

Emerson Alice B.

**Ruth Fielding In the Saddle;  
College Girls in the Land  
of Gold**



Alice Emerson

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# Emerson Alice B.

## Ruth Fielding In the Saddle / College Girls in the Land of Gold

### CHAPTER I – WHAT IS COMING

“Will you do it?” asked the eager, black-eyed girl sitting on the deep window shelf.

“If Mr. Hammond says the synopsis of the picture is all right, I’ll go.”

“Oh, Ruthie! It would be just – just scrumptious!”

“We’ll go, Helen – just as we agreed last week,” said her chum, laughing happily.

“It will be great! great!” murmured Helen Cameron, her hands clasped in blissful anticipation.

“Right into the ‘wild and woolly.’ Dear me, Ruth Fielding, we *do* have the nicest times – you and I!”

“You needn’t overlook me,” grumbled the third and rather plump freshman who occupied the most comfortable chair in the chums’ study in Dare Hall.

“That would be rather – er – impossible, wouldn’t it, Heavy?” suggested Helen Cameron, rolling her black eyes.

Jennie Stone made a face like a street gamin, but otherwise ignored Helen’s cruel suggestion. “I’d rather register joy, too – Oh, yes, I’m going with you; have written home about it. Have to tell Aunt Kate ahead, you know. Yes, I’d register joy, if it weren’t for one thing that I see looming before us.”

“What’s that, honey?” asked Ruth.

“The horseback ride from Yucca into the Hualapai Range seems like a doubtful equation to me.”

“Don’t you mean ‘doubtful equestrianism’?” put in the black-eyed girl with a chuckle.

“Perhaps I do,” sighed Jennie. “You know, I’m a regular sailor on horseback.”

“You should have taken it up when we were all at Silver Ranch with Ann Hicks,” Ruth said.

“Oh, say not so!” begged Jennie Stone lugubriously. “What I should have done in the past has nothing to do with this coming summer. I groan to think of what I shall have to endure.”

“Who will do the groaning for the horse that has to carry you, Heavy?” interposed the irrepressible Helen, giving her the old nickname that Jennie Stone now scarcely deserved.

“Never mind. Let the horse do his own worrying,” was the placid reply. The temper of the well nourished girl was not easily ruffled.

“Why, Jennie, *think!*” ejaculated Helen, suddenly turned brisk and springing down from the window seat. “It will be just the jaunt for you. The physical culturists claim there is nothing so good for reducing flesh and helping one’s poor, sluggish liver as horseback riding.”

“Say!” drawled the other girl, her nose tilted at a scornful angle, “those people say a lot more than their prayers – believe me! Most physical culturists have never ridden any kind of horse in their lives but a hobbyhorse – and they still ride *that* when they are senile.”

Ruth applauded. “A Daniel come to judgment!” she cried.

“Huh!” sniffed Jennie, suspiciously. “What does that mean?”

“I – I don’t just know myself,” confessed Ruth. “But it sounds good – and Dr. Milroth used it this morning in chapel, so it must be all right.”

“Anything that our revered dean says goes big with me, I confess,” said Jennie. “Oh, girls! isn’t she just a dear?”

“And hasn’t Ardmore been just the delightsopest place for nine months?” cried Helen.

“Even better than Briarwood,” agreed Ruth.

“That sounds almost sacrilegious,” Helen observed. “I don’t know about any place being finer than old Briarwood.”

“There’s Ann!” cried Ruth in a tone that made both the others jump.

“Where? Where?” demanded Helen, whirling about to look out of the window again. The window gave a broad view of the lower slope of College Hill and the expanse of Lake Remona. Dusk was just dropping, for the time was after dinner; but objects were still to be clearly observed. “Where’s Jane Ann Hicks?”

“Just completing her full course at Briarwood Hall,” Ruth explained demurely. “She will go to Montana, of course. But if I write her I know she’ll join us at Yucca just for the fun of the ride.”

“Some people’s idea of fun!” groaned Jennie.

“What are *you* attempting to go for, then?” demanded Helen, somewhat wonderingly.

“Because I think it is my duty,” the plump girl declared. “You young and flighty freshies aren’t fit to go so far without somebody solid along – ”

“Solid!” You said it!” scoffed Helen.

“I was referring to character, Miss Cameron,” returned the other shaking her head. “But Ann is certainly a good fellow. I hope she will go, Ruth.”

“I declare, Ruthie,” exclaimed her chum, “you are getting up a regular party!”

“Why not?”

“It *will* be great fun,” acknowledged the black-eyed girl.

“Of course it will, goosie,” said Jennie Stone. “Isn’t everything that Ruth Fielding plans always fun? Say, Ruth, there are some girls right here at Ardmore – and freshies, too – who would be tickled to death to join us.”

“Goodness!” objected Ruth, laughing at her friend’s exuberance. “I wouldn’t wish to be the cause of a general massacre, so perhaps we’d better not invite any of the other girls.”

“Little Davenport would go,” Jennie pursued. “She’s a regular bear on a pony.”

“Bareback riding, do you mean, Heavy?” drawled Helen.

Except for a look, which she hoped was withering, this was ignored by the plump girl, who went on: “Trix would jump at the chance, Ruth. You know, she has no regular home. She’s just passed around from one family of relations to another during vacations. She told me so.”

“Would her guardian agree?” asked Ruth.

“Nothing easier. She told me he wouldn’t care if she joined that party that’s going to start for the south pole this season. He’s afraid of girls. He’s an old bachelor – and a misogynist.”

“Goodness!” murmured Helen. “There should be something done about letting such savage animals be at large.”

“It’s no fun for poor little Trix,” said Jennie.

“She shall be asked,” Ruth declared. “And Sally Blanchard.”

“Oh, yes!” cried Helen. “She owns a horse, and has been riding three times a week all this spring. Her father believes that horseback riding keeps the doctor away.”

“Improvement on ‘an apple a day keeps the doctor away,’” quoted Ruth.

“How about eating an onion a day?” put in Jennie. “That will keep everybody away!”

“Oh, Jennie, we’re not getting anywhere!” declared Helen Cameron. “*Are* you going to invite a bunch of girls, Ruth, to go West with us?”

This is how the idea germinated and took root. Ruth and Helen had talked over the possibility of making the trip into the Hualapai Range for more than a fortnight; but nothing had as yet been planned in detail.

Mr. Hammond, president of the Alectrion Film Corporation had conceived the idea of a spectacular production on the screen of “The Forty-Niners” – as the title implied, a picture of the early gold digging in the West. He had heard of an abandoned mining camp in Mohave County, Arizona,

which could easily and cheaply be put into the condition it was before its inhabitants stampeded for other gold diggings.

