

TRAILS' END

by AGNES LOUISE PROVOST



FOURTH INSTALLMENT

The water in her pitcher was fresh from the creek and cold. Anne splashed it vigorously, one foot still tapping at odd moments in time to an intermittently hummed tune, but a disapproving pucker marked brows. Now why did she have to do that silly trick? Hadn't she any sense at all? Why do anything which might start anybody, even Martha, wondering where she had come from and what she had been before she had stepped off the two-thirty-eight at Marston? She must be more careful.

Dressing was a swift matter in these days. Insinuating odors of bacon and coffee were creeping in, but she went out of doors first.

Over by the horse corral she heard a sudden series of thumps, like dancing hoofs on hard ground.

Rounding the corner of the house she caught sight of Barry Duane. The dancing sounds came from the prettiest pinto Anne had ever seen, penned in the corral and making playful rushes at the gate. On the ground beside Duane was a saddle.

"Barry Duane, what are you doing?"

"Oh, hello!" He turned with a guilty grin. "Do you mind having visitors at this hour? I thought I'd bring a pinto down and ask you to exercise him occasionally. His name's Comet. It's a great riding country around here. I know some pretty good trails."

Her eyes shone. She tried to frown, and made a bad job of it.

"But you must do such things. It's awfully good of you to want to, but I really can't—"

"Can't ride? I'll teach you in a morning."

"Don't be so innocent. You know what I mean. You've taken hours of your time and Petry's, and hampered and dug and sawed, and made special trips to Marston on errands that I ought to have looked after myself, and even brought things down from your own ranch, but when it comes to taking your saddle horses—"

"Don't you like him?"

"Of course I like him. He's a darling."

"Then he's yours. And don't think that you are getting anything very great, because I have a hundred more running loose. Comet, come and make friends with your new boss."

The pinto arched his neck and looked warily at the strange hand. Anne reached over and ran her hand down a stony neck.

"Oh, you beautiful thing!" she said softly. "How could anybody part with you?"

Barry Duane looked down at her with his nice smile.

"It doesn't have to be a complete separation. I've been hinting that I expect to come along when you ride him, but haven't had even a nibble yet."

"You've got me one now. I'm wild to try him."

"This morning?"

"Love to. Right after breakfast. Have you had yours or will you have some with us?"

"Both, thank you. I like Martha's coffee and I've been up since before five. Comet, we stay."

Half an hour later he was out again saddling the pinto for her and Anne was making a quick change into riding clothes.

Barry was waiting with the horses.

"All outfitted for the trail, aren't we? I suppose that means that you have ridden before?"

"Some . . . Not much," she added honestly, "but I'm crazy about it."

The pinto danced delicately, impatient to be off, but she held him in while Barry swung himself into his saddle. He nodded approvingly.

"That's just right. Keep a steady

hand on him and he will soon know which one of you is boss. You'll find that he has plenty of ginger, but he's well behaved."

For the first half mile they scarcely spoke. Anne let Comet out a little. Pounding hoofs sounded back of her, and the long-striding Captain soon came abreast. She gave Barry a radiant look, and his heart suddenly skipped a beat or two and went rocketing up into his ears.

After a time they came to a high flat that was like a parkland.

"Like to stop?" he suggested.

"This is one of the places I wanted to show you . . ."

They found an inviting place to sit. Anne sighed happily.

"And to think," she added lazily, "that I'd planned to spend this heavenly morning struggling with a hoe."

"It's not a woman's work," he insisted doggedly. The mere suggestion seemed to make him angry.

"If you need more help, let your neighbors take a hand. Or if you won't do that, Tranquillo has a nephew who will come, by the day, and I'll see that he doesn't overcharge you. I hate the idea of your grubbing in the fields. It doesn't fit you at all."

"I'm a hard-working woman, you know, not a princess in an ivory tower."

"You'd make a better princess than anyone I know."

She caught a dark flicker in his eyes. A warning little bell chimed somewhere in her head. Barry Duane was not the kind who made careless love.

"The days ran by as swiftly as water, slipping over a dam. There was still plenty of work to be done, but the first furious onslaught was over. Things were shaping up, indoors and out.

Every morning Anne ran out to look at the new green of her alfalfa fields. There were hours in the kitchen garden or out on the porch. Evenings she often sat with pencil and paper and thoughtfully puckered brow, trying to figure profits and losses, the cost of stock and what she ought to do next year.

Barry was looking after some neglected work on his own ranch, but every few days he found an excuse to stop at Trail's End. The obliging Boone Petry detoured to Trail's End every time he drove in to Marston and occasionally when he didn't. Martha developed an uncanny prescience in guessing when Petry was due and piling up errands and odd jobs for him.

They were out on the steps one day when Petry drove up, the old car piled with supplies.

"There's your package from the mail order house. Miss Anne, and here's a letter for Martha. No letters for you or me. Shall I take the groceries around back Martha?"

He usually walked straight through the front door to the kitchen, as did everybody else, but today he flickered an eyelid at Martha and tramped around to the back door. Martha followed him.

"Look here, Martha, some of those old hens in Marston are talking."

"What's the matter with them?"

