

**Luzena Stanley Wilson, '49er; memories recalled  
years later for her daughter Correnah Wilson Wright.  
Introduction by Francis P. Farquhar, illustrations by  
Kathryn Uhl**

Luzena

Stanley Wilson

'49er

MEMORIES RECALLED YEARS LATER FOR HER

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**INTRODUCTION**

*by*

FRANCIS P. FARQUHAR

*Mrs. Luzena Stanley Wilson's account of her pioneer years in California is of significance not only for the vividness of the portrayal but for the circumstances that led to the preservation of the story. In 1881 her only daughter, Correnah, was convalescing from a serious illness. To make the time pass less slowly, Mrs. Wilson recounted her early experiences and the daughter wrote them down in long hand. Years later they were typewritten and bound, and one of the two copies was given to the Mills College Library. On the last page of the reminiscences there is subscribed: I have written my mother's story as nearly as I could in her words. Correnah Wilson, April, 1881.*

*Her many friends will recall that Correnah Wilson was graduated from Mills in 1875, that she was the first Alumnae Trustee of the college, and that she left to her alma mater beautiful examples of Oriental art. Always interested in art and literature, she took a leading part in many cultural activities. At one time she was president of the Century Club in San Francisco. In 1886 she married Edward Clark Wright who was for many years connected with the railroad business in California. Mr. Wright died in 1924. Ten years later Mrs. Wright sailed for the Orient where she planned to spend some time in travel, but her death occurred in Yokohama September 11, 1934, shortly after her arrival in Japan.*

*It is characteristic of Mrs. Wright that she left no memoranda to accompany the manuscript she gave to Mills College. For her, the experiences set forth were self-explanatory, like works of art, needing no labels. The narrative gives a vivid picture of the incessant struggle of pioneer life. It brings out especially the qualities of buoyancy and cheerfulness that helped to make conquest possible. Hearing Mrs. Wilson's story, in her own words, we come to know her well, long before she and her family are driven out of Sacramento by the flood. She reveals herself in every word and act. Yet, curiously enough, notwithstanding her ability to paint the scene and to sketch casual characters, we learn from her very little about her husband and her children. Nor is there any intimation of what went before or what came after these few years of emigration and pioneering.*

*Of what came before, little enquiry is necessary. It was undoubtedly the same story, in general outline, as that of hundreds of other families—restless prairie farming. And the sequel we know to some extent—establishment in moderate economic security with more and more means and leisure*

*for cultivated enjoyment as time went on. There is no need for elaboration upon the themes of these earlier and later periods—the dramatic quality was crowded into the central portion.*

*One is concerned, however, with a few facts; especially as the narrative touches the foundations of California history. Although not once does Mrs. Wilson think to mention her husband's name, we have a natural desire to know something of him. It might be expected that, as he was one of the earliest settlers in Vacaville, the histories of Solano County would give an account of him. Very little is recorded of that town, however, until the period of railroads and agricultural statistics and we have to use a good deal of conjecture in piecing together the fragments of earlier history. An early plat of the townsite shows a considerable area as owned by Mason Wilson, and in one of the “blocks” is shown the Wilson house. It is at about the site of the brick building which now stands on the corner of Davis Street and Main Street, just where the latter turns across the bridge over Ulattis Creek. This land was formerly part of a grant to Manuel Vaca. At precisely what date the Wilsons acquired it, is not known, but it must have been very soon after their arrival. It is not entirely clear from Mrs. Wilson's narrative whether that was in the spring of 1851 or 1852. The fire that destroyed Nevada City was in March 1851, and, although that does not allow full eighteen months for their residence there, it seems to agree with other statements in the story and establish 1851 as the date of their settling at Vacaville.*

*The records of Solano County show that Mason Wilson, farmer, of Vacaville, was born in Kentucky about 1807. He was, accordingly, forty-two years old when he came to California. His wife, Luzena, was some fourteen years younger. We may picture her, therefore, as about twenty-eight at the time of the journey. The two children who came with them were Thomas, about three, and Jay, less than a year old. Two other children were born in Vacaville—Mason, in 1855, and Correnah, in 1857.*

*In the Alta California of July 17, 1860, a traveler writes of his tour through Solano County. He tells of Vaca's land, now divided among a number of purchasers, one of them a Mr. Wilson. “Mr. Wilson,” he says, “bought a tract of about seven hundred acres where the road crosses the valley, and on the bank of the creek built an inn.” And not a word of Mrs. Wilson! I am quite sure that*

*Mrs. Wilson would not have protested against this omission—in fact, she would doubtless have deprecated any mention of the part she played in the founding of the town of Vacaville. Fortunately, however, in the narrative preserved by her daughter, we have sufficient testimony to establish the fact that her part was not merely one of “feminine influence.” It was that, of course; but it was also just as vigorous and physically productive as that of any miner, farmer, teamster, or builder. After reading these reminiscences, we hasten to correct the statement of the Alta's correspondent and declare that whereas, on the bank of the creek at Vacaville, Mr. Wilson built an inn, Mrs. Wilson ran it.*

San Francisco, California

April, 1937.

## **Chapter One**

The gold excitement spread like wildfire, even out to our log cabin in the prairie, and as we had almost nothing to lose, and we might gain a fortune, we early caught the fever. My husband grew enthusiastic and wanted to start immediately, but I would not be left behind. I thought where he could go I could, and where I went I could take my two little toddling babies. Mother-like, my first thought was of my children. I little realized then the task I had undertaken. If I had, I think I should still be in my log cabin in Missouri. But when we talked it all over, it sounded like such a small task to go out to California, and once there fortune, of course, would come to us.

It was the work of but a few days to collect our forces for the march into the new country, and we never gave a thought to selling our section, but left it, with two years' labor, for the next comer. Monday we were to be off. Saturday we looked over our belongings, and threw aside what was not absolutely necessary. Beds we must have, and something to eat. It was a strange 2 but comprehensive load which we stowed away in our “prairie-schooner”, and some things which I thought necessities when we started became burdensome luxuries, and before many days I dropped by the road-side a good many unnecessary pots and kettles, for on bacon and flour one can ring but few changes, and it requires but few vessels to cook them. One luxury we had which other

emigrants nearly always lacked—fresh milk. From our gentle “mulley” cow I never parted. She followed our train across the desert, shared our food and water, and our fortunes, good or ill, and lived in California to a serene old age, in a paradise of green clover and golden stubble-fields, full to the last of good works.

Well, on that Monday morning, bright and early, we were off. With the first streak of daylight my last cup of coffee boiled in the wide fire-place, and the sun was scarcely above the horizon when we were on the road to California. The first day's slow jogging brought us to the Missouri River, over which we were ferried in the twilight, and our first camp fire was lighted in Indian Territory, which spread in one unbroken, unnamed waste from the Missouri River to the border line of California. Here commenced my terrors. Around us in every direction were groups of Indians sitting, standing, and on horseback, as many as two hundred in the camp. I had read and heard whole volumes of their bloody deeds, the massacre of harmless white men, torturing helpless women, carrying away captive innocent babes. I felt my children the most precious in the wide world, and I lived in an agony of dread that first night. The Indians were friendly, of course, and swapped ponies for whisky and tobacco with the gathering bands of emigrants, but I, in the most tragi-comic manner, sheltered my babies with my own body, and felt imaginary arrows pierce my flesh a hundred times during the night. At last the morning broke, and we were off. I strained my eyes with watching, held my breath in suspense, and all day long listened for the whiz of bullets or arrows. The second night out we were still surrounded by Indians, and I begged my husband to ask at a neighboring camp if we might join with them for protection. It was the camp of the “Independence Co.”, with five mule-teams, good wagons, banners flying, and a brass band playing. They sent back word they “didn't want to be troubled with women and children; they were going to California”. My anger at their insulting answer roused my courage, and my last fear of Indians died a sudden death. “I am only a woman,” I said, “but I am going to California, too, and without the help of the Independence Co.!” With their lively mules they soon left our slow oxen far behind, and we lost sight of them. The first part of the trip was over a monotonous level. Our train consisted only of six wagons, but we were never alone. Ahead, as far as the eye could reach, a thin cloud of dust marked the route of the trains, and behind us, like the trail of a great serpent, it extended to the edge of civilization. The travelers

were almost all men, but a mutual aim and a chivalric spirit in every heart raised up around me a host of friends, and not a man in the camp but would have screened me with his life from insult or injury. I wonder if in the young men around us a woman could find the same unvarying courtesy and kindness, the same devotion and honest, manly friendship that followed me in the long trip across the plains, and my checkered life in the early days of California!

The traveler who flies across the continent in palace cars, skirting occasionally the old emigrant road, may think that he realizes the trials of such a journey. Nothing but actual experience will give one an idea of the plodding, unvarying monotony, the vexations, the exhaustive energy, the throbs of hope, the depths of despair, through which we lived. Day after day, week after week, we went through the same weary routine of breaking camp at daybreak, yoking the oxen, cooking our meagre rations over a fire of sage-brush and scrub-oak; packing up again, 4 coffeepot and camp-kettle; washing our scanty wardrobe in the little streams we crossed; striking camp again at sunset, or later if wood and water were scarce. Tired, dusty, tried in temper, worn out in patience, we had to go over the weary experience tomorrow. No excitement, but a broken-down wagon, or the extra preparation made to cross a river, marked our way for many miles. The Platte was the first great water-course we crossed. It is a peculiar, wide, shallow stream, with a quicksand bed. With the wagon-bed on blocks twelve or fourteen inches thick to raise it out of the water, some of the men astride of the oxen, some of them wading waist-deep, and all goading the poor beasts to keep them moving, we started across, The water poured into the wagon in spite of our precautions and floated off some of our few movables; but we landed safely on the other side, and turned to see the team behind us stop in mid-stream. The frantic driver shouted, whipped, belabored the stubborn animals in vain, and the treacherous sand gave way under their feet. They sank slowly, gradually, but surely. They went out of sight inch by inch, and the water rose over the moaning beasts. Without a struggle they disappeared beneath the surface. In a little while the broad South Platte swept on its way, sunny, sparkling, placid, without a ripple to mark where a lonely man parted with all his fortune.

In strange contrast was the North Platte which we next crossed, a boiling, seething, turbulent stream, which foamed and whirled as if enraged at the imprisoning banks. Two days we spent at its edge, devising ways and means. Finally huge sycamore trees were felled and pinned with wooden

pins into the semblance of a raft, on which we were floated across where an eddy in the current touched the opposite banks. And so, all the way, it was a road strewn with perils, over a strange, wild country. Sometimes over wide prairies, grass-grown, and deserted save by the startled herds of buffalo and eld; sometimes through deep, wild cañons, where the mosses were like a carpet beneath our 5 feet, and the overhanging trees shut out the sunshine for days together; sometimes over high mountains, where at every turn a new road had to be cleared, we always carried with us tired bodies and often discouraged hearts. We frequently met men who had given up the struggle, who had lost their teams, abandoned their wagons, and, with their blankets on their back, were tramping home.

