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The Bluebird Books

Mary Louise and Josie O'Gorman



Josie gets a job as a maid.—Chapter XII

Mary Louise And Josie O'Gorman

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"Mary Louise", "Mary Louise in the Country",
"Mary Louise Solves a Mystery", "Mary Louise
and the Liberty Girls", "Mary Louise Adopts
a Soldier", "Mary Louise at Dorfield",
"Mary Louise Stands the Test"



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Mary Louise and Josie O'Gorman

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Mary Louise and Josie O'Gorman

CHAPTER I MARY LOUISE MAKES AN INVESTMENT

Mary Louise had stood the test of being rich and beloved, and envied by all the daughters of Dorfield; and then of being poor and bereft, pitied by all who had formerly envied her. Soon after the death of her grandfather, Colonel Hathaway, had come the news of her husband's shipwreck. Hope of Danny Dexter's survival was finally abandoned by his sorrowing little wife and his many friends. Colonel Hathaway's comfortable fortune had mysteriously disappeared and Mary Louise faced a future of poverty. With native pluck she arose to the occasion. In spite of her sad heart she showed a cheerful spirit. Joining forces with Josie O'Gorman and Elizabeth Wright in the quaint Higgledy-Piggledy Shop, she opened a millinery department and was soon swamped with orders for smart hats by the elite of Dorfield and old-fashioned bonnets for the ancient ladies who refused to wear hats. When Danny came back, not having gone to a watery grave after all, and the lost fortune was found, Mary Louise again stood the test of being rich and beloved.

"Nothing can spoil our Mary Louise," Josie O'Gorman declared, and Irene Macfarlane smiled from her wheel chair.

"That is because she is pure gold, through and through," said the lame girl as she deftly plied her needle in the cobwebby lace collar she was mending.

"We certainly shall miss her here at the Higgledy-Piggledy," put in Elizabeth Wright. "It doesn't seem like the same place with Mary Louise gone. I wonder what the old ladies who still wear bonnets will do now. There is no other milliner in Dorfield who can fashion an old-time bonnet like our Mary Louise. She did them as though she loved them and the old ladies for whom they were intended."

"Well, every old woman in town has had Mary Louise make her a bonnet 'exactly like Jane's and Susan's and Martha's and Matilda's'," laughed Josie, "and they don't change their bonnets oftener than every seven years, so we needn't worry about them just yet. Speaking of angels! Here she is!"

Mary Louise literally danced into the shop. Ever since Danny returned her feet seemed to have wings.

"I didn't know how miserable I had been until I had my present happiness with which to compare my former sorrow," she had told Josie O'Gorman shortly after Danny got back.

"You were too busy to be altogether unhappy," spake the wise Josie. "Being poor enough to have to make one's living is not so bad as it is cracked up to be. It was certainly a blessing in your case."

As we have said, Mary Louise danced into the shop. Then she breezed over and kissed the three friends in turn.

"It's sad no longer to be a partner here," she said, "but it is nice to be able to kiss all of you dear old girls. A business footing does not permit of the familiarity of embraces between partners. I've just got lots to tell all of you!"

"Fire away," commanded Josie, "but you must excuse me if I go on ironing the fine linen of the wealthy."

Among the many industries the Higgledy-Piggledy Shop boasted was that of laundering fine linen and laces. It was not known in Dorfield except by a select few that Josie O'Gorman was a detective in high standing with the chief, but everybody who had laces or linen too fine to trust to the doubtful ministrations of an ordinary laundress knew that the girl was a magician with suds and a flatiron. Josie declared washing and ironing helped her to work out knotty problems and there was nothing like having your arms in suds up to the elbows to give you an insight into who did what and why.

The girls settled themselves to listen to Mary Louise's news, whatever it was. Elizabeth Wright closed her typewriter on which she had been copying some manuscript for a budding author; Irene Macfarlane stuck her needle in the pin-cushion hanging from her tidy work-basket and folded the lace collar. Only Josie went on with her work, testing her electric iron with a professional sizzle.

"Well, you see it's this way," continued Mary Louise, settling herself on an antique Windsor chair that the Higgledy-Piggledies were trying to sell on commission. "Danny and I are going to have plenty of money to live on, with what he earns. I know how Danny feels about my being an heiress; not that he ever says a word about it, but he has a good job and there is a chance of steady advancement and I have decided to do something for somebody who needs it more than I do with all that gold Grandpa Jim left me and the old house which is too huge for Danny and me to live in, and too sad somehow for me just yet."

"I'm glad you feel that way about the house," put in Josie, shaking out another damask napkin. "It's a bully old house but too big for a young couple who don't need much room to be happy in."

"What is your plan, dear?" asked Irene, her sweet eyes misting a little. The thought of Mary Louise quitting the old house which was next to Uncle Peter Conant's, where Irene made her home, caused her to be sad.

"Danny and I are going into an apartment for the time being and later on will build a house more suitable to our needs. I am going to give the old home to the Children's Home Society and make an endowment with a part of my gold, so the society can begin operations at once in their new quarters. They have a miserable place now, with not near enough room."

"What a corking plan!" cried Josie. "I know of no charity that appeals to one as this business of getting homes for poor little waifs. It helps the poor little kiddies and it helps the childless persons who want to adopt them. I'm with you, Mrs. Danny Dexter!"

"And I! And I!" came in a chorus from Elizabeth and Irene.

"The old house is more fitted for an institution than a private home. The rooms are so huge, at least most of them are, and still it is homelike. Only think how lovely it will be for the children to have the pretty yard and old garden to play in. Dr. Weston, the dear old gentleman who is in charge of the home now, says there is so little room and so little money that they can't care for the children properly and the people who come to see about adopting them are afraid to take them sometimes because they don't look healthy enough."

"Poor little things!" murmured Irene.

"I'm wondering if your Uncle Peter and Aunt Hannah would mind having a children's home next door to them," Mary Louise asked.

"I'm sure they wouldn't," said Irene. "I heard Uncle Peter say only last night that he'd like to see the old place occupied again even if it were by noisy boarders, and you know Aunt Hannah loves company and she's so deaf that the noise the children make won't affect her in the least."

"And you?" asked Mary Louise. "How will you like it?"

"I want what you want, dear. You must call on me to help in any way I can."

"Indeed I will! We hope to make a very active society of this Children's Home. I have talked to Dr. Weston, but have not told him about making the endowment or giving the old house yet. I wanted to be sure it would not be a nuisance to Uncle Peter Conant. He and Aunt Hannah have been too good to me for me to go against their wishes."

"Set your mind at rest on that score," said Irene. "I can answer for them."

"I'll do any typing you need when you begin on the thing," suggested Elizabeth, "and I can look after the publicity end, too. The more persons who get interested in an enterprise like this the better for it."

"Indeed you are right. We will need more money than I can give, too. Yearly subscriptions will have to be solicited and the more publicity we get the better."

"I'll be chief detective for the society," laughed Josie, shaking out another napkin. "You may think that is a joke, but I tell you there are more shady mix-ups in a concern like that than in courts of law. I'll bet I'll be called on to trace parentage and establish property rights and relationships before the year is up."

"Nobody could do it better," smiled Mary Louise. "Now I am going to stop in and have a little talk with Uncle Peter Conant at his office and then I'm going around and tell dear old Dr. Weston that as far as I am concerned he can move his Children's Home to the Hathaway house tomorrow. That is, if Uncle Peter doesn't object." Josie offered to meet her at the Children's Home and Mary Louise gladly accepted.

Uncle Peter didn't object. To the contrary he seemed vastly pleased with the prospect of some

young neighbors.

"I will do Hannah good and no doubt she will turn our house into a kind of annex. Go ahead, my dear, and invest your money in something where moth and rust will not corrupt and where thieves will not break through and steal."

"Oh, Uncle Peter, I am so glad to hear you say that. I haven't any blood kin to go to for advice and Danny always says for me to do exactly what I want to do, which is bad for my character. It might make me very conceited to have him always insist that I'm right just because I want to do something."

"Well, well! The young rascal is right," laughed Mr. Conant.

"But do you think Grandpa Jim would approve of what I am doing?"

"Surely he would. I haven't a doubt if you had not been in existence he would have done much the same sort of thing with his fortune. Jim Hathaway was a powerful charitable man."

Mary Louise then went to see Dr. Weston at his office in the dingy little building that housed the Children's Home Society. The old man slept on a bumpy couch in the corner of his office. He had been assigned a bedroom in the house, but the association had grown beyond its quarters and the devoted doctor had long ago given up his room as an overflow dormitory for the constantly increasing number of little children who were sent to the home to be kept there until some kind person saw fit to adopt them.

Dr. Weston's life had been dedicated to social work and now in his old age the thing which interested him most and to which he gave all his strength and time was the placing of unfortunate children in good homes. It was through his labor and influence the Children's Home Society had been established and struggled for existence. He was hampered in his work by an unwieldy board of women managers, but he realized the importance of having a large board, because the more persons interested the more money it was possible to raise for his pet charity. At the time of Mary Louise's call funds were very low, so low that it seemed as though the society might have to close its hospitable doors to the homeless waifs and the present inmates be parceled out to the various orphan asylums. The board was to meet that very day. Dr. Weston always dreaded a board meeting. There were some fine, noble women on his board, but also some interfering busy-bodies, who were always starting disagreeable discussions, such as how much sugar a little child should be allowed and how important it was that vanity should not be encouraged in the girls.

Business and finance were not Dr. Weston's strong points. His only idea was to gather in the little children and give them a home in the society until better homes could be found for them. He wanted to make the place as little like an institution as possible, but several members of the board were for unrelenting law and prison order.

The old man sat with his head in his hands worrying over the affairs of the home. He was aware of the fact that funds were low and needs were increasing. The home needed another nurse and a higher-priced cook, who would prepare the food with more care than the present slatternly incumbent. It needed several hospital wards, where children could be isolated when attacked by contagious diseases. The doctor had known his family, varying from thirty to fifty, all down at one time with bad colds, or coryza, as named by the medical profession, when isolating the first small cougher and sneezer might have saved all of the others.

"If only that young Mrs. Dexter, Jim Hathaway's granddaughter, would make us a small donation," he groaned. "No doubt she could well afford it, but young folks are mighty thoughtless. She seemed interested in the children but I fancy that will be all—just a sentimental interest and no more."

A tap on the door and Mary Louise entered as though in answer to his thoughts.

"I have come to see if I might help, Dr. Weston," she said simply.

CHAPTER II THE BOARD ELECTS NEW MEMBERS

As Mary Louise seated herself in Dr. Weston's shabby office Josie entered and was introduced.

"Miss O'Gorman is an especial friend of mine, Dr. Weston, and I have asked her to come here because she also is interested in your home."

"Fine! There can't be too many interested in my home," exclaimed the old man, a light coming in his eyes. "I say *my* home just because I am so interested in it, but it is in reality under the control

of the board. You say you want to help some?" he asked with eagerness.

"Yes, sir! I have been thinking over the matter and have decided that this undertaking of all others appeals to me most and I should like to give my old home. You know the old Hathaway house, do you not?"

"Yes, yes!" There was excitement in Dr. Weston's tone.

"It is too big for me to live in and I think my grandfather would be glad to know that many little children are finding a temporary home there," said Mary Louise. "There is a great deal of furniture there, too, much of which would be suitable, and a lovely great yard and pretty garden where the kiddies can play."

"Oh, my dear, you make an old man very happy!"

"I want to make an endowment, too," Mary Louise continued, "enough with the subscriptions you already control to take care of the children as they should be taken care of."

The tears were rolling down Dr. Weston's cheeks, then he laughed. "What a bomb I can throw in the camp when the board meets this morning! I dreaded their coming but now—now—"

"Who is on your board?" asked Josie practically.

Dr. Weston began naming them over.

"Humph!" was all Josie said, but that "humph" was eloquent.

Many of the names were known to the girls. It was a varied list composed of good, bad and indifferent personalities, from the viewpoint of the social worker.

"Mrs. Opie is a fine open-hearted woman," said Josie, "and Mrs. McGraw is good nature itself and most generous. Mrs. Wright is a great worker and manager—" Josie shrugged her shoulders without finishing her sentence.

"Yes!" breathed Dr. Weston with an eloquent sigh. "A good woman, a good woman, but something of a—a—boss!"

"You mean Elizabeth's mother?" asked Mary Louise. "Grandpa Jim used to call her Kaiser Wright, but that was before we went into the war. He said she could be the head of an absolute monarchy and run all the affairs of state and see to it that the kitchen maids washed out the tea towels after every meal. She is on every charitable and club board in town and at the same time is a most strenuous housekeeper and has a hand in the making of the clothes of her entire family."

"A wonderful woman! A wonderful woman!" exclaimed Dr. Weston, but there was that in his tone that gave Mary Louise and Josie to understand that he was glad there were not many "wonderful women" on the board of the Children's Home Society.

"The board meets in a few minutes," continued the old man. "It is now beginning to assemble in the parlor. I hope you young ladies can remain until I can inform the ladies of the generous gift in store for our home. I am the sole and unworthy representative of my sex on the board."

"Of course we can wait," declared Josie. "Who is the president of your organization?"

"Mrs. Trescott is chairman but—"

"She doesn't stay in it?" laughed Josie.

"I won't say that," smiled the doctor. "Never tell tales out of the board. Ill return in a few moments. I can't tell you the happiness I feel in being able to inform these ladies of our good fortune."

The board was trying to get in session. The girls, waiting in the office, could hear a steady hum of conversation with an occasional sharp rap of the gavel when the president evidently had something to say herself.

"Sounds more like an afternoon tea than the deliberations of an august body," said Josie.

But at last the meeting was called to order, the minutes were read, the treasurer's report made and the various committees called on for a reckoning. All this was accomplished with much talk and many interruptions. The treasurer's report brought forth a groan. There was little money left in the treasury and much was needed in the way of equipment.

"I see nothing for it but to give up," said one lugubrious member. "Dorfield doesn't take enough interest to support the home and so there's an end of it."

"That would come under new business," suggested the president. "We must get through with what is on the carpet first," consulting a small book on parliamentary law.

"Well, there is no use in staying here if we are going to have to give up," spake the lugubrious

one. "All of this talk is foolish if we are going to disband."

"Disband, nothing!" broke in Mrs. Wright, whose hands were busily employed knitting a sweater for one of her girls while her eyes were glancing from person to person. Her foot tapped constantly while her knitting needles flew. One felt that she was doing some kind of work with that tapping foot.

"Disband, indeed!" she whispered sibilantly. "We'll have a tag day and a rummage sale and I'll get up a dicker party and some theatricals. Disband, indeed!"

At last Dr. Weston was allowed to speak.

"Ladies," he said, "I mean Madame President, I have to report to the board—"

"Not another case of measles, I trust!" interrupted one.

"No, not a case of measles, but a case that I hope is going to prove quite as contagious—"

"Mumps, I'll be bound!"

"No, madame! We have had a gift for the home—"

"More old faded carpets and carved walnut furniture, I wager!"

Finally Dr. Weston was able to divulge to the board of managers that Mary Louise Burrows, Jim Hathaway's granddaughter, now Mrs. Danny Dexter, intended to hand over to them her grandfather's old home.

Mary Louise and Josie in the next room with the door closed were able to tell exactly the moment when the news was broken. Such a hubbub ensued that the doctor's voice was quite drowned out.

"And now, ladies," continued Dr. Weston, "since we have several vacancies on our board, I think we could not do better than to ask Mrs. Dexter to fill one of those vacancies and her friend Miss Josie O'Gorman one of the others."

There was much hemming and hawing at this proposition.

"Too young!" was the general verdict, but Dr. Weston declared that Mary Louise was not too young to give her property to the home, and then he hinted wisely of other things she might give. The astute old man was a good judge of human nature, especially human nature as exemplified by a board of women managers. He had held back the fact that Mary Louise also intended to endow the home. He was determined to have her put on the board first, and also her clever little friend, who had such a quiet way of hitting the nail on the head.

With the air of conferring on Mary Louise and Josie a tremendous favor they were finally elected to the board.

"But who is this Josie O'Gorman?" asked a smartly dressed woman, "and why? Isn't she a kind of a washerwoman?"

"Hush!" admonished another. "Don't you know she is in the Higgledy-Piggledy Shop with Elizabeth Wright?"

The secretary was requested to inform the two young women of the honor conferred upon them.

"They are in my office," said Dr. Weston, "and I might just step in and tell them myself."

"Oh, horrors!" cried one of the women. "Do you suppose they heard what we said?"

"I never said anything but that they were too young. Nobody could object to that."

"And I said board work might prove too arduous for them."

"And I said our board was too big as it was."

"I was for them all the time."

"And I!"

"And I!"

The members of the board need not have concerned themselves in regard to the waiting girls. Josie and Mary Louise had been fully occupied. At the moment that the hubbub had arisen, marking the time when Dr. Weston had made his announcement, there had been a sharp tap on the office door. Josie had opened the door and there had entered a woman and two children, a girl of eight and a boy of about six. The girl carried a badly wrapped bundle of clothes.

Mary Louise and Josie felt a keen interest in all three. The woman was young—under thirty. She was handsome, with raven black hair and well-cut features. Her face was pale and her eyes gloomy. She carried herself with a slow, lazy grace. The good lines of her tall figure asserted themselves in spite of the cheap, ill-fitting serge suit. Josie always noticed hands and feet, because she declared they were more difficult to disguise than any other portion of one's anatomy. One glance at the woman's ungloved hands made Josie wonder at the well-kept nails and dimpled knuckles.

"No horny-handed daughter of toil, at least," was her mental note. She then instinctively glanced at the woman's feet.

"Too well shod for the serge suit," was her verdict, "high arched triple A with French heels, about a five, which is small for a person of her height. She must be at least five feet, ten inches."

This inventory took Josie the fraction of a second, so quick was she to see and pigeon-hole her observations in her well-ordered brain.

The children had evidently been crying. The girl's eyes and nose were red and the boy at intervals gave a dry sob as though he had been through a storm of weeping and could with difficulty stop. They clung to each other as they would had they been drowning. The woman pushed them into the room. The children's clothes were the worse for wear, and untidy. Their faces were dirty and showed signs of grimy little knuckles having been dug into streaming eyes. The eyes of both children were blue, as blue as cornflowers, and their hair very light, the boy's curling in tight rings but the girl's straight and bobbed.

"I want to see the manager," said the woman in a well-modulated voice.

"Dr. Weston will be here in a few minutes," said Mary Louise. "Won't you sit down?"

The young woman sank into a chair. She paid no attention to the children, but Josie found them a seat on a bench by the window. The little girl lifted the boy to the bench and put her arm around his shoulders, drawing him close to her sisterly bosom.

"Quite warm today," said Josie to the woman.

Mary Louise could with difficulty keep from giggling. It was so foreign to Josie's character to discuss the weather.

"Think so?" answered the woman shortly.

"Not so warm as it was yesterday, but still a little unseasonable," persisted Josie. "I find a suit quite warm, but then, what is one to wear?"

Mary Louise listened in amazement. Josie talking weather and clothes! She had reduced the problem of dress to a science and having done so dismissed the matter from her mind. As for the weather, she had frequently declared that all weather was good if one just accepted it.

"Clothes are getting a little cheaper than they were last spring," she chattered on, "almost pre-war prices at Temple & Sweet's this week. Charming georgette blouses for a mere song and shoes at a great bargain if one wears a narrow last."

The woman was plainly interested.

"Temple & Sweet's?" she murmured, and her glance instinctively fell on her own well-turned arch and narrow toe.

Suddenly the little boy's sobs got the better of him and he wept convulsively. His sister hugged him more closely and with the hem of her skirt wiped his eyes. She shook her own tow head and her blue eyes snapped dangerously as the woman said roughly: "Stop your bawling!"

"Peter, dear, please!" she whispered, but Peter could not stop. Mary Louise went over and sat on the bench by the children.

"You mustn't cry, my boy," she said gently. "Whatever troubles you I am sure will come out right. Look out of the window at that robin. Isn't he busy? Do you know what he is doing? He is building his nest. There is his wife. She is going to help him. What a good little wife she is! She thinks it is better to help because her husband is always stopping and singing. There he goes now! A cunning little teasing song the robin sings. I love to hear him in the spring. He always sounds so gay and cheery. Do you know what will happen when they get the nest built?"

"Wha-at?" sobbed the boy. The tears had ceased and the sobs were almost under control.

"The little wife bird will lay four beautiful eggs. They will be a greenish blue, the blue that people call robin's egg blue. And then she will stay patiently on her nest for many days keeping those eggs nice and warm, only leaving her nest for something to eat and a drink of water and when she is off, her husband, if he can stop singing long enough, will keep the eggs warm for her, and by and by the pretty blue shells will crack and inside them will be the most ridiculous-looking little creatures you ever saw, all mouth at first, with no feathers at all, and those mouths will always be stretched wide open like this," and Mary Louise stretched her pretty mouth as wide as nature would allow. The boy laughed and his sister smiled contentedly.

Mary Louise resumed, in her pleasant voice:

"Then such a business! Mother and Father Robin will be working every minute of daylight to try and fill those hungry mouths. Poor little worms will be afraid to show their noses or their tails because there will be a robin ready to peck them up and carry them off to their babies. Those little birds will eat so much that by and by they will begin to grow feathers and they will be pretty and fluffy and two of them will take after their father and have very red breasts and two of them will take after their mother and have just a delicate shade of red on their breasts. And after those little birds get all covered with feathers and their wings begin to grow strong Father Robin will say to Mother Robin, 'See here, my dear, it is time these young rascals learned how to fly and to grub for themselves.' That will make Mother Robin sad, because she hates for her babies to grow up and have to leave her."

"O—h!" in a long-drawn sigh from the little girl. "Do you think she feels that way? How wonderful?"

"Of course she does; at least she will," smiled Mary Louise.

"Go on!" commanded Peter. "Polly, don't interrupt! Will they leave their nice house—I mean nest?"

Josie silently noted the speech of the children. "From the South!" was her verdict. "Soft slurred r's and the way the boy says house would give them away."