Mr. Hammond desired to have most of the scenes taken at Freezeout Camp and he had talked over the plot of the story with Ruth Fielding, whose previous successes as a scenario writer were remarkable. The producer wished, too, that Ruth should visit the abandoned mining camp to get her “local color” and to be on the scene when his company arrived to make the films.

There was a particular reason, too, why Ruth had a more than ordinary interest in this proposed production. Instead of being paid outright for her work as the writer of the scenario, some of her own money was to be invested in the picture. Having taken up the making of motion pictures seriously and hoping to make it her livelihood after graduating from college, Ruth wished her money as well as her brains to work for her.

Nor was the president of the Aletrion Film Corporation doing an unprecedented thing in making this arrangement. In this way the shrewd capitalists behind the great film-making companies have obtained the best work from chief directors, the most brilliant screen stars, and the more successful scenario writers. To give those who show special talent in the chief departments of the motion picture industry a financial interest in the work, has proved gainful to all concerned.

Ruth had walked slowly to the window, and she stood a moment looking out into the warm June dusk. The campus was deserted, but lights glimmered everywhere in the windows of the Ardmore dormitories. This was the evening before Commencement Day and most of the seniors and juniors were holding receptions, or “tea fights.”

“What do you think, girls?” Ruth said thoughtfully. “Of course, we’ll have to have the guide Mr. Hammond spoke about, and a packtrain anyway. And the more girls the merrier.”

“Bully!” breathed the slangy Miss Stone, wiggling in her chair.

“Oh, I vote we do, Ruth. Have ’em all meet at Yucca and – ”

Suddenly Ruth cried out and sprang back from the window.

“What’s the matter, dear?” asked Helen, rushing over to her and seizing her chum’s arm.

“What bit you, Ruth Fielding? A mosquito?” demanded Jennie.

“Sh! girls,” breathed the girl of the Red Mill softly. “There’s somebody just under this window – on the ledge!”

## CHAPTER II – EAVESDROPPING

Helen tiptoed to the window and peered out suddenly. She expected to catch the eavesdropper, but —

“Why, there’s nobody here, Ruth,” she complained.

“No-o?”

“Not a soul. The ledge is bare away to the end. You – you must have been mistaken, dear.”

Ruth looked out again and Jennie Stone crowded in between them, likewise eager to see.

“I know there was a girl there,” whispered Ruth. “She lay right under this window.”

“But what for? Trying to scare us?” asked Helen.

“Trying to break her own neck, I should think,” sniffed Jennie. “Who’d risk climbing along this ledge?”

“I have,” confessed Helen. “It’s not such a stunt. Other girls have.”

“But *why*?” demanded the plump freshman. “What was she here for?”

“Listening, I tell you,” Helen said.

“To what? We weren’t discussing buried treasure – or even any personal scandal,” laughed Jennie. “What do you think, Ruth?”

“That is strange,” murmured the girl of the Red Mill reflectively.

“The strangest thing is where she could have gone so quickly,” said Helen.

“Pshaw! around the corner – the nearest corner, of course,” observed Jennie with conviction.

“Oh! I didn’t think of that,” cried Ruth, and went to the other window, for the study shared during their freshman year by her and Helen Cameron was a corner room with windows looking both west and south.

When the trio of puzzled girls looked out of the other open window, however, the wide ledge of sandstone which ran all around Dare Hall just beneath the second story windows was deserted.

“Who lives along that way?” asked Jennie, meaning the occupants of the several rooms the windows of which overlooked the ledge on the west side of the building.

“Why – May MacGreggor for one,” said Helen. “But it wouldn’t be May. She’s not snoopy.”

“I should say not! Nor is Rebecca Frayne,” Ruth said. “She has the fifth room away. And girls! I believe Rebecca would be delighted to go with us to Arizona.”

“Oh – well – Could she go?” asked Helen pointedly.

“Perhaps. Maybe it can be arranged,” Ruth said reflectively.

She seemed to wish to lead the attention of the other two from the mystery of the girl she had observed on the ledge. But Helen, who knew her so well, pinched Ruth’s arm and whispered:

“I believe you know who it was, Ruthie Fielding. You can’t fool me.”

“Sh!” admonished her friend, and because Ruth’s influence was very strong with the black-eyed girl, the latter said no more about the mystery just then.

Ruth Fielding’s influence over Helen had begun some years before – indeed, almost as soon as Ruth herself, a heart-sore little orphan, had arrived at the Red Mill to live with her Uncle Jabez and his little old housekeeper, Aunt Alvirah, “who was nobody’s relative, but everybody’s aunt.”

Helen and her twin brother, Tom Cameron, were the first friends Ruth made, and in the first volume of this series of stories, entitled, “Ruth Fielding of the Red Mill,” is related the birth and growth of this friendship. Ruth and Helen go to Briarwood Hall for succeeding terms until they are ready for college; and their life there and their adventures during their vacations at Snow Camp, at Lighthouse Point, at Silver Ranch, at Cliff Island, at Sunrise Farm, with the Gypsies, in Moving Pictures and Down in Dixie are related in successive volumes.



Following this first vacation trip Ruth and Helen, with their old chum Jennie Stone, entered Ardmore College, and in “Ruth Fielding at College; Or, The Missing Examination Papers,” the happenings of the chums’ freshman year at this institution for higher education are narrated.

The present story, the twelfth of the series, opens during the closing days of the college year. Ruth’s plans for the summer – or for the early weeks of it at least – are practically made.

The trip West, into the Hualapai Range of Arizona for the business of making a moving picture of “The Forty-Niners” had already stirred the imagination of Ruth and her two closest friends. But the idea of forming a larger party to ride through the wilds from Yucca to Freezeout Camp was a novel one.

“It will be great fun,” said Helen again. “Of course, old Tom will go along anyway – ”

“To chaperon us,” giggled Jennie.

“No. To see we don’t fall out of our saddles,” Ruth laughed. “Now! let’s think about it, girls, and decide on whom we shall invite.”

“Trix and Sally,” Jennie said.

“And Ann Hicks!” cried Helen. “You write to her, Ruth.”

“I will to-night,” promised her chum. “And I’m going to speak to Rebecca Frayne at once.”

“I’ll see Beatrice,” stated Jennie, moving toward the door.

“And I’ll run and ask Sally. She’s a good old scout,” said Helen.

But as soon as the plump girl had departed, Helen flung herself upon Ruth. “Who was she? Tell me, quick!” she demanded.

“The girl under that window?”

“Of course. You know, Ruthie.”

“I – I suspect,” her chum said slowly.