Everything was at first weird and strange in those days, but custom made us regard the most unnatural events as usual. I remember even yet with a shiver the first time I saw a man buried without the formality of a funeral and the ceremony of coffining. We were sitting by the camp fire, eating breakfast, when I saw two men digging and watched them with interest, never dreaming their melancholy object until I saw them bear from their tent the body of their comrade, wrapped in a soiled gray blanket, and lay it on the ground. Ten minutes later the soil was filled in, and in a short half hour the caravan moved on, leaving the lonely stranger asleep in the silent wilderness, with only the winds, the owls, and the coyotes to chant a dirge. Many an unmarked grave lies by the old emigrant road, for hard work and privation made wild ravages in the ranks of the pioneers, and brave souls gave up the battle and lie there forgotten, with not even a stone to note the spot where they sleep the unbroken, dreamless sleep of death. There was no time then to wait, no time to mourn over friend or kindred, no time for anything but the ceaseless march for gold.

There was not time to note the great natural wonders that lay along the route. Some one would speak of a remarkable valley, a group of cathedral-like rocks, some mineral springs, a salt basin, but we never deviated from the direct route to see them. Once as we halted near the summit of the Rocky Mountains for our “nooning”, digging through three or four inches of soil we found a stratum of firm, clear ice, six or eight inches in thickness, covering the whole level space for several acres where our train had stopped. I do not think even yet I have ever heard a theory

accounting for the strange sheet of ice lying hard and frozen in mid-summer three inches below the surface.

After a time the hard traveling and worse roads told on our failing oxen, and one day my husband said to me, "Unless we can lighten the wagon we shall be obliged to drop out of the train, for the oxen are about to give out." So we looked over our load, and the only things we found we could do without were three sides of bacon and a very dirty calico apron which we laid out by the roadside. We remained all day in camp, and in the meantime I discovered my stock of lard was out. Without telling my husband, who was hard at work mending the wagon, I cut up the bacon, tried out the grease, and had my lard can full again. The apron I looked at twice and thought it would be of some use yet if clean, and with the aid of the Indian soap-root, growing around the camp, it became quite a respectable addition to my scanty wardrobe. The next day the teams, refreshed by a whole day's rest and good grazing, seemed as well as ever, and my husband told me several times what a "good thing it was we left those things; that the oxen seemed to travel as well again".

Long after we laughed over the remembrance of that day, and his belief that the absence of the three pieces of bacon and the dirty apron could work such a change.

## **Chapter Two**

Our long tramp had extended over three months when we entered the desert, the most formidable of all the difficulties we had encountered. It was a forced march over the alkali plain, lasting three days, and we carried with us the water that had to last, for both men and animals, till we reached the other side. The hot earth scorched our feet; the grayish dust hung about us like a cloud, making our eyes red, and tongues parched, and our thousand bruises and scratches smart like burns. The road was lined with the skeletons of the poor beasts who had died in the struggle. Sometimes we found the bones of men bleaching beside their broken-down and abandoned wagons. The buzzards and coyotes, driven away by our presence from their horrible feasting, hovered just out of reach. The night that we camped in the desert my husband came to me with the story of the "Independence Company". They, like hundreds of others had given out on the desert; their mules



gone, many of their number dead, the party broken up, some gone back to Missouri, two of the 8 leaders were here, not distant forty yards, dying of thirst and hunger. Who could leave a human creature to perish in this desolation? I took food and water and found them bootless, hatless, ragged and tattered, moaning in the starlight for death to relieve them from torture. They called me an angel; they showered blessings on me; and when they recollected that they had refused me their protection that day on the Missouri, they dropped on their knees there in the sand and begged my forgiveness. Years after, they came to me in my quiet home in a sunny valley in California, and the tears streamed down their bronzed and weather-beaten cheeks as they thanked me over and over again for my small kindness. Gratitude was not so rare a quality in those days as now.

It was a hard march over the desert. The men were tired out goading on the poor oxen which seemed ready to drop at every step. They were covered with a thick coating of dust, even to the red tongues which hung from their mouths swollen with thirst and heat. While we were yet five miles from the Carson River, the miserable beasts seemed to scent the freshness in the air, and they raised their heads and traveled briskly. When only a half mile of distance intervened, every animal seemed spurred by an invisible imp. They broke into a run, a perfect stampede, and refused to be stopped until they had plunged neck deep in the refreshing flood; and when they were unyoked, they snorted, tossed their heads, and rolled over and over in the water in their dumb delight. It would have been pathetic had it not been so funny, to see those poor, patient, overworked, hard-driven beasts, after a journey of two thousand miles, raise heads and tails and gallop at full speed, an emigrant wagon with flapping sides jolting at their heels. At last we were near our journey's end. We had reached the summit of the Sierra, and had begun the tedious journey down the mountain side. A more cheerful look came to every face; every step lightened; every heart beat with new 9 aspirations. Already we began to forget the trials and hardships of the past, and to look forward with renewed hope to the future. The first man we met was about fifty miles above Sacramento. He had ridden on ahead, bought a fresh horse and some new clothes, and was coming back to meet his train. The sight of his white shirt, the first I had seen for four long months, revived in me the languishing spark of womanly vanity; and when he rode up to the wagon where I was standing, I felt embarrassed, drew down my ragged sun-bonnet over my sunburned face, and shrank from

observation. My skirts were worn off in rags above my ankles; my sleeves hung in tatters above my elbows; my hands brown and hard, were gloveless; around my neck was tied a cotton square, torn from a discarded dress; the soles of my leather shoes had long ago parted company with the uppers; and my husband and children and all the camp, were habited like myself, in rags.

A day or two before, this man was one of us; today, he was a messenger from another world, and a stranger, so much influence does clothing have on our feelings and intercourse with our fellow men. It was almost dusk of the last day of September, 1849, that we reached the end of our journey in Sacramento. My poor tired babies were asleep on the mattress in the bottom of the wagon, and I peered out into the gathering gloom, trying to catch a glimpse of our destination. The night before I had cooked my supper on the camp fire, as usual, when a hungry miner, attracted by the unusual sight of a woman, said to me, "I'll give you five dollars, ma'am, for them biscuit." It sounded like a fortune to me, and I looked at him to see if he meant it. And as I hesitated at such, to me, a very remarkable proposition, he repeated his offer to purchase, and said he would give ten dollars for bread made by a woman, and laid the shining gold piece in my hand. I made some more biscuit for my family, told my husband of my good fortune, and put the precious coin away as a 10 nest-egg for the wealth we were to gain. In my dreams that night I saw crowds of bearded miners striking gold from the earth with every blow of the pick, each one seeming to leave a share for me. The next day when I looked for my treasure it was gone. The little box where I had put it rolled empty on the bottom of the wagon, and my coin lay hidden in the dust, miles back, up on the mountains. So we came, young, strong, healthy, hopeful, but penniless, into the new world. The nest egg was gone, but the homely bird which laid it—the power and will to work—was still there. All around us twinkled the camp fires of the new arrivals. A wilderness of canvas tents glimmered in the firelight; the men cooked and ate, played cards, drank whisky, slept rolled in their blankets, fed their teams, talked, and swore all around; and a few, less occupied than their comrades, stared at me as at a strange creature, and roused my sleeping babies, and passed them from arm to arm to have a look at such a novelty as a child.

We halted in an open space, and lighting our fire in their midst made us one with the inhabitants of Sacramento.

### **Chapter Three**

The daylight woke us next morning to the realization that if we were to accomplish anything we must be up and stirring. The world around us was all alive. Camp fires crackled, breakfast steamed, and long lines of mules and horses, packed with provisions, filed past on their way out from what was already called a city. The three or four wooden buildings and the zinc banking house, owned by Sam Brannan, looked like solid masonry beside the airy canvas structures which gleamed in the October sunshine like cloud pictures. There was no credit in '49 for men, but I was a woman with two children, and I might have bought out the town with no security other than my word. My first purchase was a quart of molasses for a dollar, and a slice of salt pork as large as my hand, for the same price. That pork, by-the-by, was an experience. When it went into the pan it was as innocent looking pork as I ever saw, but no sooner did it touch the fire than it pranced, it sizzled, frothed over the pan, sputtered, crackled, and acted as if possessed. When finally it subsided, there was left a shaving the size of a dollar, and my pork had 12 vanished into smoke. I found afterward that many of our purchases were as deceptive, for the long trip around the "Horn" was not calculated to improve an article which was probably inferior in quality when it left New York. The flour we used was often soured and from a single sieve-full I have sifted out at one time a handful of long black worms. The butter was brown from age and had spent a year on the way out to California. I once endeavored to freshen some of this butter by washing it first in chloride of lime, and afterwards churning it with fresh milk. I improved it in a measure, for it became white, but still it retained its strength. It was, however, such a superior article to the original "Boston" butter, that my boarders ate it as a luxury. Strange to say, in a country overrun with cattle as California was in early days, fresh milk and butter were unheard of, and I sold what little milk was left from my children's meals for the enormous price of a dollar a pint. Many a sick man has come to me for a little porridge, half milk, half water, and thickened with flour, and paid me a dollar and a half a bowl full. The beans and dried fruits from Chile, and the yams and onions from the Sandwich Islands, were the best

articles for table use we had for months. The New York warehouses were cleared of the provisions they had held for years, and after a twelve-months' sea voyage, they fed the hungry Californians.

Half the inhabitants kept stores; a few barrels of flour, a sack or two of yams, a keg of molasses, a barrel of salt pork, another of corned beef (like redwood in texture) some gulls' eggs from the Farallones, a sack of onions, a few picks and shovels, and a barrel of whisky, served for a stock in trade, while a board laid across the head of a barrel answered for a counter. On many counters were scales, for coin was rare, and all debts were paid in gold dust at sixteen dollars per ounce. In the absence of scales a pinch of dust was accepted as a dollar, and you may well imagine the size of the pinch very often varied from the real standard. <sup>13</sup> Nothing sold for less than a dollar; it was the smallest fractional currency. A dollar each for onions, a dollar each for eggs, beef a dollar a pound, whisky a dollar a drink, flour fifty dollars a barrel. One morning an official of the town stopped at my fire, and said in his pompous way, "Madame, I want a good substantial breakfast, cooked by a woman." I asked him what he would have, and he gave his order, "Two onions, two eggs, a beef-steak and a cup of coffee." He ate it, thanked me, and gave me five dollars. The sum seems large now for such a meal, but then it was not much above cost, and if I had asked ten dollars he would have paid it.

