

Vandercook Margaret

The Ranch Girls at Home Again



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CHAPTER I

THE RACE

AN hour before sunset a number of persons were standing in a small group facing the western horizon. But although the prairie was covered with a crop of young grass, a pale green mirror to reflect the colors of the sun, they were not looking at the landscape but toward two figures on horseback, a girl and a boy who were riding across country as rapidly as their horses could carry them.

"Will Jack Ralston ever learn to be less reckless about her riding, Jim?" Ruth Colter inquired. "Since we returned from Europe it seems to me that she has grown more attached to the Rainbow ranch than ever before. Yet at about the time we were married, dear, do you know I had a fancy that Jack and Frank Kent were going to care for each other seriously. Of course, I was mistaken since he has never been to see her in almost a year."

Then with both hands held out invitingly, Ruth received a small pink and white bundle which Jim deposited in them with infinite care. For the bundle consisted of an absurdly tiny person measuring its early existence by weeks instead of months or years. And its face, though as delicately shell pink as the blanket enveloping it, yet bore a ridiculous resemblance to the tall man's in whose arms it had lately been borne.

A moment later and Jim Colter strode forward with a blond girl at his side. For by this time the two riders were almost within hailing distance, the girl's horse scarcely a neck in advance of her companion's.

"Carlos don't like Jack," Frieda Ralston remarked unexpectedly to her guardian, "so I do wish that she would not keep on doing things to irritate him. He perfectly hates to think that a girl can beat him at any outdoor sport and yet he rarely gets ahead of Jack. Indians are so strange and silent that sometimes I feel afraid he may try and revenge himself upon her for some fancied wrong. See, he is furious now at her having won their race!"

"Well, I expect Miss Ralston will be able to manage him;" Jim returned. "Nevertheless, the boy has not turned out as I had hoped; he is lazy and proud and extremely ungrateful. Sometimes I have half an idea of turning him off the ranch, and I came very near doing it the other day, only Jack pleaded for him. Because he is Olive's friend she seems sentimental about keeping him on here, at least, until Olive joins us. Bravo, Jack! Be careful, you hoyden, don't you know you are a grown woman!" he cried.

And with his tone divided between admiration and anger, Jim caught at the flying figure of a girl as she landed lightly on the ground at his feet. She had jumped from her pony while it was still going at full speed and then run along beside it until she was able to stop without losing her balance.

"I wish you would not behave like a circus rider, Jack," Frieda scolded. For at eighteen Frieda Ralston had become a far more dignified and reposeful character than her older sister, who was now past twenty.

Nevertheless Jack only made a slight grimace, calling back over her shoulder carelessly, "Carlos, see to my horse, will you, when it gets to the stable?" And then in a kinder tone, "Oh, never mind, I had forgotten; some one else can look after him. Of course you will be interested to hear the news from Olive – Miss Van Mater," she corrected herself. "I am going to tell the family at once." Then she walked on between Jim and Frieda, with an arm laid lightly across her sister's shoulder. And without replying Carlos followed the little party.

He was a beautiful slender Indian boy of about fifteen or sixteen, with skin the color of bronze, with straight dark hair and moody, unsatisfied black eyes – the same Indian boy who had formerly helped Olive to return to the ranch after her enforced capture by old Laska, and had afterwards sought refuge there himself. As a small lad, in spite of his pride and difficult disposition, the Ranch girls and Ruth had been fond of him, but since their return from Europe they had found Carlos a problem. He was unwilling to work like the other men, either on the ranch or at the mine, and was equally determined not to go to school except when forced into it. Indeed, so far as possible, the boy had insisted upon living in the midst of civilization like one of his chieftain ancestors. Oftentimes he chose to sit idly in the sun doing nothing, save perhaps to clean his gun or else gaze for hours at the sky overhead. Then again he might without warning disappear on a hunting expedition, taking any horse from the stables that he wished for his purpose, and usually returning with game or furs, which he sometimes bestowed on Jean or Frieda or Ruth, but never on Jack.

At the present moment his manner was absurdly dignified and haughty, since he particularly objected to being treated at any time as though he were a servant, and considered Jack's request in that light. However, as no one was paying the slightest attention to him, it was self-evident that he was longing to hear Jacqueline Ralston's news.

"Have you heaps of letters, Jack? Do please hurry and give them to us." Jean Bruce called out, walking away from the two young men with whom she had been recently talking. One of them was Ralph Merritt, the engineer in charge of the Rainbow mine, and the other a visitor from one of the neighboring ranches. For as Jack had always insisted, wherever Jean was to be found there also was a masculine admirer, even in a wilderness.

Over her shoulder Jack carried a small leather mail bag, which she now opened; but before drawing forth her letters she leaned over and glanced anxiously into the face of the small baby snuggled in Ruth's arms.

"Nothing has happened to Jimmikin since I have been away? He has not cut a tooth or anything, has he, Ruth?" she queried. And as the others laughed, the baby being at the present hour only about seven weeks old, Jack drew forth more than a dozen letters and began passing them around to the different members of her family.

"Here, Jean, of course there are more for you than for any of the rest of us, and in so many handwritings that it looks as if you kept a correspondence school for young men. And, Frieda, I am sorry I had to discover this was from Tom. But the youth does send you so many boxes of candy, I can't help recognizing the address. Ruth, won't you ask everybody please to wait here a moment for I have something really important to tell you." Then Jack's radiant face grew graver.

"I have at last had a long letter from Olive," she explained. "And a week after her grandmother's death the will was read." The girl glanced about her. Ralph Merritt and their visitor had walked off several yards, so that only the few persons interested were standing near.

"Of course old Madame Van Mater has made the curious will that we might have expected. For it seems that she has given Olive one more year to make up her mind whether or not she will marry Donald Harmon. If she does, of course they will then inherit the greater portion of the estate with only a few legacies to be paid outside. But if she does not decide to marry him – and here is the strange thing – at the end of the year another will is to be read, which will divide the property differently. And no one knows just how, for this second will is sealed and in the possession of her executors. So Olive may finally be left penniless or she may receive everything, or else Donald may suffer the same fate. It is a queer and interesting state of things, isn't it?" Jack concluded.

"Yes, and pretty well calculated to make everybody that had anything to do with the old lady uncomfortable for another twelve months longer anyhow," Jim Colter replied frowning. "Funny how the old woman arranged to make her relatives and friends as miserable after her death as she had before it. It is pretty hard on both Olive and Donald. In the end I have an idea that the money will go to some charity."

