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A Little Girl in Old San Francisco



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CHAPTER I FROM MAINE TO CALIFORNIA

It was a long journey for a little girl, so long indeed that the old life had almost faded from her mind, and seemed like something done in another existence. When she was younger still she had once surprised her mother by saying, "Mother, where did I live before I came here?" The pale, care-worn woman had glanced at her in vague surprise and answered rather fretfully, "Why, nowhere, child."

"Oh, but I remember things," said the little girl with a confident air, looking out of eyes that seemed to take an added shade from her present emotions.

"Nonsense! You can't remember things that never happened. That's imagining them, and it isn't true. If you told them they would be falsehoods. There, go out and get me a basket of chips."

She was afraid of telling falsehoods, most of those rigid people called them by their plain name, "lies," and whipped their children. So the little girl kept them to herself; she was a very good and upright child as a general thing and knew very little about her tricky father. But she went on imagining. Especially when she studied geography, which she was extravagantly fond of, yet she could never quite decide which country she had lived in.

Through those months of journeying in the big vessel over strange waters, for she had been born in an inland hamlet with a great woods of hemlock, spruce, and fir behind the little cottage, and two or three small creeks wandering about, she had many strange thoughts. Though at first she was quite ill, but Uncle Jason was the best nurse in the world, and presently she began to run about and get acquainted. There were only a few women passengers. One middle-aged, with a son sixteen, who was working his way; a few wives emigrating with their husbands, three women friends who were in the hope of finding an easier life and perhaps husbands, though they hardly admitted that to each other.

She often sat in Uncle Jason's lap, hugged up to his breast. Of course, her mother had been his sister, they had settled upon that, and he did not contradict. She was lulled by the motion of the vessel and often fell asleep, but in her waking moments these were the memories that were growing more vague and getting tangled up with various things.

Her father had taught school at South Berwick the winter she could recall most readily, and came home on Saturday morning, spending most of the time at the store. Woodville was only a sort of hamlet, though it had a church, a school, and a general store. Sometimes he would go back on Sunday, but oftener early Monday morning. Then late in the summer he was home for a while, and went away after talks with her mother that did not always seem pleasant. He took very little notice of her, in her secret heart she felt afraid of him, though he was seldom really cross to her. And then he went away and did not appear again until the winter, when there seemed a great deal of talking and business, and he brought a boxful of clothes for them, and seemed in excellent spirits. He was in business in Boston, and would move them all there at once, if grandmother would consent, but she was old, and had had a stroke, and could not get about without a cane. The old house was hers and she would finish out her days there. Of course, then, her mother could not go. She had a new, warm woollen frock and a cloak that was the envy of the other children, and absolute city shoes that she could only wear on Sunday, and, of course, were presently outgrown.

She studied up everything she could concerning Boston, but her mother would not talk about it. In the summer, grandmother had another stroke and then was bedridden. It was a poor little village, and everybody had hard work to live, summers were especially busy, and winters were long and hard. Grandmother was fretful, and wandered a little in her mind. Now and then a neighbor came in to spell Mrs. Westbury, and there was always some mysterious talking that her mother did not care for her to hear. Grandmother lived more than a year and was a helpless burden at the last. After she had gone the poor mother sank down, overwhelmed with trouble. David Westbury had persuaded the old lady to sign over the house for a business venture he was to make in Boston that would put him on the road to fortune. And now it was found that he had decamped, that there had been no business but speculating, and she no longer had a home for herself and her child.

They were very poor. People bore straits bravely in those days and suffered in silence. The poor mother grew paler and thinner and had a hard cough. In the spring they would be homeless. By spring she would be – and what would happen to the child! A little bound-out girl, perhaps.

Laverne was not taken into these sorrowful confidences. She did not go to school, her mother needed to be waited upon. One bright afternoon she went out to skate on the creek. The school children joined her, and it was almost dark when they started for home. The little girl's heart upbraided her, but she had carried in the last armful of wood, and had not told her mother. What would they do to-morrow!

She went in hesitatingly. Oh, how good and warm the room felt and two candles were burning. A man sat beside the stove with a sort of frank, bright, yet weather-beaten face, a mop of chestnut-colored hair, a beard growing up to his very mouth, but with the brightest blue eyes she had ever seen, merry blue eyes, too, that looked as if there was just a twinkle back of the lashes.

"This is my little girl, Laverne," said her mother. "We have always called her Verne, seeing there were three of the same name. And this is" – the mother's tone had a curious tremble in it, as if she caught her breath – "this is Uncle Jason."

The first glance made them friends. They both smiled. She was like her mother in the young days, and had the same dimple in her cheek, and the one in her chin where the children used to hold a buttercup. She put out both hands. They had been so lonely, so poor, and she was glad all over with a strange feeling, just as if they had come to better times.

What a supper they had! She was very hungry. She had been quite used to eating bread and molasses, or a little moist brown sugar. And here was a great chunk of butter on the edge of her plate, and the room was fragrant with the smell of broiled ham.

If she had known anything about fairies she would have believed in enchantment at once. And there was part of a splendid cake, and orange jam, and she could hardly make it real. No neighbor had known all their straits, and the little girl had borne them as bravely as her mother. Then, so many people had pinches in the winter, for crops were often poor.

She helped her mother with the dishes and then she sat down on a stool beside Uncle Jason. Presently, her head sank on his knee and she went fast asleep. She never heard a word of what her mother and Uncle Jason were saying.

At nine o'clock he carried her into the bedroom and laid her on the bed, and she never woke up while her mother undressed her. He went over to the store where he had bargained for a room. The storekeeper, Mr. Lane, had been as much surprised to see Mr. Chadsey as Mrs. Westbury. He had been born in the old town and his romance had blossomed and blighted here.

"Now, I tell you," Seth Lane said to his wife, when the store was shut and they were preparing for bed, "if that scalawag Westbury was dead there'd be a weddin' in this town straight away. My, how Chadsey was cut up over hearin' his mean villainy an' gettin' hold of the house! I never b'lieved the old woman knew what she was about. And Chadsey's come back in the nick o' time, for I don't b'lieve she'll go through March."

Jason Chadsey planned for their comfort, and went to Boston the next day, but could find no trace of David Westbury, dead or alive.

As for the little girl, when she woke up in the morning she thought she had had the loveliest dream that could ever haunt one. But when she saw the bountiful breakfast she was amazed to the last degree.

"Was Uncle Jason really here?" she asked timidly. She was quite sure her mother had been crying.

"Yes, dear. He has gone to Boston and will be back in a few days. Oh, Laverne, I hope you will learn to love him. Some day, when you are older, you will understand why he came back, and he will be your best friend when" – when I am gone, she was about to say, but checked herself, and substituted "all your life. When I was a little girl he was a kind and generous big boy. Then he went to sea, and was back only a few times. For years I had heard nothing from him – he has been round the world, everywhere. And he has a big, tender heart – "

"Oh, I am sure I shall be glad to love him. Why, you seem to go right to his heart;" and the child's face glowed with enthusiasm.

"Yes, yes." She began to cough and sat down suddenly, putting her handkerchief to her mouth.

"The salt, quick, Verne," she gasped.

She lay on the old wooden settee and stuffed her mouth full of salt.

"Oh, what can I do?" cried the child, in mild alarm.

"Run for Aunt Cynthia Beers. Tell her to come quick."

The neighbor, who was the village nurse, came back with the child. Then she was despatched for the doctor. He shook his head gravely.

"Doctor, you must keep me alive a little while longer," she pleaded.

"Oh, you are good for some time yet, only you must not make the slightest exertion. Cynthia, how long can you stay?"

"Ten days or so. Then I have to go over on the Creek," she answered laconically.

"That will do." Then he gave sundry charges to Miss Beers, and left the remedies she was to use, but that lady knew what was meant.

Mrs. Westbury beckoned the nurse to her when he had gone.

"Don't tell Laverne," she said. "Don't say anything about – "

"That's cruel. Why, she ought to know and be prepared."

"No, no; I will not have a word said. I cannot explain, no one can. And if she took it hard, don't you see, it would drive me wild and shorten my days. I'm all worn out. And she will be provided for."

Everybody was kind and solicitous, sending in cooked food, offering to sit up at night, but Miss Beers was equal to all demands. The sick woman really did improve. Laverne hovered about her mother, read to her out of her geography and Peter Parley's history, as well as the sweetest hymns out of the hymn book. Jimmy Cox came over and did the chores, provided the wood, took Verne out on his sled, and the days passed along. Jason Chadsey returned. Miss Beers had to go her way, and a neighbor came in to do what was needed. One day, before the minister and the Squire, she gave her child to Jason Chadsey, who promised to care for her and educate her, and keep her from all harm.

"You both know that I loved her mother and would gladly have married her in the old days, but untoward fate intervened. I could find no trace of the child's father. She has no near relatives to care for her, so I shall be father to her, and Heaven may judge me at the last."

He was holding the child on his knee that evening, "You are to be my little girl always," he said, with tender solemnity. "You shall be made happy as a little bird. And if you will only love me – "

"Oh, I shall, I do. And will you stay here? Mother will be so glad. She was longing so to have you come back. You will never go away again?"

"Never from you, my little girl;" and he kissed the child's trust into perfect belief.

There were two more alarms, then the frail life went out peacefully. The child was stunned. It had seemed right for grandmother to leave a world that she was forgetting about, but Laverne could not understand all the mystery. Her mother had always been quiet and reserved, it was the fashion in those days, and the child could not miss the things she had never had. And neither could she ever have understood her sorrow over the great mistake in giving her such a father. But Heaven had helped her to make amends, for the child was the embodiment of her own youth. It was all she had and she gave it to the man who had loved her sincerely, glad and thankful that she was not to be left to the uncertain charity of the world.

The frightened child clung very closely to him. The worn furniture and bedding were distributed among the neighbors, a few keepsakes collected, a few good-bys said, and good wishes given, and they went first to Boston and then to New York. Then they were to go to the wonderful land of gold and sunshine, California. They found it on the map. And there was the long, long sail, and the little girl was going far away from the only sorrow of her life, that was so strangely mingled with the only dear love. For while the other had been hedged about with the severe training of the times, afraid of sinfulness in indulging in what was called carnal affections, even in loving a child, now she had the utmost tenderness lavished upon her. She had no one but him, and that was a continual joy and kept his heart at high tide. She was all his.

Later she was to know about the young love between them, and how when her mother was just fifteen he had shipped for three years aboard a merchantman. They had sailed about the Eastern seas, bought and sold, and at last started for home, to be wrecked, and nearly all had perished. Of the few saved there were no tidings of Jason Chadsey. Laverne waited and hoped and came to her twentieth birthday. David Westbury was considered a smart young man. He had been a clerk in a store, he had worked on a newspaper, and taught school, and could turn his hand to a good many things. He had a smooth tongue, too, and a certain polish in his manner above the country youths. Grandmother espoused his cause at once. Jason Chadsey was dead, lovers were not so plentiful in these small places, where the enterprising young men went away. It was hard to stand out against one's own mother, and all the years to come to be taunted as an old maid. And so Laverne married David Westbury, and when her little girl was a month old he came back not altogether penniless, but it was too late.

He had roamed about the world a good deal. He had made money, and spent it freely, lost some of it, helped friends in distress. Now, he was going out to that wonderful land that had been the dream of the Spaniard, and another nation had brought the dream true. He would visit the little old village once more, and see how it had fared with his early love and his old friends, and then say good-bye forever. And knowing she was near to death, Laverne Westbury told him her sad story, and he read between the broken sentences that he had been her early love, her only love.