After two or three days in Sacramento we sold our oxen, and with the proceeds, six hundred dollars, we bought an interest in the hotel kept in one of the wooden houses, a story-and-a-half building which stood on what is now known as K Street, near Sixth, close to what was then the Commercial Exchange, Board of Trade, and Chamber of Commerce, all in one "The Horse Market". The hotel we bought consisted of two rooms, the kitchen, which was my special province, and the general living room, the first room I had entered in Sacramento. I thought I had already grown accustomed to the queer scenes around me, but that first glimpse into a Sacramento hotel was a picture which only loss of memory can efface. Imagine a long room, dimly lighted by dripping tallow candles stuck into whisky bottles, with bunks built from floor to ceiling on either side. A bar with rows of bottles and glasses was in one corner, and two or three miners were drinking; the barkeeper dressed in half sailor, half vaquero fashion, with a blue shirt rolled far back at the collar to display the snowy linen beneath, and his waist encircled by a flaming scarlet sash, was in commanding

tones subduing their noisy demands, for the barkeeper, next to the stage-driver, was in early days the most important man in camp. In the opposite corner of the room some men were having a wordy dispute over a game of 14 cards; a cracked fiddle was, under the manipulation of rather clumsy fingers, furnishing music for some half dozen others to dance to the tune of "Moneymusk". One young man was reading a letter by a sputtering candle, and the tears rolling down his yet unbearded face told of the homesickness in his heart. Some of the men lay sick in their bunks, some lay asleep, and out from another bunk, upon this curious mingling of merriment and sadness stared the white face of a corpse. They had forgotten even to cover the still features with the edge of a blanket, and he lay there, in his rigid calmness, a silent unheeded witness to the acquired insensibility of the early settlers. What was one dead man, more or less! Nobody missed him. They would bury him tomorrow to make room for a new applicant for his bunk. The music and the dancing, the card-playing, drinking, and swearing went on unchecked by the hideous presence of Death. His face grew too familiar in those days to be a terror.

## **Chapter Four**

It was a motley crowd that gathered every day at my table but always at my coming the loud voices were hushed, the swearing ceased, the quarrels stopped, and deference and respect were as readily and as heartily tendered me as if I had been a queen. I was a queen. Any woman who had a womanly heart, who spoke a kindly, sympathetic word to the lonely, homesick men, was a queen, and lacked no honor which a subject could bestow. Women were scarce in those days. I lived six months in Sacramento and saw only two. There may have been others, but I never saw them. There was no time for visiting or gossiping; it was hard work from daylight till dark, and sometimes long after, and I nodded to my neighbor and called out "Good morning" as each of us hung the clothes out to dry on the lines. Yes, we worked; we did things that our high-toned servants would now look at aghast, and say it was impossible for a woman to do. But the one who did not work in '49 went to the wall. It was a hand 16 to hand fight with starvation at the first; later the "flush" times came, when the mines had given out their golden store, and every one had money.

Many a miserable unfortunate, stricken down by the horrors of scurvy or Panama fever, died in his lonely, deserted tent, and waited days for the hurrying crowd to bestow the rites of burial. It has been a life-long source of regret to me that I grew hard-hearted like the rest. I was hard-worked, hurried all day, and tired out, but I might have stopped sometimes for a minute to heed the moans which caught my ears from the canvas house next to me. I knew a young man lived there, for he had often stopped to say "Good morning", but I thought he had friends in the town; and when I heard his weak calls for water I never thought but some one gave it. One day the moans ceased, and, on looking in, I found him lying dead with not even a friendly hand to close his eyes. Many a time since, when my own boys have been wandering in new countries have I wept for the sore heart of that poor boy's mother, and I have prayed that if ever want and sickness came to mine, some other woman would be more tender than I had been, and give them at least a glass of cold water.

We lived two months in the "Trumbow House", then sold our interest in it for a thousand dollars in dust, and left it, moving a few doors below on K Street. The street was always full of wagons and pack-mules; five hundred would often pass in a day packed heavily with picks, shovels, camp-kettles, gum-boots, and provisions for the miners. A fleet of schooners and sloops anchored at the river bank was always unloading the freight from San Francisco. Steam-vessels had not yet plowed the muddy waters of the Sacramento. When one of these slow-moving schooners brought the Eastern mails there was excitement in the town. For the hour all work was suspended, and every man dropped into line to ask in turn for letters from home. Sometimes 17 the letters came; more often the poor fellows turned away with pale faces and sick disappointment in their hearts. Even the fortunate recipients of the precious sheets seemed often not less sad, for the closely written lines brought with their loving words a host of tender memories, and many a man whose daily life was one long battle faced with fortitude and courage, succumbed at the gentle touch of the home letters and wept like a woman. There was never a jeer at these sacred tears, for each man respected, nay, honored the feelings of his neighbor. Brave, honest, noble men! The world will never see the like again of those "pioneers of '49". They were, as a rule, upright, energetic, and hard-working, many of them men of education and culture whom the misfortune of poverty had forced into the ranks of labor in this strange country. The rough days which earned for California its name for recklessness

had not begun. There was no shooting, little gambling, and less theft in those first months. The necessities of hard work left no leisure for the indulgence even of one's temper, and the "rough" element which comes to every mining country with the first flush times had not yet begun to crowd the West.

One of the institutions of '49, which more than filled the place of our present local telegraphic and telephonic systems, was the "Town Crier". Every pioneer must remember his gaunt form, unshaven face, and long, unkempt hair, and his thin bobtailed, sorrel Mexican pony, and the clang of his bell as he rode through the streets and cried his news. Sometimes he announced a "preaching", or a "show", "mail in", an "auction", or a "stray". Another of the features of the city was the horse market to which I have already alluded. A platform was built facing what was only by courtesy called the street, and from his elevation every day rang out the voice of the auctioneer and around it gathered the men who came to buy or sell. The largest trade of the day was in live stock. The miners who came down with dust 18 exchanged it here for horses and mules to carry back their supplies, and vaqueros brought in their cattle to sell to the city butchers. Here, too, were sold the hay and grain, which almost brought their weight in gold.

The population of Sacramento was largely a floating one. Today there might be ten thousand people in the town, and tomorrow four thousand of them might be on their way to the gold fields. The immigrants came pouring in every day from the plains, and the schooners from San Francisco brought a living freight, eager to be away to the mountains.

## **Chapter Five**

There was not much lumber in Sacramento, and what little there was, and the few wooden houses, came in ships around the Horn from Boston. The great majority of the people lived like ourselves in houses made of canvas, and with natural dirt floors. The furniture was primitive: a stove (of which there always seemed plenty), a few cooking vessels, a table made of unplanned boards, two or three boxes which answered for chairs, and a bunk built in the corner to hold our mattresses and blankets. One of the articles on which great profit was made was barley, and my husband had invested our

little fortune of a thousand dollars in that commodity at fifteen cents a pound, and this lay piled at the wind side of the house as an additional protection. The first night we spent in our new home it rained, and we slept with a cotton umbrella, a veritable pioneer, spread over our heads to keep off the water. For days it rained incessantly; the streets ran full of water. Men and animals struggled through a sea of mud. We wrung out our blankets every morning, and warmed them by the fire—they never had time to dry. The 20 canvas roof seemed like a sieve, and the water dropped on us through every crevice.

At last the clouds broke, the sun shone out, the rain ceased, and the water began to sink away and give us a glimpse of mother earth, and everybody broke out into smiles and congratulations over the change. One afternoon late, about Christmas—I do not remember the exact day—as I was cooking supper and the men were coming in from work, the familiar clang of the Crier's bell was heard down the street, and, as he galloped past, the cry, “The levee's broke” fell on our ears. We did not realize what that cry foretold, but knew that it was a misfortune that was mutual, and one that every man must fight; so my husband ran like the rest to the Point, a mile or more away up the American River, where the temporary sand-bag barrier had given way. Every man worked with beating heart and hurrying breath to save the town, but it was useless; their puny strength could do nothing against such a flood of waters. At every moment the breach grew wider, and the current stronger, and they hastened back to rescue the threatened property. In the meantime I went on cooking supper, the children played about on the floor, and I stepped every minute to the door and looked up the street for some one to come back to tell me of the break.

While I stood watching, I saw tiny rivulets trickling over the ground, and behind them came the flood of waters in such a volume that it had not time to spread, but seemed like a little wall three or four inches high. Almost before I thought what it was, the water rushed against the door-sill at my feet and in five minutes more it rose over this small obstacle and poured on the floor. I snatched up the children, and put them on the bed, and hastily gathered up the articles which I feared the water might reach. The water kept rising, and I concluded to carry my children into the hotel, which we had lately sold, and which stood some three or four feet above the ground. I put them inside the 21 door, and ran back, meeting my husband just come from the levee. He said, “We must sleep in



there tonight” and, knowing the scanty hotel accommodations, I gathered up our beds and blankets and carried them in, and put in a basket the supper I had just cooked. By this time the water was six inches high in our house, and I knew we could not come back for some days, so I gathered up what I could of our clothing, and hurried again to the hotel through water which now reached nearly to my knees and ran with a force which almost carried me off my feet. In an hour more the whole town was afloat, and the little boats were rowed here and there picking up the people and rescuing what could be saved of the property. It was not until later in the night that we began to feel real alarm, for we expected every hour to see the water subside, but it steadily rose, and at midnight we moved to the upper floor. All through the night came the calls for “Help! help!” from every quarter, and the men listened a moment and then rowed in the direction of the call, sometimes too late to save. The cruel clouds clung like a cloak over the moon, and refused to break and give them light to aid them in their search. Sometimes for a moment the light shone through, but only long enough to make the darkness blacker. And the waters rushed and roared, and pale, set faces peered into the darkness, upon the hurrying monster which swallowed up in its raging fury the results of their hard labors and their perseverance.

The place where we had taken refuge was one long room, a half story with a window at each end; and here for several days lived forty people. There was one other woman besides myself and my two children; all the rest were men. For provisions, we caught the sacks of onions or boxes of anything which went floating by, or fished up with boat-hooks whatever we could. The fire by which we cooked was built of driftwood. Those were days of terror and fear, for at every minute we expected to follow the 22 zinc house we saw float away on the flood. The water splashed upon the ceiling below, and the rain and the wind made the waves run high on this inland sea. The crazy structure shook and trembled at every blast of wind or rush of water, but the swiftest current turned away and left us standing. They hung a blanket across one corner of the room, and that little territory, about six feet by four, was mine exclusively during our stay. The rest of the space was common property, where we cooked and ate during the day, and at night the men slept on the floor, rolled in their blankets. Two or three boats were tied always at the windows, and the men rowed out to the river and back again, bringing provisions from the store hulks, and news from the people

who had taken refuge on the vessels lying there. It came to be a horrible suspense, waiting either for the expected destruction or watching for the first abating of the waters. Even now, more than thirty years after, I can not hear the sound of continuous rain without, in a measure, living over again the terrors of those monotonous days, and feel creeping over me the dread of the rising waters.

Many an occurrence of those terrible days would have been funny, had we not been so filled with fear, and had not tragedy trodden so closely on the heels of comedy. Heroic actions went unnoticed and uncounted. Every man was willing, and many times did risk his life to aid his neighbor. Many a poor fellow doubtless found his death in the waters, and his grave far out at sea, perhaps in the lonely marshes which lined the river banks. There were few close ties and few friendships; and when a familiar face dropped out no one knew whether the man was dead or gone away; nobody inquired, nobody cared. The character of the pioneers was a paradox. They were generous to a degree which we can scarcely realize, yet selfish beyond parallel.

