

CHAPTER I

The Lone House at Blue Bird Ridge

"NELL, Nell, where are you? I want you to give an eye to the dog; the creature has had a dreadful mauling," shouted Doss Umpey, in petulant tones. He had thrust his head in at the open door, and seemed quite angry to find that there was no one moving about in the houseplace.

"I'm coming, granfer," cried a voice, somewhere out of sight. Then there was a shaking of the rickety ladder which stood in the far corner of the dark little room, and a thin girl in very shabby clothes came slowly into view.

No one would have called Nell, otherwise Eleanor Hamblyn, at this period of her life, a pretty girl. Two good points, however, she possessed, one a sweet, low voice, that excellent thing in woman; the other a pair of beautiful luminous eyes, which made those who saw them forget the defects of her face and figure.

"You never are on hand when you are wanted. What you find to do in that old loft all the time just about passes my comprehension," growled the old man, whose temper was none of the sweetest.

"Well, I ain't far off when I'm wanted, anyhow," replied Nell, good-humouredly. Then she asked in an anxious tone, "What's the matter with Pip?"