

CHAPTER V

DIVIDING THE RESPONSIBILITY

The rest of that day and a good share of the night was devoted to an earnest consultation concerning the proper methods of launching the Millville Daily Tribune.

"We must divide the work," said Patsy, "so that all will have an equal share of responsibility. Louise is to be the literary editor and the society editor. That sounds like a good combination."

"There is no society here," objected Louise.

"Not as we understand the term, perhaps," replied Miss Doyle; "but every community, however small, believes it is a social center; and so it is--to itself. If there is a dance or a prayer meeting or a christening or illness, it must be recorded in our local columns. If Bob West sells a plow we've got to mention the name of the farmer who bought it; if there's a wedding, we'll make a double-header of it; if a baby is born, we will--will--"

"Print its picture in the paper. Eh, Uncle John?" This from Beth.

"Of course," said Mr. Merrick. "You must print all the home news, as

well as the news of the world."

"How are you going to get the news of the world?" asked Arthur.

"How? How?"

"That was my question."

"Private wire from New York," said Mr. Merrick, as the girls hesitated how to meet this problem. "I'll arrange with the telegraph company to-morrow to have an extension of the wire run over from Chazy Junction. Then we'll hire an operator--a girl, of course--to receive the news in the office of the paper."

"But who will send us the news?" asked Beth.

"The Associated Press, I suppose, or some news agency in New York. I'll telegraph to-morrow to Marvin to arrange it."

Arthur whistled softly.

"This newspaper is going to cost something," he murmured. Uncle John looked at him with a half quizzical, half amused expression.

"That's what Marvin warned me yesterday, when I ordered the equipment," said he. "He told me that before I got through with this deal it would

run up into the thousands. And he added that Millville wasn't worth it."

"And what did you say to that, Uncle John?" asked Beth.

"In that case, I said, I would be sure to get some pleasure and satisfaction out of your journalistic enterprise. My last financial statement showed a frightful condition of affairs. In spite of Major Doyle's reckless investments of my money, and--and the little we manage to give to deserving charities, I'm getting richer every day. When a small leak like this newspaper project occurs, it seems that Fortune is patting me on the back. I've no idea what a respectable newspaper will cost, but I hope it will cost a lot, for every dollar it devours makes my mind just that much easier."

Arthur Weldon laughed.

"In that case, sir," said he, "I can make no further protest. But I predict you will find the bills--eh--eh--entirely satisfactory."

"You mentioned an office, just now, Uncle," observed Louise. "Must we have a business office?"

"To be sure," Mr. Merrick replied. "We must find a proper location, where we can install the presses and all the type and machinery that go to making up a newspaper. I hadn't thought of this before, but it is a serious matter, my dears. We may have to build a place."

"Oh, that would take too long, entirely," said Patsy. "Can't we put it in the barn, Uncle?"

"What would happen to the horses and cows? No; we'll take a look over Millville and see what we can find there."

"You won't find much," predicted Beth. "I can't think of a single unoccupied building in the town."

"Then we'll put it in a tent," declared Patsy.

"Don't borrow trouble," advised Uncle John. "Wait till we've gone over the ground together. Our truck will require a pretty big place, for Marvin said one freight car wouldn't hold all the outfit. He's going to send two cars, anyhow."

"Have him fill up the second with print paper," proposed Arthur.

"Ah; that's another thing I hadn't thought of," said Mr. Merrick. "How big a daily edition will you print, Patsy?"

"Let's see," pondered the girl. "There are about two hundred at Royal, say four hundred at Huntingdon, at Millville about--about--"

"Say fifteen," said Uncle John; "that's six hundred and fifteen, and--"

"And the farmers, of course. There must be at least a hundred and fifty of 'em in the county, so that makes seven hundred and seventy-five copies a day."

"Wait a moment!" cried Arthur, somewhat bewildered by this figuring. "Do you suppose every inhabitant--man, woman and child--will subscribe for your paper?"

Patsy blushed.

"Why, no, of course not," she acknowledged frankly. "How many do you think will subscribe, Arthur? Remember, it's to be a great newspaper."

"Four pages of six columns each. Plenty big enough for Millville," he said, thoughtfully. "My advice, girls, is to print a first edition of about four hundred copies and distribute the papers free in every house within a radius of five or six miles from Millville. These will be samples, and after the people have had a chance to read them you can ask them to subscribe. By the way, what will you charge for subscription?"

"How much, Uncle?" asked Patsy, appealingly.

"A penny paper is the most popular," he said, regarding her with merry, twinkling eyes. "Say thirty cents a month, or three-fifty a year. That's

as much as these poor people can stand."

"I think so too," replied the girl, seriously.

"But it seems to me a penny paper isn't dignified," pouted Louise. "I had intended to print all my poems in it, and I'm sure that ought to make it worth at least five cents a copy."