One of the numerous queer accessories of our flood-surrounded household was the gentlemen's dressing-room. If there had been any one there to see, it must have been a very remarkable performance. Each man took his bundle of clothing, brought from the schooners, and rowing to the corner of the house, climbed up to the peak of the roof, where, at his leisure, and in a dexterously acrobatic way, he re-arranged his toilet and cast his insect-infested clothing into the flood. Inside the house the scenes were quite as remarkable. We had all professions among our number: lawyers, physicians, miners, mechanics, merchants. Some had been senators, some gamblers; some had been owners of great plantations in the South; some had shipped before the mast. And they talked in groups about the fire, told stories, sang—rarely some one played melancholy tunes on a sad violin—played cards, gathered drift-wood, and sawed and split it up, dried their wet garments by the fire, and watched for the turning of the flood. At the end of ten days the change came; and at the end of the seventeenth day the water had run down to wading depth and we left the hotel.

The fastenings of the canvas of our house had broken away, but by some good fortune it still clung to the slender scantlings, so we had the beginnings of a house. Between the supports had gathered great piles of drift-wood and the carcasses of several animals; in one corner lay our rusty stove,

the whole covered with slime and sediment. My husband cleared out the small enclosure, fastened down the canvas walls, and built a floating floor, which rose and sank with the tide, and at every footstep the water splashed up through the open cracks. We walked on a plank from the floor to the beds, under which hung great sheets of mould. At night, when I awoke, I reached down the bedpost till my hand touched the water, and if it had risen above a certain notch, we got up and packed our movables, in preparation for a new misfortune; if it was still below the notch, we went to sleep again. A boat was tied always at the door, ready to carry us away, and we lived in this way for six weeks in constant 24 anticipation of another overflow. The canvas city was laid low; the wooden houses stood like grim sentinels in the waste, and slime and drift-wood covered the whole town. The flood of '49, I have been told, was not nearly so high as that of '52, was probably wrecked a far smaller quantity of property, but it was an unexpected blow to the '49ers, and therefore carried with it everything they had. There was not protection of any kind for property. The canvas which covered their scanty stores of goods was no barrier against the inroads of that ocean.

No attempt had been made to ward off the effects of so fearful and powerful an enemy, and the survivors were left, as we were, adrift without a dollar. When the mule trains began to move again, the poor beasts would flounder out of one hole into another, miring sometimes half up to their sides, and would be packed and unpacked half a dozen times in the length of as many blocks. Our little fortune of barley was gone—the sacks had burst and the grain had sprouted—and ruin stared us again in the face. We were terrified at the awful termination of the winter, and I felt that I should never again be safe unless high in the Sierra. A new excitement came whispered down from the mountains, that they had “struck it rich” at Nevada City—for every group of three or four tents was called a city—so we made up our minds that we would try the luck of the new mining camp. But how to get there? That was the question. We had neither money nor wagons, and apparently no way to get them. Finally we found a man with an idle team, who said he would take us, that is myself and the two children, and a stove and two sacks of flour, to Nevada City for seven hundred dollars. This looked hopeless, and I told him I guessed we wouldn't go as we had no money. I must have carried my honesty in my face, for he looked at me a minute and said, “I'll take you, Ma'am, if you will go security for the money.” I promised him it should be paid, “if I lived, and we made

the money". So, pledged to a new master, 25 Debt, we pressed forward on the road. It took us twelve long days and nights to traverse the distance of sixty miles, from Sacramento to Nevada City. There were no roads and the track, well nigh effaced by the winter storms, led up and down steep mountains, across deep ravines, through marshy holes, and over mountain streams. We were away from any shelter, for the way was as desolate as if the foot of man had never trod the soil. Scarce a sound broke the stillness of the nights except the sighing of the pines, the crash of a falling tree, or the howling of a panther. Sometimes we were overtaken by mule trains which passed us and vanished into the woods like phantoms. Occasionally we came across a lonely prospector, bending over his rocker, watching with eager eyes for the precious dust; but like a spirit, he presently dropped out of sight, and we were again alone.

The winter rains and melting snows had saturated the earth like a sponge, and the wagon and oxen sunk like lead in the sticky mud. Sometimes a whole day was consumed in going two or three miles, and one day we made camp but a quarter of a mile distant from the last. The days were spent in digging out both animals and wagon, and the light of the camp fire was utilized to mend the broken bolts and braces. We built the fire at night close by the wagon, under which we slept, for it had no cover. To add to the miseries of the trip it rained, and one night when the wagon was mired, and we could not shelter under it, we slept with our feet pushed under it and the old cotton umbrella spread over our faces. Sometimes, as we went down the mountains, they were so steep we tied great trees behind to keep the wagon from falling over the oxen; and once when the whole surface of the mountain side was a smooth, slippery rock, the oxen stiffened out their legs, and wagon and all literally slid down a quarter of a mile. But the longest way has an end. At last we caught the glimmer of the miners' huts far down in the gulch and reached the end of our journey.

## **Chapter Six**

From the brow of a steep mountain we caught the first glimpse of a mining camp. Nevada City, a row of canvas tents lining each of the two ravines, which, joining, emptied into Deer Creek, lay at our feet, flooded with the glory of the spring sunshine. The gulches seemed alive with moving men. Great, brawny miners wielded the pick and shovel, while others stood knee deep in the icy

water, and washed the soil from the gold. Every one seemed impelled by the frenzy of fever as men hurried here and there, so intent upon their work they had scarcely time to breathe. Our entrance into the busy camp could not be called a triumphal one, and had there been a “back way” we should certainly have selected it. Our wagon wheels looked like solid blocks; the color of the oxen was indistinguishable, and we were mud from head to foot. I remember filling my wash-basin three times with fresh water before I had made the slightest change apparent in the color of my face; and I am sure I scrubbed till my arms ached, before I got the children back to their natural 27 hue. We were not rich enough to indulge in the luxury of a canvas home; so a few pine boughs and branches of the undergrowth were cut and thrown into a rude shelter for the present, and my husband hurried away up the mountain to begin to split out “shakes” for a house. Since our experience of rain in Sacramento, we were inclined to think that rain was one of the daily or at least weekly occurrences of a California spring, and the first precaution was to secure a water-tight shelter. Our bedding was placed inside the little brush house, my cook stove set up near it under the shade of a great pine tree, and I was established, without further preparation, in my new home. When I was left alone in the afternoon—it was noon when we arrived—I cast my thoughts about me for some plan to assist in the recuperation of the family finances. As always occurs to the mind of a woman, I thought of taking boarders. There was already a thriving establishment of the kind just down the road, under the shelter of a canvas roof, as was set forth by its sign in lamp-black on a piece of cloth: “Wamac’s Hotel. Meals \$1.00.”

I determined to set up a rival hotel. So I bought two boards from a precious pile belonging to a man who was building the second wooden house in town. With my own hands I chopped stakes, drove them into the ground, and set up my table. I bought provisions at a neighboring store, and when my husband came back at night he found, mid the weird light of the pine torches, twenty miners eating at my table. Each man as he rose put a dollar in my hand and said I might count him as a permanent customer. I called my hotel “El Dorado”.

From the first day it was well patronized, and I shortly after took my husband into partnership. The miners were glad to get something to eat, and were always willing to pay for it. As in Sacramento, goods of all kinds sold at enormous figures, but, as no one ever hesitated to buy on that account,

dealers made huge profits. The most rare and costly articles of luxury were fruits and vegetables. One day that summer an enterprising pioneer of agricultural tastes brought in a wagon load of watermelons and sold them all for an ounce (sixteen dollars) each. I bought one for the children and thought no more of the price than one does now of buying a dish of ice-cream. Peaches sold at from one to two dollars each and were miserable apologies for fruit at that. Potatoes were a dollar a pound and for a time even higher. As the days progressed we prospered. In six weeks we had saved money enough to pay the man who brought us up from Sacramento the seven hundred dollars we owed him. In a little time, the frame of a house grew up around me, and presently my cook stove and brush house were enclosed under a roof. This house was gradually enlarged room by room, to afford accommodation for our increasing business. One Sunday afternoon as a great recreation, I took a walk along the mountainside above the town, now grown to be of some size. Looking down I found it necessary to ask which was my own house, for I had never before seen the outside of it at any considerable distance. We had then from seventy-five to two hundred boarders at twenty-five dollars a week. I became luxurious and hired a cook and waiters. Maintaining only my position as managing housekeeper, I retired from active business in the kitchen.

The “Coyote Diggings”, for that was the early name of the Nevada City placer mines, were very rich in coarse gold, and money came pouring into the town. Everybody had money, and everybody spent it. Money ran through one's fingers like water through a sieve. The most profitable employment of the time was gambling, and fifty or sixty of the men who pursued the profession were guests at my table. Many of them made fortunes and retired into a quieter and less notorious life. Of them all I can now remember only one—Billy Briggs, who has grown to prominence in San Francisco. I see him now, portly, swarthy, and complacent, and wonder what has become of the slender, fair-complexioned, smooth-faced, gentlemanly young man, who came and went so quietly, who carried my little boys away on his shoulders and sent them back to me happy with a handful of bright, new silver half-dollars. The “knights of the green table” were the aristocracy of the town. They were always the best-dressed men, had full pockets, lived well, were generous, respectful, and kind-hearted. They were in that day much what the stock-broking fraternity was here in San Francisco in the palmy days of the Comstock. The great gambling house of Smith & Barker

was the central point of interest. At night, under a glow of tallow candles, fifteen faro tables were surrounded by an eager, restless, reckless crowd. Stakes ran high into the thousands. Fortunes were won or lost on the turning of a card. Great piles of coin and bags of dust lay heaped on every table, and changed hands every minute. Men plunged wildly into every mode of dissipation to drown the homesickness so often gnawing at their hearts. They sang, danced, drank and caroused all night, and worked all day. They were possessed of the demon of recklessness, which always haunted the early mining camps. Blood was often shed, for a continual war raged between the miners and the gamblers. Nearly every man carried in his belt either knife or pistol, and one or the other flashed out on small provocation to do its deadly work.

It was such a circumstance as this which raised the first mob in Nevada City. So far as I ever learned, I was their only victim. One night I was sitting quietly by the kitchen fire, alone. My husband was away at Marysville, attending court. Suddenly I heard low knocks on the boards all round the house. Then I heard from threatening voices the cry, "Burn the house." I looked out of the window and saw a crowd of men at the back of the house. I picked up the candle and went into the dining room. At every window I caught sight of faces pressed against the glass. I hurried to the front, where the knocking was loudest and the voices were most uproarious. Terrified almost to death, I opened the door, just enough to see the host of angry, excited faces and hear the cries, "Search for him" and "No, no, burn him out". I attempted to shut the door, but could not. Some one spoke to me, called himself my friend, and tried to tell me that they meant me no harm. But I could not understand, and answered, "I have no friends; what do you want?" The sheriff, a kindly gentleman, whom I knew well and who lived in my house, tried vainly to calm my fears. He explained that a gambler named Tom Collins had been killed at a card table by one of his associates who lived in our house and that they were searching for him. Finally my old friend, Mr. Nick Turner, came pushing through the crowd and he, with the sheriff, succeeded in allaying my fright and making me understand. I then let them search the house but the man was not there. Had he been caught they would have made short work of him. The next night, or rather in the morning, my husband came home. He had seen the fugitive, who had ridden into Marysville to tell him of the shooting and of my fright. In disguise he had stood in the crowd, not ten feet from me, had watched

them search, and heard the raging of the infuriated crowd. He said it was hard work to keep from betraying himself when he saw how I was suffering from terror. His friends had provided a fleet mule, which they had tied somewhere across the ravine, and when the mob dispersed he made fast time out of the camp. Many years afterwards he came to see me and told me that the greatest regret he felt in regard to the affair was that he had not come forward and given himself up and saved me such pain.

