

Follow the Dotted Line

In which Manford finds a map and looks for treasure

NEEDLENOSE AND SSAM WEREN'T HOME. Manford had come to visit one morning but the residents of Haystack Hollow were out. He could see which way they'd gone. The grass around the burrow was wet with dew and sparkled in the sun. Brushing through it, Needle-nose had left a path that headed toward Flossie's. Manford decided to follow.

Turning to go, he saw the jagged trunk of the tree lightning had struck. The tree itself was gone. Beaver Brothers had made quick work of that right after the storm. They'd cut it into shorter lengths and dragged it down the creek to their sawmill. The trunk still stood. *It should go, too*, Manford thought. *Needlenose likes to keep things neat.*

Manford walked over to it and looked inside. The tree trunk was hollow. It had been so for years, judging by its aged and weathered condition. Birds and squirrels had built nests there one atop the other. Nothing lived there now. Manford started digging through what remained, layer after layer from season after season. He found grass and twigs and wood chips, bits of fur and shell — traces of former tenants that went back years and years. Near the bottom, he felt something solid, something that moved when he touched it.

He got hold of it and pulled it from the tree. It was a flat, wooden box bound tightly with wire and a metal clamp. He unwound the wire and pried open the clamp. Inside, he found a leather drawstring bag. In the bag was a folded piece of heavy brown paper, faintly sparkling with glittery dust. He carefully unfolded the paper and flattened it out.

It was a map — a finely drawn, hand-printed map. Someone, a long time before, had hidden it in the hollow tree.

A map to what? Manford wondered. *Why was it hidden, and when? Hmmm, I'll take it home and study it. Maybe I'll find out.* He refolded the paper, placed it back in the bag and the box, and took it home. He completely forgot he was on his way to Flossie's.

He showed it to Golly the next day. Golly looked at it for quite some time. It was roughly square, twelve inches on a side, with deep creases where it had been folded for many years. A dotted line had been drawn beginning at the left, moving more or less diagonally across and up the page, then jogging back and tracing a zigzag pattern toward the top. The line ended in a group of tiny boxes and pointed to one in particular.

"A map," Golly said, "kept in a leather bag, closed in a wooden box, and hidden long ago in a hollow tree. Curious, Manford. Curious, indeed. How long have you had it?"

"Since yesterday."

"You've been studying it, then. What have you learned?"

"There's a signature in the bottom right corner — Peter or Pierre or somebody — and it's dated: 28 Oct 36."

"That's nearly sixty years ago," Golly said.

"Do you suppose it's been in that tree all this time?" asked Manford.

"No telling, but the tree was old, so it could have been there that long. What else have you figured out?"

"This dotted line is what we're supposed to follow."

"We?" said Golly.

"A map is meant to help find things, isn't it? Whoever has the map should follow it and see where it leads."

"I see. Go on."

"The line starts where it says *Hollow Tree*," Manford said, pointing to a hand-lettered note on the map. "That's easy enough. Then it goes east over two humps. Those are the two mountains we cross to get to MorningGlory Mountain."

"Very good," Golly said.

"Then it turns. *Right Fork*, it says. What's that?"

"Hmmm ... I'd say it's the fork in the trail by the odd-shaped tree we found in Book 1 — Page 79, I believe. We took the left-hand route when we were there last."

"Sure, that's it," Manford said, looking at the map again. "Then the line zigzags. That probably means we climb the mountain."

"There you go with that *we* again, Manford."

"But we're *going* to follow it, aren't we? You *said* I should have more adventures."

"Perhaps," said Golly, "but let's go on with the map. I think you are right about the zigzags. There's an old trail up the south face of the mountain. That's likely where the right fork leads."

"What are these little boxes?" asked Manford.

"It must be the town I've seen up there. No one lives there; it was abandoned long ago."

"A town halfway up MorningGlory Mountain?"

"It's not a big place," said Golly, "about two dozen buildings is all. I've flown over it many times. MorningGlory Mine is farther up the mountain, you see. People who worked there lived in the town. At least they did until the operation closed down."

"A mine? What were they mining for?"

"Gold. There was a lot of it for a while, I understand. But when it was gone, everyone left."

"Gold!" said Manford. "Maybe that's what sparkles on the map. Do you think this map leads to gold?"

"It's a little early to say," Golly replied. "We'd have to follow it to find out, and it's not an easy trip. Maybe even then we wouldn't know."

"Well," said Manford, "I want to find out."

"Then let's talk to the others and see if anyone wants to go along."