In reply Jean slowly shook her head, turning over the envelopes in her hand with pretended interest, but with her thoughts plainly not centered upon them.

"Olive is very foolish," she remarked at length. "Really I can't see why she does not make up her mind to do as her grandmother wished. Don is a charming fellow and it is ridiculous not to appreciate the value of so much money. Why the longer I live the more important it seems to me!"

Too displeased with Jean's unexpected burst of worldliness to discuss the question with her, Jim marched a few steps away. Ruth was distressed, but being a woman she was not so unmindful of what lay behind the girl's apparently careless speech, while Frieda became immediately influenced by her cousin's point of view, just as she always had been since they were small girls. So it was Jack who was the one person in the group to take Jean's statement lightly, for she merely laughed, saying:

"Oh, of course we know that Jean is the really worldly person in our family, so we must watch and see how she lives up to her sentiments! Still you have not yet heard my most important piece of news. Olive has also written that she is completely worn out with all the business and worry of these last weeks and so she is coming to us at once. She asks if she may bring Miss Winthrop along with her for a visit?" Jack paused for a moment, looking inquiringly about at the faces of the others. "Of course she may," she ended. "It will be a pleasure to have Miss Winthrop, and besides I don't see how we possibly could refuse."

Frieda held up two white hands protestingly. She was not an industrious person and so devoted a great deal of her valuable time to her toilet instead of to more serious labors. "Oh, dear," she began, "it will be just like going back to Primrose Hall again to have Miss Winthrop staying in our house. Goodness, how she will disapprove of me for having no ambition to improve myself as Olive does. I shall have to lead a changed life!"

"Thank Providence, then. Do ask Miss Winthrop to come on the next train," Jim chuckled, returning at this instant, while Ruth shook her head thoughtfully.

"Naturally it will be an opportunity for all of us to have a woman like Miss Winthrop for our guest," she declared, in a slightly worried tone. "But has it ever occurred to any one of you where we are to put her? The poor old Lodge is so crowded now with babies and girls and Jim Colter that we have not a single spare room. Oh, of course Olive can be tucked in anywhere, but –"

"Jim, do take your son and let us walk over and look at our new house," Jack at once suggested. "Surely there will be enough bedrooms finished by the time Olive and Miss Winthrop arrive, for some of the family, so that we may give ours to our guests. Funny how we cling to the dear old Rainbow Lodge in spite of our new grandeur."

Then Jack moved on ahead, leading the way through the grove of cottonwood trees almost up to the old house. She turned to the left and about an eighth of a mile farther along came to a slight elevation, recently planted with shrubs and evergreens. There, facing the little party, was a splendid pile of stone and wood that was evidently growing into an old-time colonial house.

For of course now that the girls were older and wealthier, and Jim and Ruth married, Rainbow Lodge was no longer suited to their needs. And as the Rainbow Mine still continued to yield a handsome income, the new house had occupied a great deal of the family's time and attention since their return from Europe. For it had been both Jim's and Jack's desire to build a wonderful colonial mansion here in their own beautiful Western country, where in times past men and women had been content with rude cabins. Since a colonial house meant to Jim Colter the beauty and dignity of the old Virginia homes that he remembered in his boyhood and since Jacqueline had long cherished a photograph of the place owned by her Southern grandfather who had been killed in the Confederate army, the new house was to be as nearly as possible a replica of the latter.

In the interest of discussing what the workmen had accomplished since their last visit to the new building, no one noticed that the Indian boy, Carlos, who had followed the others up to this time, listening intently to every word of their conversation, had stalked silently away as soon as Olive's name ceased to be mentioned. His face wore a more pleasing expression, and unlike his usual habit

he afterwards joined old Aunt Ellen in the kitchen, who was still the ranch girls' cook and devoted friend. To her he at once imparted the information concerning the expected visitors; then he retired to his own tent in the yard. For Carlos had absolutely refused to live in the ranch house with the other employees about the estate and had erected for himself an Indian tepee at some distance.

CHAPTER II

AN UNANSWERED QUESTION

ON a pile of boards in a great unfinished room Frieda Ralston stood facing – the unknown future.

In the family it was sometimes said that though on occasions the younger Miss Ralston could assume the airs of a social queen, at very many other times she was more of a baby than ever. For of course Frieda had not yet been touched by any of life's hard realities, and since her sister's recovery from her accident her way had been fairly plain sailing. For did she not have health, youth, plenty of money and an adoring family? What else was there to wish for? Thus far she had never taken any of her mild love affairs with the least seriousness and had no idea of "settling down," as she expressed it, for at least ten years to come. So what was there for Frieda to do but each day to grow fairer and more charming, like a lovely wax doll that had come to life and taken upon itself the airs and graces of a really grown-up person. Because Jack objected, Frieda some time ago had given up her former fashion of wearing her heavy yellow hair in a Psyche knot, and in these months at the ranch when no strangers were about had returned to her old childish custom of two long braids. On dress occasions, however, her coiffure, copied after a Paris model, could again be made bewilderingly lovely.

On this particular occasion Frieda had unfortunately neglected to attire herself for the rôle which she was about to play, as she happened to be wearing an old blue and white middie blouse and a short duck skirt with one long plait hanging over each shoulder.

"I wonder," she began at this moment, though no one chanced to be looking toward her, "which one of us will finally fall heir to this grand new house we are building? I have just been thinking, houses are not like clothes, meant for one person and to last through one or two seasons: they may last through many generations and no telling what changes in a family."

"Hear! Hear!" cried Jean, straightway whirling around to regard her cousin with astonishment and then striking an attitude of mock admiration. "Listen, everybody, please, Frieda is making a speech! She wants to know which of us shall become the royal family of Rainbow Castle. It is an interesting question, dear; I never should have thought it of you!"

Frieda hesitated, but the next instant went on quite seriously. "Of course it won't be you though, Jean, because of all of us, Ruth, Olive, Jim, and Jack and me, why I think you love the Rainbow ranch the least. You will never want to stay on in the West once you are married; that visit you made the Princess Colonna in Rome has completely spoiled you."

And now it was Jean's turn to endure the family laughter, and though she made no reply, she showed more annoyance than the accusation merited.

Still surprisingly thoughtful, Frieda continued: "I suppose that either Jim or Jack and their children ought to inherit the new house, for of course I am the youngest and have done nothing toward making the ranch a success as Jim and Jack have. Ruth, you and Jim would want Jack to have the place after she marries and has children, wouldn't you? And yet not long ago, do you know, I believed that in spite of loving the ranch best, Jack would be the first one of us to leave it for good. I don't think so now," she added hastily, catching an expression on her sister's face that she could not altogether understand.