"Yes," continued Mary Louise, "some pleasant morning in June, perhaps, they will awaken very early and their mother and father will get busy catching the early worm for their breakfast. You see, nobody must ever try to do anything very important, like learning to fly, on an empty stomach."

"That's what I been a-tellin' Polly; but go on, please."

"Then, when they are all fed and full and happy, Mother Robin balances herself on the side of the nest and spreads her wings and says 'Now, children, watch me!' and she floats down to the ground."

"From away up in the tree tops?"

"No, not so high up, because you see robins build in high bushes and hedges, but it will seem very far to the little birds, as high as the top of trees and even church steeples would seem to you."

"But if my mother would say, 'Come on, Peter, and jump off the church steeple, I'm a-gonter do it. I wouldn't feel 'fraid—not a mite, not if my mo—" But he could not finish the word mother. A realization of something came over him and again his lip trembled and he seemed on the verge of more tears and sobs.

"And then the little birds," continued Mary Louise quickly, trying to keep the tears from her own sweet eyes, "they will look over the edge of the nest and see their mother hopping around on the soft green grass, and maybe they will see her catch a nice fat wiggly worm and, wonder of wonders! and horror of horrors! instead of flying back to the nest to give it to one of her babies she will gobble it up her own self. That won't be because she is a greedy mother, but just to let them realize that if they get down on the grass they can find plenty of delicious worms for themselves. Then Father Robin will tell them they are all little cry-babies not to jump up and fly from the nest, and one by one the little baby birds will make up their minds and before you know it all four will be down in the grass by their mother. Then, goodness gracious me! what a busy day they will have! The little birds are very plump, because their mother and father have worked so hard to keep them well fed and they have never taken any exercise before except with their mouths, and their little wings seem so weak and their little tummies are so fat and so full, but they try and try and by dusk they have almost learned. At any rate they are able to flutter back into the bush where their old nest is, not that they ever expect to get back in their nest. They would no more try to do that than a great big grown-up man would want to get back in the little cradle in which his mother had rocked him when he was a baby."

The biography of the robins was finished just as Dr. Weston came in to announce to Mary Louise and Josie that they had been elected to the board of governors of the Children's Home Society.

"Oh, but—" faltered Mary Louise.

"No buts at all, Mary Louise," insisted Josie. "Of course you must serve because you are interested and I'll serve too just to keep you in countenance."

"I think this lady wishes to speak with you, Dr. Weston."

The old man had been so full of his news that he had for the moment overlooked the other occupants of his office. He now turned courteously to the woman who stood up as though she had about finished her business and was ready to leave.

"If you are the manager then I can go," she asserted. "I want to leave these two children with you."

"Not so fast, madam!" said Dr. Weston. "We don't take little children offhand this way. We must find out who they are, why they are here, who is placing them here, all about their parentage—many things, in fact. I shall ask you to be seated, madam, for a few moments while I conduct these young ladies to the board, which is now in session."

The woman resumed her seat, a sullen expression on her handsome face. Dr. Weston drew the girls into the parlor, carefully closed the door and then, with a graceful little speech, courtly and kindly, he presented the new members.

"We think it is splendid that you will give the house to us," said one to Mary Louise, who was smiling happily.

"When can we get in?" asked another.

"Immediately!"

"We can't afford to move," spake the treasurer.

"Well, we can't afford to stay here, either," snapped Mrs. Wright. "We'll just raise the money by hook or crook."

"I—I—will give some money along with the house," faltered Mary Louise. "It isn't very much, but if \$50,000 would help any I can give that much."

The board was not noted for its sense of humor, but even it realized how absurd it was for this slip of a girl to be so modest with her fifty thousand dollars, and was it enough? The board burst into laughter. Dr. Weston looked as though he might burst with pride and happiness.

"To whom must I make the check?" asked Mary Louise simply, as though making checks for fifty thousand dollars was no more than paying one's gas bill.

"To the treasurer," answered the president, with a gasp.

"No, no, not to me! I would be afraid to carry around such a check." But the treasurer was overruled and Mary Louise proceeded to make out a check there and then. Her fortune had been left to her in cash owing to her grandfather's being unbalanced many months before his death and having converted all of his securities into gold, which he had hid away.

"I'll have the deeds to the house made over to the Children's Home Society as soon as Mr. Conant, my lawyer, can manage it," said Mary Louise.

There being no further business before the board it was joyfully and noisily adjourned by the smiling but flustered president.

"Now I must go interview the woman with the two little children," Dr. Weston said to Josie and Mary Louise.

"I must see the children again," declared Mary Louise. "Poor lambs!" But when the door leading to the office was opened the room was found empty. The woman and two children had disappeared.

CHAPTER IV JOSIE DONS A HENNA WIG

"Believe me, there's something shady about that woman!" said Josie to Mary Louise. "She was ready enough to leave the kids until Dr. Weston told her she would have to produce some kind of information about them. That is what scared her off."

"Dear little children," said Mary Louise sadly. "I wonder if she is their mother."

"Of course not! There wasn't a trace of resemblance."

"I know she was a decided brunette and the children were blue-eyed and tow-headed," Mary Louise remembered.

"Color isn't such a proof as line and certain tricks of pose and motion. They had not one single thing in common with the woman and then she was plainly indifferent to them and they were a little in awe of her. That happens sometimes with a mother, but if she is indifferent to her children she usually tries to hide it and makes a show of affection with strangers. And children just have to love their mothers a little bit and it was easy to see those poor kiddies actually hated her. I watched the girl, Polly, and when the woman told the boy to stop bawling Polly had a look in her blue eyes that suggested a desire to bite and scratch and kick or even use a hatchet if one were handy. I think I'll look those people up."

"But how, Josie?"

"There are ways," smiled Josie. "You see, I am kind of self-elected detective for the Children's Home Society and my work has begun already. It is not merely to look after the children in the home but those who might, could, would or should be in the home."

"Well, I hope you can find out something. I'd like to know about my poor little Peter. What a precious boy he is!"

That forenoon Josie happened, as if by chance, into the department store of Temple & Sweet's. First she gave a cursory glance at the bargain counters where georgette blouses were being tossed about by eager shoppers like corks on the restless sea. She then looked in at the shoe department. Seeing nothing there to interest her she made her way to a lunch counter in the basement and satisfied her healthy appetite with a club sandwich and a cup of chocolate. All the time she kept her eye on the shoppers who passed back and forth. After her luncheon she again visited the pile of crumpled blouses, much diminished, and again made her way to the shoe department. Evidently she saw something there that interested her keenly. She hurried to the dressing room and in a moment emerged looking strangely unlike the Josie her friends knew. Her sandy hair was completely covered by a henna wig, bobbed and crimped. Her sedate sailor hat was cocked at a rakish angle and draped with a much-ornamented veil, and mirabile dictu! a lipstick had been freely and relentlessly applied to her honest mouth and her cheeks were touched up with a paint of purplish hue. Her sober Norfolk jacket was as much disguised as its wearer by a silly lace frill pinned around the neck and down the front.

Back to the shoe department Josie hurried and flopped herself down by a young woman who was busily engaged in trying on several styles of bargain pumps. Her slender, high-arched foot was just the kind for the shoes advertised as greatly reduced. It was the woman of the morning, but she, too, was much changed—so much so that Josie herself might not have recognized her had she not been looking for and expecting a change. The dress she wore was no longer a cheap blue serge but a handsome tricolette, richly trimmed according to the prevailing mode. Her hat was plainly a Paris model in strong contrast to the battered, flower-trimmed thing she had worn in the morning. She also had been using a lip-stick and an extra touch of color was on her cheeks.

"Such sweet shoes!" ventured Josie in a mincing tone quite in keeping with her henna wig and lace ruffle. "My, you have a pretty arch!"

The young woman smiled encouragement, while the admiring shoe clerk tried on a smart brown suede pump.

"I have been trying to get my arch up," continued Josie, sticking out her own well-shod little foot. Josie had very pretty feet and they were one weakness. She always wore a sensible shoe, but it must be of the best material and nobby cut.

"What do you advise?" she asked the clerk. "But maybe you can tell me," she said, addressing the young woman by her side. "Your foot is so wonderful."

The woman was evidently pleased and flattered.

"Oh, thanks awfully," she drawled.

"I wonder if you dance much," continued Josie. "I bet you could do barefoot dancing with such a foot as that. Now could you? Ain't her foot a wonder?" to the clerk.

"I never saw a prettier," was his verdict.

"Well, I do dance," she confessed. "In fact, dancing is my profession. I'm not working right now but expect to get back on the road immediately."

"How thrilling!" cried Josie. Josie's intimates had often wondered at her histrionic powers when she pretended to be stupid, which was her usual way of disarming persons who might have been suspicious of her. She had found out much about those archvillains Felix and Hortense Markle by an assumption of supreme dullness. But no one of her acquaintances had ever seen Josie assume the role of a skittish, dressed-up miss, painted and brazen, talkative and impertinent.

"I'm just dying to go on the stage," she continued. "I get awful tired of pounding out a living on the typewriter. I'd a sight rather make a living with my toes than with my fingers."

The young woman bought the brown suede pumps and also a pair of black ones similar to them. She had already selected several pairs of oxfords and walking boots.

"You have to be mighty particular with your feet when you have to show them," she said, Josie's expansiveness having had its influence on her indifference. "I never can wear old shoes. They are simply ruination to one's feet. As for cheap shoes—never! Of course, these are bargains merely because they are a bit shop-worn."

"Shall I send these, lady?" asked the clerk.

"Ye-es—No! I had better take them with me. Wrap them up in as small a package as possible."

Josie noticed a fat roll of greenbacks as the woman paid for her purchases. Then, the large package under her arm, she walked off with a slow, lazy, long-limbed grace. In spite of the conversation she had held with Josie and the clerk she neglected any word of farewell.

"What can I show you, miss?" the clerk asked Josie.

"Nothing today, thank you! I reckon I'm due at my job. I'll be in another day. Good-by!" and Josie was off on her quest. She followed the woman from a safe distance up one street for several blocks and around a corner. She went in the front door of a cheap boarding house not far from the Higgledy-Piggledy Shop. From the fact that she did not ring the bell, but merely walked in, Josie gathered that there she was making her temporary home. The place was frankly third-class, with a large sign stating that boarders were wanted by the day or week. On the porch were young women coifed according to the latest and most extreme bushiness and young men with their feet on the railing, socks and toothpicks much in evidence.

Josie noted the address: 126 East Centre Street. She also noted the odors that exuded from the basement dining room.

"A veritable Todgers'," she said to herself. Dickens was Josie's favorite author and she could usually find a parallel from him to suit every case. "All the greens that were ever cooked there were evergreens and flourished in immortal strength," she quoted. "A funny hole for my lady of the high arches to choose to live in. And those kiddies—who and why are they? Anyhow, I'm going to keep my eye on the bunch of them."

Josie reported what she had discovered to Mary Louise, who was duly impressed by her friend's cleverness.

"Not a bit of it," said Josie, repudiating anything more than just an ordinary amount of knowledge of human nature. "I saw from the woman's shoes that she thought something of her feet and the way she walked and those very feet made me feel somehow she was accustomed walking on the stage. I told her about the sale at Temple & Sweet's, feeling almost sure the lure of bargain shoes would prove strong. There she was to be sure and she had a big wad of money, which makes me think she is doing those little kids dirt, not to have them better dressed. They were not even clean and so ragged it was pathetic. They are more folksy than she is, too. Something about their accent made me feel it. She had a well-modulated voice, but that is because she is evidently an actress as well as dancer; but there is something in her mode of speech that made me feel she was not exactly the same class as the children with her. She is some 'beaut,' though. You should see her in her glad rags."

Mary Louise spent a busy afternoon with her lawyer, Mr. Peter Conant, going over her affairs and having him look into the necessary deeds for the transfer of her old house to the Children's Home Society.

"And what does your young husband say to all of this giving away of good money and land?" asked Uncle Peter.

"Danny thinks it is exactly as it should be. He takes a kind of pride in being able to support me himself and he didn't have any too soft and easy a childhood, so he is anxious to help some little ones to happiness."

"Well, he is a good lad, a good lad," said Uncle Peter, "and I wish Jim Hathaway could have done something like this in his lifetime, but he was too busy trying to lay up treasures for you, my dear."

"I think sometimes he knew I'd do it and he was so unselfish he wanted me to have all the fun of it instead of having it himself. I am not depriving myself of anything to speak of. We have plenty left to buy us a nice little home and a large amount to spare besides, and Danny is making a very good salary." And Mary Louise hurried off to be home in time to see that the little new maid had everything in the way of food exactly right for her beloved young husband.

CHAPTER V BREAKFAST FOR TWO

The Higgledey-Piggledy Shop was fortunate in having so many partners or near-partners, for Josie O'Gorman was destined to be very busy for many days in looking into the mystery of Peter and Polly and the handsome young woman of the arches. Elizabeth Wright, with the assistance of Irene Macfarlane, was capable of managing the shop alone, with the exception of the fine laundering, and that perforce must wait for Josie's leisure.

On the day following the discovery of the whereabouts of the young woman and the children, Josie was called to the telephone by Dr. Weston. Mary Louise had informed the old man of Josie's real profession, the Higgledey-Piggledy Shop being a mere by-product of the business of being a trained detective, and of her willingness to serve the Children's Home in the latter capacity whenever they needed her.

"Miss O'Gorman, if you are not too busy I am in great need of your services," Dr. Weston said. "I have a feeling the matter is urgent."

"I'll be right over," was Josie's brisk reply.

"Thank goodness I haven't begun on those lace collars," she said to Elizabeth. "Lace should be washed and ironed at one sitting. You can expect me when you see me, dear. Irene will come in and help keep shop and if you get up against it call on Mary Louise or one of the other girls. So long!"

She found Dr. Weston somewhat perturbed.

"It is those same children who were here yesterday, Miss O'Gorman. They came back this morning without the woman; just walked in announcing they had come to stay and seemed to think we were expecting them. They said the young woman, whom they call Cousin Dink, had sent them. I have tried to question them, but their answers are confused and contradictory. I felt that perhaps it was better to wait for you and see what you could find out."

"You will keep them, will you not?"

"I don't know. We will if I can do as I want you know the board—"

"Yes, I know the board," said Josie with a smile.

"Sometimes they are great on rules and regulations, and one of our rules is that we must know where the children come from and who they are so we can hand over a record to the persons who are desirous of adopting them."

"I guess that is a pretty good rule, but it should work both ways. I must say I think the ones who do the adopting should have better recommendations than the poor kiddies. If they don't like the children they can bring them back, but the poor babies have to stay put whether they like the adopters or not. Where would these children go if you can't keep them?"

"The poorhouse, I think! You see, the orphan asylums are run by churches and usually take only the children whose parents were of their religious convictions. These children are too old for a foundling's home. But I do hope we may be allowed to keep them here."

Josie found the children in the parlor, huddled together on the sofa, a forlorn pair. At their feet was the same bumpy bundle of clothes.

"We comed back," the boy said. "Where is the story-telling lady? The reason we comed back was because I thought she'd be here, too. Cousin Dink told us she'd be here."

"Well, so she will," said Josie. "Where is Cousin Dink?" she asked Polly.

"I don't know and I don't care one bit," said Polly, without meaning to be pert but simply declaring the truth.

"But did she not bring you here?"

"No ma'm! She yanked us out of bed this morning and made us dress just as fast as we could and then she pulled us out in the street—"

"Did you have no breakfast?"

"I had a pickle and Peter had a cream puff she forgot to eat last night. I was awful 'fraid it might give him the tummy ache because cream puffs are mighty poor breakfast eatin's, 'specially when they are left-overs, but Peter has powerful tough insides. I believe he can eat almost anything."

"And how about you? Doesn't a pickle for breakfast make you feel kind of queer?"

"Oh, my insides are even better than Peter's. The pickle was just the thing because it kept me from wanting anything else."

"Well, I tell you what we are going to do: we are going around the corner to a nice little place and have some breakfast. You can just leave your bundle here," she said, as Polly stooped to pick up the untidy parcel.

"It's right important, because it's all Peter an' me's got," said Polly.

"Dr. Weston will take care of it for you. Now come along, because cream puffs and pickles need something to keep them company." As they passed through the office Josie told Dr. Weston where they were going.

"Bless my soul! I never thought of asking them if they were hungry. Well, come back as soon as you finish and we will see what can be done."

"If you don't mind my making a suggestion, I think the wisest thing to do in this case would be to telephone Mary Louise and let her tackle the board. They could hardly refuse her anything just now."

Such hungry children! First Josie ordered oatmeal and cream; then toast and scrambled eggs; and topped it all off with pancakes and maple syrup. She noticed that although the children were almost starving their table manners were good.

"Gently reared!" she said to herself.

"My, but it's been a long time since—" began Polly, and then stopped short.

"Since what?"

"Nothing! I was just—just—" The little girl faltered and was silent.

"All right, honey, don't you tell me a thing you don't want to tell me," said Josie kindly, "but you must remember that I am your friend and if you need me—"

"We do need you and I do want to tell you—but—but—"

"Now, Polly, you 'member what Cousin Dink said," broke in Peter, with his mouth full of pancakes.

"Yes, and you remember what Mother said about talking with your mouth full," admonished Polly.

"Yes, but she just said people would think we were po' whites if we had bad manners and would blame her. An' you 'member Dink said if we talked 'bout things bad men would git us."

"Well, no bad men are going to get you while I am around, I can tell you that," declared Josie stoutly.

"Not even p'licemen?"

"Not even policemen! They are my friends and they are your friends, too. Their business is to look after little children."

Josie smiled her friendly smile.

"Well, Cousin Dink was skeered to death of p'licemen an' she was a great deal bigger'n you."

"Was she really? What did she think policemen would do to her?" asked Josie.

"Git her!"

"Your mother wasn't afraid of policemen, was she?"

"No'm, my mother was jes' 'fraid of mice an' snakes."

"Your mother isn't with you, is she?"

"No'm, she—I reckon she's dead—me'n Polly ain't quite sure. Sometimes when we begs to go home Cousin Dink says she is dead an' th' ain't no home to go to an' sometimes when Polly an' me can't stop cryin' Cousin Dink says if we stop an' are real good some day she might take us back to our mother."

"Cousin Dink is a born liar, so we don't know what to think," spoke Polly coolly.

"Is she really?" questioned Josie cautiously. "I hope you and Peter don't tell lies."

"We don't know how to very well because we were not born that way, but Cousin Dink has taught

us right smart. You get out of lots of trouble if you can lie easy like Cousin Dink."

Josie felt satisfied now that she would be able by degrees to extract their story from the children. "There is nothing like a pleasantly full stomach to make one talk," she said to herself. "I had a feeling pancakes would turn the trick. Dr. Weston was trying to get something out of them when the poor little creatures were too hungry to expand."

"Who is Cousin Dink? Is she your mother's cousin?"

"She ain't 'zactly our cousin—that is, she told me so one time when she got so mad with me 'cause I chopped off my hair. That was two or three days ago. I couldn't get the tangles out and she wouldn't try, but just pulled the comb through as though she liked to hurt me, so I just up and cut it off with one slash. She said, 'God knows I'm glad you are no blood relation to me, you abominable brat!' I was so glad to hear for sure that she wasn't a really truly cousin that I didn't mind a bit being called an abominable brat. Cousin Dink is always talking about God—not praying or loving him, but saying 'God knows!' and 'God is my witness!' and sometimes even worse things, but Peter and I never say the things she says because we know our mother wouldn't like it."

"Have you always known your Cousin Dink?"

"Oh, no indeed! We never saw her until the day she came and brought us away."

"Away from your mother and father?"

"No, just away from home! You see, our father went to fight in the war. That was a long time ago, so long ago that Peter can't remember him, but he tries to. He can remember the porridge bowl with rabbits on it that Father gave him. He gave me one, too, with chickens on it. And he can 'most remember how Father used to tell us to eat up all the cream out of the bottom so the poor rabbits and chickens could breathe. I was not as old as Peter is now when he went away and Peter wasn't but two. And after he was gone Mother used to cry a lot but she never did let people see her, that is, no people but me, but she worked so hard knitting and making bandages and things that she got sick. And after she got sick she cried all the time and didn't mind who saw her."

"Where was your home?"

"Don't tell her! Don't tell her, Polly!" cried Peter. "Don't you remember what she said 'bout our never telling that? She said a policeman as big as the giant Jack killed would git us—an' he would gouge out our eyes an' then he would go an' take Mother to jail an' maybe he'd even hang her by the neck until she was dead."

"Has your mother done anything wicked that a policeman would do such a thing to her?" asked Josie patiently and gently.

"Our mother do anything wicked!" exclaimed Polly. "Why she was the goodest person in all the world."

"Don't you know policemen never do anything to good people. They don't do anything to bad people either but arrest them and then the judge decides what is to be done to them. The policemen are really good, kind men, as a rule."

"I believe Cousin Dink was lying, anyhow," declared Polly stoutly. "How could a policeman get our mother if our mother was already dead? I wish I knew whether our mother was dead or not. I believe she must be or she would not let us be traveling around with Cousin Dink, eating cream puffs and pickles for breakfast. Mother was powerful particular about what we ate for breakfast."

"I can find out whether or not your mother is dead if you will only tell me what your name is and where you lived before you were taken off by Cousin Dink," said Josie.

"You are sure they won't get me if I tell," whispered Polly. "Cousin Dink told me I must tell everybody that my mother and father were dead and that I loved her like a sister or aunt. She didn't want to be old enough to be a mother. She said I must forget where I lived before she carried us off. Sometimes I do almost forget it because it seems so long ago."

"You got as far as the time your mother cried all the time," suggested Josie. "What happened then?"

"Uncle Chester came back to Atlanta and said she must go to a hospital and he wouldn't let any of her friends see her. He wouldn't let us see her, either."

"And who is Uncle Chester? Is he your mother's brother or your father's?" asked Josie, making a mental note of the little girl's slip concerning Atlanta.

"Oh, he isn't either, at least, not a really and truly brother. He always called our father Brother Stephen, but his name is Chester Hunt and father's name was Stephen Waller."