“Tell me!”

“Edie Phelps.”

“There!” exclaimed Helen, her black eyes fairly snapping with excitement. “I thought so.”

“You did?” asked Ruth, puzzled. “Why should she be listening to us? She’s never shown any particular interest in us Briarwoods.”

“But for a week or two I’ve noticed her hanging around. It’s something concerning this vacation trip she wants to find out about, I believe.”

“Why, how odd!” Ruth said. “I can’t understand it.”

“I wish we’d caught her,” said Helen, sharply, for she did not like the sophomore in question. Edith Phelps had been something of a “thorn in the flesh” to the chums during their freshman year.

“Well, I don’t know,” Ruth murmured. “It would only have brought on another quarrel with her. We’d better ignore it altogether I think.”

“Humph!” sniffed Helen. “That doesn’t satisfy my curiosity; and I’m frank to confess that I’m bitten deep by *that* microbe.”

“Oh well, my dear,” said Ruth, teasingly, “there are many things in this life it is better you should not know. Ahem! I’m going to see Rebecca.”

Helen ran off, too, to Sarah Blanchard’s room. Many of the girls’ doors were ajar and there was much visiting back and forth on this last evening; while the odor of tea permeated every nook and cranny of Dare Hall.

Rebecca’s door was closed, however, as Ruth expected. Rebecca Frayne was not as yet socially popular at Ardmore – not even among the girls of her own class.

In the first place she had come to college with an entirely wrong idea of what opportunities for higher education meant for a girl. Her people were very poor and very proud – a family of old New England stock that looked down upon those who achieved success “in trade.”

Had it not been for Ruth Fielding’s very good sense, and her advice and aid, Rebecca could never have remained at Ardmore to complete her freshman year. During this time, and especially

toward the last of the school year, she had learned some things of importance besides what was contained within the covers of her textbooks.

But Ruth worried over the possibility that before their sophomore year should open in September, the influence at home would undo all the good Rebecca Frayne had gained.

"I've just the thing for you, Becky!" Ruth Fielding cried, carrying her friend's study by storm. "What do you think?"

"Something nice, I presume, Ruth Fielding. You always *are* doing something uncommonly kind for me."

"Nonsense!"

"No nonsense about it. I was just wondering what I should ever do without you all this long summer."

"That's it!" cried Ruth, laughing. "You're not going to get rid of me so easily."

"What do you mean?" asked Rebecca, wonderingly.

"That you'll go with us. I need you badly, Becky. You've learned to rattle the typewriter so nicely – "

"Want me to get an office position for the summer near you?" Rebecca asked, the flush rising in her cheek.

"Better than that," declared Ruth, ignoring Rebecca's flush and tone of voice. "You know, I told you we are going West."

"You and Cameron? Yes."

"And Jennie Stone, and perhaps others. But I want you particularly."

"Oh, Ruth Fielding! I couldn't! You know just how *dirt poor* we are. It's all Buddie can do to find the money for my soph year here. No! It is impossible!"

"Nothing is impossible. 'In the bright lexicon of youth,' and so forth. You can go if you will."

"I couldn't accept such a great kindness, Ruth," Rebecca said, in her hard voice.

"Better wait till you learn how terribly kind I am," laughed Ruth. "I have an axe to grind, my dear."

"An axe!"

"Yes, indeedy! I want you to help me. I really do."

"To *write*?" gasped Rebecca. "You know very well, Ruth Fielding, that I can scarcely compose a decent letter. I *hate* that form of human folly known as 'Lit-ra-choor.' I couldn't do it."

"No," said Ruth, smiling demurely. "I am going to write my own scenario. But I will get a portable typewriter, and I want you to copy my stuff. Besides, there will be several copies to make, and some work after the director gets there. Oh, you'll have no sinecure! And if you'll go and do it, I'll put up the money but you'll be paying all the expenses, Becky. What say?"

Ruth knew very well that if she had offered to pay Rebecca a salary the foolishly proud girl would never have accepted. But she had put it in such a way that Rebecca Frayne could not but accept.

"You dear!" she said, with her arms about Ruth's neck and displaying as she seldom did the real love she felt for the girl of the Red Mill. "I'll do it. I've an old riding habit of auntie's that I can make over. And of course, I can ride."

"You'd better make your habit into bloomers and a divided skirt," laughed Ruth. "That's how Jane Ann – and Helen and Jennie, too – will dress, as well as your humble servant. There *are* women who ride sidesaddle in the West; but they do not ride into the rough trails that we are going to attempt. In fact, most of 'em wear trousers outright."

"Goodness! My aunt would have a fit," murmured Rebecca Frayne.

## CHAPTER III – THE LETTER FROM YUCCA

Before Dare Hall was quiet that night it was known throughout the dormitory that six girls of the freshman class were going to spend a part of the summer vacation in the wilds of Arizona.

“Like enough we’ll never see any of them again,” declared May MacGreggor. “The female of the species is scarce in ‘them parts,’ I understand. They will all six get married to cowboys, or gold miners, or – ”

“Or movie actors,” snapped Edith Phelps, with a toss of her head. “I presume Fielding is quite familiar with any quantity of ‘juvenile leads’ and ‘stunt’ actors as well as ‘custard-pie comedians.’”

“Oh, behave, Edie!” chuckled the Scotch girl. “I’d love to go with ‘em myself, but I must help mother take care of the children this summer. There’s a wild bunch of ‘loons’ at my house.”

Fortunately, Helen Cameron did not hear Edith’s criticism. Helen had a sharp tongue of her own and she had no fear now of the sophomore. Indeed, both Ruth and Helen had quite forgotten over night their suspicions regarding the girl at their study window. They arose betimes and went for a last run around the college grounds in their track suits, as they had been doing for most of the spring. The chums had gone in for athletics as enthusiastically at Ardmore as they had at Briarwood Hall.

Just as they set out from the broad front steps of Dare and rounded the corner of the building toward the west, Ruth stopped with a little cry. There at her feet lay a letter.

“Somebody’s dropped a billet-doux,” said Helen. “Or is it just an envelope?”

Ruth picked it up and turned it over so that she could see its face. “The letter is in it,” she said. “And it’s been opened. Why, Helen!”

“Yes?”

“It’s for Edie Phelps.”

Helen had already glanced upward. “And right under our windows,” she murmured. “I bet she dropped it when – ”

“I suppose she did,” said Ruth, as her chum’s voice trailed off into silence. Suddenly Helen, who was looking at the face of the envelope, gasped.

“Look!” she exclaimed. “See the return address in the corner?”

“Wha – Why, it says: ‘Box 24, R. F. D., Yucca, Arizona!’”

