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**Ruth Fielding and the Gypsies  
The Missing Pearl Necklace**

Alice B. Emerson

## Imprint

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# RUTH FIELDING AND THE GYPSIES

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## CHAPTER I

### ON THE LUMANO RIVER

The steady turning of the grinding-stones set the old Red Mill a-quiver in every board and beam. The air within was full of dust—dust of the grain, and fine, fine dust from the stones themselves.

Uncle Jabez Potter, the miller, came to the door and looked across the grassy yard that separated the mill and the farmhouse attached from the highroad. Under a broad-spreading tree sat two girls, busy with their needles.

One, a sharp-faced, light-haired girl, who somehow carried a look of endured pain in her eyes in spite of the smile she flung at the old man, cried:

"Hello, Dusty Miller! come out and fly about a little. It will do you good."

The grim face of the miller lightened perceptibly. "How do you reckon a man like me kin fly, Mercy child?" he croaked.

"I'll lend you my aeroplanes, if you like," she returned, gaily, and held up the two ebony canes which had been hidden by the tall grass. *They* told the story of Mercy Curtis' look of pain, but once she had had to hobble on crutches and, as she pluckily declared, canes were "miles better than crutches."

"I ain't got no time, gals, an' that's a fac'," said the miller, his face clouding suddenly. "Ain't ye seen hide nor hair of Ben an' them mules?"

"Why, Uncle," said the second girl, quietly, "you know how many errands Ben had to do in town. He couldn't do them all and get back in so short a time."

"I dunno about that, Niece Ruth—I dunno about that," said the old man, sharply. "Seems ter me I could ha' gone an' been back by now. An' hi guy! there's four sacks o' flour to take across the river to Tim Lakeby—an' I kyan't do it by meself—Ben knows that. Takes two' on us ter handle the punt 'ith the river runnin' like she is right now."

The girl who had last spoken folded the work in her lap and got up agilely. Her movements were followed—perhaps a little enviously—by the gaze of the lame girl.

"How quick you are, Ruthie," she said. When Ruth Fielding looked down upon Mercy Curtis, her smile started an answering one upon the lame girl's thin face. 3

"Quick on my feet, dearie," said Ruth. "But you have so much quicker a mind."

"Flatterer!" returned the other, yet the smile lingered upon the thin face and made it the sweeter.

The miller was turning, grumblingly, back into the shadowy interior of the mill, when Ruth hailed him.

"Oh, Uncle!" she cried. "Let me help you."

"What's that?" he demanded, wheeling again to look at her from under his shaggy eyebrows.

Now, Ruth Fielding was worth looking at. She was plump, but not too plump; and she was quick in her movements, while her lithe and graceful figure showed that she possessed not only health, but great vitality. Her hair was of a beautiful bright brown color, was thick, and curled just a little.

In her tanned cheeks the blood flowed richly—the color came and went with every breath she drew, it seemed, at times. That was when she was excited. But ordinarily she was of a placid temperament, and her brown eyes were as deep as wells. She possessed the power of looking searchingly and calmly at one without making her glance either impertinent or bold.

In her dark skirt, middy blouse, and black stockings and low shoes, she made a pretty picture as she stood under the tree, although her features 4 were none of them perfect. Her cheeks were perhaps a little too round; her nose—well, it was not a dignified nose at all! And her mouth was generously large, but the teeth gleaming behind her red lips were even and white, and her smile lit up her whole face in a most engaging manner.

"Do let me help you, Uncle. I know I can," she repeated, as the old miller scowled at her.

"What's that?" he said again. "Go with me in that punt to Tim Lakeby's?"

"Why not?"

"Tain't no job for a gal, Niece Ruth," grumbled the miller.

"Any job is all right for a girl – if she can do it," said Ruth, happily. "And I can row, Uncle – you know I can."

"Ha! rowing one o' them paper-shell skiffs of Cameron's *one* thing; the ash oars to my punt ain't for baby's han's," growled the miller.

"Do let me try, Uncle Jabez," said Ruth again, when the lame girl broke in with:

"You are an awfully obstinate old Dusty Miller! Why don't you own up that Ruthie's more good to you than a dozen boys would be?"

"She ain't!" snarled the old man.

At that moment there appeared upon the farmhouse porch a little, bent old woman who hailed them in a shrill, sweet voice:

"What's the matter, gals? What's the matter, 5 Jabez? Ain't nothin' broke down, hez there?"

"No, Aunt Alvirah," laughed Ruth. "I just want Uncle Jabez to let me help him – –"

The old woman had started down the steps, her hand upon her back as she came, and intoning in a low voice: "Oh, my back! and oh, my bones!" She caught up the miller's remark, as he turned away again, very sharply, for he muttered something about "Silly gals' foolish ideas."

