Trudy's Threat

The River Valley Adventures, Book 3

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TWEEN HISTORICAL FICTION/AMERICAN CIVIL WAR

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Dedicated to the Underground Railroad

Tact is the ability to describe

others as they see themselves.

• Abraham Lincoln •

PREFACE

The "Heathen"

Polly Andrews had said "hello" to the Indian boy and was now eager to show her cousin's wife her *prisoner* Dick Lang even though he did just pass up a rare opportunity to get a pair of new boots. But Dick hadn't wanted a *dead* man's shoes, he said.

Then Dick told her that carrying her doll around meant that she was going to be a good mother (after he had criticized her for bringing Lillie into town with them). Polly is pleased…for the moment.

Then she grows impatient because the customers kept coming and coming. Finally, she sees the empty

counter and drags Dick to meet Phyllis and find out if the Indian boy is a heathen or not.

Polly has always known Mrs. Mills for "stretching the truth" (or, making up things for drama sake), but she wants to be for *sure*. The little Indian boy may be just a *tiny bit* heathen.

Does her cousin's wife, Phyllis, *really know* herself?

CHAPTER 1

Wren

"My, my--busy, busy!" Polly Andrews complained to Dick Lang with a scowl as her cousin's wife, Phyllis Andrews, waited on her tenth customer since their being there.

Polly *had* been able to introduce Dick to her, but hardly more had been said.

"That just means she's got a good bakery here." Dick noted, trying to smooth Polly's ruffled feathers because she hadn't been able to ask about Phyllis' new hired boy who Mrs. Mills had said was a heathen.

Polly had caught a glimpse of him as he picked

up his orders to deliver and even had said hello to him, but she didn't know if he was a "real heathen" or not.

"I know," Polly stopped bouncing on her toes, a thing she was doing out of impatience. "But…"

Suddenly, Polly's blue eyes lit up because that *tenth* customer had just left.

"Phyllis!" Polly said in a whisper but in a hurried voice. "Who's your new delivery boy since," here Polly screwed up her nose, "you-know-who broke his fat paw?"

"Polly," Phyllis shook her head but not without a smile.

Polly chuckled. "Sorry. I didn't mean fat paw. But, who is your new boy then? Anyone I know?"

Polly knew the tactics to get the right answers out of people. Just a little play of ignorance combined with a little questioning were her best remedies.

"No, I don't believe you know him--well, that

is." Phyllis began.

Polly perked up her ears and cocked her head to the listening mode, meanwhile feeling Dick's eyes on her. He knew she was just *dying* for this information.

"He just started coming to our church, you probably know," Phyllis then continued after Polly shook her head 'no' which meant she hadn't known the boy was going to their church. "His name is Wren and he's a Wyandotte. He lives with his mother and the little baby boy his mother took in even though they're as poor as homemade sap."

Polly's eyes bugged in surprise. *Took in a baby even when she is really poor? She must be one good woman.*

Polly hurried to listen to what Phyllis was now saying, "…Gardner broke his wrist so I decided to hire Wren. He doesn't want money so I give him food, and plenty of it too. He's such a sweet boy."

Polly nodded distractedly, in deep thoughts. *There must be some way to help them, too. What if*

I...? Her thoughts were interrupted when another customer walked in and she had to step away to let her stand at the counter.

Dick tugged Polly's sleeve and said in a whisper, "Let's go."

As if by instinct Polly's head turned in the direction of the other door that opened directly onto River Street. There was Mrs. Mills, getting ready to step into the bakery. Waving a goodbye at absorbed Phyllis but who returned their wave Polly and Dick practically fled the bakery by way of the corner propped open door.

They exited the bakery none too soon for as they were hurrying down the steps they heard Mrs. Mills exclaim, "Well, well, Phyllis. Wherever are my loaves of bread I ordered at 12 o'clock sharp? Is that Injun boy of yours shirking his duty? Really, Phyllis, can we truly trust *them things*?"

Dick stopped at the street, turning around to face the bakery with tight lips. Polly heard him take

a deep breath as he stood there, frowning.

“Don’t take it out on the boy, Mrs. Mills.” Phyllis was answering the lady. “I had a lot of orders and so did he.”

“Let’s go.” Polly tugged at Dick’s sleeve, wanting to hurry out of the angry Mrs. Mills’ ranting for a *male*--though so young--had to do with this mistake.

Polly began walking down the street with short, fast steps. Dick followed silently.

