

**THE
GOLDEN BIRD**



"Oh, how beautiful!" exclaimed Polly, all restraint leaving her young face and body as she fell on her knees before the sultan

This page in the original text is blank.

THE GOLDEN BIRD

BY

MARIA THOMPSON DAVIESS

Author of "The Melting of Molly," "Phyllis,"
"Sue Jane," "The Tinder Box," etc.

ILLUSTRATED BY

EDWARD L. CHASE



NEW YORK
THE CENTURY CO.
1918

Copyright, 1918, by
THE CENTURY CO.

Copyright, 1918, by
BUTTERICK PUBLISHING COMPANY

Published, September, 1918

TO
IDA CLYDE CLARKE
WHOSE COURAGE INSPIRES ME

This page in the original text is blank.

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

“Oh, how beautiful!” exclaimed Polly, all restraint leaving her young face and body as she fell on her knees before the sultan	<i>Frontispiece</i>
	FACING PAGE
A poor old sheep was lying flat with pathetic inertia while Adam stood over her with something in his arms	106
I put his babykins in a big feed-basket and the lamb twins came and welcomed him . .	118
And Bud was beautiful in the “custom-made” fifteen-dollar gray cheviot with his violet eyes and yellow shock, in spite of his red ears	192

This page in the original text is blank.

THE GOLDEN BIRD

This page in the original text is blank.

THE GOLDEN BIRD

CHAPTER I

THE primary need of a woman's nature is always supposed to be love, but very suddenly I discovered that in my case it was money, a lot of it and quick. That is, I thought I needed a lot and in a very great hurry; but if I had known what I know now, I might have been contented feeding upon the bread of some kind of charity, for instance, like being married to Matthew Berry the very next day after I discovered my poverty. But at that period of my life I was a very ignorant girl, and in the most noble spirit of a desperate adventure I embarked upon the quest of the Golden Bird, which in one short year has landed me—I am now the richest woman in the world.

“But, Ann Craddock, you know nothing

THE GOLDEN BIRD

at all about a chicken in any more natural state than in a croquette," stormed Matthew at me as he savagely speared one of those inoffensive articles of banquet diet with a sharp silver fork while he squared himself with equal determination between me and any possible partner for the delicious one-step that the band in the ball-room was beginning to send out in inviting waves of sound to round the dancers in from loitering over their midnight food.

"The little I do *not* know about the chicken business, after one week spent in pursuit of that knowledge through every weird magazine and state agricultural bulletin in the public library, even you could learn, Matthew Berry, with your lack of sympathy with the great American wealth producer, the humble female chicken known in farmer patois as a hen. Did you know that it only costs about two dollars and thirteen cents to feed a hen a whole year and that she will produce twenty-seven dollars and a half for her owner, the darling thing?

THE GOLDEN BIRD

I know I'll just love her when I get to know her—them better, as I will in only about eighteen hours now."

"Ann, you are mad—mad!" foamed Matthew, as he set down his plate of perfectly good and untasted food, and buried his head in his hands until his mop of black hair looked like a big blot of midnight.

"I'm not mad, Matthew, just dead poor, an heiress out of a job and with the necessity of earning her bread by the sweat of her brow instead of consuming cake by the labor of other people. Uncle Cradd is coming in again with a two-horse wagon, and the carriage to move us out to Elmnest to-morrow morning. Judge Rutherford will attend to selling all the property and settle with father's creditors. Another wagon is coming for father's library, and in two days he won't know that Uncle Cradd and I have moved him, if I can just get him started on a bat with Epictetus or old Horace. Then me for the tall timbers and my friend the hen.

THE GOLDEN BIRD

“Oh, Ann, for the love of high heaven, marry me to-morrow, and let me move you and Father Craddock over into that infernal, empty old barn I keep open as a hotel for nigger servants. Marry me instead—”

“Instead of the hen?” I interrupted him with a laugh. “I can’t, Matt, you dear thing. I honestly can’t. I’ve got to go back to the land from which my race sprang and make it blossom into a beautiful existence for those two dear old boys. When Uncle Cradd heard of the smash from that horrible phosphate deal he was at the door the next morning at sun-up, driving the two gray mules to one wagon himself, with old Rufus driving the gray horses hitched to that queer tumble-down, old family coach, though he had n’t spoken to father since he married mother twenty-eight years ago.

“‘Ready to move you all home, bag and baggage, William,’ he said, as he took father into his huge old arms clad in the rusty broadcloth of his best suit, which I think is the garment he purchased for father’s very

THE GOLDEN BIRD

worldly, town wedding with my mother, which he came from Riverfield to attend for purposes of disinheriting the bridegroom and me, though I was several years in the future at that date. 'Elmnest is as much yours as mine, as I told you when you sprigged off to marry in town. Get your dimity together, Nancy! Your grandmother Craddock's haircloth trunk is strapped on behind her carriage there, and Rufus will drive you home. These mules are too skittish for him to handle. Fine pair, eh, William?' And right there in the early dawn, almost in front of the garage that contained his touring Chauvinnais and my gray roadster, father stood in his velvet dressing-gown and admired the two moth-eaten old animals. Now, I honestly ask you, Matthew, could a woman of heart refuse at least to attempt to see those two great old boys through the rest of their lives in peace and comfort together? Elmnest is roof and land and that is about all, for Uncle Cradd never would let father give him a cent

THE GOLDEN BIRD

on account of his feud with mother, even after she had been dead for years. Father would have gone home with him that morning, but I made him stay to turn things over to Judge Rutherford. Are n't they great, those two old pioneers?"

"They are the best sports ever, Ann, and I say let's fix up Elmnest for them to live in when they won't stay with us, and for a summer home for us to go and take—take the children for rural training. Now what do you say—wedding to-morrow?" And the light in dear old Matthew's eyes was very lovely indeed as the music grew less blatant and the waiter turned down the lights near the little alcove that the wide walnut paneling made beside the steps that go up to the balcony. I have always said that the Clovermead Country Club has the loveliest house anywhere in the South.

"No, Matthew, I care too much about you to let you marry a woman in search of a roof and food," I answered him, with all of the affection I seemed to possess at that time in

THE GOLDEN BIRD

my eyes. "You deserve better than that from me."

"Now, see here, Ann Craddock, did I or did I not ask you to marry me at your fourteenth birthday party, which was just ten years ago, and did you or did you not tell me just to wait until you got grown? Have you or have you not reached the years of discretion and decision? I am ready to marry, I am!" And as he made this announcement of his matrimonially inclined condition of mind, Matthew took my hand in his and laid his cheek against it.

"My heart is n't grown up yet, Matt," I said softly, with all the tenderness I, as I before remarked, at that time possessed. "Don't wait for me. Marry Belle Proctor or somebody and—and bring the—babies out to Elmnest for—"

The explosion that then followed landed me in Owen Murray's arms on the floor of the ball-room, and landed Matthew in his big racing-car, which I could hear go roaring down the road beyond the golf-links.

THE GOLDEN BIRD

There is a certain kind of woman whose brain develops with amazing normality and strength, but whose heart remains very soft-fibered and uncertain, with tendencies to lapse into second childhood. I am that garden variety, and it took the exercising of many heart interests to toughen my cardiac organ.

As I traveled out the long turnpike that wound itself through the Harpeth Valley to the very old and tradition-mossed town of Riverfield, in the high, huge-wheeled, swinging old coach of my Great-grandmother Craddock, sitting pensively alone while father occupied the front seat beside Uncle Cradd, both of them in deep converse about a line in Tom Moore, while Uncle Cradd bumbled the air of "Drink to me only with thine eyes" in a lovely old bass, I should have been softly and pensively weeping at the thought of the devastation of my father's fortune, of the poverty brought down upon his old age, and about my fate as a gay social being going thus into exile; but I was n't.

THE GOLDEN BIRD

Did I say that I was sitting alone in state upon the faded rose leather of those ancestral cushions? That was not the case, for upon the seat beside me rode the Golden Bird in a beautiful crate, which bore the legend, "Cock, full brother to Ladye Rosecomb, the world's champion, three-hundred-and-fourteen-egg hen, insured at one thousand dollars. Express sixteen dollars." And in another larger crate, strapped on top of the old haircloth trunk, which held several corduroy skirts, some coarse linen smocks made hurriedly by Madam Felicia after a pattern in "The Review," and several pairs of lovely, high-topped boots, as well as a couple of Hagensack sweaters, rode his family, to whom he had not yet even spoken. The family consisted of ten perfectly beautiful white Leghorn feminine darlings whose crate was marked, "Thoroughbreds from Prairie Dog Farm, Boulder, Colorado." I had obtained the money to purchase these very much alive foundations for my fortune, also the smart farmer's costume, or rather

THE GOLDEN BIRD

my idea of the correct thing in rustics, by selling all the lovely lingerie I had brought from Paris with me just the week before the terrible war had crashed down upon the world, and which I had not worn because I had not needed them, to Bess Rutherford and Belle Proctor at very high prices, because who could tell whether France would ever procure their like again? They were composed mostly of incrustations of embroidery and real Val, and anyway the Golden Bird only cost seven hundred dollars instead of the thousand, and the ladies Bird only ten dollars apiece, which to me did not seem exactly fair, as they were of just as good family as he. I was very proud of myself for having been professional enough to follow the directions of my new big red book on "The Industrious Fowl," and to buy Golden Bird and his family from localities which were separated as far as is the East from the West. My company was responsible for my light-heartedness at a time when I should have been weeping with vain regrets

THE GOLDEN BIRD

at leaving life—and perhaps love, for I could n't help hearing in my mind's ears that great dangerous racer bearing Matthew away from me at the rate of eighty miles an hour. I was figuring on just how long it would take the five to eight hundred children of the Bird family, which I expected to incarnate themselves out of egg-shells, to increase to a flock of two thousand, from which, I was assured by the statistics in that very reliable book, I ought to make three thousand dollars a year, maybe five, with "good management." Also I was not at all worried about the "good management" to be employed. I intended to begin to exert it the minute of my arrival in the township of Riverfield. I had even already begun to use "thoughtful care," for I had brought a box of tea biscuits along, and I felt a positive thrill of affection for Mr. G. Bird as he gratefully gobbled a crushed one from my hand. Also it was dear of him the way he raised his proud head and chuckled to his brides in the crate behind

THE GOLDEN BIRD

him to come and get their share. It was pathetic the way he called and called and they answered, until I finally stopped their mouths with ten other dainties, so that he could consume his in peace. Even at that early stage of our friendship I liked the Golden Bird, and perhaps it was just a wave of prophetic psychology that made me feel so warmly towards the proud, white young animal who was to lead me to—

So instead of the despair due the occasion, I was happy as I jogged slowly out over the twenty long miles that stretched out like a silvery ribbon dropped down upon the meadows and fields that separate the proud city of Hayesville and the gray and green little old hamlet of Riverfield, which nestles in a bend of the Cumberland River and sleeps time away under its huge old oak and elm and hackberry trees, kept perpetually green by the gnarled old cedars that throw blue-berried green fronds around their winter nakedness. As we rode slowly along, with a leisure I am sure all the motor-

THE GOLDEN BIRD

car world has forgotten exists, the two old boys on the front seat hummed and chuckled happily while I breathed in great gulps of a large, meadow-sweet spring tang that seemed to fairly soak into the circulation of my heart. The February day was cool with yet a kind of tender warmth in its little gust of Southern wind that made me feel as does that brand of very expensive Rhine wine which Albert at the Salemite on Forty-second Street in New York keeps for Gale Beacon specially, and which makes Gale so furious for you not to recognize, remember about, and comment upon at his really wonderful dinners to bright and shining lights in art and literature. Returning from New York to the Riverfield Road through the Harpeth Valley, I also discovered upon the damsel Spring a hint of a soft young costume of young green and purple and yellow that was as yet just a mist being draped over her by the Southern wind.

“I feel like the fairy princess being driven

THE GOLDEN BIRD

into a land of enchantment, Mr. Golden Bird," I remarked as I leaned back upon the soft old cushions and took in the first leisurely breath of the air of the open road that my lungs had ever inhaled: one simply gulps air when seated in a motor-car. "It is all so simple and easy and—"

Just at this moment happened the first real adventure of my quest, and at that time it seemed a serious one, though now I would regard it as of very little moment. Suddenly there came the noise of snapping cords, the feeling of jar and upheaval, and before I could turn more than half-way around for purposes of observation, the entire feminine Bird family in their temporary crate abode slid down into the dust of the road with a great crash. I held my breath while, with a jolt and a bounce and a squeak of the heavy old springs, Uncle Cradd brought the ancestral family coach to a halt about ten feet away from the wreck, which was a *mêlée* of broken timber, squeaking voices, and flapping wings. As

THE GOLDEN BIRD

soon as I recovered from the shock I sprang from my cushions beside Mr. G. Bird, who was fairly yelling clucks of command at this family-to-be, and ran to their assistance. Now, I am very long and fleet of limb, but those white Leghorn ladies were too swift for me, and before I reached the wreck, they had all ten disentangled themselves from the crushed timbers and had literally taken to the woods, through which the Riverfield ribbon was at that moment winding itself. Clucking and chuckling, they concealed themselves in an undergrowth of coral-strung buck bushes, little scrub cedars, and dried oak leaves, and I could hear them holding a council of war that sounded as if they were to depart forever to parts unknown. In a twinkling of an eye I saw my future fortune literally take wings, and in my extremity I cried aloud.

“Oh, call them all back, Mr. Golden Bird,” I pleaded.

“Now, Nancy, that is always what I said about hens. They are such pesky woman-

THE GOLDEN BIRD

ish things that it's beneath the dignity of a man to bother with 'em. I have n't had one on the place for twenty years. We'll just turn this rooster loose with them and we can go on home in peace," said Uncle Cradd as he peered around the side of the coach while father's mild face appeared on the other side. As he spoke, he reached back and released my Golden Bird from his crate and sent him flying out into the woods in the direction of his family.

"Oh, they are the only things in the world that stand between me and starvation," I wailed, though not loud enough for either father or Uncle Cradd to hear. "Please, please, Golden Bird, come back and bring the others with you," I pleaded as I held out my hand to the proud white Sultan, who had paused by the roadside on his way to his family and was now turning bright eyes in the direction of my outstretched hand. In all the troubles and trials through which that proud Mr. G. Bird and I went hand in hand, or rather wing in

THE GOLDEN BIRD

hand, in which I was at times hard and cold and disappointed in him, I have never forgotten that he turned in his tracks and walked majestically back to my side and peered into the outstretched hand with a trustful and inquiring peck. Some kind fortune had brought it to pass that I held the package of tea biscuits in my other hand, and in a few breathless seconds he was pecking at one and calling to the foolish, faithless lot of huddled hens in the bushes to come to him immediately. First he called invitingly while I held my breath, and then he commanded as he scratched for lost crumbs in the white dust of the Riverfield ribbon, but the foolish creatures only huddled and squeaked, and at a few cautious steps I took in their direction, they showed a decided threat of vanishing forever into the woods.

“Oh, what will I do, Mr. G. Bird?” I asked in despair, with a real sob in my throat as I looked toward the family coach, from which I could hear a happy and

THE GOLDEN BIRD

animated discussion of Plato's Republic going on between the two old gentlemen who had thirty years' arrears in argument and conversation to make up. I could see that no help would come from that direction. "I can't lose them forever," I said again, and this time there was the real sob arising unmistakably in my voice.

"Just stand still, and I'll call them to you," came a soft, deep voice out of the forest behind me, and behold, a man stood at my side!

The man's name is Adam.

"Now give me a cracker and watch 'em come," he said, as he came close to my side and took a biscuit from my surprised and nerveless hand. "Ah, but you are one beauty, are n't you?" he further remarked, and I was not positively sure whether he meant me or the Golden Bird until I saw that he had reached down and was stroking Mr. G. Bird with a delighted hand. "Chick, chick, chick!" he commanded, with a note that was not at all unlike the com-

THE GOLDEN BIRD

manding one the Sultan had used a few minutes past, only more so, and in less than two seconds all those foolish hens were scrambling around our feet. In fact, the command in his voice had been so forcible that I myself had moved several feet nearer to him until I, too, was in the center of my scrambling, clucking Bird venture.

I don't like beautiful men. I never did. I think that a woman ought to have all the beauty there is, and I feel that a man who has any is in some way dishonest, but I never before saw anything like that person who had come out of the woods to the rescue of my family fortune, and I simply stared at him as he stood with a fluff of seething white wings around his feet and towered against the green gray of an old tree that hung over the side of the road. He was tall and broad, but lithe and lovely like some kind of a woods thing, and heavy hair of the same brilliant burnished red that I had seen upon the back of a prize Rhode Island Red in the

THE GOLDEN BIRD

lovely water-color plates in my chicken book,—which had tempted me to buy “red” until I had read about the triumphs of the Leghorn “whites,”—waved close to his head, only ruffling just over his ears enough to hide the tips of them. His eyes were set so far back under their dark, heavy, red eyebrows that they seemed night-blue with their long black fringe of lashes. His face was square and strong and gentle, and the collar of his gray flannel shirt was open so that I could see that his head was set on his wide shoulders with lines like an old Greek masterpiece. Gray corduroy trousers were strapped around his waist by a wide belt made of some kind of raw-looking leather that was held together by two leather lacings, while on his feet were a kind of sandal shoes that appeared to be made of the same leather. He must have constructed both belt and shoes himself, and he had n’t any hat at all upon his crimson-gold thatch of hair. I looked at him so long that I had to look away, and then when I did I looked

THE GOLDEN BIRD

right back at him because I could n't believe that he was true.

“Now I ’m going to pick them up gently, two at a time, tie their feet together with a piece of this string, and hand them to you to put inside the carriage. I ’ll catch the cock first, the handsome old sport,” and as Pan spoke, he began to suit his actions to his words with amazing tact and skill. I shall always be glad that the first chicken I ever held in my arms was put into them gently by that woods man, and that it was the Golden Bird himself. “Put him in and shut the door, and he ’ll calm the ladies as you bring them to him,” he commanded as he bent down and lifted two of the Bird brides and began to tie their feet together with a piece of cord he had taken from a deep pocket in the gray trousers.

“Oh, thank you,” I said with a depth of gratitude in my voice that I did not know I possessed. “You are the most wonderful man I ever saw—I mean that I ever saw with chickens,” I said, ending the remark in

THE GOLDEN BIRD

an agony of embarrassment. "I don't know much about them. I mean chickens," I hastened to add, and made matters worse.

"Oh, they are easy, when you get to know 'em, chickens—or men," he said kindly, without a spark in his eyes back of their black bushes. "Are they yours?"

"They are all the property I have got in the world," I answered as I clasped the last pair of biddies to my breast, for while we had been holding our primitive conversation, I had been obeying his directions and loading the Birds into Grandmother Craddock's stately equipage. Anxiety shone from my eyes into his sympathetic ones.

"Well, you'll be an heiress in no time with them to start you, with 'good management.' I never saw a finer lot," he said, as he walked to the door of the carriage with me, with the last pair of white Leghorn ladies in his arms.

"But maybe I have n't got that management," I faltered, with my anxiety getting tearful in my words.

THE GOLDEN BIRD

“Oh, you ’ll learn,” he said, with such heavenly soothing in his voice that I almost reached out my hands and clung to him as he settled the fussing poultry in the bottom of the carriage in such a way as to leave room for my feet among them. Mr. G. Bird was perched on the seat at my side and was craning his neck down and soothingly scolding his family. “How are you, Mr. Craddock?” Pan asked of Uncle Cradd’s back, and by his question interrupted an argument that sounded, from the Greek phrases flying, like a battle on the walls of Troy.

“Well, well, how are you, Adam?” exclaimed Uncle Cradd, as he turned around and greeted the woodsman with a smile of positive delight.

I had known that man’s name was Adam, but I don’t know how I knew.

“This is my brother, Mr. William Craddock, who ’s come home to me to live and die where he belongs, and that young lady is Nancy. Those chickens are just a whim of hers, and we have to humor her. Can we

THE GOLDEN BIRD

lift you as far as Riverfield?" Uncle Cradd made his introduction and delivered his invitation all in one breath.

"I'm glad to meet you, sir, and I am grateful for your assistance in capturing my daughter's whims," said father, as he came partly out of his B. C. daze.

As he took my hand into his slender, but very powerful grasp, that man had the impertinence to laugh into my eyes at my parent's double-entendre, which he had intended as a simple single remark.

"No, thank you, sir; I've got to get across Paradise Ridge before sundown. The lambs are dropping fast over at Plunkett's, and I want to make sure those Southdown ewes are all right," he answered as he put my hand out of his, though I almost let it rebel and cling, and took for a second the Golden Bird's proud head into his palm.

"I'll be over at Elmnest before your—your 'good judgment' needs mine," he said to me as softly as I think a mother must speak to a child as she unloosens clinging depen-

THE GOLDEN BIRD

dent fingers. As he spoke he shut the door of the old ark, and Uncle Cradd drove on, leaving him standing on the edge of the great woods looking after us.

“Oh, I wish that man were going home with us, Mr. G. Bird, or we were going home with him,” I said with a kind of terror of the unknown creeping over me. As I spoke I reached out and cuddled the Golden darling into the hollow of my arm. Some day I am going to travel to the East shore of Baltimore to the Rosecomb Poultry Farm to see the woman who raised the Golden Bird and cultivated such a beautiful confiding, and affectionate nature in him. He soothed me with a chuckle as he pecked playfully at my fingers and then called cheerfully down to the tethered white Ladies of Leghorn.

CHAPTER II

AS we ambled towards the sun, which was setting over old Harpeth, the tallest humpbacked hill on Paradise Ridge, the Greek battle raged on the front seat and there was peace with anxiety in the back of the ancestral coach.

As the wheels and the two old gentlemen rumbled and the Bird's family clucked and crooned, with only an occasional irritated squawk, I, for the first time since the landslide of our fortune, began to take real thought of the morrow.

"Yes, landslide is a good name for what is happening to us, and I hope we'll slide or land on the home base, whatever is the correct term in the national game that Matthew has given up trying to teach me to enjoy," I said to myself as I settled down to look into our situation.

THE GOLDEN BIRD

I found that it was not at all astonishing that father had lost all the fortune that my mother had left him and me when she died three years ago. It was astonishing that the old dreamer had kept it as long as he had, and it was only because most of it had been in land and he had from the first lived serenely and comfortably on nice flat slices of town property cut off whenever he needed it. He had been a dreamer when he came out of the University of Virginia ten years after the war, and it had been the tragedy of Uncle Cradd's life that he had not settled down with him on the very broad, but very poor, ancestral acres of Elmnest, to slice away with him at that wealth instead of letting himself be captured in all his poetic beauty at a dance in Hayesville by a girl whose father had made her half a million dollars in town land deals. Uncle Cradd's resentment had been bitter, and as he was the senior of his twin brother by several hours, he demanded that father sell him his half of Elmnest, and for it had paid his entire for-

THE GOLDEN BIRD

tune outside of the bare acres. In poetic pride father had acceded to his demand, lent the money thrust upon him to the first speculator who got to him, and the two brothers had settled themselves down twenty miles apart in the depths of a feud, to eat their hearts out for each other. The rich man sought a path to the heart of the poor man, but was repulsed until the day after the spectacular failure of his phosphate company had penetrated into the wilds of little Riverfield, and immediately Uncle Cradd had hitched up the moth-eaten string in his old stables and come into town for us, and in father's sweet old heart there was never an idea of not, as he put it, "going home." I had never seen Elmnest, but I knew something of the situation, and that is where the Golden Bird arrived on the situation. The morning after our decision to return to the land—a decision in which I had borne no part but a sympathetic one after I had listened half the night to father's raptures over Uncle Cradd as a Greek scholar with whom

THE GOLDEN BIRD

one would wish to spend one's last days—the February copy of "The Woman's Review" arrived, and on the first page was an article from a woman who earns five thousand dollars a year with the industrious hen on a little farm of ten acres. There were lovely pictures of her with her feathered family, and I decided that what a woman with the limited experience of a head stenographer in a railroad office could do, I, with my wider scope of travel and culture, could more than double on three hundred acres of land in the Harpeth Valley. Some day I'm going to see that woman and I'm going to stop by and speak sternly to the editor of "The Woman's Review" on my way.

"Mr. G. Bird," I began as I reached this point and I saw that we were arriving in the heart of civilization, which was the square of a quaint little old town. From a motor-car acquaintance, I knew this to be Riverfield, but I had never even stopped because of the family pride involved in the feud now dead. "Mr. Bird," I repeated, "I am

THE GOLDEN BIRD

afraid I am up against it, and I hope you 'll stand by me." He answered me by preening a breast feather and winking one of his bright eyes as Uncle Cradd stopped the ancient steeds in the center of the square, before a little old brick building that bore three signs over its tumble-down porch. They were: "Silas Beesley, Grocer," "U. S. Post-Office," and "Riverfield Bank and Trust Co."

"Hey, Si, here's William come home!" called Uncle Cradd, as a negro boy with a broad grin stood at the heads of the slow old horses, who, I felt sure, would n't have moved except under necessity before the judgment day. In less time than I can take to tell it father descended literally into the arms of his friends. About half a dozen old farmers, some in overalls and some in rusty black broadcloth the color of Uncle Cradd's, poured out of the wide door of the business building before described, and they acted very much as I have seen the boys at Yale or Princeton act after a success or de-

THE GOLDEN BIRD

feat on the foot-ball field. They hugged father and they slapped him on the back and they shook his hand as if it were not of human, sixty-year-old flesh and blood. Then they introduced a lot of stalwart young farmers to him, each of whom gave father hearty greetings, but refrained from even a glance in my direction as I sat enthroned on high on the faded old cushions and waited for an introduction, which at last Uncle Cradd remembered to give me.

“This is Miss Nancy Craddock, gentlemen, named after my mother, and she’s going to beat out the Bend in her chicken raising, which she’s brought along with her. Come over, youngsters, and look her over. The fire in the parlor don’t burn more than a half cord of wood on a Sunday, and you can come over Saturday afternoon and cut it against the Sabbath, with a welcome to any one of the spare rooms and a slab of Rufus’s spare rib and a couple of both breakfast and supper muffins.” All of the older men laughed at this sweeping invitation, and all

THE GOLDEN BIRD

the younger greeted it with ears that became instantly crimson. I verily believe they would one and all have fled and left me sitting there yet if a diversion had not arrived in the person of Mrs. Silas, who came bustling out of the door of the grocery or post-office or bank; whichever it is called, is according to your errand there. Mrs. Si was tall, and almost as broad as the door itself, with the rosiest cheeks and the bluest eyes I had ever beheld, and they crinkled with loveliness around their corners. She had white water-waves that escaped their decorous plastering into waving little tendril curls, and her mouth was as curled and red-lipped and dimpled as a girl's. In a twinkling of those blue eyes I fell out of the carriage into a pair of strong, soft, tender arms covered with stiff gray percale, and received two hearty kisses, one on each cheek.

“God bless you, honeybunch, and I'm glad William has brought you home at last, the rascal.” As she hugged me she reached

THE GOLDEN BIRD

out a strong hand and gave father first a good shake by his shoulder and then by his hand.

“Fine girl, eh, Mary?” answered father as he returned the shoulder shake with a pat on the broad gray percale back, and retained the strong hand in his, with a frank clinging.