"What d'ye mean by that, Jabez Potter?" she demanded. "If Ruth says she kin help ye, she *kin*. You oughter know that by this time."

"Help me row that punt across the river?" snarled the old man, wrathfully. "What nonsense!"

"I dunno," said the old woman, slowly. "I see Tim's flag a-flyin'. I guess he wants his flour bad."

"And I can pull an oar as good as *you* can, Uncle Jabez," added Ruth.

"Oh, all right! Come on, then. I see I shell hev no peace till I let ye try it. Ef we don't git back fer supper, don't blame *me*, Alviry."

The miller disappeared in the gathering gloom of the mill. Soon the jarring of the structure and the hum of the stones grew slower – slower – slower, and finally the machinery was altogether still.

Ruth had run for her hat. Then, waving her 6 hand to Mercy and Aunt Alvira, she ran around to the landing.

The Lumano River was a wide stream, but at this season of the year it was pretty shallow. There was little navigation from Lake Osago at any time, but now the channel was dotted with dangerous rocks, and there were even more perilous reefs just under the surface.

Uncle Jabez's boat was not really a "punt." It was a heavy row-boat, so stained and waterlogged in appearance that it might have been taken for a bit of drift-stuff that had been brought in to the Red Mill landing by the current.

And truly, that is probably the means by which the miller had originally obtained the boat. He was of a miserly nature, was Uncle Jabez Potter, and the old boat—which its first owner had never considered worth coming after, following some spring freshet—served the miller well enough to transport his goods across the river.

Tim Lakeby's store, on the north shore of the river, was in sight of the Red Mill. There were four sacks of flour to be transported, and already Uncle Jabez had placed two of them in the bottom of the boat, upon a clean tarpaulin.

"Ef we go down the river an' swamp, I shell lose this flour," grumbled Uncle Jabez. "Drat that Ben! I tell ye, he'd ought to be hum by now." 7

Ben was the hired man, and if the miller had not really been kinder underneath than he appeared on the surface, Ben would never have remained as long with him as he had!

Uncle Jabez balanced the weight in the boat with judgment. Although there seemed to be no real danger, he knew very well the nature of the treacherous current. Ruth slipped into the bow seat with her oar, and Uncle Jabez took stroke.

The girl unknotted the painter, and the boat drifted out from the landing.

"Now, set yer feet square, an' *pull!*" ejaculated her uncle, thrusting the blade of his own oar beneath the rippling surface.

They were heavy ash oars—one was all the girl really could manage. But she was not afraid of a little hard work, her muscles were supple, and she had rowed one season in the first eight at Briarwood Hall, and so considered herself something of an oarswoman.

The miller, by stretching to see over his shoulder, got the boat pointed in the right direction. "Pull, now!" he commanded, and set a long, forceful stroke for the girl to match. With the water slapping against the high side of the craft, sometimes sprinkling them with spray, they drove her forward for some minutes in silence.

The boat lumbered heavily, and it was true that Ruth had all she could do to manage the 8 oars. In some places, where the eddies tugged at the blade, it seemed as though a submerged giant seized it and tried to twist it from her grasp!

"I guess you air gittin' yer fill-up of it, Niece Ruth," growled the miller, with a sound in his throat that might have been a chuckle. "Look out, now! ye'll hev us over."

Ruth knew very well she had done nothing to give the boat that sudden jerk. It was the current; but she had no breath with which to argue the matter.

On and on they pulled, while the sinking sun gilded the little wavelets, and bathed both river and the shores in golden glory. A homing bird shrieked a shrill "good-night," as it passed above them, flying from shore to shore.

Now the northern shore was nearer than the landing they had left. Only occasionally Ruth turned her head, for she needed her full attention upon the oar which she managed with such difficulty.

"We gotter p'int up-stream," growled Uncle Jabez, after wringing his neck around again to spy out the landing near Lakeby's store. "Pesky current's kerried us too fur down."

He gave a mighty pull to his own oar to rehead the boat. It was a perilous move, and in a perilous place. Here the water ran, troubled and white-capped, over a hidden reef.

"Oh! do be careful, Uncle!" cried Ruth. 9

"Pull!" yelled the old man, in return.

By chance he sunk his own oar-blade so deeply, that it rubbed against the reef. It lifted Uncle Jabez from his seat, and unbalanced the boat.

Like a flash the heavy oar flew out of its socket, and the old man sprawled on his back in the bottom of the boat. The latter whirled around in the current, and before Ruth could scream, even, it crashed broadside upon the rock!

The rotting planks of the boat could not stand such a blow. Ruth saw the plank cave in, and the water followed. Down the boat settled upon the submerged part of the rock—a hopeless wreck!

This was not the worst of the accident. In seeking to recover his seat, Uncle Jabez went overboard, as the old boat tipped. He dove into the shallow water, and struck his head heavily on the reef.

Blood-stained bubbles rose to the surface, and the old man struggled only feebly to rise.