The doctors were busy then, for there were hundreds of men sick and dying from cold and exposure. Indeed, every profession found employment, except the clerical, for it was not yet settled enough at the “Coyote” to require the services of a pastor. Every man was too busy thinking of the preservation of his body to think of saving his soul; and the unfortunates who did not succeed in keeping their heads above water were buried “without benefit of the clergy”. Like all California mining towns, Nevada City grew up in almost the twinkling of an eye. There were ten thousand men in the Coyote Diggings, and the streets were lined with drinking saloons and gambling tables. Money came in in thousands of dollars from the mines. New parties came pouring into the town from Sacramento and fitted out here for further prospecting in the mountains. The country was full of men crazed on the subject of “deep diggings”, and the future seemed to promise a succession of greater good fortune. These were indeed “flush times”. We made money fast. In six months we had ten thousand dollars invested in the hotel and store and we owned a stock of goods worth perhaps ten thousand more. The buildings were of the roughest possible description, but they were to Nevada City what the Palace Hotel is to this city today.

There was no place of deposit for money, and the men living in the house dropped into the habit of leaving their dust with me for safe keeping. At times I have had a larger amount of money in my charge than would furnish capital for a country bank. Many a night have I shut my oven door on two milk-pans filled high with bags of gold dust, and I have often slept with my mattress literally lined with the precious metal. At one time I must have had more than two hundred thousand dollars lying unprotected in my bedroom, and it never entered my head that it might be stolen. The house had neither locks nor bolts, but, as there were no thieves, precautions were unnecessary. I had a large, old-fashioned reticule hung behind my kitchen stove, where I put the money I had made



by doing little pieces of sewing for the men. In a month or two I had four or five hundred dollars saved and was thinking of lending it, for interest was very high. But one day I missed the bag. Of course there was a general search, and I found, at last, that my youngest son had taken it down, dragged it out into the sand in the street, and was building houses with the coins. He had been there an hour or more, some of the men told me, and no one had thought of stealing even a solitary half-dollar from the little fellow. I loaned the money, but at such an extravagant rate of interest that I might have foreseen that my man must fail and run away, which he finally did. I believe the rate of interest at which I loaned it was ten per cent a month. The only case of theft I can remember to have occurred during the time I lived in Nevada City, was that of a man who appropriated a mule, and he received so aggravated a punishment that I shiver when I recollect that I was an involuntary looker-on. They tied the miserable man to a tree, and lashed his bare back with a leather whip, until he was cut and striped in a hundred places, and the blood ran down from his shoulders to the ground in a perfect stream.

My wardrobe was still a simple one. For several years my best dress was a clean calico. The first installments of genuine finery which came into the interior were crepe shawls and scarfs from the Chinese vessels which came to San Francisco. But the feminine portion of the population was so small that there was no rivalry in dress or fashion, and every man thought every woman in that day a beauty. Even I have had men come forty miles over the mountains, just to look at me, and I never was called a handsome woman, in my best days, even by my most ardent admirers.

## **Chapter Seven**

After we had been in the town of Nevada City three or four months, the first ball was given. There were twelve ladies present and about three hundred men. The costumes were eccentric, or would be now. At that time it was the prevailing fashion for the gentlemen to attend social gatherings in blue woolen shirts, and with trousers stuffed into boot-tops. Every man was “heeled” with revolver and bowie-knife. My own elaborate toilet for the occasion was a freshly ironed calico and a plaid shawl. The dresses of the other ladies were similar. A few days before the ball, word came into the town that a family of immigrants, including several grown young ladies, had moved into Grass

Valley. The news was hailed with rapture by the young men, and two of them, Messrs. Frinx and Blackman, prominent merchants, procured horses and rode over, with testimonials in hand, to engage the presence of the young ladies, if possible, for the forthcoming ball. They were cordially received, and their request gracefully accorded. On the day of the ball, they procured what they could 34 in the form of vehicles, and drove over the mountains to bring back their prizes. It was already dark when they arrived at the little log house, and a knock at the door ushered them into the one room of the residence. The old lady answered their inquiries for the young ladies by saying, "Not much. If your ball had been in the daytime, and the gals 'ud be home by dark, I wouldn't mind; but my gals don't go traipsing 'round in the night with no young men. No siree."

There was nothing left for the discomfited beaux but to come back alone. When they returned, they gave us a mournful description of their wild-goose chase. They told us how, as they stepped into the room, the clothing on two beds gave a sudden jerk and exposed the symmetry of two pairs of feet. They were at first mystified by the strange sight, but afterwards concluded that these were the dainty pedal extremities of their missing inamoratas. However, the ball went on, notwithstanding the lessening in number of the expected ladies. A number of the men tied handkerchiefs around their arms and airily assumed the character of ball-room belles. Every lady was overwhelmed with attentions, and there was probably more enjoyment that night, on the rough pine floor and under the flickering gleam of tallow candles, than one often finds in our society drawing-rooms, where the rich silks trail over velvet carpets, where the air is heavy with the perfume of exotics, and where night is turned into a brighter day under the glare of countless gas-jets.

We had lived eighteen months in Nevada City when fire cut us adrift again, as water had done in Sacramento. Some careless hand had set fire to a pile of pine shavings lying at the side of a house in course of construction, and while we slept, unconscious of danger, the flames caught and spread, and in a short half hour the whole town was in a blaze. We were roused from sleep by the cry of "Fire, fire" and the clang of bells. Snatching each a garment, we hurried out through blinding smoke and 35 darting flames, not daring even to make an effort to collect our effects. There were no means for stopping such a conflagration. Bells clanged and gongs sounded, but all to no purpose save to wake the sleeping people, for neither engines nor firemen were at hand. So we stood with

bated breath, and watched the fiery monstercrush in his great red jaws the homes we had toiled to build. The tinder-like pine houses ignited with a spark, and the fire raged and roared over the fated town. The red glare fell far back into the pine woods and lighted them like day; it wrapped the moving human creatures in a fiendish glow, and cast their giant shadows far along the ground. The fire howled and moaned like a giant in an agony of pain, and the buildings crashed and fell as if he were striking them down in his writhings. When the slow dawn broke, and the sun came riding up so calm and smiling, he looked down upon a smouldering bed of ashes; and in place of the cheerful, happy faces, which were wont to greet his appearance in the busy rushing town of yesterday his beams lighted sad countenances, reflecting the utter ruin of their fortunes. The eight thousand inhabitants were homeless, for in the principal part of the town every house was swept away; and most of them were penniless as well as homeless. Like ourselves most of them had invested their money in buildings and goods, and scarcely anything was saved. The remnant of our fortune consisted of five hundred dollars, which my husband had in his pockets and had neglected to put away, and with that sum we were to start again. For months my health had been failing, and when this blow came in the shape of the fire, my strength failed and I fell sick. Some generous man offered us the shelter of his cabin in the edge of the woods. For weeks I was a prisoner there, bound in the fetters of fever. When, at last, my returning health and strength permitted it, we moved from Nevada City nearer to the valley.

The mines around Nevada City were wonderfully rich. 36 Miles and miles of flume carried the water from mine to mine, to flow on through more miles of sluice-boxes. Claims were staked off in every ravine for hangers about the city. Men dug for gold in the very streets of the town and under the very foundations of the houses. Not infrequently the digging of a well would develop a rich claim and make the owner rich in a few weeks. After the fire we let our city lot go for a few dollars and the man who bought it took thirty thousand dollars out of the gravel part of it, which sloped down to the ravine. The streams ran muddy with the tailings from the diggings. Wherever pick and shovel disturbed and water washed the soil, a color could be found. Many men made fortunes, for thousands of dollars were taken out in a single day. The fever and uncertainty of mining made the people grow old and haggard. They might dig, dig, dig, fruitlessly for days, making scarcely

enough to keep body and soul together, and then disheartened, sell the worthless claim for enough provisions to last till they struck another camp. Perhaps the first day's work on the old claim by the new owner would yield hundreds of dollars. Not a half block from my house, a young man took out sixteen thousand dollars, and then gave his claim to me. I had no way to work it, and my husband was opposed to mining on general principles, so I sold the property for a hundred dollars. The man who bought it took out of it, before we left the town, ten thousand dollars.

Nevada City sprung, Phoenix like, from its ashes and grew up a more substantial and permanent town and with more consideration for appearances. The streets straightened themselves, the houses, like well-drilled soldiers, formed naturally into line. The little city was more rushing and prosperous than ever. The green valleys, however, seemed to offer us a pleasanter home, so we adhered to our plan of removal, and bade a rather sad farewell to the bright, spicy little snow-bound town where we had found so many friends.

### 37

The road we followed back to Sacramento had greatly changed since we had traveled over it eighteen months before. Where we had climbed up and down steep mountains, and cut down obstacles in our path, we now rose and descended by easy grades. The woods, which had then closed around dark and thick, had been charred or burned away, and the giant arms, scorched and blackened, pointed out the new way. Substantial bridges spanned the streams. Every turn brought us face to face with wagons loaded high with building materials and supplies for the city of the mountains. Instead of the twelve dragging days we spent in our first trip over this route, the journey was performed in two. Instead of sleeping in discomfort on the cold, wet ground, we enjoyed the hospitality of a comfortable house, the property of Mr. James Anthony.

This hotel, at the crossing of Bear River was, for the times, something remarkable. There for the first time in California I saw papered and painted walls. The floors were covered with China matting, and the beds rejoiced in sheets and pillow-cases. The carpeting was a real luxury, and I remember thinking if I could get a house carpeted with that beautiful covering I should scarcely care for anything else, for relief from the drudgery of scrubbing floors seemed the one thing worth

living for. It was a bachelor establishment, but, strange to say, was scrupulously clean and well conducted. Had he known it, the genial proprietor might have resented my husband's speech to me, "Don't you think you had better go out and see if supper is all right?"

As we came down from the mountains we found the country stirred up with "squatter" troubles, rumors of which had reached us in Nevada. As we neared Sacramento we found ourselves almost in the midst of them. The trouble originated through the conflicting claims of the buyers and settlers. Almost all the land, from some distance below Sacramento far up into the Shasta region, was claimed by Sutter under a Spanish grant; and the 38 towns of Sacramento, Brighton, Marysville, Coloma, and others, and the lands surrounding them, were sold by Sutter, or his representatives, under the grant title. Numbers of the newcomers resented this claim and pre-empted land under the United States laws. Naturally there arose between the rival claimants a war which was often a bloody one. The first serious outbreak to occur was "the squatter riot of '51". I believe the first real trouble took place near Sacramento, in the endeavor of the people on the grant side of the faction to dispossess the Madden brothers, Jerome and Thomas. The settlers gathered in a body, reinstated them, and paraded through the streets of Sacramento. The city turned out in force, headed by the sheriff, mayor and other officials in opposition, and a fight took place in which Bigelow, the mayor, Woodland, the assessor, and Maloney, the captain of the settlers were killed and several on both sides wounded.