“We almost didn’t make it!” groaned Polly, slowing down to walk alongside Dick who was not saying a word.

CHAPTER 2

Trudy Threatens

"Almost." Dick gritted his jaws. A pause.

"We sure got our ears full, didn't we?" Polly piped up, wanting to break the icy silence.

"Yeah," Dick agreed. "Again."

Another pause. Then Dick asked in a half-reproach, "You don't think people are trash just because they're Indian, do you? Like Mrs. Mills?"

"Of course not!" Polly stopped in the middle of the road they had just turned on. "I'm not prejudice, that's why. I love everyone, no matter what color they are. And I feel sorry for the poor slaves in the

South right now."

"Me, too." Dick looked straight at Polly. "I never gave the slave-issue a thought till right now. They *should* be free, all man, all colors, all stations no matter who you are."

"Whether you're a king or a pauper, it shouldn't make a difference," Polly agreed, walking again.

"What we should determine," Dick said thoughtfully, "is not what people are, but to what extent that person makes their self to be who they are."

"Like this," Polly cocked her head, and gave her theory, "would you rather have a big pretty horse with a broken leg to pull your wagon, or a little ugly donkey with stout legs? I'd choose the little ugly donkey for it's his legs that'll pull my wagon."

"You're right." Dick nodded. "Give me the little ugly donkey as well."

They walked along in compatible silence.

♦ ♦ ♦

"Dishes, dishes, dishes," Polly sang out later that evening, "always staring you in the face!"

"I didn't know dishes had faces," Dick slowly dried a plate with the hand towel.

"Well, *these* do." Polly held a plate between two soapy hands. "Just look at it--says, Wash me good or I will taste awful when you eat on me later. See?"

"Yeah," Dick laughed and took another plate from the rinse-sink. "You've got *one* imagination."

"I'd say I had two if I had one," Polly scrubbed away with a smile. "You see, when I get tired of the one I go to the second. That way, I'm *full* of imagination. I don't easily tire of life, you know. Some girls do that, sob their life out if they can't get what they want. I just *endure*."

Dick paused midway in drying, "I think I'll try that 'two imagination theory'. Sounds like a plan. How do you begin?"

"Well," Polly cocked her head to one side. "All you gotta do is--*think*. I dream fun stuff, you know, like swooping through the air with my imaginary wings. Uh, that is, on my windier moments. When I'm earthly, I act out heroic deeds and grand adventures. Sound easy?"

"Not entirely *easy* but," Dick grinned and continued drying the plates, "easy enough when I've got a pretty tough captain for teacher."

"Did you mean the two words together," Polly asked in the most soberest voice, "or was there a *comma* in there?"

"Comma?" Dick knitted his brows. "Where?"

"Why, between the 'pretty' and 'tough', of course." Polly frowned quite seriously. "I am a girl, you know, in case you forgot. I like compliments. They rather give me a good feeling inside, you know."

"Alright," Dick drawled out, "I suppose I meant pretty, comma, tough captain then."

"I suppose I will make those cookies you asked me to now," Polly looked at Dick with a slight smile, "but don't you call me 'captain' in front of Uncle Pierre again. It makes me feel perfectly *horrible*."

"Oh, alright then." Dick agreed. "I'll not say it if you don't call me 'prisoner' in front of him either. Okay?"

"Okay." Polly nodded in truce.

♦ ♦ ♦

Polly was just taking out the last batch of sugar cookies when Trudy Mills came barging into the kitchen, all flushed and fuming. When Polly saw who it was, she groaned. Trudy was in a hopping mad state, she could tell. *Brother! What is it this time? I haven't done or said a single thing--that I know of.*

Polly smiled quite cheerfully and said in the most bright voice she could muster up, "Hello, Trudy. I hope you're feeling well."

Trudy ignored the statement and came straight to the reason of her visit, “That dirty old heathen never showed up till fifteen minutes passed noon,” she began with a growl. “I don’t know what to think of Phyllis Andrews now! I always thought she was a refined lady--but now she’s just plain *mad*. Hiring a dirty old *heathen*? I’m sure you agree with me, Polly. You always do in *these* matters.”

“Well, this time I don’t, Trudy Mills!” Polly said stoutly, setting her cookie sheet down on the counter with a slight rattle. “That Wren-boy is not a heathen and my cousin Phyllis is *not* mad, so there!”

