Girl from the Gulches
The Story of Mary Ronan

As told to MARGARET RONAN

Edited by ELLEN BAUMLER

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Mary Ronan at the time of her marriage, 1873

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Introduction

A covered wagon on a dim road, the promise of a long journey, and the wonder of what lay ahead filled the shadowy spaces of Mary Ronan's earliest memories. By the time she was a married woman in her twenties, Mary Sheehan Ronan was a well-seasoned pioneer, having crossed most of the country and retraced her steps back across a third of it. Born Mary Catherine Fitzgibbon Sheehan in 1852 to Irish Catholic immigrants James and Ellen Sheehan, her story is unusual for its range of experience, its feminine perspective, and the distances it spans during an era that witnessed monumental changes in the western United States.

There were three major sequences of western gold rushes in the mid-nineteenth century—to California from 1849 through the 1850s, to Colorado between 1859 and 1862, and finally to Montana from 1862 to 1866. Mary Ronan and her family traveled with the peak waves of immigrants to the goldfields of both Colorado and Montana, caught up by the lure of gold and promises of the West. The "girl from the gulches" grew to young womanhood in the rough-and-tumble western gold camps that formed the backdrop of much of her childhood. Her descriptions of the early Montana gold camps at Virginia City and Helena are perhaps the most detailed and certainly among the best extant.

The lesser-known parts of Mary Ronan's story, however, reach

beyond the Montana gold camps to the railroad camp of Corinne, Utah, as the Union Pacific neared completion, and to the ruins of the Spanish mission of San Juan Capistrano in southern California, where the Sheehan family homesteaded in 1869. There, Mary made friends within the Mexican community, learned to speak Spanish, was a guest at the *rancheros* of the wealthy Hispanic-American elite, and received her education from the Catholic Sisters of St. Vincent de Paul in the village of Los Angeles. Once back in Montana as wife of a newspaperman (and later Flathead Indian agent), Mary witnessed firsthand the consequences of westward migration and the iniquities of the government toward Native Americans.

Like thousands of other westward pioneers in the nineteenth century, the Sheehans were ordinary people living through extraordinary times. Mary described the places they pitched their tent, the cabins they made into homes, and the people they met with passion, depth, feeling, and enthusiasm. The exhilaration of a forbidden sled ride, the creaking of the hangman's rope, her father giving the last of their water to his dying mule—these things she remembered with vivid clarity, and they make her reminiscence a joy to read.

Mary's story begins with her first recollections of her mother, Ellen Sheehan, who died when Mary was very young. Her father, James, shouldered the responsibility of single parenthood and on the heels of a second tragedy assumed guardianship of his brother's three orphaned teenagers as well. James's financial struggles and his lack of roots determined the family's nomadic cross-country wanderings, and his itinerant employment kept the family moving and sometimes required months of separation from the children.

The Sheehans' westward trek took them from Kentucky, where Mary was born, to Indiana, Illinois, and Iowa, and then, on the

brink of the Civil War, to the plantation of slave-owning relatives at St. Joseph, Missouri. Leaving Mary and her cousins in St. Joseph, James remarried and headed west to the stark mining camps near Denver, Colorado, where he opened a small store in the boomtown of Nevada City. There he and his new wife Anne awaited the arrival of a baby daughter, Kate. James returned to St. Joseph for Mary with the outbreak of the Civil War in 1861. Less than two years after Mary's arrival in Colorado, James took up freighting, and the Sheehans pushed on to Bannack in what would become Montana Territory. Mary remembered the journey as a pleasant one: "I can picture the golden sunsets gliding behind distant mountain peaks and flooding the valleys with magic light. Joyous eager childhood and the rhythm of going, going, going combine to make a backdrop and a theme song for that long trek into the land of gold."

Gold discovered the previous year on Grasshopper Creek brought the first sizable population to the remote Montana wilderness east of the Continental Divide. Although its fame rapidly spread, Bannack was little more than a collection of cabins, shacks, and tents teeming with hopeful miners and camp followers looking to turn a fast profit. The Sheehans arrived in the boisterous gold camp around June 1, 1863, on the eve of the great stampede to Alder Gulch. A week earlier, on May 26, along the alder-choked banks of a clear stream some sixty miles east of Bannack, a party of miners had made a very lucky strike. Word of the discovery soon leaked out, and the stampede to Alder Gulch began, with James taking the first wagonload of freight to the new camp. The Sheehans soon followed the trampled ground in the wake of several hundred miners to the overnight boomtown of Virginia City. To her father's amusement, Mary whittled a stick to scrawl her name in the dirt and stake an imaginary claim. "Even children caught that fever," she recalled, looking back on her family's arrival at Alder Gulch.

In the months following the stampede, Virginia City rose to such significance in the settlement of the frontier that it has been compared to Colonial America's Williamsburg.[1]

Mary's place in this tumultuous frontier settlement was that of a schoolgirl and a keen observer. She knew the road agents hanged by the vigilantes (one of them took meals with her family during the brief period that her stepmother ran a boardinghouse). She attended one of Montana's first schools, run by Thomas Dimsdale, who published an account of the violence in Montana's first book, *The Vigilantes of Montana*. Mary danced with her secessionist-minded classmates at the news of Lincoln's assassination (much to the dismay of her father), and she got close enough to the town's fancy ladies to smell their cigarettes. She helped dress the makeshift altar for the first Catholic Mass in the territory, cleaned gold dust from the miners' sluice boxes, and sold freshly picked wildflowers and "table greens" to boardinghouses until her father forbid the practice.

A major gold strike, this one 120 miles north of Virginia City in July 1864, opened new opportunity for the Sheehans. Placer mining along Alder Gulch had become less profitable by 1865, and like many of their neighbors that year, the Sheehans moved to the new boomtown of Helena along Last Chance Gulch. Helena was bursting with activity and new adventures, but the new camp was also an extension of Virginia City. Much of the population was the same, allowing some friendships to continue despite the transitory nature of mining camp communities. The Sheehans' social life was grounded in the growing Democratic Irish community and the Catholic Church. Mary, for example, makes little mention of prominent radical Republicans such as Wilbur Fisk Sanders.

Ironically, Mary's world became more constrained in cosmopolitan Helena than it had been in Virginia City; her parents'

concerns about social propriety grew as Mary moved from girlhood to womanhood, the gold camp matured, and the town became more socially minded. Nevertheless, Mary's father's business often took him away from home, and her stepmother Anne still allowed her relative freedom in his absence: Mary writes of sleighing parties, oyster suppers, horseback riding, and her courtship with Peter Ronan, a friend of her father's and the editor of Helena's *Rocky Mountain Gazette*.

In 1869 the Sheehan family left Helena, a move prompted by James's financial trouble and his disapproval of sixteen-year-old Mary's engagement to the much older Peter Ronan. Mary's engagement—and her heart—broken, the family headed south to Corinne, Utah, where the Union Pacific neared completion. At Corinne, Mary endured the gruff, rude railroaders as the Sheehan women served boarders in a tent and contributed income to the family's coffers. They soon packed up for California, but the experience at Corinne was a turning point, after which James increasingly relied on Mary for help, allowing her to perform tasks more commonly undertaken by men. Like other women who came with their families to the western frontier, the Sheehan women had not actively sought liberation from established women's roles, but they adapted to new situations and the needs of their family as they arose. Like other frontier daughters, Mary took on more nontraditional tasks than did her stepmother.[2] On the journey to California, she drove the heavy freight wagon for her father; once there she helped him build their house, hauling mortar in the wagon, transferring it into buckets, and hoisting it up to him on the scaffolding.

On the Sheehans' homestead near the Spanish mission ruins of San Juan Capistrano, Mary settled into a very different life than she had led in the gold rush towns of Montana. James filed on a tract of 160 acres on which he planted hay, corn, potatoes,

and grape vines, as well as walnut, peach, apricot, and pear trees. Mary found herself moving between the world of physically demanding work on the homestead and the elegant *rancheros* of the Spanish elite, where she attended fiestas in carefully ironed white dresses. Mary's entrée into community life was the Catholic Church, but although local Mexican families welcomed her into their homes, they resented the arrival of her family. When the United States acquired California in 1850 after the war with Mexico, ownership records and land titles were vague and contradictory. Confusion over land ownership led to years of squatting and legal battles. Although Mary was aware of her family's status as squatters on untitled land, she did not fully comprehend the plight of her Mexican neighbors. The arrival of squatters like the Sheehans foreshadowed lengthy, costly court cases for the Mexican population and ultimately the loss of their land.

Mary left the homestead in 1871 to study with the Sisters of St. Vincent de Paul in Los Angeles. Her father desperately needed money, and the plan was for Mary to eventually earn enough from teaching to help the household. Although she enjoyed school, "I knew that I was not capable" of teaching, she remembered. In retrospect it seems that Mary knew then that she did not want to teach school. And so in a self-fulfilling prophecy, she graduated with flying colors but did not pass the teacher's examination in "mental arithmetic." Nor did she ever try again. Instead, after seriously considering joining the convent, she decided to marry her Montana suitor, Peter Ronan.

Mary's love story with Peter Ronan began in Virginia City and threads its way throughout much of the narrative. Even before their first meeting, Mary and Peter were on paths that would eventually converge. In fact, Peter's trek west mirrored that of Mary's long before the two met at a sluice box in Alder Gulch. When the Sheehans' St. Joseph, Missouri, relatives lost their slaves

at the start of the Civil War, Peter Ronan, at almost the same time, was less than fifty miles away in Leavenworth, Kansas, editing a Democratic newspaper. Peter's Southern sympathies landed him in the Fort Leavenworth guardhouse where the Sisters of Charity brought him his meals and did his laundry. Mother Vincent, then the mother superior of the Leavenworth-based order, especially took him under her wing. Their friendship likely helped bring the Sisters of Charity to Montana, for according to Mary, Peter asked the Catholic priests to invite the sisters to Helena. In 1869 the first Sisters of Charity arrived and founded St. John's Hospital and St. Vincent's Academy, the first of their many institutions in Montana.

While Mary attended school in Los Angeles, she initiated correspondence with Peter, who was still in Helena editing the *Gazette*. Their courtship resumed through letters. The decision of whether to accept Peter's proposal of marriage was a difficult one: choosing a husband was the most important decision of a young girl's life, and in this case, marriage would mean leaving her family far behind. Nevertheless, the two married in the little chapel at San Juan Capistrano early in 1873.

The couple returned to Helena where Mary established a home for her husband and gave birth to the first of their nine children (only one of whom—Louise, a twin—died in infancy in 1885). Peter's *Rocky Mountain Gazette* flourished until fire destroyed his uninsured equipment. After a brief period mining at Blackfoot City, Peter accepted a government appointment to fill out an unexpired term as Indian agent to the tribes of the Flathead Reservation in 1877. He remained in that position until 1893.

Peter Ronan was an unusual Indian agent. Generally appointed by political favor, many agents were unscrupulous and neglectful of their duties, and few remained in office long. Eight of Peter Ronan's predecessors between 1864 and 1877 were either suspended

or terminated; one died in office, and one resigned.[3] Ronan's sixteen years of office set him apart, as did his honesty and genuine concern for the Salish, Kalispel, Kootenai, and Pend d'Oreille Indians who lived on the reservation. During his term as agent, he saw the reservation through several turning points, including the Nez Perce War, the building of the transcontinental railroad, and the removal of Chief Charlo and members of his band from their Bitterroot Valley home to the Flathead Reservation. A sincere believer in the United States' civilizing mission (a mission whose racist assumptions are today widely recognized), Peter worked conscientiously on behalf of the reservation Indians to promote among them the practice of agriculture, to encourage their education, and to instill in them the value of religion.

Mary enjoyed life on the reservation, although she found that from the time she assumed the "mask of the smiling hostess" as wife of the Flathead agent, she never again had the luxury of being alone in her own house. Eight children, others the Ronans took in, guests, and officials of all kinds kept her table nearly always full at mealtimes and her household crowded in between. That she would not have had it any other way is abundantly clear in the charming portraits of her children and Indian neighbors and servants, and in the steady loyalty and devotion to her husband that her reminiscence reflects. Mary and Peter experienced life on the reservation through a "prejudicial veil" of unself-conscious ethnocentrism and casual racism common among whites of their time, even as they genuinely desired to improve the lives of Peter's "charges."[4] Mary's reminiscence clearly reveals both this ethnocentrism (note her use of such terms as "squaw," "children of the forest," and "noble red man") and her belief that the Indians under her husband's protection were good people who had been wronged and deserved better. Her account provides a fascinating perspective on the events of her day and of the daily life of the wife of an Indian agent. Mary's descriptions,

however, should not be read as an accurate portrayal of tribal life, nor are her viewpoints and opinions in any way objective.

Peter's sudden death from a heart attack in 1893 at the age of fifty-five left Mary with financial difficulties and legal entanglements, presumably over Peter's numerous mining claims. But Joseph Carter, Mary's son-in-law, was appointed Peter's replacement, and as long as he remained in that position, Mary and her younger children made their home at the agency. In 1898 Joseph moved to California, and Mary took the four youngest children to Missoula. The oldest child still at home was Katherine, sixteen; Margaret was next at thirteen. The youngest two were Isabel, ten, and Peter, seven. Mary bought a house on West Pine Street, free and clear. She must have had some financial resources having sold her father's California property in 1899. In fact, the 1900 census records show her occupation as "capitalist," a claim that seems to indirectly declare her independence.

