

JOAN of the
JOURNAL

HELEN DIEHL OLDS

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Joan of the Journal

JOAN OF THE JOURNAL

By

Helen Diehl Olds

ILLUSTRATED BY ROBB BEEBE

GROSSET & DUNLAP

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To my sons
Bob and Jerry
just because ...

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ILLUSTRATIONS

It was the story of the Charity Play
“I’ll talk with this young woman alone,” he said
“Mark ’em ‘first’ and ‘second’,” Tim shouted
“Are you a deaf-mute or aren’t you?”

CHAPTER I

JOAN GETS A JOB

“I’ll be back in a minute,” Joan called over her shoulder to Mother, as she scurried around past the lilac bushes by the kitchen windows.

Oh, suppose she were too late!

Tim had gone into the *Journal* office, just as she had started doing the dishes. Joan rarely minded doing dishes, because the windows above the kitchen sink looked across at the *Journal* office and she could watch everything that went on over there. Usually, she lingered over the dishes, just as she hustled over the bed making because the bedrooms were on the other side of the house. But to-day, she had done the dishes in less than no time, because she wanted to be nearer the scene of action than the kitchen windows.

She hurried now, though it was rather undignified for a person fourteen years old to run in a public place like this. That was the trouble with living right down town. No privacy. Joan thought of the rows and rows of new homes out at the end of Market Street, and then looked back at her own little home—also on Market Street. It was a tiny, red brick house, tucked in between the *Journal* office and the county court house, set back behind a space of smooth green lawn. It was like living in a public square. But Joan had lived there all her life and really loved the excitement of it.

Uncle John, who was general manager of the paper, would probably be busy and tell Tim to wait, as though he were just anybody applying for a summer-time job and not his own nephew, Joan’s seventeen-year-old brother.

Joan crossed the green plot to the nearest window of the *Journal*—she had climbed in and out of those windows as a little girl. She could see Chub, the red-haired office boy, wandering around. He was never very busy this time of the afternoon after the paper was on the press. Joan was as much at home in the *Journal* office as in her own brick house next door. As a baby, she had often curled up on a heap of newspapers and taken her nap, regardless of the roar and throb of the presses. That was when Daddy had been alive and had been city editor. He had been so proud of his baby girl that he had often taken her to work with him in an afternoon when Mother was busy and things at the office were slack.

She had grown up with the roar and clatter of the machines, and the smell of hot ink, and she loved it all, just as other girls might love a battered old piano in

the parlor—just because it spelled home.

Uncle John's office was at the end of the editorial rooms, just by the swinging door into the composing room. "Sanctum sanctorum" she and Tim called Uncle John's office. Joan stationed herself out of sight, under the buckeye tree, and peered through the dirty, streaked window. She could see Uncle John's desk, with its crowded cubby-holes, frayed blotter, and books about to fall off.

She craned her neck and saw Tim standing before the desk, twisting his cap in his hands. Of course, talking to Uncle John wasn't anything, but asking for a job as a cub reporter was. They were talking together, and Tim looked so serious, Joan would hardly have recognized him.

Oh, he had to get that job! It was during graduation week, when Tim had had to have a new outfit for the commencement exercises, that Mother had done some figuring and suddenly discovered that perhaps there would not be enough money for college for Tim, after all. Tim had had his heart set on going to the State University at Columbus that fall. Joan herself had even dreamed of attending the big football games while he was there, and when they cheered, "Martin! Atta boy, Martin!" she would say, as modestly as she could, "That's my brother!" Tim was good in all sports—had been a leader in them all through high school. It was the only thing he really liked, but, in a town like Plainfield, excelling in sports offered no method of earning money during the summer months.

Tim had stalked about for days, gloomy as could be, after Mother's announcement. Then one evening, when Uncle John had dropped in for supper, he had said, "Want a job, do you? Well, come over, and talk to me some time. Maybe I can fix you up. We're adding new names to the pay roll every week, and you might as well get yours on, too."

If he'd said anything like that to Joan, she would have been in seventh heaven, she thought. But Tim seemed only mildly thrilled. Of course, he wanted the job, but it was only a job to Tim, while a job on the *Journal* had been Joan's lifelong dream.

Finally, as she watched now, she saw Uncle John get up and walk around his desk. He shook hands with Tim and patted him on the shoulder. Tim grinned all over his face, then turned and went out the door, while Uncle John went back to his cluttered desk. Joan could have watched Tim as he went through the editorial rooms and the business office and the front door of the *Journal*, for there were rows of windows all facing her own green yard, but instead, she turned and raced to their kitchen door.

"Mother!" her voice vibrated through the old house. "Tim got the job!"

Mrs. Martin looked up from the oven where she had slipped in a cake, and smiled. "That's nice."

Joan sank down on a kitchen chair that was peeling its paint. "Mother, it's wonderful!"

"Joan, don't get so excited." The oven door banged. "It's not you that's got the job."

"I really feel as though it was, honest," declared the girl. "You know, I've always dreamed of having a job on the *Journal* and now I have it—or rather Tim has, but it's all in the family."

"You should have been a boy, Jo," Mrs. Martin made her oft-repeated remark. As it was, Joan's dark, straight hair was always given a boyish bob, and there were some boyish freckles on her short nose, too. "Tim may be the image of his father, but you're just the way he was, crazy about the newspaper. I don't see what you see in it. Though I guess it has been better since John's been managing it. But as soon as we can sell this house without a loss, we'll move."

"Mother!" Joan wouldn't feel she were living without the *Journal* next door. But she didn't take her mother's words seriously. Mother was always talking vaguely of selling the house and had suggested it in earnest recently. The interest on the mortgage was high and being in a business block, it was hard to find a buyer. If she could retain it, until some one wanted it for business purposes, they might make a nice profit. But Plainfield was a slow-growing town. Uncle John advised holding it until some one wanted it for a business.

"Your poor father just slaved for that paper, and it never got him anywhere," went on her mother. "I hope you get over the notion of being a reporter by the time you're Tim's age, and take up stenography."

"Ugh." Joan made a little face. "Office work—not me!"

No, she was going to be a reporter, no matter what. Hadn't Daddy taught her to typewrite when she was only eleven, and didn't even Tim think she was a "pretty good typist"? Daddy had always said she had a "nose for news," too. She remembered feeling her pug nose speculatively the first time he said that, wondering what it meant. Her nose did turn up inquisitively. Now she knew, "nose for news" meant she had the natural curiosity that it took to make a good reporter.

Then the door opened and Tim came in, still wearing the broad grin with which he had left the *Journal* office.

"I'm glad you got it, son." Mrs. Martin spoke before Tim could say a word.

"Just like that kid, to tell everything before any one else gets a chance."

He was really cross. That's the way he was most of the time, these days. They

had been good chums until his senior year in High School, when he had assumed such superior airs. He had acted especially high and mighty since his graduation last week. As far as Joan could find out, he had nothing against her except her age. Could she help it that she was nearly four years the younger? She was almost as tall as Amy Powell, her best friend, and Amy was fifteen years old. He was usually nice to Amy, too, but then Amy had a grown-up way around the boys.

Only at times did he seem the same old brother. To think that only a year ago they had been such chums, even to having a secret code between them. When she was small, it had amused her to learn that Tim's real name, Timothy, was also the name of a grain. "Oats and beans and barley," she used to sing the old song at him, and somehow or other in their play that phrase came to mean, "Danger. Look out." It had been convenient lots of times in their games, Hie Spy and Run Sheep Run. But they hadn't used it for a long time now.

"Tim, I just couldn't help telling. I was so excited." She tried to make her dark eyes sober and her voice sorry sounding, now.

"She's the limit." Tim turned to his mother. "Reads what I'm writing over my shoulder and breathes down my neck till I'm nearly crazy."

He, like Mother, refused to believe she was in earnest about being a reporter.

"You ought to be glad I do snoop around," Joan told him, as she wiped off the table for Mother. "You know Edna Ferber's *Dawn O'Hara* was rescued from the wastebasket by her sister, so you see! When do you start in?"

"To-morrow." Tim drew up his shoulders, proudly. "Uncle John says they really need a cub reporter since they put Mack on Sports. That's the place I'd really like! But—they need a cub, and I'm it. Decent enough salary, too, Mother; I'll be able to pay you some board, besides saving for the University."

Mother smiled. "That's fine!"

"I stopped at Nixon's desk and he gave me my beat." Tim pulled a scrap of yellow paper from his pocket.

"What is your beat?" Joan squirmed to see.

He let her read:

Railway Station

Flower Shops

Library

Post Office

"I have to go round there every day and scare up news," he said. "The rest of the time, I'll be busy doing obits and rewrites." (That meant obituary notices and

articles rewritten from other newspapers.)

Joan gazed at him over the plates and things she was carrying into the china closet. She always just drained them, and they were dry now. “And can I go with you?”

“On my beat?” came the scandalized echo. “I should say not!”

But, as she put the plates away, Joan schemed to go. How else could she learn what a cub reporter did on his beat? And since she wanted to be a reporter some day herself, she must not miss this opportunity.

“And I mustn’t make any mistakes.” Tim followed her into the dining room. “Uncle John says we can’t stand a black eye with election time coming off in the fall.”

“Why, what has that to do with it?” Joan asked.

Tim, always willing to display his knowledge, went on to explain that a man named William Berry from Western Ohio and called “Billy Berry” in political circles, was running for governor of the state. He had bought the *Journal’s* rival, *The Morning Star*, the only other newspaper in town, and was trying every way to “get in good with the people,” to insure his election. The *Journal*, opposed to certain methods and past actions of Billy Berry, had had to double their efforts against this man, who was not the right one for governor at all. The *Journal* had its own candidate, Edward Hutton, who lived in Cleveland, but who spent a great deal of time on his estate in the beautiful Ohio Valley country near Plainfield. The *Journal* and Edward Hutton’s followers were striving to show every one that he was the better man for governor.

Joan listened intently and tried hard to understand. “And is the *Journal* Uncle John’s ‘political tool’?” she asked.

“No, he’s not interested in politics himself, but he is interested in getting Hutton elected.” Tim was really being very decent about explaining. “Everything good we can say about him will help.” He broke off and started upstairs. “I’ve got to study to be ready for my job.”

Study what, Joan wondered, but she knew better than to ask. He had been such a peach telling her so much, she mustn’t get him provoked with her. She wandered out to the yard and called Em, the cat. Em really belonged to the *Journal* but she spent most of her time at the Martins’. Daddy had named her Em—which is a very small newspaper measure—when she had been a tiny, black kitten that you could hold in the palm of your hand. Now, she was a big, shiny cat. She rubbed against Joan’s plaid sport hose, entreatingly. Joan picked her up and cuddled her slippery length on her shoulder.

What did it matter if Em shed black hairs over Joan’s white middy? Joan

never bothered much about clothes. She wore middies almost all the time because they were easy to get into and were comfortable. She wished she might always wear knickers, but since she couldn't, she wore pleated skirts as often as she could. The one she had on to-day was a real Scotch plaid.

Joan began to hunt for four-leaf clovers in the short-cropped grass. If she found one, she'd give it to Tim, to bring him good luck in his new work. They could have them for "talismen" like Lloyd and Rob in *The Little Colonel* books. She was half afraid that Tim would not be a good reporter; he was too—temperamental somehow.

She glanced often toward the *Journal* windows. Mother hated having her run over there so much—was afraid Uncle John wouldn't like it, so she was never to go without an excuse. But Chub often called her to the windows to keep her posted on everything that went on.

Pretty soon, she heard his familiar, "Yoo-who!"

A window in the *Journal* office opposite was pushed up, and Chub stuck his red head out. "Come here a minute."

Chub was just Joan's age and her special pal. He knew almost everything there was to know about a newspaper office. He was sympathetic with Joan's ambitions to newspaper fame, and was always willing to answer any of her questions. When work was slack at the *Journal*, the two often had games together—even playing mumble-peg on the worn, splintery floor of the editorial office.

"I suppose you know the news?" he grinned, as she came to the window.

"About Tim? Sure thing," she answered. "Say, Chub, do me a favor, and think up something to call me over to the *Journal* about, to-morrow afternoon, will you? It'll be Tim's first day, and I'll be so anxious to know how everything goes, but I don't dare let on to him."

"O.K." That was Chub's favorite expression at the present. He got a new one every few weeks.

"Say, Jo," he lowered his voice. "There's something queer going on over here. Mystery. I'm working on it—oh, gee, there's Cookie waving some copy at me. I gotta go. But I'll tell you more as soon as I really find out something."

The red head was withdrawn, and Joan went back to the kitchen steps, depositing Em beside her saucer of milk.

A mystery at the *Journal*! What could it be? And would it affect Tim? Joan rather guessed so, from Chub's remarks. Joan loved mysteries, and Chub knew it. Besides, if Chub had discovered it, then it was bound to be a really good one. A real man's mystery—nothing silly, like the mysteries Amy tried to concoct.

In a little bit, Tim came out, in a radiant mood, Joan could tell at a glance. “Grab your swimming suit, kid. I want to get in a last swim before I start my job—I’ll be too busy as a cub, and don’t want to go alone.”

It was wonderful having Tim decent to her, Joan thought as she flew to do his bidding. Would he always be this agreeable, now that he was happy and important over having a job? She hoped so.

After supper, Joan sat on the side steps and listened to the drone of the humming bird that visited the honeysuckle vines, and looked up at the stars above the *Journal* office roof.

“To-morrow, I start my job,” she thought. She really could not have been more interested if she herself, instead of Tim, were to report at the *Journal* at eight o’clock in the morning.

Soon, there was a little jingle behind her. It was Tim, putting out the milk bottle, with its pennies and nickels, for Mother—also a signal that Joan should come on to bed.

As she went through the dining room to the stairs, a slim tan booklet lying there on the dining room table caught her eye. It was entitled *Journal Style*, and was a little pamphlet on what a cub should and should not do. She had never seen a copy of it before. She supposed they were just given to the new men and that was why. That was what Tim had been studying that afternoon up in his room, and this evening, too, probably while she sat on the steps.

She opened it. “The lead of every story should answer, if possible, the questions: Who? What? Where? When? and How?”

Why, this was just exactly what she wanted! She hooked one of the chairs up to the table with her foot and began to read.

About an hour later, Mother’s voice called her. “Joan, aren’t you *ever* coming up to bed?”

She left the book where she had found it, and stumbled up the stairs, trying to remember all the hints to reporters she had read.

To-morrow. The Job! That reminded her of Chub’s mystery. What could he mean, and when would he tell her?

CHAPTER II

THE JOURNAL FAMILY

Next morning, Joan did not even hint to Tim that she was planning some time to follow him. It would seem like “tagging” to him. But she must learn all she could about his job. Maybe she could really help him in some way, and then he’d be glad she had taken such an interest.

She hustled about making beds and putting the house in order. She had her regular duties, and in the summer-time they were heavier than when she went to school. Joan did not like housework. But she always tackled it the way she did everything, and was done before she really had much time to think how she hated it. Whenever she demurred at having to do household tasks, when she would rather be over at the *Journal*, learning about newspapers, Mother would say, “Joan, remember that Louisa Alcott often had to drop her pen for her needle or broom.” Sometimes, Mother almost seemed to understand.

Joan had to stop in the middle of her dusting this morning to answer the telephone. It was Amy asking her to go for a swim.

“I can’t—I tell you, I’ve got a job.” Joan told her for the fourth time. Joan adored swimming, even though the inland city of Plainfield offered nothing more than a dammed-up creek.

A laugh buzzed through the wire. “Jo, don’t be silly.”

It was hard to refuse Amy. She was one of those bossy girls. But Joan hung on, and though Amy coaxed at great length, she was firm.

“You’re going to spoil our vacation!” Finally Amy banged down at her end.

Joan, rising with cramped muscles to resume her work, thought to herself that this was going to be the best vacation she ever had because she—well, Tim really—had a job on the *Journal*. As she turned from the telephone, she saw her mother’s face full of disapproval. Mother always wanted her to go with Amy, rather than hang around the *Journal* office.

“How could I go, to-day,” she appealed, “when Tim just starts his job? I don’t know when something may break, and Tim might miss a big story. Why, there might be a big fire right in this block. I have to stick around.”

The disapproval did not leave Mother’s face, but she said nothing.

Everything finished, Joan found it impossible to settle down to reading. It seemed strangely lonesome in the house without Tim. Their vacation had been

going on for a whole week now, and the two had been together most of that time, laughing, chattering and bickering with each other. She missed Tim, even if he often did fail to treat her with proper respect.

She wandered down to the kitchen and was grateful for Mother's timid suggestion that the ice box needed cleaning. Anything to keep busy! She discovered a quantity of milk. Enough for fudge, she decided. Tim would love some when he came home from work that afternoon. She'd make it for a surprise. She followed the directions Amy had written for her in the back of the thick cook book—a new kind of fudge. It turned out beautifully. Mother praised it with lavish adjectives. Joan knew it wasn't that wonderful, but Mother was always pleased when she took an interest in anything domestic.