There were many episodes at that time that would be more thrilling than romance. One of the most talked of incidents was the killing of Sheriff McKenna at the house of William Allan, near Brighton. Allan, who was supposed to be in league with the squatters, had been heard to make sympathizing remarks to and about them, and by his course had incurred the wrath of the officials. A posse, headed by the sheriff returning from the funeral of the murdered mayor and assessor, rode out to arrest the suspected man. They knocked at the door, and were told that Mrs. Allan was very sick, perhaps dying, and were requested to retire. Allan promised to come to Sacramento and give himself up in the morning. But during the discussion some one fired a pistol, whether intentionally or not was never known; and the guard, thinking someone was resisting the sheriff, broke open the doors and fired upon the occupants of the room, killing Allan's son and wounding the old man

himself in two places. A shot, inflicted by McKenna, wounded him in the right arm as he stood with revolver drawn. The weapon fell, but the determined 39 old man grasped it with his left hand and fired the shot which killed the officer. When their leader fell, the posse withdrew to a distance, but, ascertaining his fate, returned in hot haste to the house. I was told by an eye-witness that, as they looked through the open door, they saw dead upon the bed the poor mother, her features drawn and distorted by the fright which had hastened her approaching end. Bending over her, apparently broken-hearted, was the daughter, with pale face and horror-stricken eyes, and dead at her feet, in a pool of blood lay the son. The sight of so much misery seemed to touch no tender cord in the bosoms of the enraged men and they searched with intent eyes and strained ears for a sound which might tell of their victim's hiding-place; but he baffled pursuit. They rode up and down the river for several miles, searched out-houses, and beat the bushes but failed to find him. It was not until years after that I heard the almost miraculous story of his preservation. He crept to the river, and hung to the willows in the water, with his face raised only to admit his breathing, while the pursuers passed and repassed at the distance of a few feet. At last when silence told of their withdrawal, he swam the river and sought shelter in a neighboring barn. It was not till five days after that he crept unobserved into Coloma, and obtained medical attendance for his wounds, which the hot weather had aggravated into a death-like torture. His friends came to his assistance and he was safely hidden from pursuit and helped out of the State, and it was many years before he dared openly to show himself in California. His life, however, ended peacefully a few years ago in the calm and seclusion of Lake County.

## **Chapter Eight**

When we reached Sacramento again we became undecided whether to go on toward the bay or to remain there. In the meantime we took possession of a deserted hotel which stood on K Street. This hotel was tenanted only by rats that galloped madly over the floor and made journeys from room to room through openings they had gnawed in the panels. They seemed to have no apprehension of human beings and came and went as fearlessly as if we had not been there. At that time Sacramento was infested with the horrible creatures. They swarmed from the vessels lying at the wharves into the town and grew into a thriving colony which neither flood nor fire could subdue. In the flood of

'49 I had seen dozens of them collected upon every floating stick, or box, or barrel, and had seen men push them off into the water and watch them scramble back to another resting-place. Every rope and board would be alive with them. They ran backward and forward across the chains that held the vessels to the piers. All of them seemed to have survived the second flood as well, and when we spent the first night in that deserted house it seemed that all their descendants had gathered there to hold high carnival. As it grew dark they came out by scores, and my husband threw a little barley on the ground in the back yard to see how many would collect there. It was not many minutes till the yard was covered with rats; they seemed piled three deep in their ravenous hunger for the grain; when my husband fired into them with a shot-gun, he killed thirty-two. A second shot killed twelve, and I believe if he had continued his curious sport he might have killed hundreds. From every corner they glared at us with their round, bright eyes. They snapped at our heels as we passed. They bit at each other, and gnawed the legs of chairs where we sat. At night I put the bedding upon the tables, lest in our sleep the fierce creatures would be tempted to make their raids upon our bodies. I listened with perfect horror to their savage wrangling over bits of discarded food which had been left lying about. Even rat-terriers and ferocious cats came off second best in their encounters with the pests.

Sacramento had very greatly changed since our departure after the flood of '49. We had left the town covered with slime and mud; with dirty canvases clinging to broken poles; with festering carcasses in the streets; with drift-wood caught at every obstructing point; with yawning mudholes at every corner; with floundering teams and miring wagons everywhere to be seen. We had left it full of men with broken fortunes, with long faces and empty pockets. A second flood had come and gone and the city, newly risen from the waters, was built up along broad, graded streets, with large airy, well-built houses. Brick and mortar had taken the place of canvas and shakes. Sidewalks gave the pedestrian security against dust and mud. Well-stocked stores of dry goods, groceries, and hardware had taken the place of the redwood board over the barrel-head. An enterprising daguerreotypist had set up his sign in the city, and was doing a rushing business at 42 thirty dollars a picture. The banking house of Page & Bacon was one of the solid institutions of the time. Adams Express transported dust and valuables. The pony express thundered into Sacramento every day,

connecting the East with the West. The overland stage drew up with a flourish, and emptied its weight of mails and freight of passengers into the eager hands of the waiting Californians. Other lines of stages ran in all direction to the mines, and steamers came up from San Francisco. The town was full of people and full of money. The “Golden Eagle” still nods in sleepy indolence on the same spot on K street where it then stood, wide awake and bustling, with “mine host” Callahan smiling pleasantly and accommodatingly on his guests. The little fish of the puddle waked up to the sense that they were quite grown up and required amusement. The city boasted a theatre; and stars in eclipse or waiting for a first bright dawning walked the boards in proud consciousness of their unappreciated worth. The first play I saw there was “Julius Caesar”. In the intervals of the tragedy we were regaled with the songs of Charles Vivian. When he came back again, fifteen years later, he revived his songs of “’49 and the great big yellow lumps of gold” and the pioneer airs, “Wapping Old Stairs”, and “The Blue-tailed Fly”.

On the day of a bull fight, or a mustang race, the sporting population turned out *en masse*, and the victory or defeat of Chiquita or Rag-tailed Billy, made their respective owners rich or poor, for no man ever hesitated to bet his bottom dollar on his own horse. I have seen them come home sometimes bootless, coatless, hatless, from the track, having parted with those articles as the exigencies of the race demanded, and when they handed over their red sashes and silver-plated, chain-decked spurs, the struggle was like the severing of soul and body. Sometimes the losing turfman shot his defeated horse, as a sort of sedative to his irritated feelings. The streets were lined with gambling houses and whisky shops. Every second door on J Street led to a faro 43 table and a bar, and every place was thronged with customers. Sacramento was filled with desperadoes, and almost every twenty-four hours witnessed at least one murder. So long as the gamblers confined their murderous attack among their own kind, no one paid much attention to their sport, but when their blows fell on an outsider with fatal result, vengeance was swift and sure, for the population took the matter into their own hands in defiance of law. The second day after we had arrived such an episode occurred.

A young man walking down the street was attracted by a street brawl among the gamblers, an occurrence so frequent that had it not been for the manifest injustice of one man being assailed by



two, it would have passed unnoticed. As it was, he generously interfered, separated the combatants and released the weaker party. Enraged at the uncalled for obtrusion, one of the young ruffians fired upon the intruder, inflicting a mortal wound. Scarcely was the deed committed before the gathering crowd, mad with rage, demanded the murderer's life. The officers whirled away the malefactor, and for lack of another stronghold, confined him in the basement of a brick building of private ownership, pending trial. But as the morning wore on, the fury of the populace grew hotter, and their always existing hatred of the gamblers grew into an ungovernable passion at the one against whom they had a clue. They refused to listen to the advocates of the law. The mob were quick about it. They broke open the improvised jail and dragged the criminal from his prison.

It must have been two o'clock at night when I was startled by the tramp of feet passing by the door. I ran to look and the glimmer of the torches carried by the muttering men revealed in their midst the figure of the murderer. He seemed frozen with terror, his knees knocked together, and his legs refused to support him. He was carried by the men on either side of him. His eyes were starting from their sockets, his face was ghastly, his lips were livid, and his hair stood on end. He seemed not to see the mob about him, who cried, "Hang him, hang him", and his fixed eyes dilated with fear at the phantom of death he saw before him. I had not heard the story of the shooting, so I was in ignorance concerning the meaning of the crowd, or what was the fault of the miserable wretch. After they had passed by I ran to the corner, half a block distant, to see where they carried him. As I reached the spot, I saw a black object shoot up into the air above the heads of the swaying mob and dangle from the limb of a great sycamore tree which stood in the street. It writhed and trembled for an instant and was still, and the silence of satisfied revenge settled down over the dispersing crowd. When daylight broke the summer wind swayed to and fro in the warm morning air all that was mortal of the murderer, but not a whisper told whose hands had executed the fearful vengeance. His friends came with the early light to remove the body. He was buried on the following day, and by some strange fatality, the same bright sun shone on the newly made graves, where the murderer and his victim lay sleeping side by side.

We lingered a month or more in Sacramento, undecided what to do, but finally our interest was again strongly attracted to the valley, and, our tastes and former habits being somewhat agricultural,

we determined to move on. The tules barred our direct way, stretching in a broad water covered sheet from the Sacramento River ten miles in to land. We could not swim our teams across, as I have known Jerome Davis and his fellow stock-traders to swim their bands of cattle and wire mustangs, so we drove up the river to the ferry, now known as Knight's Landing, and there we crossed over in a flat bottomed ferry-boat.

The plain from the river bank to the mountains was a sheet of waving grass and bright-hued wild flowers, trackless and unenclosed. The fresh spring breezes fanned our faces and invigorated our bodies; the calmness and silence of the wide prairie soothed us like a sweet dream. We journeyed on to the foothills, passing for miles through wild oats which rose to the heads of our mules. Antelopes and elks stopped on every knoll, and, surveying us with startled eyes and uplifted heads, wheeled and galloped out of sight. After four or five days of easy traveling, we pitched our camp over the first range of low outlying foothills at the foot of a spur of the Coast Range.

Our location was close by a tiny spring-fed stream, near the most frequented route from the upper country to Benicia. The shade of a wide-spreading oak afforded us a pleasant shelter from the sunshine, and at night we slept in a tent improvised from the boughs and canvas cover of our wagon. We were fascinated by the beauty of the little valley which already bore the name of Vaca from the Spanish owner of the grant within the limits of which it lay. The green hills smiled down on us through their sheeny veil of grass. The great oak trees, tall and stately, bent down their friendly arms as if to embrace us; the nodding oats sang a song of peace and plenty to the music of the soft wind; the inquisitive wild flowers, peeping up with round, wide opened eyes from the edge of every foot-path bade us stay. We made up our minds, if possible, to buy land and settle.

We were again almost penniless, and we felt that we must get to work and begin to lay by something.

It was early spring time, and the wild oats, growing all about us in such rank profusion, seemed to say, "Here is food and drink and clothing." Hay was selling in San Francisco at a hundred and fifty dollars a ton, so my husband, leaving me to my own resources, set hard at work cutting and

making hay; and I, as before, set up my stove and camp kettle and hung out my sign, printed with a charred fire-brand on a piece of board, WILSON'S HOTEL. The accommodations were, perhaps, scanty, but were hailed with delight by the traveling public, which had heretofore lunched or dined on horseback at full gallop, or lain 46 down supperless to sleep under the wide arch of heaven. The boards from the wagon bed made my table, handy stumps and logs made comfortable chairs, and the guest tethered his horse at the distance of a few yards and retired to the other side of the hay-stack to sleep. The next morning he paid me a dollar for his bed and another for his breakfast, touched his sombrero, and with a kind "good morning", spurred his horse and rode away, feeling he had not paid too dearly for his entertainment. My husband's ready rifle supplied the table with roast and steak of antelope and elk from the herds which grazed about us, and the hotel under the oak tree prospered.