Mary's circumstances may not have been so steady by 1903. Correspondence from that period indicates that Mary sold many items the Ronans collected during their years at the agency. In a letter dated March 14, 1903, to Montana Historical Society librarian Laura Howey, Mary wrote that she had a number of other Indian items "that the state may have for seventy-five dollars. Were I differently situated, I should gladly donate [them]." Even so, some of Mary's eight children attended college, and two of her four daughters—Margaret and Isabel—chose to pursue careers instead of marriage, remaining at home with their mother.

In 1929 Mary began dictating her reminiscence to Margaret, an English and journalism teacher at Missoula County High School and a graduate student in English at the State University of Montana (now the University of Montana). It was Margaret who transcribed and organized her mother's thoughts and encouraged her through the project. In 1932 Margaret submitted

the well-researched thesis, under the title *Memoirs of a Frontiers Woman*, to the English Department in partial fulfillment of the requirements for her master of arts.

Margaret continued her duties as teacher and assistant principal of Missoula County High School where she had taught for nearly twenty-five years. Margaret's life, however, was troubled. In January 1935 she suffered a nervous breakdown and obtained a leave of absence. On May 24 of that year, Margaret drowned in the Missoula River. Her death was most likely a suicide. The community mourned the teacher who, for a quarter of a century, encouraged aspiring journalists and then did the same for their children. Warren Davis, editor of the *Missoulian*, wrote, "No woman could have been more generally loved than was Margaret Ronan."[5]

Mary Ronan died in 1940, outliving four of her eight children. Her memoir, lovingly prepared as Margaret's thesis, lay gathering dust in the University of Montana library for nearly forty years. In 1973, at the age of ninety, former University of Montana English professor H. G. Merriam, who had served as chairman of Margaret's thesis committee in the 1930s, prepared an edition of the manuscript published under the title *Frontier Woman: The Story of Mary Ronan as told to Margaret Ronan*. It had limited distribution. In a very brief preface, Merriam praised Mary Ronan's account for its historical accuracy and the diversity of places, people, and events it discussed.

Merriam's edition omitted what he termed "items of personal family interest," including the love letters that passed between Mary in California and Peter in Montana. Presumably these omissions were in deference to close family members still living in 1972. A mentor of numerous well-known Montana authors including A. B. Guthrie and Dorothy Johnson, Merriam himself had a long, prolific career as an editor and author. Among the many titles to his credit are *Way Out West* (University of Oklahoma Press, 1969),

Montana Adventure: The Life of Frank B. Linderman (University of Nebraska Press, 1968) and *Recollections of Charley Russell* (University of Oklahoma Press, 1963). *Frontier Woman* was a readable work that unfortunately lacked promotion and availability.

Girl from the Gulches offers a more complete version of Margaret Ronan's original manuscript. Most of the material left out of the Merriam edition has here been restored, although some of the more lengthy correspondence, pedantic quotes, and material Mary included to bolster Peter's reputation in his role as Indian agent have been either eliminated or shortened. The threads of the love story, especially, are fully included in this edition, as I think Mary surely would have wished.

Following Merriam's example, wording has been changed only for clarification. Some of the scattered events have been rearranged by subject matter and/or by chronology for ease of transition. I have added a few more chapter divisions, but I have also restored Margaret's original three-book format. The footnotes written by either Merriam or myself are marked "Ed."; I have tried not to burden the reader with too many of them. Other footnotes are those of Mary Ronan, so designated, or undesignated, those of her daughter, Margaret.

BOOK ONE

Into the Land of Gold

Did a prairie schooner pass this way
In the dusty haze of a summer day,
Rolling and dipping over the swells
As it followed the winding grade?

—Elliott C. Lincoln
"Wheel Tracks," *Northwest Verse*

Mary Ronan with her father, James Sheehan

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Early Recollections

My first experience traveling in a covered wagon and camping out at night came to me when I was so young, and the daily journeying was so much a matter of course, that I have only a vague recollection. I had traveled with my father and mother from Kentucky to Indiana, from Indiana to Illinois. I then journeyed with my widowed father from Illinois to Iowa and on to Missouri. The journey alone with him from Missouri to Colorado is a little clearer, and clearer still come those long treks from Colorado to Montana, from Utah across the desert to southern California. Clearest of all is the memory of the journey back from California to Montana with my husband by boat and train and stagecoach.

In my earliest memories, I see a covered wagon halted on a dim road. It winds out of sight on a wide prairie undulating endlessly toward a vast, shadowy background of looming mountains. Just ahead of the wagon a little girl ventures along the road, gazing across the expanse of country. I can recall my wonder at the bigness of the world and what the long journey might promise me.

My father, James Sheehan, was a sixteen-year-old Irish emigrant when he came from County Cork in Ireland. His wanderings in search of livelihood led him to Louisville, Kentucky, where he met and married my mother, Ellen Fitzgibbon, an Irish girl not long from Limerick. At Louisville in July 1852 (my father was

not one to recall exact days of the month), I was born and christened Mary Catherine Fitzgibbon Sheehan, but family and friends called me simply Mollie Sheehan, and by that name many of my old time friends still call me. A little boy, Gerald, was born while my parents lived in Louisville. I have a vague memory of being on a boat on a river and of a man who tried to coax me to trade my brother for a doll. I presume my father was on the way to Indiana with us where he had a contract to do railroad construction. How the poor, young Irish emigrant accumulated enough to equip himself for such work I do not know. My father was always reticent, and I took him for granted as most young people do their parents. When I longed to ask the details of his life story, he had followed my mother forth beyond my questionings.

I remember playing with my little brother Gerald. His eyes were dark blue; his hair was light and curly. From Ireland my father brought his brother, a widower, and that brother's three children, Patrick, Mary, and Ellen Sheehan, to live with us. My uncle could not work because of heart trouble. One day he carried Gerald out to watch the men at work with their teams of oxen and their carts. He sat the little boy on a stump around which green grass was growing, and left him there for a moment while he stepped a few paces away to speak to Patrick, who was working among my father's men. A yoke of oxen, grazing, nosed nearer and nearer to the stump, knocked the baby off and trampled him to death in an instant. I have faint memories of sorrowing and mourning. Gerald must have been buried there in Indiana, and there, too, my uncle lies. I used to hear my relatives say that he died suddenly from the shock of this tragic occurrence.

My father's work took him to Illinois. My mother gave birth to a baby girl who lived for only two weeks. I have heard my father tell that in order to take the little body to a cemetery for burial, he had to wade a swollen stream. Neighbors advised him

not to take the risk, but he did, carrying the tiny coffin on his shoulder. In the night while he was away the "shanty" in which we were temporarily living burned to the ground. Being carried from the burning house into the cool darkness is a recollection that comes back even now with a little thrill reflected from the terror of long ago. My mother was carried out from her sick bed; she caught a cold and in less than a week she died. I was taken in someone's arms to her bedside to kiss her goodbye. I can dimly remember my father crying and crying. Though I did not know what it was all about, my Aunt Margaret, my mother's sister, whom the neighbors called Mrs. Coffee, came from Kentucky. I was awakened and there she sat, a shadowy woman in the doorway of our cabin. This dim memory is all I recall of any contact with my mother's people.

My father took my cousins Patrick, Mary, and Ellen with us to Ottumwa, Iowa. We lived with a family named Lauder in a house that had a big fireplace. That impressed me and so did the wide bed in which I slept with my father. How I loved Jane Lauder, the daughter. She went away, and I cried and cried. For the first time I experienced winter and cold. I used to stand by the window and watch for my father to come through the dusk from work. When spring came and the weather grew warm I would go walking with my father on Sundays. I would run ahead and gather flowers to give to him. I wore white pantalets that I was told were made from the fine linen sheets my mother had brought with her from Ireland. Other underwear and nightdresses, too, I had made from that same linen.

I have nothing left of my mother. The women of the Lauder household talked with Mary and Ellen about a chest of linens belonging to my mother. My father had been keeping it for me but it had been stolen. Years afterwards my stepmother used to wear some brooches that I thought beautiful. They had belonged

to my mother, she told me in her reticent way, and would be mine some day. However, they were not, and I have never known what became of them. As late as 1869, in our household in San Juan Capistrano, there was in use a fine woolen comforter that my mother had brought from Ireland. In Last Chance Gulch, in the early days, I had a green parasol that had been my mother's. One day when I was riding horseback around Mount Helena, I took the parasol with me and lost it off the horn of the saddle. I was sorry and searched diligently but did not find it. These things and a lock of her soft brown hair, which I still treasure, were the only mementos I ever had of my young mother, and I have told much of them because they meant much to me. Often through long years I have dwelt in fancy on these bits of things, trying through them to divine the kind of woman my mother was, to call back to mind her face, for I never had a picture of her.

A Catholic priest started a school in Ottumwa. The Lauders, who were not Catholics, took me regularly. While we lived with the Lauders, my cousin Patrick was married and dropped out of my life forever. The second winter of our stay in Iowa was so cold that there was no work in my father's line. He left Mary and Ellen with the Lauders and took me with him into the country to care for his horses and mules, his investment capital. We lived with an Irish family. The cooking was done over a fireplace in the big farmhouse kitchen. The lady of the house marked her accounts of my father's bill for board and lodging on the bricks above the fireplace with charred wood. Those strange marks, cryptic and portentous, fascinated me.

That winter I went to a little country school. The children used to crowd around the big stove. I would sit shivering on the edge of the group, my feet curled under me. I suppose that I was too small and too timid to assert a right to share the warmth. One day I came home with frozen feet. My father was wrathful and

made a terrible scene. Another time I went on an expedition with my schoolmates to a cemetery said to be haunted. When the cry went up, "The ghost! The ghost!" I fled, terrified, firmly believing that I had seen the ghost. In the evenings I remember that the Irish neighbors danced first at one house and then at another. As there was nothing else to be done with me, my father took me with him. No sort of musical instrument was in evidence, not even a fiddle. The men made music, or at least rhythmic sound for the jigs and quadrilles, by putting paper over the teeth of coarse combs. In this manner they blew forth "The Irish Washerwoman," "The Rocky Road to Dublin," and other old favorites.

At last the ominous marks on the bricks above the fireplace were erased. Mary and Ellen rejoined us and we set forth in the covered wagon, this time for St. Joseph, Missouri, where either a new road-building contract or freighting took my father. Our new home was with my father's cousin, John Sheehan, who had been settled in the South for some time and owned a plantation and a number of slaves. He lived with his family of eight children in a large white house.[1]

After we had been at St. Joseph for some time, my father married Anne Cleary, a young lady whom I had seen but once before the marriage. He went to Colorado with his bride, freighting provisions for frontier settlements. Because I so loved my father I was lonely in my Cousin John's household. I wept bitterly when the children read or told stories in which the cruel stepmother caused evil and suffering. Mammy Caroline, the old Negress who took care of us children, consoled me. When I was told that my father was coming to take me to Colorado, I felt that of all the household I would be the saddest to part from Mammy Caroline, and that parting came in an unexpected way.

Those were the dark days at the beginning of the Civil War. One morning we woke to find all the Negro servants gone. All the

horses, too, were gone from the barns. I heard members of Cousin John's family say, for they were in sympathy with the cause of the South, that Union soldiers had come in the night, stolen the horses, and driven the darkies away. One terrifying night we children were aroused from bed and dressed in readiness to flee; I heard whispering that the soldiers would surely come and turn us out and burn the house. Before any tragedy happened, my father returned. That was in the autumn of 1861. During the year and more that he had been gone, he had established a little store in Nevada, Colorado, and there he had left my stepmother in charge while he came back to St. Joseph for me.[2]

Overland to Colorado

My father and I made the journey from St. Joseph, Missouri, to Denver, Colorado, alone. We were six weeks on the way. I remember no hardships, only joy at being with my dear father again in the covered wagon on the road with the world all before us.

I was nine years old and I felt great satisfaction in being helpful. If we camped for the night by a stream, I jumped down from the wagon at once and ran to get a bucket of water. Then I picked up sticks to start the fire, or buffalo chips when we traveled through buffalo country. It was most exciting to help put the nosebags on the mules. My father always drove a six-mule team with a jerkline.[3] He said that mules were stronger than horses and got over the ground faster for longer distances.

Most of the time as we jogged and jolted along I sat beside him on the high seat of the wagon and played with my kitten, or listened to him sing. He had a good voice and knew many Irish, Scotch, and southern melodies and Civil War songs that were beginning to sweep the country even to its farthest outposts. He taught me "The Irish Immigrant," "Old Folks at Home," "Nellie Grey," "Swanee River," "I am Captain Jenks of the Horse Marines," and other songs. To the tune of "Gentle Annie," my father had composed words in honor of his gentle little wife, Anne Cleary. These, also, he taught me. How gay we were when we made our voices ring out together:

Gramachree, ma cruiskeen
Slanta Gael, mavourneen!
Gramachree ma cruiskeen lawn, lawn, lawn!
Gramachree me cruiskeen
Slanta Gael, mavourneen!
Gramachree me cruiskeen lawn, lawn, lawn!
Arrah, ma colleen bawn, bawn, bawn,
Arrah, ma colleen bawn.[4]

Often while we were singing the kitten would spring from my arms to ride upon the back of one of the mules. "Perhaps the kitten does not understand our songs," I might say. "Perhaps she wants to get a better view," my father might answer, for the prairie country must then have worn the warmth of autumnal browns and the glory of scarlet and gold.