"That will make it worth more, my dear," commented Uncle John; "but frequently one must sell property for less than it's actually worth.

You must remember these people have not been used to spending much money

on literature, and I imagine you'll have to coax them to spend thirty cents a month. Many of the big New York papers are sold for a penny, and without any loss of dignity, either."

"Do you think we can make it pay on that basis, Uncle?" asked Beth.

Uncle John coughed to gain time while he thought of a suitable reply.

"That, my dear," he informed his niece, "will depend upon how many subscribers you can get. Subscribers and advertisers are necessary to make any paper pay."

"Advertisers!"

"Of course," said practical Beth. "Every merchant in Millville and

Huntingdon will naturally advertise in our paper, and we'll make the major get us a lot from New York."

"Oh," said Patsy; "I see. So that difficulty is settled."

Arthur smiled, but held his peace. Uncle John's round face was growing merrier every minute.

"Patsy, do you think we shall make any money from this venture?" asked Louise.

"We ought to, if we put our hearts and souls into the thing," was the reply. "But before we divide any profits we must pay back to Uncle John the original investment."

"We don't especially care to make any profit, do we?" inquired Beth.

"It's fun for us, you know, and a--a--great educational experience, and--and--a fine philanthropy--and all that. We don't need the money, so if the paper pays a profit at a cent a copy we'd better cut down the price."

"Don't do that yet," advised Uncle John, soberly. "There will be expenses that as yet you don't suspect, and a penny for a paper is about as low as you can go."

"What's to be my position on the staff, Patsy?" asked Beth, turning to

her cousin.

"You're a good mathematician, Beth, so I propose you act as secretary and treasurer, and keep the books."

"No; that's too mechanical; no bookkeeping for me. I want something literary."

"Then you can be sporting editor."

"Goodness, Patsy! There will be no sporting news in Millville."

"There will be a ball game occasionally, and I saw some of the men pitching quoits yesterday. But this is to be a newspaper reflecting the excitement of the entire world, Beth, and all the telegraphic news of a sporting character you must edit and arrange for our reading columns. Oh, yes; and you'll take care of the religious items too. We must have a Sunday Sermon, by some famous preacher, Uncle. We'll print that every Saturday, so those who can't go to church may get as good a talk as if they did--and perhaps a better one."

"That will be fine," he agreed. "How about murders, crimes and divorces?"

"All barred. Nothing that sends a cold chill down your back will be allowed in our paper. These people are delightfully simple; we don't

want to spoil them."

"Cut out the cold chills and you'll spoil your newspaper," suggested Arthur. "People like to read of other folks' horrors, for it makes them more contented with their own lot in life."

"False philosophy, sir!" cried Fatsy firmly. "You can't educate people by retailing crimes and scandals, and the Millville Tribune is going to be as clean as a prayer book, if I'm to be managing editor."

"Is that to be your office, dear?" asked Louise.

"I think so. I've a heap of executive ability, and I'm running over with literary--eh--eh--literary discrimination. In addition to running the thing, I'll be the general news editor, because I'm better posted on newspaper business than the other girls."

"How does that happen?" inquired Louise, wonderingly.

"Why, I--I read the papers more than you or Beth. And I've set myself to master every detail of the business. No more crocheting or fancy work--no novel reading--no gossipy letter writing. From this day on we must attend strictly to business. If we're to become journalist, girls, we must be good ones--better than the ordinary--so that Uncle John may point to us with pride, and the columns of the Millville Daily Tribune will be quoted by the New York and Chicago press. Only in that way can

we become famous throughout the world!"

"Pass me the bonbons, dear," sighed Louise. "It's a high ambition, isn't it?"

"A very laudable ambition," added Uncle John approvingly. "I hope my clever nieces will be able to accomplish it."

"How about pictures?" asked Beth. "Modern newspapers are illustrated, and have cartoons of the leading events of the day."

"Can't we buy those things somewhere?" asked Patsy, appealing to Uncle John again. "There isn't an artist among us, of any account; and we shall be too busy to draw pictures."

"We must hire an artist," said Mr. Merrick, adding the item to his memoranda. "I'll speak to Marvin about it."

All these details were beginning to bewilder the embryo journalists. It is quite possible that had not Uncle John placed his order for presses and type so promptly the girls might have withdrawn from the proposition, but the die was now cast and they were too brave--perhaps too stubborn--to "back down" at this juncture.

"I realize," said Patsy, slowly and with a shake of her flaming head, "that we have undertaken an important venture. Our new enterprise is a

most serious one, girls, for there is nothing greater or grander in our advanced age than the daily newspaper; no power so tremendous as the Power of the Press."

