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Introduction, Studies and Commentaries by Logan Bremner

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Introduction

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Balancing the pull of home with the call of the horizon, Clover traces how everyday tenderness becomes courage when a young woman learns to transplant the habits of a close-knit household into a larger world whose beauty, unpredictability, and moral tests expand her sense of what duty, health, friendship, and self-reliance can mean, so that the intimate patience of caregiving and the quick wit of cheerful adaptability, once exercised in familiar rooms, must be refashioned for strange climates, new neighbors, and opportunities that ask her to keep faith with the past while stepping steadily toward a future she has not yet imagined.

Written by the American author Susan Coolidge and first published in the late nineteenth century, Clover belongs to the tradition of domestic coming-of-age fiction and continues the narrative world introduced in the Katy books, shifting the center of attention to Katy Carr’s younger sister. The novel moves from the well-ordered comforts of home to a settlement in the Rocky Mountain West, using regional detail and the rhythms of community life to anchor its events. Read today, it stands at the crossroads of classic children’s literature and frontier narrative, a period piece whose textures remain accessible without requiring specialized historical knowledge.

The premise is disarmingly simple and rich in possibility: Clover relocates to a mountain town to support a family member and to seek the restorative promise of a high, dry climate, quickly discovering that elevation brings both vigor and vulnerability. The narration is clear, observant, and gently humorous, favoring bright scenes of conversation,

household ingenuity, and outdoor excursions over spectacle. The tone is warm yet unsentimental, inviting readers to notice small kindnesses, practical resourcefulness, and the soft corrections of experience. The pace is steady, the voice companionable, and the moral atmosphere candid without severity, making the book welcoming across ages.

At its heart, the novel measures responsibility not as burden but as a sustaining art. Themes of sisterhood, caregiving, and the reinvention of home unfold alongside questions about health, habit, and environment—how a change of air might change a mind, and how new landscapes test and deepen character. Community forms through hospitality and mutual aid; independence grows through competence and judgment. The West is not a backdrop of conquest here but a lived place of weather, work, and neighborly exchange, where domestic routines adapt to altitude and season, and where resilience is learned as much in kitchens and parlors as on trails.

Coolidge’s craft lies in her economy and accuracy: clean descriptions of mountains and sky, attentive sketches of lodgings and makeshift comforts, and dialogue that reveals temperament through manners rather than declarations. The narrator’s steadiness allows moments of risk, fatigue, or loneliness to register without melodrama, while flashes of dry wit keep moral lessons buoyant. Refrains of letter-writing and visiting underscore how relationships are maintained across distance. The novel thus interleaves scenic nature writing with domestic procedure, showing that beauty and order are mutually sustaining, and that the skills of caring—planning, mending, listening—constitute a form of intelligence.

For contemporary readers, Clover matters because its questions are still ours: how to move for health or work

without losing oneself; how to care for relatives without erasing one’s own hopes; how to build community quickly and kindly in new places; how to find meaning in ordinary competency when crises ebb and flow. Its portrait of a young woman’s agency, exercised within everyday constraints and widened by travel, anticipates modern conversations about wellness, mutual support, and the ethics of belonging. The book models steadiness rather than spectacle, offering an approach to change that values patience, curiosity, and practical courage.

Approached as a standalone or as a later chapter in the Katy sequence, Clover offers the pleasures of a classic with the immediacy of a journey story: fresh air in the sentences, steady warmth in the outlook, and a plot that rewards attention to small transformations rather than grand reversals. It invites readers to inhabit a setting both restorative and exacting, to admire competence as a form of care, and to trust that character is shaped by place as surely as by intention. Without relying on surprise, it creates anticipation through growth, making rereading as satisfying as discovery.

Synopsis

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Susan Coolidge’s Clover, part of the Katy series, shifts the spotlight to Clover Carr as she steps from loyal sister into a voice of her own. The story opens with a practical family decision: a move westward to a higher, drier climate, sought for a loved one’s recovery and general well-being. This change of scene furnishes the premise and mood—fresh air, new distances, and an unfamiliar social fabric. Coolidge frames the relocation not as adventure for its own sake but as an extension of home-making and duty, inviting readers to watch Clover balance affection, prudence, and curiosity in a landscape that gently tests her.

Arrival in a mountain community brings a new rhythm of life. Lodgings must be arranged, economies planned, and daily routines reordered around the air, altitude, and silence of the West. Clover’s tact becomes practical leadership: overseeing comfort, observing medical advice, and cultivating neighborly ties. The circle she enters is varied—locals, health seekers, and travelers—whose cordial habits differ from those at home. Through their conversations and small kindnesses, Coolidge sketches a social world that is at once provisional and supportive. Clover learns to read the place—its distances, weather, and customs—while preserving the warmth and steadiness that have long defined the Carr household.

