

THE SEA CHEST'S SECRET

Grandpa Selby had always been a sailor, but at the age of seventy, he had retired from the sea. For nine years afterward, ^{until his death} he lived with Mr. Baker, his nephew, and the family. This consisted of Mr. Baker himself, and his daughters, Ellen and Peggy.

The Bakers' "apartment" was the upstairs rooms of a modest brick building wedged between two larger ones. Since Mrs. Baker died, five years before, they had had a hard time keeping up with the rent and expenses. Mr. Baker was a carpenter and could not find work easily.

It was 5:05 P. M. Ellen was in the kitchen preparing supper. In a few minutes, she knew, Mr. Baker would come home, probably discouraged. "There he comes now. Its up to me to cheer him up," she said to herself.

The door opened and Mr. Baker walked in and hung up his hat and coat. It seemed to Ellen, as he came to the kitchen, that his step was light and almost gay. He must have found a job after all.

"Ellen, where are you?" called John Baker. "How would like to move?" he said as he came into the kitchen.

"Oh, Dad, what happened? We paid the rent, didn't we?" exclaimed Ellen, wondering why her father looked happy rather than sad at the prospect of moving.

"Yes, Ellen, we did pay the rent, but I met one of my former school mates, Mr. Bruce. He is going to move out west, and buy a home on the prairies. Talking with him gave me the idea that we could do just that ourselves. Land is very cheap and even though

it is rather wild, it would be better than staying here where I can't get work."

Just then Peggy bounced in and looked from one to the other. "What are you two up to now?" she asked.

"Well, Peggy, I have an idea that ^{the} will please you," answered Mr. Baker with a twinkle in his eye. "How would ^{you} like to fight with some Indians?"

"You're just teasing me, Daddy," said Peggy. "There aren't any Indians in New York."

"No, Peggy, but there are Indians out west. I thought that perhaps we might move out there."

"Well, lets talk this over after supper." he said.

The Bakers finished the meal and Ellen and Peggy did the dishes. Neither of them mentioned the suggestion their father had made, but both were thinking about it.

By seven o'clock, Ellen, Peggy, and Mr. Baker were seated in the living room. Mr. Baker suggested that they have some music "to start the evening right," so Ellen went over to the piano, once mellow-sounding but now rather out of tune, and they sang several songs. Confucius, the family ^{parrot} pet, accompanied them with a squawking and harsh sound. He, no doubt, didn't like the music, or preferred his own.

After this cheery prelude, the Bakers settled around the table to discuss the question which Mr. Baker had brought up.

"~~Let's~~ take a vote to see if there is a majority in favor of it. Then we ^{lets} can talk about the advantages and disadvantages of moving," suggested Ellen.

The rest agreed so they voted by ballot, that is all except Confucius, who voted yes by emphatically nodding his head several times.

When he was given a pencil and paper he promptly dropped the paper but used the pencil as a backscratcher.

"The vote is unanimous in favor of ^{moving to the west} ~~the Indians~~," exclaimed Mr. Baker.

After two hours of pro and con they decided to let ^{it} rest and see if they still felt the same about it in the morning. A breakfast vote assured them that they still were inclined to favor the idea, so ways and means were taken up next.

"In the first place, Dad, where are we going ^{and} when should we start?" asked Ellen. "I suggest that we get some maps and information."

Mr. Baker replied, "I was thinking we could travel with Mr. Bruce. He is leaving next Tuesday and has everything planned for the whole trip. We've already looked over some maps, and Tom and I picked Westmont and Greenridge as our future homes. Greenridge is only five miles from Westmont. Of course, we will have to see it before we decide if we want to live there. I'll see Mr. Bruce today and make arrangements with him."

It was Sunday. The Bakers were already deep in the flurries and worries of packing. Immediately after going to church, the girls started to pack a little trunk, which was to hold their special treasures. Grandpa Selby had given it to them as a remembrance of him.

The chest stood in the middle of the room, and not a piece of furniture was free from some treasure or other, waiting to be tucked away in the trunk.

"Oh, Ellen!" wailed Peggy, "the trunk is half full and we have all ~~this~~ to put in yet." She pointed to the things perched all around the room.

trivially happens," replied Mr. Bruce.

After a two days ride on the steamboat, during which Peggy only fell overboard once and Ellen's hat attempted to become a boat, Greenridge came into sight.

"Well," said Mr. Baker, "it doesn't look so bad."

Peggy, inclined to be pessimistic, said under her breath, "From a distance." Then aloud she commented, "I don't see any tepees or Indians."

"You knew I was just teasing," said her father. "And yet, there may still be a few of them in the woods somewhere."

Fifteen minutes later the steamboat stopped at Greenridge to let off or take on passengers. True to Peggy's inaudible prediction, the town proved to be not as large as it has looked from the boat. Most of the buildings had false fronts, which gave them an impressive appearance from Main street.

The Baker family stayed at the Grand Hotel, which was almost the opposite of its name.

"They might have picked a more suitable name for this du-- I mean place," corrected Peggy. "Some thing like Cave Inn would just fit it perfectly."

"Well, Peg, you'll have to like or lump it. There's no other place to stay until Dad finds a home for us."

