, if Jess was not.

“Come on, then!” cried the good-natured but talkative city girl. “Come, Dud, you ride ahead and engage a table and order something nice. I’m as ravenous as a wolf. Dear me, Miss Morrell, if you have been riding long you must be quite famished, too!”

“I had coffee and rolls early,” said Helen, as Dud spurred his horse away.

“Oh, what’s coffee and rolls? Nothing at all—nothing at all! After I’ve been jounced around on this saddle for an hour I feel as though I never *had* eaten. I

don’t care much for riding myself, but Dud is crazy for it, and I come to keep him company. You must ride with us, Miss Morrell. How long are you going to stay in town? And to think of your having saved Dud’s life—Well! he’ll never get over talking about it.”

“He makes too much of the incident,” declared Helen, determined to get in a word. “I only lent him a rope and he saved himself.”

“No. You carried him on your pony to that ranch. Oh, I know it all by heart. He talks about it to everybody. Dud is *so* enthusiastic about the West. He is crazy to go back again—he wants to live there. I tell him I’ll go out and try it for a while, and if I find I can stand it, he can hang out his shingle in that cow-town—what do you call it?”

“Elberon?” suggested Helen.

“Yes—Elberon. Dud says there is a chance for another lawyer there. And he came back here and entered the offices of Larribee & Polk right away, so as to get working experience, and be entered at the bar all the sooner. But say!” exclaimed Jess, “I believe one reason why he is so eager to go back to the West is because *you* live there.”

“Oh, Miss Stone!”

“Do call me Jess. ‘Miss Stone’ is so stiff. And you and I are going to be the very best of friends.”

“I really hope so, Jess. But you must call me Helen, too,” said the girl from Sunset Ranch.

Jess leaned out from her saddle, putting the horses so close that the trappings rubbed, and kissed the Western girl resoundingly on the cheek.

“I just *loved* you!” said the warm-hearted creature, “when Dud first told me about you. But now that I see you in the flesh, I love you for your very own self! I hope you’ll love me, too, Helen Morrell—And you won’t mind if I talk a good deal?”

“HERE’S THE VERY NICEST GIRL WHO EVER CAME OUT OF MONTANA.”
(Page 246.)

“Not in the least!” laughed Helen. “And I *do* love you already. I am so, so glad that you and Dud both like me,” she added, “for my cousins do not like me at all, and I have been very unhappy since coming to New York.”

“Here we are!” cried Jess, without noting closely what her new friend said. “And there is Dud waiting for us on the porch. Dear old Dud! Whatever should I have done if you hadn’t got him out of that tree-top, Helen?”

CHAPTER XXIII

MY LADY BOUNTIFUL

That was a wonderful breakfast at the Casino. Not that Helen ever remembered much about what she ate, although Dud had ordered choice fruit and heartier food that would have tempted the most jaded appetite instead of that of a healthy girl who had been riding horseback for two hours and a half.

But, it was so heartening to be with people at the table who “talked one’s own language.” The Stones and Helen chattered like a trio of young crows. Dud threatened to chloroform his sister so that he and Helen could get in a word or two during Jess’s lapse into unconsciousness; but finally *that* did not become necessary because of the talkative girl’s interest in a story that Helen related.

They had discussed many other topics before this subject was broached. And it was the real reason for Helen’s coming East to visit the Starkweathers. “Dud” was “in the way of being a lawyer,” as he had previously told her, and Helen had come to realize that it was a lawyer’s advice she needed more than anything else.

“Now, Jess, will you keep still long enough for me to listen to the story of my very first client?” demanded Dud, sternly, of his sister.

“Oh, I’ll stuff the napkin into my mouth! You can gag me! Your very first client, Dud! And it’s so interesting.”

“It is customary for clients to pay over a retainer; isn’t it?” queried Helen, her eyes dancing. “How much shall it be, Mr. Lawyer?” and she opened her purse.

There was the glint of a gold piece at the bottom of the bag. Dud flushed and reached out his hand for it.

“That five dollars, Miss Helen. Thank you. I shall never spend this coin,” declared Dud, earnestly. “And I shall take it to a jeweler’s and have it properly engraved.”

“What will you have put on it?” asked Helen, laughing.

He looked at her from under level brows, smiling yet quite serious.

“I shall have engraved on it ‘Snuggy, to Dud’—if I may?” he said.

But Helen shook her head and although she still smiled, she said:

“You’d better wait a bit, Mr. Lawyer, and see if your advice brings about any happy conclusion of my trouble. But you can keep the gold piece, just the same, to remember me by.”

“As though I needed *that* reminder!” he cried.

Jess removed the corner of the napkin from between her pretty teeth. “Get busy, do!” she cried. “I’m dying to hear about this strange affair you say you have come East to straighten out, Helen.”

So the girl from Sunset Ranch told all her story. Everything her father had said to her upon the topic before his death, and all she suspected about Fenwick Grimes and Allen Chesterton—even to the attitude Uncle Starkweather took in the matter—she placed before Dud Stone.

He gave it grave attention. Helen was not afraid to talk plainly to him, and she held nothing back. But at the best, her story was somewhat disconnected and incomplete. She possessed very few details of the crime which had been committed. Mr. Morrell himself had been very hazy in his statements regarding the affair.

“What we want first,” declared Dud, impressively, “is to get the *facts*. Of course, at the time, the trouble must have made some stir. It got into the newspapers.”

“Oh, dear, yes,” said Helen. “And that is what Uncle Starkweather is afraid of. He fears it will get into the papers again if I make any stir about it, and then there will be a scandal.”

“With his name connected with it?”

“Yes.”

“He’s dreadfully timid for his own good name; isn’t he?” remarked Dud, sarcastically. “Well, first of all, I’ll get the date of the occurrence and then search the files of all the city papers. The reporters usually get such matters pretty straight. To misstate such business troubles is skating on the thin ice of libel, and newspapers are careful.

“Well, when we have all the facts before us—what people surmised, even, and how it looked to ‘the man on the street,’ as the saying is—then we’ll know better

how to go ahead.

“Are you willing to leave the matter to me, Helen?”

“What did I give you a retainer for?” demanded the girl from Sunset Ranch, smiling.

“True,” he replied, his own eyes dancing; “but there is a saying among lawyers that the feminine client does not really come to a lawyer for advice; rather, she pays him to listen to her talk.”

“Isn’t that horrid of him?” cried Jess, unable to keep still any longer. “As though we girls talked any more than the men do. I should say not!”

But Helen agreed to let Dud govern her future course in trying to untangle the web of circumstance that had driven her father out of New York years before. As Dud said, somebody was guilty, and that somebody was the person they must find.

It encouraged Helen mightily to have someone talk this way about the matter. A solution of the problem seemed so imminent after she parted from the fledgling lawyer and his sister, that Helen determined to hasten to their conclusion certain plans she had made, before she returned to the West.

For Helen could not remain here. Her uncle’s home was not the refined household that dear dad had thought, in which she would be sheltered and aided in improving herself.

“I might as well take board at the Zoo and live in the bear’s den,” declared Helen, perhaps a little harsh in her criticism. “There are no civilizing influences in *that* house. I’d never get a particle of ‘culture’ there. I’d rather associate with Sing, and Jo-Rab, and the boys, and Hen Billings.”

Her experience in the great city had satisfied Helen that its life was not for her. Some things she had learned, it was true; but most of them were unpleasant things.

“I’d rather hire some lady to come out to Sunset and live with me and teach me how to act gracefully in society, and all that. There are a lot of ‘poor, but proud’ people who would be glad of the chance, I know.”

But on this day—after she had left her riding habit at a tailor’s to be brushed and pressed, and had made arrangements to make her changes there whenever she wished to ride in the morning—on this day Helen had something else to do beside thinking of her proper introduction to society. This was the first day it had

been fit for her to go downtown since she and Sadie Goronsky had had their adventure with the old man whom Sadie called “Lurcher,” but whom Fenwick Grimes had called “Jones.”

Helen was deeply interested in the old man’s case, and if he could be helped in any proper way, she wanted to do it. Also, there was Sadie herself. Helen believed that the Russian girl, with her business ability and racial sharpness, could help herself and her family much more than she now was doing, if she had the right kind of a chance.

“And I am going to give her the chance,” Helen told herself, delightedly. “She has been, as unselfish and kind to me—a stranger to her and her people—as she could be. I am determined that Sadie Goronsky and her family shall always be glad that Sadie was kind to the ‘greenie’ who hunted for Uncle Starkweather’s house on Madison Street instead of Madison Avenue.”

After luncheon at the Starkweathers’ Helen started downtown with plenty of money in her purse. She rode to Madison Street and was but a few minutes in reaching the Finkelstein store. To her surprise the front of the building was covered with big signs reading “Bankrupt Sale! Prices Cut in Half!”

Sadie was not in sight. Indeed, the store was full of excited people hauling over old Jacob Finkelstein’s stock of goods, and no “puller-in” was needed to draw a crowd. The salespeople seemed to have their hands full.

Not seeing Sadie anywhere, Helen ventured to mount to the Goronsky flat. Mrs. Goronsky opened the door, recognized her visitor, and in shrill Yiddish and broken English bade her welcome.

“You gome py mein house to see mein Sarah? Sure! Gome in! Gome in! Sarah iss home to-day.”

“Why, see who’s here!” exclaimed Sadie, appearing with a partly-completed hat, of the very newest style, in her hand. “I thought the wet weather had drowned you out.”

“It kept me in,” said Helen, “for I had nothing fit to wear out in the rain.”

“Well, business was so poor that Jacob had to fail. And that always gives me a few days’ rest. I’m glad to get ’em, believe me!”

“Why—why, can a man fail more than once?” gasped Helen.

“He can in the clothing business,” responded Sadie, laughing, and leading the way into the tiny parlor. “I bet there was a crowd in there when you come by?”