But by this time Jack had marched across the room and was gently but firmly pulling Frieda down from her exalted position.

"I suppose hearing the news of old Madame Van Mater's will has gone to your head, Frieda darling," Jack protested. "But really no one of us wants to hear you arranging our futures and talking about our descendants, as if fifty years might suddenly pass away before tea time. Of course 'Rainbow

Castle,' as Jean calls our new home, shall belong to the one of us who wishes it and needs it the most. But which of us that may be – well, in the words of Mr. William Shakespeare, 'that is the question.'"

Jack now turned to her cousin, Jean, who was standing before one of the unfinished windows looking out at the beautiful view. For the prospect from the new house was far lovelier than any outlook from Rainbow Lodge, since it stood on a higher incline and showed a wider sweep of the prairies.

"Jean," Jack asked, "I wonder if you happen to know where Ralph Merrit is? There is something Jim and I want particularly to talk over with him. I happened to notice he was with you last. Did he say whether he was going to have dinner with us tonight or with the men at the Ranch House?"

The other girl shrugged her shoulders impatiently.

"Really, Jack, I don't see why I should be expected to know Ralph Merrit's plans because I was talking to him for ten minutes. But what is all this mystery about anyway? What is going on down at the mine? Ralph looks either as if he were working himself to death or as if he had the weight of the world on his shoulders. To tell you the truth, I believe he did ask me to tell you that he was going away for several days perhaps. He preferred to talk over matters with you on his return. But do come on home, Ruth," Jean finished crossly, "it is much too cold for the baby to be outdoors now the sun is down. And Jim and Jack always prefer to have their business secrets alone. I suppose we have no right to be interested. But of course there can't be any serious trouble at the Rainbow Mine while Ralph is managing things." Then Ruth, Jean, the baby and Frieda walked on ahead, leaving Jim and Jack to follow slowly behind. For in spite of the accusation in Jean's speech, her cousin had made no denial.

With her hand inside his, after the fashion she had as a little girl when anything about the big ranch troubled her, Jack gazed earnestly up into her old friend and guardian's strong and gentle countenance.

"I am right not to speak of this trouble Ralph Merrit is having with the men at Rainbow Mine, don't you think so, Jim?" she queried. "You see I don't understand the situation anyhow, and it all may come to nothing in the end. So any discussion does not seem to me fair to Ralph. Surely the men are only grumbling! Why next to you I feel that we owe our fortune to the splendid way Ralph Merrit has managed the mine. And you know you have always liked him better than any other young man we have ever known, better even than Frank Kent."

Jim cleared his throat. "Have I said that I had changed my mind about Merrit?" he demanded. "You are right, Jack; you just lie low and say nothing even to the men who may come to you with their complaints. In my opinion the trouble is this: The fellows at work on Rainbow Mine are most of them middle-aged men, kind of down-and-out miners and a hard lot, who have either given up the hope of discovering gold for themselves or postponed searching for it for a while so as to first make a good living out of us. Well, you see, compared to them Ralph Merrit is a kid. And of course his being a real mining engineer graduated out of a college and placed as the boss over them makes the older men kind of sore. Then, besides paying our miners their regular wages we have been giving them a percentage also of the amount of gold that is taken out of the mine each month. There is still enough pay dirt for us to live pretty comfortable, but the men say we ought to be getting a whole lot more. Merrit isn't certain yet, he wants to make some more investigations. The gold that is a whole lot deeper down under the earth may prove either too dangerous or too expensive to get out. So at bottom I believe that is what the real grievance is, they want Ralph to hurry up. It is nothing to them to have us sink, say a hundred thousand dollars, in new mining machinery and maybe get nothing back. So they have been spreading ugly stories, say Merrit does not know his job and that he is too busy speculating and trying to earn a fortune that way for himself to care what becomes of the mine."

After this speech Jack kept silent for several moments and they were almost at the Lodge before she replied:

"Look here, Jim, don't be angry with me if I say something. Of course I know Ralph is doing the best he can for us at the mine. But about that other story – really you ought to try and find out

if it is true. John Raines, one of the miners, said he wanted to tell me something; do let him tell you instead. Because, Jim dear, if once you believe in a person you know you believe in him forever, and yet maybe Ralph may have gotten into mischief. You see I should not wish to be prying into his private affairs, but it is as plain as the nose on your face to everybody but you that Ralph is in love with Jean and always has been for that matter, though I must confess he has been paying her a good deal less attention lately. And as for Jean, well I don't believe she will marry any one who cannot give her wealth and position; yet just the same it would be wiser to know the truth about Ralph. Couldn't you ask him to tell you? I believe he would. Oh dear me, I do hope we won't have a strike at the mine or any other kind of trouble."

"You sound pretty sensible, partner," Jim agreed, "maybe I had better look into things a little more. It never hurts any fellow to keep his eyes open. But let me tell you that I have never heard of a gold mine yet, whether it was a good one or a poor one, that did not keep on piling up trouble."

CHAPTER III

THE ENGINEER OF THE RAINBOW MINE

READERS of the Ranch Girls' Series probably remember that the first meeting between the members of the Rainbow Ranch family and Ralph Merrit occurred several years before, while they were making a caravan journey to the Yellowstone Park.

And Jean Bruce had been Ralph's original acquaintance. How many times since had they not laughed at the vision of the girl idly washing her hair in an outdoor stream with no thought of a stranger in many miles. Then there was the story of their first luncheon together with only Frieda as chaperon and Ruth and Olive's return, the storm, and Jim and Jack's disaster by the deserted mine. Within less than a week Ralph Merrit had appeared like an old and tried friend. And from the hour of his arrival to advise and assist Jim Colter in regard to the Rainbow Mine he had seemed almost like one of the family. Only twice had he left his work for any length of time – once to visit his mother and sister in Chicago, and the second time to say farewell to the Ranch girls when they sailed for Europe. His friends understood that a large part of his generous salary went each month to the support of his people, and that in his present position Ralph was not making his fortune so quickly in the West as he had hoped. But was that the reason why he had been taking so many short trips away from the ranch in the past few months and why he had recently changed so decidedly in his appearance and manner?

Though Jean may have had her own special reasons for observing these changes most, no one else was wholly blind. Could it be possible that Ralph Merrit's difficulties were graver than they suspected?

