



TRANSCONTINENTAL JOURNEYS

THE PROGRESS OF TRANSPORTATION, like all other phases of American endeavor, has been swift and sure. The modern luxury liner, the streamlined train and the swift transports of the skyways are a far cry from the days of the Yankee Clipper Ships, the stage coach or the Covered Wagon trains. Yet the heyday of these sailing ships and horse-drawn vehicles lies within the memory of living men and women. Among their thinning ranks there yet remain gallant survivors of frontier days and we find one in the person of a courageous little

white-haired lady. Her face is marked with eighty-eight years of living, but her sharp little eyes are alive with excitement as she peers out the window of a giant transport roaring out of the Omaha airport, westbound, on a night flight to Cheyenne, Salt Lake and Los Angeles. The hostess speaks to her over the drone of the motors. . . .

HOSTESS: Everything comfortable, Mrs. Dean?

MRS. DEAN: Yes indeedy! Like bein' home in my own rocking chair . . . only better. . . . My rocking chair never takes me anywhere.

HOSTESS: It's too bad you couldn't wait and take the day plane. You could see the country.

MRS. DEAN: It's better this way. Bein' night I kin imagine it's just like it was in '56. Instead of all civilized as it is now.

(*buzzer sounds*)

HOSTESS: (*quickly*) Pardon me a moment, Mrs. Dean. The pilot's calling me.

MRS. DEAN: Tell him not to spare the horsepower on my account!

HOSTESS: (*laughing*) I'll do that.

PILOT: How's the little old lady taking it, Betty?

HOSTESS: She's grand. Just told me to tell you not to spare the horsepower.

PILOT: Tell her we're doing a hundred and ninety, but I'll push her up to 220 if she's in a hurry.

VOICE: (*over radio*) Omaha calling Flight 12!
Omaha calling Flight 12!

PILOT: Go ahead, Omaha.

VOICE: (*over radio*) Cheyenne reports sleet . . . high winds . . . visibility five hundred . . . temperature 29. . . . Watch for ice on your wings!

PILOT: OK, Omaha . . . tell Cheyenne to put on the coffee pot. We'll soon be coming in.

HOSTESS: I hope for Mrs. Dean's sake we don't have to come down this side of Cheyenne.

PILOT: Don't worry about her. She'll stand this trip better than some of those modern girls back there.

HOSTESS: She told me she made this trip in 1856. In a covered wagon. It took them three months.

PILOT: Now she's doing it in three hours. There goes the buzzer. Somebody wants a cracker. See you later, Betty.

HOSTESS: I'll bring you a cup of tea.

DIANA CAPE: Hostess!

HOSTESS: Yes, Miss Cape?

DIANA CAPE: I'm hungry. What is there to eat?

HOSTESS: I have sandwiches . . . would you care for tea or bouillon?

DIANA CAPE: (*irritably*) sandwiches . . . tea or bouillon! Is that all you have to offer?

HOSTESS: I'm sorry. We don't serve meals on this run.

DIANA CAPE: Well of all the stupid things.

MR. CAPE: Don't be unreasonable, Diana. You had time to eat in Omaha.

DIANA CAPE: I wasn't hungry then, father. I don't see why we have to put up with so many inconveniences in this day and age.

MRS. DEAN: (*laughing*) If you'll pardon an old lady buttin' into things that's none of her business, I'd say you don't know the meanin' of inconveniences. I'd a liked to have had you along on the trip we made outa Omaha in 1856.

MR. CAPE: (*amazed*) Do you mean to say you made a trip then? Why that was in the days of the covered wagons!

MRS. DEAN: (*chuckles*) Canastogas, we called them. I was eight years old, when I crossed with my father, Silas Perry.

DIANA CAPE: It must have been terribly hard.

MRS. DEAN: There were folks that thought so . . . even then.

MR. CAPE: Won't you tell us about it?

MRS. DEAN: Pshaw . . . it's just an old lady's tale. . . .

DIANA CAPE: Please tell us about it. How long did it take?