“Yes, indeed,” agreed Helen.

“Sure! he’ll get rid of all the ‘stickers’ he’s got it in the shop, and when we open again next week for ordinary business, everything will be fresh and new.”

“Oh, then, you’re really not out of a job?” asked Helen, relieved for her friend’s sake.

“No. I’m all right. And you?”

“I came down particularly to see about that poor old man’s spectacles,” Helen said.

“Then you didn’t forget about him?”

“No, indeed. Did you see him? Has he got the prescription? Is it right about his eyes being the trouble?”

“Sure that’s what the matter is. And he’s dreadful poor, Helen. If he could see better he might find some work. He wore his eyes out, he told me, by writing in books. That’s a business!”

“Then he has the prescription.”

“Sure. I seen it. He’s always hoping he’d get enough money to have the glasses. That’s all he needs, the doctor told him. But they cost fourteen dollars.”

“He shall have them!” declared Helen.

“You don’t mean it, Helen?” cried the Russian girl. “You haven’t got that much money for him?”

“Yes, I have. Will you go around there with me? We’ll get the prescription and have it filled.”

“Wait a bit,” said Sadie. “I want to finish this hat. And lemme tell you—it’s right in style. What do you think?”

“How wonderfully clever you are!” cried the Western girl. “It looks as though it had just come out of a shop.”

“Sure it does. I could work in a hat shop. Only they wouldn’t pay me anything at first, and they wouldn’t let me trim. But I know a girl that ain’t a year older nor me what gets sixteen dollars a week trimming in a millinery store on Grand Street. O’ course, she ain’t the *madame*; she’s only assistant. But sixteen dollars is a good bunch of money to bring home on a Saturday night—believe me!”

“Is that what you’d like to do—keep a millinery shop?” asked Helen.

“Wouldn’t I—just?” gasped Sadie. “Why, Helen—I dream about it nights!”

Helen became suddenly interested. “Would a little shop pay, Sadie? Could you earn your living in a little shop of your own—say, right around here somewhere?”

“Huh! I’ve had me eye on a place for months. But it ain’t no use. You got to put up for the rent, and the wholesalers ain’t goin’ to let a girl like me have stock on credit. And there’s the fixtures—Aw, well, what’s the use? It’s only a dream.”

Helen was determined it should not remain “only a dream.” But she said nothing further.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE HAT SHOP

“Them folks you’re living with must have had a change of heart, Helen,” said Sadie Goronsky, as the two girls sallied forth—Sadie with her new hat set jauntily on her sleek head.

“Why do you say that?”

“If they are willing to spend fourteen dollars on old Lurcher’s eyes.”

“Oh, it isn’t a member of my uncle’s family who is furnishing the money for this charity,” Helen replied. Sadie asked no further questions, fortunately.

It was a very miserable house in which the old man lodged. Helen’s heart ached as she beheld the poverty and misery so evident all about her. “Lurcher” lived on the top floor at the back—a squalid, badly-lighted room—and alone.

“But a man with eyes as bad as mine don’t really need light, you see, young ladies,” he whispered, when Sadie had ushered herself and Helen into the room.

He had tried to keep it neat; but his housekeeping arrangements were most primitive, and cold as the weather had now become, he had no stove save a one-wick oil stove on which he cooked his meals—such as they were.

“You see,” Sadie told him, “this is my friend, Helen, and she seen you the other day when you—you lost that dollar, you know.”

“Ah, yes, wonderful bright eyes you have, Miss, to find a dollar in the street.”

“Ain’t they?” cried Sadie, grinning broadly at Helen. “Chee, it ain’t everybody that can pick up money in the streets of New York—though we all believed we could before we come over here from Russia. Sure!”

“You see,” said Helen, softly, “I had seen you before, Mr.—er—Lurcher. I saw you over on the West Side that morning.”

“You saw me over there?” asked the old man, yet still in a very low voice—a

sort of a faded-out voice—and he seemed not a little startled. “You saw me over there, Miss? *Where* did you see me?”

“On—on Bleecker Street,” responded Helen, which was quite true. She saw that the man evidently did not wish his visit to Fenwick Grimes to be known. Perhaps he had some unpleasant connection with the money-lender.

“Yes, yes!” said Lurcher, with relief. “I—I come through there frequently. But I have such difficulty in seeing my way about, that I follow a beaten path—yes! a beaten path.”

Helen was very curious about the old man’s acquaintance with Fenwick Grimes. The more she thought over her own interview with the money-lender and mine-owner, the deeper became her suspicion that her father’s one-time partner was an untrustworthy man.

Anybody who seemed to know him better than *she* did, naturally interested Helen. Dud Stone had promised to find out all about Grimes, and Helen knew that she would wait impatiently for his report.

But she was interested in Lurcher for his own miserable sake, too. He had lived by himself in this wretched lodging for years. How he lived he did not say; but it was evident that his income was both infinitesimal and uncertain.

Nevertheless, he was not a mean-looking man, nor were his garments unclean. They *were* ragged. He admitted, apologetically, that he could not see to use a needle and so “had sort o’ got run down.”

“I’ll come some day soon and mend you up,” promised Helen, when the old man gave her the prescription he had received from the oculist at the Eye and Ear Hospital. “And you shall have these glasses just as soon as the lenses can be ground.”

“God bless you, Miss!” said the old man, simply.

He had a quiet, “listening” face, and seldom spoke above a whisper. He was more the shadow of a man than the substance.

“Ain’t that a terrible end to look forward to, Helen?” remarked Sadie, seriously, as they descended the stairs to the street. “He ain’t got no friends, and no family, and no way to make a decent livin’. They wouldn’t have the likes of him around in offices, writin’ in books.”

“Oh, you mean he is a bookkeeper?” cried Helen.

“Sure, I do. That’s a business! My papa is going to be in business for himself again. And so will I—you see! That’s the only way to get on, and lay up something for your old age. Work for yourself——”

“In a millinery store; eh?” suggested Helen, smiling.

“That’s right!” declared Sadie, boldly.

“Where is the little store you spoke of? Do you suppose you can ever get it, Sadie?”

“Don’t! You make me feel bad here,” said Sadie, with her hand on her heart. “Say! I just *ache* to try what I can do makin’ lids for the East Side Four Hundred. The wholesale houses let youse come there and work when they’re makin’ up the season’s pattern hats, and then you can get all the new wrinkles. Oh, I wish I was goin’ to start next season in me own store instead of pullin’ greenies into Papa Yawcob’s suit shop,” and the East Side girl sighed dolefully.

“Let’s go see the shop you want,” suggested Helen.

“Oh, dear! It don’t do no good,” said Sadie. “But I often go out of my way to take a peek at it.”

They went a little farther uptown and Helen was shown the tiny little store which Sadie had picked out as just the situation for a millinery shop.

“Ye see, there’s other stores all around; but no millinery. Women come here to buy other things, and if I had that little winder full of tasty hats—Chee! wouldn’t it pull ’em in?”

They stood there some minutes, while the young East Side girl, so wise in the ways of earning a living, so sharp of apprehension in most things, told her whole heart to the girl who had never had to worry about money matters at all—told it with no suspicion that My Lady Bountiful stood by her side.

She pointed out to Helen just where she would have her little counter, and the glass-fronted wall cases for the trimmed hats, and the deep drawers for “shapes,” and the little case in which to show the flowers and buckles, and the chair and table and mirror for the particular customers to sit at while they were being fitted.

“And I’d take that hunchback girl—Rosie Seldt—away from the millinery store on my block—she *hates* to work on the sidewalk the way they make her—she could help me lots. Rosie is a smart girl with some ideas of her own. And I’d curtain off the end of the store down there for a workroom, and for stock—Chee,

but I’d make this place look swell!”

Helen, who had noted the name and address of the rental agent on the card in the window, cut her visit with Sadie short, so afraid was she that she would be tempted to tell her friend of the good fortune that was going to overtake her. For the girl from Sunset Ranch knew just what she was going to do.

Dud Stone had given her the address of the law firm where he was to be found, and the very next morning she went to the offices of Larribee & Polk and saw Dud. In his hands she put a sum of money and told him what she wished done. But when Dud learned that the girl had the better part of eight hundred dollars in cash with her, he took her to a bank and made her open an account at once.

“Where do you think you are—still in the wild and woolly West where pretty near everybody you meet is honest?” demanded Dud. “You ought to be shaken! That money here in the big city is a temptation to half the people you pass on the street. Suppose one of the servants at your uncle’s house should see it? You have no right to put temptation in people’s way.”

Helen accepted his scolding meekly as long as he did not refuse to carry out her plan for Sadie Goronsky. When Dud heard the full particulars of the Western girl’s acquaintanceship with Sadie, he had no criticism to offer. That very day Dud engaged the store, paid three months’ rent, and bought the furnishings. Sadie was not to be told until the store was ready for occupancy. There was still time enough. Helen knew that the millinery season did not open until February.

Meanwhile, although Helen’s goings and comings were quite ignored by Uncle Starkweather and the girls, some incidents connected with Helen Morrell had begun to stir to its depth the fountain of the family’s wrath against the girl from Sunset Ranch.

Twice May Van Ramsden had come to call on Helen. Once she had brought Ruth and Mercy De Vorne with her. And on each occasion she had demanded that Gregson take their cards to Helen.

Gregson had taken the cards up one flight and then had sent on the cards by Maggie to Helen’s room. Gregson said below stairs that he would “give notice” if he were obliged to take cards to anybody who roomed in the attic.

May and her friends trooped up the stairs in the wake of their cards, however—for so it had been arranged with Helen, who expected them on both occasions.

The anger of the Starkweather family would have been greater had they known that these calls of their own most treasured social acquaintances were really

upon the little old lady who had been shut away into the front attic suite, and whose existence even was not known to some of the servants in the Starkweather mansion.