So they whiled the time away, the man's dreams growing more vivid, the child's fading. They passed strange countries, there were seas of peerless blue, seas of emerald green, then strange colors commingled. There were cloudless skies and broad sheets of sunshine that seemed to envelop the whole world in a blaze; there were nights of such glowing stars as one seldom sees on land, there were gray days with sullen winds, and storms that sent a thrill to the stoutest hearts, when the vessel groaned and creaked and the women cried in terror. But Laverne only crept closer in Uncle Jason's arms and felt safe.

They stopped here and there at a port, places they hunted up on the map, cities that seemed marvels to the little girl, shores with waving blooming forests and almost steaming fragrance. Strange birds, strange many-hued fish, darting hither and thither, seaweed that in the sunshine looked like masses of bloom, or living things swimming about. Curious people, too, speaking

languages no little girl could understand, then leaving the warmth, and shivering with blasts of cold air, wonderful islands and capes jutting out – some bleak and bare and rocky, others shining in verdure and waving smiles of welcome, it seemed; going safely round the Horn with half their journey done and finding more wonders, great mountain ranges, shores thickly studded with islands, natives swimming about like fishes, queer, half ruinous old Spanish towns, and when they stopped at a port, such a clatter of tongues, such a screaming of voices, such a confusion, one was glad to get out of it to lovely, enchanting peace once more.

Warmer grew the air with a languorous, permeating fragrance. Moonlight silvering the water that leaped softly up and down as if playing hide and seek with the next wave. All the boundless space lighted with it, going round the world, swelling, decreasing, a golden crescent, then a pale gibbous thing and afterward darkness when the ship crept softly along.

If one came in near the shore it was like the blast of a furnace. Then, passing the equator with the queer ceremony among the sailors, and looking across at the little neck of land joining the two countries, past Central America, which the little girl insisted made three Americas. She had listened to the tales of the early explorers and their cruel lust for gold until she had shuddered.

"Uncle Jason, are you going for gold in California, and will the people murder whole nations and rob them? I would rather not have the gold."

"No, my little girl; and the country that has the gold belongs to us. But it has many other delightful things as well. It is not like bleak Maine."

"What a strange journey it has been, and oh, how beautiful most of the time. I do not believe I shall ever be afraid of storms again."

"You have made a most excellent sailor. It will seem queer to be on land again. You will keep your sea legs for some time to come."

"Sea legs?" She laughed inquiringly.

"The faculty one acquires of walking with the roll of the ship. Sailors always do it on land. And you will see that you have an inclination to go from side to side as if the street was hardly wide enough;" and he looked at her out of humorous eyes.

He had a way of nearly shutting one eye, which gave an absolutely funny expression to his face. He had buffeted so many storms and narrow escapes that he looked fully ten years beyond his age, which was but thirty-five. He had a tall, vigorous frame, with a little stoop in the shoulders and a way of sitting down all in a heap. The little girl told him he made a cave for her to sit in. Every day she loved him more dearly, and to him she was the one thing that brightened his way and gave him new aims. He had been going to California simply to see a strange and new land. He had not been won by the wonderful tales of gold, he had cared very little for wealth. But now he would make a fortune for her and have it so safely invested that she should not come to want if she lived to be old. He could never forget the afternoon he had come to Laverne Westbury's home, that she had been warned to leave in the spring, and found her almost on the verge of starvation, too proud to keep asking charity, worn out and disheartened, with only the county house looming before her. Little Verne should never know this, never suffer as her mother had done.

And this was one reason he led her thoughts away from the old life. She was too young to know that he had loved her mother, she took the relationship for granted. And even on the long voyage there had been so much to entertain her. The only child on board, and a winsome one at that, she had been a universal favorite; and Jason Chadsey hardly less so. The trio, as the three single women had been dubbed, though the married ones often said "the old maids," after a little, established very friendly relations with Mr. Chadsey. Miss Holmes was past thirty, and had worn herself almost out teaching school. A sea voyage had been prescribed to avoid consumption, that scourge of the eastern towns. She had gained in health and strength, and certainly in looks. When she found the little girl and her uncle poring over their old map, she brought out some of her school books, to Laverne's great delight. Among them was the story of the Argonauts that caught the

young imagination, and even Dick Folsom became interested in the various explorers who had dreamed of gold and of the straight route to China. Miss Gaines had been a dressmaker until a troublesome pain in her side warned her to seek a different occupation, and Miss Alwood had kept house, done nursing, and they had planned to make better fortunes in the new country, where there were fewer women. Mrs. Dawson was going out to meet her husband, who had been among the "Forty-miners," and now kept a sort of lodging ranch, that with her help could be transformed into a regular hotel, much in demand at that time.

And so they had made quite a little colony on shipboard. Slowly they came up the Pacific Coast, past the long peninsula of Southern California, and there, fairly in sight, was the Golden Gate.

CHAPTER II

OLD SAN FRANCISCO

Was it any wonder the old explorers missed the narrow outlet from the great bay when the hills from the farther shore cast a great gloomy shadow, and dreary rocks flanked the shore, inhabited by cormorants and auks and gulls, screaming out their discordant music? What if the tide did run out sweeping like a torrent – were they going to breast the danger back of it? Was the great rocky point worth their consideration? In the islands off the shore seals and sea lions had it all their own way and basked and frolicked in the sunshine.

It had changed then, in the early fifties, but half a century has almost forgotten the bareness of it then. And yet it was magnificent in the October sunset as the old ship made its way, puffing from the strains of its long journey. They had nearly all huddled on deck to view their land of promise. There are few enthusiastic emigrants now, everything is viewed with commercial eyes. Afar to the westward stretched the magnificent ocean, a sheet of billowy ranges tipped with molten gold, changing to a hundred iridescent tints and throwing up the gold again in prodigal fashion, sweeping it over to foreign seas. And, on the other hand, the mile-wide gap, the gateway to the wonderful land, tranquil enough now, with frowning rocks like the cave of Scylla on the one hand, that was to be transformed into a wonderful city. They are piloted through to the great magnificent bay that seems endless at the first glance of its seventy miles. Northward long lines of rolling hills, purple and blue and black, with glints of the setting sun fighting the shadows like some strange old gods with their fire-tipped arrows. At the south it fades into misty dreamland. Red Rock stands up defiant. And so they look at their new country and then at each other. There is shipping at the rude wharves, and they find a place to anchor, but it is too late to look for a home and so they make themselves content. But if they thought they were coming to great space, and semi-loneliness they were mistaken and confused by the noise and tumult, the crowds, the bustle of business, the people of all countries it seemed.

"Why, I had no idea," the women said to one another. "The place must be overcrowded."

What chance was there then for women who had come to seek their fortunes?

They soon found that San Francisco was the stopping place of nearly every nation, and yet there was room for more, and work for those willing to do it.

Mr. Dawson came down to meet his wife the next morning, and was made acquainted with the little party that had become such friends in their long journey.

"We can take some of you in if you will accept the accommodations," he said cordially. "They might be worse," with a shrug of the shoulders. "Luckily, I escaped being burnt out. Will you come and take a view of our town?"

What an odd place it was, built on the hills like Rome. On the ocean side great frowning rocks that suggested fortresses. At the extreme end, the highest of hills, the city began, and it spread out over little valleys and other hills, sloping to the busy, beautiful bay. And it seemed right in the heart of it lay devastation, débris and ashes. Hundreds of men were clearing, laying foundations again, rearing new structures.

"It was an awful fire," explained their guide. "We had thought fireproof bricks and iron-bound structures would at least stay the devastating hand of destruction, and even that proved useless. But for the loss one might have enjoyed the magnificent spectacle of the immense fiery field. The fierce roar of the flames, the shouts and shrieks of the flying people, the glowing crackling mass sending spires up to the very sky, it seemed, was something we shall never forget. It was said to have been visible a hundred miles away."

The ruins were startling even now. Then the party turned, crossed Market Street and came into Spear Street. Here there was a rambling frame building that had been added to several times, two stories for the most part, but a long ell of only one story. The main end bore the name of "Dawson House." It was not a hotel, and had no bar, that usual accompaniment. Round in the next street, Mr. Dawson had a clubhouse that supplied this want, and all games of chance, but this place was of the better sort.

The Farnsworths had gone to friends only a few squares from the wharf. Mr. Dawson made friends at once with young Folsom and offered him a position.

"I'm in for the gold fields," he declared with boyish eagerness.

"You'd better consider a day or two," suggested his mother.

"And I'll take the mother, too, if she is as good a housekeeper as she looks to be," Mr. Dawson subjoined laughingly. "If I don't, young fellow, some man will snap your mother up before you'll have a chance to see the color of his eyes."

"Well, here are four husbandless women," she retorted gayly. "He could have a choice."

They were ushered into a spacious room with a painted floor and nondescript furnishing. In one corner was a large desk at which sat a clerk. This opened into a dining room, in which the long table was seldom without a guest. Several were seated there now. On the other side were two smaller rooms tolerably well furnished, one a sleeping chamber.

"You'll find we're suffering from the want of woman's hands and woman's wit. I could hardly believe my wife had consented to come. You see those who are worth anything are soon offered homes of their own, and the others – " He made a peculiar little gesture, that elicited a shrewd smile from Jason Chadsey.

It was comforting to find a place of refuge so soon, they all thought. On the second floor were lodging rooms for the better class. The ell was fitted up with rows of bunks, and there was seldom a vacancy by midnight.

Laverne kept tight hold of Uncle Jason's hand, and when Mr. Dawson smiled over to her, half hid her face on Uncle Jason's ample frame.

"Are we all going to live here?" she asked in a low tone.

"For a little while, I think. We would not want to go away alone. And there must be some one to keep the house when I get one."

"But you know that I helped mother, oh, for a long while. Sometimes I chopped up the wood. And in the autumn I dug the potatoes and husked the corn, but we had to kill the poor hens, after all," and she sighed. "I swept up the house, too. Oh, I can do a great many things."

He took the slim little hand in his and tried to smile over her eagerness, but his heart ached as he thought of her mother, and the hardships he could not save.

"Will it be winter soon?" she inquired.

"Not a Maine winter, my child. I believe there is no real winter."

"Everything looks queer and dried up, yet it isn't cold. And what a great city, it is almost as large as New York."

He laughed at that, then he was grave a moment. "It may be as great, some day. The Pacific will be a big rival to the Atlantic."

"To think we are clear over here! Why don't they build a railroad – just so?" and she made a mark with her small finger.

"No doubt that will come also."

They made arrangements about staying for the present. It seemed queer to the child that the friend she had known so long should be Mr. Dawson's wife. Already she was giving some orders and telling what she wanted done, and did not seem a bit afraid of the portly man who could speak so sharply to the Chinese servants.

Laverne thought them very odd. She had only seen pictures of them before. They walked so softly in their pointed slippers, and looked a little like women in their loose blue shirts with hanging sleeves. The long queue twisted around their heads, and their slanting eyes seemed weird enough.

She saw many other queer people in their walk back to the boat. Uncle Jason thought it too long, but she pleaded so to go. There were other curious dark-eyed and dark-skinned men, small and bright Japanese she came to know, and tall Spaniards in picturesque attire with handsome sashes about their waists; Indians, too, and a group of squaws girt about with blankets, two carrying their babies on their backs, and these made her think of the Maine clear across the continent, for you occasionally saw them there.

The old vessel seemed almost like home to her. They gathered up their luggage and that belonging to the ladies and ordered it sent to the Dawson House. Then they went up on Telegraph Hill, and half the world seemed spread out before them. The sun was shining in well-nigh blinding brilliancy. There was the narrow passageway that hardly looked its real width, there was the northern peninsula, Mount Tamalpais, Belvidere, Sausalito, and all the places she was to come to know so well. And there over the bay were the low spurs of the Coast Range, at whose feet were to spring up towns and cities. The bay looked to her like a smaller ocean. But boats were plying back and forth. And they could see the other hills about, and the town spreading here and there outside of the burned district.