I wondered if—

“She ’s her Aunt Mary’s blessed child, and I will have her making riz biscuits like old Madam Craddock’s black Sue for you two boys in less than a week,” she answered him, with a laugh that somehow sounded a bit dewy.

“Oh, do you know about chickens, Mrs.— I mean, Aunt Mary?” I asked as I clung to the hand to which father was not clinging.

“Bless my heart, what ’s that I see setting up on old Madam Craddock’s cushions? Is it a rooster or a dream bird?” she answered me by exclaiming as she caught sight of Mr. G. Bird sitting in lonely state, but as good as gold, upon the rose-leather cushions. “I thought I feathered out the finest chickens

THE GOLDEN BIRD

in the Harpeth Valley, but this one is n't human, you might say," and as she spoke she shook off father and me, and approached the carriage and peered in with the reverence of a real poultry artist. "Bless my heart!" she again exclaimed.

"Those are just Miss Nancy's whims to take the place of her card-routs and sinful dancing habits," said Uncle Cradd, with a great and indulgent amusement as all the little crowd of native friends gathered around to look at the Bird family.

"Say, that rooster ought to have been met with a brass band like they did Mr. Cummins' horse, Lightheels, after he won all those cups up in the races at Cincinnati," said the tallest of the young farmers, whose ears had begun to assume their normal color.

"And a sight more right he has to such a honor, Bud Beesley," replied Aunt Mary, with spirit, as she stroked the proud head of the Golden Bird. "It takes hens and women all their days to collect the money men spend on race-horses sometimes, my son."

THE GOLDEN BIRD

“Well, Mary, I reckon you are n’t alluding to this pair of spanking grays I’ve got; but in case you are getting personal to them, I think we had better begin to go. Come, get in with the Whim family, Nancy, and let’s be traveling. It’s near on to a mile over a mighty rough road to the house from the gate here. Everybody come and see us.” As he spoke Uncle Cradd assisted me with ceremony into the chariot beside the Golden hero of the hour, and started the ancient steeds into a tall old gate right opposite the bank-store-post-office. As he drove away something like warm tears misted across my eyes as I looked back and saw all the goodwill and friendliness in the eye of the farmer friends who watched our departure.

“That, Ann, is the salt of the earth, and I don’t see how I consumed life so long without it,” said father as he turned, and looked at me with a sparkle in his mystic gray eyes that I had never seen there when we were seated at table with the mighty or making our bow in broadcloth and fine linen in some

THE GOLDEN BIRD

of the palaces of the world. I did n't know what it was then, but I do now; it is a land-love that lies deep in the heart of every man who is born out in meadows and fields. They never get over it and sometimes transmit it even to the second generation. I felt it stir and run in my blood as we rumbled and bumped up the long avenue of tall old elm-trees that led through deep fields which were even then greening with blue-grass and from which arose a rich loamy fragrance, and finally arrived at the most wonderful old brick house that I had ever seen in all of my life; it seemed to even my much traveled eyes in some ways the most wonderful abode for human beings I had ever beheld. It was not the traditional white-pillared mansion. It was more wonderful. The bricks had aged a rich, red purple, and were rimmed and splotched with soft green and gray moss under traceries of vines that were beginning to put out rich russet buds. The windows were filled with tiny diamond panes

THE GOLDEN BIRD

of glass, which glittered in the gables from the last rays of the sun setting over Old Harpeth, and the broad, gray shingled roof hovered down over the wide porch which would have sheltered fifty people safely. A flagstone walk and stone steps led up from the drive, seemingly right into the wide front door, which had small, diamond-paned, heavily shuttered windows in it, and queer holes on each side.

“To shoot through in case of marauding Indians,” answered Uncle Cradd to my startled question, which had sprung from a suspicion that must have been dictated by prenatal knowledge. As I entered the homestead of my fathers I felt that I had slipped back into the colonial age of America, and I found myself almost in a state of terror. The wide old hall, the heavy-beamed ceiling of which was so low that you felt again hovered, was lighted by only one candle, though a broad path of fire-light lay across the dark polished floor from

THE GOLDEN BIRD

the room on the left, where appeared old Rufus enveloped in a large apron no whiter than the snowy kinks on his old head.

“Time you has worship, Mas’ Cradd, my muffins and spare ribs will be done,” he said after he had bestowed a grand bow first upon father and then upon me, with a soft-voiced greeting of “sarvant, little Mis’, and sarvant, Mas’ William.”

“It is fitting that we render unto the Lord thankfulness for your return home with Nancy, your child, William, in the first moments of your arrival. Come!” commanded Uncle Cradd, and he led us into a huge room as low ceilinged and dark-toned as the hall. In it there was only the firelight and another dim candle placed on a small table beside a huge old book. With the surety of long habit father walked straight to a large chair that was drawn close to the hearth on the side opposite the table, behind which was another large chair of exactly the same pattern of high-backed dignity, and seated himself. Then he drew me down into a low

THE GOLDEN BIRD

chair beside him, and I lifted up my hands, removed my hat, and was at last come home from a huge and unreal world outside.

As I sat and gazed from the dark room through a large old window, which was swung open on heavy hinges to allow the sap-scented breeze to drift in and fan the fire of lingering winter, out into an old garden with brick-outlined walks and climbing bare rose vines upon which was beginning to be poured the silver enchantment of a young moon, Uncle Cradd, in his deep old voice, which was like the notes given out by an ancient violin, began to read a chapter from his old Book which began with the exhortation, "Let brotherly love continue," and laid down a course of moral conduct that seemed so impossible that I sat spellbound to the last words, "Grace be with you all. Ahmen."

Then I knelt beside father, with old Rufus close behind our chairs, and was for the first time in my life lifted on the wings of prayer and carried off up somewhere I had n't been before. As Uncle Cradd's

THE GOLDEN BIRD

sonorous words of love and rejoicing over our return rolled forth in the twilight, I crouched against father's shoulder, and I think the spirit of my Grandmother Craddock, whom I had heard indulging in a Methodist form of vocal rejoicing which is called a shout, was about to manifest itself through me when I was brought to earth and to my feet by a long, protracted, and alarmed appeal sent forth in the voice of the Golden Bird.

"Keep us and protect us through the night with Your grace. Ahmen! Why didn't you put those chickens out of the way of skunks and weasels, Rufus, you old scoundrel," rolled out Uncle Cradd's deep voice, dropping with great harmony from the sublime to the domestic.

Then, with Rufus at my heels, I literally flew through the back door of the house towards the sound of distress that had come from that direction. In front of a rambling old barn, which was silvered by the crescent that hung over its ridge-pole, stood the

THE GOLDEN BIRD

chariot, and at its door, with Mr. G. Bird in his arms, I saw that man Adam.

“He did n’t recognize my first touch,” came across the moonbeams in a voice as fluty as the original Pan’s, and mingled with friendly chuckles and clucks from the entire Bird family as they felt the caress of long hands among them. I was so ruffled myself that I felt in need of soothing; so I came across the light and into the black shadow of the old coach.

“Oh, I don’t know what I would have done if you had n’t come!” I exclaimed.

After my ardent exclamation of welcome to Pan I stood still for fear he would vanish into the moonlight, because with his litheness and the eerie locks of hair that even in the silvering radiance showed a note of crimson cresting over his ears, he looked exactly as if he had come out of the hollow in some oak-tree.

“I thought you might feel that way about it,” he answered me, or rather I think that is what he said, because he was crooning to me

THE GOLDEN BIRD

and the Ladies Bird at the same time, and with a mixture of epitaphs and endearments that I did n't care to untangle. "There, there, lovely lady, don't be scared; it is going to be all right," he soothed, as he lifted one of the fluffy biddies and tucked her under his arm.

"Oh, I am so glad you think so," I claimed the remark by exclaiming, while she made her claim by a contented little cluck.

"Now don't be bothered, sweetheart," he again said, as he picked up another of the Ladies Bird and turned towards the huge old tumble-down barn that was yawning a black midnight out into the gray moonlight. "Let's all go into the barn and settle down to live happily together ever after."

"I think that will be lovely," I answered, while beautiful Mrs. Bird made her reply with a consenting cluck. I never supposed I would make an affirmative answer to a domestic proposal that was at least uncertain of intent, but then I also never dreamed of being in the position of guardian to eleven

THE GOLDEN BIRD

head of prize live stock, and I think anything I did or said under the circumstances was excusable.

“Don’t you want to come with me and bring the cock with you. Old Rufus would n’t touch one of them for a gold rock,” he asked, and I felt slightly aggrieved when I discovered that I was to know when I was being addressed by a lack of any term of endearment, though the caressing flutiness of Adam’s voice was the same to me as to any one of the Ladies Leghorn.

“Naw, Marster, chickens am my hoodoo. To tetch one makes my flesh crawl like they was walking on my grave, and if little Mis’ will permit of me, I wanter git back to see to the browning of my muffins ginst the time Mas’ Cradd rars at me fer his supper,” and without waiting for the consent he had asked, old Rufus shuffled hurriedly back into the house.

“I ’ll bring Mr. Golden Bird. I adore the creeps his feathers give me,” I said as I reached in the coach and took the Sultan in

THE GOLDEN BIRD

my arms. He gave not a single note of re-monstrance, but I suppose it was imagination that made me think that he fluffed himself into my embrace with friendly joy.

“Come on, let ’s put them for to-night over in the feed-room. There, ladies, did you ever see a greater old barn than this?” As he spoke to us he led the way with four of the admiring and obedient Ladies, in his arms, while the fifth, who was I, followed him into the deep, purple, hay-scented darkness.

“I never did see anything like it,” I answered, while only one of the Leghorn ladies gave a sleepy cluck of assent to their part of the question.

I really did have a thrill of pure joy in that old barn. It was n’t like anything I had ever seen before, and was as far removed from a garage as is a brown-hearted chestnut burr from a soufflé of maroons served on a silver dish. I could hear the moth-eaten string of steeds munching noisily over at one end of the huge darkness, and the odor that arose from their repast was of corn and not

THE GOLDEN BIRD

of suffocating gasoline. Tall weeds and long frames with teeth in them, which gave them the appearance of huge alligator mouths yawning from the dusk to snap me, pressed close on each side. Straps and ropes and harness were draped from the beams and along the walls, and the combined aroma of corn and hay and leather and horses seemed an inspiration to a lusty breath.

“There, sweeties, is a nice smooth bin for you to go to bed on,” said Adam as he set the Ladies Leghorn one by one from his arms on the edge of a long narrow box that was piled high with corn. “Now you stay here with them until I bring the rest. Put your Golden Bird down beside the biddies, and I’ll bring the others to put on the other side of him to roost, and in the morning he can begin scratching for a happy and united family.” With which command Pan disappeared into the purple darkness and left me alone in the snapping monster shadows with only the sleepy Golden Bird for company.

THE GOLDEN BIRD

The Bird shook himself after being deposited beside the half-portion of his family, puffed himself up, sank his long neck into his shoulders, and evidently went to sleep. I shivered up close to him and looked over my shoulder into the blackness behind the teeth and then didn't look again until I heard the soft pad of the weird leather shoes behind me.

"Now all 's shipshape for the night," said Pan as he spread out his armful of feathers into a bunchy line on the edge of the bin. "Just throw them about two double handfulls of mixed corn and wheat down in the hay litter on the floor at daybreak and keep them shut up and scratching until you are sure none of them are going to lay. From the red of their combs I judge they will all be laying in a few days."

"At daybreak?" I faltered.

"Yes; they ought to be got to work as soon as they hop off the roost," answered Pan, as he spread a little more of the hay on the floor in front of the perch of the Bird family.

THE GOLDEN BIRD

“How do I know it—I mean daybreak?” I asked, with eagerness and hesitation both in my voice, as Pan started padding out through the monster-haunted darkness towards the square of silver light beyond the huge door. As I asked my question I followed close at his heels.

“I ’ll be going through to Plunketts and I ’ll call you, like this.” As we came from the shadows into the moonlight beside the coach, Adam paused and gave three low weird notes, which were so lovely that they seemed the sounds from which the melody of all the world was sprung. “I ’ll call twice, and then you answer if you are awake. If not, I ’ll call again.”

“I ’ll be awake,” I asserted positively. “Won’t you—that is, must I fix—”

“That ’s all for to-night, and good night,” he answered me with a laugh that was as reedy as the brisk wind in the trees. In a second he was padding away from me into the trees beyond the garden as swiftly as I suppose jaguars and lithe lions travel.

THE GOLDEN BIRD

“Oh, don’t you want some supper?” I called into the moonlight, even running a few steps after him.

“Parched corn in my pocket—lam’bs,” came fluting back to me from the shadows.

“Supper am sarved, little Mis’,” Rufus announced from the back door, as I stood still looking and listening into the night.

“Uncle Cradd,” I asked eagerly at the end of the food prayer that the old gentleman had offered after seating me with ceremony behind a steaming silver coffee urn of colonial pattern, of which I had heard all my life, “who is that remarkable man?”

CHAPTER III

“**S**I BEESLEY? Spare rib, dear?” was his disappointing but hospitable, answer in two return questions to my anxious inquiries about the Pan who had come out of the woods at my need.

“No; I mean—mean, did n’t you call him Adam?”

“Nobody knows. Now, William, a spare rib and a muffin is real nourishment after the nightingale’s tongues and snails you ’ve been living on for twenty-odd years, is n’t it?” As he spoke Uncle Cradd beamed on father, who was eating with the first show of real pleasure in food since we had had to send Henri back to New York, after the crash, weeping with all his French-cook soul at leaving us after fifteen years’ service.

“I have always enjoyed that essay of Charles Lamb’s on roast pig, Cradd,” an-

THE GOLDEN BIRD

swered father as he took a second muffin. "I know that Lamb used to bore you, Cradd, but honestly now, does n't his materialism seem—"

"Oh, Uncle Cradd, please tell me about that Adam man before you and father disappear into the eighteenth century," I pleaded, as I handed two cups of steaming coffee to Rufus to pass my two elderly savants.

"There is nothing to tell, Nancy child," answered Uncle Cradd, with an indulgent smile as he peered at me over his glasses. "Upon my word, William, Nancy is the living image of mother when we first remember her, is n't she? You are very beautiful, my dear."

"I know it," I answered hurriedly and hardly aware of what I was saying; "but I want to know where he came from, please, Uncle Cradd."

"Well, as near as I can remember he came out of the woods a year ago and has been in and out helping about the farms here in

THE GOLDEN BIRD

Harpeth Valley ever since. He never eats or sleeps anywhere, and he's a kind of wizard with animals, they say. And, William, he does know his Horace. Just last week he appeared with a little leather-covered volume, and for four mortal hours we—"

"They says dat red-haided peckerwoods goes to the devil on Fridays, and Mas' Adam he cured my hawgs with nothing but a sack full of green cabbage heads in January, he did," said Rufus, as he rolled his big black eyes and mysteriously shook his old head with its white kinks. "No physic a-tall, jest cabbage and a few turnips mixed in the mash. Yes, m'm, dey does go to the devil of a Friday, red-haided peckerwoods, dey does."

"By the way, Cradd, I want you to see a little volume of the Odes I picked up in London last year. The dealer was a robber, and my dealer didn't want me to buy, but I thought of that time you and I—"

"Not one of the Cantridge edition?"

"Yes, and I want you—"

THE GOLDEN BIRD

During all the rest of supper I sat and communed with my own self while father and Uncle Cradd banqueted with the Immortals.

Even after we went back into the low-ceilinged old living-room, which was now lighted by two candles placed close together on a wonderful old mahogany table before the fire, one of the dignified chairs drawn up on each side, with my low seat between, I was busily mapping out a course of action that was to begin with my dawn signal.

“I ’d like to get into the—trunk as soon as possible. There is something I want to look up in my chicken book,” I said before I seated myself in the midst of one of the battles that raged around Ilium.

“Nancy, my dear, you will find that Rufus has arranged your Grandmother Craddock’s room for you, and Mary Beesley came over to see that all was in order,” said Uncle Cradd, coming and taking my face into his long, lean old hands. “God bless you, my dear, and keep you in His care

THE GOLDEN BIRD

here in the home of your forefathers. Good-night!" After an absent-minded kiss from father I was dismissed with a Sanskrit blessing from somewhere in the valley of the Euphrates up into my bedroom in the valley of Old Harpeth.

If I had discovered the shadow of tradition in the rest of the old house, I walked into the very depths of them as I entered the bedroom of my foremothers. Deep crimson coals of fire were in a squat fireplace, and a last smoldering log of some kind of fragrant wood broke into fragments and sent up a little gust of blue and gold flame as if in celebration of my arrival. There was the remnant of a candle burning on a small table beside a bed that was very near, if not quite, five feet high, beside which were steps for the purposes of ascension. All the rest of the room was in a blur of lavender-scented darkness, and I only saw that both side walls folded down and were lit with the deep old gables, through the open windows of which young moon rays were struggling

THE GOLDEN BIRD

to help light the situation for me. As I looked at that wide, puffy old bed, with a blur of soft colors in its quilt and the valance around its posts and tester, I suddenly became as utterly weary as a child who sees its mother's arms outstretched at retiring time. I don't know how I got out of my clothes and into my lace and ribbons, with only the flickering candle and the dying log to see by, but in less time than I ever could have dreamed might be consumed in the processes of going to bed I climbed the little steps and dived into the soft bosom of the old four-poster.

"God bless me and keep me in His care here in my grandmother's bed," I murmured after the invocation of Uncle Cradd, and that is all I knew after the first delicious sink and soft huddling of my body between sheets that felt as if they must be rich silk and smelled of old lavender.

And then came a dream—a most lovely dream. I was at the opera in Gale Beacon's box, and Mr. G. Bird was out on the

THE GOLDEN BIRD

stage singing that glorious coo in the aria in Saint-Saëns' "Samson and Delilah," and I was trying to answer him. Suddenly I was wide awake sitting up in a billowed softness, while moonlight of a different color was sifting in through the gable windows and the most lovely calling notes were coming in on its beams. Without a moment's hesitation I answered in about six notes of that Delilah song which was the only sound ready in my mind. Then I listened and I am not sure that I heard a reedy laugh under my window as just the two notes succeeding the ones I had given forth came in on the dawn beams. Then all was as still and quiet as the hush of midnight.

In about two seconds I had vaulted forth from between the high posts, splashed into a funny old wooden tub bound together with brass rims, whirled my black mop into a knot, slipped into the modish boots, corduroys, and a linen smock, and was running out into the peculiar moon-dawn with the swiftness of a boy.

THE GOLDEN BIRD

But I was too late! The silver-moon sky was growing rosy over behind the barn as I peered about, and a mist was rolling away from between the trees, but not a soul in all the world was awake, and I was alone.

“Did he call me?” I asked of myself under my breath. And the answer I got was from the Golden Bird, who sent a long, triumphant, eager “salutation to the dawn” from out the shadows of the barn.

Eagerly I flew to him, and the minute I entered the apartment of the Bird family I discovered that I had been only half dreaming about my early morning opera. Pan had come and gone. Upon the door was pinned a piece of torn brown wrapping-paper upon which I found these penciled words:

Give them about two quarts of warm meal mash, into which you put some ground turnips at noon. Better build about four nests in the dark under the bin, and be sure to disinfect them by white-washing inside and out. Put in clean hay. Dust all the beauties on their heads and under their

THE GOLDEN BIRD

wings with wood ashes in which you put a little of the powder you 'll find in a piece of this paper in the right-hand corner of the bin. They 'll want a good feed of ground grain at three o'clock. Get copperas from Rufus to put in their water, and I 'll let you know later what else to do. Salutations!

ADAM

“I 'm glad I got up so early if that 's the day's program,” I gasped to myself as I leaned against the bin from which the Golden Bird had already alighted and was commanding the Ladies Leghorn to descend—a command which they were obeying one at a time with outspread white wings that were handled with the height of awkwardness. “But I 'll do it all if it kills me,” I added, with my head up, as I began to scatter some of the big white grains that I knew to be corn and which, by lifting lids and peering into huge slanting top boxes set against the wall, I discovered along with a lot of other small brown seed stuff that I knew must be wheat. I was glad that I had

THE GOLDEN BIRD

remembered that Adam had called the room the feed-room so I had known where to look.

It was so perfectly exciting to see all those fluffy white members of my family fortune scratching and clucking about my feet that I prolonged the process of the feeding by scattering only a few grains at a time until great shafts of golden morning sun were thrusting themselves in through the dim dusk and cobweb-veiled windows.

“Morning, little Mis’! I axes yo’ parding fer not having breakfast ’fore sun-up fer you, but they did n’t never any Craddock ladies want theirn before nine o’clock before, they did n’t,” came Rufus’s voice in solemn words of apology uttered in tones of serious reproof. As he spoke he stood as far from the door of the feed-room as possible and eyed the scratching Bird family with the deepest disapproval. “Feed-room ain’t no place fer chickens; they oughter make they living on bugs and worms and sich.”

“These chickens are—are different, Ru-

THE GOLDEN BIRD

fus, and—and so am I,” I answered him with dignity. “Call me when the gentlemen are ready to breakfast with me.”

“They talked until most daylight, and I knows ’em well enough to not cook fer ’em until after ten o’clock. They ’s gentlemen, they is.” The tones of his voice were perfectly servile, though it was plain to see that his mental processes were not.

“All right, I ’ll eat mine now, Rufus, and then I want you to get me a—a hammer and some nails. Also a bucket of whitewash,” I said as I closed the door upon the Birds and preceded him to the house.

“Oh, my Lawd-a-mussy!” he exclaimed as he dived into the refuge of the kitchen, completely routed, to appear with my breakfast upon his tray and with such dignity in his mien that it was pathetic. I was merciful while I consumed the meal which was an exact repetition of the supper of the ribs of the hog and muffins and coffee; then I threw another fit into him, to quote from Matthew at his worst in the way of diction.

THE GOLDEN BIRD

"Please set a bucket of the wood ashes from the living-room fire out at the barn for me, Rufus," I commanded him with pleasant firmness.

"Yes, Madam," was the answer I got in a tone of cold despair. It was thus that the feud with my family traditions was established.

"Also, Rufus, please bring the saw with the hammer and the nails," was my last hand-grenade as I departed out the back door to the barn. From the old clock standing against the wall in the back hall I discovered the hour to be exactly seven-thirty, and I felt that I had what would seem like a week ahead of me before the setting of the sun. However, I was wrong in my judgment, for time fairly fled from me, and it was nine o'clock by my platinum wrist-watch before I had more than got one very wobbly-looking box nailed together on the floor of the barn, and I was deep in both pride and exhaustion.

THE GOLDEN BIRD

“I knew I could do it, but I did n’t believe it,” I was remarking to myself in great congratulations when a shadow fell across the light from the door. I looked up and, behold, Mrs. Silas Beesley loomed up against the sun and seemed to shine with equal refulgence to my delighted eyes! In her hand she held a plate covered with a snowy napkin, and her blue eyes danced with delighted astonishment.

“Well, well, Nancy!” she exclaimed, as she seated herself upon a bench by the door and began to fan herself with a corner of a snowy kerchief that crossed her ample bosom. “Looks like you have begun sawing and nailing at the Craddock family estate pretty early in the action though it’s none too soon, and mighty glad I am to see you do it while there is still a little odd lumber left. I’ve always said that it’s women folks that prop a family and it will soon tumble without ’em. I am so glad you’ve come, honeybunch, that tears are laughing

THE GOLDEN BIRD

themselves out of the corner of my eyes.” This time the white kerchief was dabbed over the keen blue eyes.

“Is it all—very—very bad, Mrs.—I mean, Aunt Mary?” I asked, as I laid down my dull-toothed instrument for the dissection of the plank, and sank cross-legged on the barn floor in front of her.

“Oh, it might be worse,” she answered as she smiled again with resolution. “Rufus has eleven nice hogs and feed enough for them until summer, thanks to the help of Adam in tending the ten-acre river-bottom field, which they made produce more than any one else in the river bend got off of fifty. Nobody can take the house, because it is hitched on to you with entailment, and though the croppers have skimmed off all the cream of the land, the clay bottom of it is obliged to be yours. Now that you and William have come with a little money the fields can all be restored. Adam will help you like he did Hiram Wade down the road

THE GOLDEN BIRD

there. It only cost him about ten dollars to the acre.

“But—but father and I—that is, Aunt Mary, you know father has lost all his property and Uncle Cradd assured us that—that there was plenty for us all at Elmnest,” I said in a faltering tone of voice as a feeling of descending tragedy struck into my heart.

“Cradd and Rufus have lived on hog, head, heels, and tail for over a year, with nothing else but the corn meal that Rufus trades meat with Silas for. I thought, honey-bunch, when I saw you coming so stylish and beautiful with those none-such chickens that you must have been bringing a silk purse sewed with gold thread with you. I said to Silas as he put out the lamp last night, ‘The good Lord may let His deliverance horses lag along the track, but He always drives them in on the home stretch for His own, of which Moseby Craddock is one.’ ‘Why, she’s so fine she can’t eat eggs outen chickens that costs less than maybe a hun-

THE GOLDEN BIRD

dred dollars the dozen,' answered Silas to me as he put out the cat."

"They cost eight hundred and fifty dollars and they are all I have got in the world. Father gave up everything, and I sold my clothes and the cars to buy back his library and—and the chickens," I said with the terror pressing still more heavily down upon me.

"Well, I should n't call them chickens spilled milk. Just listen at 'em!" And just as we had arrived at the point of desperation in our conversation a diversion occurred in the way of two loud cacklings from the feed-room and the most ringing and triumphant crow that I am sure ever issued from the throat of a thoroughbred cock. "'T ain't possible for 'em to have laid this quick after traveling," said Aunt Mary, but she was almost as fleet as I was in her progress to the feed-room door. And behold!

"Well, what do you think about that, right out of the crate just last night, no nests nor

THE GOLDEN BIRD

nothing!" she exclaimed as we both paused and gazed at two huge white eggs in hastily scratched nests beside the bin over which two of the very most lovely white Leghorn ladies were proudly standing and clucking, while between them Mr. G. Bird was crowing with such evident pride that I was afraid he would split his crimson throat. All the other white Birds were clucking excitedly as if issuing hen promissory notes upon their futures.

"They 're omens of good luck, bless the Lord, Honeybunch. Pick 'em right up!" exclaimed Mrs. Silas.

"Oh, they are warm!" I cried as I picked the two treasures up with reverent hands and cuddled them against the linen of the smock over my breast in which my heart was beating high with excitement. And as I held them there all threat of life vanished never to return, no matter through what vicissitudes the Golden Bird family and I were to pass.

"You can eat these, and next week you

THE GOLDEN BIRD

can begin to save for a setting as soon as you can get a hen ready. I'll lend you the first one of mine that broods," said Mrs. Silas as she took both the beautiful treasures into one of her large hands with what I thought was criminal carelessness, but did n't like to say so.

"I've ordered a three-hundred-egg incubator for them," I said proudly, as I gently took the warm treasures back into my hand. "Incubators are so much more sanitary and intelligent than hens," I added with all the surety of the advertisement for the mechanical hen which I had answered with thirty-five dollars obtained from the sale of the last fluffy petticoat I had hoped to retain, but which I gave up gladly after reading the advertisement. Two most lovely chemises had gone for the two brooders that were to accompany the incubator, and it seemed hard to think that I would have to wait ten days to receive the fruits of my feminine sacrifice from the slow shipping service of the railroad.