"You say your father's name was Stephen Waller. Do you think he is dead?"

"I think so sometimes and sometimes I don't. I don't know what to think. If he is alive why didn't he come back to Mother and if he is dead why didn't Mother know it for sure? When the war got over we thought he was coming home and Mother stopped crying and soldiers kept on coming back and Daddy wasn't with them. And she wrote letters to the President and everybody and nobody seemed to be able to tell her much of anything about Daddy. One time after a big fight he was missing and still some of the men in his regiment say they saw him alive but they don't seem to know just where. And it was all so mixed up and Mother got awful sick and then Uncle Chester came."

"Didn't your mother have any brothers or sisters or any relations of her own?"

"No, ma'm, she never did have any and her mother and father died when she was little and she was brought up in France in a convent 'cept'n she wasn't a Catholic."

"Did you live in a house in Atlanta or an apartment?"

"We had a great big house and three automobiles and a whole lot of servants. Cousin Dink says I am lying when I say that because she wants people to think we are poor little orphans that she had to support. I know her tricks."

"What was your address in Atlanta?"

"Oh, gee! I've let out Atlanta and I reckon I might as well tell the address."

Josie wrote it down. She could trust herself to remember any name, but she was more careful with numbers.

"You don't know where they took your mother? To what sanitarium?"

"No, they never told me and when I asked Uncle Chester he pretended at first he didn't hear and then when I kept on asking him he told me to shut my mouth. Uncle Chester had always been nice to us but then he got as sour as pickles."

CHAPTER VI A SUCCESSFUL DISGUISE

When Josie and her little friends reached the Children's Home they found Mary Louise waiting for them.

"It is all right," she whispered to Josie. "Dr. Weston and I have had the whole board on the line one by one and we have talked them into letting the poor kiddies stay. It is against the rules of the board to take children who can give no credentials but all the same we have worked it. Poor lambs, where else can they go? If Danny and I had not moved into such a tiny flat we might have taken them, but as it is—"

"As it is you and Danny had better be by yourselves awhile," asserted Josie. "You had better interest yourself in the institution and in children in general and not particularize too much. Poor Danny has had a hard enough time to deserve a little honeymooning period before he adopts a lot of orphans."

Although she was so independent, Josie had a strong feeling of sentiment and was essentially feminine in spite of her rather boyish attire. She was a firm believer in what she called "old-fashioned love." Danny Dexter had no better friend than the girl detective, and nobody had understood better or sympathized more in the trials Danny had endured the first few months of his married life than did Josie O'Gorman.

Peter was delighted at again seeing the "story-telling lady." "I was wondering about the robins all night," he said. "That was one reason I stopped crying when Cousin Dink told us we must come here. You see, Cousin Dink used to tell me if we didn't behave she would put us in a 'sylum and that folks in 'sylums didn't give you nothin' to eat but calf neck an' sheep's tails an' sour bread an' scorched oatmeal. Somehow, when we saw you yesterday an' you tol' me about the robins I thought Cousin Dink might have been tellin' one of her whoppers."

By degrees Josie got from the little waifs as much of their story as they could remember. Polly thought they had been with Cousin Dink for about a year. She had taken them from place to place, sometimes stopping in small villages, sometimes in great cities, but never for more than a few weeks anywhere.

Cousin Dink seemed to be a relation of Chester Hunt, and Chester Hunt, as near as Josie could make out, was either a half-brother or stepbrother to Stephen Waller, the father of the children. Stephen Waller evidently was among those missing in one of the battles in the Great War. The mother was perhaps crazed by grief and uncertainty. Why the children should have been put in

charge of such a person as Cousin Dink remained a mystery that Josie O'Gorman was determined to solve. Why she should have left them for the Children's Home Society to take care of and where she had flitted in the meantime were other questions Josie was determined to have answered. It was a case that appealed to her detective instincts.

As was her habit, she took her story to Captain Charlie Lonsdale, chief of police, and asked his advice. He listened carefully to all her points.

"Sounds shady, very shady. Evidently this Dink is a bad 'un, but who is employing you on this case?"

"Nobody. I'm just on my own, but I can't sit still and see two clever little kids done out of home and mother and maybe a fortune just because nobody makes it his business to dig out the evidence. I'd like to travel a little, anyhow, so I'm going on a trip to Atlanta and see for myself who these Wallers are and what this Chester Hunt is doing and if the father is really dead. Sooner or later somebody is going to want to know and your Aunt Josie is going to have that information when it is called for."

Captain Lonsdale smiled. "The real spirit of a detective, my child, is to be interested in every mystery whether it is your business or not. I give you all honor because of it. But tell me, who is to defray expenses? One can't live on curiosity."

"Almost!" laughed Josie. "But this time Mary Louise is to help me out. I am going to take a holiday, I tell you, and go on a trip for my health, so why shouldn't I pay for my own jaunt?"

"No reason at all. I wish I had a few like you on the force. My men are afraid to take a taxi when it is of paramount importance to get to a spot in a hurry. Afraid somebody won't reimburse them."

"That's not their fault," declared Josie. "I fancy they have families to support and maybe the city is slow to recognize their expense accounts. I have nobody to support but myself and I would pay out my whole income just for the satisfaction of getting ahead of some crook. This Cousin Dink is the limit for selfishness and impertinence. You haven't advised me yet."

"Tell me first what your plans are?"

"Well, first I'm going to find out all I can here in Dorfield about this woman. I'm thinking of staying a few days in that greasy Todgers to get on to her all I can from the standpoint of her fellow boarders."

"Good! Then what?"

"Then I'll go on to Atlanta and see what I can see."

"Will you be traveling for your health ostensibly?"

"No indeed! I'm going to get a job as saleslady for some kind of household novelty, house-to-house canvass."

"Good. What next?"

"When I find out all I want to know I'll come back and tell you about it."

"Fine!"

"Any other advice to offer?" asked Josie, trying to hide a sly little smile. One of her quiet jokes was that Captain Lonsdale always labored under the impression that he gave her advice. Of course, his habit was to applaud her decision, but the kindly police officer really thought Josie's plans of campaign originated with him. She always came to him and he always backed her up. She declared the moral support he gave her was better than the good advice he thought he gave her.

"Nothing else," replied the kind chief. "But don't run any risks. A man like this Chester Hunt and a woman like this Dink person are often capable of any crime to attain their ends."

"I'll be careful," said Josie, "but I can't promise not to run risks. I don't see what fun there is in the business without some few risks."

"Bless me, child, you are surely your father's own daughter! Pity you weren't a son!"

"Pity nothing!" answered Josie hotly. "You have plenty of sons on your police force. I should think you'd be glad of an occasional daughter. Slater is a son of somebody and didn't he let the Markles get off? Don't talk to me about sons!"

"All right, daughter, never again!" grinned the chief.

From the police station Josie went back to the Higgledy-Piggledy Shop. She found Elizabeth Wright and Irene attending to business, which was flourishing.

"We are missing you a lot, but I fancy we can manage," said Elizabeth. "The laundry work is not urgent and if it does become so we shall have to turn it down. I'd do it if I could but I'm the bummiest ever."

"Just tell them I'm off on a trip for my health," suggested Josie. "You can call it lungs or heart or just plain head if you'd rather, but I've got to be away for many days." She then told the girls all the complications concerning the children who had recently been sent to the home. "Keep your eyes and ears open for me, but your mouths shut, please. You two girls might pick up a lot to help me out. Now I must transform the plain Josie into a giddy miss after a job selling household and jewel novelties."

"Have you got the job?" laughed Irene.

"No, but I'm going to fix up so pretty and talk so silly I'll be sure to get it. There is an ad in the morning paper for canvassers for southern cities."

"Why do you go after that kind of job?" asked Elizabeth.

"Because nobody can pick up so much information concerning neighbors as a canvasser."

Josie disappeared into her sleeping compartment, packed her suitcase, and in half an hour emerged a changed being. The henna wig again served its turn and her countenance was so made up that her best friends had difficulty in recognizing her. Mary Louise, who came in at that moment, almost had hysterics when the same old Josie spoke from behind that painted mask.

"I wish I didn't have such a blob of a nose," she said ruefully. "There is mighty little to be done with a nose like mine unless I have paraffin injected under the skin right on top. Of course, I could make it up for the stage from the outside, but not for close inspection. Are my skirts too short for decency?"

Josie grimaced comically at her friends.

"No shorter than some we see, but to think of our Josie looking like that!" gasped Irene. "Let's see you walk."

Josie minced off with a good deal of hip movement according to the fashion of the day.

"I'd like to wear run-down heels, but I can't afford to ruin my feet. I have a pair of fancy blue and gray shoes I got at a second-hand shop and I'll put those on for dress occasions, but I'll have to wear my own decently sensible shoes when I am at work. I am going to be in town for a few days yet, but won't be staying here but at a swell third-class boarding house on Centre Street. If I should come in here and you have customers do you think you can keep straight faces?"

"We'll try!" giggled the partners.

"Here comes somebody now," cried Elizabeth. "You'd better hide!"

But there was no time to hide. The visitors turned out to be Mrs. Wright and a Mrs. Hasbrook, a rich woman who had recently moved to Dorfield, and according to Mrs. Wright's custom she had been among the first to call on the newcomer and now had her in tow telling her where to buy and what to buy. She had conducted her to the Higgledy-Piggledy Shop as a place where her fine damask could be laundered well. Mrs. Wright had recovered from her mortification over Elizabeth's engaging in this strange occupation and now that the shop was proving so successful and so fashionable she was not only reconciled but very proud of her daughter's connection with it and she took every opportunity to come to the shop and to bring others there.

"Where is Miss O'Gorman?" demanded Mrs. Wright. "I want Mrs. Hasbrook to talk with her concerning this work."

"She is not in," faltered Elizabeth.

"Not in! I saw her come in not half an hour ago. Mrs. Hasbrook was having a shampoo just across the street and I certainly saw Miss O'Gorman enter the building and I have not seen her depart."

Elizabeth looked hopeless under this relentless questioning of her determined parent. She turned to Josie for help. Josie arose to the occasion with such spirit that Mary Louise and Irene were taken completely off their guard and almost exploded with laughter. With a lisping drawl and a voice none of her friends had ever heard before Josie said:

"You were going to show me one of those vanity boxes. Miss O'Gorman told me you had some for seven dollars. I met her at the corner about five minutes ago."

"Oh, you did?" asked Mrs. Wright. "Well, I fancy I must have looked another way for a moment." She glanced curiously at Josie, who returned her stare with the utmost composure.

Elizabeth opened a drawer of vanity boxes and Josie crossed the room to inspect them with an exaggerated walk which reminded Mary Louise of a movie vamp. Again she was moved to laughter and had to pretend to sneeze.

"I am afraid you have caught cold," said Mrs. Wright. "You must take five grains of aspirin and go to bed. Follow it up with a dose of aromatic spirits of ammonia and let your diet be light."

Mary Louise listened politely and Josie made her escape with her suitcase without purchasing the vanity box.

CHAPTER VII JOSIE GETS A JOB

When Josie left the Higgledy-Piggledy Shop, after having hoodwinked Mrs. Wright, she made her way to a small hotel much favored by traveling men. It was the address given by a man who wished to employ a number of young women to travel in the South to introduce a line of household articles as well as some jewel novelties.

"What experience have you had?" the man asked her.

"Plenty of it," Josie answered with assurance. "I tell you, mister, I can sell anything from a baby's rattle to a tombstone. You can ask the girls who run the Higgledy-Piggledy Shop here in Dorfield. Ever hear of them?"

"Sure!"

"Well, I have a letter here from Miss Josie O'Gorman, who is chief cook and bottle washer 'round there and she will tell you that I am a winner. I tell you Mrs. Danny Dexter and Miss O'Gorman think old Sally Blossom is a peacherino."

The man took the letter, which was written on Higgledy-Piggledy paper and in Josie's best handwriting. In it the cleverness of Miss Sally Blossom was lauded to the skies. Josie blushed through her paint as he read it aloud.

"To think of my having the nerve to say all that about myself!" flashed through her mind. "But I bet it lands me my job."

It did. Since she was the first to apply she was given her choice of a field of operations and she chose Atlanta. She gave her address as 126 East Centre and made an engagement with the man to see him the next day to receive instructions and literature concerning her wares. Samples were to be sent to her at Atlanta.

"Now, having given my address as 126 East Centre, I must hurry over there and apply for board," said Josie to herself as she left the hotel.

The group gathered on the porch at 126 East Centre was the same as it had been on the day that Josie had tracked the elusive Dink to her lair. The young men were tilted back in their chairs at the same angle, and the young women were equally taken up with their ear puffs and frizzes. The clientele of 126 was an ever-changing one, but the class characteristics were stationary.

Josie tripped up the steps, assuming a kind of nonchalance as she calmly viewed the loafing boarders. They in turn gazed at her, some with interest and some with open disdain. With the boarders at 126 one must prove herself down to their standards before being accepted into their social order.

"Stuck up!" declared one young woman—the one with the most extreme ear puffs of all, the shortest skirt and the highest heels.

"Oh, I don't know," objected a man, removing the toothpick from his mouth and his gaudily socked feet from the railing. "I think she's some cutey."

A snicker of derision answered this sally.

"With them unstylish low heels? I guess you ain't got below her henna bob," snapped the girl, arching her instep and poking out her near-silk clad foot with its high-heeled, dirty, white kid pump.

Josie pulled the bell. It was the old-fashioned kind that must be pulled not pushed. When it was in working order a pull would set a wire in motion through the length of the house to the back entry and there a bell attached to the wire would start such a jangling that someone would come to the front door. This happened when the bell was in order, which was seldom the case at 126. When Josie gave a tug, which was vigorous and somewhat vicious from the embarrassment she could but feel at the overheard remarks, the bell handle with a coil of broken wire spring came limply away, and it was nothing but Josie's training that kept her ever on the alert that saved her from falling backwards.

"April fool!" called a grinning youth from the porch.

Josie laughed good-naturedly at her prospective fellow-boarder.

"Anyhow I know how not to get in," she said.

"'Tain't any trouble to get in this joint," ventured a woman. "There's more goin' than comin'. I'll never send a dog here."

"Oh, 'tain't so bad considering the H. C. of L.," put in a middle-aged man in a very tight Shepherd's plaid suit. "Mrs. Pete feeds us the best she can for the mon."

"Oh, you're sweet on Mrs. Pete," laughed the youth who had called "April fool" to Josie.

"Is Mrs. Pete at home?" asked Josie, glad to know the name of her future landlady.

"Sure she's home! Just open the door and walk in. Follow your nose—there's cabbage to-day so it's easy—right down the hall until you come to some steps. Then fall down the steps to the dining room. If Mrs. Pete ain't there she's in the kitchen next to it."

Josie thanked the youth and followed his advice. She found everything as he had told her she would, even to Mrs. Pete in the kitchen. She was hardly prepared for the knock-down odors which greeted her nostrils as she fell down the steps, nor was she prepared for the appearance of Mrs. Pete.

Josie's first thought was: "How does the woman ever get down those narrow stairs?" but she realized afterwards that she was of the soft type of fat that could be squeezed into any space. She was bursting from a tight kimono, a garment usually the loosest of all apparel, but Mrs. Pete's arms quite filled the flowing sleeves and although it was drawn tightly around her huge hips the fronts refused to meet but took on the slant of a cutaway coat. There was no expression to her face. It was simply fat. Her eyes looked like raisins in a bun and her mouth had almost disappeared. One tooth projected as though nature had decided that would be the only way to save the mouth from being entirely submerged. Her nose would have been lost had it not been for a wart. She moved lightly and easily, reminding Josie of a balloon with not enough gas in it to soar aloft. She wore a black wig at a rakish angle and a string of huge pink beads were lost and found in the folds of fat of her neck.

"Well?" she questioned Josie in a voice that sounded as though she were speaking down an empty hogshead.

"I want a room and board," said Josie.

"How many in a room?"

"I'd like one to myself."

"Humph! You'll have to pay for it then."

Josie expressed her willingness and they soon came to terms.

"It's a room a professional lady has just left, her and two children. I don't usually take children but she engaged the room without letting on there were any kids. She didn't take her meals here regular so I never saw them much. Lord knows what the little things ate because she never brought them down to what few dinners she got here. I'm so fleshy like I never get up on the top floor. Here, Betty, you Betty! Come show this lady the room on the top floor, the one Miss Dingus just left," she called to a slouchy colored girl who was washing dishes at the sink.

"Dinner at half past one," boomed the landlady to Josie's back as she followed Betty up the narrow stairs.

"I ain't ter say cleaned up that there top floor room yit," confessed the maid, "but I'll try ter git it in fust rate fix befo' come night time."

"Oh, that's all right," said Josie. "You just give me some clean sheets and a clean pillow case and I won't mind the rest at all."

The room was large, the third floor back, with windows overlooking dingy back yards. Its disorder was astonishing.

"I didn't know it wa' quite so stirred up as this," exclaimed the girl. "These here, folks ain't many er 'em got no raisin'. They ought ter git bo'd an' lodgin' in a pig pen. I's kinder fussed ter be a showin' you sich a spot. Well," she added philosophically: "What kin you expect from a hog but a grunt?"

Josie laughed.

"Never mind, Betty," she said, giving the girl a quarter. "I can manage very well. You go on and finish your dishes and I will make up the bed myself if you get the bed linen."

Betty looked at Josie curiously.

"Say, miss, you belies yo' looks. You got the 'pearance er these here folks but you ain't got they ways. I been wuckin' in this here bo'din house fer three years an' I ain't never had a one of them give me mo'n a dime at a time unless'n it wa' ter git me not to tell Mrs. Pete 'bout some devilment or other they done got in."

Josie had not thought it necessary to be other than herself before the colored maid but she took herself severely to task for lowering her guard, even with anyone seemingly so unimportant as Betty.

"Father used to say that small things were the stumbling blocks of some of the biggest detectives," she said to herself. "I'll try to do better."

The grateful Betty returned immediately with clean sheets and pillow slips and one small towel. She then departed to finish her dishwashing.

As soon as she was alone Josie, first taking the precaution of locking the door, began a search in the dirty grate for any papers that might prove of importance to the matter in hand.

The grate was piled high with old torn letters and some had been dumped in without even being mutilated. A match had evidently been applied to the mass of papers but had only charred the corners of the envelopes.

"Oh what a careless Cousin Dink! Now we will see what we can find," whispered Josie.

The girl worked quickly and methodically, sorting out the letters and putting them in neat packets and snapping rubber bands around them. She examined the seemingly worthless accumulation of advertisements and circulars, saving the envelopes wherever the date and postoffice stamp were legible. Every scrap of paper in the heaped fireplace was carefully scrutinized. What she deemed worthless was finally put back, care being taken to pull the mass apart so that the grate seemed to be as full as before.

"That Betty is too noticing to be careless," Josie reflected.

She then sat down by the window and began piecing together the letters Cousin Dink had taken the trouble to tear up.

"She had a reason for tearing up some and not bothering about others."

The ones that were mutilated were all in the same handwriting. Fortunately for Josie's patience they were not torn in very small pieces. Fitting them together was not a difficult task for one so alert and quick fingered as our little detective. In several instances the letter had been torn and the pieces all put back in the envelope. That made plain sailing indeed for the puzzle worker.

These letters that so especially interested our Josie were signed in various ways but always with the same flourish of the pen: "Yours always, C. H." "Lovingly, Ches." "Hastily, C." Several were signed: "Chester Hunt." The letters were a strange mixture of love and business. They commenced sometimes "Dear Coz:" sometimes "My own Dink:" or "My own dear girl:" Always, while they were more or less affectionate, Josie could read between the lines that this Chester Hunt could command Cousin Dink to do as he chose. Whether he controlled her by affection or whether by some other force it was hard to say. Sometimes his tone was frankly impatient but he usually ended up such epistles with repeated assurances of affection. Through the correspondence Josie traced much in regard to Peter and Polly. There was one telegram in which this Chester Hunt had summoned the woman to Atlanta. That was dated about a year before.

"Come—I need you—C. H." That was all.

"That must have been when she went and got the poor kids," Josie decided. "But there is one thing that is worrying me: why should this Dink have saved all these letters up to this time, and after having saved them so carefully, why now should she have torn them up and evidently attempted to destroy them?"

The letters had followed the woman to many places, now a small town in Louisiana, now Dallas, Texas, then St. Paul, Minnesota and so on. Sometimes they were addressed to Miss E. Dingus, sometimes Margery Dubois; sometimes Hester Broughton. Sometimes they were sent to a street number, but often to General Delivery. Mention was often made of the children and usually in rather impatient terms. The following are extracts from the letters:

"Don't let the brats worry you but you had better not let anything happen to them."

"Get a doctor if the pests are sick, because we don't want investigations."

"If they keep on insisting on going back to their mother just tell them she is dead."

"Caution them not to tell anything about themselves and if need be intimidate them. Polly can remember too much."

"Keep up and don't get too tired of your job. There will be an end of it sometime and you will receive your reward."

"Of course I mean to marry you as soon as I can arrange our affairs. It is important to go carefully for a while. Don't let the kids know there is any possibility of our marrying. Be sure and burn all of my letters."

"M. W. is safe behind bars. S. W.'s will has been probated, it being certain now that he is dead. I am sole executor and guardian of the children in case his wife should pass away without a will. She will I am sure."

"The infamous wretch!" exclaimed Josie,

In many of the letters there was a response to a plea for money and more money. "I send you all I can spare. Don't let the brats spend so much. They have been spoiled by too much indulgence already."

"Humph! Pickle and cream puffs for breakfast!" stormed Josie. "Mr. Chester Hunt I certainly hope to make you squirm. But I wish I could find out why Dink gave up the kiddies and why she destroyed her more-or-less love letters."

Every torn letter was pieced together and the contents mastered before Josie heard the dinner bell. The other communications appeared to be of little value—letters from theatrical persons from different parts of the country and a few from some man who signed himself "Mike." The letters from Mike, Josie put in a packet to themselves. "She may have another man on the string," she mused. "Mike may be our trump card, the joker."