I crawled into the back of the wagon for a nap on the heap of bedding when I grew tired, but this was not often, for besides songs my father had stories in his repertory of entertainment. I liked best a new one about a dear little baby sister that I would find in our new home. She was born in Empire City, Colorado, on July 30, 1861, and christened Katherine Empire, "Katherine" for Pa's dear old mother back in Ireland and "Empire" because Kate was the first child born in Empire City. The enthusiastic citizens saw in her birth the portent of permanency for their settlements, so they deeded to her several town lots. The bestowal of her middle name was a return of courtesy on the part of her parents. Before the town or the child was many weeks old, the boom had burst. Whatever became of those lots I do not know for once he had moved away from a place, my father never returned. My sister never investigated the registers of that old town.[5]

When we came to our journey's end in Denver, for some reason my father left me for a month with a German man and wife while he went on to Central City.[6] I remember well how lonely I

The Sheehans lived only briefly in the gold-rush town of Empire, Colorado, shown here in the late 1860s. In 1861 Mary's sister Katherine Empire was the first baby born in the town.
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was in the days immediately following and how I sighed and wept to be traveling again with my father. However, my German landlady was kind to me. I sometimes thought her a trifle severe when she made me learn to hem, practicing on her husband's shirttails. When the allotted portion had been laboriously stitched, I was allowed to go outdoors and scamper with the dog. My German hosts also took me to my first play. How thrilled I was, how complete the illusion. How puzzling it was to understand that what seemed so real was "a play!"[7]

I remember nothing of the trip from Denver to the new home in Nevada City on Clear Creek in Gilpin County, Colorado. I do remember the joy of meeting my stepmother and the thrill when she kissed me and held out the plump little red-haired baby sister for me to kiss. Red hair was something new and interesting in our

family. All the Sheehans, my stepmother too, had brown hair, blue eyes, and dark brows and lashes.

My father had not told me what to call his wife. This worried me, yet I was too shy to ask. I treasured one memory too dear to call Anne Cleary "Mother." It never occurred to me that I might call her "Anne." So impressive a personage, my father's wife! After more than seventy years I look back and try to realize that she was then just a girl. We grew to love each other. The problem of what to call her was solved by hearing other little girls call their mothers "Ma," and that name corresponded well with "Pa," the approved way of the period for addressing one's father.

I used to play in the tailings from Pat Casey's quartz mill, delighted with the shining bits of iron pyrite. Casey's night hands—the crew that worked the night shift—were much talked of in early days. I liked to whisper over and over again the phrase, "Pat Casey's night hands." It had a mysterious ring. When I peered through the windows of the shack where the night hands were fed, nothing strange or frightful was to be seen. Long tables were set quite in the ordinary way with tin cups and plates and many, many salt and pepper shakers and bottles and bottles of condiments.

I walked from Nevada to the school in Central City every day. The girls taught me the waltz and other round dances, as those engaged in by two couples were called. They were very daring and pious people looked askance at them. My father's freighting expeditions took him away from home often and for long periods of time. For company Ma began to take me to dances with her. When she left me at home, she always brought me, in her handkerchief, bits of frosting from the cakes served at the hearty midnight suppers. One old Irish woman scorned the sweets and kept saying that when her turn came to entertain the neighbors she would serve "thim refrishmints that wuz refrishmints." She did. I know for I went to the party. In the middle of the night

the guests sat down to corned beef, cabbage, bread, jam, and coffee. For weeks after the ladies who came to see my stepmother talked and laughed about that supper. I secretly thought that the cabbage had tasted good, but I said nothing for fear they would laugh at me. My father was much displeased when he came home and found that his young wife and little daughter had been going to dances without his escort and protection. We went no more.

Mine was a loving but stern father of the Irish type who believes that a man is the master of his home and makes his belief the practice of his household. Children must mind. I never thought of disobeying him. I feared, respected, and loved him. He had a high regard for learning. He sent me to every little school that was started at any place in which we established our residence, however brief. As I grew older, he talked and talked of sending me back to "the states" to be educated. Always, though, there were obstacles: the expense, the distance, the difficulties of the journey. If ever my dear father had a little leisure, he read. Whenever he could, he bought books. Even during our residence in Alder Gulch, so wild, so isolated from civilization, we had Shakespeare's plays, some of Scott's romances, and Moore's and Byron's poems.

Our big yellow dog, Dange, always went with my father on his trips to Denver to guard the wagons. One night my father was camped alone in a little tent just out of Denver when Dange failed to give alarm. Marauders awakened him. As he sat up in his bed one of them toppled over the tent and grappled with him. My father seized his Bowie knife and jabbed furiously and at random through the canvas. The marauder loosed his grip and fleeing steps sounded. When my father disentangled himself from the canvas of the fallen tent and crawled out, no one was to be seen. In the breaking light of morning he made his way to the police to notify them about what had happened. They returned with him

to the place of his encampment. The trampled grass was spattered with blood; drops of blood showed on the canvas of the tent. In his offhand account of this incident, my father explained his escape by saying, "It was always my habit to be quick."

I learned much during that year at Nevada City. My father taught me to ride Charley, his fine-spirited horse. Ours was a far-off, wild western settlement and I was just ten years old, but there were proprieties to be observed. I must sit sideways on the man's saddle. For a long time I did not dare go faster than a walk. One day Pa "accidentally" struck Charley with the bridle rein. The horse broke into a gallop. After that I loved to ride fast.

Ma taught me to recite pieces. I enjoyed the jingle of the voices, but the meaning did not concern me particularly. At any rate, I had my own way of saying and understanding some of the lines. This passage meant to me just what it did to my older listeners, but the lines, "If I should chance to fall below/Demosthenes or Cicero," I understood this way: "If I should chance to fall below/ The moss, the knees, or Sis Ero."

Once when I was left at home to take care of the baby, I dressed in one of Ma's silk dresses and, playing lady, trailed it through the mud as I carried plump little Kate about to visit the neighbors. When my stepmother saw her bedraggled dress, she said severely, "Mollie, you shall never play lady again." I was plunged into the depths of mortification and utterly surprised for I had never seen my stepmother angry.

Denver Days

In the fall of 1862 we moved to the straggling town of Denver and lived on F Street next door to a store kept by P. S. Pfouts, whose acquaintance we continued later in Alder Gulch. My father must have met with financial reverses. We lived in a house that seemed to have been built for a store or saloon. Ellen came out from St. Joseph and joined us. She did domestic work for one of our neighbors. Mary had been married in St. Joseph where she continued always to make her home.[8]

Christmas time came with Pa away from home. In a certain store window I saw doll's dishes for which I yearned. I do not recall that we ever talked about Santa Claus, but someplace I had got the idea of hanging up my stocking on Christmas Eve. When I talked about doing so to see if an angel would come and leave those doll's dishes or something, Ma laughed and said that I was talking nonsense. I did slip out of bed in the night and hang up my stocking. It was empty on Christmas morning, and I was a sad little girl.

At school my *Readers* and those of the other children in grades above and below me absorbed my attention. I looked through them for the poetry, all of which I read and reread. Pages and pages I learned by heart and still remember. Memorizing was a practice with me throughout my school days. I cannot state exactly which

ones I learned during the Denver school days, yet some I remember definitely and clearly that I did learn at this time for the gentle sound of the words: "Down in a green and shady bed / A modest violet grew."[9]

Moralizing lines and lines weighted with admonition appealed to me. Often in the midst of the hard tasks of childhood my will to do was renewed by gritting my teeth and repeating,

> 'Tis a lesson you should heed
> Try, try again;
> If at first you don't succeed,
> Try, try again.[10]

Sad stories about separation and death were fascinating to me. Because we had lived near the town of Black Hawk, I became interested in learning by heart the speech of Chief Black Hawk when he was taken prisoner. Sympathizing with Indians was not usual among the families of emigrants. Now when I recall my intensity in reciting that speech, it seems as if I had almost a premonition of the experience of living among the Indians and of sorrowing for their wrongs and dispossession that was awaiting me in the far years to come.[11]

Every Friday afternoon at school we spoke pieces. In this I reveled. I recited with flourish of pathos and luxuriance of gesture in the approved manner of the period. I loved my teacher at the Denver school. It was she who taught me to curtsy to my elders and to the audiences at the Friday afternoon performances. On one gala day I was given permission to invite her home to dinner. The joy of having her was almost extinguished by the worry about how I should introduce her to my stepmother. I was anxious to be correct. It seemed a delicate matter to submit to the counsel of Ma and Pa. I could not say, "This is my mother," for it was not true, and I did not want to say, "This is my stepmother."

Teacher might feel sorry for me, and neither she nor anyone else needed to feel so. Ma was not a bit like Cinderella's stepmother or the others in the tales we children talked about so solemnly. "Meet my father's wife." Dreadful! Unconscious of my worries, Ma dispelled them quite simply by greeting the guest cordially at the door of our humble home, waiting for no ceremonius introduction to the learned lady.

I attended instructions given by a priest who was preparing a class for first Holy Communion. Early in the morning of the important day, I dressed myself with care in my white frock and veil. As I went through the kitchen on my way to join the other children, I stuck my finger in and tasted the thick cream that had gathered on a pan of milk on the table. Then I remembered! I ran to Ma's bed and asked her if I had broken my fast. She said that I had, that I must not touch food or drink from twelve o'clock the night before until after I had received Holy Communion. I was ashamed that I had forgotten. I suffered deeply sitting alone on the bench and seeing all the children of the catechism class going to the altar rail without me. On the following morning, in my white frock and veil, carrying a candle in my hand, I marched alone down the long blocks of F Street to Mass and my first Holy Communion.

My father had come home and said that we were soon to set forth again in our wagons to the rich, newly discovered gold diggings in Bannack, Montana.[12] The priest who had prepared me for first Holy Communion gave me a penance to say every day on the journey: the Lord's Prayer, Hail Mary, and Glory Be to the Father five times each. Now I think that he did this to provide a little girl with a means of passing time while the wagons creaked monotonously mile after mile, hour after hour, and with the deeper purpose of fixing the habit of daily prayer. He must have known that in a far-off frontier not much would be found to minister to the spirit. I was a lively, healthy child, never at a loss for something

interesting to see or do, so that sometimes I would let my prayers go for days at a time and become so dreadfully in arrears that I thought I would never get them said. I always felt the obligation that had been put upon me. I was glad to reach Bannack chiefly because I was released from saying my penance.

River crossings, such as the one shown here, were the most dangerous part of any overland trip.

NEBRASKA STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY PHOTOGRAPH COLLECTION

The Long Trek

In April 1863, we set out for Montana. A few nights before, Ma hung a big washing on the lines so that she might have everything clean at least at the beginning of the long trek. In the morning she found that thieves had stripped the lines.

My father always had two wagons drawn by six-mule teams, one loaded very heavily and driven by a hired man. My father drove the other wagon in which the family rode. Supplies covered the bottom of this wagon. Over the supplies, Pa spread mattresses, blankets, and comforters; there we slept at night. Sometimes during the daytime Ma, Ellen, or I would be glad enough to crawl back for a nap with Kate. Fastened on the back of the wagon were a sheet-iron stove, a little rocking chair for my stepmother, and a mess box containing the food we needed day to day. When we stopped for a couple of days or more, the stove was set up and we cooked and washed. While the bread was baking and the clothes were drying, Ma rocked in her little chair and mended. In the evenings as we traveled right along, we cooked supper over a campfire. If we were out of bread, biscuits or shanter's bannock was baked in a Dutch oven.[13]

It was my duty in the mornings to help gather up the food and pack the mess kit. Wood, water, and grass were necessary for a good camping site. We watched for the three essentials as soon as

afternoon shadows began to lengthen. My father took a chance on finding wood or buffalo chips and water, but he always carried some grain for the horses and mules. They were our faithful servants and a surer means of livelihood than the elusive gold in the mines.

I do not remember that we left Denver with other people but from time to time other emigrants joined us. No one in our family kept a diary, so I do not know what route we followed. Much of the way must have been the route traced by John Owen in the journal of his trip in the fall of 1864.[14] Up Green River Valley, through the Wind River Canyon, the ford on the Big Horn, and Bridger's route west of the Big Horn Mountains are phrases that come back to me with the familiarity of an old refrain.

Bridger's Cutoff is the most familiar of all. The grown-ups looked forward to reaching Bridger's Cutoff where a large emigrant train was to form. We waited there several days. I dimly remember a blockhouse-like structure, and nothing else of the place. Around the campfires at night I heard excited talk about the rich placer diggings in Montana and the increased hostilities of the Indians. When my father cut my thick brown hair, I suppose so that it could more easily be kept clean and kempt, I heard it remarked that Jim Sheehan "wasn't goin' to have no Injuns git his little girl's scalp." This did not frighten me nor impress me as gruesome; it was all part of the day's talk and jesting.

Our train of twenty-five or thirty wagons set out from Bridger's Cutoff about the first of May. A man named Clark was elected captain. Everyone in our train drove horses or mules except Nelson Story who, with his beautiful sixteen-year-old bride, had joined us there. Mr. Story drove oxen. Though they were slow, he had decided that rather than wait for an ox train he would try to keep up with Captain Clark. He did. His wagon was always the last in camp in the evenings, but it always drew into its place in the circle before darkness fell. As the years passed and I witnessed Mr. Story's

financial success, I came to see its explanation. His indomitable spirit led him to join our train and keep his oxen traveling with the horses and mules no matter what the effort.