Several days later, Mr. Baker came up to Ellen and Peggy sitting on the porch of the hotel.

"I've found just the place for us, I believe," he exclaimed. "There's an Eastener who bought land out here, with a lot of ambition, He's become lonesome for the city, and wants to return there. This Mr. Campell will sell his land as soon as possible and at a fairly good price. Would you like to look it over?"

Mr. Campell's land was about a mile from town and was just about what the Bakers were looking for. There were eighty acres of land, most of which was wooded. In a clearing, a cabin had been built, not very large but roomy enough for the Baker family.

The next step was to inspect the cabin. It was solidly built and made of good lumber. The inside contained only one room which served as a living room and kitchen. One part of it was curtained off for a bedroom. All the furniture that there was, was handmade.

With a loan from a New York finance company, Mr. Baker bought the land. The house was partitioned off into three rooms, a living room, a kitchen, and a bedroom for Mr. Baker. The girls' bedroom was in the attic.

It had been an unusually pleasant April with not much wind or rain, when the Bakers had moved to Greenridge. They had found the farm they wanted in plenty of time to plant the crops which, when sold, would pay the mortgage.

Ellen announced her intention to plant a garden. She asked her father about it.

Mr. Baker replied, "Certainly, Ellen, that will be a grand thing to do. You can raise enough vegetables to keep ^{us} through the winter. It's almost time for me to start to do my planting too."

The crops and the garden were planted and because of the fertility of the soil, which had never been touched by a plow before, they grew rapidly. Then one day a terrible thing happened.

Ellen was baking pies.

"The stove must be smoking," she said peevishly, "but I can't see where."

As she bent over to put the pies in the oven, Confucius, who had survived the trip, started screaming, "Fire! Fire!"

Startled, Ellen straightened and as she did so, she saw that the horizon was darkened by rolling clouds of smoke. The prairie was on fire!

The fire swept over the dry grass. Ellen could do nothing to stop it, but she filled buckets full of water in case she had to protect the house.

Mr. Baker and the neighbors soon saw the fire and ran ^{to} help. After a half-hour had passed, the fire was under control but not before it had destroyed Mr. Baker's grain. All that was left was the charred remains of once golden topped fields.

The neighbors were sympathetic but the fire had done damage that could not be undone.

It was late in August. Ellen had convinced the leading citizens of Greenridge that they needed a school and that she would be a good teacher. So in September, a school was organized in one room of the hotel until a building could be erected. Though Ellen's salary was small, it would help to pay the mortgage, which was due in November.

One Saturday afternoon, Ellen and Peggy opened the chest they had worked so hard to pack. They had already unpacked much of its contents and were going to finish it today.

As Peggy lifted the last article out she exclaimed, "Oh, this is caught in the bottom. I'm afraid it will tear."

Ellen looked into the chest and then tried to pry the boards apart. They not only moved a little but slid to both sides of the trunk. In a little aperture beneath the boards lay a piece of paper.

Peggy eagerly snatched it up and looked at it.

"I can't make anything out of it," she said. It must be Grandpa Selby's.

She gave it to Ellen, who stared at it ~~intently~~ for a few seconds and then said, "It's a note made out to Grandpa by Richard Lamont. Let's give it to Dad. He ought to know what it's about. Here he comes."

Peggy ran to meet Mr. Baker, with the note in her hand.

When Mr. Baker had read the note, and had heard the story about its discovery he said, "I've heard Grandfather talk about this Richard Lamont. He said that they had sailed on the same ship for several years. Also he told me that Mr. Lamont borrowed some money from him once but did not pay it back. He said

He glanced at the note in his hand and suddenly straightened in his chair.

"Why, it's ^{due} ~~dated~~ October 15 of this year!" he exclaimed. "That's three weeks from now.

For a while they were silent. Then Mr. Baker spoke again.

"Perhaps we should send this to Mr. Lane, the lawyer. He could tell us what to do about it.

That evening a letter was mailed to New York and for days afterward the village postoffice was visited not less than twice daily.

At last the long-awaited letter arrived, and this is what it contained:

Dear Mr. Baker,

Your letter came as a surprise to me for I had been trying to find out where you lived.

Several days ago, the man you mentioned in your letter, Richard Lamont, came to see me at my office. He wished to pay a note, a replica of the one enclosed in your letter, and asked where he could find Mr. Selby. I informed him of Mr. Selby's death, and said that I would try to find you.

Mr. Lamont left the money in my care and I was to notify him when I discovered your address.

I enclose in this letter a check for the sum of \$500 plus \$25 ~~interest on the~~ first sum.

I am happy to have been of assistance to you in this respect.

Sincerely yours,

M. R. Lane
attorney at law

Just as Mr. Baker finished the letter, Confucius startled them all by screaming, "When do we eat?"

"Why, its way past supper time," said Ellen. "No wonder the poor parrot wants something to eat."

"Well, I'm too excited to eat anything now. Three cheers for Grandpa Selby!" yelled Peggy.

"That yell you gave would make him turn over in his grave." replied Ellen.

"Well, it's been a happy day for us," said Mr. Baker. "and I hope all the rest of our days are just as happy as this."

THE END

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