"He is hurt! he will be drowned!" gasped Ruth, and seeing him so helpless, she sprang nimbly over the canted side of the boat and sought to draw her uncle's head out of the water.

Although she was a good swimmer, and was not afraid of the water, the current was so swift, and her own footing so unstable, it was doubtful if Ruth Fielding could save both the miller and herself from the peril that menaced them.

## CHAPTER II

### ROBERTO, THE GYPSY

Ruth Fielding, following the death of her parents and while she was still a small girl, had left Darrowtown and Miss True Pettis, and all her other old friends and acquaintances, to live with her mother's uncle, at the Red Mill. Her coming to the mill and her early adventures in and about that charming place were related in the first volume of this series, entitled "Ruth Fielding of the Red Mill."

Ruth made many friends in her new home, among them Helen and Tom Cameron, the twin, motherless children of a wealthy dry-goods merchant who had a beautiful home, called "the Outlook," near the mill, and Mercy Curtis, the daughter of the railroad station agent at Cheslow, the nearest important town to Ruth's new home. Ruth, Helen, and Mercy all went to Briarwood Hall, a girls' school some distance from Cheslow, while Master Tom attended a military academy at Seven Oaks, near the girls' institution of learning. The incidents of their first 11 term at school are related in the second volume of the series, while in the mid-winter vacation Ruth and her friends go to Snow Camp in the Adirondacks.

Later, our friends spent part of a summer vacation at Lighthouse Point on the Atlantic Coast, after which they visited Silver Ranch in Montana. The sixth volume tells of another mid-winter camping adventure on Cliff Island, while the volume previous to our present story—number seven, in fact—was entitled "Ruth Fielding at Sunrise Farm."

This story narrated Ruth's particular interest in Sadie Raby, a strange, wild girl who ran away from cruel people who had taken her "to raise." Her reunion with her twin brothers, Willie and Dickie, and how they all three became the special care of Mr. Steele, the wealthy owner of Sunrise Farm, is told. It is through Ruth's efforts that the Rabys are settled in life and win friends.

Now Ruth and her schoolmates had returned to the Red Mill and Cheslow, and but a brief space would elapse before the girls would begin their third year at Briarwood Hall; they were all looking toward the beginning of the fall term with great eagerness.

Had Ruth Fielding been able to think at this moment of the boat's overturn, or of anything but her uncle's peril, she might have considered that the possibility of her ever seeing Briarwood Hall again was somewhat doubtful!

The hurrying water tugged at her as though a hundred hands had laid hold of her person. She was nearly arm-pit deep in the flood, and her uncle's body was so heavy that she had all she could do to hold his head above the surface.

She could not get him back into the boat, even, and perhaps that would not have been a wise move. For the old skiff, shaking and rocking, was likely to be torn free by the battling current. If it should swing into deep water, it must sink almost at once, for the water was pouring in through the hole that had been battered in its side.

The flour was fast becoming saturated with the river-water, and its increased weight would bear the boat to the bottom, if it slipped from the reef.

Unable to see any good of boarding the boat again, Ruth tried to work her way along the reef until she stood upon a higher part of it. Uncle Jabez was unconscious, blood flowed from a deep cut on his head, and he lay a dead weight in her arms.

Never had Ruth Fielding been in greater peril. She was frightened, but mostly for the old man who seemed so seriously hurt.

Tossing her loosened hair out of her eyes, she stared longingly at the landing near Lakeby's store. It was some distance up-stream, and not a person was in sight. She feared, too, that it was too far away for her voice to carry.

Yet she must scream for help. She shouted again and again, endeavoring to put all the strength of her voice into the cries. Was that an answer? The girl held her uncle high in her arms and looked all about.

Nobody was at the store landing. Nobody was behind on the other shore of the river—and she was glad that Aunt Alvirah and Mercy had not seen the accident, for neither of them could have helped in this predicament.

Yes! there was the repeated shout—and nearer. Ruth's eyes turned to the north shore of the Lumano again. There was somebody running down the bank—not near the store kept by Timothy Lakeby, but directly opposite the rock on which the old boat had stranded.

"Oh! oh! Help! help!" shrieked the girl of the Red Mill.

"Hold on! I'm coming!"

The voice came to her more strongly than before. She could not see who the person was, but she knew he was alone. She could not imagine how he was to aid them.

Why did he not run to the store and bring other men to help? There! he seemed to have leaped right into the river! 14

"Oh, dear me! the strongest swimmer could not reach us, let alone help Uncle Jabez ashore," was Ruth's thought.

But up came the figure into sight again. Dripping, of course, now he stood firmly on a peak of rock that was thrust above the tide, and shook back the long black hair from his eyes.

He was a wild looking person. His feet were bare and his ragged trousers were rolled to his knees. He wore neither vest nor coat, and his shirt was open at his throat. To Ruth he seemed very bronzed and rough looking.

