The Alpine Path:

The Story of My Career.

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When the Editor of *Everywoman's World* asked me to write "The Story of My Career," I smiled with a little touch of incredulous amusement. My career? *Had* I a career? Was not – should not – a "career" be something splendid, wonderful, spectacular at the very least, something varied and exciting? Could my long, uphill struggle, through many quiet, uneventful years, be termed a "career"? It had never occurred to me to call it so; and, on first thought, it did not seem to me that there was much to be said about that same long, monotonous struggle. But it appeared to be a whim of the aforesaid editor that I should say what little there was to be said; and in those same long years I acquired the habit of accommodating myself to the whims of editors to such an inveterate degree that I have not yet been able to shake it off. So I shall cheerfully tell my tame story. If it does nothing else, it may serve to encourage some other toiler who is struggling along in the weary pathway I once followed to success.

Many years ago, when I was still a child, I clipped from a current magazine a bit of verse, entitled "To the Fringed Gentian," and pasted it on the corner of the little portfolio on which I wrote my letters and school essays. Every time I opened the portfolio I read one of those verses over; it was the key-note of my every aim and ambition:

"Then whisper, blossom, in thy sleep
  How I may upward climb
The Alpine path, so hard, so steep,
  That leads to heights sublime;
How I may reach that far-off goal
  Of true and honoured fame,
And write upon its shining scroll
  A woman's humble name."

It is indeed a "hard and steep" path; and if any word I can write will assist or encourage another pilgrim along that path, that word I gladly and willingly write.

I was born in the little village of Clifton, Prince Edward Island. "Old Prince Edward Island" is a good place in which to be born – a good place in which to

spend a childhood. I can think of none better. We Prince Edward Islanders are a loyal race. In our secret soul we believe that there is no place like the little Province that gave us birth. We may suspect that it isn't *quite* perfect, any more than any other spot on this planet, but you will not catch us admitting it. And how furiously we hate any one who does say it! The only way to inveigle a Prince Edward Islander into saying anything in dispraise of his beloved Province is to praise it extravagantly to him. Then, in order to deprecate the wrath of the gods and veil decently his own bursting pride, he will, perhaps, be induced to state that it has one or two drawbacks – mere spots on the sun. But his hearer must not commit the unpardonable sin of agreeing with him!

Prince Edward Island, however, is really a beautiful Province – the most beautiful place in America, I believe. Elsewhere are more lavish landscapes and grander scenery; but for chaste, restful loveliness it is unsurpassed. "Compassed by the inviolate sea," it floats on the waves of the blue gulf, a green seclusion and "haunt of ancient peace."

Much of the beauty of the Island is due to the vivid colour contrasts – the rich red of the winding roads, the brilliant emerald of the uplands and meadows, the glowing sapphire of the encircling sea. It is the sea which makes Prince Edward Island in more senses than the geographical. You cannot get away from the sea down there. Save for a few places in the interior, it is ever visible somewhere, if only in a tiny blue gap between distant hills, or a turquoise gleam through the dark boughs of spruce fringing an estuary. Great is our love for it; its tang gets into our blood: its siren call rings ever in our ears; and no matter where we wander in lands afar, the murmur of its waves ever summons us back in our dreams to the homeland. For few things am I more thankful than for the fact that I was born and bred beside that blue St. Lawrence Gulf.

And yet we cannot define the charm of Prince Edward Island in terms of land or sea. It is too elusive – too subtle. Sometimes I have thought it was the touch of austerity in an Island landscape that gives it its peculiar charm. And whence comes that austerity? Is it in the dark dappling of spruce and fir? Is it in the glimpses of sea and river? Is it in the bracing tang of the salt air? Or does it go deeper still, down to the very soul of the land? For lands have personalities just as well as human beings; and to know that personality you must live in the land and companion it, and draw sustenance of body and spirit from it; so only can you really know a land and be known of it.

My father was Hugh John Montgomery; my mother was Clara Woolner Macneill. So I come of Scotch ancestry, with a dash of English from several "grands" and "greats." There were many traditions and tales on both sides of the

family, to which, as a child, I listened with delight while my elders talked them over around winter firesides. The romance of them was in my blood; I thrilled to the lure of adventure which had led my forefathers westward from the Old Land – a land which I always heard referred to as "Home," by men and women whose parents were Canadian born and bred.