There we lived for the whole summer, six months or more without other shelter than the canvas wagon-cover at night and the roof of green leaves by day. Housekeeping was not difficult then, no fussing with servants or house-cleaning, no windows to wash or carpets to take up. I swept away the dirt with a broom of willow switches, and the drawing room where I received my company was "all out doors". When the dust grew inconvenient under foot, we moved the cook stove and table around to the other side of the tree and began over again. A row of nails driven close in the tree trunk held my array of culinary utensils and the polished tin cups which daily graced my table, and a shelf held the bright tin plates from which we ate. No crystal or French decorated egg-shell china added care to my labors. Notwithstanding the lack of modern appliances and conveniences, my hotel had the reputation of being the best on the route from Sacramento to Benicia. The men who came and went up and down the country, and ate frequently at my table, used often to compliment me upon the good cheer which they always found provided, and by pleasing contrast, told stories of the meals they sometimes got at other places. I remember one morning having eight or ten at breakfast, and they vied with each other in relating tales of the poor breakfasts they had eaten. But 47 the palm was carried off by Mr. Thad. Hoppin, who in his slow way, said, "Well, the worst meal I ever ate they gave me yesterday down at Allford's. All they had was clabber milk and seed cucumbers."

My nearest American neighbors were Mr. John Wolfskill, and Mr. and Mrs. Mat. Wolfskill, who lived twelve miles away, on the banks of Putah Creek. After I had been about six months in Vaca Valley, I concluded to ride over and get acquainted. So one morning bright and early, after the breakfast was over, the dishes washed, and the housework finished, I saddled my horse with my husband's saddle (a side-saddle was unknown in those parts), packed a lunch, took a bottle of water, tied my two boys on behind me with a stout rope and started off. I did not know the exact spot where my neighbors lived, but felt sure of finding them without trouble, as I had only to ride on across the plain until I struck the first stream, and follow it down. There were no roads, so I could select my path as I pleased, taking care only to avoid as much as possible the bands of Spanish cattle which covered the whole country; they were dangerous to encounter, even mounted, and to any one on foot they were certain death. We were riding rapidly through the scattered herds, when a sudden gust of wind took away the hat of one of the children, and as a hat was something precious and not easily procured at that time, we must stop and get it. I should hardly have been able to descend and remount without attracting the notice of the cattle by the fluttering of my dress, and then a stampede would inevitably have followed; so I constructed a stirrup of handkerchiefs; then my little boy clambered down and climbed up again, in the face of the tossing heads, red eyes and spreading horns all about us.

At ten o'clock we arrived at a house thatched with tule, and, seeing a man sitting near it, we stopped to ask, "Does Mr. Wolfskill live here?"

48

"My name's Wolfskill," was the reply, "but there ain't no mister to it."

I began to introduce myself, when he cut short my speech with, "Git down, git down. I know you. I got a drink at your well yesterday. Git down."

It was not a ceremonious greeting, but it was intended to be a cordial one, and the entire visit proved to be very satisfactory. Mrs. Wolfskill, good woman, was as delighted to find an English-speaking neighbor as I was myself and gave me a hearty welcome. That day saw the

commencement of a real friendship between us, which ended only with her death; and thereafter, at short intervals, we rode across the plain to exchange friendly visits, until every vaquero on the grant knew us, and saluted us as we passed with a polite, “*Buenas Dias, senora.*” The Los Putos grant, belonging to the Wolfskills, comprised fifty thousand acres of some of the best land in what is now Solano County. But these good people, who were then the possessors of leagues of land and thousands of Spanish cattle, lived in that little tule house with a dirt floor for years. Their children, still living at the same spot, in a great southern-looking, veranda-shaded, cool, stone house, surrounded with orange groves and fig orchards, are the happy possessors of the finest ranches in the country.

## Chapter Nine

Our nearest neighbors were the members of the Spanish colony, who lived only three-quarters of a mile away, in the little Laguna Valley. The lord of the soil, the original owner of all the land included in the grant on which we lived, was Manuel Vaca, and around him clustered the Spanish population of great or lesser note. Some of their adobe houses still remain, in unpleasing, barren, squalid desolation, a rude and fast-decaying monument to the vanished grandeur of Spanish California, and a shelter to American settlers of even less energy and enterprise than the “greasers”. About us in all directions roamed herds of cattle and droves of mustangs, which constituted the wealth of the settlement and a whole day's hard riding about the grant would not reveal half the extent of their four-footed possessions. Even at that early day some portions of the original grant had already passed from Vaca to American owners. Today of all that great body of fertile valley and leagues of pasture land scarcely more than two or three hundred acres can be found in the possession of his heirs.

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The Mexican character of slothfulness and procrastination assisted materially to undermine their financial stability, and they succumbed to the strategy and acuteness of the American trader. It was but a few years till the proud rulers of the valley were the humblest subjects of the new monarchs, reduced from affluence almost to beggary by too greatly trusted Yankees.

At the time we arrived in the valley, however, the “greaser” element, as it has since been called, was in its pristine glory. All the accompaniments of Spanish happiness were to be found in the small precinct occupied by their dwellings. An army of vaqueros congregated every day about the settlement, smoked cigarettes, ran races, played cards for high stakes, and drank bad whisky in unlimited quantities. The man of position felt proud of his patrician blood, and condescended when he addressed his surrounding inferiors. He wore a broad sombrero, gold-laced jacket and wide bell-decked pantaloons, girt his waist with a flaming sash, wore jangling at his heels, large, clanking, silver spurs, swung a lariat with unerring aim, and in the saddle looked a centaur. The belles of the valley coquetted with the brave riders, threw at them melting glances from their eyes, and whispered sweet nothings in the melodious Spanish tongue. I was always treated with extreme consideration by the Spanish people, and they quite frequently invited me to participate in their dances and feasts, which they gave to celebrate their great occasions. We had been in the valley only about two months, when Senor Vaca came riding over one morning to ask me, by the aid of an interpreter, to attend a ball to be given that night at his house. I was quite unfamiliar with the manner and customs of the Spanish people, and my acceptance of the cordial and pressing invitation was prompted quite as much by curiosity as by my friendly feelings for my neighbors.

When we arrived at the adobe house the light streamed through open windows and doors far out into the night and 51 revealed, tethered all about, the saddle-horses of the guests and lit up many black-eyed, smiling faces, looking to see how the Americans would be received. Don Manuel with his daughter, greeted us with all the ceremony and courtesy of a Spanish grandee and showed us to the place of honor. We were ushered into a long room illuminated with tallow dips, destitute of furniture, with the exception of the two or three chairs reserved exclusively for the use of the American visitors. On either side were many mats, on which reclined with careless grace and ease the flirting belle and beau and the wrinkled duennas of the fiesta. The musical accompaniment to the dancing, which had already begun, was played upon guitar and tambourine, and the laughing, chattering, happy crowd swayed and turned in wave-like undulation to the rhythm of a seductive waltz. They fluttered their silken vari-colored scarfs, and bent their lithe bodies in graceful dances which charmed my cotillion and quadrille-accustomed eyes. The young ladies were dressed in

true Mexican costume; snowy chemises of soft fine linen, cut low, displayed the plump necks, leaving bare the dimpled arms; bright hued silk petticoats in great plaid patterns and shawls and scarfs of brilliant scarlet, set off in contrast their glossy, jet hair, their red lips, and their sparkling, tigerish, changing eyes. The men in holiday attire of velvet jackets of royal purple and emerald green, profusely trimmed with gold and silver braids, were as gaudy in color and picturesque in appearance as the feminine portion of the assembly. The refreshments comprised strangely compounded but savory Spanish stews, hot with chilies, great piles of tortillas, and gallons of only tolerable whisky. Near midnight they were served informally. Some of the guests ate reclining on their mats, some standing about the long, low table, some lounging in door-ways and window-seats—all laughing, talking, coquetting and thoroughly enjoying the passing minutes, forgetful of yesterday, heedless of tomorrow, living only in the happy present. Among 52 the prominent and honored guests were members of the most wealthy and influential Spanish families of the country. I remember well the pretty faces and manly figures of the Armijos, Picos, Penas, and Berryessas, who have long since been gathered in peace to their fathers, or are still living, holding prominent places in various California communities.

The vaqueros who rode up and down about the country stopped often at our place, and were very kind and friendly. Many a quarter of freshly killed beef or mutton, game caught in the valley, or birds snared in the mountains, found their way from their hands to my not over-well stocked larder. Once they brought me a young elk, that I might have it about the place for a pet. I was delighted with the gift, and took it out toward the corral, intending to keep it with the cows. Imagine my surprise and consternation when, as I approached the gate, meek, patient old mulley, who had followed us across the plains and lived through fire and flood, lashed her tail from side to side, broke into a gallop, scaled an eight foot fence at a single bound and only stopped her frightened run when she was three miles from home. After that I gave up my intention of adding an elk to my domestic collection of animals, and declined all further gifts of the kind. The vaquero and his horse were inseparable; even while he drank his whisky at the roadside “deadfull” he retained his hold on the lariat of the horse grazing fifty feet away outside. He ate, drank, and slept in the saddle; and

even if he lay down under a tree for the night, the horse was in constant requisition for a breathless gallop across country after the stampeding cattle.

Toward the end of the summer months, as we began to look for the early rains, the matter of house-building absorbed all our attention. Lumber was very scarce and very high in price, and all that we got was hauled from Benicia, a distance of thirty miles, and the greater part of our savings was used up in the construction of the rudest kind of a shelter. I had grown so accustomed to sleeping in the open air, that the first night we slept under a roof I absolutely suffered from a sense of suffocation, although there were neither doors nor windows to the structure. All during the summer my hotel had prospered and made money, while my husband kept hard at work making hay. At the end of the season, he had cut and baled and hauled the long fifteen miles to Cache Slough, two hundred tons of hay and it lay there awaiting shipment to San Francisco. But alas for all our hopes, the rains came unexpectedly, and the water rising in tules, carried away again all the labor of the year and the money on which we had depended to pay partly for the land we had bought. The hay was a total loss, and we had only the refuge of harder work at the hotel business and farming for next year. Trouble seemed to follow us relentlessly; we had scarcely moved into our little frame house under the oak, when the Land Commissioners met in San Francisco to settle or accept the surveys of the Spanish grants. Among the disputed boundary lines were those of the grant upon which we had bought. The commissioners had decided at first that the land upon which we lived was included in the grant, but the news had scarcely reached us when other testimony bearing on the case was heard, and the decision was reversed. The news came to Benicia at night, and long before daylight there came knocks at the door calling me up, and I was busy until long after the usual breakfast time satisfying the hunger of the unusually large crowd of travelers. My husband was away in Sacramento, and therefore I did not learn till later in the day the cause of this sudden immigration. By night a whole party of surveyors had staked off half the valley and all the land we had bought, and a band of squatters had built a rough cabin half a mile from us. When my husband returned at night he was furious, and he swore that he would either have the land or kill every man who disputed his ownership. Before it was light he<sup>54</sup> left the house on his errand of ejection, taking with him a witness, in case he should be killed or be forced to kill the squatters. He kissed



me good-bye, hardly expecting to come back to me alive, for the squatters, many of whom knew and feared his reckless and determined purpose, would not have hesitated to dispose of him with a bullet.