"Miss Anne's the matter. Miss Bagley, she can't get over the shock of findin' that there wasn't any tag on her coat, and Miss Caswell at the post-office, she says it's awful queer that Miss Cushing never gets letters from home like other folks."

"Well," said Martha sharply, "what did you tell her?"

"What could I tell her?" Petry scratched a worried head. Her hein' a lady, I couldn't very well cram her remarks down her throat, could I?"

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"No," said Martha dryly. "Bein' a man, you wouldn't know how. Now see here. Boone Petry, the next time you hear any such interesting conversation goin' on, you just slide up and tell 'em you know for certain, only you wouldn't tell anybody but them, that Miss Anne hasn't any folks except cousins she's never seen, and she run away because her guardian wanted her to marry a rich old rake that she hated."

Petry grinned. "All right, Martha, just as you say."

Martha's mouth quirked briefly and sobered again.

"Look here, do you suppose Barry's heard any of this?"

Don't believe so. If anybody'd ever said it to him, he'd sailed in and took 'em apart."

Martha looked worried. "No," she said grimly, "he wouldn't take 'em apart. He'd just turn icy mad and freeze 'em until they cracked. And he'd rage inside all the way home, because he's awful fond of Miss Anne."

Inside of the house a voice was singing, a lilting soprano. Petry listened for a moment, eased the box softly to the table and tiptoed out again.

Anne was restless. She was alone, for Martha had gone to Marston to spend the day, leaving shortly after breakfast with Petry. At first it had been rather fun. She had roamed from the house to the creek and back to the house again, but little by little things that she wanted to forget had crept in.

She must not think of them; she didn't want to. This was a new life and she was going to be happy in it. She was happy. Would she ever feel free to do the things that other girls did—well, to marry, for instance? Even if she told the man first? But she couldn't tell. What-ever happened, she didn't dare do that . . . She wondered what Barry Duane would say if he knew.

She jumped up suddenly and gave herself an impatient shake. She would go out and saddle Comet, and leave it miles behind.

For the first level half mile they swept along in an exhilarating burst of speed, but after that she pulled the pinto down to a steadier pace, and once turned to a steeper trail he bent down to business and climbed diligently.

This was the first time that she had ridden for any great distance alone, and there was a thrill in it. She meant to make the same circle that she and Barry had traveled on their first ride together.

For over an hour she rode slowly. Then she reined in and dismounted. Comet watched her with liquid, unblinking eye as she climbed out to a boulder of red sandstone. It made a natural seat.

For a long time she sat there. The sun's rays were slanting from the west. Little by little the warmth and light were fading from her face again. She jumped up abruptly. She suddenly realized how low that sun was. "Comet!" she called. "Comet, boy, we're going home."

No answering whinny came to her call. There was no sign of the pinto.

Anne stood very still for a moment, telling herself that she wasn't scared. It was her own fault; she ought to have "tied him to the ground," as Petry called it. She gave an anxious glance at those slanting rays and turned quickly on her way . . .

A swaying of bushes on a lower slope caught her eye, and then in an open space there was a flash of glossy piebald flanks. She called with all the strength of healthy young lungs. The pinto caught the sound, looked back and hesitated. She was within a hundred feet of him when he frisked capriciously, broke into an easy canter and stopped at a safer distance.

She could have wept with vexation. More slowly this time, Anne followed him with coaxing voice and outstretched hand. This was a nice game, and Comet was feeling coltish and gay. He let her come quite near and then wheeled and cantered off again.

When she came to the next open space there was no sign of the pinto. She stopped and called again. There was no sound. The graceful Comet had gone lightly about his own business, and she must her long way home.

The trail? The thought startled her. She made a turn, blankly strange, and came suddenly on a wall of rock.

It rose sheer, two hundred feet or more, directly in her path. She turned and looked back uncertainly, wondering where the first wrong turning had been. Back of her was the blank wall of cliff, and ahead on both sides stretched an endless reiteration of trees and underground and rocks in bewildering confusion.

The Family DOCTOR

by JOHN JOSEPH GAINES, M.D.

WE MUST BE ALERT

This week one of my neighbor towns—a "county seat" town, was startled by the development of two cases of typhoid fever. The excitement was like that of a military invasion almost. Typhoid fever! Instantly the physicians sprang into action—the source of the infection must be found—and wiped out. It was discovered to be in the city's water supply.

Two things imperative and without delay: First, boil ALL WATER used by the population of the city, and immunize as many as possible by giving the necessary vaccine that is now of proven value. The town is doing just that. An epidemic of typhoid must be prevented. Even as I write this, the news reached me—that one of the cases, a bright young man,—died of the fever.

I remember the Spanish-American War days; various army camps reeked with typhoid; vaccination was unknown. Came the immense World War army—all immunized—no typhoid cases that I heard of.

A case of typhoid fever in your community, if you should be so unfortunate as to have one, should bring instant investigation of the water-supply; if the water is found pure, then search all foods and sanitation within the district. Don't trust your road overseer or street commissioner to conduct the investigation. It is the duty of your physician—if he cannot do it he must have it done properly. You can't tell whether water contains typhoid by just looking at a pailful of it. Call the bacteriologist.

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