“Meek as a kitten, are we, Polly Andrews?” Trudy said with shocked eyes. “Can it be that you’re sliding off your rocker having that dirty old *rebel* in your house?”

CHAPTER 3

Cookies

"Gertrude Mills!" Polly placed both hands on her hips with narrowed eyes. "Straight out that back door where you came from until you have the decency to not meddle with other people's lives. Shoo, out you go!"

Trudy gave Polly her meanest face. "You'll be sorry, Polly Andrews. Just you wait and see."

Trudy stormed out of the kitchen with stomping steps and Polly sighed with relief behind. Trudy was gone. But, a little shock jerked her pounding heart, what had Trudy just said? She would be sorry? How?

Polly stared thoughtfully as she scooped the cookies from the cookie sheet and onto the platter with the rest of their cookie-fellows.

“Can a dirty old rebel have a cookie now?” Dick asked from behind, having heard the whole uproar.

Polly slightly jumped at his voice, and nodded absently, “Yes. As much as you’d like.”

Dick filled himself a glass of milk and began piling a saucer full of cookies. As he sat there at the kitchen table, munching on cookies and milk, he glanced up to find Polly still standing there by the counter and thoughtfully staring.

“Not scared of silly old Trudy, are you?” Dick asked, breaking her out of her horrific reverie for she was at that moment imagining a gun shooting and she falling to the ground, dead.

Polly shuddered and shook her thoughts back. “I-I guess. Anyhow, my imagination is almost there,” she smiled sheepishly, “I was just picturing myself

laying flat on the ground with a bloody bullet wound, shot dead."

"Cheerful thought," Dick took another bite of his cookie.

Polly filled herself a glass of milk and then brought the whole platter of cookies over to the table, and sat down.

"You don't suppose anything like that will happen, do you?" Polly asked frightfully, knitting her brows. "She said I'd be sorry. And how more sorrier is *shot dead*?"

"I don't think Trudy Mills is a murder candidate, Polly." Dick grinned. "Stop your worrying over the silliest things."

"But one thing they do say," Polly shook her head in a wise-way, "you never really can be sure of a murder candidate until you're dead. *Shot dead*."

Dick broke into a laugh, shaking his head. Polly was apt to say *anything* that came into her head…and, mind you, there was plenty *there*, too.

"I don't think it's very proper for a prisoner of my household to laugh at me in such a way," Polly said in her most dignified voice. "It's *appalling*."

"Sorry, captain." Dick toned his laugh into a grin that simply wouldn't erase off his face. "I'm taking lessons right now. The 'two imagination theory', you know."

Polly then smiled. "You're getting it. Keep learning, Dick, and you'll soon get the hang of it."

"Just as long as I don't picture myself *shot dead* in the middle of the night," Dick laughed. "Then I'll really be in trouble. I'll be scared stiff, girl!"

Now it was Polly's turn to laugh which she did with a burst of giggles. Imagining Dick *imagining* himself shot dead in the middle of the night and getting scared stiff over it struck her funny. A big boy like Dick diving under his covers and covering his head with his pillow?

"Good cookies, by the way," Dick smiled as Polly's giggling toned down.

"Thanks," Polly said without a trace of her previous frightfulness. "I was just imagining you diving under the covers and hiding your head with your pillow when *you* were imagining yourself shot dead."

CHAPTER 4

Grand-pa

"What!" Dick almost yelled, his mouth falling open. "Me--with my covers over my head?"

"Sure." Polly shrugged comically. "I do that every time it storms. That way, no lightning can strike me--as quick, anyways."

"Lightning can't strike you *in* the house," Dick explained with a know-it-all air. "It's just when you're outside, that's the thing."

"Well, whether you're right or not, listen," Polly stated firmly. "I heard a story once about a man laying in bed with his window open the tiniest

crack and his foot was out of the covers and--zap. Lightning struck him and he hasn't walked since!"

"Whew!" Dick raised his black eyebrows below his shaggy black hair. "I'd say Mrs. Mills told that one. Didn't she?"

"She did but," Polly nodded once for emphasis, "it's *true*. My uncle Pierre met the man after, and he's *still not walking*."

"Well, don't leave windows open even the tiniest crack when it storms then," Dick grinned. "You'll be alright."

"Wait till you go through a River Valley thunderstorm and you're gonna be shaking in your boots, boy!" Polly flattened her palms against the table before her and raised her brows. "*Then* tell me if you pull your covers over your head or not."

