

CHAPTER ONE

A New Life With New Friends

DAVID Cameron lay and looked up at the stars overhead. They seemed so close that he should have been able to reach out and touch them. He listened to the sounds of the sheep camp, muffled now with drowsiness, the tranquil tinkle of bells attached to the necks of lead goats and burros, the whine of a dog in troubled sleep. An occasional baaing or a goat's sharp bleat reached his ears. He sniffed the mixed odors of the night: growing alfalfa, smooth-flowing water, the pungent creosote bush beside him, and the dry sand of the desert with the odor of sunshine still warm upon it.

The first thrill of going on the sheep trail was still with him. Although he was sixteen years of age, this was the first time he had not been in school when the sheep went and returned upon the trail.

Big Jess Cameron, David's father, owned six flocks of sheep, totaling more than eleven thousand animals. Each flock had a herder and a camp man to travel with it, several dogs, a few goats, and a train of pack burros. Each had his job to do, and each knew it well.

The trail over which David was to follow with one of his father's flocks of sheep was a broad way allotted to the sheep owners by the State of Arizona and the United States forestry departments, so that sheep traveling to their high summer grazing grounds would not trespass upon the wide desert acres of unfenced mountain and valley where the cattle roamed. That was to keep the sheep owners and cattle owners from quarreling over the range. The trail, unfenced and unmarked, was two miles wide in some places, while in others it broadened to four miles. Only the forestry men and the sheep owners and cattlemen knew its boundaries.

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As David looked at the stars, he thought of how it happened that he was starting out in April on what promised, to be an interesting adventure instead of remaining at school. In February he had been seriously ill with pneumonia, and when he was better the doctor had advised his parents to keep him out of school for the rest of the term. Although David was one of the strongest boys of his age in school, he had been weak after his illness. He was content to lie in the patio at home in the Arizona sunshine, regaining his strength. Then he had urged upon his father the idea of allowing him to go on the sheep trail.

Father and mother had talked it over. "I believe it would be the best thing in the world for the boy," his father had said." He has always liked to work with the sheep, and he will certainly be a sheepman someday. Now would be a good time for him to learn the business from the ground up." So mother had consented to David's going.

"I'll put him with the No. 2 flock, in charge of old Doroteo," father decided. "He is the best herder we have, and he and David are already good friends. I'll be seeing them every few days on the trail, and if the trek seems too hard for a convalescing boy I'll bring him home."

David and his father had driven under the warm April sun from their valley home to the camp this afternoon. Doroteo had come over to their pickup from the pasture where the sheep were grazing. A young Mexican boy whom David had never seen before was with the old herder.

"Hallo, Davie," the old man had greeted him, with a wide flash of bone-white teeth in a dark face, weathered and furrowed deeply by years of smiling contentment. "You come along with us this time, no?"

"Yes, I guess that's how it's to be," David had answered, but his eyes were on the boy who seemed to shrink timidly behind old Doroteo as though David's eyes upon him were discovering all the flaws in his appearance—the uncut hair, the ragged old overalls, and the worn-out shoes. He scuffed his feet

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in the sand and shifted uneasily scarcely lifting his large, dark eyes.

“Who’s the boy, Doroteo?” Mr. Cameron had asked. His big, booming voice, so comforting to David, seemed to terrify the timid boy.

“This boy,” said Doroteo, “is Diego. He is what you call my grandson. His papa live in Socorro. Is also shepherder like me, but he get hurt pretty bad on the horse. This boy’s mamma she is dead, so his papa send Diego to me. For why, I don’t know. I got all the sheeps to care for. How I take care for a boy, I do not know. I think about Davie. You say he go on trail with me. Maybe you let me take Diego on trail also. One boy he is too much, maybe two boys be just enough, no?”

Mr. Cameron was looking the boy over carefully, while Diego appeared thoroughly miserable and as though he would like to dissolve into thin air to escape the prying eyes. David was sure that he knew how Diego felt, though he was seldom shy himself. He felt sorry for him, but he thought, “I don’t want to spend all summer with that dirty little kid!”

“How old are you?” Mr. Cameron had asked the boy. Diego had gulped down his shyness enough to murmur, “Thirteen year.”

“Too bad you are not nearer David’s age,” the man remarked. “Well, Doroteo,” he went on, “if you think you can manage it, take him along. You’d better try to put some meat on his bones though, or he’ll fall apart.

“How will them sleep?” Doroteo had asked. “Me and Pascual, we take up all the tent now.”

“I have another tent here in the pickup dial I brought along for David,” Mr. Cameron had replied. “They can share it I have an extra bedroll, too.”