He walked straight to their cabin, and pushing aside the blanket hung for a door, found the intruders, six in number, sound asleep, and their guns standing loaded, ready for use, near at hand. Slipping softly in, he secured the six guns, and then, covering the sleepers with his own weapon, waked them. They were of course enraged but helpless, and at his command filed silently out of the cabin. Then, still under the pitiless aim of that steady gun, they silently and unresistingly watched the demolition and removal of their mushroom house. When the last stick of wood and scrap of material had been dragged away, the gun was lowered, and they were given a solemn warning never again to attempt the unlawful seizure of another man's property under pain of death. The foiled squatters stormed and raved and vowed vengeance, but we were troubled no more by that party. Others, with as little regard for the rights of property-owners, were ready to attempt, and did attempt, the same wholesale theft of land, but were disposed of in as summary a manner. The trouble thus begun grew into a perfect war, in courts and out of courts. Men who paid for their lands were determined to hold them at any cost, and everybody went armed to the teeth, ready to defend his claim. The decisions of the Land Commissioners kept us in a state of continuous ferment, and for years we had not only a hard struggle to keep our land, but were in constant terror of the murderous shots of the infuriated men who desired to eject us. The "squatters" were so much the topic of common conversation among us that even the children, left to invent their own amusements, used to play at being 55 "squatters". Once, had I not rescued my youngest son, he would have been hanged, in mimicry of the punishment not unusually discussed as a salient remedy for the "squatter troubles".

The capital of the State was removed to Benicia about the time that we moved to Vaca Valley, and that point being not far distant, we were on the route of constant travel, and among the men who stopped with us often were some who, even then, owned large tracts of land in the country, and many of whom have since become well known to the public, either through political position or great wealth. Among them were Judge S. C. Hastings, who still lives in San Francisco, and who

has since amassed a great fortune, a monument of energy and business shrewdness. Judge Murray Morrison dispensed justice in our district courts; Judge Curry was the owner of a great deal of valuable property; Judge Wallace meted out punishment to offenders. Mr. L. B. Mizner, who still lives in Benicia, was an early traveler; Mr. Paul Shirley and he were for years the most dashing beaux of the scattered young ladies of the upper country.

The map of the town of Vacaville had been filed some years before we settled there, but it was still some time before enough people came there to justify us in asking for a postoffice or giving the place its name.

The second Christmas of our stay I gave a dinner party, and invited all the Americans in the valley; even then I entertained only five guests. My dinner party was considered very fine for the time. My cook was a negro of the blackest hue, who had formerly cooked for some army officer, and was accustomed to skirmishing, as he expressed it. The menu included onion soup, roast elk, a fricasse of lamb, boiled onions, the home-grown luxury of radishes, lettuce and parsley, dried-apple pies, and rice pudding. Fowls were too rare and valuable to be sacrificed, as yet, to the table, and probably had they been killed would have defied mastication, for they were, like ourselves, pioneers.

## **Chapter Ten**

As time went on, we and our few neighbors began to wish for educational advantages for our children, and by paying double tuition for each child we managed to secure a teacher—sound in mind, but defective in body, he having lost a leg and an eye—to start a school in a little blue cotton house under a tree. The trustees of this school of six pupils were Mr. Ed. McGary (he afterward moved to Green Valley and after amassing a substantial fortune, again to San Francisco where he still lives), Mr. Eugene Price (he died some years ago, a wealthy resident of Chicago) and my husband. The canvas building was shortly replaced by a wooden structure and this in turn by a larger one; and the school thus started developed some years later into the Pacific Methodist College, which was for many years one of the foremost educational institutions of California.

For a good many years after we came to Vaca Valley there were not enough families in the immediate vicinity to induce a doctor to settle there. Although the climate might safely be called the healthiest in the State, people once in a great while 57 would get sick. A physician who made a desperate effort to make a living there and failed, left his medicine-chest in liquidation of his long-standing board bill, and thereafter I came to act as general practitioner and apothecary for the neighborhood, and my judgment on diseases was accepted with as much faith and my prescriptions followed with more readiness than is now often accorded to the most learned members of the medical fraternity. I dealt out blue-mass, calomel, and quinine to patients from far and near; inspected tongues and felt pulses, until I grew so familiar with the business that I almost fancied myself a genuine doctor. I don't think I ever killed anybody, and I am quite sure I cured a good many of my patients. Indeed, they grew so accustomed to my ministrations that, even after a good physician settled among us, the sick people used not infrequently to ask me if they should take the medicine that he prescribed; and I believe that if the matter had come to an actual choice, they would have followed my advice in preference to his.

The Spanish population gradually vanished before the coming immigration. The thick-walled adobe houses, which sheltered under one roof horses and men, crumbled away and mingled with the dust. The vaquero and his bands of Spanish cattle fled to wider ranges. The plow turned the sod where the brilliant wild flowers had bloomed for ages undisturbed, and silken corn and golden wheat ripened in the little valley. Year by year more acres of the fertile land were laid under cultivation. The canvas tent was followed by a tiny, unpainted redwood cabin with a dirt floor, and that in turn by more pretentious homes. It was years before the title of the land was established, and we were kept in continual commotion through the persistent efforts of squatters to obtain possession. The surveys of the Spanish owners were very imperfect and caused a world of trouble and annoyance to their successors. The usual mode of measurement in early days, before surveyors and surveying instruments were in 58 the country, was for a vaquero to take a fresh mustang and gallop an hour in any direction. The distance thus traversed was called ten miles. Smaller distances were subdivisions of the hour's ride; and, as the speed of the horse was variable you may easily see that

the survey thus made would be a very irregular one and would be likely, as it did, to give rise to many complications in later transfers of the land.

The valley was settled principally by emigrants from Missouri and Arkansas, and they brought with them the shiftless ways of farming and housekeeping prevalent in the West and South, which have, in a measure, prevented the improvement and advancement that might have been expected from so fertile and productive a country. I remember as an illustration of the principles of early housekeeping, being called to help take care of a neighbor who was very ill. I sat up all night by the sick woman in company with another neighbor, a volunteer nurse. Growing hungry toward morning we concluded to get breakfast, so I sent the daughter of the house, a girl of seventeen years, to bring me some cream to make biscuits. She was gone a long time, and I waited with my hands in the flour for her to come back. Finally she made her appearance with the cream, and when I asked the cause of the delay, she answered, "Well, old Bob was in the cream, and I had to stop and scrape him off".

To emphasize the statement, "old Bob", the cat, came in wet from his involuntary cream bath. I made the bread with water that I pumped myself. The out-door management of the men was as badly conducted as the indoor system of their wives. A general air of dilapidation seemed to pervade and cling to the houses and barns of the farmer from the West. He sat cross-legged on the fence and smoked a clay pipe in company with the "old woman", while the pigs and chickens rooted and scratched unmolested in his front garden. The Western farmers still, in some few instances, hold possession, and from the highway as you pass 59 you may detect the unmistakable signs of their early training, but by far the greater part of the pioneer population has been succeeded by economical, industrious, energetic, thrifty families from the North and Canada, and they have converted the little valley into a cultivated and blooming garden. The redwood shanty has given way to large and well-built pleasant homes, furnished with comforts and often luxuries. Instead of the barefooted, rag-covered urchins of early times, who ran wild with the pigs and calves, all along the roads one may see troops of rosy, well-clad children on their way to school. The old-time Sabbath amusements of riding bucking mustangs into the saloons, drinking all day at the various bars, running foot-races, playing poker, and finishing the day with a free fight are things of the past. The sobering influence of civilization has removed all such exciting but dangerous pastimes as

playing scientific games of billiards by firing at the balls with a pistol, taking off the heads of the decanters behind the counter with a quick shot, and making the bar-keeper shiver for his well-curved hair. Now when the individual members of the enlightened population play cards, as perhaps they sometimes do, it is in the seclusion of the back-room, out of range of prying eyes.

We residents of Vaca Valley were an amusement-loving people in the early days of the settlement, and every few weeks saw a ball or party given, to which came all the younger portion of the surrounding families, and not seldom the town overflowed for the night with the buxom lads and lassies from thirty miles away. The largest room in the town—usually my dining room—was cleared to make room for the dancers, and they danced hard and long until daylight, and often the bright sunlight saw the participants rolling away in spring wagons, or galloping off on horseback to their distant homes. The costumes were, like the gatherings, quite unique; the ladies came in calico dresses and calf boots; a ribbon was unusual, and their principal ornaments were good health and good nature; the gentlemen came ungloved, and sometimes coatless. But the fun was genuine, and when the last dance was turned off by the sleepy fiddler who kept time with his foot and called off in thundering tones the figures of the cotillions it was with a sigh of genuine regret that the many dancers said “good morning”. Now the little town has grown civilized; when they give a party now, the young ladies come be-frizzled and montagued, with silk dresses, eight-button gloves, and French slippers with Pompadour heels; and the young men come in all the uninteresting solemnity of dress-coats.

The stages which ran every day from Sacramento to Napa and Benicia brought with them a stream of travelers and many new settlers to the valley. The arrival of the rattling, thundering old six-horse coach, with its load of grumbling, dusty passengers, and their accompanying poodle-dogs, canary birds, pet cats, parrots, Saratoga trunks and band-boxes, and the swaggering, self-important driver who handled the reins with consummate skill, and could only be bribed into amiability by frequent drinks, was the event of the day. All the dogs of the village welcomed its advent and saluted its departure with a chorus of howls; the ragged urchins along the dusty roads waved their battered hats and shouted at the stolid passengers; the old farmer rode up on his slow cob to wait its coming; the inquisitive girls peeped around the corner to see if perchance a new masculine attraction might be

left in the town. With the stages went the rollicking, unassuming fun of the country, and with the railroads came in the aping of city airs and the following of city fashions.

For twenty-seven years I have called the little valley home, have watched with unfailing interest its growth and development. But few years elapsed until Vacaville was the center of a thriving country; the farm produce found its nearest market at the village stores; orchards and vineyards were planted, found profitable, were enlarged, flourished, and are today a source of 61 wealth and constantly increasing revenue to the fortunate owners. But the “flush times” are all over; the trials and cares of the pioneer days are things of the past; the rags and tatters of my first days in California are well nigh forgotten in the ease and plenty of the present. The years have been full of hardships, but they have brought me many friends, and my memory of them is rich with pictures of their kind faces and echoes of their pleasant words. The dear old friends are falling asleep one by one; many of them are already lying quietly at rest under the friendly flower strewn California sod; day by day the circle narrows, and in a few more years there will be none of us left to talk over the “early days”.

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