
MARY
LOUISE
At Dorfield

EDITH VAN DYNE



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Mary Louise At Dorfield



"A pretty snug place," said Felix.

Mary Louise At Dorfield

By

Edith Van Dyne

[pseud.]

Author of

"Mary Louise," "Mary Louise in the Country," "Mary Louise Solves a Mystery," "Mary Louise and the Liberty Girls," "Mary Louise Adopts a Soldier."

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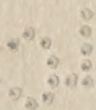
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Mary Louise at Dorfield

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Mary Louise At Dorfield

CHAPTER I

THE SEWING BEE

Dorfield was trying to settle down into its pre-war quiet, but no matter how conservative and sleepy a town has been, when once it is shaken up with war activities it finds it difficult to go to sleep again. It may pull the bedclothes over its head and bury its ears in the downy pillows of memories of what it used to be but the echoes of marching troops, shouting crowds, martial music, newsboys crying extras, powder mills and so forth will reach it no matter how soft the pillows or thick the bedclothes.

The girls of Dorfield found it more difficult to settle down than anybody else. Fathers had always been busy, so had mothers. The returning soldiers had dropped into their old places

and were at work almost as though there had been no amazing interlude of A. E. F. Only the girls seemed to be left out of the scheme of things. Many of them kept on working, although before the war the idea of making a living had been undreamed. The girls who, for purely patriotic reasons, had taken positions left empty by enlisted men, were loath to go back to the old state of dependence now that the men had returned.

“I am tired of being an unproductive consumer and I don’t intend to stand it any longer,” declared Elizabeth Wright.

“What are you going to do about it?” asked Lucile Neal.

“Do! I’m going to get a good job and hold it. I did the work in the bank just as well as Price Middleton, although I got only about half as much pay for it. I can type better than he can and write a business letter all around him. When he came back from the war, I stepped out as gracefully as you please and gave up my job. Nobody seems to be much worried about my future, that is, nobody but me, but I’ve been thinking a lot about what is going to become of me, not only because of money but because I am

simply bored to death at the prospect of having no regular occupation."

"I feel that way too," said Laura Hilton. "I do wish Dorfield wasn't so poky about its girls. Father says young women ought to stay at home and preserve fruit, unless it is necessary for the family finances that they should go out and work."

"Always for the good of the family where the girl is concerned!" exclaimed Elizabeth, "and never the good of the girl! Suppose there isn't any fruit! Suppose there is no sugar to preserve with! Suppose the beloved family is not fond of jam! Suppose there are more girls in the household than there are paring knives! Suppose one's mother is so capable and industrious that there is no work left for the girls to do! Suppose a million things!"

The group of girls gathered on Colonel Hathaway's porch laughed at the vehemence of Elizabeth Wright's harangue. Elizabeth had always been different from the rest of her family, who were old-fashioned and conservative in their ideas. She was one of five sisters. The other four were quite content to live the life of "unproductive consumers" on the not very large

income which was derived from an estate inherited by their father. Mr. Wright's sole occupation consisted in writing letters demanding catalogues of rare books. These he pored over from morning until night. Sometimes, enticed by the extreme rarity and desirability of a book, he would decide he must have it in his fine collection but he usually took so long to decide and put off so long writing his order that, in nine cases out of ten, the desired book was sold before he sent for it.

Mrs. Wright was one of those thoroughly practical souls who glory in their activity and efficiency. She did everything so easily that she had never seen the necessity of teaching her daughters to do anything.

"They will learn soon enough!" she always declared. "Nobody taught me! They will marry and then they will learn."

Elizabeth always winced when her mother announced so confidently that her daughters would marry. Perhaps they would but, on the other hand, perhaps they wouldn't. She for one was sure she would not. Certainly it was not her aim in life as it seemed to be of her sisters. Marriage was all right if it was built on true

love, as she was sure this marriage of Mary Louise's was to be. In her heart of hearts Elizabeth wanted to write but she thought she had not lived long enough to have anything to write about.

Dear Mary Louise Burrows! How happy she looked with her friends gathered around her on her grandfather's piazza! That piazza was a favorite place for the girls to assemble and now that Mary Louise was so soon to marry Danny Dexter it was almost a daily occurrence for them to meet there. Irene MacFarlane was there in her wheel chair, her countenance as calm and peaceful as ever, while her busy fingers embroidered a wonderfully dainty bit of lingerie for her friend's trousseau. Alora Jones was there, not looking much happier than she had formerly, although her three millions had been almost doubled in the last few years, thanks to the war activities that wealth had indulged in. Poor Alora found it difficult to let herself go. Her wealth made her suspicious. Because she had been imposed upon once, she was ever looking out for similar experiences. She was happier with this band of friends, tried and true, than with anybody else in the world. Certainly they

wanted nothing from her but friendship and that her shy heart was eager to give. Her artist father encouraged her in seeking out these wholesome, normal girls, hoping through them his daughter would begin to value life for what it was worth.

“We are cursed with money, Alora,” he would say, “but for Heaven’s sake, let’s forget it. In the meantime we must give and give!”

Pretty Laura Hilton was there, as small and bird-like as ever. By her sat Lucile Neal, who had inherited an executive ability from her father, the owner of the Neal Automobile Factory, and whose clear judgment was ever in demand when Mary Louise and her friends had any project on foot. Edna Barlow, the only poor girl in the group, was in the hammock with Jane Donovan, the daughter of Dorfield’s mayor.

All of the girls were sewing on Mary Louise’s trousseau. It was Irene’s idea that they should meet together in this way and busy themselves with this labor of love.

“To return to jobs,” said Elizabeth. “I’m going to find out what pays best and learn how to do it and then bust loose from my family. If they don’t like it, they can lump it. I want a

latchkey and a bank account of my own. As it is, if I'm not in the house at a certain time, there is a hue and cry and father begins on what young ladies did in his day and Gertrude and Annabel look shocked and Pauline and Margaret say they would never be guilty of such unladylike behavior and they all agree that men don't like independent girls and I'll never get a suspicion of a beau if I don't mend my ways — as though I wanted one if I'd have to make myself over to get him!"

"And what does your mother say?" laughed Mary Louise.

"Oh, Mother doesn't say anything. She is always so busy she doesn't even know I'm not there. With two servants in the house Mother still manages never to be idle one moment in the day. She is always baking and brewing, sewing and dusting, cleaning out closets or bureau drawers, airing beds, rubbing furniture, cleaning silver, doing a million and one things that the maids could do just as well as she. The truth of the matter is Mother should have had a profession outside of being a wife and mother. She has too much energy and efficiency to waste on a mere home."

“ But a mere home is the greatest thing in the world,” said Mary Louise, softly.

“ Oh, yes, it is a good enough place, but it can be pretty uncomfortable with somebody always making you move to sweep under you. Why, my mother could run a big hotel and still have time to spare to keep the church sewing circle going.”

“ She must be very unselfish,” said Laura Hilton, whose own mother was noted for being the best dressed and most frivolous woman in Dorfield, though very charming and kind-hearted withal.

“ Oh, I don't know about that!” answered Elizabeth. “ She is never so happy as when she is bustling around doing for people. She would let all of us girls sleep all day and then cook breakfast herself and bring it up to us and have the time of her life doing it. I think it would be a great deal more unselfish if she would let us help and expend some of her energy on making us be a little more efficient instead of being so perfect herself.”

“ Have you decided yet, Mary Louise, where and when you will be married?” asked Irene, gently changing the subject. Irene had the faculty of turning the conversation into smoother

channels when she saw breakers ahead. Criticism of one's mother and home was not conducive to smooth sailing for the ship of conversation.

"About decided," blushed Mary Louise. "Danny and I think it would be nice to be married right here at home with only our intimate friends present. We haven't any relations to speak of, neither one of us. Danny has his Uncle Jim O'Hara and I have Grandpa Jim — a Jim apiece and that is all. We have lots of intimate friends, though, when we begin to count up. Of course Danny wants to ask every man in his regiment besides all the friends he has made at the Neal Automobile Factory."

"Father and the boys say he is the most popular man in the works in the short time he has been with them," said Lucile.

Mary Louise blushed again. She was frankly delighted at the praise bestowed upon her fiancé. Danny's popularity was very delightful to the girl and indeed it spoke very well for Danny Dexter that Dorfield was receiving him with open arms. He had come to the town unknown, poor, friendless except for the men in his regiment who one and all pronounced him a trump. All of his worldly possessions he could get in his

army kit. But on his battle scarred face was a smile that was worth more than silver and gold and when he had won, right under the noses of a host of admirers, the love of the prettiest and most attractive girl in town, the rejected and dejected suitors of Mary Louise Burrows bore him no grudge but were willing to come dance at his wedding.

“Here comes Mrs. Markle!” exclaimed Mary Louise. “She has been so kind to me and Mr. Markle is perfectly dear to Danny. Both of them are so charming that we appreciate their seeing anything in us worth knowing.”

“Pooh!” cried Elizabeth Wright. “Everybody thinks you and Danny are worth knowing. The Markles aren’t so much of a muchness.”

“Oh, but they are lovely! Don’t you think so, Irene?” asked Mary Louise.

“I don’t know them very well,” responded Irene. “If you like them so much they must be worth knowing, however.”

Mary Louise looked at her friend, astonishment expressed in her countenance. That did not sound like Irene MacFarlane. What faint praise she gave the Markles! And her voice sounded so cold. What could be the matter?

Could she be jealous of these new friends? Hardly that! Of course, Irene had been her first and only friend when Mary Louise came to Dorfield and stayed with Irene's uncle, Mr. Peter Conant and his wife, dear Aunt Hannah. But since then she, Mary Louise, had made acquaintance with almost everybody in town and it would take all her fingers and toes to count her intimate girl friends. Irene had never shown jealousy before but had been as eager to enlarge her acquaintance as Mary Louise herself. Poor Irene was lame and had spent the whole of her life either on her back or in the wheel chair. She had an intense interest in humanity in general and girls in particular. Her friendship with Mary Louise had opened up a new life for the poor girl, bringing her more and more in touch with the outside world. But why this coldness where the Markles were concerned?

Nobody could deny that the Markles were a delightful couple. Mrs. Markle was a woman of about thirty, while her husband was nearer fifty but he seemed to be as fond of young people as his wife. They were strangers in Dorfield, having settled there since the war, but already they had taken a place in the society of the town and

were looked upon as agreeable additions to the four hundred of Dorfield. Mr. Markle was engaged in the real estate business, which seemed to be thriving. To be sure, they lived in a small apartment, but it was in one of the best houses in town and, while they were not classed with the reckless spenders, they entertained frequently and in lavish style. The soft Persian rugs and exquisite paintings and etchings filled their apartment with harmony and beauty. There were cabinets of rare and wonderful curios, book-cases of first editions and carved furniture that looked as though it belonged in museums, so wonderful was it in design and finish.

CHAPTER II

A ROSE AND A SONG

As Mrs. Markle tripped up the steps of Colonel Hathaway's porch, where the girls were holding their sewing bee, one could but wonder why Irene MacFarlane should have been chary of her praise of anyone so altogether charming. She was perfect from the tips of her tiny grey suede shoes to the hat which shaded the piquant face at just the right angle. Nature had not only endowed Hortense Markle with a rare and glowing beauty but hers also was the gift of knowing exactly how to clothe that beauty. Every portion of her costume was as carefully thought out and planned by the little artist as had been the rarest of her rugs by some Hindu weaver or the most choice of her pictures by some famous painter. She delighted in soft greys and pastel shades which set off to perfection her rich, almost oriental, beauty.

“She knows perfectly well if she wore brilliant colors they would be becoming but would

coarsen her," Irene said to herself as she watched the charming little lady mount the steps, her arm around Mary Louise, who had hurried down the walk to meet her new friend.

"Oh, why didn't you girls let me know you were here sewing? I have been so lonely sitting up in my stuffy little apartment all alone. Only think, I might have been here all morning having such a pleasant time with all of you! I believe you think I am too old for you."

This she said so gaily, giving such a ringing laugh at the thought of anybody's thinking she was too old, that all the girls joined in, even Irene. Irene had wondered at herself as much as Mary Louise had. For the life of her she could not account for a feeling of antipathy that she felt for both Mr. and Mrs. Markle. It was not like her to take unaccountable dislikes, or even accountable ones. Her theory of life was to live and let live and her sympathy embraced all mankind, good and bad alike. Why could she not find room in her heart for this charming, beautiful young woman whose manner to her had always been gracious and kind?

"It is just a case of Dr. Fell," Irene said to herself.

“ ‘ I do not like thee, Dr. Fell—
The reason why I cannot tell;
But one thing 'tis, I know full well:
I do not like thee, Dr. Fell.’ ”

She determined, however, to keep her unreasonable sentiments to herself and at least to be as cordial and polite to Mary Louise's guest as she could manage to be.

“ We sew here almost every morning,” said Irene. “ We are helping to make Mary Louise's trousseau.”

“ How charming! Please let me help. Sewing is my one accomplishment.”

A thimble was found to fit the tapering finger and Mrs. Markle was soon as busy as the others in their task of love.

“ I wish I could sew better,” exclaimed Elizabeth Wright. “ I am going to have to pick out this foolish little flower that I have been trying so hard to make look as though it were growing on Mary Louise's camisole. There now! I've cut a hole in it! Oh, what a stupid I am! Right in the middle of the garment and this crepe de chine costs 'steen dollars a yard! Oh me, oh my! I told you girls I ought to go into business and not try to be so girlie.”

“Let me see if I can’t set you right,” said Mrs. Markle. “I am a past mistress at patching.” She took the garment from the unresisting hands of Elizabeth, quickly ripped out the crooked flower that poor Elizabeth had been vainly endeavoring to embroider on it and then, with deft sure fingers and a needle so fine one could hardly see it, she inserted an invisible patch where the cruel scissors had slipped. This needle she took from the lining of her velvet hand bag. It was much smaller than any found in the work boxes of the girls. Irene remarked on it.

“I never can get such tiny needles as that,” she said. “Perhaps if I could manage to shop for myself I might find one.”

“Oh, I’ll be delighted to give you some!” cried the older woman. “I am like you: I simply cannot sew with a spike.”

“That will be very kind of you,” said Irene, wishing she could be as pleasant to Mrs. Markle as Mrs. Markle was to her and hoping that her sentiments were not voiced in her words. She was trying hard to get over her feeling of dislike and distrust for the beautiful little lady but, even though she should give her a thousand fairy needles, she knew that she could not like her.

She watched the process of putting in the invisible patch. It was the most perfect piece of needlework she had ever seen and Irene herself did all but perfect work.

“How on earth do you do it?” she exclaimed.

“Why, one cannot tell where the patch is!”

The girls crowded around to see the little patch. If Irene did not know how to do it it must be wonderful indeed.

“It is quite easy when once you learn,” laughed Mrs. Markle. “I learned at the convent in Paris. First be sure and match the warp and woof of your material. It takes sharp eyes, but one thread out of place is fatal. Then use a bit of raveled crepe de chine for your thread and the rest is all plain sailing. Practice makes perfect. Now shall I embroider a rose over the place?”

“Oh, do!” cried Elizabeth, “and please somebody give me some plain basting to do on gingham aprons if the bride is to have such things.”

“Don’t you have to have a pattern for your rose?” asked Irene, reaching for her workbag. “I have some patterns here, very pretty ones, and some tracing paper.”

“ No, thank you! I just make up as I go along — ”

“ Like the wonderful rug weavers of India,” cried Alora. “ Do you sing a song as you go and weave the music into your work as they do, Mrs. Markle? ”

“ Why, yes, sometimes! But please don't call me Mrs. Markle. I'm not so terribly old and you don't know how I long to have someone call me by my own name, Hortense.”

“ Doesn't Mr. Markle? ”

“ He calls me Pet. Awfully silly, but he always has. I think it would be so pleasant if all of you girls would just call me Hortense. Won't you? ” She smiled so brightly on the ring of girls grouped around her that they succumbed to her charms. Even Irene melted a bit and decided that perhaps she did like the little lady a tiny bit after all. Anyone who could put in an invisible patch must be a desirable acquaintance.

“ You see it has been many years since I have been with my own people and so few ever call me anything but Mrs. Markle. It is very lonesome to have persons so formal.”

As she talked she had been deftly outlining a

rose on the front of the camisole, drawing it with needle and thread with strokes as sure as those of a great flower painter. Then choosing her silk from Irene's basket she began to embroider. Irene was spellbound in her attention. The first petal took form under the flying fingers as though by magic.

And then the woman sang. It seemed hardly fair that anyone so beautiful and clever as Hortense Markle should also have a voice, but voice she did have of a rich depth that thrilled her audience.

‘Gather ye rosebuds while ye may,
Old Time is still a flying:
And the same flower that smiles to-day
To-morrow will be dying.

The glorious land of heaven, the sun,
The higher he's a-getting,
The sooner will his race be run,
And nearer he's to setting.

That age is best which is the first,
When youth and blood are warmer;
But being spent, the worse and worst
Times still succeed the former.

Then be not coy, but use your time,
And while ye may, go marry:
For having lost but once your prime,
You may forever tarry."

"Lovely! Lovely!" cried the girls.

"I don't know that tune," said Laura Hilton, who had a sweet little voice of her own with a bird-like note and was ever in search of songs that would fit it. "I know the words, Herrick's, aren't they? But the tune is different from any I have ever heard."

"It has a kind of teasing quality," said Alora.

"The tune is my own," declared the singer.

"Then you can write music too!" cried Irene. This was surely a remarkable person for her to take an unreasonable dislike to.

"Not write it—just sing it. I don't know one note from the other except by ear," answered Mrs. Markle still busily embroidering.

"I think the tune was fine," put in Elizabeth, "but I can't hand a thing to the words. Always hammering on girls to get married! It sounds too like home to me. I bet anything old Herrick was as withered and dried up as a salt herring. Losing his own prime was nothing. He, as a

man, was perfectly sure that he was still attractive, married or unmarried — but the poor girls — it makes me more and more determined to get me a job.”

They all laughed heartily at Elizabeth's taking the song personally and Mrs. Markle was much interested in what the girl expected to do and how soon she intended to begin doing it.

“ I don't blame you at all for wanting to do something. I often feel myself I should like to but Felix is so opposed. He is away so much I could easily carry on some occupation besides home making. What are you thinking of doing? ”

“ I don't know. I can type but I don't want to be a stenographer, at least I don't want to be a man's stenographer. Somebody might think it was up to me to marry the creature. I'd like to have a shop — a kind of literary work-shop — where one could get manuscript typed; where budding authors could have their spelling corrected and their punctuation put to rights. I'm a queen bee on spelling and punctuation. I might even write obituaries and valedictories for the going and coming. I might combine a kind of clipping bureau with it for folks who like to see their

names in print. Of course I'd have to have a partner."

"The very thing!" cried Mary Louise. "A friend of mine, Josie O'Gorman, wants to come to Dorfield to settle and she could go in with you. Josie is financially independent, but she says she simply must do something. You know her father was the great detective. He died last month," she explained to Mrs. Markle.

"See, I have finished the rose!" Hortense interrupted and held it up for their inspection. It was so natural that one almost expected a fragrance to arise from it.

"But look! What is that on the edge of this petal?" cried Irene, who was bending over the embroidery entranced by its perfectness. "It looks like a tiny faded place."

"So it is! That is where the tune got woven into my picture.

'The same flower that smiles to-day
To-morrow will be dying.'"

"Oh!" was all Irene could say, but she began all over to hate Hortense Markle for suggesting fading flowers where Mary Louise's trousseau was concerned. "It wasn't kind! It wasn't kind!" she kept on saying to herself.

CHAPTER III

MATRON OF HONOR

“ We were speaking of Mary Louise’s wedding when you came in,” Alora said to Mrs. Markle.

“ And Danny’s!” put in Mary Louise.

“ Oh, of course, Danny’s! Danny may be a wonder but he doesn’t count much on his own wedding day. That day is the bride’s,” laughed Alora.

“ You are to have a church wedding, I fancy,” said Mrs. Markle.

“ No, we are to be married here at home. Grandpa Jim much prefers it and so do Danny and I.”

“ Oh, then of course it must be at home. Your house is large but the rooms do not open into each other for the best effect for a wedding. Why don’t you be married out of doors?” suggested Mrs. Markle. “ It would be lovely. The guests could stand all along these terraces or anywhere they chose and the bridal party could approach through the opening in that wonderful

old yew hedge. It would be a beautiful picture. I can see it now!" and she waved her hand towards the fine old sunken garden which was the pride of Colonel Hathaway and his granddaughter.

"The very thing!" exclaimed Elizabeth.
"Don't you think so, Irene?"

"It would be lovely."

"Grandpa Jim would like it a lot, I am sure," said Mary Louise.

"You are to have bridesmaids, of course," continued Mrs. Markle. "Let them dress in pastel shades of palest and softest hue and carry sweet peas."

"That will be great if we have different colors," put in Elizabeth. "I am crazy about being a bridesmaid, but I must say I am not crazy about going around with about seven twins for the rest of the summer."

"You are to have eight bridesmaids, then?" asked Mrs. Markle as she and her hostess went down to the garden to plan.

"Yes, eight besides my maid of honor," explained Mary Louise. "You see, I couldn't bear to leave out any of the girls."

"And who is the maid of honor?"

“ Irene MacFarlane! She is the very best friend I have in the whole world.”

“ But how can she be a maid of honor in a chair? ”

“ I don't know, but she must be. In the house she can roll around quite easily. I am not sure about it out of doors but, if she can't, we will abandon the idea of having it out in the garden.” Mary Louise spoke quite decidedly.

“ That would be a pity.”

“ Yes, but I must have Irene.”

Mary Louise had always said if she ever married she would have her dear friend as maid of honor and Irene had felt a fierce pride in the fact that she was chosen. She realized the moment the plan was suggested of having the ceremony out of doors that this honor was not to be hers. She could run her chair with great skill on smooth floors but she felt it would be awkward indeed to try to do it in the garden and then she felt that in some way she would mar the picture. She too could close her eyes and see the effect of the outdoor wedding with the old yew hedge as a background and the beds of old-fashioned flowers adding to the beauty of the scene; the bride in white and the eight brides-

maids in the pastel shades suggested by Hortense Markle.

“It will be beautiful and I must quietly get out of the picture,” Irene said to herself. It hurt her to think of it. The girl was sure she would never marry herself, nobody would ever want to marry such a poor little deformed person. She had settled that long ago, but it would have been pleasant to be the next one to the bride. Even that pleasure must be taken from her and she herself must be the one to put it away. She looked sadly after the girls as they trooped into the garden to join Mary Louise and Mrs. Markle.

“If she only had not suggested the outdoor wedding!” she sighed. “But I must not harbor resentment against Mrs. Markle. She is charming and so clever. Instead I must try to like her. I wish I could sew as well as she can.”

She picked up the dainty camisole whereon Hortense had embroidered the exquisite rose and examined it closely. She took from her basket a little magnifying glass she occasionally made use of in doing very fine embroidery. Through the glass she could see where the patch had been inserted.

“I must not look at people through a magni-

fyng glass," she mused. "If it magnified their perfections it would be all right, but it seems only to show up their faults. I have shown a poor spirit myself this morning, and if I turned the magnifying glass on my own soul, it would disclose many ugly patches and gashes." She put her hand over her eyes and offered a silent prayer for a just and contrite spirit.