THE GOLDEN BIRD

“Don’t ever say that again, Nancy! Hens have more genuine wisdom growing at the roots of their pin feathers than most women display during the span of their entire lives, and they make very much better mothers,” reproved Aunt Mary, with sweet firmness. “Just you wait and see which brings out your prize birds, the wooden box or the hen. When men invent something with a mother’s heart, they had better name it angel and admit that the kingdom has come. Bless my soul; these biscuits I brought over for you-all’s breakfast are stone-cold!”

“I’ve had my breakfast a half a day ago,” I answered. “You go in and start father and Uncle Cradd off with the biscuits while I finish the nest and—and do some more things for my family fortune.”

“Child, if you attempt to do the things that Adam wants you to do for and with live stock you may see miracles being hatched out and born, but you’ll be too worn out to notice ’em. Trap nests indeed! I’ve got

THE GOLDEN BIRD

to have some time to make my water waves and offer daily prayer!" And with this ejaculation of good-natured indignation, evidently at the memory of sundry and various poultry prods, Mrs. Silas betook herself to the house with a beautiful and serene dignity. As she went she stopped to break a sprig from a huge old lilac that was beginning to burst its brown buds and to put up half a yard of rambler that trailed across the path with its treacherous thorns.

"Your lilacs are breaking scent already," she called back to me over her shoulder.

A woman can experience no greater sensation of joy than that which she feels when she first realizes that she is the mistress of a lilac bush. Neither her *début* dance nor her first proposal of sentiment equals it. It is the same way about the first egg she gathers with her own hands; the sensation is indescribable.

"I'll do all the things he says do for you and the family, Mr. G. Bird, if it kills me, as it probably will," I said with resolution as I

THE GOLDEN BIRD

drove a last wobbly nail into the first nest, and took up the saw to again attack the odds and ends of old plank I had collected on the barn floor. "If I can make one nest in two hours, I can make two more in four more, and then I will have time for the rest of the things," I assured myself as I again looked at my wrist-watch, and began to saw with my knee holding the tough old plank in place across a rickety box.

CHAPTER IV

IT is beautiful how sometimes deserving courage is rewarded if it just goes on deserving long enough. After about an hour's hand-to-saw bout with the old plank I was just chewing through the last inch of the last of the four sides of nest number two when I suddenly stopped and listened. Far away to the front of the house I heard hot oaths being uttered by the engine in a huge racing-machine with a powerful chug with which I was quite familiar. While I listened, the motor in agony gave a snort as it bounded over some kind of obstruction and in two seconds, as I stood saw in hand, with not enough time to wipe the sweat of toil from my brow, the huge blue machine swept around the corner of the house, brought up beside the family coach, which was still standing in front of the barn, and Matthew flung himself out of it and to my side.

THE GOLDEN BIRD

“Holy smokers, Ann, but you look good in that get-up!” he exclaimed as he regarded me with the delight with which a person might greet a friend or relative whom he had long considered dead or lost. “Why, you look just as if you had stepped right out of the ‘Elite Review.’ And the saw, too, makes a good note of human interest.”

“Well, it’s chicken interest and not human, Matthew Berry,” I said, answering his levity with spirit. “And I’m sorry I can’t be at home for your amusement to-day, but my chickens are laying while I wait, and the least I can do is to get these nests ready for ’em. You’ll excuse me, won’t you, and go in to talk with father and Uncle Cradd?”

“They’re not producing dividends already, are they, Ann? Why, you only started the Consolidated Egg Co. yesterday!” exclaimed Matthew, with insulting doubt of my veracity in his voice.

“Look there!” I said, as I pointed to my two large pearls, which I had carefully put in the soft felt hat I had purchased to go

THE GOLDEN BIRD

with the smocks for fifteen dollars at Goertz's.

"Well, what do you know about that?" exclaimed Matthew, with real astonishment, as he sat down on his heels and took the two treasures into his highly manicured hands. "Gee, they are right hot off the bat!" he exclaimed, as he detected some of the warmth still left in them, I suppose.

"Yes, and I've got to get these nests done right away so as to be ready to catch the rest of them," I said and began to saw furiously, as if I were constructing a bucket to catch a deluge.

"Say, gimme the saw, Ann, and you get the fodder and things to put in the bottom of them to keep them from smashing as they come," said Matthew, as he flung off his coat, jammed his motor-cap on the back of his head, and took the saw from my unresisting hand.

"I'll get the whitewash and whiten them as you finish them," I said, as I hurriedly consulted the torn piece of wrapping-paper

THE GOLDEN BIRD

I took from one of the huge pockets of my smock.

“All right, but you had better hump yourself, for I believe I ’m going to be some carpenter. This saw has a kind of affinity feeling to my hand,” said Matthew, as he put his foot on one end of the plank and began to make the saw fly through the wood like a silver knife through fluffy cake. If saws were the only witnesses, the superiority of men over women would be established in very short order. “And say, Ann, I wish you would be thinking what you are going to charge for a half interest in this business. Law and real estate look slow to me after these returns right before my eyes,” he added, as he stopped to move the pearl treasures farther out of the way of a possible flying plank.

“I ’m going to give you one of them to take home with you, Matt,” I answered, with a most generous return of his appreciation of these foundation pebbles of my family fortune. Then I went to appeal to Rufus for the whitewash.

THE GOLDEN BIRD

“They’s a half barrel uf lime and a bucket and bresh in the corner uf the barn what Mas’ Adams made me git, he did; but it’s fer the hawgs and can’t be wasted on no chickens,” he said, answering my very courteous request with a great lack of graciousness.

“The chickens will pay it back to the hogs, Rufus,” I answered airily as I ran back to the barn, eager for the fray.

And a gorgeous fray it was, with Matthew whistling and directing and pounding and having the time of his very frivolous life.

Now, of course, nobody in these advanced times thinks that it is not absolutely possible, even easy, for a woman to live any kind of constructive life she chooses entirely without assistance from a man, but she’ll get to the place she has started for just about a year after she would have arrived if a man had happened along to do the sawing. The way my friend Matthew Berry cut and hammered off one by one the directions on that piece of paper in my smock pocket

THE GOLDEN BIRD

would have proved the proposition above stated to any doubtful woman. And while Matthew and I had had many happy times together at balls and parties and dinners and long flights in our cars and at the theatre and opera, also in dim corners in gorgeous clothes, I am sure we had never been so happy as we were that morning while we labored together in the interest of Mr. G. Bird and family. We went beyond the paper directions and delved in my book and hammered away until, when Rufus, with stately coldness, announced some time after noon that dinner was served, we both declared that it was impossible, though Matthew was at that moment performing the last chore commanded by dusting the medicated ashes under the last wing of the last Lady Leghorn, held tenderly in my arms. The mash had been concocted and heated in the cleansed whitewash bucket over a fire improvised by Matthew between two stones beside the barn, because I did not dare disturb Rufus again, and the model nests were all in

THE GOLDEN BIRD

place and ready for the downpour of pearls that we expected at any time, and there was nothing left to do that we could think of or read about in the book.

“Let’s go in and get a bite with Father Craddock and the twin, and then we’ll read things to do this afternoon in the book where you got those directions,” said Matthew as he started towards the house in the wake of Rufus’ retiring apron.

I had n’t broken Pan to Matthew, and I did n’t know exactly why. Perhaps I did n’t quite believe in the red-headed Peckerwood myself just then, and felt unable to incarnate him to Matthew.

Uncle Cradd’s welcome to Matthew was very stately and friendly when we went in and found him and father in their high-back chairs on each side of the table, waging the classic argument that Rufus had reported them to have discontinued at an early hour of the morning: Father was delighted with the package of books that Matthew had brought out with him in his car, because

THE GOLDEN BIRD

father considered them too valuable to be transported in the wagon which was to bring the rest of the library.

“Just a little of the cream of the collection, Cradd,” he said as he unwrapped a small leather-covered volume which Matthew had transported in the pocket over his heart.

“Just five hundred dollars’ worth of cream,” whispered Matthew to me, with a whimsical look at the small and very ancient specimen of Americana. “It is a good thing that Senator Proctor has only Belle and let her have the six thousand cash for the Chauvenaise, and Bess wanted your little Royal in a hurry, though she got a bargain at that. Still the library is really worth five times what you paid.”

“Sh—hush!” I said as I led the way before the parental twins into the old dining-room. Father had n’t even questioned how he was to have the library saved for him, and of course Uncle Cradd knew nothing at all about the matter.

After seating me with the same ceremony

THE GOLDEN BIRD

he had employed since my arrival into the family, though with hostility bristling psychologically for my plebeian intrusion into his traditions of the Craddock ladies, Rufus appalled me by offering me for the third time since my arrival at Elmnest roasted ribs of the hog, muffins and coffee. Only my training in the social customs of a world beyond the ken of Rufus kept me from exclaiming with protest, but I came to myself to discover that Matthew was devouring huge slabs of the roasted bones and half a dozen batches of the corn bread in a manner that was ravenously unconventional. I remembered that the last time I had been him at repast, just about forty-eight hours past, he had speared a croquette of chicken with disdain, and I decided not to apologize for the meal even in the most subtle way. Also the spectacle of father polishing off the small bones, when I remembered the efforts of devoted Henri to tempt his appetite with sophisticated food, filled me with a queer primitive feeling that made it possible for me

THE GOLDEN BIRD

to fall upon my series of the ribs with an ardor which I had thought I was incapable of.

“I call that some food,” sighed Matthew, as he regarded the pile of bones in his plate with the greatest satisfaction in his appeased eyes. I felt Rufus melt behind me as he passed the muffins again.

“The native food of the Harpeth Valley nourishes specially fine men—and very beautiful women,” answered Uncle Cradd, with a glance of pride, first at me and then at father in his spare, but muscular, uprightness and finally at Matthew, with his one hundred and eighty pounds of brawn packed on his six-foot skeleton in the most beautiful lines and curves of strength and distinction.

“Oh, that reminds me, Mr. Craddock, and you, too, Father of Ann,” said Matthew, as he reached into his pocket and hurriedly drew out a huge letter. “I have a proposition that came to the firm this morning to talk over with you two gentlemen. Ann thought I came out to help her settle the

THE GOLDEN BIRD

Bird family comfortably, and for a while I forgot and thought so too, but now I 'll have to ask you two gentlemen to talk business, though I must confess the matter puzzles me not a little."

"The art of dining and the craft of business should never be commingled; let us repair to the library," said Uncle Cradd, thus placing the spare ribs in an artistic atmosphere and at the same time aiming an arrow of criticism, though unconscious, at the custom of the world out over Paradise Ridge of feeding business conditions down the throat of an adversary with his food and drink, specially drink.

"I don't know why, but I'm scared to death now that I'm up against it," Matthew confided to me as he first took a legal-looking piece of paper from his pocket and then hastily put it back as he and I followed the parental twins down the hall and into the library.

"Will you rescue me, Ann?" he whispered

THE GOLDEN BIRD

as he ceremoniously seated me in my low chair and took a straight one beside father as Uncle Cradd stood tall, huge and towering on the old home-woven rug before the small fire in the huge rock chimney.

“Yes,” I answered as I settled back in the little chair and took one passionately delighted look around the old room, which I was seeing in the broad light of day for the first time. I am glad that the old home which had been the stronghold of my foremothers and fathers was thus revealed to me in half lights and a little at a time; I could n't have stood the ecstasy of it all at once. The room was the low-beamed old wonder that I had felt it to be in the candle-light the night before, only now the soft richness of the paneling, which held back into the gloom the faded colors of the books that lined the walls, the mellowed glow of the rough stone of the chimney, and the faded hand-woven rugs on the floor made it all look like one of Rembrandt's or Franz Hals' canvases. But in

THE GOLDEN BIRD

a few seconds I came back from the joy of it to a consciousness of what Matthew Berry was saying.

“You see,” he was explaining with enthusiasm, “that this new form of office for the state commissioner of agriculture is really a part of the great program of preparedness that has been evolving here in America since the Great War began, and nobody knows just what to expect of it as yet. The request from the President for the appointment of Evan Baldwin to take the portfolio in the State of Harpeth has made everybody see that the President means business with the States, and that America is to be made to produce her own food and the food of the rest of the world that needs it. When a scientist like Baldwin, worth millions and with experiment stations of hundreds of acres in most states in the Union, which are coining more millions with their propagation output, steps out and stands shoulder to shoulder with Edison in working to get the United States prepared to feed

THE GOLDEN BIRD

the world as well as to fend off any of that world that menaces it, the rest of us have got to get up and hustle, some with a musket and some with a plow."

"And some with an egg-basket," I added, as my cheeks began to glow with something I had n't ever felt before, but which I classified as patriotism.

"My country has only to call us and we 'll answer to the whole of our kingdom, William and I. We were lads too young to carry muskets against her in the Civil war, but we, with Rufus, plowed these acres with children's strength, and the larger portion of our products went to feed hungry soldiers both blue and gray. I say, just let my country call William and me!" As Uncle Cradd spoke, his back straightened, and I saw that he must have been every inch of six feet three in his youth. "William?"

"With you, Cradd," answered father quietly, and I felt that that formula was the one by which they had lived their joint youth.

THE GOLDEN BIRD

“Well, that is about what they are asking of you, Mr. Craddock,” said Matthew, his cheeks red with the glow of the blood Uncle Cradd had called up in his enthusiastic heart. “The new State secretary of agriculture has asked our firm to undertake negotiations for the purchase of Elmnest, for a recruiting station for the experts who are to take over the organizing of the farming interests in the Harpeth Valley, which is the central section of the State of Harpeth. They offer three hundred dollars an acre for the whole tract of two hundred acres, despite the fact that some of it is worn almost to its subsoil. They consider that as valuable, because they wish to give demonstrations and try experiments in land restoration, though very little of that is needed here in the valley. It’s a pretty big thing, Mr. Craddock and Father William, sixty thousand dollars will provide all the—”

“Did I understand that this proposition is put to us in the form of a demand of our Government upon our patriotism?” asked

THE GOLDEN BIRD

Uncle Cradd in a booming voice, while father only looked uncertain and ready to say, "With you, Cradd." I sat speechless for a moment, with a queer pain in my heart that I did not for the first second understand.

"Well, not exactly that, Mr. Craddock, but something like it in a—" Matthew was beginning to say in a judicial way.

"That is enough, Matthew Berry, son of the friend of my youth. If the United States needs Elmnest for national defenses, I am willing to give it up—indeed insist on presenting it to the Government except for a small part of the sum mentioned, which is needed for the simple and declining lives of my brother William, Rufus, and me, and my niece Nancy. Will you so convey our answer, William?"

"With you, Cradd," came the devoted formula with which father slipped back finally into the dependence of his youth.

"Good, Mr. Craddock," exclaimed Matthew, and I could see visions of Ann Crad-

THE GOLDEN BIRD

dock reclaimed from her farmer's smock in a ball-gown upon the floor of the country club in the fleeting glance of triumph he gave me. "Of course, about the price—"

Then in that counsel of the mighty arose 'Ann Craddock, farmwoman in the stronghold of her worn-out acres.

"Is it or is it not true, Uncle Cradd, that no deed to this property can be made without my consent?" I asked calmly.

"Why, yes, Nancy," answered Uncle Cradd, indulgently. "But this is a matter for your father and me to decide for you. I am sure you cannot fail in patriotism, my child."

"I don't," I answered. "I am going to be more patriotic than any woman ever was before. I am not going to sell my Grandmother's rosebushes in their gardens or the acres that have nourished my family since its infancy in America long before this Evan Baldwin ever had any family, I feel sure, for sixty thousand dollars to go back and sit down in a corner with. I am going to

THE GOLDEN BIRD

demonstrate to the United States what one woman can do in the way of nutriment production aided by one beautiful rooster and ten equally beautiful hens, and when they begin to take stock of the resources of this Government, we women of the Harpeth Valley will be there with our egg-baskets. Just take that answer to your Mr. Evan Baldwin, Matthew Berry, and I'll never forgive you for this insult."

"Nancy!" ejaculated Uncle Cradd with stern amazement.

"Can't do a thing with her when she looks like that, Cradd," said father, as he comfortably lighted a cigar and drew the small leather-covered book towards him with hungry fingers.

"Now, Ann," began Matthew, in the soothing tone of voice he had seen fail on me many times, "you don't understand entirely, and your situation is pretty desperate in—"

"I do, I do understand that when I refuse this offer I am assuming enormous obliga-

THE GOLDEN BIRD

tions, Matthew Berry," I answered, with my head in the air and absolute courage in my heart.

"I ask you to bear witness, Matthew, to what my answer to the demand of my country would have been if I alone could have answered, but Nancy is within her rights, and I protect the rights of a woman before those of any man," said Uncle Cradd, and there was not a trace of relief in his fine old face that he was to be saved from a parting with the land that had been the love of his life, but one of affectionate regard and admiration for me. "Also say to the secretary of agriculture that a Craddock woman is as good as her word, and that the Harpeth Valley can be depended upon to lead the United States in the production of eggs in—when shall I promise, Nancy?"

"About—about a year," I answered, searching in my mind for some data from the huge red book as to when wealth from the hen could be expected to roll in in response to the "good management" I felt even

THE GOLDEN BIRD

then capable of displaying. Even now I can't blame myself for over-confidence when I think of the two white pearls in my hat on the table beside father's book.

"Better make it two," advised Matthew cautiously, but with a gleam of enthusiasm as he also glanced at the eggs. That gleam was what earned my forgiveness for his daring to come upon me with such a mission.

"Say eighteen months. That will be the end of the second season," I answered with decision. "And it is about time for me to give the last feeding of my hostages to the United States and Mr. Evan Baldwin. You'll excuse me, Matthew?" I asked politely, but cruelly, for I knew he intended to follow me immediately.

"Now here is your line of dispute, Cradd, just as I said," exclaimed father, who had opened his leather treasure and been hunting through its pages even before my heroics had completely exploded. And before Matthew and I had left the room, they were off on a bat with some favorite Ancient.

CHAPTER V

“OF course, Ann, you *do* realize just what you are doing?” asked Matthew of me, as we walked on the moss-green flagstones back to the barn, and his voice was so sweet and gentle with solicitude that I felt I must answer him seriously and take him into my confidence. Affection is a note that one must always make payment on.

“Yes, Matt, I do realize that those two are in a way children, for whose maintenance I have made myself responsible, and my mind is scared to death, but my heart is beating so high with courage that I can hardly stand it.”

“Oh, come with me, Ann, and let me—” Matthew wooed.

“Matt,” I answered gravely, “I have n’t been here twenty-four hours yet, but when the thought of having it all taken away came

THE GOLDEN BIRD

to me, something in me rose and made me rage, rage, as I did in the house. I don't know what it is, but there is something in this low old farm-house, this tumble-down old barn, that leafless old garden with its crumbling brick walks, and these neglected, worn-out old acres, which seems to—to feed me and which I know I would perish without. Oh, please understand and—and help me a little like you did this morning," I ended with a broken plea, as I stretched out my hand to him just as I entered the door of my barn-castle of dreams for the future.

"Dear Lord, the pluck of women!" Matthew exclaimed reverently, down in his throat. "I'll be here, Ann, whenever you want me, and if you say that chickens must fill my future life, then chickens it shall be," he added, rising to the surface of the question again.

"Oh, Matt, you are a darling, and I—" I was exclaiming when a soft voice from out of the shadows of the barn interrupted me and an apple-blossom in the shape of a girl

THE GOLDEN BIRD

drifted into the late afternoon sunlight from the direction of the feed-room.

“I’m Polly Beesley, and mother sent these eggs to scramble with the ones you got this morning for supper,” she said in a low voice that was positively fragrant with sweetness. Two huge plaits of corn-silk hair fell over her shoulders, and her eyes were as shy and blue as violets were before they became a large commercial product. Her gingham dress was cut with decorum just below her shoe-tops and, taking into consideration the prevailing mode, its length, fullness, and ruffles made the slim young thing look like a picture from the same review from which I had cut my smocks. However, I am sure that if she had been at the between six and eighteen age year before last, when about two and a half yards of gingham would have been modish for her costume, she would still have been attired in the voluminous ruffles.

“Holy smokes,” I thought I heard Matthew gurgle, and I felt him start at the ap-

THE GOLDEN BIRD

partition, though the young thing never so much as glanced in his direction as she tendered me a quaint little basket in which lay half a dozen eggs, real homely brown eggs and not pearl treasures.

“Oh, thank you, Polly dear,” I answered with enthusiasm, and in obedience to some urge resulting from the generations ahead of Polly and my incarnation in the atmosphere of Riverfield, my lips met the rosy ones that were held up to me. I felt sorry for Matthew, and I could n’t restrain a glance of mischief at him that crossed his that were fixed on the yellow braids.

“I did n’t believe it of this day and generation,” I heard him mutter as I presented him to Polly, who answered that she was “pleased to make his acquaintance,” in a voice in which terror belied the sentiment expressed.

In her eyes traces of that same terror remained until suddenly the Golden Bird stepped proudly out of the bushes with the Ladies Bird, clucking and scratching along

THE GOLDEN BIRD

behind him. He had led the family out into the pasture and was now wisely returning them to the barn before the setting of the sun. I thought I had never seen him look so handsome, and no wonder his conquest was immediate.

“Oh, how beautiful,” exclaimed Polly, while all restraint left her young face and body as she fell on her knees before the Sultan. “Chick, chick, chick,” she wooed, in the words that Pan had used to command, and with a delight equal to hers in the introduction, the Bird came toward her. “Oh, please, sir, Mr.—Mr. Berry, get me some corn quick—quick! I want to squeeze him once,” she demanded of Matthew, confident where she had before been fearful. His response was long-limbed and enthusiastic, so that in a few seconds Mr. G. Bird stood pecking grains from her hand. The spectacle was so lovely that I was not at all troubled by twinges of jealousy, but enjoyed it, for even at that early moment I think I felt a mercenary interest in seeing the

THE GOLDEN BIRD

friendship between the Golden Bird and the Apple-Blossom sealed. In her I psychologically scented an ally, and I enjoyed the hug bestowed upon him fully as much or even more than he did. It was a lovely picture that the kiddie made as she knelt at our feet with the white fluff balls and wings whirring and clucking around her.

“Yes; let’s go into the chicken business, Ann,” said Matthew, as his eyes danced with artistic pleasure. “You love ’em, don’t you, Miss—Miss Corn-tassel?” he asked, with teasing delight in his voice as well as in his eyes.

“Yes sir,” she answered as she looked up at him merrily, all fear of him gone.

“Say, what do you think of going into the business with your Uncle Matthew if Ann refuses to sell a half interest in hers to me?” he asked of her in his jolly booming voice, with a smile many inches wide across his face. “I’ll put up the capital, you put up the work, and we’ll take all the prizes away from Ann.”

THE GOLDEN BIRD

“I don’t want to take the prizes from Miss Ann. I’d rather have Reds so we could both get ribbons,” she answered as she dimpled up at me as affectionately as if she had tagged at my gingham skirts at our sixth and second years.

“Reds it shall be, Corn-tassel, and I’ll be back with them as soon as an advertisement in the daily papers can find them for me. I’ll start the search right now,” said Matthew, teasing the kiddie as if he had known her all his life, but with an expression turning to the genuine poultry business enthusiasm. “You and Ann come on down to the gate with me in the car and we’ll talk—”

But just here an interruption occurred in the way of a hoarse squawk coming from around the corner of the house. Hastily my eye called the roll of the Ladies of Leghorn and found them all present just as the tall young farmer whose ears had cooled down the day before over at Riverfield enough to let him admire the Golden Bird and family appeared around from behind the huge lilac

THE GOLDEN BIRD

at the corner of the house. He was attired as yesterday in the beautiful dull-blue overall and jacket; his hair was the color of Polly's and shocked from under the edges of a floppy gray hat, and in his arms he carried a large hen the identical color of Pan's head.

"Howdy, Miss Nancy," he said in a voice as shy as Polly's, and his eyes were also as blue and shy as hers. He looked right through Matthew until I introduced them, then he shifted the hen and shook hands with Polly's "Pleased to make your acquaintance" greeting.

"Glad to meet you, Mr. Beesley," said Matthew, exerting more charm of manner than I had ever seen him use before. "My, but that is a gorgeous bird you have!"

"She's a right good hen, but she's a mongrel. There isn't a single thoroughbred Rhode Island Red hereabouts. I aim to get a setting of pure eggs for Polly this spring if I sell my hawgs as good as Mr. Adam per-dicks I will. I brought her as a present to you, Miss Nancy, 'cause she's been a-brood-

THE GOLDEN BIRD

ing about two days, and if you get together a setting of eggs the last of next week she'll hatch 'em all. She carried three broods last year."

"Oh, Mr. Beesley, how lovely of you," I exclaimed, as I reached out my arms for the gorgeous old red ally. "I like her better than any present I ever had in all my life!" This I said before the face of Matthew Berry, with a complete loss of memory of all of the wonderful things he had been giving me from my *début* bouquet of white orchids and violets to the tiny scarab from the robe of an Egyptian princess that I wore in the clasp of my platinum wrist-watch.

"Well, I should say!" Matthew exclaimed, with not a thought of the comparison in his generous mind. "Did you know that your sister, Miss Polly, and I are going into the Rhode Island Red business together? We were just deciding the details as you came around the house. What do you say to coming in? How many shall I buy? Say, about fifty hens and half a dozen cocks?"

THE GOLDEN BIRD

Let's start big while we are about it. If Ann is going to make three thousand dollars a year off one rooster and ten hens, we can make fifteen off of five times as many."

"Yes, and we can bust the business all to pieces with too much stock," answered the brother Corn-tassel. "Miss Nancy has got real horse-sense starting small, and chicken-sense too."

"I stand corrected," answered Matthew. "I see that a flyer cannot be taken in chickens any higher than a hen can fly. I'm growing heady over this business and must go back to town to set the wheels in motion. All of you ride down to the gate with me and find out what the word jolt means."

Then after housing the Bird family in the feed-room with their guest, all happily at scratch in the hay for the wheat and corn thrown to them by the Corn-tassels while Matthew and I went in to bid the paternal twins good-by, we all rode merrily and joltily down the long avenue under the old elms to the big gate at the square in River-

THE GOLDEN BIRD

field. In front of the post-office-bank-grocery emporium we deposited the Corn-tassels, introduced Matthew to Aunt Mary and Uncle Silas, with the most cordial results on both sides, and then turned in the car out the Riverfield ribbon instead of in.

“Just a spin will do you good, sweet thing,” said Matthew, as I settled down close enough to his shoulder to talk and not interrupt the powerful engine. “I want you to myself for a small moment away from your live stock, human and inhuman.”

“Oh, Matt, there is nobody just like you and you have made this day—possible,” I said as I snuggled down into the soft cushions.

“Honestly, Ann, do you mean positively that you don't want me—now?” he asked me as he sent the car whirling into the sun setting over Old Harpeth.

“Not—now,” I answered bravely, though I nestled a little closer to him. He seemed so good and strong and—certain.

“All right then, I'll take the next best

THE GOLDEN BIRD

and I 'll come in to your farm circle as partner or competitor or any old thing that keeps me in your aura. I 'll grow chickens with the Corn-tassels or—here we turn back for I want to get out again over that bit of mountain-path that leads to your citadel before twilight.”

“Put me out at the gate, Matt. I want to walk up,” I said, and held to it against his protest. I finally made him see that I really was not equal to another “rocking” over the road, and I stood and watched him drive the huge car away from me down the Riverfield ribbon.

