A HUNDRED AND TWENTY-FOUR years ago, Chummy and Sandra Bee were the rowdiest little kids in Ruby, Arizona. Chummy was ten. Sandra Bee was six, and she could do everything that Chummy could do, plus ride a unicycle. They got along famously, even though Chummy knew that little sisters were usually kind of annoying. But Sandra Bee was his best friend, his closest confidant, and his partner in crime.

Their pops ran the only general store in Ruby—a town so tiny it could almost fit on a ring. Rain was scarce there, and money was even scarcer. But while the adults worried, the kids of the town ran feral in the streets, led as always by Chummy and the fearless Sandra Bee.

Because of this, most of the parents didn’t like the siblings very much.

“They never bathe!” wailed Mrs. Montgomery-Gregorson, who played organ at the church.
“I saw them climbing trees, pretending to be pterodactyls,” sniffed Lavender Rodeo, the cowboy’s wife.

And Pops and Mama could only shrug their shoulders and sigh. Sure, they had hoped and prayed for good kids, kids who used napkins and who never spit out their boiled peas. Kids who lived up to their legal names: Chummy was “Charles Ignatius” on his birth certificate, and Sandra Bee was, infuriatingly, “Chrysanthemum Sandra Beatrice.” Kids who didn’t invent games called “Tragical Apocalypse” and “Bald Bandit Showdown.” But what could you do?

One scorching day, when Chummy and Sandra Bee were lying on the floor and sucking ice chips, they overheard their parents talking.

“No one’s buying anything,” said Pops. “This town isn’t big enough for a store.”

“People have to eat,” said Mama. “Isn’t anyone buying food?”

“Yes, but no one wants our penny candy, or farm tools, or cough syrup,” said Pops. “I’m worried we’ll have to close down and move back East.”

Chummy and Sandra Bee looked at each other, ice dripping through their fingers.
Each knew exactly what the other was thinking: they wouldn’t go back East unless they were dragged there by their ears. East was where people dressed up for teatime. East was where people wore white gloves.

They went out to the swimming hole to splash around and think.

“We need money,” said Chummy. “Lots of money. Maybe we should become pirates and go looting for gold.”

“On what ocean?” said Sandra Bee, casually tossing aside a water bug that was attempting to crawl up her arm.

“Good point,” said Chummy. “We could start our own store,” said Sandra Bee, “with EXORBITANT prices. And we could convince everyone that we’re selling things they really, really NEED.”

“You sure are learning big words in school,” said Chummy, admiringly. “But if Pops can’t sell cough syrup, I’m not sure we can sell much else.”

“Consarn it,” said Sandra Bee after a while. “I’m tired of thinking. I’m gonna skip some rocks.”
Chummy watched as his sister sent rock after rock skipping moodily across the water. She sure was good at skipping, he thought. The way the rocks flew out of her hands—they practically sparkled.

Wait a minute. The rocks were sparkling.

“Stop!” he yelled, racing toward her. “Hold on to that rock, Sandra Bee!”

“You wanna try to out-skip me?” said Sandra Bee, with a wicked smile on her face.

“Look closer at those rocks,” said Chummy. “See how they catch the sun?”

They peered at the rock in Sandra Bee’s hand. It was muddy, sure, but spotted with brilliant specks of some sort of mineral. A mineral that blinked and sparkled in the light like . . .

“GOLD!” they yelled at the same time.

Chummy and Sandra Bee had paid enough attention in school to know that finding gold was a big deal. Their teacher told them that

Sandra Bee’s rock-skipping abilities were legendary. She sent her stones flying across the water like they had wings. She was known for her “seven-skip swan dive,” during which the rock would skip seven times and then plummet into the water like a bird going after a fish.
“gold rushes” were exciting, sure, but that they only happened in
towns like Volcano, Skidoo, and
Mokelumne Hill, frontier towns
full of wild cowboys, daring bandits,
and fearless miners.

Gold wasn’t for Ruby, Arizona.
Gold wasn’t for kids.

But if there was one thing that
Chummy and Sandra Bee knew for
certain, it was that the sorts of adults
who said things never happened were
often quite wrong.

They raced home, with Sandra
Bee clutching the glittery rock in
her grubby hands. “Pops!” they
yelled. “We saved the store! We
saved the store!”

Pops was eating at the kitchen
table when they rushed in. He took
one look at the rock and dropped
half a corn muffin right out of his
mouth. “Jumping Jehoshaphat,” he
whispered. “Is that what I think
it is?”

The next few days were a blur,
even for kids who were used to
chaos. They remember racing their
dad out to the swimming hole to
show him how almost all of the
rocks sparkled. They remember
how Mama scrubbed their faces
and took them to a town meeting,
where Pops explained to everyone
that they were “sitting on a nest egg,”
whatever that meant, and that they should all work together and share generously. They remember how Lavender Rodeo, the cowboy’s wife, smiled at them for the first time ever—and how Sandra Bee almost stuck out her tongue in response, but reined herself in at the last minute.

The sleepy days of Ruby were over, then. New families moved in. New children joined the school, new games were invented, new toys were swapped for old ones. Business boomed at Pops’s general store. Sandra Bee nearly fainted when an ice cream parlor opened down the street.
And the other parents stopped calling Chummy and Sandra Bee “wild” and “raucous” and started calling them “plucky” and “clever.” The attention was nice for a while, but the siblings were pretty glad when it faded. They didn’t much care for adults pinching their cheeks, anyway. They preferred to grab their swimsuits and their skipping rocks and go hollering off into the sunset.