I remember Mr. Story so vividly because I watched for him with childish eagerness each evening hoping that he would reach camp early enough to give me a ride on one of the little donkeys he had in his outfit. When I did get a ride, whether on bareback or on a man's saddle, I always sat primly sideways. Never in all my riding days did I ride "cross-saddle" ("astride" was a coarse expression). How my father used to laugh when I would beg him to buy me a donkey from Mr. Story.[15]

Another person who joined our train at Bridger's Cutoff was Jack Gallagher, afterwards known as a desperado, who forfeited his life at the hands of the vigilance committee in Virginia City on January 14, 1864.[16] I remember him standing about the campfires in the evening. He was tall, dark, and striking looking. He often spoke to me in a pleasant, quiet voice, and praised me for reading so well. I knew by heart pages from the little books I had with me. One was a story similar to the Little Eva portion of *Uncle Tom's Cabin.* I would sit by the campfire in the dim light, a book on my lap, say the words by heart and enjoy the adulation that I would receive. One of life's little ironies is a memory of Jack Gallagher—headed swiftly to destruction—praising the little girl whose special book for the journey was Reverend Preston's *The Life of Mary Magdalene or The Path to Penitence*.[17] On the flyleaf Pa wrote, "Mary C. Sheehan from her father Denver, Colo. March 1863." He bought it just before we set out. I did not understand nor care for it then. What child of ten would? But I grew to love and cherish the little book.

Men on horseback rode beside the wagon train, reconnoitered, and guarded the rear. The guards were especially vigilant in Indian country. Word was brought to camp one day that the

train ahead of ours had come upon some murdered bodies. We passed by a mound of fresh earth with a board marker on which a penciled message stated that an unidentified body had been found and buried. In one narrow canyon the mounted guard was more watchful than usual. Ma, Ellen, and I were warned to keep out of sight. The wagons drew into a great circle at night and guards patrolled outside it to protect the sleepers and stock, picketed and grazing a little way from camp. One night Indians did steal a few fine horses. That is the only mishap to our train that I recall. I often heard it said that ours was an unusually fortunate or well-directed journey, made in almost record time.

The accounts of hardship, of suffering, of fear one reads in the diaries actually written from day to day by emigrants of the sixties left little impression on me. The monotonous miles of jolting, weariness, illness, cold, heat, acrid dust, alkali water, mosquitoes, cactuses, rattlesnakes, perilous ascents and descents on scarcely broken roads, terrifying fordings of great rivers, dread of lurking Indians, apprehension that the parting from loved ones back home was for life, and forebodings that new surroundings might hold worse not better fortunes are not what I remember. I can picture in my mind gorgeous sunsets gliding behind distant mountain peaks and flooding great valleys with magic light. Joyous eager childhood and the rhythm of going, going, going combine to make a backdrop and a theme song for that long trek into the land of gold.

We arrived at Bannack, a mile above sea level near the Continental Divide, about the first of June, 1863. From a hundred flumes the tailings were dumped in piles with just a slather of water and the arrastra's huge wheel turned.[18] Bearded, suntanned miners in gum boots and faded red flannel shirts with six-guns in holsters on their hips sweated in the heat of early summer. Although the Grasshopper Creek diggings were nearly worked out, hope

charged the air with excitement when some of them passed on a story. A party of horsemen had just come to Bannack from "somewheres east," leading a horse loaded with gold. They were bartering for a grubstake. They were trying to keep their secret from all but a few "pardners," but someone let it leak out. The discovery men were watching for a chance to slip away, but a crowd waited at every turn, camping around them. When they did start, three or four hundred men on foot and on horseback went right along with them.[19]

My father pitched a tent for our family on the outskirts of Bannack on Grasshopper Creek where the water near the bank was richly mantled with tender green cress. He provided us with food, loaded his wagon with supplies, and set out to follow the trampled path of the stampeders over that eighty rugged miles between Bannack and Alder Gulch. My father made his way, broke his own road, and drove the first wagonload of supplies into Alder Gulch.

More memorable to me than witnessing this historic stampede was a black puppy someone had given me and playing with a little girl named Annie McCabe. After a few days my father returned to Bannack, pulled up our tent stakes, and loaded our belongings. Soon we were creaking in the warm sunshine amid a hovering cloud of alkali dust over endless tobacco brown ground, through long stretches of parched, gray-green sagebrush. It was more pleasant going through Beaverhead Valley and along the river bottom. In the backwater, when we camped, we could hear the slap of beavers' tails and the sudden splash of muskrats.

At a queer closing in the valley near the huge rounded Beaverhead Rock, the landmark which guided my father and countless other travelers long before him, we crossed over to another river, now called the Ruby or the Passamari.[20] We forded and traveled over a great flat bench surrounded by distant mountain ranges, fold upon fold of them. We dropped into a smaller

valley, green with great cottonwoods growing along the little river, guarded by near and friendly wooded mountains. A long pull up the benchland brought us to a large creek, beautifully clear, running over stones made gay with red jasper, mica, and rose quartz. It was hidden by a thick growth of alder bushes whose clean red bark flashed among the dark green leaves.

The mules kept stopping to rest. At one of these stops I asked to ride in the back of the empty wagon driven by the hired man so that I could play with my puppy. On a steep slope the wagon tipped over. My father saw the accident and jumped from the wagon he was driving. He came running and picked me up. I was neither bruised nor scratched nor even frightened. My only concern was that the puppy, which I had continued all the while to hold in my arms, had been hurt.

At last the mule teams panted into a little valley, green and homey, snuggled among the hills. We camped where a large stream wound intricately among the high wooded hills from under the rim of a great bald crater to join a tiny crossline creek that crept from among the grassy rolling hills toward the east. I jumped down from the wagon in haste and excitement (for even children caught that fever), searched for a stick, whittled a place for my name, scrawled "Mollie Sheehan," pounded the stick into the ground, and announced that I had staked my claim. Father looked on and laughed.

Alder Gulch

Hundreds of tents, brush wickiups, log cabins, and even houses of stone quarried from the hills were springing up daily in the windings of Alder Gulch and Daylight Gulch, in the hollows of the hills, and along the ramblings of Alder Creek and the Stinkingwater. Soon over a stretch of fifteen miles a cluster of towns had assumed the importance of names: Junction, Adobetown, Nevada, Virginia City, Pine Grove, Highland, and Summit. In a few weeks the population numbered into the thousands.[21] Every foot of earth in the gulches was being literally turned upside down. Rough-clad men with long hair and flowing beards swarmed everywhere. Some were digging for bedrock and some were bent over barrow loads of the pay dirt that they wheeled to the sluice boxes. Others shoveled the dirt. Up and down the narrow streets bull trains and sixteen- or twenty-horse teams labored, pulling three and four wagons lashed together, and there were long strings of packhorses, mules, and donkeys. Loafers lolled at the doors or slouched in and out of saloons and gambling and hurdy-gurdy houses too numerous to estimate. Frequently the sounds of brawling, insults, and oaths echoed through the gulch. Bowie knives flashed and pistols cracked. When my stepmother sent me down the street on errands, she often said, "Now run, Mollie, but don't be afraid." I was never spoken to in any but a

Virginia City, Montana, grew quickly from the tent camp Mary first encountered to the booming metropolis pictured here in 1866.
MONTANA HISTORICAL SOCIETY PHOTOGRAPH ARCHIVES

kindly way by any of those men. What Dimsdale said of the regard which was accorded respectable women and girls was, indeed, true.[22]

I took our surroundings for granted as was the way of little girls. Nevada, Central City, and Denver in Colorado and Virginia City were very much alike. Here, as in those other towns, was a certain class of women whom I have heard called "fancy ladies" because of their gaudy dress, so different from that of the ladies who were our friends. The fancy ladies were easily recognizable on the streets by their painted cheeks and the way they flaunted their gaudy clothes. They were always to be seen either walking up or down the streets, clattering along on horseback, or riding in hacks. Sometimes one appeared through a window, lounging in a dressing gown and puffing on a cigarette. These women were so in evidence that I felt no curiosity about them. I knew that

besides being so evident upon the streets, they went to hurdy-gurdy houses and to saloons and that they were not "good women." I did not analyze why that was.

After a while I made the acquaintance of Carrie Crane, Lizzie Keaton, and some other little girls, but not many, for there were very few in Virginia City as long as I lived there.[23] We spent our leisure time playing in the back streets or learning the haunts and the names of the wildflowers and their times for blossoming. There were tall buttercups and blue flags in the valley. Up Alder Gulch snow and timber lilies bloomed; wild roses and syringa grew in sweet profusion; flowering currant bushes invited canaries to alight and twitter. There were great patches of moss flowers with a scent and blossom like Sweet William. And such forget-me-nots! Larger and bluer and glossier than any other I have ever seen. On the tumbled hills among and over which the town straggled, the primroses made pink splotches in early spring. There the yellow bells nodded and the bitterroots unfolded close to the ground with their perplexity of rosy petals. In watered draws among the hills, blue, yellow, and white violets bloomed. In a place we thought was our secret, by the creek in Daylight Gulch, was a patch of white violets tinted with pink. We gathered wild gooseberries in the gulch and serviceberries and chokecherries on its steep sides. Robins, meadowlarks, bluebirds, black birds, camp robbers, blue jays, crows, and magpies lured us away from where men were ravishing the gulch.

A walk that was never denied us because it branched away from the diggings led up Daylight Gulch to a spruce grove called Gum Patch in a wooded canyon. We learned to distinguish the fir and nut pine and juniper and the dwarf cedar with the blueberries. Striped badgers were everywhere among the hills and so were their holes, which menaced a horse's way. Gophers amused us, whistling, flipping their tails, and whisking down their holes. It was fun

to startle the cottontails and to watch them dart into the underbrush, or to climb up the mountainside and make the rock chucks scurry away along the sunny walls. Sometimes a deer flashed a white signal of danger and we glimpsed him leaping to cover. On rare occasions we were permitted to go so far out on the benchland that we used to see, or think that we saw, an antelope in the distance, or a lone buffalo, or a wraith of an Indian smoke signal. Under the blue, blue sky in the clear air of that high valley, nearly seven thousand feet above sea level, we could see a hundred miles.

My family lived in a big log cabin on Wallace Street, the main thoroughfare running up Daylight Gulch.[24] Because my father was a freighter, the Sheehans were well provisioned and always set as good a table as was possible to set in a remote mining town. My stepmother's and Ellen's dried apple and dried peach pies were rare delicacies much in demand, and so it came about that we began to take in boarders. Among these were the "discovery men," as Bill Fairweather, Henry Edgar, Barney Orr, and the others were called. Among the men who dropped in now and again to a meal was our companion on the journey to Montana, Jack Gallagher. He was always courteous and soft-spoken to us, and yet within the year we came to know that he was one of the most hardened of all the road agents. Another of this gang who came often enough so that I remember him distinctly was George Ives. My attention was directed to him because of the long blue soldier's overcoat he wore. I went on to notice that he stood head and shoulders above most of the men who gathered around our table. Unlike the others, Gallagher was smooth-shaven and he was blonde and handsome. Henry Plummer was only a name to me, but after his execution I heard him discussed at home; when he had last come to Virginia City, how picturesque in appearance, how gentle in manner. Who could have guessed the unutterable depth of his deceit and depravity?[25]

Long before the vigilantes organized, my father had evidently made his own observations and drawn his own conclusions about the character of some of the patrons of our boardinghouse. He soon closed the doors of our cabin to Virginia City's public and moved the family into a little two-room cabin off Wallace, the main street.

Grasping desperately and by any means for gold—brawling, robbing, shooting and hanging—was not all of life in the mining camp. Into our midst came the man of God. Father Joseph Giorda, S.J., whom I came to know so well in later years, was a sweet-faced Italian gentleman. He had made the long drive from St. Peter's Mission and had only two days to carry spiritual consolation to the far-flung frontier.[26] When he asked wherein he might say Mass, two young Irishmen, placer-miner partners Peter Ronan and John Caplice, offered a cabin they were having built. Miners from neighboring claims helped to level the dirt floor and put the cabin in such order that it could be used the next morning. My stepmother was asked to dress the improvised altar. Together she and I covered the rough-hewn boards with sheets and arranged the candles. Mr. Ronan often told me that it was there that day with my stepmother that he first noticed me, busy and serious. He thought, "What an old-fashioned little girl Mollie Sheehan is."

That first Mass in Virginia City on the Feast of All Saints, November 1, 1863, was a memorable event.[27] It was a simple, reverent congregation that knelt on the dirt floor within the four walls of new-hewn logs on that crisp morning. The majority were bearded miners in worn work clothes. Many received the Holy Eucharist from the consecrated hands of Father Giorda. I was distracted from spiritual to human contemplations by the tinkling sound of large tin cups that passed from one man to another. I saw each pour a trickle of gold dust from his buckskin pouch. Then the gold dust from all the cups was poured into a new yellow

buckskin purse and Peter Ronan, whom the miners had chosen to make the presentation to the priest, laid it upon the altar.

When Father Giorda went to the stable where he had left his team and asked for his bill, he was told that it was forty dollars for the two days. He turned to Mr. Ronan, saying that he had not enough money to pay so excessive a price. Mr. Ronan inquired if he knew how much he had in the buckskin purse. Unworldly and unconcerned with money, Father Giorda had not thought of weighing its contents. Together he and Mr. Ronan did so and found that the purse contained several hundred dollars in gold dust.