The narrative advances through linked episodes rather than spectacles. Errands, rides, and hillside picnics supply occasion for character, not showy incident. Clover discovers how frontier inconveniences call for ingenuity, and how quiet hours can restore spirits. Letters from home shuttle

news and perspective, keeping the book grounded in the larger series while underlining Clover’s independence. In small decisions—managing expenses, attending to visitors, gauging exertion—she grows fluent in responsibility. Nature’s scale, rendered through Coolidge’s gentle realism, functions as a steady undertone: beautiful but unromanticized, shaping the day’s choices and reminding Clover why the sojourn matters.

Beneath the calm surface, conflicts test her good sense. Health improves unevenly, and setbacks demand patience. Clover must weigh the claims of duty against chances for personal delight, mindful of what propriety expects of a young woman away from home. The town’s informal codes—who calls first, what favors are appropriate, how much frankness is welcome—offer lessons in tact. Resourcefulness becomes ethical as well as practical: she protects privacy, steers around gossip, and keeps morale high without making promises the future cannot keep. The tension remains domestic and humane, centered on care, endurance, and judicious cheerfulness.

New acquaintances widen Clover’s horizon. Fellow residents and visiting outsiders bring contrasting manners, stories, and values, and conversation ranges from books to landscapes to the oddities of Western living. Friendly companionship shades, at moments, into possibilities that require discernment. Coolidge treats these openings with restraint, allowing Clover’s reflections—about home, ambition, and belonging—to carry the weight of choice. The book’s social scenes highlight differences between regions without caricature, suggesting how character can be both softened and steadied by new surroundings. Affection, if it blooms, is shown as an outcome of mutual respect rather than sudden drama.

Seasonal shifts and community needs draw the household into cooperative action. A spell of difficult weather, a neighbor’s trouble, or an unexpected absence requires plans to be revised and loyalties reaffirmed. Clover’s calm presence and practical sympathy serve as the hinge on which several minor crises turn, confirming the book’s confidence in everyday virtues. Outcomes are restorative without easy triumph, and the emphasis remains on healing, adaptability, and gratitude. As the stay in the mountains lengthens, a clearer picture of future paths emerges, yet Coolidge keeps conclusions measured, avoiding grand finales in favor of earned, modest satisfactions.

Clover endures as a quiet coming-of-age set against the American West’s tonic air. Its significance within the Katy series lies in how it translates the earlier books’ domestic ethos to a broader landscape, showing duty and delight in fresh proportion. Without relying on shocks or secrets, Coolidge traces how steadiness, courtesy, and attention to others can enlarge a life rather than confine it. The closing chapters gesture toward continuing possibilities while preserving a light hand with outcomes. Readers are left with a sense of open horizons—moral and literal—that gives the novel its lasting gentleness and resonance.

Historical Context

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Clover, published in 1888 by the Boston firm Roberts Brothers, is the fourth novel in Susan Coolidge's popular "What Katy Did" series. Coolidge was the pen name of Sarah Chauncey Woolsey (1835–1905), an American writer associated with the domestic fiction tradition. The book follows the Carr family into the later nineteenth century United States, extending a series that began with What Katy Did (1872). Written for a growing middle-class juvenile audience, Clover blends realism and moral instruction typical of the Gilded Age. Its setting and manners mirror postbellum American life, foregrounding home, kinship, and duty as anchoring institutions amid rapid social and geographic mobility.

Late nineteenth-century American children's literature expanded rapidly, supported by urban publishers and family magazines such as St. Nicholas (founded 1873). Boston houses like Roberts Brothers cultivated serial fiction for girls in the wake of Louisa May Alcott's Little Women (1868–69), encouraging narratives that rewarded self-discipline while allowing humor and individuality. At the same time, opportunities for girls' education widened through female seminaries and new women's colleges—Vassar (1865), Smith (1871), and Wellesley (1875). Though Clover is not a college novel, its emphasis on reading, correspondence, and character formation reflects a culture that prized female cultivation and imagined wider horizons for adolescent heroines.