Tim came home for lunch and between mouthfuls he told Joan what he had written up that morning—one really sizable obituary. She hoped he had put in all the details that the *Journal Style* booklet had said were necessary for the well-written obit. That was pretty good for him actually to report something the first day, she thought. She wished he would tell her in minutest detail, moment by moment, what he had done that morning, but boys were so vague in their conversations. He merely said he had “legged” it all over town—a leg man, is what he was called on the newspaper.

Joan was eager to go over to the *Journal* for the paper as soon as it was off the press to see Tim's story. Would Chub remember to call her?

She would go over sooner if an excuse offered itself, she decided as she settled down restlessly with a book on the side steps. If only Uncle John would need her for something; or Miss Betty, who did the society notes, would send her out for candy to nibble on, or for an extra hair net or something, as she often did.

About the middle of the afternoon the call came.

“Yoo-who!” It was Chub at the *Journal* window. “Come on over.”

Joan's book fell on the ground and she hurried over. In the editorial room, she glanced around. Tim was not at his desk—he had told her that he was to have the one right next to Mack's. He was probably out on a story. She hoped it was a big one.

Mr. Nixon, the editor, was in a good humor and gave the manager's niece a smile. The editor seldom wore a coat these days. He was usually in vest and shirt sleeves which made him seem younger than he really was. The collar button at the back of his neck always showed. Often he was cross and would bellow, “Get a job on a monthly,” at all the unlucky ones who tried to plead that their stories were not quite finished. He was just as apt to call pretty Miss Betty a nincompoop if she made a mistake, as he was to say, when she wrote up a good

article, "A few more stories like this, and the *Journal* won't be able to hold you."

Miss Betty Parker waved hello from her desk by the window. Miss Betty had the distinction of being the only woman on the editorial staff. "Here, woman!" was the way the men often summoned her to the telephone.

There was a pink rose on Miss Betty's desk. Had Mack, the sport editor, who was there with a green eye shade and a pencil behind his ear, given it to her? Joan thought it must be lovely to write all those society items about the people who lived on the North Side and who gave teas and parties and luncheons and things. Beside that, Miss Betty conducted an Advice to the Lovelorn Column, which Joan read every evening. She signed her answers, Betty Fairfax. Mack tried to make Joan believe that he wrote the questions, but she knew better than that, because they had had them before he came to the *Journal*, which was only a few months ago.

Somehow, Joan did not like Mack, although he was really almost as good-looking as Tim. Tim was dark, with wavy hair and dark eyes, while Mack was very blond, with a reddish mustache. Tim had been loud in his protest against Mack when he first joined the *Journal* family, and especially when he had been made sport editor. "That sissy! Imagine him a sport editor." But later, he admitted that Mack was a smart fellow. "He has a 'nose for news' all right and he certainly can write," Tim had added admiringly.

Mack's corner had been fixed up with appropriate sport pictures before he came. He had added no new ones. Tim would have.

There was a member of the *Journal* staff, of whom Joan approved wholeheartedly. That was old James Cook, a veteran reporter, called Cookie by all who knew him. He was fat and old, but kind, and always as gracious to Joan as though she had been Miss Betty's age.

"Well, well," he greeted her now, as he shuffled over to the files. "I thought the day wouldn't be complete without your shining face around here. Especially now with brother Tim on the pay roll. When are you going to steal Miss Betty's job away from her?"

He was not teasing, like Mack. But Joan was embarrassed. She really did hope to have Miss Betty's job in a few more years, but it hardly seemed polite to admit it.

"Just as soon as I get to be the star reporter around here on double space rates," Miss Betty laughed in reply to Cookie, and Joan did not need to answer.

Cookie was one of the nicest men in the world—always ready to help any one. He would even pitch in and help Miss Betty write up social items, pink teas and things when she got rushed. "I can describe a wedding gown as well as any one,"

he would brag. He had once been on the *New York Banner*, but his health had failed and now he was content to putter along here on the *Journal*, doing desk work. He was liked by every one. He was always willing to answer all Joan's questions about the newspaper. He had taught her long ago that "news is anything timely that is of interest," and Joan had learned that phrase by heart before she was ten. He had told her that the word "news" came from the letters of the four points of the compass, north, east, west, and south.

"Cookie," Joan reminded him, "you're always saying you are going to tell Chub and me some of your experiences on that big New York newspaper. When are you?"

"Oh—some time," he drawled, as he ambled off.

Another member of the *Journal* tribe sauntered up. It was Bossy, the colored janitor. His steel-rimmed spectacles gave his dark face an owlish look. He sniffed at Betty's rose. "Hit sho looks just like an artificial one, don't hit now?" he asked, amiably.

There was no squelching Bossy. He was a great talker and every one let him ramble on. He had been the janitor so long that he felt almost as though he owned the paper. No one felt it more keenly when the *Journal* was "scooped" by the *Star*, than did this same, good-natured Bossy. He prided himself that he read every word in the *Journal* every day.

"Your brother gwine be a newspaper reporter, dat what?" He turned to Joan. "Well, he'll hab to be careful and not make no mistakes. De *Journal* got to be careful. Mistakes is bad. Bossy knows." He muttered something to himself.

Tim came back into the office now, with a rather disgusted look on his face, and began pounding his typewriter keys, for all the world like a provoked small boy doing his detested piano practice. Joan went over and glanced over his shoulder at what he was writing. It was a short article asking for cast-off baby things, toys and clothing for the babies of the crowded-to-overflowing day nursery on Grove Street. Of course, Tim would hate a "sissy" assignment like that, but Joan would have enjoyed seeing all the babies and having the matron tell her of the things recently donated.

When he finished that story, he started on the rewrites, stories from the *Morning Star* dished up in a different style. Joan glanced at his desk. It was cluttered like a real reporter's. The whole editorial office was untidy. The staff seldom used the tall, green metal wastebasket in the corner. They wadded up papers and aimed at it. Chub often said, "The first person to hit the wastebasket around here will be fired."

Joan noticed that Tim had tacked a slip of yellow copy paper on the wall just

above his typewriter. It read, in the editor's handwriting:

Martin—

Call Undertakers twice a day, at 9:30 and 1:15.

Call Medical Examiner at the same time.

Read other papers and clip any local deaths.

Ugh! Being a cub reporter was sort of a gruesome job. But Tim did not seem to mind that part of it. Would he really like the work, she wondered. He had never been half so crazy about the *Journal* as she was.

"They're running, Jo!" called Chub from the swinging door to the composing room, and Joan hurried after him.

That meant that the paper was being printed. Joan followed Chub "out back" into the composing room where the linotype machines were all silent now. This part of the *Journal* was just as important as the writing and business end, Joan knew, though Amy did not agree with her. Amy had visited "out back" only once, and then had brushed daintily by the printers in their ink-smearing aprons. Joan didn't mind the dirty, dim old place, or the rough men. They might be inky and stained, but they were kind, always joking together just as the men in the front offices did. The "front" and "back" were like brothers of an oddly assorted family.

Joan knew all the men back here. The head pressman, the linotype men who often printed her name in little slim lines of lead for her when they weren't busy. But she had to hold the lines up to the looking glass to read her name. It always made her feel like Alice in *Through the Looking Glass*.

All about on shelves under the long tables stood little tin trays of type, stacked—stuff ready set for a dearth of news. Joan had learned to read type, too. It was just as easy as anything when you got used to it.

They passed a gray-haired man sitting hunched on a tall stool, reading yards and yards of proof.

"Meet the Dummy!" Chub said, with a wave of his hand.

Joan looked at the man, whom she had seen only once before, with some interest. Chub's remark was not so impolite as it seemed, for "dummy" is a word used for the plan of the newspaper before it is made up, and names apropos of their work delighted the *Journal* family. Just like Em, the cat.

He was a middle-aged man, and seemed rather dignified for a proofreader, with his gray hair and blue eyes.

"The office Dummy. He can't hear a sound or say a word," Chub stated in his ordinary voice, just at the man's elbow. "But I'd forgotten that you were

introduced to him the other day when you were over. He came last week, you know.”

The man gave Joan a half-smile of recognition. There was something puzzling about him. Perhaps there was about every deaf-mute. It really must be terrible to have to write everything you wanted to say, Joan mused. And not to be able to hear, but still he couldn't hear the rumble and clatter of the presses, and that might be a blessing, though Joan liked it.

Joan recalled what Chub had told her of Dummy. That he had applied for the job in writing. “I do not speak,” he wrote, “but I can work. I can read proof. I do not have to talk to read proof.” He got the job.

“Dat new proofreader gives me de creeps,” said a voice behind Joan and Chub, and there was Bossy. “Never saying a word, like dat. Hit ain't natural.”

“Well, it is for a deaf-mute,” explained the office boy.

They went on out to the cement-floored pressroom where the big presses were. They were roaring like thunder, and whirling endlessly back and forth, over and over. Little ridges of tiny blue flames, to speed up the drying of the ink, made blobs of color in the drabness. Leather straps above the presses were slap-slapping to a dull rhythm. It was a dim place, old, musty, ink-reeking, but romantic to Joan. And to think that to-day, this big press was multiplying Tim's story for the thousands of *Journal* readers!

The place had a spell for Chub, too, for it was here that he chose to mention the mystery.

“Say, Jo, you remember what I said yesterday? Well, there's nothing new for me to tell you. When there is, I will. It's just a mystery, that's all.”

“But what's it about?” pleaded Joan. She hated to be kept in the dark.

“It's—well, I guess I can tell you this much,” he granted. “It's about—mistakes.” He shouted the last word, to be heard above the roar.

“Sh!” warned Joan. She was bewildered. Mistakes. It seemed to be in every one's mind. First Tim had mentioned mistakes, then Bossy, and now Chub! She wanted to ask more about the mysterious mistakes, but she knew Chub would tell her when he was ready and no sooner.

They went around to the other side of the big Goss press, where a crowd of newsboys, both white and colored, were waiting for the papers. Joan hardly noticed their grins. She rushed to the levers that were shoving the papers, already folded, and let one be shot right into her hands.

She looked down at the folded paper, opened it out, and searched the front page. Tim's story wasn't there. She had expected it would be, with a two-column head, at least. But now she realized that was silly. A new cub reporter wouldn't

make the front page, right off like that! She turned the pages and hunted. On the back page, she found it—about two paragraphs long and under the regular obituary heading. She was thrilled, anyway.

She clasped the damp paper, reeking of fresh ink, to her chest and the inky letters reprinted themselves in a blur upon the front of her white middie. “My brother wrote that!”

Over the paper she caught a glimpse of Dummy, who had left his corner in the other room and appeared now around the big press. Why, the man had rather a scared look. Had he read her lips and was he afraid of her brother, perhaps? Maybe Tim’s job wasn’t so safe as they thought. The man might be plotting against the manager’s nephew. Joan had read of such things, but her thoughts were rather vague.

CHAPTER III

JOAN ON THE BEAT

Joan opened the drawer to her dresser by sticking the buttonhook into the keyhole. The handle had been gone for years, but she never minded, except when she forgot and shut the drawer tight. Then she had to resort to the buttonhook.

She carefully tucked inside the little tan booklet *Journal Style* that she had been studying, and shut the drawer again tight. She borrowed it whenever she had a chance. Tim hadn't missed it, and she hoped he would not find out that she had it. He would only tease; for he refused to believe how frightfully in earnest she herself was about getting a job on the *Journal* one of these days.

She went down the stairs, tying her middie tie and saying under her breath, "Never call a bridegroom a groom. A groom is a horseman." That had been one of the bits of advice in the booklet.

Tim was just going out of the door when she reached the kitchen.

Every morning during the past week since Tim had become a reporter on the *Evening Journal*, he had managed to slip out of the house before Joan was up and around. But this morning he wasn't so far ahead of her but that she could catch up with him. Perhaps her chance had come. She'd go with him this morning to see what having a beat was like.

She sat down on the edge of a chair, and poured most of the contents of the cream pitcher into her cup of cocoa to make it cool enough to swallow in a gulp or two. Then she reached for a crumbly, sugary slice of coffee cake.

"No cereal, thanks. I'm in a hurry." Joan started for the door, the coffee cake in one hand. At her mother's look, she added, "I'll eat an extra egg at lunch to make up the calories, but I must go now."

She dashed out.

What luck! Tim was just coming out of the front door of the *Journal* office when she reached the sidewalk. She paused there, pretending to be absorbed in nibbling her cake, her eyes ostensibly fastened on the cracks in the sidewalk. The sidewalk was worth looking at—it was brick and the bricks were laid diagonally. It had been a game, when she was small, to walk with each step in a brick.

Tim mustn't see her. He would accuse her of tagging, and he was cross

enough with her as it was. For all week she had been offering bits of information, like, “Mrs. Redfern has had her dog clipped,” and asking, “Is that news, Tim?”

And Tim, harried with his new work, would snap out an answer in the negative. Poor Tim had already, as he often remarked, written up “battle, murder, and sudden death” since he had taken the job on the *Journal*.

He went on, now, up the slight slope of Market Street. Joan, slipping along as though headed for the *Journal* office, went too. At the *Journal* door, she paused and watched while Tim crossed through the traffic of Main Street and started on towards Gay Street. Block by block, or “square” as they say in Ohio, she trailed after, looking into the shop windows every now and then, lest he should turn around.

He kept right on, however—straight to the Plainfield railroad station, where he disappeared through the heavy doors. Joan, across the street, stopped in front of the *Star* office. Somehow, the *Star* office seemed almost palatial with its white steps and pillars, in contrast with the somewhat shabby *Journal* office. That was because the *Star* was a government newspaper, that is, a political man owned it. Tim had once said that about one third of the newspapers in the United States were owned by politicians. The *Journal* wasn’t, though.

But Joan wouldn’t have traded the *Journal* office for the shiny new one of the *Star*. She loved every worn board in the *Journal* floor, every bit of its old walls, plastered with pictures and old photographs.

She crossed the street and opened the heavy door by leaning her weight against it. Tim was at the ticket window. The ticket agent was shaking his head, and Tim went on.

No news there, Joan guessed, as she, too, went across the sunny station and out the opposite door to where the express men were hauling trunks, and travelers were waiting for trains.

Back to Gay Street, through the musty-smelling Arcade, then Tim entered a small florist shop, crowded with flowers. Joan looked in the window. The girl at the counter reminded her of Gertie in the business office of the *Journal*. She was chewing gum, and as she talked to Tim, her hands were busy twisting short-stemmed pink roses onto tiny sticks of wood. Tim got his pencil and pad, and wrote leaning on the counter.

When Tim opened the door, a whiff of sweet flowers was wafted to Joan who was innocently gazing into the window of the baby shop next door.

Tim hurried on up toward the corner, brushing past two ragged children who stood by the curb, both of them crying. They might be “news,” thought Joan, but

Tim was hurrying on. Joan took time to smile at the smaller child. Though she wore boy's clothing, Joan could tell she was a girl by her mass of tangled, yellow curls. "What's the matter, honey?" she asked.

The little girl hung her head and was too shy to answer, but the brother spoke up. "Mamma's dead and papa's gone," he said.

Tim was up at the corner, now, going into the public library, and Joan hurried on. Maybe it wasn't true anyway.

Joan stood behind a tall rack of out-of-town newspapers while she listened as Tim asked the stiff-backed, white-haired librarian, "Anything for the *Journal* today?" That must be the formula cub reporters used. But Miss Bird had said no, softly but surely, almost before he had the question asked.

Then, across the street to the post office. Joan, feeling safe in the revolving door, watched while Tim approached the stamp window. He was getting some news, for the clerk was talking to him.

Just then, a brisk business man of Plainfield, hurrying into the post office to mail a letter while the engine of his car chugged at the curb, banged into the section of the revolving door behind Joan with such force that she was sent twirling twice around the circle of the door, and in the dizziness of the unexpected spin, she shot out of the door—on the post office side, instead of the street side. Tim, leaving the stamp window and coming toward the door, bumped into her!

"I beg your pardon—" he began, before he recognized his sister. Then, "Jo, you imp! Where'd you come from?"

"Tim, I'm sorry," she pleaded. "But I had to see what you did on your beat."

"Tagging me—making a fool of me," Tim fairly sputtered.

"Tim, there's two children on Gay Street, crying—I think it's 'news.'"

"News! What do you know about news?" scoffed Tim. "Probably lost the penny they were going to spend on candy."

"No, the boy said that their mother was dead and their father went away. If the mother just died, you could at least get an obit out of it," she explained.

"Sounds like a decent human interest story," Tim admitted. "Say, maybe the father couldn't pay the rent and got dispossessed."

They came successfully through the revolving doors and started down Gay Street together. "Is that the gang over there?" He pointed across at the boy and girl. "They do look forlorn. Maybe I've found a big story. You go on home, Jo. I don't want you following me around on my beat. Looks crazy."

No use trying to explain her real motive to him. "Did the flower shop girl give

you a story?" she asked, partly to make conversation and partly because she was curious.

"A wedding. I'll hand it over to Betty."

"What'd the post office man give you?"

"Just a notice about the letter carriers organizing a bowling team," he told her. "Run on, now. Maybe this isn't anything. You can meet me at the *Journal* and I'll tell you."

She did go on, then. Tim might tell Mother if she didn't, and then she'd be told not to bother her brother. She couldn't expect them to understand that she'd only been trying to help.

