

pegs on the kitchen wall and fit them to him, and still waited while she donned riding skirt and broad-brimmed hat and knotted some Chiles and bacon into the end of a sack and kissed her father good-bye and patted Murphy's head until he sneezed. Five minutes later Ol' Man Tone sat with the unmended strap hanging forgotten from his hands while he watched the loved little figure rising and falling rhythmically in the distance as Lightning bore her away and thought drearily of the hours it must be before he might expect her home-coming.

Patty was never so much alive anywhere as on Lightning's back, feeling the play of his strong limbs under her and delighting in the wind of his motion which cooled her face and blew back the loosened strands of her hair. And to-day the prairie was beautiful to see, all fresh with the first luxuriance of springtime. Close at hand it was green as the pile of emerald velvet, but far off the earth tint came up in a faint wash of greyish-yellow streaked here and there duskily with chapparal. And everywhere were flowers, verbenas all fashionably white and purple, great clots of lupine gleaming mistily through the mirage of rising heat waves. Their fragrance mingled delicately with the rich, warm air and Patty sniffed with all her nose, utterly ignoring the smokiness of the bacon broiling in the sack which she had made fast to the pommel of her saddle. But before the twenty miles were covered she was moist and uncomfortable and the bacon obtruded itself more and more on her reluctant senses; tiny streams trickled down Lightning's neck under his flapping mane, and flecks of foam came flying back to cling to his mistress's riding-skirt.

Both were glad when the sod-house of the Schlosses wheeled slowly up over the horizon—a brown lump, whose distinguishing features came out very gradually as the distance lessened between them and it. There was the piece of corn Jim had spoken of, not much like her father's, which grew grandly higher than a tall man's head, and other patches and strips of feeble growing things. And there was the sod-house door with a woman standing in it, holding a baby in her arms, while two shy heads showed from behind the folds of her scant cotton skirt—a woman so slight that Patty felt gigantic by contrast, with blue eyes too big for her thin face and a weight of flaxen hair that made her look curiously top-heavy. She waved her hand as soon as she thought Patty could see it and made the baby wave his, and when Patty slipped out of the saddle before the door she set the baby down and running to the girl, threw both arms about her and kissed her.

'I was so afraid when I first saw you that you mightn't be going to stop!' she cried.

'Why, I come awn purpose,' said surprised Patty. 'I'm Ol' Man Tone's Patty an' I reckon we're neighbors.'

'I've heard of you,' the woman said. 'And, oh, you don't know how glad I am to see you.' And she put her head on Patty's shoulder and sobbed away some of her loneliness and misery. The baby left to himself on the hot earth went into a sudden fit of screaming at the over-familiarity of a huge black beetle which had begun to scramble up his bare leg.

His mother turned and snatched him up and the beetle shaken off, made all possible speed toward a chink in the sod-wall from which it had probably issued.

'Oh, what is it?' she cried, pointing. 'Was it a tarantula?'

Patty laughed.

'Wa'al, I reckon not. Hain't yo' seen a tranchler yet?' she asked.

'I've seen most everything in the bug line, I guess,' the woman answered, wearily. 'I never wake up at night without feeling something crawling on me. I found a horned toad in the children's bed once.' She shuddered. 'Well, come in,' she said, 'though I don't know as it's a might cooler inside. It's so hot everywhere.'

'I will soon's I git Lightnin' lariatied out,' Patty said. She led the pony round to the cool side of the house where the cyclone cellar was, slipped off his bridle and unwound a long coil of rope which hung from her saddle. At one end was a noose, at the other a sharpened bodark peg. Patty flung the noose over Lightning's neck and stamped a peg well into the yielding soil, thus making him secure. Then she picked up the sack of beans and bacon and went within.

'I reckoned yo' might not be 'xactly ready fo' company,' she said, 'so I fetched along a little something I could carry easy. I don't know but y'd like me to show yo' how to make a mess o' Chile-concarni. We 'air powerful fond of it at our house.'