May, as she had promised, was bringing, one or two at a time, her friends who, as children when Cornelius Starkweather was alive, had haunted this old house because they loved old Mary Boyle. And May was proving, too, to the Western girl, that all New York people of wealth were neither heartless or ungrateful. Yet the crime of forgetfulness these young women must plead to.

The visits delighted Mary Boyle. Helen knew that she slept better—after these little excitements of the calls—and did not go pattering up and down the halls with her crutch in the dead of night.

So the days passed, each one bringing so much of interest into the life of Helen Morrell that she forgot to be lonely, or to bewail her lot. She was still homesick for the ranch—when she stopped to think about it. But she was willing to wait a while longer before she flitted homeward to Big Hen and the boys.

CHAPTER XXV

THE MISSING LINK

Helen met Dud Stone and his sister on the bridle-path one morning by particular invitation. The message had come to the house for her late the evening before and had been put into the trusty hand of old Lawdor, the butler. Dud had learned the particulars of the old embezzlement charge against Prince Morrell.

“I’ve got here in typewriting the reports from three papers—everything they had to say about it for the several weeks that it was kept alive as a news story. It was not so great a crime that the metropolitan papers were likely to give much space to it,” Dud said.

“You can read over the reports at your leisure, if you like. But the main points for us to know are these:

“In the two banks were, in the names of Morrell & Grimes, something over thirty-three thousand dollars. Either partner could draw the money. The missing bookkeeper could *not* draw the money.

“The checks came to the banks in the course of the day’s business, and neither teller could swear that he actually remembered giving the money to Mr. Morrell; yet because the checks were signed in his name, and apparently in his handwriting, they both ‘thought’ it must have been Mr. Morrell who presented the checks.

“Now, mind you, Fenwick Grimes had gone off on a business trip of some duration, and Allen Chesterton had disappeared several days before the checks were drawn and the money removed from the banks.

“It was hinted by one ingenious police reporter that the bookkeeper was really the guilty man. He even raked up some story of the man at his lodgings which intimated that Chesterton had some art as an actor. Parts of disguises were found abandoned at his empty rooms. This suggestion was made: That Chesterton was a forger and had disguised himself as Mr. Morrell so as to cash the checks

without question. Then Fenwick Grimes returned and discovered that the bank balances were gone.

“At first your father was no more suspected than was Grimes himself. Then, one paper printed an article intimating that your father, the senior partner of the firm, might be the criminal. You see, the bank tellers had been interviewed. Before that the suggestion that by any possibility Mr. Morrell was guilty had been scouted. But the next day it was learned your father and mother had gone away. Immediately the bookkeeper was forgotten and the papers all seemed to agree that Prince Morrell had really stolen the money.

“Oddly enough the creditors made little trouble at first. Your Uncle Starkweather was mentioned as having been a silent partner in the concern and having lost heavily himself——”

“Poor dad was able to pay Uncle Starkweather first of all—years and years ago,” interposed Helen.

“Ah! and Grimes? Do you know if he made any claim on your father at any time?”

“I think not. You see, he was freed of all debt almost at once through bankruptcy. Mr. Grimes really had a very small financial interest in the firm. Dad said he was more like a confidential clerk. Both he and Uncle Starkweather considered Grimes a very good asset to the firm, although he had no money to put into it. That is the way it was told to me.”

“And very probable. This Grimes is notoriously sharp,” said Dud, reflectively. “And right after he went through bankruptcy he began to do business as a money-lender. Supposedly he lent other people’s money; but he is now worth a million, or more. Question is: Where did he get his start in business after the robbery and the failure of Grimes & Morrell?”

“Oh, Dud!”

“Don’t you suspect him, too?” demanded the young man.

“I—I am prejudiced, I fear.”

“So am I,” agreed Dud, with a grim chuckle. “I’m going after that man Grimes. It’s funny he should go into business with a mysterious capital right after the old firm was closed out, when before that he had had no money to invest in the firm of which he was a member.”

“I feared as much,” sighed Helen. “And he was so eager to throw suspicion on

the lost bookkeeper, just to satisfy my curiosity and put me off the track. He's as bad as Uncle Starkweather. *He* doesn't want me to go ahead because of the possible scandal, and Mr. Grimes is afraid for his own sake, I very much fear. What a wicked man he must be!"

"Possibly," said Dud, eyeing the girl sharply. "Have you told me all your uncle has said to you about the affair?"

"I think so, Dud. Why?"

"Well, nothing much. Only, in hunting through the files of the newspapers for articles about the troubles of Grimes & Morrell I came across the statement that Mr. Starkweather was in financial difficulties about the same time. *He* settled with his creditors for forty cents on the dollar. This was before your uncle came into *his* uncle's fortune, of course, and went to live on Madison Avenue."

"Well—is that significant?" asked the girl, puzzled.

"I don't know that it is. But there is something you mentioned just now that *is* of importance."

"What is that, Dud?"

"Why, the bookkeeper—Allen Chesterton. He's the missing link. If we could get him I believe the truth would easily be learned. In one newspaper story of the Grimes & Morrell trouble, it was said that Grimes and Chesterton had been close friends at one time—had roomed together in the very house from which the bookkeeper seemed to have fled a couple of days before the embezzlement was discovered."

"Would detectives be able to pick up any clue to the missing man—and missing link?" asked Helen, thoughtfully.

"It's a cold trail," Dud observed, shaking his head.

"I don't mind spending some money. I can send to Big Hen for more——"

"Of course you can. I don't believe you realize how rich you are, Helen."

"I—I never had to think about it."

"No. But about hiring a detective. I hate to waste money. Wait a few days and see if I can get on the blind side of Mr. Grimes in some way."

So the matter rested; but it was Helen herself who made the first discovery which seemed to point to a weak place in Fenwick Grimes's armor.

Helen had been once to the poor lodging of Mr. Lurcher to “mend him up”; for she was a good little needlewoman and she knew she could make the old fellow look neater. He had got his glasses, and at first could only wear them a part of the day. The doctor at the hospital gave him an ointment for his eyelids, too, and he was on a fair road to recovery.

“I can cobble shoes pretty good, Miss,” he said. “And there is work to be had at that industry in several shops in the neighborhood. Once I was a clerk; but all that is past, of course.”

Helen did not propose to let the old fellow suffer; but just yet she did not wish to do anything further for him, or Sadie might suspect that her friend, Helen, was something different from the poor girl Sadie thought she was.

After the above interview with Dud, Helen went downtown to see Sadie again; and she ran around the corner to spend a few minutes with Mr. Lurcher. As she went up the stairs she passed a man coming down. It was dark, and she could not see the person clearly. Yet Helen realized that the individual eyed her sharply, and even stopped and came part way up the stairs again to see where she went.

When she came down to the street again she was startled by almost running into Mr. Grimes, who was passing the house.

“What! what! what!” he snapped, staring at her. “What brings you down in *this* neighborhood? A nice place for Mr. Willets Starkweather’s niece to be seen in. I warrant he doesn’t know where you are?”

“You are quite right, Mr. Grimes,” Helen returned, quietly.

“What are you doing here?” asked Grimes, rather rudely.

“Visiting friends,” replied Helen, without further explanation.

“You’re still trying to rake up that old trouble of your father’s?” demanded Grimes, scowling.

“Not down here,” returned Helen, with a quiet smile. “That is sure. But I *am* doing what I can to learn all the particulars of the affair. Mr. Van Ramsden was a creditor and father’s friend, and his daughter tells me that *he* will do all in his power to help me.”

“Ha! Van Ramsden! Well, it’s little you’ll ever find out through *him*. Well! you’d much better have let me do as I suggested and cleared up the whole story in the newspapers,” growled Grimes. “Now, now! Where’s that clerk of mine, I wonder? He was to meet me here.”

And he went muttering along the walk; but Helen stood still and gazed after him in some bewilderment. For it dawned on the girl that the man who had passed her as she went up to see old Mr. Lurcher, or “Jones,” was Leggett, Fenwick Grimes’s confidential man.

CHAPTER XXVI

THEIR EYES ARE OPENED

As her cousins were not at all interested in what became of Helen during the day, neither was Helen interested in how the three Starkweather girls occupied their time. But on this particular afternoon, while Helen was visiting Lurcher, and chatting with Sadie Goronsky on the sidewalk in front of the Finkelstein shop, she would have been deeply interested in what interested the Starkweather girls.

All three chanced to be in the drawing-room when Gregson came past the door in his stiffest manner, holding the tray with a single card on it.

“Who is it, Gregson?” asked Belle. “I heard the bell ring. Somebody to see me?”

“No, mem, it his not,” declared the footman.

“Me?” said Hortense, holding out her hand. “Who is it, I wonder?”

“Nor is hit for you, mem,” repeated Gregson.

“It can’t be for *me*?” cried Flossie.

But before the footman could speak again, Belle rose majestically and crossed the room.

“I believe I know what it is,” she said, angrily. “And it is going to stop. You were going to take the card upstairs, Gregson?”

“No, mem!” said Gregson, somewhat heated. “Hi do not carry cards above the second floor.”

“It’s somebody to see Helen!” cried Flossie, clapping her hands softly and enjoying her older sister’s rage.

“Give it to me!” exclaimed Belle, snatching the card from the tray. She turned toward her sisters to read it. But when her eye lit upon the name she was for the moment surprised out of speech.

“Goodness me! who is it?” gasped Hortense.

“Jessie Stone—‘Miss Jessie Dolliver Stone.’ Goodness me!” whispered Belle.

“Not the Stones of Riverside Drive—*the* Stones?” from Hortense.

“Dud Stone’s sister?” exclaimed Flossie.

“And Dud Stone is the very nicest boy I ever met,” quoth Hortense, clasping her hands.