There is a possibility that Jack Ralston's and even Jim's faith might have been shaken had they been able to follow the young man's proceedings on the afternoon of their conversation about him.

He and the neighbor, who had simply been a visitor at the ranch for afternoon tea, walked along without much conversation until they came to within the neighborhood of Rainbow Creek – that portion of the creek where important mining machinery had been set up and near which a shaft had been sunk, forming a narrow entrance into the Rainbow Mine.

As the hour for work had passed some time before, the place was now deserted and Ralph Merrit showed no interest in lingering in its vicinity. Yet the discovery of the surprising wealth contained in the Rainbow Mine had never ceased being a subject of interest, of speculation and oftentimes of acute envy to many of the ranch owners in that end of Wyoming, and the young man, Hugo Manning, who was Ralph's present companion, had only recently purchased a cattle ranch about ten miles away. He had come from the western part of New York State and this was his first sight of a gold mine.

Plainly Ralph was at first simply bored by the stupid questions that his neighbor asked of him. Then unexpectedly the young engineer's expression changed and his face flushed angrily.

"I hear that your famous Rainbow gold mine is panning out," the young man had remarked carelessly. "They tell me around here that you have already taken out all the gold that lies near enough to the surface to be of value. They insist that it is going to cost you more to buy new machinery and try out new methods of mining than the gold is worth. Better advise your friends to sell out while selling is good and before their mine loses its reputation."

Ralph made a queer noise in his throat that was half anger, and yet he did not positively deny the suggestion. "Oh, they say that, do they?" he exclaimed. "It's funny how much sooner strangers find out about your affairs than you do yourself! I don't believe Mr. Colter or Miss Ralston have yet had to complain of any lack of money. When that time comes then we shall decide what is best to do."

And Ralph started to move along, but his companion waited, hesitating for half a moment. "I say, Merrit," he continued, "if the Rainbow Mine owners should make up their minds that they want

to get out, I wish you would let me hear the news first. Isn't it possible that they might be willing to take a lump sum down and not run the risk of losing what they have already got by investing in new machinery? I believe it mostly belongs just to the two Ralston girls. But a company of men, say in New York City, might look at the proposition differently. They could afford to sink a few hundred thousands easier."

Ralph nodded dryly and this time walked on so resolutely that his companion was obliged to hurry in order to keep alongside and to hear the answer to his request.

All the reply he received was: "Thank you; it is kind of surprising to meet a fellow who knows people who are willing to lose money."

But when at the edge of the ranch the two men finally separated, Ralph Merrit went on alone to the nearest railroad station. It was several miles away and few persons from the Rainbow Ranch ever attempted walking so great a distance. But Ralph had not ordered a horse for one reason because he did not wish to have a boy accompany him to bring the animal home again and also because he preferred not having any one know just where he was going. That there was discussion and ill feeling concerning him among the men at work on the Rainbow Mine he understood, although Ralph was not yet aware how unkind the criticism was, nor just what was being said.

By midnight he had finally arrived at his destination, Laramie, the largest city in Wyoming. He had then gone directly to a small, out-of-the-way hotel. But after his arrival, instead of getting immediately into bed as any tired, healthy fellow should, the young man dropped into a chair before his open window, sitting there most of the night. Now and then he dozed a few moments from sheer exhaustion, but the greater part of the time he stared out into the lighted streets below him, moody and restless and totally unlike the Ralph Merrit of former days.

If one trait of character had previously distinguished Ralph from the Ranch girls' other young men friends, it had been his practical common sense. Unlike Frank Kent and Donald Harmon, Ralph Merrit was a self-made boy, who had earned his own way through college and had afterwards suffered many disappointments and disillusion on coming West to seek his fortune. Upon taking charge of the Rainbow Mine and making the success of it, which he certainly had, for a time Ralph felt happy and satisfied. He was doing work which many an older man might have envied him. Then why had he recently become so disheartened and dissatisfied? It was true that the Rainbow Mine was not yielding so much gold as it formerly had and that he was beginning to feel fearful that the veins near the surface, which had held valuable ore, were now nearly worked out. Yet Ralph did not even try to pretend to himself that his nervousness and discontent were due to conditions at Rainbow Mine. No, his anxiety and despondency were entirely personal.

For in the past six months Ralph had been overtaken by an ambition that makes for more unhappiness and destroys the careers of more young men than almost any other vice. He had developed an overpowering desire to make a large fortune quickly, not by hard work or economy or any of the ordinary, slow methods for gaining wealth, but by some single, brilliant stroke of good luck that should make him a rich man at once.

Yet this represented such a curious change in Ralph Merrit's former nature, in his good sense and sound judgment, that surely some outside influence must have been at work to render him so unlike himself. What that influence really was Ralph Merrit alone knew perfectly well.

Now it is idle to deny that while under most circumstances a refined girl is an ennobling influence in a young fellow's life, now and then there may be exceptions to this fact as to all others. At the very beginning of their acquaintance Ralph Merrit had understood that he was falling hopelessly in love with Jean Bruce. But in the two years of her absence at school and in Europe he had fought the matter out with himself and decided that he had mastered his impossible fancy. During her short visits at the ranch they had remained especial friends as at the start, but nothing more. Now, however, since Jean's return to live at the Rainbow Lodge, Ralph had not only felt a return of his first affection, but an emotion that was very much stronger and more serious.

And he felt this in spite of recognizing that Jean herself had greatly changed. No longer was she the fascinating unspoiled girl of his early acquaintance; she was a far more worldly-minded and ambitious Jean than he could have imagined. She was also far prettier and more alluring from her experiences and opportunities, and there was no doubt but that she was constantly yearning for the companionship of distinguished people, for more society, broader social opportunities of every kind. During the past year at the ranch she had not been altogether contented. Their former life now seemed too simple and uneventful to her, she no longer had Jack's intense interest in outdoor amusements. Yet to Ruth's and her cousin's suggestions that she make a visit in the east to her friends, Margaret and Cecil Belknap, Jean would not listen. Of course she was happy at home, and whatever her family might say to the contrary they would be absurdly lonely without her. Moreover, did they believe that she would miss Olive's home-coming? But any other influence that may have been at work in the back of the girl's heart or mind she did not mention. And assuredly Ralph Merrit did not dream that his presence on the ranch could be in any possible sense an added influence.

For whatever Ralph's present weaknesses, he did not put the blame upon a woman. Jean had given him no false encouragement, had shown him no special favor. The fault was his, that moved by what he believed her attitude toward wealth, he had used the wrong method for obtaining it. He had not even given Jean the chance to say that his struggle was unwise or unnecessary, since he had been paying her far less attention recently.