When the girls came back from the garden, they found Irene with a smile on her sensitive face and on her lips a gay little tune she was humming.

"I do hope you have decided to have the wedding out of doors," she cried. "If it is out of doors, I can see it too, as I will be a spectator. From my chair I can see the procession as it comes through the yew hedge and follows the garden walk."

"But, Irene —" began Mary Louise.

"Don't but Irene me," laughed the girl. "As for bridesmaids: they are like the purple cow to me, 'I'd rather see than be one.' Let me be a kind of vestal virgin, stationed near the altar."

"But I have always said that I would have no maid of honor but you," declared Mary Louise, "and I won't."

“ You shall have to swallow your words then, my dear,” insisted Irene.

“ If not a maid, you might have a matron,” suggested Hortense.

“ Certainly,” agreed Irene.

“ Nobody could take the place of Irene,” objected Mary Louise.

“ But, honey, a place in a wedding procession is not a place in your heart,” whispered Irene, drawing her friend close to her.

“ I have heard brides say that, unless they have an attendant, the thing is hard to go through with,” said Hortense. “ Of course you might go on your grandfather’s arm, but it is not quite so picturesque as having all girls. Black coats, when all is told, are ugly affairs.”

“ Grandpa Jim would rather not be too much in evidence, I think. The truth of the matter is he is afraid he might get stage fright. He says it is hard enough on him to have to give me away. Will you be my matron of honor, Hortense? ”

“ But, my dear, you must have closer and dearer friends than I am among the young married people. Nobody who loves you more, but — ”

“ Please,” begged Mary Louise.

“ Why, of course! I feel more flattered than I can say.”

And so it was settled.

“ We must plan the dresses, making each color the one the wearer prefers. I must wear pale grey, as I am merely the bride’s shadow. I must not show much.”

“ And I want pink! ” cried one.

“ And I blue! ” said another. And so on until all the colors in the rainbow and some others were appropriated either by the girls present for themselves or for the absent members.

“ Suppose it rains! ” suggested Elizabeth.

“ But it couldn’t and it wouldn’t! ” cried Lucile. “ Not on Mary Louise’s wedding day.”

Irene was quietly gathering up her sewing things preparatory to her departure. As the girls discussed their bridesmaids’ dresses, she glanced at Hortense and could not help noting a kind of triumph in her bearing.

CHAPTER IV

JOSIE O'GORMAN

Detective O'Gorman's death while he was abroad on United States Secret Service brought sadness to the hearts of many, even to some of the criminals whom his almost uncanny powers had been instrumental in bringing to justice.

"A good thief has some respect for a good detective," one noted cracksman, who was serving his term in the penitentiary, was heard to say when the news came that his one-time enemy was no more. "There is pleasure in trying to circumvent a man like O'Gorman, but most of these so-called detectives have gone into the business because they have failed as life insurance agents. It is no fun trying to get ahead of them. They are too easy."

Little Josie O'Gorman mourned keenly the loss of her father. He had been everything to her and it was hard to feel that he was gone and she was never to see his dear, homely face again. Not that Josie thought his face was homely.

She considered his funny fat nose more classic than the one worn by the sculptured Adonis and much more fitting to follow a scent; and his round eyes that could narrow down to slits when he got on the right track in a big case were to the daughter more expressive than Wallace Reid's or any other movie hero's.

Crushed at first by the blow of his sudden death, Josie had felt that never again could she go about the business of living; but the girl came of sturdy stock and she knew too well that her father would have been disappointed in her if she had given up to the grief that was well nigh overwhelming her.

"I must do as he would wish me to do. He would never sit and mope," she declared to herself and immediately wrote to Mary Louise that she was thinking of coming to settle in Dorfield, as Washington was too sad for her right then.

"I am not going to stay with you, though, honey," she wrote. "But must have a place of my own. I'll engage in some business because I don't know how to be idle. I must hunt a partner and perhaps I might get a flat and go to housekeeping."

When Elizabeth Wright told Mary Louise of

her unrest and determination to leave the ranks of unproductive consumers, Mary Louise immediately thought of Josie and how well the two girls might hit it off together.

Josie came, a sad little figure.

“Sadder than she would be if she had on mourning,” Mary Louise said to herself as she embraced her friend at the station.

“I guess you expected to see me in mourning,” Josie said as they took their seats in Mary Louise’s car. “Somehow I’d like to have it on, but Father hated it so that I decided not to wear it. He used to say that people in dripping black simply exuded gloom and had no right to impose their sorrows an all around them. I must do what he wanted.”

“That’s a brave girl!” cried Mary Louise, holding her close for a moment before she started the car. “I think the war has changed people’s ideas concerning mourning. But you should have a gold star. Your father certainly was serving Uncle Sam just as much as a soldier.”

“That is what I think and so I have a gold star, but I wear it where it can’t be seen. It is just as much satisfaction to me and I can feel it shining on my heart. But tell me about your-

self! When are you and Danny going to begin to trot in double harness?"

"In six weeks! This is the fifteenth of April and we have set the first of June. I am so sorry you won't be a bridesmaid."

"Well, I will be one in spirit, but just now I can't quite make up my mind to go through with it in the flesh. When you wrote asking me, I was just as happy as could be that you wanted me, but I felt that I must not try. The fact that you did ask me though is shining on my heart just like the gold star."

"And now I believe I have a partner for you. I don't know just what you mean to do and neither does your partner, but she means to do something."

"Well so do I, and that makes a good beginning towards congeniality," laughed Josie.

"Have you any ideas?"

"A few!"

"So has Elizabeth Wright."

"Is that my partner's name? I know I shall like her. I always do like Elizabeths. I'm awfully funny about names. Some names I simply can't stand. Persons who have those names have to prove themselves to be worthy before I accept

them, while the ones who have the names I like have a hard time proving themselves unworthy. I try to have an open mind where names are concerned, realizing that it is no fault of the namee but of the parents."

"Did I have to prove myself worthy before you accepted me?" asked Mary Louise, amused as usual by her friend's whimsical way of looking at things.

"Not at all! Your name was one of my strongest reasons for coming to your rescue, hiring myself to Mrs. Conant as a servant so that I might guard your interests and prove your grandfather's innocence. I felt in my heart that the grandfather of a Mary Louise must be good."

"Well, your instincts were right that time. I believe really and truly that Grandpa Jim is the best man in the world."

"Now that my father is gone, I think maybe he is," said Josie earnestly.

The girls were silent for a while as they sped through the streets of Dorfield. Finally, Mary Louise spoke:

"What are your ideas for an occupation?"

"Of course, my work in life is unraveling

mysteries and I mean to be as clever a detective as my father's daughter should be, but I have an idea that the best way to succeed is to keep it dark. Now this is my plan: I want to have a shop of some sort where all kinds of persons will come, where I can get in touch with all conditions of folk and they will think I am just the shopkeeper and have no idea of my real calling."

"Oh, Josie, you are so clever!"

"Not a bit of it! Don't begin flattering me or I'll approach my work in the wrong spirit. Father always said one must have a humble and contrite heart or the fine points would slip by."

"What kind of shop were you contemplating?"

"Something quite different from any shop Dorfield now boasts. But you tell me what this Elizabeth was thinking of so she can get the credit if she deserves it. We may have had the same plans in mind. Ideas seem to be in the air like flocks of birds and the same ones or ones of the same family light on several persons at the same time."

"Elizabeth wants a literary work-shop, where one could get manuscript typed and corrected. She thought she might combine a clipping bureau

with it and even write articles for persons who had not the brains to do their own work. She says she could do obituaries and valedictories and club papers for aspiring females, also speeches for politicians. Elizabeth is very clever but comes of the stuffiest, most conservative family. The mother is one of those women who are work crazy but never want their daughters to raise their hands and the father is living about fifty years too late. Mrs. Wright would have been a wonder if she had had the outlook to go into business instead of wasting all her energies on cleaning and cooking and getting husbands for her daughters. Elizabeth is dead tired of being what she calls 'an unproductive consumer.' The taste she had of being at work and drawing a salary during the war has ruined her as far as taking her place in the family of daughters, all of them striving towards the matrimonial goal. Elizabeth is determined to break the bonds."

"Bully for Elizabeth! She sounds fine to me. I like the idea of the literary work-shop and clipping bureau. Does she know short-hand as well as typewriting?"

"I believe she knows it but has no speed, having just picked it up by herself."

“Better and better! She is the kind that picks things up by herself. When can I see my partner?”

“She will come to see you this morning. Elizabeth always wants to get what she is interested in going immediately. She is like her mother in some ways but a much more comfortable person to be with.”

They found Elizabeth Wright awaiting them when they arrived at Colonel Hathaway's residence.

“Please excuse me if I have come too soon, but I couldn't wait,” she cried as she came forward to embrace Mary Louise and shake hands with her future partner.

“You couldn't come too soon for me, but Josie may be tired after her long trip,” suggested Mary Louise.

“Not at all! I never let a trip tire me. My father used to say that it was onnsense for persons to get tired on a trip. ‘Just let the engine do the work and sit back and read and think and mix with your fellow passengers and you won't get tired. The persons who let a journey make them tired are usually the ones who feel somehow that they must help pull the cars.’”

Elizabeth laughed. Already she was liking this funny little friend of Mary Louise. What an amusing looking person she was! Her features were not plain, although certainly not beautiful. Her hair was decidedly red, her face freckled but with a healthy color which kept the freckles from being too apparent. Her eyes were her best points, although at times she could make those eyes as stolid and dim as a half-wit's. Her teeth were excellent, but as she usually laughed with her eyes one seldom saw her teeth. Elizabeth thought her face was interesting.

Josie O'Gorman was older than Mary Louise and her other friends, but there was something very youthful about her little figure and as she always dressed in misses' sizes and cuts she could easily have passed for seventeen, although she was at least twenty-two. She said she bought juvenile clothes because they fitted her small figure and because they were especially designed for boarding school girls who were late for breakfast and had no time to fool with hooks and eyes. Her favorite style of dress was a one-piece affair that slipped over her head like a middy blouse. It hung in straight pleats from yoke to hem, confined loosely at the waist by a

low hanging leather belt. Her headgear was always a straight brimmed sailor and her shoes of a broad-toed, low-heeled, sensible style. In the winter she wore blue serge in the morning, white serge in the evening and heavy white rajah silk for dress-up. In the summer, it was blue linen in the morning, white linen in the evening and linen lawn or crepe de chine for dress-up. Josie always looked fresh and well dressed, if not in the latest fashion, and she had to take no thought whatsoever concerning her apparel, not even as much as a man, since she had no collar button with which to contend and no stiff collars to be frayed out by heartless laundries. She could carry everything she possessed in a small wardrobe trunk with its convenient compartments for different garments. She always kept her clothes in her trunk whether she was at home or on a visit and a neat handbag ready packed with a change of linen and toilet articles in case of a sudden journey being sprung upon her. That was the result of her father's training.

Detective O'Gorman used to say: "If we are to track criminals we must be as ready as criminals and I am sure no thief or murderer worthy

of the name would have to stop and pack a grip to go on an enforced trip whether he knew he was hounded or not."

Josie desired above all things to be as much like her father as a young girl could be like a middle-aged man and she was bidding fair to succeed.

She constantly quoted her father, who had been full of wise saws. Sometimes Josie gave him credit for sayings that were well known to have belonged either to Solomon or Good Richard, but the devoted daughter was sure they had originated with Detective O'Gorman and those other two less brilliant gentlemen had plagiarized his wisdom.

"Now tell us, Josie, what are your plans for a shop?" suggested Mary Louise after Elizabeth and Josie had finished sizing each other up. "I have told Josie what you are contemplating, Elizabeth."

"My idea is a kind of higgledy-piggledy place, a place where one can get anything under heaven that is needed, because, if we happen not to be carrying it in stock, we will take orders for it if there is time to wait for an order or we will go out and shop for it if the thing can be bought

in Dorfield. We will bargain to furnish anything from strawberries in January to information concerning the identity of the doorkeeper in Congress who dropped dead when news came of Cornwallis' surrender. I know of a shop called 'The Serendipity Shop.' That, I believe, is the name Leigh Hunt gave to a place where one could go in and find out anything. But that has too erudite and obscure a meaning for us, who mean to be quite plain and simple. I think Higgleddy-Piggleddy Shop would be a grand name for us. Don't you? ”

“ Splendid! ” was the verdict of both her listeners.

“ I have perhaps the most complete collection of encyclopedias and dictionaries outside of the Congressional Library. Father was daffy about exact information and had systematically collected all books that professed to contain such information from 'Inquire Within, 3,700 Facts for the People,' to the latest and most down-to-date dictionary of war slang. These books will be invaluable. ”

“ Will you let our customers — clients — patients — whatever we will call them, have access to these books? ” asked Elizabeth.

“Not on your life! No more than doctors let us read their books for fear we might cure ourselves and they would be minus fees.”

CHAPTER V

THE WRIGHT FAMILY

The Wright family was up in arms over Elizabeth's decision "to go into trade." That was the way they expressed the fact that their daughter and sister was going to open up the Higgledy-Piggledy Shop with the unstylish girl from Washington.

"What will people say?" questioned Gertrude.

"I haven't a doubt it will simply ruin her chances for ever having a proposal," said Annabel. "Elizabeth is pretty enough, but she is so peculiar. Men don't like peculiar girls."

"She is so selfish to be doing such a silly thing," complained Pauline. "I just know people will get mixed and think Margaret and I are the ones."

"Well, it is too bad," put in Mrs. Wright, as she bustled in. "I am sure I have done my best to make all of you girls have a good time and, now the war is over, I hoped Elizabeth would be

contented to make her debut in society. Of course, I could put my foot down and say she shouldn't, but I hate to take issue with her — ”

“ Yes, and if you do she will simply go off and live with that funny little Miss O'Gorman, who never had a beau in her life, I could wager anything. What does Father say? ” yawned Margaret, who was busily engaged in putting an extra polish on her already highly glazed finger nails.

“ Say about what? ” asked Mr. Wright as he entered the room, his arms laden with pamphlets with which he was planning to spend a happy morning.

“ Say about Elizabeth's crazy plan to open up a foolish shop, ” explained Margaret.

“ Well, it seems strange to me that one of my blood should engage in mercantile pursuits. There has never been a member of the family that I know of, in trade. What is the nature of her undertaking? ”

Mr. Wright always used the longest words he could think of. The strange thing was he did not often seem to have to think of them but had them on his tongue's end.

“ As far as we can make out they are going

to sell everything from pins to pianos," said Gertrude.

"She will have to stop when the warm weather sets in, because I have taken the lake cottage for two months, July and August, and expect to close up the house in town," declared Mrs. Wright briskly.

"Why don't you get it a month earlier and force Elizabeth to come in June?" suggested Pauline.

"Good idea! I could get it quite cheaply for June, they may even let me have it for almost nothing, as June is an off month for the lake and it is better for property to have a tenant than not, especially where one takes such good care of a place as I am sure I try to do. I shall have to ask you girls to go in the parlor or dining room this morning, I am going to have this room thoroughly cleaned. The books must be dusted and the walls wiped down. The windows were washed last week, but it would not hurt them to be washed again. I may have the rug beaten too."

"Oh, Mother, for pity's sake, the library is clean enough!" complained Annabel. "Why don't you let us stay put?"

“Not at all! I work my fingers to the bone trying to make a comfortable home for your father and you girls and all I ask of you is to move to another room.”

Mr. Wright had settled himself on the sofa with his catalogues and was loath to move, but move he must, as a sullen colored maid came in with broom and rags and ladder and pail.

“I ain’t never wucked fur no lady possessed with sech a clean devil befo’,” she grumbled as she began to dismantle the room. “Th’ ain’t no wonder th’ ain’t no nap lef on this here cyarpet. It done had all the nap breshed off’n it. It’s a wonder the winders don’t come inter holes with all the washin’ they gits. Yo’ maw don’t let the dus’ git laid befo’ she’s a stirrin’ it up again,” she said to the girls as they reluctantly trailed from the room.

The abused creatures had hardly settled themselves in the parlor when Mrs. Wright called from upstairs:

“Girls, come on up here! Miss Pinkie and I are ready to try on those shirt waists. All of you come, as we are ready for all of you.”

Miss Pinkie was the sewing woman engaged spring and fall for a month at the time to get

the family in order. Mrs. Wright sewed with her and occasionally one of the daughters condescended to make buttonholes or put a little finishing handwork on the garments. Miss Pinkie was a good sempstress but undervalued her acquirements so that she was willing to work for very little money. Mrs. Wright with her usual efficiency did all the cutting and fitting, although Miss Pinkie was quite capable of doing it herself.

“Heavens! Mother won’t let us sit still a minute,” complained Pauline.

“Sometimes I think Elizabeth shows her sense to get out of it all,” whispered Margaret to Gertrude, but Gertrude looked so shocked at her younger sister that Margaret declared she was just fooling. It did not seem very hard lines to have to go upstairs and stand to have shirt waists fitted on one, but the idle Wright girls felt it to be. How much happier they would have been if their mother had seen fit to have them make their own clothes, but that lady thought she was doing everything in her power to make her children contented in working for them from morning until night. It was much easier to sew for them than to teach them how to sew.

“ I need more buttons,” said Mrs. Wright briskly as the daughters entered the sewing room. “ Are you going out this morning, any of you girls? ”

“ We had not planned to go. We aren't dressed for the street,” drawled Gertrude. “ We were up late last night at the dance.”

“ Well, never mind, then! I can get them myself. I am afraid you would not get the right size anyhow,” was the mother's cheerful acceptance of her daughter's selfishness. “ It won't take me a minute to get dressed and I can market for to-morrow while I am down town. I think I'll step in and see how that foolish Elizabeth is getting on while I am near the building.” Her curiosity was as strong as her disapproval.

“ Oh, let's all of us go! ” exclaimed Pauline. And so the four who were too weary to change their dresses to go buy buttons went gayly off to prepare themselves to visit their foolish sister in what they considered her degrading stronghold.

“ I'll see the agent and engage the cottage at the lake for June, while I am down town,” said Mrs. Wright as she bustled into her street clothes after having fitted the shirt waists and

given Miss Pinkie minute directions as to how to sew them up.

Mrs. Wright and her daughters made a handsome group as together they walked down the street. The mother had been a very pretty girl and still was a good looking woman, although she had no time to give to her own appearance. She spent all the money and time that could be spared on beautifying her daughters. Her object in life was to marry them well and it was said by the knowing ones of Dorfield that she kept a list of the eligible young men of the town and carefully cultivated them in degree according to their eligibility.

“Who was that young man who bowed to you just now?” she asked Pauline sharply. “I never saw him before.”

“He’s a friend of Danny Dexter’s. I met him last night at the dance. He’s on a newspaper, I believe.”

“What newspaper,”

“The Recorder. He dances divinely.”

“You did not tell me his name.”

“I don’t know it.”

“Weren’t you introduced?” she asked, shocked.

“ Oh, yes, but I didn't catch his name. It was kind of Frenchified in sound.”

“ Well you had better find out. He looks quite nice. We might ask him to call and then have him down to the lake for a week end. We must not go to the lake before Mary Louise Burrows's wedding. I would not have you girls miss it.”

“ I don't believe for an instant she intends to ask any of us but Elizabeth, who has to be asked as she is bridesmaid,” said Gertrude.

“ Not ask you! Absurd! You can just leave that to me. Of course, I know she is supposed to have only her intimate friends and all that, but Danny Dexter knows every man in Dorfield and they are sure to be there.” Quite cheerfully the Wright girls were willing to leave it to her, for they felt sure it would come out all right with such a major general maneuvering for them.

The buttons were bought; the next day's marketing done; the real estate agent interviewed and the cottage at the lake engaged for June at a bargain; and then the cavalcade started for the old building where Josie and Elizabeth had rented a room which they were rapidly converting into a Higgledy-Piggledy Shop.

“ It all seems so vulgar,” commented Pauline,

as with raised skirts she tripped up the far from clean stairs.

“Not even an elevator,” from Gertrude.

“I’d like to come down here and scrub this place!” exclaimed Mrs. Wright.

“Well, for Heaven’s sake don’t!” cried Annabel. “It is bad enough to have one’s sister keeping a shop without having one’s mother scrubbing one.”

They all of them laughed at Annabel’s rueful countenance and, without knocking, opened the door and walked into the Higgledy-Piggledy Shop.

CHAPTER VI

THE HIGGLEDY-PIGGLEDY SHOP

It was well named! If higgledy-piggledy meant topsy-turvy I am sure there was no place on the globe so suited to that name. Our young would-be shopkeepers were busily engaged trying to get order out of chaos when the Wright family came bursting in on them.

“Heavens, what a mess!” cried Gertrude.

“Yes, but we are not ready for callers,” said Elizabeth rudely. It was a great irritation to her that her family should have turned up at that particular moment. Why couldn't they let her alone? After everything should be in order, she hoped they would come to see how clever their arrangements were, but just now it was too much to have them come poking in her place of business.

“We are very glad to have callers at any time,” declared Josie, who had been literally standing on her head in a packing box from which she had been unearthing the last of the

encyclopedias. The astute Josie had no idea of going into business with the ill will of anyone it was possible to avoid. She well understood how the Wrights looked upon this seemingly mad venture of Elizabeth's and she was anxious to do all she could to make things easier for her youthful partner.

“Our things have just come and we are trying to get them placed. Wouldn't you like me to show you how nicely we are to be fixed up?” she asked Mrs. Wright, in whose energetic countenance she saw some hope of interest.

“Why, yes, I should,” answered that lady, looking at Josie earnestly. She rather liked what she saw in Josie O'Gorman's countenance and certainly she could not help being interested in the girls' plans.

They had rented a long narrow room that covered the entire second floor of the shabby old building which was squeezed in between two sky-scrapers so tightly that it seemed to be gasping for breath. It had been spared destruction and improvement because of some hitch in the title and nobody had been willing to put money in a piece of property with an unfortunate name for getting its owner into trouble.

The consequence was that tenants were difficult to obtain and impossible to hold. Even real estate agents did not like to handle it. It was now in the hands of Mr. Markle and it was from him that Josie and Elizabeth had rented it. On the ground floor was a cleaning and dyeing establishment and the third floor was cut up into several rooms in which various small industries were carried on.

“It isn’t exactly what we wanted, but it was cheap and we can make it attractive, I believe,” Josie explained. “Thank goodness it has a fire place, not that that makes much difference right now but when next winter comes we will be glad of its cheeriness. We are planning to branch out in so many directions and this huge room will give us plenty of space in which to expand. In front we are to have our reception room and shop where we will display our wares. In the back I am to live and have kitchen, bedroom and bath. The middle part is to be our store room.”

“Are you to draw chalk marks to show which is which?” asked Mr. Wright, who was becoming more and more interested in her eager little hostess.

“I am to have partitions made in the back,

not to go all the way to the ceiling but just high enough to give me some privacy, and we are to have a huge portiere to divide the front shop from the store room and a smaller one cutting off our information bureau. The carpenters are going to work to-day on our partitions and the plumbers also are to install our bath tub, kitchen sink, gas stove, etc. My furniture is here and I intend to set up housekeeping immediately."

