

"Oh, indeed! How glad I am to be here safe at last!"

"How—eh—did you happen to—eh—recognize the church?" asked Mr. McNeil with evident admiration. "You—eh—can't see it from the saloon."

Moffat disdained reply, and the lurching stage rolled rapidly down the valley, the mules now lashed into a wild gallop to the noisy accompaniment of the driver's whip.

The hoof's clattered across the narrow bridge, and, with a sudden swing, all came to a sharp stand, amid a cloud of dust before a naked yellow house.

"Here's where you get out, miss," announced the Jehu, leaning down from his seat to peer within. "This yere is the Herndon shebang."

The gentlemen inside assisted Miss Spencer to descend in safety to the weed-bordered walk, where she stood shaking her ruffled plumage into shape, and giving directions regarding her luggage. Then the two gentlemen emerged, Moffat bearing a grip-case, a handbox, and a basket, while McNeil supported a shawl-strap and a small trunk. Thus decorated they meekly followed her lead up the narrow path toward the front door. The latter opened suddenly, and Mrs. Herndon bounced forth with vociferous welcome.

"Why, Phoebe Spencer, and have you really come! I didn't expect you'd get along before next week. Oh, this seems too nice to see you again; almost as good as going home to Vermont. You must be completely tired out."

"Dear Aunt Lydia; of course I'm glad to be here. But I'm not in the least tired. I've had such a delightful trip." She glanced around smilingly upon her perspiring cavaliers. "Oh, put those things down, gentlemen—anywhere there on the grass; they can be carried in later. It was so kind of you both."

"Hey, there!" sang out the driver, growing impatient, "if you two gents are almin' to go down town with this outfit, you'd better be pillin' in lively, fer I can't stay here all day."

Moffat glanced furtively aside at McNeil, only to discover that individual quietly seated on the trunk. He promptly dropped his own grip.

"Drive on with your butcher's cart," he called out spitefully. "I reckon it's no special honor to ride to town."

The pleasantly smiling young woman glanced from one to the other, her eyes fairly dancing, as the lumbering coach disappeared through the red dust.

"How very nice of you to remain," she exclaimed. "Aunt Lydia, I am so anxious for you to meet my friends, Mr. Moffat and Mr. McNeil. They have been so thoughtful and entertaining all the way up the Bear Water, and they explained so many things that I did not understand."

She swept impulsively down toward them, both hands extended, the bright glances of her eyes bestowed impartially.

"I cannot invite you to come into the house now," she exclaimed, sweetly, "for I am almost like a stranger here myself, but I do hope you will both of you call. I shall be so very lonely at first, and you are my earliest acquaintances. You will promise, won't you?"

McNeil bowed, painfully clearing his throat, but Moffat succeeded in expressing his pleasure with a well-rounded sentence.

"I felt sure you would. But now I must really say good-by for this time and go in with Aunt Lydia. I know I must be getting horribly burned out here in this hot sun. I shall always be so grateful to you both."

And the two radiant knights walked together toward the road, neither uttering a word.

#### CHAPTER XI.

##### Becoming Acquainted.

Once within the cool shadows of the living-room, Mrs. Herndon again thought herself to kiss her niece in a fresh glow of welcome, while the latter sank into a convenient rocker and began enthusiastically expressing her unbounded enjoyment of the west, and of the impressions gathered during her journey. Suddenly the elder woman glanced about and exclaimed, laughingly, "Why, I had completely forgotten. You have not yet met your room-mate. Come out here, Naida; this is my niece, Phoebe Spencer."

The girl thus addressed advanced, a slender, graceful figure dressed in white, and extended her hand shyly. Miss Spencer clasped it warmly, her eyes upon the flushed, winsome face.

"And is this Naida Gillis!" she cried. "I am so delighted that you are still here, and that we are to be together. Aunt Lydia has written so much about you that I feel as if we must have known each other for years. Why, how pretty you are!"

Naida's cheeks were burning, and her eyes fell, but she had never yet succeeded in conquering the blunt independence of her speech. "Nobody else ever says so," she said, uneasily. "Perhaps it's the light."

Miss Spencer turned her about so as to face the window. "Well, you are," she announced, decisively. "I guess I know; you've got magnificent hair, and your eyes are perfectly wonderful. You just don't fix yourself up right; Aunt Lydia never did have any taste in such things, but I'll make a new girl out of you. Let's go upstairs; I'm simply dying to see our room, and get some of my dresses unpacked. They must look perfect frights by this time."

They came down perhaps an hour later, hand in hand, and chattering like old friends. The shades of early evening were already falling across the valley. Herndon had returned home from his day's work, and had brought with him Rev. Howard Wynkoop for supper. Miss Spencer viewed the young man with approval, and immediately became more than usually vivacious in recounting the incidents of her long journey, together with her early impressions of the western country. Mr. Wynkoop responded with an interest far from being assumed.

"I have found it all so strange, so unique, Mr. Wynkoop," she explained. "The country is like a new world to me, and the people do not seem at all like those of the east. They lead such a wild, untrammled life. Everything about seems to exhale the spirit of romance; don't you find it so?"

He smiled at her enthusiasm, his glance of undisguised admiration on her face. "I certainly recall some such earlier conception," he admitted. "Those just arriving from the environment of an older civilization perceive merely the picturesque elements; but my later experiences have been decidedly prosaic."