They called everyone together in the meadow that afternoon. The others listened quietly as Manford told of his discovery.

“I found a map inside the tree hit by lightning,” he said. He spread it out for them to see.

“Golly and I have looked it over. We think it leads to an old town on MorningGlory Mountain.” He showed them the route along the dotted line.

“There’s a mine there, Golly says. With this map, we might find gold or treasure! Do you want to come along?”

“Climb the mountain *again?*” said Flossie.

“Well, sure,” said Manford, “it would be fun. We had lots of fun last time, didn’t we?”

“Oh, yes,” Flossie answered: “rain and fog, high winds blowing us all over the mountain, getting lost in the dark, spooky lights and voices in the night, Princess almost meeting her doom — it was great fun.”

“But it was an adventure,” Manford said, disappointed. “Those things are part of an adventure. You didn’t mention good things that happened, like meeting Ssam and Mr. Turner, and exploring the mountain and seeing how everything looked from the top, and finding out what The Place With No Trees really was, and learning how to use my necklace to find things. Are you sorry those things happened?”

“No, I’m not,” said Flossie, “and you’re right, many good things happened, too. I’m just not eager to go up there again.”

“I’ll go,” said Ssam.

“You got to ride and sleep all the way,” said Columbine. “Of course you’ll go.”

“We might find treasure!” Manford said, trying to share his excitement. “We can all go look for treasure!”

“Oh, Manford,” said Flossie, “we don’t need treasure. We’re happy the way we are. We have nice places to live, plenty to eat, and good friends. What would we do with treasure? Oh, sure, we could pay our bills, I suppose. But I don’t really need treasure if I have you all as friends.”

“Well, maybe it isn’t the *treasure* so much,” Manford said; “maybe it’s *looking* for it that’s fun. Following the map, figuring out the clues — that’s what I want you to help me do. It’s fun when we can all do something like this together. Even if we don’t find anything, we’ll have a good time looking.”

“I agree,” said Veronica. “I want to go along.”

“I’ll go,” said Needlenose.

“And so will I,” said Golly. “You’ll join us, won’t you, Flossie?”

“Oh, I suppose, if you put it that way,” she replied. “What about you, Princess?”

“If everyone’s going, so will I. But I hope it’s not as scary as last time.”

They began planning at once. They would follow the same route as before but would start earlier so they could camp the first night at the fork in the trail. Instead of carrying baskets and bags of food with them, Golly and Flossie would fly supplies ahead and stash them in tree-tops along the way. As before, Manford and Veronica would walk, Flossie and Golly would fly, the others would get to ride.

They gathered in the meadow in early morning two days later. Mary Moose saw them off, reminding them again to be careful, to stay together, and to watch out for each other along the way.

“That’s what you told us last time, mom,” Manford said.

“It’s just as important today,” she answered. “Good luck hunting treasure.”

They crossed the first mountain easily by lunchtime, stopping to rest and watch the scenery along the way. Veronica, Ssam, and Manford marveled at what they saw. The world at a distance no longer looked fuzzy to them; now it was sharp and clear.

They climbed the second mountain in the afternoon. Descending it as daylight faded, they reached the narrow ridge and the fork in the trail at the bottom. Golly retrieved their hidden supplies and they made camp around the wind-bent tree.

“Did you say we’re going to a ghost town?” asked Needlenose.

“No, I didn’t,” said Golly, “but that’s what it is. It’s been abandoned as long as I can remember. Why do you ask?”

“I thought that if we were going to a ghost town, maybe we should tell ghost stories.”

“I don’t think I’d like that,” said Columbine. “Just remembering what happened last time we were here is spooky enough.”

“We should have *some* kind of story,” Needlenose went on. “Mr. Turner told us about meeting Veronica’s mom last time.”

“I’ll tell one,” said Flossie.

“What’s it about?” asked Manford.

“Since you invited us on your adventure because we’re your friends, I’ll tell a story about adventuring friends.”

The group gathered round to listen as Flossie began:

The Fox and the Squirrel

Once upon a time — long, long ago — far, far away — there lived a fox in a large, large forest. He was a crafty fox, a clever fox, as foxes are known to be, but he wasn’t very popular with the neighbors. Oh, it wasn’t his craftiness or cleverness the neighbors didn’t like; no, those were admirable qualities. It was his habit of eating things smaller than himself, like the neighbors, that made the neighbors nervous.