"Not in all this confusion?"

"But all this confusion will be worse confounded in a few hours. Mary Louise is coming in a few minutes and is bringing her own housemaid to help clean up and Danny Dexter is coming later in the afternoon with some of his friends to help."

Mrs. Wright began to feel sorry that she had not put off their visit until afternoon. Her ruling passion of having her daughters receive attention from young men was uppermost. She had not thought of this absurd shop as a place where desirable young men might come. At any rate, she intended to wait until Mary Louise should arrive and set the matter at rest in regard to all of her daughters being invited to the wedding.

While Mrs. Wright's ruling passion was the desire to have her daughters popular and married, another passion was almost as strong in her bosom and that was, cleaning up. What a field here presented itself! She was sure she could take hold of the disorder and get things cleaned and into place much better than could Mary Louise's maid. This Josie O'Gorman might be able to scrub and clean, but she was pretty sure her daughter Elizabeth could not; at least she had never seen her do more than dust the parlor at home.

"Here, child, give me that hammer! You don't know how to open a box," she said to Elizabeth, who was drawing nails from the top of a huge box of books.

"But I can," insisted Elizabeth; "at least I can learn."

"Pooh! Just let me do it." She grasped the hammer, but Elizabeth refused to release her hold.

"I am going to open the box," she announced firmly and proceeded to carry out the statement in spite of her mother's protests.

Amazement was depicted on the countenance of Mrs. Wright. Mary Louise arrived just then,

followed by a maid carrying a great basket of provisions.

“Luncheon!” said Mary Louise. “The carpenters and plumbers are to have lunch with us.”

“What fun!” exclaimed Josie and Elizabeth.

“I am sorry I can’t ask all of you to join us,” said Mary Louise, graciously taking in Mrs. Wright and the four daughters in her polite smile, “but I did not count noses, or rather mouths, for so many, and carpenters and plumbers do eat so much.”

“I think Elizabeth had better come on home with me,” said her mother a little stiffly. She did not want to do anything to anger Mary Louise, but she did think she was coming it a little strong to be asking one of her daughters to sit down and eat with the carpenters and plumbers. No doubt they were very worthy persons but hardly fit associates for such aristocrats as the Wrights.

“Indeed I am not coming home,” spoke up Elizabeth quickly. “I have a great deal to do this afternoon and you people at home might as well get used to the idea that I am going to be away from home every day and all day.”

“By the way, my dear,” said her mother

suavely, "I have rented the lake cottage for June, July and August, so you shall have to forego the pleasures of shop keeping for those months at least, as we are to shut the town house."

"Oh, I'll just stay with Josie then," said Elizabeth. "I have no idea of giving up my business every summer."

Mrs. Wright looked shocked. This was a new thing for a member of her family not to be accepting the arrangements she made for them. She would have to take this refractory Elizabeth in hand. In the meantime, she decided not to let her daughter remain to lunch with carpenters and plumbers unchaperoned. Besides, she did so want to get her finger in the pie of straightening up the debris incident to unpacking. She was sure Mary Louise's maid knew nothing at all about how to go to work to get the place cleaned up.

"Gertrude, you and Annabel and Margaret and Pauline can go on home. I am going to stay and help these girls get this place in order. I can get it done in no time and then I'll bring Elizabeth home with me."

She began by taking off her hat and jacket and

tying around her ample waist an old curtain that had been used in packing some of Josie's treasures.

Elizabeth was aghast for a moment. It looked as though her mother could not even let her run the little shop without her assistance. Where would be her highly prized independence if Mrs. Wright was to superintend everything and even do the cleaning? Why couldn't she let her alone? She looked appealingly at her sisters, who were reluctantly taking their departure. She caught Margaret's eye. Margaret was the sister who was a little like Elizabeth in that she occasionally rebelled, at least in spirit, against the state of inertia in which the very managing mother held her entire family. Margaret was quick of tongue too and not in the least in awe of her efficient parent.

"Now, Mother!" she cried, coming to Elizabeth's assistance. "I should think you could see with half an eye that you are not in the least needed here. For pity's sake, let Elizabeth have half a chance and stop butting in."

"What do you mean?" asked Mrs. Wright severely.

"I mean the girls were getting on perfectly

well here without your assistance and you have a sempstress at home and the library was in a sad state when we left and company is coming to supper — and — ”

“ Heavens! I forgot all about that! But this seems more important. I — ”

“ Oh, come along, Mother! ” insisted Margaret.

Mary Louise and Josie had retired to the back of the long room. They were intensely sorry for Elizabeth, but felt that it was something they could not very well interfere with. If her mother chose to come down to the shop to make a nuisance of herself, it could not be helped. After all she was Elizabeth's mother and must be treated with respect. It was with a feeling of intense relief that they saw her untie the old curtain and don her hat and coat.

“ I cannot stay to-day, ” she said as the two girls came towards her. “ I am extremely sorry, as I am sure I could have straightened you out in short order. You will never manage to get all of this trash cleared away, I am sure, unless you, Miss O'Gorman, are much more capable than Elizabeth. ”

“ I am not a bit more, but I am sure we can do it, ” declared Josie with a twinkle in her eye.

“I am much interested in your wedding,” went on Mrs. Wright, riveting her attention on Mary Louise. “In fact I am going to put off our going to the lake for a few days so that we will be able to attend. I am deeply disappointed not to be making Elizabeth’s bridesmaid’s dress myself, but since it was decided Mrs. Barlow was to make them all, of course, I had to give way to her. At least, I can have the satisfaction of making dresses for my other girls.”

“Oh — yes — of course!” Mary Louise managed to say. “I’ll be so glad to have you stay over.”

With a triumphant swoop Mrs. Wright gathered together her four daughters and ushered them out of the shop and down the dusty stairs. She was so delighted that her superior management had drawn from Mary Louise an invitation for her entire family to the highly desirable wedding reception that she forgot all about making a point about taking Elizabeth home for luncheon.

“I hate to leave her,” she said, after Pauline reminded her of her remissness, “but one can’t manage everything at once.”

“No?” questioned Margaret with a rising inflection that might have been taken for imper-

tinence by her mother had she not been taken up with gazing at an automobile full of young men stopping in front of the ramshackle building where the Higgledy-Piggledy Shop was coming into being.

“How do you do, Mr. Dexter?” she said graciously, as the young man who was driving the car raised his hat.

“I believe my soul they are going up to the shop,” she said with some irritation to her daughters. “And what are those things they are carrying? Why, it is plumbing! There is a bath tub and pipes right in the car with them. And look! The car behind them, also full of young men, is bringing a gas stove.”

“And there is Billy McGraw driving a lumber wagon!” exclaimed Gertrude.

Billy McGraw was known as the richest young man in Dorfield, the richest and the best dressed, and to see him in khaki trousers, evidently left over from his recent army experience, and olive drab sweater on top of a load of lumber was too much for the curiosity of the Wrights.

“What can it mean?” wondered Annabel.

“It means that those are the carpenters and plumbers who are to lunch at the shop,” laughed

Margaret. "Now aren't you glad you didn't drag Elizabeth away by the hairs of her head?"

"Well, well!" was all Mrs. Wright could answer, but when she got her breath after the surprise of finding out who the carpenters and plumbers were, she began with her usual ease to congratulate herself on her superior management.

"Sometimes we are wise just to leave things in the hands of Providence," she said.

"Yes, but I am afraid Provy would never have wormed out of Mary Louise an invitation to her wedding for the entire Wright family," said Margaret, pertly. "Some things we must attend to ourselves."

CHAPTER VII

THE CAPTAIN OF HER SOUL

What a gay luncheon was that given in honor of the carpenters and plumbers! The huge hamper produced such a variety of goodies and the quantity was quite up to the quality, so that Josie, while she was thankful that Mary Louise had not invited the Wrights to remain, nevertheless wondered at her statement that there was not food enough for the extra mouths. There seemed to be food enough for a whole regiment, but when she saw how Danny and his friends attacked the provisions, she realized that Mary Louise had not been guilty of the polite fabrication which she feared.

Empty packing boxes were turned over and covered with white crepe tablecloths and the table set with paper plates and drinking cups and Japanese napkins. Piles of sandwiches, dishes of salad and cold meats, pickles and olives were placed thereon and the center decoration consisted of a great Lady Baltimore cake.

“It’s the birthday cake for the Higgledy-Piggledy,” explained Mary Louise, sticking in the center a pink candle.

“But it’s not a year old yet,” objected Billy McGraw. “It’s just born, I should say.”

“But this is a Japanese spread, you see,” laughed Mary Louise, “with Japanese napkins and tablecloths, Japanese crab salad, and so forth, and you know the Japs count their kids’ birthdays from the time they are born and a new born Japanese baby is one year old.”

“I sit corrected,” said Billy. “When do we eat?”

“Isn’t he the limit?” asked James Drake, another one of Danny’s chums who had fought with him in the Dorfield regiment. “I have never seen the likes of Billy for feeding his face.”

“Some faces are meant to be fed,” suggested Bob Dulaney, the young newspaper man who had made such an impression on Margaret Wright the evening before at the dance. “Billy’s face is that kind of face, one crying out to be fed. I was sure relieved when the armistice was signed before Billy got a chance to catch a bomb in that mouth of his.”

Billy grinned delightedly at this sally. His mouth was large, but it was saved from ugliness by thirty-two perfect teeth.

“What’s the use of my coming safe out of the trenches if you shoot off your gab and hit me in my fatal spot, you old ink pot?”

Bob Dulaney was, like Danny Dexter, not a native of Dorfield, but he had fought with that regiment during the war and after peace was declared had drifted to the spot where so many of his friends lived and, having obtained a position on the Recorder, had decided to settle in the pleasant old town. He was a delightful young man, full of wit and humor and quite as popular with the regiment as Danny himself. He had joined Danny in his undertaking of doing the carpentering and plumbing for the girls, although he was well known to have absolutely no mechanical skill.

“The only nail Bob ever hits on the head is a verbal one,” Danny explained, “but he hits them all right. He has come along to help lift and carry, not that he is much on that, unless it is an argument which is to be carried on.”

“He is some lifter too,” suggested Tim Turner, one of the other young men.

“Right you are!” laughed James Drake. “Remember the old cock he lifted off the roost that night on the outskirts of Nancy?”

“Remember it! I’ll never forget it, and how he went back for the ding dong,” said Tim.

“What’s a ding dong?” asked Josie, innocently.

“That’s Tim’s French for turkey,” cried Billy. “He means dindon.”

“Oh,” blushed Josie, “excuse me!”

“Not at all,” said Tim, blushing in his turn.

“You mean you won’t excuse her?” teased Billy.

“I mean — I mean — Oh you dry up!”

“But when are we to eat?” persisted Billy.

“Laura Hilton and Lucile Neal were coming in to help us,” said Mary Louise. “They will be along in a minute. It is really not quite time. I’m sorry you are so hungry.”

“Sorry! I’m glad, terribly glad — in fact, I’m thanking God for the room that is in me,” declared Bob Dulaney. “But let’s wait for the young ladies if it takes all day.”

“I do wish Irene could have come,” sighed Mary Louise. “I hated to drive off without her. She looked so sweet and patient sitting

there in her chair and waving to me as cheerfully as though she expected to be one of the party. I left her in our garden where she loves to wheel her chair."

"Who is Irene?" asked Bob Dulaney.

"Oh, Irene MacFarlane is my very best friend," explained Mary Louise. "She is lame and has to spend all her waking hours in a wheel chair. She gets around remarkably well, but can't go anywhere unless there is an elevator, as stairs are too much for her. I do wish Josie and Elizabeth could have found a place on the ground floor, just for Irene's sake."

"I wish we could have," said Josie, "especially as Irene is almost a member of our firm. She is to take charge of our needlework department, but we shall have to carry everything to her."

"If you only had an elevator," sighed Mary Louise wistfully, the picture of her poor friend still in her mind, sitting so patiently in her chair, her fair smooth brow expressing peace and contentment when she must have felt some chagrin at Fate that she could not join the merry crowd at the Higgedy-Piggedy Shop.

"I forgot something important!" exclaimed

Danny suddenly. "Can you put off luncheon just about ten minutes?"

"Why, of course, if you must go," said Mary Louise. "Laura and Lucile will be here in two minutes," consulting her tiny wrist watch. "Lucile inherits too much efficiency from her father ever to be a minute late."

"Just a minute, sweetheart," Danny whispered. "I'll be back before you know I'm gone."

"I doubt that," smiled Mary Louise with a meaning understood by the happy Danny.

"Come on, Bob! You are the person who has to help lift. You come with me, please."

"More bath tubs or another gas stove?" asked Bob as he raced down the steps after Danny. The two young men jumped into the car and were off and around the corner on two wheels before an excited cop had time to read their fast disappearing number.

"My Mary Louise wants something and I'm going to get it for her."

"I heard her say she wanted an elevator. Is that what you are going to get?"

"Yes! When I can manage it, but that shall have to wait awhile until I can make my plans. Now I'm going to get Irene and you and I are

going to carry her upstairs. She doesn't weigh much."

"Fine! I reckon we could manage her between us even though she weighed five hundred. How did you happen to think of it?"

"Well, you see I feel so terribly unworthy of Mary Louise that I made up my mind that the only way I could make up in the least little teensy weensy bit to her for what she is and what she has done and is going to do for me in marrying me is never to let her express a single desire without trying to gratify it."

"Mighty noble of you, old fellow, but mightn't you spoil her if you persist in such a policy?"

"Spoil my Mary Louise! Why, man, she is pure gold. You could not spoil her if you tried. It would have been done long ago by her grandfather and her friends if it could have been done. She never wants anything for herself. It is always for others."

"Well, I am glad to be doing something for Miss Burrows, but I am pretty glad if we can help give the poor lame girl a lift too."

When Irene saw Mary Louise drive off in her car with Dilsy, the housemaid, sitting on the back seat holding the huge hamper of lunch on

her knees, it had taken all of her self-control not to show how, for the moment, the realization of her lameness, her handicap, was almost more than she could bear. She was able to keep an unruffled brow and to smile bravely, waving her handkerchief until the car was out of sight. Then she bowed her head and, in spite of her determination not to give way, she wept a few bitter tears.

She said to herself:

“ Irene MacFarlane, I am ashamed of you. The idea of your being such a baby. I know you are missing lots of fun, about the best kind of fun. I know you do miss a lot of things, but stop whining and think of all the wonderful things that do come to you. Think of the joy of having such a friend as Mary Louise. Think of the good health you have in spite of your lameness. Think of all the books you can read. Think of the pupils you get in music. Think of the new Victrola Mary Louise’s Grandpa Jim gave you. Think of all the wonderful records you own and all you are to own in future. Think of the mockingbird singing now in the hedge. Think of Uncle Peter and Aunt Hannah and how they love you. Powder your nose this minute

so they won't know you have been making a baby of yourself!"

She produced from her work bag a tiny vanity case and carefully powdered her exceedingly well formed nose, looking critically at herself the while.

"You are not a bad looking person, Irene MacFarlane, but if you turn crybaby you'll be hideous. Hold up your head and behave yourself if you have a spark of sense." She laughed and held up her head and then in a low tone recited Henley's *Invictus*.

"It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishment the scroll,
I am the master of my fate:
I am the captain of my soul."

She had begun in a whisper, but as the poem clutched her heart strings, as that particular poem always did, she spoke aloud. Her voice was singularly clear and musical. She had not noticed a car stopping at the entrance to Colonel Hathaway's nor did she realize that two young men were walking towards her across the close cut grass.

Danny and Bob took off their hats and stood with heads bowed while the girl finished her

impassioned recitation of that gallant hearted poem.

“ I felt kind of like I was in church,” Danny said to Mary Louise afterwards when telling her of the occurrence.

“ And so you were,” she had replied. “ Somehow the Divine which is within all of us is more apparent to the naked eye in Irene than in any one else I know. And where God is, there is his Church.”

When Irene looked around and saw the two young men, she was devoutly glad she had powdered her nose. Irene did have much of the Divine within her but she also had enough of the feminine to wish to appear at her best when good looking young men suddenly came upon her.

“ Oh! ” she exclaimed. “ How do you do, Danny? ”

“ I do finely except that I am starving and I can't eat until you consent to come eat with us. This is my friend Mr. Dulaney, Bob for short. And, Bob, this is our best friend, Miss MacFarlane, Irene for all times.”

“ How do you do, Bob for Short? ”

“ And how do you do, Irene for all Time? ”

He took the lame girl's hand in his and looked earnestly in her eyes. The skillful use of the vanity case did not deceive him. He saw in her eyes that she had been suffering, and that not many minutes before. Powdering her nose had not thrown dust in his eyes if it did fool Danny. He saw and understood. The calm peace of her brow he felt was but a camouflage worked by an indomitable will to conceal the anguish of soul the poor girl must often have suffered. His gaze was so kind that Irene felt she had made a new friend.

“Will you go?” asked Danny. “Lunch in the shop awaits us.”

“But I can't get up stairs,” faltered Irene. “You see, there is no elevator.”

“Yes there is — a human elevator like this,” and grasping wrists the young men formed what children call a basket and stooped invitingly in front of Irene's chair. “Mary Louise is sad without you and you know we can't let Mary Louise be sad.”

“So are we all, at least so am I, now that I have seen Irene for all Time. Put on your hat and come on, please do,” Bob entreated.

“But I am too heavy.”

“Heavy! Why we have carried in a porcelain bath tub and a gas range. I am no good except to carry on,” insisted Bob. “Must I tell anyone you are gone?”

“No, I live right next door, but Aunt Hannah is out and she will know I am with Mary Louise if I’m not at home.”

“Here is your hat, so tie it on,” he said, taking a pretty garden hat from the back of Irene’s chair. “What a nice hat! I certainly do like hats that have some *raison d’etre*. Now this hat really shades and still one can see under it,” he laughed, peeping under the brim and, without any by your leave, he stooped and picked Irene up in his strong arms and started for the car.

“We don’t need a basket just now, I can tackle this burden alone. Danny, you can climb in and get up steam.” Tenderly he deposited Irene on the back seat and got in beside her and away they speeded for the postponed luncheon.

“I think it is great for you to pick up and come without even having to fluff up your hair or change your dress,” Bob said, looking admiringly at the neat little lawn frock worn by his companion.

The first thing one noted about Irene MacFar-

lane was her exquisite neatness and freshness. Her hair was soft and abundant and the glossy coils gave evidence of much brushing. Her complexion was clear and, while not rosy, still there was a soft glow of health in the oval of her cheeks. No longer was the lame girl delicate but, under the watchful care of Aunt Hannah and Mary Louise, she had thrown off the fragility of her early girlhood and now could boast of almost perfect health. Of course, her form of exercise was restricted, but what gymnastics she could do she did religiously. The consequence was in those slender arms and well formed shoulders there was a great deal of strength and under the artistic tapering of her fingers there was concealed a grip of steel. The lines of her figure were good. Nature had meant her for a "perfect woman, nobly planned," but the disease which had attacked her in infancy had withered and enfeebled the lower limbs.

Irene's clothes were of extreme simplicity but her skill with a needle was manifest in the well fitting frocks which she pressed herself with the help of a lap-board and an electric iron. There was never a wrinkle in Irene MacFarlane's dress, but nobody ever saw her fussing over her

clothes. When she arose in the morning, she dressed for the day. Mary Louise used to say her friend reminded her always of a narcissus flower, not the hot-house kind but the ones that came up year after year in Grandpa Jim's old-fashioned flower beds.

CHAPTER VIII

THE ORCHID BROOCH

“Why don’t we begin on the eats?” demanded Billy McGraw. “I am starving in the sight of plenty.”

“He is always that way,” said Tim Turner. “Ever since the time in the trenches there has been no satisfying Billy. Bet anything the trenches will be filled up and leveled over before Billy is filled up.”

“Well, I hope they will be leveled over before I am,” laughed Billy, good-naturedly. “It’s so Miss Wright, I can even eat beans and stew, two things at which most of the returned soldiers balk. Still no one answers me—why do we wait?”

“We are waiting for Danny,” blushed Mary Louise. “He had to leave for a few moments.”

“Tut, tut! Don’t begin by spoiling him.”

“But you couldn’t spoil Danny,” insisted his loyal little fiancée. “I don’t know what he went

out for, but I am sure he had some unselfish reason.”

“ You can’t spoil me either,” pleaded Billy.

“ Any more than you can gild the lily or paint the rose. You are already in a state of decomposition,” put in Tim.

“ Somebody take pity on me and feed me! Danny may be gone a year or so. He often goes away and doesn’t return. Even now he may be eating at a restaurant — ”

“ Here, here’s a sandwich! ” said Elizabeth Wright. “ Here are two sandwiches and a chicken leg.”

“ Gee! You are a nice girl,” cried Billy. “ About the nicest girl I know. You’ll be even nicer if you sit over here by me while I get on the outside of this ambrosia.”

He looked at Elizabeth Wright with a feeling of real interest. Up to that moment he had only regarded her as one of the Wright sisters with the managing mother of whom he lived in holy terror. Being an exceedingly well off young man, he was on Mrs. Wright’s list with triple stars as one of the most eligible possibilities in Dorfield. He had felt that the Wright girls were quite as eager for his attentions as their mother,

but this Elizabeth seemed to be different from the rest somehow. She did not seem to care whether he paid her attention or not. To be sure, she fed him, but it was with the compassion she might have shown a hungry dog, and when he asked her to sit down by him on the window seat while he ate the purloined sandwiches and chicken leg, she declined, saying she must help Josie unpack and had no time to watch the animals feed.

“Cruel!” he murmured through a muffling tomato sandwich. He could not help smiling to think how Mrs. Wright would have been shocked at a daughter of hers refusing even such a simple invitation as watching a desirable parti eat.

Billy McGraw had been in a fair way to become spoiled with all the money he could spend. He was an only child, with a doting mother of his own and all the managing mammas in Dorfield reaching out after him for their daughters. But the war had come just in time to save him not only from the managing mammas but from himself and the inevitable spoiling that wealth and self-indulgence was sure to bring him. He had enlisted as a private at the first call of his country and the training he had received in the ranks

was to prove of life-long benefit to him. His was a lovable nature and it was hardly his fault that he had been born with a silver spoon in his mouth, but it was much to his credit that when the test came he was able to dispense with that same silver spoon and could manage to stomach the army beans often without even the formality of a fork. Now that the war was over he had returned to Dorfield with more purpose in his life. He had realized it was up to him to work in spite of his wealth and, having some mechanical skill, he had applied to the Neal Automobile Factory for a job with the determination of learning the business from the beginning. The consequence was he was enjoying his short Saturday as much as any workman in Dorfield. Lunch with a bunch of interesting girls would fully repay him for the job of carpentering and plumbing that Danny Dexter had mapped out for him for the afternoon.

“Here they are!” he shouted, peering down from the window, and in a moment Danny and Bob arrived with Irene borne between them in their improvised basket.

“Oh, Danny! You darling!” cried Mary Louise, rushing forward and embracing Irene, who sat smiling like a queen on her throne.

“ Here, sit here, Irene, in the seat of honor at the head of the packing box.”

“ Wasn't it lovely of them to come for me? ”

“ No lovelier than for you to come with us,” said Bob Dulaney in an undertone.