"Alright, I will." Dick nodded with a chuckle. "And I'll be telling you I *didn't*."

"We'll see." Polly stood up and pointed towards the living room. "I think it's time for Bible reading.

I'm getting sleepy."

"Me, too." Dick stood up and put his glass and saucer in the sink. "You never have sent me to work outside yet."

"You've just gotten well enough today," Polly responded. "Wait till tomorrow. Then begins the real work, prisoner!"

"I'm in utter anticipation!" said Dick in a groan.

"It's not that bad, silly boy." Polly smiled. "You *will* feed the chickens 'cause I can't stand the smell of them. Please?"

"Okay, the chickens." Dick grinned, and started towards the living room. "What else?"

"I don't know yet. But the chickens," Polly screwed up her nose. "Combine their smell and the possibility of a rooster's spurring--you've got *one* job."

"I've dealt with chickens before," Dick paused and threw his hand out for her to pass him at the doorway. "Age before beauty, ma'am."

"Beauty before age, you mean," Polly grinned. "I *am* younger than you, you know."

"That's what I meant," Dick slightly frowned. "I'm always saying the perfect opposite of what I mean."

"Well then let's hope you don't ask anyone to marry you--on accident." Polly said chirpily. "What if they say yes, and you're a goner?"

Dick laughed and shrugged. "And I'll probably say 'Will you die with me?' instead of 'Will you marry me?' My luck, you know."

Polly shook her head. "Then you'll just have to learn carefully not to voice the fatal question before you mean it."

"The fatal question? What's that?"

"Why, 'Will you marry me?', of course." Polly looked up at him with round blue eyes. "It is deadly when you get caught up with the wrong answerer or the wrong questioner. I always say."

"Fatal question," Dick mused aloud, nodding

slowly. “I’ll have to remember that. And what if the deadly answerer is not deadly?”

“Then she just won’t be the deadly answerer, of course.” Polly smiled and cocked her head with a dramatic expression filling her entire face. “Stick around me and you’ll be wiser than a serpent and gentler than a dove.”

♦ ♦ ♦

“I always cover my nose,” Polly shouted over to Dick the next day as she was pumping the water pump briskly and watching Dick spray out the chicken feed with wide strokes. “That way I don’t smell it.”

“Maybe that’s why you hate the job,” Dick called back, throwing the feed. “Takes longer that way. Besides, if you throw it a long ways out the *rooster* is not likely to spur you.”

“But you’ve got longer arms than me,” she returned with a pout, finishing filling up the bucket

of water to pour into the large kettle boiling nearby for Mama to wash the clothes. “I don’t.”

“Eat more,” Dick laughed out, remembering the tall-glass-story. “Like me.”

“Grandma Polly!” girls’ voices taunted from behind a blackberry bush. “Grandma wants a Grand--pa!”

CHAPTER 5

The Storm

"Trudy Mills!" Polly felt water splashing all over her dress front from where her pail dropped from the pump. "Get!"

"We won't get. We want to see Grand-pa feeding the chickens!"

A giggle behind the bushes confirmed that they were enjoying their joke. Polly fumed. She was *not* a grandma and Dick was certainly *not* her grandpa husband. He was seventeen and she was only eleven. Absurd!

"Good girl." Dick set the empty pail of cracked

corn down to wash his hands.

Polly's blue eyes snapped up at him.

"You didn't scalp them." He nodded towards the retreating girls skipping back into town.

Polly huffed a deep breath and a smile emerged under her frown. "Thank you."

♦ ♦ ♦

Several nights later, Polly lay under her soft covers thinking about how life had become. She no longer had the stinky chickens to feed or had a backache hauling in the firewood to feed the cook stove. Dick did all of that. *I'm glad I found him, my prisoner.* Then she closed her eyes and began to drift to sleep.

But just as her eyes drooped heavily, the thunder began. Then lightning. And then her glass windows rattled and she bolted upright. A moment later, Mama came into her doorway with a lantern and a shawl over her.

"Dear, a storm's coming."

"I hear it." Polly's voice rattled as she shivered. She blinked away the thought of her laying flat on the floor, struck dead with lightning. "Is it bad?"

"Yes. Uncle Pierre is waking Dick. We have to go to the cellar. Bring a blanket."

Polly wearily picked herself up out of bed and pulled the blanket over her. It would be a long night. As usual. Thunderstorms were unpredictable things. Once, their roof had come off from strong winds. She felt her pigtail braids pull under her blanket as she followed Mama out of the room.