The fox was also curious. Curious about trees, about rocks, about the water in the pond. Most of all, he was curious about the large, large forest, about how large it really was, and what lay outside it, if anything did at all. Maybe there was nothing outside it. Maybe it was forest everywhere. The fox wanted to know.

He tried to ask the neighbors, but when he knocked at their doors to pose a few questions — nothing else in mind, honest — they pretended they weren’t home. He went from door to door for most of a day, but except for the bear, who didn’t know, no one came to hear what the fox had to ask.

So he decided to see for himself. One morning he began walking, figuring he’d walk till he found the end of the large, large forest. The neighbors were glad to see him leave. They hoped he’d go so far away he’d never find his way back.

The fox walked a hundred days but always there was nothing but forest. It wasn’t called large comma large for nothing, you see. There was nothing much to eat, either. News of him had spread — news of his craftiness and cleverness, and especially news of his habit of eating things smaller than himself. All but a few luckless creatures managed to stay out of his way and he was hungry most of the time.

On the hundred eleventh day, he came at last to the edge of the large, large forest. He was puzzled at what he saw. It was water, he knew that, but he’d never seen so much of it.

What he'd found was the bank of the wide, wide river. He wondered how wide it was, and what lay beyond it, but it didn't really matter what he was wondering at this point because, a) it was too wide to swim, b) there was no bridge or ferry, and c) he was too weak from hunger to go on. It looked like this was the end of the crafty and clever and curious fox.

"Maybe this fox was too curious for his own good," said Columbine.

"What happened next?" asked Manford. "Did he get rescued somehow?" Flossie continued her tale:

A squirrel, watching from the upper branches of a tree, saw the fox fall exhausted at river's edge. He was a nimble squirrel, a speedy squirrel, as squirrels are known to be, and he believed in putting things away for the future. And he'd heard about the fox. He knew of his admirable qualities and of his bad habit, but instead of just believing what everyone said, the squirrel wanted to find out for himself.

After some negotiation — the fox not being in any condition to argue — the two made a bargain. The squirrel would help the fox find food, the fox would give up all thought of having the squirrel for lunch, and when the fox was strong again, together they'd build a boat to cross the wide, wide river. The squirrel wondered what was on the other side, too, you see, and why everyone thought it necessary to call the river wide comma wide.

From the squirrel, the fox learned to eat fish and fruit and berries and soon was strong again. The two built a boat from driftwood logs and planks. The fox named it Little Friend out of gratitude for the kindness the squirrel had shown. Then they set off, drifting with the current hundreds of miles downstream. It took weeks and weeks to cross the wide, wide river, but eventually they did and landed at the docks of the big, big city.

Neither fox nor squirrel had ever seen a city but they soon figured out what to do. Because the fox was crafty and clever and curious, and because the squirrel was nimble and speedy and believed in investing for the future, before long they were fabulously rich, living splendidly in the most fashionable part of a city that was big comma big.

But they grew restless. They wanted to go adventuring once more. Their driftwood boat had long ago been swept downstream but that didn't matter. They bought a magnificent yacht, christened it Little Friend II and set off once again, drifting downstream toward the land of the tall, tall mountains, the deep, deep valleys, the blue, blue skies.

And it's just possible they're still there today because, as we know: A little friendship can go a long, long way.

"I thought for *sure* the fox would eat the squirrel," said Manford.

"So did I," said Needlenose. "What a good story!"

"Excellent," said Ssam. "I'll have to remember that."

"Anyone can be friends, you see," said Flossie, "and friends can work together to make things happen."

"Like finding treasure," said Manford.

"Enough about finding your treasure," said Flossie. "We're just here for the looking, remember? Now let's get some sleep."

They took the right-branching trail first thing next morning. The path was harder to find in that direction. Tall grass hid the way in places; the trail disappeared over rocky ground in others. Flossie and Golly showed the trail's general direction from the air and kept everyone moving along.

And the general direction was up. MorningGlory Mountain rose steeply before them as they climbed along the broad switchbacks the map had shown. They made their way back and forth, onward and upward through the forest. Sometimes they crossed open ridges and looked off to distant views. Other times steep slopes and rocky cliffs barely gave them room to pass.

They crossed many small creeks and springs along the way and toward noon, again heard water in the distance. The sound increased as they moved on until it became a muffled roar. They were high on the mountain now and the path led around a steep cliff on a wide, rock ledge. Suddenly, blocking the way, was a stream thirty feet across fed by a tremendous waterfall up a canyon opening to their right. The water looked deep. It rushed by in surging, foaming swells to where it dropped off another waterfall to their left.