“I 'm afraid I love him and just don't know it,” I said to myself, as I stood at the big gate and watched him going away from me into life as I had known it since birth until twenty-four hours past. And from that vision of my past I turned in the sunset light of the present and began to walk slowly up the long avenue into my future. “I 've never known anything but dancing and motoring and being happy, and how could

THE GOLDEN BIRD

that teach any woman what love is?" I queried as I stopped and picked up a small yellow flower out of a nest of green leaves that some sort of ancestral influence must have introduced to me as dandelion, for I had never really met one before. I felt a pale reflection of the glow I had experienced when I took the two warm pearls in my hands in the morning.

Then suddenly something happened that thrilled me first with interest and then with—I don't know what to call it, but it was not fear. A fierce little wind, that was earthy and sweet, but strong, ruffled across my path and up into the tops of the elms, and with a bit of fury tore down an old bird's-nest and flung it at my feet. It was soft and downy with bits of fur and hair and wool inside, but it was all rent in two.

"I wonder if I can hold my Elmnest steady on the limb when—" I was saying to myself unsteadily, with a mist in my eyes for the small wrecked home, when from somewhere over my left shoulder there came

THE GOLDEN BIRD

Pan's reedy call, and it ended with the two Delilah notes that I had thought I heard in the early morning. It was with no will of my own that I answered with that coo which I had heard Mr. G. Bird singing on the stage of the Metropolitan in my dawn dream. Also I crashed rapidly through the bushes in the direction of the call that this time came imperatively and without the coo.

"To your left and then straight toward the oak-tree," came human words from Pan in quick command and direction. "Hurry!"

With a last struggle with the briars I broke out into a small open space under the spreading branches of the old oak and upon a scene of tragedy, that is, it was almost tragedy, for the poor old sheep was lying flat with pathetic inertia while Adam stood over her with something in his arms.

"It's the fine Southdown ewe I persuaded Rufus to trade for one of the precious hogs," he said, with not so much as a word of greeting or interest personal to me in his voice or glance, but with such wonderful tenderness

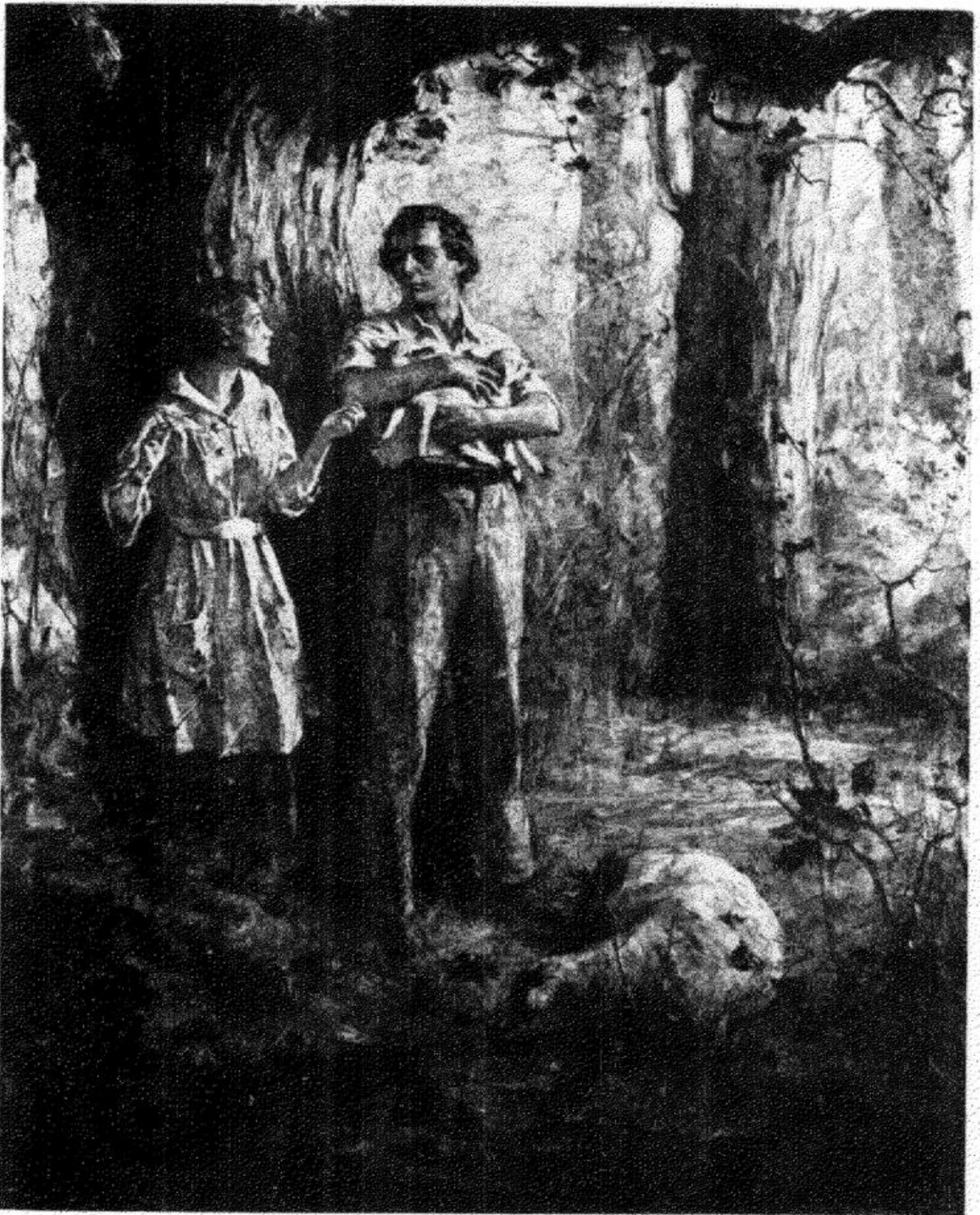
THE GOLDEN BIRD

that I came close to him because I could n't resist it. "She dropped twin lambs last night and she is down with exhaustion. They are getting cold, and I want to take her right up to the barn where I can bed her on hay and get something hot into all three. Can you cuddle the lambs and carry them while I shoulder her?" As he spoke he held out his armful to me without wounding me by waiting for my consent.

"Oh, the poor, cold babies!" I exclaimed, as I lifted the skirt of my long, fashionable, heavy linen smock and wrapped them in it and my arms, close against my warm solar plexus, which glowed at their soft huddling. One tiny thing reached out a little red tongue and feebly licked my bare wrist, and I returned the caress of introduction with a kiss on its little snowy, woolly head.

"You've the lovesome hand with the beasties," said Pan as he smiled down on the lambs and me.

"I like 'em because they make me sorter grow inside some place, I don't know exactly



A poor old sheep was lying flat with pathetic inertia while Adam stood over her with something in his arms

This page in the original text is blank.

THE GOLDEN BIRD

where," I answered as I adjusted my woolly burden for what I knew would seem a long march. "I 'll get 'em to the barn all right," I assured their first friend, who was now bending over the poor mother. "This is what I took Russian ballet dancing and played golf for, only I did n't know it."

"You 'd have executed more Baskt twists and done more holes a day if you had known," said Adam, with beautiful unbounded faith in me, as he braced his legs far apart and lifted the limp mother sheep up across his back and shoulder. It seemed positively weird to be standing there acting a scene out of Genesis and mentioning Baskt, and I was about to say so when Pan started on ahead through the bushes and commanded me briefly to: "Come on!"

At his heels I toiled along with the sheep babies hugged close to my breast until at last we deposited all three on a bed of fragrant hay in a corner of the barn.

"What 'll I feed 'em?" I questioned anxiously. "There is n't a bit of any kind of

THE GOLDEN BIRD

food on this place but the ribs of a hog and a muffin and a cup of coffee.”

“We ’ll give her a quart of hot water with a few drops of this heart stimulant I have in my pocket, and she ’ll do the rest for the family as soon as she warms up. She ’s got plenty of milk and needs to have it drawn badly. There you are—go to it, youngsters. She is revived by just being out of the wind and in the warmth, and I don’t believe she needs any medicine. She would n’t let them to her udder if she was n’t all right. Now we can leave them alone for a time, and I ’ll give her a warm mash in a little while.” As he spoke Adam calmly walked away from the interesting small family, which was just beginning a repast with great vigor, and paused at the feed-room door. With more pride than I had ever felt when entering a ball-room with a Voudaine gown upon me and a bunch of orchids, I followed and stood at his side.

“Well, how do you do, sweeties, and where did you get this model hen-house? ’Trap

THE GOLDEN BIRD

nests! I would n't have believed it of you!" said Adam to the Leghorn family and me inclusive.

"I did n't do it all," I faltered as I experienced a terrific temptation to lie silently and claim all of the affectionate praise that was beaming from Pan's eyes upon all of us, but I fought and conquered it with nobility. "Matthew Berry came out and did about—no, a little more than half of it. But I did all I could," I added, with a pathetic appeal for his approbation.

"Well, half of the job is more than the world could expect of the beautiful Ann Craddock, who sits in the front of Gale Beacon's box at the Metropolitan," answered Pan, with a little flute of laughter in his voice that matched the crimson crests which stood more rampant than ever across the tips of his ears.

"Why, where—who are you and—" I asked in astonishment as I followed him into the last of the sunset glow coming across the front of the barn.

CHAPTER VI

“I ’M just Adam and I go many places,” he answered with more of the intoxicating crooning laughter.

“Rufus says that red-headed Peckerwoods go to the devil on Fridays,” I retorted to the raillery of the Pan laugh.

“It *was* Friday and she did n’t sing Delilah to my notion. Did she to yours?” he asked, this time with a smile that was even more interesting than the laugh. “Come over and sit with me by the spring-house and let’s discuss grand opera while I eat my supper and wait until I think it is safe to give the ewe some mash.

“I will if you ’ll invite me to the supper; I can’t face another swine and muffin meal,” I answered as I followed him down a path that led west from the barn-door.

“I ’ve got two apples and a double hand-

THE GOLDEN BIRD

ful of black walnut kernels. The drinks from the spring are on you," he answered as he led me down through a thicket of slim trees that were sending out a queer fragrance to a huge old stone spring-house from which gushed a stream of water. "Just these two spring days are bringing out the locust buds almost before time. Smell 'em!" he said as he looked up into the tops of the slim trees, which were showing a pink-green tinge of color in the red sunset rays.

"Oh," I said softly as I clasped my hands to my breast and breathed in deep, "I'm glad, glad I didn't have to let them sell it. I love it. I love it!"

"Sell it?" asked Adam as he brushed a rug of dry leaves from under the bushes upon one of the huge slabs of rock before the door of the spring-house for me to sit on, and took two apples from his pocket.

"Yes, and I'll work both my fingers and toes to the bone before I'll give it up," I answered as I crouched down beside him on the leaves and began to munch at the apple,

THE GOLDEN BIRD

which he had polished on the sleeve of his soft, gray, flannel shirt before he handed it to me.

While we dined on the two red apples, the tangy nuts, and a few hard crackers that, I think, were dog-biscuits, I told him all about it, up to my defiance and assumption of the management of Elmnest in the library after dinner.

“I *can* keep us from starving until I learn chickens, can't I?” I asked after the recital, and I crouched a little closer to him on the rock, for black shadows were coming in between the trees and into my consciousness, and all the pink moonlight had faded as a rosy dream, leaving the world about us silver gray.

“I wonder just how much genuine land passion there is in the hearts of women?” said Adam, softly answering my question with another. “The duration of race life depends upon it really.”

“I don't know what you are talking about, but I understand you,” I answered him

THE GOLDEN BIRD

hotly. "Also I know that I love that old sheep more than you do, and I'm going to get in line with my egg-basket when the United States begins mustering in forces to fight, no matter what it is to be. I wish I could say it like I feel it to that Mr. Secretary Evan Baldwin, who forgets that women are the natural—the nutritive sex."

"I wish you could," said kind Adam, with one of Pan's railing laughs.

"Don't laugh at me—I'm getting born all over, and it is hard," I said with a sob in my throat.

"Forgive me! I'm not really laughing—it's just a form—form of the Peckerwood's nature-worship," he answered as he took my hand in his warm one for a second, "Let's go finish up with old sheep mother," he added as he began to pad swiftly away up the path, drawing me after him.

"Yes, I *am* growing inside," I assured myself as I for the second night fell asleep on the soft bosom of my family tradition of four posts.

THE GOLDEN BIRD

One of the most bromidic performances that human beings indulge in anywhere from their thirty-fifth to eightieth years is to sigh, look wise, and make this remark: "If I could only begin life over again, knowing what I do now!"

I'm never going to be impressed by that again, and I'm going to answer straight out from the shoulder, "Well, it would be a great strain to you if you found yourself doing it."

That was about what my entry into life at Elmnest, Riverfield, Harpeth, was, and in many places it rubbed and hurt my pride; in many places at many times it sapped my courage; in many ways it pruned and probed into my innermost being with a searching knife to see if I really did have any intelligence or soul, and at all times it left me with a feeling of just having been sprouted off the cosmic. I know what I mean, but it does n't sound as if I did. This is the way most of it happened to me in my first six weeks of life in the rustic.

How did I know that when you cleaned

THE GOLDEN BIRD

up a house that had n't been cleaned up for about fifteen years you must wait for ten days after you came to that realization for a sunshiny day, and carry all the beds out in the yard before you began, and that no matter how much awful dust and cobwebs you swept and mopped out or how much old furniture you polished until it reflected your face, it was all perfectly futile unless the bed-sunning ceremony had been first observed? Just how were the ability to speak French in the most exclusive circles of Parisian society and a cultivated knowledge of every picture-gallery in the world going to keep me from making a blunder that would put me down in Mrs. Pennie Addcock's mind as a barbarian?

"Why, Mrs. Tillett and me have been getting ready all along to come and help you beat and sun the beds the first sunshiny day and then turn to with our buckets and mops and brooms. Now you've gone and done the wrong thing by all this polishing before a single bed had been beat and aired." As

THE GOLDEN BIRD

she spoke Mrs. Addcock surveyed my house, upon which I had spent every waking moment of my muscular strength, assisted by Polly Corn-tassel and sometimes Bud of the blue eyes, but not at all by Rufus, who resented the cleansing process to such an extent that he wrapped up his jaw in a piece of old flannel and retired to the hay-loft when Bud and Polly and I insisted on invading the horrors of his kitchen.

“Oh, my dear Mrs. Addcock, won't you and Mrs. Tillett please forgive me for being so ignorant and help me do it to-day?” I pleaded as I picked up a small Tillett, who was peeping soft wooing at me from where he balanced himself on uncertain and chubby legs against his mother's skirts.

“Well, in this case there is just nothing else to do, but turn to on the beds now, wrong end first, but next year you 'll know,” she answered me with indulgent compromise in her voice. “And I guess we 'll find some broom and mop work yet to be done. Come

THE GOLDEN BIRD

on, Mrs. Tillett. I guess Nancy can mind the baby all right while we work”

“Oh, he ain't no trouble now except he wants to find out all about the world by tasting of it. Don't let him eat a worm or sech, and he'll be all right,” answered the beaming young mother of the toddler. “And, Miss Nancy, I was jest going to tell you that I have got a nice pattern of a plain kind of work dress if you would like to use it,” she added as she pointedly did not look at my peasant's smock that hung in such lovely long lines that I found myself pausing much too often before one of the mirrors in the big living-room to admire them. Mrs. Tillett's utility costume was of blue checked gingham and had no lines at all except top and bottom, with a belt in between. Both ladies wore huge gingham aprons, and I must say that they looked like the utility branch of the feminine species while I may have resembled the ornamental. But they were dear neighbors, and the Til-

THE GOLDEN BIRD

lett baby and I had a very busy and happy day with the Golden Bird and his busy family while the two missionaries did over every bed in Elmnest, even invading the living-room and shaking out the cushions of the old couch in the very face of one of the charges of Xerxes' army. I put his babykins in a big feed-basket in a nest of hay, and the two lamb twins came and licked him every now and then by way of welcome into my barn nursery. The fine young sheep mother was now in blooming health, and the valuable progeny were growing by the hours, most of which they spent at the maternal fount, opposite each other and both small tails going like a new variety of speedometer.

"I see mother ewe knows enough to hang around the lady of the barn and feed-bins. Those lambkins are two pounds heavier than any born within a week of them at Plunkett's," Pan had said not a week past, and both sheep mother and I had beamed with gratified pride at his commendation.



I put his babykins in a big feed-basket and the lamb twins came and welcomed him

This page in the original text is blank.

THE GOLDEN BIRD

Then while the renovation of the four-posters went on with a happy buzz, I busied myself in and out and about with the numberless details of care of the Bird family. My knowledge of music earned by many long hours in the practice of harmonics and a delighted and diligent attendance at the opera seasons of New York, Berlin, and Paris, to say nothing of Boston and London, had not, in my new life, in any way aided me to see that I had made a mistake in ordering a three-hundred-egg incubator to start building a prize flock with Mr. Golden Bird and the ten Ladies Leghorn, but in this case Adam had guided me from off that shoal, and by telegram I had changed the order for three fifty-egg improved metal mothers and the implements needed in accomplishing their maternal purpose. In one of them were now fifty beautiful white pearls that I could not refrain from visiting and regarding through the little window in the metallic side of the metallic mother at least several

THE GOLDEN BIRD

times an hour, though I knew that twice a day to regulate the heat and fill the lamp was sufficient.

“I don’t believe I ’ll be able to stand seeing them hop out,” I remarked to Baby Tillet, the lambkins, and the good old red ally, who was patiently seated on a box over fifteen of the pearls. Adam had kept the poor old darling covering some white china eggs for nearly two weeks before he gave her the pearls on the same day we put the forty-five in the interior of her metal rival. I didn’t at first understand his sinister purpose in thus holding her back until the metal rival could get an even start, but I did later.

“I hope you have a mighty good hatching, Nancy, but I have no faith in half-way measures, and a tin box is a half-way measure for a hen, just as cleaning house without bed-sunning is trifling,” said Mrs. Addcock, with a final prod as she came out to the barn with Mrs. Tillet to reclaim Baby Tillet.

“You ain’t married, Miss Nancy, and you won’t understand how babies need mothers,

THE GOLDEN BIRD

even the chicken kind," said Mrs. Tillett, as she cuddled Baby Tillett gurglingly against her shoulder and followed in the wake of Mrs. Addcock with the mops and buckets down the walk and around the house.

I stood beside the tin triumph of science, with my baby lambs licking at my hands, while Mrs. Ewe nuzzled for corn in one of my huge pockets, and a baby collie, which Pan had brought the week before, when her eyes were scarcely open, tumbled about my feet, and looked after the retreating women—and I did understand.

"Still, I'll do the best I can by your—your progeny, Mr. G. Bird," I said as the great big, white old fellow came and pecked in my pocket for corn in perfect friendliness with Mrs. Ewe.

I was called upon to keep my promise in less than a week. It might have been a tragedy if Bess Rutherford's practical sense had not helped save my affections from a panic. This is how it happened.

"Yes, chicken culture is a germ that

THE GOLDEN BIRD

spreads by contagion. I'm not at all surprised at your friends," Adam had answered when I had appealed to him to know if I could sell Bess Rutherford just six of the baby chicks, when they came out, for her to begin a brood in a new back-yard system, only Bess is so progressive that she is having a nice big place in the conservatory that opens out of her living-room cleared for them to run about out of their tin mother when they want to. She says she believes eternal vigilance is the price of success with poultry as the book she bought, which is different from mine, says, and Bess decided that she wanted her chickens where she could go in to see them comfortably when she came from parties and things without having to go around in the back yard, which is the most lovely garden in Hayesville anyway, in her slippers and party clothes. "I'd sell her the chicks at twenty dollars apiece, and that's cheap if they produce as they ought to with their blood and such—such care as she intends to bestow on them. The twenty-dollar price

THE GOLDEN BIRD

will either cure her or start an idle woman into a producer," said Adam, in answer to my request, as he cut me out a pair of shoes from a piece of hide like that which the shoes upon his own feet were made from. It was raining, and I sat at his feet in the barn and laboriously sewed what he had cut.

I told Bess what Adam said, and she paid me the hundred and twenty dollars right on the spot, and then insisted on opening the incubator at the regular time for the ten minutes the book directs, to cool off the eggs night and morning, and putting her monogram on six of the eggs. To do this she decided to stay all night, and telephoned her maid, Annette, to pack her bag and let Matthew bring it out to her when he came to help Polly Corn-tassel put their first batch of eggs into their incubator. Matthew had bought twenty hens and two nice brotherly roosters, and they had almost caught up with me in the number of their brown babies on the whole shells. Matthew had been coming out night and morning ever since he

THE GOLDEN BIRD

had brought out his and the Beesleys' poultry and had either had supper with us at Elmnest or we had both got riz biscuits and peach preserves and chicken fried with Aunt Mary and Uncle Silas and Polly and Bud. I had subjugated Rufus into cooking a few canned things, for which I had traded one of his pig jaws at the bank-post-office-grocery emporium, and Uncle Silas had thrown in a few potatoes, and Adam had brought me a great bag of white beans from across Paradise Ridge, so the diet at Elmnest had changed slightly. The absorbed twins had never noticed it at all; only they displayed more hearty vigor in attacking the problems of literature and history that absorbed them. Also almost every day Pan brought me young green things that were sprouting in the woods, and I cooked them for him in an old iron pot down by the spring-house and had supper with him.

"Those two dears are the most precious old Rips I ever beheld," said Bess when we had retired to my room after supper on the

THE GOLDEN BIRD

fateful night of our near tragedy. "You are so fortunate, Ann, to have two delicious fathers in name only. Mine pokes into my business at all angles and insists on so much attention from me that I don't know how I'll amount to anything in this world. He says it takes a very fine and brainy woman to earn about ten thousand dollars a year being affectionate and agreeable to her own father, and that I get so much because there is no possible competition as I am an only child, but all the same it looks like unearned money to me. Just wait until those six little chickens begin to earn me a hundred dollars a month like my book guarantees they will do in their second year; then I'm going to show dad just how much I love him for himself and give him back my bank-book."

"Still it is an awful lot of work, Bess," I remonstrated feebly, because I knew that I could n't have made myself believe all I had learned in just two months at Elmnest the day I started in business.

"You know, Ann, I told you about that

THE GOLDEN BIRD

wonderful Evan Baldwin who has been in Hayesville two or three times this winter, the man to whom the governor gave the portfolio of agriculture, I believe they call it. Well, he was at the Old Hickory ball the other night when you would n't come, and I told him all about you and about buying those little chickens from you, and he was so wonderful and sympathetic that Owen Murray sulked dreadfully. He encouraged me entirely and told me a lot of things about some of his experiment stations in all the different States. You thought you were going to stagger me with that twenty-dollar price on those chicks in shell, but he said he had paid as much as five hundred dollars apiece for a few eggs he got from some prize chickens in England and had brought them over in a basket in his own hand. He said he thought from what I told him about the Golden Bird that twenty would be about right for one of his sons or daughters. Ann, he is a perfectly delicious man, and you must meet him. It is awful the way all the

THE GOLDEN BIRD

girls and women just follow him in droves, though I 'm sure he does n't seem to notice us."

"I never want to lay eyes on him, Bess. He has insulted me and I never—" but just here a thought struck me in my solar plexus and crinkled me entirely up. "Oh, Bess, I forgot to fill the lamp in the incubator tonight, and I believe the chicken eggs will be all chilled to death. What will I do? It is near midnight and it 's—it 's—c—cold."

"Let 's get 'em quick and maybe we can resuscitate 'em. Don't you remember about reviving frozen people in that first-aid class we had just after the war broke out and we did n't know whether we were in it or not? Come on, quick!" Bess seized the quilt from the bed and descended into the back yard, clad only in her lingerie for sleeping, a silk robe-de-chambre and satin mules, while I followed, likewise garmented.

"Oh, dear, how cold," wailed Bess as the frosty Spring air poured around us in our flight to the barn.

THE GOLDEN BIRD

“Put the quilt around you,” I chattered.

“I ’m going to put all the egg chickens in it,” she answered as we scuttled into the barn out of the wind.

“The lamp is out, but the eggs still feel warm to the hand,” I said as I knelt in deep contrition beside the metal hen.

“Fill it and light it, and they ’ll soon warm up,” advised Bess.

“There ’s no oil on the place. I forgot it,” I again wailed.

“Is n’t there room under the hen here?” asked Bess, with the brilliant mind she inherited from Mr. Rutherford running over the speed limit, and as she spoke she felt under the old Red Ally, who only clucked good naturedly.

“It feels like she is covering a hundred now, and there ’s no room for more,” said Bess, answering herself with almost a wail in her voice. “What will we do? The book says April-hatched chickens are the best, and these would have come out in just a few days.”

THE GOLDEN BIRD

And then from somewhere in my heart, which had harbored the cuddle of the cold lamb babies against it, there rose a knowledge of first aid for the near-baby chickens.”

“Oh, Bess,” I exclaimed, “let’s wrap the tray of eggs up in the quilt and take it upstairs to bed with us. We are just as warm as the hen, and I’ll get Rufus to go for Polly at daylight to fix the lamp while we stay in bed and huddle them until the incubator warms up, as it does in just an hour after it’s lighted.”

“Ann, you are both maternal and intellectual,” said Bess, with the deepest admiration in her voice. “Let’s hurry or we’ll never get warmed up ourselves.”

And in very much less time than could be imagined Bess Rutherford and I were in the middle of the four-poster, sunk deep into the feathers with the precious pearls of life carefully imbedded between us.

“Now don’t joggle,” Bess commanded as we got all settled and tucked in.

“Mrs. Tillett lets little Tillett sleep with

THE GOLDEN BIRD

her cold nights," I murmured drowsily.

"I don't believe it; no woman would undertake the responsibility of human life like that," Bess answered as she tucked in a loose end of cover under the pillow.

"Most of the world mothers sleep with their babies," Adam said when I told him about little Tillett, "and—" I was answering when I trailed off into a dream of walking a tight rope over a million white eggs. In the morning Bess said she had dreamed that she was a steam roller trying to make a road of eggs smooth enough to run her car over.

CHAPTER VII

ALSO Bess and I woke to find ourselves heroines. Matthew came to breakfast after he had seen the lamps in his mock hens burning brightly, and brought Polly with him to congratulate us on the rescue of our infant industry. Polly had told him of our brilliant coup against old Jack Frost, and he was all enthusiasm, as was also Uncle Cradd, while father beamed because he was hearing me praised and thought of something else at the same time. Later Owen Murray came out for Bess in his car, and insisted on buying six more of the eggs, because, he said, they had now become a sporting proposition and interested him. Bess agreed to board them to maturity in her conservatory for him at fifty cents a day per head and let him visit them at any time. He gave me a check immediately.

THE GOLDEN BIRD

He offered to buy six of Polly's chicks at the same price, but Matthew refused to let her sell them at all, and also Bess refused to have any mixing of breeds in her conservatory. Polly didn't know enough to resent losing the hundred and twenty dollars, because she had never had more than fifty cents in her life, and Matthew didn't realize what it would have meant to her to have that much money, because he had more than he needed all his life, so they were all happy and laughed through one of Rufus' worst hog effusions in the way of a meal for lunchers, but—but I had in a month learned to understand what a dollar might mean to a man or woman, and at the thought of that two hundred and forty dollars Mr. G. Bird and family had earned for me in their second month of my ownership my courage arose and girded up its loins for the long road ahead. I knew enough to know that these returns were a kind of isolated nugget in the poultry business, and yet why not?

