

Lila heard shouts from the bend in the road behind the tailor's shop. Dust was flying up from over there and then around the bend galloped a man on a chestnut stallion, shouting "Gold! Gold! Gold from the American River!" He was holding in his right hand a glass vial with gold flakes inside. Lila rushed home to tell her father and mother, John and Sarah. But, by then everybody had heard the racket, and her little brother Garret ran into her yelling, "I want that!", and they both fell down. Ignoring Lila, he got back up and ran towards the horse. Lila's parents followed more slowly.

Mom was saying, "Why should ya' believe that! It could of just been a' yeller cloth in water."

"If it's in the newspaper in like'a month ana' half it just might be real," said Lila's father.

"Nonsense!"

"I'm going pannin' for gold in yon creeks if it is in that newspaper."

"I have no idea whatever has gotten into your head!"

By then the horse and the rider were farther down the road, and Lila ran along the trail of thick, choking dust the horse had kicked up to catch up to them. After walking about a quarter mile, she saw the chestnut horse tied to a post next to a pub called The Cat's Claw. She knew to stay away from that one, as her father said that people there love to throw stones at people first-time in, and drunk people had not a clue of what they were saying or doing. Disappointed, Lila ran into the shrubs behind the pub, and listened, ear to the mossy wall and heard:

"...goldish colored rock in the tailrace."

"Howd' he know that was gold?"

"He and Sutter did all the usual tests, pounding it with the hammer and biting it."

"What did Sutter do?"

"Jack said Marshall said he said to swear to keep it a secret."

"Lot's of saids, Sammy."

"Well, now I'm goin' on home and I'm goin' to set up shop to sell pickaxes and all those things."

One Month Later...

"It's probably still fake even though it's in your newspaper!" shouted mom.

"So?! I'm still going to pan for gold in that river. It's not like we're going to move," said father.

Then, he picked up his sack with his pan, food and water. Lila was starting out the door to go to school. She started to walk the half-mile with her friends, Anna and Jade. Jade had light brown hair and light green eyes. Anna had dark brown hair and brown eyes. Suddenly, Jade said, "Why don't we play hooky and go to Mossy Creek?"

"Why?", asked both Lila and Anna.

"To look for gold!", and her eyes got real big.

"That guy was probably lying," remarked Anna.

"So? Wouldn't you regret staying at school when I found a giant golden nugget? I definitely wouldn't share!"

Jade was good at persuading people, and Lila and Anna agreed to come. They ran behind the restaurant called Green Hills Buffet, and into the coyote bushes behind it.

"Now I've ripped my skirt!", complained Anna.

"Well, I have too. But a big nugget is worth this twenty times over!" said Lila.

Finally, they came out into a very small clearing where soft grass and moss blanketed the ground. In the middle, there was a clear stream about four feet wide and five feet deep.

Redwood Sorrel covered its banks. At the far side of the clearing, a Redwood forest began, and a squirrel was peeling a pinecone on a rotting log.

"Where do we start?", asked Lila, taking off her shoes.