Doroteo’s eyes were shining with relief. He had been worried about this extra responsibility that had been thrust upon him.

“Fine!” he had exclaimed, rubbing gnarled brown hands together. “That is very fine. Two boys should be good friend.”

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But David had had his doubts. What could he and this shy young Mexican boy from some remote sheep range in New Mexico have in common? How could they find anything to talk about, find any interest that would lend pleasure to the passing of the days on the trail?

Doroteo had said, "Señor Jesse, this boy he have need of many thing. He need the new shoes, the underwear, and the shirt and overall. You know I do not got the time for go into town to buy these thing. Maybe Davie go with Diego to buy them tomorrow. I give to him the moneys."

"I have to get a haircut and buy a few things for myself tomorrow," Mr. Cameron had said; "so I'll just take him along with me. We'll join you again on the way to Blue Point and the sheep bridge."

Doroteo, smiling broadly, had said, "That is very good for you to do that, Señor Jesse. We will get started early, no?" Pascual and Doroteo had an unvarying habit of sleeping, Doroteo always on the left side of the tent pole, Pascual on the right. The night was warm, so they did not erect the other tent, and since there was no room in Doroteo's tent, Diego put his bedroll on the outside its door. Mr. Cameron had decided to spend the night in camp, so he and David laid their bedrolls side by side a little way from the others. The sheep were huddled on the other side of the irrigation ditch in the alfalfa field, as close to their human guardians as they could get. Oso and Sapo, Doroteo's two dogs, slept beside the huddle of sheep and goats. The burros were at some distance in the field, hobbled to keep them from straying. The clear sky arched above them, full of bright stars, and the air was sweet and with only a gentle warmth.

"Do you want to go into town with me in the morning, David, or would you rather stay with the sheep?" father asked as they settled themselves into their bedrolls on the warm sand.

"I think I'll stay with Doroteo and Pascual," David said; "I don't want to go tagging all over town with that skinny little kid."

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“Do as you like,” father replied; “but you must try to be kind to Diego. He’s had a lot of trouble, and he’ll be lonely.”

“Well, he doesn’t put himself out to be friendly,” David answered with some heat. “He droops around like a sad-eyed hound.” “He seems to be bashful,” said his father. “And remember, he has lost his mother, and now it looks as though he will lose his father, too. He has been handed around from one family of relatives to another ever since his mother died. You would probably act a little droopy yourself under those circumstances.”

“Oh, I feel sorry for him,” said David; “but I don’t think he’ll be much fun to have around all summer.

“Get acquainted with him and you may find that he’s better company than you think,” urged his father. “Remember that even though he is only a lonesome Spanish boy, he is one of the Good Shepherd’s lambs, just as you are.”

Father and old Doroteo lived their whole lives, it seemed to David, with the thought of God as the divine Shepherd and the people of this earth as His sheep. Every morning each of them, no matter where he was, upon rising repeated the twenty-third psalm, the Shepherd Psalm, Doroteo in Spanish, father in English. In trail camp, away from other listening ears, father liked to sing the words of the psalm to a beautiful and sublime melody. His strong baritone voice sounded like the tones of a great organ, echoing against the hills. He never sang it that way at home or in camp in the valley, and David had once asked him why. Father had laughed and replied, “Why, David, this voice of mine would blast all the quail and most of the people out of the valley. It’s louder than the braying of a burro and about as melodious.” But to David, at least, his father’s voice was beautiful.

David knew that the psalm had been written three thousand years ago by a shepherd boy who had later become a king. His father’s name was Jesse. More than that, his name had been given to David Cameron. He recalled how mother would poke fun at father when she told how it happened that David had been given that name.

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“When dad first saw you,” she would say, “I asked him what we should call you. He answered as though that was a most foolish question. ‘Why,’ he shouted, he’s going to be a sheepman; well call him David, of course. David, son of Jesse, just like that other sheepman who wrote the Shepherd Psalm.’ And of course,” said mother, “we couldn’t have named you anything else.”

Now, as he lay under the desert stars, the youth thought of that other boy whose name had been David. He recalled the words of the song that David had written to compare his own life with that of the sheep under the shepherd’s care. The beautiful words filtered through his mind as his eyes were closing in sleep:

The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want.
He maketh me to lie down in green pastures:
He leadeth me beside the still waters.”

The next thing David knew, he was brought to a sitting position by a trumpeting sound. It was the braying of a burro standing over his head. Day was sending forth bold and brilliant banners over the rugged blue battlements of Superstition Mountain. A mourning dove cooed sadly in the paloverde tree on the edge of a nearby wash. The boy sprang from his bedroll and began pulling on his clothes.