"Yes, the press must be powerful or it wouldn't print clearly," remarked Beth.

"We are to become public mentors to the simple natives of Chazy County," continued Patsy, warming up to her subject and speaking oratorically.

"We shall be the guiding star of the--er--er--the benighted citizens of Millville and Huntingdon. We must lead them in politics, counsel them in the management of their farms and educate them to the great World Movements that are constantly occurring."

"Let's put all that rot in our prospectus," said Louise, looking at her cousin admiringly. "Can you remember it, Patsy, or had I better write it down now? I like that about teaching the farmers how to run their farms; it's so practical."

"You wait," said Patsy unflinchingly. "I'll write 'em an editorial that will make their eyes roll. But it won't do a bit of harm for you and Beth to jot down all the brilliant thoughts you run across, for the benefit of our subscribers."

"We haven't any subscribers yet," remarked Beth, placidly.

"I'll overcome that defect," said Uncle John. "I want to subscribe right now for ten copies, to be mailed to friends of mine in the city who--who need educating. I'll pay in advance and collect of my friends when I see 'em."

This was certainly encouraging and Patsy smiled benignantly.

"I'll take five more yearly subscriptions," said Arthur.

"Oh, but you're going to be on the staff!" cried Patsy.

"Am I?"

"Certainly. I've been thinking over our organization and while it is quite proper for three girls to run paper, there ought to be a man to pose as the editor in chief. That'll be you, Arthur."

"But you won't print my name?"

"Oh, yes we shall. Don't groan, sir; it's no disgrace. Wait till you see the Millville Tribune. Also we shall print our own names, in that case giving credit to whom credit is due. The announcement will run something like this: 'Arthur Weldon, General Manager and Editor in Chief; P. Doyle, General News Editor; L. Merrick Weldon, Society and Literary Editor; E. DeGraf, Sporting Editor, Secretary and Treasurer.' You see, by using our initials only, no one will ever suspect we are girls."

"The Millville people may," said Arthur, slyly, "and perhaps the disguise will be penetrated by outsiders. That will depend on the paper."

"I don't like that combination of sporting editor and secretary and treasurer," objected Beth. "It isn't the usual thing in journalism, I'm sure. Suppose you call me Editor of Special Features, and let it go at that?"

"Have we any special features?" asked Louise.

"Oh, yes," said Arthur; "there's Beth's eyebrows, Patsy's nose, and--"

"Do be sensible!" cried Patsy. "This isn't a joking matter, sir. Our newspaper will have plenty of special features, and Beth's suggestion is a good one. It sounds impressive. You see, Arthur, we've got to use you as a figurehead, but so you won't loaf on your job I've decided to appoint you Solicitor of Advertising and Subscriptions."

"Thank you, my dear," he said, grinning in an amused way.

"You and Louise, who still like to be together, can drive all over the county getting subscriptions, and you can write letters on our new stationery to all the big manufacturers of soaps and breakfast foods and beauty powders and to all the correspondence schools and get their

advertisements for the Tribune. If you get a good many, we may have to enlarge the paper."

"Don't worry, Miss Doyle; I'll try to keep within bounds."

And so they went on, laying plans and discussing details in such an earnest way that Uncle John became as enthusiastic as any of them and declared in no uncertain tone that the Millville Daily Tribune was bound to be a "howling success."

After the girls had retired for the night and the men sat smoking together in Uncle John's own room, Arthur said:

"Tell me, sir, why you have encouraged this mad project."

The little millionaire puffed his pipe in silence a moment. Then he replied:

"I'm educating my girls to be energetic and self-reliant. I want to bring out and develop every spark of latent ability there is in them. Whether the Millville Tribune succeeds or fails is not important; it will at least keep them busy for a time, along new lines, and tax their best resources of intellect and business ability. In other words, this experience is bound to do 'em good, and in that way I figure it will be worth all it costs--and more. I like the originality of the idea; I'm pleased with the difficulties I see looming ahead; I'm quite sure my

girls will rise to every occasion and prove their grit." He paused to knock the ashes from his pipe. "I'm worth a lot of money, Arthur," he continued, meekly, "and some day these three girls will inherit immense fortunes. It is my duty to train them in all practical business ways to take care of their property."

"I follow your line of reasoning, sir," observed Arthur Weldon; "but this absurd journalistic venture is bound to result in heavy financial loss."

"I know it, my boy. I'm sure of it. But can't you see that the lesson they will learn will render them more cautious in making future investments? I'm going to supply a complete newspaper outfit--to the last detail--and give 'em a good running start. Then I shall sit back and watch results. If they lose money on running expenses, as they surely will, they'll first take it out of their allowances, then sell their jewelry, and finally come to me for help. See? The lesson will be worth while, Arthur, and aside from that--think of the fun they'll have!"