MRS. DEAN: Well—our wagon train was the first out of Omaha after the spring thaw of '56. Nothing much happened till we was about a week out. It was slow goin' . . . twelve to fourteen miles a day, but

finally we reached a ford of the river Platte and made camp on the other side. As well as I can recollect, there was forty wagons in the train to start with . . . nigh on to two hundred men and wimmin-folk and a whole passel of younguns. Like a little town movin' on wheels. One night the head scout who was leadin' us across the Indian country to the Rocky Mountains called the menfolk together outside the wagons that had been drawn into a close circle for protection against a surprise attack from the Indians. . . .

IRISH VOICE: Them slinkin' coyotes sound like banshees a-wailin' in the night.

MARK CULVER: (*young pioneer*) Likely as not it's a scalp huntin' Sioux . . . which is worse.

SILAS PERRY: (*Mrs. Dean's father*) Now just a minute, men. Don't go stirrin' up imaginary dangers. There's plenty real ones and Cherokee Joe has called us all out here to give ye the benefit of his understandin' of the ways of this wild land and its savage people. Will ye speak to the men, Cherokee Joe?

CHEROKEE JOE: I'm no hand with words, men. I've only this much to say! From this day forward there will never be an hour when danger does not await the train behind every hillock . . . at every river ford and in the tall . . . innocent lookin' grass of the prairie itself.

HIRAM TAGGERT: We'll do as ye say, Joe.

CHEROKEE JOE: Aye . . . but mind ye. There's dangers within the wagon train as well as without. I've contracted to see ye safe to the Rockies. Ye have appointed a committee headed by Silas Perry. Ye'll mind them and me. They're the only law ye'll have in a lawless land and unless ye stand together yer bones'll bleach on the prairie like many afore ye.

MARK CULVER: I saw smoke signals to the north just around sundown, Cherokee.

CHEROKEE JOE: Yes, Mark, I been expectin' them.

HIRAM TAGGERT: Do you think the redskins know we're here?

CHEROKEE JOE: Ye couldn't hide a stew pan on the prairie without the injuns knowin' it was there, Mr. Taggert.

SILAS PERRY: Do you think they'll attack us soon?

CHEROKEE JOE: We most likely outnumber them now, Mr. Perry, but in three . . . mebbe four nights from now, they'll have gathered their braves. . . .

HIRAM TAGGERT: What can we do?

CHEROKEE JOE: There's nothing to do but push on, and beginnin' now we double the sentries at night, and on the trail every man that can carry a rifle'll ride the flanks, and the wimminfolks'll drive the teams.

SILAS PERRY: You can count on every man, woman and child to do his part.

CHEROKEE JOE: They must! And now back to the

wagon circle with ye and mind ye . . . keep a close mouth of the dangers ahead. There's no need to be alarmin' the wimminfolk. They'll know of it soon enough.

MA ABAGAIL: (*calling*) Sooooo bossie. . . . Sooooo bossie. . . .

SILAS PERRY: Evenin' to ye, Ma Abigail. Still callin' for your cow?

MA ABAGAIL: That pesky critter'll be the death of me afore I reach Californy.

CHEROKEE JOE: Don't go wanderin' off beyond the picket lines, Miss Abigail.

MA ABAGAIL: (*going off*) I ain't aimin' to. . . . Sooooo bossie. . . . Sooooooo. . . .

HIRAM TAGGERT: I guess the Injuns have them a fine milk cow by now.

CHEROKEE JOE: Or it's joined up with that buffalo herd we passed today.

MRS. DEAN: Aye, I was but a child but I recollect those nights and the singing around the campfires. We were happy dreamin' about our new homes beyond the mountains. My mother joined in the singing . . . not suspectin' the terrible blow that was to strike us next day. It was near sunset when we reached another ford of the river. Our wagon was near the end of the train. The river was swollen with melted snow, and filled with ice. My father was just leadin' our wagon out into the river when he slipped

and fell. A big cake of ice struck him and he went down into the water under the wheels. The men tried to save him but he was gone. We never even saw his body again because there was no turnin' back then, even if my mother had wanted to. There was nothin' to do but go on to California. My mother drove the oxen. I did what I could to help but I was only eight years old. But there were cheerin' moments. Folks lent each other a helpin' hand and we even had a kind of school. All the kids would gather in one wagon and there was a Miss Turner who'd teach us when she wasn't sparkin' with that young Culver boy from Virginia. I recall one day we was holdin' a spellin' bee. It was a sunny day and the canvas top of the canastoga was rolled up. Miss Turner was managin' us younguns as best she could. . . .