Joan was sitting on the sunny stone step of the *Journal* office, half an hour later, when Tim returned.

"It'll be a dandy feature," he announced. "May even make the front page." He forgot it was just his "kid" sister to whom he was talking. He *had* to tell some one. "That father deserted those children. I turned them over to the Welfare Society." He told her details, excitedly.

Joan hung about the *Journal* office, though Tim hinted openly that she should go home. She wasn't going to leave now. Tim was working hard over his story of the deserted children. The father's name was Albert Jackson and he lived in South Market Street, a poor section of the city.

Tim was getting nervous over the story. He was sitting on the edge of his chair and squinting at the machine before him. Finally, he jerked the page out, crushed it into a wad and dropped it on the floor.

"Nixon'll jump on me for such awful-looking copy," he muttered. "I'll have to do the whole thing over."

The editor often remarked that "copy" didn't need to be perfect, but it had to be understandable to avoid mistakes, and he often told the young reporters, when they handed him scratched-up copy, "Don't economize on paper. There's plenty around here and it's free. Do it over, if there are too many changes."

Tim reached for the sheet and straightened it out. "It's written all right, I guess —"

"Just copying?" Joan queried. "Oh, Tim, let me do it."

"Think you can?" Tim glanced around the office. Mr. Nixon was out to lunch, or he would have refused right off.

"Of course," Joan assured him. "I've often copied lists of guests for Miss Betty. You know, sometimes folks write up their own parties and lots of the county correspondents write in longhand. She lets me copy them for her."

“I didn’t know that.” Tim gave her his chair. “Well, go ahead. That typewriter makes me nervous. Some of the letters don’t hit. The comma’s nothing but a tail. See? It doesn’t write the dot part at all. You’d think I’d rate a better typewriter than this old thrashing machine.”

Joan made no reply. She was too thrilled to speak—to think of helping Tim! She must do her best and not make any mistakes. She smoothed out the copy sheet and placed it on the sliding board.

“Albert Jackson of—” her fingers struck the keys slowly but surely.

When she finished the sheet, Tim read it over and placed it on Mack’s desk. He read copy while Nixon was out at lunch, rather than let the work pile up.

The sport editor’s face was always smile-lit, like that of an æsthetic dancer. He teased every one. When Gertie from the front office walked through, with stacks of yellow ads in her hands, he had a tantalizing remark ready for her. He started the rumor in the office that Gertie was making love openly and loudly to Dummy’s silent back.

Joan went back to the *Journal* after lunch to bask in the last-minute rush, just before the paper was locked up, or “put to bed”—that last, breathless pause to see whether anything big is going to break before the paper is locked into the forms. She was glad school was over—suppose she’d have had to miss all this excitement of Tim’s job!

She and Chub went out into the press room again and she grabbed another folded newspaper, damp with fresh ink, from the press. She turned the pages, the narrow strips of cut edges peeling away from them as she opened out the paper. There was the story she’d typed—on the back page, among the obituary notices. It was almost as though she herself had written it. Why, the name was wrong. Instead of starting “Albert Jackson,” as she had written it, the story began, “Albert Johnson of North Market Street—” a different name and address.

“I guess that won’t make much difference,” reflected Joan, as she carried the paper back to the editorial office to show to Tim.

“You never can tell,” grinned Chub, as he trotted along beside her, his rubber sneakers slipping over the oil spots on the cement floor. He had not been an office boy in a newspaper office for two summers for nothing. He knew any mistake was apt to be serious. “That’s what I was telling you about, Jo—mistakes.” But Joan hardly heard him.

Tim was furious when he saw the story.

Miss Betty, busy already writing up a lengthy account of a wedding that would take place to-morrow, for the next day’s paper, paused in the middle of her description of the bridal bouquet to console the cub reporter.

“Mistakes do happen, Tim,” she laughed. “Think of the day I wrote up a meeting of the Mission Band and said that the members spent the afternoon in ‘shade and conversation,’ only to have it come out as ‘they spent the afternoon in shady conversation’!”

But Tim refused to be cheered, and Joan began to realize that the mistake was serious, for Mr. Nixon, the editor, had a set look on his face, too.

“Does it really make so much difference?” she asked.

“Does it?” Tim glared at her, his eyes darker than ever. “With Albert Johnson one of the most influential men in town?”

Then Joan understood. It was the name and address of a real resident of Plainfield that had been printed, and that was bad. The man wouldn’t relish reading in the paper that he had deserted his children when he hadn’t at all.

“I can kiss my job good-bye,” groaned Tim. “Why weren’t you careful?”

“I’m sure I wrote it right!” To think she had brought all this on Tim.

“But you couldn’t have, Jo,” he insisted.

“I’ll hunt up the copy for you, Tim,” offered Chub. This was often part of his duties.

Joan went with him. They went up to the high stool, before a tall, flat table, where Dummy read yards and yards of proof every day. It was such a nuisance having to write everything out to him. He directed them to the big copy hook where used copy was kept for alibis. Joan fumbled through the sheets and found the story. It had “Martin” up in the left-hand corner, the way Tim marked all his copy. The story started, “Albert Johnson of North Market Street.”

“Why, it’s written wrong!” she gasped. Her eyes fell on Dummy’s bowed gray head. He gave a start as he bent over his pad, wrote something, and held it out to her. “That’s the way the copy came to me,” she read.

It was certainly a mystery how she could write one thing, and it could be changed into something different. There was nothing to be gained by scribbling notes to the Dummy, and so Joan and Chub filed back.

Tim was glummer than ever when she told him the news. “You must have written it that way, without realizing,” he said. “We’ve asked Mack, and he says it came to him that way.” He bent over his typewriter and banged away. He was doing rewrites now.

“Much as we all like you, Tim, we can’t let any mistakes like this happen,” the editor said. “I’m responsible for everything in the paper, and if anything gets in wrong, I have to discover who’s the guilty party and get rid of him.”

Joan and Chub crept away to the open back window, perched themselves on

the broad sill, with their legs outside.

“I bet that Dummy’s like Dumb Dora in the comic strip, ‘She ain’t so dumb,’” remarked Chub. “There’s something queer about him. I’ve always said so. And there’s been queer things going on. You know what I told you about the mysterious mistakes. They’ve been happening before Tim got on the paper. But I couldn’t prove *who* made ’em. Now, I’m sure it’s Dummy.”

“He couldn’t help it, when the story came to him wrong.”

“But, Jo, if you’re sure you wrote it right, then somebody changed it and I think Dummy did. He’s got it in for Tim somehow, or for the paper, and put that mistake there on purpose. He thinks no one would dare accuse him, being a deaf-mute.”

“But nothing was erased. I looked especially to see. Perhaps I did write it wrong,” began Joan, and then broke off, “Oh, there’s Amy.”

A figure in an orchid sweater was waving to them from the corner. It was Amy in a new sweater. She adored clothes. Amy didn’t know a thing about a newspaper, and Chub was always disgusted with her for that. Tim, surprisingly enough, thought her a “decent kid” and really treated her with respect. Amy openly admired Tim—she thought him so romantic looking.

“Jo, you wretch!” she said now, crossing the lawn to the *Journal* window. “You’re never at home since Tim got that job. I’ve been phoning you all afternoon and I think your mother’s tired of answering.”

Chub got off the window sill. “Here,” he offered Amy a seat.

“There’s room for all of us.” Amy was always nice to every male creature, even though he might be just a red-haired, freckle-faced, chubby office boy.

They all sat together and Joan confided the new mystery to Amy. Though Amy knew little about newspaper life, she knew mysteries. She agreed that Dummy seemed a most suspicious character.

“But he’s so refined and nice,” Joan demurred.

“Spies are always refined like that,” was Amy’s reply. Her ideas were based on prolific reading. “The more refined they are the worse they are, always.”

“Oh!” Joan’s mouth dropped open. “I wonder,” she mused. “Say, Amy, you’ve said something. I believe he is a spy.”

Amy had no notion of what the man could be spying for, but Joan’s eager mind was grasping at ideas. Bits of Tim’s conversation about the political candidate came to her—the importance of not having mistakes in the *Journal* just at this time. That man, Dummy, had been hired to spy upon the *Journal* and to see that somehow mistakes were made, mistakes that would give the *Journal* that “black eye” that Tim talked about; mistakes that would eventually elect the

Star's candidate. She was a little hazy about how it worked. But of course, a deaf man had been chosen because no one would bother to argue much with a deaf person. It was too much trouble to write everything.

"I've read of things like that," admitted Chub, when she had explained her ideas. "We'll be detectives," he announced. "And we'll be on the watch for developments. I've a peachy book, *How to Be a Detective*."

"Maybe—maybe it's like this," ideas came to Joan. "Maybe Dummy wants to be a reporter himself and is jealous of Tim's job. Maybe he doesn't like it because Tim's only seventeen and a full-fledged reporter. That's why he makes the mistakes look like Tim's. Still, I can't help but like Dummy. He's so kind and mild. But he is sort of spooky, somehow."

Tim came to the window behind them now.

"Jo," his voice was hoarse and scared-sounding. "Come in here. Mr. Albert Johnson wants to talk to you."

Joan jumped off the sill to the soft grass, and stood for a moment trying not to tremble while she looked down at Em, who had just come up and was sniffing at her ankles. What was going to happen, now?

"Don't let 'em scare you, Jo." Chub's grimy hand was pressing hers. "The *Journal*'s got insurance that takes care of libel suits."

Libel suits. Oh, dear, that had a dreadful sound. Would Uncle John fire Tim for her mistake—if it had been a mistake?

"All right, Tim, I'm coming," she called in a voice, that in spite of her, trembled, as she came in out of the sunshine, in through the window of the *Journal* office to meet Mr. Albert Johnson.

CHAPTER IV

“NO MORE MISTAKES”

Joan, with pounding heart, lifted her eyes and looked at Mr. Albert Johnson. He was a man of about fifty and was seated in the chair at Tim’s desk. His hair was thin and his face was round. He was holding his gray felt hat and his yellow gloves in his hands resting upon a yellow cane between his knees. He was tapping the cane on the floor—not with impatience, Joan realized, but it was that cross kind of a tapping noise that a person makes when he is very angry and is trying to control himself. Mr. Johnson’s face told her the same thing. It was red, now, and his mouth was set like a bulldog’s. His eyes glared at her. Tim was standing there, too, silent. The rest of the office staff was watching the scene, and pretending not to.

“And are you the young woman who typed this—this—” Mr. Albert Johnson lifted up his hat and his hand shook as he held a folded newspaper toward her, “this ridiculous story about me?”

“Yes,” was Joan’s faint answer. “But—”

“Why,” the man seemed to be seeing her now for the first time, “why, you’re nothing but a child. Are you really able to run a typewriter?”

“Yes,” she said again. She hated to be called a child.

“Very, very peculiar.” Mr. Johnson tapped his yellow cane harder than ever.

Joan could bear it no longer. “But I’m just positive I wrote that name Albert Jackson,” she burst out.

The bulldog man eyed her. “Can you prove it?”

“No, the copy was different. It was changed.” She was full of the mystery, having just come from the discussion over it with Chub and Amy. “We’re working on it—the mystery—now, and maybe we’ll have it cleared up. We have a suspect already.”

The man still glared at her. “Young woman, do you know that I’m part owner of this paper with your Uncle John—the general manager is your uncle, isn’t he?—and that I’m a lifelong friend and chief backer of the *Journal’s* candidate for the coming election?”

“Oh, dear!” Joan almost sobbed. “I knew you lived out on North Market Street, so I imagined you must be somebody, but I never dreamed you were all that!”

The bulldog man's eyes actually twinkled and the yellow cane was still.

"Well, I am," he snapped, "all that. Of course, you're too young to understand about politics, but if you're big enough to help around a newspaper office, you must know how disastrous it is to have a mistake like this come out in the paper." He waggled the newspaper again.

"Oh, I do!" breathed Joan, fervently.

"It's going to cost this young man his job, I'm afraid." Mr. Johnson turned his head slightly toward Tim. Her brother's face was white.

"Oh, no, please!" beseeched the girl. "It wasn't his fault, at all. I did it, so why should he lose his job? He needs the money so badly for college this fall." Why, it'd be terrible to have Tim lose his job.

Tim gave her a look that said, "You didn't need to say *that*."

"But your brother admits he read the copy over, after you'd typed it." Mr. Johnson leaned over his cane. "First off, I suspected something crooked, but when I found out just a kid had made the mistake... Your brother did read it over, didn't he?"

Joan nodded dumbly. Then her mind, in its wretchedness, went back to the mystery. "But, Mr. Johnson," she began, unmindful of Tim's watchful eyes, "don't you think that when we both read the story over, it's mighty queer that it had a mistake like that in it, and neither of us saw it?"

"But you probably did it unconsciously. You're young. The boy's new at the job and was in a hurry. He let it slip," answered the man. "You see, I know a lot about newspaper work."

"Do you know anything about mysteries?" Joan couldn't help but ask. Somehow this fierce little man was not so fierce as he seemed. He had had a perfect right to be angry. Indeed, there was something really rather likable about him.

A smile played about his bulldog features. "Well," he drawled. "I ought to. I have indigestion bad, lots of times, and then I can't get to sleep, so I keep a good detective story right by my bed, all the time. I guess I read about one a week."

"And don't you think we have a mystery here?" Joan dropped her voice.

In answer, Mr. Johnson motioned Tim to leave. "I'll talk with this young woman alone," he said, and shoved a chair toward her. "Now, let's get this straight. To begin with, before we go on to your little mystery, let me ask you, do you realize how serious a mistake like that is?"

"It's libel," said Joan, sadly. "I've lived next to the *Journal*"—she pointed through the smudgy window to her red brick home—"all my life, and I do know how terrible mistakes are. Daddy was city editor, and I know how particular he

was about it.”

“Well, then what about me?” asked Mr. Johnson.

“Oh, I’m sure the *Journal* will make it right some way—write a contradictory story and explain that the Albert Johnson who lived on North Market Street is not the Albert Jackson who deserted his two children. Tim’ll write you something nice, I know. And the publicity may even help you.” She smiled encouragingly. Oh, if she could only get Tim out of this mess!

“Well, all right, I’ll risk that.” The man cleared his throat. “And now to business. Who’s the suspect?”

Joan slid her chair up until her red plaid skirt touched the gray-trousered knees of Mr. Albert Johnson. His cane was leaning back against his arm now. She told him all about the Dummy—how the copy must have been changed, and Dummy had insisted that it had been handed to him like that, when she knew she hadn’t written it wrong.

Then she went on and told him how she and Chub and Amy had jumped to the conclusion that Dummy was a spy. “Every crime has a motive, you know,” she assured him earnestly. “And so we thought it all out. Of course, we’ll have to have more evidence than just that before we can accuse him.”

“Of course,” nodded Albert Johnson. “Now, listen here. I’m part owner here and I’ll fix it for your brother to stay on here, and for you to stick around this office as much as you like, on one condition.”

“Yes, indeed.” Joan felt she would promise anything to save Tim.

“I want you to promise me to watch out for ‘developments’ as you call them, and come to me the next time anything suspicious happens. I don’t mind admitting things look queer. And don’t you accuse any one until you come to me. Remember?”

That would be easy! They were going to watch for developments, anyway. And Tim’s job would be safe.

Mr. Johnson got Tim back to the desk, and shook his hand, before he went into Uncle John’s little office with the frosted glass door and the “John W. Martin” on it. Joan watched his bulldog profile shadowed there until Mother telephoned to Tim to “send Joan home to help with dinner.” Amy had left long ago.

Nothing very exciting happened anyway, Joan learned later. Uncle John had been on the verge of firing Tim, but after his talk with Mr. Johnson, he said Tim could remain on probation, providing no more mistakes happened. That evening,

Tim spent hours wording an apology concerning Mr. Johnson for the paper, and Joan insisted that he tell the public what a nice man Mr. Johnson was.

Tim told her that Mr. Johnson was a wealthy man who dabbled in politics as a pastime, so she understood how he had time to bother with mysteries. The *Journal* staff would be interested in it, but they were all too busy to do much more than wonder. She did not tell any one that she had enlisted Mr. Johnson's services in the detective work.

Tim's write-up of Mr. Johnson must have met with his approval, because he telephoned Joan about twenty minutes after the paper was out, that he was about ready to forgive the entire affair. He asked Joan whether she were watching out for the mystery.

She was. Now that she had gained permission from Uncle John and the editor, through Mr. Johnson, to "stick around" the office, she fairly camped there every waking moment. Of course, Miss Betty and Tim took advantage of having such a willing young worker around. Miss Betty let her copy the news from the suburban towns, which usually came in in longhand. Joan loved it and worked painstakingly. Tim grumbled at times, Mack teased, Cookie joked, and even the editor got used to seeing her around.

"Newspaper work is hard," Cookie would tell her when she would make a little face about being sent on so many errands for Tim. "Make up your mind to get used to hard work and nothing else. You work as hard as you can on one story; then it's printed and over with and you start on something else. Always some new excitement on a newspaper."