“I know Miss Jessie. Jess, they all call her. I saw her on the Westchester Links only last week and she never said a word about this.”

“About coming to see Helen—it isn’t possible!” cried Hortense. “Gregson, you have made a mistake.”

“Hi beg your pardon—no, mem. She asked for Miss Helen. I left ’er in the reception parlor, mem——”

“She thinks one of us is named Helen!” cried Belle, suddenly. “Show her up, Gregson.”

Gregson might have told her different; but he saw it would only involve him in more explanation; therefore he turned on his heel and in his usual stately manner went to lead Dud Stone’s sister into the presence of the three excited girls.

Jessie by no means understood the situation at the Starkweather house between Helen and her cousins. It had never entered Miss Stone’s head, in fact, that anybody could be unkind to, or dislike, “such a nice little thing as Helen Morrell.”

So she greeted the Starkweather girls in her very frankest manner.

“I really am delighted to see you again, Miss Starkweather,” Jess said, being met by Belle at the door. “And are these your sisters? I’m charmed, I am sure.”

Hortense and Flossie were introduced. The girls sat down.

“You don’t mean to say Helen isn’t here?” demanded Jess. “I came particularly to invite her to dinner to-morrow night. We’re going to have a little celebration and Dud and I are determined to have her with us.”

“Helen?” gasped Belle.

“Not Helen Morrell?” demanded Hortense.

“Why, yes—of course—your Cousin Helen. How funny! Of course she’s here? She lives with you; doesn’t she?”

“Why—er—we have a—a distant relative of poor mamma’s by that name,” said Belle, haughtily. “She—she came here quite unexpectedly—er quite uninvited, I may say. Pa is *so-o* easy, you know; he won’t send her away——”

“Send her away! Send Helen Morrell away?” gasped Jess Stone. “Are—are we talking about the same girl, I wonder? Why, Helen is a most charming girl—and pretty as a picture. And brave no end!

“Why, it was she who saved my brother’s life when he was away out West——”

“Mr. Stone never went to Montana?” cried Flossie. “He never met Helen at Sunset Ranch?”

“Be still, Floss!” commanded Belle; but Miss Stone turned to answer the younger girl.

“Of course. Dud stopped at the ranch some days, too. He had to, for he hurt his foot. That’s when Helen saved his life. He was flung from the back of a horse over the edge of a cliff and fortunately landed in the top of a tree.

“But the tree was very tall and he could not have gotten out of it safely with his wounded foot had not Helen ridden up to the brink of the precipice, thrown him a rope, and swung him out of the tree upon a ledge of rock. Then he worked his way down the side of the cliff while Helen caught his horse. But his foot hurt him so that he could never have got into the saddle alone; and Helen put him on her own pony and led the pony to the ranch house.”

“Bully for Helen!” ejaculated Flossie, under her breath. Even Hortense was flushed a bit over the story. But Belle could see nothing to admire in her cousin from the West, and she only said, harshly:

“Very likely, Miss Stone. Helen seems to be a veritable hoyden. These ranch girls are so unfortunate in their bringing up and their environment. In the wilds I presume Helen may be passable; but she is quite, quite impossible here in the city——”

“I don’t know what you mean by being ‘impossible,’” interrupted Jess Stone. “She is a lovely girl.”

“You haven’t met her?” cried Belle. “It’s only Mr. Stone’s talk.”

“I certainly *have* met her, Miss Starkweather. Certainly I know her—and know her well. Had I known when she was coming to New York I would have begged her to come to us. It is plain that her own relatives do not care much for Helen Morrell,” said the very frank young lady.

“Well—we—er——”

“Why, Helen has been meeting me in the bridle-path almost every morning. And she rides wonderfully.”

“Riding in Central Park!” cried Hortense.

“Why—why, the child has nothing decent to wear,” declared Belle. “How could she get a riding habit—or hire a horse? I do not understand this, Miss Stone, but I can tell you right now, that Helen has nothing fit to wear to your dinner party. She came here a little pauper—with nothing fit to wear in her trunk. Pa *did* find money enough for a new street dress and hat for her; but he did not feel that he could support in luxury every pauper who came here and claimed relationship with him.”

Miss Stone’s mouth fairly hung open, and her eyes were as round as eyes could be, with wonder and surprise.

“What is this you tell me?” she murmured. “Helen Morrell a pauper?”

“I presume those people out there in Montana wanted to get the girl off their hands,” said Belle, coldly, “and merely shipped her East, hoping that Pa would make provision for her. She has been a great source of annoyance to us, I do assure you.”

“A source of annoyance?” repeated the caller.

“And why not? Without a rag decent to wear. With no money. Scarcely education enough to make herself intelligibly understood——”

Flossie began to giggle. But Jessie Stone rose to her feet. This volatile, talkative girl could be very dignified when she was aroused.

“You are speaking of *my* friend, Helen Morrell,” she interrupted Belle’s flow of angry language, sternly. “Whether she is your cousin, or not, she is *my* friend, and I will not listen to you talk about her in that way. Besides, you must be crazy if you believe your own words! Helen Morrell poor! Helen Morrell uneducated!

“Why, Helen was four years in one of the best preparatory schools of the West—in Denver. Let me tell you that Denver is some city, too. And as for being poor and having nothing to wear—Why, whatever can you mean? She owns one of the few big ranches left in the West, with thousands upon thousands of cattle and horses upon it. And her father left her all that, and perhaps a quarter of a million in cash or investments beside.”

“Not Helen?” shrieked Belle, sitting down very suddenly.

“Little Helen—*rich*?” murmured Hortense.

“Does Helen really *own* Sunset Ranch?” cried Flossie, eagerly.

“She certainly does—every acre of it. Why, Dud knows all about her and all about her affairs. If you consider that girl poor and uneducated you have fooled yourselves nicely.”

“I’m glad of it! I’m glad of it!” exclaimed Flossie, clapping her hands and pirouetting about the room. “Serves you right, Belle! *I* found out she knew a whole lot more than I did, long ago. She’s been helping me with my lessons.”

“And she *is* a nice little thing,” joined in Hortense, “I don’t care what you say to the contrary, Belle. She was the only one in this house that showed me any real sympathy when I was sick——”

Belle only looked at her sisters, but could say nothing.

“And if Helen hasn’t anything fit to wear to your party to-morrow night, I will lend her something,” declared Hortense.

“You need not bother,” said Jess, scornfully. “If Helen came in the plainest and most miserable frock to be found she would be welcome. Good-day to you, Miss Starkweather—and Miss Hortense—and Miss Flossie.”

She swept out of the room and did not even need the gorgeous Gregson to show her to the door.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE PARTY

Helen chanced that evening to be entering the area door just as Mr. Starkweather himself was mounting the steps of the mansion. Her uncle recognized the girl and scowled over the balustrade at her.

“Come to the den at once; I wish to speak to you Helen—Ahem!” he said in his most severe tones.

“Yes, sir,” responded the girl respectfully, and she passed up the back stairway while Mr. Starkweather went directly to his library. Therefore he did not chance to meet either of his daughters and so was not warned of what had occurred in the house that afternoon.

“Helen,” said Uncle Starkweather, viewing her with the same stern look when she approached his desk. “I must know how you have been using your time while outside of my house? Something has reached my ear which greatly—ahem!—displeases me.”

“Why—I—I——” The girl was really at a loss what to say. She did not know what he was driving at and she doubted the advisability of telling Uncle Starkweather everything that she had done while here in the city as his guest.

“I was told this afternoon—not an hour ago—that you have been seen lurking about the most disreputable parts of the city. That you are a frequenter of low tenement houses; that you associate with foreigners and the most disgusting of beggars——”

“I wish you would stop, Uncle,” said Helen, quickly, her face flushing now and her eyes sparkling. “Sadie Goronsky is a nice girl, and her family is respectable. And poor old Mr. Lurcher is only unfortunate and half-blind. He will not harm me.”

“Beggars! Yiddish shoestring pedlars! A girl like you! Where—ahem!—*where* did you ever get such low tastes, girl?”

“Don’t blame yourself, Uncle,” said Helen, with some bitterness. “I certainly did not learn to be kind to poor people from *your* example. And I am sure I have gained no harm from being with them once in a while—only good. To help them a little has helped me—I assure you!”

But Mr. Starkweather listened not at all to this. “Where did you find these low companions?” he demanded.

“I met Sadie the night I arrived here in the city. The taxicab driver carried me to Madison Street instead of Madison Avenue. Sadie was kind to me. As for old Mr. Lurcher, I saw him first in Mr. Grimes’s office.”

Uncle Starkweather suddenly lost his color and fell back in his chair. For a moment or two he seemed unable to speak at all. Then he stammered:

“In Fenwick Grimes’s office?”

“Yes, sir.”

“What—what was this—ahem!—this beggar doing there?”

“If he is a beggar, perhaps he was begging. At least, Mr. Grimes seemed very anxious to get rid of him, and gave him a dollar to go away.”

“And you followed him?” gasped Mr. Starkweather.

“No. I went to see Sadie, and it seems Mr. Lurcher lives right in that neighborhood. I found he needed spectacles and was half-blind and I——”

“Tell me nothing more about it! Nothing more about it!” commanded her uncle, holding up a warning hand. “I will not—ahem!—listen. This has gone too far. I gave you shelter—an act of charity, girl! And you have abused my confidence by consorting with low company, and spending your time in a mean part of the town.”

“You are wrong, sir. I have done nothing of the kind,” said Helen, firmly, but growing angry herself, now. “My friends are decent people, and a poor part of the city does not necessarily mean a criminal part.”

“Hush! How dare you contradict me?” demanded her uncle. “You shall go home. You shall go back to the West at once! Ahem! At once. I could not assume the responsibility of your presence here in my house any longer.”

“Then I will find a position and support myself, Uncle Starkweather. I have told you I could do that before.”