Suddenly she said she was very tired, and her steps lagged a little. Uncle Jason would have been glad to carry her, he had occasionally carried greater burdens in times of peril, but that would be hardly admissible, they were going downhill too, which was easier. She had not seen all the strange people yet, for they met a group of Portuguese sailors with big hoop earrings, who were gesticulating fiercely, and some Russians with high caps and black, bushy beards. She was glad she had studied so much geography on shipboard, and she began to feel quite wise about different countries.

When she reached their present home she begged that she might go to bed. She did not want to eat even a tempting bit of cake. Mrs. Dawson took her into her room and put a pillow on the lounge, and while the others talked and planned she slept soundly.

"What a pretty child she is," Mr. Dawson said. "You will have to watch her closely that no one steals her."

"Oh!" Uncle Jason said thoughtfully. But in this wild, bustling life few would want to be burdened with a child not belonging to them.

When Laverne woke there was a queer, rushing, rustling sound, and it was dark like twilight. Where was she? What was happening? Then she sprang up and remembered. The ladies were talking in the next room. Oh, it rained and the wind seemed blowing a gale.

"Oh, what a nice sleep you have had!" exclaimed Mrs. Dawson. "And now you must be hungry, though we shall have dinner in a very short time. You look rested," and she smiled cheerfully.

"Yes, I am. I don't know what made me so tired." She had not climbed a hill in a long while.

"We didn't have any hills to climb on shipboard, and in all these months we did get out of practice," said Miss Holmes. "I was tired as well. And now the rainy season has begun, and Mr. Dawson has been saying that in a week or two the country will look like spring."

"And won't there be any winter? Though I don't like winter very much," she added naively. "Only the sledding and skating."

"I shouldn't care to live in Maine," and Miss Gaines gave a little shiver. "All my life I have longed for a warm winter climate. And if this doesn't suit, I shall go further south."

"You women without husbands are very independent," laughed Mrs. Dawson.

"You certainly can go where you like if you have money enough to take you there," was the reply. "Verne, come sit here and tell me if you like San Francisco as well as the ship and the voyage."

"It's queer and such lots of queer people, and how they can understand each other I can't see, for they all seem to talk different. I'd rather not live on a ship all my life."

"Then do not marry a sea captain. But your uncle may take a fancy to go to China or Japan. It is not so far from here. Grace, have you written any letters this afternoon?"

"No," replied Miss Alwood. "I think my friends will not be immediately alarmed."

"And this little girl has left no relatives behind, I heard her uncle say. Haven't you any cousins?"

"My mother had no brothers or sisters." Then she remembered how little she had ever heard about her father.

Mrs. Dawson brushed her hair and they were summoned to dinner. They had the upper end of the table. Two other women came in with their husbands. There were some Spaniards among the men, and a few very dark, peculiar-looking people. There was a great deal of talking in tongues unknown to the little girl, but some of the voices had a soft, musical sound.

The little girl was really hungry and enjoyed her dinner. Afterward most of the party played cards. The other lodgers were of the commoner sort, had a dining room to themselves, and generally sallied out in the evening. Fights were not infrequent and the harmless phases of games degenerated into gambling.

Miss Holmes had not mastered the art even on the long voyage. She took Laverne under her wing now.

"You and I will have to learn Spanish," she said. "Once Spain owned all this country."

"And will we have to learn all the other talk? I know some Indian words, there were two old Indian women in our town, and in the summer some of the tribes would come down. But Chinese – that funny reading that comes on tea chests –" and a knot gathered in her forehead.

"We will not take Chinese the first. I have a friend who went out as a missionary and who can talk it fluently. But all down along the coast it is settled by Spaniards, and they were in South America, you know, and it seems as if half the people here were talking it. Then it is a stately and beautiful language. You know you learned some French on shipboard."

"And there are so many things to learn. There were so few in our little place. They spun and knit and sewed, and you made bed quilts in case you were married. Mother had two she had never used, and a great counterpane grandmother had knit."

"Yes. It is a pity they couldn't have been saved for you. I have a chest of heirlooms stored in the house of a cousin at Dorchester, and some Revolutionary relics. My grandfather fought in the war. And I have left them all behind."

Miss Holmes gave a little sighing laugh. She could not tell whether she was glad or sorry that she had taken this long journey to a strange land.

"What did Spain want of America?" queried the little girl.

"Oh, don't you remember how they came to Mexico for the gold. There was Pizarro and Cortez –"

"And poor Montezuma in South America. Are there any real gold mines here?"

"Not just in the town."

"Then no one will come and fight us and take the gold away," she said with a sigh of relief. Uncle Jason gave a dry smile. There was fighting enough, he had found already.

"Would you care for the gold?" The child raised soft, inquiring eyes.

"Why, yes; I should like to have a share of it. But I do not think I shall go and work in the mines."

"Did they fight very much at the fort. And who did they drive away?" she asked in a rather awe-stricken voice.

"Oh, my child, they did not fight at all. The country belonged to us. The gold was free for any one willing to mine. We shall see the men coming in with their bags of gold dust and nuggets,

and though they may talk fiercely and quarrel, they need not disturb us," and Miss Holmes smiled reassuringly.

"Uncle Jason will not go," she said confidently, after quite a pause. Then she glanced over to him and smiled, and was answered in return.

He lost that trick and the next and Mrs. Dawson won his money. It did well enough to play for fun on shipboard, the captain had strictly forbidden gambling, but here one would not dream of such a thing. The stakes were not high, however.

He was thinking of his little girl and whether he had done wisely to bring her here. He had planned this journey before he knew whether the little girl was dead or alive; at any rate he had supposed she would be in the keeping of her own father. And the pitiful story of the woman he had loved, and would have slaved for had she been his, had roused all the chivalrous feelings of his nature. And that she should give him the child who had her smile and her soft, appealing voice, and the pretty eagerness that had cropped out now and then, though it was the fashion to repress it, seemed so wonderful and so sacred to him, and occupied so much of his thoughts that he never dreamed of altering his plans, or whether they would be best for her. Everything was so different, such a hurly-burly, that he wondered if a little girl could be brought up clean and wholesome and happy. A touch of uncertainty was creeping through every nerve. A man's life was so different. And there must be some one to guard her since he had to make the fortune for her. Would Miss Holmes do? They had become great friends. Then Miss Holmes had the Eastern refinement and uprightness.

He had not counted on sharing her with any one, his ideas had been vague and impractical and he would have to remodel them.

"Upon my word, I never knew you to play so poorly," laughed Mrs. Dawson teasingly; "I believe you are half asleep."

"I think that must be it. I am a landlubber to-night, so I beg you to excuse me," and he rose.

CHAPTER III

MAKING A NEW HOME

It rained three days, not quite like sullen Eastern storms, but in gusts and showers. At times the wind drove it along like a trampling army, then the fog came up and you could hardly see anything but the vaguest outlines. The rainy season had set in.

"Will it rain all the time?" asked Laverne. "And I have no rubbers."

"That is a sad oversight. I don't believe you will find any small ones here," answered Mrs. Dawson. "But I have interviewed some of the old residents, and they say it only rains by spells, but that the spells are rather frequent. I suppose we shall get used to it."

It was mid-forenoon. Laverne had asked questions about everything she could imagine, and heard many wonderful stories. The convent tales interested her deeply. They had found an old volume of the early days, and she had rejoiced in the legend of Father Francis, who had been left out of the list of missions that were to be named after the Saints.

"And no St. Francis!" cried the good missionary, surprised at such neglect. "Is not our own dear Father Francis to have a mission assigned to him?"

The visitador replied loftily, "If St. Francis wishes a mission let him show you a good port and it shall bear his name."

They had been discouraged at the rough shores and rocky heights. But they went on and suddenly the gateway opened before them, and the bay came in view. So they entered it, and while they were waiting for the storeship, they cut down timber and began to make a settlement on a fertile plain surrounded by vine-clad hills. When the storeship arrived with cattle, provisions, and some more emigrants, they built some plain houses, and the mission, and on the day of St. Francis it was blessed and consecrated with a Mass, and for music they had a continual discharge of firearms, while the smoke answered for incense. Then they set about converting the natives who were poor, wandering clans with no religion, but a great fear of sorcerers, and were very easily managed. And now the Mission de los Dolores was but a crumbling ruin, while the good St. Francis lives in the noble name of bay and city.

Then there was the pathetic story of Doña Concepcione, daughter of the Commandant of Presidio. A Russian official visited it, and fell deeply in love with the beautiful girl. But he not only had to return with business matters, but had to lay before the Czar his earnest wish to espouse his sweetheart. Doña Concepcione waited at first in great joy and hope, but no word and no lover came. When her father tried to win her from her love by various devices, she would not be comforted with them. Many a time she looked longingly over the ocean, straining her eyes to see the vague outline of his ship that never came, and so her sweet youth passed, her beauty began to fade, but she would not give up her faith. He was dead, or he would have come. He could not prove false. She went into a convent and prayed for his soul's rest. Long afterward she heard he had been killed on his way home, and her sad heart was comforted by the thought that she had never doubted his love.

And then another beautiful girl, whose lover had gone to battle with a fierce tribe of Indians who had attacked one of the lower missions. His horse had found its way back unharmed, and some one who had seen him fall brought back his bloody scarf and his jewelled dagger, picked up from the ground, but the Indians had mutilated his body horribly and cast it away in fragments. When Doña Eustacia recovered from her long illness she would take the veil in spite of her mother's protests, for there was another lover the elder had preferred. And so two years passed away when a poor, dishevelled, footsore man came back, who had not been killed but wounded and taken prisoner, and at last managed to escape. And when the Señor Roldan learned Eustacia's sorrowful mistake he begged that she be released from her vows, and proffered his estate to the mission for

her. But the Padre was obdurate and would not listen. Did some bird carry messages to her? There was no need to pray for his soul, and his faithful love was too sweet to give up. So the little bird comforted her, and though she knew she was perilling her soul's salvation she slipped out of the convent one night, and her lover lifted her on his horse and they went away in the storm and the darkness, whither no one ever knew, but the Padre took his estate, and they were both laid under the ban of the Church.

"But did it really hurt them?" queried the young listener.

"I should like to think they were very happy," declared Miss Holmes, closing the book, "and we will end it that way."

"Do see!" cried Laverne, running to the window. "Why, it is yellow and purple, and rolling up –"

"The fog is lifting. And the sun is coming out," was the reply.

"The cobwebs being swept from the sky," laughed the child. "But there is no old woman with a broom."

Yes, there was the sun out in all its glory, driving the fog into the ocean, tearing it into tatters, and suddenly everything was glorified. The evergreens had been washed free from dust and were in their metallic tints, other foliage that had seemed brown a few days ago, glowed and shimmered in the crystal-clear air. The change was marvellous. The newcomers glanced at each other in surprise, with no words to express their exhilaration.

"And now we can go out!" cried Laverne. "I want to climb a hill."

Uncle Jason laughed. "Come and see," he replied.

Alas! Rivulets were running down the slopes and the wind was appalling. Some of the streets were simply seas meandering along.

"Never mind, to-morrow it will be nice and you will see it dry up by magic."

Laverne went back to the book of legends and stories. The others had been considering plans. Mrs. Folsom had accepted Mr. Dawson's proposal and was installed as housekeeper to his wife's great satisfaction.