Hugh Montgomery came to Canada from Scotland. He sailed on a vessel bound for Quebec; but the fates and a woman's will took a hand in the thing. His wife was desperately seasick all the way across the Atlantic – and a voyage over the Atlantic was no five days' run then. Off the north shore of Prince Edward Island, then a wild, wooded land, with settlements few and far between, the Captain hove-to in order to replenish his supply of water. He sent a boat ashore, and he told poor Mrs. Montgomery that she might go in it for a little change. Mrs. Montgomery did go in it; and when she felt that blessed dry land under her feet once more, she told her husband that she meant to stay there. Never again would she set foot in any vessel. Expostulation, entreaty, argument, all availed nothing. There the poor lady was resolved to stay, and there, perforce, her husband had to stay with her. So the Montgomerys came to Prince Edward Island.

Their son Donald, my great-grandfather, was the hero of another romance of those early days. I have used this tale in my book, *The Story Girl*. The Nancy and Betty Sherman of the story told there were Nancy and Betsy Penman, daughters of a United Empire Loyalist who came from the States at the close of the war of Independence. George Penman had been a paymaster in the British Army; having forfeited all his property, he was very poor, but the beauty of the Penman girls, especially Nancy, was so great that they had no lack of suitors from far and near. The Donald Fraser of *The Story Girl* was Donald Montgomery, and Neil Campbell was David Murray, of Bedeque. The only embroidery I permitted myself in the telling of the tale was to give Donald a horse and cutter. In reality, what he had was a half-broken steer, hitched to a rude, old wood-sled, and it was with this romantic equipage that he hied him over to Richmond Bay to propose to Nancy!

My grandfather, Senator Montgomery, was the son of Donald and Nancy, and inherited his stately presence and handsome face from his mother. He married his first cousin, Annie Murray, of Bedeque, the daughter of David and Betsy. So that Nancy and Betsy were both my great-grandmothers. If Betsy were alive to-day, I have no doubt, she would be an ardent suffragette. The most advanced feminist could hardly spurn old conventions more effectually than she did when she proposed to David. I may add that I was always told that she and David were the happiest couple in the world.

It was from my mother's family – the Macneills – that I inherited my knack of writing and my literary tastes. John Macneill had come to Prince Edward Island in 1775; his family belonged to Argyleshire and had been adherents of the unfortunate Stuarts. Consequently, young Macneill found that a change of climate would probably be beneficial. Hector Macneill, a minor Scottish poet, was a cousin of his. He was the author of several beautiful and well-known lyrics, among them "Saw ye my wee thing, saw ye my ain thing," "I lo'e ne'er a laddie but one," and "Come under my plaidie" – the latter often and erroneously attributed to Burns.

John Macneill settled on a north-shore farm in Cavendish and had a family of twelve children, the oldest being William Macneill, my great-grandfather, commonly known as "Old Speaker Macneill." He was a very clever man, well educated for those times, and exercised a wide influence in provincial politics. He married Eliza Townsend, whose father was Captain John Townsend of the British Navy. His father, James Townsend, had received a grant of Prince Edward Island land from George III, which he called Park Corner, after the old family estate in England. Thither he came, bringing his wife. Bitterly homesick she was – rebelliously so. For weeks after her arrival she would not take off her bonnet, but walked the floor in it, imperiously demanding to be taken home. We children who heard the tale never wearied of speculating as to whether she took off her bonnet at night and put it on again in the morning, or whether she slept in it. But back home she could not go, so eventually she took off her bonnet and resigned herself to her fate. Very peacefully she sleeps in the little, old, family graveyard on the banks of the "Lake of Shining Waters" – in other words, Campbell's Pond at Park Corner. An old, red sandstone slab marks the spot where she and her husband lie, and on it is carved this moss-grown epitaph – one of the diffuse epitaphs of a generation that had time to carve such epitaphs and time to read them.

