









**THE GOLDEN BIRD**

**BY**

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

TO

IDA CLYDE CLARKE

WHOSE COURAGE INSPIRES ME



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"Oh, how beautiful!" exclaimed Polly, all restraint leaving her young face

and body as she fell on her knees before the sultan

A poor old sheep was lying flat with pathetic inertia while Adam stood over

her with something in his arms

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

welcomed him

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



# 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 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? 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.

"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 hadn'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 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 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. Aren'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 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 isn'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.

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 wasn't. 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 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 at leaving life—and perhaps love, for I couldn'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 eggshells, 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 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 naked-

ness. As we rode slowly along, with a leisure I am sure all the motor-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 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 —"

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 *mélée* of broken timber, squeaking voices, and flapping wings. As 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 womanish things that it's beneath the dignity of a man to bother with 'em. I haven'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 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 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, aren'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 commanding 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 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 hadn'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 right back at him because I couldn'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 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 haven't got that management," I faltered, with my anxiety getting tearful in my words.

"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 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.