THE GOLDEN BIRD

"We'll sell Mr. Evan Baldwin a five-hundred-dollar gold egg yet, Mr. G. Bird," I said to myself.

After luncheon they all departed and left me to my afternoon's work. Matthew lingered behind the others and helped me feed the old red ally and Mrs. Ewe and Peckerwood Pup.

"I was talking to Evan Baldwin at the club after his first lecture the other night and, Ann, I believe I'll be recruited for the plow as well as for the machine-gun. I'm going to buy some land out there back of the Beesleys' and raise sheep on it. He says Harpeth is losing millions a year by not raising sheep. I'm going to live at Riverfield a lot of the time and motor back and forth to business. Truly, Ann, the land bug has bit me and—and it is n't just—just to come up on your blind side. But, dear, now don't you think that it would be nice for me to live over here with you as a perfectly sympathetic agricultural husband?"

"I needed a husband so much more yester-

THE GOLDEN BIRD

day to help with the pruning of the rose-vines than I do to-day, Matthew," I answered with a laugh. Matthew's proposals of marriage are so regular and so alike that I have to avoid monotony in the wit of my answers.

"I 'm never in time to do a single thing on this place, and I don't see how everything gets done for you without my help. Who helps you?"

"Everybody," I answered. I had never had the courage to break Adam to Matthew in the long weeks I had been seeing them both every day, and of course Pan had never come out of the woods when Matthew or any of the rest were there. "I 'll tell you what you can do for me," I said, with a sudden inspiration about getting rid of him, for the red-headed Peckerwood had promised to come and put some kind of hoodoo earth around the peonies and irises and pinks in my garden, also to bud some kind of a new rose on one of the old blush ones, and I

THE GOLDEN BIRD

wanted the place quiet so he would venture out of his lair. "You can go on to town and look after Polly carefully. She is going in with Bess for the first time since their infatuation, and I want her eyes to open gradually on the world out over Paradise Ridge."

"Ann, ought they ever to open?" asked Matthew, suddenly, with the color coming up to the roots of his hair and burning in his ears like it still does in Bud Corn-tassel's when he comes over to see or help me or to bring me something from Aunt Mary, his mother. "Bess is one of the best of friends I've got in the world, but I just—just could n't see Corn-tassel dancing in some man's arms in the mere hint of an evening gown that Bess occupied while fox-trotting with Evan Baldwin at the club the other night."

"Who was the belle of the ball, Matt?" I asked him, with a flame in my cheeks, for the pink and lavender chiffon gown Bess had

THE GOLDEN BIRD

worn was one of the Voudaine creations that I had brought from Paris and sold her after the crash.

“Oh, Bess always is when you are not there and, Ann, don’t for a moment think that I—I—” Poor Matthew was stuttering while I rubbed the tip of my nose against his sleeve in the way of a caress, as I had a feed-bucket in one hand and a water-pan in the other.

“Do go and shop with Polly and Bess as a force for protection. I must have a quiet afternoon to commune with my garden,” I commanded.

“Sometimes you make me so mad, Ann Craddock, that—that—” Matthew was stuttering when Uncle Cradd appeared at the back door to chat with him, and I made my escape through the barn and out into the woods. I had thought that I saw a glint of Peckerwood red pass through the pasture that way, and I was determined that Pan should n’t give me and the garden the slip as he always did when he saw anybody around.

THE GOLDEN BIRD

As I ran rapidly through the old pasture, which was overgrown with buckbushes and sassafras sprouts, which were turning into great pink and green fern clumps in the warm April sunshine, I gave the two or three Saint-Saëns Delilah notes which had been robbed of any of their wicked Delilah flavor for me by having heard Mr. G. Bird sing them so beautifully on the stage of the Metropolitan in that first dream night in Elmnest. But I called and then called in vain until at last I came out to the huge old rock that juts out from the edge of the rugged little knoll at the far end of the pasture. Here I paused and looked down on Elmnest in the afternoon sunshine with what seemed to be suddenly newly opened eyes. I had been in and out of Elmnest to such an extent for the last six weeks that I had n't had a chance to get off and look at it from an outsider's standpoint, and now suddenly I was taking that view of it. The old rose and green brick house, covered in by its wide, gray shingle roof, the gables and

THE GOLDEN BIRD

windows of which were beginning to be wreathed in feathery and pink young vines, which were given darker notes here and there in their masses by the sturdy green of the honey-suckles, hovered down on a small plateau rear-guarded by the barn and sheds, flanked by the garden and the gnarled old orchard, and from its front door the long avenue of elms led far down to the group of Riverfield houses that huddled at the other end. All villages in the State of Harpeth have been so built around the old "great houses" of the colonial landowners, and between their generations has been developed a communistic life that I somehow feel is to bridge from the pioneer life of this country to the great new life of the greater commune that is coming to us. Down there in Riverfield I knew that there was sin and sorrow and birth and death, but there was no starvation, and for every tragedy there was a neighbor to reach out a helping hand, and for every joy there were hearty and friendly rejoicings.

THE GOLDEN BIRD

“Oh, and I ’m one of them—I belong,” I said to myself as I noted each cottage into which I went and came at will, as friend and beloved neighbor. Even at that distance I could see a small figure, which I knew to be Luella Spain, running up the long avenue, and in its hand I detected something that, I was sure, was a covered plate or dish. “And I ’m making Elmnest fulfil its destiny into the future—into the future that the great Evan Baldwin is preaching about in town, instead of practicing out in the fields. I wonder if he really knows a single thing about farming.”

“He does,” came an answer from right at my shoulder in Pan’s flutiest voice, and I turned to find him standing just behind me on the very edge of the old tilting rock.

“How do you know?” I demanded of him as I took the clean white cloth tied up at four corners, gypsy-fashion, which he offered me and which, I could see, was fairly bursting with green leaves of a kind I had never seen before.

THE GOLDEN BIRD

“I was with him at the Metropolitan the night I saw Ann Craddock in Gale Beacon’s box, you know,—the night that Mr. G. Bird sang ‘Delilah,’ and also I’ve slept on the bare ground with him in his woods in Michigan and on his red clay in Georgia.”

“Well, I hate him all the same for the insult of his offer to buy Elmnest, though I doubt if he has any family pride or any family either, so, of course, he would n’t understand that it *is* an insult to offer to buy one’s colonial home with holes in the door to shoot Indians through,” I answered with the temper that always came at the mention of the name of a man I had chosen to consider a foe without any consent on his part at all.

“You’d think he was born and raised in a hollow log if you should ever interview him, and he has n’t any family, but from some of the motions he is making, I think he intends to have,” answered Pan, with one of his most fluty jeers, and he shook his head until the crests ruffled still lower over the tips of his ears.

THE GOLDEN BIRD

“Are you—you one of his agents—that is, *spies*, and was it you that insulted me by wanting to buy Elmnest just because it was poor and old?” I demanded, with the color in my cheeks.

“I am not his spy or his agent, and do you want to come down to the spring-house and cook these wild-mustard shoots for our dinner, or shall I go at our old garden with the prospect of an empty stomach at sunset?”

“Why won’t you come in to dinner with me?” I asked, with a mollified laugh, though I knew I was bringing down upon myself about my hundredth refusal of proffered hospitality.

“Two reasons—first, because I won’t eat with my neighbors at the ‘great house’ when I can’t eat with them in the cottage, and I just can’t eat the grease that a lot of the poorer villagers deluge their food with. I’m Pan, and I live in the woods on roots and herbs. Second—because about six weeks ago I found a farm woman who would

THE GOLDEN BIRD

come out at my wooing to cook and eat the herbs and roots with me and I could have her to myself all alone. Now, will you come on down to the spring?" And without waiting for my reply, Adam started down the hill, crosswise from the path by which I had ascended, padding ahead in his weird leather sandals and breaking a path for me through the undergrowth as I followed close at his shoulder, an order of rough travel to which I had become accustomed in the weeks that had passed and that now seemed to me—well, I might say racial.

In the riot of an April growing day, in which we could hear life fairly teem and buzz at our feet, on right, and left, and overhead, Adam and I worked shoulder to shoulder in the old garden of Elmnest. Every now and then I ran down to the spring to put a green fagot under the pot of herbs, which needed to simmer for hours to be as delicious as was possible for them. From the library came a rattle and bang of literary musketry from the blessed parental

THE GOLDEN BIRD

twins, who were for the time being with Julius Cæsar in "all Gaul," and oblivious to anything in the twentieth century, even a spring-intoxicated niece and daughter down in her grandmother's garden with a Pan from the woods; occasionally Rufus rattled a pot or a pan; but save for these few echoes of civilization, Adam and I delved and spaded and clipped and pruned and planted in the old garden just as if it had been the plot of ground without the walls of Eden in which our first parents were forced to get busy.

"Great work, Farmwoman," said Adam as we sat down on the side steps to eat, bite-about, the huge red apple he had taken from the bundle of emigrant appearance which he always carried over his shoulder on the end of a long hickory stick and which I had by investigation at different times found to contain everything from clean linen to Sanskrit poetry for father. To-day I found the manuscript score of a new opera by no less a person than Hurter himself, which he in-

THE GOLDEN BIRD

sisted on having me hum through with him while we ate the apple.

“I told Hurter I thought that fourth movement would n’t do, and now I know it after hearing you try it through an apple,” said Pan as he rose from beside me, tied the manuscript up in the bandana bundle, and picked up his long pruning-knife. “Now, Woman, we ’ll put a curb on the rambling of every last rambler in this garden and then we can lay out the rows for Bud to plant with the snap beans to-morrow.” Adam, from the first day he had met me, had addressed me simply with my generic class name, and I had found it a good one to which to make answer. Also Adam had shown me the profit and beauty of planting all needful vegetables mixed up with the flowers in the rich and loamy old garden, and had adjusted a cropping arrangement between the Corn-tassel Bud and me that was to be profitable to us both, Bud only doing in odd hours the work I could n’t do, and getting a share of the profits.

THE GOLDEN BIRD

“Don’t work me to death to-day,” I pleaded, and told him about the rescue of the babies Bird with so much dramatic force that his laughter rang out with such volume that old Rufus came to the kitchen window to look out and shake his head, and I knew he was muttering about “Peckerwoods,” “devils,” and the sixth day of the week. “Will the chicks live all right, do you think?” I asked anxiously.

“They’re safe if they never got cold to the touch and you did n’t joggle ’em too much. Do either you or Miss Rutherford happen to er—er—kick in your sleep?”

“We do not!” I answered with dignity, as I snipped away a dead branch of ivy from across the path.

“I just thought Miss Rutherford might from—”

“You don’t know Bess; she’s so executive that—”

“That she would n’t kick eggs for anything,” finished Pan, mockingly. “She

THE GOLDEN BIRD

does pretty well in the Russian ballet, does n't she?"

"Oh, I wish you could just see her in the 'Cloud Wisp'!" I exclaimed, with the greatest pride, for Bess Rutherford has nothing to envy Pavlova about.

"I have—er—have a great desire to so behold her at some future time," answered Pan, with one of his eery laughs, and I could almost see hoofs through the raw hide of his shoes. I would have ruffled the red crests off of the tips of his ears to see if they really were pointed if he had not stood just out of reach of my hand, where it would have been impossible to catch him if I tried.

"You won't eat with me in civilization, you won't meet any of my friends, and I don't believe you ever want to please me," I said as I turned away from his provocation and began again with the scissors.

"I don't like world girls," he said with the fluty coo in his voice that always calms the Ladies Leghorn when they are ruffled. "I only love farm women. The moon is begin-

THE GOLDEN BIRD

ning to get a rise out of the setting sun, and let's go away from these haunts of men to our own woods home. Come along!" As he spoke Pan pocketed his long knife, picked up his stick and bundle, and began to pad away through the trees down towards the spring, with me at his shoulder, and for the first time he held my hand in his as I followed in my usual squaw style.

In all the long dreary weeks that followed I was glad that I had had that dinner at sunset and moonrise with him down in the cove at the spring that was away from all the world. All during the days that never seemed to end, as I went upon my round of duties, I put the ache of the memories of it from me, but in the night I took the agony into my heart and cherished it.

"And it's the Romney hand ye have with the herb-pot, Woman dear," said Adam as he squatted down beside our simmering pot and stirred it with the clean hickory stick I had barked for that purpose when, very shortly after high noon, I had put the greens,

THE GOLDEN BIRD

with the two wild onion sprigs and the handful of inevitable black-walnut kernels, into the iron pot set on the two rocks with their smoldering green fire between. "You know you 'd rather be eating this dinner of sprouts and black bread with your poor Adam than—than dancing that 'Cloud Drift' in town with Matthew Berry—or Baldwin the enemy."

"Yes," I answered, as I knelt beside him and thrust in another slim stick and tasted the juice of the pot off the end. "But it would be hard to make Matthew believe it. I forgot to tell you that Matt is really going in for farming, thanks to the evil influence of your friend Evan Baldwin, who would n't know a farm if he met one on the road, a real farm, I mean. Poor Matt little knows the life of toil he is plotting for himself."

"Is he coming to live at Elmnest?" asked Adam, in a voice of entire unconcern, as he took the black loaf from his gypsy pack and began to cut it up into hunks and lay it on the clean rock beside the pot.

THE GOLDEN BIRD

“He is not,” I answered with an indignation that I could see no reason for.

“Sooner or later, Woman, you ’ll have to take a mate,” was the primitive statement that confronted me as I lifted the pot with the skirt of my blouse and poured the greens into two brown crockery bowls that Adam kept secreted with the pot on a ledge of the old spring-house.

“Well, a husky young farmer is the only kind of a man who need apply. I mean a born rustic. I could n’t risk an amateur with the farm after all you ’ve taught me,” I answered as we seated ourselves on the warm earth side by side and began to dip the hunks of black bread into our bowls and lift the delicious wilted leaves to our mouths with it, a mode of consumption it had taken Pan several attempts to teach me. Pan never talks when he eats, and he seems to browse food in a way that each time tempts me more and more to reach out my hand and lift one of the red crests to see about the points of his ears.

THE GOLDEN BIRD

“Do you want to hear my invocation to my ultimate woman?” he asked as he set his bowl down after polishing it out with his last chunk of bread some minutes after I had so finished up mine.

“Is it more imperative than the one you give me under my window before I have had less than a good half-night’s sleep every morning?” I asked as I crushed a blade of meadow fern in my hands and inhaled its queer tang.

“I await my beloved in
Grain fields.
Come, woman!
In thy eyes is truth.
Thy body must give food with
Sweat of labor, and thy lips
Hold drink for love thirst.
I am thy child.
I am thy mate.
Come!”

Pan took my hand in his as he chanted, and held my fingers to his lips, and ended his chant with several weird, eery, crooning

THE GOLDEN BIRD

notes blown across his lips and through my fingers out into the moonlit shadows.

“I feel about you just as I do about one of Mrs. Ewe’s lambkins,” I whispered, with a queer answering laugh in my voice, which held and repeated the croon in his.

“I am thy child.
I am thy mate.
Oh, come!”

again chanted Pan, and it surely was n’t imagination that made me think that the red crests ruffled in the wind. The light in his eyes was unlike anything I had ever seen; it smouldered and flamed like the embers under the pot beside the rock. It drew me until the sleeve of my smock brushed his sleeve of gray flannel. His arms hovered, but did n’t quite enclose me.

“And the way I am going to feel about all the little chickens out of the incubator,” I added slowly as if the admission was being drawn out of me. Still the arms hovered, the crests ruffled, and the eyes searched

THE GOLDEN BIRD

down into the depths of me, which had so lately been plowed and harrowed and sown with a new and productive flower.

“And the old twin fathers,” I added almost begrudgingly, as I cast him my last treasure.

Then with a laugh that I know was a line-reproduction descended from the one that Adam gave when he first recognized Eve, Pan folded me into his arms, laid his red head on my breast, and held up his lips to mine with a “love-thirst” that it took me more than a long minute to slack to the point of words.

“I knew there was one earth woman due to develop at the first decade of this century, and I’ve found her,” Pan fluted softly as he in turn took me on his breast and pressed his russet cheek against the tan of mine. “I’m going to take her off into the woods and then in a generation salvation for the nation will come forth from the forest.”

“My word is given to the Golden Bird to

THE GOLDEN BIRD

see his progeny safe into the world, and I must do that before—" but my words ended in a laugh as I slipped out of Pan's arms and sprang to my feet and away from him.

"We'll keep that faith with Mr. Bird to-night, and then I can take you with me before daylight," said Pan as he collected his Romney bundle with his left hand and me with his right and began to pad up the path from the spring-house towards the barn under a shower of the white locust-blossoms, which were giving forth their last breath of perfume in a gorgeous volume.

"To-night?" I asked from the hollow between his breast and his arm where I was fitted and held steadily so that my steps seemed to be his steps and the breath of my lungs to come from his.

"Yes; most of the eggs were pipped when I went in the barn to put away the tools," answered Adam, with very much less excitement than the occasion called for.

"Oh, why—why didn't you tell me?" I demanded as I came out of the first half of

THE GOLDEN BIRD

a kiss and before I retired into the last half.

“Too hungry—had to be fed before they got to eating at your heart,” answered Pan in a way that made me know that he meant me and not the dandelion greens and brown bread.

“You are joking me; they are not due until day after to-morrow,” I said as I took my lips away and began to hurry us both towards the barn.

“All April hatches are from two to three days early,” was Adam’s prosaic and instructive answer that cut the last kiss short as we entered the barn-door.

CHAPTER VIII

QUICKLY I released myself from his arm and flew to kneel in front of the metal mother, with the electric torch aimed directly into the little window that revealed all her inmost processes. The Peckerwood Pan hovered just at my shoulder, and together we beheld what was to me the most wonderful phenomenon of nature that had ever come my way. No sunset from Pike's Peak or high note from the throat of Caruso could equal it in my estimation. Behold, the first baby Bird stepped forth into the world right before my astonished and enraptured eyes! It was in this manner.

"Look, right here next to the glass," said Adam, as he put his finger against the lower left-hand corner of the peep window, and there I directed my torch. One of the great white pearls had a series of little holes around one end of it, and while I gazed a

THE GOLDEN BIRD

sharp little beak was thrust suddenly from within it. The shell fell apart, and out stepped the first small Leghorn Bird with an assurance that had an undoubted resemblance to that of his masculine parent. For a moment he blinked and balanced; then he stretched his small wings and shook himself, an operation that seemed to fluff about fifty per cent. of the moist aspect from his plump little body, and then he deliberately turned and looked into my wide-opened eyes. I promptly gasped and sat down on the barn floor, with my head weakly cuddled against Adam's knee.

“Two more here on the right-hand side, Woman,” said Adam, as he knelt beside me, took the torch, supported me in my reaction of astonishment, and showed me where a perfect little batch of babies was being born. “Whew, Farmer Craddock, but those are fine chickens! Heaven help us, but they are all exploding at one time! Only eggs of one hundred per cent. vigor and fertility hatch that way. Look at the moisture gath-

THE GOLDEN BIRD

ering on the glass. If you put your hand in there you would find it about a hundred and ten."

"Oh, look! G. Bird Junior, the first, is almost dry. Please, please let me take him in my hand!" I exclaimed as that five-minute-old baby pressed close up against the glass and blinked at the light and us bewitchingly.

"You must n't open the door for at least twelve hours now. Come away before the temptation overcomes you," commanded Pan.

"Wait twelve hours to take that fluff-ball in my hands? Adam, you are cruel," I said, as he pocketed the torch and left the drama of birth dark and without footlights. As he padded away towards the moonlit barn-door, I followed him in reluctant protest.

"Do you see that tall pine outlined against the sky over there on Paradise Ridge, Woman?" asked Adam, with the Pan lights and laugh coming back into his farmer eyes and voice. "I have got to be there an hour

THE GOLDEN BIRD

before dawn, and it is fifteen good miles or more. I want to roll against a log somewhere and sleep a bit, and it is now after ten o'clock. Go get your bundle, and I'll hang it on my stick, and we will disappear into the forest forever. I know a hermit who'll put us in marriage bonds. Come!" As he held out his arms Adam began to chant the weird tune to that mate song of his own invention.

"You know I can't do that," I said as I went into his embrace and drank the chant down into my heart. "There are so many live things that I must stay to watch over. I—I'm their—mother as well as—as yours. They must be fed."

"God, there really is such a thing as a woman," said Adam as he hid his smouldering eyes against my lips. "You'll be waiting when I come back, and you'll go with me the minute I call, if it's day or night? You'll be ready with your bundle?"

"You don't mean at daylight to-morrow, do you, Pan, dear?" I asked, with one of

THE GOLDEN BIRD

the last laughs that my heart was to know, for sometimes, it seemed forever, rippling out past his crimson crests.

“No; listen to me, Woman,” said Adam, as he held me tenderly on his right arm and took both my hands in his and held them pressed hard against my breast. “I am going away to-night, and I don’t know when I can get back. I only knew to-day I’d have to go; that’s why I—I took you and put my brand on your heart to-night. I can leave you aloose in the forest and know that I’ll find you mine when I can come back. But, oh, come with me!”

“I would n’t be your earth woman, Adam, if I left all these helpless things. I’ll wait for you, and no matter when you come I’ll be ready. Only, only you’ll never take me quite away from them all, will you?”

“No; I’ll build a nest over there in the big woods, and you can go back and forth between my—my brood and Mr. G. Bird’s,” promised Adam with Pan’s fluty laugh.

“Branded, and I don’t even know the ini-

THE GOLDEN BIRD

tials on the brand," I said to myself as I stood on the front steps under a honeysuckle vine that was twining with a musky rose in a death struggle as to the strength of their perfumes, and watched Adam go padding swiftly and silently away from me down the long avenue of elms. A mockingbird in a tree over by the fence was pouring out showers of notes of liquid love, and ringdoves cooed and softly nestled up under the eaves above my head. "I'm a woman and I've found my mate. I am going to be part of it all," I said to myself as I sank to the step and began to brood with the night around me.

I think that God gives it sometimes to a woman to have a night in which she sits alone brooding her love until somehow it waxes so strong and brave that it can face death by starvation and cold and betrayal and still live triumphant. It is so that He recreates His children.

"Now, of course, Ann, everybody admires your pluck about this retiring from the

THE GOLDEN BIRD

world and becoming a model rustic, but it does seem to me that you might admit that some of your old friends have at least a part of the attraction for you that is vested in, well, say old Mrs. Red Ally, for instance. Will you or will you not come in to dine and to wine and to dance at the country club with Matthew Saturday evening?" Bess delivered herself of the text of her mission to me before she descended from her cherry roadster in front of the barn.

"Oh, Bess, just come and see old Mrs. Red and never, never ask me to feel about a mere friend of my childhood like I do about her," I answered with welcome and excitement both in my voice. "Do come quick and look!"

"Coming," answered Bess, with delightful enthusiasm and no wounded pride, as she left the car in one motion and swept into the barn with me in about two more.

"Now, just look at that," I said as I opened the top of the long box that is called a brooder and is supposed to supplement the

THE GOLDEN BIRD

functions of the metal incubator mother in the destiny of chicken young. It has feed and water-pans in it, straw upon the floor as a carpet, and behind flannel portieres is supposed to burn a lamp with mother ardor sufficient to keep the small fledglings warm, though orphaned. Did the week-old babies Leghorn have to be content with such mechanical mothering? Not at all! Right in the middle of the brooder sat the old Red Ally, and her huge red wings were stretched out to cover about twenty-five of the metal-born babies and part of her own fifteen, and spread in a close, but fluffy, circle around her were the rest of her adopted family all cosily asleep and happy at heart. "I left the top of the brooder open while I went for water the second day after hers and the incubator's had hatched, and when I came back she was just as you see her now, in possession of the entire orphan-asylum."

"Oh, look, she's putting some out from under her and taking others in. Oh, Ann!"

THE GOLDEN BIRD

exclaimed Bess as she dropped on her knees beside the long box.

“Yes; she changes them like that. I’ve seen her do it,” I answered, with my cheeks as pink with excitement as were those of my sympathetic friend, Elizabeth Rutherford. “And you ought to see her take them all out for a walk across the grass. They all peep and follow, and she clucks and scratches impartially.”

“Ann,” said Bess, with a great solemnity in the dark eyes that she raised to mine, “I suppose I ought to marry Owen *this* June. I want to have another winter of good times, but I—I’m ashamed to look this hen in the face.”

“Owen is perfectly lovely,” I answered her, which was a very safely noncommittal answer in the circumstances.

“He carries one of the chickens he bought from you in his pocket all the time, with all necessary food, and it is much larger than any of mine or his in my conservatory.

THE GOLDEN BIRD

Owen is the one who goes in to tend to them when he brings me home from parties and things and—and—”

“Matthew took off all of his and Polly’s little Reds yesterday, and I’ve never seen him so—so—” I paused for a word to express the tenderness that was in dear old Matt’s face as he put the little tan fluff-balls one at a time into Polly Corn-tassel’s outstretched skirt.

“Matthew is a wonder, Ann, and you’ve got to come to this dance he is giving Corn-tassel Saturday—all for love of you because you asked him to look after her. He is the sweetest thing to her—just like old Mrs. Red here, spreads his wings and fusses if any man who is n’t a lineal descendant of Sir Galahad comes near her. He’s going to be awfully hurt if you don’t come.”

“Then I’ll tear myself away from my family and come, though I truly can’t see that I wished Polly Corn-tassel upon all of you. You are just as crazy about the apple-blossom darling as I am, you specially,

THE GOLDEN BIRD

Bess Rutherford," I answered, with pleased indignation.

"Ann, I do wish you could have seen her in that frilled white thing with the two huge blue bows at the ends of the long plaits at my dinner-dance the other night, standing and looking at everybody with all the fascination and coquetry of—of—well, that little Golden Bird peeping at us from the left-hand corner of Mrs. Red Ally's right wing. Where *did* she get that frock?"

"Do you suppose that a woman who runs a farm dairy of fifty cows, while her husband banks and post-offices and groceries would be at all routed by a few yards of lace and muslin and a current copy of 'The Woman's Review'? Aunt Mary made that dress between sun-up and -down and worked out fifty pounds of butter as well," I answered, with a glow of class pride in my rustic breast.

"All of that is what is seething in my blood until I can't stand it," said Bess as we walked towards the barn-door. "The rea-

THE GOLDEN BIRD

son I just feel like devouring Polly Corn-tassel is that somehow she seems to taste like bread and butter to me; I'm tired of life served with mayonnaise dressing with tabasco and caviar in it.

"Yes, a Romney herb-pot is better," I said, as a strange chant began to play itself on my heartstrings with me alone for a breathless audience.

"And if you come in on Saturday you can—" Bess was saying in a positive tone that admitted of no retreat, when Matthew's huge blue car came around the drive from the front of Elmnest and stopped by Bess's roadster. On the front seat sat Matthew, and Corn-tassel was beside him, but the rest of the car was piled high with huge sacks of grain, which looked extremely sensible and out of place in the handsomest car in the Harpeth Valley.

"Oh, Miss Ann, Mr. Matthew and I found the greatest bargain in winter wheat, and the man opened every sack and let me run my arm to the elbow in it. It is all hard

THE GOLDEN BIRD

and not short in a single grain. We are going to trade you half." And Polly's blue eyes, which still looked like the uncommercialized violet despite a six weeks' acquaintance with society in Hayesville, danced with true farmer delight.