At ten o'clock the next morning Ralph learned from his stock broker that instead of being nearer the fortune he so much desired, he was several thousand dollars farther away. And this loss represented almost the last dollar he had in the world.

CHAPTER IV

OLIVE COMES HOME

SOON after dinner Ruth and Jim Colter and of course the small son had retired to their rooms in Rainbow Lodge, leaving Jack, Jean and Frieda to amuse themselves in the living room until bedtime. A week had passed since their visit to their new house and tonight Frieda and Jack were busily studying over their original plans and discussing various alterations which they felt were absolutely necessary, while Jean, without seeming to regard them, was playing idly upon the piano.

It was not cold, and one of the front windows was partly raised with the blind drawn down; but a small fire was burning in the old fireplace, since the Rainbow Lodge living room was never exactly the same delightful abode without it.

Except for a few handsome, additional pieces of furniture and some odd pictures and china which the girls had brought home from abroad, there was no material change in the beloved room. For Ruth and the girls had the good taste to know that its primitive character with its decorations of bright Indian rugs and simple furnishings was far more suitable and beautiful than any alteration their money could bring. So the newer and more splendid furnishings which they had purchased in New York and in Europe had been safely stored away for the finishing of their new house. And this evening in their former familiar surroundings Jack, Jean and Frieda looked not unlike they had on that first evening years ago when Jack had returned from her original meeting with Frank Kent and before either Ruth or Olive had ever been seen at the Rainbow Lodge.

"But, Frieda dear, it will be far too expensive to make such a change as you suggest," Jack protested. "You know that we agreed to have the four big bedrooms and two baths on one side of the house and just one upstairs sitting room. Now if we try to arrange a private sitting room off from your room, it will either make your bedroom too small or else rob the rest of us. And another big bay window would cost hundreds of dollars more."

"Well, why not?" Frieda returned petulantly. "Here we have all been living quietly at the ranch for nearly a year and spending no outside money except on the house. It is only because you are suddenly growing stingy, Jack. I heard you tell Ruth that we had better not order as many new oriental rugs as we planned to have. Mr. Parker says that he can add the extra space to my apartment without spoiling the effect of the house in the least. Do let me have him do it, Jack darling, please? You know you and Jean and Olive will often be talking about things in our big sitting room that you won't wish me to hear and I do want a tiny den all to myself."

Because Jack did not agree at once to her sister's pleading the girl at the piano ceased playing for an instant to glance at her cousin, and, surprised by her expression, did not look immediately away.

Jack was frowning and was a little pale. But she had been out all day riding over the ranch and talking to the men at the mine, and naturally might be expected to be tired. She had gone to her own room and undressed almost immediately after dinner, and as there was no possibility of any visitors arriving unexpectedly at the ranch, she was now wearing a lovely old Chinese blue silk kimono and had her gold brown hair in a loose knot on top of her head. Leaning over she suddenly kissed Frieda, who sat on the other side of their small table puzzling over the drawings for their new place.

"It isn't fair to say that I am stingy, baby," Jack declared, "when you know that our house is costing thousands of dollars more than we first expected. People say that is just what all houses do, yet just the same we have to set a limit somewhere. And of course I don't want you or Jean to worry, but there is a possibility that we may not get as much money out of Rainbow Mine in the future as we have for the past few years. And you know we have not a large fortune stowed away in bank. Besides, we have gotten into the habit of living pretty expensively and spending an awful lot of money thinking that our mine would hold out forever. Today Jim told me that frequently there were gold mines that

ceased to yield almost altogether when certain veins had been worked out. I don't think he meant that this was going to happen to ours – only that our income might be cut down."

As Jack finished speaking Jean Bruce got up from her piano stool and came across the room to face her cousin.

"It's funny, Jack, that you let Jim give you all this information about affairs at the mine, instead of Ralph Merrit. It seems to me that Ralph must know more than Jim. And as he is head engineer you know you ought to get your information from him," she protested.

Rather wearily Jack leaned back in her chair; yet she answered without any show of temper. "I thought you knew, Jean, that Ralph has not yet come back to the ranch. Five or six days ago he wrote Jim not to expect him for some little time as he had important business to look after. So you see I could not very well discuss business with him while he is away."

With a little shrug Jean turned to stare into the fire.

"Yes, but you could have waited until Ralph's return and then have had the conversation with him. Besides, it isn't only Jim who has been telling you that the gold in our mine will give out unless some new method for mining it is employed. No, it is the other miners who have been grumbling to both of you. I wonder if they can be dissatisfied with Ralph's management? But, Frieda, for goodness sake don't be a baby and don't worry Jack about spending more money on our new house than we can afford. Dear me, I wonder how we shall behave if suddenly we should become poor as church mice again. It would be my duty then, I suppose, Jack, to let you get rid of supporting such an expensive cousin by some means or other."

Already won over by her sister's argument, since Jack's judgment was almost always hers in the end, Frieda had left her chair and was sitting on the arm of her sister's, pulling softly at the loose coils of her hair and trying to rearrange them.

She and Jack both stared at Jean in surprise and consternation. What was the matter with her? Why should she talk in this absurd fashion? Had they ever felt or shown any difference between her and themselves in the right to everything they possessed? Something was making Jean unlike herself tonight.

Seeing the hurt and surprise in the other two faces Jean at once changed the subject.

"Jack, have you heard anything more about when Miss Winthrop and Olive are planning to come for their visit to us?" she demanded. "Just think, we have not seen Olive since our return from England! Won't it be splendid for you to have her with you again, Jack dear? Frieda and I are so dreadfully spoiled and lazy, we never do anything to help you about the ranch and only complain if things go wrong and we haven't more money to spend. I do wish somebody would show me how to be useful. I haven't even the beds to make now we have another girl to help Aunt Ellen."

Jack shook her head. "I am sorry you are bored. I wish I could think of something to interest you. You seemed to like the ranch when we first came back and the work at the mine. The only word I have heard from Olive since her other letter was a short note in answer to my telegram that begged her to come at once. She said that she and Miss Winthrop had a lot of business matters to look after, but meant to run away as soon as possible. What in the world was that?" And Jack, who seemed unusually tired and nervous tonight, startled the other two girls by jumping up unexpectedly.

Jean had also heard the noise and turned in the direction from which it came.

"It is only that tiresome boy, Carlos," she explained. "I mean to tell Jim that I don't like his sneaking up here and peering into our window in that spooky fashion. Carlos can move more like a spirit than a human being anyway! But what has become of him recently, for now I think of it I have not seen him before for several days?"