"It would be folly for a young fellow like you to go out to the mines," Mr. Dawson said to Richard. "There's gold enough to last ten years or I'll miss my guess. It's no place for a boy. And there is plenty to do right here. I'll take you as a clerk."

"We certainly have fallen in a clover bed," exclaimed his mother; "I don't know how to thank you."

"I guess I need you as much as you need me. And if the boy keeps honest and upright and doesn't take to gambling his fortune is made."

"But I shall go to the gold fields in the end," Dick said to his mother. She was satisfied to have it put off a while.

The rain had not kept Jason Chadsey in the house. He had gone on several inspecting tours. There was work to be had everywhere. Building up the burned district, draying around the bay in every conceivable branch. Every week dozens of men threw up a job and started for the gold fields. Three or four shipping houses almost fought for him when they learned he was a Maine man, and had been half over the world, was indeed full of shrewd knowledge that had been discriminated by a wide experience, and neither drank nor gambled, the besetting sins of those early days.

Then there was the home. Miss Alwood had found a position. The other two had been friends for years. A needlewoman would readily gain employment, and no doubt teachers would be in demand.

Jason Chadsey ruminated over the matter. Women had hardly begun to make homes for themselves in that chaotic region. What if he made a home for them both and Miss Holmes took care of Laverne? The child was very fond of her.

He went about the matter in a straightforward fashion. Miss Holmes accepted at once. She had begun to wonder a little at her temerity in seeking her fortune in this new land. In the older cities it was different. And she had a motherly heart for Laverne. Indeed, if Jason Chadsey had offered her marriage she would have accepted it readily, though it would have been based on respect and friendship.

"You will be head of the interior," he said, in a rather humorous tone. "We may find some one to do the rough part. And if Miss Gaines would like to make her home with you we shall be a cheerful and comfortable family, I fancy."

It was not so easy to find a domicile ready made. Too many of the houses, even among those offered for sale, were flimsy things and held at exorbitant prices. But he struck one presently. The man's wife had died and he wanted to go to the mines, but did not really care to sell. He would rent furniture and all for six months.

The Dawsons were sorry to have them leave. To be sure, their places could be filled easily enough, but they had all been so friendly.

Meanwhile the weather would have been amusing if it had not been so trying. It had come off very hot, and the north wind seemed to be bringing gusts from the desert that scorched the green things with its withering fury. The stars shone out pitiless like lesser suns. Then splendid revivifying showers, and air as balmy as spring, laden with wafts of curious fragrance, touching the hillsides with magic, clothing them with daintiest verdure. Was this winter? Were not the seasons absolutely lost?

The little girl was as much interested in the house as if she had been a decade older. It was rather out of the business region, and built on a side hill. Downstairs, even with the street in front, which had a narrow plank sidewalk, there were two rooms; on the next floor four, and you stepped out on the level again at the back. There was a flat rock, then another declivity, but not so steep. Up here there was a magnificent prospect. A little shrubbery grew about, but it was mostly a tangle of vines, where flowers were to run riot in the spring.

It was quite as plain as the little cottage in the Maine town though much less substantial. Sometimes in a strong west wind it seemed as if it might slide to the street below. But houses seldom blew about that way.

Outside a series of rude steps had been laid. Now and then they washed out in a heavy rain, but they could be relaid without much trouble, and sometimes the sticky clay hardened like stone and they remained for a long while. She liked to run up and down them, flying like a gull, stretching out her small arms, to the terror of Miss Holmes.

"You will slip some day and break your neck or some of your limbs, and your uncle will think I was careless about you," she said anxiously.

"Oh, I will tell him that you were always cautioning me. And I do not believe I shall break easily," laughing with a child's glee.

Every day changed her it seemed. Her eyes glowed with quivering lights like the bay, her cheeks rounded out, the dimple grew deeper and held a pink tint like the heart of a rose. Uncle Jason put uncounted kisses in it. She would be prettier than her mother, and that gave him a jealous pang. Her father had been esteemed good-looking, but really she was not like him. The coloring and hair resembled her mother's. Ah, if she could be here amid the splendor, and he shuddered, thinking of the bleak little town.

The housekeeping was not arduous. Even in those early days fruits were abundant and vegetables enough to surprise one. Then Jason Chadsey went away in the morning and oftener took his lunch at the Dawsons', not coming home until night. Everything in a business way rushed.

There were schools already, for the American plants his schoolhouse if there are a dozen children. They could see the one down on the Plaza. There were churches, too. Even in 1848 there had been Sunday worship established on the Plaza, and a year later, in spite of all the hubbub,

churches were really organized. Then they erected a substantial tent on Dupont Street, until one of their members ordered a church ready to be put together, from New York. There was beside a Congregational Society and this attracted Miss Holmes, for she had always been "orthodox" in Boston. But the long sea voyage and the lawless life all about her were rather demoralizing.

Men and women broadened out, sharp corners of creeds were rubbed off. There was a very earnest endeavor among the better classes for the extension of higher moral purposes, and a purer rule, and all of that mind worked heartily together.

Marian Holmes was much interested in her friend's welfare. Miss Gaines, with true Yankee faculty, was meaning to make a place for herself and some money. Her heart yearned for the intelligence and order of her native city.

"I shall not spend all my life in this riotous, disorderly place where you cannot tell what will happen to you next. Like the men, I want to make some money. It doesn't take so very much to be comfortable in Boston, and there are all the appliances and enjoyments of civilization. I was talking to that Mrs. Latham who has come to the Dawsons for a few weeks while their house is being finished. And she recommends that I shall start an establishment at once, while I am new to the town."

Miss Gaines studied her compeer. She had been talking so rapidly she was out of breath.

"Well?" as Miss Holmes was silent.

"Why, it might be an excellent thing. Only could you get girls to sew? I do not think the young women are of that type. They flock to the restaurants."

"There are two Catholic women Mrs. Latham spoke of – you know their priests keep stricter watch over them. They are of the old Spanish Californian stock. They have sewed for her and are neat as new pins, but have no style. They rent out the lower floor of their house, being in straitened circumstances. Their tenant is to go next week, I believe I shall take the two rooms, and open a shop, emporium, establishment, whatever it is best to call it. They will work for me. And the more bizarre clothes are made the better. I think they will suit these people, who do not care how they spend their money if it is so their neighbors can see it. Then we will all be provided for. Though I think I could have had an offer of marriage last night. A man had just come in from the mines with a pile of gold. He was a Boston man, but sadly demoralized by drink. I felt sorry for him at first, then disgusted."

Miss Holmes laughed. "And thereby missed a chance that it is supposed no woman lets slip."

"I certainly shall not take a chance like that. Come with me to see the rooms."

"I must find Laverne. The child grows wild as the wildest thing in town, and yet she is sweet as a rose. There's something in the air that sets all your blood astir. I have not danced for years. I should like to dance. I feel curiously young."

"Marian Holmes! You are in love! But I can't imagine Jason Chadsey dancing. Though you are not compelled to dance with your husband in this lawless place."

"I am afraid it would be love's labor lost if that were the case. He like you has his heart set on making money, but for the child."

She ran out and looked at Table Rock, as they called a large, flattish boulder. Laverne was not there. Then she glanced around. Some distance down the street was a group of little girls, but Laverne's light hair made her distinctive. She walked a short distance and then called.

The child hesitated, and the call was repeated. Laverne came with the rush of a wild deer.

"Oh, can't I stay a little longer? I'm telling them about Maine, and the snows and coasting. And it doesn't snow here, at least only a little bit. They are such nice girls, and I am so lonely with only big folks. They talk Spanish and very broken English."

"I want to take you out. Your uncle wouldn't like me to leave you among strangers."

"Oh, but we're not strangers now. We know each other's names. Carmencita, – isn't that pretty, – and Juana, and Anesta, and their voices are so soft, and such black eyes as they have!"

"But you must come with me, dear," and there was a firmness in Miss Holmes' tone.

The child looked irresolute. "Well, I must tell them," and she was off again. These walks about the city always interested her. She made amends by promising to come in the afternoon.

There was not much regularity in the streets save in the business section. Some were little better than alleyways, others wound about, and like most new places, houses had been set anywhere, but there were a few pretty spots belonging to some of the older settlers before the irruption of the horde. And already the Chinese had congregated together, the Germans had a settlement, and the American was everywhere.

This was really a pretty nook, with some wild olive trees about and almonds, while grape vines clambered over the rocks. It had been quite a fine estate, but its day was past. At one end was the adobe cottage of two stories, with a flat roof and small deep-set windows, that made it look like the spur of a mission. At the southern end was a great open porch, the adobe floor stained a dullish red, and vines were climbing over the columns. The little garden in front had some vegetables growing in it.

The Señora Vanegas came down the outside stairs, she had seen the guests from her window. She spoke quite brokenly, falling into Spanish when she was at loss for a word. Then she called her daughter Jacintha, who had mastered English, but spoke it with a charming accent, and translated into Spanish that her mother more readily understood the desire of the visitors. Mrs. Latham had sent them. Yes, they knew Mrs. Latham very well. Oh, it would be charming to have some one to take the lead, they did not profess to understand all the art of costuming. But Jacintha brought down some exquisite embroidery and drawn work, and the mother made cushion lace for some of the big ladies. Her brother, it seemed, had owned the whole estate, which had come from their father, and drank and gambled it away, keeping racing horses. Only this little spot was left to them, and they were very poor. The mother would gladly retire to a convent, but the daughters —

"I could not like the life," Jacintha protested. "Perhaps, when I am old and have had no lovers, I might be willing. But while I can work, and the world is so bright," smiling with youth and hope.

"All three of you —" inquired the mother.

"Only Miss Gaines," explained Jacintha. "The others have a home, and Miss Gaines will go there on Sunday. Oh, Señorita, you will find plenty of work, and we will be glad to help. And it will be a great interest."

The mother brought in a plate of crispy spiced cakes, and some sweet wine of berries that she always prepared. For berries grew almost everywhere, even if they were not of the choicest kind. A little cultivation worked wonders.

So that was settled. They all went to Dawson House and had luncheon. Mrs. Dawson was really in her glory.

"I was a fool that I didn't come out before," she said, with her heartsome laugh. "Several of my cousins went West and suffered everything, and I had no taste for emigrating. So I said to Dawson when he was smitten with the gold craze, 'Go out and make some money, and get a home to keep me in, and a servant to wait upon me, and then I will come.' But I might as well have been here a year ago. There is money to be paid for everything, no one haggles over the price. So, Miss Gaines, we will wish you success and a fortune."

"Thank you for your hand in it," and Miss Gaines nodded merrily.

"Hillo!" cried a bright voice, as Laverne stood talking to the beautiful big dog in the hall. "Why, I've not seen you for ever so long. Where have you been?"

"Home — I suppose that's home over there," and she nodded her head, while the dimple in her cheek deepened. "But it is all so queer. Well, when you are over on the other side of the world, — turned upside down" — and she looked half funny, half perplexed.

"Are you homesick? Do you want to go back to Maine?"

"But there isn't any one to care for me there," she said a little sadly. "Uncle Jason's all I have. It's so queer for winter, though. No snow, no sliding, no skating, no fun at snowballing. And between the rains things spring up and grow. I've tamed two funny little squirrels, so one of them will eat out of my hand. And the birds come to be fed."

"You can see snow enough up on the mountain-tops. It never melts away. I like the fun and stir and strange people. It makes you believe in Sir Francis Drake and the pirates and everything. But my! how they spend money and gamble it away! I hope your uncle will have a level head and hold on to what he gets."

"I've found three Spanish girls that are just lovely. There are so few little girls about," in a rather melancholy tone. "And Miss Holmes teaches me at home. I'd rather go to school, but it's too far, and uncle says wait until I get older."

