

MISS ALADDIN

By Christine Whiting Parmenter

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THE STORY

CHAPTER I.—Ruined, financially, by the stock market crash, James Nelson, Boston merchant, breaks the news to his household. Nance is on the verge of her introduction to society, the date of her debut having been set. A short time before, an elderly cousin of Nelson's, Columbine, had written suggesting that Nance come to her at Pine Ridge, Colo., as a paid companion. The offer had been regarded by the family as a joke.

CHAPTER II.—Jack urges Nancy to accept Cousin Columbine's proposition, thus relieving their father of a certain financial burden, and offering to go with her so that she will not feel too lonely. The girl is at first appalled by the idea, but agrees that Jack write to Cousin Columbine, and they will await her answer. Columbine wires welcome to both of them, and despite their parents' apprehension of Nance's reaction to the situation they know she must face, it is arranged that the two shall go.

CHAPTER III.—At the railroad station the youngsters are welcomed by Cousin Columbine. They are somewhat dismayed by her unconventional attire and mannerisms, but realize she has character and a certain charm. The driver of their car is a young man, Mark Adam, son of a close friend of the old lady. The desolation (to Nance's city ideas) of Pine Ridge appalls the girl.

CHAPTER IV.—The newcomers meet Aurora Tubbs, Cousin Columbine's cook and housekeeper, and Matthew Adam, Mark's older brother. The old-fashioned furnishings of her bedroom further depress Nance. Cousin Columbine explains her reasons for desiring Nance to come to her, and tells some experiences of her 73 years of life on the plains.

CHAPTER V.—Nance gets better acquainted with Matthew Adam, and is impressed, despite the handicap of his bashfulness, by his evident good sense—and his good looks. Jack finds a temporary job.

CHAPTER VI.—The fascination of a new country wears off, and time begins to hang heavily on Nance's hands. An absence of interesting reading, both in the house and in the community, gives her an inspiration.

CHAPTER VII

NANCY'S letter to her Aunt Louise arrived on a Saturday, and she carried it out to Edgemere to read aloud. The young people had been gone more than a month, and as the strangeness of their absence wore away, life was settling down into its new routine. Despite financial worry, Margaret Nelson was conscious of a sense of restfulness which had been lost to her during the last few years. Fond as she was of her husband's sister, Louise's almost daily comments on the children often annoyed her; but now the week-end visit was something to look forward to. Today she arrived on the train with her brother, and said before she had taken off her hat:

"I've a letter from Nancy. It's rather surprising on the whole. Shall I read it now?"

"Let's wait till I get supper on the table," suggested Margaret, with a glance at her husband's tired face. "Phil says he's famished, and no wonder! He's dug out every path since four o'clock. I don't know what I'd do without that boy, here in the country. He's a real worker."

"And in town there were no chores to occupy him," observed his aunt. "This move has been a splendid thing for Phil, Margaret. He looks and acts like a different boy. And I'm not sure but that the visit to Colorado has done something for Nancy, even if I did oppose it. Just wait till I drop my things and I'll help with supper. I'll be down in a moment."

Watching his sister run lightly up the stairs, John Nelson wondered if the change in environment hadn't benefited her as well as Phil. Possibly Louise appreciated this taste of family life the better, because of her absence during the week. As she disappeared, he bent to kiss his wife for the second time since his arrival. It was, Margaret comprehended, an effort on his part to make up for the lack of cheering news, and tactfully refrained from asking how the day had gone.

"This is wonderful brown bread," declared Louise when they assembled at supper. "In our days of affluence, Margaret, I'd completely forgotten that you could cook! I'll take two bites and then read the letter. Have you heard from Colorado yourself today?"

"A note from Jack. He says—" "It was addressed to me," broke in Phil impatiently. "He's learned to milk; and is riding horseback every day. He says those Adam people are awfully nice, and that Mr. Adam does a lot of cooking because his wife doesn't like to and he does. He hadn't seen Nancy for more'n a week, but one of the Adam boys was there to dinner—at Cousin Columbine's, I mean; and there's been a blizzard; and Cousin Columbine and Nancy are going to eat Christmas dinner at the ranch 'cause they can't spare Jack; and Mr. Adam's going to cook the turkey all himself. I wish I could go to Colorado and get a job. Just feel my muscle."

Aunt Louise complied obligingly, and having satisfied her first hunger, opened the letter from Pine Ridge.

"Read it all," said Dad. "We haven't heard for several days."

"No doubt Nancy counted on my bringing this out tonight. It should have reached me sooner. Those storms in the Middle West delayed it, and she's in a hurry for an answer, too. She says:

"Dear useful Aunt Louise: A blizzard is raging and I can't see Pike's Peak from my tower, and have to hop up every five minutes to drop a log into the stove. I could write in the warm kitchen, but Aurora Tubbs would insist on talking, and I've simply got to get this down on paper. It came of my trying to find something to read this stormy morning. All Cousin Columbine has is Scott and Dickens—"

"I love Dickens, and Scott, too," Phil interrupted. "I can read those when I visit Cousin Columbine. Go on, Aunt Lou."

"Your sister does not share your admiration of the classics," observed his aunt. "She says: . . . and they look so dull (especially Scott), and the volumes are so heavy that I gave it up. I asked Aurora if there was a library here, and she said nobody in Pine Ridge has time to read, though the drug store does a thriving business in the sort of magazines that make you shudder and look schoolmarmy, Aunt Louise! Anyway, that gave me the idea. When I talked with Cousin Columbine she said that there was no Aladdin in Pine Ridge to rub his wonderful lamp, you know, and wish for a library; and while I was thinking what I'd do to this awful little place if I were Aladdin, I got an inspiration.

"It's this; and I'm rushing my letter so you'll have it before Christmas vacation. I want to start a library here, Aunt Lou. If I got the books, I'm sure I'd find a place to keep them. There's a schoolhouse here that isn't used now the children are carried to a county school in busses, which would be wonderful. I'd open the place two or three afternoons a week, and no matter what Aurora says, I'm sure the young people and old ones, too, would be glad to take out books if they had the chance.

"And here's where you come in: Wouldn't each girl at school donate a volume or two if you told them about the scheme? And haven't you and Mother got a lot you'd like to get rid of! No matter if they're shabby. Juanita Tubbs will help me cover them with paper. I'm sure the Adams will give some, too; and if you have any friends with books to part with, just grab them for my Aladdin library. That's what I'll call it if I can get somebody to paint a sign without being paid for the work. The Aladdin library! Won't that look swell over the door?"

"I shan't say a word to anyone until I hear from you, but do write soon or I'm likely to explode. With the exception of the Adam boys and Mary Taylor, the postmaster's daughter, this population looks as if it needed to be shaken up, and I'm sure a library will be a step in the right direction."

(Continued next week)

Be an optimistic optimist,
Ignore depressing things,
The man that wins life's prizes
Is the man that works and sings.
—Kleiser.

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