"To the memory of James Townsend, of Park Corner, Prince Edward Island. Also of Elizabeth, his wife. They emigrated from England to this Island, A.D. 1775, with two sons and three daughters, viz., John, James, Eliza, Rachel, and Mary. Their son John died in Antigua in the lifetime of his parents. His afflicted mother followed him into Eternity with patient resignation on the seventeenth day of April, 1795, in the 69th year of her age. And her disconsolate husband departed this life on the 25th day of December, 1806, in the 87th year of his age."

I wonder if any homesick dreams haunt Elizabeth Townsend's slumber of over a hundred years!

William and Eliza Macneill had a large family of which all the members possessed marked intellectual power. Their education consisted only in the scanty, occasional terms of the district school of those rude, early days; but, had circumstances been kinder, some of them would have climbed high. My grandfather, Alexander Macneill, was a man of strong and pure literary tastes, with a considerable knack of prose composition. My great-uncle, William Macneill, could write excellent satirical verse. But his older brother, James Macneill, was a born poet. He composed hundreds of poems, which he would sometimes recite to favoured persons. They were never written down, and not a line of them, so far as I know, is now extant. But I heard my grandfather repeat many of them, and they were real poetry, most of them being satirical or mock-heroic. They were witty, pointed, and dramatic. Uncle James was something of a "mute, inglorious" Burns. Circumstances compelled him to spend his life on a remote Prince Edward Island farm; had he had the advantages of education that are within reach of any schoolboy to-day, I am convinced he would have been neither mute nor inglorious.

The "Aunt Mary Lawson," to whom I dedicated *The Story Girl*, was another daughter of William and Eliza Macneill. No story of my "career" would be complete without a tribute to her, for she was one of the formative influences of my childhood. She was really quite the most wonderful woman in many respects that I have ever known. She had never had any educational advantages. But she had a naturally powerful mind, a keen intelligence, and a most remarkable memory which retained to the day of her death all that she had ever heard or read or seen. She was a brilliant conversationalist, and it was a treat to get Aunt Mary started on tales and recollections of her youth, and all the vivid doings and sayings, of the folk in those young years of the Province. We were "chums," she and I, when she was in the seventies and I was in my teens. I cannot, in any words at my command, pay the debt I owe to Aunt Mary Lawson.

When I was twenty-one months old my mother died, in the old home at Cavendish, after a lingering illness. I distinctly remember seeing her in her coffin – it is my earliest memory. My father was standing by the casket holding me in his arms. I wore a little white dress of embroidered muslin, and Father was crying. Women were seated around the room, and I recall two in front of me on the sofa who were whispering to each other and looking pityingly at Father and me. Behind them the window was open, and green vines were trailing across it, while their shadows danced over the floor in a square of sunshine.

I looked down at Mother's dead face. It was a sweet face, albeit worn and wasted by months of suffering. My mother had been beautiful, and Death, so cruel in all

else, had spared the delicate outline of feature, the long silken lashes brushing the hollow cheek, and the smooth masses of golden-brown hair.

I did not feel any sorrow, for I knew nothing of what it all meant. I was only vaguely troubled. Why was Mother so still? And why was Father crying? I reached down and laid my baby hand against Mother's cheek. Even yet I can feel the coldness of that touch. Somebody in the room sobbed and said, "Poor child." The chill of Mother's face had frightened me; I turned and put my arms appealingly about Father's neck and he kissed me. Comforted, I looked down again at the sweet, placid face as he carried me away. That one precious memory is all I have of the girlish mother who sleeps in the old burying-ground of Cavendish, lulled forever by the murmur of the sea.

I was brought up by my grandparents in the old Macneill Homestead in Cavendish. Cavendish is a farming settlement on the north shore of Prince Edward Island. It was eleven miles from a railway and twenty-four miles from the nearest town. It was settled in 1700 by three Scotch families – the Macneills, Simpsons, and Clarks. These families had inter-married to such an extent that it was necessary to be born or bred in Cavendish in order to know whom it was safe to criticize. I heard Aunt Mary Lawson once naively admit that "the Macneills and Simpsons always considered themselves a little better than the common run;" and there was a certain rather ill-natured local saying which was always being cast up to us of the clans by outsiders, "From the conceit of the Simpsons, the pride of the Macneills, and the vain-glory of the Clarks, good Lord deliver us." Whatever were their faults, they were loyal, clannish, upright, God-fearing folk, inheriting traditions of faith and simplicity and aspiration.