"I guess that's best," returned the experienced youth. "Sometimes it is hardly safe for a little girl in the street. There are so many drunken rowdies."

"Oh, I never do go out alone, except over at the cedars. They are sort of scrubby and look like Maine. The little girls live there. I don't quite like their mother; she has such sharp black eyes. Why do you suppose so many people have black eyes?"

Dick considered a moment. "Why, the tropical nations are darker, and the Mexicans, and those queer people from Hawaii and all the islands over yonder. Your uncle will know all about them. When I am a few years older I mean to travel. I'll go up to the gold fields and make a pile, and you bet I won't come in town and gamble it away in a single night, the way some of them do. I'll go over to Australia and China."

Laverne drew a long breath. What a wonderful world it was! If she could be suddenly dropped down into the small district school and tell them all she had seen!

Some one called Dick. She sauntered back into the room, but the women were still talking business and clothes. There was a beautiful big hound who looked at her with wistful eyes, and she spoke to him. He nodded and looked gravely wise.

"You've a most uncompromising name," Mrs. Latham was saying. "You can't seem to Frenchify the beginning nor end. You must put a card in the paper." For the newspaper had been a necessity from the very first, and the *Alta Californian* was eagerly scanned.

"Yes," Miss Gaines returned, "Calista Gaines. It has a sound of the old Bay State. Well, I'm not ashamed of it," almost defiantly.

"And we shall have to get most of our fashions from the States for some time to come. We are not in the direct line from Paris. And I really don't see why we shouldn't have fashions of our own. Here are the picturesque Spanish garments that can be adapted. Oh, you will do, and we shall be glad enough to have you," giving a most hearty and encouraging laugh.

"Fortune-making is in the very air," declared Miss Gaines on the homeward way. "Well, I think I like a new, energetic country. And what a delicious voice that Jacintha has! I wonder if voices do not get toned down in this air. Our east wind is considered bad for them. And it is said a foggy air is good for the complexion. We may end by being rich and beautiful, who knows!"

Laverne ran out to look after her squirrels, and chattered with them. Then something bright caught her eye up among the tangles of vines and shrubs. Why, flowers, absolutely in bloom in December! She gathered a handful of them and hurried back overjoyed.

"Oh, see, see!" she cried, out of breath. "They are up here on the hill, and everything is growing. Isn't it queer! Do you suppose the real winter will come in July?"

"If stories are true we will hardly have any winter at all," was the reply.

"And they are all snowed up in Maine. Oh, I wish there was some one to write me a letter."

CHAPTER IV

A QUEER WINTER

Christmas and New Year's brought a mad whirl. All that could, came in from the mines. The streets were thronged. Banjo and guitar were thrummed to the songs and choruses of the day, and even the accordion notes floated out on the air, now soft and pathetic with "Annie Laurie", "Home, Sweet Home," and "There's Nae Luck About the House," "The Girl I Left Behind Me," or a jolly song from fine male voices. Then there were balls, and a great masquerade, until it seemed as if there was nothing to life but pleasure.

Miss Gaines came in with some of the stories. But the most delightful were those of the three little Estenega girls about the Christmas eve at the church and the little child Jesus in the cradle, the wise men bringing their gifts, the small plain chapel dressed with greens and flowers in Vallejo Street. Laverne had not been brought up to Christmas services and at first was quite shocked. But the child's heart warmed to the thought, and Miss Holmes read the simple story of Bethlehem in Judea, that touched her immeasurably.

And then there seemed a curious awakening of spring. Flowers sprang up and bloomed as if the rain had a magic that it scattered with every drop. The atmosphere had a startling transparency. There were the blue slopes of Tamalpais, and far away in the San Matteo Range the redwood trees stood up in their magnificence. Out through the Golden Gate one could discern the Farallones forty miles away. The very air was full of exhilarating balm, and the wild oats sprang up in the night, it seemed, and nodded their lucent green heads on slender stems. And the wild poppies in gorgeous colors, though great patches were of an intense yellow like a field of the cloth of gold.

Sometimes Jason Chadsey of a Sunday, the only leisure time he could find to devote to her, took his little girl out oceanward. There were the seals disporting themselves, there were flocks of ducks and grebes, gulls innumerable, and everything that could float or fly. Ships afar off, with masts and sails visible as if indeed they were being submerged. What stores they brought from the Orient! Spices and silks, and all manner of queer things. And the others coming up from the Pacific Coast, where there were old towns dotted all along.

Or they took the bayside with its circle of hills, its far-off mountains, its dots of cities yet to be. Angel Island and Yerba Buena where the first settlement was made, growing so slowly that in ten years not more than twenty or thirty houses lined the beach. Or they boarded the various small steamers, plying across or up and down the bay. Miss Holmes did object somewhat to this form of Sunday entertainment. There was always a motley assemblage, and often rough language. Men who had come from decent homes and proper training seemed to lay it aside in the rush and excitement. Yet that there were many fine, earnest, strong men among those early emigrants was most true; men who saw the grand possibilities of this western coast as no eastern stay-at-home could.

Was the old legend true that some mighty cataclysm had rent the rocks apart and the rivers that had flowed into the bay found an outlet to the sea? Up at the northern end was San Pablo Bay into which emptied the Sacramento and its tributaries, and a beautiful fertile country spreading out in a series of brilliant pictures, which was to be the home of thousands later on.

And from here one had a fine view of the city, fast rising into prominence on its many hills as it lay basking in the brilliant sunshine. Irregular and full of small green glens which now had burst into luxuriant herbage and were glowing with gayest bloom, and diversified with low shrubbery; then from the middle down great belts of timber at intervals, but that portion of the city best known now was from Yerba Buena Cove, from North Beach to Mission Cove. Already it was thriving, and buildings sprang up every day as if by magic, and the busy people breathed an enchanted air that incited them to purposes that would have been called wildest dreams at the sober East.

The little girl looked out on the changeful picture and held tight to her uncle's hand as the throngs from all parts of the world, and in strange attire, passed and repassed her, giving now and then a sharp glance which brought the bright color to her face. For the Spanish families kept their little girls under close supervision, as they went decorously to and from church on Sunday; the dirty, forlorn Indian and half-breed children hardly attracted a moment's notice, except to be kicked or cuffed out of the way. More than one man glanced at Jason Chadsey with envious eyes, and remembered a little girl at home for whom he was striving to make a fortune.

Jason Chadsey did not enjoy the crowd, though the sails to and fro had been so delightful. Miss Holmes was shocked at the enormity of Sabbath-breaking.

"There is no other day," he said, in apology. "I shouldn't like you to go alone on a week-day, the rabble would be quite as bad."

She sighed, thinking of orderly Boston and its church-going people. Not but what churches flourished here, new as the place was, and the ready giving of the people was a great surprise to one who had been interested, even taken part in providing money for various religious wants. It was a great mystery to her that there should be so many sides to human nature.

"I wonder if you would like a pony?" he asked of the little girl, as they were picking their way up the irregularities of the pavement or where there was no pavement at all.

"A pony?" There was a dubious expression in the child's face, and a rather amazed look in her eyes. "But – I don't know how to ride," hesitatingly.

"You could learn," and he smiled.

"But a horse is so large, and looks at you so – so curiously – I think I do feel a little bit afraid," she admitted, with a flush.

"Oh, I mean just a nice little pony that you could hug if you wanted to. And I guess I could teach you to ride. Then we could have nice long journeys about. There are so many beautiful places and such fields and fields of wild flowers. You cannot walk everywhere. And I have not money enough to buy a boat of my own," with a humorous smile.

"I suppose a boat does cost a good deal," she returned thoughtfully. "I love to be on the water. Though at first I was afraid, and when that dreadful storm came. A ship is a queer thing, isn't it? One would think with all the people and all the cargo it must sink. I don't see *how* it keeps up," and her face settled into lines of perplexity, even her sweet mouth betraying it.

"That is in the building. You couldn't understand now."

"Do you know who made the first ship?"

He laughed then. He had such a hearty, jolly laugh, though he had been tossed about the world so much.

She had a mind to be a little offended. "It isn't in the geography," she said, with dignity. "And Columbus knew all about ships."

"Yes, we can go back of Columbus. The first one I ever really heard about was Noah's Ark."

"Oh, Noah's Ark! I never thought of that!" She laughed then, and the lines went out of her face. "I'm glad we didn't have a deluge on our long journey. And think of all the animals on board! Was the whole world drowned out?"

"I believe that has never been satisfactorily settled. And long before the time of Christ there were maritime nations –"

"Maritime?" she interrupted.

"Sailors, vessels, traders. The old Phœnicians and the nations bordering on the Mediterranean Sea. Though they went outside the pillars of Hercules, and there were seamen on the Asian side of the world."

"Oh, dear, how much there is for me to learn," and she drew a long breath. "And they thought I was real smart in our little old school. But I could spell almost everything."

"There are years in which you can learn it," he said encouragingly.

"And you have been almost everywhere." There was a note of admiration in her voice. "The stories were so wonderful when you told them on shipboard. I didn't half understand them then because I didn't think the world could be such a great place, so you must tell them over to me."

"Yes. And some day you may go the rest of the way round the world. You've been nearly half round it and you are still in America."

They paused at the little cottage. Bruno, the great dog, lay on the doorstep, but he rose and shook himself, and put his nose in the little girl's hand.

She had been rather afraid of him at first. Even now when he gave a low growl at some tramp prowling round it sent a shiver down her spine. But he was a very peaceable fellow and now devoted to his new mistress.

Miss Holmes prepared the supper. She had a fondness for housekeeping, and this life seemed idyllic to her. The old weariness of heart and brain had vanished. Miss Gaines told her she looked five years younger and that it would not take her long to go back to twenty. Miss Gaines had made some charming new friends and did not always spend Sunday with them.

Laverne wiped the dishes for Miss Holmes. Jason Chadsey lighted his pipe, and strolled uptown.

"I wish you would read all about Noah's ark to me," Laverne said, and Miss Holmes sat down by the lamp.

The child had many new thoughts about it at this time.

"People must have been very wicked then if there were not ten good ones. There are more than that now," confidently.

"But the world will never be drowned again. We have that promise."

"Only it is to be burned up. And that will be dreadful, too. Do you suppose – the people will be – burned?" hesitating awesomely.

"Oh, no, no! Don't think of that, child."

"I wonder why they saved so many horrid animals? Did you ever see a tiger and a lion?"

"Oh, yes, at a menagerie."

"Tell me about it."

She had an insatiable desire for stories, this little girl, and picked up much knowledge that way. Miss Holmes taught her, for there was no nearby school.

She made friends with the Estenega girls, though at first their mother, with true Spanish reticence and pride held aloof, but interest in her children's welfare and a half fear of the Americanos, beside the frankness of the little girl induced her to walk in their direction one day, and in a shaded nook she found Miss Holmes and her charge. Perhaps the truth was that Señora Estenega had many lonely hours. Friends and relatives were dead or had gone away, for there had been no little friction when California was added to the grasping "States." When she could sell her old homestead she meant to remove to Monterey, which at this period was not quite so overrun with Americanos. But she had been born here, and her happy childhood was connected with so many favorite haunts. Here she had been wedded, her children born, in the closed room where there was a little altar her husband had died, and she kept commemorative services on anniversaries. And then no one had offered to buy the place – it was out of the business part, and though the town might stretch down there, it had shown no symptoms as yet.

Miss Holmes was reading and Laverne sewing. She had taken a decided fancy to this feminine branch of learning, and was hemming ruffles for a white apron. Her mother had taught her long ago, when it had been a very tiresome process. But the Estenega girls made lace and embroidered.