They stood on the streambank, feeling vibrations the pounding falls sent through the ground. The crossing was much too wide to jump. There was no bridge or helpful path of stones.

"This must be the wide, wide river," said Needlenose.

"The map says *Thunder Creek*," Manford reported.

"Well-named," said Veronica. "How do we get across? If we lose our footing we'll be swept over the edge."

"I think I'll fly," said Princess Columbine, and she fluttered easily across to alight on a tuft of grass.

"I think I will, too," said Needlenose. "Ring up my travel agent, would you?"

Ssam poked his head out of Manford's pack to look over the situation.

"If you had a rope you could tie it to trees on either side and pull yourselves across."

"There was a rope here once," said Golly. "I see a piece of it on a tree on the other side."

"Maybe there was a cable car for crossing," said Ssam. "One would sure be handy now."

Flossie flew across. Golly put on Manford's backpack and flew it and Ssam to the other side. That left Manford, Veronica, and Needlenose yet to cross.

There was room to walk upstream along the bank of the creek. They headed upcanyon toward the waterfall, hoping a path would lead behind it like at Misty Falls. None did. Logs had jammed on the rocks below the falls, however, making a precarious walkway. If they were careful, they might make their way across one to another.

Manford inched his way across, moving carefully over logs and large rocks amid the rushing water and the unnerving roar of the falls. His feet slipped at times. Other times the rocks and logs moved. But having four legs worked to his advantage and he made it to the other side without falling. Veronica, with Needlenose aboard, followed the same way Manford had gone, moving slowly from step to step. Thus they crossed the thundering creek with no one getting wet.

The town was a short way through the woods. They walked down its streets looking at the rows of old buildings. Windows were broken or boarded up. Paint and signs had bleached away. Grass grew in the streets and walks. The wind was quiet. The town was quiet. They only heard the distant rush of Thunder Creek.

"Not exactly the big, big city," said Ssam.

"No," said Golly, "it's more like the still, still village. As still as you'll find anywhere, I suspect."

The first building they entered had three floors, each with many rooms on a long hallway. They found rusted bedsprings, broken chairs, chipped enamel basins and pitchers. The building had been a hotel or bunkhouse for families of workers in the mine. The downstairs kitchen

had three large iron stoves and two long sinks. The dining area might have held fifty, though the tables and chairs were long gone.

They looked through the hospital next. It was on the very edge of town, built so close to the mountain that a rockslide had come into the building. Back rooms were filled with dirt and rock. Only a small part of the door and windowframes showed above the surface. Grass and small flowers were growing inside.

Manford picked an old book of records off a shelf. He read aloud of visits for broken bones, fevers, assorted cuts and bruises. Babies had been born there. He wondered how many people had lived in the town when the mine was working. They found the power plant at far end of the main street, a building half a block long with smokestacks rising fifty feet above its roof. The entrance was boarded over but they found an open door in the rear. Four oil-fired boilers had once operated there turning water into steam and electrical power. The larger equipment was still in place, still attached to a jungle of pipes hanging from the walls and ceiling. From the plant, the pipes ran above and below ground to carry steam heat and electricity to other buildings in town. Much of the power went to the gold mill they'd passed farther back along the street.

The mill extended many stories up the mountain. They climbed to the top of the building and Golly described how the mill worked.

"The gold mine is several miles up the mountain," he said as they stood on the top floor. "Miners loaded rock into tram cars and sent them down the mountain on cables. When the cars landed here, the rock was dumped through grates into wooden chutes that led to the crushers below. Rocks that didn't pass through the grate were broken up with sledges." They walked down stairs to lower floors.

"The crushers had powerful iron jaws to grind the rock," Golly went on, showing them the machinery. "The first crushers ground it down to golf-ball size. The rock then went again and again through another crusher, a roller mill, and vibrating screens until it came out as sand." They continued down stairs, walking through several rooms containing many large tables.

"Sand passing through the screens came through a settling chamber to these shaker tables. High-grade gold was separated from the rock here; it was heavier and sank to the bottom during shaking. The rock left over went into big tanks in a building across the street. They used acid, steam, and pressure in the tanks to leach out the last traces of gold."

"How do you know all this?" asked Manford.

"I read about it years ago after I first visited here. The buildings seemed unusual and I was curious."

"They must have found lots of gold."

"They did," Golly said, "but when it ran out, everyone left. How quiet it is here now. Think what it must have been like years ago when these machines ran in high gear, crushing, grinding, shaking tons of rock to extract that precious gold."