I spent my childhood and girlhood in an old-fashioned Cavendish farmhouse, surrounded by apple orchards. The first six years of my life are hazy in recollection. Here and there, a memory picture stands out in vivid colours. One of these was the wonderful moment when, I fondly supposed, I discovered the exact locality of Heaven.

One Sunday, when I could not have been more than four years old, I was in the old Clifton Church with Aunt Emily. I heard the minister say something about Heaven – that strange, mysterious place about which my only definite idea was that it was "where Mother had gone."

"Where is Heaven?" I whispered to Aunt Emily, although I knew well that whispering in church was an unpardonable sin. Aunt Emily did not commit it.

Silently, gravely, she pointed upward. With the literal and implicit belief of childhood, I took it for granted that this meant that portion of Clifton Church which was above the ceiling. There was a little square hole in the ceiling. Why could we not go up through it and see Mother? This was a great puzzle to me. I resolved that when I grew bigger I would go to Clifton and find some means of getting up into Heaven and finding Mother. This belief and hope was a great, though secret, comfort to me for several years. Heaven was no remote, unattainable place – "some brilliant but distant shore." No, no! It was only ten miles away, in the attic of Clifton Church! Very, very sadly and slowly I surrendered that belief.

Hood wrote, in his charming *I Remember* that he was farther off from Heaven than when he was a boy. To me, too, the world seemed a colder, lonelier place when age and experience at length forced upon my reluctant seven-year-old consciousness the despairing conviction that Heaven was not so near me as I had dreamed. Mayhap, 'twas even nearer, "nearer than breathing, closer than hands or feet" but the ideas of childhood are, necessarily, very concrete; and when I once accepted the fact that the gates of pearl and streets of gold were not in the attic of Clifton Church, I felt as though they might as well be beyond the farthest star.

Many of those early memories are connected with visits to Grandfather Montgomery's farm at Park Corner. He and his family lived in the "old house" then, a most quaint and delightful old place as I remember it, full of cupboards and nooks, and little, unexpected flights of stairs. It was there, when I was about five years old, that I had the only serious illness of my life – an attack of typhoid fever.

The night before I took ill I was out in the kitchen with the servants, feeling as well as usual, "wide-awake and full of ginger," as the old cook used to declare. I was sitting before the stove, and cook was "riddling" the fire with a long, straight bar of iron used for that purpose. She laid it down on the hearth and I promptly caught it up, intending to do some "riddling" myself, an occupation I much liked, loving to see the glowing red embers fall down on the black ashes.

Alas, I picked the poker up by the wrong end! As a result, my hand was terribly burned. It was my first initiation into physical pain, at least, the first one of which I have any recollection.

I suffered horribly and cried bitterly; yet I took considerable satisfaction out of the commotion I had caused. For the time being I was splendidly, satisfyingly important. Grandfather scolded the poor, distracted cook. Father entreated that

something be done for me, frenzied folk ran about suggesting and applying a score of different remedies. Finally I cried myself to sleep, holding my hand and arm to the elbow in a pail of ice-cold water, the only thing that gave me any relief.

I awoke next morning with a violent headache that grew worse as the day advanced. In a few days the doctor pronounced my illness to be typhoid fever. I do not know how long I was ill, but several times I was very low and nobody thought I could possibly recover.

Grandmother Macneill was sent for at the beginning of my illness. I was so delighted to see her that the excitement increased my fever to an alarming pitch, and after she had gone out, Father, thinking to calm me, told me that she had gone home. He meant well, but it was an unfortunate statement. I believed it implicitly – too implicitly. When Grandmother came in again I could not be convinced that it was she. No! She *had* gone home. Consequently, this woman must be Mrs. Murphy, a woman who worked at Grandfather's frequently, and who was tall and thin, like Grandmother.

I did not like Mrs. Murphy and I flatly refused to have her near me at all. Nothing could convince me that it was Grandmother. This was put down to delirium, but I do not think it was. I was quite conscious at the time. It was rather the fixed impression made on my mind in its weak state by what Father had told me. Grandmother *had* gone home, I reasoned, hence, she could *not* be there. *Therefore*, the woman who looked like her must be some one else.