Technological change made Clover's geographic reach plausible. After the first transcontinental railroad opened in

1869, multiple lines linked Eastern cities to Colorado and other Rocky Mountain destinations by the 1870s and 1880s. Rail companies promoted resort towns and excursions, turning long-distance travel into a respectable middle-class experience. Guidebooks and timetables mapped routes to springs, mountain hotels, and burgeoning towns. The novel’s east-to-west journey thus sits squarely within a national infrastructure that compressed distance and diffused regional cultures. In situating domestic life along new rail corridors, the book registers how travel could reshape family arrangements without discarding nineteenth-century ideals of propriety and care.

Health-seeking travel was a defining Gilded Age practice. Physicians frequently recommended “climate cures” for respiratory and nervous ailments, especially in dry, high-altitude locales. Colorado Springs and nearby resorts attracted invalids throughout the 1870s and 1880s, part of a wider movement that continued even after Robert Koch identified the tuberculosis bacillus in 1882. Sanatorium care expanded later in the decade, but boardinghouses and hotels remained common settings for convalescence. Clover’s attention to routines of rest, fresh air, and sociable caretaking accords with contemporary medical advice and popular health culture, portraying recovery as a moral as well as physical discipline within a supportive community.

The novel’s Western milieu aligns with Colorado’s post–Civil War development. Colorado became a U.S. state in 1876, and the silver boom—centered on places like Leadville in the late 1870s—spurred rapid growth, migration, and urban services. Towns mixed long-term residents, transient workers, tourists, and health seekers, with boardinghouses and small enterprises providing social anchors. Eastern manners and aspirations traveled west with migrants and

visitors, meeting newer civic institutions and looser social hierarchies. By filtering this environment through a courteous, domestic lens, Clover renders the West not as a lawless frontier but as a space where respectability, neighborliness, and enterprise could be reconciled.

Gilded Age middle-class culture placed high value on industrious housekeeping, polite sociability, and thrift. Etiquette manuals and domestic advice literature flourished, while scientific approaches to household management began to circulate through lectures and books, anticipating the later home economics movement associated with figures like Ellen Swallow Richards. Economic volatility and regional relocation made practical competence a moral credential. Clover’s portrayals of budgeting, furnishing rooms, and sustaining community in temporary lodgings exemplify those ideals. The narrative treats domestic work as skilled, ethical labor that stabilizes families and friendships, thereby endorsing a widely shared belief that private virtues carried public significance.

Coolidge wrote within a transatlantic tradition of domestic realism shaped by authors such as Louisa May Alcott in the United States and Charlotte M. Yonge in Britain. These writers favored episodic plots, everyday dilemmas, and gentle humor over melodrama, using homes, schools, and parlors as theaters for moral growth. Contemporary reviews praised such books for cultivating taste and character in young readers. Clover’s conversational tone, ensemble cast, and incremental tests of judgment align with that aesthetic. The result is a text that reflects prevailing literary standards for juvenile fiction while normalizing female initiative exercised within the bounds of courtesy and duty.

The 1880s also brought debates about women’s public roles and the nation’s westward expansion. While professional avenues for middle-class women remained limited, club work, philanthropy, and travel offered new agency. Federal policies like the Dawes Act (1887) accelerated the dispossession and allotment of Native lands, even as railroads and resorts marketed the West to Eastern consumers. Clover largely brackets political conflict, preferring household-scale ethics and neighborly service. In doing so, it mirrors its era’s optimism and blind spots: celebrating mobility, self-culture, and benevolence, while smoothing over the structural inequities that underwrote the comforts and opportunities available to its characters.

CLOVER (Children's Classics Series)

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Chapter I.

A Talk on the Doorsteps

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It was one of those afternoons in late April which are as mild and balmy as any June day[1q]. The air was full of the chirps and twitters of nest-building birds, and of sweet indefinable odors from half-developed leaf-buds and cherry and pear blossoms. The wisterias overhead were thickly starred with pointed pearl-colored sacs, growing purpler with each hour, which would be flowers before long; the hedges were quickening into life, the long pensile willow-boughs and the honey-locusts hung in a mist of fine green against the sky, and delicious smells came with every puff of wind from the bed of white violets under the parlor windows.

Katy and Clover Carr, sitting with their sewing on the door-steps, drew in with every breath the sense of spring. Who does not know the delightfulness of that first sitting out of doors after a long winter’s confinement? It seems like flinging the gauntlet down to the powers of cold. Hope and renovation are in the air[2q]. Life has conquered Death, and to the happy hearts in love with life there is joy in the victory. The two sisters talked busily as they sewed, but all the time an only half-conscious rapture informed their senses,—the sympathy of that which is immortal in human souls with the resurrection of natural things, which is the sure pledge of immortality.