They met Uncle Pierre and Dick on the landing. Dick's eyes were all saucers and Polly had an urge to laugh. But she didn't.

"You look scared." The words popped out of her mouth as she sat on the hard wood floor of the cellar.

"I just woke up." Dick blinked widely. He sat inside his blanket cross-legged, like an Indian. "Are

you scared?"

"Yes. I always am." Polly bobbed her messy braids and tried to think of something else other than the storm. But that was hardly possible. A loud *CRRRCK* sounded nearby.

Dick's head snapped up and he looked around wildly. "It wasn't the shed, was it?"

"Let's pray." Uncle Pierre bowed his head and Polly felt her heart pumping away.

The next thing she knew, she was opening her eyes in her bed. She hopped out of bed with a start. Sunshine was pouring through her windows. Outside, there were small branches covering the yard. *So the storm did happen*, Polly brushed her hair and braided it. *I didn't just dream it*. She skipped down the steps and met Dick coming up. He stopped and smiled.

"I was just coming to tell you that breakfast is ready and you're *late*!"

"Late for what?" Polly pushed past him, feeling a little curiosity drive her yawn away. "I didn't miss

breakfast so I'm *not*!"

Dick grinned. Instantly, Polly had a *feeling*. "What did I miss?"

"Nothing."

"Oh please, tell me!"

"Guess what the storm blew in?"

"More chickens." Polly groaned. After a storm--a bad storm like last night--things always blew in. Neighbors trash, frogs and horrible things like that. "Answer me."

Dick shook his head and then steered her towards the kitchen. A woman's voice was talking to her mother. Polly yanked onto Dick's arm that was pushing her. "Don't tell me it's Mrs. Mills. I didn't say anything terrible to Trudy and you know it."

"It's not stuffy old Mrs. Mills." Dick pushed her the rest of the way and Polly had no choice but to smile pleasantly as she entered the kitchen.

A medium-framed woman was frying ham on the skillet with a large handkerchief tied around her

head. She gave Polly a smile as Mama introduced her.

"Polly, this is Jemima. And Jemima, this is my daughter Polly."

"Pleased to meet you, Mrs. Jemima." Polly started to curtsy as was the proper thing to do but the woman called Jemima wrapped her up in a hug with her brown arms.

"Just call me Aunt Jemima." Jemima bustled back to the stove. "Your mama says I stay here with yous."

Polly gulped and her eyes gaped. "Did the storm really blow you in?"

"Just say the good Lord blew me in." Jemima smiled and flipped the large, sizzling ham. "I was a slave. Now I'm free."

"Go wash your face, Polly." Mama told her with a little hug and handed her a towel. "But be quick. It's almost time to eat."

Polly ran out the kitchen door to the pump. As

she washed the sleepy from her eyes, she noticed a tree split in two. “Dick!”

CHAPTER 6

Patsy

Dick looked up from his perch on the kitchen steps. "I know. That's what we heard last night. Your uncle Pierre and I are going to cut it up after breakfast."

"Can I help?" Polly dried her face.

Dick smirked. "Can you really use an axe?"

"I can always *try*." Polly flashed a grin and skipped back to the house.

As they settled into breakfast, the roll of buggy wheels caught Polly's attention. At once, she knew whose buggy it was by the certain *roll* and *stop*.

"Nana and Grandpapa!" she gulped her milk

down excitedly and knocked her chair over as she stood up. She glanced back at it. “Oh, I’ll stand you up when I get back.”

She flung the front door open and hopped from the porch without taking the three steps. There they were--Nana and Grandpapa Boone with Cousin Patsy. She met them with hugs and chattering. She dragged them into the bright, sunny kitchen where Jemima was bringing three extra plates, forks and glasses on the table.

Patsy was still shy around Dick and Polly didn’t know why. When they had met at the little chapel halfway between Corydon and Leavenworth for a cousin’s dedication, Patsy had been totally silent. Dick had confided to Polly that he thought Patsy was afraid of him, since he was a Rebel.

“So, how is everything?” Grandpapa looked out of the kitchen window at the big tree that was spilt in the middle.

“We almost died.” Polly answered with a flat

voice. She always loved *drama*. “Did all your cows stay alive?”

“Yes, all of them.” Grandpapa’s eyes had a twinkle to them. “Even the old bull you’re scared of.”

