

# **Jem Digs Up Trouble**

**Goldtown Beginnings Series**

*Jem Strikes Gold*

*Jem's Frog Fiasco*

*Jem and the Mystery Thief*

*Jem Digs Up Trouble*

*Jem and the Golden Reward*

*Jem's Wild Winter*



# Jem Digs Up Trouble



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## New Words

**ain't**—a poor way of saying “am not,” “are not,” or “is not”

**bedroll**—a rolled-up blanket

**burlap**—a rough fabric used for sacks

**canteen**—a metal container that holds water, with a strap for carrying

**flannel**—soft fabric made of wool or cotton

**grub**—food

**kinfolk**—family

**long johns**—underwear with long legs and long sleeves

**pay dirt**—ground that contains enough gold to make it worth mining

**pesky**—annoying

**suspenders**—straps that hang over  
a person's shoulders and hold up  
their pants

**varmint**—a pest





## CHAPTER 1

# A Muddy Creek

*Swish, swish, swish.* Sand and water swirled in Jem's gold pan.

*Rattle, rattle.* Gravel and small rocks banged against the sides.

The morning sun beat down on Jem's head.

His hat kept the sun out of his eyes, but it could not keep out the heat.

Jem felt like it had sucked him dry.

The August heat had almost sucked Cripple Creek dry, too. It was only a muddy trickle.

A muddy creek was not good for washing gold. It was hard to see flakes or nuggets in brown water.

“You’re mighty dirty, young’un.”

Jem looked up. Strike-it-rich Sam squatted a few feet away.

Mud dotted the old prospector’s wrinkly face and his beard.

Strike’s pants and red-flannel shirt were also caked with mud. So were his suspenders.

Jem grinned. “You’re muddy too.”

Just then Nugget joined Jem. The golden dog pushed his nose close and whined.

*Pet me!* he seemed to say.

Jem put down his gold pan and ruffled Nugget’s golden fur. “Where have you been?”

Nugget shook himself. Dust flew up in a big cloud.

“Pesky dog!” Strike waved his hands and coughed. “Rolling in the dirt again.”

Jem sneezed. *Ah-choo!* His eyes watered.

Then he hugged Nugget. “He’s not pesky. Have you seen any rattlesnakes this summer?”

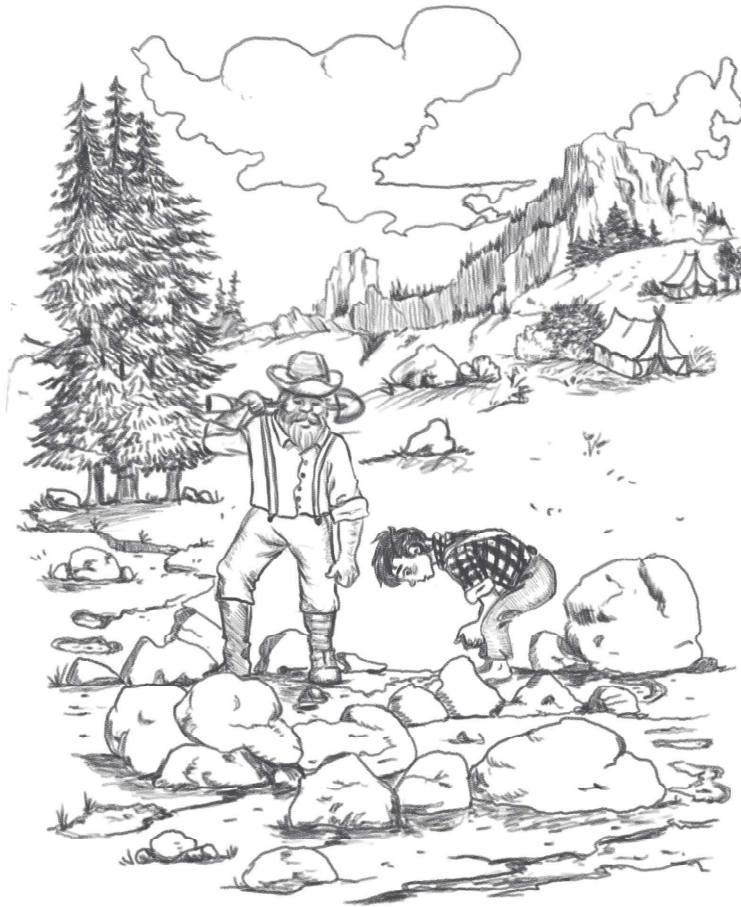
Strike grunted and scooped creek dirt into his pan.