'I never heard of it,' the woman said. A little flush had risen in her thin cheeks and her eyes looked all the brighter for their bath of tears. Patty thought her pretty. 'I used to think I could cook real good when I was a girl at home,' she went on, 'but you can't do much with just cornmeal and smoked meat and that's all we have down here.' She had seated herself in a low, straight-backed chair and was jogging gently back and forth in it trying to get the baby to sleep at the same time she talked with Patty. The older children hung on either side of her staring with round blue eyes like her own at this brown-faced girl, whose teeth showed so white when she spoke or laughed. Patty did not feel at all shy. She wished now when she saw how much good she seemed to be doing that she had come before.

'It's all so different, anyway,' the woman said in her clear, quick tones. She moistened her thumb and forefinger and began to twist the hair on the baby's forehead into little ringlets. 'I don't know what I'd do if it wasn't for my children. I guess Fred's as good as most men but he's German and I don't think they ever just sympathize with their women the way Americans do. I fought with all my might against coming down here,' her eyes blindly studied the strip of sunshine that cut the brown shadow of the earth floor between her and Patty. 'But it was no use. You see we didn't do well on the farm—it was real old and worn-out. Fred had heard of someone who had been down here and made a good deal of money and he was all taken up with the idea. Why, crops just raised themselves and land—could be had for the asking. He talked and talked and finally pulled up everything and away we came. My sister was just as much against it as I was.

She's a widow with a good property and she said we could take her place and live on it a year rent free. She'd rather live in the village. But Fred never liked Liza somehow and he's that proud and independent he wouldn't be beholden to her for anythin'.' She sighed. 'I don't know but what he wishes now he'd taken longer to think before he made this move. Did you notice the crops as you came past?'

Patty nodded.

'Well, that's the way everything goes he puts his hand to. I guess he's beginning to see that northern days don't count down here. We brought a little money with us, but it's all gone now. I don't know what we shall do and sometimes I think I don't care. I'm that sick and discouraged. Seems to me I'd be willing to die if I could just see a brook or a tree or a mountain again. You don't know what it is always to have been used to them and then not have them.' Her lips quivered. The children turned and looked solemnly into her face. Patty stirred uncomfortably in her chair and swallowed hard. 'But there's my babies and Fred,' the little woman went on, trying to be brave. 'I don't want to complain too much. It's hard for Fred, too. I wish you could see him. He's losing flesh awful fast and he looks wretched—it goes right to my heart. He's real kind and patient, too, lately.' She had begun at the baby's hair again. One of the little girls whimpered and her mother put an arm about her and drew her close.

'The children are hungry,' she said to Patty, 'and I guess it's about time we all had something to eat. I can put the baby down now—he's gone to sleep.' She rose and came forward with him in her arms, bending down so Patty could see his face. 'Isn't he pretty?' she whispered, with loving mother-pride. 'He looks like his father. Fred was the handsomest young man in our section.' She laid him down on the white counterpane of the bed behind the curtain, kissed him and came away softly. 'Now I'll get some dinner,' she said. 'It won't be much, but maybe you'll excuse it. I haven't seen a white potato since I came down here or any white flour to speak of. Fred's gone to Rosalia to get some things. I can make you a cup of tea, though. I don't know what we'd ever do without tea,' she ended 'the water goes against us so.' She took a handful of papers and a match and went to light a fire in the cook stove, which had been carried out of the house and set up in the open air.

The meal was a meagre one, but Patty found herself eatin with real appetite. Everything about the little sod-house was so exquisitely clean and well kept. It had a homely look, too, and Patty fell to wondering what she could do to give the great bare ranch-house that same look. She made careful notes of this little Northern woman's housekeeping and hospitality—how she set the table and poured the tea into the shallow old blue cups and passed it; how she laid the knives and forks and arranged the spoons in their holder. After dinner, when the beans for the Chile-concarni had been put cooking and the baby had awakened from his nap fresh and rosy and good-natured, his mother sat down with him in her lap and she and Patty had a long, comforting, heart-to-heart talk. It was very hot and very, very still. The