Laura and Lucile had arrived exactly on time and immediately the feast began. There was so much hilarity that the cleaning and dyeing establishment below began to wonder what manner of industry was to be conducted above them and some of the roomers on the third floor crept down and peeped in the door to see what all the fun was about.

In the midst of the luncheon, Mrs. Markle came tripping up the steps.

“ Oh, please excuse me, I had no idea of interrupting a party,” she said. “ I merely wanted to see Mary Louise for a moment and went by her home and was sent here by her darling old colored butler.”

“ Oh, but you are not interrupting, Hortense,” declared Mary Louise, drawing her new friend into the room and introducing her to Josie and some of the young men with whom she was not acquainted. She knew most of the persons seated around the packing boxes.

“You must sit down and have some lunch,” said Josie hospitably. She looked keenly at the new arrival and evidently what she saw pleased her, as she smiled engagingly, making room for Hortense at her own right hand.

Indeed it would have been a critical person who would not have conceded that Hortense Markle was a delightful picture on that pleasant Saturday in May. Her gown was, as usual, exquisite. It was mauve and of soft material that clung to her shapely form. Her hat, a small toque, was formed of orchids and her one ornament was a brooch of wonderful workmanship. It was an orchid of rare beauty made of gold and enamel with a large diamond shining like a dew drop from its centre.

She took her seat, remarking as she did so that, since she had run in on them, she felt sure she would make less disturbance by sitting down than by making all the male guests stand while she transacted her business with Mary Louise.

“She is a lady of discrimination,” declared Billy McGraw to Elizabeth, by whom he had found a seat. “I know you think I am insatiable, but please take another sandwich and make out it is for yourself and then slip it to me. It is

working in the factory that makes me so hungry. Sometimes I get empty enough to chew a rubber tire.”

“What a pretty woman!” said Bob Dulaney to Irene, by whose side he had found a seat and to whom he had been talking steadily during the gay luncheon.

“Yes, she is lovely,” said Irene, hoping devoutly her tone of voice was not divulging the feeling of something akin to hate that she could not help nursing for the dainty little newcomer, but, try her best, she could not put into her answer the enthusiasm that she wished to. Bob looked at his companion keenly.

“What’s up!” he asked himself. “Whatever it is, I’ll bet Irene for all Time is in the right. She doesn’t like the pretty lady and I wonder why.” But he said nothing to let Irene know he had fathomed her feelings in the matter.

“Excuse me,” said Billy McGraw, whose eyes showed plainly the admiration he felt for Mrs. Markle, “but do you know I think that’s the most beautiful breast-pin I ever saw except one I saw like it once.”

“Oh, I didn’t know there was one like it in the world,” said Mrs. Markle. “I declare these

artists are an unreliable lot. My husband had this made for me by an old goldsmith in Munich. It was after his own design. Poor Mr. Markle worked on it for days and days and took such delight in the fact that it was to be the only thing of its kind in the whole world. Now that wretched old goldsmith has no doubt duplicated it."

"The one I speak of was made at Tiffany's. Of course, it too was supposed to be unique. Jerard Thomas had it made for his wife. I fancy old Jerry didn't do the designing, though, for he is more of an adept on Wall Street reading the ticker than he is drawing orchids. I should like to see it closely if you wouldn't mind," he pleaded. "I have a perfect passion for finely wrought gold and enamel."

"Oh, I'm so sorry," answered Mrs. Markle, blushing a bit, which made her even lovelier than before, "but this brooch is a kind of keystone to my costume. You girls will understand, I know," and she looked appealingly at the females. "Of course, mere man doesn't know how a woman puts on her frock and then pins it at exactly the right place. I know it doesn't show, all this care we take, but I am sure, if we didn't take the care and if we put our brooches in the wrong place and

at the wrong angle and had our gowns too tightly drawn up in front or too much open, then you would note the difference. I must confess that, when I dress, I go to work with a certain reverence, the kind of reverence a painter feels for his palette and canvas.”

“ Well, far be it from me to ruin the picture,” laughed Billy. “ And let me do reverence to the artist,” bowing low. “ It was stupid of me to look at such perfection and to ‘ consider the lilies ’ just as though somebody had not been toiling and spinning to bring forth so much beauty.”

“ I know you think I am foolish,” said Mrs. Markle, blushing again.

“ Indeed we don’t, Hortense, we think you are exactly right not to ruin the effect of your lovely gown,” put in Mary Louise. “ I know just exactly how it is. Sometimes I have a horrid time getting myself to look right and nothing would make me undo the work.”

Everybody laughed at this, as it was a well known fact among Mary Louise’s friends that she spent less time in front of the mirror than any pretty girl ever did. Being blessed with wavy hair that arranged itself, she had nothing to do but coil it in a low knot at the nape of

her neck. She had many tastefully chosen gowns but they must be easy to get into with no complications of hooks and buttons to madden her. She often changed her dress on the fly trusting to luck that she was all right. And she usually was.

“Heavens above! I didn't mean to get in bad. Please, Mrs. Markle, forgive me. It has actually taken my appetite away. I believe everybody here is down on me,” moaned Billy.

“Not at all, Mr. McGraw, and to show that I am not I'll ask you to come call on us at our apartment and then you can see my little breast-pin to your heart's content.”

“Thank you! Thank you! Now I believe I will have another piece of cake. My appetite is restored,” grinned Billy.

Bob Dulaney looked thoughtfully at Irene while the above conversation was carried on. His eye fell on the brooch at her throat, a pretty little enameled violet, as modest as the model from which it was taken and as unassuming as its wearer. He wondered if Irene could take off her pin without upsetting her costume. He smiled at the thought. On Irene's smooth brow was a slight pucker and in her honest clear eyes he could detect a slight suggestion of scorn. It passed

immediately and her usual placid expression returned, but the young man wondered again what the lame girl had against the beautiful Mrs. Markle and if she had any reasons for what he felt was a distrust of the fair stranger. He looked up and caught a twinkle in the eye of Josie O'Gorman. As though conscious that someone was catching her twinkling when she had no idea of letting anyone onto the fact that she was amused, Josie immediately took on the dull fish-eyed expression which was the despair of her friends.

“Umhum!” said Bob Dulaney to himself. “These girls are up to something, at least that funny red-headed one is.” And having a nose for news, an essential to every good newspaper man, he began to go over the situation in his mind.

“Enter a beautiful stranger, known to most of the company! Immediately Irene, who seems to be all kindness and loveliness, shows what might almost be called temper, except that it was so carefully kept in that one could hardly see it. The beautiful stranger refuses with the utmost tact to take off her breast-pin, giving what seemed a good excuse and again Irene's fair brow is clouded and the little red-headed girl who is

going to help keep the Higgledy-Piggledy Shop is plainly amused, even delighted, but does not want anybody to know how she feels. A mystery is a mystery and, even though it prove nothing more than some kind of girlish foolishness or jealousy, me for the solving of it!"

CHAPTER IX

THE BOOK OF CRIMINALS

The carpenters and plumbers were soon busy with their tasks. The old building rang with the sound of hammer and saw. The partitions for bedroom, kitchen and bath were up in an inconceivably short time with the help of the tongue and groove sealing which had been cut the right length at the lumber yard under Danny's directions. The ready-made doors were hung and the bath and small gas range put into place by the muscular Bob and connections made by those more expert in pipe fitting.

"It has been finished so rapidly it is almost like the little house Peter Pan built Wendy," laughed Elizabeth.

"It is lovely," said Lucile, "but I'd be afraid to sleep in a room that had no top to it. Just think how easy it would be for burglars to crawl over the partitions and run off with the family plate!"

"But there is no family plate and what there

is will be out in the shop and not in my bedroom. Our bedroom, I should say, as I think Elizabeth will be spending the summer with me," laughed Josie. "I'm never afraid and besides I carry a small automatic for emergencies."

"You do? How amusing!" said Mrs. Markle, who had stayed on through the afternoon in spite of the fact that she had declared she had only a moment and wanted to see Mary Louise on some important matter which she forgot to divulge. She had been very charming and the young men, one and all, as Billy McGraw expressed it, "fell for her."

"Don't forget you are coming to call on us," she said to that young man, sweetly. "I want you and Mr. Markle to know each other. You are sure to like each other. I know you think I am foolish, but my husband is such a dear."

"Foolish because your husband is a dear?"

"I mean foolish to talk about it. I know it is not the thing in this day and generation for the wife to be too much in love with her husband, but I am hopelessly old-fashioned."

"You evidently don't know Dorfield, Mrs. Markle. It seems to be the style here for wives to be very fond of their husbands, but, of course,

Dorfield is a million years behind the times, thank goodness! ”

“ It is lovely to see a young man who feels that way about things. So many young men are inclined to be facetious on the subject. Sometimes they seem to think I am not worth talking to because I am so unfeignedly devoted to my husband. Of course, I could have a much gayer time if I could disguise my feelings, but I can't do it. They seem to think that, because Mr. Markle is so much older than I am, I must not be sincere in my protestations of affection. How absurd they are! ”

“ Your protestations? ”

“ No, I mean the young men. ”

Now the above conversation sounds very silly when put down in cold print, but when it was carried on by a wonderful beautiful young woman with a voice that thrilled one down the spinal cord with a certain rich cello quality, eyes that were so deep and glorious that Billy in looking in them had a kind of feeling he must catch hold of something to keep from falling in, and withal a friendly, sweet, girlish grace, it did not seem at all silly to Billy McGraw. He forgot all about what a nice girl Elizabeth Wright was and how

he had fully intended to ask her to go to the next dance with him, forgot why he had been asked to have lunch at the Higgledy-Piggledy Shop, forgot everything but how extremely lovely Mrs. Markle was and what a lucky dog her old husband was. Never having met that gentleman, he pictured him as tottering on the brink of the grave.

“Hey, Billy, pipe fitting going on! Come on and help! What do you think you are here for?” called Danny.

Mrs. Markle blushed again adorably.

“Oh, please go! I am mortified that I should have kept you chatting with me when they need you. You see sometimes I get just a teensy bit lonesome and long for the companionship of someone nearer my own age, just to talk foolishness to. My dear husband is so — so — deep and intellectual — not that you are not intelligent too — oh, ever so much so, but you don't mind stooping to my foolish prattle.”

Billy went off to fitting pipes with quite a glow around his generous, boyish heart.

“Poor little girl! I fancy she does get bored with such an old dry-as-dust as Markle must be. I'll see if I can't give her some good times.”

“ Now do tell me something of what your plans are in this delightful place,” said Mrs. Markle, joining Josie and Elizabeth, who were busily engaged in unpacking more and more books, which Irene, seated on a low chair, was dusting and placing on the shelves.

“ Well, this corner is our information bureau. These books are all of them different kinds of encyclopedias. Anybody who wants to know anything can come to us and we can come mighty near telling him or her what is wanted.”

“ Where did you get such a collection, child? It is wonderful.”

“ It was my father’s,” said Josie, with the look in her eyes that always came at mention of her father.

“ Your father was the great detective, was he not? ”

“ Yes! ”

“ He was a wonderful man, so I have heard.”

“ Yes, he was, thank you.” Josie’s tone was quite final, so Hortense did not pursue the subject.

“ What else are you to do in your shop? ” she asked.

“ Oh, we are to have the literary work-shop, of

which I spoke to you," said Elizabeth. "And we are to have antiques of all kinds, and we are to take orders for sewing and fancy work. We will order any book direct from the publisher. We take orders for score cards, menu cards, name cards, or anything of that sort. Of course, we don't do those things ourselves, but we will take the orders and get a small commission for them. Now Josie wants to open up a laundry where we have all kinds of fine laces, table linen, etc., done up. If that grows we shall have to get someone to take hold of it, but Josie says she can wash and iron as well as a blanchisseuse de fin and, if we don't get too many orders, she will attend to that end herself."

"It is my one accomplishment," said Josie, "and I have a passion for it. I'd rather launder laces and fine linen than do anything in the world. I am no good at sewing or embroidering, but I can certainly add to anyone's needlework by my manipulation of a flat-iron."

"How interesting!" said Hortense. "Now I adore needlework, but am helpless with an iron and the more I wash things the dirtier they get. I have just finished some napkins and despair of ever getting them done up properly."

My maid is a wretched laundress, almost as bad as her mistress. How I should love to be your first customer! Please let me bring my damask to you."

"Why, of course," answered Josie. "As soon as the boys get the gas stove up I am ready for washing and as soon as they get the electric wires installed I am ready for ironing."

Irene had gone on steadily with her dusting while Hortense had been talking, never once looking up from her task. Occasionally, she opened one of the books and glanced at its contents. What a lot of learning one could find between the covers of those solid books! One long narrow book with a binding evidently home-made attracted her attention. She opened it, but its contents were still as a closed book to her. It was closely written manuscript of strange characters about as unintelligible as the notes of a stenographer would ordinarily be to her employer.

"What is this, Josie?"

"Oh, that is my father's notebook! I am glad to see it," exclaimed Josie. "I never intended to pack it with the other books but in the confusion of getting off I forgot it. I wouldn't

lose it for all the wealth of the Indies." She clasped it to her bosom.

"That is the one you told me about?" asked Mary Louise, joining the group in the corner, "with all the notes he made about criminals and suspected criminals? Perhaps you don't know it, Hortense, but Josie's father knew more about the criminals in the United States, and the world perhaps, than almost anybody."

"Ah, indeed! The book must be interesting reading for a student of criminology. I abhor the subject myself."

"What's that you abhor?" asked Bob Dulaney, who had no occupation for the time being, having helped lift everything that could be lifted and so had leisure to join the girls.

"Criminology!"

"Why, it is the most interesting subject in the world," said Bob.

"Well, you would like this book then," said Mary Louise, explaining it to the newcomer. Josie stood by with her fishy-eyed expression.

"You don't mean Detective O'Gorman's book! Why, I didn't know you were the daughter of Detective O'Gorman. Know about him! I should say I did. Why, there isn't a newspaper chap

in the United States that doesn't know about him. Gee, I'd like to get my hooks on his book."

"Well, his book is all pot hooks, so it wouldn't do you much good if you did," laughed Josie, opening it so he could glance down a page. "I wouldn't let it out of my possession for a mint of money."

"If it's something old Lifter wants you had better nail it down," said Tim Turner. "Remember what I told you about the ding dong."

"I guess it will be safe here," said Josie, putting the slim volume of mysterious manuscript between two ponderous tomes.

"Sure," laughed Bob, "unless I come snooping in at night. It wouldn't be so hard to make an entrance in this old building."

"Don't say such things," begged Mary Louise. "I am scared to death to have Josie stay here by herself as it is."

"Nonsense!" declared Josie.

"Not nonsense at all!" insisted Mary Louise. "Anyhow, I am glad you can't stay to-night."

"Well, as far as our work is concerned she can," declared Danny. "The water and gas are connected and the walls of her house are built."

“ She just can’t, though! ” said Mary Louise, putting her arm around her friend. Josie put on her dull-eyed look and said nothing, only hugged her darling Mary Louise with warm affection.

CHAPTER X

CHIEF CHARLEY LONSDALE

“ Why don't you like Mrs. Markle? ” Josie asked Irene as they sat in Mary Louise's car while she went in a shop on a housekeeping errand on their way home from the Higgleddy-Piggleddy after the strenuous day of unpacking and carpentering and plumbing.

“ Why do you think I don't like her? ” and Irene tried not to give herself away to the astute Josie.

“ Why, Irene dear, you couldn't deceive a flea! ”

“ I hope I wasn't rude to her. I try always to be extra polite to her. ”

“ Oh, you were polite enough, but your eyes are 'wells of truth' and one only has to look in them to know what your sentiments are. ”

“ I didn't know that! Mercy, what am I to do? Put on smoked glasses? ”

“ Fortunately, you are inclined to like mankind, so won't have to wear smoked glasses all the

time," laughed Josie. "But you haven't told me why you don't like her."

"I have no reason for a strange feeling of distrust and abhorrence that comes over me when she approaches. I know she is beautiful and clever and charming and I fully realize that I am foolish to harbor such sentiments, but, try as I may, I cannot get rid of the feeling. It is one of nameless depression, a kind of smothered sensation."

"Like some persons have when cats come in the room?"

"Exactly! Now do you think I am mean and silly?"

"No, not in the last! I think you perhaps have some kind of occult power that I wish I had myself. Now I don't fancy the lady myself, but it is because her name is Hortense."

"Why, what has that to do with her character?"

"Nothing on earth, but I have an antipathy to certain names and Hortense is one of them. Of course, I am well aware of the fact that there are many good Hortenses, as many as there are good Josies, but, somehow, it seems that I am not the one to meet the good ones. They are always a

bit false, the Hortenses I have known. Now you are thinking I am silly. Confess!"

"No, not at all silly, but a bit unreasonable," laughed Irene. "I fancy Mrs. Markle's parents gave her that name and she had nothing to do with it."

"I am not so sure of that. They may have named her plain Jane or even Maria or Hannah and she may have felt Hortense more in keeping. I'll give it to her she has wonderful taste and Hannah would have been out of tone with her general make-up. Why do you think she wouldn't let that young Mr. McGraw see her pin?"

"Why, wasn't her reason given sufficient?" asked Irene.

"Not to me! Either there was something about the pin she did not want him to see or she wanted to get him to come to her apartment and call and thought that would be a good way to manage it."

"Oh, Josie, you are hard on her!"

"Well, when you don't like a person, you might as well find out why and that is what I am doing. I am just trying to analyze my emotions and find a cause for the effect. I must prove to myself

for my own private satisfaction why the bristles stand up on my spine when the pretty lady comes around."

"You did not show you felt that way in the least. I wish I could hide my feelings as well as you," sighed Irene.

"Please don't try to! You, with your instinct to detect evil, would prove too valuable to a would-be detective. Not that I am one," quickly added Josie, who was determined not to let anyone know of her dual occupation.

After an early tea, Josie, in spite of objections raised by Mary Louise, insisted upon going back to her Higgledy-Piggledy apartment.

"I might just as well get used to it, honey. It is going to be in a mess for a while yet, but if I can be there early and late just so much the sooner will we begin operations. To-morrow is Sunday and I can have a nice long day to write letters that must be written and look over some papers. That won't be too much like working on the Sabbath, and I can begin to work in dead earnest early Monday morning. I'll see you at church to-morrow though, however."

Josie refused the offer Mary Louise made of sending her home in her car but insisted her legs

were made to use, and if she got too accustomed to riding around in cars, it would spoil her for more primitive forms of locomotion.

Josie did not go directly to her shop after leaving Colonel Hathaway's, but slipping down a side street she walked quietly into the police station. Josie had a power inherited directly from her father of being almost invisible, that is she moved so quietly and was so unobtrusive in manner and dress that she could pass in a crowd absolutely unnoticed, and even where there was not a crowd, she had a way of effacing herself so that she might stand in one's presence for minutes without being observed. And after she was observed, it would tax the powers of the most alert to describe the girl, so neutral could she appear. Her red hair even seemed to become dun and colorless when she, for some reason, was intent on being unnoticed.

The police station was quiet. It was too early for the usual Saturday night bustle of business. An officer was dozing at his exalted desk with a great book open in front of him, the book where the business of the day was recorded. At the door sat another policeman. He too was napping with his stiff belt unbuttoned and his helmet cocked

over his closed eyes, his legs stretched out as though to trip up the unwary.

Josie was far from being in that class, however. She quietly and lightly jumped over the hurdle of legs and slipped under the nose of the man at the desk and made her way down a hall to the door of the Chief of Police, Captain Charley Lonsdale.

The chief was not asleep, far from it, but he was lost in the perusal of some closely written sheets over which he was knotting his beetling brows. His door was ajar and with a small tap to announce herself Josie entered and stood before him. He grunted in acknowledgment that he knew someone was in his presence to whom he would give his attention when he solved some troublesome problem.

“ Well, what is it? ” he finally jerked out, looking up from his papers. “ Why, bless my soul! If it ain’t little O’Gorman. Child, I am glad to see you. I can’t tell you how I have felt about your father. Why, we’ll never get over his loss in the service. What he didn’t know about criminals was not worth knowing. A good man too! A good man, for sure! I wish I had him here right now to help me out with a case. I

don't see why those fellows in the East think their crooks are working around here. I don't believe they are," he declared, glancing again at the papers which had so absorbed his attention on Josie's entrance.

"What is the case?" she asked, looking keenly at the chief.

"Oh, just the same old tale of crooks, but this time they seem to be stealing lots of things besides money. They have actually walked off with the entire furnishings of apartments, rugs, sideboards, pictures, even beds and wardrobes and whole sets of china. There must be an unbroken chain of them extending through the states. It is post-war conditions that we might have expected, but it seems to be even worse than we had anticipated and now they are worrying me about things that were lost in New York and Boston. I am sure nobody would come to Dorfield with stolen goods. Aren't you?"

Josie said nothing and the chief looked at her keenly.

"Well?" he asked. "What do you say?"

"I don't know."

"Do you still dabble in detective work?"

"No, I never did dabble."

“ So! ” he laughed. “ You were in it in dead earnest. ”

“ Exactly! ”

“ Well, you are your father’s own daughter and waste no words. I reckon you are here hunting a job. ”

“ I have a job, sir, I am keeping a shop. ” Josie then told him of the Higgledy-Piggledy Shop and what her ideas were in regard to the running of it in connection with a secret detective service.

“ Already I have a clue I want to follow up, sir, ” she told him, “ but, of course, if you could put me on the force it might be a help to me at some time. The shining star displayed on occasions sometimes has a good effect. ”

“ You are right. Sometimes it means more than a loaded pistol, ” laughed the chief.

“ Well, good-by, sir, ” and Josie fitted from the chief’s office and by the drowsing attendants in the outer office without their being conscious of the fact that she had been in the building.

“ What a fine little girl! ” mused the chief. “ She knows how to leave when her business is over with, too. That’s something precious few folks understand. I wish I had more like her

on the force. I forgot to ask her if she had a telephone." He rang his bell, which buzzed teasingly near the ear of the policeman sprawling at the door over whose legs Josie had lightly jumped.

"Casey," he asked when the huge Irishman made his appearance trying to conceal the fact that he was not quite awake, "has the young lady got out of sight?"

"Yes, sorr, clane out of sight!" And Casey blinked rapidly.

"Well, that's all!" said the chief shortly.

"Yes, sorr!" and Casey made a hasty retreat.

He remarked to the man at the desk, whose slumbers had also been broken by the buzzer:

"Sure an' Chief Charley has been slapin' an' drammin' uv the ladies. He was arfter wantin' to know if the young lady was out uv sight. I could truthfully tell him she was that. There's been no young lady here."

CHAPTER XI

A SKELETON KEY

It was dusk when Josie fitted the great brass key into the door of the Higgledy-Piggledy Shop. The place looked very large and bleak and Josie felt small and lonesome, but she said to herself that it was no time to give way to such weakness. She did not switch on the light, although the amateur plumbers and electricians had not left until everything was in O. K. condition. Instead she produced a small search light and with its aid went to work on a mysterious bit of business. Peering along the shelves, she put her hand on the book of her father's notes, the one with the home-made binding. Diving into the tray of a small trunk, she produced a handful of papers covered with cryptic hieroglyphics similar to those found in the precious notebook. With deft fingers she ripped the back from the notebook, carefully placing the contents in a large pocket in her petticoat. Securely pinning it with a huge safety pin, then smoothing out the

loose papers she had extracted from the trunk, she proceeded to do a clever and neat job of amateur book binding sewing on the old back of the notebook. Then she put the book between the ponderous tomes where it had been before.