MISS TURNER: Children. . . . Children! How do you expect to learn to read and spell if you cut up this way?

YOUNG CLAY: That Yankee Jones kid stuck me with an arrow.

MISS TURNER: An arrow! Where did you get it?

YOUNG JONES: My pappy found it in the grass yestiddy. It's a real Injun arrow. Look!

MISS TURNER: Put it away and don't you dare stick any of the children again!

YOUNG JONES: Yes'm. . . . I won't.

MISS TURNER: Very well. Now where were we? Oh yes. Thomas Jones . . . how do you spell . . . California?

YOUNG JONES: Ca . . . Ca . . . l—e—f.

MISS TURNER: Wrong! Ephraim Clay. . . . Spell California.

YOUNG CLAY: I can't . . . but I can spell Kentucky 'cause that's where I comes from.

MARGARET PERRY: (*Mrs. Dean*) I can spell it, Miss Turner. . . . Cal-if-or-nia.

MISS TURNER: Very good, Margaret. Ephraim . . . how is your little brother today?

YOUNG CLAY: He's tooken bad with pains, Miss Turner. Pa says he's afeered he won't get well . . . ever. . . .

MISS TURNER: We're all sorry to hear that, Ephraim, but I'm sure little Tommy will get well.

MARGARET PERRY: Oh . . . Look Miss Turner. Here comes Mark Culver a-ridin' down the line o' wagons.

MISS TURNER: (*quickly*) Never mind children . . . we've lesson to do.

YOUNG JONES: Miss Turner's got a beau!

(*laughter*)

MARK CULVER: Hi young uns . . . How do you like your lady schoolmarm?

YOUNG JONES: Swell, Mister Culver. She don't whip us much.

MARK CULVER: That's why they don't take to lady schoolmarms as a general thing. Hello Jessie!

MISS TURNER: (*archly*) Why aren't you out guarding us against the Indians?

MARK CULVER: I'm on sentinel duty tonight.
(*whispers*)

I thought I'd drop by and ask you if you'd go fer a walk with me tonight when the train camps.

MISS TURNER: Why . . . I . . . I'll think about it.

MARK CULVER: I'll come by your wagon.

(*louder*)

What you learnin', kids?

YOUNG CLAY: Aw—how to spell.

MARK CULVER: Well . . . here's one for teacher. How do you spell LOVE, Miss Turner?

MRS. DEAN: Yes . . . there were happy hours even in that wild land, but never for long. That same night, the ailin' child of the Clay family passed away and there was a task to be done that was mighty sad. In the darkness of the moonless night, those who were not on sentry post, gathered on the prairie to pay their last respects to the little one. . . .

HIRAM TAGGERT: . . . earth unto the earth returneth . . . Oh Heavenly Father consecrate this ground . . . In the name of thy own beloved Son . . . Amen.

VOICES. Amen!

MR. CLAY: (*gently*) Take your mother back to the wagon, Ephraim. . . .

YOUNG CLAY: Yes, father. . . .

MR. CLAY: Thank ye kindly—all. Now I'd like to be alone for a few moments. . . .

CHEROKEE JOE: What have ye in your hand, brother Clay?

MR. CLAY: It's only a little cross of wood with his name carved upon it.

CHEROKEE JOE: (*gently*) It'll grieve ye I know, man . . . but ye must not put it by the grave.

MR. CLAY: You . . . You're not tellin' me I must leave my son here in this wilderness of grass and sand . . . with nothing to mark his resting place?

CHEROKEE JOE: If ye mark it, the Indians will find it. You would not want that. . . .

MR. CLAY: No . . . I did not think of that.

(*grimly*)

You're right. We must leave no sign . . . no mark upon this lonely plain. . . .