Polly made a face. “If only…” She stopped and put on a silly grin. “Well, can we take a look around town after breakfast?”

“Why?” Dick frowned thoughtfully. He took another gulp of milk and sat back.

“Because I want to see if anybody died in the storm.” Polly said quite cheerful and drank the last drops of her milk.

She noticed her cousin Patsy blinking and staring at her food solemnly. “Eat up, Patsy! You don’t have to look at the dead people, if you don’t want.”

“Polly.” Mama shook her head and stood up to collect the dirty dishes. She gave her mother a smile. “I’ll stay with you if--”

“No, I’d like to go myself.” Nana smiled in spite

of the solemn occasion. “I’d like to catch up on the townsfolk.”

Polly swung her feet under the table and knocked them into Uncle Pierre. She made a cringe and planted her feet onto the floor. “No, Uncle Pierre,” she giggled. “I’m not asking to court you.”

Dick almost choked on his spit as he sputtered.

“What did--!”

“A Danish girl told me before,” Polly said importantly, “that in her country if a man kicks a girl’s feet under the table he’s asking to court her.”

She cleared her throat and sat back, feeling quite globally informed. She glanced at Patsy blinking once again. *How odd. She must like Dick…but Dick’s my prisoner, she can’t! Ah, yes…* “We can bring Wren and his mother some more food!”

“What a good thoughtful li’l girl, ma’am,” Jemima nodded to Mama and Polly only grinned.

She wanted to see the "heathen" again and play with the bubbly baby with the big brown eyes. She glanced at Patsy. "You'd like meeting Wren and his mother and his baby brother. *He's* a dear!"

"Wren, hmm?" Dick leaned up on his elbows and grinned. He shook his head. "Six years young, my, my!"

"Hush up, Mr. *Prisoner*." Polly gave him a frown. "Now, let's go. I'm ready!"

"Me too." Grandpapa stood up and gave Polly a tussle on her blond braids. "A chip off the old Boone block."

Polly smiled and felt pleased. Grandpapa always gave the best compliments and made you feel good. And Nana always made you want to laugh with all of her funny tales.

"Well!" Polly huffed as she plopped down on the sofa

on a cloudy June afternoon.

"What's wrong now, Captain Polly?" Dick pulled his nose from her history book to raise one eyebrow. His smirk was mild.

"Trudy was awful today. Again." A pause. She turned a fierce expression to him. "She's saying *more* horrible things."

"Like what?"

"She *likes* a gambler who stopped into town from the ferry and…" another pause.

"Yeah--and?"

"And…she said people were losing things. I mean, somebody is stealing peoples things." She gulped.

There. She had said it. Now Dick would get her meaning. Trudy had said *Dick* was the one stealing so he could sell it in another town and go home to Tennessee. *True, he does want to go back to his home,* she bit onto her lip. *But would he steal to do that? Dick's not a criminal even if he is my prisoner. I've tamed him…or, I think I have.*

CHAPTER 7

Gambler Spy

"Don't tell me you believe *I'm* the one stealing?" Dick bolted upright on the rocking chair. Her history book clattered from his hands and he bent down to pick it up. "I mean…after all this time, I--"

Polly held up her hands for silence. "No, I didn't say you did. I only said *Trudy* said it."

Dick blinked in reply.

"I only told you because…well, Trudy is threatening to ruin you. That's what!"

"How?" Dick rolled his eyes and sank back into the rocker, rolling back and forth.

"People believe her, she says."

Dick bolted upright again, his eyes wide with fear. "They do? Who?"

"She said they did, I don't know who. But it's horrible." Polly made a wry face. "They might lock you up if they have enough things stolen. Oh Dick!" she ended in a wail.

"Don't 'oh Dick' me, Polly." Dick closed his eyes and locked his fingers behind his head. "Let me think."

Her eyes suddenly bugged in horror and she gulped again. "Don't leave, Dick. Please. Not until Paul comes back. I don't want to feed the chickens!"

"So, you'd rather me go to prison than to feed the chickens, hmm?"

"No." The word dragged out and she found herself making a wish. A good wish. Only she wouldn't wish it aloud. She put on a cheerful smile. "I know--"

The tone sounded too bright for sober Dick. He eyed her sideways and made a groan. "Please no, Polly. We don't need the Home Guard on us *both*!"