Joan understood that, for look how soon every one had forgotten the episode of the mysterious mistake about the Albert Johnson story—or appeared to. But she and Chub had not. The office boy had a new solution to offer every day.

"The life of a newspaper is just ten minutes," Cookie told her another time.

Ten minutes. She glanced around at the staff all working feverishly to get out the paper. And the actual interest in the paper lasted only about ten minutes. That was true, she guessed. Still, all the *Journal* family seemed to enjoy their jobs.

After a week, Joan suddenly realized that she had joined the staff just in time for the annual outing. June nineteenth was just June nineteenth to a lot of people in Plainfield, but to the members of the *Journal* family, it was the big day of the year—the one day when they dropped their labors of supplying the town with news and took an afternoon and evening off. The *Journal* members were jolly for the most part while they worked. But when they took time off to play they were a perfect circus. Joan looked forward to the picnic.

A neat "box," that is, a little outlined notice, appeared on the front page of the

paper at the beginning of the week, announcing that the *Journal* would come out early on Friday in order that the staff and all employees could attend the annual picnic. Of course, it would be an unusually slim paper that day, but the subscribers did not mind one day in the year. Always by one o'clock on June nineteenth the paper was out on the street and the staff ready to pile into the two big busses chartered for the occasion.

Now Joan could go along. She and Tim had both gone when Daddy was editor, but that was long ago. All the employees took their families, and Joan would go. Mother, too, perhaps. But no, Mrs. Martin declined the invitation immediately.

“Bounce around in those uncomfortable, crowded busses for an hour, get eaten alive by mosquitoes and things, and come home as tired as though I'd done two weeks' washing? No, thank you. I'll take the day off, too, but I'll run out and see sister Effie. She's thinking about having her appendix taken out, and wants my advice.”

The big event at the picnic was the baseball game, and this year the *Journal* team was scheduled to play the *Star*. The *Journal* team this year was excellent—Mack, Mr. Nixon, Lefty the photographer, Burke the bookkeeper, Cookie, the two advertising men, and one of the pressmen. Chub and Bossy always sat on the bench—that is, they were substitutes and hardly hoped for an opportunity to play. Would Tim get to play, Joan wondered. The first day he had come to work, Chub grabbed him. “You'll try out for the team, won't you? I bet you're a peacherino pitcher.” Joan could easily see that Chub thought Tim mighty near perfection. Well, she thought so, too, most of the time, herself. He had been a star in the game at high school, but the men on the *Journal* team were all older than he was.

The owners of the *Journal* were proud of the prowess of the *Journal* team and their interest in baseball. The owners had this year ordered baseball suits for the team, and the *Journal* nine had challenged the *Star* team to a game to be played at the annual outing.

The suits arrived one day during Tim's first week on the paper and that afternoon no one worked. Fortunately, Bossy did not come in with the boxes until the paper was out. Bossy's eyes were just visible over the big flat suit boxes. Instantly, every member of the staff forgot that the paper must come out to-morrow just as to-day. They'd all work overtime to-morrow and get it out in record time, but now they had to look at the suits.

They were striped gray flannel with “Journal” written across the front in flaming red letters.

Bossy's brown eyes were almost popping out of his face. He had always played substitute, but he was a bit puzzled now. Was he to have one of the suits?

"Here's my fat one," Cookie held up a shirt by the sleeves across his plump front. He was a dandy catcher but a bit slow on bases.

"This skinny one must be yours, Mack!" The editor tossed him a gray bundle. "Just look through these, Bossy. There was one ordered for you."

Bossy's eyes blinked behind their glasses. "Deed and I will, sah."

Then the red socks were distributed. "Double up your fist and if it goes around that, it'll fit." Miss Betty did the measuring.

Chub was squeezing into his suit, putting it on over his everyday clothes, and soon the others followed his example. Cookie looked like a young boy in his. They all paraded up and down, until Miss Betty rushed to her typewriter and began pounding out a poem to celebrate the occasion. She called it, "The Wearing of the Gray." They all clapped when she read it aloud. She tried to coax Mr. Nixon to promise to print it.

"Luckily for me," said the editor, "the *Journal's* policy is never to print poetry."

Whereupon Miss Betty made up a jingling tune to go with the words, and taught it to every one to use as a cheer.

"Let's have a bit of practice." The editor was in rare good humor, for they usually practiced in the late afternoons. "But, since I seem to recall a certain mishap, I suggest we step outside for our practice."

He meant the time that they had had a few "passes" right there in the big editorial room, one day when work was slack, and Chub had missed a ball. The glass in the ticker, which reeled out yellow lengths of news bulletins, had been broken since that day.

They went through the windows to the grassy place by Joan's home. Em scurried out of the way at the first ball.

Joan sat on her own side steps and looked on. How handsome Tim was, in that gray uniform and cap! Chub sat beside her, both of them engrossed in watching the men making catches and putting out imaginary opponents. "We *have* to beat the *Star*," she vowed.

Suddenly, Mr. Nixon, who was captain by courtesy, called Tim. "Lefty here and I have been watching you play, Tim. You're fast and sure. I believe I'll put you in as shortstop."

Tim grinned. Every one seemed delighted. Miss Betty was loud in her exclamation. Only Mack was silent. He appeared peeved. Why should he care whether Tim was on the team or not?

“No clues to the mystery,” Chub said glumly. “I’ve been watching for developments every minute. Maybe we’ll get some at the picnic.”

“Maybe.” Joan hoped so, because she did want to solve the mystery and make it up to Tim for having got him into such a mess with the Albert Johnson story.

CHAPTER V

THE ANNUAL OUTING

The two big busses chugged at the curb. Joan, in a sleeveless green linen frock, with her tightly rolled bathing suit dangling by a string from one finger, had been out a dozen times to have the driver of the first bus assure her that he was saving two seats next to himself for her and Chub. The busses were draped all around with huge placards announcing, "The Annual Outing of the Plainfield Evening Journal."

The staff had raced all morning, and by noon, the forms were locked and the big presses roaring. The paper was "on the street" half an hour later, and by one o'clock the *Journal* family was ready to start.

But first, they must all line up in front of the *Journal* office, while Lefty, the staff photographer, snapped a picture. Miss Betty wailed that she was sure he had taken it while her mouth was open. Then, every one scrambled aboard. Chub captured the two seats reserved for him and Joan, and they were delighted to find that Cookie had squeezed himself next to them. Betty sat in the last seat of all, between Tim and Mack. Both of them were in their baseball suits, as were all the team.

The editor and his wife sat in the seat right behind Joan and Chub. Mr. Nixon had his year-old daughter on his knee. His wife (the office staff called her Mrs. Editor) often brought the baby down to the office and let her play on the files of out-of-town papers spread out on the long table where Tim did his pasting when he had an extra long story. Joan thought little Ruthie very sweet and waved to her now.

Lefty came with his camera over his shoulder and extra plates under his arm, for he planned to take more pictures later. Uncle John, who was as fat as Cookie, was there, too, with his family. That was Aunt Elsie and Cousin Eleanor. Aunt Elsie's facial expression showed plainly that she was present only because Uncle John had insisted that her attendance would be good policy. Cousin Eleanor was about Tim's age and ignored Joan almost completely, but played up to Tim. It was Aunt Elsie and Cousin Eleanor, Joan was sure, who made Mother hate having Joan hang around the *Journal*. They both felt above the newspaper and thought Mother should feel so, too.

The head pressman and his wife and their three little boys filled one entire seat. Joan saw Dummy coming, old and dignified. Would he enjoy a picnic?

Papa Sadler, as the circulation man was called, and his scores of newsboys, went in the other bus.

At last the busses were filled, and after the usual query, "Is every one here?" they started. Chub and Joan, from their positions of advantage, watched the driver and the route through the city. Out to Yellow Springs Street and then straight toward Cliff Woods. It was about a half hour's ride after they passed the city limits, marked by the charred ruins of what had been a match factory.

The flat dusty road stretched out ahead. They passed a swiftly moving traction car. Fields of yellow mustard plant reflected the sunshine. Blackberry bushes grew on the roadside and brushed their branches against the *Journal* busses. Joan sniffed deeply when they passed a grove of locust trees in bloom.

The sight of the old match factory had started the editor and Cookie reminiscing about that fire which had occurred several years ago.

"Is a fire the most exciting thing that a reporter can be sent to write up?" Joan forgot the scenery long enough to ask Cookie her question.

"Well, in a way, it is," he admitted. "But reporting a fire is not always fun. There're too often deaths and accidents to write up, too, with a fire story."

"That's so," answered Joan, soberly.

"Fires are like bananas—they come in bunches," said the old reporter.

Joan laughed. "Cookie, remember, just the other day, you promised to tell us some of your experiences on the New York newspaper. Can't you do it, now?"

"Um—I guess so." Cookie glanced out of the corner of his eye at the editor. But Mr. Nixon was totally absorbed in retying the strings on the baby's frilly bonnet. He was clumsy about it, but he would not let his wife help him.

Chub and Joan leaned near Cookie. His spotted vest smelled of stale tobacco, but they did not mind.

"Well, anything to oblige and help a future newspaper reporter," he chuckled. "This happened a good many years ago, when I was on the *New York Banner*. I started as a cub, you know, but inside of a year I was doing really decent stories. No more obits for me. Then, one day, the editor called me to the desk and said he was going to send me out on the Vanderflip wedding story. Well, can you imagine what that meant to me?"

"Was it a big wedding?" Joan did not know what answer Cookie expected.

"Was it? The wedding of Vanderflip's only son to a girl as rich as she was pretty? Oh, rats, I'm forgetting that all this was over ten years ago. You couldn't remember. But it was the biggest wedding St. Thomas' had seen in many a day. I didn't write up the ceremony—understand, the society editors did that. But I was to trail along when the wedding party left on the honeymoon, which was to be a

hunting trip to Canada. I was to send back a story every day—a good long one, too, for New York would eat up all the details it could get.

“Well, I sleuthed those folks within an inch of their lives. It was all right till we got to the lodge. I found it one of those glorified camps, deep in the heart of the woods, on a private lake, and nowhere for me to park within hiking distance. What did I do but apply for the job of chore boy at that camp—and got it! I wasn’t much good as a chore boy, but fortunately, there wasn’t a lot to do—take care of the boats and canoes, and be generally useful. My job gave me plenty of opportunity for close-hand stories. But between the work and writing up the stuff on my portable typewriter up in my little shack way off in the woods by itself, I was pretty tired at night, and that’s how I happened to miss the fox hunt.”

“I missed it because I overslept. When I came down to the main lodge, I discovered that the wedding couple and their party had departed at dawn. The caretaker there was a jolly fellow who liked to talk. Believe me, I started him on the subject of fox hunts. I had to get some sort of story to my chief. The old fellow told me all he knew, which, aided by my healthy imagination, made a grand story. I described the woods in the early morning, the dogs sniffing, the barking, and finally, the triumphant end.”

“You *faked* it?” Even Chub was scandalized.

Cookie nodded. “Had to. Well, I approached my chief’s desk with shaking knees, when I got back, expecting to be told I was fired. Instead he said, ‘Cookie, old kid, I believe you’ll make an extra space rate man, some day. You covered the Vanderflips pretty well, for the most part. But that fox hunt story—that was the cream of the whole collection!’”

“Didn’t you ever tell him?” Joan wanted to know.

“No. I was tempted to, often,” acknowledged the old reporter. “He was a good sort. Most editors are. At that, I hadn’t done anything so terrible. A great many editors would rather have a plausible and entertaining fake than a dull, colorless fact. He hates to be taken in, himself. He wants to be in on the joke, too. But it’s best to be honest always,” he warned.

“We’re almost there!” piped the shrill tones of the head pressman’s oldest son, as the bus swooped through a rustic gate and down into a shady, cool, cavernous valley. On one side huge gray cliffs, ragged and old, now rose to greet them. One looked like the Old Man of the Mountain. The busses stopped at the side of the quaint old pavilion, where supper would be served in event of rain, and every one was out in two seconds.

“First thing on the program,” announced Cookie, “is—

Lemonade

Made in the shade
Stirred with a rusty spade.”

He was a self-appointed lemonade maker and was famous for the concoction. The makings for the drink had been brought along. The rest of the supper was coming out by the caterer’s delivery auto later on. Bossy, Joan, and Chub cut lemons while Cookie pressed them with a wooden squeezer into a large galvanized tub, kept from year to year for this special purpose. A big cake of ice, shed of its coat of burlap, and rinsed off in the near-by spring, was slipped into the sweetened juice. Then buckets of spring water, more stirring, until Cookie pronounced it “Just as good as last year’s.” Dozens of shiny tin cups were let loose and tumbled upon the soft grass, and every one was invited to “Step right up and help yourself!”

The head pressman’s three little boys took this literally. Finally Cookie had to hint, “It’ll be here all afternoon, folks. But we must save some for the *Star* team.”

All during the lemonade making every one had been glancing back toward the rustic gate, watching for the coming of the *Star* team. Just as Joan was starting on her third cup of lemonade, a delivery truck with a red star on each side, drove up and the *Star* team, in their baseball suits of gray with blue letters, with a few of the staff as rooters, hopped out. The staff of the *Star*, since it was a morning newspaper, did not need to take much time away from the office for the game. They always worked at night to get their paper out, anyway. Joan had often gone to the *Star* office with Chub when he delivered advertising cuts, which the two newspapers sometimes shared, and she knew most of the staff by sight. Tebbets, the city editor, was a big bully of a man. Joan did not like him at all. His voice was so loud that the echo of it rumbled back from the cliffs. He was so different from Mr. Nixon. Of course, Editor Nixon often got provoked and then he’d roar like a mad bull, but most of the time he was good-natured and treated the *Journal* family fair and square. Joan might think him hard and stern, but he was as meek as a lamb, compared to Mr. Tebbets.

“Well, Journalites,” Tebbets was bellowing now, “are you ready to get trimmed by the best little team in the Ohio Valley?”

Of course, some one else might have said those very words and they would not have been mean. But not the way Mr. Tebbets said them.

His eyes lighted upon Mack. “So you’re on the team?” he asked.

Joan guessed he was trying to be funny, for any one could tell Mack was on the team when he had on the baseball suit.

“Well—I’m the *Journal* sport editor,” Mack said, as if in answer to Tebbets.

The *Star* editor snickered as though that were very funny. Little Ruthie toddled toward him, waving her plump hands. She had a gold ring on one of her fat fingers, tied to her wrist with a ribbon. But Mr. Tebbets did not even glance at her standing there. She looked so cute, too. She had her bonnet off now, and her dark hair was mussed. She was frowning because the sun was in her eyes. She looked like a miniature of the editor.

Altogether it was not a promising beginning. The *Star* team looked so much stronger than the *Journal* men. Mack was of slight build and though Tim was tall, he seemed awfully young next to all those strapping *Star* players. Joan was silent as they all trooped along the footpath and up a little slope to the sunny field where the game was to be held. Rude bleachers had been erected by placing boards across wooden boxes. The *Journal* folks, except some of the women who declared it was too hot up there, and the children too young to be interested in baseball, lined up on one side. The *Star* rooters took the other. Chub and Bossy sat on the bench for substitutes. Joan hung about.

“Have we a bat boy?” asked the editor captain, glancing toward the newsboys on the sidelines.

But Joan was ahead of any of them. “Let me!” she begged.

She had played baseball at school and in the neighborhood, besides having attended several of the big games. She knew that the duty of the bat boy was merely to pick up the bat flung to the ground by the player and to get it out of the way. The first time she had ever been a bat boy was when she was only eight years old. She had been hit in the nose by a baseball that time.

“All right,” nodded the editor, and Joan took her place on the field, to the right of the home plate, to be ready.

The two teams, first the *Star* and then the *Journal*, had a bit of batting practice (to sharpen up their batting eye, Chub said) as well as fielding practice. A well-liked deputy sheriff was to act as umpire. Chub spoke of him as “Umps.”

Soon the game was called. The *Journal* team was in the field, and the first *Star* batter was ready to step up to the plate.

“Play ball!” shouted the umpire.

Joan shivered with excitement and was glad again that Tim had made the team. She glanced at him over there between second and third base, ready to live up to the name of his position, and “shortstop” the ball whenever possible. The *Star* made one score during the first inning.

“The *Star* team knows its baseball,” Chub admitted, grumpily, as the *Journal* team trooped in from the field.

Lefty was the first batter up. "Wait for a good one," the crowd advised him, after two balls had been called. He was a good waiter and got a walk. Mack, the second batter, was nailed before he could reach second. A groan escaped the *Journal* rooters as the inning ended and their side had not scored.

Three more innings dragged by without a score for either team. Then, Captain Nixon got his men together and encouraged them with a few, quick words. Aroused to the fight, the *Journal* team battled on. Lefty was still pitching splendidly, while the *Star* pitcher seemed to be weakening under the strain. Even so, the *Star* team managed two runs. Two more scoreless innings followed.

During the first half of the ninth, the *Star* team fought harder than ever. But the *Journal* team was fighting, too. No score was made.

The *Journal* team was at bat again. The *Star* pitcher's balls were going a bit wild. The first batter was struck by the ball and got a base. The second made a base on balls. Then Mack managed a bunt which let the runners on first and second each capture a base. All three bases were full when Lefty came to the bat.