Patting her pocket where reposed the precious notes and also the huge brass key which she had removed from the door after locking it, Josie then made her way by the packing boxes and debris, that all the willing workers had not been able to clear away on that busy Saturday afternoon, back to the bedroom. Her little iron bed was made up with fresh linen and pretty dimity spread and looked very inviting to the tired girl.

“ I’d certainly like to tumble in,” she yawned, “ but this is no time for sleep. Father always said: ‘ Work first and then sleep! ’ ”

Shutting the door to the partition which divided her bedroom from the shop, she turned on the shaded reading light which Danny had placed at the head of the bed, under the directions of Mary Louise, and drawing up a low chair she unpinned the notes and drew them from her pocket.

“ Dear Father! ” she sighed. “ What a man he was! ”

Detective O'Gorman had taught his daughter the code in which he made his notes and Josie could read the hieroglyphics as easily as she could printed English. She could write it as rapidly as a first-class stenographer can shorthand. Turning over the leaves she came to one that riveted her attention.

“Exactly!” she muttered. “He could have been a great novelist if he had not have been so busy being a great detective. There never were such accurate, concise descriptions. Here are their aliases too: my, what a lot of names they can answer to — and as many crimes as names if one can only catch them in the act. They have so many confederates they always go scot free. Won't my father be proud of me if I am the one to get them? I mean to be that one, too.”

She put the notes back in her pocket, pinning them carefully as before. Then she produced from another pocket a small revolver which she examined critically.

“I'm not going to use it, but it must be ready — in case — ”

She stopped suddenly.

“What's that? Tenants stumping around overhead? Rats in the wainscoting? There are

rats." She listened intently, switching off the light hanging over her bed.

"That old-fashioned brass lock will be easy to open with a skeleton key," she decided. "If they are coming here it will be only a moment before they are in the room." Grabbing her tell-tale hat and gloves and small bag, she dived under the bed, the pretty dimity spread hanging down on the side making a curtain for her retreat.

The town clock was striking twelve as the skeleton key finally unlocked the door. Josie lay very still listening eagerly.

"We might just as well switch on the light," said a man's voice.

"A bit imprudent, but, of course, nobody in this stupid old town would notice." The voice was undoubtedly Mrs. Markle's.

"I fancy everybody, even the police force, is asleep by now," laughed the man.

Josie felt for her detective's badge pinned in the breast pocket of her dress, and smiled happily in her retreat behind the dimity spread.

"Here is the book, Felix, exactly where that dull little O'Gorman girl put it. Do you think you will ever be able to make out the code?"

“ Sure! There is no code I can’t work. It may take time but it will be great fun to find out what that old devil O’Gorman thought of us. It will be helpful too to find out exactly what he knew; and think of destroying all trace of our identity.”

“ Umhum! I am dull and my father was a devil,” mused Josie. “ Two more reasons for catching you red-handed, you Markles! ”

“ Here are the scissors,” went on the rich voice of Mrs. Markle. “ Let me rip out the notes, Clumsy! Here, these blank papers can be stitched in their place. The girl will no doubt not think of opening this book for weeks, maybe never, but she knows the code and might want to read the notes sooner. There you are! Now put it back in between those big books. Now shall we be off? ”

“ Let’s look around now that we are here. This is a clever idea of that O’Gorman girl’s, to run this shop. Are you sure she is so dull? ” asked the man.

“ Sure! She has a fish eye and a face like a dumpling.”

“ O’Gorman had too, and he wasn’t dull,” said Mr. Markle with some doubt in his tone.

“ Oh, trust me, Felix, to know when a woman has sense. I don't believe she even has any humor.”

Josie smothered a giggle and drew her little revolver from her pocket. The interlopers were pushing open the door of her bedroom and without further ceremony switched on the light. The girl could see their feet from her hiding place, and exceedingly shapely, well. shod feet they were.

“ A pretty snug place,” said Felix. “ Nothing worth lifting, however.”

“ Not now, but wait until they begin to stock up with antique furniture and jewelry and what not. There will be plenty then. I am going to give them lots of work so I can come here often. One will get to know very desirable persons through these girls. That little soft fool, Mary Louise, knows everybody and she is very much interested in this venture and is going to push it for all it is worth. My first job for them is laundering those napkins I have just finished.”

“ Oh, what a clever pet it is!” and Felix stopped and kissed Hortense. “ A man never had such a partner before, I am sure.”

“ What an old goose you are!” Her voice

was as pleased and affectionate as any woman's might have been who had won her husband's approbation by some wifely act.

“Come on now! Let's get out. We have what we came for and I am eager to get busy on that old devil O'Gorman's code.”

They switched off the light and locked the door carefully. Josie scuttled from under her bed and ran to the front window. Peeping down into the faintly lighted street she saw the Markles walking off affectionately, arm in arm.

“And poor man, he is going to master Father's code so he can read Francis Thompson's ‘The Hound of Heaven,’” and Josie allowed herself a good laugh.

The notes Mr. Markle had so carefully carried off were nothing more than Josie's lessons she had written out when her father was teaching her the code.

“Maybe it will do them some good,” said the girl with a feeling akin to sympathy in her heart. “I feel kind of sorry for the poor wretches. Father said he always felt sorry for criminals.”

As the girl undressed she recited “The Hound of Heaven.”

“ I fled Him, down the nights and down
the days;

I fled Him, down the arches of the years;

I fled Him, down the labyrinthine ways
Of my own mind; and in the midst of
tears

I hid from Him, and under running
laughter.

Up vistaed hopes I sped;

And shot, precipitated

Adown Titanic glooms of chasmèd tears,
From those strong Feet that followed,
followed after.

But with unhurrying chase,

And unperturbed pace,

Deliberate speed, majestic instancy,

They beat — and a Voice beat

More instant than the Feet —

‘ All things betray thee, who betrayest
Me.’ ”

CHAPTER XII

BILLY MAKES A CALL

Josie told not a soul of her experience on her first night spent in the Higglely-Pigglely Shop. She felt as though perhaps she should have taken Chief Lonsdale into her confidence, but on the other hand was so afraid a mere man might bungle the thing. Besides she felt a pardonable pride in the possibility of being the one to solve a mystery that had been puzzling the wise heads of the secret service for some time. Thefts were constantly being reported from wealthy persons, high in the social world, from every city in the union. All kinds of household goods would disappear most mysteriously, pictures, bric-a-brac, rugs, books; sometimes even furniture heavy enough to take two strong men to move, would be spirited away in a style uncanny to say the least. Unsuspecting people would lock their apartments and go off for a pleasant week-end in the country, perhaps leave servants in charge, and come

home to rooms bereft of all valuables. The thieves always showed excellent taste and never stole anything but the best. Similar losses were reported from East and West, North and South.

Of course our little detective had many misgivings on the subject of the intimacy between her dear Mary Louise and the Markles, which seemed to be growing closer and warmer as the days went on.

“I am as sure as sure can be of their perfidy. I certainly did not go to sleep under the bed and dream that they came in and did and said what they did, but I must bide my time or they will get off without my proving anything of importance on them,” she would say to herself when she saw Hortense with her arm around Mary Louise, making a great show of affection.

Hortense Markle knew very well how to make herself both agreeable and useful. She would spend hours playing chess with Colonel Hathaway or she would go to the greatest trouble to match some bit of lace for Mary Louise. She spent much of her time engaged in matchless needlework for the prospective bride. She was so pleasant, so agreeable and so very pretty that one could not help liking her. Most of Mary

Louise's friends found her quite as charming as Mary Louise did. Irene MacFarlane was the only one who did not succumb to her fascination.

Poor Irene! She had many a struggle with herself on the subject of Hortense Markle. She felt that her dislike was unreasonable and endeavored in every way to hide it, but she was of such a truthful nature that it was impossible for her to dissemble. In the meantime preparations for the wedding were under way and all of the group of girls chosen to be bridesmaids were busy over their frocks. Irene was willing to assist in any way, but Mrs. Markle was the one whose help was oftener asked.

"It is not that I am jealous," Irene would say to herself. "It can't be that. I have never been jealous in my life. I have an instinct of distrust that I can't overcome. Her husband affects me the same way. What am I that I should set myself up as a person whose instinct is of any value? They must be all that they seem or so many persons would not be attracted by them."

She rather hoped Josie O'Gorman would

feel like discussing the matter with her after their little talk concerning Hortense Markle on the day the Higgedy-Piggedy Shop had its house warming, but the astute Josie did not mention it again and Irene felt that she must not be the one to approach the subject.

The Higgedy-Piggedy Shop was getting on its feet in great shape. It was a novelty in Dorfield and found its customers because of its unusualness at first and then those customers returned because of the efficiency of the young shopkeepers.

Elizabeth Wright was kept quite busy hunting up facts for students on many and various subjects. She had typing to do and even obituary notices to write and sometimes love letters to compose for bashful young men and maidens. It was her lot to write club papers on every subject from Shakespeare to the musical glasses.

Josie had felt it necessary to take Elizabeth into her confidence concerning her being connected with the secret service, but never once had she divulged her suspicions of the attractive Markles. The one little talk she had had with Irene was the only time she had

let herself go in the least concerning those persons whom she hoped to catch up with in some of their supposed villainies. Elizabeth was as enthusiastic about the beautiful Hortense as were all of the young people of her set, in spite of the fact that her sisters and mother declared the young married woman had an inclination to monopolize the eligible young men of their acquaintance. Billy McGraw certainly was very attentive to her, although his liking for Elizabeth was growing day by day.

“She’s such a good fellow,” he would say to himself, never thinking of her as anything but a pal, however, while he spent many a wakeful night tormented by the thought of Hortense Markle, for whom he had a chivalrous pity because of being married to such an unsympathetic middle-aged man. Many were the calls he made at the Markles’ charming apartment, when Mr. Markle would make himself obligingly scarce and leave the young man to delightful tête-a-têtes with his charming young wife.

“You promised to let me see the orchid pin when I came to see you,” he remarked on his

first call, which was on the very next evening after the luncheon at the Higgledy-Piggledy.

“Why, of course,” she responded readily. “But I am so sorry it is not here. The catch was a little weak and Felix took it yesterday afternoon to the jewelers to have it strengthened. I would not lose it for worlds with all of its tender associations. I know you think I am sentimental.”

“Not at all! That is just the way Vi Thomas felt about hers, the one that was a counterpart of yours. By the way, I heard from Jerald Thomas only yesterday afternoon. It was something of a coincidence that we should have been talking about him at luncheon. I have not heard from him for ages. He tells me that he and Vi went off to Atlantic City several months ago for a breathing spell, leaving their apartment in charge of a trusted butler. They had wonderful furnishings, rugs, etchings and so forth. When they came back their place was cleared of everything in the least valuable. The butler had gone out to dinner with some friend he had picked up and had been drugged and not able to get back to his place, and while he was sleeping off his drunk, thieves had

simply lifted the whole blooming business. Vi's jewels had been taken from the safe too. I don't know whether they got her orchid pin or not."

"How terrible!" cried Hortense. "I can't think of a greater calamity than losing my precious household gods, things that Felix and I have so carefully selected and for which we've denied ourselves so much."

"You have some fine etchings too, have you not? I don't know much about etchings, but I like them a lot."

"Yes, but don't look at them now. Felix adores showing them to people and he knows all about them. The next time you come he will take great pleasure in showing them to you. Just talk to me now."

"Sure!" said Billy quite flattered that such a beautiful lady cared to talk to him. "Jerry and Vi Thomas were quite keen on etchings too. They had some rare signed proof ones, and Jerry was very particular about the frames too. He had some wonderful ebony frames made that were almost as valuable as the etchings."

"How lovely they must have been," said

Hortense. "Let's go out on the balcony. It seems warm in here to me."

"Why not come for a spin in my car? It's parked around the corner."

"All right! You go and get it and I'll be down directly."

She ushered her caller out and ran back to a small den in the rear of the apartment where her husband was busily engaged trying to find the key to Detective O'Gorman's cryptic code.

"I'm going out for a ride with Mr. McGraw. While I am gone, for goodness' sake take down from the walls those signed Rembrandts and Whistlers, the ones in the ebony frames, and put something else in their places. This callow youth, Billy McGraw, is a great friend of the Thomases and has a liking for etchings."

"Good girl! You didn't let him see them!"

"Not I! I had to make him look at me instead."

He pinched her cheek affectionately and looked at her with admiration shining in his eyes.

"Please get the mark off the orchid pin soon, dear, as I need it sorely for my new dress."

"I'll do it this afternoon," he promised.

"I guess this code can keep. It is deucedly

hard. I may have to get you to help me. You are a clever pet and can jump at a conclusion it takes a clumsy man days to reach.”

Hortense smiled happily. “There is one thing I don’t like about this business, Felix.”

“And what is that?”

“I don’t like this thing of having to pretend to these foolish youths that you are a stern middle-aged person who is not in the least en rapport with me. You are so much more wonderful than any man I ever see anywhere.”

“Well, pet, we trust each other — eh?” and he looked searchingly in her eyes.

“Oh, Felix, what a question!” and she kissed him lightly on his smooth, iron-grey hair and ran off for her ride with Billy McGraw.

CHAPTER XIII

BUSINESS COMING ON

True to his determination to let no wish of Mary Louise's go unfulfilled, Danny Dexter rigged up an elevator to the Higgledy-Piggledy Shop, so that Irene MacFarlane could go there at any time without waiting for Bob Dulaney or Danny to carry her upstairs. In days gone by there had been a dumb-waiter in the back of the old building but it had long since been abandoned because of its rusty pulleys and broken cords. This dumb-waiter shaft had been used by the shifting tenants as a receptacle for all kinds of debris. In cleaning it out before he could find room to rig up the little elevator, Danny declared there was nothing he didn't find from broken baby carriages to old sets of false teeth. The only drawback to the elevator was that one must enter by way of the alley, but Irene insisted that made no difference whatsoever. Sometimes she came to the shop, which was not far from her home, propelling herself in her

wheelchair. She would roll up the alley, which was fortunately paved and not too rough, right into the little elevator that was the exact dimensions of her chair. Then with a vigorous pull on the rope with her strong and capable hands, she would shoot to the second floor and roll out into the Higgleddy-Piggleddy Shop.

Her coming was always greeted with exclamations of delight by the proprietors of the shop. Clever Danny had so well rigged the little elevator that the usual groaning and squeaking of a misnamed dumb-waiter had been done away with. Her coming would be unheralded by bell or knock and she would glide from the shaft like a veritable fairy princess, so Elizabeth declared.

Irene's part in the shop had become a very important one, so important that Josie and Elizabeth felt they could hardly do without her. The lame girl's skill with the needle was in great demand, as one of the chief industries of the unique shop was fine mending, which was not the long suit of either Josie or Elizabeth. One of their principles in running their business, however, was that they must undertake everything that came their way and then, if

they could not do it themselves, as Josie put it, they would "farm it out."

"My, I'm glad to see you!" exclaimed Josie as Irene came gliding from the elevator into their midst. "A lot of lace to be mended and laundered has just arrived. Exquisite stuff and a hurry call. Can you spend the day and work on it for us? There will be at least three dollars in it for you."

"Of course I can, if you will telephone Auntie," and Irene drew from her bag her thimble and needle case and soon was at work mending the exquisite point lace that had been left at the shop only that morning by a wealthy and particular old lady. At times, where the work was very delicate, Irene made use of a magnifying glass, which was as much a part of her little sewing kit as her thimble and the very fine needles she delighted in, and the sharp scissors, no longer than her little finger, and the assortment of cotton and silk threads.

"I am going to launder the lace that does not need mending," said Josie, getting out a diminutive tub, placing ready an ironing board and attaching her electric iron.

"And I'll go on with my typing," said Eliza-

beth. "It is manuscript from a would-be authoress who is all dashes and an occasional period when her pen seemed to be out of breath. I think I should charge extra for punctuation, don't you, Irene?"

"Certainly," laughed Irene, "but how would you grade your charges?"

"I'll give a period for nothing. It is a kind of relief to make a period after such an effusion as this: 'His flashing eye was bent on her with a look of mingled admiration and rage while in spite of the feeling of uncontrollable fear that filled her pure heart to the brim the beautiful girl first breathing a prayer to her Heavenly Father of whose watchful care she was ever conscious no matter how severe her trials and tribulations raised her sad blue eyes and looked into the bold black ones of the insinuating villain who had by his machinations brought her to this lonesome spot where he hoped to have her in his power and as she looked into those wicked orbs that seemed to Elaine very like the lonesome miasmic tarn by which she had been led on this perilous journey she felt sure of the power of good over evil and as the realization of this great truth came to

her the wretch dropped his eyes and turned away.' All this without a punctuation mark of any kind, not even a dash, except at the tail end where I have thrown in a period. I should get a tenth of a cent for every comma and at least a fifth for semicolons — they come high — and as for a colon: it is worth anything one wishes to charge. I think there is nothing so elegant as colons. They have such a knowing air."

Irene and Josie laughed heartily at Elizabeth, who went on with her typing, occasionally reading to them choice bits from the manuscript.

"Of course, this joking can only be in the bosom of our official family," said Elizabeth. "It would never do to get out that we make fun of our patrons."

"And so is that what you do?" was the gay question flung at them from the door. It was Hortense Markle. "I knocked, but you were laughing so gaily and the typewriter was clicking so noisily that you did not hear." She tripped in, laying a large package on the table.

"Come in! We are very glad to see you," said Josie cordially, but into her eyes came

the dull fishy look she could assume at will. Elizabeth spoke hospitably to their guest, moving some pamphlets from a chair to make room for her. Irene tried to bring a smile of welcome to her calm, sweet eyes, but she felt that anyone who chose to look could easily tell it was perfunctory.

“I have brought the damask napkins that you promised to launder for me,” said Hortense, untying the cord around her package. “I have just completed the initials and am anxious to have them done up, as I am sure you can do them,” smiling and bowing prettily to Josie. “It is wonderful linen, some Felix got for me the last time he was in New York. He paid untold sums for it but he knows how fond I am of beautiful linen.” She opened up the package and displayed the napkins, which were of exquisite damask of a rare and artistic pattern.

“Why, they have been laundered once,” said Irene, looking at one of the napkins with the pleasure she always felt at the touch of fine fabrics.

“Oh, yes, I often have damask washed before I embroider it. It is so much softer and more

sympathetic to the needle. Does not resist it as does unlaundered linen," explained Hortense easily.

"We have some lace on hand for to-day. Would you mind waiting until to-morrow for your napkins?" asked Josie.

"Not at all! There is no hurry."

"I must count them and put them down on our books," said Josie with a business-like air. "Why, there are only twenty-two here. How did you happen not to have the full two dozen?"

"Are you sure? I thought there were two dozen," said Hortense, frowning as though trying to remember where she could have put the other napkins. "I may have left two at home."

Josie counted again very carefully.

"Twenty-two! I hope they aren't lost. Anyhow they aren't lost here and that is some satisfaction for the Higgledy-Piggledies."

Another tap at the door and in came Bob Dulaney.

"May I come in? How jolly to find all of you here!" He bowed to them all but looked at Irene when he said "all of you." "And does the elevator work all right? I was mighty afraid Danny would slip up on the piece of

work, but that fellow will tackle anything. He is a wonder for sure."

"Yes, it works beautifully and I find it the greatest convenience. I am quite independent now and can come and go as I will."

"How jolly it is up here! Aren't you afraid at night, Miss O'Gorman?" asked Bob.

"Not a bit! There are too many persons tramping around overhead for me to be afraid, but I wouldn't be afraid anyhow. I guess nobody would want to hurt me. I haven't anything to steal as yet. Of course when we get in our rare editions that I am to sell on commission for a man in New York there will be something; also some antique jewelry and some bronzes. We may have a few small rugs soon too."

Josie turned her dull eyes on Hortense, who had stopped chatting with Elizabeth and was listening attentively to the above conversation.

"So you are going to open up your shop in good earnest, then?" she asked. "How delightful! It's such an interesting venture. I do hope you will succeed."

"We are sure to if we keep on as well as we have begun," said Josie, allowing herself the

satisfaction of a little twinkle in her eye. "Business is just rolling in."

"How much will you charge a fellow if he wants to consult your books?" asked Bob. "There is no library worthy of the name in Dorfield and when I want something very badly I am up against it."

"Persons are supposed to ask us for information and we do the searching," explained Josie.

"But that wouldn't suit me at all. I like to see for myself and one bit of information suggests the advisability of another, and so on. I could spend days with your various encyclopedias just on this one article I am getting up for the Sunday supplement."

"What is your article on?"

"Criminology! Gee, but I'd like to peek into that notebook of your father's!" sighed Bob, who took his profession of expert reporter and writer of special articles very seriously.

Josie beckoned to Elizabeth and retiring to the back of the shop the girls held a short consultation. Coming forward, Josie said to Bob:

"My partner and I are going to make an exception in your favor, feeling as we do very grateful to you and all of Danny Dexter's friends

for their kindness to us in launching us so beautifully on our shop-keeping venture. We are going to let you come and consult our books whenever you feel like it. We'd rather not have them taken home unless it is something you find you can't possibly finish up here in the shop."

"But how splendid of you! I don't deserve such a favor. I did nothing but lift bath tubs and things. I can't accept such kindness, though, unless you let me pay regular rates for what information I pick up."

"We are not so mercenary as all that," said Josie, "besides we may need your muscles sometimes and would not know how to pay for them. Let's call it a draw — fifty-fifty. We might even leave you here sometimes to keep shop for us if you'll be good."

"Good! I'd take in the fancy work especially well," laughed Bob. "I hate to seem greedy, but while I'm poking among your books may I peek in the wonderful notebook?"

Josie paused a moment, turning dull eyes on Mrs. Markle, who had been listening intently to the above conversation, although she seemed to be interested solely in the lace Irene was mending. Her dark eyes were sparkling and her

pretty grey suede shoe was nervously tapping the floor. None of this was lost on Josie.

“You mustn’t let me look in it if you really don’t want me to,” Bob continued. “I know it is cheeky of me to ask it.”

“But I will let you,” declared Josie. “I shouldn’t be so silly about the poor little book. You may take it home with you if you promise to take good care of it.” She took the little book from the shelves and handed it to Bob. “Keep it tied up carefully; don’t open it now. I wonder if you can decipher what is in it. I fancy it would be a tough job. Father wouldn’t mind, I am sure. He always liked newspaper chaps, as he called men of your profession, and used to get them to help him often on cases. He helped them too. He used to say they had much more sense about digging out crime and solving mysteries than the average detective. I tell you he handed over many a scoop to young reporters and got them started in their careers with fine feathers in their caps.”

“I can’t tell you how I thank you,” said Bob, taking the shabby little book reverently in his hand and putting it carefully in his breast pocket. “I’ll guard it with my life. I won’t

have time to look into it for a day or so, however. And now I'll be going. I'll come in day after to-morrow and get my work in with your learned books. I do thank you girls more than I can say. I hope I can lift mountains for you sometime to show you how I appreciate your kindness."