MRS. DEAN: It was a terrible thing to have to leave the child there, but it was part of the hardships of that long journey. In the days that followed, storms, prairie fires, and Indian attacks took their toll of our little band, but life went on just the same. Two children were born before we reached the

mountains, and one evening young Mark Culver came up to Cherokee Joe's campfire, leadin' Jessie Turner by the hand. . . .

MARK CULVER: (*coming on*) Hey, Cherokee!

CHEROKEE JOE: Hi, Mark . . . Ah . . . Good evenin' to ye, Miss Turner.

MISS TURNER: Good evening to you, Joe.

CHEROKEE JOE: It's a fine night—

MARK CULVER: (*breaking in*) To be married! Jessie and I want to get married, Cherokee!

CHEROKEE JOE: Well . . . now glory be. What do you think of that? But hey! Wait a minit . . . ye can't. There's no preacher with the wagon train.

MARK CULVER: I know . . . but that doesn't matter out here. We have a Bible here and if you'll read the service, that'll have to do until we get to a place where we can have it done right and proper.

CHEROKEE JOE: Hmm . . . sounds mighty irregular. What do you think about it, Jessie?

MISS TURNER: We love each other, Joe. . . . I don't think it'd be wrong. . . .

CHEROKEE JOE: Well. . . . I reckon mebbe. . . .

MARK CULVER: I knew you'd do it, Cherokee. Here's the Bible. I'll go get some witnesses. . . .

CHEROKEE JOE: Hey . . . wait a bit. I'd do this for ye gladly . . . but I can't read.

MARK CULVER: Gosh . . . that's right . . . you can't. Let's see . . . who can we get?

CHEROKEE JOE: Looka here. The folks is havin' a prayer meetin' over by Hiram Taggert's wagon . . . 'tain't fitten and proper to keep such a joyous occasion to ourselves. Come on!

MARK CULVER: Come on, Jessie! We'll get Hiram Taggert to read the ceremony.

CHEROKEE JOE: Reckon they ain't no harm breakin' up a prayer meetin' to perform a marriage ceremony.

MARK CULVER: They're going to be plenty surprised.

CHEROKEE JOE: (*laughs*) Not as surprised as you think, son.

HIRAM TAGGERT: (*calling*) Welcome to our little meetin', Cherokee!

MR. CLAY: We were just gettin' ready to have a sing, Joe.

CHEROKEE JOE: Jest a minit, folks. Afore ye do any singing, these young folks'd like a marriage ceremony performed.

(*exclamations of surprise and pleasure*)

HIRAM TAGGERT: But we've no preacher, Cherokee.

CHEROKEE JOE: Mr. Taggert, you've presided over three christenin's and ye've read the good book over graves of yer departed ones.

HIRAM TAGGERT: Aye . . . I have that.

CHEROKEE JOE: Well, I'm not what you might call a religious man but it seems to me that marryin'

ain't no more sacred than them occasions that mark the beginnin' and the end of this life.

MARK CULVER: We'd be grateful if you would perform the ceremony, Mr. Taggart.

HIRAM TAGGERT: Very well . . . I'll do it but ye'd best have it done over again when we reach California. What two of ye will stand up with these young people?

CHEROKEE JOE: Since ye've no near kin of yer own, Miss Turner, I'll give ye away if you'll let me.

MISS TURNER: Thank you, Joe . . . there's no one I'd rather have. . . .

MR. CLAY: I'll stand as witness.

HIRAM TAGGERT: Fine . . . and now if ye'll join hands.

(sound of horses coming on at full gallop)

VOICE: *(calling)* Cherokee! . . . Quick! . . . In the moonlight we saw them. . . . A band of Sioux . . . ridin' down from the north!

CHEROKEE JOE: Start singing, girls—and the Indians'll think we're not ready.

MARK CULVER: *(urgently)* Taggart. . . . Quick! . . . the vows! . . . there's time. . . .

HIRAM TAGGERT: *(quickly)* Jessie . . . do ye take Mark Culver to be they wedded husband?

MISS TURNER: I do. . . .