“No, indeed!” exclaimed Mr. Starkweather, at once. “I will not allow it. You are

not to be trusted in this city. I shall send you back to that place you came from—ahem!—Sunset Ranch, is it? That is the place for a girl like you."

"But, Uncle——"

"No more! I will listen to nothing else from you," he declared, harshly. "I shall purchase your ticket through to-morrow, and the next day you must go. Ahem! Remember that I *will* be obeyed."

Helen looked at him with tear-dimmed eyes for fully a minute. But he said no more and his stern countenance, as well as his unkind words and tone, repelled her. She put out her hand once, as though to speak, but he turned away, scornfully.

It was her last attempt to soften him toward her. He might then, had he not been so selfish and haughty, have made his peace with the girl and saved himself much trouble and misery in the end. But he ignored her, and Helen, crying softly, left the room and stole up to her own place in the attic.

She could not see anybody that evening, and so did not go down to dinner. Later, to her amazement, Maggie came to her door with a tray piled high with good things—a very elaborate repast, indeed. But Helen was too heartsick to eat much, although she did not refuse the attention—which she laid to the kindness of Lawdor, the butler.

But for once she was mistaken. The tray of food did not come from Lawdor. Nor was it the outward semblance of anybody's kindness. The tray delivered at Helen's door was the first result of a great fright!

At dinner the girls could not wait for their father to be seated before they began to tell him of the amazing thing that had been revealed to them that afternoon by Jessie Stone.

"Where's Cousin Helen, Gregson?" asked Belle, before seating herself. "See that she is called. She may not have heard the gong."

If Gregson's face could display surprise, it displayed it then.

"Of course, dear Helen has returned; hasn't she?" added Hortense.

"I'll go up myself and see if she's here," Flossie suggested.

"Ahem!" said the surprised Mr. Starkweather.

"I listened sharply for her, but I did not hear her pass my door," said Hortense.

"I must ask her to come back to that spare room on the lower floor," sighed

Belle. “She is too far away from the rest of the family.”

“Girls!” gasped Mr. Starkweather, at length finding speech.

“Oh, you needn’t explode, Pa!” ejaculated Belle. “We are aware of something about Helen that changes the complexion of affairs entirely.”

“What does this mean?” demanded Mr. Starkweather, blankly. “Something about Helen?”

“Yes, indeed, Pa,” said Flossie, spiritedly. “Who do you suppose owns that Sunset Ranch she talks about?”

“And who do you suppose is worth a quarter of a million dollars—more than *you* are worth, Pa, I declare?” cried Hortense.

“Girls!” exclaimed Belle. “That is very low. If we have made a mistake regarding Cousin Helen, of course it can be adjusted. But we need not be vulgar enough to say *why* we change toward her.”

Mr. Starkweather thumped upon the table with the handle of his knife.

“Girls!” he commanded. “I will have this explained. What do you mean?”

Out it came then—in a torrent. Three girls can do a great deal of talking in a few minutes—especially if they all talk at once.

But Mr. Starkweather got the gist of it. He understood what it all meant, and he realized what it meant to *him*, as well, better than his daughters could.

Prince Morrell, whom he had always considered a bit of a fool, and therefore had not even inquired about after he left for the West, had died a rich man. He had left this only daughter, who was an heiress to great wealth. And he, Willets Starkweather, had allowed the chance of a lifetime to slip through his fingers!

If he had only made inquiries about the girl and her circumstances! He might have done that when he learned that Mr. Morrell was dead. When Helen had told him her father wished her to be in the care of her mother’s relatives, Mr. Starkweather could have then taken warning and learned the girl’s true circumstances. He had not even accepted her confidences. Why, he might have been made the guardian of the girl, and handled all her fortune!

These thoughts and a thousand others raced through the scheming brain of the man. Could he correct his fault at this late date? If he had only known of this that his daughters had learned from Jess Stone, before he had taken Helen to task as he had that very evening!

Fenwick Grimes had telephoned to him at his office. Something Mr. Grimes had said—and he had not seen Mr. Grimes nor talked personally with him for years—had put Mr. Starkweather into a great fright. He had decided that the only safe place for Helen Morrell was back in the West—he supposed with the poor and ignorant people on the ranch where her father had worked.

Where Prince Morrell had *worked*! Why, if Morrell had owned Sunset Ranch, Helen was one of the wealthiest heiresses in the whole Western country. Mr. Starkweather had asked a few questions about Sunset Ranch of men who knew. But, as the owner had never given himself any publicity, the name of Morrell was never connected with it.

While the three girls chattered over the details of the story Mr. Starkweather merely played with his food, and sat staring into a corner of the room. He was trying to scheme his way out of the difficulty—the dangerous difficulty, indeed—in which he found himself.

So, his first move was characteristic. He sent the tray upstairs to Helen. But none of the family saw Helen again that night.

However, there was another caller. This was May Van Ramsden. She did not ask for Helen, however, but for Mr. Starkweather himself, and that gentleman came graciously into the room where May was sitting with the three much excited sisters.

Belle and Hortense and Flossie were bubbling over with the desire to ask Miss Van Ramsden if *she* knew that Helen was a rich girl and not a poor one. But there was no opportunity. The caller broached the reason for her visit at once, when she saw Mr. Starkweather.

“We are going to ask a great favor of you, sir,” she said, shaking hands. “And it does seem like a very great impudence on our part. But please remember that, as children, we were all very much attached to her. You see,” pursued Miss Van Ramsden, “there are the De Vorne girls, and Jo and Nat Paisley, and Adeline Schenk, and some of the Blutcher boys and girls—although the younger ones were born in Europe—and Sue Livingstone, and Crayton Ballou. Oh! there really is a score or more.”

“Ahem!” said Mr. Starkweather, not only solemnly, but reverently. These were names he worshipped. He could have refused such young people nothing—nothing!—and would have told Miss Van Ramsden so had what she said next not stricken him dumb for the time.

“You see, some of us have called on Nurse Boyle, and found her so bright and so delighted with our coming, that we want to give her a little tea-party to-morrow afternoon. It would be so delightful to have her greet the girls and boys who used to be such friends of hers in the time of Mr. Cornelius, right up there in those cunning rooms of hers.

“We always used to see her in the nursery suite, and there are the same furniture, and hangings, and pictures, and all. And Nurse Boyle herself is just the same—only a bit older—Ah! girls!” she added, turning suddenly to the three sisters, “you don’t know what it means to have been cared for, and rocked, and sung to, when you were ill, perhaps, by Mary Boyle! You missed a great deal in not having a Mary Boyle in your family.”

“*Mary Boyle!*” gasped Mr. Starkweather.

“Yes. Can we all come to see her to-morrow afternoon? I am sure if you tell Mrs. Olstrom, your housekeeper will attend to all the arrangements. Helen knows about it, and she’ll help pour the tea. Mary thinks there is nobody quite like Helen.”

These shocks were coming too fast for Mr. Starkweather. Had anything further occurred that evening to torment him it is doubtful if he would have got through it as gracefully as he did through this call. May Van Ramsden went away assured that no obstacle would be placed in the way of Mary Boyle’s party in the attic. But neither Mr. Starkweather, nor his three daughters, could really look straight into each other’s faces for the remainder of that evening. And they were all four remarkably silent, despite the exciting things that had so recently occurred to disturb them.

In the morning Helen got an invitation from Jess Stone to dinner that evening. She said “come just as you are”; but she did not tell Helen that she had innocently betrayed her true condition to the Starkweathers. Helen wrote a long reply and sent it by special messenger through old Lawdor, the butler. Then she prepared for the tea in Mary Boyle’s rooms.

At breakfast time Helen met the family for the first time since the explosion. Self-consciousness troubled the countenances and likewise the manner of Mr. Starkweather and his three daughters.

“Ahem! A very fine morning, Helen. Have you been out for your usual ramble, my dear?”

“How-do, Helen? Hope you’re feeling quite fit.”

“Dear me, Helen! How pretty your hair is, child. You must show me how you do it in that simple way.”

But Flossie was more honest. She only nodded to Helen at first. Then, when Gregson was out of the room, she jumped up, went around the table swiftly, and caught the Western girl about the neck.

“Helen! I’m just as ashamed of myself as I can be!” she cried, her tears flowing copiously. “I treated you so mean all the time, and you have been so very, very decent about helping me in my lessons. Forgive me; will you? Oh, please say you will!”

Helen kissed her warmly. “Nothing to forgive, Floss,” she said, a little bruskly, perhaps. “Don’t let’s speak about it.”

She merely bowed and said a word in reply to the others. Nor could Mr. Starkweather’s unctuous conversation arouse her interest.

“You have a part in the very worthy effort to liven up old Nurse Boyle, I understand?” said Mr. Starkweather, graciously. “Is there anything needed that I can have sent in, Helen?”

“Oh, no, sir. I am only helping Miss Van Ramsden,” Helen replied, timidly.

“I think May Van Ramsden should have told *me* of her plans,” said Belle, tossing her head.

“Or, *me*,” rejoined Hortense.

“Pah!” snapped Flossie. “None of us ever cared a straw for the old woman. Queer old thing. I thought she was more than a little cracked.”

“Flossie!” ejaculated Mr. Starkweather, angrily, “unless you can speak with more respect for—ahem!—for a faithful old servitor of the Starkweather family, I shall have to—ahem!—ask you to leave the table.”

“You won’t have to ask me—I’m going!” exclaimed Flossie, flirting out of her chair and picking up her books. “But I want to say one thing while I’m on my way,” observed the slangy youngster: “You’re all just as tiresome as you can be! Why don’t you own up that you’d never have given the old woman a thought if it wasn’t for May Van Ramsden and her friends—and Helen?” and she beat a retreat in quick order.

