

The Golden Road

By

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Foreword

Once upon a time we all walked on the golden road. It was a fair highway, through the Land of Lost Delight; shadow and sunshine were blessedly mingled, and every turn and dip revealed a fresh charm and a new loveliness to eager hearts and unspoiled eyes.

On that road we heard the song of morning stars; we drank in fragrances aerial and sweet as a May mist; we were rich in gossamer fancies and iris hopes; our hearts sought and found the boon of dreams; the years waited beyond and they were very fair; life was a rose-lipped comrade with purple flowers dripping from her fingers.

We may long have left the golden road behind, but its memories are the dearest of our eternal possessions; and those who cherish them as such may haply find a pleasure in the pages of this book, whose people are pilgrims on the golden road of youth.

I. A New Departure

"I've thought of something amusing for the winter," I said as we drew into a half-circle around the glorious wood-fire in Uncle Alec's kitchen.

It had been a day of wild November wind, closing down into a wet, eerie twilight. Outside, the wind was shrilling at the windows and around the eaves, and the rain was playing on the roof. The old willow at the gate was writhing in the storm and the orchard was a place of weird music, born of all the tears and fears that haunt the halls of night. But little we cared for the gloom and the loneliness of the outside world; we kept them at bay with the light of the fire and the laughter of our young lips.

We had been having a splendid game of Blind-Man's Buff. That is, it had been splendid at first; but later the fun went out of it because we found that Peter was, of malice prepense, allowing himself to be caught too easily, in order that he might have the pleasure of catching Felicity--which he never failed to do, no matter how tightly his eyes were bound. What remarkable goose said that love is blind? Love can see through five folds of closely-woven muffler with ease!

"I'm getting tired," said Cecily, whose breath was coming rather quickly and whose pale cheeks had bloomed into scarlet. "Let's sit down and get the Story Girl to tell us a story."

But as we dropped into our places the Story Girl shot a significant glance at me which intimated that this was the psychological moment for introducing the scheme she and I had been secretly developing for some days. It was really the Story Girl's idea and none of mine. But she had insisted that I should make the suggestion as coming wholly from myself.

"If you don't, Felicity won't agree to it. You know yourself, Bev, how contrary she's been lately over anything I mention. And if she goes against it Peter will too--the ninny!--and it wouldn't be any fun if we weren't all in it."

"What is it?" asked Felicity, drawing her chair slightly away from Peter's.

"It is this. Let us get up a newspaper of our own--write it all ourselves, and have all we do in it. Don't you think we can get a lot of fun out of it?"

Everyone looked rather blank and amazed, except the Story Girl. She knew what she had to do, and she did it.

"What a silly idea!" she exclaimed, with a contemptuous toss of her long brown curls. "Just as if WE could get up a newspaper!"

Felicity fired up, exactly as we had hoped.

"I think it's a splendid idea," she said enthusiastically. "I'd like to know why we couldn't get up as good a newspaper as they have in town! Uncle Roger says the Daily Enterprise has gone to the dogs--all the news it prints is that some old woman has put a shawl on her head and gone across the road to have tea with another old woman. I guess we could do better than that. You needn't think, Sara Stanley, that nobody but you can do anything."

"I think it would be great fun," said Peter decidedly. "My Aunt Jane helped edit a paper when she was at Queen's Academy, and she said it was very amusing and helped her a great deal."

The Story Girl could hide her delight only by dropping her eyes and frowning.

"Bev wants to be editor," she said, "and I don't see how he can, with no experience. Anyhow, it would be a lot of trouble."

"Some people are so afraid of a little bother," retorted Felicity.

"I think it would be nice," said Cecily timidly, "and none of us have any experience of being editors, any more than Bev, so that wouldn't matter."

"Will it be printed?" asked Dan.

"Oh, no," I said. "We can't have it printed. We'll just have to write it out--we can buy foolscap from the teacher."

"I don't think it will be much of a newspaper if it isn't printed," said Dan scornfully.

"It doesn't matter very much what YOU think," said Felicity.

"Thank you," retorted Dan.