All of Mike's letters were addressed to Margery Dubois. They were badly spelled and written in a labored handwriting but Josie felt that Mike was a worthy fellow. Reading character by means of chirography had been one of Detective O'Gorman's hobbies and Josie had taken up the science to some extent. As Josie perused these epistles she gathered that Mike had been Margery Dubois's dancing partner. Evidently they had been on the vaudeville stage together.

"Not love letters at all," Josie decided. "When he says he misses her so much, can't get along without her, he means he wants her to act with him again."

The last one was from Chicago. In it he made an urgent appeal to his former partner to join him there. "A big thing if you can come in a day or so. Plenty of tin and three-night stands in big towns. No barnstorming bizness in this job." This letter was signed Mike Brady and the Chicago address was given.

"That's where she has gone," decided Josie.

By the time the great gong in the basement clanged forth its summons to dinner Josie had grasped the contents of most of the letters found in the grate, had tied them in neat packages and had them carefully stowed away in her suitcase, the suitcase locked and the key in her pocket.

CHAPTER VIII PETER REFUSES NEW PARENTS

The Children's Home Society moved to the old Hathaway house as soon as possible after Mary Louise signed the deed making over the property to the society. The new quarters were well suited to the needs of the Children's Home, large airy rooms with long porches and a delightful yard and garden where the little tots could play.

"I don't want to leave Mr. and Mrs. Robin before they hatch out their fambly," moaned Peter. "Looks like we can't never stay put, can we, Polly?"

"But the big house is much nicer, Peter dear," comforted Polly. "It kinder reminds me of where we lived one time with Mother and Daddy. That had a yard to it and lots of sweet violets bordering the walks. I wish you could remember the violets, Peter."

"I wish I could. Sometimes I 'most can—but don't you ever forget 'em, Polly. You keep on talking about 'em and maybe sometime I can 'member too the way I can the porridge bowls. I won't never forget our mother. I'm sure glad you didn't never let Cousin Dink know we had her picture, hers and Daddy's."

"Not me! That old Dink wouldn't have let me keep them. I haven't ever showed them to anybody but that nice Miss Josie girl. She is safe I believe and she wouldn't ever let Cousin Dink nor anybody know. She is going to have them framed and let us hang them up in our room. I like being here lots better than traveling 'round with old Cousin Dink, don't you, Peter!"

"I should say so. I hope nobody won't want to 'dopt us. They say folks is all time 'doptin' children from here. That's what the nurse told me when she washed my face and hands. She says, 'If you don't be clean nobody won't want to 'dopt you,' so I'm gonter be as dirty as ever I can be."

"Oh, Peter, what would Mother say? It would be real nice to be 'dopted if we could get 'dopted together."

"Oh, but they couldn't take me without you," and Peter began to weep. "Let's both of us have dirty faces all the time so nobody won't want us."

"No, let's both of us have clean faces all the time so somebody will want both of us. I'm mighty sorry I cut my hair off so jiggly. When it grows out I'm going to see if I can't save up some money and get a permanent wave so's I'll look lovely and everybody that comes to the home will say, 'Who is that charming child? I'll take her and her dear little brother too and well be a happy family.' Now wouldn't that be nice, Peter dear?"

"That 'pends on who it is. Supposin' it was a person like Cousin Dink that comed along an' took us away an' then knocked us around an' wouldn't let us stay put; I'm thinkin' about stayin' put for a while."

The two little waifs had many conversations similar to the foregoing. They soon fitted themselves into the life of the home. Peter was a general favorite because of his engaging manner and sweet confiding nature, while Polly made herself so useful in helping to care for the babies with which the home swarmed that the nurses declared they did not know what they would do without her. She was a motherly child and, having taken care of Peter so much during her mother's illness and after the wanderings with Cousin Dink began, she was well able to nurse the little ones.

"There's something about little babies that makes me happy all over and makes me want to cry too," she said to one of the nurses, holding to her bosom a little pink mummy-like bundle, a recent addition to the home. "I hope some nice kind lady is going to want this little baby child and she will grow up and never know she's 'dopted. Being 'dopted isn't so bad if you don't ever know it. Peter don't want ever to be 'dopted because he thinks somebody like Cousin Dink might get him. I hope they will just let me go on living here and by and by I can be a real sure-enough nurse and wash all the little babies and Peter can grow up and be a policeman or something. Peter used to be afraid of policemen but ever since Miss Josie told him what nice men they were and one time introduced him to a big cop on the corner and Peter shook hands with him, he's been thinking policemen are the finest things going and he wants to be one worse than anything. Peter could be a big policeman and could bring all the little homeless babies here and I could wash them clean and curl their hair and get them ready to be 'dopted."

One day shortly after they had moved to the Hathaway house a ringing of the front door bell heralded the advent of callers. Since callers often meant would-be adopters of infants it was natural for manager and nurses to wish to make as good a showing as possible. A lady and a gentleman were ushered into the parlor. Dr. Weston congratulated himself that everything was in such good order and that he could testify to the good health and disposition of so many of his charges.

"I am thinking of adopting a little boy," spoke the lady, an exceedingly prim little person with a determined chin. "My husband wants a boy, although I should really prefer a girl."

The husband, a sad-eyed man with a humorous twitch to his mouth, looked a bit astonished at this statement. He had been laboring under the idea that it was just the other way around—that he preferred a girl and his wife a boy—but it made very little difference. She was going to have what she wanted, even to the extent of making him pretend he wanted what she wanted.

"An infant, I presume, madam?" said Dr. Weston.

"No, not at all! I'd prefer a little boy who has cut his teeth and can talk. Of course I'd like him to have curls, and to come from a nice family, and to be perfectly sound and healthy, and to have no bad habits—such as eating plastering or having adenoids. I want a bright, attractive child with a sweet disposition so that I can raise him up for the ministry."

"Um-hum!" mused Dr. Weston. "I'll see what we have to offer in the way of angels. There are some children playing in the yard now, madam. Perhaps you and your husband would like to go have a look at them. The infants are on the southern porch in their cribs but the little ones who can toddle we keep out in the yard all we can."

The garden of the old Hathaway house again was the background for a picturesque scene. In the same spot where Hortense Markle had so cleverly staged Mary Louise's out door wedding not so many months before, ten little children from two years up to six were playing happily in a sand pile, recently donated to the home by Mrs. Peter Conant with shovels and buckets enough to go around and a few to spare for possible additions.

Peter Waller was evidently the chief engineer of the sand pile and the other children looked to him for inspiration, whether it were turning out whole spice cakes by packing down the sand in buckets and adroitly inverting them or excavating marvelous tunnels that one could actually see

through.

"Now this is a tunnel," he said. "I know 'cause I've been through a whole lot of tunnels. Haven't I Polly?" calling to his sister who was patiently nursing a child with a bumped knee on a bench near by.

"Yes!" answered Polly, "but don't be too show-offy."

Peter disregarded this sisterly rebuke.

"Well, anyhow it is and I have. And this is a chu-chu track."

"Chu-chu track!" echoed his admirers who didn't at all mind his showing off.

"And when the chu-chu train goes in the tunnel it is all dark, as dark as dark, and the engine makes a rumblin' noise and the cars get all full of smoke. But you mustn't git scairt—nobody mustn't git scairt 'cause God is there in that tunnel same as he is on dry land and God loves you —"

"Dod loves us! Dod loves us!" cried a wee tot jumping up and down in the sand in a kind of ecstasy of emotion and the other babies took up the refrain and in a moment all of the sand diggers were shouting in glee but with absolutely no conception of what it all meant: "Dod loves us! Dod loves us!"

They were unconscious of the onlookers. Dr. Weston and the lady and gentleman stood close by hearing Peter's lecture and witnessing the sudden wave of emotion that took the children.

"Wonderful!" exclaimed the lady. "What a darling boy that is—the one who preached the sermon. I want him! Oh, how I want him! I could raise him to be a preacher, I am sure; and look at his curls!"

"He has only been with us a short time," said Dr. Weston, "so short a time that we should prefer keeping him until we find out more about him. He was left here with his sister under rather unusual circumstances."

"I don't care what the circumstances were, I want him. I will have him or none at all."

Dr. Weston glanced at the lady's determined chin and had a feeling she was going to get what she wanted.

"We have thought it advisable not to separate the two children," he continued in a soothing voice. "They have been through various vicissitudes together and a separation would hardly be right. There is his sister over there on the bench with the little child in her lap. Polly is a nice child, helpful and motherly and extremely intelligent."

"But her hair doesn't curl," objected the lady. "I would never adopt a girl whose hair doesn't curl. She would be a nuisance instead of a pleasure."

"Ah really!" from Dr. Weston.

The children were still unconscious of their audience. Peter was widening the tunnel at one end and at the other the eager babies were crowding together, peering through at the youthful civil engineer.

"Ith He in there?" queried one.

"Cose He's in here," announced Peter. "He's everywhere in the world—but He won't git you. He'll just be good to you an' love you an' maybe give you candy, 'cept'n I'd rather have pancakes."

"He shall have them!" cried the eager lady. "He shall have all he wants! Little boy," she asked, impulsively leaning over Peter, who had seated himself in the sand the better to proceed with his excavating, "dear little boy, wouldn't you like to come and live with me and be my little boy?"

Peter looked up startled and distressed. Polly dropped the child with the bumped knee and flew to Peter's side.

"I'll be so good to you and love you as though I were your own mother. You can have a pony to ride and a bicycle and skates—"

"Gee whilikins!" exclaimed Peter.

"I will adopt you—"

"'Dopt me! No you won't! I didn't know you meant to 'dopt me. Me'n Polly ain't ever gonter git 'dopted. We's gonter jes' live along here till we gits growed up an' maybe our mother won't be dead an' will come find us. Me'n Polly has to be together all the time," an expression of agony on his face. "Don't we, Polly?"

"Yes, yes, Peter darling!"

"Well you would hardly stand in your brother's light," spoke the lady a bit sharply. "It would certainly be to his advantage to come and live with me and my husband. He would take our name and be brought up exactly as though he were our own."

"But his own name is a good name," spoke Polly, holding her cropped head proudly. "Peter Waller is a very fine name. I have heard my mother say so often."

"Oh, you have! Well it is no better than Peter Thraves would be. My name is Mrs. Thraves, child."

The little girl was not a bit impressed.

"And mine is Miss Mary Washington Waller, Polly for short," spoke Polly, her head still up.

There was a look of breeding about the child and at the same time a hint of battle in her blue eye and her firm little mouth. Dr. Weston could not help smiling at Miss Mary Washington Waller.

"I am going to adopt your brother because I have taken such a fancy to him. He is so sweet and pious and I am going to raise him to be a preacher."

With that Peter set up such a yell as had never been heard before in the Hathaway garden. He flung himself in Polly's arms and burst into a storm of tears.

"I ain't gonter be no preacher! I—I am gonter be a p'liceman. I don't want to be 'dopted. That's what I git for lettin' you wash my face, Polly." He picked up a handful of dirt and smeared it over his face. With the help of the tears it was very effective. "I'm jest as bad as bad can be. I know a whole string of cuss words an' I can say them as fast as now-I-lay-me. Doggone, devil, deuce, dam, da—"

"Oh, Peter!" gasped Polly, putting her hand over her brother's mouth.

"Don't you stop me, Polly," sputtered Peter. "I ain't near done."

Mrs. Thraves turned away in disgust.

"I fancy it would be more satisfactory if we adopted an infant," she said to Dr. Weston, who was almost bursting with pent-up laughter. "Perhaps a little girl would be less apt to turn out badly. Boys are so deceptive. To think of that angel face! Such language!"

Mr. Thraves stood for a moment looking wistfully at Polly and Peter, who still clung to each other. Polly was drying Peter's tears and endeavoring to clean his dirty face, while she admonished him gently.

"Peter, you were so naughty. What will good Dr. Weston think of such a bad boy?"

"He won't think a thing. He wouldn't like to be 'dopted hisself when his mother might come alive any time an' he'd be gone off with his name changed an' everything. Why don't she be a preacher herself if she wants a preacher so bad? Why didn't she go marry a preacher an' have a whole lot of preacher chilluns? Say, Polly, please don't be mad of me. Did you know I was such a pretty cusser? I made up that cussin' all to once. It was just as easy as anything. I kinder s'prised myself."

Mr. Thraves gave an involuntary chuckle. He glanced at his wife, who was walking across the lawn, presenting a rather indignant and consciously virtuous back to naughty Peter. Down in his pocket went his hand and before Peter and Polly knew what had happened they found themselves each with a silver dollar clasped in a grubby fist.

CHAPTER IX JOSIE GETS HER BEARINGS

Josie's luck in finding the partially destroyed letters left by the careless Cousin Dink, alias Margery Dubois, alias Hester Broughton, sometimes D. Dingus, made it possible for her to pass up the doubtful privilege of sleeping in the clean sheets provided for her by Betty. That afternoon she went back to her employer, received all necessary instructions concerning the campaign she was to wage in Atlanta in the line of household novelties and jeweled specialties and, after paying Mrs. Pete for the room she had decided not to occupy, she took the night train for the South.

Before she left Dorfield Josie had time to run in on the Higgledy-Piggledies for a few moments, long enough to say "howdy" to her partners and to leave directions for having her mail forwarded. She found Mary Louise having a chat with Elizabeth Wright.

"You are the very one I wanted to see, dear," she cried. "I want to ask you to keep an eye on little

Polly and Peter. Make friends with them even more than you have and if they let drop anything else about their past please wire it to me. Now I'm going to pack up some of my own especial duds. I may have to disguise myself as my real self before I get through with this adventure. In that case I must have my own clothes with which to do it."

"Before you go, you come to you, please tell us what has happened so far," begged Mary Louise.

Josie smiled, her ever-cheery smile.

"Nothing much except I landed my job and will get all my expenses. I mean to do good work for my boss. If I get pushed for time I'll get an assistant and pay her well to do his work—all that I can't accomplish myself. I am supposed to hire canvassers when I get to Atlanta and open up a kind of office for the time being. The letter I wrote myself puffing Miss Sally Blossom as a person little short of perfect got the boss going. Now I'll have to make good. I am almost sorry I boosted myself up so in his estimation. It's an awful strain sometimes to make good."

"But you can do it I feel sure, you funny old Josie," cried Mary Louise. "Now be sure to write us what you do and what you find out. If I didn't think Danny would miss me too much I'd go with you just for the experience."

"Heavens! You with your countenance so ingenuous that you'd give the whole thing away the first dash out of the box. You are too honest to engage in such a frame-up as this, Mary Louise."

"I'm no more honest than you are."

"Well, perhaps our fundamentals are about the same, but I have to pretend to be a lot of things I am not, to work out my principles and I am sure you couldn't pretend to be anything but just dear, sweet Mary Louise Dexter if your life, or even your dear Danny's life, depended on it. Could you paint your face and be a vulgar minx as I am being just now?"

"I—I—don't know."

"I bet you could," put in Elizabeth. "You have never yet failed to do what it was up to you to do and I believe you could even do that."

Mary Louise laughed. "I could but try if my doing it would help anybody. Good luck to you, Josie dear!"

And the next moment Josie was gone on her great adventure.

Atlanta had on its smiling, spring face when Josie arrived. The air was soft and balmy and everything smelt of violets. They were growing everywhere, on the poor streets as well as the more pretentious ones. A house was lowly indeed that did not boast a bit of yard with borders of violets by fence and walk. Old colored women sat on the corners with huge bunches of violets for sale. Pretty girls walked on the streets with corsage bouquets of the fragrant flowers.

"Poor little Polly and Peter! No wonder they are homesick for Atlanta," was Josie's first thought.

She found lodgings in a quaint little old hotel called the Elberta Inn. Everything in Atlanta seemed to Josie to have something to do with peaches—Peachtree Street, West Peachtree Street, Peachtree Terrace, Peachtree Gardens. Then hotels and inns bore the name where they could and others named themselves after famous brands of peaches, such as Elberta.

"What's in a name?" sighed Josie when, at her very first dinner in her new quarters, dried apple pies were shamelessly served.

The landlady of the Elberta Inn was as thin as the landlady at 126 East Centre was fat. Her name was Miss Oleander Denton. She was quick to let each prospective guest know that she had seen better days.

"My grandfather would turn over in his grave if he knew that one of his female descendants was at work and all," she whispered to Josie. "We owned thousands of acres and hundreds of slaves and all."

Sometimes Miss Oleander was known to reverse this statement, having her grandfather own hundreds of acres and thousands of slaves. Whatever it was, poor Oleander was certainly hard at work now. Perhaps her proud grandfather was saved from turning over in his grave by the fact that his male descendants were not inclined to work. Old Mr. Denton—Major he was called by the boarders—had never been known to do a day's work in his life and Miss Oleander had a brother, Braxton, who was occupied only during the races.

"I should think your grandfather would be proud that you are so capable," suggested Josie.

"Oh, not at all," sighed Miss Oleander. "Efficient women were not considered ladylike in my grandfather's time—that is not efficient enough to make a living. They could be good housekeepers and all." Miss Denton always ended every sentence with "and all." It could mean anything and nothing.

Josie felt she had found exactly the right place. She was sure that Miss Oleander could tell her about the Wallers and Chester Hunt, and what she didn't know Major Denton would. Josie had modified her appearance somewhat, lengthened her skirts, discarded the strings of beads, left off the paint and powder except for a becoming dash and put away her lip-stick until she might have use for it. She still clung to the bobbed henna wig with its permanent wave. That in itself completely changed the appearance of the usually demure Josie.

"First I must get my bearings," she mused, as she settled herself in the shabby hall bedroom, that had the one advantage of overlooking the great and only Peachtree Street.

On a shelf in her room she found an old telephone book. Stephen Waller's name and address were given. The house proved to be only three doors from the Elberta Inn, which had been a private residence in former years. By the telephone in the hall near Josie's door hung a new, down-to-date book. She looked for Stephen Waller's name in it. It was not there. She then looked for Chester Hunt's name. It was given and the address was the same as Stephen Waller's had been.

"So he is living in the old home!" A picture of the children arose in Josie's mind, their forlorn condition, ragged, worn clothes and hungry eyes. Then she thought of the room at Mrs. Pete's where they had lived before they had gone to the Children's Home and her mouth tightened. "I'll show him a thing or two before I get through," she muttered.

Before dinner that evening she went out for a walk. She turned to the left from Elberta Inn and sauntered along as though she had no object in life, and from the vacant expression on her face one might think she had no more intelligence than object. Josie had the faculty of appearing dull and stupid. A fishy look would come in her clever eyes and she could assume the expression of a moron. She was apt to take on this facial disguise whenever she was deeply interested in a case.

There was the Waller house on the corner, a handsome structure of pure colonial architecture. The grounds around it were spacious for a city, with box bushes whose size were indicative of their great age. The walls of the house were almost covered with thick English ivy, but the weathered pink of the old brick asserted itself in spots. The yard, front and sides, had flower beds bordered with violets and the formal walks were also indicated by rows of the fragrant flower. Magnolia trees with glossy leaves and great white waxen blossoms shaded the house and over the brick wall, that extended down the side street, leaned fig trees.

Peachtree Street runs along the top of a ridge and the side streets slope from it. This means that the houses must be built with basements in the rear. Usually the kitchen and servants' quarters are in this basement. Josie's walk led her down the side street. In the wall near the end of the lot was a green door, no doubt the servants' and tradesmen's entrance. Facing on the alley was a large garage, the door of which was open. There was little sign of life about the place. Josie noticed some belated clothes hanging on a line in the back yard. By tiptoeing she could see over the wall. The wash was that of a man, rather sporty striped shirts and socks of many colors.

"Mighty late to be having the wash still hanging out," said Josie to herself. "Having trouble with servants, I wager. Hope so, anyhow."

As she started to cross the alley the honk of a horn warned her of the approach of an automobile. She stepped back and a big touring car turned into the alley. Josie looked up. A very handsome man of about forty was alone in the car, which he drove with great skill. He directed his car into the garage with noiseless shifting of gears.

Josie eyed him dully, which meant that not one detail of his countenance or clothing escaped her. She even noted the make of the car. The man glanced casually at Josie but she was nothing more than a pedestrian crossing the alley to him, and a stupid-looking pedestrian at that, who did not cross the alley even when she had a chance. Josie stood for a moment after the car had passed the crossing.

"Could that be Chester Hunt?" she mused. "If so, he is not my idea of a villain in appearance. He is too pleasant looking and his countenance is entirely too open and engaging. Too good looking, in fact! I was looking for a black-browed villain with selfishness and devilry written all over his face. If that is he then woe be to poor Dink and Mrs. Waller! When evil has so much the appearance of good it is difficult to combat."

She crossed the alley and continued her walk, not returning to the Elberta Inn by way of the Waller house. She did not want the inmates of that house, whoever they might be, by any chance to become familiar with her face and form, disguised or natural.

It was too late in the evening to see about an office and the business of making good as a saleswoman for household necessities and jeweled novelties, but it was not too late to get a pretty good idea of the city and a general notion of the kind of persons who made Atlanta their home. Josie walked for an hour, noting and remembering the names of the streets, the lines of trolleys, the principal hotels and clubs and many other things that an ordinary tourist would have passed by or forgotten in a moment. She stopped at a drug store and bought a map of the city. Then when she got home she traced on the map the streets she had traversed or followed in her walk.

"Now I am beginning to get my bearings," she declared as she freshened up a bit for dinner. "I mustn't let myself slump into too great respectability," she grinned at herself in the mirror.

CHAPTER X AT MISS DENTON'S DINNER TABLE

Seven o'clock dinner at Elberta Inn was a function in spite of the dried apple pies. Miss Oleander Denton always insisted upon making of it a real dinner party. It seemed as though, for the hour, she attempted to forget that her guests were paying ones. To her black silk gown she gave a festive air by turning it in at the neck, thereby exposing her too prominent clavicles, but the effect was softened by a beautiful old lace collar and a large cameo breastpin of rare workmanship, depicting a lady in hoop skirts by a grave, over which leant a weeping willow tree. Major Denton wore a rusty dress suit and a carnation in his buttonhole. The boarders dressed or not as they chose, but as a rule they played up to Miss Oleander's role of hostess and appeared at dinner in festive raiment.