"The gambler is stealing!" Polly stood up to pace the floor like a real detective. "He already is doing something illegal so why shouldn't he *steal*? And Trudy wants to get even with *me* so that's why she's doing it."

"Doing what?"

"She's trying to cheat me out of a--" an impish grin replaced her stern expression.

"A *prisoner*." Dick laughed and flipped through the pages of her history book once again. "Girls!"

"You're saying that in a scornful tone. Why?" She looked nettled.

"Calm your feathers, Polly." Dick stood up and stretched. The bullet in his arm was a thing of the past--now nicely healed.

"Where you going?"

"You sound as bad as I did when I first came

here."

"I mean, can I come too?" Polly flung her right out towards the sofa where her doll smiled flatly with her painted smile. "I'm even leaving Lillie behind. Aren't you glad?"

"Yes." Dick bugged his eyes out. Then he grabbed one of her pigtail braids. "Come along, *Captain* Polly."

"Bossy." Polly grumbled under breath and followed Dick's long strides. But she knew an adventure was waiting on the other end of the walk. As always.

♦ ♦ ♦

They rounded the street where the river met Main Street, where Phyllis' bakery sat on two corners. The big ferry looked busy as usual, even in this penny-pinching wartime. Mostly, Southern traders came in search of their lost "property" (which they called

their slaves). But once they arrived, they had to return South empty-handed.

"I think the gambler is a spy!" Polly tugged on Dick's sleeve and he glanced down with a curt nod.

"I'm not though!" he hissed lowly. His eyes roamed the area, searching for clues.

"I'm hungry." Polly said suddenly.

Dick shrugged. "Nice. Just when we don't have any money on us."

"I'll put it on our charge with Phyllis." Polly smiled and headed in the direction of the propped-open orange-and-white door. "I always do. So, what do you want?"

When they entered the bakery, a man with a little sleek mustache was sitting on a round table by the windows. He looked up at them and Polly shivered. He had a wicked look about him--something she could not explain. She stiffened and tried to smile at Phyllis who waited behind the counter.

They grabbed a half-moon apple pie and chilled bottle of lemonade apiece, and then walked to sit on the riverbank to watch the dock and the ferry sliding across the river. Dockmen shouted and Polly tried not to listen too carefully so she wouldn't have to hear their swearing. It *was* such a hot day.

They sat in companionable silence.

"I still think it's *him*." Polly declared between a bite. She glanced up, chirpily. "Well, don't you think so?"

"We can't be for sure…" Dick stalled.

Polly sat up ramrod straight. "If it's not *him*, then who could it possibly be? You?"

CHAPTER 8

Stolen

Dick sank his eyes into the swirling waters, glumly. Polly took a deep breath and stood up. “It’s hot. Let’s go.”

They walked all the way home in silence. When they entered the hallway, she ventured a penitent smile. “Sorry. But don’t you believe *me*?”

“Yeah.” Dick rammed his knuckles on the wall. “But we have to be for *certain*.”

“I wouldn’t make a very good judge, would I?” Polly giggled and found Mrs. Mills staring at her with her *precious* Trudy at her side.

"Yes ma'am?" Polly looked into Mrs. Mills' furious face. *What now?* She plastered a smile and offered them refreshment.

"Thank you, but no." Mrs. Mills gave Dick a cold stare and turned back to Polly. "Where's your mother? I need to speak to her."

Trudy kept her head held high as Polly and Dick sat in the kitchen with her. Mama had gotten home from the button factory and was now talking to Mrs. Mills in low tones in the living room. Polly cleared her throat.

"Do you want a cookie?"

"No!" Trudy sent a scowl in Dick's direction. "Not when *he's* been in the house. There's no telling what type of germs he's brought in."

Dick politely turned his head and bit his tongue. Polly boiled inside and was on the verge of eruption when Mrs. Mills briskly came to collect Trudy. They left in a whirl.

"Thank goodness!" Polly stared at the air where

they had gone. "I'd probably be having to *apologize again* if they hadn't left."

Dick blew out his breath. "Me too. Only there's no telling what type of apology I'd have to be making now." He made a face.

"I know which type. In jail." Polly had a triumphant grin. "And I'd be there, too."

"You don't really think…" he stopped.

Mama came into the room with a very sober face. "Polly dear, please step out while I speak with Dick."

"But Mama, he's not--" Polly began.

"Please." Mama cut in and strained a small smile. "Out."

Polly made a grumbling reply and fled upstairs so she could press her ear to the floorboards to listen. Dick said nothing and Mama was speaking too quiet for her to hear.