“Nugget is the reason you haven’t,” Jem said. “He keeps tarantulas and gophers and other varmints away.”

When Strike didn't answer, Jem filled his gold pan. He would wash gold one more time this morning.

*Then I'm going to play with Nugget.*

"It's hotter than blazes around here," Strike muttered.



The old miner was right about that.  
Sweat dripped down Jem's face and neck.  
It trickled down his back and arms.

Only his hands and bare feet felt cool.  
Brown creek water dribbled over his toes.

"It's time for me to get away from this heat," Strike said. He dumped out his pan.  
"I'm thinkin' of goin' off on a prospecting trip."

Jem's heart leaped. "Up in the mountains?"

Cool breezes. Icy-cold creeks. Sparkling water.

"Yep." Strike pointed to the tall mountain peaks. "I've heard about some gold strikes up there."

"What kind of strikes?" Jem asked.

Strike chuckled. "Rich ones."

Jem's heart thumped even faster.

Strike-it-rich Sam was always going off on prospecting trips. Like four months ago, when he found Nugget.

Strike had never struck it rich. Not yet, anyway. But bringing home a hungry golden dog was better than finding gold.

At least Jem thought so.

“Yes sirree,” Strike was saying. “There’s gold up there. I can feel it in my bones.”

Jem’s ears pricked up. “How long will you be gone?”

“Oh, two weeks or so,” Strike said. “It takes time to find just the right spot.”

“That’s for sure.” Jem looked at the muddy brown trickle. “This is not the right spot.”

Strike laughed. “You got that right. I’m gonna strike it rich up there someday.”

Jem’s thoughts buzzed louder than a swarm of bees. Maybe Strike really would hit pay dirt this time.

And maybe . . .

“I wish I could go with you.” Jem’s words came out fast.

Strike’s bushy eyebrows went up, like he was surprised. “You want to come along?”

Jem nodded.

Strike slapped his knee. “That’s a jim-dandy idea, young’un. It gets mighty lonesome on the trail.”

Jem’s mouth fell open. “Really?” Strike wanted his company?

“We’re partners, ain’t we?”

“We sure are!”

How could Jem forget? Whenever Pa was too busy to pan for gold, Jem took his place alongside Strike.

Like today.

“I’m almost eight years old,” Jem said. “I could be a real help on the trail.”

“You could at that, I reckon.” Strike smiled.

Jem beamed. “When do we leave?”

“Hold your horses, young’un.” The miner pointed to a big canvas tent and a black cookstove not far uphill from the creek.

“Take a look.”

Jem followed Strike’s pointing finger.

Pa was walking into camp. He held a shotgun in one hand. A wild turkey hung over his shoulder.

Jem’s mouth watered. *Yum!* “Turkey for supper!”

It had been many weeks since the Coulter family enjoyed such a fine feast.

“That ain’t what I meant,” Strike said.

“It’s not me you got to ask. It’s your pa.”

Jem’s cheerful thoughts went *pop!*

Would Pa and Mama let him go prospecting in the wilderness with Strike?

Jem slumped. Probably not. At least  
Mama probably wouldn't.

Mama worried enough when the family  
went blueberry picking up in the hills each  
fall.

She worried about bobcats, mountain  
lions, and bears.

She especially worried about grizzly  
bears.

Mama would not want to worry about  
Jem for two weeks.

Strike pulled himself up from the rocky  
creek bed. "Well, partner. What are you wait-  
ing for? Let's go ask your folks."