Almost every evening the miners cleaned their sluice boxes with a tin contrivance called a scraper. Much fine gold was left in the cracks of the boxes and around the edges. Often after the miners had gone into their cabins for supper, Carrie Crane and I would take our little blowers and the hair brushes, which we kept for the purpose, and gather up the fine gold. We took it home, dried it in the oven and blew the black sand from it. Sometimes we would find that our gold dust weighed to the amount of a dollar or more. I had a little gutta-percha inkwell, which had traveled with us in the covered wagon from Denver. I kept my gold dust in it and carried it when I went to the store to buy rock candy. Carrie and I thought that this sweet was kept especially for the accommodation of little girl shoppers. The phrase "rock and rye" was a familiar one to us but not meaningful.[28] We found little on which to spend our gold dust. Sometimes the storekeeper had stick candy, candy beans, or ginger snaps. Twenty-five cents was the least that was ever accepted across the counter. The amount of the purchase in gold dust would be measured out with blowers on scales. Once I bought my father a present of a shirt, which cost $2.50 in gold dust, the only kind of money that I ever saw in Virginia City.

A man would have entered another miner's sluice box at the risk of being shot on sight, but it amused the miners to have us

little girls clean up after them. We were given so much encouragement that we actually thought we honored the men whose sluice boxes we chose to clean. One evening I busied myself about the property of Peter Ronan. I was wearing my new "shaker," a straw poke-bonnet my stepmother had just made. It was trimmed with bright pink chambray. For fear that I might rub against the sides of the sluice boxes and soil the bonnet, I laid it on the cross piece of a box while I stooped to brush and blow. Mr. Ronan, not noticing me, lifted a gate above and let muddy water run through his boxes. It splashed on the adored pink chambray "valance." Many times afterwards I heard Mr. Ronan tell in his inimitable way how the angry little girl suddenly stood up straight, then scrambled from the sluice box, crying out indignantly, "I'll never, never, never again, Mister, take gold from your sluice boxes!" How his dark eyes flashed, how gaily he laughed as he apologized and begged me to reconsider. This is my first memory of Peter Ronan. Child as I was, vexed and embarrassed, even then I felt his great personal charm and a harmony between us.

My father objected to my going about where men would speak to me. He did not approve of the expeditions to the sluice boxes and finally forbade them. From some of my Alder Gulch gold a jeweler in Virginia City wrought me a ring. A few years later in Last Chance Gulch I put it on Mr. Ronan's finger, saying, "Keep it till I ask you for it."

On Christmas Day, 1863, the first marriage to be contracted in Virginia City took place between Ellen Sheehan, then seventeen years of age, and William Tiernan, who owned what was called the "upper discovery claim." Bill was black bearded, tall, rangy like the type so familiar in Wild West romances. Ellen was little and trim as a brown wren. Henry Edgar was the best man. I remember no other detail, I suppose, because the wedding was not made an occasion since there was no priest in the vicinity nor would there be,

perhaps, for months. Only the civil ceremony could be observed. My father disapproved of the marriage without a priest to officiate and Ellen grieved because of his disapproval.

Ellen and Bill went to live in a little cabin up Alder Gulch at the discovery claim. Ellen took the discovery men to board and kept their tollgate to the road leading up the narrow gulch. Added to her other duties, she became a banker in a certain sense. The miners trusted her. Many who had no safe place to keep their gold dust and nuggets left their buckskin purses with her for days at a time. She would hide their purses in the mattress. She has often told how lumpy and uncomfortable her bed would get as the "bank deposits" grew, and how doubly relieved she was when the "savings accounts" were drawn out and sent by stagecoach to Salt Lake City.

First one person and then another in Virginia City would start a little school. Professor Thomas J. Dimsdale (every man who taught school was called "professor") is the one I remember most distinctly. He was an Englishman, small, delicate looking, and gentle. I liked him. It seemed to me that he knew everything. In his school all was harmonious and pleasant. While his few pupils buzzed and whispered over their variously assorted readers, arithmetics, and copy books, the professor sat at a makeshift desk near the little window of the log schoolhouse writing, writing during the intervals between recitations and at recess, always writing. When, during 1864, *The Vigilantes of Montana* was being published at the *Montana Post*, I thought it must have been the composition of those articles which had so engrossed him.[29]

We children took advantage of Professor Dimsdale's preoccupation. Carrie Crane and I would frequently ask to be excused. We would run down the slope, for the schoolhouse was just below what the tourists now call Boot Hill Cemetery, into a corral at the bottom of Daylight Gulch. We would spend a few thrillful

moments sliding down the straw stacks. We thought our absences daringly prolonged; probably they were not. At any rate, we were never chastised. Lettie Sloss is the only other teacher of this period whose name I recall, for we never had the same one a second term and the terms of school were brief and uncertain periods.

Coming from school one winter day, January 14, 1864, I cut across the bottom of the gulch, climbed the steep hill, and passed close behind a large cabin being built. People were gathered in front on Wallace Street. The air was charged with excitement. I looked. The horror of what I saw is photographed on my memory. The bodies of five men with ropes around their necks hung limp from a roof beam. I trembled so that I could scarcely run toward home. The realization flashed on me that two forms were familiar. One was Jack Gallagher, the other was Club Foot George, who used to notice me and speak in a kind way. His deformity had arrested my attention and made me pity him. I did not know that he and Jack were bad men. The three men that hung with them were Frank Parish, Haze Lyons, and Boone Helm. After some time the bodies were taken down and buried on top of the bleak, windswept hill overlooking the scene of their last turbulent days.[30]

One frosty morning a few weeks later when I opened the back door of our cabin, I saw in the gulch below a crowd of men gathered around a scaffold. There stood a young man with a rope around his neck. He shook hands with several of the men, then he pulled a black cap over his face. I knew the portent. I rushed into the house and slammed the door, but I could not shut out then, nor ever, from my memory that awful creaking sound of the hangman's rope.[31]

One day when my stepmother sent me to the meat market with the usual injunction, "Now run, Mollie, and don't be afraid," I was alarmed by a clatter of horses' hooves and the crack of pistol shots. A man galloping his horse recklessly down the street was

firing a six-shooter in the air and whooping wildly. Suddenly he reared his horse back on its haunches, turned it sharply, and forced it through the swinging door of a saloon. I sidled into the first open doorway that I dared enter.

"That's Slade," said the storekeeper, "one of his sprees, shootin' up the town, scarin' women and children. That smart alec orter be strung up."

He led me out the back door and warned me to run home quickly and to stay in the house out of range of any stray bullets. "He'll git his needins yit," he threatened.

One day in early spring not long after this incident, we children were delayed at school because of a milling crowd of men gathered in Daylight Gulch, directly across the homeward path of most of us, around a corral called the "Elephant's Pen." Many of the men were armed. From the steep hillside path I could look down into their midst. I recognized Slade, dressed in fringed buckskin, hatless, with a man on either side of him. They forced him to walk under the corral gate. His arms were pinioned, the elbows were bent so as to bring his hands up to his breast. He kept moving his hands back and forth, palms upward, and opening and closing them as he cried, "For God's sake, let me see my dear wife! For God's sake, let me see my dear wife! For God's sake, let me see my dear wife!" Three times distinctly I heard him say this in a piercing, anguished voice.

The stir among the men increased. Voices rose louder, more angry, more excited, gesturing arms pointed to the long road winding down the hill from the east. Down that long hill road a woman was racing on horseback. Someone shouted, "There she comes!" A man in a black hat standing beside Slade made an abrupt, vigorous movement. I turned and sought the refuge of home.

Soon excited neighbors came in to say that the woman galloping so swiftly down the hill was, indeed, Mrs. Slade on her

Kentucky thoroughbred, Billy Bay. When she was recognized, the men of the vigilance committee made haste to do their dreadful duty for fear her presence would arouse so much sympathy among bystanders that the hanging would be stayed. They dwelt grimly on the details of how the man in the black hat had hastily adjusted the rope when the warning was given of her approach. He had kicked the box from under Slade so that he swung with a broken neck from the cross piece atop the corral gate. Many good citizens, among them my own people, criticized this act of summary vengeance because Slade had actually committed no crime in Montana. All admitted that he was a braggart and a brawler and had risked manslaughter on many a rowdy spree when he put on a show by shooting up the town. When he was sober he was said to be a good workman and a likable fellow.[32]

Slade's body was taken from the scaffold, used ordinarily for hanging beeves, and delivered to his wife in the old Virginia Hotel. My heart ached for Mrs. Slade. I slipped away from home, determined to go and tell her how sorry I was for her. I found her sobbing and moaning, bowed over a stark form shrouded in a blanket. I stood beside her for a moment trembling and choking, then I slipped away unnoticed, or so I have always thought.

Though he was on the road so much, freighting to and from Salt Lake City or Fort Benton, my father was never robbed by the road agents. He always carried his gold in buckskin bags attached to a belt that he wore under his clothing. We lived through days and nights of anguished uncertainty whenever he went on his long lonely expeditions for supplies. One anxious time in the fall of 1863 when the road agents' reign of terror was at its height, my father had so much gold dust to carry out of Virginia City that it was too heavy to conceal in his accustomed way. He was warned that the road agents had him "spotted," but if his business was to continue, he had to make the trip. He decided to try a ruse. He

put the buckskin purses filled with gold into the old carpetbag in which he carried his clothes. He tossed it into the bottom of the wagon and threw his bedding and camping equipment on top. He hired a driver for this wagon and sending him on with instructions on where to camp, he told his driver that he would overtake him later. The driver did not suspect that he carried the treasure. Late at night my father sped away on horseback alone, armed, and determined to dispute his rights. He overtook his driver without being challenged. Later he learned through the confessions of Dutch John Wagner, I think to my father's friend Neil Howie, that he had not outwitted the highwaymen. He had been allowed to pass in safety through the good grace of George Ives who demanded that

Freight wagons pulled by mules are pictured here on the corner of Van Buren and Wallace streets in Virginia City, Montana, circa 1865. The Sheehans lived for a time in a log cabin on Wallace; as a freighter, James Sheehan transported goods to Virginia City from Salt Lake City using mule teams such as these.

MONTANA PICTURE GALLERY PHOTOGRAPHERS, MONTANA HISTORICAL SOCIETY PHOTOGRAPH ARCHIVES

this should be because of "Jim Sheehan's nice wife and two little girls living in the gulch."[33]

In the spring of 1864 when the work of the viligantes had been accomplished, life became quieter, happier, more orderly and ordinary. Carrie and I and our schoolmates could roam farther and more freely over the hills, gullies, and benchlands. I often stopped at the home of one of our near neighbors with flowers for John Creighton, a young man who was confined to the house with a broken leg.[34] Boardinghouse and hotel keepers began to offer us little girls twenty-five cents in gold dust for a big bouquet of wildflowers with which to deck their tables, most of them laid with red-checked cloths, half-inch thick earthenware or tin cups and plates, and cheap assorted knives, forks, and spoons. Among the thousands of people who thronged Virginia City were some who would pay for the pretty little touches that give a semblance of gracious living.

Naturally no fresh vegetables were to be had during that first spring. We girls knew that lamb's-quarters, what we called "goosefoots," were edible when young and tender; they were an even tastier pot-herb than spinach. Lamb's-quarters grew riotously in the ground turned by the miners the previous summer and fall. From gathering these for the table at home we extended our activity to selling them at $1.50 in gold dust for a gallon bucket crammed full.

My career as a marketer of fresh flowers and "greens" lasted only until my father learned what I was doing. Indignantly and right off quick he put a stop to it, saying that he would not have a daughter of his running about the streets and into hotels and public places. My gentle little stepmother never questioned my flitting about as free as a bird.

Excitement ran high in the summer of 1864 when Cornelius and David O'Keefe arrived from Hell Gate with a wagonload of

potatoes.[35] I rushed home with the news of their precious cargo, and my stepmother went in great haste to be in time to purchase some. As a result she made the acquaintance of the genial, witty, rollicking Cornelius O'Keefe. Later, for the magnificence of his manner in dispensing the simplest hospitality, General Thomas Francis Meagher gave O'Keefe the sobriquet of "Baron." My stepmother introduced him to Hannah Lester, and she and the Baron were married. Together they drove back across the territory to his log cabin home on the ranch at the mouth of the remote, rugged, rocky Coriacan defile now known as O'Keefe Canyon, through which wound the road to the Flathead Indian Reservation.

Hannah was romantic, venturesome, and lonely. The story of her coming to Montana, as my stepmother told it to me, was that a younger sister of Hannah's, also a lover of adventure, had agreed with some friends to make one of their party on the long journey to the promising new country. The Lester family protested against their youngest going so far from home. Hannah took her sister's place and so came to Virginia City. Accustomed as she was to refinements, intellectual pursuits, and quoting as well as writing poetry, Hannah found the crudeness of a frontier settlement almost unbearable. She was told that Cornelius O'Keefe had a wonderful ranch in a beautiful, long-settled agricultural district. When her suitor described his holdings in his glowing, Irish way, Hannah's vivid imagination flashed the picture of a manor house and an estate similar to those she had known in England and Scotland, and she accepted him as her deliverer. There she lived the rest of her life in great simplicity, sometimes enduring great hardships.