It was not until I was able to sit up that I got over this delusion. One evening it simply dawned on me that it really was Grandmother. I was so happy, and could not bear to be out of her arms. I kept stroking her face constantly and saying in amazement and delight, "Why, you're *not* Mrs. Murphy, after all; you *are* Grandma."

Typhoid fever patients were not dieted so strictly during convalescence in those days as they are now. I remember one day, long before I was able to sit up, and only a short time after the fever had left me, that my dinner consisted of fried sausages – rich, pungent, savoury, home made sausages, such as are never found in these degenerate days. It was the first day that I had felt hungry, and I ate ravenously. Of course, by all the rules of the game, those sausages should have killed me, and so cut short that "career" of which I am writing. But they did not. These things are fated. I am sure that nothing short of pre-destination saved me from the consequences of those sausages.

Two incidents of the following summer stand out in my memory, probably because they were so keenly and so understandably bitter. One day I heard Grandmother reading from a newspaper an item to the effect that the end of the world was to come the following Sunday. At that time I had a most absolute and piteous belief in everything that was "printed." Whatever was in a newspaper must be true. I have lost this touching faith, I regret to say, and life is the poorer by the absence of many thrills of delight and horror.

From the time I heard that awesome prediction until Sunday was over I lived in an agony of terror and dread. The grown-up folk laughed at me, and refused to take my questions seriously. Now, I was almost as much afraid of being laughed at as of the Judgment Day. But all through the Saturday before that fateful Sunday I vexed Aunt Emily to distraction by repeatedly asking her if we should go to Sunday-school the next afternoon. Her assurance that of course we should go was a considerable comfort to me. If she really expected that there would be Sunday-school she could not believe that the next day would see the end of the world.

But then – it had been *printed.* That night was a time of intense wretchedness for me. Sleep was entirely out of the question. Might I not hear "the last trump" at any moment? I can laugh at it now – any one would laugh. But it was real torture to a credulous child, just as real as any mental agony in after life.

Sunday was even more interminable than Sundays usually were, then. But it came to an end at last, and as its "dark, descending sun" dimpled the purple sky-line of the Gulf, I drew a long breath of relief. The beautiful green world of blossom and sunshine had not been burned up; it was going to last for a while longer. But I never forgot the suffering of that Sunday.

Many years later I used the incident as the foundation of the chapter "The Judgment Sunday" in *The Story Girl*. But the children of King Orchard had the sustaining companionship of each other. I had trodden the wine-press alone.

The other incident was much more trifling. The "Martin Forbes" of *The Story Girl* had his prototype in an old man who visited at my grandfather's for a week. Forbes was not his name, of course. He was, I believe, an amiable, respectable, and respected, old gentleman. But he won my undying hatred by calling me "Johnny" every time he spoke to me.

How I raged at him! It seemed to me a most deadly and unforgivable insult. My anger amused him hugely and incited him to persist in using the objectionable name. I could have torn that man in pieces had I had the power! When he went

away I refused to shake hands with him, whereupon he laughed uproariously and said, "Oh, well, I won't call you 'Johnny' any more. After this I'll call you 'Sammy,'" which was, of course, adding fuel to the fire.

For years I couldn't hear that man's name without a sense of hot anger. Fully five years afterward, when I was ten, I remember writing this in my diary: "Mr. James Forbes is dead. He is the brother of a horrid man in Summerside who called me 'Johnny'."

I never saw poor old Mr. Forbes again, so I never had to endure the indignity of being called "Sammy." He is now dead himself, and I daresay the fact that he called me "Johnny" was not brought up in judgment against him. Yet he may have committed what might be considered far greater sins that yet would not inflict on any one a tithe of the humiliation which his teasing inflicted on a child's sensitive mind.

That experience taught me one lesson, at least. I never tease a child. If I had any tendency to do so, I should certainly be prevented by the still keen recollection of what I suffered at Mr. Forbes' hands. To him, it was merely the "fun" of teasing a "touchy" child. To me, it was the poison of asps.