Perhaps the *Star* team had forgotten that Lefty batted the balls left-handed. Anyway, he knocked it straight down the third baseline and fooled the *Journal*'s rivals, for their fielders were not on duty.

"Do a 'Babe Ruth,' Lefty!" yelled the newsboys as Lefty started toward first like a flash. There was no doubt but that all three men would come home safe, making the score four to three. The newsboys started running to the field. The *Journal* had won!

The side lines, under Miss Betty's guidance, burst into the strains of "The Wearing of the Gray." Every one was pounding Lefty on the back. Joan suddenly felt a warm glow in her heart, as though this victory meant that always would the *Journal* win over their rivals, in scoops and in the coming elections. She couldn't help but feel her paper was always right!

Mr. Johnson, who had been standing on the side lines with the other owners of the paper, sought her out. He inquired solicitously after the mystery, and she had to admit they had no new clues. He had to hurry off to Cincinnati, he explained, and would not be able to stay for the supper, but he had enjoyed the game. Joan wondered whether he were proud now that Tim was on the staff, for Tim had been a splendid shortstop.

"Now for a swim!" That was every one's thought after the game. In one corner of Cliff Woods was a lovely, round lake, with bathhouses and rafts. Here, the hot, dusty members of the *Journal* family enjoyed a splash.

As Joan emerged from the bathhouse, her wet suit a limp roll under her arm, her sunburned neck scratchy against her green linen dress, she found Chub

waiting for her. Together, like two hungry bears, they approached the pavilion but were shooed away by a bevy of printers' wives, the refreshment committee, who were surveying the long tables they had set up under the trees. The caterers' wagons had come and gone. "Not quite ready yet," the committee warned.

"Let's go put that rock on the Picnic Pillar," Chub suggested. "It might be too dark if we wait till after supper."

They started up the path again, keeping to the right now, instead of turning left as they had when they went to the ball field. The Picnic Pillar was an old rock tower, where every picnic party added a rock to the monument.

Soon they were in a little dell, where the brook bubbled noisily over the rocks, and ferns and mint and watercress grew in abundance. They began climbing the cliffs. Chub's sneakers gave him good footholds, and he helped to pull Joan up the steep, jutting side of the cliff, up to a flat space where there were more ferns and sweet, spicy-smelling plants. Near the edge of the ridge was the Picnic Pillar, high and towering. Chub found a round, smooth rock, after turning over several until he found one that just suited. He scrambled up on a convenient boulder, and Joan steadied his ankles for him while he reached up and placed the big stone on the top of the pillar—the most recent addition to the stone erection which was a monument of hundreds of happy gatherings.

"Sh, Jo!" Chub had jumped to the ground and was silencing her as she was about to speak. "There's that spooky Dummy down there, creeping along. I saw him from up there; he's just below the ledge—and he's with Tebbets!"

CHAPTER VI

TIM'S SECOND WARNING

Dummy with Tebbets of the *Star*! What could that mean, Joan wondered. "Let's peep over," she whispered to Chub. "Maybe we'll get some clues."

Noiselessly, they crept to the edge of the elevation, fearful of being seen if they stood upright. Stretched out on the ground, clutching the roots of clumps of weeds, they peered over the edge.

There was Dummy, treading with stealthy steps along the path below, and just a few paces ahead of him, just about to disappear into a bushy thicket, was the broad back of the city editor of the *Star*. Why should the *Star* editor and Dummy go for a stroll way up here together unless to talk over some guilty secret? It was clear now to Joan that Dummy was a spy, hired by Tebbets. No true member of the *Journal* family would think of being friends with that awful Tebbets of the rival paper. The two newspapers were often forced to work together, and the two staffs were friendly enough, but just at this time, they were at strained relations over the coming election.

"Tebbetts must know the deaf and dumb language." Joan hardly knew what to think.

"Sure!" Chub snorted. "It's not so hard. How else could he hire Dummy to do his dirty work? He couldn't write everything he wanted to tell him—too dangerous. Tebbets didn't want the picnic people to see him talking sign language, so they came up here."

"Sh! Some one might hear." But there was no one at all in sight now and no sound except for the swaying of the trees and the drowsy hum of unseen insects. "I wish Mr. Johnson hadn't had to hurry off to Cincinnati. You know I promised him not to jump to conclusions, so we can't do anything."

"No, I guess not," agreed the office boy. "Come on, let's get back before all the food's eaten."

Just like a boy, always thinking of food—even in the midst of a mystery. However, the exercise of the game and the swim had given Joan a ravenous appetite, too, so she raced Chub down the steep cliff, stones clattering loose after them until it sounded in that quiet place as though mountains were falling.

When they reached the picnic table, Miss Betty was signaling that she was saving places for them next to her own and Tim's. The *Star* staff had just left,

she said, for they had to get back to their work.

“Oh, boy, fried chicken!” Chub whistled as he viewed the table.

It was a wonderful spread, every one declared. Besides the fried chicken, there was cold baked ham, golden mounds of potato salad, sliced tomatoes, pickles, olives, and towering plates of bread and butter sandwiches.

During the meal, Betty motioned across the table to Mr. Nixon. “Listen to this, will you, chief?” She unfolded a page of familiar yellow copy paper, and cleared her throat preparing to read something aloud. Every one became quiet and listened.

“This is our cub reporter’s write-up of the game this afternoon,” she said and began to read: “‘Lefty Dale did a Dick Merriweather stunt this afternoon, when in the ninth inning in the game between the *Journal* and the *Star*, he poled a circuit clout à la Babe Ruth, with the bases loaded to bring his team from behind with two outs in the last frame.’”

The account went on in Tim’s best baseball manner and told of the game, inning by inning, up to the victorious end.

“Why, that’s good, Martin!” the editor said when Miss Betty had finished reading. “Wish I could publish it as it is, but the general reading public of Plainfield doesn’t want to read about our triumphing over our rivals with all the gory details. Since we aim to give them what they want, just a mere note of the picnic and game score will have to suffice. But your write-up is fine.”

Tim was eating and grinning all at the same time. Mack was scowling at his forkful of salad. Was he afraid that Tim would steal his job from him? Or—was it that he was provoked that Miss Betty was promoting the cub reporter this way? Joan had tried to decide whether Miss Betty wasn’t beginning to like Tim better than she did Mack. But the society editor treated them both as two brothers whom she expected to be pals. Joan was disappointed that the office romance wasn’t blossoming faster.

“That’s a big compliment the editor’s giving Tim,” Joan whispered to Chub, now. He nodded over a cold drumstick in reply.

Talk rattled on. Jokes and clever banter were battered about the table, flung from one to another, like a baseball. The head pressman’s three little boys, up at the other end of the table, were almost choking with the effort of trying to eat and giggle at the same time. The only one who was apparently taking no part in the fun was Dummy. He was sitting on the other side of the table, with the editor’s family and was feeding little Ruthie something out of a bowl. Zweiback and milk was her supper, but she was contented with it.

“Ice cream and cake coming. Save room!” one of the refreshment committee

cautioned Chub. He blushed as every one laughed.

Poor Dummy. He was missing all the jibes, but he seemed to be enjoying himself anyway. Was he only acting a part in being nice to little Ruthie? Wouldn't he be surprised if he knew that they had seen him there with Mr. Tebbets, and that they knew his wicked secret? Now he was playing a silent game of peekaboo with the baby. Silently, Dummy would remove wrinkled hands from his dull blue eyes and little Ruthie would bubble over with baby chuckles.

"I don't see," Joan mused to herself, as she ate another olive, "how a man can seem so nice and make a baby like him like that and still be such a deep-dyed villain."

Every one was tired the next day, for the *Journal* family had lingered at the picnic woods to make the trip home by moonlight. Perhaps that was why a mistake occurred the very next afternoon. It was in a story Tim had written, too. He was not in the office when the error was discovered. Mr. Nixon had sent him up to the library to get a list of new books, in response to a request from Miss Bird, the librarian.

Chub told Joan about the mistake. "Old Nix's on his ear." He seemed as worried as though it were his own brother. "There's another mistake in one of Tim's stories. That write-up about the patronesses of the flower show the Women's Club gives every year for the benefit of the hospital. Old Mrs. McNulty's name was left off the list."

"But is that anything so terrible?" Joan asked. Oh, dear, another mistake!

"Well, you see, the old lady is Mr. Hutton's mother-in-law, you know," he explained. "She likes publicity, too, even though she pretends not to. She called the chief up and gave him a good raking over, I guess. The whole office was pretty blue. Seems she gives lavishly to things she's interested in and is sore as a boil about her name being left off. Besides, the paper wants to stand in good with her."

"Do you think Dummy—?" Joan began.

"Sure thing!" nodded the office boy. "They probably doped it up at the picnic. But I don't know how we can prove that Dummy left that name off. It wasn't on the copy, for Nixon compared that first thing."

Joan's head was swimming as she waited in the *Journal* office for Tim to return. When he came in, he was called to the editor's desk right off, and every one heard Mr. Nixon confronting him with the mistake.

The office was silent, waiting for Tim's reply.

"Guess I am guilty this time," he acknowledged. "I realized afterwards that I had left some names off. I took the notes in a hurry, and filled one piece of paper, and took the last two or three names of the list on another piece, and then I forgot that second page."

He went for his notes on the big hook by his desk. Every one at the *Journal* was required to keep all notes one week, for alibis. Every Saturday, the stuff on the hooks was thrown out. Tim thumbed through the papers on the hook—there were a great many, for this was Saturday, but the one he was looking for was near the top. He found the scrawled list and discovered that two names besides Mrs. McNulty's were written on an extra bit of paper and had been left out of the printed list.

"Well, I guess it's not serious, for no one complained but Mrs. McNulty. Give her a ring and make peace with her." The editor looked relieved, then provoked the very next minute. "But, Martin, really, as a reporter, I must say you're a better ball player. Why can't you be accurate? You've shown you can write. Now, take that baseball write-up yesterday. That was dandy."

"That was fun," Tim showed his relief at being let off. "Writing this other junk isn't."

"That's the regular cub assignment," snapped the editor, turning back to his work. "Remember now, second warning, no more mistakes."

"What's all this about a mistake?" It was Uncle John hurrying out from his sanctum sanctorum.

So he had to be told. "The boy's had the grace to admit that he made it this time," finished up Mr. Nixon. He sounded as though he still believed that Tim had made the first mistake, too—the one about the deserted children.

"Perhaps he will learn more from the mistake than they themselves are worth," Uncle John said. "But be careful, Tim."

Be careful! He would have to be now, Joan realized. She was more puzzled than ever. Even if Tim had made this mistake, she knew she hadn't written Mr. Johnson's name in that other story. She'd have to stick around the office even more than ever now to be ready to help Tim. It was too bad that the only time he had really let her help, that terrible mistake had had to happen. She supposed he was afraid to trust her again. Well, she'd hang around anyway to be on hand if he did want her.

"Say, I'm in an awful rush," Tim said one afternoon. He was always in a rush, it seemed. "Can you look up the stuff for the Ten Years Ago column?"

It was her chance, the first really big thing he had asked her to do since he

allowed her to type that story about the deserted children. Of course, he had let her do little things, like looking up telephone numbers and checking initials.

She'd be extra careful, she resolved, as she picked up Em, who was curled up for a nap on the coverless dictionary. Then she lifted off the dictionary and tugged at the heavy, bound file.

Every day the *Journal* carried a few items culled from these files. It was part of Tim's work to pick out those which he thought would interest the present readers of the *Journal*, and to copy them off verbatim. The beginning of this column was always the same—the type was always left set up in the forms. It said, “The following article was printed in the issue of the *Plainfield Evening Journal* for June—19—” and then came the date, ten years ago. Joan loved the old files; she liked to pore over the yellow pages and laugh at the queer fashions that were in vogue in the fifteen and twenty years ago numbers—long skirts that trailed on the ground, veils and funny hats. Why, Mother had a queer old silk blouse up in the attic, almost like that picture.

She learned to pick out items about prominent men—men who had not been so prominent ten years ago. Some of the issues were as interesting as stories, real stories, not just news ones. Then she'd type them off, so very carefully.

“Those old files are full of good stories,” Betty told her. “Don't you know that half of the authors nowadays get their plots from newspaper clippings?”

“Do they?” Joan was interested.

“Sure, that's why they sound as though they couldn't possibly have happened,” laughed Tim. “Because they actually did.”

Well, wasn't their mystery as impossible-sounding as any made up one? All the while she was watching Dummy every possible chance. She had come upon him suddenly several times “out back” and he had scurried out of the way, like a cat caught in the cream. She and Chub spent every minute they could “sleuthing the office” as he called it. “Watch everything! That's the only way,” he told her.

So Joan watched, and discovered that Betty didn't go out to lunch with Mack any more, but she and Tim went out at the same time and often lunched together at a white-tiled place, with copper bowls of scarlet apples and golden oranges in the window. Mother thought it was silly of him to spend his salary on lunches when he lived right next door to his job, and said so.

Of course Miss Betty couldn't help but like Tim when he tried to be nice, and he did try. He would leave foolish notes addressed to “Betty Barefacts” on Miss Betty's desk. Joan discovered one on the society editor's hook when she was destroying her notes for her. It read:

Dear Miss Barefacts,

I am a young man with passes to the stock company. Is it proper to ask a girl to go to a show on passes?

T. M.

Mack didn't tease so much any more, either. He seemed provoked that Betty was preferring Tim. Once when Tim was busy at his machine, and Mack was going out to lunch, his hat punched down over his eyes, Joan asked him timidly, "Mack, may I use your machine to copy this Ten Years Ago To-Day?"

He seemed about to give a nod of assent, when Joan added, coaxingly, "Your typewriter is better than Tim's. His commas have no heads."

Instantly the sport editor's face changed. "You keep out of here." He jammed the cracked, black canvas cover down over his machine, and strode out of the office, muttering what he thought about a newspaper in a jay town like this that let a kid stick around every minute!

Joan was bewildered, until she looked across the office now and saw Betty and Tim laughing together over some letter she had received for the Advice to the Lovelorn column. Then she thought she understood. Mack was peeved because Betty liked Tim—and about the lunches and notes and shows. But why shouldn't she prefer big, broad-shouldered, dark-haired Tim to that silly, pink-mustached sport editor, even though Tim was only seventeen? And, of course, Mack wasn't going to treat his rival's sister nicely.

Things seemed rather at a standstill. To be sure, Mr. Johnson stopped in at the office about every other day, when he was in town, and he always asked after the mystery. He was interested in learning that Dummy was seen in the woods with Mr. Tebbets, but didn't seem to think that it proved anything. Almost every time Mr. Johnston came he had a box in his hand.

"It's typewriter supplies," he would say as he handed it to Joan, with a grin upon his bulldog features.

Expecting to find a new ribbon for the machine, she would open it always to find that it was candy.

"Aren't you a typewriter?" he would explain, amused at his own joke. He was always surprised to realize that she could type.

Joan would pass the candy all around, to the girls in the front office, to the business staff and to the men out back. Dummy always wrote a polite "Thank you" on his pad, when he took a piece, and always gave her a smile.

Poor old Dummy, he might seem innocent enough, as Mr. Johnson appeared to believe, but it was he, Joan was sure, who had changed the name and address

on the story she had typed for Tim his second day at the *Journal* and had brought about all the trouble. For Tim was still on trial.

Tim's probation brought one good result, however. He was working harder than ever and turning in more and better copy, and at the end of the week he got his first real assignment.

CHAPTER VII

CHUB GETS AN IDEA

Joan happened to be in the *Journal* office that morning when Tim got the assignment.

“Martin, get a picture of this girl that’s going to marry Judge Hudson,” Editor Nixon said over his red date book. “We’ll use it to-morrow. Now, don’t fall down on this.”

Tim reddened a bit at this, but he said nothing. He had never been sent out after a bride’s picture before. But Joan guessed that Editor Nixon was giving him an opportunity to retrieve himself for the mistakes. Therefore, she knew immediately that he simply must get that picture.

Miss Betty had sent for Joan to help her check up some lists of wedding guests that morning. Her part was to verify the names and initials by looking them up in the city directory. The *Journal* was “death on accuracy,” as Tim often said.

“The Judge is marrying that Miss Edith King,” Miss Betty told her. “Tim’s a whiz if he gets that picture. The Kings pride themselves on their modesty, I guess. Anyway, I’ve been squelched by some of the best people, but never quite so thoroughly as when Mrs. King made up her daughter’s mind that they didn’t want her picture in the paper.”

Tim had heard part of Miss Betty’s conversation and came over. “I suppose I might ask the Judge for his girl’s picture.”

“I did,” replied the society editor, “with my most winning smile. Told him what a wonderful girl he was marrying and all that. She’s got him under her thumb. He admitted he had dozens of pictures of his fiancée, but he doesn’t dare let us have one. ‘She told me not to.’ When an engaged man says that, you might as well give up.”

Joan knew Judge Hudson, or “Judge Hal” as he was called. He was the youngest judge in the municipal court, and every one liked him.

Cookie looked up from his desk in the corner. He was always willing to help a new man. “Don’t give up before you try, Tim,” he warned now. “When the editor says get something, he doesn’t mean for you to come back empty-handed.”