Laverne sprang up. "It is Carmen's mother," she said. Then she glanced up at the visitor, with her lace mantilla thrown over her high comb, her black hair in precise little curls, each side of her face, and her eyes rather severe but not really unpleasant.

"I do not know how you say it," and she flushed with embarrassment. "It is not Madame or Mrs. –"

"Señora," answered the Spanish woman, her face softening under the appealing eyes of the child.

Then Laverne performed the introduction with an ease hardly expected in a child. Miss Holmes rose.

"I am very glad to meet you. I was deciding to come to ask about the children. Laverne is often lonely and would like playmates. And she is picking up many Spanish words. You understand English."

"Somewhat. It is of necessity. These new people have possessed our country and you cannot always trust servants to interpret. Yes, the children. I have a little fear. They are Catholics. Carmencita will go to the convent next year for her education. And I should not want their faith tampered with."

"Oh, no," Miss Holmes responded cheerfully. "You know we have different kinds of faith and yet agree as friends." And glancing at Laverne she almost smiled. These Spanish children would be much more likely to convert her to their faith. Would her uncle mind, she wondered? He seemed to think they all stood on the same foundation.

"You have not been here long?" and there was more assertion than inquiry in the tone.

"No," returned the younger woman. And then she told a part of her story, how she had come from the east, the Atlantic coast, and that she was governess to the child, and housekeeper. "Did the Señora know a family by the name of Vanegas?"

"Ah, yes, they were old friends. Two daughters, admirable girls, devoted to their mother, who had suffered much and whose husband had made away with most of the estates. There was an American lady in her house, she rented two rooms."

"A friend of mine. She came from the same place, and we have known each other from girlhood."

Then the ice was broken, and Miss Holmes in a certain manner was vouched for, which rather amused her, yet she accepted the Spanish woman's pride. Many of them felt as if they had been banished from their own land by these usurpers. Others accepted the new order of things, and joined heart and soul in the advancement of the place, the advancement of their own fortunes also. But these were mostly men. The prejudice of the women died harder.

The children were in a group at one of the little hillocks, much amused it would seem by their laughter. And the two women patched up a bit of friendship which they both needed, seeing they were near neighbors, and interested in the education of young people, Miss Holmes listened to what the elder woman said and did not contradict or call the ideas old-fashioned. After all it was very like some of her old grandmother's strictures, and she was a staunch Puritan. What would she have said to women who had not yet reached middle life, and had planned to go to a strange land to seek their fortunes!

The Señora was so well satisfied that she asked Miss Holmes to come and take coffee and sweetmeats with her the next afternoon.

Oh, how lovely the hills and vales were as they wandered homeward. For now it was the time of growth and bloom and such sweetness in the air that Marian Holmes thought of the gales of Araby the blest. Truly it was an enchanted land. The birds were filling the air with melody, here and there a farmer or gardener, for there was fine cultivated lands about the foothills, and even higher up there were great patches of green where some one would reap a harvest, garden stuff waving or running about rich with melon blooms, here the blue of the wild forget-me-nots and the lupines. And further on flocks of sheep nibbling the tufts of grass or alfalfa. Some one was singing a song, a rich, young voice:

"Oh, Susanna, don't you cry for me,

I'm goin' to California with my banjo on my knee."

Here and there in a clump of trees was a dark shadow, and the long slant rays betokened the coming of evening. It gave one a luxurious emotion, as if here was the true flavor of life.

Miss Holmes was feeling a little sorry for those swept off of their own land, as it were.

"What have they been doing with it these hundreds of years?" asked Jason Chadsey. "Even the Indians they have pretended to educate are little better off for their civilization. And think how the gold lay untouched in the hills! Spain still has the Philippines with all her treasures."

It rained the next morning with a musical patter on everything, and little rivulets ran down the steps. Then it suddenly lighted up and all San Francisco was glorified. Pablo, an old Mexican, came to work in the little garden patch. Laverne said her lessons, then went out to find her squirrels and talk to her birds who came to enjoy the repast of crumbs, and then went hunting bugs and worms for their importunate babies. And at last they were making ready for their walk.

"It is nice to go out visiting," Laverne said, as she danced along, for the sunshine and the magnetic air had gotten into the child's feet. "We have been nowhere but at Mrs. Dawson's."

"And Miss Gaines."

"Oh, that isn't really visiting. Just a little cake and fruit on a plate. And now she is so busy she can hardly look at you. I wish we lived farther up in the town. Don't you think Uncle Jason would move if you said you did not like it here?"

"But I do like it. And there are so many dreadful things happening all about the town. And we might be burned out."

"Well, I am glad of the Estenegas, anyhow."

The old place was like some of the other old homes going to decay now, but it was so embowered with vines that one hardly noted it. The chimney had partly fallen in, the end of the porch roof was propped up by a pile of stones. But the great veranda was a room in itself, with its adobe floor washed clean, and the big jars of bloom disposed around, the wicker chairs, the piles of cushions, and the low seats for the children. Little tables stood about with work, many of the women were very industrious, the mothers thinking of possible trousseaus, when laces and fine drawn work would be needed. Carmencita had her cushion on her knees, and her slim fingers carried the thread over the pins in and out, in a fashion that mystified Laverne.

"It's like the labyrinth," she said.

"What was that?" glancing up.

"Why, a place that was full of all kinds of queer passages and you did not know how to get out unless you took a bit of thread and wound it up when you came back."

"But I know where I am going. Now, this is round the edge of a leaf. I leave that little place for a loop, and then I come back so. The Señorita Felicia makes beautiful lace for customers. But mine will be for myself when I am married."

"But I thought – you were going to a convent," said Laverne, wide-eyed.

"So I am. But that will be for education, accomplishments. And there are more Spanish men there," lowering her voice, "more lovers. Pepito Martinez, who lived in the other end of the old place, down there," nodding her head southward, "found a splendid lover and was married in the chapel. Her mother went on to live with her. They had no troublesome house to sell," and she sighed.

"Juana," exclaimed the mother, "get thy guitar. The guests may like some music."

Juana rose obediently. She, too, was older than Laverne, but Anesta younger. She seated herself on one of the low stools, and passed a broad scarlet ribbon about her neck, which made her look very picturesque. And she played well, indeed, for such a child. Then she sang several little songs in a soft, extremely youthful voice. Miss Holmes was much interested.

The children were sent to play. There was a little pond with several tame herons, there were two great cages of mocking birds that sang and whistled to the discomfiture of the brilliant green and scarlet parrot. The children ran races in the walk bordered with wild olive trees on the one side, and on the other a great tangle of flowers, with the most beautiful roses Laverne had ever seen, and hundreds of them.

"Oh, I should like to live here," declared Laverne.

"Then ask thy uncle to buy. The Americanos have money in plenty. And see here. It is my tame stork. His leg was broken so he could not fly. Diego bound it up and he staid here. But when he sees a gun he dashes away and hides."

He had a number of amusing tricks, but he eyed the strange little girl suspiciously and would not let her come too near.

They went back to the house and swung in the hammock, talking broken English and Spanish and laughing merrily over the blunders. Carmencita put away her lace and began to prepare two of the small tables, spreading over each a beautiful cloth.

Miss Holmes had been taken through the apartments. There were three on the lower floor, the kitchen being detached. The walls were a dark faded red, the windows small, with odd little panes of glass. There was some fine old furniture, and a rug soft as velvet on the floor that long ago had crossed the ocean. Family portraits were hung high on the wall, and looked down frowningly, the brilliancy of their garments faded and tarnished, but Miss Holmes noted that they were mostly all military men. In the next room were several portraits of the priests of the family, and hideous copies of the old Madonnas. In this room a high cabinet of wonderful carving, filled with curios and one shelf of books. The third was evidently a sitting and sleeping chamber, with a spindle-post bedstead and canopy of faded yellow silk, edged with old lace; while the bedspread in its marvellous handiwork would have filled a connoisseur with envy. For two hundred years or more there had been Estenegas here, and then the old part, now fallen down, had its ballroom and its long dining room where banquets and wedding feasts had been given.

"There is another branch of the family at Santa Margarita who have not fallen into decay as we have, and as many old families do. I dare say they would be glad to have some of the heirlooms. They have young men, and it would be but right that they should propose to marry one of my daughters."

Carmen summoned her mother and the guest. The tables were daintily arranged with fruit and custards, some sweet fried cakes and bread covered with a sort of jelly compound that was very appetizing, with some shredded cold chicken highly spiced. For drink, tea for the elders, but fruit juice made of orange and berries for the young people. Carmencita was at the table with her mother, the three others together, and they had a merry time.

The Señora and the children walked part of the way with them. Miss Holmes had proposed that they should come up in the morning for lessons with Laverne. The distance to the Sisters' school was too great, and now one dreaded to send young girls through the new part of the town.

"It was very nice," declared Laverne, "only I think I like the little Maine girls better. They understand more quickly, and they have so many thoughts about everything, while you have to explain continually as you talk to these children."

"Perhaps it is because they do not understand the language," said Miss Holmes.

CHAPTER V

PELAJO

Laverne was about to reply, with the feeling of superior knowledge, "It's because they are not Americans," when she caught sight of Uncle Jason, Pablo, and a pile of rough timber, an excavation made in the side hill, a slope over which she had been training some blossoming vines.

"Oh, Uncle Jason," she cried, with eager forbiddance. "That's my garden. What are you going to do?"

"Build a house for a pony. This seemed most convenient, though he is such a cunning little fellow I think we could have trained him to go up the steps."

His shrewd, humorous smile and her own curiosity disarmed her.

"The pony? Have you really – "

"Well, I had to take him or see him go to some one else. I was afraid he would get a hard master. And he is such a pretty intelligent fellow. He talks, his fashion. And he laughs, too."

"Oh, now you are making fun."

"Well, if you won't have him I can sell him again. He's just fit for a little girl, or some one hardly grown up."

"But who had him before?"

"A young lady. A delicate little body. I've had my eye on him some time."

"If she loved him why did she want to sell him?" and Laverne glanced up with a kind of incredulity.

"She was going away." He had not the courage to say that she was dead, that she had made a vain struggle for recovery, and failed.

"I suppose horses are not quite like people," she returned thoughtfully. "They like those who are good to them."

"Well – they're grateful, and as a general thing appreciate kind treatment. Humans don't always do that."

She had not gone very far in the philosophy of ingratitude, but she was wondering if the pony had been very fond of his mistress.

"This place was the handiest. Then he can go cropping the tufts of grass about here, and we shall not have to lug the feed up on the next round," viewing the sort of natural terraces with a squint in one eye. "I'm sorry about the posies."

"Oh, well – they grow so easily. And here was the spruce tree, and, oh, we ought to have a big veranda to the house, where we could sit and sew and I could study lessons and we could have supper."

"But the place isn't really mine, you know. And I shouldn't want to spend a great deal of money. Some day we may have a house in which we can truly settle ourselves."

Miss Holmes, who had been looking on, smiled now. "The Señora Estenega is very anxious to sell," she said.

"And it is so splendid all around. There are trees and trees and they are full of birds. Oh, you never heard such singing. And the flowers! Why, I wanted to dance all around the paths for very gladness. But it was dull and dark inside, and full of ugly portraits and Virgins and hideous babies."

"They wouldn't want to sell the pictures, they are old family relics," appended Miss Holmes.

"And she asks a fortune for the estate. These old Spanish people have caught on to values mighty quick. But a house for the pony is as much as we can compass now. In a few years you shall have a home to your liking."

Miss Holmes went within, and soon there was a savory smell of fish frying and cakes baking on a bed of coals.