“Yucca, Arizona,” repeated Helen. “Just where we are going. Ruth! there is something very mysterious about this. Do you realize it?”

“It is the oddest thing!” exclaimed Ruth.

“Edith getting letters from out there and then creeping along that ledge under our windows to listen. Well, I’d give a cent to know what’s in that letter.”

“Oh, Helen! We couldn’t,” cried Ruth, quickly, folding the envelope and slipping it between the buttons of her blouse.

“Just the same,” declared her chum, “she was eavesdropping on us. We ought to be excused if we did a little eavesdropping on her by reading her letter.”

But Ruth set off immediately in a good, swinging trot, and Helen had to close her lips and put her elbows to her sides to keep up with her. Later, when they had taken their morning shower and had dressed and all the girls were trooping down the main stairway of Dare Hall in answer to the breakfast call, Ruth spied Edith Phelps and hailed her, drawing the letter from her bosom.

“Hi, Edith Phelps! Here’s something that belongs to you.”

The sophomore turned quickly to face the girl of the Red Mill, and with no pleasant expression of countenance. “What have you there?” she snapped.

“A letter that you dropped,” said Ruth, quietly.

“That *I* dropped?” and she came quickly to seize the proffered missive. “Ha! I suppose you took pains to read it?”

Ruth drew back, paling. The thrust hurt her cruelly and although she would not reply, the sophomore's gibe did not go without answer. Helen's black eyes flashed as she stepped in front of her chum.

"I can assure you Ruth and I do not read other people's correspondence any more than we listen to other people's private conversation, Phelps," she said directly. "We found that letter *under our window where you dropped it last night!*"

Ruth caught at her arm; but the stroke went home. Edith Phelps' face reddened and then paled. Without further speech she hurried away with the letter gripped tightly in her hand. She did not appear at breakfast.

"It's terrible to be always ladylike," sighed Helen to Ruth. "I just *know* we have seen one end of a mystery. And that's all we are likely to see."

"It is the most mysterious thing why Phelps should be interested in our affairs, and be getting letters from Yucca," admitted Ruth.

The chums had no further opportunity of talking this matter over, for it was at breakfast that Rebecca Frayne threw her bomb. At least, Jennie Stone said it was such. Rebecca came over to Miss Comstock's table where the chums and Jennie sat and demanded:

"Ruth Fielding! who is going to chaperon your party?"

"What? Chaperon?" murmured Ruth, quite taken aback by the question.

"Of course. You say Helen's brother is going. And there will be a guide and other men. We've got to have a chaperon."

"Oh!" gasped Helen. "Poor old Tommy! If he knew that! He won't bite you, Rebecca."

"You girls certainly wouldn't dream of going on that long journey unless you were properly attended?" cried Rebecca, horrified.

"What do you think we need?" demanded Jennie Stone. "A trained nurse, or a governess?"

Rebecca was thoroughly shocked. "My aunt would never hear of such a proceeding," she affirmed. "Oh, Ruth Fielding! I want to go with you; but, of course, there must be some older woman with us."

"Of course – I presume so," sighed Ruth. "I hadn't thought that far."

"Whom shall we ask?" demanded Helen. "Mrs. Murchiston won't go. She's struck. She says she is too old to go off with any harum-scarum crowd of school girls again."

"I like that!" exclaimed Jennie, in a tone that showed she did not like it at all. "We have got past the hobbledohoy age, I should hope."

Miss Comstock, the senior at their table, had become interested in the affair, and she suggested pleasantly:

"We Ardmores often try to get the unattached members of the faculty to fill the breach in such events as this. Try Miss Cullam."

"Oh, dear me!" muttered Helen.

Ruth said briskly, "Miss Cullam is just the person. Do you suppose she has her summer free, Miss Comstock?"

"She was saying only last evening that she had made no plans."

"She shall make 'em at once," declared Ruth, jumping up and leaving her breakfast. "Excuse me, Miss Comstock. I am going to find Miss Cullam, instantly."

It was Miss Cullam, too, who had worried most about the lost examination papers which Ruth had been the means of finding (as related in "Ruth Fielding at College"); and the instructor of mathematics had taken a particular interest in the girl of the Red Mill and her personal affairs.

"I haven't ridden horseback since I was a girl," she said, in some doubt. "And, my *dear!* you do not expect me to ride a-straddle as girls do nowadays? Never!"

"Neither will Rebecca," chuckled Ruth. "But we who have been on the plains before, know that a divided skirt is a blessing to womankind."

“I do not think I shall need that particular blessing,” Miss Cullam said, rather grimly. “But I believe I will accept your invitation, Ruth Fielding. Though perhaps it is not wise for instructors and pupils to spend their vacations together. The latter are likely to lose their fear of us – ”

“Oh, Miss Cullam! There isn’t one of us who has a particle of fear of you,” laughed Ruth.

“Ahem! that is why some of you do not stand so well in mathematics as you should,” said the teacher dryly.

That was a busy day; but the party Ruth was forming made all their plans, subject, of course, to agreement by their various parents and guardians. In one week they were to meet in New York, prepared to make the long journey by train to Yucca, Arizona, and from that point into the mountains on horseback.

Helen found time for a little private investigation; but it was not until she and Ruth were on the way home to Cheslow in the parlor car that she related her meager discoveries to her chum.

“What did you ever learn about Edie Phelps?” Helen asked.

“Oh! Edie? I had forgotten about her.”

“Well, I didn’t forget. The mystery piques me, as the story writers say,” laughed Helen. “Do you know that her father is an awfully rich man?”

“Why, no. Edith doesn’t make a point of telling everybody perhaps,” returned Ruth, smiling.

“No; she doesn’t. You’ve got to hand it to her for that. But, then, to blow about one’s wealth is about as crude a thing as one can do, isn’t it?”

“Well, what about Edith’s father?” asked Ruth, curiously.

“Nothing particular. Only he is one of our ‘captains of industry’ that the Sunday papers tell about. Makes oodles of money in mines, so I was told. Edith has no mother. She had a brother – ”

“Oh! is he dead?” cried Ruth, with sympathy.

“Perhaps he’d better be. He was rusticated from his college last year. It was quite a scandal. His father disowned him and he disappeared. Edith felt awfully, May says.”

“Too bad,” sighed Ruth.

“Why, of course, it’s too bad,” grumbled Helen. “But that doesn’t help us find out why Edie is so much interested in our going to Yucca; nor how she comes to be in correspondence with anybody in that far, far western town. What do you think it means, Ruthie?”

“I haven’t the least idea,” declared the girl of the Red Mill, shaking her head.