On one of my father's sojourns at home he moved the family from the little cabin off Wallace Street, whose particular location probably accounts for my being a witness to the terrible scenes of the days of vigilante justice. We went to live in a little frame house

on the hillside across Daylight Gulch on Cover Street away from the main thoroughfare. One room was used for storing supplies. In it were many bags of flour that my father freighted to Last Chance Gulch and sold at a hundred dollars for a hundred pound sack. As I remember my poor, dear father, himself so honest, so trusting that he was always being imposed upon and losing money on his investments, I think he must have been lucky rather than shrewd in getting out of Alder Gulch with his flour before it was confiscated.

The citizens arose in wrath at the price of flour and threatened to raid those who were hoarding. A committee was formed to search all known sources of supply and to secure an equitable distribution. My stepmother emptied a barrel of beans, half filled it with flour and put beans on top. When the members of the investigating committee searched our house, they did not discover the deception. They found only the amount of flour agreed upon for each family.[36]

Near neighbors of ours while we lived on Wallace Street were Granville Stuart and his Indian wife. They had a little baby that the mother used to put in a hammock made Indian fashion with a blanket folded over suspended ropes. I liked to swing the baby and so was a frequent visitor. One day the incongruity of the situation struck me, young as I was. Mr. Stuart was handsome, and looking like a scholar and an aristocrat, he sat writing at a combination desk and bookcase. The Indian wife in moccasined feet was padding about doing her simplified housekeeping. Impulsively I stepped close to his chair and said, "Mr. Stuart, why did you marry an Indian woman?" He turned, smiled, put his hand caressingly on my shoulder and said sweetly, "You see, Mollie, I'm such an odd fellow. If I married a white woman she might be quarreling with me."[37]

This incident I could never, never forget, because when I related it to my stepmother she impressed upon my mind that it

was rude of me to ask personal questions, terribly rude if the question might hurt one's feelings. I was deeply mortified, for I wished to appear gently bred and to have manners like those of Hannah Lester and Mrs. W. F. Sanders. Mrs. Sanders lived in a little frame house, whitewashed with green shutters on the windows. I thought it beautiful. It was cozier than any other house I had encountered since we had left the cousins in Missouri. Mrs. Sanders had a board floor in her house and pieces of furniture and bits of carpet that she had brought from "the states." She once told me that she had sold almost all of her Brussels carpet in two and three yard strips to saloonkeepers who had besieged and besought her for it. They used it to dress their bars.[38]

We had some Jewish neighbors named Goldberg. Once they concluded their celebration of the feast of the Passover by serving supper at sundown to all Jewish people in Virginia City. Mrs. Goldberg asked me to help her serve her guests. I was more impressed by the hostess's large, flat feet than by any other detail of that supper. I wanted to share my amusement with my stepmother. When I was going home Mrs. Goldberg gave me a generous basket filled with the good things she had prepared to take home to the family. I watched my chance to slip in also one of her astonishing slippers to show my stepmother. The next morning I took the basket back and returned the slipper to its accustomed place. I always thought our kindly, odd friend Mrs. Goldberg was unconscious of our little fun at her expense.

My stepmother took Kate and me with her to spend a day with a friend named Mrs. McGrath who lived in Nevada City, a mile down the gulch. Her home was next door to her husband's place of business, no doubt a saloon, for Mrs. McGrath referred to it as "the place." While the ladies chatted we children went to play in the backyard. Beyond the high board fence that shut off "the place" from the residence, we heard shouts, cheers, murmurs, thuds, grunts,

and heavy breathing. We found a broken board, pried the crack wider apart, and peeked through. Two men, all but stripped on a platform circled round with rope, were brutally and furiously pommeling each other. Crowds of men surged about in seething excitement. We two little girls were glimpsing one of the historic fights between Con Orem and Hugh O'Neill. [39]

On St. Patrick's Day, whether 1864 or 1865 I cannot be certain, my parents took me to a dance. Candles in sconces stuck into the log walls of the cabin flickered softly over that long-ago festivity, leaving more shadows than lighted places. Out of the dimness of that far away memory, two forms emerge. A fiddler at one end of the crowded little cabin sat with knees crossed, tapping his foot to accentuate the rhythm of the quadrille, varsovienne, schottische, polka, minuet, waltz, jig, or whatever his nimble fingers were tearing or picking from the fiddle strings. Wreathing gracefully through every dance with first one and then another shadowy partner was a slender, beautiful, interesting woman in a tightwaisted black dress. Her black hair was smoothed back from her eager face and coiled softly low on her neck. A bit of spray broken from a cedar branch was tucked under the coil at one side and lying against the glossy black hair just above one delicate ear. She was "Mrs. Lyons," that was all I knew of her then and all that I have ever known. Though I was but twelve years old, or scarcely that, women and girls were so few that young men sought me for dances. While this flattered me, it made me more uncomfortable than happy, for I felt very young and very, very shy. I enjoyed sitting quietly watching "Mrs. Lyons."

News, only a little belated, of the assassination of Abraham Lincoln came in by Pony Express. The little girls who were my particular friends and playmates were all the children of Southern parents. They had reawakened in me all the prejudices that were mine because of my Kentucky birth and because of association with

my Missouri cousins. It pains me to recall what we did when we were told of Lincoln's death. The news reached Virginia City in April 1865. It was noon. We girls were in the schoolhouse eating our lunches, which we sometimes carried to school with us. The Southern girls, by far the majority, picked up their ankle-length skirts to their knees and jigged and hippity-hopped around and around the room. They cheered for the downfall of that great, good, simple man whom they had been taught to regard as the archenemy of the South. They believed him the first and last cause of any and every misfortune that had befallen their parents and driven them to seek new fortunes amid the hardships of a far western frontier. When my playmates called, "Come on, Mollie, come on join the dance; you're from Kentucky; you're a Southerner!" I did join half-heartedly, with a guilty feeling. At home that evening I told what we had done. My father was shocked.

"I am ashamed of you, Mollie," he said, "I am a Democrat, but I am first, last, and always for the Union and for Lincoln."

My last recollection of Virginia City is of a day atingle with motion, color, and music. People thronged the street in wagons or on horseback, or jostled each other on the boardwalks and footpaths to view the proud parade of July Fourth, 1865.[40] There was I, none more proud, riding with thirty-six other little white-clad girls in a "triumphal car" or "float" (a dead-ax wagon—a wagon without springs—bedecked with evergreen and bunting and drawn by eight mules). The tallest and fairest of us, her long blonde hair flowing over her shoulders and dressed in the traditional Grecian tunic corded in at the waist, stood in the center—Columbia! We sat in groups at her feet, the States of the Union, forming the prettiest "tableau vivant." On a blue scarf crossing the left shoulder and tied under the right arm, were the letters of the state each of us represented.

And therein, for me, was one of the two drops of bitter in the ointment. My scarf flashed the name Missouri! I thought it

essential to an adequate celebration of Virginia City's first Fourth of July that I should represent Kentucky, the state of my birth. The other bitter drop was the worry lest, after all, my hair (which I had worn done up for a night in the sufferance of rags) was too kinky and bushy. And so the memory of Alder Gulch breaks off, and again we were on the road with all our household possessions loaded in the wagons, trekking the hundred and twenty-five miles to a new home in Last Chance Gulch.

Last Chance Gulch

John Cowan and his party from Colorado discovered Last Chance Gulch, July 21, 1864.[41] They had prospected in vain for a long time and were about to give up when someone in the party suggested that they take a "last chance" there in the gulch. Pay dirt was struck, and thus the name given. The town was christened in September 1864, at a meeting called to organize the mining district. Suggestions of Pumpkinville, Squash Town, Tomahawk, Tomah, and so on, given with guffaws, threatened to split opinion and break down the dignity of the occasion. The chairman, John Somerville, according to local story, stood up and stated peremptorily that he belonged to the best country in the world and had lived in the best county, Scott, in that state, and the best town, Helena, in that county. "By the eternal," he said, "this town shall bear that name."[42]

A Deer Lodge correspondent for the *Rocky Mountain Gazette*, December 26, 1866, had this to say about conditions in the gulches:

> women, many of them young and good-looking, go about dressed up in men's clothes, wear short hair and have the swaggering gait of a gambler and a drunkard. Every camp abounds more or less with prostitutes; the coaches and hotels are full of them. In fact, the country abounds in sin and iniquity. Many young men just landed in the country with a few greenbacks

> in their pockets hang around these dens of vice until winter comes upon them and catches them out of money, hence they have a terrible time through the cold, bleak winter in this latitude.

A. K. McClure, who came to Last Chance Gulch on August 24, 1867, wrote:

> Helena has all the vim, recklessness, extravagance and jolly progress of a new camp. It is but little over two years old, but it boasts of a population of 7,500 and of more solid men, more capital, more handsome and well-filled stores, more fast boys and frail women, more substance and pretense, more virtue and vice, more preachers and groggeries, and more go-aheaditiveness generally than any other city in the mountain regions. It has gradually swelled beyond the narrow, crooked gulch to the tablelands, and many beautiful cottages adorn its suburbs.[43]

Amid these surroundings and unconscious of their danger, I grew to young womanhood.

How I loved Helena! I loved its setting, high in the hills of the valley of the Prickly Pear. I loved its narrow, crooked Main Street that followed the course of Last Chance Gulch a little way and broke off abruptly in a wilderness. I loved the cross streets that led up and down steep hills and ended suddenly against other steeper hillsides, in prospect holes, or in piles of tailings. It did not matter that the thoroughfares were trampled deep with dust or churned oozy with mud by long strings of mules, oxen, or horses drawing heavy wagons. I had known life only in towns that were thus, and for that reason I was unaware of the ugliness of the hastily constructed frame and log buildings with false fronts and rickety porches. I paid no attention to the inconvenient boardwalks at different levels and only occasionally continuous. I continued, as in Virginia City, to be neither curious about Helena's vices nor interested in their blatant demonstrations. The dry, light sparkling air of the place invigorated me and gave zest to living.

My father came into Last Chance Gulch in the spring of 1865 with flour and other supplies. The boom was waxing. He started a store that he put in charge of a man named Barker and procured a cabin on Clore Street. By late summer my stepmother, Kate, and I had settled there. I date our arrival in Helena by an outstanding and exotic incident. A pack train of camels was herded into the gulch.[44] My father took me to see them unloaded. I was given a strange wobbly ride on one of the strange creatures. The wonder of it was never to be forgotten.

I vividly remember our cabin home. I thought it quite cozy and comfortable. There was one large room which, according to my standards seemed very large, with a dirt floor covered with rawhides stretched over the ground and fastened down with wooden pegs. Later my father added a little lean-to kitchen with a board floor. This we covered with braided rag rugs my stepmother and I made. We hung calico partitions so as to divide the cabin into a sitting room, a bedroom for my father and stepmother, and a smaller bedroom for Kate and me. The sitting room was furnished with one rocking chair and several straight-back chairs. One was made from a barrel and covered with bright calico. A long mirror hung on one wall and there were one or two pictures. White muslin curtains were tied back from the three windows. Commanding the scene, more dominating even than the heating stove, was the "stand" covered with a bright-colored throw. Our kerosene lamp was in the center and grouped around it were books. We always had a prayer book and a little testament, selected plays of Shakespeare, and collected poems of Moore, Byron, and Scott.

We were no sooner settled than my father followed another stampede into Blackfoot, and in Blackfoot City he started another little store which he left in charge of hired help. He returned to Helena, where in the winter of 1865 or 1866 he built and stocked an icehouse, the first one in the city. In the spring of 1867, when

The Sheehans lived just up the block from the Pioneer Cabin in Helena, a typical dwelling from the mid-1860s that still stands today.
MONTANA HISTORICAL SOCIETY PHOTOGRAPH ARCHIVES

the boats came up the Missouri to Fort Benton, he sent his wagons and mules in charge of a man named Moore to freight supplies back to Helena. Moore did not return at the appointed time. Some other freighters or some passengers coming in from Fort Benton asked my father why he had sold some of his mules and wagons.

He went hastily on horseback to Fort Benton and found that Moore had sold some of his property to people in that vicinity and had gone down the river on the returning boat. After days of delay, my father followed on the next down-river boat. He did not find any trace of Moore, nor was he ever apprehended. My father was able to recover some of the stolen property, but financial difficulty beset him.

After he returned from his expedition in search of Moore, my father made preparations to go to Utah on a road-building contract with the Union Pacific Railroad. My stepmother remained in Helena with us children during the year and a half that my father was gone. He made money on this contract, but how much I do not know. When he returned to Helena, he found that Barker had sold out the entire supply of provisions in the little store and the icehouse but had no money to pay over. He found a similar state of affairs at the store in Blackfoot City. And so his venture in both places was concluded.

Meanwhile the busy stir of school occupied my life. For a short time the beloved Lettie Sloss was my teacher again in a little log schoolhouse clinging to the steep side of the gulch. The distinguishing memory of this school is that on Friday afternoons we had lessons in embroidering and that Miss Sloss directed my making of some pin cushions. An Irishman named Thomas A. Campbell, son of Alexander Campbell, the founder of the Christian Church was, I think, my next teacher.[45] I used to go see his wife. She told me that she spoke Gaelic. We were always planning that she would teach me the language, but we were also always postponing beginning, and so I never even had my first lesson.