“I told Lefty to snap her getting into her car some time, if he gets a chance,” stated Miss Betty.

“It’s up to me to round up the studios.” Tim reached for his hat.

It made no difference whether a person wanted his picture in the paper or not. If the *Journal* thought it should go in, in it went. The photographers in town helped out, too. They couldn’t offer a picture without the customer’s consent, of course, but they could and did permit the reporters to look over their records, and, when they found what they wanted, would make a proof of it for the paper—in return for many favors in the way of advertising “readers” or “puffs,” little squibs in the social column that looked like real bits of news. The paper guaranteed the photographers would be protected in event of trouble.

This part of the newspaper game had always worried Joan a bit, but Chub, the office boy, had told her, “Ugh, half the time when folks say no, they really mean yes, and are tickled pink when the picture comes out. Anyway, after the picture’s been published, they can’t do anything. Besides, what’d a newspaper be without pictures?”

Even Miss Betty stood up for the newspaper ethics.

“If people would only understand,” sighed Cookie, “that a reporter is a reasonable creature. It would not hurt that Miss King to give us just one picture, and then every one would be happy. Reporters will always play fair if treated right. People show their true character by the way they react to a newspaper inquiry,” he went on; “if they’re snobs, it comes out. A newspaper is a public institution and folks should help reporters instead of hindering them.”

“I’m glad he didn’t give me that assignment,” rejoiced the society editor, now. “I’ll be glad when June is over. I’ve described so many bridal costumes, I’ve used up all the adjectives in my Roget’s *Thesaurus*. If you ever get married, Jo, take pity on the poor society editor and don’t do it in June.”

At lunch time, Tim came home, frowning and silent. It was not until he started on his dessert, which was his favorite apple cake, that Joan dared ask him how things had gone that morning.

“Went to the three best studios,” he mumbled.

“And none of them had Miss King’s picture?” she asked, and then realized how silly that was, because if Tim had the photo, he wouldn’t be so grumpy-looking.

“I did find one place where she’d had a picture taken,” Tim said. “But it didn’t do me any good. I found her name on the list at Barton’s studio, for back a couple of years. But when Mr. Barton went to his files to look up the plate to make me a proof—he files ’em by years, see?—he found that that was the year his studio was damaged by fire, and all the plates ruined.”

“Oh, Tim!” Joan knew how tragic it was. “But can’t you find any one who has

a picture of Miss King?"

"Fat chance she hasn't posted all her friends not to give the *Journal* her picture since she's so dead set against it." Tim jabbed savagely at the second piece of cake.

When Tim had finished his lunch, Joan made up her mind to go over to the *Journal* office. Maybe Miss Betty would have some suggestion to offer in this dilemma. If only she could really help Tim!

Mother saw her hurrying through the dish-washing and knew why.

"Joan, I do wish you would be like other girls," she complained, "and sit down once in a while with a bit of embroidery, instead of traipsing around after Tim."

"Girls don't do that any more, Mother, unless they're going to take up embroidery as a career," Joan laughed. "And I'm not. I'm going to be a reporter like Miss Betty and I have to learn all I can about the job, to be ready. There's a girl in my class who's going to be an architect. She's taking lessons, already. Her father's one, and he's teaching her."

Tim was scowling and talking to Miss Betty when Joan reached the *Journal* office. "The chief's on his ear about that King girl's picture," he said. "I've been to every studio in town, and I can't get it. And I'm afraid the *Star* will come out with it."

"Gosh!" ejaculated Miss Betty. "Municipal court judges would stay bachelors, if they knew how much trouble their modest, retiring brides-to-be made us."

"Isn't there any way to get it?" Joan appealed to Miss Betty.

"I don't know," the society editor answered, as her fingers pounded out write-ups of social functions. "I don't believe Tim can get that picture anyway, short of going over to the King home and snatching it off the mantel."

"Oh, is there one on their mantel?"

Miss Betty laughed at her eagerness. "There is. I saw it with my own two eyes when I went there to cover the announcement tea last week. The tea table was right in front of the fireplace, so that's where I parked, having had no lunch that day, and the caterer behind the table mistaking me for one of Plainfield's sub-debs. That's how I happened to notice the picture. I was tempted to grab it then."

Miss Betty was joking, most likely, but Joan noticed that Chub was listening, intently, too.

"I don't suppose it would do any good to ask the Judge again," said Tim.

"Let me ask him," begged Joan. "I'll coax so hard."

"Well, no harm for the kid to try, I guess."

Joan started off to Plainfield's weather-beaten city hall, and found Judge Hal in his office, with his hat on and a briefcase under his arm. He was fumbling on his desk, among the papers.

"I'm from the *Journal*," she explained.

The judge looked at her. "New office girl?"

"Well, sort of..." she answered. After all, wasn't she?

"Here, then," he thrust some papers into her hand. "I'm glad you came. You look more reliable than that red-headed imp. Here's the stuff the *Journal* wanted about that case."

Joan took them. "But I wanted to ask you about Miss King's picture? Couldn't you let me have one? It'd be such a favor, and would help my brother so much. He's the cub reporter."

The judge stared. "Miss King's picture?" he repeated, and he seemed cross. "Well, I should say not. You're the second one that's asked for that to-day. Some young upstart from the *Star* was bothering me about it, too. Miss King's shy and retiring," he interrupted, "and doesn't like publicity."

"But she ought to like it," Joan told him almost tearfully. "If she's going to marry a young judge. You'll need lots of publicity and the support of the paper. Every time her picture's in the paper, it'll help you."

"No, no!" The judge was waving his hat and briefcase at her. "I'm in a frightful hurry, dashing to make a train. Why should they want that picture so much? Why all the interest in *us*?"

"I'm sure I don't know," Joan snapped, and wondered what in the world made her speak so rudely. Probably it was the sting of disappointment. Then, too, there was the added anxiety of the knowledge that the *Star* was after the picture, too. Oh, the *Journal* mustn't be beaten! "I don't know why Plainfield is so interested. For all *I* care you can marry as many girls as you please. But the people are interested, and my paper gives 'em what they want. And they want that picture."

Joan was flinging her remarks after the judge, as she followed him across the room, for he was hurrying off, now.

Joan reached the corridor just in time to see the elevator flattening out its iron gates with judge and briefcase inside. He was gone!

Well, she'd take the papers he had given her back to the *Journal* office, and then she'd think up some way to get the picture of Miss King. Instead of being stumped by the judge's curt refusal, she was now all the more determined to get it.

She left the papers with Chub, and since the staff seemed busy, she went on home and started weeding the zinnia bed. She could think better if she were

doing something. She rather liked weeding the garden, especially the flowers on the *Journal* side of the house, for then she could watch all the excitement that went on over there and not miss anything. The zinnias, being on that side, always received extra attention. It was shady there now, too. She *had* to help Tim. He mustn't fail—not after that other mistake he had really made. Oh, it seemed as though he were hoodooed. But this trouble could not be blamed upon any one. Not even the mysterious Dummy could have caused this.

Was Tim going to be a good reporter, after all? Daddy had had strong ideas on what kind of a person was cut out for a reporter. Tim seemed to like sports. Perhaps he should have tried to be a coach or something, instead of a reporter.

Tim simply had to get that picture somehow. If only Editor Nixon hadn't said, "Don't fall down on this," it wouldn't be so bad. He must think that Tim was not doing his best, after all. That's why he had given him the hard assignment. If she could get that picture, then Tim would have to admit she was a real help. Besides, the editor expected the reporters to let nothing short of accident or death keep them from fulfilling an assignment.

Just then, the Doughnut Woman came around the house toward the kitchen door. "Is your ma to home, Joan?"

The Doughnut Woman came to the house every Wednesday. She had been coming for years. Her basket was faintly stained with grease and smelled sweetly of warm, powdered sugar. Mother always bought a dozen doughnuts every Wednesday, because Tim liked them and because she felt sorry for the Doughnut Woman. She had pathetic brown eyes and wore the most outlandish clothes. To-day, hot as it was, she was wearing a green plaid silk blouse and a black skirt. A wide sailor hat and flat-heeled shoes completed her costume.

"Mother's taking a little nap," Joan told her. "But she left the doughnut money. I'll get it."

When she came back, there was Chub parked on the kitchen steps. "I saw the doughnuts and came on over," he explained. "Thought I heard you call me."

Joan laughed. He hadn't thought so at all, but he was welcome. Mother never cared if she gave Chub a doughnut or so. It always amused Mother that Chub admired Tim so much.

"Now don't you two go eat 'em all up before your brother comes home." The Doughnut Woman handed Joan one of the paper bags from her basket. "You know he does dote on my doughnuts. Well, I use the best of everything in them. You could feed my doughnuts to a baby. They wouldn't hurt it."

"They sure are good." Chub bit into one Joan offered him and made a sugar mustache upon his lips. He was eyeing the Doughnut Woman over the sugar

morsel.

“Tell your ma I hope she gets a good rest. I’m glad she don’t have to peddle doughnuts the way I do, when the days is so hot,” said the Doughnut Woman as she took her leave.

The two watched her around the house. “Isn’t she a scream?” asked Joan. “She looks like some of the pictures in the files of the *Journal* fifteen years ago. Mother has a blouse like that in the attic, only it’s even worse looking because it’s red.”

“Has she?” Chub asked. “Do you suppose you could find it for me—an outfit like that? I’d like to have it ready, in case I needed it some time. In case I wanted to fool people again the way I did last April Fool’s Day, remember?”

Joan did. She and Amy had been invited to a party given by one of their classmates. Chub had offered to escort them there and had arranged to meet them on a certain corner. When Joan and Amy reached the place, there was no one there under the dim street light but a dumpy colored woman, with a basket on her arm, bent over what appeared to be a thick stick. There the two girls had waited, with increasing annoyance, for Chub who had not appeared at the end of twenty minutes. In no uncertain words they said exactly what they thought of a boy who would treat two girls like that. Finally, almost with tears of vexation in their eyes, they decided to hail the next street car and go to the party alone and unescorted.

Hardly had they mounted the car steps than the colored woman came hobbling after them, screaming, “Hey, wait for me!” She picked up her skirts, displaying two legs in knickers and boyish hose and shoes, and ran to the car. In the glare of the lighted street car, they saw a rim of red hair peeping under the bandanna when the woman approached. It was Chub, ready with nickels to pay their fares. The stick he had been leaning on was nothing but a ball bat. He had been particularly elated at having fooled Amy.

“But, Chub,” Joan objected now, “it’s suffocating in the attic.”

“Oh, come on, be a sport,” he pleaded; “I want to assemble my ensemble for Hallowe’en.”

“Well, all right,” she gave in. The attic was so hot she stayed there only long enough to yank the red silk blouse and other things out of the trunks. She found an old tweed skirt of mother’s and a panama hat that Tim had discarded. The skirt was too small in the waist for Chub, but they made it fit with a big safety pin. It reached to his ankles. The panama hat brim came down over his eyes. His own dusty brown oxfords gave just the right effect. As a final touch, Joan, really interested now, added a pair of shell-rimmed glasses that Tim had once worn to a

movie party when he had assumed the role of Harold Lloyd.

“It’s perfect, Chub,” she giggled. “Wait till I get Mother’s covered basket, and you’ll look exactly like the Doughnut Woman.”

She found the basket in the pantry, and Chub put the rest of the doughnuts in the bag to give it a bit of reality.

“Guess I’ll go over to the office and give the folks a laugh,” he decided. “You stay here or they’ll guess who I am.”

Joan turned again to her weeding and her thoughts. How could she get that picture for Tim? Betty’s joking remark about snatching the picture off the mantel came to her now, as she pulled viciously at the weeds.

Remembering Cookie’s story—how he had been forced to play the part of chore boy to get that story of the wedding in the East—she wondered whether she might not go to the King home on some pretense and get the picture, returning it after it had been in the paper. If this were a movie, now, she’d dress up as a dainty little maid with cap and apron and get a job in the King household and then disappear with the picture. But she had to do something *quick*!

The idea of a disguise seemed so safe. But maids in caps and aprons did not walk the streets in Plainfield. Anyway, she wouldn’t really have the nerve to go herself, though, and there was no one she could send on such an errand. Chub would be willing enough, but he would only bungle things.

She looked up and saw Chub still standing at the sidewalk in front of her home. He hadn’t gone to the *Journal* office, but was just standing there. Now, he was starting, slowly because of the long skirt, but he was going north instead of over to the *Journal*. Where could he be going in that garb?

Suddenly she realized that his mind had been working along the same lines as her own. She was sure just where Chub was going and why—he was going after that picture. It was just like him, and he, too, wanted to help Tim.

Oh, she shouldn’t let him. Why, that was a terrible thing, even for a mischievous office boy to do.

“Chub,” she called, “you better come back here.”

But the strangely attired figure hurried on. “Well, let him go,” thought Joan. “Maybe he won’t get the picture after all, but if he does it’ll be wonderful.” She hopped up, deciding, “I’ll just trail along after him.” Why, this was even more thrilling than the mystery about Dummy.

CHAPTER VIII

CHUB TAKES A HAND

And as for Chub—

He had had no idea of going over to the *Journal* office and showing off. He hadn't known precisely how else to get away from Joan, and that had been as good a way as any. Not that he would really have minded confiding his scheme to her. She was a good sport, and usually as much fun as a boy. But somehow he felt in his bones that she might object, and when Joan felt strongly about anything, she could lay down the law to him and be as bossy as her friend, Amy. He had decided not to give her the opportunity. After it was all over and he had the picture safely in his hands, that was time enough to tell her how he had come by it.

It was the old Doughnut Woman who'd given him the idea of getting into the King home, disguised, and capturing the picture. He had nearly told Joan his plan, but hesitated, realizing what a "stickler" for honesty she was.

No, this was something Joan had better not get mixed up with. Girls couldn't do things like this; things like masquerading and snatching things off people's mantels were for men to do. Chub had come to the *Journal* office, full of stories he had read about newspaper reporters. Of course, he supposed things like that didn't really happen in real life, though old Cookie was always saying stranger things happened than were ever read in books. Hadn't Cookie played the rôle of chore boy in order to get that story when he was on the *New York Banner*? And the secret about Dummy and the mysterious mistakes—gosh, now, that'd make a swell detective story.

He had walked as slowly as possible around the house and at Joan's front steps his courage had almost given out. Suppose one of the staff should see him and recognize him even in this get-up! It was one thing to dress up like an old colored mammy with face black beyond recognition and to stand on a half-dim street corner at night for a joke on Joan and Amy. This was different. It was broad daylight. He began to feel just a little foolish in the outfit. Besides, the skirt was hot and scratchy. Perhaps he oughtn't to go. But—he wanted to for Tim. He adored Joan's brother.

He stood at the sidewalk, almost ready to turn back, when he caught Joan's eyes upon him. He knew that she suspected he was up to something, but he did not dream she had really guessed his secret. That decided him, if she was going

to start bossing him, that this was his clew to do exactly as he pleased. He turned and hurried down the street toward the North Side. Joan wasn't going to tell him what he could and could not do.

Anyway, even if some of the *Journal* people did see him from the windows, they would think him only some sort of peddler. He looked a little like a gypsy, he reflected.

Slowly he made his way along North Market Street. After he had passed several pedestrians who cast only casual glances in his direction, he felt better and began to walk more confidently. At one corner, just before he crossed the bridge, right in front of the Plainfield jail, he met Amy but she did not know him. He could not stifle a giggle. It was a silly sounding giggle. Perhaps people would think he was a crazy person.

Amy was hurrying along, with a rolled-up something under her arm that he guessed was her bathing suit. For all her being a perfect lady, Amy was a good swimmer, and Chub had to admire her for that. Otherwise, he thought her a total loss and wondered that Joan tolerated her. Would she be surprised if she knew who he was? What was she looking so scared about, anyway? Was she scared of him in this rakish get-up? Then he recalled that Amy always dreaded to pass the jail. Gosh, she sure was a simp. Why, he bet Joan would just as soon go right up and interview one of the jailbirds. Joan was a good sport.

How different everything looked when you were pretending to be some one else. It was almost as though he were walking down a strange street in a strange city.

Over the bridge, the residential part of Market Street began. Several more blocks, then around a corner and there on Maple Street was the King home, a big yellow house with a wide porch across the front, set up on a terrace. The street was shady and deserted. Except for Amy, he had not met any one he knew. It hadn't been so bad, and soon he would have the picture in his hands. Wouldn't Joan be surprised, and Tim—just think how pleased he'd be to have the office boy risk everything for him like this.

He had his plan all mapped out. He'd go to the front door, and boldly ask whether doughnuts were wanted. It would probably be answered by a maid and when she went to ask Mrs. King about the doughnuts, Chub would seize the picture. If she bought the doughnuts right away, why, Chub'd sell her the solitary bagful, with the short dozen in it that was in his basket, and would manage some way to get into the house.

Up the steps and across the porch. Masquerading was fun, after you got used to it. But the long skirt was swelteringly hot. The panama hat was tight and hurt

him where the bows of the spectacles pressed into his head.