## CHAPTER IV – A WEEK AT HOME

Mr. Cameron met the chums *en route*, and the next morning they arrived at Seven Oaks in time to see Tom receive his diploma from the military and preparatory school. Tom, black-eyed and as handsome in his way as Helen was in hers, seemed to have interest only in Ruth.

“Goodness me! that boy’s got a regular crush on you, Ruthie!” exclaimed Helen, exasperated. “Did you ever see the like?”

“Dear Tom!” sighed Ruth Fielding. “He was the very first friend – of my own age, I mean – that I found in Cheslow when I went there. I *have* to be good to Tommy, you know.”

“But he’s only a boy!” cried the twin sister, feeling herself to be years older than her brother after spending so many months at college.

“He was born the same day you were,” laughed Ruth.

“That makes no difference. Boys are never as wise or as old as girls – ”

“Until the girls slip along too far. Then they sometimes want to appear young instead of old,” said the girl of the Red Mill practically. “I suppose, in the case of girls who have not struck out for themselves and gone to college or into business or taken up seriously one of the arts, it is so the boys will continue to pay them attentions. Thank goodness, Helen! you and I will be able to paddle our own canoes without depending upon any ‘mere male,’ as Miss Cullam calls them, for our bread and butter.”

“*You* certainly can paddle your own boat,” Helen returned admiringly, leaving the subject of the “mere male.” “Father says you have become a smart business woman already. He approves of this venture you are going to make in the movies.”

But Uncle Jabez did not approve. Ruth had written to Aunt Alvirah regarding the manner in which she expected to spend the summer, and there was a storm brewing when she reached the Red Mill.

Set upon the bank of the Lumano River, the old red mill with the sprawling, comfortable story-and-a-half farmhouse attached, made a very pretty picture indeed – so pretty that already one of Ruth’s best scenarios had been filmed at the mill and people all over the country were able to see just how beautiful the locality was.

When Ruth got out of the automobile that had brought them all from the Cheslow station and ran up the shaded walk to the porch, a little, hoop-backed old woman came almost running to the door to greet her – a dear old creature with a face like a withered russet apple and very bright, twinkling eyes.

“Oh, my pretty! Oh, my pretty!” Aunt Alvirah cried. “I feared you never *would* come.”

“Why, Auntie!” Ruth murmured, taking Aunt Alvirah in her arms and leading her back to the low rocking chair by the window where she usually sat.

There was a rosy-cheeked country girl hovering over the supper table, who smiled bashfully at the college girl. Uncle Jabez, as he had promised, had hired somebody to relieve the little old woman of the heaviest of her housekeeping burdens.

“Oh, my back! and oh, my bones!” groaned Aunt Alvirah as she settled back into her chair. “Dear child! how glad we shall be to have you at home, if only for so short a while.”

“What does Uncle Jabez say?” whispered Ruth.

“He don’t approve, Ruthie. You know, he never has approved of your doing things that other gals don’t do.”

“But, Aunt Alvirah, other girls *do* do them. Can’t he understand that the present generation of girls is different from his mother’s generation?”

Aunt Alvirah wagged her head seriously. “I’m afraid not, my pretty. Jabez Potter ain’t one to l’arn new things easy. You know that.”

Ruth nodded thoughtfully. She expected a scene with the old miller and she was not disappointed. It came after supper – after Uncle Jabez had retired to the sitting-room to count his day's receipts as usual; and likewise to count the hoard of money he always kept in his cash-box.

Uncle Jabez Potter was of a miserly disposition. Aunt Alvira often proclaimed that the coming of his grand-niece to the Red Mill had barely saved the old man from becoming utterly bound up in his riches. Sometimes Ruth could scarcely see how he could have become more miserly than he already was.

"No, Niece Ruth, I don't approve. You knowed I couldn't approve of no sech doin's as this you're attemptin'. It's bad enough for a gal to waste her money in l'arnin' more out o' books than what a man knows. But to go right ahead and do as she plumb pleases with five thousand dollars – or what ye've got left of it after goin' off to college and sech nonsense. No –"

The miller's feelings on the subject were too deep for further utterance. Ruth said, firmly:

"You know, Uncle Jabez, the money was given to me to do what I pleased with."

"Another foolish thing," snarled Uncle Jabez. "That Miz Parsons had no business to give ye five thousand dollars for gettin' back her necklace from the Gypsies – a gal like you!"

"But she had offered the reward to anybody who would find it," Ruth explained patiently.

Uncle Jabez ploughed right through this statement and shook his head like an angry bull. "And then the court had no business givin' it over to Mister Cameron to take care on't for ye. *I* was the proper person to be made your guardeen."

Ruth had no reply to make to this. She knew well enough that she would never have touched any of the money until she was of age had Uncle Jabez once got his hands upon it.

"The money's airnin' ye good int'rest in the Cheslow bank. That's where it oughter stay. Wastin' it makin' them foolish movin' pictuers –"

"But, Uncle!" she told him desperately; "you know that my scenarios are earning money. See how much money my 'Heart of a Schoolgirl' has made for the building of the new dormitory at Briarwood. And this last picture that Mr. Hammond took here at the mill is bound to sell big."

"Huh!" grunted the miller, not much impressed. "Mebbe it's all right for you to spend your spare time writin' them things; but it ain't no re'l business. Can't tell me!"

"But it *is* a business – a great, money-making business," sighed Ruth. "And I am determined to have my part in it. It is my chance, Uncle Jabez – my chance to begin something lasting –"

"Nonsense! Nonsense!" he declared angrily. "Ye'll lose your money – that's what ye'll do. But lemme tell you, young lady, if you do lose it, don't ye come back here to the Red Mill expectin' me ter support ye in idleness. For I won't do it – I won't do it!" and he stamped away to bed.

The few days she spent at home were busy ones for Ruth Fielding. Naturally, she and Helen had to do some shopping.

"For even if we are bound for the wilds of Arizona, there will be men to see us," said the black-eyed girl frankly. "And it is the duty of all females to preen their feathers for the males."

"Just so," growled her twin. "I expect I shall have to stand with a gun in both hands to keep those wild cowpunchers and miners away from you two when we reach Yucca. I remember how it was at Silver Ranch – and you were only kids then."

"Kids, forsooth!" cried his sister. "When will you ever learn to have respect for us, Tommy? Remember we are college girls."

"Oh! you aren't likely to let anybody forget that fact," grumbled Tom, who felt a bit chagrined to think that his sister and her chum had arrived at college a year ahead of him. He would enter Harvard in the fall.

During this busy week, Ruth spent as much time as possible with Aunt Alvira, for the little old woman showed that she longed for "her pretty's" company. Uncle Jabez went about with a thundercloud upon his face and disapproval in his every act and word.