HIRAM TAGGERT: Mark . . . do you take Jessie Turner to be thy wedded wife?

MARK CULVER: I do!

HIRAM TAGGERT: Then I pronounce you man and wife until death do ye part.

CHEROKEE JOE: Quick men . . . to your horses! . . .

MARK CULVER: Jessie honey, I'll be back! Good-bye!

MRS. DEAN: It was a strange wedding ceremony, but it bound those two for all their lives together. Our little wagon train knew all the joys and sorrows of a big town—birth—death—marriage.

DIANA CAPE: But what happened when the Indians attacked, Mrs. Dean?

MRS. DEAN: Our men beat off the Indians and after many more weeks of hardships and suffering, our wagon train rolled over the great divide and into California . . . the land of promise.

MR. CAPE: And to think that within your own lifetime you're able to span the continent in a single day!

(sighs)

Those were the days of *real* men and women.

MRS. DEAN: No more then than today. I'd have gone across the prairies with those two young men that are pilotin' this airplane. And that nice young hostess who waits on us . . . she's brave.

DIANA CAPE: I'm afraid I wouldn't have been much help to your Covered Wagon train, Mrs. Dean.

MRS. DEAN: I wouldn't say that, child.

DIANA CAPE: I'm an awful coward.

MRS. DEAN: I wouldn't say you were. Here you are thousands of feet in the clouds, flyin' like the wind, and takin' it as a matter of course.

DIANA CAPE: That's different.

MRS. DEAN: Not so much. It's all what we're used to.

DIANA CAPE: I wonder if we're getting near Cheyenne?

MR. CAPE: I don't think so. Can't tell . . . it's pitch black and sleeting hard.

MRS. DEAN: I ain't in no hurry. . . . I'm enjoyin' myself. . . .

HOSTESS: (*calling, quickly and tense*) Please fasten your safety belts!

MR. CAPE: (*alarmed*) What's that? We're not due for fifteen minutes, are we?

HOSTESS: No—but we're going to make an emergency landing. Ice is forming on the wings. We can't make Cheyenne!

DIANA CAPE: (*quickly*) Let me help you fasten your safety belt, Mrs. Dean.

MRS. DEAN: What for? . . . I ain't a-gonna jump outa the window.

DIANA CAPE: Please . . . you must . . . Mrs. Dean . . . This is a forced landing! . . . We may hit something. Here . . . You buckle it this way. . . .

MRS. DEAN: My goodness to gracious . . . for a

girl that thinks she's skeered you're actin' cool as a cucumber!

DIANA CAPE: But I'm not . . . I'm scared silly . . .

HOSTESS: Don't worry, Mrs. Dean . . . Everything's all right.

MRS. DEAN: I ain't a-worryin'. . . .

HOSTESS: Just relax . . . lean against your belts. . . .

DIANA CAPE: (*gently*) Give me your hand . . . Mrs. Dean. . . .

MRS. DEAN: I figgered you'd come through if there ever came a time, Miss. . . .

MR. CAPE: (*tensely*) I don't see any trees . . .

HOSTESS: It's pretty level country. . . . we'll be all right. . . . Bill's a good pilot—he'll make it if anybody can.

MR. CAPE: There's the ground!

(*series of heavy bumps followed by a splintering crash*)

We've hit!

DIANA CAPE: Mrs. Dean . . . Are you all right?

MRS. DEAN: 'Course I am!

DIANA CAPE: Thank goodness!

PILOT: (*calling*) Everybody all right back there?

HOSTESS: All okay, Bill—thanks to you.

PILOT: (*coming in*) Well, we won't be here long. We radioed ahead and the boys from the airport are starting in cars right now.

MRS. DEAN: My, my—that radio's simply amazin'!

DIANA CAPE: *You're* amazing, Mrs. Dean . . . I never saw anyone so calm!

MRS. DEAN: Well, I figgered I was in good hands.

There was a world of wisdom in the words of the gallant old lady. She knew the rugged courage of Covered Wagon days, yet recognized in her pilots and fellow passengers that self same courage. She saw in them a courageous spirit that never dies—the spirit of Americans.