It was nearly a year since Katy had come back from that too brief journey to Europe with Mrs. Ashe and Amy, about which some of you have read, and many things of interest

to the Carr family had happened during the interval. The “Natchitoches[1]” had duly arrived in New York in October, and presently afterward Burnet was convulsed by the appearance of a tall young fellow in naval uniform, and the announcement of Katy’s engagement to Lieutenant Worthington.

It was a piece of news which interested everybody in the little town, for Dr. Carr was a universal friend and favorite. For a time he had been the only physician in the place; and though with the gradual growth of population two or three younger men had appeared to dispute the ground with him, they were forced for the most part to content themselves with doctoring the new arrivals, and with such fragments and leavings of practice as Dr. Carr chose to intrust to them. None of the old established families would consent to call in any one else if they could possibly get the “old” doctor.

A skilful practitioner, who is at the same time a wise adviser, a helpful friend, and an agreeable man, must necessarily command a wide influence. Dr. Carr was “by all odds and far away,” as our English cousins would express it, the most popular person in Burnet, wanted for all pleasant occasions, and doubly wanted for all painful ones.

So the news of Katy’s engagement was made a matter of personal concern by a great many people, and caused a general stir, partly because she was her father’s daughter, and partly because she was herself; for Katy had won many friends by her own merit. So long as Ned Worthington stayed, a sort of tide of congratulation and sympathy seemed to sweep through the house all day long. Tea-roses and chrysanthemums, and baskets of pears and the beautiful Burnet grapes flooded the premises, and the door-bell rang so often that Clover threatened to leave the door

open, with a card attached,—“Walk straight in. *He* is in the parlor!”

Everybody wanted to see and know Katy’s lover, and to have him as a guest. Ten tea-drinkings a week would scarcely have contented Katy’s well-wishers, had the limitations of mortal weeks permitted such a thing; and not a can of oysters would have been left in the place if Lieutenant Worthington’s leave had lasted three days longer. Clover and Elsie loudly complained that they themselves never had a chance to see him; for whenever he was not driving or walking with Katy, or having long *tête-à-têtes* in the library, he was eating muffins somewhere, or making calls on old ladies whose feelings would be dreadfully hurt if he went away without their seeing him.

“Sisters seem to come off worst of all,” protested Johnnie. But in spite of their lamentations they all saw enough of their future brother-in-law to grow fond of him; and notwithstanding some natural pangs of jealousy at having to share Katy with an outsider, it was a happy visit, and every one was sorry when the leave of absence ended, and Ned had to go away.

A month later the “Natchitoches” sailed for the Bahamas. It was to be a six months’ cruise only; and on her return she was for a while to make part of the home squadron. This furnished a good opportunity for her first lieutenant to marry; so it was agreed that the wedding should take place in June, and Katy set about her preparations in the leisurely and simple fashion which was characteristic of her. She had no ambition for a great *trousseau*[2], and desired to save her father expense; so her outfit, as compared with that of most modern brides, was a very moderate one, but being planned and mostly made at home, it necessarily involved thought, time, and a good deal of personal exertion.

Dear little Clover flung herself into the affair with even more interest than if it had been her own. Many happy mornings that winter did the sisters spend together over their dainty stitches and “white seam.” Elsie and Johnnie were good needle-women now, and could help in many ways. Mrs. Ashe often joined them; even Amy could contribute aid in the plainer sewing, and thread everybody’s needles. But the most daring and indefatigable of all was Clover, who never swerved in her determination that Katy’s “things” should be as nice and as pretty as love and industry combined could make them. Her ideas as to decoration soared far beyond Katy’s. She hem-stitched, she cat-stitched, she feather-stitched, she lace-stitched, she tucked and frilled and embroidered, and generally worked her fingers off; while the bride vainly protested that all this finery was quite unnecessary, and that simple hems and a little Hamburg edging[3] would answer just as well. Clover merely repeated the words, “Hamburg edging!” with an accent of scorn, and went straight on in her elected way.

As each article received its last touch, and came from the laundry white and immaculate, it was folded to perfection, tied with a narrow blue or pale rose-colored ribbon, and laid aside in a sacred receptacle known as “The Wedding Bureau.” The handkerchiefs, grouped in dozens, were strewn with dried violets and rose-leaves to make them sweet. Lavender-bags and sachets of orris lay among the linen; and perfumes as of Araby were discernible whenever a drawer in the bureau was pulled out.

So the winter passed, and now spring was come; and the two girls on the doorsteps were talking about the wedding, which seemed very near now.

“Tell me just what sort of an affair you want it to be,” said Clover.