He stopped a moment to have a little talk with Irene, whose sweet face flushed with pleasure when he asked her if he might call on her that very evening. It was nice to be treated just like other girls.

CHAPTER XIV

ANOTHER CLUE

Bob Dulaney had hardly left the shop before Hortense Markle burst out with the remark:

“ Miss O’Gorman, how could you be so imprudent? ”

“ Imprudent? I? You mean because I told Mr. Dulaney he might come keep shop for us? ” asked Josie, looking so stupid Hortense felt like slapping her. “ You don’t think that was proper? ”

“ Proper! The idea! My dear girl, I only meant it was imprudent to let him go off with that valuable book of your father’s. I am sure we all feel an interest in you, and such a book as that is of untold value. Did you not say it contained notes he had kept almost from the beginning of his career and had descriptions of all the noted criminals, convicted and unconvinced? ”

“ Yes, it has, ” answered Josie, putting on the air of a moron. Her tone was so dull and her

manner so stupid that Elizabeth and Irene, who well understood the keen intelligence of their partner, looking on in astonishment. What was she trying to do?

“ Well, knowing that, don't you think it was a little too trusting to let a strange young man simply walk off with that precious book in his pocket? He might keep on walking and never come back. Such a treasure as that would be of more value to a collector than I can tell you and Mr. Dulaney could realize more from the sale of such a book than he could make on his tuppenny articles for Sunday supplements in ten years' time.”

Irene's eyes were flashing. At least now she had a reason for hating Hortense Markle. What a cruel suggestion! How could she harbor such a thought? Bob Dulaney with his frank open manner and kind, clear eyes, Bob Dulaney a possible thief! Danny Dexter's friend! Her friend too — she felt she could count him among her real friends. Could she sit there and let such an imputation go unchallenged? She looked at Josie in astonishment. Of course it was her business to combat such an unkind suggestion, but Josie was looking blank as a whitewashed

fence. Elizabeth, however, arose to the occasion with:

“ I fancy you are mistaken, Mrs. Markle. I am sure Mr. Dulaney is honor itself. I think he can be trusted with anything, no matter how valuable. I'd stake my life on it.”

“ And I, mine! ” spoke up Irene in a low clear voice.

“ Ah, and so the handsome Goliath has champions among the fair sex,” laughed Hortense. “ Heavens, children, I had no idea of bringing down such a deluge of vituperation on my poor little head! I was merely interested in the little book, not on my own account but on my husband's. Felix was so excited over your having such a book, my dear Josie. He has always been interested in codes and hieroglyphics. He was dying for me to ask you to lend it to him, but I utterly refused. No wonder I am a little peeved when you hand it calmly over to the first good looking young man who asks for it. Well, I must be going. Don't hurry with the napkins and don't bother to send them to me. I'll call for them.”

She tripped gaily from the shop, calling back from the door:

“ Please don’t be cross with me for suggesting that poor Mr. Dulaney might be tempted by the marvelous little book. He is, to all appearances, a charming young man, but then after all we don’t really know him very well.”

“ We know him as well as we know you,” was on the tip of Irene’s tongue, but she did not say it, only bowed her head stiffly when Hortenes included her in the beaming smile and wave of farewell.

“ Rather catty, I call that,” said Elizabeth, when their charming visitor was well out of ear shot. “ What do you think she meant by suggesting such a horrid thing, Josie? ”

Josie, who had lost her strange stupid look, laughed gaily at Elizabeth’s question. “ She didn’t mean anything at all, Elizabeth. She was put out because the nice, big boy didn’t pay her any attention. He was either talking business and books with you and me or he was leaning over Irene there making engagements. The beautiful Mrs. Markle must be the center of attraction or she won’t play.”

“ Oh! ” and Irene blushed rosy red. This was indeed being like other girls if somebody was jealous of her. “ I can’t help thinking she had

some other motive," Irene whispered to Josie, when Elizabeth went back to her noisy copying of the flamboyant story. "Of course, if such a charmer as Mrs. Markle wanted the attentions of a young man she could have them without lifting an eyelash."

"I'm not so sure of that," insisted Josie. "Some men don't fall for so much beauty of face. They are on the lookout for beauty of soul. Wonderful damask napkins she left! Did you look at the embroidered initials? I hope I won't scorch them. There is no telling what they are worth. Each one is big enough for a tablecloth."

"They are wonderful," said Irene. "I never heard of anyone's having napkins laundered before the initials were embroidered, but it no doubt is a good thing. Mrs. Markle certainly knows all about it. I have never imagined such perfect work." She sighed and dropped the lace she was mending for a moment and picked up one of the napkins the closer to scrutinize the regular stitches. Her magnifying glass was in her lap and she gazed at the work through it.

"Why, Josie, come here!" she cried in some excitement. "This napkin has had a piece cut

out and a patch put in — one of Mrs. Markle's incomparable patches, but a patch for all that."

"See if this one has too," asked Josie, trying not to show the excitement that she too felt.

"Yes, this one and this one and this one — all of them!" exclaimed Irene in a puzzled tone. "Look, she has matched each thread and then made an initial large enough to cover the patch almost entirely. I never saw such clever work in my life — but why?"

"Perhaps she did not like the initial she first put there and cut it out to put another," suggested Josie, a twinkle asserting itself in her eyes that she seemed to be trying to make opaque.

"The patches are not all the same size," declared Irene, picking up napkin after napkin and examining them carefully through her glass. "What can it mean, Josie?"

"Well, I guess we can safely say we have found the other two napkins," whispered Josie. "They went to make the patches. Also someone besides Hortense did the cutting. Clever Hortense! Not clever enough, however, to get by with it! My father used to say that only the people who went to work taking for granted that

others were cleverer than they kept out of the penitentiary. Hortense thinks I am a dullard and you a sweet person who has taken a dislike to her and not to be worried about one way or the other.”

“ But what do you mean, Josie? Penitentiary — you can’t — ”

“ Yes, I can — but don’t tell Elizabeth — anybody in fact — we must catch the whole bunch and, if we jump too soon, we may get only an innocent bystander. I am going to call on you to help me if I need you.”

“ What’s that you are not going to tell me? ” asked Elizabeth. “ This old typewriter makes just enough noise to keep me from catching secrets. Is it ice cream you are going to have up for lunch or are you going to make me pay the gas bill? Is it a pleasant secret or otherwise? ”

“ Well, it may be both,” answered Josie. “ I wasn’t going to tell you because my father always said the more persons you took in on a case the harder it was to get at the bottom of it. He thought they kind of crowded each other when the business narrowed down to the final outcome.”

“But I’m a partner here and if there is anything I might make use of in the way of copy in the literary career I hope to follow, I think it is mean not to tell me,” laughed Elizabeth.

“I guess you are right,” decided Josie. “I may get help from you girls too. But mind not a word or look to a soul to let on you suspect a thing! Swear!”

“We swear!” chorused Irene and Elizabeth in hollow excited tones.

Then Josie told them the whole thing from the beginning; told how she had had some suspicion of the Markles because of something intangibly mysterious about them; told of her visit to the chief of police and the information he had given her concerning a chain of thefts being committed all over the country; told of the mission she had had confided to her before she reached Dorfield; told how she had been confident of something being a bit fishy in Hortense’s not being willing to take off the orchid pin and show it to Billy McGraw, for the reason that it had the Tiffany mark on it, no doubt the initials of his friend Mrs. Thomas. Then she made their blood run cold when she described her first night in the Higgledy-Piggledy Shop and the entrance

of the Markles and their theft of the contents of the book.

“ But, Josie, weren't you scared to death? ” asked Irene, her eyes big at the thought. “ I am not a timid person ordinarily, but I believe I'd have died of fright when they came into the bedroom. ”

“ Well, I was a bit shaky, I must confess. Persons like the Markles don't like to kill because it is a low form of wit, but they will do it just as a great humorist will occasionally pun if he can't get his joke over without it. I was determined to be the first to fire if there was any firing to be done. ”

There was nothing dull looking about Josie as she told her story to her two friends and confederates. Had Hortense seen her then, no doubt she would have changed her tactics in dealing with the daughter of the famous detective.

“ And now, ” said Josie, “ in conclusion, as the preachers say, we must be ever watchful and never let on to a soul, man or beast, that we have any suspicion of the Markles. What we know of them is not enough yet to convict them and by waiting, watchful waiting, we may be able to

unearth the whole plot and bring a whole gang to justice.”

“It is a little hard on Mr. Dulaney to let him take off the notebook full of blanks,” suggested Irene, a faint flush appearing on her cheeks.

“Yes, I know it is,” agreed Josie, “and I would not have done it except I wanted to see what Hortense would look like when I allowed him to have the precious book. Her face was a study. She has humor enough, I rather like her for that, and there was an amused twinkle in her eyes, relief also when I told the young man not to untie it just then. I fancy there are times when anyone with such a speaking countenance as the Markle has a hard time to appear indifferent. Her suggestions concerning Mr. Dulaney were very slick. Of course if I had not known all the time the book was full of blanks, I would naturally be inclined to hold Mr. Dulaney responsible for such a state of affairs.”

“Yes, that is what I am afraid of,” said Irene, “afraid he may be horribly embarrassed about it when he discovers the hoax.”

“There is danger of that, but I’ll do my best to make it up to him,” answered Josie. “Of course he’ll get the scoop of his lifetime when

we finally nab the wretches. Such a scoop will more than repay him for a temporary embarrassment."

"Are you keeping Chief Lonsdale informed of what you are finding out?" asked Elizabeth, who was beginning to feel that plots were hers for the asking in the stories she meant to write.

"Not on your life! He'd have a bunch of bungling blue-coats snooping around scaring off the game and taking all the final credit. No siree! This is my party. Chief Lonsdale can put as many men as he's a mind to work digging up evidence, but I bide my time and go it alone. I don't see any of the detectives helping me any. Now I'm going to finish up this lace before I give up for the day and deliver it to the rich old lady. I saw Mrs. Markle looking at it with a practiced and covetous eye. These people get to be regular kleptomaniacs when they stay in the business long enough. She may be back here at midnight and lift the whole shop."

"Leave the key in the door so they can't get the skeleton key in from the outside," suggested Irene.

"Mere keys and doors don't worry such as

the Felix Markles. They are so clever with burglar tools there is no keeping them out if they want to get in. Of course, if we lock fast the door there is still the 'dumb-elevator' as Danny calls it. Bar that fast, or cut the cables and they will manage to come down from the floor above. The thing to do is leave nothing here they want and let them know as much. I wish you would drop in and make a short call at their apartment, Elizabeth, and tell Hortense I am taking back the lace this evening. I must say I'll sleep better if she knows it is out of my keeping."

"I'll do that very thing. Now aren't you glad you took me in your confidence?"

"I wanted to all along but was trying to follow Father's plans in going it alone as much as possible."

"I'd like to see the Markles' faces when they finally decipher the notes and read 'The Hound of Heaven,'" said Irene. "What else was in the notes?"

"Oh, long stanzas from 'Paradise Lost,' 'Hamlet's Soliloquy,' and pages from 'Les Miserables' in French. I don't speak French at all but I can read it quite well and Father wanted

me to be able to take notes in it, as sometimes we have to work with French detectives and he thought it might be useful. Anyhow it was good practice. I copied a lot about the convicts and a chapter on argot. They will have a grand time reading it if they ever master the key. It is almost cruel for me to fool them so when they might spend their time to so much better advantage.”

CHAPTER XV

SIMPKINS & MARKLE

Hortense Markle had besought the friends of Mary Louise to come and call on her, but when Elizabeth Wright was ushered into the charming little drawing room bent on the mission intrusted to her by her partner, she had a feeling that she was not quite so welcome as she had been led to expect. Could it be because she interrupted a tête-a-tête between her hostess and Billy McGraw? That young man seemed to be very much at home in the little apartment, as though he had paid many visits there in the short time he had been acquainted with the charming Mrs. Markle.

Elizabeth was a little embarrassed but determined to fulfill her mission before she left. She liked Billy and hated to see him making a fool of himself over the pretty adventuress. She wished she could save him from the bitter chagrin that would be sure to be his when the sorry business would finally come to light, but

her loyalty to Josie forbade her doing or saying a thing to put him on his guard. Then he had paid her just enough attention to make it possible for him to think that jealousy prompted her in anything she might do or say.

“ We have been very busy at the shop to-day,” Elizabeth began, in a rather loud tone as though determined that her voice would be heard by Hortense and her husband too, if he had concealed himself somewhere behind the curtains. “ Irene finished mending the lace and then Josie laundered the whole lot and I have just delivered it to its owner.”

“ Ah, indeed! ” ejaculated Hortense.

Was there a note of disappointment in her voice?

“ I rather wanted to see that lace again. It was a beautiful pattern. I have a passion for fine and rare lace.”

“ Well, it’s safe with the rich old lady who brought it to us,” said Elizabeth, bluntly.

“ You are quite wise to get it in safe keeping as soon as possible,” said Hortense, suavely.

“ By the way, you never have let me see the orchid pin,” put in Billy. “ You remember you promised.”

“Why, of course! I’ll get it immediately.”

She was gone from the room for a few moments. Elizabeth, who usually was very much at home with Billy McGraw, now sat in silence. For the moment she had nothing to say. He looked at her a little uneasily.

“Are you — are you — kind of angry with me?” he finally said.

“I? The idea! Why should I be angry with you?”

“I don’t know. You don’t seem so — so — chummy as you do sometimes.”

“Chummy? I did not know I had been quite that,” she said with a touch of coldness that she could not keep from her tones.

“Now I know you have got it in for me somehow.”

Elizabeth said nothing as Hortense came back in the room with the orchid pin which she handed to Billy.

“My, it’s a peach!” he declared. He examined it with great interest. “It is as near like Vi Thomas’ as can be. Hers, of course, had Tiffany’s mark on the back and a date, as I remember, some date that meant something to her and her husband.

“ Mine just has the name Felix loves to call me, ‘ Pet.’ It sounds awfully silly and sentimental, but he would have it on.”

“ Can’t I see it? ” asked Elizabeth, wishing in her heart she had a magnifying glass handy, feeling sure there would be marks of other things to be disclosed. She noticed that the gold mounting back of the pin was slightly concave. “ No doubt Josie will attach much importance to that,” she said to herself.

“ You promised some day to show me your original Rembrandt etching,” she said to Hortense. “ I have never seen one.”

“ Have you an original Rembrandt? ” asked Billy. “ You never told me. I’d certainly like to see it. The Thomases had a crackerjack of a Rembrandt. Of course that was lifted too when the orchid pin was.”

“ Heavens! what luck. Those Thomases seem to be perfect Jonahs,” laughed Hortense. Elizabeth thought she detected a little sharp note in her laugh.

“ I am terribly sorry not to show you my treasure of treasures, but the frame was pulling loose a bit and Felix has taken it to have it mended. Anything as precious as a Rembrandt

must be framed in an airtight frame. Felix has been offered a huge sum for our Rembrandt and I am trembling for fear he might sell it. Of course, I know that persons of our means have no business owning such a rare etching but I would so hate to part with it. Felix is something of a speculator in such things, while I have more the soul of the born collector."

"I should think you would live in continual fear of having your things snatched from you," said Elizabeth, wondering at her own cruelty in making such a remark.

"I do," said Hortense, sadly. "Why, Felix is so keen on a trade that I shouldn't be astonished if he wanted sometime to sell my lovely orchid pin."

"Ah, but the 'Pet' engraved on the back would keep him from doing that," suggested Billy, thinking what a mercenary brute the husband must be.

"Oh, but that could be taken off," said Elizabeth with an air of childlike innocence. "We had some marks taken off some silver one time. It was the initials of a person who had married into my father's family and had her initials put on an old family tea service. She had no right

to the service and the service was ruined in our eyes by the addition of her initials. Of course, it meant some of the thickness of the silver had to be sacrificed to get rid of the engraving and there is almost a concavity where there used to be a convexity, but we prefer that to the initials of the interloper."

"Oh, please don't tell my husband such a thing could be done," was Hortense's playful rejoinder. "He would surely get some of the eraser and take off the 'Pet.' Of course, this little pin is very valuable as a work of art and I shouldn't object if we get really hard up. I have never been an unreasonable wife, and we have had our ups and downs."

"You might write to your friend Mr. Thomas," Elizabeth suggested to Billy, "and tell him there is a chance for him to buy the duplicate of the pin his wife lost." Elizabeth well understood she was teasing Mrs. Markle, but could not resist doing it, feeling assured that she was supposed to be unconscious of so doing.

"Don't do it! Please don't do it!" begged Hortense, plainly alarmed. "If this Mr. Thomas hears of this pin he might make a bid for it and Felix is almost sure to take him up, although it

does belong to me. I couldn't bear to part with my beautiful pin. It has such wonderful associations. You see, Felix gave it to me in our early married life when everything was quite different." This, of course, was for Billy's benefit and he looked sad and promised he would not write to his friend.

Hortense looked daggers at Elizabeth, who began to feel that she was regarded as being a bit catty, the expression that she had so recently used to describe Hortense.

"No doubt I am," Elizabeth said to herself, "but I couldn't resist it." Aloud, she remarked that she must be going. Mrs. Markle did not urge her to remain. She found this girl Elizabeth a little too inclined to suggest unpleasant things. She was on the whole rather relieved when Billy McGraw offered to take Elizabeth home in his car. She wanted to get rid of both callers and to see Felix alone and report to him that things were getting a trifle warm.

"I am afraid my clever puss has been talking too much," suggested Mr. Markle, when his wife told him of her having been asked to exhibit the Rembrandt.

"Oh, I can't think it. You see, one must be

natural and what more natural than to say one has a Rembrandt if it is the case? ”

“ That’s so! We may be moving on soon, Pet. Simpkins & Markle had a fine offer to-day for a furnished apartment, and no questions asked. This would be the very one and we could take with us all the doubtful things and still leave a costly enough place.”

“ Not before the wedding, surely! ” she exclaimed.

“ Well, hardly, when my wife is to be matron of honor! We will be here several months longer. What is the date fixed? ”

“ June the twelfth! Must I give out that there is a chance of our moving? ”

“ Not yet, but when you do, of course you must be the abused young wife with the peculiar and mercenary husband. That is a great stunt of yours. I heard what you were saying to that young ass of a McGraw.”

“ Not jealous, are you? ” she asked coyly.

“ Not a bit! Just more in love with you than ever. I don’t know what I’d do without such a clever wife and such a stupid business partner. Simpkins is duller than ever. He accepts everything on its face value in the firm and assists me

in operating the business with never an idea in his numskull that he is not conducting a perfectly legitimate thing. Of course, we have a lot of simple deals on that any real estate firm might have and then we have this out of town rental list that I attend to as much as possible. Sometimes, though, it is up to him and he accepts it with perfectly good grace. Specializing as we do in elegantly furnished apartments brings in a class of clients with whom he is unfamiliar and they seem in a measure to overawe him into extra stupidity.”

Dorfield and the neighboring towns were suffering from the after war congested conditions quite as much as were the large cities. New industries had sprung into existence, bringing many strangers to settle in the towns. Building was high and the cost of materials was increasing every day. That was forcing up the price of real estate and quite ordinary little apartments were renting for fabulous sums. When those apartments were furnished the supposed value was doubled. And when they were furnished elegantly the agents could go as far as they liked in their demands upon the tenants.

Simpkins & Markle were doing a flourishing

business, specializing in small, elegantly furnished apartments. They had branch offices in all the neighboring towns, Mr. Markle being the traveling member who kept in touch with the branch offices.

These apartments were always let with the greatest care as to the form of lease. The empty apartment would be rented to a young couple who would sign the lease and pay a month's rent in advance. Then their household goods would arrive from some distant state and be installed. Rugs, pictures, beautiful furniture of all kinds, silver, china, table linen, etc. The couple would live in the apartment for about a month and then the young husband would report at the real estate office that he had a raise, a new job, a sick mother, or something and wanted to sub-let his apartment, furnished. Of course, the beautiful furnishings would double and sometimes triple the value of the rooms and Simpkins & Markle would reap a reward. Simpkins would never be called upon to interview this couple and would therefore never be struck with its likeness to the couple before. He seemed merely to see that the firm was doing well and their kind of business was a lucrative one. He

staid in Dorfield and kept the books and attended to the old Dorfield business, which was slow but steady, while his more active partner attended to the furnished apartment rentals. His was the duty to pass on to the distant young couple the profits reaped by their contract in sub-renting.

The unerring taste of Hortense was often called in play to arrange the furniture in these apartments. She could put a touch to them that would add greatly to their value. Strangers, warned beforehand of the difficulty of finding any place to live and almost hopeless of obtaining even a roof over their heads, would be carried off their feet when shown these beautiful rooms where Hortense had had her artistic will. No price seemed too high for such a haven of rest and beauty.

There can be little doubt in the minds of my readers where this furniture came from. A chain of burglars reaching from New York to San Francisco were ever busy robbing any and every house where they could make an entrance. Then the spoils were carefully sorted and shifted to far away points where detection was not likely. Felix and Hortense Markle were head

and brains for this bold undertaking. They worked under many aliases and sometimes appeared as father and daughter, sometimes brother and sister, sometimes they worked singly, but usually they were husband and wife. They were clever beyond the belief of ordinary mortals, so clever that their existence was doubted by some of the most astute and highly esteemed detectives. O'Gorman had been on their track and was in a fair way to come up with them when the war broke out and he was compelled to serve his country in other ways besides bringing to justice a pair of the cleverest thieves he confessed himself ever to have seen. He had talked to Josie of his ambition and had given her what information he possessed. This form of real estate hoax was a new one with the Markles, but their method was the one they had always used, that of living in a respectable and decent way and making friends with the best people in the town where they hoped to get the most loot.

Sleepy Dorfield was a good place for their machinations. There was a good deal of wealth in town and the friendship of Mary Louise and her grandfather was "open sesame" to the society of Dorfield.

CHAPTER XVI

A DINNER PARTY

There was some excitement in the Wright family when Elizabeth came speeding home in Billy McGraw's stylish little racer. They had grown accustomed if not resigned to the peculiarities of this member of the family who insisted upon working all day in a funny shop with an unstylish little person, the daughter of a policeman so they understood. Her only value in their eyes was that she was a friend of Mary Louise's. As has been remarked before, that fact went a long way in the opinion of Dorfield towards establishing a person as worthy of being cultivated.

Another thing that was reconciling the Wright family somewhat to Elizabeth's erratic mode of life was that she had begun to put money in the bank. This they were sure of, as one of the sisters had had a peep in her bank book. The shop was proving a financial success and in the

eyes of one's family nothing succeeds like monetary success.

And here was Elizabeth driving up in style in the car of the young man conceded by all Dorfield mothers and daughters to be the most desirable catch in town. Next to catching him themselves the sisters of Elizabeth would have liked to have her catch him. The mother was perfectly impartial as to which member of her family should land such a large game fish.

"I don't believe she even asked him in," declared Gertrude, peeping out the window.

"I am sure she didn't," agreed Annabel. "I know he would have come in if she had asked him. Elizabeth doesn't know how to handle men at all."

