

## Beyond the Mountains

*Isabelle Rohrer*

The bright rays of sunshine shone clear in contrast against the cloudless blue sky. As five-year-old Rose Michael skipped up the stone pathway, tulips on either side of her and meadowlarks singing, there was no trace of the hardships and tragedy this small girl had survived. Before Rose was born, her father perished on a sea voyage, giving Rose a fear of the ocean and other bodies of water. Rose's mother died with her birth, so with no other living relatives, Mrs. Rachel Grant, whom is forever beloved known as Nana to anyone under the age of forty, became Rose's guardian as she was the only other person present when Rose was born and her closest neighbor on the Rocky Mountains they lived on. Polly Thompson, who was thought to be an orphan even though there was no real record of her fathers' death (he was in the military, and was captured without meeting his daughter), walked beside Rose. At age seven, Polly was taller than Rose and had curly black hair, creamy brown almond-shaped eyes, and a fair olive complexion. Rose's hair was auburn, with waves and she had hazel blue-green eyes. The two girls had been inseparable since they met years before. Polly and Rose presently sat down together on their favorite rock and gazed at the mountain outlook.

"I wonder what's out there." Polly sighed, cupping her chin with her hand. "I've always wanted to see."

Rose opened her mouth to respond, but never got the chance.

"Girls, I made you fresh cookies!" Nana opened the back door of their cottage wide, and both girls ran in, completely forgetting their conversation until a few years later.

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### *Ten Years Later*

The wagon rattled and shook as it made its way slowly down the dirt street, kicking up dust behind it. Trees surrounded the passengers on both sides of the road. As the wagon rounded another corner, a dark shape came into view. When the silhouette became closer, it was clear that it was a barn. Rose offered her hand to Polly, who gladly took it and stepped off of the wagon precariously, her large skirts swirling around her. Rose and Polly slowly walked towards the barn, listening to the music and shouts of laughter that echoed outside of the barn's walls.

"Let me take your coat." Rose whispered at the door when no one had noticed the two girls standing out in the cold November night.

"Thank you." Polly said breathlessly. "I wish you could join me. Think of the fun we would have together!"

"Next year I'll be old enough." Rose sighed wistfully. "This year I'll help you as much as I can and watch the dancers spin. What fun it will be at the Harvest Dance next year!"

"I can only imagine." Polly smiled nervously.

As a new dance began, Rose slipped away and sat down on a fresh hay bale, drinking in its sweet smell and letting her foot tap along to the music. She watched as Polly whirled merrily around the room, eyes snapping and sparkling, her dance card always full. Rose pulled her shawl tighter over her shoulders and enjoyed the music.

When Polly and Rose slipped into the house, imagining Nana to be asleep because it was far past midnight, they instead found her sitting up in the parlor.

"Girls, I have something I must tell you." Nana said quietly.

"Oh, Nana. What is it?" Polly rushed to her side.

"Your father... Polly... has been found." Nana blinked slowly.

"What? He has? When? Oh, my." Polly clutched her side and glanced helplessly at Rose. "Where is he now?"

"In one month, he will be here, in Sancta." Nana said gently, placing a steady hand over Polly's shaking one. "We will meet him there, my dear."

Polly never lived to see her father, as it turned out. Soon after the Harvest Dance, Polly developed a throaty hack, which settled in her lungs. Nana quickly sent for the doctor, who diagnosed her with pneumonia.

"Go... Rose. To the far places. Travel... to the... sea. I... I never was able to. Please... go... go for me. Thank you... for... always... being... my friend... you're truly... like... a sister... to me." As Polly's breathing slowed and she inhaled for the last time, Rose bent over her friend and wept.

"Polly... no!" She cried over Polly, who's normal rosy cheeks were white and sunken, her eyelids seemed dark. "Polly... please come back. Do not leave me. I need you." At this moment when Rose needed her most, Nana sailed in, and seeing Rose weeping she comforted her. Later in the evening, when both women were dressed in black mourning clothes and Nana thought she was alone, Rose heard her sob for the first time in her life. Nana, who had always been strong. Nana, the protector. Nana, the counselor, and comforter. But there was no one to comfort her. Rose fingered her only picture of Polly, taken when they were very young. She remembered that day, so many years ago, when Polly had first voiced her dreams of traveling afar and beyond to the sea. Now, Polly would never get the chance.

After almost a year had passed, Rose packed a few of her belongings, said goodbye to Polly's father, who stood over his daughter's grave, freshly picked flowers resting on top of it. Rose then traveled beyond the mountains of her childhood, and to the sea. Finally, after Polly's death, her dream came true. As the moon rose that night, Rose no longer mourned her friend's death but celebrated the

wonderful time that they had together. No longer was Rose afraid of the sea, and her treasured journey beyond the mountains always would hold a dear place in her heart. Rose was a completely new person thanks to her journey beyond the mountains.

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