Going to school I used to pass the office of the weekly *Rocky Mountain Gazette*, of which Peter Ronan was coeditor and owner with Major E. S. Wilkinson. Of course my father was a subscriber. I must have read the paper diligently, for when my little dog was

stolen I stopped one morning to ask Mr. Ronan if he could not help me find the dog by advertising for it in his paper. He always noticed me and spoke politely to me. Either I had chosen to overlook or had, for the time being, forgotten the Alder Gulch episode of the sluice box. The next issue of the *Gazette* carried among the locals a paragraph demanding that whoever had taken a certain little dog from a certain house on Clore Street should restore it at once to a young lady owner or expect to feel the heavy hand of justice. With what pride I read the paragraph and displayed it to my friends and acquaintances. The dog was never found, but that paper I treasured for nearly forty years.

Another day as I was passing his office, Mr. Ronan called, "Here's something for you, Mollie." It was a little "holy picture" of Pharoah's daughter discovering the infant hidden in the bulrushes. Pictures and picture books were rare in those days. I was delighted with the gift, and treasured that picture. I used it to illustrate the story of Moses for each of my own little ones again and again.

Hangman's Tree stood in Dry Gulch near the head of Wood Street, going south. One morning when we children came up from Last Chance Gulch to the crest of the hill, we saw the limp form of a man hanging with a rope around his neck from a branch of the tree. There the body continued to hang for three days as a warning to lawbreakers. During the days of this gruesome display and for a long time afterward we children were in a state of extreme nervous tension. All the distressing details were viewed and reviewed. The boys kept running down to the tree at recess and between sessions. There was talk of how the "bad man" had been aroused from sleep by the avengers, made to dress hurriedly, and taken out and hanged in the dead of night. No doubt the story was enlarged to include circumstances having to do with three recorded executions on Hangman's Tree: Jake Silvie, John Keene, and James Daniels.[46] I hated the talk. It made me shiver. I did not

want to know by what name he had gone in life—that dreadful, pitiful object, with bruised head, disarrayed vest and trousers, with boots so stiff, so worn, so wrinkled, so strangely the most poignant of all the gruesome details. I tried to forget, but I have never forgotten. I have heard the story told, but for its truth I will not vouch, that one over-zealous Sunday school teacher marched her class to the foot of the tree for a close-up view of this horrible example of the results of a wayward life, hoping by means of an object lesson to frighten her young charges into paths of righteousness.

As early as the summer of 1867 a circus came to Helena, heralded for weeks in advance. Horses were the only animals. Daring bareback riders, equestriennes, acrobats, tightrope walkers, and clowns performed. In chorus the company sang and a big darkie with a fine mellow voice rolled out the words of a foolish song:

> I feel, I feel, I feel so queer
> I can't tell what to do!
> My heart beats fast as she goes by
> In dark dress trimmed in blue.

So many interesting, worthwhile, beautiful things have slipped from my mind. Why should this insipid melody and these more insipid words remain so distinct?

Professor Stone and his brother opened a private school in August 1867, on Academy Hill not far above the first little Catholic Church where the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart was later built.[47] At one end of the long room Professor Stone taught us older children. At the opposite end his brother taught the primary grades. We sat in prim rows on long, rough benches. This was the largest and most interesting school I had ever attended. Professor Stone began a Latin class and I was a member. This gave me a feeling of great importance; I felt I was standing on the edge of real intellectual achievement! Most stimulating was the lesson each day in

Webster's school dictionary, with strange sounding words to spell and define. Before school closed each afternoon the older students would pronounce words; we would each in turn rise, repeat the word, spell it, and sit down. Sallie Davenport always spelled down the school.[48] One day Professor Stone's brother was conducting this drill. It was Raleigh Wilkinson's turn. Raleigh was the son of E. S. Wilkinson, Peter Ronan's partner in the *Rocky Mountain Gazette*. He misspelled the word.

"Try it again, Raleigh," said Mr. Stone.

"I don't think I can spell it," Raleigh replied.

"Well, try it," insisted Mr. Stone.

"I told you I don't think I can spell it," growled Raleigh.

Mr. Stone, himself young, large, and athletic looking, flushed angrily and repeated his command. "Well, try it, I tell you." Raleigh repeated his refusal. For several times more command and refusal were bandied back and forth in rising crescendo until a tempestuous climax came in an exchange of blows. Suddenly up jumped all the big boys and precipitated a melee. We girls fled from the schoolhouse to our homes. This free-for-all fight was the occasion of much talk among the patrons of the school for many days.

Professor Stone encouraged dramatic reading. One of my boy schoolmates and I practiced a dialogue, without any coaching, which we gave at a public "entertainment" in the schoolroom. Our stage was the little platform where the teacher had his desk. I was a Roman matron encouraging her husband:

"Have the walls ear? I wish they had and tongues, too, to bear witness to my oath and tell it to all Rome."

"Would you destroy?" my opposite intoned.

Fervently I picked up my cue, "Were I a thunderbolt! Rome's ship is rotten! Has she not cast you out?" The applause thrilled me and fired my ambition to be an actress. Professor Stone added fuel to the flame by complimenting me warmly.

I learned the part of Lady Anne in *Richard III*. I practiced at home in the little sitting room before the mirror, trying a variety of interpretations from mincing to flamboyant. My stepmother, who often admonished me for my vanity, became now positively alarmed for the salvation of my soul and forbade me to go on with the practices or to present at school what was to have been my "big performance."

My choice of parts and ideas about interpretation I got from attending the theatre. I saw the Langrishes in the Lady of Lyons. Couldock and his daughter, Eliza, played at the People's Theatre on Wood Street in the autumn of 1867. I was deeply impressed by them. Among what I suppose were the current dramas of the period, included in the repertoire of the Couldocks, I recall most distinctly *One Touch of Nature*. The plot had to do with the separation of a father and daughter, their trials and tribulations, and their final restoration to each other. Having a real father and daughter play these parts added "one touch of nature" so thrilling that I was set daydreaming.[49] I could see in the Couldocks an analogy to my father and me. I fancied the Sheehans, father and daughter, as actors. Better still, when my father was at home for any length of time we would sing all our old songs together, as grand opera stars! Needless to say I had never seen but had only heard of grand opera.

I did not go to the theatre often, but it was a great treat and long-to-be-remembered occasion when I did go. For me the play was the thing. Escorts who took me have remained but dimly in my memory. I should like to say that my parents thought it part of my education to attend the theatre, but I do not know that this was true. Perhaps I went because to attend the productions of classic drama was the thing to do.

On another occasion, my father took me to hear General Thomas Francis Meagher deliver his famous lecture on the Irish

Brigade; it stirred me and kindled my imagination.[50] The setting was that same shabby, tawdry little theatre on Wood Street. Either backstage or in a little cabin near the theatre, my father introduced me to General Meagher before the lecture. He was a gallant, most exciting person. He had the Irish gifts of beautiful speech, of laughter and tears. Ideas flowed from him picturesquely and dramatically. He often quoted poetry with richness of tone and accentuation of rhythm. I remember clearly, after the lapse of sixty-five years, how in the course of that lecture he quoted lines from "The Irish Emigrant." I thrilled to that. I knew the lines and sang them.

An event in our own family about this time was the birth of a baby boy. I do not remember the exact date because, as I have said before, birth dates were not kept in my father's family. We were all happy to have a son, but my father was especially delighted. I was allowed to name my little brother. I called him James for my father and Francis so that [he] might have the same middle name as General Meagher. According to signs and superstitions of the old country connected with the baby's birth, great things were predicted for him. Most significant of all these signs and wonders was the fact that he was born with a "veil" over his face. This bit of tissue my poor, dear little stepmother had mounted in some way and treasured all her life.[51]

Norma Ewing was my chum at Professor Stone's school. Her father, General R. C. Ewing, was a Kentucky gentleman and Confederate soldier. He was the first clerk and recorder of Lewis and Clark County, and Norma used to help out in his office. All the girls were clever. Ella, the eldest, had gone to school in the "states." When Professor Stone was called away from school on business or was ill, Ella would teach—even his Latin class. Birdie, another older sister of Norma's, was the society belle of those days in Helena. She was petite, gay, and coquettish with tiny tripping

feet and modish clothes. Her trousseau, when she married John McCormick, was a wonder and delight to all of us girls. None of us had ever seen anything so stylish or so elaborate as her Dolly Varden dresses.[52]

Florence Lamme used to come to school looking so pretty. She had beautiful dark red hair that her mother spent much time and care in arranging in the elaborate fashion of the period. Dr. A. Lamme soon moved to Bozeman with his family. Julia Lowry was a Southern girl. I thought her mother unusually refined and her home lovely. After a short time that friendship, too, was broken off, for Julia's father took his family back to St. Louis. Friendship, like everything else in a mining camp, was in a constant state of flux and change.

Raleigh Wilkinson, of whom I have already spoken, was among the boys at Professor Stone's school. Several tall young men from the mines and ranches attended in the wintertime. My first beau was Massena Bullard.[53] We called him Mattie. He was lame. It was said that his leg had been broken when he was immersed for baptism. The overture to this friendship came in his offer one day to carry my books home from school. I surrendered the books but was too shy to walk with Mattie, so I marched down one steep side of Broadway and he down the other, keeping directly opposite me. Later we braved the teasing of our friends and walked home together on the same side of the street, Mattie burdened with our combined stacks of books. Boy and girl natures don't change, not so much as language does. To have spoken of Massena Bullard as a "fellow" would have invited reproach and worse. Whatever fringe meaning of the word "fellow" had for my father I do not know, but it was a word he would not permit me to use.

Massena Bullard's family lived on a farm in the Little Prickly Pear Valley. Sometimes his mother invited me to visit. But the

first time I ever went with an escort was on a sleigh ride with Mattie. When I looked out the window and saw him coming, shyness possessed me. I ran into my room behind the calico partition. My father was standing in front of the mirror clipping his beard. He let his amusement be quite evident, yet he did succeed in reassuring me. Mattie and I had but started when—oh ignominy!—the sleigh tipped over into a ditch. My father came running to the rescue, helped to right the sleigh, brushed the snow from my cloak, and sent us jingling on our way. The horse was bedecked and bedight with sleigh bells and more sleigh bells. Mattie outdid himself to overcome the inauspicious beginning of our drive and make his horse pass every other one on the road. This incident I long tried to forget but could not because of my parents' jesting and teasing.

Sleighing parties and oyster suppers afterwards at the St. Louis Hotel or at someone's home were social diversions of the winter season. As usual in mining camps the male population greatly outnumbered the female. Girls blossomed quickly into young ladies, passed from the companionship of school boys, and began to be escorted about by men of mature years.

To one of these sleighing parties I went with Mr. Ronan. Coming down Broadway, the driver, to add thrills to thrills, purposefully and very skillfully tipped over the sleigh. Neil Howie, also an acquaintance, was my escort on another occasion.[54] We drove about singing such old songs as "Kathleen Mavournee," "Only a Lock of Her Hair," "We Met 'Twas in a Crowd," "Her Bright Smile Haunts Me Still," and "Then You'll Remember Me." This time we went to the home of one of the girls for supper. As we drew near the house, we sang and shouted as loud as we could. After supper we played drop the handkerchief. Soon we tired of that and gathered in a circle and sang more old songs without accompaniment.

Not only school boys but also men, some of them verging on middle age, made merry from morning to night coasting down

the steep hills of Helena. Down Broadway into Main was a favorite speedway. They vied with each other in the manufacture of sleds. Many of them were gaily painted and, after the manner of ships, displayed names. One was "The Bird" because it flew. Sometimes they were named for Helena's belles. This sort of compliment was extended, but the fun of coasting was denied to even little schoolgirls. Coasting was not ladylike. Only "tomboys," a term of deep reproach, did so. When the hilarity of the boys did tempt my girl companions and me to try the fun of sliding down hill, we retired to side streets far from the main thoroughfare.

One Christmas Eve, a group of us young people had brought evergreens to the church and had spent the afternoon decorating. When we started home, Charlie Curtis said, taking hold of a branch of one of the fir trees, "Get on, Mollie, and I'll coast you down Broadway!" I stepped on the thick branches. A young man on each side took me by the hand to steady me, Charlie pulled the tree down the steep incline, and home we went, gay, laughing, and shouting. For me, it was a breathtaking adventure!

During the pleasant weather from April sometimes through the month of November, we girls took long walks. We climbed Mount Helena. We trudged the miles of ups and downs to the hot springs, where the Broadwater Hotel was later built, to gather wild gooseberries. Fresh fruits and vegetables were only a little less rare than they had been in Alder Gulch. A little shack had been built over the springs and they were beginning to be somewhat of a resort.[55] Buggy and horseback riding were other summer pastimes. Alone, on my father's horse and always seated sideways on his saddle, I explored the hills and wooded canyons within easy riding distance from Last Chance Gulch. When young men took us girls riding they hired saddle horses, equipped with side saddles, at the livery stable. I remember one ride with Mr. Whitlach and many with Mr. Ronan.[56]

An Irish tailor made me a black alpaca riding habit. He took my measurements and made it without ever trying it on. It fit me perfectly. It was tight and small waisted with a long flowing skirt. I wore white cuffs and collar with this suit and a little black hat. I can never forget this tailor's sign. It was suspended in some way across the middle of the narrow street. Approaching from either direction one read in large letters:

The Tailor
E Pluribus Unum
Erin Go Bragh!