"He has been away from the ranch most of the time," Frieda answered sleepily, "for I wanted him to do an errand for me the other day and could not find him. But Aunt Ellen says he has come to her for food several times and then has gone off with as much as she would give him. Somehow I'm fond of Carlos – he was such a queer, handsome little boy when he first came to us. I hope Olive

will understand him better than the rest of us do. But dear me, what does he mean by coming in at the front door without knocking?" And Frieda also jumped up hurriedly. "I hope he is not bringing us bad news!"

Not only had the front door opened, which had not yet been locked for the night, but the door of the living room was mysteriously unclosing just half an inch at a time.

The three girls were seriously annoyed and Jack spoke sharply:

"Carlos, what do you mean by entering our room without asking permission? Unless you have something important to say I should prefer your waiting to speak to us until tomorrow."

A soft voice, which was not that of the Indian boy, replied: "But I can't wait till morning or not another moment, Jack dearest, when I have traveled across a whole continent to see you. And please forgive Carlos for my sake, because he and I have been planning this surprise together ever since I left Primrose Hall."

Afterwards Olive Van Mater could only get a few steps further inside the old Lodge living room, because Frieda, Jean and Jack at once flung themselves upon her. And the tears were gathering fast in the girl's big star-like black eyes as she tried her best to explain the mystery of her arrival and to embrace her three friends at the same instant.

"You see, Miss Winthrop found that she could not leave home for some time yet and I was so tired and so nearly dead to see you that she would not let me wait until she could come. So I thought that I would rather surprise you than anything else I could imagine. I wrote Carlos when to expect me and to have a horse and carriage at the train. But the poor lad has been at the station apparently for several days, fearing he might make some mistake and that I should arrive without his knowing. But you brought me home safely after all, didn't you, Carlos?" And Olive disengaged her hand for a moment from the girls' hold to extend it to the Indian boy.

"Goodness, how you have grown, I haven't had a good look at you until this moment," she ended admiringly.

And surely Carlos made a handsome picture. In honor of Olive's home-coming he wore a soft shirt of some yellow material and a pair of clean khaki trousers with a bright sash knotted about his waist and a crimson tie at his throat. All the surliness had disappeared from his expression, his skin was like polished bronze and his eyes like shining coals, as he took his old friend's hand and for a moment pressed it reverently to his lips.

Then Jack removed Olive's traveling hat and long broadcloth coat, with every movement of her hands a caress.

"But please, Carlos and Olive," she demanded, "I don't pretend to be able to hear outdoor sounds as you can; yet I have fairly well trained ears of my own. Would you mind telling me how you managed to drive a rickety old hired carriage up to the very door of Rainbow Lodge with us in the living room and yet never a sound heard we?"

Olive laughed. "That is our secret, but if you must know, we did no such thing. Half a mile away I sent the driver back to the station and Carlos and I ran on tiptoes under the stars all the way home." The girl ended her sentence with a slight catch in her breath. "Then please to remember that we are both Indians, or at least I am almost one. And now won't somebody go and find Ruth and Jim, for I just must see the baby this minute even if he cries his eyes out the rest of the night."

CHAPTER V

THEIR RIDE TOGETHER

OLIVE and Jack had scarcely been alone for more than a half hour at a time since Olive's arrival almost a week before. But before ten o'clock this morning they had both started off on horseback with their lunch boxes packed, leaving word at home that they were not to be expected back until sundown.

First of all they yearned for a long, uninterrupted gallop together over the sweet-smelling, wild, rose-strewn prairies. For not since the very first year of Olive's life at Rainbow Ranch had they enjoyed this formerly well-loved entertainment. Soon after then had come Jack's accident, and until this year she had not been in entirely good health during any of their days at the ranch.

And the beauty of this special windswept, sunlit day was nature's gift to the two friends' reunion.

Jack rode a little ahead on her own horse, Romeo, which she had bought immediately after their return from abroad and christened "Romeo" in a kind of joking recollection of their visit in Rome. Of course, he was the fastest riding horse on Rainbow Ranch, but not a beautiful animal, since he had been chosen for speed and endurance rather than appearance. And in truth he was only a rough Western pony with sagacity and knowledge of the country, dignified by the name of horse simply because of his slightly greater size and length of limb.

Following close behind, her pretty nose almost able to touch the other animal's rough coat, came Olive's smaller mare, which Jean had named "Juliet" by reason of following Jack's horse about whenever they were permitted to graze in the open fields.

Juliet had been no one's special property, since she had been born on the place and no one had chosen her for personal use. So shortly after Olive's return the other three girls had escorted her to the stables and there solemnly presented her with "Juliet," avowing that no one else should have the privilege of using the mare except with Olive's consent.

The two friends rode for more than an hour after leaving the neighborhood of the Lodge without speaking, except now and then to call attention to some particularly beautiful effect in the landscape. First they galloped to the farthest outskirts of the great thousand-acre ranch, which was still as carefully and scientifically managed as during the time when the Rainbow Mine was an undiscovered quantity and when the girls and Jim's living depended entirely upon its success. There were groups of cattle scattered here and there wherever the alfalfa grass was ripe for eating, and mares with young colts were allowed free pasture. But by and by when a far-off rim of hills could be seen, with their summits glistening with caps of snow and the sky above them so scattered with fleecy-like clouds that snow and cloud seemed to touch and melt into each other, Jack slowed down for a moment, waiting for her friend to come up alongside her.

"Is it because I am a Western girl and all this means childhood and home to me that the country seems more beautiful and inspiring than anything we saw in Europe, Olive dear?" Jack asked.

And Olive looked into the other girl's face searchingly for an instant before replying. She had been wondering for a good many months why Frank Kent had never come to America to see Jack when on leaving England she had believed that he and Jacqueline were almost on the point of being engaged. Several times recently she had actually written and asked Jack why on earth Frank had not made his promised visit to Rainbow Lodge. Without really answering, Jack had always arranged to evade her questioning. "Frank was too busy, he was thinking of running for Parliament, he preferred waiting until Olive was also able to be at home, so that they might be there together once again." None of these replies had made a very profound impression upon the questioner. So today Olive had planned in her own mind to get at the real truth. Jack would not dare to refuse to answer her direct inquiry if once she had the courage to demand it of her. Positively she must know whether Frank's

apparent indifference was due to a change in his own feeling or to an unreasonable request on Jack's part for postponing her decision.