"Of course," said the Story Girl hastily, not wishing to have Dan turned against our project, "if all the rest of you want it I'll go in for it too. I daresay it would be real good fun, now that I come to think of it. And we'll keep the copies, and when we become famous they'll be quite valuable."

"I wonder if any of us ever will be famous," said Felix.

"The Story Girl will be," I said.

"I don't see how she can be," said Felicity skeptically. "Why, she's just one of us."

"Well, it's decided, then, that we're to have a newspaper," I resumed briskly. "The next thing is to choose a name for it. That's a very important thing."

"How often are you going to publish it?" asked Felix.

"Once a month."

"I thought newspapers came out every day, or every week at least," said Dan.

"We couldn't have one every week," I explained. "It would be too much work."

"Well, that's an argument," admitted Dan. "The less work you can get along with the better, in my opinion. No, Felicity, you needn't say it. I know exactly what you want to say, so save your breath to cool your porridge. I agree with you that I never work if I can find anything else to do."

"Remember it is harder still
To have no work to do,"

quoted Cecily reprovingly.

"I don't believe THAT," rejoined Dan. "I'm like the Irishman who said he wished the man who begun work had stayed and finished it."

"Well, is it decided that Bev is to be editor?" asked Felix.

"Of course it is," Felicity answered for everybody.

"Then," said Felix, "I move that the name be The King Monthly Magazine."

"That sounds fine," said Peter, hitching his chair a little nearer Felicity's.

"But," said Cecily timidly, "that will leave out Peter and the Story Girl and Sara Ray, just as if they didn't have a share in it. I don't think that would be fair."

"You name it then, Cecily," I suggested.

"Oh!" Cecily threw a deprecating glance at the Story Girl and Felicity. Then, meeting the contempt in the latter's gaze, she raised her head with unusual spirit.

"I think it would be nice just to call it Our Magazine," she said. "Then we'd all feel as if we had a share in it."

"Our Magazine it will be, then," I said. "And as for having a share in it, you bet we'll all have a share in it. If I'm to be editor you'll all have to be sub-editors, and have charge of a department."

"Oh, I couldn't," protested Cecily.

"You must," I said inexorably. "England expects everyone to do his duty.' That's our motto--only we'll put Prince Edward Island in place of England. There must be no shirking. Now, what departments will we have? We must make it as much like a real newspaper as we can."

"Well, we ought to have an etiquette department, then," said Felicity. "The Family Guide has one."

"Of course we'll have one," I said, "and Dan will edit it."

"Dan!" exclaimed Felicity, who had fondly expected to be asked to edit it herself.

"I can run an etiquette column as well as that idiot in the Family Guide, anyhow," said Dan defiantly. "But you can't have an etiquette department unless questions are asked. What am I to do if nobody asks any?"

"You must make some up," said the Story Girl. "Uncle Roger says that is what the Family Guide man does. He says it is impossible that there can be as many hopeless fools in the world as that column would stand for otherwise."

"We want you to edit the household department, Felicity," I said, seeing a cloud lowering on that fair lady's brow. "Nobody can do that as well as you. Felix will edit the jokes and the Information Bureau, and Cecily must be fashion editor. Yes, you must, Sis. It's easy as wink. And the Story Girl will attend to the personals. They're very important. Anyone can contribute a personal, but the Story Girl is to see there are some in every issue, even if she has to make them up, like Dan with the etiquette."

"Bev will run the scrap book department, besides the editorials," said the Story Girl, seeing that I was too modest to say it myself.

"Aren't you going to have a story page?" asked Peter.

"We will, if you'll be fiction and poetry editor," I said.

Peter, in his secret soul, was dismayed, but he would not blanch before Felicity.

"All right," he said, recklessly.

"We can put anything we like in the scrap book department," I explained, "but all the other contributions must be original, and all must have the name of the writer signed to them, except the personals. We must all do our best. Our Magazine is to be 'a feast of reason and flow of soul.'"

I felt that I had worked in two quotations with striking effect. The others, with the exception of the Story Girl, looked suitably impressed.