"It 's warranted to make 'em lay in night shifts, Ann," said Matthew as he beamed down upon me with a delight equal to Polly's, and somehow equally as young. "Where 'll I put it? In the feed-room in the bins?"

"Yes, and they are almost empty. I was wondering what I would do next for food, because I owe Rufus and the hogs so much," I answered gratefully.

"What did you pay?" asked Bess, in a business-like tone of voice.

"Only a dollar and a quarter a bushel, all seed grade," answered Matthew, with the greatest nonchalance, as if he had known the grades of wheat from his earliest infancy.

"Why, Owen bought two bags of it for our joint family and paid such a fortune for

THE GOLDEN BIRD

it that I forgot the figures immediately; but I took up the rug and put it all in my dressing-room to watch over, lest thieves break into the garage and steal. Also I made him send me plebeian carnations instead of violets for Belle Proctor's dinner Tuesday," said Bess, with covetousness in her eyes as she watched Matthew begin to unload his wheat. I wonder what Matthew's man, Hickson, at one twenty-five a month, thought of his master's coat when he began to brush the chaff out of its London nap.

"Oh, Owen Murray is just a town-bred duffer," said Matthew, as he shouldered his last sack of grain.

"Well, you are vastly mistaken if you think that—" Bess was beginning to say in a manner that I knew from long experience would bring on a war of words between her and Matthew when a large and cheerful interruption in the shape and person of Aunt Mary Corn-tassel came around the corner of the house.

"Well, well, what sort of city farning is

THE GOLDEN BIRD

going on to-day amongst all these stylish folks?" she asked as she skirted the two cars at what she considered a safe and respectful distance, and handed me a bunch of sweet clover-pinks with a spring perfume that made me think of the breath of Pan O'Woods as I buried my lips in them. "You, Polly, go right home and take off that linen dress, get into a gingham apron, and begin to help Bud milk. I believe in gavots at parties only if they strengthen muscles for milking time."

"May I wait and ride down with Mr. Matthew and show him where to put our wheat, Mother?" asked Polly as she snuggled up to her mother, who was pinning a stray pink into Matthew's button-hole per his request.

"Yes, if he 'll put his legs under old Mrs. Butter to help you get done before I am ready to strain up," answered Aunt Mary, with a merry twinkle in her eye as she regarded Matthew in his purple and fine linen. "Put an apron on him," she added.

THE GOLDEN BIRD

“Lead me to the apron,” said Matthew, with real and not mock heroics.

“But before you go I want to tell all of you about an invitation that has come over the telephone in the bank to all of Riverfield, and make a consultation about it. Now who do you suppose gave it?”

“Who?” we all asked in chorus.

“Nobody less than the governor of the State called up Silas, me answering for him on account of his deafness, and asked everybody to come in to town next Saturday night to hear this new commissioner of agriculture that he is going to appoint make the opening address of his office, I reckon you could call it. You know Silas is the leading Democrat of this district, and the governor has opened riz biscuits with me many a time. I told him ‘Thank you, sir,’ we would all come and hear the young man talk about what he didn’t know, and he laughed and rang off. Yes, we are all going in a kind of caravan of vehicles, and I want you to go, Nancy, in the family coach and take Mrs.

THE GOLDEN BIRD

Tillett with you on account of her having to take all the seven little Tilleths, because there won't be a minder woman left to look after 'em. Bud will drive so as not to disturb Cradd or William in their Heathen pursuits or discommode Rufus' disposition. Now, won't it be nice for the whole town to go junketing in like that?" As she spoke Aunt Mary beamed upon us all with pure delight.

"But Saturday evening is the night that Mr. Matthew is going to have that dance for me, Mother," said Polly, with the violets becoming slightly sprinkled underneath the long black lashes.

"Well, dancing can wait a spell," answered Aunt Mary, comfortably. "The governor said that all the folks at Cloverbend and Providence and Hillsboro are going, and Riverfield has got to shake out a forefoot in the trip and not a hind one."

"Oh, we'll have the dance next week, Corn-tassel," promised Matthew, promptly enough to prevent the drenching of the vio-

THE GOLDEN BIRD

lets. "It will be great to hear Baldwin accept his portfolio, as it were."

"And after his term begins I suppose he'll have offices at the capitol and will be in town most of the time. Then we can have him at all the dances. Polly, he dances like nothing earthly. Still Matthew won't let him come near you; he's deadly to women. We are all positively drugged by him," exclaimed Bess, delighted at the idea of Hayesville society acquiring the new commissioner of agriculture for a permanent light.

"Then I can count on you to help Mrs. Tillett and the children in and out, Nancy?" continued Aunt Mary, with the light of such generalship in her eye that I was afraid even to mention my one-sided feud with the hero of the hour. "You can take Baby Tillett and sit a little way apart from her so she won't have to feed him all the time to keep him quiet."

"I can take eight people in my car,

THE GOLDEN BIRD

Mother Corn-tassel," said Matthew, with the most beautiful eagerness.

"I can get in five," added Bess, with an equal eagerness. "Can I have the Addcocks?" Bess and the pessimistic Mrs. Addcock had got together over some medicine to prevent pip in the conservatory young Leghorns.

"Yes, and Matthew can take all the eight Spains if I can sit down Mrs. Spain to a bolt of gingham in time to get them all nicely covered for such a company," decreed the general, as she ran over in her mind's eye the rest of the population of Riverfield. "I'll make all the men hitch their best teams to the different rigs, and by starting early and taking both dinner and supper on the way we can get there in plenty of time. Twenty miles is not more than a half day's trip."

"I can sit by you and hold two Spains in my lap," I heard Polly plan with Matthew.

"Sure you can," he answered her. "I

THE GOLDEN BIRD

think the loveliest thing about Matthew Berry is the way he speaks to women and children." As he answered, he piled Aunt Mary and Polly in beside the rest of the wheat-bags and motored them away down the avenue.

"Ann, please come to town with me," pleaded Bess as she got into her car and prepared to follow in the wake of the wheat-bags. "I miss you so, and Belle weeps at the mention of you. She and I are having dinner at the Old Hickory Club with Houston Jeffries and Owen to-night. Matt will come, and let's have one good old time. I came all this way to get you."

"I honestly, honestly can't, Bess," I said as I took her hand stretched down from her seat behind the wheel to me, and put my cheek against it. "I've got this whole farm to feed between now and night. Both incubators must have their supper of oil or *you* know what'll happen. Mrs. Ewe and family must be fed, or rather she must be

THE GOLDEN BIRD

fed so as to pass it along at about breakfast time, I should say, not being wise in biology or natural history; the entire Bird family are invited to supper with me, and I even have to carry a repast of corn over the meadows to my pet abhorrences, Rufus' swine, because he has retired to the hay-loft with a flannel rag around his head, which means I have offended him or that father has given him an extra absent-minded drink from the decanter that Matthew brought him. Peckerwood Pup is at this moment, you see, chewing the strings out of my shoes as an appetizer for her supper. How could I eat sweetbreads and truffle, which I know Owen has already ordered, when I knew that more than a hundred small children were at home crying for bread?"

"Ann, what is it that makes you so perfectly radiantly beautiful in that faded linen smock and old corduroy skirt? Of course, you always were beautiful, but now you look like—like—well, I don't know whether it is

THE GOLDEN BIRD

a song I have heard or a picture I have seen.” Bess leaned down and laid her cheek against mine for a second.

“I ’m going to tell you some day before long,” I whispered as I kissed the corner of her lips. “Now do take the twin fathers for a little spin up the road and make them walk back from the gate. They have been suffering with the Trojan warriors all day, and I know they must have exercise. Uncle Cradd walks down for the mail each day, but father remains stationary. Your method with them is perfect. Go take them while I supper and bed down the farm.”

“I know now the picture is by Tintoretto, and it’s some place in Rome,” Bess called back over her shoulder as she drove her car slowy around to the front door to begin her conquest and deportation of my precious ancients.

“Not painted by Tintoretto, but by the pagan Pan,” I said to myself as I turned into the barn door.

CHAPTER IX

WHEN I came out with a bucket of the new wheat in my hand, I heard Bess and her car departing, with Uncle Cradd's sonorous speech mingling with the puff of the engine.

"We are all alone, Mr. G. Bird, and we love it, because then we can talk comfortably about our Mr. Adam," I said to the Golden Bird as he followed me around the side of the barn where a door had been cut by Pan himself to make an entry into my improvised chicken-house.

Suddenly I was answered by a very interesting chuckling and clucking, and I turned to see what had disengaged the attention of Mr. G. Bird from me and my feed-bucket. The sight that met my eyes lifted the shadow that had lain between the Golden Bird and me since the morning I had taken him in to

THE GOLDEN BIRD

see his newly arrived progeny and had not been able to make him notice their existence. Stretching out behind me was a trail of wheat that had dripped from a hole in the side of the bucket, and along the sides of it the paternal Bird was marshaling his reliable foster-mother, Mrs. Red Ally's and all his own fluffy white progeny. With exceeding generosity he was not eating a grain himself, but scratching and chortling encouragingly.

"I knew you were not like other chicken men, Mr. G. Bird, 'male indifferent to hatches,' as the book said," I exclaimed as he caught up with me and began to peck the grains I offered from my hand. "You are just like Owen and Matthew and Mr. Tillett and—and—" but I did n't continue the conversation because the chant began rending my heartstrings again. "Oh, Mr. G. Bird, it is an awful thing for a woman to have an apple orchard and lilac bushes in bloom when she is alone," I sighed instead, as I

THE GOLDEN BIRD

went on to my round of feeding, very hungry myself for—a pot of herbs. Later I, too, was fed.

Long after the twin fathers had had supper and were settled safely by their candles, which were beacons that led them back into past ages, I sat by myself on the front doorstep in the perfumed darkness that was only faintly lit by stars that seemed so near the earth that they were like flowers of light blossoming on the twigs of the roof elms. In a lovely dream I had just gone into the arms of Pan when I heard out beyond the orchard a soft moo of a cow, and with it came a weak little calf echo.

“Somebody’s cow has strayed—I wish she belonged to me and could help me with this nutrition job,” I said to myself as I rose and ran down under the branches of the gnarled old apple-trees, which sifted down perfumed blow upon my head as I ran. Then I stopped and listened again. Over the old stone wall that separated the orchard from

THE GOLDEN BIRD

the pasture I heard footsteps and soft panting, also a weak little cow-baby protest of fatigue.

“I ’ll get over the wall and see if there is any trouble with them,” I said and I suited my actions to my words. I suppose in the dark I forgot that cows have horns and that I had never even been introduced to one before, for with the greatest confidence and sympathy I walked up near the large black mass that was the cow mother, with a very small and wavering body pressed close at her side.

“Did you call me, Mother Cow?” I asked softly.

The question was taken from my lips as Pan came out of the darkness behind her and took me into his arms.

“Yes, she called you. I did n’t think I ’d see you. I was just going to leave her for you and go my way; but trust women for secret communication,” he said as my arm slipped around his bare throat.

“Not see me?” I questioned.

THE GOLDEN BIRD

“I never wanted to see you again until I came for you, Woman. I did n't think I could stand it—to put you out of my arms again. I can't take you with me to-night. I came miles out of my way to bring her to you, and I've hurried them both cruelly. The calf is only two days old, but you do need her badly to feed the chickens. Milk-fed chickens show a gain of thirty per cent. over others. You can churn and get all the butter you need and feed them the buttermilk.”

“Do you suppose I can learn to milk and churn her?” I asked as I shrank a bit closer in his arms from this new responsibility.

“Milk her and churn the milk,” laughed Pan as he bent my head forward on his arm, set his teeth in the back of my neck, and shook me like Peckerwood Pup shakes the gray kitten when I'm not looking.

“Will you show me in the morning?”

“Woman, I have to run ten miles through the forest before daybreak, and I don't know when I can come back to you. I know I

THE GOLDEN BIRD

ought to tell you things, but I—I just can't. I demand of life that I be allowed to come for you and take you into the woods with only your Romney bundle. Will you be here ready for me when I come, and keep the bundle tied up?"

"Yes," I answered as I drew his head down and pressed it to my breast, hoping that he might hear the chant on my heart-strings. I think he did hear.

"I am thy child.
I am thy mate.
Come!"

he made response, as he slipped from my arms and away into the darkness, leaving me alone with only the mother cow for company. She licked my arm with a warm, rough tongue, and I came back into my own body and led her to the barn and supper.

There are two kinds of love, the cultivated kind that bores into a woman's heart through silk and laces in a hot-house atmosphere and

THE GOLDEN BIRD

brings about all kinds of enervating reactions until operated upon by marriage; the other kind a field woman breathes into her lungs and it gets into her circulation and starts up the most awful and productive activity. I've had both kinds. I moped for months over Gale Beacon, and made him and Matthew and father completely unhappy, lost ten pounds, and was sent to a rest-cure for temper. The next morning after Adam gave me the cow and calf and passionate embraces out in the orchard I began to work like six women, and what I did to Elmnest not ten women could have accomplished in as many days.

I weeded the whole garden and I picked three bushels of our first peas, tied up sixty bunches of very young beets with long, tough orchard grass, treated fifty bunches of slender onions the same way, half a dozen of each to the bunch, and helped Bud Corn-tassel load a two-horse wagon with them and everything eatable he could get out of Aunt Mary's garden. Then I got up at two

THE GOLDEN BIRD

o'clock in the night and fed the mules so Bud could start at half-past two in order to be in the market at Hayesville long before the break of day, so as to sell the truck at the very top of the market to the earliest greengrocers. I gave Bud coffee and bread and butter and drove the team down to the gate while he went ahead to open it. I stood up while I drove, too, because Bud had not had room to put a seat in for himself and expected to stand up all the way to town. Talk about Mordkin and Pavlova! To stand up and drive a team hitched to a jolt-wagon over boulders and roots requires leg muscles! I hope I will be able to restrain myself from driving the team into market some day, but I am not sure I can. With the eggs and the "truck" Bud brought back sixteen dollars, eleven of which were mine. I bought a peck of green peas for myself from myself and ate most of them for dinner by way of blowing in some of the money. Then the chant on my heartstrings speeded me up to white-washing all the chicken para-

THE GOLDEN BIRD

phernalia on the place, and I dropped corn behind Rufus' plow for a whole day, even if it was to produce food for the swine. I went to bed at night literally on time with the chickens. I could only stay awake to kneel and reach out the arms of prayer and enfold Pan to my heart for a very few seconds before I vaulted into the four-poster and tumbled into the depths of sleep.

My activities were not in any way limited by the stone walls that surround Elmnest, but they spread over entire Riverfield, which had very nearly quit the pursuit of agriculture and gone madly into a social adventure. Everybody was getting ready for the trip into the capital city to answer the governor's invitation, and clothing of every color, texture, and sex was being manufactured by the bolt. For every garment manufactured I was sponsor.

"I sure am glad you have come down, Nancy," said Mrs. Addcock, with almost a moan; "that Mamie there won't let me turn up the hem of her dress without you, though

THE GOLDEN BIRD

I say what is a hem to a woman who has set in six pairs of sleeves since day before yesterday!"

"I want shoe-tops and Ma wants ankles," sniffed Mamie Addcock. "Polly Beesley wears shoe-tops and she's seventeen and goes to the city to dance. And Miss Bess' and yours are shoe-tops, too."

"Now you see what it is to raise a child to be led into sin and vanity," said Mrs. Addcock, looking at me reproachfully from her seat upon the floor at the feet of the worldly Mamie.

"I'll turn up the hem just right, Mrs. Addcock, while you get the collars on little Sammie's and Willie's shirts," I said soothingly as I sank down beside her at Mamie's feet.

"I had to cut Sammie's shirt with a tail to tuck in, all on account of that Mr. Matthew Berry's telling him that shirt and pants ought to do business together. And there's Willie's jeans pants got to have pockets for the knife that Mr. Owen gave him. I just

THE GOLDEN BIRD

can't keep up with these city notions of my children with five of 'em and a weak back." As she grumbled Mrs. Addcock rose slowly from her lowly position to her feet.

"I 'll make Willie's trousers, Mrs. Addcock, this afternoon, if he 'll come and help me feed and bed everything at Elmnest," I offered, with my mouth full of pins.

"No, child, but thank you for your willing heart. Mrs. Spain told me how you made Ezra's pants so one leg of him came while the other went, and I guess a mother is the only one to get the legs of her own offspring to match. I 'll work it out myself now that Miss Mamie is attended to."

"But now I know how to trouser boys normally. I turned Joe Tillett out in perfect proportion as well as in strong jeans," I answered, without the least offense at finding my first efforts as a tailor thus becoming the subject of kindly village gossip.

"Well, I hope this junket will turn out as Mary Beesley expects, with enjoyment for everybody. However, I 'm going to risk my

THE GOLDEN BIRD

back with Mr. Silas' mules rather than with that Bessie Rutherford's wheels that are not critter-drawn. I only hope she don't spill all my children, that I've had such a time getting here on earth, back into Kingdom Come."

"Would you rather go in my carriage with Mrs. Tillett, and let me go with Bess to hold in the children?" I asked with unconcealed eagerness.

"No, I don't believe so," answered Mrs. Addcock, cannily. "Sallie Tillett is having her dress made buttoned up in the back, and she has been in the habit of feeding the baby whenever he cries for it, though he can 'most stand alone. She is going to depend on you and a bag of biscuit to manage him through the show, and I'd rather not take your place."

"No; perhaps you would enjoy it more behind Uncle Silas and the mules," I answered cheerily, feeling perfectly capable of handling Baby Tillett and his bag of biscuits,

THE GOLDEN BIRD

because the memory of the times his little head with its tow fuzz had cuddled down on my linen smock, when I had carried him back and forth for long visits in the barn to the Peckerwood Pup so his mother could have a little vacation from his society, accelerated the movement of the chant on the cardiac instrument in my breast. "He stays hours and hours with me in a basket in the barn and is perfectly satisfied with the biscuits."

"All the same I told Sallie I could make that dress by another pattern, and you'd better sit with him a good distance during the show," said Mrs. Addcock, as I finished shoe-topping Mamie and picked up my pink-lined white sunbonnet, which had been a present from Mrs. Addcock herself and was astonishingly frilly and coquettish emanating from such a source, and began to depart.

"I'll take him on the other side of the auditorium," I answered, with respect for advice that I knew must be good through experience.

THE GOLDEN BIRD

And thus that pink and white, cooing, obstreperously hungry baby was made an instrument of cruel fate and—

“Come over and see the little cap I’ve made Bennie so as to do you honor,” called rosy Mrs. Tillett as I went down the street towards the grocery.

“I ain’t got but six more yards of gingham to sew up for the two littlest,” Mrs. Spain called cheerily as she looked past a whirring sewing-machine out through a window that was wreathed with a cinnamon rose-vine in full bloom.

“Want any help?” I called from the gate, which was flanked on both sides by blooming lilacs.

“No; you go on down to the store. Mr. Silas have brought out ten suits of clothes for the men to pick from, and they are a-waiting for your taste. Persuade Joe Spain to get that purple mixed. I do love gay colors, and it’ll go with my pink foulard.”

The scenes into which I entered in the

THE GOLDEN BIRD

post-office-bank-grocery was comedy in form, but serious in interpretation. The counter was piled high with men's garments of every color that is bestowed upon woolen cloth in the dyers' vats. Uncle Silas stood behind it with his glasses at a rampant angle on his nose, and Aunt Mary stood in the center of a shuffling, embarrassed, harassed group of farmers in overalls. Before her stood Bud, attired in a light gray suit of aggressively new clothes, and she was using him hard as a dummy upon which to illustrate her vigorous and persuasive remarks.

"Now, I am glad you have come down, honeybunch," she exclaimed at sight of me. "Here 's a bale of clothes and a bale of men, and nobody can seem to match 'em up suitable. I have at last got Bud Beesley here into a dead match for his beauty, if I do say it of my own son. Just look at him!" As she spoke she stood off from him and folded her plump hands across her wide waist in motherly rapture.

And Bud, with his violet eyes and yellow

THE GOLDEN BIRD

shock, *was* beautiful in the "custom-made," fifteen-dollar gray cheviot, despite his red ears. All the Harpeth Valley farmer folk have French Cavalier, English gentle, and Irish good blood in them, with mighty little else and, as in the case of Bud and Polly Corn-tassel, when clothed in garments of the world, it comes to the surface with startling effect. Bud could have put on a gray slouch hat with either a crimson or an orange band and walked into any good Eastern college fraternity or club he might have chosen.

"Shoo, Mother," said Bud as he turned around for my admiration, not surfeited with that of his mother.

"I only hope some town girl won't catch him like your mother did William," said Aunt Mary, with a laugh that ended in a little sigh that only I heard. Somehow I *will* feel psychically akin to Bud and Polly.

"Town girls are all movie-struck and don't want a man if a butter-paddle goes along



And Bud was beautiful in the "custom-made" fifteen-dollar gray chevrot with his violet eyes and yellow & lock, in spite of his red ears

This page in the original text is blank.

THE GOLDEN BIRD

with him," said Bud, with a laugh that was echoed from the overalled group.

"Yes, but Miss Nancy here has outsold any woman in Riverfield for cash on eggs and chickens before May first," said Mr. Spain as he picked up a gray purple coat from the top of the pile on the counter.

"She 'll marry and go away in a big car, too," said Bud, as he looked down and flicked an imaginary speck from the sleeve of his new coat. Something in his voice made me determine to introduce Belle Proctor's little sixteen-year-old sister to Bud in the near future. The kiddie spends half her time away from school in Bess's conservatory with Mr. G. Bird's non-resident family, and I think it will do her good to come out in the field and play with Bud. She is frail and too slight.

"Say, Miss Nancy, what do you think of this here purple to set me off?" asked Mr. Spain, as he held up the garment of his wife's desire. "Betty says it 'll match out

THE GOLDEN BIRD

her dimity, and I 'low to match Betty as long as I can."

"It 'll be the very thing, Mr. Spain," I said, as I controlled my horror at the flaring-colored coat and reminded myself that harmony of domestic relations is greater than any harmony of art.

"Now, pick your coats and slip 'em on, all of you, so Nancy can judge you," commanded the general. In a very short time each man had got out of his overall jumper and into his heart's desire.

A stalwart, comely, clean-eyed group of American men they were as they stood on parade, clothed for the most part in seemly raiment, chosen with Uncle Silas's quiet taste, except in the case of Mr. Spain, where he had let his experience of the past lead his taste.

"Please, dear God, don't let them ever have to be put into khaki," I prayed with a quick breath, for I knew, though they did not seem to recognize the fact, that this rally of the rural districts in the city hall

THE GOLDEN BIRD

was a part of the great program of preparedness that America was having forced upon her. I knew that the speech of the governor would be about the State militia and I knew that Evan Baldwin would talk to them about the mobilization of their stocks and crops. Quick tears flooded across my eyes, and I stretched out my hands to them.

"You all look good to me," I faltered in some of Matthew's language, because I could n't think of anything else to say but the prayer in my heart, and I did n't want to repeat that to them.

"Now, you have all passed your city examinations, so you can get back to work. Remember, that day after to-morrow is the junket, and one day won't be any too much to bank up your fires to run until you come back," said Aunt Mary in the way of dismissal.

"Talk about vanity in women folks? The first peacock hatched out was of the male persuasion," she remarked as we stood at the emporium door and watched the men

THE GOLDEN BIRD

dispersing, their bundles under their arms, each one making direct for his own front door. "Every woman in Riverfield will have to put down needle and fry-pan and butter-paddle to feed them so plum full of compliments that they'll strut for a week. Bless my heart, honeybunch, we have all got to turn around twice in each track to get ready, and as I'm pretty hefty I must begin right now." With this remark, Aunt Mary departed from the back door to her house on the hill and sent me out the front to Elmnest opposite.

"I thought that there was some reason why Pan and I both chose to wear Roycroft clothes. Mr. and Mrs. Spain are in love after eight children," I remarked to myself happily. "I am in agony in any shoes Pan does n't make. I wonder if any woman ever before was as much in love with a man about whom she knew so little—and so much as I do about Adam."

"I don't want to know about him—I want to love him," I answered myself as I walked

THE GOLDEN BIRD

up the long elm avenue. Afterwards I recalled those words to myself, and they were bitter instead of sweet.

CHAPTER X

FRIDAY, the twenty-first of April, I shall always remember as the busiest day of my life, for, as Aunt Mary had said, it takes time to bank fires enough to keep a farm alive a whole half day even if it is not running. I did all my usual work with my small folk, and then I measured and poured out in different receptacles their existence for the last half of the next day. After breakfast on Saturday I finally decided upon Uncle Cradd as the most trustworthy person of the three ancients, one of whom I was obliged to depend upon for substitution. Rufus, I felt sure, would compromise by feeding every ration to the hogs, and I knew that he could persuade father to do likewise, but Uncle Cradd, I felt, would bring moral force to bear upon the situation.

“Now, Uncle Cradd, here are all the dif-

THE GOLDEN BIRD

ferent feeds in different buckets, each plainly marked with the time to give it. Please, oh, please, don't let father lead you off into Egypt or China and forget them," I said as I led him to the barn and showed him the mobilization of buckets that I had shut up in one of the empty bins.

"Why not just empty it all out on the ground in front of the barn, Nancy, my dear, and let them all feed together in friendly fashion. I am afraid you take these pretty whims of yours too seriously," he said as he beamed affectionately at me over his large glasses.

"Because Peckerwood Pup would eat up the Leghorn babies, and it would be extermination to some and survival to the most unfit," I answered in despair. "Oh, won't you please do it by the directions?"

"I will, my child, I will," answered Uncle Cradd, as he saw that I was about to become tearful. "I will come and sit right here in the barn with my book.

"Oh, if you only will, Uncle Cradd, they

THE GOLDEN BIRD

will remind you when they are hungry. Mr. G. Bird will come and peck at you when it is time to feed his family, and the lambs and Mrs. Ewe will lick you, and Peckerwood Pup will chew you, so you can't forget them," I exclaimed in relief.

"That will be the exact plan for action, Nancy. You can always depend upon me for any of the small attentions that please you, my dear."

"I can depend on the fur and feathers and wool tribes better than I can on you, old dear," I said to myself, while I beamed on him with a dutiful, "Thank you, sir."

Then as Bud Corn-tassel had arrived to begin to hitch up the moth-eaten steeds to the ark, I ascended to my room to shed my farmer smocks, for the first time since my incarnation into them, and attire myself for the world again. The only garb of fashion I possessed, having sold myself out completely on my retirement, was the very stylish, dull-blue tailor suit in which I had traveled out the Riverfield ribbon almost

THE GOLDEN BIRD

three months before. But as that had been mid-February, it was of spring manufacture, and I supposed would still be able to hold its own.

"It's perfectly beautiful, but it feels tight and hampering," I said as I descended to enter the coach Bud had driven around to the front door.

"Will you give me a guarantee that you are n't just a dream lady I'll lose again in the city, Miss Nancy?" asked Bud, as he handed me into the Grandmother Craddock coach with great ceremony. Gale Beacon could n't have done any better on such short notice.

"I'll be in smocks at feeding-time in the morning, Bud, just as you will be in overalls," I answered laughingly.