No one answered his ring right away, so Chub peeped through the door. It opened into the living room, which looked like a furniture ad. Just across the room was a red brick fireplace. Chub pressed his face closer till the spectacles clinked against the glass. There was a picture of a girl on the fireplace. Just as Miss Betty had said. He had been rather anxious for fear she had been joking. The *Journal* folks did joke so much you never could tell when they weren't stringing you.

He waited and then pressed the bell again—hard. Perhaps it didn't ring unless you pressed it very hard.

Some one came across the room and the door was opened suddenly. It was a maid, big and fat and as black as the ink he used to put on the advertising roller. She almost filled the doorway. It would be hard to pass her.

"D-do you want any doughnuts?" Chub's chin quivered now when he began to speak, in spite of himself.

The colored woman eyed him, and took in every detail from the glasses down to the sport hose and oxfords. "What you mean, ring ma do'bell like dat?"

"Why—I thought maybe it was broken," Chub explained.

"Hit will be broken, if you keep on ringing hit like dat," she snapped. "What's the idea of ringing hit dat way?"

Chub remembered his character. "Do you want some doughnuts? Nice, fresh doughnuts, only thirty cents a dozen."

"No, we don't." The door began to shut.

"I use the best of everything in them," Chub persisted, recalling the Doughnut Woman's chatter. "You can feed them to the baby."

"Hain't got no baby," was the answer. "I wouldn't feed 'em to no dog."

Somehow, she reminded Chub so much of himself, as he had looked and acted April Fool's Day, that he almost laughed. The door began again to close.

Chub, frantic that his plan was failing when he was this near his goal, put one sturdy oxford in the door and held it open. He couldn't give up, now. "Just go ask the lady of the house if she'd like some nice, fresh doughnuts, my good woman." He had heard that phrase, "my good woman," on the stage, and thought it would impress the maid.

He had to get that picture!

"Ma name's Sarah, and not 'my good woman' like dat. I ain't aiming to budge. I done told you, we don't want none of your doughnuts." She began mumbling under her breath again.

What should he do? Ideas, usually so ready for him in an emergency, seemed to have left him stranded, now. Then he had a thought. “But you’re new here, aren’t you?” he asked.

“Right new,” Sarah admitted. “But what’s dat to you?”

“Well, Mrs. King’s been getting doughnuts for years and years,” Chub rattled on, with a sick smile. “I’m just sure she wants them. Just ask her, will you?”

Sarah was unconvinced, but she edged a bit, wheeled around in the doorway and waddled toward the stairs at the end of the room.

Chub dashed to the fireplace, and grabbed the picture. There was only one there. He was out of the house like a flash, his tweed skirt flapping against his legs, the bag of doughnuts rattling around in the basket.

“Tell Mrs. King I had to have this, but I’ll send it back all right,” he called over his shoulder in panting gasps, as he hurried down the steps to the sidewalk.

Fat Sarah loomed in the doorway, calling wild words. Now she was starting down the steps after Chub, wheezing and groaning and waving her pink-palmed black hands.

She was coming down the sidewalk! “Stop, thief! Robber! Help! Murder!”

Chub was glad that the street was deserted and that he was a good runner. He picked up the tweed skirt and went faster.

Black Sarah followed to the corner, but Chub was around it and down an alley by that time. He could outrun Sarah, even in a gunny sack, he was sure. Clutching the picture in one hand, the basket bouncing on his other arm, he trotted down the alleys parallel to Market Street. Suddenly his skirt seemed to be grabbing him about the ankles, getting longer and longer. He transferred the picture to his other hand, and felt at the back of the skirt. The pin was gone, and the skirt was coming off. Chub let it fall to the ground, stepping out of it as he ran, kicking it ahead with one foot and catching it up in his arms, without slacking his speed. He probably looked crazier than ever now, with his short knickers and that red blouse. Just before the last alley brought him to the bridge, where he would have to cross into Plainfield’s business section, he decided to discard his disguise right there. He peeled off the blouse, flipped off the glasses, and pulled off the hat. Then he squeezed everything into the basket. He put the picture inside, too, for safekeeping.

Chub was so elated over his success that he felt like racing when he came out on the street again. It was so good to be free of those cumbersome old clothes, too. At the bridge, he passed two men talking together.

“They’re saying up the street that the King home has just been robbed,” one of them said.

Chub shuddered as he hurried on. He supposed he was a thief. But he was merely borrowing the picture for the paper. He would have it back on the King fireplace, safe and sound, to-morrow. He'd take it back himself. No, maybe Sarah would recognize him even without his disguise and would wallop him with her mighty black arm. She was capable of anything. He'd send it back by a regular messenger.

"Yoo-whoo! Chub, wait!" He heard a call and looked back over his shoulder. Joan was coming toward him.

Hidden behind a tree, Joan had watched Chub's encounter with Sarah, though she could not hear their conversation. When he had disappeared down an alley, she had started on back home, so she was surprised to see him hurrying along ahead of her when she reached the bridge. She knew he had the picture, for she had seen it in his hand when he emerged down the King steps, tripping over the tweed skirt. But he refused to show it to her until they reached her own yard, when he transferred the basket and its contents to her.

Tim was at the editor's desk when she and Chub came into the office. "Think we're getting out a weekly?" the editor was bawling. "Is this all the copy you can turn in?"

"I would have had more," Tim defended himself. "But I spent most of the day hunting for the King girl's picture."

"Where is it?"

"I haven't it," Tim answered and added, "yet."

Joan wished they could go over now, but she knew Tim would be provoked if Editor Nixon found out they had hunted for the picture. They could do nothing but stand there in the doorway and listen.

"It's got to be in the hands of the engraver by ten in the morning," the editor said. "So get a wiggle on, Martin."

They reached Tim's desk before he did, and held out the picture.

"Oh, fine!" Tim did not even say thank you, but the grateful look on his face repaid them for all their trouble. He went back to the editor's desk with the picture.

"Good for you, Martin!" shouted the editor. "I didn't believe anybody could get that picture!" He looked at it. "Yes, that's the girl, all right. Looks a bit like Jacqueline Joyce, the screen star, doesn't it, Betty?"

The society editor looked at it. "A little," she agreed. "Seems to me I've heard people say that."

The *Star* didn't have the picture, after all. After the *Journal* was out, next afternoon, Joan started over to meet Miss Betty, who was going to treat her at the tea room for helping her yesterday morning. The *Journal* staff often went there between meals, and it somehow gave Joan a deliciously grown-up feeling. Mother, scandalized at the idea, had said, "There's toast left from breakfast and plenty of fresh fruit, if you're really hungry." Joan had pointed out, "It isn't that, Mother. I just want to eat *out*."

Besides, she wanted to confide to Miss Betty all about yesterday and to ask her advice about the best method of returning the picture.

When she entered the front office she found Chub, rather pale beneath his freckles, laughing away with Gertie, the ad girl.

"Oh, gee, Jo, you're just about two minutes too late," he grinned. "You missed it."

"What?"

"The grand finale to the King act," he went on. "Mamma King and Daughter King—I suppose I should call them the Queen and the Princess—just left here, with...."

"With the Betrothed Knight," added Gertie.

"The Kings?" Joan's mind groped. "Was she provoked about the picture?"

"Well, she was put out," admitted Chub. "I thought Tim and me'd both lose our jobs, immediately, if not sooner. But she never got to see Nix, and everything's O.K. now. You see, it just happened that the *Journal* came out with the wrong picture. That was a picture of Jacqueline Joyce that we—we came across. Mamma King was fit to be tied. But I saved the day. I told 'em how we wanted to help the cub reporter, and how when an editor says get it, he doesn't mean you to come back empty-handed."

"The wrong picture!" Joan felt a little sick.

"Chub apologized all over the place, 'n' everything," put in Gertie, "but he couldn't make an impression until *he* came in—"

"Judge Hal," Chub explained. "He was just back from Dayton and found out they were down here. Hadn't seen the picture, but only laughed about it, even when I had to admit that I was the 'queer old character' who Mrs. King said hooked it off the mantel. It seems he has a soft spot in his heart for reporters, 'cause he used to be editor of his college mag., and knows how mistakes happen. He was a prince, all right! He said *you* jumped all over him yesterday and he'd thought over all you'd said, and decided you were right, and that it was mostly their own fault for not letting the paper have the picture. Well, somehow or other, *he* pacified them and took 'em home."

And they had tried so hard to help Tim. But to get out of it all so nicely!

“He even got her to promise to give us her latest picture,” he went on. “He said you were such a spunky kid asking for it, and if no one knew anything but them, it didn’t need to be mentioned that the wrong picture was used. They’re both going to pose for Lefty, this afternoon, they promised.”

Both of them! A special photo with “... by the Staff Photographer” printed underneath. That would be a real scoop for the *Journal*. Usually, the society people of Plainfield would smash Lefty’s camera rather than pose before it.

Gertie was busy now, taking an ad for a customer who’d come in. Chub whispered above the thump, thump of the stamp he was marking on the ad sheets, “Well, Jo, there’s another mistake we couldn’t blame on Dummy. Maybe those others were real ones, too.”

But Joan knew that the story she had typed had been changed.

CHAPTER IX

A MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE

Tim was being careful these days. His whole job depended on his accuracy. The editor had said to Mack when he commissioned the sport editor once to read copy, "You have to watch Martin's stuff. He's apt to make mistakes."

Tim *had* made but one mistake, though Joan could not prove it. So he had to be extra careful.

Joan was out in the grassy yard, one morning, playing a game of croquet with Em, the cat. Joan did the playing for both herself and her opponent, who stalked about with a very disinterested air. Joan was playing with one eye on the *Journal* office. Suddenly Chub rapped on the window and called her over.

When she reached the *Journal* office, Chub was standing outside one of the phone booths, waving the telephone receiver at her. "It's for you."

Joan went inside the airless booth—still partly filled with smoke because one of the men of the staff had been in there recently. The booth had penciled numbers all over the woodwork. That list of numbers in one corner were those of the undertakers. Tim let her call them once in awhile, when he was pretty sure there were no deaths, and had instructed her to call him to the phone if there were any to be reported. Joan had learned to know the different voices at the other end of each number. She did not like that part of the cub's job. It seemed so cold-blooded to ask, "Anything for the *Journal*?" She was always relieved to have the politely mournful voice say, "No, nothing to-day."

"Listen, Jo," it was Tim at the other end of the wire. His voice sounded excited. "I'm stuck out here in Baiting Town, covering a Lodge picnic, and I can't get back in time. I just realized that I've let a mistake go through. It's that story about the charity play. I wrote it up from the dress rehearsal yesterday morning. It was to come off last night, but the leading lady came down with tonsillitis and it's been postponed. So kill the story for me, won't you? Grab it off the hook, if it hasn't been set."

Kill it! That had a horrible sound, but that meant only voiding the story—throwing it out. She hoped it hadn't really got into print, for then they would have to stop the presses. That would be dreadful. Chub had told her once that it cost the *Journal* a great deal of time, expense and labor to stop the presses. But it would have to be done. The paper couldn't come out with a long story about a play that had not come off. Tim had been so proud of that play assignment, too.

“Give me about a column on this,” the editor had said and had consented to Tim’s attending the dress rehearsal in order to have the story all set up, ready to come out on the heels of the performance.

Joan slammed down the receiver and dashed through the swinging door to the composing room. She went straight to the big hook where the day’s copy hung and began thumbing through it. As she stood there, she became aware of some sort of confusion going on in the proofreader’s corner. He and Mack seemed to be having an argument.

Dummy could argue, though he seldom did. It was too much trouble for any one to carry on his part in writing. Mack would write something, Dummy would read the pad, and he would write. Mack would write again. Then Dummy would merely point to an item already written on his pad. This seemed to provoke Mack even more, for he would have to write new arguments.

Joan had gone through all the stories on the hook and had not found the one about the charity play. As she started over again to look once more, she glanced back at the two men over in the corner.

Dummy was beginning to write something, asserting whatever it was with fierce strokes of his pencil. Mack, reading as Dummy wrote, seemed crosser than ever and grabbed Dummy’s pencil. This infuriated the proofreader, and Joan did not wonder. To have his pencil taken away from him like that! Why, that was as if some one seized your tongue and held it so you could not speak.

Well, the story wasn’t here. She’d have to ask Dummy what happened to it. Maybe he had not read proof on it yet.

As she approached, both men glanced up and dropped their quarrel, pretending that there had been no argument. Joan was puzzled. Perhaps Mack had been merely teasing poor old Dummy. But no, the proofreader’s eyes were hard and glittering with real anger. Joan felt it had been more than a mere bandying of words. Mack strolled off, abruptly, sauntering with his important little way, that caused Amy to call him “high hat.” Being on the copy desk once in a while was giving him the big head, Chub said.

Joan looked at Dummy. He did not look like a villain. However, she felt again as she had when she had discovered his eyes upon her that first day Tim was on the paper. What was there peculiar about him? Was it shyness or secretiveness?

He had regained his pencil now, and Joan borrowed it to write on the clean pad sheet that he presented, “Where is the story about the charity....”

“Yes,” he wrote without waiting for her to finish. “Where is it? That’s what I want to know.”

That’s what they had been arguing about, Joan guessed.

“The story was wrong—” Joan began.

“I know it,” Dummy had the pencil again. “I went to the hook to get it to keep it out, because another story came through about Miss Florence Webb having tonsillitis.”

Joan was sure he had intended to make changes in one of Tim’s stories. But she did not say or write anything. She was too worried. Had the story gone through? Suddenly, as she stood there, thinking, there sounded in her ears a familiar and terrible racket, unearthly and unending. The presses were running.

“Stop the presses!” She ran toward the big Goss giant in the pressroom. She could not let that story come out. The *Journal* would look ridiculous, printing something that hadn’t happened.

Dummy sensed her words and followed, trying with gestures to soothe her. If she had not known he was a villain, she would have thought him very nice. He always treated her as though she were grown up. But she knew he really wanted that story to go through.

However, his glances and gestures were kind enough—as consoling as words. He smiled as she seized one of the damp, fresh papers. What did that smile mean? He was a puzzle.

Joan opened out the paper, and with the proofreader looking over her shoulder, she went through the whole issue, column by column.

“It isn’t in!” she cried. Tim was safe. By some miracle, the charity play story had been left out. The presses would not have to be stopped, after all. Oh, blessed relief!

Dummy had taken the paper from her limp hand, and was going through it again. Then he shook his head. Was he relieved, too? Or was he sorry that the terrible mistake hadn’t been made? Was he merely jealous of Tim’s job or was he a spy, as they thought?

Things looked suspicious, though, she thought. Mack and Dummy had been arguing about this very story. And where was the story? It seemed to have simply disappeared. She had really no facts to present to Mr. Johnson. She’d have to wait and watch some more. She and Chub had been so busy chasing that picture of Miss King, working so hard to get it that they very nearly got into hot water because they got the wrong one, while all the time something really important was brewing right under their noses here in the back room of the *Journal*.

Joan, hurrying out to the editorial office to tell Chub the latest details, brushed past Bossy, who was ambling into the front office with a bundle of papers on his arm. He was muttering to himself, “Quare goin’s on around heah, dat’s what I

say.”

Bossy was always mumbling under his breath, and Joan paid no attention. She had had an inspiration (what she and Amy called a brain throb). Perhaps Chub in his eagerness to help Tim had realized the story was wrong and had held it from going into the paper. Chub, however, denied knowing anything about the mysterious disappearance of the charity play story. His guileless, freckled face helped corroborate his innocence. Joan felt he was telling the truth. Chub might be mischievous and full of faults, but he did not lie. He listened intently while she told him the latest developments.

When Tim came in, they had to discuss it all over again. He was relieved that the story hadn't been printed, but he was dumbfounded that it had disappeared right off the hook. “Come on, I'm going to look over the lay of the land,” he said to Joan. “I want to get to the bottom of this. It surely looks crooked. Besides, I don't like to lose that write-up with all my carefully phrased compliments for each and every member in the cast. I can use it whenever the play does come off.”

Dummy was still in his corner. Although the paper was out, the afternoon's work was not over for the *Journal* family. No sooner was one edition out than they went to work assembling news stories and articles for the next day's paper. Not news items, necessarily, mostly rewrites and things that had no special time value. The back office usually worked, pressmen and all, until four o'clock or after.

Tim satisfied himself that the story was not on the big hook; then he went over to the proofreader's corner. Joan saw Dummy's eyes upon them. “It certainly is funny how that story could vanish—” he began.

Joan wanted him to be careful how he worded his conversation to Dummy, lest the proofreader guess himself to be under suspicion. If she said, “Sh!” he would read her lips and know she was warning her brother to be on his guard and he might divine that they were suspecting him.

“Oats and beans and barley,” she said, instead. She had never expected really to use that old slogan in a crisis like this, but it came in handy.

Tim stared. Then he understood and stopped speaking. Joan gave him a look that meant, “I'll explain later.” Tim conducted a cautious, written conversation with Dummy but found nothing new about the mystery.

“He and Mack were arguing about that story being gone,” Joan told her brother; “that's why I didn't want you to say anything much. He'd read your lips and be warned. See?”

But both Dummy and Mack denied any knowledge of the lost story.