Before Saturday a telegram came from Ann Hicks. She had arrived at Silver Ranch, conferred with Uncle Bill, and it was agreed that she should meet Ruth and the other girls at Yucca on the date Ruth had named in her letter. The addition of Ann to the party from the East would make it nine strong, including Miss Cullam as chaperon and Tom Cameron as “courier.”

Tom was to make all the traveling arrangements, and he went on to New York a day before Ruth and Helen started from Cheslow. There he had a small experience which afterward proved to be important. At the time it puzzled him a good deal.

It had been agreed that the party bound for Arizona should meet at the Delorphone Hotel. Therefore, Tom took a taxicab at the Grand Central Terminal for that hostelry. Mr. Cameron had engaged rooms for the whole party by telephone, for he was well known at the Delorphone, and all Tom had to do was to hand the clerk at the desk his card and sign his name with a flourish on the register.

The instant he turned away from the desk to follow the bellhop Tom noted a young man, after a penetrating glance at him, slide along to the register, twirl it around again, and examine the line he, Tom, had written there. The young fellow was a stranger to Tom. He was dressed like a chauffeur. Tom was sure he had never seen the young man before.

“Now, wouldn’t that bother you?” he muttered, eyeing the fellow sharply as he crossed the marble-floored rotunda to the elevators. “Does he think he knows me? Or is he looking for somebody and is putting every new arrival through the third degree?”

He half expected the chauffeur person to follow him to the elevator, and he lingered behind the impatient bellhop for half a minute to give the stranger a chance to accost him if he wished to.

But immediately after the fellow had read Tom’s name on the book, he turned away and went out, without vouchsafing him another glance.

“Funny,” thought Tom Cameron. “Wonder what it means.”

However, as nothing more came of it – at least, not at once – he buried the mystery under the manifold duties of the day. He met a couple of school friends at noon and went to lunch with them; but he returned to the hotel for dinner.

It was then he spied the same chauffeur again. He was helping a young lady out of a private car before the hotel entrance and a porter was going in ahead with two big traveling bags.

Tom was sure it was the same man who had examined the hotel register after he had signed his name; and he was tempted to stop and speak to him. But the young lady whisked into the hotel without his seeing her face, while the chauffeur, after a curious, straight stare at Tom, jumped into the car and started away. Tom noticed that there was a monogram upon the motor-car door, but he did not notice the license number.

“Maybe the girl is one of those going with us,” Tom thought, as he went inside.

The porter with the bags and the young lady in question has disappeared. He went to the desk and asked the clerk if any of his party had arrived and was informed to the contrary.

“Well, it gets me,” ruminated Tom, as he went up to dress for dinner. “I don’t know whether I am the subject of a strange young lady’s attentions, or merely if the chauffeur was curious about me. Guess I won’t say anything to the girls about it. Helen would surely give me the laugh.”



## CHAPTER V – THE GIRL IN LOWER FIVE

Tom and his father had visited his sister and Ruth at Ardmore; the young fellow was no stranger to the girls whom Ruth had invited to join the party bound for Freezeout Camp. Of course, Jennie Stone knew Helen's black-eyed twin from old times when they were children.

"Dear me, how you've grown, Tommy!" observed the plump girl, looking Tom over with approval.

"For the first time since I've known you, Jennie, I cannot return the compliment," Tom said seriously.

"Gee!" sighed the erstwhile fat girl, ecstatically, "am I not glad!"

That next day all arrived. Ruth and Helen were the last, they reaching the hotel just before bedtime. But Tom was forever wandering through the foyer and parlors to spy a certain hat and figure that he was sure he should know again. He was tempted to tell Helen and her chums about the chauffeur and the strange young lady while they were all enjoying a late supper.

"However, a man alone, with such a number of girls, has to be mighty careful," so Tom told himself, "that they don't get something on him. They'd rig me to death, and I guess Tommy had better keep his tongue between his teeth."

The train on which the party had obtained reservations left the Pennsylvania Station at ten o'clock in the forenoon. Half an hour before that time Tom came down to the hotel entrance ahead of the girls and instructed the starter to bespeak two taxicabs.

As Tom stepped out of the wide open door he saw the motor-car with the monogram on the door, the same chauffeur driving, and the girl with the "stunning" hat in the tonneau. The car was just moving away from the door and it was but a fleeting glimpse Tom obtained of it and its occupants. They did not even glance at him.

"Guess I was fooling myself after all," he muttered. "At any rate, I fancy they aren't so greatly interested. They're not following us, that's sure."

The girls came hurrying down, with Miss Cullam in tow, all carrying their hand baggage. Trunks had gone on ahead, although Ruth had warned them all that, once off the train at Yucca, only the most necessary articles of apparel could be packed into the mountain range.

"Remember, we are dependent upon burros for the transportation of our luggage; and there are only just about so many of the cunning little things in all Arizona. We can't transport too large a wardrobe."

"Are the burros as cunning as they say they are?" asked Trix Davenport.

"All of that," said Tom. "And great singers."

"Sing? Now you are spoofing!" declared the coxswain of Ardmore's freshman eight.

"All right. You wait and see. You know what they call 'em out there? Mountain canaries. Wait till you hear a love-lorn burro singing to his mate. Oh, my!"

"The idea!" ejaculated Miss Cullam. "What does the boy mean by 'love-lorn'?"

It was a hilarious party that alighted from the taxicabs in the station and made its way to the proper part of the trainshed. The sleeping car was a luxurious one, and when the train pulled out and dived into the tunnel under the Hudson ("just like a woodchuck into its hole," Trix said) they were comfortably established in their seats.

Tom had secured three full sections for the girls. Miss Cullam had Lower Two while Tom himself had Upper Five. There was some slight discussion over this latter section, for the berth under Tom had been reserved for a lady.

"Well, that's all right," said Tom philosophically. "If she can stand it, *I* can. Let the conductor fight it out with her."

“Perhaps she will want you to sleep out on the observation platform, Tommy,” said Jennie Stone, wickedly. “To be gallant you’d do it, of course?”

“Of course,” said Tom, stoutly. “Far be it from me to add to the burden on the mind of any female person. It strikes me that they are mostly in trouble about something all the time.”

“Oh, oh!” cried Helen. “Villain! Is that the way I’ve brought you up?”

Tom grinned at his sister wickedly. “Somehow your hand must have slipped when you were molding me, Sis. What d’you think?”

When the time came to retire, however, there was no objection made by the lady who had reserved Lower Five. Of course, in these sleeping cars the upper and lower berths were so arranged that they were entirely separate. But in the morning Tom chanced to be coming from his berth just as the lady started down the corridor for the dressing room.