"But," said Cecily, reproachfully, "haven't you anything for Sara Ray to do? She'll feel awful bad if she is left out."

I had forgotten Sara Ray. Nobody, except Cecily, ever did remember Sara Ray unless she was on the spot. But we decided to put her in as advertising manager. That sounded well and really meant very little.

"Well, we'll go ahead then," I said, with a sigh of relief that the project had been so easily launched. "We'll get the first issue out about the first of January. And whatever else we do we mustn't let Uncle Roger get hold of it. He'd make such fearful fun of it."

"I hope we can make a success of it," said Peter moodily. He had been moody ever since he was entrapped into being fiction editor.

"It will be a success if we are determined to succeed," I said. "'Where there is a will there is always a way.'"

"That's just what Ursula Townley said when her father locked her in her room the night she was going to run away with Kenneth MacNair," said the Story Girl.

We pricked up our ears, scenting a story.

"Who were Ursula Townley and Kenneth MacNair?" I asked.

"Kenneth MacNair was a first cousin of the Awkward Man's grandfather, and Ursula Townley was the belle of the Island in her day. Who do you suppose told me the story--no, read it to me, out of his brown book?"

"Never the Awkward Man himself!" I exclaimed incredulously.

"Yes, he did," said the Story Girl triumphantly. "I met him one day last week back in the maple woods when I was looking for ferns. He was sitting by the spring, writing in his brown book. He hid it when he saw me and looked real silly; but after I had talked to him awhile I just asked him about it, and told him that the gossips said he wrote poetry in it, and if he did would he tell me, because I was dying to know. He said he wrote a little of everything in it; and then I begged him to read me something out of it, and he read me the story of Ursula and Kenneth."

"I don't see how you ever had the face," said Felicity; and even Cecily looked as if she thought the Story Girl had gone rather far.

"Never mind that," cried Felix, "but tell us the story. That's the main thing."

"I'll tell it just as the Awkward Man read it, as far as I can," said the Story Girl, "but I can't put all his nice poetical touches in, because I can't remember them all, though he read it over twice for me."

II. A Will, A Way And A Woman

"One day, over a hundred years ago, Ursula Townley was waiting for Kenneth MacNair in a great beechwood, where brown nuts were falling and an October wind was making the leaves dance on the ground like pixy-people."

"What are pixy-people?" demanded Peter, forgetting the Story Girl's dislike of interruptions.

"Hush," whispered Cecily. "That is only one of the Awkward Man's poetical touches, I guess."

"There were cultivated fields between the grove and the dark blue gulf; but far behind and on each side were woods, for Prince Edward Island a hundred years ago was not what it is today. The settlements were few and scattered, and the population so scanty that old Hugh Townley boasted that he knew every man, woman and child in it.

"Old Hugh was quite a noted man in his day. He was noted for several things--he was rich, he was hospitable, he was proud, he was masterful--and he had for daughter the handsomest young woman in Prince Edward Island.

"Of course, the young men were not blind to her good looks, and she had so many lovers that all the other girls hated her--"

"You bet!" said Dan, aside--

"But the only one who found favour in her eyes was the very last man she should have pitched her fancy on, at least if old Hugh were the judge. Kenneth MacNair was a dark-eyed young sea-captain of the next settlement, and it was to meet him that Ursula stole to the beechwood on that autumn day of crisp wind and ripe sunshine. Old Hugh had forbidden his house to the young man, making such a scene of fury about it that even Ursula's high spirit quailed. Old Hugh had really nothing against Kenneth himself; but years before either Kenneth or Ursula was born, Kenneth's father had beaten Hugh Townley in a hotly contested election. Political feeling ran high in those days, and old Hugh had never forgiven the MacNair his victory. The feud between the families dated from that tempest in the provincial teapot, and the surplus of votes on the wrong side was the reason why, thirty years after, Ursula had to meet her lover by stealth if she met him at all."

"Was the MacNair a Conservative or a Grit?" asked Felicity.

"It doesn't make any difference what he was," said the Story Girl impatiently. "Even a Tory would be romantic a hundred years ago. Well, Ursula couldn't see

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