It was an unpleasant breakfast for Helen, and she retired from the table as soon as she could. She felt that this attitude of the Starkweathers toward her was

really more unhappy than their former treatment. For she somehow suspected that this overpowering kindness was founded upon a sudden discovery that she was a rich girl instead of an object of charity. How well-founded this suspicion was she learned when she and Jess met.

Hortense brought her up two very elaborate frocks that forenoon, one for her to wear when she poured tea in Mary Boyle's rooms, and the other for her to put on for the Stones' dinner party.

"They will just about fit you. I'm a mite taller, but that won't matter," said the languid Hortense. "And really, Helen, I am just as sorry as I can be for the mean way you have been treated while you have been here. You have been so good-natured, too, in helping a chap. Hope you won't hold it against me—and *do* wear the dresses, dear."

"I will put on this one for the afternoon," said Helen, smiling. "But I do not need the evening dress. I never wore one quite—quite like that, you see," as she noted the straps over the shoulders and the low corsage. "But I thank you just the same."

Later Belle said to her airily: "Dear Cousin Helen! I have spoken to Gustaf about taking you to the Stones' in the limousine to-night. And he will call for you at any hour you say."

"I cannot avail myself of that privilege, Belle," responded Helen, quietly. "Jess will send for me at half-past six. She has already arranged to do so. Thank you."

There was so much going on above stairs that day that Helen was able to escape most of the oppressive attentions of her cousins. Great baskets of flowers were sent in by some of the young people who remembered and loved Mary Boyle, and Helen helped to arrange them in the little old lady's rooms.

Tea things for a score of people came in, too. And cookies and cakes from the caterer's. At three o'clock, or a little after, the callers began to arrive. Belle, and Hortense, and Flossie received them in the reception hall, had them remove their cloaks below stairs, and otherwise tried to make it appear that the function was really of their own planning.

But nobody invited either of the Starkweather girls upstairs to Mary Boyle's rooms. Perhaps it was an oversight. But it certainly *did* look as though they had been forgotten.

But the party on the attic floor was certainly a success. How pretty the little old lady looked, sitting in state with all the young and blooming faces about her!

Here were growing up into womanhood and manhood (for some of the boys had not been ashamed to come) the children whom she had tended and played with and sung to.

And she sung to them again—verses of forgotten songs, lullabies she had crooned over some of their cradles when they were ill, little broken chants that had sent many of them, many times, to sleep.

Altogether it was a most enjoyable afternoon, and Nurse Boyle was promised that it should not be the last tea-party she would have. “If you are ’way up here in the top of the house, you shall no more be forgotten,” they told her.

Helen was the object next in interest to Nurse Boyle. May Van Ramsden had told about the Starkweathers’ little “Cinderella Cousin”; and although none of these girls and boys who had gathered knew the truth about Helen’s wealth and her position in life, they all treated her cordially.

When they trooped away and left the little old lady to lie down to recuperate after the excitement, Helen went to her own room, and remained closely shut up for the rest of the day.

At half-past six she came downstairs, bag in hand. She descended the servants’ staircase, told Mr. Lawdor that her trunk, packed and locked, was ready for the expressman when he came, and so stole out of the area door. She escaped any interview with her uncle, or with the girls. She could not bid them good-by, yet she was determined not to go back to Sunset Ranch on the morrow, nor would she remain another night under her uncle’s roof.

CHAPTER XXVIII

A STATEMENT OF FACT

Dud Stone had that very day seen the fixtures put into the little millinery store downtown, and it was ready for Sadie Goronsky to take charge; there being a fund of two hundred dollars to Sadie's credit at a nearby bank, with which she could buy stock and pay her running expenses for the first few weeks.

Yet Sadie didn't know a thing about it.

This last was the reason Helen went downtown early in the morning following the little dinner party at the Stones'. At that party Helen had met the uncle, aunt, and cousins of Dud and Jess Stone, with whom the orphaned brother and sister lived, and she had found them a most charming family.

Jess had invited Helen to bring her trunk and remain with her as long as she contemplated staying in New York, and this Helen was determined to do. Even if the Starkweathers would not let the expressman have her trunk, she was prepared to blossom out now in a butterfly outfit, and take the place in society that was rightfully hers.

But Helen hadn't time to go shopping as yet. She was too eager to tell Sadie of her good fortune. Sadie was to be found—cold as the day was—pacing the walk before Finkelstein's shop, on the sharp lookout for a customer. But there were a few flakes of snow in the air, the wind from the river was very raw, and it did seem to Helen as though the Russian girl was endangering her health.

"But what can poor folks do?" demanded Sadie, hoarsely, for she already had a heavy cold. "There is nothing for me to do inside the store. If I catch a customer I make somet'ings yet. Well, we must all work!"

"Some other kind of work would be easier," suggested Helen.

"But not so much money, maybe."

"If you only had your millinery store."

“Don’t make me laugh! Me lip’s cracked,” grumbled Sadie. “Have a heart, Helen! I ain’t never goin’ to git a store like I showed you.”

Sadie was evidently short of hope on this cold day. Helen seized her arm. “Let’s go up and look at that store again,” she urged.

“Have a heart, I tell ye!” exclaimed Sadie Goronsky. “Whaddeyer wanter rub it in for?”

“Anyway, if we run it will help warm you.”

“All ri’. Come on,” said Sadie, with deep disgust, but she started on a heavy trot towards the block on which her heart had been set. And when they rounded the corner and came before the little shop window, Sadie stopped with a gasp of amazement.

Freshly varnished cases, and counter, and drawers, and all were in the store just as she had dreamed of them. There were mirrors, too, and in the window little forms on which to set up the trimmed hats and one big, pink-cheeked, dolly-looking wax bust, with a great mass of tow-colored hair piled high in the very latest mode, on which was to be set the very finest hat to be evolved in that particular East Side shop.

“Wha—wha—what——”

“Let’s go in and look at it,” said Helen, eagerly, seizing her friend’s arm again.

“No, no, no!” gasped Sadie. “We can’t. It ain’t open. Oh, oh, oh! Somebody’s got *my* shop!”

Helen produced the key and opened the door. She fairly pushed the amazed Russian girl inside, and then closed the door. It was nice and warm. There were chairs. There was a half-length partition at the rear to separate the workroom from the showroom. And behind that partition were low sewing chairs to work in, and a long work-table.

Helen led the dazed Sadie into this rear room and sat her down in one of the chairs. Then she took one facing her and said:

“Now, you sit right there and make up in your mind the very prettiest hat for *me* that you can possibly invent. The first hat you trim in this store must be for me.”

“Helen! Helen!” cried Sadie, almost wildly. “You’re crazy yet—or is it me? I don’t know what you mean——”

“Yes, you do, dear,” replied Helen, putting her arms about the other girl’s neck.

“You were kind to me when I was lost in this city. You were kind to me just for nothing—when I appeared poor and forlorn and—and a greenie! Now, I am sorry that it seemed best for me to let your mistake stand. I did not tell my uncle and cousins either, that I was not as poor and helpless as I appeared.”

“And you’re rich?” shrieked Sadie. “You’re doing this yourself? This is *your* store?”

“No, it is *your* store,” returned Helen, firmly. “Of course, by and by, when you are established and are making lots of money, if you can ever afford to pay me back, you may do so. The money is yours without interest until that time.”

“I got to cry, Helen! I got to cry!” sobbed Sadie Goronsky. “If an angel right down out of heaven had done it like you done it, I’d worship him on my knees. And you’re a rich girl—not a poor one?”

Helen then told her all about herself, and all about her adventures since coming alone to New York. But after that Sadie wanted to keep telling her how thankful she was for the store, and that Helen must come home and see mommer, and that mommer must be brought to see the shop, too. So Helen ran away. She could not bear any more gratitude from Sadie. Her heart was too full.

She went over to poor Lurcher’s lodgings and climbed the dark stairs to his rooms. She had something to tell him, as well.

The purblind old man knew her step, although she had been there but a few times.

“Come in, Miss. Yours are angel’s visits, although they are more frequent than angel’s visits are supposed to be,” he cried.

“I do hope you are keeping off the street this weather, Mr. Lurcher,” she said. “If you can mend shoes I have heard of a place where they will send work to you, and call for it, and you can afford to have a warmer and lighter room than this one.”

“Ah, my dear Miss! that is good of you—that is good of you,” mumbled the old man. “And why you should take such an interest in *me*——?”

“I feel sure that you would be interested in me, if I were poor and unhappy and you were rich and able to get about. Isn’t that so?” she said, laughing.

“Aye. Truly. And you *are* rich, my dear Miss?”

“Very rich, indeed. Father was one of the big cattle kings of Montana, and Prince

Morrell’s Sunset Ranch, they tell me, is one of the *great* properties of the West.”

The old man turned to look at her with some eagerness. “That name?” he whispered. “*Who* did you say?”

“Why—my father, Prince Morrell.”

“Your father? Prince Morrell your father?” gasped the old man, and sat down suddenly, shaking in every limb.

The girl instantly became excited, too. She stepped quickly to him and laid her hand upon his shoulder.

“Did you ever know my father?” she asked him.

“I—I once knew a Mr. Prince Morrell.”

“Was it here in New York you knew him?”

“Yes. It was years ago. He—he was a good man. I—I had not heard of him for years. I was away from the city myself for ten years—in New Orleans. I went there suddenly to take the position of head bookkeeper in a shipping firm. Then the firm failed, my health was broken by the climate, and I returned here.”

Helen was staring at him in wonder and almost in alarm. She backed away from him a bit toward the door.

“Tell me your real name!” she cried. “It’s not Lurcher. Nor is it Jones. No! don’t tell me. I know—I know! You are Allen Chesterton, who was once bookkeeper for the firm of Grimes & Morrell!”