“My!” thought Tom. “That’s some pretty girl. Who – ”

Then he caught a glimpse of her face, just as she turned it hastily from him. He had seen it once before – just as a certain motor-car was drawing away from the front of the Delorphone Hotel.

“No use talking,” he thought. “I’ve got to take somebody into my confidence about this girl. To keep such a mystery to myself is likely to affect my brain. Humph! I’ll tell Ruth. She can keep a secret – if she wants to,” and he went off whistling to the men’s lavatory at the other end of the car.

Later he found Ruth on the observation platform. They were alone there for some time and Tom took her into his confidence.

“Don’t tell Helen, now,” he urged. “She’ll only rig me. And I’m bound to have a bad enough time with all you girls, as it is.”

“Poor boy,” Ruth said, commiseratingly. “You *are* in for a bad time, aren’t you? What about this strange and mysterious female in Lower Five?”

But as he related the details of the mystery, about the chauffeur and all, Ruth grew rather grave.

“As we go through to the dining car for breakfast let us see if we can establish her identity,” she told him. “Never mind saying anything to the other girls about it. Just point her out to me.”

“Say! I’m not likely to spread the matter broadcast,” retorted Tom. “Only I *am* curious.”

So was Ruth. But she bided her time and sharply scrutinized every female figure she saw in the cars as they trooped through to breakfast. She waited for Tom to point out this “mysterious lady;” but the girl of Lower Five did not appear.

The train was rushing across the prairies in mid-forenoon when Tom came suddenly to Ruth and gave her a look that she knew meant “Follow me.” When she got up Jennie drawled:

“Now, see here, Ruthie! What’s going on between that perfectly splendid brother of Cameron’s and you? Are you trying to make the rest of us girls jealous?”

“Perhaps,” Ruth replied, smiling, then hurried with her chum’s brother into the next car.

“Oh!” exclaimed Ruth suddenly, and she stopped by the door.

“Know her?” asked Tom, with curiosity.

Ruth nodded and hastily turned away so that the girl might not see that she was observed.

“Well, now!” cried Tom. “Tip me off. Explain – elucidate – make clear. I’m as puzzled as I can be.”

“So am I, Tommy,” Ruth told him. “I haven’t the least idea *why* that girl should be interested in our affairs. And I’m not sure that she *is*.”

“Who is she?” he demanded.

“She goes to college with us. Not in our class, you understand. I am sure none of our party had an idea Edie Phelps was going West this vacation.”

“Huh!” said Tom suspiciously. “What’s up your sleeve, Ruth?”

“My arm!” she cried, and ran back to the other girls and Miss Cullam, laughing at him.

Edith’s presence on this train was puzzling.

“That was a man’s handwriting on the envelope Helen and I picked up addressed to Edith,” Ruth told herself. “Some man has been writing to her from that Mohave County town. Who? And what for?”

“Not that it is really any of my business,” she concluded.

She did not take Helen into her confidence in the matter. Let the other girls see Edith Phelps if they chanced to; she determined to stir up no “hurrah” over the sophomore.

Besides, it was not at all sure that Edith was going to Arizona. Her presence upon this train did not prove that her journey West had any connection with the letter Edith had received from Yucca.

“Why so serious, honey?” asked Helen a little later, pinching her chum’s arm.

“This is a serious world, my dear,” quoth Ruth, “and we are growing older every minute.”

“What novel ideas you do have,” gibed her chum, big-eyed. But she shook her a little, too. “There you go, Ruthie Fielding! Always having some secret from your owniest own chum.”

“How do you know I have a secret?” smiled Ruth.

“Because of the two little lines that grow deeper in your forehead when you are puzzled or troubled,” Helen told her, rather wickedly. “Sure sign you’ll be married twice, honey.”

“Don’t suggest such horrid possibilities,” gasped the girl of the Red Mill in mock horror. “Married twice, indeed! And I thought we had both given up all intention of being wedded even the *first time*?”

This chaff was all right to throw in Helen’s eyes; but all the time Ruth expected one of the party to discover the presence of Edith Phelps on the train. She felt that with such discovery there would come an explosion of some kind; and she shrank from having any trouble with the sophomore.

Of course, with Miss Cullam present, Edith was not likely to display her spleen quite so openly as she sometimes did when alone with the other Ardmore girls. But Ruth knew Helen would be so curious to know what Edith’s presence meant that “the fat would all be in the fire.”

It was really amazing that Edith was not discovered before they reached Chicago. After that her reservation was in another car. Then on the fifth night of their journey came something that quite put the sophomore out of Ruth Fielding’s mind, and out of Tom Cameron’s as well.

They had changed trains and were on the trans-continental line when the startling incident happened. The porter had already begun arranging the berths when the train suddenly came to a jarring stop.

“What is the matter?” asked Miss Cullam of the porter. She already had her hair in “curlers” and was longing for bed.

“I done s’pect we broke in two, Ma’am,” said the darkey, rolling his eyes. “Das’ jes’ wot it seems to me,” and he darted out of the car.

There was a long wait; then some confusion arose outside the train. Tom came in from the rear. “Here’s a pretty kettle of fish,” he said.

“What is it, Tommy?” demanded his sister.

“The train broke in two and the front end got over a bridge here, and, being on a down grade, the engineer could not bring his engine to a stop at once. And now the bridge is afire. Come on out, girls. You might as well see the show.”

## CHAPTER VI – SOMEBODY AHEAD OF THEM

Even Miss Cullam – in her dressing gown – trailed out of the car after Tom. The sky was alight from the blazing bridge. It was a wooden structure, and burned like a pine knot.

Beyond the rolling cloud of smoke they could see dimly the lamps of the forward half of the train. The coupling having broken between two Pullmans, the engine had attached to it only the baggage and mail coaches, the dining car and one sleeping car.

The other Pullmans and the observation coach were stalled on the east side of the river.

“And no more chance of getting over to-night than there is of flying,” a brakeman confided to Tom and the girls. “That bridge will be a charred wreck before midnight.”

“Oh, goodness me! What *shall* we do?” was the cry. “Can’t we get over in boats?”

“Where will you get the boats?” sniffed Miss Cullam.

“And the water’s low in the river at this season,” said the brakeman. “Couldn’t use anything but a skiff.”

“What then?” Tom asked, feeling responsibility roweling him. “We’re not destined to remain here till they rebuild the bridge, I hope?”

“The conductor is wiring back for another engine. We’ll pull back to Janesburg and from there take the cross-over line and go on by the Northern Route. It will put us back fully twelve hours, I reckon.”