Now at Jack's question, studying her friend's face, Olive feared that this last idea must be the true one. Love of her old home, the grip which the western country and atmosphere always had on the girl's character and affections – these must have been waging a winning battle against her former affection for Frank Kent.

Must she ask Jack if this were true? No, Olive decided that she had best refrain until later in the day. For Jack was not at the present moment in the mood for confidences. She was just gloriously alive and filled with the physical beauty and splendor of the morning. Later on, when there had been opportunity for more conversation, Olive would make her query. For there were dozens of intimate personal things which she and her best beloved friend must get at the heart of before this ride of theirs together was over. So now Olive only laughed, and leaning over lightly stroked the neck of the other horse.

"It is only because you are such a pagan, Jack, that Europe seems too crowded for you," she answered. "Besides you know how dearly you finally learned to love the English country, although it was the direct opposite of all this! Doesn't its wonderful greenness, the splendid old trees and the flowers and cultivated beauty of the fields make up to you for the great wide spaces and the colors in your prairies?"

Slowly Jack shook her head, in reply, at the same instant taking off her soft brown felt hat and hanging it on the pommel of her saddle. "I don't know," she answered, drawing in a deep, quiet breath.

The past year of outdoor work and amusement on the ranch had brought back to Jacqueline Ralston the glow and brilliant, healthy color of her childhood. Her complexion was several shades darker than it had been the summer before, her cheeks more vividly rose and her hair lighter from exposure to the sun. Then Jack had again grown dreadfully indifferent to clothes since their return home, much to Jean's and Frieda's disgust and to Jim Colter's secret amusement. For quite forgetting their fortune and the fact that she was now almost ready to cast her first vote in Wyoming, Jack had returned to wearing the old brown corduroys or faded khakis of her youth, together with almost any soft hat which she happened to find convenient for her outdoor jaunts. And only when the other girls insisted, or Ruth pleaded, or guests were expected to dinner at the Lodge, would Jack return to wearing the pretty toilets which she had brought home from Europe. For not one single dress had she given time or thought to purchasing since then, although Jean and Frieda frequently amused themselves by sending east for hats and gowns.

So today, although Jack was actually the older and in times past had looked it, Olive would have been considered her senior. For one reason she was still weary from the shock and strain of her grandmother's death and from the business difficulties resulting from her strange will. Then there was a last and final interview with Donald Harmon which even yet the girl did not like to recall. She was sorry not to be able to return his affection. Moreover, Olive's new riding-habit was of black cloth, which Miss Winthrop had ordered from a well-known New York tailor, adding to her appearance of age and dignity. Yet in spite of the elegance and decorum of her own riding attire, Olive did not feel the objection to her friend's as Jean and Frieda undoubtedly would have. For Jack's costume was eminently characteristic. Moreover, the old corduroy skirt and leather leggings and slouch hat were not unbecoming now that her coat was open showing the curve of her strong white throat.

It was equally characteristic of Jack when they finally reached the clump of trees where they were to have luncheon to jump first from her horse and then lift Olive as carefully down as though she had been her masculine escort. Afterwards it was she who led the horses to water, fed them and then tied them.

Coming back, she flung herself down on the ground by her friend and taking one of the girl's hands in hers kissed it, saying carelessly:

"Olive, child, did you hear any one or anything while I was away? I thought we were going to have a perfectly peaceful and uninterrupted day, but I have an idea that while I was looking after the horses I heard some one stirring about not so very far off. Still I may have been mistaken or it may have been a deer or a wildcat. This woods gets so much denser as one goes further into it. This is near the same place where I managed to break my poor little pony's legs several years ago. It was when we were making that horrid visit at the Norton's before it was finally decided that you were to come and live with us. I never have been able to think of having to shoot 'Hotspur' without its giving me the shivers." And Jack now took a small pistol out of a leather holster fastened about her waist. "I never go on a long ride with either of the girls without carrying this," she remarked carelessly, "but I don't believe I am ever going to like hunting again as I did when I was younger. That was one of the lessons I learned when I was ill so long – a greater respect for life, anybody's or anything's." Then the girl's voice grew suddenly hushed.

"Didn't you hear a slight noise then?" she whispered.

After a moment of enforced silence Olive shook her head. "No, or at least nothing of importance," she replied. "Of course these woods must have wild game in them, since it is the only place with running water nearer than Rainbow Creek. But it is odd your having this impression now. Several times I meant to tell you and forgot – that while we were riding I kept having the idea that some one was following after us. Half a dozen times I looked around thinking that it might possibly be either Jean or Frieda. But I saw no one, so of course it must have been only a fancy."

"Well it certainly was neither Jean nor Frieda," Jack replied laughingly. "They have both grown too lazy for such a journey as we are taking. But come along, because if we are ever to get to your old Indian village and back again this afternoon, we must hurry."

For this had been the supposed object of Jack's and Olive's free day together. Soon after her arrival at the Lodge Olive had suggested that she would very much like to go back to the little Indian village where she had lived as a child with old Laska, and see if the woman and her son were yet alive. She desired also to pay a visit to her former teacher and first friend, who was still at work among the Indian children at the little Indian reservation school.

Before the two girls had finally arrived at their destination, it was Olive who discovered the ghost stealthily pursuing them. And it was he whom Jack must have heard in the woods.

Olive at once turned apologetically to her friend. "Don't be cross, Jack, and don't scold if I tell you something," she began unexpectedly. "But just now I saw at some distance behind us a brown shadow on a brown horse. So I'm afraid it is Carlos who has been trailing after us. But really it is my fault for having told him where we intended going. Probably he won't trouble us if we don't wish to notice him."

Frowning, Jacqueline returned: "I'm sorry to confess it to you, Olive dear, but really, Carlos is getting to be rather a nuisance to Jim and me. I do hope you may be able to influence him to settle down to some kind of work or study – to anything he likes. Neither Jim nor I care so much what except that his idleness is a bad influence among the men on the place. There is no use in my trying to do anything with him, for he has taken such a violent dislike to me. Frieda says that I am too much of a boss and it has offended the boy's dignity. But I shan't scold today since Carlos is only following us because he does not entirely trust me to look after you and adores you so that he does not wish you out of his sight."

Just as though four or five years had not passed with its crowded and ever changing experiences, walking up to old Indian Laska's dirty hut alone Olive Van Mater found the Indian woman still sitting in her same open doorway, smoking the apparently identical pipe and clothed in the same old nondescript rags of former days with a brilliant Indian blanket across her shoulders. But at the sight of her beautifully dressed visitor the Indian woman showed not the slightest sign of recognition. Nor did she do anything further than nod and grunt several times in succession when Olive assured her that she had once been the girl "Olilie," who had lived with her from the time she was a baby.