CHAPTER XXIX

“THE WHIP HAND”

An hour later Helen and the old man hurried out of the lodging house and Helen led him across town to the office where Dudley Stone worked. At first the old man peered all about, on the watch for Fenwick Grimes or his clerk.

“They have been after me every few days to agree to leave New York. I did not know what for, but I knew Fenwick was up to some game. He always *was* up to some game, even when we were young fellows together.

“Now he is rich, and he might have found me better lodgings and something to do. But after I came back from the South and was unfit to do clerical work because of my eyes, he only threw me a dollar now and then—like throwing a bone to a starving dog.”

That explained how Helen had chanced to see the old man at Fenwick Grimes’s door on the occasion of her visit to her father’s old partner. And later, in the presence of Dudley Stone—who was almost as eager as Helen herself—the old man related the facts that served to explain the whole mystery surrounding the trouble that had darkened Prince Morrell’s life for so long.

Briefly, Allen Chesterton and Fenwick Grimes had grown up together in the same town, as boys had come to New York, and had kept in touch with each other for years. Neither had married and for years they had roomed together.

But Chesterton was a plodding bookkeeper and would never be anything else. Grimes was mad for money, but he was always complaining that he never had a chance.

His chance came through Willets Starkweather, when the latter’s brother-in-law was looking for a working partner—a man right in Grimes’s line, and who was a good salesman. Grimes got into the firm on very limited capital, yet he was a trusted member and Prince Morrell depended on his judgment in most things.

Allen Chesterton had been brought into the firm’s office to keep the books

through Grimes's influence, of course. By and by it seemed to Chesterton that his old comrade was running pretty close to the wind. The bookkeeper feared that *he* might be involved in some dubious enterprise.

There was flung in Chesterton's way (perhaps *that* was by the influence of Grimes, too) a chance to go to New Orleans to be bookkeeper in a shipping firm. He could get passage upon a vessel belonging to the firm.

He had this to decide between the time of leaving the office one afternoon and early the next morning. He took the place and bundled his things aboard, leaving a letter for Fenwick Grimes. That letter, it is needless to say, Grimes never made public. And by the time the slow craft Chesterton was on reached her destination, the firm of Grimes & Morrell had gone to smash, Morrell was a fugitive, and the papers had ceased to talk about the matter.

The true explanation of the mystery was now plain. Chesterton said that it was not himself, but Grimes, who had been successful as an amateur actor. Grimes had often disguised himself so well as different people that he might have made something by the art in a "protean turn" on the vaudeville stage.

Chesterton had known all about the thirty-three thousand dollars belonging to Morrell & Grimes in the banks. Grimes had hinted to his friend how easy it would be to sequestrate this money without Morrell knowing it. At first, evidently, Grimes had wished to use the bookkeeper as a tool.

Then he improved upon his plan. He had gotten rid of Chesterton by getting him the position at a distance. His going out of town himself had been merely a blind. He had imitated Prince Morrell so perfectly—after forging the checks in his partner's handwriting—that the tellers of the two banks had thought Morrell really guilty as charged.

"So Fenwick Grimes got thirty-three thousand dollars with which to begin business on, after the bankruptcy proceedings had freed him of all debts," said Dud Stone, reflectively. "Yet there must have been one other person who knew, or suspected, his crime."

"Who could that be?" cried Helen. "Surely Mr. Chesterton is guiltless."

"Personally I would have taken the old man's statement without his swearing to it. *That* is the confidence I have in him. I only wished it to be put into affidavit form that it might be presented to the courts—if necessary."

"If necessary?" repeated Helen, faintly.

“You see, my dear girl, you now have the whip hand,” said Dud. “You can make the man—or men—who ill-used your father suffer for the crime——”

“But, is there more than Grimes? Are you *sure*?”

“I believe that there is another who *knew*. Either legally, or morally, he is guilty. In either case he was and is a despicable man!” exclaimed Dud, hotly.

“You mean my uncle,” observed Helen, quietly. “I know you do. How do you think he benefited by this crime?”

“I believe he had a share of the money. He held Grimes up, undoubtedly. Grimes is the bigger criminal in a legal sense. But Starkweather benefited, I believe, after the fact. And *he* let your father remain in ignorance——”

“And let poor dad pay him back the money he was supposed to have lost in the smashing of the firm?” murmured Helen. “Do—do you think he was paid twice—that he got money from both Grimes and father?”

“We’ll prove that by Grimes,” said the fledgling lawyer who, in time, was likely to prove himself a successful one indeed.

He sent for Mr. Grimes to come to see him on important business. When the money-lender arrived, Dud got him into a corner immediately, showed the affidavit, and hinted that Starkweather had divulged something.

Immediately Grimes accused Helen’s uncle of exactly the part in the crime Dud had suspected him of committing. After the affair blew over and Grimes had set up in business, Starkweather had come to him and threatened to tell certain things which he knew, and others that he suspected, unless he was given the money he had originally invested in the firm of Grimes & Morrell.

“I shut his mouth. That’s all he took—his rightful share; but I’ve got his receipts, and I can make it look bad for him. And I *will* make it look bad for that old stiff-and-starched hypocrite if he lets me be driven to the wall.”

This defiance of Fenwick Grimes closed the case as far as any legal proceedings were concerned. The matter of recovering the money from Grimes would have to be tried in the civil courts. All the creditors of the firm were satisfied. To get Grimes indicted for his old crime would be a difficult matter in New York County.

“But you have the whip hand,” Dud Stone told the girl from Sunset Ranch again. “If you want satisfaction, you can spread the story broadcast by means of the newspapers, and you will involve Starkweather in it just as much as you will

Grimes. And between you and me, Helen, I think Willets Starkweather richly deserves just that punishment.”

CHAPTER XXX

HEADED WEST

Just at this time Helen Morrell wasn't thinking at all about wreaking vengeance upon those who might have ill-treated her when she was alone in the great city. Instead, her heart was made very tender by the delightful things that were being done for her by those who loved and admired the sturdy little girl from Sunset Ranch.

In the first place, Jess and Dud Stone, and their cousins, gave Helen every chance possible to see the pleasanter side of city life. She had gone shopping with the girls and bought frocks and hats galore. Indeed, she had had to telegraph to Big Hen for more money. She got the money; but likewise she received the following letter:

> "Dear Snuggy:—
>
> "We lets colts get inter the alfalfa an' kick up their heels for a while; but they got to steady down and come home some time. Ain't you kicked up your heels sufficient in that lonesome city? And it looks like somebody was getting money away from you—or have you learnt to spend it down East there? Come on home, Snuggy! The hull endurin' ranch is jest a-honin' for you. Sing's that despondint I expects to see him cut off his pigtail. Jo-Rab has gone back on his rice-and-curry rations, the Greasers don't plunk their mandolins no more, and the punchers are as sorry lookin' as winter-kept steers. Come back, Snuggy, and liven up the old place, is the sincere wish of, yours warmly,
>
> "HENRY BILLINGS."

Helen only waited to see some few matters cleared up before she left for the West. As it happened, Dud Stone obtained a chance to represent a big corporation for some months, in Elberon and Helena. His smattering of legal knowledge was sufficient to enable him to accept the job. It was a good chance for Jess to go out, too, and try the climate and the life, over both of which her

brother was so enthusiastic.

But she would go to Sunset Ranch to remain for some time if Helen went West with them and—of course—Helen was only too glad to agree to such a proposition.

Meanwhile the Western girl was taken to museums, and parks, and theaters, and all kinds of show places, and thoroughly enjoyed herself. May Van Ramsden and others of those who had attended Mary Boyle's tea party in the attic of the Starkweather house hunted Helen out, too, in the home of her friends on Riverside Drive, and the last few weeks of Helen's stay were as wonderful and exciting as the first few weeks had been lonely and sad.

Dud had insisted upon publishing the facts of the old trouble which had come upon the firm of Grimes & Morrell, in pamphlet form, including Allen Chesterton's affidavit, and this pamphlet was mailed to the creditors of the old firm and to all of Prince Morrel's old friends in New York. But nothing was said in the printed matter about Willets Starkweather.

Fenwick Grimes took a long trip out of town, and made no attempt to put in an answer to the case. But Mr. Starkweather was a very much frightened man.

Dud came home one afternoon and advised Helen to go and see her uncle. Since her departure from the Starkweather mansion she had seen neither the girls nor Uncle Starkweather himself.

"He doesn't know what you are going to do with him. He brought the money he received from your father to my office; but, of course, I would not accept it. You've got the whip hand, Helen——"

"But I do not propose to crack the whip, Dud," declared the Western girl, quickly.

"You're a good chap, Snuggy!" exclaimed Dud, warmly, and Helen smiled and forgave him for using the intimate nickname.

But Helen went across town the very next day and called upon her uncle. This time she mounted the broad stone steps, instead of descending to the basement door.

Gregson opened the door and, by his manner, showed that even with the servants the girl from Sunset Ranch was upon a different footing in her uncle's house. Mr. Starkweather was in his den and Helen was ushered into the room without crossing the path of any other member of the family.

“Helen!” he ejaculated, when he saw her, and to tell the truth the girl was shocked by his changed appearance. Mr. Starkweather was quite broken down. The cloud of scandal that seemed to be menacing him had worn his pomposity to a thread, and his dignified “Ahem!” had quite disappeared.

Indeed, to see this once proud and selfish man fairly groveling before the daughter of the man he had helped injure in the old times, was not a pleasant sight. Helen cut the interview as short as she could.

She managed to assure Uncle Starkweather that he need have no apprehension. That he had known all the time Grimes was guilty, and that he had benefited from that knowledge, was the sum and substance of Willets Starkweather’s connection with the old crime. At that time he had been, as Dud Stone learned, in serious financial difficulties. He used the money received from Grimes’s ill-gotten gains, to put himself on his feet.