The table was set with care and taste, but Josie found the food no better than the one meal she had eaten at Mrs. Pete's in Dorfield. Mrs. Pete's cabbage and the accompanying corned beef had been excellent, although the table had been covered with a red cloth, the crockery of the thickest, unbreakable variety and a large toothpick holder the only ornament. Miss Denton always had flowers on the table and her china was what remained in the family after the administration of the hundred slaves. It did not match but it was all good, some thin porcelain with a gold band, some Canton whose blue made Josie homesick for the Higgledy-Piggledy Shop and the little breakfast set, a gift from Mary Louise.

The great difference between 126 East Centre and the Elberta Inn lay in the type of boarders. A wider gulf existed between the clientele of the two places than that between a red table cloth and a fine damask one, or Canton china and Mrs. Pete's heavy stone crockery, or a vase of roses and a toothpick holder.

Most of the boarders were permanent ones and while it was a rule of the house to resent transients, they were secretly welcome because of the added zest they gave to the humdrum of everyday life. The permanent guests of Elberta Inn knew only too well all about each other and it was a relief to have outsiders to pick on in spite of the ignominy of having to sit down to meals with persons whose antecedents might be doubtful. Elberta Inn was of the old South. The inroad of Western and Northern capital had not touched the Maison Denton. To be sure the transients who occasionally bore down upon them were often northerners or westerners but they did not represent much capital or they would have put up at a first-class hotel. This the boarders who called Elberta Inn home year in and year out well understood and so it was all transients were more or less looked down upon. They were not rich or they would not be there and they were hardly well born, since they were not born in the South. Of course they sympathized with Miss Oleander in wanting to rent her rooms and the fact that a much higher board was charged transients than permanents made transients somewhat desirable if too long intervals did not elapse between their goings and comings.

All of the foregoing Josie gathered at her first dinner. She was introduced with great eclat by her hostess. The party was seated as she came into the dining room and down one side of the table and up the other Miss Oleander called the names, each time repeating Josie as

"

Miss Blossom, Colonel Brent; Miss Blossom, Miss Kite-Smith; Miss Blossom, Mrs. Bucknow; Miss Blossom, Major Dugan; Miss Blossom, Mrs. Claiborne; Miss Blossom, Judge Tuttle; Miss Blossom, my father, Major Denton," and so forth and so on down a line of twenty.

Josie felt she had never been among so many titles in all her life. She recalled some lines from an opera of Gilbert and Sullivan's:

Note to self: These lines are indented.

"With admirals the ocean teemed

A

nd bishops in their shovel hats

W

ere cheap as any tabby cats,

I

n point of fact too many."

"The women have no titles but their names sound so aristocratic," she thought. "Why, oh, why did I choose such a silly name as Blossom? There were plenty of nice plain names that would have done me just as well and I wouldn't feel such a fool when I am introduced. I thought Miss Oleander would never get through calling out Blossom."

She was relieved to find that her henna wig was not so very much out of place. Miss Hite-Smith was blondined in the back, with a transformation in the front that did not quite match and all of the aristocratic dames had resorted to cosmetics of one kind or another. Powder predominated but an occasional dash of rouge gave color to the party.

Dinner was in courses, served by two colored maids whose social strata must have been about that of Betty's at Mrs. Pete's. To be sure they had on white caps and aprons, garnishings of which Betty boasted not, but their motions were reminiscent of the cornfield, as though they might still be walking over ploughed ground.

Josie could not help thinking that perhaps the grandfather, he of the hundreds of slaves and thousands of acres, would have turned over in his grave again if he could have seen the type of repast served on his beautiful old china. There was course after course but each was merely a sample, from soup to coffee. Josie remembered the heaping plate of cabbage and corned beef with the hunk of corn bread at Mrs. Pete's with regretful sentiment.

"Blossom, Blossom! Did I hear aright, young lady?" asked Judge Tuttle. "Is your name Blossom?"

"Yes, sir," said Josie, respectfully, but wishing in her heart the old gentleman would not insist on that absurd name, "Sally Blossom!"

"Ah, and from what part of the country do you come?"

"Washington," answered Josie, thankful that at one time she had lived there—was living there in fact when her father, Detective O'Gorman, died. "I have been in Dorfield lately, though, on business."

"My grandmother's maiden name was Blossom," continued the judge, "and strange to say, it was also Sally, or Sarah by the time she got to be my grandmother. But she was a Virginian, a Virginian of tide-water fame. What Blossom are you?"

"Just Blossom, sir; a blooming Blossom! My father was English," she said in desperation. "At least I think he was. He died before he was born—I mean I was born."

"Ah, very sad!" ventured the Judge and Miss Hite-Smith thought so too. Josie, for her part, thought he was much better dead—that fictitious Blossom. This questioning was more than she had bargained for. People usually let her do the questioning. She rather fancied it was the bobbed wig and the artificial complexion that made persons like the judge notice her.

"That is a beautiful old house on the corner near here," she ventured.

"You mean the Haskins?" spoke up Miss Denton. "Yes, it is very handsome, no doubt, but too ornate and pie-crusty for my—taste." Then a discussion ensued concerning architecture, old and new.

"I mean the house going East from this place," put in Josie, not at all interested in the Haskins house. "The old home with the ivy and the box-bushes in the yard."

"Oh, the Waller house!" said Major Denton. "That is perhaps the finest specimen of the old South left in the city. It was saved from the Yankee invasion by a piece of luck."

He then plunged into war reminiscences that lasted through three courses, his table companions listening with bored politeness.

"Do the same people still live there?" asked Josie, after Major Denton had fired the last shot for states' rights.

"Well, they do and they don't," began the Major.

"I can't see why you say they do," broke in Judge Tuttle. "Chester Hunt hasn't an ounce of Waller blood in his veins."

"Indeed he has," declared Mrs. Claiborne. "Chester Hunt's mother's great-grandmother was a niece of old Edmund Waller's, the English founder of the Waller family. That is a well-known fact."

"Ah, yes, a niece but—ah, well—the presence of ladies would deter my pressing my point," said Judge Tuttle, who then whispered sibilantly to a pink-cheeked old man across the table.

"As I was saying," continued Major Denton, "they do and they don't. The present occupant of the Waller mansion is a stepbrother of Stephen Waller's. He, poor fellow, was killed during the war,

the world war, I mean, not the war between the states."

"Yes," breathed Josie, "and the stepbrother inherited his property?"

"Oh, no, there is a widow and two children. A very sad story, very sad! The widow has been crazed by grief and I hear is hopelessly insane. The two children have been placed in care of an excellent woman and are now living near their mother, so if she should ever ask for them they can be reached quickly. She has shown no sign as yet of wanting to see them. A sad case!"

"Yes, and I wouldn't trust those sanitariums," spoke Miss Oleander. "They are often very tricky."

"Neither would I," said a young woman across the table from Josie. Her name was Miss Chisholm and she had the distinction of being in business. The ladies at Miss Denton's were not the type to be in business.

"But Chester Hunt has been to the place again and again and says his step-sister-in-law is receiving every attention and is being watched with the greatest care. She is raving, so he says, and he is very sad over it. Chester Hunt is a fine young fellow in spite of the unkind things some persons say about his great-great-grandmother," declared Mrs. Claiborne, vindictively.

"I don't like him," asserted Miss Chisholm.

"Indeed!" and Mrs. Claiborne eyed Miss Chisholm through her lorgnette. "He is very popular with young ladies." There was a slight accent on the ladies.

"Popular enough with girls who see him in society but you ask stenographers how they like him," flushed Miss Chisholm.

"I am hardly likely to converse with stenographers on the subject of Mr. Hunt," was the insolent answer.

Josie determined to cultivate Miss Chisholm and to give Mrs. Claiborne a wide berth.

"Where has the poor lady been put?" Josie asked Miss Oleander,

"Somewhere in New York, I think!"

"Not at all! The place is an excellent one near Washington," said Mrs. Claiborne.

"Hunt told me himself it was in Indiana," said Judge Tuttle. "I had some business to settle for him. You see he is the executor and administrator of Stephen Waller's estate. Naturally he was appointed guardian of the children by the court.

"I understand they are a very unruly pair," went on Mrs. Claiborne. "It seems it was their selfishness and naughtiness that gave their poor mother her final breakdown. I hate to think it of Stephen Waller's children, but I hear it on all sides. Chester Hunt can hardly control himself when the subject comes up. He has done everything for them but they have behaved so very badly. Mother spoiled them, I reckon."

"Why, that's too bad," put in kind Miss Oleander. "I used to see them playing in their yard and I was much attracted by them. I don't see how such sweet-looking children could be so very naughty."

"Nonsense!" cried Miss Chisholm. "My cousin taught little Polly Waller and she says she was the most tractable child she has ever had in her class. The boy was too young for school, but I happened to hear his kindergarten teacher discussing the family with my cousin and she said Peter was a love of a boy and clever beyond anything. He is a born leader, so she said."

"They are sneaky," asserted Mrs. Claiborne. "I have heard of many sneaky underhand things they have done. Poor Chester Hunt, I don't envy him the job of guardian."

"Neither do I," said Josie to herself.

"He has had a great deal of trouble with servants lately," said Miss Hite-Smith. "I hear he is not trying to keep up the whole house but it takes several servants to maintain any kind of cleanliness in such a huge house. He is advertising for white maids, so I hear. It seems the colored ones think the place is haunted."

"He is advertising for white maids!" Josie repeated to herself.

Josie regretted her job. Life was becoming complicated, what with trying to organize a force of canvassers for household necessities and jewel novelties when every moment of her waking hours must be spent trying to find out the true inwardness of the affair concerning Peter and Polly and their demented mother. Her boss was trusting her, so she must make good. And had she not, as Josie O'Gorman, highly recommended Miss Sally Blossom? It was doubly up to her to deliver the goods. So she thought as she sat in her little hall bedroom and went over in her mind all she had learned that day.

There was a tap on her door. It was Miss Chisholm coming to call.

"I thought you might be lonesome," she said. "The guests of this house are not very friendly to 'outsiders,' as they designate everybody who hasn't been living at Miss Denton's since the flood. I liked the way you shut up Judge Tuttle about your family name. The folks here talk all the time about who's who. Sometimes I try to switch them over to what's what but I can't keep them long from their beloved genealogical dope."

"I didn't mean to shut him up," laughed Josie. "I was rattled to beat the band."

Josie looked keenly at her visitor. Honesty was written all over her countenance—wide-open grey eyes, delicately tip-tilted nose and large, frank mouth that laughed easily, and at the end of a laugh shut decisively.

"I liked the way you spoke out concerning Chester Hunt and stood up for the poor kiddies, too," said Josie earnestly.

"It got me in bad with old Lady Claiborne, but I am dead tired of these people here blindly accepting that man just because he is so all-fired handsome. I believe he is crooked, but he is mighty popular with the general run of people. The stenographers all hate him and there are a few business men who don't trust him but he seems to be able to hoodwink the society set. He has beautiful manners and is gentle and graceful until he forgets himself and then look out! I feel in my bones he is double dealing and I can't think what the Wallers' friends are thinking of to let him take their affairs in hand as he does without ever investigating a thing."

"But he is executor of Mr. Waller's estate, is he not?"

"Oh, yes, he is all that and I reckon nobody has a right to say a word. Now, he is guardian of the children. The idea of that old hag's saying those children are so naughty they ran their mother crazy! It makes me sick. They are precious kids."

"They certainly are," agreed Josie. Miss Chisholm looked at her in astonishment.

"Do you know them?"

"Yes," said Josie, "I know them very well. Miss Chisholm, I'm going to do a rather cheeky thing. I'm going to force my confidence on you and make you party to a secret—that is, I am going to do it if you have no objection. It won't implicate you in any way and won't involve any work unless you choose to let it. I want your advice and I want your outlook. I need hardly say that this is of a most confidential nature. May I impose on you?"

"Yes, you may, but before you do, please tell me why you think I am worthy," asked Miss Chisholm, her eyes shining with excitement.

"The way you shut your mouth and open your eyes," laughed Josie. "The way you stood up for the kids and were not afraid to speak your mind concerning a man who has in some way got the majority for him. Of course I can't say I am never mistaken about people but I am pretty safe to hit it right once in a while and I have a hunch I have hit it right with you. I am rather meek just now concerning my powers of reading character by countenance, because I am sure if I had not had a preconceived idea of what Chester Hunt is I should have trusted him because of his handsome face. He is one of the best-looking villains I ever saw."

"Oh, you know him too, then?"

"No, I have only seen him. I haven't been in Atlanta long enough to know him yet, but I saw him drive up in his car and enter the garage at the Waller house."

"You knew all about who lived there all the time you were asking, then," smiled Miss Chisholm.

"Not all about it but a little and I wanted to get the outlook of Miss Denton's boarders."

"Heavens above! I believe you are a detective," cried Miss Chisholm.

J

osie chuckled delightedly.

"Exactly! A detective but a very humble one. My father was a great detective, one of the best the United States has had. O'Gorman was his name."

"Of course I have heard of him. And you are his daughter and not Sally Blossom. No wonder you had to cut Judge Tuttle off short. Oh me, oh my, but I'm having a good time!"

"So am I, but I've bitten off more than I can chew. When I am at home I go talk things over with the chief of police or one of my partners and I seem mighty far off just now with a big thing on hand and no one to go to. I'm not cry-babying, but just want to gas along on the subject for a while. I have a kind of idea you can help me a lot."

"Well, cut loose," commanded Miss Chisholm. "By the way, my name is Alice—Alice Chisholm."

"All right, Alice Chisholm. Mine is Josie O'Gorman, but I'd better be Sally Blossom for a while yet."

Then Josie told her new friend all about the Children's Home Society of Dorfield and her friend Mary Louise Dexter's donation to the Home and how the little Polly and Peter had come to the office with the person known as Cousin Dink. She told of finding the letters in the grate at Mrs. Pete's, of all the children had let drop concerning their home life and their sad wanderings with Cousin Dink.

"And now I am on the war path to see if there isn't something to be done for those poor kiddies. If they stay at the Home they will have to be adopted sooner or later—maybe separated and that would be a tragedy indeed."

She showed the letters from Chester Hunt to the cousin.

"Whew! Wouldn't some of these society girls throw fits if they knew about this Dink person?" laughed Alice. "But what is it you want me to do? I am crazy about helping but how can I?"

Then Josie told of the job she had as a canvasser and her feeling that the detective work was going to take all her time. "I thought I'd find out things as a canvasser and never dreamed of how easy it was to get boarders to talking and find out that way. Now I hear that Chester Hunt is advertising for white servants and of course my stunt would be to apply at once for the place of housemaid or even cook."

"How funny! Would you really do that?"

"Sure I've done it before, and under my father's orders, but that is another story. But I must make good with my boss on this canvassing. He has trusted me and it is up to me to deliver the goods."

"Why don't you get an assistant?"

"That is what I mean to do, but where?"

"I'm open to inducements," declared Alice seriously. "You see I am a free-lance in business. My job is doing publicity work for any and every concern that feels like paying me. I have nothing on hand just now, but am expecting a deal to come my way to-morrow. I don't have to take it if they are in a hurry, but can turn it down and take up your canvassing business. I have an office of my own—nothing but a tiny hole in the wall but it will serve as headquarters. I can get in touch with plenty of women to canvass for you in a little or no time. The office next to mine is that of the Vocational Bureau for Women. They fly higher than this kind of job usually but I reckon there are enough unemployed females on their books who would jump at the chance to earn a few dollars."

"Good! I am a fortunate person. My supplies will be along to-morrow. I shall have them sent to your office and you can get busy as fast as you can."

The girls then had a serious business talk. The question of remuneration was satisfactorily settled.

"I wonder, now, if you could write me a reference for his nibs, Chester Hunt. I want to apply for the job of housemaid this very night. It isn't too late, do you think?"

"I'll do it immediately," laughed Alice. "What must I say?"

"That I am honest and willing and capable. I am all those things, I can assure you. Perhaps you won't think so when you see me get back to normalcy. I must change my make-up if I want a job as house servant. I think I'll be a Swede. Josie Larson will be a good name. I must say I feel better if I'm Josie. I'm always afraid I'll forget to answer as Sally."

Alice Chisholm's eyes danced merrily as she watched Josie O'Gorman make herself ready to apply for a housemaid's position. First the henna wig was pulled off and Josie brushed out her neat sandy braids that had been tightly coiled around her head. She parted her hair in the middle and then pulled it tightly back in a hard knot, carefully disclosing her ears, something no person of any breeding was supposed to do at that time. The knot was placed at exactly the wrong angle, giving a strangely comic look to her profile. The georgette dinner dress was discarded for the tweed suit but the suit was so put on that all semblance of natty cut was lost. The skirt was on slightly askew and pulled up in front and down in the back. The belt to the Norfolk jacket was drawn too tight and the effect was blousy from the rear and what Alice called "a poor white folk's

tuck" in the fore. Josie's sailor hat she placed on the back of her head, carefully pulling it down so that one ear was pushed down by the crown. The despised rouge was wiped from her cheeks and artistically applied to her nose—not much, but just a suspicion.

"Splendid! Splendid!" cried Alice. "I don't believe you will need a reference. You would have to be honest to look like that."

The reference was written, however, and signed A. Chisholm. With it tightly clasped in a hand upon which Josie had drawn a large white cotton glove, a finishing touch to her costume, the would-be housemaid silently crept from the Elberta Inn and, with an extra dull look in her eyes, rang the front door bell at the Waller house.

CHAPTER XII CHESTER HUNT'S NEW MAID

"Nobody home!" was Josie's disappointed verdict after she had waited a few minutes and there was no response to her ring. She rang again, this time with sharp decision. She heard the opening of a door upstairs and then the lower hall was flooded with light and a sound of quick, light footsteps on the stairs and the front door was jerked open somewhat impatiently. Josie looked stolidly into the handsome countenance of Chester Hunt.

"Well, what is it?" he asked brusquely, taking in with some amusement the awkward little figure before him.

"I bane come to work for you."

"Oh! In answer to my ad?"

"Sure!"

"What can you do?"

"Anything with my hands but I bane not much good on head work."

"Can you clean a house and serve a meal?"

"Yah!"

"Perhaps you can cook too!"

"I can cuke some."

"What nationality are you?"

"I bane Luther."

"German?" smiling.

"Naw! I bane Swede," and Josie permitted an expression of disgust to flit over her otherwise blank countenance.

"Well, when can you go to work?"

"How much you bane pay?"

"Of course! How stupid of me! What do you ask?"

"I ask twelve dollar a week for cukiing and ten dollar a week for claneuping but I bane get less than I ask. If I do cukiing and claneuping both together I ask fifteen dollar a week but I bane come to you and see how you suit me for twelve. I bane a bum at telegraphing."

"You mean telephoning?"

"Yah, telephoning, but I bane willing to learn. Have you bane keeping other help?"

"I try to but they have all left me lately. Would you work with colored people?"

"You bane meaning blacks? I do not love them but if you try me you find I do twice three time as much work as blacks."

"And your name?"

"Miss Josie Larson!"

"All right, Miss Josie Larson, suppose you come in the morning and go to work."

"I bane come tomorrow night and cuke the dinner. I got other business on hand for morning."

"Well, I'm sorry, but I fancy I can get along without you for twelve hours longer. Now, mind you, come in time. I have dinner at seven."

"I bane coming at five. Do you to market go yourself?"

"I'll have provisions in the house ready for you. After tomorrow you will have to do the housekeeping as well as cooking. If I have a friend in to dinner could you serve two of us?"

"Sure! I bane smart enough to serve eight if you have knives and forks to go round."

Josie made a stiff bow and backed awkwardly down the steps. When the door was closed she turned quickly and literally ran back to the Elberta Inn. She got safely to her room without being seen by any of the aristocratic boarders.

Alice Chisholm was waiting for her.

"Well, how about it?"

"Got my job as chief cook and bottle washer with the handsome Chester Hunt and will cook dinner for him tomorrow evening. In the meantime I have some work ahead of me. What I would have done without you, Alice, I do not see. I should have been forced to double-cross my boss, and I'd have hated it. My father always preached being faithful in small things."

The next day was a busy one for Josie as well as Alice Chisholm. Josie must lay in a supply of maid's uniforms, aprons and caps. She must write letters to Mary Louise and her partners of the Higgledy-Piggledy, also a business epistle to her boss of the household necessities and jeweled novelties. A cook book must be purchased of the latest and most approved recipes, Josie having mastered only a few of the simpler dishes, but she had always declared that the keynote to cookery was gumption and with a good recipe and plenty of that ingredient she could master even anything as intricate as angel's food.

"I can make biscuit and coffee and waffles and scrambled eggs and tea and cinnamon toast, too. I know so many ways to please an arch-villain," she said to Alice.

"And I know how to make batter bread and jelly roll. I am certainly coming to see you some time and show you my stunts," said Alice.

"Fine but you will have to be a Swede. I didn't ask my new employer about company but I guess he won't object, just so I give him something fit to eat and clean up his house."

Alice Chisholm took over the business of getting canvassers and planning the work with such efficiency that Josie was delighted. "I never could have done it so well. I know the boss will thank his stars that I had to go cook for Chester Hunt and was forced to employ a so-called assistant."

"I am quite crazy about it," said Alice. "I always loved organizing and bossing and it so happens I am always the one to be organized and directed. Now, my talents have full scope. I am going to canvass some myself and I tell you I am going to show some of these women how to work."

At five o'clock, sharp, Josie was installed in the kitchen of the old Waller house.

"

You will find the raw materials in the refrigerator. I am to have a gentleman to dine with me. Dinner at seven." Chester Hunt's tone was one of command and his manner not an agreeable one. Josie could well understand that the girls in the business world did not find him so agreeable as the society girls.

"All right, sir! I bane on time. Must I cuke everything I find in the refrigerator?"

"Heavens, no! Just get up a good dinner. If you don't know how you better say so and get out before you start."