But whoever, or whatever, he might be, the girl prayed that he would prove able to rescue Uncle Jabez. She felt that she could save herself, but she was having all she could do to bear up the unconscious miller.

"Hold on!" shouted the rescuer again.

Once more he plunged forward. He disappeared off the rock. Was he swimming again? The half-overturned boat hid him from Ruth's gaze.

Suddenly he shouted close at hand. Up he bobbed on the higher point of rock just beyond the boat.

"What's the matter, Missy?" he demanded. "Is the old man hurt?"

"He hit his head. See! he is unconscious," explained Ruth. 15

"I'll get him! Look out, now; I've got to push off this old boat, Missy. She ain't no good, anyway."

Ruth saw that he was a big, black-haired, strong looking boy. His complexion was very dark and his eyes sparkling—like cut jet beads. He might have been seventeen or eighteen years old, but he was fully as tall, and apparently as strong, as an ordinary man.

His long hair curled and was tangled like a wild man's. His beard had begun to grow on his lip and chin. In his ears Ruth saw small gold rings and his wrists and forearms—which were bared—were covered with an intricate pattern of tattooing in red and blue ink.

Altogether, she had never seen so strange a boy in all her life—and certainly none so strong. He leaped into the broken boat, seized Ruth's oar that had not been lost in the upset, and bracing it against the rock, pushed the trembling boat free in a moment.

Ruth could not repress a scream. It looked as though he, too, must be thrown into the river, as the boat was caught by the current and jerked free.

But the wild boy laughed and leaped upon the higher part of the rock. As the miller's old boat drifted down stream, he sprang into the water again and reached the girl and her burden. 16

"Give him to me!" commanded the boy. "I can bear him up better than you, Missy. We'll get him ashore—and you can't be any wetter than you are now."

"Oh, never mind me!" cried Ruth. "I am not afraid of a ducking. And I can swim."

"You don't want to try swimming in *this* place, Missy," he returned. "You follow right behind me—so."

He turned, carrying the heavy figure of the miller in his arms as though he weighed but a hundred pounds instead of nearer two, and set off toward the shore along the ledge of rock by which he had come.

Ruth saw, now, that beyond where the boat had been wrecked, the rock joined the shore, with only here and there a place where it was deep under water.

She saw, too, that the boat was now sinking. It had not sailed ten yards in the fierce current before its gunwales disappeared. It sank in a deeper channel below—flour and all! Ruth realized that Uncle Jabez would be sorely troubled over the loss of those bags of flour.

Ruth paddled to the shore behind the strong boy, but before they really reached terra firma, she knew that Uncle Jabez was struggling back to consciousness. The boy lowered the miller easily to the ground. 17

"He's coming 'round, Missy," he said. His smile was broad, and the little gold rings twinkled in his ears.

Ruth, wet and bedrabbled as she was, did not think of her own discomfort. She knelt beside Uncle Jabez and spoke to him. For some seconds he was so dazed that he did not seem to recognize her. Then he stammered:

"Ha—ha— —I knowed we couldn't do it. No—no gal kin do a man's work. Ha!"

This seemed rather hard on Ruth, after she had done her best, and it had not been her fault that the boat was wrecked, but she was too excited just then to trouble about the miller's grumbling.

"Oh, Uncle! you're not badly hurt, are you?"

"Ha—hum! I dunno," stuttered the miller, and sat up. He rubbed his forehead and brought his hand, with a little blood upon it, back to the level of his eyes. "I vum!" he ejaculated, with more interest than before. "I must ha' cracked my head some. Why was it I didn't drown?"

"This little missy, here," said the black-eyed youth, quickly. "*She* saved you, Mister. She held your head above water till I come."

"Why—why— —Niece Ruth! you did *that*?"

"Oh, it was nothing, Uncle Jabez! I am so glad you are not hurt worse. This boy really saved you. He brought you ashore." 18

"Who be ye, young man?" asked the miller. "I'm obleeged to ye— if what my niece says is true."

"Oh, I am named Roberto. You need not to thank—no!" exclaimed the stranger, suddenly getting up and looking all about.

"But it was very brave of him," declared Ruth, and she seized the boy's hand. "I—I am so glad you were near."

"Here's Tim and Joe Bascom coming," said Uncle Jabez, who was facing the store.

Instantly Roberto, as he called himself, jerked his hand from Ruth's grasp. He had seen the men coming, too, and without a word he turned and fled back into the woods.

"Why — why — —" began Ruth, in utter surprise.

"What's the matter with that feller?" demanded Uncle Jabez, just as the storekeeper and Farmer Bascom arrived.

"I seen the feller, Jabe," said the latter, eagerly. "He's one o' them blamed Gypsies. I run him out o' my orchard only yisterday."