"That will do for to-night, Pablo," Jason Chadsey said. "Come early to-morrow morning and I will show you about the posts."

The Mexican nodded slowly, and walked to the kitchen door, where Miss Holmes gave him a chunk of bread and a fish, and he went his way.

Uncle Jason washed hands and face in true Yankee fashion, with a great splurge. He had enlarged the rude cistern and led a rivulet of clear water down to it. In many of the outlying districts there were but few conveniences, and yet San Francisco had flashed into existence as if a new Kubla Khan had decreed it. Perhaps no city in the world could boast such rapid advances, or gain in population. Those early years will always sound like a fairy tale. But it had some of the best and most energetic brain and brawn from the East, whose forefathers had settled other wildernesses much less promising.

The pony shared interest with the visit and the promise of the Estenega girls coming up every morning. She was a very happy little girl to-night; Uncle Jason thought she had not been quite so bright of late, but now her eyes flashed with an eager light, and her pretty lips melted from one curve to another, while her voice had a bird-like gayety. The day had been so full and taken so much energy, that she laid her head in Miss Holmes' lap and went fast asleep. Jason Chadsey read his paper by the light of the smoky lamp, and Miss Holmes dreamed of clean, orderly Boston even if its streets did run crooked.

The Estenegas were certainly not bright scholars. But the Yankee schoolma'am had seen obtuse children before. They were extremely narrow and incurious as to real knowledge, but anxious to get on with English. Laverne flashed up and down the walk. Pablo set up the frame, put on a rude roof, then filled in the chinks with a common kind of adobe. The pony would not live much indoors, to be sure, but he needed some shelter.

"Do you know what his name is, Pablo?" the child asked.

Pablo shook his head. He was a dried-up specimen, with a skin like leather and small deep-set eyes, quite bowed in the shoulders, which made him no taller than some boys of a dozen years. He had a little hut of his own down in the wilds, and he often lay on the sand when the sun was too hot, and drowsed from pure laziness.

Uncle Jason led the pony home at night. He had been well kept, for his coat was smooth, just far enough off of black to be a rich brown. Shapely, with slender legs, a head not too large for his body, a flowing mane, now braided up in tails, flexible nostrils that quivered with every breath, and the most beautiful large, dark eyes that looked as if they could laugh and understand many things.

She had been somewhat dubious all along. She had really felt afraid of Bruno at first, but as she looked at the merry eyes she laughed.

"Yes, I *do* like you," she said. "I'm glad you are not any larger. And his tail almost sweeps the ground," watching her uncle, who was patting his neck and smoothing down to his nose, and talking in a persuasive voice.

"Maybe you won't like his name. He comes of good stock, it seems, and if he was ten years younger would be worth a pile of money."

"Why, he doesn't look old. And his name – "

"Is Pelajo."

She repeated it, and he came a step nearer. She ventured to pat him, and then she reached up and put her arm over his neck. Uncle Jason handed her a lump of sugar, but she drew back as his soft nose touched her hand.

"You must learn to give him tidbits, even a handful of grass or wild oats."

"Oh, I shall like you very much, I know," she declared, in a glad voice, and he seemed to understand, for he rubbed against her shoulder, and this time she did not shrink away. He was used

to being caressed. Perhaps he dumbly questioned what had become of his sweet young mistress who had petted him the last year.

It was so warm they tethered him and set Bruno to keep watch, for there were many prowlers and thieves about; not quite as many down here perhaps, since horses and money were the only desirable things in their estimation. He was all right in the morning. The first thing Laverne did was to rush out and greet him, and he seemed quite as glad to see her.

She did shake a little when she was perched up on his back, but Uncle Jason walked beside her up and down the gravelly path, and after a little it was really exhilarating. When she had taken two or three lessons she felt quite safe and began to enjoy it. Uncle Jason taught her to ride astride as well; it might be useful, he declared, and certainly was a common-sense view of the matter. So Pelajo grew into the little girl's heart.

On Sunday morning she always went to church with Miss Holmes, and the churches were really well filled if the rest of the day was devoted to pleasure. The lovely spring was now over, though fruit trees were still blooming and laden with fruit. But there had been a few days that seemed to scorch up everything and dry up the small streams and cisterns.

The church bells were ringing in a leisurely, devoted fashion. "Come to church for rest and refreshment," they said, when suddenly there was a wild clangor and each one looked at his neighbor with frightened eyes, or stood motionless, not knowing which way to turn. Then something shot up in the air, scarlet against the sunshine, and the cry of terror rang out, "Fire! Fire!"

There had been a fear lest the gang of lawless desperadoes who had half threatened and half laughed about keeping the anniversary of the great fire the year before would make some endeavor. But June 14th had passed, though there had been unusual watchfulness. After a week the orderly part of the city breathed more freely. And this day seemed almost like a special thanksgiving for safety. Before they had time to voice it the red terror began. Crowds with hymn and prayer books in their hands paused paralyzed before the church they had made such efforts to gain and enjoyed so thoroughly, the brief five months they had worshipped in it. And now they fled up and down the streets, while the fire swept this way and that with a tremendous roar. From Pacific over to Jackson Street, Washington, Stockton, Dupont. Goods and invalids were hurried out to the Plaza, and then the wind swept the fire this way and that, and they had to fly again and save nothing. Buildings were blown up with a horrid din like war. And so for four mortal hours of frantic endeavor with no reservoirs near. And when it had ceased to spread it lay a great mass of charred and smouldering ruins, and several lives had gone with it. That it was the work of incendiaries there could be no doubt. Ruined men invoked the arm of speedy justice if they could not have law.

In one way it was not so disastrous as the fire of the year before, which had taken the business part and immense stocks of goods. This was more of a residential section, but homeless people were running to and fro, wild with the agony of loss of all they had. Parents and children separated, elderly people wandering about in a dazed condition, the scene one of the wildest confusion.

Miss Holmes had decided to go over to hear Mr. Williams, instead of the church nearer by, which she usually attended. Then they would go to Mr. Dawson's for lunch, and meet Miss Gaines and bring her home with them. At first she thought she could find a way through, but the fire spread so rapidly over to Montgomery Street, that she did not dare venture. It might go down to the very edge of the bay and on its march take in the Dawsons. She held tight to Laverne, and used strenuous efforts to force her way through, but throngs were coming up, drawn by a weird fascination such as a fire always exercises. The child began to cry. Her hat was torn off. Oh, if anything *should* happen to her!

After a while the way began to grow clearer, but it seemed as if she was in a new place.

"Oh, I'm so tired," cried Laverne. "And my foot hurts. Let us sit down."

They were out of the well-built part. A tall old pine offered shelter. She sat down on the dry earth and took the child in her lap.

"Oh, do you think Uncle Jason will be burned up?" she moaned. "If we could only find him. And will our house go, too?"

"Oh, no, dear. It is in a different direction. That will be safe."

"If we could only get there. Do you think Pelajo will be frightened? And everything looks so strange here. Are you not afraid of all these wild men?"

They seemed, indeed, inhabitants of every clime. And though they looked sharply at the woman and child, no one molested them.

"Are you rested now? Shall we go home?"

"Oh, I do hope Uncle Jason is there. What if he had come to the fire and was killed!"

"Hush, dear! Don't think of such a thing."

What would she do alone with the child if any untoward accident happened to him? She shuddered!

They picked their way over strange places, but they still saw the black smoke of the holocaust going skyward. Miss Holmes kept one or two objective points in mind. True, streets had been laid out, but they were overgrown with brush and the rampant cactus, with tangles of vines. In some places they had begun to wither. Rabbits scurried hither and thither, amazed at the steps. Birds were still carolling as if there was naught but joy in the world.

"And I am so hungry! Oh, when will we get home? Suppose we are lost?" complained the child wearily.

"I think we have been lost, but now I see where we are," the elder exclaimed, in a hopeful tone. "It is not far. And then we will have a nice supper. Poor, tired little girl, I wish I could carry you."

"Oh, you couldn't," and there was a sound in her voice as if she had smiled. "But if it isn't much farther – my legs feel as if they would drop off."

"We have come ever so much out of our way. I could not see in the crowd, and it pushed one about so. I never want to see another fire."

"Oh, now I know." Laverne let go of the elder's hand, and in spite of fatigue gave two or three skips. "Could I make Bruno hear, I wonder? Bruno! Bru – no!"

Either she made him hear or he had a presentiment. He came bounding through the brush with short, sharp barks of joy, and lunged so against Laverne that she nearly lost her balance.

"Oh, good doggie, good Bruno!" she cried, in joy. "What if there were dogs burned up in the fire, and maybe horses?"

Miss Holmes shuddered. She had seen some men carrying a mattress with a human body, when a fierce blazing brand had fallen in it, and though she turned her head then, she almost screamed now.

They dropped down on the small porch steps and sat there a few moments.

"I must go and see Pelajo," Laverne said, weary as she was.

He whinnied with joy, and rubbed his nose on her small hand.

"Oh, Pelajo, I am so glad you were not in the fire," and she could have kissed him for very thankfulness.

Uncle Jason was nowhere to be seen. When Miss Holmes was a little rested she built a fire and put on the kettle. There was part of the leg of lamb they had had yesterday, and the pie she had baked early this morning. For in spite of all his wanderings, Jason Chadsey had preserved his New England fondness for such pies as a New England woman could make. And there was a great bowl of delicious berries.

They had their meal, being puzzled just what to call it, since it was a little too early for supper. Then they swung in the hammocks while old Pablo came to look after Pelajo, and talk about the fire, which he insisted was still burning. They waited and waited until the poor little girl begged to go to bed.

"It hasn't seemed a bit like Sunday," she murmured sleepily.

Then Marian Holmes swung drowsily in the hammock again. Through the opening between two trees she could see the great glowing stars that seemed as gorgeous again as in the eastern skies. There were screams of night birds, the long note of the owl, the tree frog beseeching stridently for rain. Now and then Bruno would flip his ears or straighten them, and at last he gave a sudden rush down the street, and returned with his master, but the clock had struck ten.

He dropped on the step as they had done.

"Were you alarmed when you came from church? Of course you knew about the fire."

"We were really in it," and Miss Holmes detailed her day, leaving out some of the most trying incidents.

"Thank God you came back safely," he returned, with deep feeling. "It was a most awful catastrophe. There has been an indignation meeting held, and some of the miscreants will be brought to justice. Then, there must be better arrangements for fighting fires. It was a terrific sight, and there are hundreds of homeless people. The best provision that could be, was made for them. Generous-hearted people took them in, supplied them with food. Accidents were plentiful. Yet it has been a terrible day, but if I had thought of you and the child being there – "

"Oh, you couldn't, you see. And we came safely out of it all, so don't feel distressed. Will you have some supper?"

"Yes. Though I was at the Dawsons' and had a meal. They came mighty near going once or twice, if a dangerous gust of wind had lasted longer. And the crowds that poured in upon them! The courage of these people seems superhuman, but it has been severely tried now. I do not believe any city ever suffered so much by fire and had the pluck to go on again."

She began to busy herself about the meal. He leaned against the flat post and went sound asleep, though he wakened easily. Then leaving her dishes, an unusual thing for her, she retired herself.

For days the fire was the uppermost subject. They had always planned rebuilding before with tremendous energy, but now courage seemed to wane in this direction. But it was taken up energetically in others. The great want of water in the fire department had to be remedied speedily, and at any cost. Money was offered freely.

The other was a more strenuous effort for the punishment of criminals, and a rigorous observance of law.