They walked through the general store in late afternoon. Shelves and bins around the outside of the room once held goods for sale. Counters in the center had been used for displays. Cones of string for wrapping packages still hung from the ceiling. Newsprint describing mer-

chandise lay scattered on the floor. They looked around each room trying to identify things they saw.

They found billing invoices, ledger books, and bundles of other paperwork in a storeroom upstairs, all stacked in boxes on shelves and strewn about the floor. They stirred through the papers noting prices of long before.

“A tin of peaches for a dime,” Golly said.

“A bolt of cloth only twenty cents a yard,” said Flossie.

“Oatmeal, a penny a pound,” said Needlenose.

“*Henderson’s*,” Manford said suddenly. “These bills and newspaper ads say *Henderson’s*.”

“Is that important?” asked Ssam.

“There’s a note on the map about it: *Henderson’s, downstairs*, it says.”

“Is there anything more?”

“No, that’s all,” Manford said. “But it sounds like we should be looking for something downstairs.”

They returned to the main floor. They began to search each room, looking in drawers, in cabinets, on the very top shelves, but nothing they found seemed connected with the message on the map. The safe stood open. They looked through it, but if it had once held treasure, or even a clue to one, there was nothing but dust in it now. They explored closets, a tiny office the store clerk must have used, and storage areas under the stairs. They found only what they’d been finding all along: dust, scraps of paper, and furnishings left behind when the store had closed.

“If there *was* a clue here once,” said Manford, “it’s probably gone now. This place has seen a lot of visitors.” “But none with a map,” Golly reminded him. “No one knew they were *supposed* to find something here.”

“It looks hopeless to me,” Flossie said. “We should get something to eat.” It was getting toward dark.

“Oh, I hate to give up,” said Manford.

“We can look again tomorrow, if you want, but it sure seems like a dead end.”

“What’s this?” Manford asked. He was behind the main counter near the front door, looking at something at his feet.

“What’s what?” asked Needlenose.

“There’s a metal ring here in the floor.”

They gathered round to look. A small ring was attached inside a groove in a floorboard. It barely showed under the counter.

“Maybe there’s something under the counter,” said Veronica. “Let’s move it.”

She easily shoved aside the heavy counter, first one end, then the other. The outline of a large, hinged door was revealed. Veronica lifted the ring and pulled. The door swung noisily up and open.

“There’s a stairway leading down to a basement,” said Columbine.

“*Henderson’s, downstairs*,” said Manford. “*Here’s* where we’re supposed to look.”

The opening was large enough for them all to descend the stairs. Three sides of the stone-walled basement room were used for storage — more shelves, more cabinets, more boxes to look through. The fourth wall was blank, but had a window near the ceiling giving a small

amount of light. They searched, and when they'd finished, they knew nothing more than before.

"Phooey," said Manford. "I thought sure we'd find the answer here."

"I told you it was time to eat," said Flossie.

"Could I look at the map a moment?" said Golly. Manford spread the map in the light for Golly to see.

"Just as I thought," Golly said. "See where the dotted line we've been following comes into town and goes up the main street?" They looked and nodded.

"The line turns and points to this building," said Manford.

"Right," Golly said, "but it points to the *west* side of the building. There's no door on that side. The entrance is from the *east*."

"Maybe that's just the way Pierre or Peter drew the map," said Needlenose.

"I don't think so," said Golly. "I think it's a clue. We should look for something on the west side of this room." "There's nothing there," said Columbine. "It's a blank stone wall with a window."

"Exactly," Golly went on. "I think we're looking for a particular stone on that wall."

They checked the wall up and down, left and right, tapping and prying on stones as they went. The fourteenth stone from the left, in the fourth row from the bottom, was loose. Veronica pried it out. Needlenose snuffled inside the hole and dug around with his paws.

"Just loose dirt in here," he said, making a pile on the floor as he dug. "Wait a minute ... there might be something ... yes, I've got it ... oh-oh...."

He drew out a flat wooden box like the first one Manford had found. It was bound again with wire and a metal clamp.

They took it upstairs and opened it in the fading evening light. Inside was a leather drawstring bag. Inside that was a piece of brown paper.

"Another map, it looks like," said Veronica. Manford unfolded it.

"It's a map, all right," Manford said with a broad smile. "It has the same signature but it's dated a month later. I *told* you we'd find something. Now we can follow *this* dotted line!"

"Tomorrow," Flossie said sternly. "We'll talk about this tomorrow. Tonight we're going to eat. I'm really hungry now."