Then had come the death of old Cornelius Starkweather and the legacy. After that, when Prince Morrell sent Starkweather the money he was supposed to have lost in the bankruptcy of Grimes & Morrell, Starkweather did not dare refuse it. He feared always that it would be discovered he had known who was really guilty of the embezzlement.

Flossie met Helen in the hall and hugged her. “Don’t you go away mad at me, Helen,” she cried. “I know we all treated you mean; but—but I guess I wouldn’t act that way again, to any girl, no matter what Belle does.”

“I do not believe you would, Floss,” agreed Helen, kissing her warmly.

“And are you really going back to that lovely ranch?”

“Very soon. And some time, if you care to and your father will let you, I’ll be glad to have you come out there for a visit.”

“Bully for you, Helen! I’ll surely come,” cried Flossie.

Hortense was on hand to speak to her cousin, too. “You are much too nice a girl to bear malice, I am sure, Helen,” she said. “But we do not deserve very good treatment at your hands. I hope you will forgive us and, when you come to New York again, come to visit us.”

“I am sure you would not treat me again as you did this time,” said Helen, rather sternly.

“You can be sure we wouldn’t. Not even Belle. She’s awfully sorry, but she’s too proud to say so. She wants father to bring old Mary Boyle downstairs into the

old nursery suite that she used to occupy when Uncle Cornelius was alive; only the old lady doesn't want to come. She says she's only a few more years at best to live and she doesn't like changes."

Helen saw the nurse before she left the house, and left the dear old creature very happy indeed. Helen was sure Nurse Boyle would never be so lonely again, for her friends had remembered her.

Even Mrs. Olstrom, the housekeeper, came to shake hands with the girl who had been tucked away into an attic bedroom as "a pauper cousin." And old Mr. Lawdor fairly shed tears when he learned that he was not likely to see Helen again.

There were other people in the great city who were sorry to see Helen Morrell start West. Through Dud Stone, Allen Chesterton had been found light work and a pleasant boarding place. There would always be a watchful eye upon the old man—and that eye belonged to Miss Sadie Goronsky—rather, "S. Goron, Milliner," as the new sign over the hat shop door read.

"For you see," said Miss Sadie, with a toss of her head, "there ain't no use in advertisin' it that you are a Yid. *That* don't do no good, as I tell mommer. Sure, I'm proud I'm a Jew. We're the greatest people in the world yet. But it ain't good for business.

"Now, 'Goron' sounds Frenchy; don't it, Helen? And when I get a-going down here good, I'll be wantin' some time to look at a place on Fift' Av'ner, maybe. 'Madame Goron' would be dead swell—yes? But you put the 'sky' to it and it's like tying a can to a dog's tail. There ain't nowhere to go then but *home*," declared this worldly wise young girl.

Helen had dinner again with the Goronskys, and Sadie's mother could not do enough to show her fondness for her daughter's benefactor. Sadie promised to write to Helen frequently and the two girls—so much alike in some ways, yet as far apart as the poles in others—bade each other an affectionate farewell.

The next day Helen Morrell and her two friends, Dud and Jess Stone, were headed West. That second trip across the continent was a very different journey for Helen than the first had been.

She and Jess Stone had become the best of friends. And as the months slid by the two girls—Helen, a product of the West, and Jessie, a product of the great Eastern city—became dearer and dearer companions.

As for Dud—of course he was always hanging around. His sister sometimes

wondered—and that audibly—how he found time for business, he was so frequently at Sunset Ranch. This was only said, however, in wicked enjoyment of his discomfiture—and of Helen's blushes.

For by that time it was an understood thing about Sunset Ranch that in time Dud was going to have the right to call its mistress "Snuggy" for all the years of her life—just as her father had. And Helen, contemplating this possibility, did not seem to mind.

THE END

SOMETHING ABOUT
AMY BELL MARLOWE
AND HER BOOKS FOR GIRLS

In these days, when the printing presses are turning out so many books for girls that are good, bad and indifferent, it is refreshing to come upon the works of such a gifted authoress as Miss Amy Bell Marlowe, who is now under contract to write exclusively for Messrs. Grosset & Dunlap.

In many ways Miss Marlowe's books may be compared with those of Miss Alcott and Mrs. Meade, but all are thoroughly modern and wholly American in scene and action. Her plots, while never improbable, are exceedingly clever, and her girlish characters are as natural as they are interesting.

On the following pages will be found a list of Miss Marlowe's books. Every girl in our land ought to read these fresh and wholesome tales. They are to be found at all booksellers. Each volume is handsomely illustrated and bound in cloth, stamped in colors. Published by Grosset & Dunlap, New York. A free catalogue of Miss Marlowe's books may be had for the asking.

THE OLDEST OF FOUR

"I don't see any way out!"

It was Natalie's mother who said that, after the awful news had been received that Mr. Raymond had been lost in a shipwreck on the Atlantic. Natalie was the oldest of four children, and the family was left with but scant means for support.

"I've got to do something—yes, I've just got to!" Natalie said to herself, and what the brave girl did is well related in "The Oldest of Four; Or, Natalie's Way Out." In this volume we find Natalie with a strong desire to become a writer. At first she contributes to a local paper, but soon she aspires to larger things, and comes in contact with the editor of a popular magazine. This man becomes her warm friend, and not only aids her in a literary way but also helps in a hunt for the missing Mr. Raymond.

Natalie has many ups and downs, and has to face more than one bitter disappointment. But she is a plucky girl through and through.

“One of the brightest girls’ stories ever penned,” one well-known author has said of this book, and we agree with him. Natalie is a thoroughly lovable character, and one long to be remembered. Published as are all the Amy Bell Marlowe books, by Grosset & Dunlap, New York, and for sale by all booksellers. Ask your dealer to let you look the volume over.

THE GIRLS OF HILLCREST FARM

“We’ll go to the old farm, and we’ll take boarders! We can fix the old place up, and, maybe, make money!”

The father of the two girls was broken down in health and a physician had recommended that he go to the country, where he could get plenty of fresh air and sunshine. An aunt owned an abandoned farm and she said the family could live on this and use the place as they pleased. It was great sport moving and getting settled, and the boarders offered one surprise after another. There was a mystery about the old farm, and a mystery concerning one of the boarders, and how the girls got to the bottom of affairs is told in detail in the story, which is called, “The Girls of Hillcrest Farm; Or, The Secret of the Rocks.”

It was great fun to move to the farm, and once the girls had the scare of their lives. And they attended a great “vendue” too.

“I just had to write that story—I couldn’t help, it,” said Miss Marlowe, when she handed in the manuscript. “I knew just such a farm when I was a little girl, and oh! what fun I had there! And there was a mystery about that place, too!”

Published, like all the Marlowe books, by Grosset & Dunlap, New York, and for sale wherever good books are sold.

A LITTLE MISS NOBODY

“Oh, she’s only a little nobody! Don’t have anything to do with her!”

How often poor Nancy Nelson heard those words, and how they cut her to the

heart. And the saying was true, she *was* a nobody. She had no folks, and she did not know where she had come from. All she did know was that she was at a boarding school and that a lawyer paid her tuition bills and gave her a mite of spending money.

“I am going to find out who I am, and where I came from,” said Nancy to herself, one day, and what she did, and how it all ended, is absorbingly related in “A Little Miss Nobody; Or, With the Girls of Pinewood Hall.” Nancy made a warm friend of a poor office boy who worked for that lawyer, and this boy kept his eyes and ears open and learned many things.

The book tells much about boarding school life, of study and fun mixed, and of a great race on skates. Nancy made some friends as well as enemies, and on more than one occasion proved that she was “true blue” in the best meaning of that term.

Published by Grosset & Dunlap, New York, and for sale by booksellers everywhere. If you desire a catalogue of Amy Bell Marlowe books send to the publishers for it and it will come free.

THE GIRL FROM SUNSET RANCH

Helen was very thoughtful as she rode along the trail from Sunset Ranch to the View. She had lost her father but a month before, and he had passed away with a stain on his name—a stain of many years’ standing, as the girl had just found out.

“I am going to New York and I am going to clear his name!” she resolved, and just then she saw a young man dashing along, close to the edge of a cliff. Over he went, and Helen, with no thought of the danger to herself, went to the rescue.

Then the brave Western girl found herself set down at the Grand Central Terminal in New York City. She knew not which way to go or what to do. Her relatives, who thought she was poor and ignorant, had refused to even meet her. She had to fight her way along from the start, and how she did this, and won out, is well related in “The Girl from Sunset Ranch; Or, Alone in a Great City.”

This is one of the finest of Amy Bell Marlowe’s books, with its true-to-life scenes of the plains and mountains, and of the great metropolis. Helen is a girl all readers will love from the start.

Published by Grosset & Dunlap, New York, and for sale by booksellers everywhere.

WYN’S CAMPING DAYS

“Oh, girls, such news!” cried Wynifred Mallory to her chums, one day. “We can go camping on Lake Honotonka! Isn’t it grand!”

It certainly was, and the members of the Go-Ahead Club were delighted. Soon they set off, with their boy friends to keep them company in another camp not far away. Those boys played numerous tricks on the girls, and the girls retaliated, you may be sure. And then Wyn did a strange girl a favor, and learned how some ancient statues of rare value had been lost in the lake, and how the girl’s father was accused of stealing them.

“We must do all we can for that girl,” said Wyn. But this was not so easy, for the girl campers had many troubles of their own. They had canoe races, and one of them fell overboard and came close to drowning, and then came a big storm, and a nearby tree was struck by lightning.

“I used to love to go camping when a girl, and I love to go yet,” said Miss Marlowe, in speaking of this tale, which is called, “Wyn’s Camping Days; Or, The Outing of the Go-Ahead Club.” “I think all girls ought to know the pleasures of summer life under canvas.”

A book that ought to be in the hands of all girls. Issued by Grosset & Dunlap, New York, and for sale by booksellers everywhere.

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