“Good-night!” exploded Tom.

“Why, what does it matter?” asked Helen, wonderingly. “We have all the time there is, haven’t we?”

“Presumably,” Miss Cullam said drily.

“But I telegraphed ahead to Yucca for rooms at the hotel,” Tom explained, slowly, “and sent a long message to that guide Mr. Hammond told you about, Ruth.”

“Oh!” cried Helen, giggling. “Flapjack Peters – such a romantic name. Mr. Hammond wrote Ruth that he was a ‘character.’”

“H. J. Peters,” Tom read, from his memorandum. “Yes. I told him just when we would arrive and told him that after one night’s sleep at the hotel we’d want to be on our way. But if we don’t get there – ”

“Oh, Tom, there’s Ann, too!” Ruth exclaimed. “She will be at Yucca too early if we are delayed so.”

“I’ll send some more telegrams when we get to Janesburg,” Tom promised Ruth and his sister. “One to Ann Hicks, too.”

“Those people in the forward Pullman will get through on time,” Jennie Stone said. “I’m always losing something. ‘Twas ever thus, since childhood’s hour, my fondest hopes I’ve seen decay,’ and so forth!”

Tom whispered to Ruth: “That sophomore from Ardmore will get ahead of us. She’s in the forward Pullman.”

“Oh, Edith!” murmured Ruth. “She was in that car, wasn’t she?”

They were all in bed, as were the other tourists in the delayed Pullmans, before the extra locomotive the conductor had sent for arrived. It was coupled to the stalled half of the train and started back for Janesburg without one of the party bound for Yucca being the wiser.

Tom Cameron meant to send the supplementary telegrams from that junction as he had said. Indeed, he had written out several – one to his father to relieve any anxiety in the merchant’s mind should he hear of the accident to their train; one to the guide, Peters; one to Ann Hicks to supplement the one already awaiting her at Yucca; and a fourth to the hotel.

But as he wished to put these messages on the wire himself, Tom did not entrust them to the negro porter. Instead he lay down in his berth with only his shoes removed – and he awoke in the morning with the sun flooding the opposite side of the car where the porter had already folded up the berths!

“Good gracious, Agnes!” gasped Tom, appearing in the corridor with his shoes in his hand. “What time is it? Eight-thirty? Is my watch right?”

“Ah reckon so, boss,” grinned the porter. “Most ev’rybody’s up an’ dressin’.”

“And I wanted to send those telegrams from Janesburg.”

“Oh Lawsy-massy! Janesburg’s a good ways behint us, boss,” said the porter. “Ef yo’ wants to send ’em pertic’lar from dere, yo’ll have to wait till our trip East, Ah reckon.”

Tom did not feel much like laughing. In fact, he felt a good deal of annoyance. He made some further enquiries and discovered that it would be an hour yet before the train would linger long enough at any station for him to file telegrams.

They spent one more night “sleeping on shelves,” as Jennie Stone expressed it, than they had counted upon. Miss Cullam went to her berth with a groan.

“Believe me, my dears,” she announced, “I shall welcome even a saddle as a relief from these cars. You are all nice girls, if I do say it, who perhaps shouldn’t. I flatter myself I have had something to do with molding your more or less plastic minds and dispositions. But I must love you a great deal to ever attempt another such long journey as this for you or with you.”

“Oh, Miss Cullam!” cried Trix Davenport, “we will erect a statue to you on Bliss Island – right near the Stone Face. And on it shall be engraved: ‘Nor granite is more enduring than Miss Cullam.’”

“I wonder,” murmured the teacher, “if that is complimentary or otherwise?”

But they all loved her. Miss Cullam developed very human qualities indeed, take her away from mathematics!

The party was held up for two hours at Kingman, waiting for a local train to steam on with them to their destination. And there Tom learned something which rather troubled him.

Telegrams were never received direct at Yucca. The railroad business was done by telephone, and all the messages sent to Yucca were telephoned through to the station agent – if that individual chanced to be on hand. Otherwise they were entrusted to the rural mail carrier. One could almost count the inhabitants of Yucca on one’s fingers and toes!

“Jiminy!” gasped Tom, when he learned these particulars. “I bet I’ve made a mess of it.”

He tried to find out at the Kingman station what had become of the final messages he had sent. The operator on duty when they arrived was now off duty, and he lived out of town.

“If they were mailed, son,” observed the man then at the telegraph table, “you will get to Yucca about two hours before the mail gets there. Here comes your train now.”

Had the girls not been so gaily engaged in chattering, they must have noticed Tom’s solemn face. He was disturbed, for he felt that the comfort of the party, as well as the arrangements for the trip into the hills, was his own particular responsibility.

It was late afternoon when the combination local (half baggage and freight, and half passenger) hobbled to a stop at Yucca. Besides a dusty looking individual in a cap who served the railroad as station agent, there was not a human being in sight.

“What a jolly place!” cried Jennie Stone, turning to all points of the compass to gaze. “So much life! We’re going to have a gay time in Yucca, I can see.”

“Sh!” begged Trix. “Don’t wake them up.”

“Awaken whom, my dear?” drawled Sally Blanchard.

“The dead, I think,” said Helen. “This place must be the understudy for a graveyard.”

At that moment a gray muzzle was thrust between the rails of a corral beside the track and an awful screech rent the air, drowning the sound of the locomotive whistle as the train rolled away.

“For goodness’ sake! what is that?” begged Rebecca, quite startled.

“Mountain canary,” laughed Helen. “That is what will arouse you at dawn – and other times – while we are on the march to Freezeout.”

“You don’t mean to say,” demanded Trix, “that all that sound came out of that little creature?” And she ran over to the corral fence the better to see the burro.

“And he didn’t need any help,” drawled Jennie. “Oh! you’ll get used to little things like that.”

“Never to that little thing,” said Miss Cullam, tartly. “Can’t he be muzzled?”

Meanwhile Tom had seized upon the station agent. He was a long, lean, “drawly” man, with seemingly a very languid interest in life.

“What telegrams?” he drawled.

Tom explained more fully and the man referred to a memorandum book he carried in the breast pocket of his flannel shirt.

“Yep. Three messages received over the ’phone from Kingman station. All delivered.”

“Good!” Tom exclaimed, with vast relief.

“Four days ago,” added the station agent.

That was a dash of cold water. “Didn’t you receive other telegrams in the same way yesterday?”

“Not a one.”

“Where have they gone, then?”

“I wouldn’t be here ’twixt eight and ’leven. They’d come over the wire to Kingman, and the op’rator there would mail ’em. Mail man’s due any time now.”

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