"Why, Mr. Wynkoop! how could they be? Your work is heroic. It is perfectly grand! Why, the very men I met seem to yield me a broader con-

ception of life and duty; they are so brave, so modest, so active. Is—is Mr. Moffat a member of your church?"

The minister cleared his throat, his cheeks reddening. "Mr. Moffat? Ah, no; not exactly. Do you mean the mine-owner, Jack Moffat?"

"Yes, I think so; he told me he owned a mine—the Golden Rule the name was; the very choice in words would seem to indicate his religious nature. You have the only church in Glencald, I understand, and I wonder greatly he has never joined you. But perhaps he may be prejudiced against your denomination. There is so much narrowness in religion. But I left every prejudice east of the Missouri," she declared, laughingly, "every one, social and religious. I'm going to be a true westerner, from the top of my head to the toe of my shoe. Is Mr. McNeil in your church?"

The minister hesitated. "I really do not recall the name," he confessed at last, reluctantly. "I scarcely think I can have ever met the gentleman."

"Oh, you ought to; he is so intensely original, and his face is full of character. He reminds me of some old paladin of the Middle Ages. You would be interested in him at once. He is the foreman of the 'Bar V' ranch, somewhere near here."

"Do you mean Billy McNeil, over on Sinsiniwa creek?" broke in Herndon.

"I think quite likely, uncle; wouldn't he make a splendid addition to Mr. Wynkoop's church?"

Herndon choked, his entire body shaking with ill-suppressed enjoyment. "I should imagine yes," he admitted finally. "Billy McNeil—oh, Lord! There's certainly a fine opening for you to do some missionary work, Phoebe."

"Well, and I'm going to," announced the young lady, firmly. "I guess I can read men's characters, and I know all Mr. McNeil needs is to have some one show an interest in him. Have you a large church, Mr. Wynkoop?"

"Not large if judged from an eastern standpoint," he confessed, with some regret. "Our present membership is composed of eight women and three men, but the congregational attendance is quite good, and constantly increasing."

"Only eight women and three men!" breathlessly. "And you have been laboring upon this field for five years! How could it be so small?"

Wynkoop pushed back his chair, anxious to redeem himself in the estimation of this fair stranger.

"Miss Spencer," he explained, "my parish comprises this entire mining region, and I am upon horseback among the foothills and up in the ranges for fully a third of my time. The spirit of the mining population, as well as of the cattlemen, while not actually hostile, is one of indifference to religious thought. For three long years I worked here without even a church organization or a building; and apparently without the faintest encouragement. Now that we have a nucleus gathered, a comfortable building erected and paid for, with an increasing congregation, I begin to feel that those seemingly barren five years were not without spiritual value."

She quickly extended her hands. "Oh, it is so heroic, so self-sacrificing! I am going to help you, Mr. Wynkoop, in every way I possible can—I shall certainly speak to both Mr. Moffat and Mr. McNeil the very first opportunity. I feel almost sure that they will join."

The unavoidable exigencies of a choir practice compelled Mr. Wynkoop

to retire early, nor was it yet late when the family circle also dissolved, and the two girls were themselves alone.

The light was finally extinguished; the silvery moonlight streamed across the foot of the bed; and the regular breathing of the girls evidenced slumber.

(To be continued)

#### HANNER.

(By W. W. Fink.)

It was here in Indianner  
That I sparked and married Hanner,  
Which is probably the reason  
I've a story to relate;  
Well, the world was all-agin me,  
And there weren't no good luck to me  
And my toes grew sore a-kickin'  
'Gin the horny shins of fate.

On the farm, somehow or other,  
Storms kept chasing one a-nuther,  
Till they trampled down my harvest  
And they mildewed out my hay.  
Still I'd time enough to gether  
All my crops in purty weather  
If I hadn't run for office,  
Which (the office) ran away.

But my Hanner, in a manner,  
Held aloft the family banner,  
For she kept the pot a-biling;  
Day and night she'd spin and weave,  
While I kept "a-lectioneerin'."  
'Till the neighbors got to sneerin',  
Just because she made the livin'  
And I thought we'd better leave.

Well, we kind o' took to roaming,  
'Till we landed in Wyoming.  
It's the most confounded kentry  
That a Hoosier ever struck!  
Injen-fighters, woman's-righters,  
Long-nosed Yankees, pome-inditers—  
I'm for business, but what's business  
Where none but fools have luck!

Fust I merchandized and busted  
'Till I couldn't uv got trusted  
For a plug of black terbacker,  
Let alone a bag of flour;  
But my Hanner went to cookin'  
And fust thing I knowed she took in  
Twenty boarders, and the money—  
Goodness sakes, she made a power!

Well, my life was growing sunny  
With the shine of Hanner's money;  
But the woman's-righters ran her  
For a Jestice of the Peace,  
And you bet it riz my dander,  
For to see her turnin' gander,  
Supercedin' uv her husband  
Leavin' him among the geese.

But the long-nosed pome-inditers,  
Injen-fighters, woman's-righters,  
'Lected her; but you can bet your  
Boots I did't 'lectioneer,  
And I told her, that's what I did,  
That I'd finally decided  
That the kentry wasn't healthy,  
And we'd better come back here.

So we come to Indianner,  
And I must confess that Hanner  
Had electioneered so honest  
That she hadn't spent a dollar.  
And my life is once more sunny,  
Hanner's keerful of my money,  
And she's now a modest female,  
Not ashamed her spouse to foller.