♦ ♦ ♦

Dick's eyes were dark above his cheekbones the next morning. He tried to smile but Polly knew he was hiding something. He looked restless…but scared. *What's he up to?* she frowned inside. *He looks so mysterious. And--*

"Captain Polly," his voice was even an odd tone, dull and put-on cheerful. "Off to feed the chickens! Want to come?"

"No thanks." Polly wrinkled her nose. "I have the floors to sweep."

Dick walked outside and Polly began the dusty task of sweeping. But at least dust did not fly up like when she had first learned to sweep. Back then, she had to cover her nose with a handkerchief. Uncle Pierre's voice boomed from the downstairs hallway as Polly was sweeping the top stairs. She cringed. He sounded angry.

"I found my stolen knife in the chicken shed!" Uncle Pierre roared. "Not only that--"

Uncle Pierre had lost a knife? She hadn't known that. The chicken shed! Her hands on the broom began to shake. That was where Dick went to every morning and every evening. Surely not…*him*.

That night at supper was a quiet one. Even Jemima was silent. After everyone had eaten, Polly was sent upstairs while Mama said she and Uncle Pierre had important things to discuss with Dick. She trudged up the steps, kicking them noiselessly as she went. It was not fair! Dick hadn't stolen Uncle Pierre's knife or all the other things they found in the chicken shed.

She crawled into bed, growing tired and grumpy. But just as her head touched her pillow, a grin popped onto her face. *Ah, it's them! Trudy and mournful Mrs. Mills. I knew it. But they were inside, not outside. Hmm…* she drifted off into sleep.

Sometime in the night, she awoke. A creak of a door made her bolt upright, heart pounding. She listened. Slow footsteps softly died away and her

heartbeat calmed nicely.

In the morning, she remembered the nightly noises and crept down the steps after she had dressed and brushed her hair, hoping nothing else of theirs had been stolen.

CHAPTER 9

Missing Dick

Jemima was in the kitchen, humming away as she kneaded biscuit dough. She looked up when Polly entered, bleary-eyed. “Morning, chil’.”

“Good morning, Aunt Jemima.” Polly smiled prettily and cocked her head. “Can I help you make biscuits? It looks fun.”

“You just water up them glass ends and that’ll be just dandy for startin’.” Jemima smiled, her large white teeth contrasting her nutmeg-colored skin. She kneaded gently.

Polly found herself cutting the biscuit dough

carefully and had the biscuits cooking on their cookie sheet when Mama came into the kitchen from outside. Her face looked worried even through her smile.

"Good morning, Mama. Look," Polly said proudly, holding up floury hands. "I helped Aunt Jemima make biscuits."

"Good girl. Now," her voice fell into an *almost*-groan, "did Dick tell you anything last night before supper? About, well, er…"

"About what?" Polly frowned, her lit up face falling by the seconds. "He isn't sick, is he? Why isn't he feeding the chickens?"

"That's what I'm asking *you*, Polly."

Polly's mind whirled as she dumped her hands into the water bucket. Blobs of grease surfaced and she wrung her hands together. Dick was gone. He had left a note with one little line on his made up bed:

Thanks for everything. Bye. Dick Lang

So that was it. No more Dick. No more fun. She growled inside. *Just when I was having fun since…well…* The bucket of water grew strangely bubbly. Then she realized she was crying. With half-greasy hands, she covered her face with her palms and ran out the kitchen door.

Time drifted into nothingness.

The days dragged by once again. Pa was long gone. Now Dick was gone. Maybe even her cousin Paul… She gulped. Everything seemed to go wrong nowadays. Trudy was as mean as ever--even meaner--and the girls at the sewing luncheons eyed her warily now. She had had a Rebel for her friend.

"There!" Polly threw out the chicken feed with wide strokes, trying to remember if that was the exact way Dick did it. "Yes," she talked to the

chickens in a giggle, “you don’t smell so bad now. I wonder if--”

Her words were cut short when saw a blur of gray in the woods. She dumped the rest of her feed and ran into the house on feet like wings. She had to warn Mama. The Rebels were back! And a whole lot of them too. *Why don’t they just go back home?* Her heart raced along with her feet.

• The River Valley Adventures •

Book 1:	Polly's Prisoner
Book 2:	Lillie Andrews
Book 3:	Trudy's Threat
Book 4:	Church Jail

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