"No, she is simply foolish the way she goes to work," said Pauline. "No man likes to be cut so short. She just gave him a little nod and came on in before he had even got back in his car and started his engine. She'll never win out with such indifference."

"I don't know about that," put in Margaret, who loved to take the opposite view, "sometimes the grand independent way is quite taking, especially with a man like Billy McGraw, who has

been spoiled to death. How did you happen to get a lift?" This to Elizabeth, who had just entered the room.

"I met Billy at Mrs. Markle's and he asked to bring me home, as he was coming this way," said Elizabeth with as much sangfroid as she could muster.

"I think I shall have the Markles and Mr. McGraw to dinner soon," said Mrs. Wright, who had listened with half an ear to the conversation of her daughters. "I have meant to entertain them for some time and since they are such friends of Billy McGraw's it would be agreeable to have them all come together."

"I wouldn't," faltered Elizabeth. "You are not called on to entertain them."

"I fancy I am the best judge of that," said her mother sharply. "I should like to know since when it has been necessary for one of my daughters to dictate to me when I should and should not entertain in my own house. You say you have been calling at Mrs. Markle's and it seems quite fitting then that I should call on her and invite her to dinner."

"Don't you like Mrs. Markle?" asked Margaret curiously, noting with amusement that

Elizabeth had flushed painfully under her mother's tirade. Mrs. Wright's tirades were not usually looked upon very seriously by her daughters.

"Why, I never thought much about it," said Elizabeth evasively.

"I fancy she is some beau grabber," suggested Pauline.

"Why did you call on her if you didn't like her?" asked Gertrude.

"Heavens above!" ejaculated Elizabeth. "Perhaps I had some business to attend to—or perhaps I didn't," remembering suddenly that her business with Mrs. Markle was of a delicate nature and not to be mentioned outside of the bosom of the Higgleddy-Piggleddy.

"What business?" insisted Gertrude.

"The kind one gets rich attending to, my own," said Elizabeth. She knew she was rude, but why couldn't her family let her alone? She had worked hard all day typing the novel for the would-be author; writing an obituary notice for a bereaved gentleman who had just lost his fourth wife; and polishing up a paper for an aspiring leader of a literary club. She was tired now and would have liked to go to her room

and be quiet for a few moments. How different life was at the shop! There everybody was busy and nobody had time to be poking her nose in everybody's business.

"I fancy your business was running after Billy McGraw," continued Gertrude. Since rudeness was the order of the day, she was fully capable of doing her share to keep the ball rolling.

Elizabeth's inclination was to answer with increased acrimony but she thought better of it and merely left the room, even refraining from slamming the door, which was always a good way to get the last word in an argument in the Wright household.

"Why, why, can't they let me alone?" she asked herself when she got to the room which she shared with Margaret. She vaguely wished she had kept her temper and not been so quick to take it for granted that her sisters were interfering.

"They are so idle is the reason they ask so many questions, I am sure," she argued with herself. "I should feel sorry for them because they don't know what fun it is to be busy. I'm going to try to be nicer and bring home some-

thing in the way of news that will be helpful to them instead of flying off the handle the way I did. I do wish though that Mother wouldn't entertain the Markles. Of course, she is doing it to encourage Billy McGraw. Mother's methods are too apparent for him who runs not to read. Only suppose the Markles come and find things here they want." Here Elizabeth had to giggle a bit to herself. "They might go off with Father's first editions and the great-grandfather forks, to say nothing of the silver slop basin in which George Washington is supposed to have drunk his toddy. What am I to do? I shouldn't let Mother entertain such persons, but there is no stopping her short of divulging my real reason for not having them and that would be queering Josie's game. Well, maybe it will teach Mother a lesson. Of course if anything does happen they will blame me for being the one to introduce them to such persons."

The outcome was that the Wrights did entertain the Markles and Billy McGraw on the same evening, although Elizabeth put in one more earnest protest which had no more effect than to raise the ire of her mother and sisters, who declared she was a dog in the manger. Evidently

she did not want Billy McGraw herself, but she didn't want any of her sisters to have him.

“ He is taken with you, anyone can see with half an eye,” declared Gertrude. “ But you treat him just as though he were any ordinary young man — ”

“ Isn't he? ” asked Elizabeth.

“ Pooh! You know he is a cut above the others with all that money.”

The dinner party proved a success in spite of Elizabeth's embarrassment. The poor girl felt that the evening would never end. The Wrights knew how to entertain and nobody in Dorfield could give a better dinner than Mrs. Wright; the daughters were handsome and could be agreeable; Mr. and Mrs. Markle had a social gift and easy manners that insured a light, pleasant conversation wherever they were invited.

Elizabeth almost had hysterics when she saw her father leading Mr. Markle into his sanctum sanctorum to show him his rare first editions, his autographed copies, etc. Mrs. Markle was delighted with the Boydell plates from Shakespeare and the portfolio of Hogarth's drawings handed down from an ancestor, who also collected.

“And this is the silver service you spoke of,” she said to Elizabeth. “See, Felix, this old service was marked and Mrs. Wright had the initials removed. Isn’t that wonderful?” she said naively to her husband. “I wonder how they do it. It is a wonderful piece of silver. Only feel how heavy! And look at those brass candlesticks! Heavens, Mrs. Wright! Those candlesticks are worth more than their weight in gold. They are of a rare and wonderful design. Surely you don’t go off to the beach and leave such treasures unprotected?”

“Oh, yes,” said Mrs. Wright, delighted that her guest was so appreciative of the heirlooms. “We have never had any burglaries in Dorfield, at least none for years to amount to anything. Of course, as a rule, we take the silver with us.”

“Oh, of course,” said Hortense, and Elizabeth listened for the disappointed note she felt was surely in her voice.

“We either take it with us or hide it somewhere in the house,” continued Mrs. Wright. “This heavy service I usually hide in first one place and then another. Sometimes I hide things so well I can’t find them myself. The

tops of wardrobes are famous places. Nobody ever thinks of looking for things there."

"Of course, nobody would," commented Hortense.

"I am to begin tomorrow to pack up for the summer," went on Mrs. Wright, rather pleased that this young woman was so attentive. "You see, we are to go to the lake just as soon as Mary Louise's wedding is over. That is quite soon now. To-morrow I send the servants out to the lake house to get it ready for us. It makes it rather inconvenient for us, but it is only for a few days and then it is nice when we get there to have everything in such perfect order."

"All of you will go to the wedding?" asked Hortense.

"Oh, yes, Mary Louise has invited the entire family. It was no less than she could do since Elizabeth is one of the bridesmaids. Mr. Wright is not inclined to accept invitations, but we have persuaded him to go to this wedding, since it is really the event of the year. Of course, the girls and I would not miss it for anything."

Elizabeth was glad when the evening was over. It embarrassed her to see the way in which her mother and sisters made up to Billy McGraw

and the warmer their manners became the colder grew her own towards that young man, who could not understand what he had done to merit her disapproval. The more distant she became the closer he tried to come. He forgot to look at the beautiful Mrs. Markle in his endeavor to make Elizabeth smile on him.

CHAPTER XVII

ANOTHER VISIT TO THE CHIEF

Felix Markle was at the very top of his profession. A man of rare culture and natural refinement and of indomitable will and courage, he might have made a name for himself in any walk of life he had chosen to follow. It was a pity that so much that was fine in him should have gone to make a master thief instead of the noble leader he might have been.

The possession of Detective O'Gorman's notebook was of the greatest importance to him. The deciphering of it would tell exactly how much the secret service knew concerning him and his accomplices. How much was known concerning his aliases and if his wife was suspected or had been at any time.

He was determined to protect her at any cost, but everything was going so well he could see no reason to doubt that they could go on with their clever schemes indefinitely. Every now and then one of the supposed owners of the

elegantly furnished apartments determined to have a sale and then large sums would be realized on the stolen treasures. The firm of Simpkins & Markle would handle the sale, taking out their commission and Markle would have the part of seeing that the fictitious owners got their share of the profits. All transactions appeared on the books of the real estate firm and any expert examiner of those books would have pronounced everything to be in perfect form and order.

Josie O'Gorman had hoped to keep up with the case unaided by mere man, but things were getting too much for her. She began to lose sleep going over and over how best she could trap the persons of whose dishonesty she was assured. Her idea was not to spring the trap too soon for fear she might lose some of the principal offenders. After many sleepless nights, she determined to take Chief Charley Lonsdale into her confidence and ask for his support.

On this visit she found the man at the door awake and taking notice.

"You can't see the chief," he announced decisively, looking at Josie as though she were thin air. "He's that busy he says he can't see

a soul. If you are after making a complaint about a neighbor's hins or the like, there's a man at the desk for such business."

Josie's eyes took on the dull look she loved to assume when there was important business on hand.

"It's worse than hens—it's tigers!" she exclaimed. "A man at the desk can't attend to tigers. I must see the chief."

The astonished man let her pass. Of course tigers were a little too important for a small man like the one at the desk to cope with.

The chief was alone and busy looking over some papers. A worried frown was on his brow. He looked up a moment after Josie entered.

"Ah, the little O'Gorman! Nothing doing, I fancy, and you have come for help."

"I have come for help but not because there is nothing doing. I could handle that situation alone," replied Josie in a cool drawl that was ludicrously like the tone her father had used and it made Chief Lonsdale smile. "There is so much doing that I have had to come for help. I hate to do it, as I'd like the glory along with the work, but I can't let the whole school of fish

escape just so I can have the honor of landing the biggest one of the lot. Father used to say that a detective must first consider his duty to society; that is, to get the wrong-doers caught, never mind who does the catching."

"Humph! I wish there were more of his way of thinking. Now tell us all about it."

Josie sat down and unfolded her tale from the beginning. She made the man's eyes wide with astonishment when she told of the Markles' entrance into her shop and the purloining of the notebook. He laughed delightedly over what Markle was spending so much time trying to master.

"The Hound of Heaven!" he cried. "That sounds like good stuff. And who is this young newspaper chap who has drawn the blank? Does he know it yet?"

"He has been very busy and has not yet opened the book," explained Josie. "I have seen him once and he tells me he has it in his breast pocket and is waiting for an evening off when he intends to untie the hard knot of the ribbon and then try to unravel the cipher. I was sorry not to put him on to the fake, but I felt I had better not take anyone else into our

confidence just yet. I'll set his mind at rest when he finds it out, because, of course, he will feel responsible for it. I am rather hoping Mrs. Markle will be around when he lets me know about it. I like to study her. She is a deep one, for sure.

“Of course,” she continued, “up to this time we have nothing to go upon but suspicion, except that they came in and purloined the notebook. The fact that Mr. McGraw's friends in New York lost an enamel pin and all their etchings and rugs, etc., and that Mrs. Markle has a pin like the one lost is no proof, but link by link the chain is being forged and, in my own mind, I am sure of them. Of course, I overheard their talk when they were in my shop, and that is enough to settle the matter for me, but it wouldn't amount to much as evidence. Not even the fact that former initials had been cut out of the napkins would count for much.”

“Well, now, what do you advise?” asked the chief, quite humbly. This girl's level-headed ingenuity amazed him.

“I advise a very circumspect supervision of the real estate firm of Simpkins & Markle first,” said Josie. “If by hook or crook one could get

hold of their books and see where they have done business lately. Do you know Simpkins?"

"Yes, went to school with him — a man of no imagination and perfect honesty — dull though — dull."

"Any means?"

"Doing well — very well — so I am told, especially since he has gone into partnership with this Markle."

"You see, if we could get some idea of where their business is located we could spread nets all around and catch the whole bunch of confederates. Have you someone you can trust not to bungle?" Josie looked so solemn and so young the chief had to smile behind his papers.

"Perhaps!" and then the man and the girl put their heads together and step by step traced out their strategic plans.

"I hope the ax won't drop until after Mary Louise is married and off on her wedding trip," sighed Josie. "Poor Mary Louise is always getting mixed up in other persons' villainies."

"Yes, if we could only warn her of the perfidy of this new friend. Don't you think we might?" asked the chief, who was as fond of Mary Louise as though she had been his own daughter.

“Never! In the first place, she wouldn’t believe any tales about her dear Hortense, and in the second, she would queer our game by trying to get her off if she was convinced of her being a criminal. Mary Louise is not of the stern stuff that you and I are made of, Chief.”

“Well, I only hope they won’t be trying any of their monkey tricks at her wedding,” laughed the man. “But they would hardly do that. Anyhow, we must be prepared and, of course, our object is to catch them redhanded. I may have to send to New York for assistance, but I promise you that no matter what help I get, you are the boss of this job.”

“I wish I had been born triplets,” sighed Josie. “I’d like to run on to New York and have a personal interview with this friend of Billy McGraw’s named Thomas who had his stuff all lifted — as it is, I think you had better put some man on the job who can fix it up with him to be in Dorfield in the next few days, or immediately after the wedding, so he can identify his goods. I have an idea most of his things are right here in the Markle apartment. Of course, he must not let on to McGraw that he is coming or he will queer the whole thing by mentioning

to Hortense Markle that he is expecting his friend and she will see to it that all traces are removed. She is slick as slick can be and has that young fellow guessing, not that he is in love with her, but just fascinated by her big eyes and her confiding girlish manner. My opinion is that she is madly in love with that scamp of a husband but she leads these rich young men on just to fleece them."

"Yes, I know the type," put in the chief.

The young girl and the old man were agreed that they would try to hold off until after their dear Mary Louise was married and started on her wedding trip, then they would close in around the Markles and their confederates and have the matter all settled before Danny and his bride should return from their honeymoon.

"Nothing must come up to cloud the girl's happiness," said Josie, and the chief said: "Amen!"

CHAPTER XVIII

BOB DULANEY RETURNS THE NOTEBOOK

The next day the shop was doing a thriving business. Josie was busily engaged in hunting up information concerning the best method to pursue when contemplating taking a donkey trip through Spain for a middle aged lady who had saved money for the venture and was determined to have the trip in spite of discouraging friends; Elizabeth was touching up a club paper on extra foraneous ornamentation; and Irene, who had been sent for in a hurry to do some smocking, had just wheeled herself from the dumb-waiter, produced her thimble and gone to work.

Hortense Markle came into the shop looking, as usual, fresh as the dawn and her eyes sparkling like dew drops. Josie looked at her almost pityingly. It seemed so sad to her that anyone who looked so charming could be so wicked.

“ I have brought some trifling little gew-gaws that Felix and I have picked up at various times

in our travels, thinking you young merchants might have some sale for them. They are of no great value, but there is no use in keeping such things around the house when one no longer cares for them," she said, opening a package she carried. "Would you care to try to sell them?"

"Sure, we would," answered Josie. "We are expecting to go into that kind of business a good deal. Are the things antiques?"

"Some of them! Here is a cameo brooch that is really quite pretty, but I am not the cameo brooch type. I can't imagine what made Felix take — buy — such a thing." Josie noticed the little slip but her expressionless face gave no clue to her thoughts. "Here is a chain, quite pretty, and a locket too."

There were various trinkets, all of them accepted by the girls and a price agreed upon for them. They were to receive a commission on the sales.

"I have some rugs too that we don't want," continued Hortense. "Would you like them? Perhaps you might buy them outright and make quite a pretty penny on them."

"Send them around and we will see about it," said Josie. "Are they handsome?"

“ Yes, quite fine! Felix thinks they are prettier than the ones we are using but I have a fancy for the old ones to which I have grown accustomed.”

Irene and Elizabeth listened to the above conversation with feelings of mingled astonishment and amusement. Life for those girls was very interesting during the days while the net was slowly closing around the unconscious Markles. They could not help feeling sorry for them, but at the same time disgust at Hortense's perfidy was uppermost in the minds of the girls who had led quiet sheltered lives themselves.

“ Tell me, Miss O'Gorman, has young Mr. Dulaney ever brought back your father's notebook, and could he make head or tail of the pot-hooks? ” asked Hortense, pretending to be very nonchalant.

“ No, not yet, but he was to get to it last evening,” answered Josie. “ But here he is now.”

Bob Dulaney came in the shop looking decidedly perturbed.

“ Oh, Miss O'Gorman, I am worried stiff,” he cried, taking in the other occupants with a general bow. “ I can't bear to meet you, but I

must have it over with. Do you know something has happened to the book you lent me, your father's notebook, I mean. I have not had it out of my possession since you handed it to me, in my breast pocket all the time and when my coat was not on my back it was hanging on a chair by my bed. I have not had time to open the little book until last night. Then I untied the hard knot of the ribbons and found the book filled with nothing but blank pages. I can't account for it. Certainly when you showed it to us when you moved in, it had ciphered notes in it. I remember well that you untied the strings and the pages were covered close with hieroglyphics. You put it back on the shelves tightly tied up and I fancy it had not been opened since. In fact, I think you said it had not when you lent it to me."

It was difficult for Josie to pretend to the perturbed young man, but she felt she must keep up the farce before the watchful Hortense. She devoutly hoped Irene and Elizabeth could hold on to themselves. She could plainly see they were excited and that Irene was filled with pity for poor Bob.

"It is too bad," said Josie with as cold a

voice as she could muster. "I should not have let the book get out of my possession. Of course, I don't know myself what was in it, never having had time to dig out the meaning since my father died, but I understood from him that the information in it would be of the greatest value for the secret service."

"I know it — but oh, Miss O'Gorman, I can't tell you how I feel about it. I'm so miserable. I'm going to see a detective about it immediately. I don't see how it happened, or who could have known even that I had it. Could it have been done before I took it?"

"Well, hardly," spoke up Hortense with something of a sneer. "I was here when Miss O'Gorman gave it to you and she remarked at the time that —"

"Well, there is no use in crying over spilt milk, as my father used to say," interrupted Josie. "I have learned a lesson and that is perhaps as worth while as the information detectives may have gained from the book — that is, not to lend too promiscuously."

Irene turned away her face. She felt so sorry for Bob she could not bear to look at him. She felt Josie was carrying the thing too far, but she

knew she must keep out of the discussion. If she could only let Bob know that she trusted him.

“ I am so sorry! That is all I can say,” and Bob turned to go. “ Good-by, all of you. I fancy you won’t want to see me in your shop any more.”

“ Oh, well, we may have to see you to try and clear up this matter,” said Josie, brusquely. She followed him to the door and out into the hall. Her manner suddenly changed.

“ Shh! ” she warned. “ It is all right. Don’t worry a minute. I have the notes all safe. You must forgive me for being so rude. Don’t ask any questions now but come back in a few minutes. Wait across the street until you see Mrs. Markle is gone, or better still, go to the back of the house and come up in the elevator and wait there until she is out of the house. We need your help. Understand? ”

“ No, but it is all right if you say so,” was Bob’s relieved reply.

“ Well, young man, you come back here as soon as the coast is clear and, if you are sharp, you are going to assist in the biggest haul of fourflushers of this century. Also, you are going to get the scoop of your life for your paper.

But don't move without letting me know." With that Josie turned back the collar of her middy blouse and disclosed a badge that made Bob whistle.

The young man carried down those old stairs a much lighter heart than he had carried up.

"Who would have thought it?" he muttered. "A chip of the old block, that's sure — but what has the beautiful Mrs. Markle to do with it? Gee! But life is interesting!"

When Josie went back in the shop, Hortense began with a bitter invective against Bob Dulaney. Of course, he had purloined the notes. He very well knew their value and was simply trying to pull the wool over Josie's eyes. Empty and blank papers indeed! She had seen the sheets all covered with notes with her own eyes and had seen Josie tie the ribbons around the little book in the hardest kind of a knot. Dulaney had simply sold them to some collector. For her part she had no faith in him. Why didn't Josie send for the police? Josie told her perhaps she would but, after all, she doubted the papers being so very valuable. She only prized them for sentimental reasons. Irene sat like a frozen girl during the conversation. She longed for Hor-

tense to go, which she did soon, and then Bob came whizzing up in the dumb-waiter and there was general rejoicing in the Higgedy-Piggedy Shop.

“ We must lie very low and keep very quiet,” warned Josie. “ Remember we are all novices and dealing with hardened criminals. We must not make the mistake the Markles are making in underestimating the intelligence of our opponents. Father always said to give the enemy credit for having more sense and ingenuity than you possess yourself and try to make up for your possible lack by eternal vigilance. Do you realize, Elizabeth, that our shop has been drawn into this net, that we are receivers of stolen goods? Every one of these trinkets has been stolen, also the rugs she is to send up on approval. Of course, she hopes we will buy them outright and hand over the money in case she and her rascally husband may have to vamoose in a hurry. We will keep her waiting for a few days, eh, partner Elizabeth? ”

CHAPTER XIX

THE WEDDING

The twelfth of June was just such a day as it should have been for the wedding day of the lovely Mary Louise and her darling Danny Dexter. The weather is always an important factor for a successful undertaking of any kind, but a stormy wedding day is something we cannot forgive the weather man. It was especially important that the sun should shine, but not too hotly, and the breezes should be soft and gentle for this wedding, since it was to be staged out of doors.

“ And what is so rare as a day in June?

Then, if ever, come perfect days;
Then Heaven tries earth if it be in tune,
And over it softly her warm ear lays;
Whether we look, or whether we listen,
We hear life murmur, or see it glisten.”

That twelfth of June was just such a day as Lowell describes in his immortal poem. Every-

body was happy, even Grandpa Jim, since his beloved child was not really being taken from him. He was merely being presented with a grandson-in-law who would but add to the joy of his declining years. The wedding trip was to take Mary Louise away for only two weeks and Irene was to stay with him until Mr. and Mrs. Danny Dexter should return.

The ceremony was to be at high noon, followed by a wedding breakfast, the splendor and lavishness of which was to be the talk of Dorfield for days to come. Colonel Hathaway was not inclined to show, but the marriage of this dear grandchild was of paramount importance to the old man and he felt that nothing must be left undone to make this wedding breakfast perfect. The list of guests had grown, as such lists always do grow, and to the dear friends and intimates were gradually added the new acquaintances of grandfather and granddaughter. It was difficult to draw the line, since both old man and young girl had such kindly feelings for everybody in Dorfield and everybody surely loved them.

“ Why draw the line, since it is so difficult? ” Grandpa Jim had remarked. “ If there is any doubt about whether we should or shouldn't ask

anybody, for goodness' sake let's ask them. It is better to err on that side of the ledger." And so the invitation ended by being general, much to the delight and satisfaction of Dorfield. Mrs. Wright, after all, might have spared herself her trouble of maneuvering for invitations for her daughters.

The bridesmaids had arrived. They looked very like the bunches of sweet peas they were to carry. As for the bride, no lily of the field could have been fairer.

“ Her angel face as the great eye of
Heaven shone bright
And made a sunshine in a shady place.
Did ever mortal eye behold such
heavenly grace? ”

quoted Elizabeth in a whisper to Josie. Josie had refused to be a bridesmaid, but was with them upstairs where they were waiting for the hour to strike. “ I do wish Irene could see you now,” she said to Mary Louise.

“ Where is she, the dear girl? I'll run down and speak to her before the people all come.”

“ You could hardly do that, honey, as Irene is already out on the lawn. She has wheeled her chair to the spot where we decided she must

sit so she can be part of the ceremony, as it were."

"Here I am!" cried Hortense Markle tripping into the room. "I was so afraid you would worry about my not getting here in time. I am a wee bit late, but dear Felix is ill and I could not leave him before."