"I bane asking, but if you don't want me to ask I bane smart enough to yump in."

"All right then 'yump in,'" he said, laughing in spite of being in a decidedly bad temper.

Josie "yumped in" with a will. By the process of selection from what she found in the pantry and refrigerator she concocted a good dinner and had it on the table at seven o'clock. This was something of a feat, because every cooking utensil had to be scoured before she could use it and even the china and silver was not fit to put on the table without a thorough washing.

"My, I wish I had Elizabeth Wright's mother here!" Josie said to herself. "Wouldn't she have the time of her life getting this place cleaned up?"

The drop-leaf mahogany table in the beautiful old dining room looked very inviting when Josie

informed the master:

"Dinner bane served up, sir!"

A low bowl of violets and early hyacinths that the new maid had found blooming in the back yard were reflected in the polished surface of the mahogany. The table must perforce be bare as all the tablecloths in the house were soiled. She had found some lacy mats which she had washed and ironed hurriedly. The silver and glass were polished to the nth degree. The master looked his approval and actually smiled at the clever maid but Josie's eyes were dull and fishy and on her face nothing was expressed but dense stupidity. She proceeded to serve the dinner with meticulous care, thankful for the training she had had at the Higgledy-Piggledy tea room. Not one false move did she make in her service, but not once did she allow a gleam of intelligence to flicker across her countenance.

"Where did you make your find?" asked the guest, who turned out to be Braxton Denton, Miss Oleander's horse-racing brother, a middle-aged man with a flashy cravat and a crooked mouth.

"She found me. She seems to be a good enough servant considering she is so marvelously stupid."

Josie overheard the conversation as she removed the soup plates. In the pantry she permitted herself the luxury of a grin and after she slid the broiled pompano from the grill to the fish plates she let off more steam by a pirouette that a premiere danseuse might have envied.

Silently and efficiently she served the whole meal, managing to efface herself so utterly that the two men talked as freely as though they had been alone in the dining room.

"Gloomy old house!" said Braxton Denton. "I wonder you hang on here."

"It has been my home ever since I was a boy and I am more comfortable here than I would be at a hotel. I am very fond of this place. The property would run down terribly, too, if I let it stand vacant. It is only gloomy because I can't get anyone to keep it in order. The servants have all left and I don't seem to be able to get any more—not until this girl came last night. How long she will stick I can't tell."

"Until I find out what I want to know," muttered Josie to the empty fish plates as she bore them off.

"How is your sister-in-law getting?"

"No better," with a heavy sadness in his tone. "I am afraid the case is a hopeless one. I get daily reports from the sanitarium and they are most discouraging."

"And the children?"

"Oh, they are in excellent hands, both of them well. They never ask for their mother, however, nor does she ask for them. It is a strange case—one almost of antagonism. They have shown the strangest lack of feeling in regard to their mother and she seems really to hate them. I can hardly blame her because while they are only little children their callousness is positively diabolical."

Josie permitted herself the slight revenge of sprinkling a little extra pepper on her master's English mutton chop.

"Very imprudent of me, but I hope he will sneeze his handsome nose off," she said, giving the pepper box another shake.

She had her wish. His handsome nose didn't exactly come off but it was not for lack of sneezing.

"Kerchoo! Kerchoo!" he gasped for breath, choking and sneezing at the same time.

"Heavens, girl!" he finally sputtered. "How much pepper do you usually put on chops?"

"Mine is fine," ventured his guest.

"Excuse, please," and Josie gave a stiff curtsy. "My foot slipped and I bane put more pepper than I meant."

His feelings were soothed by a caramel pie. After dinner he came to the pantry door and called the new maid to him.

"You have done very well, all but over seasoning the chops."

"The chop!" corrected Josie.

"I think you will be able to do the work. I want breakfast at eight. You must look after my mail carefully. Most of my mail comes to my residence. I shall expect you to do the marketing and not bother me with details of housekeeping. Do you need any assistance with the cleaning? I fancy everything is pretty dirty."

"Filthy!" ejaculated Josie, "but I bane strong."

"All right! You understand about looking after my mail carefully, do you not?"

"Yah! I yoost put it on the desk. I bane take care."

How much care she did not think it advisable to tell him, but his mail was one of the things to which Josie was determined to give much attention.

CHAPTER XIII A NEW BROOM SWEEPS CLEAN

Being an innately honest person it went sorely against the grain with Josie to pry into anybody's private mail, even though he be an arch-villain who was doing his best to keep two poor little children out of their heritage.

"He is so handsome I don't see how he can be really wicked," she mused as she endeavored to get order out of the chaos that reigned in the kitchen. Josie had determined to clean up in the kitchen and pantry first and then proceed to the other corners of the house. The succession of incompetent servants that had been employed by the present master of the old Waller house had left layers of dirt and grease, each according to to her lights. Josie was bent upon getting to the bottom of dirt as well as the mystery of what Chester Hunt was up to.

"The better I do my work the more he will trust me. I do so hate to steam open his mail," she wailed as there came a sharp ring and a thud of falling letters through the slot in the front door.

If Chester Hunt could have peeped in on the new servant and had seen her deftly sorting his mail, putting aside the advertisements and invitations, carefully pocketing an official-looking envelope postmarked from somewhere in Indiana and another sloppily written envelope from Chicago, perhaps he would have changed his mind about her lack of brains. The scouring of the kitchen must wait for a few moments while the new maid-of-all-work held these two letters over the steaming kettle just long enough to loosen the flaps, which she rolled back neatly and carefully.

The official-looking letter was from a sanitarium in Indiana. This Josie devoured greedily. It was merely a report from the physician in charge concerning one of his patients. That patient was Mrs. Waller.

The letter stated that the lady was quite normal except for the fact that she refused to believe her husband was dead. She spent much time writing to her children and trying to devise means of getting the letters mailed to them. She was evidently a far from meek patient and was giving the attendants a good deal of trouble. The owner of the sanitarium was willing to keep the lady longer if Chester Hunt, the person in authority, decided she must stay. The rate would be increased, however, as it was much more trouble to look after a normal person than one more or less demented.

The letter was a cold, businesslike one. There was something in it, read between the lines, that made Josie shudder. She no longer had any qualms about having steamed open Chester Hunt's mail. She made a quick copy of the letter in the cryptic characters taught her by her father, carefully noting the address and date. She then sealed the letter neatly and turned to the communication from Chicago.

As she had divined, it was from the faithless Dink. It was full of reproaches to her darling Ches for not writing oftener and of demands for funds. "These tiresome children are so extravagant," she wrote. "And now Polly has been ill with a throat that looked as though it might be diphtheria and I have had to have a doctor in. We have been in Chicago for the last week and I think I may just stay here. We have board in an excellent place, but of course it is expensive. Don't be such a tight wad, Ches. You know I am looking after these brats entirely on your account. If it wasn't for you I'd lose them fast enough. What do you expect me to do next? Whatever you want me to do, give me time to do it in." She ended with assurances of truest affection.

"So," mused Josie, "lying to each other, too! Chester Hunt thinks the kids are with Dink. He doesn't know how cheaply she has boarded them either. Not even honor among thieves! The plot thickens! Wheels within wheels! As father used to say:

"Oh, what a tangled web we weave
When once we practice to deceive."

One thing that always amused Josie's friends was that she constantly quoted old saws and attributed them to her beloved father. According to Josie, Detective O'Gorman was the originator of half of "Poor Richard's Almanac" and the "Wisdom of Solomon" and many terse sayings of

Shakespeare.

After Josie had copied the contents of the two important communications she sealed them neatly and placed them with the rest of the mail on the master's desk, carefully mixing the letters so that the two which had been tampered with did not lie together. After that she redoubled her efforts towards cleaning the kitchen. Into every crack and corner went Josie's broom and scrubbing brush. She rescued the clothes from the line in the back yard, and then ironed them and, folding them in a highly professional manner, placed them on the foot of Chester Hunt's bed,

"It is bad enough to have to spy on a man but at least I intend to earn my twelve a week or whatever it was I told him I asked."

Her cleaning mania then led her to the dining room, where such another upheaval occurred as seldom takes place in a mistressless home.

"Poor man! He has certainly lived in extreme discomfort." She found herself pitying Chester Hunt, but just then in the raid she was making on the shelves of the Sheraton sideboard she found two porridge bowls, one decorated with chickens and one with rabbits, which brought Polly and Peter back so vividly that her incipient pity was turned to rage. After that she wielded her brush and broom with pitiless fury. She rubbed the mahogany with the expression of one who might have been rubbing salt into the wounds of a bitter enemy.

"Thank goodness he doesn't expect to come home to luncheon today," she said to herself. "Those porridge bowls get my goat to that extent that my foot might slip again and I'd drop something worse than pepper on his food."

Josie had reckoned without her host, as the saying goes. Chester Hunt did come home to luncheon. She had just put the finishing touch on the sideboard, having rubbed the massive old silver and scrubbed the beautiful Wedgwood pitchers so that the former shone with some of its pristine glory and the latter's little fat cupids and heavy garlands of roses stood out from their lavender background as they had not done for a year or more. She had taken down the dusty lace curtains and washed the dingy windows. The room was no longer dark and gloomy. The sun did not have to find its way through grime but came joyfully through the shiny windows and glinted on silver and polished mahogany.

"Now that's something like!" Josie exclaimed, stepping back to view her handiwork.

"So it is."

Josie prided herself on being steeled against surprise of any sort but this voice breaking in on her monologue was almost too much for her. Her heart lost a beat, but her habit of self-control was uppermost and she was able to turn on Chester Hunt her imperturbable countenance unlit by intelligence, her eyes dull and unseeing.

"You bane having dirty blacks for help," she ventured. "Is it lunch you bane come for?"

"I'm ill, Miss Josie Larson," he said with a whimsical look on his face, that Josie now noticed was drawn and white. "It's that devilish lumbago that has got me. I hope I did not startle you."

"Yah! I bane hearin ghosts all morning," Josie declared stoutly. "When I was scroobing the sideboard shelves and picked up two little porridge bowls, one with rabbits and one with chickens, I thought I heard the chickens crowing and the rabbits didn't make a sound but I thought I saw their mouths wiggling."

"Oh!" said the man, his expression changing, "strange ghosts to be fearing!"

"I don't bane afraid. I don't bane afraid of anything."

"Well, that's good! Any mail? I'll have to get to bed and I'll ask you to bring me tip a tray of food. Something quite simple, tea and toast or anything you can think of. This lumbago hits me every now and then."

"Where do you have lumbago?" asked Josie. "Is it in your face or your stomach?"

"Back, f—! Back!"

Josie realized her master had almost called her a fool and felt the compliment highly. "The bigger fool he thinks I am the better I am attending to my business," she thought.

"I bane sorry. Don't you want me to iron your back, sir? In my country we iron backs. I can iron very well, sir. You will see your laundry on your bed. I have ironed it so well I feel sure you could trust your back to me. I did not put your wash away, fearing you might think I bane meddlin."

"Oh, that's all right, my girl. I fancy what meddling you do will make no difference to me. Just don't get my papers mixed up."

"Sure, I bane careful with all such things. Your letters are on your desk."

"Well, bring them up to me when you bring my tea and toast. They will keep until then. I must get to bed." He walked with his back bent. Evidently every movement was painful.

"I'll feel sorry for him again if I don't look out," muttered Josie. "I think I'll keep these porridge bowls where I can look at them to keep myself from weakening. Polly, you stay there," she said, putting the rabbits behind a big silver pitcher. "And Peter, you can hide behind this fruit bowl. Don't crow too loud, little chickens, but just loud enough to keep me from being too sorry for that handsome wretch upstairs, with his noble brow and the lumbago in his back."

Josie arranged a tray for the sick man deftly and neatly. To the toast and tea she added a fluffy omelette and, with the letters carefully tucked in by the teapot, she tripped up to the master's room. He had piled the beautifully ironed shirts on a chair and was in bed, groaning from the extra exertion of undressing.

"Try to eat, sir," she said gently. "I bane caked you something nice."

He did eat and felt refreshed. Josie noticed he looked over his mail and evidently took especial interest in the two letters that had also claimed her attention. He put them aside and told her she could remove the others, he would look at them later on. Slipping back into the room for the tray, Josie caught the master with his mask off, as it were. He held in his hand the two opened letters. On his countenance was an expression of mingled cunning and cold calculation.

"I'll trouble you to hand me my fountain pen," he said to the girl. "There is a portfolio of stationery on the table over there. In about an hour you may come up and get some letters I want you to mail for me. Do you know where the postoffice is?"

"Yah, I bane there for my mail which come to a window."

"Well, take my letters all the way to the post-office. You understand."

"Yah, I ain't bane no fool."

"Oh, excuse me," he said cynically. "Anyhow, you bane a very good cook and from my shirts I judge you are a very fine laundress, so when you get my letters safely deposited in the postoffice I will ask you to come up and try your hand on my back."

"All right, sir, I bane willing."

Josie permitted herself another grin and a gay pirouette in the lower hall.

"I only wish I knew some Swedish talk besides 'bane'," she said to herself. "I am not at all sure scroobing isn't Irish and cuke for cook might be any old language. The poor man has got an awful backache, Josie O'Gorman, and you ought to feel sorry for him."

CHAPTER XIV JOSIE JUMPS HER JOB

In less than an hour Josie was summoned to her master's bedside. "The letters are written, and a hard job it was, too, with this infernal lumbago getting me if I so much as lift a finger. Get them in the postoffice as soon as you can, my good girl. Don't stop for a thing."

"I bane have to stop to dress myself," said Josie. "Girls in service don't like to go by the street in uniform."

"Well, if you must you must, but don't stop to doll up," he commanded, "and be quick about it."

"Sure!" Josie smiled to think how quick she would be.

Again the tea kettle must play its part. First she opened the letter addressed to Miss D. Dingus. There was a check for a good sum enclosed. The letter was evidently written by a man with lumbago. The tone was impatient and critical, although he seemed to remember his manners before he finished and dropped a few endearing terms such as "darling Dink," "My own girl," "I am thinking of you constantly," etc. He begged her to be patient and put up with the annoyance of the children for a while longer, when everything would come all right. "You will be rewarded a thousand fold," was his promise.

"I don't believe a word of it," was Josie's decision, as she put the letter back in its envelope after taking a careful copy of it in her own especial brand of shorthand. "Dink is too common for such a fine gentleman as Chester Hunt. He could never introduce her to the elite of the Southland."

The other letter was addressed to the doctor at the sanitarium. In it he begged the physician to keep Mrs. Waller for a while longer. "I will make it worth your while. Don't let any of her letters

get by. I will come to see her as soon as I recover from an attack of lumbago that has laid me low. I don't mind confiding in you that I am hoping to make Mrs. Waller my wife. We would have been married before if it had not been for this nervous condition that has made it necessary for her to be placed in confinement for the time being."

"Wretch! Miserable wretch!" stormed Josie.

"She, perhaps," the letter continued, "will not remember that she had consented to marry me after a reasonable time should have elapsed since the death of her husband. Part of her dementia was that she had never cared for me, when the truth of the matter was nothing but her wifely loyalty kept her from running away with me, even before Stephen Waller went overseas."

"Just a pack of lies! And so he is going to see her just as soon as the lumbago lets him up out of bed. Well, Josie O'Gorman, it looks as though you would have to change jobs again."

From the postoffice Josie went to a ticket office. After consulting a time table she bought a ticket, engaged a berth for that night, ran in to see Alice Chisholm and tell her that she must leave town immediately, giving her directions where to forward mail and repeat telegrams.

"Ask Miss Denton to keep my room for me indefinitely. I'll pay whatever it is. I may need it soon. Just tell her urgent business keeps me from the city."

"Tell me, Alice—you seem to know the ins and outs of Atlanta people—was there ever an affair between Mrs. Waller and Chester Hunt?"

"He was supposed to have courted her before she married Stephen Waller, but it was a well-known fact that she did not like him. It was astonishing to some of their acquaintances that Stephen Waller should have made his stepbrother his executor because of Mrs. Waller's evident dislike of him. Mr. Waller was devoted to him, however, and perhaps his wife never let him know how she felt about Chester Hunt."

Josie went back to her place of service. Armed with a hot iron she reported to the master.

"I bane come to press your back, sir."

"Can I trust you not to burn me?" the suffering man queried.

Josie wondered whether he could or not. "I'd like to make such a big blister on him he could not put on a shirt for weeks to come," she thought, but she put on an especially stupid expression and said dully, "I never have burnt anything yet, sir."

Gently she pressed the aching back with an iron just hot enough.

"Gee, that's fine! Do you know, Miss Josie Larson, there are some things better than beauty and better than brains at times?"

"Yah! Being a good laundress," declared Josie, "but that bane take more sense than you think, sir."

"Well, perhaps. Anyhow, you are a good girl. I'd like to do something nice for you—give you something for being so kind to me. What would you like,"

"I'd like to have the bowls with the rabbits and the chickuns on them."

"Take them! Take them, girl! Take them and welcome," he laughed, "ghosts and all!"

When Josie packed her suitcase she carefully put in the two bowls. From a drawer in the library table she purloined a photograph that she had discovered there when she had dusted the room in the morning, trying to make it a bit more presentable before the master came down to breakfast. It was a picture of a handsome, soldierly looking man in an officer's uniform, with two children snuggling up to him. The children were Polly and Peter—some years younger but the little Wallers without doubt. The officer must be their father.

"Stealing is not my forte," Josie said to herself, "but I fancy this photograph will never be missed by the present occupant of this house. I may need this in my business."

Josie arranged an attractive supper tray for the sick man.

"You'd better eat a plenty," she warned him. "It bane a long time before your breakfast." Then she took herself to task for cracking the quiet joke on him. It surely would be a long time—much longer than he had any idea of.

Chester Hunt slept in a fool's paradise that night. Soothed by the ironing of his aching back and comforted by the tray of nourishing and appetizing food, he had dropped into a doze early in the evening from which he had only awakened to congratulate himself on the treasure of a Swedish maid he had at last found.

"She is almost a half-wit," he had said to himself, "but she can cook and clean and seems to have

the kindest heart in the world. She wouldn't be bad looking if only she did not look so all-fired foolish." Even Josie's atrocious make-up couldn't blot out entirely her good looks.

At that very moment the so-called half-wit was boarding a train for the village in Indiana where a certain sanitarium was situated. Faithful in small things, according to her father's teaching, Josie had left her employer's abode in much better order than she had found it, in spite of having worked for the man only about thirty hours. The kitchen and dining room were spotless, silver and glass polished and china presses in order. She left a note on the hall table, which the infuriated Chester Hunt was to find after a morning spent in frantic pushing of the bell in his bedroom and vain bellowings over the bannisters for Josie Larson. It was only after supreme effort that he could get out of bed, but once he got on his feet it was not so difficult to walk.

"Josie! Josie!" he yelled. "Where are you? What do you think I am to do with no breakfast? This is a fine way to treat a sick man." His voice echoed down the hall. Hearing a noise on the street that he thought proceeded from the kitchen he called again, "Hurry up, you fool. I have been calling you for hours!"

There was no answer to this command. He leaned over the bannisters and spied the note on the hall table. Painfully and slowly, his dressing gown wrapped around him and his slippers flapping dolefully on the steps, he made his way to the lower hall. Josie had enjoyed greatly writing that note. It was difficult to do and for that reason great fun.

Respected Mr. Hunt:

I bane sad to leave you without more formal leave-taking, but you were snoring so happy when I went up stairs I bane had no heart to awoken you. I bear you no grudge for almost letting me know I bane a fool and am not leaving your service because of that, although it is not happy to know I can not hide what a fool I bane no matter how hard I work. I take the two bowls with rabbits and chickuns, the same you gave to me. I go from your service because in part the son of my aunt's father is dead. Because of my so sudden leaving I do not charge you for the work I have given you. It bane a pleasure to work for you. I more profit got from it than you I gave.

Yours devoted,
Miss JOSIE LARSON.

"The son of her aunt's father," repeated Chester Hunt. "What relation would that be? What a fool the girl is anyhow! Why didn't she say her uncle? It might even have been her father," he laughed grimly. "Well, fool or no fool, Miss Josie Larson, you are the best servant I have had."

CHAPTER XV JOSIE VISITS INDIANA

When Josie arrived at her destination she went to the one small hotel the village boasted and, engaging the only room in the house with a private bath, she made herself comfortable for the time being. She needed sleep before she could engage in the adventure she was planning. A hotel or boarding house is a good place in which to pick up information and Josie wanted to pick up a little information before she proceeded.

The proprietor of the hotel was a sieve for gossip and in less than twelve hours Josie had not only had a good night's rest but she had learned several things she considered of importance. The host was a man of generous proportions and a loud emphatic utterance, with which he gave voice to a perpetual grievance he had concerning the high cost of food and the low price of board.

"Nothing in it! Nothing in it! I have been keeping this here hotel for thirty years and if it wasn't for the war I'd be in the poor house this minute. The war did whoop things up for me a bit. A camp within six miles meant I kept my house full to running over with wives and mothers and what-not."

"Did it leave off, this prosperity, when the war was over," asked Josie.

"Well, the hospital still hands me a bit of business."

"You mean the sanitarium?"

The hotel man snorted in disgust.

"Not on your life! That old skinflint, Dr. Harper, who is running the sanitarium, has a place he calls his Guest House, and when folks come to see their nutty relations he sees to it that they stop there. There is never a nickel that gets by that old gouger. I mean Uncle Sam's hospital that is yonder just over the hill. It's a place for nuts, too, the men that got done up during the war. Poor

fellows! They make me feel right bad, but I am glad they have built the hospital near me, s'long as they have to have one."

"That is sad—as sad as anything in the world," sighed Josie. "Do the inmates of that hospital have to be confined?"