Possibly Laska could neither understand nor believe what this charming American girl was trying to explain to her, but certain it was that she never once invited Olive inside her former home, nor showed the slightest interest in her, except to smile at the handful of small change that was bestowed upon her in parting. For of course Olive had long since ceased to feel any bitterness against the old woman, whose ignorance and greed had not been nearly so responsible for her past unhappiness as her own grandmother's careless neglect of her.

Olive's interview with her first teacher was such a great pleasure and satisfaction to them both, that except for Jack's insistence that it was already past time to go back to the ranch and that Olive and her old friend could now meet each other frequently, the two girls would never have started for home until nearly sundown. And as it was they were an hour later than they should have been in leaving.

They were not able to ride as rapidly as in the morning because neither of the horses was so fresh. So that by and by, just as both girls had wished, they fell into the first long, confidential talk they had enjoyed in nearly a year.

And there was so much to say! Olive had to repeat the strange terms of her grandmother's will and her own positive intention not to marry Donald Harmon, no matter what the second will might insist upon – even if it left her penniless.

Then Jack confided the present trouble at the Rainbow Mine. For during Ralph's continued and unexplained absence the miners had grown uglier, threatening that unless a new engineer was secured at once they would go upon a strike. Moreover, they would see that no other men be allowed to take their places. Already they insisted that there was not enough gold in the former veins to make Rainbow Mine worth working. A new manager and new machinery must be procured at once.

Just how to quell the disturbance and set things right neither Jim Colter nor Jacqueline could decide at present. Of course they were awaiting with impatience Ralph Merrit's return in order to have a talk with him. But afterwards what should they do? Would Ralph be forced by the miners into advising them to buy more machinery before he knew just what should be done? This might sink all their capital and make them poor again.

"Really it is Jean and Frieda about whom I am worrying the most if we do lose our money," Jack frankly acknowledged. "For Ruth and Jim and I can be happy living as we used to do. But then of course the building of our new house must be completed, since the contract is already given for finishing it."

So the two friends talked on, and it was small wonder that the sun was sinking as, followed by the ever watchful Carlos, they finally rode up to the Lodge. But Olive had not yet satisfied herself in regard to the state of affairs now existing between Jack and Frank Kent.

In answer to a point-blank question Jack had simply replied that she and Frank had not been engaged to be married. Also that she had too much upon her mind at present to ask him to make them a visit. However, now that Olive had arrived, perhaps Frank would wish to come in a short time.

CHAPTER VI

THAT SAME AFTERNOON

SINCE a short time after lunch Jean Bruce had been alone at the Rainbow Lodge, except for the presence of Aunt Ellen and the housemaid. For at about two o'clock Jim and Ruth, Frieda and the baby had driven off to pay a long visit to some old-time friends. For Ruth had not entirely recovered her strength since the baby's birth and therefore Jim was unwilling to have her far away from him.

But Jean was not lonely, or at least not for the first few hours. She had letters to write – one to her New York friend, Margaret Belknap, and another to her adored Princess, who had never wavered in her interest and affection for the American girl since Jean's visit to her in Rome.

Then, at about four o'clock, Jean strolled over to look at their new house, which seemed to have been making tremendous strides in the last few days, now that the outside had been entirely completed. She had one or two suggestions that she wished to make to the architect about her own room and this was the best hour for having a talk with him, as she happened to know that he had been spending most of the day with his men. The architect did not superintend their house building more than two or three times a week. Determined to have their new home as beautiful and as harmonious as possible, the girls, Jim and Ruth had decided upon employing the most distinguished architect in that part of the country. Theodore Parker was a Wyoming man with his central office in Laramie, and yet his work on public buildings and his creation of certain types of houses for western millionaires had given him a reputation throughout the country. So it was scarcely possible to expect him to devote a large portion of his valuable time even to the construction of "Rainbow Castle." For Jean's laughing title for their new home had somehow clung to it.

The place would probably be almost, if not quite, as beautiful as many a palace, Jean thought, as she slowly approached the front entrance. This was to have a flight of broad, low stone steps leading up to it, while the base of the house would be banked with low, close-growing evergreen shrubs.

For the outdoor work on their estate the girls had not consulted a landscape gardener, but they had studied many books and pictures of beautiful gardens and had then developed certain ideas of their own. In order to keep the view of the rolling prairies to the distant line of hills several miles beyond, the slope before the house was to be left unchanged. Here and there were flower beds in the carefully planted and tended blue grass lawn, which with constant watering and top soil might be persuaded to grow. But on either side and toward the back of the modified colonial mansion were to be the real gardens. Although the flowers had not yet been planted, bushes had been set out that were later to form green and blossoming aisles. In the preceding autumn a dozen or more large evergreen trees had been transplanted from the nearby forests, and zealously tended all through the winter, so that already they showed signs of growth.

Jean's interview with Mr. Parker was entirely satisfactory and the girl would have liked to linger and talk at greater length with the big, purposeful man, who seemed to bring to one of the noblest of all the professions the spirit of the artist, and the executive ability of the business man. But Mr. Parker was plainly too busy to give her more than a few minutes of his attention, although in their conversation they did wander from her errand far enough to permit their discussing a few of their impressions of Europe. And, oddly enough, the architect who had studied in Paris and traveled a great deal, had never been to Italy, the mother of much that is most beautiful in modern architecture.

A man of about thirty-five or six, Jean imagined he must be as she returned to the Lodge, and assuredly extremely good-looking, with his iron-gray hair, dark eyes and smooth face. One could hardly help wondering why he had never married.

At home once more, Jean suddenly had a sensation of feeling deserted and forlorn. What could she do to amuse herself? Although she insisted upon denying it to her family, certainly there were

occasions lately when their former life did seem dull and uninteresting to her. Yet perhaps Jack was right in thinking that this was due to her paying no special regard to the things that were happening on the ranch itself. Should she take a walk now, or go down to Rainbow Mine to see if anything was going on? Ralph Merrit was still away, certainly for an unaccountably great length of time! And undoubtedly there was some kind of trouble brewing among the workers in the mine, though what it was Jean had not the remotest idea. Yet Jack and Jim had been plainly annoyed and concerned over some disturbance, otherwise so many consultations between them and their workmen would have been unnecessary.

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