

MISS ALADDIN

By Christine Whiting Parmenter

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"Was, perhaps," Matthew corrected gravely.

Nance threw him a little smile; then her face sobered.

"I'm not so sure the past tense is correct, Matt. Sometimes I think my courage has never been tested, and wonder how I'd show up in a pinch. It was pride that made me consent to come out here—that is, mostly pride. I wanted to help Dad, of course. We all did. But I'd never have come alone, Matt. I'm no heroine."

"I beg to disagree with you, lady. Jack says you never whimpered at giving up that glorious debut."

The girl raised her head in sheer surprise.

"He did?"

Matthew nodded.

"Your kid brother thinks the world of you, Nancy. Did you know it?"

Nance pondered that.

"I knew Jack was fond of me, of course; but when I hesitated about coming to Colorado he—he called me a parlor ornament, and—"

Matt laughed, his eyes shining as his mother's had when Nance first saw her.

"What's the disgrace of being ornamental so long as you're something else besides? Look at our library, Miss Aladdin! And you've practically transformed Juanita Tubbs! Aren't you aware that she copies everything about you, from your Boston accent to the way you wear your clothes? She confided in Mother that she'd dyed that awful evening dress dark blue."

Nance laughed as she rose.

"That gown was an outrage, and if I'm accountable for its transformation Pine Ridge owes me a vote of thanks." Her eyes were shining now, and the dimple made its elusive appearance for a moment. "Come on home with me, Matt, and I'll smuggle you an apple turnover."

It was that evening, seated before a crackling hearth-fire at the Adam ranch, that Cousin Columbine told them the story of the Pemperton hoax. Jack had been asking about a pathetic little cemetery he passed one day when doing an errand for Mr. Adam.

"He means that little burying ground near West Creek, doesn't he?" questioned John Adam.

"Not if West Creek's a town," responded Jack.

"Do you recall a mile or so farther on, passing a dwelling house and two ramshackle buildings that looked fit to collapse at the first high wind?" asked Cousin Columbine.

Jack nodded; and the old lady continued: "Those buildings, and that wayside cemetery, are all that remain to tell the tale of a prodigious hoax which was planned and carried out successfully by old Marsh Pemperton. You Adams have heard the story many times."

"Never from you," Eve Adam reminded her. "Tell it again, Miss Columbine. You saw the place in its heyday, I suppose."

"I surely did; and to one of my age it's not even ancient history. The Pemperton hoax was started in 1894, soon after the boom at Cripple Creek. I dare say that as a child, Eve, you heard your people mention it, for the news must have spread much farther than Denver. You see, the general feeling in those days was that all these mountains were lined with gold, and that anyone could take a pick and dig it out; but old man Pemperton had been working a tunnel with no success, and I dare say he got impatient."

"How much of the land 'round there did he own, Miss Columbine?" asked Luke.

"That I can't tell you; but it was plenty anyway, and the lurid tales of quickly gotten wealth at Cripple Creek probably made him furious

that his own acres were useless save as pasture land. So at last he determined to make use of the prevailing excitement to feather his nest, an idea which he carried out with exceeding shrewdness, as you shall hear. He made a trip to Cripple Creek to purchase some gold ore; and a week or two later he emerged from his tunnel stuttering with excitement and both hands full of nuggets!"

"I'll say your friend Pemperton wasn't burdened with a New England conscience," observed Jack.

"He was no friend of mine, Jack Nelson, nor of Father's either. I am glad to say. For that hillside cemetery with its pathetic graves is the direct result of this fraudulent scheme of his. It was easy enough to start a gold excitement. The news spread rapidly, as such news always does; and it wasn't long before the stampede began. There was pandemonium in that lovely valley. People staking out claims—starting tunnels—buying 'town lots' which Pemperton himself marked out and sold at sky high prices. One fortunate woman who had paid twenty-five dollars for a strip of land in that locality a year before, sold it during that hectic time for ten thousand! That sounds incredible now, but it's the way things go in boom days. I've seen it happen."

"More than a thousand people, possibly twice that number, came pouring in. The town was incorporated. When I saw the place there were no less than a dozen saloons—three general stores—a long street of frame houses or tents, and even two ore-crushing machines, though not one ounce of precious metal was ever discovered in the vicinity."

"What became of the people when the bubble burst?"

"Drifted away, poor souls, leaving their dead behind them—their high hopes crushed. I recall one family stopping at our house for water, and Father bringing them in to be fed and warmed. They were a pitiful sight: the young mother frail and worn by hardships, the father in ragged shirt and trousers, and an ailing baby. They promised to let us know how things went with them, but we never heard."

"Ships that pass in the night," said Matthew softly; and Luke broke in:

"But will you tell us how old Pemperton escaped being tarred and feathered when the hoax was discovered?"

"For the very good reason," replied Miss Columbine, "that the scamp was nowhere to be found! When the boom was at its height he disappeared; and now all that is left of the 'ghost city' which bore his name, are those tumble-down buildings (one of which cost a woman five thousand dollars, I was told), and that small burying ground where lie the bodies of those who were too frail to survive the rigors of frontier life."

"I'd like to see that place," said Nancy, as Cousin Columbine ceased speaking.

"You shall, my dear; and we'll make an excursion out on the plains as well. They can be so beautiful, our western prairies, that I hate to think how cruel they sometimes are."

"Cruel?" Nance questioned, a little puzzled. "You mean those sudden blizzards when the grazing cattle have no shelter? Well, this winter's over, Cousin Columbine, and if you've no objection I'll start getting acquainted with the plains tomorrow. I've got a marvelous idea. Why can't I ride to Prairie ranch with Jack and Matthew? It would be a lark."

"You're a new woman, Nancy Nelson," remarked her brother. "If you regard as anything like a lark the necessity of piling out of bed along with the robins! We'll pass your tower at five a. m., young lady. Do you think you can make it?"

"Of course she'll make it," put in Matthew eagerly. "We'll get lunch at Uncle Tom's, Nance. It'll be bully having you along."

Thus it was settled, though on the ride home that night Cousin Columbine predicted a change of weather. Despite this prophecy the sun was shining when Nance awoke, dressed rapidly; and slipped downstairs on tiptoe; but as she passed the lower bedroom a call arrested her.

"That you, Nancy?"

(Continued next Week)

Death of B. B. Ferrell

Following an illness of only a few days Mr. Booner Ferrell died Friday about 10:00 p. m., May 3. He was a farmer and respected citizen of the community. He was the son of Mr. Cornell Ferrell and Mrs. Bettie Bolton Ferrell. He spent nearly all of his life in Wake county. He was engaged in the saw mill business and farming.

He joined the Wakefield Baptist Church in 1896 or 1897 and was a Mason in the Wakefield Lodge.

Funeral services were conducted at the home by Rev. A. A. Pippin, a Mason, and the Masons burial was in Wakefield cemetery.

It was estimated that at least 700 people gathered at the home

Sunday afternoon for his burial services.

He is survived by his wife, Mrs. Lillie Fason Ferrell and six children. Booner, Cordie, Deby, Elbert, Flonnie and George; one brother, A. A. Ferrell; an aunt, Mrs. Lucinda Liles, of Durham.

"Truth in every realm is inferior to man. Truth was made for man."

—Proverbs

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