"Not all of them. Some of them have merely lost memory. There was a fellow in here yesterday. He is a real gentleman, but somehow in the shuffle of war he got dropped on the floor. He can't remember his name and nobody can trace his connections in the army. He was a prisoner in Germany for a long time—was ill there and had typhoid fever on top of shell shock and his captors didn't take the trouble to keep his identification tag and here the poor fellow is walking around in a kind of daze. He seems to be healthy and sane but just can't remember who he is or where he came from. He has a kind of job at the hospital because he is so trustworthy. They send him to the station to meet people who are arriving and they tell me he reads to the patients a lot. There's nothing like eddication. It will stick to you when everything else is gone. He has the saddest face you ever saw. That man gives me the willies."

"How about the sanitarium run by this Dr. Harper?" asked Josie. "Does it have a good reputation?"

"About as good as Judas Iscariot!" exclaimed the hotel keeper with violence. "I'd just as soon put any of my nutty kin in the penitentiary and sooner. I betcher that Harper is going to get in trouble some of these days. There's a lot going on there that won't bear the light. Old skinflint! Never a customer has he sent me. He can't keep any help, either, just because he is such a one to squeeze a dollar until the eagle shrieks. He's always advertising for nurses and servants. I saw an ad only yesterday in a Chicago paper."

"Is that so? Are the nurses trained nurses?"

"Trained nothing! He doesn't give them as much wages as I give old Black Annie who scrubs the halls and porches at my hotel. He just picks up any woman or man who is willing to work for him and puts them in to nurse. He calls himself running a training school for nurses. Don't talk to me about that old Harper!"

As Josie was not talking to him but encouraging him to talk to her she could but smile and continue her questions. She had registered as J. O'Gorman, Dorfield, and had engaged her room for a week.

"

I may have to be away from town on business through the county, but I want to retain my room and get you to look after any mail or telegrams that may come for me," said Josie. She had telegraphed the Higgledy-Piggledies her whereabouts as soon as she was established, and written a long special delivery letter to Mary Louise, telling her as much as was pertinent about her adventures in Atlanta.

"It is a comfort to be registered as my own self and to be wearing my own clothes and hair," she confided to Mary Louise, "but the morrow, I hope, will find me assuming another character."

The morrow did. She applied to the sanitarium for a job as nurse and was taken on, without the formality of asking what experience she had had or even for the credentials which she had been at great pains to get up for herself.

The grounds around the sanitarium were well laid out and quite imposing, with large trees and well-grouped shrubs. The buildings were handsome but gloomy-looking. Dr. Harper was a benevolent-looking old man, with a long white beard and a voice, as Josie afterwards described it, like hot fudge. He always addressed everyone with some endearment such as, "My dear child," "My son," "My dear girl," or "Little one." Josie could hardly believe he was the same one who had written the letter to Chester Hunt, a copy of which she had in her note book.

"What a lot a long white heard can hide," was her thought after her interview with the seemingly benevolent old gentleman.

Her job was secured. She was to look after those patients who were not so very ill but were to be watched and whose every attempt to leave the grounds must be frustrated.

"You are small, my child," Dr. Harper had said. "Are you strong enough in case of—er—emergency to take a hand in controlling a patient?"

"I think so."

"Well, we can but try," purred the doctor. "Be gentle with them, my dear child. Gentleness does more than violence. Many of them are not difficult at all. Just be patient."

"Yes, sir." Josie then received instructions from a head nurse, who was in reality a kind of matron. She was a hard-faced woman with a voice as unrelenting as Dr. Harper's was soft. "I'd trust her sooner than I would him," thought Josie.

"There is one patient here whose mind is cured, if there ever was anything the matter with it," the nurse said. "She is trying to get out, but her folks don't want her to yet. I guess they know their business, but I'm not one to leave all to the folks unless I know them mighty well."

"Which one is she?" asked Josie, her heart jumping with excitement.

"That delicate-looking lady over yonder, walking under the trees. She walks all the time, back and forth, no matter how cold it is. We can hardly keep her in the house. Her husband was killed during the war. She is a nice lady and tries to buck up for her children's sake, she says. Old Harper has it in for her because she uses her wits, but old Harper is a terrible old person to boss."

Josie noticed that nobody had any respect for the head of the institution. He was always spoken of as "Old Harper," or "The Old One," and one attendant who was a reader of Shakespeare always called him "Grey Beard Loon." The morale of the place was low in consequence of the lack of respect the employees felt for the head. Only the lowest and most brutal types of nurses and servants were willing to remain for any length of time at the sanitarium. The head nurse, from whom Josie had received her instructions, was an exception. She had a hard face and a harder voice but somewhere, deep down in her heart, there was a soft spot and never was she cruel or unreasonable. Josie grew to feel that she stayed on at the place to keep Dr. Harper from doing more harm than he was doing. He evidently respected her and relied on her, in spite of the fact that she made no attempt to hide her dislike and contempt for him.

The delicate looking lady, who spent her time pacing up and down the gravel paths under the great trees, was none other than Mrs. Waller. Josie would have recognized her anywhere, not only from the photograph that little Polly had managed to keep with her through all of her wanderings but from the strong likeness Peter bore to her—the same great trusting eyes and sensitive mouth and the same set to the head, which was carried well up through any and all misfortunes.

It was an easy matter to approach this woman who had been in a manner put in her care. One look in her eyes assured Josie that she was perfectly sane. The mouth was sensitive but firm and Josie was sure that a person with that mouth could control her emotions unless under great stress, as she had perhaps been when the nervous breakdown had come upon her after the long anxiety concerning the soldier husband.

"Mrs. Waller," Josie said gently, "I have been sent to look after you."

"I am in need of nothing," was the dignified answer. Mrs. Waller continued to walk. Evidently she had no desire to engage in conversation with an attendant at the sanitarium. They were all alike, either coarse and brutal or stupid beyond belief.

Josie joined her, walking by her side.

"Mrs. Waller, I have news for you but you must be careful and not show any emotion while I talk with you." Josie's voice was quiet and firm. "I am your friend and am here at this sanitarium to see you. I have been engaged as a nurse by Dr. Harper, but am really here to give you news of—"

"My husband!" gasped the poor lady, trying to be as calm as Josie.

"No, dear lady, of your children."

"They are well?"

"Yes, well and loving you all the time and talking about you constantly. They are in good hands now."

"Ah—my Polly and Peter!"

Then Josie told the poor woman all that she knew of the two children. Her eyes flashed at the mention of the so-called Cousin Dink, but on the whole she controlled herself remarkably well during the recital—so well that Josie felt it was safe to go into detail concerning her visit to Atlanta, even to the ironing of Chester Hunt's back.

"Why, why didn't you burn him?" she laughed, "but thank you for the pepper you put on his chop." That laugh reassured Josie as to the sanity of Mrs. Waller.

"They have told me that my children have forgotten me and never asked for me. Chester Hunt has done his best to make me think that they are depraved beyond belief, always pretending to love me and condole with me because of their lack of feeling. My poor babies! Never have I doubted them—never for an instant!"

Josie then told her of the letter Chester Hunt had written Dr. Harper and of his intention to marry her willy nilly.

"Marry me! But I am married! Ah, I see you think I am demented because I say that, but my husband is alive. I know it as well as I know that I am here in this awful prison-like place and that you have come from outside to help me. I know it as I know that you are an honest, kind girl with

more sense in your little finger than Chester Hunt and that wretched Dink have in their whole make-up. I know he is alive because if he had died I'd have felt it. We were so close, so in sympathy, that nothing could happen to one without the other divining it. There was and is a bond between us that is in a way supernatural. I know and feel at all times that he is unhappy, miserable and in trouble, but he is not dead.

"If he were dead this load would be lifted from my heart. I'd be glad again knowing that he was at peace and his troubles were over. If I could get out of this place I could find him. I know I could. Sometimes I think he is quite near me—not near like a spirit but in flesh. Once I ran through the grounds calling to him. I could not help it. Something urged me on, and then it was they put me in close confinement, declaring I was raving crazy.

"We often used to talk of that sympathy that existed between us. It was like second sight, only it seemed natural and normal. I was so dependent on him and he on me. Neither of us had any relations. This stepbrother of his was the only tie he had and of course that is not a blood tie. Chester Hunt was the only shadow that ever came between us. I always hated the man but Stephen loved him and I tried to conceal my feelings in regard to him. I wish I had been more open and honest about it now, because then my dear husband would not have put me so in the power of this wicked person by making him executor of his will."

"Well, now you know your children are safe and well and no matter what Mr. Hunt tries to make you believe concerning them, you will know he is lying," said Josie. "He is going to try to work on your feelings about them to make you marry him. Why have you not tried to get help through your friends, Mrs. Waller?"

"I have written and written but never an answer from a soul and now I realize the letters were always seized by this man Harper. When no answers came I felt I had been deserted by God and man and was to be left forever in this place—never to see my children or husband again. Now you have come, my dear, everything will be all right. To think I don't even know your name! I never can thank you enough."

"I don't need any thanks if I can just unravel the mystery—not that it is a real mystery—just a tangle. I was willing to do anything for Polly and Peter from the minute I saw them and now I am willing to do just that much more for their mother. Besides I shall be rather glad to get even with Chester Hunt for calling me so many kinds of fool."

CHAPTER XVI JOSIE GETS A RIDE

Josie made herself so useful to Mrs. Stark, the head nurse, that in a few days time she was high in that person's favor. Poor Mrs. Waller was so cheered by the news brought to her that she became much more tractable and less trouble to Dr. Harper and he, too, was grateful to Josie for this change that had been wrought in one of the patients.

"The girl has a cheerful way with her that makes all the poor souls less miserable," Mrs. Stark told the doctor. "She is trustworthy too. I do hope we can keep her. She is not at all above doing maid's work. In fact, she asked to be allowed to take care of some of the rooms when she found we were short of servants. She is quick and orderly."

Of course Josie saw to it that Mrs. Waller's room was one to be cleaned by her. It gave her opportunity to talk to the poor lady in private and many times must she tell everything she could recall concerning Polly and Peter. Josie produced the photograph of Stephen Waller and the children and it proved a great comfort to the wife and mother. She had not been allowed to bring from home a single thing to remind her of her loved ones.

Josie had an afternoon off. She was anxious to inquire for mail at the hotel. Also to get some things from the suitcase she had left in her room. She had heard from Mary Louise, who reported all well at Dorfield and the Children's Home Society as flourishing. Polly and Peter were more and more beloved by all. There was a growing demand to adopt them but dear old Dr. Weston had refused to give them up, hoping for better things for them. The Higgledy-Piggledy Shop was flourishing in spite of the absence of a valued partner.

The sanitarium was situated about half a mile from the village. It was a pleasant walk in good weather, but on Josie's afternoon off it had set in for a cold spring drizzle, disagreeable enough to dampen the ardor of anybody but Josie O'Gorman, who scorned the excuse of dreary weather for the doleful dumps. Well protected with rubbers and raincoat, the girl paddled along the muddy road, busily going over in her mind a plan of action. She realized she must get from Mrs. Waller letters to her friends in Atlanta and they must be fully informed of the injustice that was being done her and take legal action for her release from this durance vile to which she had been subjected. Those friends, of course, had been told by Chester Hunt that she was crazy. They had taken his honesty for granted and had been hoodwinked by his seeming distress over the

condition of his brother's wife. The question was, how soon must she leave the sanitarium and how proceed?

Josie's instinct was to go to Dorfield and there get help from Mr. Peter Conant and Chief Charlie Lonsdale. On the other hand, she did not want to leave the sanitarium until after Chester Hunt's promised visit to that institution. She found several letters awaiting her at the hotel. The host welcomed her cordially. Of course it was not a very regular thing to have an unattached, mysterious young woman engage the best room in the house, the one known as the bridal chamber, and then not occupy it but go cavorting over the county on some kind of unknown business, blowing in to the hotel occasionally for mail and inquiring eagerly for telegrams, but business was business and it was profitable to rent the best room with bath and then not have it occupied—no wear and tear on it at all, no change of linen or cry for soap and towels.

Josie realized it was an extravagance but she had a feeling she might need that room soon and need it badly and this was no time to be small about money. She took from the suitcase the two porridge bowls, determined to pretend to Mrs. Stark that she had bought them as a present for Mrs. Waller, feeling that they might be a comfort to the mother.

As she tramped back to the sanitarium, rather enjoying paddling through the puddles and feeling the cold rain on her face, she heard the sound of a motor. She stepped aside to let the army truck pass, but it slowed up and stopped beside her. There was nobody but the chauffeur in the car. He leaned from his seat and spoke to her in a gentle voice, with an accent unmistakably southern with a soft slurring of the final g and an almost imperceptible r—too subtle to be pronounced a dialect but still decided enough to place the man below the Mason and Dixon line.

"I believe I am going your way and I shall be very glad to take you to your destination," he said, saluting her. "It is a bad day to be walking."

Josie was sorry to have her walk cut short but the man's courtesy was not to be gainsaid. She climbed up on the seat by him, thanking him frankly. She had seen him before, where, she could not remember.

"Are you in the army?" she asked.

"I suppose so," he answered whimsically.

"They tell me I am, but I can't remember ever getting in it. I can't remember anything, in fact. I remember how to read and how to speak French and some German and whenever I get hold of a book I have read before the plot comes back to me if it happens to be a novel, but my past life is a blank. If I could get some inkling of it I believe it would come back like the plot of the novels. I am as well as can be physically and the alienists say I am as sane as anyone, but I might have been born yesterday, for all I know of my life before I became conscious in a vile German prison camp.

"But I wonder why I tell you all this! It seems hardly fair to pick up a young lady on the road and take advantage of her helplessness to pour in her ear my own troubles."

"Oh, please, tell me! I am very much interested. Do you never have any remembrance of your former existence? Do not odors or sounds or sights bring some vague impression of yesterday?"

"Why—yes! Violets seem to mean more to me than other flowers. Why, I don't know—but I have a feeling that someone I must have loved and who loved me is in trouble. I can't get rid of the feeling. But if it is so—if anyone does love me why doesn't he or she find me? I'm here—not really lost. If I only could get some clue—a name—an address—something, anything on which to build."

He turned and looked at Josie. She met his gaze with a long wondering look.

"Stop the car, please, for a moment," she asked. He obeyed immediately.

"Mr. Waller," she said gently, "Don't you remember these little porridge bowls?"

She tore the wrappings from the bowls, disclosing the rabbits and the chickens. The man took them in his hands reverently. His lips pressed together to form the letter P.

"Yes," said Josie, "Polly and Peter! You lived in Atlanta on Peachtree Street. Your wife is Mary and your name is Stephen. You enlisted in the United States Army at the first call to arms. Your wife is well and so are your children."

"Mary! Mary!" he cried, and clasping the porridge bowls to his heart he wept—great sobs shaking his frame.

When he could control himself he begged Josie to tell him more. "Everything is coming back to me in leaps and bounds. It is just like the plots of the novels that I have read before. Now we must go and report to the Colonel. The funny thing is I remember now that I am a captain. At least I was. Perhaps I am dead in the eyes of the army. I reckon I was reported missing in action."

"Your wife believes you are alive." Then Josie must tell the poor man of all the trials his wife had undergone and of the perfidy of Chester Hunt. She did it in as few words as possible. He was

deeply moved at the story of her sufferings.

"To think of her being so close to me all the time! Once I thought I heard someone calling me. I couldn't catch the name but there was a tone of voice that rang in my ears for days and days. It was while I was driving the truck, and bless me if it wasn't going along that road that leads near that sanitarium. I must report to the Colonel first and then I can go get my wife."

"Dr Harper may make some trouble, as his rule is not to let a patient out until the person who is responsible for her being there comes to remove her."

"We'll see about that," and his jaws snapped together much to Josie's admiration. She had great respect for a firm jaw.

"I am leaving my job now, as there is no use in my staying longer in the employ of the oily Dr. Harper. Perhaps I can help you. It is a pity for dear Mrs. Waller to spend another moment in this place where she has been so miserable. It would take some time for Mr. Hunt to reach here from Atlanta. When he comes he may make trouble about identifying you. He is so determined that you are dead, but I shall let your wife go into details concerning what that man hopes to gain by your death."

The Colonel was accessible and as delighted at the restoration of Stephen Waller's memory as Josie herself. Indefinite leave was given him and the Colonel advanced enough money from his own private funds to enable him to travel comfortably with his wife.

CHAPTER XVII HUSBAND AND WIFE

"I have come for my wife. I am Stephen Waller."

Those words were simple enough but Dr. Harper seemed to find them most confusing. He wagged his venerable beard like an angry goat and said nothing at first, but like a goat he looked as though he might be gathering his forces for a mighty butting.

"I don't know what you mean. I know nothing of your wife."

"Nothing of a Mrs. Waller who has been in your sanitarium for a year or more?"

"Nothing!"

"See here! I am not going to stand any foolishness. Do you mean to say you have not a patient named Mrs. Waller?"

"I do not! I have such a patient but she is a widow and I am sure she knows nothing of you. How am I to know who you are?" asked Harper.

"You can get out of here faster than you got in. I have plenty of men here who can put you out and none too gently. Mrs. Waller was put in my care by a Mr. Chester and he, and he alone, has the authority to remove her from my sanitarium."

Josie had slipped up to Mrs. Waller's room when she left Captain Waller at the door and there, as gently and with as much composure as she could command, she told her of her husband.

"I knew it, I knew it all the time. I must go to him." Lightly she ran down the stairs and into the office, past the wagging beard of the angry Harper and into the arms of the shabby soldier.

"Stephen!"

"Mary!"

Even the incredulous Dr. Harper could but be convinced that they really were husband and wife.

"Well, she can't leave until her board is paid," he blustered. "It is months in arrears and I have no idea of losing it."

Dr. Harper had not noticed that Josie had come in the office behind Mrs. Waller. Josie had a way of being able to efface herself almost entirely—she stood so still and was so silent.

At Dr. Harper's words she made herself seen and heard, however. From her pocket she produced a small note book filled with cryptic characters and from it she read solemnly like a recording angel. First was the letter to Chester Hunt from Dr. Harper. Date and all she gave with businesslike precision. Then she read Chester Hunt's answer to that letter, with a copy of the check which was enclosed with it.

"You can't deny then," Josie said severely, "that Mrs. Waller's board has been paid and paid in advance and also that you have been conniving with this Chester Hunt in unlawfully detaining this lady in your institution after she has been entirely cured of any nervous malady she may have had."

Dr. Harper was speechless for a moment. He had tried to interrupt her but with a warning finger Josie had held him spellbound. At last he sputtered:

"You—you—why you are nothing more than a servant in my establishment. Get out of my office!"

"

I have been a servant in your establishment to further my own ends. Now I am through with my job. I'll ask you, sir, to pay me off, as I am leaving. I have served you well in the capacity of servant and the laborer is worthy of his hire."

"Who are you, anyhow?" he exploded wrathfully.

"I am Josie O'Gorman. Perhaps you remember my father, Detective O'Gorman. He had certain dealings with you and had not he been cut off at the height of his career, his reckoning with you would have come, much to your undoing. As it is, he only scared you a bit. I am merely carrying on his work. I have scared you a bit more. Now I fancy you will let Captain Waller take his wife away unmolested. No doubt Mr. Chester Hunt will soon be here to settle with you. You owe me \$17.35. I prefer cash."

The angry old man counted out the money, his hand shaking and his beard wagging. He was loath to have them go without giving them his heartfelt curses, but he was speechless.

"Now I feel justified in having retained the room and bath at the hotel," Josie said to herself. "Captain and Mrs. Waller can be comfortable in it and no doubt my host can put me up in a smaller way."

The last train that might connect with the line going to Dorfield had gone and there was nothing to do but wait until morning.

"The children are safe and not unhappy," smiled Mrs. Waller, "so we must content ourselves for a few hours in realizing that."

"I am going to telegraph my friend Mrs. Danny Dexter—Mary Louise—and tell her to prepare the children for the great happiness in store for them. Or would you rather surprise them?"

"It is hardly fair to keep them in ignorance of their dear father's being alive just for the pleasure we might get in surprising them," said the mother.

"That is so like you, Mary. I can't see how I ever could for one instant have forgotten all your goodness," and Stephen Waller held his wife closer, in spite of Josie's presence.

They had a merry little dinner that evening in the hotel, having the dining room to themselves. The host was all smiles and good cheer. He felt in a measure responsible for reuniting this interesting couple. Had he not received with hospitality this young detective person who was, to say the least, mysterious? Had he not told her first of the poor soldier who had mislaid his memory? Had he not made her wise as to the general unworthiness of Dr. Harper and his skinflint methods of never throwing business to the hands of the local hotel keeper? Had he not cheerfully reserved the best room in the house for days and days for this strange little person?

And so Captain and Mrs. Waller and Josie were perfectly willing to include him in the general festivities. Josie felt that the reunited pair should have a *tete à tete* dinner but they would not hear of her leaving them.

"Stephen must hear all you have to tell of the children," said Mrs. Waller. "To think of the little things telling you of their porridge and of those bowls being instrumental in restoring their father to us. It sounds like the most romantic novel."

"Not at all," insisted Josie. "There has been too much coincidence in this reality for it to go down as fiction. All the teachers of story writing would tell you that. They might allow one bit of coincidence but not so much as has occurred in this realistic plot. It wouldn't even go down as a detective tale. I have had too much lost motion in my plans for even that. I needn't have taken the job of canvasser in the first place. That was plain foolishness and if I hadn't have run against that peach of a girl, Alice Chisholm, I'd have been a total loss to my boss, the man introducing household necessities and jeweled novelties. I am wasting money even now in retailing that room at Mrs. Denton's. A good detective wastes neither time nor money."

"Well, thank goodness we are real people and not characters in a novel," laughed Captain Waller. "We are together and a dear girl brought us together by her intelligence and diligence. If she is not the type out of which a good detective tale can be manufactured then so much the worse for the detective tales. Give me a live girl every time and never mind the plot."

"The only thing I can't reconcile to reality is Chester Hunt. Why, he has been like my own brother

—at least I have felt that way about him, ever since my mother married his father when I was nothing but a little shaver. My stepfather only lived two years and then my mother had the raising of Chester. He was five years older than I was and I always looked up to him. He is so handsome and so clever."

"Handsome is as handsome does," said Josie "and if he had been a little cleverer he would not have trusted that fake Swedish maid who had no word to express her nationality but bane for been.