Among the immigrants had been convicts from different lands, lawless men who formed themselves into bands for plunder and maliciousness. Clark's Point, Broadway, and one end of Pacific Street was called Sydney Town from its great number of convicts and ticket-of-leave men from the Colonies; and to them were added the criminally inclined from the States, who had left their own cities for the city's good. And out of the earnest endeavor to put a stop to the lawlessness and crime the Vigilance Committee was formed. Then an old Mexican law was exhumed that forbade the emigration to California of criminals convicted of crime elsewhere. Notices were served upon many vicious persons and they were compelled to leave the city. And with it all grew a greater regard for law and order.

Energy and perseverance did not fail, it is true, and the confidence born of the geographical knowledge that this must eventually be the great highway of trade, and the idea of a glorious future destiny, inspired the really solid portion of the community to continue their efforts to make it the city of the world. Still, many of the middle classes, discouraged by misfortunes, returned to their native cities. Others went further south in the more equable climate and became farmers. Still others wooed by the endless forests further north, and the many advantages for starting new cities on a better industrial foundation, went to seek better fortunes. The city never could recover from all the evils it was said. But the splendid bay and the magnificent harbor were left, the gold fields were not exhausted. And now arose the demand for a railroad across the Continent, which had a hard fight for many years, but succeeded at length.

At Clark's Point a huge rock was quarried, and removed, and the hill excavated to make room for new streets. Sansome and Battery Streets were carried out and filled up with the débris. The wharves were pushed further out, great warehouses built, and though it was a fact that fewer people came to seek their fortunes, more brought with them the idea of settling. Wherever any tiny stream ran among the sand hills numerous vegetable gardens were laid out, and the fertility was remarkable. Markets opened here and there, the New World Market, enlarged and improved, where it seemed as if one might buy all the luxuries of the world. San Francisco began to lose the characteristics of a Spanish or Mexican town, how could such drowsy ways be tolerated among the adventurous, hard-working people!

There came to be an admixture of foreign races – musical Germans; light-hearted, theatre and dance-loving French; some from different Mongolian countries, who looked on with grave faces, seldom affiliating, and the Chinese, who made a settlement of their own, many of them content to be hewers of wood and drawers of water, laundrymen and servants, but others aspiring to the rank of merchants, even bringing their wives later on.

On the opposite side of the bay, settlements were changing into towns, and business seemed to run riot everywhere. There was no lack of employment for those willing to work.

All these things were far away from the little girl's life. She studied because she loved to know about everything, that was a New England heritage. She acquired Spanish rapidly, while the Estenega girls were stumbling over English. The Señora came up one afternoon and they had a sort of high tea, with game of several kinds, a bird pie, and a pudding that would have rejoiced the heart of a far Easterner. It was a wonderful feast for the children, but the Señora shook her head gravely over the superabundance of luxuries.

"Was not the little girl going to learn lace-making and drawn-work that she would want presently for her trousseau? And were not the catechism and the prayers, confirmation, music, and languages enough for any girl? And these new Americanos, who dressed in silks and velvets, and trailed up and down the streets nodding and laughing to men!" and the Señora shuddered.

It was very true that stylishly attired women promenaded the two shopping streets where the windows were full of rich goods. For the early settlers had not to spin and weave in this golden country. Vessels were coming in frequently laden with goods from almost everywhere. India and China sent treasures, France and England did not lag behind. So the women went gorgeously arrayed, leaned out of handsome private equipages, as if they were queens. For gold was found in most unexpected places, and miners came in only to waste and gamble it away.

The old Spanish residents shook their heads over this wild extravagance, and clung more closely to their Church and the old ways. Even the natives were often amazed. There were not a few who had Spanish blood, and proud enough they were of it. The emigration of the French began to exercise an influence upon the heterogeneous society. The skilled workman gave a finer air to shops and buildings; the higher classes, lured by the wonderful reports, added their ease and refinement to the society, gradually crystallizing into settled classes.

"It is not all the Americans," Miss Holmes said, in answer to the Señora's strictures. "All the Eastern cities I have seen are quite unlike this. They grew slowly, and each from its own peculiar industry. We had no gold mines on the Eastern coast, and you are likely to prize more highly the fortunes you have to struggle for. Here we have every nation, it seems to me, and often the very liberty of choice degenerates into license. But it is hardly fair to blame it all on our people."

"They have invaded us and taken away our land, our rights. Years ago we were happy and content, and now it is all excitement, and if you do not join you are pushed to the wall, driven out. The gold in the hills was all ours."

"But you let it lie there. Yes, you could have discovered it. It was the wild dream of more than one explorer, and yet he never tapped the great secrets the land held."

Now that the hitherto placid Spanish woman was roused she went over the ground with great bitterness, the war, the ceding of the country, the influx of the nations for greed. Half her talk lapsed into her native tongue. Miss Holmes pitied her in a certain way, but was it not the old, old story since De Soto had crossed the Continent and Tonti came down the Mississippi? The weaker nation was always distanced by the stronger. And was supine content a virtue?

Meanwhile, the children had a merry time. Carmen gained courage to mount Pelajo and rode around in fine style. The younger ones wanted their turn. When they were called in to tea their cheeks glowed, their eyes were bright with excitement, and they chattered like a flock of birds.

The Señora looked on in surprise.

"Do you always allow so much wildness?" she asked, in a rather disapproving tone.

If they had a little frolic their walk home always sobered them.

"Oh, no," returned Miss Holmes, with a smile. "They have lessons. This is a holiday. And I am glad for Laverne to have companions. We sometimes think she gets too grave."

"Girls," and their mother rapped on the table. What with their laughing, the broken English, and the Spanish they were in quite a whirl. Laverne looked on more calmly. Indeed, the Señora was a little angry that she seemed rather to shame her girls.

"Oh, please, Señora, do not scold them. We were so merry riding the pony. He is almost human. And he understood Spanish. I did not know that before."

Laverne's face was a study, in its sweet pleading. The girls quieted down, and their mother looked less severe, but she was considering a proper penance.

The moon came up early. How magnificently the soft light silvered all the open spaces, until one forgot the drought. Each twig that swayed to and fro in the translucent air seemed alive.

Miss Holmes and Laverne walked some distance with their guests, leaving Bruno to keep watch. They parted with the utmost cordiality.

"We have had such a splendid time," whispered Carmencita. "I wish I was an American girl and had a good indulgent uncle such as thou hast, little one. Then I would not care to go to the convent."

Laverne was astonished at the outburst, for Carmen had heretofore rather cavilled at Americans. They walked back in silence until they met Bruno's greeting.

"Didn't you have a nice time with the girls?" Miss Holmes asked.

"Oh, yes! Carmen was – well, I think I have been not exactly afraid of her, but she seemed so much older, and this afternoon she was splendid. And she wished – what do you think – that she was an American girl! And I wish I knew some American girls."

"You will go to school presently. Your uncle was talking of it."

The thought startled the little girl. She was not quite sure she liked it.

"Oh, there he is now," and she ran to meet him. The moon was up higher and it was lighter. Her hands were outstretched, but he caught her under the arms and, lifting her up, gave her several kisses. It was so gratifying to have her always glad to see him.

Then he put her down and she caught his hand in both of hers and went a hop and a skip, giving short, soft laughs.

"I'm late. Did you eat up all the supper?"

"Oh, we had ours early. The Estenegas were here, the mother and all. We had a good, good time," with emphasis. "They all rode Pelajo. Anesta fell off twice, but it didn't hurt any, she asked us not to tell. And oh, how hungry they were!"

"Little girls ought always to be hungry. That makes them grow."

"And Carmen wished she had an uncle like you."

"Why – she has scarcely seen me."

"But then I talk about you," the child added, naïvely.

"Well – do you want to give me away?"

"Oh no, no."

"Or shall we adopt her?"

A positive unwillingness sprang up in the child's heart.

"I think her mother would not let her come," she replied evasively.

"But you would like her? You are tired of being alone."

"No, I don't want any one but you for all time," she admitted, a little jealously.

He laughed. He was fond of this confession.

Miss Holmes' supper was satisfactory to the hungry man as well. Afterward they went out and sat on the flat stone step. That always made him think of his boyhood.

"Little one," he began, "how would you like to move? Or are the Estenegas too dear to give up?"

"Move!" in a tone of surprise.

"Yes. We haven't much worldly goods, as these traps do not belong to us. But we can take ourselves, Bruno, and Pelajo."

"Where would we go?"

"Quite far from here. Up on Telegraph Hill."

"Oh, that would be splendid! We could always see the bay, and over the strait to all the mountains beyond. Yes, I should like to go."

"Well, I am glad. It will be more convenient for me, but we would have to go, anyhow. This place has been sold."

"Is there a stable? And I think I would like a garden. And at least *one* tree."

He laughed.

"They have been taking down part of the hill. No doubt some day they will take it all down. That is the fashion of cities. But our end not being so high will not be disturbed for some time to come."

"This has been nice," she said retrospectively. "But I shall like the new place, and the bay, and – and –"

"And the change," he laughed. Then he called Miss Holmes, who had put away the last of her dishes.

He had talked this over with her before, but he had not made his bargain until to-day. Then they settled a few of the most important points. There were to be some repairs made, but they could go the next week. And to-morrow he would take them up to see it.

"Will you like to go?" Laverne asked of Miss Holmes as they were preparing for bed.

"Yes, I think I shall. We shall be so much nearer everything. We can often walk down among the stores. And we shall be nearer Miss Gaines. You will miss the Estenega girls."

"But there may be other girls. I'd like to know some new ones," and there was a sound of delightful expectation in her voice.

CHAPTER VI

A DIFFERENT OUTLOOK

It was almost being in a new town, Laverne thought. They had trotted all over this bluff, to be sure; they had looked over to Sausalito, up and down the bay, and to the wonderful ocean that reached to China. But before they had been rather hidden away in a valley between the ridges, and from the windows you could see very little. She was quite wild at first, running from window to window, and calling on Miss Holmes to see this or that.

Then they had a Chinaman to come in and help them settle, and that amused her very much. He understood, but could not speak much English, and she did wonder why he should tack another syllable to the short words by adding the double e. But he was very handy and obedient, quick to see, and the soft shoes that made no clatter allowed him to go about so quietly that he often surprised one. His name was Ah Ling.

"I think I like Pablo better," she said gravely. "Then he knows so many things about the country and the missions and the priests, and the races of the Spaniards, and they did have bull fights, you know, they have some now. Uncle Jason said he must not tell me about them, they were too cruel. Do you suppose Pablo will come?"

Jason Chadsey had made the old Mexican an offer to come and live with them, but he was loath to leave his little hut and his independence. He knew Pablo could be trusted anywhere with the little girl, and that he was a good gardener. He had even offered him a new hut, and Pablo was taking matters into consideration as he lolled in the sun and smoked his pipe. He did not want to be too hard worked, what good did so much money do these Americanos; they went on working and working and hustling the life out of one.

Here was the old Franciscan Mission where the first settlement was made by the Fathers. It might have had the semi-solitude in those early years, for all about was poetic enough. When it became a Mexican province early in the century it had been stripped of its treasures, and was even now a poor unsightly ruin with its few padres eking out their subsistence and saying prayers for the living and the dead in the little Campo Santo. Presently a modern cathedral was to overshadow it, but that had not come yet, with the shops and dwellings that were to crowd it still closer. But now there were outlying fields, tangles of shrubbery and vines run wild. Not so many trees as farther down, but still some that withstood the ocean blasts. And there was Alcatraz and Buena Yerba; almost within a stone's throw, it seemed, in the clear air that often foreshortened space. Laverne never wearied studying the marvellous pictures, and when her thoughts went back to the dreary little Maine village she always gave a shiver.

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