

CHAPTER XVII - YELLOW POPPIES

"So this is California!" exclaimed Patsy gleefully, as the automobile left Parker and crossed the Arizona line.

"But it doesn't look any different," said Myrtle, peering out of the window.

"Of course not," observed Uncle John. "A State boundary is a man-made thing, and doesn't affect the country a bit. We've just climbed a miniature mountain back in Arizona, and now we must climb a mate to it in California. But the fact is, we've entered at last the Land of Enchantment, and every mile now will bring us nearer and nearer to the roses and sunshine."

"There's sunshine here now," declared the Major. "We've had it right along. But I haven't seen the roses yet, and a pair of ear muffs wouldn't be uncomfortable in this cutting breeze."

"The air is rather crisp," admitted Uncle John. "But we're still in the mountainous district, and Haggerty says--"

The Major coughed derisively and Mumbles barked and looked at Uncle John sagaciously.

"Haggerty says--"

"Is that a rabbit or a squirrel? Something has caught the eye of our Mumbles," interrupted the Major, pointing vaguely across the mesa.

"Haggerty says--"

"I wonder if Mumbles could catch 'em," remarked the Major, with complacency.

"He says that every mile we travel brings us nearer the scent of the orange blossoms and the glare of the yellow poppies," persisted Uncle John. "You see, we've taken the Southern route, after all, for soon we shall be on the Imperial road, which leads to San Diego--in the heart of the gorgeous Southland."

"What is the Imperial road?" inquired Beth.

"The turnpike through Imperial Valley, said to be the richest bit of land in all the world, not excepting the famous Nile banks of Egypt. There is no railway there yet, but the Valley is settling very fast, and Haggerty says--"

"How remarkable!" exclaimed the Major, gazing straight ahead. And again Mumbles, curled in Patsy's lap, lifted his shaggy head and gave a wailing bark.

Uncle John frowned, but was loyal to Haggerty.

"He says that if America was now unknown to all the countries of the world, Imperial would soon make it famous. They grow wonderful crops there--strawberries and melons the year around, as well as all the tropical and semi-tropical fruits and grains, flowers and vines known to any country yet discovered."

"Do we go to Imperial?" asked Myrtle, eagerly.

"I think not, my dear; we just skirt the edge of the Valley. It's rather wild and primitive there yet; for although many settlers are flocking to that favored district Imperial is large enough to be an empire by itself. However, we shall find an ideal climate at Coronado, by the edge of the blue Pacific, and there and at Los Angeles we shall rest from our journey and get acquainted with the wonders of the Golden State. Has the trip tired you, girls?"

"Not me," answered Beth, promptly. "I've enjoyed every mile of the way."

"And so have I," added Patsy; "except perhaps the adventure with the remittance men. But I wouldn't care to have missed even that, for it led to our acquaintance with old Dan'l."

"For my part," said Myrtle softly, "I've been in a real fairyland. It has seemed like a dream to me, all this glorious journey, and I shall hate to wake up, as I must in time."

"Don't worry just yet about the awakening, dear," returned Patsy, leaning over to kiss her little friend. "Just enjoy it while you can. If fairylands exist, they were made for just such as you, Myrtle."

"One of the greatest marvels of our trip," said the Major, with a smile, "is the improvement in our dear little invalid. It isn't the same Myrtle who started out with us, believe me. Can't you all see the change?"

"I can feel it," returned Myrtle, happily. "And don't you notice how well I walk, and how little use I have now for the crutches?"

"And can you feel the rosy cheeks and bright eyes, too?" asked Uncle John, regarding her with much satisfaction.

"The trip was just the thing for Myrtle," added Patsy. "She has grown stronger every day; but she is not quite well yet, you know, and I depend a good deal upon the genial climate of California to insure her complete recovery."

Uncle John did not reply. He remembered the doctor's assertion that a painful operation would be necessary to finally restore Myrtle to a normal condition, and his kindly heart disliked to reflect upon the ordeal before the poor girl.

Haggerty proved a prophet, after all. Each mile they covered opened new vistas of delight to the eager travelers. The air grew more balmy as they left the high altitudes and came upon the level country to the north, of the San Bernardino range of mountains, nor was it long before they sighted Imperial and sped through miles of country carpeted with the splendid yellow poppies which the State has adopted as the emblems of California. And behind this golden robe loomed the cotton fields of Imperial, one of the most fascinating sights the traveler may encounter. They made a curve to the right here, and headed northerly until they came to Salton. Skirting the edge of the curious Salton Sea they now headed directly west toward Escondido, finding the roads remarkably good and for long stretches as smooth and hard as an asphalt boulevard. The three days it took them to cross the State were days of wonder and delight.

It was not long before they encountered the roses and carnations growing on every side, which the Major had persistently declared to be mythical.

"It seems all wrong," asserted Patsy's father, moodily, "for such delicate flowers to be growing out of doors in midwinter. And look at the grass!

Why, the seasons are changed about. It's Springtime just now in California."

"The man at the last stop we made told me his roses bloomed the year round," said Patsy, "And just smell the orange blossoms, will you! Aren't they sweet, and don't they remind you of brides?"

From Escondido it was a short run to the sea and their first glimpse of the majestic Pacific was from a high bluff overhanging the water. From this point the road ran south to San Diego, skirting the coast along a mountain trail that is admitted to be one of the most picturesque rides in America.

Descending the hills as they neared San Diego they passed through fields of splendid wild flowers so extensive and beautiful that our girls fairly gasped in wonder. The yellow and orange poppies predominated, but there were acres of wild mustard throwing countless numbers of gorgeous saffron spikes skyward, and vistas of blue carconnes, white daisies and blood-red delandres. The yucca was in bloom, too, and added its mammoth flower to the display.

They did not halt at San Diego, the southernmost city of California, from whence the Mexican line is in plain sight, but drove to the bay, where Wampus guided the limousine on to the big ferryboat bound for Coronado. They all left the car during the brief voyage and watched the porpoises sporting in the clear water of the bay and gazed abstractedly at the waving palms on the opposite shore, where lies nestled "the Crown of the Pacific"--Coronado.