"Oh, I am so sorry," said Mary Louise. "Is he in bed?"

"No, he is sitting up with his dressing gown wrapped around him. It is just one of those miserable neuralgic attacks he is subject to, but it completely lays him out, poor fellow. He is so sorry not to come to the wedding. In fact, up to the last minute, he hoped he would be able to control the wretched headache and come anyhow, but he finally had to give up. I gave him a huge dose of aspirin. I really hated to leave him but, of course, I could not be absent from such a post of honor at such a time. The matron of honor is almost as necessary to a bride as the groom himself. But how beautiful you are, my dear Mary Louise! And the girls! They are wonderful. I am almost sorry I am to be in the picture, I want so much to see it."

Hortense herself was as beautiful as could be.

Her dress of the palest grey made over iridescent silk was perfect and her glowing beauty shone in a manner that Elizabeth thought of as being almost diabolical in its lure.

“I am sorry I know what she is,” Elizabeth whispered to Josie. “I can’t enjoy her beauty as I should like to, knowing as I do what a thing she is.”

“Well, keep up a face, anyhow,” admonished Josie. “I am expecting trouble. I hope it won’t go wrong.”

“I promised to telephone Felix just before the ceremony,” said Hortense. “He says he wants to picture us as we go through the yew hedge. He is really quite sentimental about this wedding, dear Mary Louise. You are a prime favorite with him and he thinks great things of your Danny.”

At last the hour struck! It was time for the start. The guests had gathered on the lawn. It was hard for some of them to tear themselves away from the room where the wedding presents were placed. Such wedding presents! Cases of silver of every known pattern and device! Cut glass and fine china! Wonderful rugs and tapestries! Rare etchings and prints! Linen

fine enough for a king's ransom! All of these things were in a little room downstairs that connected Grandpa Jim's bedroom and the living room. This room Mary Louise had always used as an extra sitting room where she could take her intimates. It had been cleared of furniture for the occasion and tables brought in to hold all the beautiful presents. Some of the more curious guests wanted to linger and read every card and look at the bottom of every piece of silver to see if, by chance, anyone could have sent anything not marked sterling; but when the rumor went forth that the bridal procession was ready to start, the curious ones hastened for the terraces. Hortense telephoned to her husband a moment before they left the house.

"We are ready, dear," she said in the phone in Mary Louise's room. "Just starting! You may think of us in five minutes now as being in the midst of the ceremony. I hope your dear head is better. Oh, I am so sorry! Go to bed dear!"

Josie watched every movement of the matron of honor. Nothing escaped the little detective. It was easy to see that Hortense was filled with an excitement that merely being matron of honor

did not warrant. Her eyes were sparkling and her cheeks were flushed. Her beauty glowed like a ruby. Occasionally, Josie noticed she stood still for a moment in an attitude of listening. Josie listened too up to the moment the bridal party came through the yew hedge and made its way to the spot on the greensward where the minister awaited. Then for a moment, she forgot everything but the fact that Mary Louise, her dear little friend, was being united to her Danny in the holy bonds of matrimony in sickness and in health until death would them part.

Of course, the servants came out to the side of the house to see their little mistress married. Even the caterers who had begun to swarm in and out of the place left their work and joined the house servants. Mary Louise was a favorite with everybody and this was not the first time those caterers had been called to Colonel Hathaway's to serve, for the old gentleman was a famous entertainer and many had been the parties given by him to his granddaughter. The great house was empty. Everybody was in the garden thrilled by the beautiful and picturesque sight of the wedding.

As the procession came through the yew hedge

a small automobile truck was driven up the alley. It stopped at the Hathaways' back gate and two men got out, each one with a trunk slung over his back. Quietly they made their way through the deserted kitchen and butler's pantry and into the small room where the presents were on display. They closed the doors to this room and then with remarkable dispatch proceeded to pack the presents in the trunks filled with excelsior, first the silver which they took from the cases, thereby economizing space, and then the cut glass wrapped in the fine linen and tapestries and packed between the folds of the rugs. Such clever packers were never seen. They seemed to have an instinct for fitting an article in a space. The trunks were filled in a twinkling and then the men carried them out one at a time, and quietly and easily lifted them into the truck. Just as the minister pronounced Danny and Mary Louise man and wife and warned the guests that whom God had united let no man put asunder, the truck started up the alley.

“ Well, we got off there all safe,” laughed one of the men. “ I must say you are the cleverest ever. Of course, you have your wife to help you plan a thing like this.” The man who was

thus blessed was no other than Felix Markle, who seemed to have shaken off his headache remarkably quickly and have got to the Hathaways' in time for the ceremony after all.

“ Yes, she is a wonder. I'd like to know if the others got the things from the Wrights. I hope they didn't fill up with useless plunder. The Wrights are off to the beach tomorrow and they won't know a thing about their treasures being lifted until they come back in the fall. There they are! ”

The truck was met at the corner by one similar also carrying trunks and run by two men.

“ All safe? ” called Markle.

“ As easy as shootin'! ” was the answer. “ Not a soul around and back windows all unlatched. We found the silver on top the wardrobe and brought along all the books you named to us. We picked up some rugs too, all nicely packed in moth balls and two fur coats. ”

“ Well, we'd best be off now. You have the address all right, eh? Mark your tag clearly and bring me your check tomorrow at my office. Good boys! ”

The trucks then separated, the one Markle was in making at a goodly speed for a small

town about fifteen miles from Dorfield, the other one going to the Dorfield station.

Josie, whose eye was ever on Hortense, noticed the woman was a little distrait at the close of the ceremony. Just as the benediction was pronounced instead of casting down her eyes she seemed unable to keep her eyes from the back of the garden, even stooping a little to peer through a gap in the hedge. What could she be interested in?

Congratulations in order! Everybody kissing the bride and shaking hands with the bridegroom, some of them even kissing him. Josie slipped through the crowd and whispered something to Bob Dulaney.

“A truck you say drove up during the ceremony?”

“Yes, and it is off now, but we can keep up with it. The chief is having all the stations watched. Have you your disguise?”

“Sure! And you?”

“Mine is in my pocket, so come along.”

CHAPTER XX

THE RIDE TO SOMERVILLE

They made their way to the garage, where there was a motorcycle with a side car attached. Josie darted behind the Colonel's big touring car and in a moment came out as good a little boy as one could wish. She had simply stepped out of her dress, having the boy's clothes on underneath. Then she put on a pair of big automobile goggles and, pulling a cap down over her sandy hair, made the disguise perfect. Bob put on over his wedding garment a black alpaca dress of goodly proportions, since he was a broad shouldered, powerful youth. Across his manly bosom he folded a spotless white kerchief and under his chin he tied the strings of a huge black satin quilted sunbonnet, first fitting over his smooth brown head a wig composed of many water waves, the kind beloved by a certain type of female.

“All right but your shoes and they are awful,” complained Josie. “I thought you would for-

get them and brought these. Father always said your feet would give you away quicker than anything else." Josie produced from the side car a huge pair of list slippers which Bob was loath to put on but which he did, knowing the girl was right. The patent leathers he had on were hardly in keeping with the bombazine dress and the quilted satin bonnet. He surveyed himself with interest, twisting to see his back.

"Put your shoes and hat in your grip, Auntie, and then we are off." She handed the young man a lumpy, bumpy grip known as a telescope. He climbed into the side car, Josie mounted the motorcycle and in a jiffy they were off, making the usual splutteration of those noisy modes of locomotion.

"The chief is to attend to the station at Dorfield and we are to follow the truck, which is more than likely going over to Somerville. If it goes beyond there we will go beyond also. Of course, you realize the reason we don't nab the fellows right now is that we are anxious to get the whole bunch and if we can keep up with where these trunks are to be sent we can more than likely get many more of the gang in our net," explained Josie, putting on more speed as

she saw the rear end of a truck making for the open road on the way to Somerville.

“ Now I am to hang around and find out where Markle ships the trunks and then I am to find out what the number of the checks is and report to the chief. Is that it? ”

“ Exactly! You are such a fussy old lady and so full of curiosity, Auntie.”

“ Are you going to let the trunks go off? ” asked Auntie anxiously.

“ We may have to. Then the persons who apply for them at the other end will be nabbed. Of course, Markle will buy tickets and check the trunks and mail the checks to his confederates. More than likely, he will not get on the train himself but just pretend he is going to. I fancy poor old Markle will wish he had taken the train to-night. He may be near the end of his rope. I can't help feeling kind of sorry for the poor devil.” Josie sighed a little. “ Father always felt sorry for the criminals. One can't help it. He used to say they had just as much feeling as we had and because they had gone wrong did not alter the fact that they had been cunning little babies once and their mothers had no doubt loved them. Perhaps they loved them so much

they did not spank them enough and that is the reason they turned out so badly."

Bob laughed in a voice not at all suitable for a respectable auntie and was admonished by her critical nephew. They soon caught up with the truck and kept a few hundred feet behind them.

"What is that coming up behind us?" Markle asked his companion.

"Nothing but one of those Indians with a side car carrying an old woman and a little boy. I tell you we made a safe getaway and these trunks will be on the Eastern express bound for the metropolis before the wedding guests have sat down to their paté de fois gras."

It went off quite as Josie had planned. Markle, quietly and in a businesslike manner, bought two tickets to New York as soon as he reached the bustling little station at Somerville, after lifting out the heavy trunks. Josie and her fictitious auntie were near him and heard him ask for the tickets and demand checks for his baggage.

"I'll get your tickets, Auntie, while you go 'round to the baggage room and see if your trunk has come," suggested Josie in an audible tone and a manner of a small nephew who was

more or less wearied by his female relatives. "But maybe I'd better not buy your ticket until you see whether it is there or not, 'cause I know you won't get on the train without it. You women won't go on trips without your duds."

Bob flounced off with all the dignity he could muster, managing his bombazine with surprising grace. Markle and his companion paid no attention whatsoever to the boy and the old woman, but went on to the baggage room, where they personally superintended putting the checks on their trunks. It took but a moment for Auntie to poke around the piled up trunks in her diligent search for her own dream luggage and take the numbers of the checks.

"Can't you find it?" asked Josie. "They promised to get it here in time. I don't see why you don't go on without it." But Auntie decided she would wait until the next train. Her decision was made in a husky whine that astonished Josie, for it sounded so exactly like that of a peevish old woman.

Josie watched Markle from the corner of her begoggled eyes. He took from his pocket a stamped, addressed envelop and carefully placed therein the trunk checks; then he sealed it and

dropped it in the mail box on the platform. Josie noted a special delivery stamp on it.

“See that those two trunks go on this express,” he said to the baggage master, who was busy sorting luggage for the train that was due in ten minutes. “I will take the next train myself but a drummer likes to find his wares waiting for him at his destination instead of having to wait for them. They are fairly heavy trunks — would you like a lift?” He was handing out good cigars as he spoke, one to the baggage master and one to the porter, whom he tipped generously. “Have another,” he said to the baggage master, taking out several more cigars. The men moved with alacrity, pulling out the two heavy trunks first, determined that the generous donor of cigars and tips should be well served.

“Now we’ll be going,” Markle said to his companion.

Josie darted into the one telephone booth the small station boasted and quickly had Chief Lonsdale on the wire. The chief had been unable to attend the wedding because of this business.

“Chief, this is O’Gorman! Markle and his

pal are just leaving Somerville. The trunks are filled with loot from the wedding. We have the check numbers. Trunks are checked to go on this outgoing express to New York. I'll stop them, of course."

"Certainly, O'Gorman!"

"Are the men ready to seize Markle before he gets back into Dorfield?"

"All ready!"

"Are they using my plan?"

"Sure! Didn't I tell you this was your case?"

"Good by, then! Will see you later."

The truck with Markle and his companion was moving off when Josie finished telephoning. She ran breathless into the baggage room and accosted the man in charge:

"Say, you know that gentleman who left two trunks here to be sent by this train—he says not to send them yet. He believes he will have them go when he goes. You know the ones—booked for New York—No. 82-6573 and 82-6574. Here they are on the platform."

"All right, Bo! I'll cart them back in the baggage room," agreed the baggage master. He patted the cigars in his vest pocket as much as

to say that the gentleman deserved anything at his hands.

Auntie was already comfortably ensconced in the side car keeping her eye on the disappearing truck. Josie jumped into the saddle and they started off.

“There is liable to be something doing pretty soon,” Josie confided to Bob. “Would you rather meet it as my aunt or get back into your own character?”

“You mean a rumpus on the road?”

“Yes! Chief Lonsdale has sent out a force to stop the gentlemen of the road.”

“Which character would be the most useful for me to assume?” laughed Bob.

“Well, as a fussy old woman you might astonish them somewhat with your superior strength if that was needed.”

“Then a fussy old woman I shall remain.”

The road between Dorfield and Somerville was smooth and well kept, except for a piece of about one hundred yards midway between the towns. This stretch of road had caused some bad feeling between the citizens of the rival towns, each side declaring it was up to the other to put in repair. It was a low lying bit of country with a small

creek winding through it. At times this creek went on a rampage and inundated the road and when it returned to its channel it always left a sticky gummy road bed, the terror of automobilists.

It was an impossible place for two cars to pass and, if they should meet, it was necessary for one of the cars to back out and give the other right of way. This, of course, was the spot chosen by Josie as the proper place to stop Markle and his companion. When she came puffing up with her auntie she found her plans being put to the test. The truck had been stopped by a shabby Ford that seemed to have come to grief. The four men who had been traveling in it had alighted and were aimlessly poking at the machinery. The accident had occurred just around the bend and the truck had come upon them unaware of its being there.

“What’s the matter?” called Markle impatiently. “Can’t you give me room to pass?”

“Can’t budge her,” responded the chauffeur dully. “She’s got some mysterious ailment that I can’t fathom, but I ain’t much of a hand at a car anyhow. Ain’t been running one for long. If I could get her started I’d back out for you,

mister, seeing as you should have the right of way, being as you are further in this here swamp than me.”

“ I’ll get out,” Markle said to his companion, “ and find out what ails them and let them back out. It won’t do for us to lose too much time.”

It was plain to see that he was nervous and impatient, but he held on to himself with wonderful control. The men let him get to the car and look it over.

“ Out of gas! ” he said with disgust. “ Bring over that can and let us fill her up,” he called to his companion. Under the seat of the truck was a five-gallon can of gasoline. Nobody could ever place Felix Markle in the category of the foolish virgins. He never found himself out of oil. The man obeyed and just as he started to open the can Josie and her auntie arrived on the scene.

CHAPTER XXI

THE SURPRISING STRENGTH OF AUNTIE

At a signal from Josie, Markle and his companion were grabbed from behind. The handcuffs were on the companion in a twinkling but with tiger-like agility and strength Markle slipped from the grasp of the detectives. Without a moment's delay he sprang to the motorcycle, seized Josie by the collar, pulled her from the saddle and hurled her into the bushes by the wayside. He was in the seat and had the machine started before his would-be captors could catch their breath.

“That's what I get for trusting those stupid men,” muttered Josie as she picked up her bruised and scratched little body from the blackberry bushes where Markle had so ignominiously thrown her. “Thank God for Auntie!” she devoutly added.

And now began one of the most exciting contests ever beheld. Markle, of course ignorant of

who the passenger was in the side car and determined to get rid of her at any cost, said:

“ Now old woman, I don't want to kill you, but I will unless you do exactly what I say. When we get a mile further on I am going to stop this infernal machine and you are going to get quietly out. Do you understand? ”

The supposed old woman nodded. She began, however, to unbutton the large white cotton gloves confining her muscular hands and unknotted the bonnet ribbon tied under her chin. She moved her shoulders back and forth in the bombazine gown, making sure there was plenty of room to give them free play.

Bob Dulaney had been conceded by his regiment in the A. E. F. to be the best wrestler among them. He had strength and agility and science. He had never had to use his powers handicapped in a woman's dress and kerchief with a stiff sunbonnet but, in spite of the confining clothes and the powerful build of Markle, he felt quite confident that he could master him. He was conscious of his muscles rippling under his feminine garb and as he drew off his gloves he gloried in the strength of his great hands. Should he wait until Markle stopped the car or

would it be better to grapple with him immediately? Of course, an immediate grapple would mean the detectives in the temporarily disabled Ford would come to his assistance. The sporting blood in Bob's veins rebelled at this thought. He did not want any assistance. He preferred to have the fight out single handed. He glanced at Markle. A handsome fellow with a well set head and fine square jaw. His close cropped iron-grey hair gave a touch of dignity to his appearance.

“Such a pity! Such a pity!” Bob thought. “Talent gone wrong, just as little Josie said!” but he patted the handcuffs which Josie had placed in the old lady's reticule.

“Here's where you get off!” said Markle, stopping his Indian. “Step lively, old woman! I've no time to lose.”

The old woman reached out and grasping Markle around the middle she lifted him from the saddle. For the first time in his eventful career of systematized crime, Felix Markle was taken completely by surprise. Knowing the ups and downs of his profession, he was ever ready for an attack, but this bunched old woman who had so meekly submitted to being carried off had

given him a shock. If she was not what she seemed, why had she let him get away from the plain clothes men who might have rendered assistance in the way of ready revolvers and handcuffs. All this flashed through his mind as he struggled in the bear hug of the mysterious female.

Markle was even stronger and more agile than Bob had thought him to be. In spite of the hold he had on him from the back he wriggled around and grappled with his foe. Back and forth they fought each one trying to get the death grip on the other. The bombazine skirt was more of a handicap than Bob had thought it would be. He had not realized before how necessary his legs were in a fight. Strange to say the voluminous skirts also got in Markle's way and finally managed to trip him up. They rolled in the dirt. With a great wrench Bob managed to pull up the offending skirt and with all the strength and science he could command caught the infuriated Markle in the death-like vise known as the body scissors. In this grip, the opponent is held between the legs of one who has obtained this advantage and by the play of the thigh muscles the breath is slowly squeezed out.

As Markle's head drooped Bob drew the handcuffs from his bedraggled reticule and snapped them on his wrists. With his kerchief, no longer snowy, he bound his ankles together.

"There, poor fellow, I fancy you would have been happier if I had not let up when I did but had squeezed all the breath out of you," Bob panted.

The chug of the rejuvenated Ford was now heard and, after it, the rumble of the truck. The Ford was breaking the speed limits in its endeavor to come up with the Indian and its side car. Josie was wild with impatience. It was all she could do to keep from slapping the stupid detective who had let their quarry escape.

"It is what I get for trusting them," she kept on saying to herself. "I could have snapped the handcuffs on myself without using any force. And now, poor Bob Dulaney may be killed or almost worse than killed, Markle escaping and no scoop after all to speak of."

The fight that had seemed to Bob Dulaney to last hours had in reality only taken a few minutes, only long enough for the gasoline to be put in the tank and the car to be backed out of the miry road, turned around and started.

They found Bob sitting on the roadside by his captive burglar. He was still in the bombazine gown but his wig and bonnet were gone. He had found the pockets of his trousers under his skirts and had produced therefrom cigarettes and matches and was contentedly smoking.

“Hurrah for Auntie!” cried Josie when she took in the situation as the car slowed down. Tears of joy were in her eyes but a little lump of sympathy in her throat. They lifted Markle into the truck. Life was slowly coming back to him. He opened his eyes for a moment and then closed them wearily. He murmured something but only Josie caught the meaning of his whisper:

“Pet, poor little Pet!”

It was an easy matter to round up the gang of thieves when once the master mind was not allowed to direct them. Markle was confined in jail, there to await his trial. The holder of checks Nos. 82-6573 and 82-6574 when he applied at the New York baggage room was followed and trapped and with him many others.

The books of Simpkins & Markle were inspected and, through them, the furnished apartments were located and the stolen goods re-

stored to their owners. Poor Simpkins had learned a lesson not to shut his eyes and get rich too quick. He was let off—having convinced the jury that he was not dishonest—but merely stupid.

But to return to the wedding breakfast and the fortunes of Mary Louise: Everything went off as it should have and the theft of the presents was not discovered until the bride and groom were off on their honeymoon and then Chief Lonsdale had the trunks brought from Somerville and, so carefully had the things been packed by the experts, that not even one piece of cut glass had been broken. The trunkful of things purloined from the Wrights had also been held at the station and was returned intact. Of course Elizabeth was blamed by her family when the whole thing came out for having introduced them to such people but Elizabeth only smiled, being very happy way down deep in her heart that Billy McGraw was saved from the wiles of the beautiful Hortense.

The beautiful Hortense simply faded out of sight. By some occult means she must have known of the pursuit of her husband and the vigilance of the police in regard to herself. It

may have been through a confederate employed by the caterers who perhaps saw Josie and Bob speeding away on the motorcycle. At any rate, she did not return to her apartment, but as soon as the ceremony was over, she excused herself to Mary Louise, regretting exceedingly not being able to be present during the breakfast and sit at the bride's table, but her poor Felix was so miserable she must go to him. She tripped down the terrace and as has been said, simply faded out of sight. The detectives who had been set by the astute chief to guard the apartment and to arrest her when she made her appearance had a long and unfruitful vigil. It seemed strange that a beautiful woman dressed so strikingly in pale grey over iridescent silk could in a town no bigger than Dorfield escape the notice of everyone and disappear.

Bob Dulaney got, as he expressed it, "the scoop of his life." He was able to get his story in one of the big New York papers before the A. P. got on to it, thereby reaping a reward in reputation as well as money. The whole country rang with the daring scheme practiced by the gang of thieves and Chief Lonsdale and his force received compliments from every city. Josie

asked not to be put in the papers as the one who had really done the work.

“It isn’t newspaper notoriety I want,” she explained. “My father never wanted that kind of credit. He just wanted to have the consciousness that he had delivered the goods and to be sure he had the respect of the profession. If it gets out I was active in this, I might lose my chance to nab others by being the insignificant little person I appear. It’s better for me to go on keeping the Higgledy-Piggledy Shop with Elizabeth. I can learn all kinds of things that I’d miss if I were known to be a real detective. I am here if you need me,” she said to Chief Lonsdale, and he smiled at her.

“How like your father you are, child!”

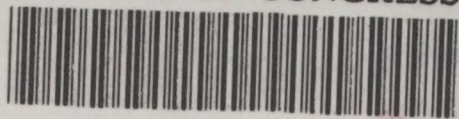
Markle had one consolation while he was in prison awaiting his trial: he had the notebook which had belonged to Detective O’Gorman which he had not yet been able to decipher. The long hours of solitary prison life gave him the opportunity to put his whole mind on it and at last he felt sure he had mastered the cipher. With painstaking care he translated the first page. Then he sat and looked at it with an expression on his handsome face that beggared

description. After all he had been fighting Fate and trying to escape his own sin. And this is what he had translated:

“ I fled Him, down the nights and down the days;
I fled Him, down the arches of the years;
I fled Him, down the labyrinthine ways
Of my own mind; and in the midst of tears
I hide from Him, and under running laughter,
Up vistaed hopes I sped;
And shot, precipitated
Adown Titanic glooms of chasmèd fears,
From those strong Feet that followed, followed
after.
But with unhurrying chase,
And unperturbed pace,
Deliberate speed, majestic instancy,
They beat — and a Voice beat
More instant than the Feet —
‘ All things betray thee, who betrayest Me.’ ”

THE END.

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