"My, but you are a sight!" said Mrs. Tillett, as she handed up Baby Tillett to me, with such a beaming countenance that I knew she meant a complimentary construction to be placed upon her words. "Now, just take up them little girls and set 'em

THE GOLDEN BIRD

down easy, Mr. Bud, on account of their ruffles, and ram the boys in between to hold 'em steady. Now, boys, if you muss up the girls I 'll make every one of you wear your shoes all day to-morrow to teach you manners. Go on, Mr. Bud."

Thus nicely packed away, we started on down the Riverfield ribbon at the head of the procession, followed by Uncle Silas driving Aunt Mary's rockaway, with his beautiful, dappled, shining, gray mules hitched to it, and beside him sat Mrs. Addcock in serene confidence in being driven by a man who could drive a bank and a post-office and a grocery. Mamie and Gertie Spain were spread out carefully on the back seat, with only one small masculine Spain for a wedge. The Buford buggy, all spick and span from its first spring washing and polishing, came next, with Mr. and Mrs. Buford cuddling together on the narrow seat. They were a bride and groom of very little over a year's standing, and the blue-blanketed bundle that the bride carried in her arms was no reason,

THE GOLDEN BIRD

in Mr. Buford's mind, why he should n't drive with one hand while he held a steadying and affectionate arm around them both. Buford Junior was less than a month old, but why should n't he begin to adventure out in the big world? Parson and Mrs. Henderson came next, he with snow-white flowing beard, and she, beside him, in a gray bonnet with a pink rose, while beside her sat his mother, Granny Henderson, now past eighty, but with a purple pansy nestled in her waterwaves.

Others followed, and the remainder waited on the steps of the emporium, with Aunt Mary and Polly, for Matthew and Bess to come for them. It was hard for them to realize that the powerful engines in both cars would take them into town in little over an hour, when the journey as they before had made it had always consumed six, and they were becoming impatient even before we left. So when we met Bess and Matthew half an hour later down the Riverfield ribbon, I hurried them back. I after-

THE GOLDEN BIRD

wards learned that they had had to persuade Mrs. Spain to re clothe herself in the pink foulard, because she had decided that they were not coming and had gone back to work.

In reality I did n't draw a perfectly free breath until I saw the entire population of Riverfield seated in advantageous seats on the middle aisle in the town hall at six-thirty, and beginning to get out their lunch-baskets to feed themselves and the kiddies before the opening of the convocation at eight o'clock.

According to the advice of Mrs. Addcock and Mrs. Tillett herself, I had taken a stuffed egg, a chicken wing, and a slice of jelly-cake for my own supper, along with Baby Tillett's bag of hard biscuits, over on a side aisle, and from that vantage-point I could see the whole party.

"They are lovely—the loveliest of all, mine are," I said to myself as I surveyed them proudly and compared them with other

THE GOLDEN BIRD

lunching delegations, which I knew to be from Providence and Hillsboro and Cloverbend.

Baby Tillett crowed a proud assent as he stuck a biscuit in his mouth and looked at the lights with the greatest pleasure. I took off his new cap with its two blue bows over the ears, unbuttoned his little piqué coat, which I had almost entirely built myself, and which was of excellent cut, and settled down to dine with him in contentment.

Then it happened that I was so weary from the day of excitement that I had hardly finished my supper before I snuggled Baby Tillett closer in my arms, as I felt him grow limp very suddenly, and with him I drifted off into a nap. I was sitting in a corner seat, but I don't yet see how I slept as I did and cuddled him too unless it was just the force of natural maternal gravitation that held my arms firmly around him, but the first thing I knew I opened my eyes

THE GOLDEN BIRD

on the whole hall full of people, who were wildly applauding the governor as he stepped forward on the platform. Hurriedly straightening my drooping head and looking guiltily around to see if I had been caught napping, I discovered Matthew Berry at my side in a broad chuckle, and I immediately suspected his stalwart right arm of being that force of gravitation.

“He ’s dead to the world; let him lie across your knees and listen to the governor’s heroics of introduction to Baldwin,” said Matthew as he settled the limp baby across my lap with his bobbing head on my arm. And he adjusted his own arm less conspicuously along the seat at my back.

“I was up at four,” I whispered, as the applause died away and the governor began to speak.

The Governor of the State of Harpeth is a good and substantial man, who was himself born out on Paradise Ridge, and he had called in all of his people from their fields to talk to them about a problem so serious that

THE GOLDEN BIRD

the world of men, who had hitherto considered themselves as competent to guide the great national ship of state through peaceful waters, had been impelled to turn and call to council the men from the plows and reapers, to add their wisdom in deciding the best methods of safeguarding the nation. His speech was a thoughtful presentation of the different methods of preparedness which the whole of America was weighing in the balance. He explained the army policy, the Congressional policy, and then that of the State guard, and he asked them to weigh the facts well so that if it should come to the vote of the people of the nation, they would vote with instructed wisdom.

There was a strained gravity on all the listening faces, and I could see some of the women in the groups of farmer folk draw nearer against the shoulders of the men, who all sat with their arms along the back of the seats as Matthew sat beside me. Young Mrs. Buford held the precious, limp, blue bundle much closer in her arms, and hid her

THE GOLDEN BIRD

head on the broad shoulder next her own, but on Mrs. Spain's comely face I saw a light beginning to dawn as she proudly surveyed the four sturdy sons with shining faces who flanked her and Mr. Spain.

“And now,” said the governor, “I have asked you here to-night to introduce formally to you one of the great sons of Old Harpeth, who has come back from the world, with his wealth and honors and wisdom and science, into his own valley, to show us how to make the plowshare support the machine-gun with such power that the world will respect its silence more than any explosion. A year or more ago he came home and asked me for his commission, and since then he has lived among you so as to become your friend, in hopes that he might be your chosen leader in this food mobilization. Gentlemen and ladies of the Harpeth Valley, I present to you Mr. Evan Baldwin, who will speak to you to-night on the ‘Plowshare and the Machine-gun.’ Friends, Evan Adam Baldwin.”

THE GOLDEN BIRD

For a second there was expectant silence, and then from the back of the platform from behind a group of State officials stepped—my Pan!

For a long second the whole hall full of people held their breath in a tense uncertainty, because it was hard to believe in the broadcloth and fine linen in which he was clothed, but the brilliant hair, the ruffling crests, and the mocking, eery smile made them all certain by the second breath, which they gave forth in one long masculine hurrah mingled with a feminine echo of delight. For several long minutes it would not be stilled as he stood and smiled down on them all and mocked them with his laugh mingling with theirs.

Finally Aunt Mary, the general, could stand it no longer, and forgetful of her Saint Paul, she arose with all the dignity of her two hundred pounds and raised her hand.

“All be still, neighbors, and let Adam tell us the same things he ’s been saying for these many months, and then we ’ll let him shuck

THE GOLDEN BIRD

his fine clothes and come on home in my rockaway with us."

"No, with us!" fairly yelled Cloverbend in unison of protest with Providence.

"Thank you, Aunt Mary," said Pan in the fluty tenderness with which he had always addressed her. "The governor does n't know it, but I can't make a speech to you to-night. I am going to catch that ten o'clock train for Argentina, to get some wheat secrets for all of us, and I want all of you to begin right away to plow good and deep so you 'll be ready for me when I get back in a few months. We 'll have to inoculate the land before we sow. Only here are just one or two things I will say to you before I have to start."

For about ten minutes Adam stood there before those farmer folk and, with his fluty voice and the fire glow in his eyes, led them up upon a high mountain of imagination and showed them the distant land into which he could lead them, which, when they arrived, they would find to be their own.

THE GOLDEN BIRD

The baby on my lap stirred, and I lifted him against my throbbing breast as I listened to this gospel of a new earth, which might be made into the outposts of a new Heaven, in which man would nourish his weaker brother into a strength equal to his own, so that no man or nation would have to fight for existence or a place in the sun. Then while we all sat breathless from his magic, Pan vanished and left us to be sent home rejoicing by the governor.

Sent home rejoicing? Suddenly I realized that when Evan Adam Baldwin had gone, my Pan had also vanished without a word to me. What did it mean? His eyes had n't found me sitting apart from my delegation with another woman's baby in my arms. Would there be a word for me in the morning?

"In Baldwin emerges the new American," said Matthew, with a light in his face I had never seen before, as we all rose to go.

"Do you blame every woman in the world for being mad about him when you saw that

THE GOLDEN BIRD

look in his eyes when he held out his hands and chanted that food plea to us? I'm glad he does n't beckon to me, or I am afraid Owen Murray and Madam Felicia would be disappointed about that June decision of mine," said Bess as she and Owen helped Bud pack the Tilletts and me into the ark for our return trip.

"Will there be word for me in the morning?" the old wheels rattled all the way out the Riverfield ribbon, and I thought an old owl hooted the question at me from a dead tree beside the road, while I felt also that a mocking-bird sang it from a thicket of dogwood in ghostly bloom opposite. "Will there be word in the morning?"

The next morning I awoke with the same question making a new motive in the chant on my heartstrings.

"Uncle Cradd will bring his letter when he comes back from the post-office, and I know he'll send a message to you, Mr. G. Bird," I said happily, as I watered and fed and caressed and joyed in the entire barn family.

THE GOLDEN BIRD

“I hate him for being what he is and treating me this way, but I love him still more,” I confided to Mrs. Ewe as I gave her an extra handful of wheat out of the blouse-pocket which I kept filled for Mr. G. Bird from pure partiality.

Uncle Cradd did not bring a letter from the post-office for me. The blow in the apple orchard and the purple plumes on the lilac bushes looked less brilliant in hue, but the tune on my heartstrings kept up a note of pure bravado. I weeded the garden all afternoon, but stopped early, fed early, and went up-stairs to my room before the last sunset glow had faded off the dormer windows. Opening my old mahogany chest, I took out a bundle I had made up the day after the advent of Mother Cow and the calf, spread it out on the bed, and looked it over.

In it was an incredible amount of lingerie, made of crêpe de chine and lace, folded tightly and tied with a ribbon into a package not over a foot square. A comb and a brush of old ivory, which had set in its back a small

THE GOLDEN BIRD

mirror held in by a silver band, which father had purchased in Florence for me under a museum guaranty as a genuine Cellini work of art, were wrapped in a silk case, and a toothbrush and soap had occupied their respective oil-silk cases along with a tube of tooth paste and one of cold cream. Two pairs of soft, but strong, tan cotton stockings were tucked underneath the ribbon confining the lingerie, and a small prayer-book with both mine and my mother's name in it completed the—I had n't exactly liked to call it a trousseau. It was all tied up in one of Adam's Romney handkerchiefs, which he had washed out one day in the spring branch and left hanging on a hickory sapling to dry, and which I had appropriated because I loved its riot of faded colors.

“It is just about the size of his,” I had said to myself as I had tied up its corners that day after my love adventure in the orchard under the chaperonage of Mother Cow, and I had laughed as I imagined Pan's face when he discovered that I had been so en-

THE GOLDEN BIRD

tirely unfemininely subservient to his command about light traveling. Suddenly I swept the bundle together and back in the chest, while a note of genuine fear swept into the song in my heart.

“He ’ll write from New Orleans—he does n’t sail until to-morrow,” I whispered as I quieted the discord and went down to prayers.

. . . “I shall not want.

He maketh me to lie down in
green pastures: he leadeth me be-
side the still waters.

He restoreth my soul:”

intoned Uncle Cradd, and somehow the tumult in my heart was stilled for the night, and I could as usual take Pan into my prayer arms and ask God to keep him safe. I wonder how many women would really pray if there were n’t men in the world to furnish them the theme!

Also I wonder how it is possible for me to write about that following first week of May when I had to feel the chant die out of my

THE GOLDEN BIRD

heart and still live and help a lot of other live creatures, both people and animals, to go on breathing also.

Each day Uncle Cradd failed to bring me a letter from the post-office, and after a week I ceased to look for one. I knew that Evan Adam Baldwin was on the high seas and that if he had not written before he sailed he never intended to write. My common sense kindly and plainly spoke this truth to my aching heart: Pan had been simply having a word adventure with me in character.

CHAPTER XI

THE beginning of the twentieth century has witnessed many startling inventions, reforms, evolutions, and revolutions, but mankind generally is not aware that the most remarkable result of many combined new forces is a woman whose intellect can go on functioning at the same time that her heart is aching with either requited or unrequited love. Just ten days after I had been jilted, instead of lying in a darkened room in hysterics, I went into a light corner of the barn, sat down on an upturned seed-bucket, took my farm-book on my knee, wet my pencil between my lips, and began to figure up the account between Evan Adam Baldwin and myself. First, I sat still for a long second and tried to set a price on myself the hour before I had first encountered him out on the Riverfield ribbon on the day I had

THE GOLDEN BIRD

made my entry into rural life. And think as hard as I could I could n't think up a single thing I had done worth while to my race; so I had to write a great cipher against myself. Then in another column I set down the word "assets," and after it I wrote, "The Golden Bird and family, eight hundred dollars." Then I thought intently back into the past and into the haircloth trunk and wrote, "Clothes, one hundred and fifty dollars."

Then I sat for another long time and looked out the door to the Paradise Ridge across the Harpeth Valley, after which I smoothed the page, dated it, and again began to take stock of myself and the business. I listed the original investment of Mr. G. Bird and the ladies Leghorn, one of which was at that moment picking wheat from my pocket, on through their fifty progeny, for which I had established a price of twenty dollars per head, through the two lambkins I had bought from Rufus for ten dollars, Mother Cow and the calf, the hundred and fifty pearls in the

THE GOLDEN BIRD

incubators, half of which I had sold to Owen and Bess and ten of which I had sold to a real chicken dealer who knew Mr. G. Bird's pedigree and had come all the way from Georgia to buy them. The whole inventory, including the wheat I had paid Matthew for and the improvements I had made on the barn, or rather Adam had made, also including the prospects in the garden, amounted to eighteen hundred dollars. Then I thought still longer and finally after my own name wrote one hundred and fifty dollars' worth of "education." The total was nineteen hundred and fifty dollars, thus making a profit on my investments of about eight hundred dollars. After this calculation I sat and chewed the pencil a long time, then turned a fresh page, wrote, "Evan Adam Baldwin," on the one side, "Profit" in the middle, and a large cipher opposite.

Then I closed the book forever with such decision that the Leghorn lady and Mrs. Ewe, who was helping her explore me, both jumped, and I rose to my feet.

THE GOLDEN BIRD

“I got eight hundred and fifty dollars out of the deal, and Evan Adam Baldwin only got a few mediocre and amateur kisses, which he shared with me, for all his hard labor in plowing and tilling and restoring Elmnest and me to the point of being of value in the scheme of things. I got the best of that deal and why should I sulk?” I said to myself in a firm and even tone of voice. I did n't.

If I had worked like a couple of women when speeded up by a weird chant on my heartstrings, which I now recognized was just a part of the system used in my reorganization, I worked like five when my heart became perfectly dead and silent. I got out of my bed the very minute that the first gleam of consciousness came into my mind, before I could have a second to think about anything unprofitable, plunged into the old brass-bound cedar tub of cold water, which I had carried up from the spring in a bucket that matched it the night before, got into my corduroys and smock, and was out in the

THE GOLDEN BIRD

barn and at work before it would seem possible for a woman to more than open her eyes of understanding upon the world. All day long I weeded and hoed and harvested and fed and cleaned and marketed that farm until I fell dead between the posts of the old bed at night.

I did n't pray. I knew God would understand.

And through it all there was Matthew! The first week or two he remonstrated with me; then when he saw that I was possessed by the demon of work he just rolled up his sleeves, collected Polly and Bud, and helped. He promoted his best clerk in the office to a junior partnership, refused several important cases, bought the hundred-acre forest which joins Elmnest, which Aunt Mary had had in her family for generations, and which had been considered as waste land after the cedars had been cut off, and began to restore it. He never bothered me once in a sentimental way, and when he brought the plans of his house over on the knoll opposite Elm-

THE GOLDEN BIRD

nest, Polly helped me enthuse and criticize them, and he went away seemingly content. His and Polly's Rhode Island Reds were rivaling my Leghorns in productiveness, and all of Riverfield seemed to have gone chicken mad. Mr. Spain traded a prize hog for a cock, and twelve black Minorca hens, and Mr. Buford brought the bride two settings of gray "Rocks" to start a college education for the bundle.

"Do you know what the whole kit and billing is so busy about?" said Aunt Mary as she surveyed with pride a new hen-house that Bud had just finished, in which I saw the trap nests over which she had disputed with the commissioner of agriculture. "They were just woke up by that speech of Adam's, and they are getting ready to show him what Riverfield can do when he gets back. When did you say you expect him, honeybunch?"

"I don't," I answered quietly.

"Why, I thought Silas said you did," she

THE GOLDEN BIRD

answered absent-mindedly. "Now, you can have Bud, but not for keeps, because as I borned him I think I am entitled to work him." We all laughed as Bud and I betook ourselves and a large farm-basket full of late cabbage plants across to Elmnest.

"Miss Ann, please ma'am, make mother let me go to town to-night with Mr. Matthew and stay with Miss Bess. All her linen chest has come, and I want to see it," Polly Corn-tassel waylaid us and pleaded. I went back and laid the case before her mother.

"Well, I suppose it won't hurt her if all this marriage and giving in marriage don't get into her head. I aim to keep and work her at least two years longer to pay my trouble with her teething back," agreed Aunt Mary. "When did you say the wedding was going to be?"

"June tenth," I answered.

"I heard that Mr. Owen Murray talking to Mr. Spain about his wooded piece of land over by the big spring the other night.

THE GOLDEN BIRD

Looks like you are a pot of honey, sure enough, child, that draws all your friends to settle around you.”

“No, it’s the back-to-the-land vogue, and this is the most beautiful part of the Harpeth Valley,” I answered as I again began to depart with Bud and the cabbage plants.

“Adam told me one night that he was going to prove that the Garden of Eden was located right here. It was when your locusts were in full bloom and I asked him if he had run down Eve anywhere. Are you sure you don’t know when he’ll come back to see us all?” Aunt Mary’s blue eyes danced with merriment.

“No,” I answered, and went hastily back to Bud and left her muttering to herself, “Well, Silas *did* say—”

All afternoon I stolidly planted the gray-green young cabbage sprouts behind Bud’s hoe and refused even to think about Bess’s wedding-chest. But at sunset I saw I must go into town to her dinner for the announce-

THE GOLDEN BIRD

ment of her wedding, and wear one of my dresses that I had sold and then borrowed back from her—or have a serious crisis in our friendship. I had n't strength for that, and I had hoped that the fun of it all would make noise enough to wake some kind of echo in my very silent interior, but it did n't, though there was a positive uproar when Owen brought the whole Bird collateral family, who now have wings and tails and pin feathers, into the dining-room and put them in the rose bed in the middle of the table so as to hear his oratorical effort as expectant bridegroom.

“Why is it, Matt, that you have heart enough to drive me like mad out here in the dark and not make me say a word?” I asked him as he brought me home in the after-midnight hush.

“You've trained my heart into silence, Ann,” he answered gently.

“No!” I exclaimed, for I could n't bear the thought of Matthew's big heart being silent too. Just then Polly, who had gone

THE GOLDEN BIRD

to sleep on the back seat, fell off and had to be rescued. We put her out at home in a wilted condition from pure good times, and then Matthew took me on up to Elmnest. An old moon was making the world look as if mostly composed of black shadows, and Matthew walked at my side out to the barn to see if all was quiet and well.

“Why, what’s the matter?” I exclaimed as I ran to the side of the shed in which Mrs. Ewe and the lambs resided. “Strike your cigar-lighter quick, Matt.”

As Matthew shed a tiny light from a silver tube upon the situation, I sank to my knees with a cry. There upon the grass lay one of my lambkins, and red blood was oozing from its woolly white throat. As I lifted it on my arm, its little body gave a shudder and then lay so still that I knew it was dead. Mother Ewe stood near in the shadow and gave a plaintive bleat as she came to my side.

“Oh,” I sobbed as I looked up at Matthew, “it’s dead. What did it?”

THE GOLDEN BIRD

“A dog,” answered Matthew, as he knelt beside me and laid the tiny dead lamb back on the ground.

“Not Peckerwood Pup!” I exclaimed.

“No, she’s too young; some stray,” answered Matthew as he look savagely around into the shadows.

“It’s the littlest one, and she licked my hand the last thing before I left. I can’t bear it all, Matthew—this is too much for me,” I said, and I sobbed into my hands as I sank down into a heap against the side of the bereaved sheep mother, who was still uttering her plaintive moans of question.

I say now and I shall always maintain that the most wonderful tenderness in the world is that with which a man who had known a woman all his life, who has grown with her growth, has shared her laughter and her tears, and knows her to her last feminine foible or strength, takes her into his arms. Matthew crouched down upon the grass beside me and gathered me against his breast, away from the dreadful monster-inhabited

THE GOLDEN BIRD

shadows, and made me feel that a new day could dawn upon the world. I think from the way I huddled to his strength that he knew that I had given up the fight and that his hour was at hand.

“Do you want me now, Ann?” he asked me gently as he pressed his cheek against my hair.

“If you want me, take me and help me find that dog to-morrow,” I answered as I again reached out my hand and put it for the last time on the pathetic little woolly head. I could n't hold back the sob.

“Go in the house to bed, dear, for you are completely worn out. I'll bury the lam'b and look for any traces that may help us to find the savage,” said Matthew as he drew me to my feet and with quiet authority led me to the back door and opened it for me. For a second I let him take me again into his strong arms, but I wilted there and I simply could not raise my lips to his. The first time I remember kissing Matthew Berry was at his own tenth birthday party,

THE GOLDEN BIRD

and he had dropped a handkerchief behind me that I had failed to see as all of the budding flower and chivalry of Hayesville stood in a ring in his mother's drawing-room.

"Dear old Matt," I murmured to myself as I again fell dead between the posts of the ancestral bed.

The next morning I awoke to a new world—or rather I turned straight about and went back into my own proper scheme of existence. At the crack of dawn I wakened and set my muscles for the spring from my pillows, then I stretched my arms, yawned, snuggled my cheek into those same pillows, and deliberately went to sleep, covering up my head with the old embroidered counterpane to shut out from my ears a clarion crow from beyond my windows. When I next became conscious old Rufus' woolly head was peering anxiously into my room door, and I judged from the length of the shadows that the sun cast from the windows that it must be after ten o'clock.

THE GOLDEN BIRD

“Am you sick?” he inquired with belligerent solicitude.

“No, Rufus, and I ’m going back to sleep. Call me in time to have dinner with father and Uncle Cradd,” I answered as I again burrowed into the pillows.

“I give that there rooster and family a bucket of feed,” said Rufus begrudgingly, and he stood as if waiting to be praised for thus burying the hatchet that he had been mentally brandishing over the neck of the enemy.

I made no response, but stretched my tired limbs out between the silky old sheets and again lost consciousness.

The next time I became intelligent it was when Polly’s soft arm was slid under my neck and her red lips applied to my cheek.

“Miss Ann, are you ill?” she questioned frantically. “Mr. Matthew and I have been here for hours and have fed and attended to everything. He made me come up because he was afraid you might be dead.”

THE GOLDEN BIRD

"I am, Polly, and now watch me come back to life," I said as I sat up and blinked at the sun coming in through the western window, thus proclaiming the time as full afternoon.

"We found Mr. G. Bird and all of the other—" Polly was beginning to say when I cut her short.

"Polly, dear, please go tell Matthew to ride down to the bank and telephone Bess that I'm coming in to stay a week with her and to invite Belle and Owen and the rest to dinner. By the time he gets back I'll be ready to go." As I spoke I threw the sheet from me and started to arise, take up my life, and walk.

"But who'll attend to the chickens and—" Polly fairly gasped.

"I don't know and I don't care, and if you want to go in to dinner with us, Polly, you had better hurry on, for you'll have to beg your mother hard," I said, and at the suggestion Polly fairly flew.

I don't exactly know what Polly told

THE GOLDEN BIRD

Matthew about me, but his face was a study as I descended elegantly clad and ready to go to town with him.

“Good, dear!” he said as I raised my lips to his and gave him a second edition of that ring-around-rosy kiss. “I knew you would wear yourself out. I have telephoned Owen to motor out that young Belgian that Baldwin got down to run my farm, and he’ll take charge of everything while you rest.”

“I don’t care whether he comes or not,” I said as I walked towards the library door to say good-by to my parent twins, who hardly noticed me at all on account of a knotty disagreement in some old Greek text they were digging over.

“Well, you need n’t worry about—” Matthew was continuing to say, with the deepest uncertainty in his face and voice.

“I won’t,” I answered. “Did Bess say she could get enough people together to dance to-night?”

“We’ll all go out to the country club and

THE GOLDEN BIRD

have a great fling," said Matthew, with the soothing tone of voice that one would use to a friend temporarily mentally deranged. "Hope Mother Corn-tassel lets Polly go."

"There she is waiting at the gate for us with her frills in a bundle. Swoop her up, Matt, and fly for fear she is getting off without Aunt Mary's seeing her. Aunt Mary is so bent on keeping Polly's milking hand in."

"That young Belgian says he's a good milker, and you need n't worry about—"

"I won't," I again answered Matthew, and there was snap enough in my eyes and voice to make him whistle under his breath as he literally swooped up Polly, and they both had the good sense to begin to talk about town affairs and leave unmentioned all rural matters.

Half-way into town Matthew swapped me for his Belgian in Owen's car, and Polly and I went on in with Owen and Bess, while Matthew returned out the Riverfield ribbon to install the rescuer of Elmnest.

THE GOLDEN BIRD

"Oh, Ann, this is delicious," said Bess as she came back with me to cuddle me and ask questions. "But what are—"

"Bess," I said, looking her straight in the face with determination, "I am going to marry Matt two days before you marry Owen, though he does n't know it yet, and if you talk about Elmnest to me I'll go and stay with Belle this week."

"How perfectly lovely, and how tired you are, poor dear!" Bess congratulated and exclaimed all in the same breath, then imparted both my announcement and my injunction to Owen on the front seat. I did n't look at Polly while Owen was laughing and exclaiming, but when I did she looked queer and quiet; however, I did n't let that at all affect the nice crisp crust that had hardened on me overnight. And I must say that if Corn-tassel was n't happy that evening surrounded by the edition of masculine society that Matt had so carefully expurgated for her, she ought to have been.

By that time I had told Matthew about

THE GOLDEN BIRD

his approaching marriage, accepted his bear-hug of joy, delivered before Bess and Polly and Owen and Belle, and I had been congratulated and received back into the bosom of my friends with great joy and hilarity.

“Now I can take care of you forever and ever, Ann,” whispered Matthew in his good-night, with his lips against my ear. And there in his strong, sustaining arms, even though limp with fatigue, I knew I never did, could, or would, love anybody like I loved him. I don’t really suppose I did hear Polly sob on her pillow beside mine, where she had insisted on reposing. She must have been all right, for she was gone out into the rural district with Matthew before I was awake the next morning.

After Annette had served mine and Bess’s chocolate in Bess’s bedroom we settled down to the real seriousness of trousseau talk, which lasted for many long hours.

“Now if I sell you back all the things of yours I have n’t worn for two hundred and fifty dollars that will leave you over three

THE GOLDEN BIRD

hundred in the bank to get a few wash frocks and hats and things to last you until you are enough married to Matthew to use his money freely," said Bess after about an hour of discussion and admiration of her own half-finished trousseau.