Among the ancient Romans, the assuming of the toga meant a young man's entrance upon manhood. So, in Helena in the sixties, did the wearing of a long dress have a somewhat similar significance for girls. I wore my first long dress to a private dancing party to which Mr. Ronan took me. This combination of events made the details of that dress memorable. The material was poplin with wide stripes of alternating red and brown. The low neck was square cut and the sleeves puffed out at the shoulders, fitted close down the arm, and were fastened around the wrist. The basque fit close and the skirt billowed out in ample folds to stiffly touch the floor. My family and friends remarked how tall and womanly I looked. I was five feet five and three-quarter inches, and slender, and I took thought to stand erect. My friend Lizzie Ryan and I had taken particular pains in dressing our hair alike for this occasion. It was rolled high on top of the head and held back with a fillet of white net so fastened that the loose ends of the net fluttered about the shoulders. We were conscious of creating an effect.

Lizzie Ryan's was a sad little story. An uncle, Jim Ryan, who was her guardian, brought her to Alder Gulch to live with his

cousin, Mrs. Henneberry. Lizzie was lonely and dissatisfied. On a short acquaintance, without the knowledge of her relatives, she married a young man who was said to be utterly worthless, a gambler, and so unsuccessful a one that his father had to support him. Immediately after the marriage the groom took the stagecoach for Helena to inform his father of the step he had taken. In spite of the protests of her guardian, Lizzie followed on the next coach. The young man's father and Lizzie's uncle set at once about having the marriage annulled. The young man went to California. Branded as a good-for-nothing by his own father, he nevertheless was successful, married again, and established a home in California. After a few years Lizzie married a printer named Morrison. She died while still young. I have the impression that the whole of her short life was unhappy. She admired Mr. Ronan. But of course she did, for he was everyone's favorite.

Peter Ronan was a handsome, dashing-looking young man of medium height and well proportioned. I have never since seen, not even in the son and daughter that resemble him, such flashing and expressive dark eyes. He had a straight, high-bridged nose, and delicate nostrils, and slender, shapely hands and feet. All his features suggested well bred and sensitive forebears. His hair was dark brown at the roots, shaded into the tawny of the sunburned miner and wayfarer. His mustache was dark auburn. I recall him at this period in a suit of brown broadcloth with cape (called a "talma") to match. Usually he wore a broad-brimmed tan hat and high-heeled boots. I cannot paint the picture. Still less can I do justice to his rich and radiant personality. He was full of gaiety, of fun, of mimicking. Every day some encounter yielded him another humorous story. He laughed much and he loved much. He was openhearted, openhanded, even too generous. Things of the mind appealed to him. There were spiritual depths to his nature for which I have no words.

Our love story, if so I am to speak, commenced quite simple. Mother Vincent, of the Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth, Kansas, who had indeed been a mother to Mr. Ronan before he came to Montana during the troublous days in Leavenworth, wrote to him asking about the prospect of starting a school in Helena. Mr. Ronan brought the letter to my father to read, thinking that it might interest him on account of his two little girls, Kate and me.[57] I answered Mr. Ronan's knock and admitted him to our little home on Clore Street. Often afterwards he told me that I wore such "a pretty little tunic." His attention was attracted first by that and then to the fact that I was no longer only an amusing little schoolgirl. From that evening Mr. Ronan was a frequent visitor in our home. He read poetry to me. We went about together to social affairs. He was my avowed lover.

When I was sixteen we were engaged, with the approval of my stepmother. Mr. Ronan gave me an engagement ring set with a cluster of three diamonds. As a double plighting of our troth, I took from my finger the ring wrought for me from the gold of the placer diggings of Alder Gulch and slipped it onto his little finger. All this came about during the time that my poor, dear father was working under contract with the Union Pacific Railroad, and during an interval between my brief periods of attending school.

My father owned a little frame house near our cabin that was standing unrented. Some of our neighbors suggested that I make use of it to open a school for their young children. I did. Tuition for each pupil was $1.25 a week. Fourteen or fifteen tots attended. Among them was a lovely little boy about seven years old, the child of J. Jules Germain, proprietor of the International Hotel. Mr. Germain was separated from his wife. She and their little boy were living at the St. Louis Hotel. One morning, after my school had been in session for several weeks, when I rang the bell for the children to come in from recess, little Jules Germain did not march

in with the other children. I looked out but did not see him. The children said that he had run down the street to the hotel to see his mother, as he sometimes did.

The noon hour passed. Mrs. Germain came asking for her child. She had not seen him since he left for school in the morning. She feared his father had taken him away. We questioned the children. They said that they had not seen Jules since they had played with him at recess. The mother went to the father. He had not seen the little boy. A search began. Near a prospect hole, half filled with water, a little distance from the school, a child found the little boy's cap. The hole was dragged and true enough, the little dead body was brought up. The funeral took place in the parlor of the St. Louis Hotel, and there I marched my little scholars, two by two. We stood in a group around the little casket and sang: "I want to be an angel and with the angels stand, / A crown upon my forehead and a harp within my hand." As I look back on it now I realize that the part my scholars and I took in the sad occasion was heartrending. I choked so that I could scarcely get through the song. I could hear the sobbing of the heartbroken mother and father and of their friends and mine. Over the dead body of their son, Germain and his wife were united. After this tragedy I did not have the heart to go on with my little school.

Of that which touches us most profoundly we can say the least, and so I have said nothing of the influence that religion had come more and more to have upon me. Tied up inextricably with the story of the establishment of the Catholic Church in Helena is not only my story and my family's, but also that of Peter Ronan. The old *Gazette* office on Ewing Street became the dwelling place of Helena's first parish priests. Then it sheltered the Sisters of Charity and later housed their boys' school. My family was present at the celebration of the first Mass on November 1, 1866, in the first little Catholic Church on the hill. One of our dearest friends and

Mr. Ronan's, John M. Sweeney, supervised the building, built partly with his own skillful hands. My dear father's name is signed to the historic document, the petition addressed to Father U. Grassi asking for the appointment of two priests to the Helena mission.[58]

I knew them well—Fathers Francis X. Kuppens, A. J. Vanzina, C. Imoda—better still Father Leo Van Gorp and best of all dear, dear, gentle little Father Jerome D'Aste. Each in turn was my confessor, my confidant, my adviser on concerns temporal as well as spiritual. Besides soul solace these men, reared amid an old-world culture, brought some of that worldliness, culture, and courtliness into our frontier settlement, where various and banal provincialisms, crudeness, and lawlessness combined to form our social background. Through their influence my soul and its needs became a major concern. Perhaps, in fact I am very sure that, this religious influence accounts for my growing up so oblivious of the viciousness that I realize now was flaunted on the streets of every mining camp in which I lived.

When I was attending Professor Stone's school I used to go to Father Grassi for help with difficult lessons, with my Latin and my compositions. Through Father D'Aste's interest I sang in the first Catholic choir in Helena. At one Christmas Mass I sang as a solo one verse of the "Adeste Fidelis." I remember a few of the members of that choir: Charlie Curtis had a fine baritone voice; Lizzie Ryan; a Mr. Smedley; three Germans; a woman and two men with splendid rich voices. A man named Clark played the organ and directed the choir. He was a quiet, gentle, ordinary appearing man who earned his living playing in saloons. He offered to teach me to play the organ. He was a married man. I was to go to his home for the lessons. To this plan my stepmother, who only occasionally opposed me in anything, absolutely objected.

Major and Mrs. Martin Maginnis were dear and close friends of mine all their lives. They were both intellectual, cultured, clever,

and distinctly different. The Major was witty and scintillating; Mrs. Maginnis was astonishingly frank, a kindly but keen observer upon life who expressed those observations with a dash of cynicism that was spicy rather than bitter. I thought their three-room home charming. Its interesting and unusual pictures and books, every detail of its furnishing, reflected the rare personalities of the owners. Many evenings I spent there in that delightful atmosphere. When I came alone the Major always ceremoniously escorted me home, down the hill to the bottom of the gulch. On Sunday evenings, although Mrs. Maginnis was not then a Catholic, she and the Major would go with me to vespers. I loved to sing in the choir and never willingly missed.

Hattie and Julia, the beautiful daughters of Charles Rumley, were friends of those yesterdays. Mr. and Mrs. Hugh Galen, their little daughter Nellie (Mrs. Thomas Carter), Mr. and Mrs. H. N. Holter, Mr. and Mrs. John Ming, Mr. and Mrs. H. N. Parchen, John Curtis, T. H. Kleinschmidt, Richard Lockey, A. J. and D. W. Fisk—their names, their faces, little incidents—all rush to mind. When I come upon the names of people in reading accounts of early days in Helena, I am surprised to find, young girl that I was, how wide were my acquaintances. C. W. Cannon once told me that when he first came to Last Chance Gulch my father gave him a couple bags of flour with which he started a bake shop. W. A. Clark, to select a name very widely known, often waited on me when he was engaged in the mercantile business in Helena. He was slender, sprightly, gave his customers prompt and courteous attention always. With such disconnected bits of memories I could fill volumes.[59]

My father returned from Utah in March 1869. What a storm of wrath broke. His little girl marry! Indeed not! She was too young! She was to go to school and learn something. I was commanded to return the engagement ring to Mr. Ronan and all his

other gifts. There was nothing else for me to do. I never questioned my father's authority. I never argued. I always obeyed.

Among these gifts was a precious copy of "The Lady of the Lake," the first poem that Mr. Ronan had read aloud to me, from that very volume. There was also a scrapbook, the scrapbook which I still have after more than sixty years, the old scrapbook which has yielded me so many reminders and much material for these wanderings through my yesterdays. When we became engaged, we planned to keep it together—the newspaperman's idea—clipping things we fancied such as sketches Mr. Ronan wrote, newspaper accounts of social affairs we attended together. Nothing had been entered when my father issued the stern command to break the engagement and to return the gifts. Before I gave back the scrapbook, I wrote in pencil on the inside of the cover:

To Peter Ronan—

Other skies may bend above you,
Other hearts may seek thy shrine,
But none other ere will love thee
With the constancy of mine.

Your friend,
Mollie Sheehan

I read the lines over and over again. I felt that I was being disloyal to my father and not entirely obedient. I erased the lines; the words showed faintly through the blur.

My father and Mr. Ronan had been friends since they had met on the stampede into Alder Gulch. The whole situation was unhappy and embarrassing. Considering everything, the closing of my father's stores in Helena and Blackfoot City, the fact that my stepmother had always wanted to go to California, and the fact that San Diego was said to be booming, it seemed the time for us to load the wagons and push on.

Among the things that I had given or loaned to Mr. Ronan, which he now returned to me, was a volume of Tom Moore's complete works, given to me by a good neighbor and friend, Andy O'Connell. He was a great admirer of Thomas Francis Meagher. After the General's tragic death, Mr. O'Connell came into possession of some of his hero's personal belongings. He wanted me to have one of the precious relics and so he had presented me with this volume, inscribed in Thomas Francis Meagher's handwriting with his own name. After Mr. Ronan had given it back to me, I found that he had marked passages with which to convey messages from him to me whenever I turned those pages, and they did. When my children had read that volume to tatters, years after their father's death, I saved one particular page and clipped from it the poem, "When Cold in the Earth." His pencilings made in that time long past speak now with exquisite sadness.

Shortly before we left Helena, on St. Patrick's Day, April 17, 1869, with my parents I attended a costume ball. I wore a white Swiss dress, with rows and rows of paper shamrocks glued on for trimming. On a wide green satin ribbon, arranged over the left shoulder and fastened at the waist on the right, were a gilded harp and shamrock. I wore a gilded crown on my head. Under this array was a heavy heart. With my father's permission, Mr. Ronan danced once with me. He still wore my little gold ring!

Our little house on Clore Street was emptied. We spent our last night in Helena at the St. Louis Hotel. Very early in the morning the family drove off in the covered wagon down the steep slope toward the valley. It had been arranged for me to overtake them in the afternoon. The gypsy instinct had slipped away with the things of childhood. I was heavyhearted at leaving the place, the friend, the one above all others that I loved. As I went back through the narrow hall of the hotel, after having seen my family off, I met Mr. Ronan. He said, "Goodbye, Mollie, and here is

your ring." As he held it out in the palm of his hand, the finality of this parting crushed me. "Keep it till I ask for it and goodbye," I barely whispered, and turned quickly into my room.

In the afternoon John M. Sweeney came for me, driving a spirited team hitched to a light buggy. As we neared the little church on the hill, he said, "Mollie, let us go in and say a little prayer for your safe journey and that all may turn out well and happily for you." He tied his team to the hitching post and we went into the church and knelt down, side by side, and prayed silently, simply, earnestly. John Sweeney was the best man I have ever known. A success financially, a man among men, he was deeply religious. He never lost the simplicity and faith of childhood.

We overtook my family in the valley where camp for the night had been made. Because I was taken up with my heartbreak, or because of memory's strange tricks, I recall no other incident of this journey. We stopped to visit Ellen and Bill Tiernan at their ranch in the Ruby Valley, about twenty miles from Virginia City. Ellen was expecting a baby and needed my stepmother's help. Carrie Crane, the Alder Gulch schoolgirl chum, was living on a ranch on Wisconsin Creek, a few miles away. We renewed our friendship. While we waited for the coming of the baby, I helped with the sewing for the event and with the housework. Bill Tiernan took me horseback riding. Carrie's friends invited me about to country dances. After a few weeks, the baby was born. We called her Elizabeth and I was her godmother. As a farewell for me Carrie Crane gave a quilting bee. Then the Sheehans were again trekking westward over tableland and hill and mountain pass and desert.[60]