"Listen! Mrs. Waller, you must not get excited, but I think I hear Mr. Chester Hunt's voice."

CHAPTER XVIII CHESTER HUNT CONFESSES

The dining room of the little hotel opened directly into the lobby and the proprietor's desk could be plainly seen from where our friends were seated at dinner. It was Chester Hunt leaning over the desk and demanding from the proprietor the best room and bath.

"I have been ill, man, and I must be comfortable."

"But the room with the bath is occupied," the landlord objected.

"Well, get them out of it. I telegraphed for reservations. You surely got my wire."

"I did not, but it was occupied whether you wired or not," bristled the proprietor.

Finally Chester Hunt must content himself with another room, without the bath.

"Dinner?"

"Naturally."

Captain and Mrs. Waller's faces were as though they had been carved of stone as Hunt, all unconscious of their presence, entered the dining room with something of the superiority in his manner that Josie had felt he assumed for the benefit of those he did not consider his equals. His face showed he had been ill. He paid no attention to the other occupants of the dining room, but seated himself at a table to one side. He was facing Josie. Mrs. Waller's back was towards him and Captain Waller's profile was in his direct line of vision. Mrs. Waller raised her eyes to her husband's face. No graven image could have been more immovable. Josie gave her attention to Chester Hunt's countenance, determined not to miss his expression when first he became aware of Stephen Waller's presence. She felt reasonably certain of his not recognizing in her his one-time jewel of a general house-worker.

Having given his order for dinner Chester Hunt finally deigned to notice that there were other occupants of the hotel dining room. He gave a cursory glance in the direction of the three persons at the table near him. A spasm of terror crossed his face. There was a sound of grating on the tessellated floor, as he pushed his chair back. His mouth opened in an involuntary gasp. Josie noted his agitation but she could but admire his quick command of himself. In a moment his face had assumed its normal suavity. It was evident that he had decided that he had been startled with nothing but a resemblance. This man in the hotel dining room could not be his stepbrother. Stephen was dead.

Hunt's eyes traveled uneasily to the lady whose back was towards him. Those lines were unmistakable! That poise of the small head, the way the hair grew at the nape of the neck—it was Mary Waller, his brother's wife! Wildly he looked at the third person at the table. Where had he seen her before? He couldn't for his life remember, but that countenance was familiar.

There were certain things about Chester Hunt that Josie could not help admiring, archvillain though she knew him to be. His good looks of course she must approve of, his debonair grace and easy bearing; but what she respected about him was his quick grasp of a situation. She saw the moment he recognized the fact that he was in the same room with his long lost stepbrother and his wife he became convinced the game was up and he must make the best of it and begin salvaging what he could from the wreck he had made of his affairs through his inordinate ambition and brotherly affection was his cue. He immediately jumped from his seat and hurried across the room, his hands out and his face beaming with a joy that he assumed with the ease of a consummate actor.

"Stephen! My brother! I am overcome with joy! My boy, we thought you were dead—Mary and I. I am here now to take Mary from the sanitarium where they have effected a most marvelous cure on the poor girl. My dear brother! My dear sister!"

Funny Stephen did not respond. What could they know? He looked again at the little person

seated at the table with his brother and his wife. Where on earth had he seen her before? What connection had she with this affair? He hardly expected much warmth from Mary. She had been queer of late, but Stephen had always been devoted to him.

"Tell me where you have been, dear boy. Don't be so—so mysterious. I have been looking after your affairs to the best of my ability."

"Yes?" was all Captain Waller would say.

"You might know I would. Stephen, you are unappreciative. Where have you been hiding? Why am I, your own brother, the last person to hear that you are alive and, I hope, well and returned to the bosom of your family?"

Captain Waller's face lost its frozen expression. His cheeks, which had been deadly pale from the moment he heard the voice of Chester Hunt, now flushed painfully. He sprang from his chair and stood facing the other man.

"Where are my children?" was all he said.

"Oh, they are all right—in good hands. If that is what is eating you, old fellow, you can drop your heroics and embrace your brother."

"What good hands?"

"When Mary got sick—of course you must know how very ill she has been—I hardly knew what to do with the kids. They had got a bit unruly because of their mother's being in such a bad way and naturally my first care was for her and I felt it wiser to have them away from her for the time being—"

"So you got some of our good friends at home to look after them? That was natural and right."

"No-o, I did not. The fact was Polly and Peter were pretty difficult and nobody really wanted them—that is nobody whom I might have trusted—so I sent for a cousin of mine, a very worthy, high-principled young woman, Miss Dingus. You have heard me speak of her. I saw a good deal of her after I left Atlanta. She is a cousin of my father's. Cousin Dink, we call her. I was sure she would take good care of the children and give them the proper surroundings and education until their mother could resume charge of them. I get weekly reports from her and she says they are thriving—"

"And where does this Cousin Dink live?"

"She is in Chicago. She writes me she is devoted to the kids and gives them the greatest care. Polly has had a little trouble with her throat lately but the doctor assured Cousin Dink it was not infectious."

"How long is it since you have seen them?"

"Eh—eh—some time, now!"

Captain Waller looked at Chester Hunt sadly. Josie saw pity mingled with indignation in his expression. Mrs. Waller said nothing and never once took her eyes from her husband's face. Nevertheless she was listening to every word that passed between the two men.

"I'll telegraph Cousin Dink immediately to prepare the children for the great surprise," Hunt continued.

"You need not trouble to do that," said Captain Waller. "I reckon they know we are on the way to get them by this time. Eh, Miss O'Gorman?"

When Josie was included in the conversation Chester Hunt turned and looked at her curiously. In a spirit of mischief Josie assumed the dull expression she had used as the Swedish servant girl and looked at her one-time master with dull and fishy eyes.

"By heavens, Miss Josie Larson!" he exclaimed. "What are you doing here?"

"I bane dining with Captain and Mrs. Waller, sir." Josie then resumed her normal expression, which was one of keen intelligence, and with a glance at her tiny wrist watch, she answered the question concerning the children: "Yes, Captain Waller, I am sure that by this time the message is on the way to Polly and Peter and even now Mary Louise may be reading it to them. The telegraph delivery in Dorfield is very prompt."

"Dorfield? Polly and Peter in Dorfield? And how did you get in this?" Chester Hunt's manner was rude and overbearing as he addressed Josie.

"I am not such a fool as I look, Mr. Hunt. Next time you had better ask for references when you hire a Swedish maid and don't give her bowls with chickens and rabbits on them so she can go off and identify husbands and fathers who have lost their memory in the war. Don't let the fools sort your mail either. They might find out things that might make it uncomfortable for the gracious

master."

"Then you are a spy!"

"Not at all! A detective!" Josie turned over the lapel of her packet, disclosing a small badge.

"Well, all I can say is a mighty good cook was ruined when you went into business."

"And a mighty fine detective would be lost to the world if our little friend here turned cook in dead earnest," said Captain Waller. "But see here, Chester, there is no use in our beating around the bush with one another. We must come to an understanding and it might just as well be here, this moment, unless you are too hungry."

"No, I am afraid my appetite for dinner is gone. It is like you, Stephen, though, to think of it. I thank you. I have been a beastly cad and I'm ready to fess up. It was the thought of having a fortune and owning the old house on Peachtree Street. I always loved it and it seemed hard for you to have everything. I loved Mary before you did—"

"Never mind that part," said Captain Waller sternly. "It so happens we know what you intended to do in regard to my wife, but the mystery to me is what was your idea about my children? Why should you have sent them traveling about the country with this impossible Dink, who is nothing but a dancer in vaudeville with no manners and few morals? She has abused the children and half starved them and finally left them ragged and hungry in an orphan asylum or some similar institution."

"What? You have been misinformed. That is nonsense. I know for certain she has the children with her in Chicago. I heard from her only last week. Here is the letter," he declared, slapping his pocket. "As for starving and ill treating the children, Dink has had a generous check from me every week. They have had money enough to live on the fat of the land."

"Well, then, this Dink must have feathered her own nest with it. Would you mind, Miss O'Gorman, telling Mr. Hunt what you know of my children?"

And then Josie told in as few words as possible all she knew of Polly and Peter and of the whereabouts of Dink.

"There is no use in my telling you how I know these things," she said, "but it is enough to tell you I do know them, and I also know that the children made their last breakfast with Miss Dingus, alias Hester Broughton, alias Margery Dubois, on a pickle and a stale cream puff. Miss Dubois is now doing a dance turn in Chicago with one Mike Brady. She fondly imagines when you want to see the children she can come to Dorfield and get them away from the Children's Home as easily as she put them there. The fact is, Miss Dingus has more sense in her heels than her head, and her heart was left out entirely when she was made. She hopes, however, that she will finally become Mrs. Chester Hunt, because otherwise she would not have kept these children with her at all. She has fooled you and you have fooled her. In both cases I am reminded of the old story in the fairy book called 'The Biter Bit.'"

Chester Hunt bowed his head. "You are right, Miss Josie Larson, alias Miss O'Gorman, alias Miss Sherlock Holmes. I am bit and stung alike. I thought at least I could depend on Cousin Dink. That honor among thieves I was sure she had. But I see she is as bad as I am. I am going now.

"Good-bye, Stephen. I won't even ask you to shake hands with me. As for you, Mary, I won't even ask you to speak to me or look at me. I know you hate me as you do a snake. Miss Josie Larson, I take off my hat to you, as being wise in your generation. Tell me something, though, if you don't think it is too frivolous. Did you put too much pepper on my chop on purpose?"

Josie grinned. "Yes, and if I had not bane such a good Lutheran I would have burnt your back when I ironed it. It was hard to keep my foot from slipping again, but I have taken a pride in my laundry work and hated to begin scorching anything—even your back."

Chester Hunt bowed his proud head again and was gone. His dinner was left untasted, much to the astonishment of the hotel proprietor.

"He must be a nut from Dr. Harper's," grumbled that individual.

CHAPTER XIX A HAPPY REUNION

Josie's telegram to Mary Louise, announcing the wonderful news that Captain and Mrs. Stephen Waller were found, united and on the eve of departing for Dorfield, was delivered at the Dexter's apartment, received by the little new maid and carefully deposited with the other mail. The mistress had gone on a short journey to a neighboring town with her young husband and

expected to be away from home about twenty-four hours. The joyful tidings lay hidden in the yellow envelope of the telegraph company, and Polly and Peter serenely followed the routine of the Children's Home Society in ignorance of the happiness in store for them.

They were happy in this institution, happier than they had been since their dear mother had begun the ceaseless and uncontrollable weeping that had made it impossible to tear her children from her and incarcerate her in Dr. Harper's sanitarium. Was not everyone kind to them? Was not the food regular and wholesome with frequent delightful treats from the beautiful Mrs. Dexter, who seemed to feel that the Waller children were her especial orphans? Did not Polly have all the babies to nurse and fondle that her motherly soul craved, and did not Peter have huge piles of sand in which he might dig to his heart's content? The only thing that marred their happiness was that some kind-hearted person might insist upon adopting them and they would be separated.

"There isn't much chance of anybody wantin' me," said Polly, "cause of my hair bein' so straight. It's your curls that are the maindes' trouble, Peter."

"Yes, I know," said Peter sadly. "I don't see what the angel that fits the wigs on babies was a thinkin' 'bout when he did us so dirt. If we'd a been twinses I wouldn't er blamed him for getting' kinder mixed up an' bornin' me curly an' you straight, 'cause I reckon twinses are right confusin', but th'ain't no 'souse when there was plenty of time with nobody hurryin' 'em a bit. I don't see what anybody wants their hair all kinked up like water spaniels for. I wisht mine was as straight, as straight. I wouldn't mind a bit bein' bald headed. I tell you what, Polly, s'pose I shave my head and nobody won't know about my old curls!"

"Oh, no, no!" cried Polly. "You mustn't, Peter dear. It would o' been all right if you had done it while Cousin Dink had us, 'cause it would o' made her so mad, but we mustn't do anything to make Dr. Weston and dear Mrs. Dexter feel sad, 'cause they're so nice an' good to us. Another thing—s'posin' you shaved your head an' all of a sudden Mother came. How would you feel then, mister?"

"I reckon I'd feel pretty bald headed," said Peter. "But Mother ain't ever comin', Polly. What makes you say that?"

"I keep on a dreamin' 'bout her," answered Polly, wiping away a little tear that gathered in the corner of her eye. "Last night I dreamed and dreamed. She was laughing and happy and wasn't cryin' any more."

"Oh! Maybe she knows ol' Cousin Dink is gone off an' lef' us. I reckon that would make her smile," suggested Peter. "I wisht I could dream 'bout her an' Daddy. One time I did dream 'bout him before we come here to live but I thought that time he was a p'liceman an' was gonter git us."

"I reckon poor Daddy is a angel in heaven by now. He'd be a soldier angel in khaki," mused Polly. "He'd be a awful big handsome angel. If you could only remember him, Peter! It would be so comfortin' somehow if you could remember him the way I can,"

"Yes, him an' the vi'lets!"

The children were sitting on a bench under the old box bushes that were clustered in the corner of the Hathaway garden. Spring had come to Dorfield. The trees were budding, jonquils and tulips were blooming. The foolish peaches were sticking out their pink noses forgetful of the fact that the year before an untimely frost had nipped them in the bud. But there was no frost in the air on that evening when, after an early, wholesome tea the Waller children had sought the sweet seclusion of the box bushes there to talk on the old days.

"I wonder where ol' Cousin Dink is anyhow," ventured Polly.

"I ain't knowin' or carin'. She's a mean ol' bulwhinger wherever she is." Peter had a funny way of making up names to suit occasions. What a bulwhinger was Polly did not know but it was a pretty good name for Dink. "I just hope I ain't ever gonter see her again. I ain't scairt of her anymore though. Are you, Polly?"

"I ain't 'zactly but I hope she's gone for good—" The word froze on Polly's lips. She threw her arm around Peter as though to protect him. Coming along the garden path was none other than the dreaded Dink.

"Get a move on you, you kids," was her greeting. "I have come for you. I haven't got all day to wait, either. Never mind your hats. I'll buy you some new ones. Now don't set up a bawl. God knows it ain't any treat to me to have you tagging along after me. Mind me! Come along."

Polly and Peter clung to one another and refused to move.

"I'm not going with you and neither is Peter," declared Polly. "You are a bad, wicked woman who tells lies."

"Oh ho! So you are not coming with me. Well, we'll see about that. I don't want to raise a row but

I fancy you will come when I tell you your mother has sent me to get you. Eh?"

"No, we won't come then because bur mother would never send you to get us. If she was living she would come herself if she could and if she couldn't she'd get somebody better'n you to come."

Polly's eyes were flashing and her nostrils swelling. She must protect Peter at all cost to herself, even though the hated Dink would kill her for telling her such unpleasant truths. She stood up in front of the scornful, handsome, hard-eyed woman and defied her.

"Run, Peter! Go tell Dr. Weston!" she cried to her little brother.

Peter was up and away in a flash. Dink made a dive for him but Polly grabbed her skirt and the moment's delay gave Peter a good start. Dink turned, gave Polly a wicked slap on her cheek, jerked her skirt from her grasp and flew down the walk after Peter. Peter's legs were short and Dink's extremely long. Long legs were gaining on short legs.

"She's gonter git me! She's gonter git me!" Peter told himself, but in spite of his despair he ran the faster.

The vicious slap on Polly's soft cheek had for a moment staggered the little girl, but Polly was the stuff that heroines are made of. Down the walk she ran after Dink. Whatever got Peter would have to get her as well. Dink was gaining on Peter; Polly was gaining on Dink. In imagination Peter felt long, strong, slim fingers grabbing him by the collar of his little jacket. Dink had caught him in that manner in days gone by and shaken him and slapped him—even pinched him with those long, strong fingers. She would do it again. She would surely get him. Good-bye to the sand pile and three meals a day! Good-bye to dear Mrs. Dexter and her wonderful stories and frequent treats! Better to be adopted than to have Dink get him.

Just as Peter gave up hope, knowing full well that the hated Dink was close enough to put out her hand and catch him, he ran plump into the arms of a khaki clad man who caught him to his breast with a dry sob.

"Son, little son!" Peter heard him whisper.

"Now I'm gone dead," Peter decided. "Polly said Daddy would be a soldier angel and now I'm in heaven with him. Ol' Dink scairt me to death." He closed his eyes contentedly.

"Mother! Mother!" cried Polly. In a moment she too was in heaven without having to die to get there. Her mother held her so tight it seemed as though she would never let her from her arms again.

"My darling! My darling!" was all Mrs. Waller could say.

Dink, too, was in an embrace, but not such a loving one. She had no idea who these persons were who had come upon the scene of action at such an untimely moment. She only knew that a small sandy haired girl had her by the wrists and it was useless to struggle.

"Let me go!" she said shrilly. "Who are you anyhow and what do you folks mean by interfering with me and my children?"

"To be sure, we have the advantage of you, Miss E. Dingus, alias Hester Broughton, alias Margery Dubois," said Josie cheerily. "Allow me to introduce you to Mrs. Stephen Waller and Captain Stephen Waller. I fancy you had come to the Children's Home Society for your charges. Of course you left them here so informally I imagine you thought any formality in removing them would be unnecessary. It seems we arrived in the nick of time. The garden bench, where you have just had the conversation with Polly and Peter is in earshot as well as in sight of the street. I thought I might as well tell you this to save you trouble in the tale you are no doubt concocting. I am sure Captain Waller will want me to let you go and not have you arrested. He has his children and I fancy he can do very well without avenging himself. Is not that right, Captain Waller?"

A nod from the khaki angel assured Josie she was. She loosened her hold on the furious if crestfallen Dink.

"I'll walk a little way with you, however, Miss Dingus. I want to give you a little advice. You needn't bother to answer me but you must listen. I know I irritate you beyond endurance but you have caused me a great deal of trouble and expense and taken much of my valuable time and now it is up to you to give me a few moments of yours."

Miss Dingus looked at the small, sandy haired girl with astonishment. "Well, can you beat it?" was all she said. Without a word of farewell to the children she had but a moment before announced as her own, she turned on her French heels and walked out of the Hathaway garden. Josie caught step with her and continued her conversation. When Josie O'Gorman had something to say she usually said it.

"No doubt you wonder how I got in on this. I'll tell you, Miss Dingus. I got in from the moment you entered the Children's Home Society, disguised more or less in a cheap serge suit, with two poor little kiddies with dirty faces and eyes full of tears. I saw by your shoes that your dress was

not the kind you usually wore and you had put it on to pretend you could not care for the children—were too poor. I saw how indifferent you were to Polly and Peter and how interested you were in yourself. You don't remember me, of course. You were too taken up with yourself—always are in fact—to notice other persons. I am the unimportant person who put you on to a shoe sale. I knew you would take advantage of it. I am also the person who sat by you when you were purchasing the shoes and flattered you about your feet. They are pretty but they have led you out of the straight and narrow path. I am going to give you some advice now. You won't follow it because, Miss Dingus, when all is told you have very little sense."

"Can you beat it?" Dink repeated.

"Mighty little sense and no heart, but you are a woman and my sympathies are with you, so I'll go ahead with my advice. In the first place, when you want to destroy letters stay with them until they are burned to ashes. A grate in a boarding house is a poor place in which to leave letters you don't want seen."

"Oh!" gasped Dink.

"In the next place, don't trust handsome, distant cousins, who get you to do the dirty work."

"You mean Chester Hunt?"

"Yes, Chester Hunt! He is on to you, Miss Dingus, and since I put him wise to your disloyalty I feel it but fair to put you on to his. Don't trust him an inch. He is even worse than you are, because he has some sense and there is no excuse for him. In the first place he has no more idea of marrying you than he has of marrying me—in fact not quite so much," declared Josie with a twinkle in her eye. "He thinks I am such a good cook he might even consider me, but he looks down upon you as beneath him socially in spite of the fact that you are distant cousins. He has merely played with you and used you to gain his ends. I can tell you on my word of honor that he intended to marry his step-brother's widow, Mrs. Stephen Waller, and nothing but the timely coming alive of Captain Waller prevented his trying to carry out his plans. Of course, I was Johnny-on-the-spot and would have saved the dear lady from such a terrible fate. There is no use in your swelling your nostrils at me and pretending you scorn me and my news. I have proof positive of it all. I have lived in Chester Hunt's home in Atlanta as a domestic and there I discovered many things."

"Who are you anyhow?" stormed Dink.

Josie turned back the lapel of her coat and one glance at what it disclosed was enough for the scornful Dink.

"You made the poor little kiddies afraid of policemen because you were afraid of them yourself, eh? Well, you can beat it now. Anyhow, when Chester Hunt looks you up, which he is sure to do, and begins to reproach you for having been false to the trust he imposed in you, you can just meet fire with fire and you can also tell him that Josie Larson sends her regards. I fancy you have come for the children because he has written he might come to see you any day."

Dink nodded miserably.

"He may be on his way to Chicago now, but I rather fancy he will stop awhile and rest up. He has been ill with lumbago and on top of that the shock of finding his much loved brother, Stephen Waller, to be alive and well has been too much for him. When he is able to travel again he will travel directly towards you and if you are any wiser now than you were ten minutes ago you will make it convenient to change your address. It would be the better part of valor not to meet Chester Hunt until he has cooled down a bit."

"Thanks!" cried Miss Dingus in ludicrous haste. "I believe you. I'll be going now." With a nonchalant nod she turned the corner walking as fast as her long legs could carry her in the direction of the railroad station.

On returning to the Hathaway house Josie found that Mary Louise and her husband, having finally received the telegram, had hastened to inform Polly and Peter of the good news contained therein. Already they were fast friends with the Wallers. Dr. Weston had joined them and came in for his share of thanks from the grateful parents.

The children looked very happy. Peter acknowledged that he was glad he wasn't dead and his father was not an angel after all.

"I'd rather a' been dead than go back with ol' Dink, though," said Peter snuggling in his mother's arms.

The children changed laps every now and then, as though to make sure that both parents were really alive and well and belonged to them, Polly and Peter.

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