"Yes; I should say those things would be worth about two hundred and fifty dollars now that they are third-hand," I answered Bess's excited eyes, giving her a look of well-crusted affection, for there are not many women in the world, with unlimited command of the material that Bess has, who would not have offered me a spiritual hurt by trying to give me back my thousand dollars' worth of old clothes which she had not needed in the first place when she bought them.

"Now, that's all settled, and we'll begin to stretch that three hundred dollars to its limit. We won't care if things do tear, just so they look smart until you and Matthew get to New York. Matthew won't be the first bridegroom to go into raptures over a

THE GOLDEN BIRD

thirty-nine-cent bargain silk made up by a sixty-dollar dressmaker. I'm giving Owen a few deceptions in that line myself. That gray and purple tissue splits if you look at it, and I got it all for three dollars. Felicia made it up mostly with glue, I think, and I will be a dream in it—a dream that dissolves easily. Let's go shopping." As she thus led me into the maze of dishonest trousseau-buying, Bess began to ring for Annette.

Of course most women in the world will refuse to admit that shopping can arouse them from any kind of deadness that the sex is heir to, but a few frank ones, like myself, for instance, will say such to be the case. For three weeks I gave myself up to a perfect debauch of clothes, and ended off each day's spree by dancing myself into a state of exhaustion. Everybody in Hayesville wanted to give Bess and me parties, and most of them did, that is, as many as we could get in at the rate of three a day between dressmakers and milliners and other

THE GOLDEN BIRD

clothing engagements. Owen got perfectly furious and exhausted, but Matthew kept in an angelic frame of mind through it all. I think the long days with Polly out in the open helped him a lot, though at times I detected a worried expression on the faces of them both, and I felt sure that they were dying to tell me that it had been a case of the razor from Rufus' shoe between him and the Belgian or that the oil was of the grade that explodes incubators, but I gave them no encouragement and only inquired casually from time to time if the parental twins were alive. Polly even tried me out with a bunch of roses, which I knew came from the old musk clump in the corner of the garden which I had seen rebudded, but I thanked her coldly and immediately gave them to Belle's mother. I saw Matthew comforting her in the distance, and his face was tenderly anxious about me all the rest of the evening.

"Dear, are we going to be—be married in town at a church?" Matthew inquired

THE GOLDEN BIRD

timidly one afternoon as he drove me home from a devastated hat shop on the avenue, in which Bess and I had been spending the day.

“No, Matt dear, at Elmnest,” I answered kindly, as a bride, no matter how worn out, ought to answer a groom, though Bess says that a groom ought to expect to be snapped every time he speaks for ten days before the wedding. “As long as I have got a home that contains two masculine parents I will have to be married in it. I’ll go out the morning of the wedding, and you and Polly fix everything and invite everybody in Riverfield, but just the few people here in town you think we ought to have, not more than a dozen. Have it at five o’clock.” I thought then that I fixed that hour because everybody would hate it because of the heat and uncertainty as to style of clothes.

“All right, dear,” answered Matthew, carefully, as if handling conversational eggs.

“Miss Ann, where do you want us to fix

THE GOLDEN BIRD

the wedding—er—bell and altar?” Polly ventured to ask timidly a few days later.

“The parlor, of course, Polly. I hate that room, and it is as far from the barn as possible. Now don’t bother me any more about it,” I snapped, and sent her flying to Matthew in consternation. Later I saw them poring over the last June-bride number of “The Woman’s Review,” and I surmised the kind of a wedding I was in for. That day I tried on a combination of tulle, lace, and embroidery at Felicia’s that tried my soul as well as my body.

“It’s no worse than any other wedding-dress I ever saw; take it off quick, Madame,” I snapped as crossly as I dared at the poor old lady, who had gowned me from the cradle to the—I was about to say grave.

“Eh, la la, *mais*, you are *très difficile*—difficult,” she murmured reproachfully.

“Any more so than Bess?” I demanded.

“*Non*, perhaps *non*,” she answered, with a French shrug.

With beautiful tact Matthew fussed with

THE GOLDEN BIRD

his throttle, which I could n't see stuck at all, the entire time he was driving me home, and left me with a careful embrace and also with relief in his face that I had n't exploded over him. Owen is not like that to Bess; he just pours gas on her explosions and fans the resulting flame until it is put out by tears in his arms.

"Let's never get married at the same time any more, Ann," groaned Bess as Annette tried to put us both to bed that night before we fell dead on her hands.

"Don't speak to me!" was my answer as nearly as I can remember.

"I'll be glad to get Bess away from your influence," raged Owen at me the next day when I very nearly stepped on one of the little chickens that he was having run in and out from the conservatory.

"You'll want to bring her back in a week if both your tempers don't improve," was my cutting reply as this time I lifted another of his small pets with the toe of my slipper and literally flung it across the room.

THE GOLDEN BIRD

“Great guns!” exploded Owen, as he retreated into the conservatory and shut the door.

The next night was the sixth of June and the night of my wedding eve. All Bess’s bridesmaids and groomsmen were dining with her to rehearse her wedding and to have a sort of farewell bat with Matthew and me.

“What about your and Ann’s wedding to Matthew, Miss Polly?” I heard Cale Johnson ask Polly as she and Matthew were untangling a bolt of wide, white-satin ribbon that I had tangled. “All the show to be of rustics?”

“Nobody but Polly is going to stand by us,” said Matthew, looking cautiously around to see if I was listening. “Ann does n’t believe in making much fuss over a wedding.”

“I did n’t know I was to be in it until Miss Bess took me to be fitted—oh, it is a dream of a dress, is n’t it, Mr. Matthew?” said Polly, with her enthusiasm also tempered by a glance in my direction.

THE GOLDEN BIRD

"It sure is," answered Matthew, with the greatest approval, as he regarded Polly with parental pride.

"Well, I'm glad I'm invited to see it," said Cale as he glanced at Polly tenderly. "I mean to be at the wedding, Matt," he added politely. Cale was to be best man with Polly as maid of honor at Bess's wedding, and he had been standing and sitting close at Polly's side for more than ten days.

"Let's try it all over again, everybody," called Bess's wearied voice, interrupting Polly's enthusiastic description of ruffles.

The wedding day was a nightmare. Annette and the housemaid and Bess and a girl from Madame Felicia's packed up three trunks full of my clothes and sent them all to the station.

"I wish I never had to see them again," I said viciously under my breath as the expressmen carried out the last trunk.

"Now, dear, in these two suitcases are your wedding things and your going-away gown. Your dress is in the long box and

THE GOLDEN BIRD

we will send them all out early in the morning in my car. Matthew will drive us out as soon as we can get ready," Bess had said the night before, as she sank on my bed and spread out with fatigue.

CHAPTER XII

THE next morning it took Annette until ten o'clock and a shower of tears to get Bess and me to sit up and take our coffee. She said the decorators were downstairs beginning on Bess's wedding decorations and that the sun was shining on my wedding-day.

"Well, I wish it had delayed itself a couple of hours. I'm too sleepy to get married," I grumbled as I sat up to take the tray of coffee on my knees.

"Owen is a darling," I heard Bess murmur from her bed, which was against the wall and mine as our rooms opened into each other. I also heard a rustle of paper and smelled the perfume of flowers.

"This is for Mademoiselle from Monsieur Berry," said Annette, as she triumphantly produced a white box tied with white rib-

THE GOLDEN BIRD

bons that lay in the center of a bunch of wild field-roses.

"Take it away and let me drink my coffee," I said, and I could see Annette's French eyes snap as she laid down the offering from Matthew and went to attend upon Bess.

"Dear Matt," I murmured when I had consumed the coffee and discovered the long string of gorgeous pearls in the white box. "Come on, Bess, let's begin to get married and be done with it," I called to her as I wearily arose. "What time did Polly say she and Matthew had decided to marry me?" I asked as I went into my bath.

"Five o'clock, and it's almost twelve now," answered Bess in a voice of panic as I heard things begin to fly into place in her room.

Despite the superhuman efforts and patience of Annette and two housemaids, directed from below by Owen and Judge Rutherford, it was half-past two o'clock before I was ready to descend to the car in

THE GOLDEN BIRD

which Matthew had been sitting, patiently waiting in the sunshine of his wedding day for almost two hours.

"Plenty of time," he said cheerily, as I sank into the seat beside him, and Bess and Owen climbed in behind us. Owen's chauffeur took Judge Rutherford in Owen's car, and Annette perched her prim self on the front seat beside the wheel.

"Oh, Matt, there is nobody in the world like you," I said as I cast myself on his patience and imperturbability and also the strength of his broad shoulder next mine. I could positively hear Bess and Owen's joy over this bride-like manifestation, which the wind took back to them as we went sailing out of town towards the Riverfield ribbon.

And to their further joy I put my cheek down against Matthew's throttle arm and closed my eyes so that I did not see anything of the twenty-mile progression out to Elm-nest. I only opened them when we arrived in Riverfield at about half after three o'clock.

THE GOLDEN BIRD

Was the village out to greet me? It was not. Every front door was closed, and every front shutter shut, and I might have felt that some dire disapproval was being expressed of me and my wedding if I had not seen smoke fairly belching from every kitchen chimney, and if I had n't known that each house was filled with the splash of vigorous tubbing for which the kitchen stoves and wash boilers were supplying the hot water.

"Bet at least ten pounds of soap has gone up in lather," said Matthew as he turned and explained the situation to Bess and Owen after I had explained it to him.

At the door of Elmnest stood Polly in a gingham dress, but with both ends of her person in bridal array, from the white satin bows on the looped up plats to the white silk stockings and satin slippers, greeting us with relief and enthusiasm. Beside her stood Aunt Mary and the parent twins, also Bud, in the gray suit with a rose in his button-hole.

Matthew handed me out and into their re-

THE GOLDEN BIRD

spective embraces, while he also gave Polly a bundle of dry-goods from which I could see white satin ribbon bursting.

“Everything is ready,” she confided to him.

“I knew it would be, Corn-tassel,” he answered, with an expression of affectionate confidence and pride.

Then from the embrace of Uncle Cradd I walked straight through the back door towards the barn, leaving both Bess and Annette in a state of wild remonstrance, with the wedding paraphernalia all being carried up the stairs by Bud and Rufus. Looking neither to the right nor to the left, I made my way to the barn-door and then stopped still—dead still.

It was no longer my barn—it was merely the entrance to a model poultry farm that spread out acres and acres of model houses and runs behind it. Chickens, both white and red, were clucking and working in all the pens, and nowhere among them could I see the Golden Bird.

THE GOLDEN BIRD

"I hope he 's dead, too," I said as I turned on my heel and, without a word, walked back to the house and up to my room, past Polly and Matthew, who stood at the barn-door, their faces pale with anxiety.

When I considered that I had been able for months to clothe myself with decency and leave my room in less than fifteen minutes, I could not see why time dragged so for me when being clothed by Annette and Aunt Mary. True, Aunt Mary paused to sniff into her handkerchief every few minutes or to listen to Annette's French raptures as she laid upon me each foolish garment up unto the long swath of heathenish tulle she was beginning to arrange when an interruption occurred in the shape of Rufus, who put his head in the door and mysteriously summoned Polly, who had come in to exhibit her silk muslin frills, in which she was the incarnation of young love's dream.

"You are beautiful, darling," I had just said, with the first warmth in my voice I had felt for many days, when Rufus appeared

THE GOLDEN BIRD

and Polly departed to leave Annette and Aunt Mary to the task of the tulle and orange-blossoms. They took their time, and it was only five minutes to five when Bess came in to get her procession all marshalled.

"Come down the back steps, darling, and let's all cool off on the back porch," she advised. "It is terribly hot up here under the roof, and Polly and Matthew say they have decided to come in from the back door so everybody will have a better view of you. How beautiful you are!"

As directed, I descended and stood spread out like a white peacock on the back porch.

"Now call Matthew and Polly," Bess directed Annette.

For several minutes we waited.

"Monsieur Berry is not here," finally reported Annette, with fine dramatic effect of her outspread hands.

"Tell Owen to find him," commanded Bess. "It is five minutes late now, and they must make that seven-twenty New York train. Hurry!"

THE GOLDEN BIRD

Annette departed while Aunt Mary came to the back door and looked out questioningly.

"Great guns, Bess, where is Matt?" demanded Owen as he came around the house with his eyes and hair wild.

"Where's Polly? she'll know!" I answered tranquilly.

"I searched Mademoiselle Polly, and she is also not here," answered Annette, again running down the back stairs. From the long parlor and hall came an excited buzz, and Aunt Mary came out upon the back porch entirely this time.

"Every one of you go and look for them and leave me here quiet if you don't want me to have a brain storm," I said positively. "They have probably gone to feed the chickens."

Not risking me to make good my threat, Bess and Annette and Aunt Mary and Owen and Bud disappeared in as many different directions. They left me standing alone out on the old porch, along the eaves

THE GOLDEN BIRD

of which rioted a rose, literally covered with small pink blossoms that kept throwing generous gusts of rosy petals down upon my tulle and lace and the bouquet of exotics I held in my hand. Across the valley the skyline of Paradise Ridge seemed to be holding down huge rosy clouds that were trying to bubble up beyond it.

Suddenly I drew aside the tulle from my face, dropped my bouquet, and stretched out my arms to the sunset.

“I will lift up mine eyes to the hills—Oh, Pan!” I said in a soft agony of supplication as I felt the crust around me begin a cosmic upheaval.

“Well, this looks like a Romney bundle and my woman to follow into the woods. You know I won’t have this kind of a wedding,” suddenly fluted a stormy voice from the other side of the rose vine as Pan came up to the bottom of the steps.

“Why—why,” I began to say, and then stopped, because the storm was still bursting over my head from Pan, who was at-

THE GOLDEN BIRD

tired in his usual Roycroft costume and had in one hand the Romney bundle and in the other the usual white bundle of herbs. Also as usual he was guiltless of a hat, and the crests were unusually long and ruffled.

“You look foolish, and I won’t marry you that way. Go straight up-stairs and put on real clothes, get your bundle, and come on. I want to eat supper over on Sky Rock, and it is seven miles, and you ’ll have to cook it. I ’m hungry,” he stormed still more furiously.

“Everybody is inside waiting, and it ’s not your—”

“Well, tell ’em all to come out in the open. I won’t take a mate in a house, even if it has to be done with this foolish paper,” he continued to rage as he sought in the bandana bundle and produced an official document with a red tape on it. “You go and put on your clothes, and I ’ll break up this foolishness and get ’em in the yard.”

“But wait — you don’t understand. You—”

THE GOLDEN BIRD

“You’ve got all the rest of your life to explain disobeying me like this when I expressly wrote you just what I wanted you to—” Pan went on with his raging. At this juncture Uncle Cradd appeared at the back door in mild excitement.

“Nancy, my child, our friends are growing impatient, and is there anything the—”

But here he was interrupted by a clamor of voices that fairly poured its volume around the corner of the house. In two seconds it explained itself by its very appearance. First came Matthew, walking slowly, and in his arms he carried a soaked bundle which he held to his breast as tenderly, I was sure, as young Mrs. Buford was holding the blue bundle in the parlor, and two long plaits hung down over his arm. From between him and the bundle there came a feeble squawking and fluttering of wings. From them all poured rivulets of water, and mingled with the squawks were weak gurgles. As I looked, Matthew stopped and lifted the bundle closer on his breast,

THE GOLDEN BIRD

disclosing its identity as that of Polly, and buried his face in the soaked hair while they all stood dripping together as the rest of us stood perfectly silent and still.

“That fool Henri let the Golden Bird get away, and he flew across the river and fell in a tangle of undergrowth. Rufus called Polly, and she plunged right in after him. Her dress caught on the same snag and God, Ann, they were being sucked under just as I got to them. She’s still unconscious.” In some ways as unconscious as was the Corn-tassel, Matthew began to press hot kisses on the face under his chin which brought forth a feeble choke.

“Lay her down on the porch, and I’ll show you how to empty her lungs, Berry,” said Adam, laying down his bundle and taking charge of the situation, as all the rest, even capable Aunt Mary, still stood helpless before the catastrophe. Reluctantly, Matthew obeyed.

“Uncle Cradd, go in the house and tell them all what has happened, and ask them

THE GOLDEN BIRD

all to come out on the cool of the lawn until we can have the wedding. It will be in just a few minutes, tell them," I said, with the brain that had taken the incubator eggs to bed with Bess and me beginning to act rapidly. "Let me speak to you just a second, Matt," I said, and drew the dazed and dripping bridegroom to one side.

"Matthew," I said very quietly and slowly so that I would not have to repeat the words, "I'm not going to marry you at all, but I'm going to marry Evan Baldwin. I'll tell you all about it when I come back from my honeymoon with him. You help me put it through and then stay right here and look after Polly. She may suffer terribly from shock."

"Oh, God, Ann, my heart turned over in my breast and kicked when I saw her sink, and for a minute I could n't find her," Matthew said as he gave a dripping shudder that shook some of the water off him and on my tulle. To the announcement of the loss of a bride he gave no heed at all, for at that

THE GOLDEN BIRD

moment, as Pan lifted the drenched bundle across his knees and patted it, a faint voice moaned out Matthew's name, and he flew to receive the revived Polly in his arms.

"Now, hold her that way until I am sure I have established complete respiration," commanded Pan. "You women begin to take these wet rags off of her. Get two blankets." At which command the rest of the bridal party flew to work in different directions and I with them. Bess and I arrived in my room at the same moment, and she seized the two blankets I drew from the chest and departed without waiting for words. As I drew out the blankets, something else rolled to the floor, and I saw it was my Romney bundle, packed weeks before my death.

Its suggestion was not to be denied. I stopped just where I was, and in two minutes my strong hands ripped that tulle and lace and chiffon from my back without waiting to undo hooks and eyes. In another three minutes I was into a pair of the tan

THE GOLDEN BIRD

cotton stockings and the flat shoes, which Pan had made me that rainy day in the barn, had on my corduroys and a linen smock, and was running down to my wedding with wings of the wind.

When I reached the back porch I found Polly sitting up on the floor, with Matthew's arms around her, and the entire wedding-party standing beside the back steps, looking on and ejaculating with thankfulness. Old Parson Henderson stood near, beaming down benedictions for the rescue, and I decided that they were all in a daze in which anything could be put over on them.

"Here's my bundle and me," I whispered to Pan, as he stood regarding the young recovered squaw proudly. "Hand the license to Parson Hendricks. I'll make him go on and marry us and get away before anybody puts me back into tulle."

"As Polly is all right now we'll have the wedding, for it's getting late, and we want to get across to the Paradise Ridge to camp," said Adam, with the fluty command

THE GOLDEN BIRD

in his voice which always gets attention and obedience. As he spoke he put down his bundle, gave Parson Hendricks the document, and drew me beside him. I kept my bundle in my hand and stood with my other in his.

“Why, I did n’t know that—” the old parson began to splutter while a murmur of surprise and question began to arise among the hitherto hypnotized wedding-guests. Judge Rutherford stood apart with the twin parents showing them some book treasure he had unearthed for father, and I don’t think that either one of my natural guardians was at my wedding except in body.

At the critical moment dear old Matt did rise to the occasion, as did Polly also, with a crimson glow coming into her drenched cheeks, pallid only a second before, and a light like sunrise on a violet bank coming into her eyes.

“She’s always intended to marry Baldwin. I knew all about it. Go on!” Matthew commanded, as he supported

THE GOLDEN BIRD

Polly in her blankets on wobbly bare feet.

During the resuscitation of Polly, Owen Murray, true to his new passion for the Leghorn family, had been reviving Mr. G. Bird and now with regard for decorum, he set him quietly upon his feet. Did the Golden Bird run like a coward from the scene of the catastrophe of his making? He did not. He deliberately stretched his wings, gave a mighty crow, and walked over and began to peck in my smock-pockets at corn that had lain there many long weeks for him.

“Go on, Parson,” commanded Pan again, impatiently, and then standing together in the fading sunlight, Pan, Mr. G. Bird, and I were married.

Did Pan allow me to stay and make satisfactory explanations of my conduct to my friends and enjoy the wedding festivities so carefully copied out of the “Review” by Polly and Matthew? He did not. Immediately after the ceremony he picked up his two bundles and turned to all of our assembled friends.

THE GOLDEN BIRD

“We ’ll be back in a few weeks, and then I ’ll show you what I learned in Argentina. We have to hurry now to get across the valley. Some of the fine sheep over at Plunkett’s are down with foot rash, and I want to be there by noon. Luck to you all.” With these words Pan led me around the corner of the house, through the old garden, and out into the woods, Mr. G. Bird still following at the smock-pocket.

“We ’ll have to go back and lock him up; he ’ll follow me,” I said, as I paused and took the Golden Bird’s proud head in my hand and let him peck at a dull gold circle on my third finger, which, I am sure, Pan himself had hammered out of a nugget for me.

“No, let ’s take him. I want to show him over at Plunkett’s and then in Providence and Hillsboro, to grade up their poultry. I doubt if there ’s his equal in America,” answered Pan as he went on ahead of me to break the undergrowth into which he was leading me underneath the huge old trees.

THE GOLDEN BIRD

"I did n't write you to let that fool Belgian prune the whole place like that," Pan remarked as we paused at old Tilting Rock and looked down upon the orderly and repaired Elmnest in the sunset glow.

"Write?" I murmured weakly, while my mind accused Uncle Cradd, and rightly too, as I learned later after a search in his pockets.

"Was n't any use sending any letter after that New Orleans one, because I traveled on the return trip all the way myself. Still you did pretty well to get the wedding and all ready at the hour I set, even if you did make that awful flummery mistake. I'll forgive you even that after I get over the shock of seeing you look that way."

"The hour you set?" I again murmured a weak question.

"I thought of writing you to get ready by nine o'clock in the morning, but I knew I'd have to stop in Hayesville for that bit of red tape, so I said five o'clock and had to hustle to make it. I knew you'd be ready. Now

THE GOLDEN BIRD

you 'll have to travel, for we have five miles to go and it takes the pot two hours to simmer. Are you hungry?"

I had n't the strength to answer. I had just enough to pad along behind at his heels with Mr. G. Bird at mine. However, as I padded, I suddenly felt return that strength of ten women which I had put from me the morning I fled from the empty Elmnest, and I knew that it had come upon me to abide.

I needed every bit of the energy of ten ordinary women to keep up with Pan's commands, as I helped him make camp beside a cool spring that bubbled out of a rock in a little cove that was swung high up on the side of Paradise Ridge. I washed the bundle of greens he had brought to the wedding and set them to simmer with the inevitable black walnut kernels in a pot that he produced from under a log in the edge of the woods, along with a couple of earthen bowls like the ones he kept secreted in the spring-house at Elmnest.

THE GOLDEN BIRD

“Got ’em all over ten States,” he answered, as I questioned him with delight at the presence of our old friends. Then while I crouched and stirred, he took his long knife out, cut great armfuls of cedar boughs, threw them in a shadow at the foot of a tall old oak, and with a bundle of sticks swept upon them a great pile of dry leaves into the form of a huge nest. The golden glow was just fading as I lifted the pot and poured his portion in his bowl, then mine in the other, while he cut the black loaf he had taken from his bundle into hunks with his knife. It was after seven o’clock, and the crescent moon hung low by the ridge, waiting for the sun to take its complete departure before setting in for its night’s joy-ride up the sky. It was eight before Pan finished his slow browsing in his bowl and came over to crouch with me out on the ledge of rock that overlooked the world below us. Clusters of lights in nests of gray smoke were dotted around over the valley, and I knew the nearest one was Riverfield; indeed I could see a

THE GOLDEN BIRD

bunch of lights a little way apart from the rest, and I felt sure that they were lighting the remaining revelers at my wedding-feast at Elmnest. The Golden Bird had gone sensibly to roost on one of the low limbs of the old oak, and he reminded me of the white blur of Polly's wedding bell, which I had caught a glimpse of as I ran through the hall at Elmnest.

"I am thy child," crooned Pan, with a new note to his chant that immediately started on my heartstrings. "And I'm tired," he added as he stretched himself on the rock beside me, laid his head on my breast, and nuzzled his lips into my bare throat.

"I'm going to lift the crests and look at the tips of your ears, Pan," I said as I held him tight.

"Better not," he mocked me.

I did, and the tips were—I never intend to tell.

The lights were twinkling out in the valley one by one, and the young moon made the purple blackness below us only faintly

THE GOLDEN BIRD

luminous when Pan drew me closer and then into the very edge of the world itself, and pointed down into the soft darkness.

“We are all like that, we natives of this great land—asleep in the midst of a silvery mist, while the rest of the world is in the blaze of hell. We’ve got to wake up and take them to our breast, to nourish and warm and save them. There’ll be just you and I and a few others to call the rest of our people until they hear and value and work,” he said as he settled me against him so that the twain chants of our heartstrings became one.

“I’ll follow you through the woods and help you call, Adam,” I said softly, with my lips under the red crest nearest to me.

“And I’ll bring you back here to nest and stay with you until your young are on their feet, with their eyes open,” Pan crooned against my lips. “Dear God, what a force unit one woman and one man can create!”

THE END

This page in the original text is blank.

THE FIREFLY OF FRANCE

By **MARION POLK ANGELLOTTI**

This is not a story of laughter or tears, of shock or depression. It has no manufactured gloom. It preaches no reform. It has not a single social problem around which the characters move and argue and agonize. No reader need lie awake at night wondering what the author meant; all she intends to convey goes over the top with the first sight of the printed words. The story invites the reader to be thrilled, and dares him (or her) to weep.

Briefly, "The Firefly of France" is in the manner of the romance—in the manner of Dumas, of Walter Scott. It is a story of love, mystery, danger, and daring. It opens in the gorgeous St. Ives Hotel in New York and ends behind the Allied lines in France. The story gets on its way on the first page, and the interest is continuous and increasing until the last page. And it is all beautifully done.

The Philadelphia Record says: "No more absorbing romance of the war has been written than 'The Firefly of France.' In a sprightly, spontaneous way the author tells a story that is pregnant with the heroic spirit of the day. There is a blending of mystery, adventure, love and high endeavor that will charm every reader."

12mo, 363 pages
Illustrated by Grant T. Reynard
Price \$1.40

At All Bookstores
Published by **THE CENTURY CO.** 353 Fourth Avenue
New York City

FILM FOLK

“Close-ups” of the Men, Women and Children who make the “Movies.”

By ROB WAGNER

A book of humor and entertaining facts. It is a sort of Los Angeles Canterbury Tales wherein appears the stories, told in the first person, of the handsome film actor whose beauty is fatal to his comfort; of the child wonder; the studio mother; the camera man, who “shoots the films”; the scenario writer; the “extra” man and woman, whose numbers are as the sands of the sea; the publicity man, who “rings the bells,” etc., etc.

All the stories are located in or near Los Angeles, a section more densely populated with makers of “movies” than any other section on earth. The author lives there, he has been in sympathetic contact with these votaries of this new art since its beginning, and his statements are entirely trustworthy.

“Film Folk” is not a series of actual biographies of individuals; the author in each case presents an actor, a director or one of the other characters for the sake of concreteness and to carry out the story-form, and he contrives to set forth in the course of the book the entire movie-making world. The reader gets a clear idea of how the films are made and he is immensely entertained with the accounts of the manners and customs of the inhabitants of the vast movie villages—manners and customs unique in many respects.

The stories are told in a style as easy to read as the author is good-humored.

8vo, 356 pages

Illustrated from photographs

Price \$2.00

At All Bookstores
Published by **THE CENTURY CO.** 353 Fourth Avenue
New York City
