

"In the days of old, the days of gold, the days of forty-nine!" So sang the California gold miners in 1852. Already the days of '49 were "the good old days." After three years the towns were becoming "civilized," with women and children slowly drifting in. Also following the miners were musicians, actors, and dancers.

The day that much-talked-of Lola Montez arrived in Grass Valley, the whole mining town turned out to gape. She had entertained in mining camps, and some of the men of Grass Valley said they never saw anything like her spider dance.

Among those who waited for Lola to arrive was a six-year-old girl with bright eyes and a mop of red hair. She was looking excitedly down the road.

Into town rode the most beautiful lady the child had ever seen. She was dressed in black velvet and had a plumed hat swaying on her head. She leaped from her horse and walked toward a small white cottage. As she entered the house, Lola noticed the little girl with the red hair.

"Ah," she cried. "The lovely little girl—who is she?"

"Lotta Crabtree," said the child shyly.

"Come back to see me, Lotta."

As Lotta climbed into her chair at dinner that night in her mother's boardinghouse, she thought of the pretty lady. The miners were talking of Lola while they gobbled up the food.

"Did you know that Lola Montez has come to live in Grass Valley?" Lotta piped in. "She bought a cottage just around the corner." Mrs. Crabtree glanced at her daughter. She had never seen the child so excited.

Next day Lotta slipped away and ran to

the cottage. She hung on the fence until the beautiful dark-haired woman appeared. When Lola noticed Lotta, she smiled and called her into the yard. The child approached slowly, but soon lost her shyness with the friendly actress.

As the days passed, Lotta became Lola's constant companion. Lola began to teach the child dance steps. Little Lotta learned fandangos, highland flings, and several ballet steps immediately. But she was always especially delighted with jigs and reels, and when she danced them she was so taken by the rhythm that she laughed out loud as she danced.

From time to time Lola would leave on a series of dancing tours through the mining towns, coming back every time with sacks of gold. One day Lola returned from Marysville furious. She sat quivering on the edge of a chair and spoke to Lotta.

"I went to give my spider dance, but those miners did not want to see me. They threw eggs at me, and they shot off pistols, but I danced anyway. I shall leave this place and go to Australia."

Lola wanted to take Lotta with her to Australia, but Mrs. Crabtree firmly answered no, and that settled the matter.

Still, Mrs. Crabtree could see that Lotta was talented. The little girl couldn't help dancing and singing. Mart Taylor, a Grass Valley storekeeper, was an old-time actor who had built a small log theater in the town of Rabbit Creek. It wasn't long before Lotta was there doing jigs and reels and bringing in showers of golden nuggets and Mexican dollars.

Mrs. Crabtree was delighted, and when Mart Taylor suggested a plan for a wandering

troupe with Lotta as the child star, Mrs. Crabtree agreed.

The last performance in Rabbit Creek was a triumph for the lively little girl. She did an Irish jig. Her costume was green knee breeches and a green jacket and a high green hat, and she swung a shillelagh in her hand. Behind the flickering candles set up in empty bottles for footlights, Lotta flung her red hair back and laughed as she danced. The miners roared approval, and when she sang "How Can I Leave Thee," they wept, thinking of home and mother. Mrs. Crabtree had to bring a basket on the stage to gather up the gold.

Lotta danced in Marysville, in Hornitos, in

Sacramento, in Downieville, and in San Francisco. She became the hit of the mining camps, and men walked miles to town to see her.

When boom days in the diggings were over, Lotta was still a favorite in the cities. Before she was grown Lotta Crabtree was known from coast to coast. The miners who went back home talked of her, for she had touched their hearts with her songs and made them laugh with her dances. They never forgot the child with her mop of red hair whose face crinkled in an impish grin as she did a hornpipe or kicked up her feet in a jig and reel.

CHECK YOUR READING

1. **The mining towns were becoming more “civilized” as**
 - A families moved in
 - B entertainments were added
 - C Both A and B
2. **According to the men of Grass Valley, Lola Montez’s best dance was her**
 - A Irish jig
 - B spider dance
 - C fandango
3. **Lotta Crabtree’s mother operated a**
 - A hotel
 - B boardinghouse
 - C dance studio
4. **Lola had come to Grass Valley to**
 - A visit her family
 - B settle down
 - C dance at the Silver Swan
5. **Lola taught Lotta how to dance**
 - A jigs and reels
 - B the minuet
 - C waltzes
6. **When the miners in Marysville treated her rudely, Lola**
 - A became enraged
 - B left the stage
 - C quit dancing forever
7. **After Lola left for Australia, Mrs. Crabtree tried to**
 - A stop Lotta’s dancing
 - B teach Lotta to act
 - C Neither A nor B
8. **Mrs. Crabtree recognized that Lotta was**
 - A sad without Lola
 - B very spoiled
 - C talented
9. **The miners in Rabbit Creek wept when Lotta**
 - A quit the stage
 - B sang “How Can I Leave Thee”
 - C accidentally broke her leg
10. **The story implies that Lotta became famous coast to coast because of**
 - A newspaper ads
 - B miners talking about her
 - C Both A and B