“Dummy’s a crackerjack proofreader,” Tim mused, when he and Joan were back in the editorial room. “Uncle John says it’s really uncanny how quick and accurate he is.”

“That’s because his speech and hearing are gone,” said Miss Betty. “The other senses become more acute. I read that somewhere.”

“Sounds reasonable,” admitted Tim.

“But he hasn’t good sense if he’s been letting mistakes get by him,” thought Joan.

“Ye-ah,” put in Chub, “but that makes it more mysterious why he should make mistakes. Makes me think more than ever that he—”

Joan punched him to cease speaking. The whole office mustn’t be informed that they were suspecting poor old Dummy.

“Who is he, anyway?” asked Mack. “With his gentlemanly manners and his quiet ways. Still waters run deep, you know.”

Every one admitted Dummy was a mystery.

When the editor heard that the charity play had been postponed, he was wild, in the parlance of the office. He cornered Tim. “Didn’t you write up a big spiel about it?” he almost groaned. “And the play didn’t come off.”

“The story wasn’t in,” Tim told him.

“But I sent it out back early this morning.”

Tim shrugged his innocence. “I know, but it’s—well, it’s *gone!*”

“A lucky break for you, Tim,” conceded the editor, after he had listened to the story. “You better keep on being careful. One more bust, and out you go. You see, Tim, I like you and all that, but as editor, I’m responsible for everything in the paper. If mistakes are getting into the paper, it’s up to me to see who’s making ’em, p.d.q., and get rid of him. I’ve told you all this before.”

Again Joan felt like shouting that Tim had made only one mistake—the omission of Mrs. McNulty’s and the two other names. Mr. Nixon was stubborn. He was convinced that Tim had made the mistakes. He would probably not believe otherwise until she and Chub cleared up the mystery and brought the guilty party to him.

She and the office boy fairly sleuthed Dummy, hoping to get something to report to Mr. Johnson. On Fourth of July, which was a week later, Joan stumbled upon another clew. “This mystery is getting to be as bad as the Alger books,” she thought.

The *Journal* was coming out early that day, with a diminished edition, as on the day of the annual outing, in order that the staff might have a bit of a holiday.

Every one was busy, working extra hard, so busy that they did not even have time to let Joan help. She had stayed home instead, spending the time trying to console Em.

Poor Em did not like the fireworks. Living right in the heart of the town like this, she suffered agonies. The boys on the street, and the *Journal* newsies, hanging around waiting for the paper to come out, would hurl “two-inchers” and snakes-in-the-grass in her direction. She would meow and hiss like a wild thing. Finally, she would flee to a safer place. Now, she had just disappeared through one of the back windows of the *Journal*. Joan knew more newsboys were waiting back there—boys ready to tease the cat. She determined to go after her pet and lock her in the house until the terrible—to Em, at least—day of independence was over.

Joan scurried through the editorial office and through the door to out back. She caught sight of Em’s slim, black body scuttling along ahead of her over the cement floor, on velvet-soft paws. Now she was under the make-up tables, where the long galleys of print were assembled in a newspaper form.

Then the cat darted across the composing room and into the pressroom, over to the far corner where rolls of paper, as high as Joan herself, were stored. Em, frantic at being chased, even by Joan, played hide and seek about the paper rolls. Joan called her endearing names, and finally rounding her into a corner, stooped to pick her up. She quieted the cat with reassuring words. Her eyes wandered to the floor. Why, what was that, there in the corner? It looked like yellow copy paper, several sheets pasted together, the way Tim did when he wrote a long story. She started to turn the paper over, idly, with the toe of her oxford, when her foot touched something hard underneath. She pushed the paper off with her foot. The thing was long and hard and dirty with dried ink and dust; it was a galley of type, still set up in its narrow tin trough. Newspapers are notoriously untidy places; still, Joan was surprised to find the set-up type here, for the type was always melted down in a little furnace and reused in the linotype machines. She was about to go on when her eyes were attracted by Tim’s name peeping out from a fold of the yellow paper—MARTIN, written all in capitals, the way he always did in the upper left-hand corner. It must be one of his stories. She draped Em over her arm while she picked up the paper and smoothed it out on her knee.

It was the story of the charity play, the story that had disappeared off the hook. She examined the galley and found it to be the proof of the story and underneath were the proof sheets, too. No wonder it had not been in the paper, for every evidence of the story had been hidden away here in this corner. Some one had done it who had not quite dared to destroy the story. It could not have been

Chub, trying in his bunglesome way to help Tim. She believed firmly in his honesty.

She'd save the story for Tim, because he had said he could use it later. She folded it up and tucked it under her middy. The proof sheets and the galley of type she put back into the corner and left.

Chub vowed he knew nothing about the story being hidden. He thought, like Joan, that Dummy must have taken it to put a mistake in it somehow and then, panicky at being almost caught, had hidden it away.

She vowed then that she would watch developments more closely than ever. But, as it happened, she did not.

Later, she recalled Cookie's statement that reporters were always keyed up over something, forgetting the big excitement of one assignment when the next one came along. Yes, that was true. Think how wrought up she had been over the deserted children, over Miss King's picture, and now over the charity play story.

"Something exciting every day on a newspaper," Miss Betty told her when Joan tried to tell the older girl these thoughts. "You'd love it, Sub-Cub." That was their new name for Joan.

"I'd like the same thing, over and over," Tim grumbled, thumping on his typewriter keys. He was peeved that morning because he had been sent to interview a set of six-months-old triplets, whose parents had rented a garage, though they owned no car. They needed the space to park the triple baby carriage, which was too wide to enter their front door!

"At least, I mean, I'd like to write about the same *kind* of thing every day," he went on. "Then I could work up a style of my own—and followers."

"Ah, the lad aspires to be a columnist!" jeered Mack, who had a habit of overhearing everything that was said, since his desk was next to Tim's.

"No, not exactly." Tim was fussed. Why did Mack always tease?

Cookie looked up from his corner. "I had dreams, too, once," he said. "Hang on to yours, Tim. They're mighty precious."

Cookie was right about forgetting one thrilling story for new interests and about there always being something new in newspaper life. Despite Joan's resolve to watch developments, she was so preoccupied for the next few weeks that she hardly thought of Dummy and the mysterious mistakes at all.

For it was that very Saturday morning that she met Tommy.

CHAPTER X

TOMMY-BY-THE-DAY

Joan met Tommy in the Juvenile Court. She had hesitated outside the big double doors that Saturday morning, listening to the low hum of voices. It was distressing how shy she was at times. She must get over it, if she were to be a real reporter. Talking to people didn't bother her, but walking into that room full of strange, staring people did.

However, Judge Grayson merely turned his head for a second and Mrs. Hollis, the matron of the Detention Home, flashed her a smile of recognition as she stole in, tiptoeing over the creaky boards. Tim was in the back of the room, of course. The sight of reporters up in front sometimes worried the timid mothers who had come to plead for their wayward sons. "Oh, all this ain't going to be in the papers, is it?" they would wail to the judge.

Joan disregarded her brother's frown, and slipping into the seat next to him, whispered her message. She had been sent to tell him to come back to the *Journal*—a story had broken and he was needed. She had happened to be over there, and had volunteered to go for him, after the editor had looked around for the red-headed office boy and found him missing as usual, when wanted. Joan was glad she happened to have on a fresh middy.

Tim hadn't been sent to "cover" the Juvenile Court, for the *Journal* had its own court reporter, but Editor Nixon had wanted to see what Tim could do in the feature-story line. Miss Betty, who sometimes attended court, was busy with brides this Saturday morning and couldn't be spared.

Now he shoved his note paper into his pocket and slipped out of the court room, at Joan's whisper. He seemed a bit provoked at being called away. The half-dozen young boys who were up before Judge Grayson for some deviltry or other, eyed him as he went out. Joan herself, now that she had braved the ordeal of entering the room while the court was in session, decided to stay awhile, and that's how she met Tommy! Court was always interesting. She hoped that none of these cases would be the kind when every one under sixteen was asked to leave.

She knew all the officials in the Juvenile Court. It was held in a room in the county courthouse. Juvenile Court was an informal proceeding, with Judge Grayson talking more like a father than a judge.

It wasn't the usual playing hooky from school case that the judge was taking

up now. It wasn't a boy at all, but a young mother, hugging a chubby little boy. He wore blue overalls and looked about two years old. The morning sun slanting in through the long windows made his curls as yellow as the *Journal* copy paper.

"I didn't think Tommy would cry so long and hard, Judge! He's not really a baby," the young mother was saying. "Or I never would have left him alone in the room. But I had to go to work to earn some money."

Judge Grayson's tired-looking face was kind but stern. "Don't you know there's a Day Nursery on Grove Street for just such mothers as you?"

The young woman nodded. "I did take him over there when I first came to Plainfield two weeks ago and got this job at Davis'. But the lady there said the nursery was full—the babies were taking naps two and three in a crib, and she couldn't possibly take Tommy. I couldn't take him to work with me, and I didn't dare ask the landlady to keep him so I left him alone."

Joan knew where the Day Nursery was—just the front room in Mrs. Barnes' own home. She and Amy had visited it when it first opened with two babies, not long ago—and now it was filled to overflowing.

"If you have no one to care for the boy," said Judge Grayson in his slow, even tones, "I'm afraid he will have to go to the Home till there is room in the Day Nursery."

Tommy's mother raised eyes dark with fright. "Oh, don't take him away, Judge." She hugged the little fellow harder than ever.

"I'll keep him till I find some family to board him by the day," spoke up Mrs. Hollis, briskly. "But what Plainfield needs is a bigger Day Nursery."

The next case was called. A big boy of sixteen was up for petty thieving. He was sent to "Boyville," the truant school, and then the court adjourned for lunch.

Joan could not get the thought of the too full Day Nursery out of her mind, and of poor Tommy locked in a furnished room and howling for his mother while she was out at work. Maybe Mother would keep Tommy till there was a vacancy at the Day Nursery. That would be better than having him at the Detention Home with Mrs. Hollis. It would be fun, too. On the way out, she edged over toward Mrs. Hollis and spoke to her about it. Tommy gave her a wobbly smile.

At lunch, Joan was too absorbed in the problem of Tommy to take her usual interest in Tim's account of the morning. He had been sent to write up a butcher shop that had been flooded from a broken water main. That was what the story had been. "Nothing at the Juvenile Court, either," he grumbled.

"Oh, yes, there was," she corrected, as she spread her bread with peanut butter to make a sandwich. Lunch in summer was always a picnicky meal. "That part

about the Day Nursery ought to make a dandy feature.”

“Who’s interested in babies?” Tim always took her suggestions doubtfully. Besides he seemed to be getting all the baby assignments lately.

“Why, everybody! Except *you*, maybe. Everybody’s been a baby, you see,” she told him.

“Well, I’d like to hand in something from the Court so Nixon will send me again, for listening to cases isn’t a bad way to spend a morning.”

After Tim had hurried off, Joan approached her mother. “Couldn’t we take Tommy by the day? I asked Mrs. Hollis and she says it’d be much better for him to be here with us, and she says the mother’s willing to pay something for his care.”

Mrs. Martin considered. “Well, if you want to,” she decided. “It’s the lesser of two evils, I guess. Maybe having Tommy here will keep you from running over to the *Journal* so much. But you and Amy will have to take charge of him. I’ve planned to put up preserves this week.”

“We will,” promised Joan. Amy would adore to help. Amy didn’t know much about newspapers, but she knew a lot about babies. She had played dolls till she was a big girl. Joan had seldom played with dolls even when she was small. Playing about under the desks in the *Journal* office, using the discarded bits of lead plate for blocks had been more fun than dolls to young Joan. But now—a real baby! She’d like that!

Tommy was installed that very afternoon.

Tommy-by-the-Day, Chub named him when Joan explained to the *Journal* staff through the open windows that Tommy was to be at her house by the day, and that his mother would bring him early in the morning and call for him after work.

“Me, Tommy-by-the-Day” the baby echoed, patting his chest with one pudgy hand.

While he took his nap, Joan stole off to the *Journal*, and found Tim hard at work over the Day Nursery story. When he was called into one of the phone booths, she read what he had written. His story covered the facts, but it was stiff and journalistic, somehow. It did not give half an idea how cute Tommy really was. As she stared at the yellow page, Joan was seized with such an amazing inspiration that she trembled, just thinking of it. Oh, she wouldn’t *dare* do it!

She would. Tim couldn’t do much but scold. She rolled his story out of the machine, inserted another sheet and began to type. She was not used to composing on the typewriter and in her worry and hurry, her fingers struck the wrong keys, but the result was readable. She used all of Tim’s facts in the story,

but by merely changing a phrase of his now and then and sticking in a few of her own, she managed to capture all the adorable neediness of that little scamp of a Tommy.

Tim came and shooed her off when she was writing in the middle of it, writing in the heat of creation. Would he be mad?

“What’s the big idea?” he sputtered, but not very loudly, for he was reading her story. “Oh, I see, well—I may use some of your ideas, kid. They’re not half bad.” But Joan suddenly turned shy and fled. Would he kill her?

When Tim came home after work, Tommy was sitting up on the big, red dictionary eating his early supper of rice, milk, and applesauce.

“Cute kid.” Tim pretended to punch him in the stomach by way of welcome. Then he told her, “Nixon said my Day Nursery story was good.” Not a word about her suggestions. But, being Tim, he wouldn’t say anything. “He even said he was going to write his to-morrow’s editorial on the situation, just to see what’ll happen.”

What happened was that the *Journal’s* readers immediately wrote in on the subject. Some even enclosed checks, but it would take a lot of checks to enlarge the present nursery. New and larger quarters were needed. Since there was no money with which to build, a place would have to be found among the present buildings in Plainfield. At the end of a week one letter suggested that the county offer part of the old Historical Building for use as a day nursery.

The Historical Building was a landmark and was right across the street from the *Journal* office, on the corner. It contained relics from the time when Plainfield was first settled.

“Why wouldn’t that be a wonderful place?” asked Miss Betty of the rest of the staff later, when Joan was in the *Journal* office. Every one on the *Journal* was interested in Tommy, now, and in the nursery problem.

“It would. But they can’t get it,” drawled Cookie. “It’s because of old Mrs. McNulty. She gave a whole room full of junk to the Historical Building, and she wants the place used for that and nothing else. They approached her on the subject once before, soon as folks saw the Day Nursery wasn’t going to be big enough. But she put her foot down. The county doesn’t want to get in bad with her because she’s Hutton’s mother-in-law. The county wouldn’t care—hardly any one but country hicks or school kids go through the building any more, anyway. But the old lady won’t give in...”

“Maybe if she saw Tommy and realized how much the nursery would mean to him,” proposed Miss Betty. “A concrete case might make all the difference to a person like that, and Tommy’s an appealing kid.”

Yes, Tommy was a darling and he was thriving under the girls' care. That wasn't vanity. Every one said so. Tommy's mother told them so every evening when she came to "collect" him. She always looked tired, but as soon as her eyes lighted on her small son, she looked like a different person. "You girls are giving him wonderful care," she had told them more than once in the short time they had had him. He was getting plumper and healthier every day.

"I believe I will take him round to Mrs. McNulty's," Joan determined now. "And let him plead his own case." She turned and started home. Maybe Mrs. McNulty wasn't really mean. She was glad, however, that the woman would not know she was a sister to the cub reporter who had left her name off the list of patronesses that time.

She found that "minding" a baby and holding down a job were difficult things to combine. Of course, she hadn't really a job, but she felt as though Tim's were her own, somehow—and now she couldn't keep up with it. Anyway, Tommy was so interesting that she didn't miss the *Journal* excitement so much. The tricks that a two-year-old could think up! He had a passion for stealing sugar—all the door knobs were smeary and sticky where his sugary hands had reached to open the doors. You simply had to watch him every single minute, she had discovered. He was at the run-about, reaching age. Nothing was safe from him.

She found Amy waiting for her on the steps of the Martins' porch, her face tragic. Had something happened to Tommy?

"Joan! Your mother's got a telegram from your Aunt Effie to come and keep house for her while she's at a hospital having her appendix taken out. She's going next week, and that means we can't keep Tommy, for she says you can't manage the house and Tim and Tommy both."

It did look hopeless until Joan remembered about Mrs. McNulty and the Historical Building. Amy fell right in with the plan of taking Tommy to see the old lady. She always welcomed any kind of adventure, and her imagination, fed by the romantic books she read, pounced immediately upon the idea that Mrs. McNulty would take a great fancy to the little boy.

"Maybe she'll give him a fortune," she mused. "Probably she'll get him a nurse with a long veil like you see in the New York papers."

As soon as Tommy woke up from his nap, they got him ready. They scrubbed his cheeks till they shone like candy apples and brushed his yellow hair, matted from his nap, till it looked like taffy. "Good enough to eat!" thought Joan. No one could resist him.

His diminutive overalls were brushed spic and span and a missing button replaced—with green thread since that was all they could find in a hurry. His

worn sandals were polished so thoroughly that some of the shine was brushed on to his pink toes showing through the cut-work.

Mrs. McNulty lived on the North Side, just across the bridge over the glorified creek that divided the main part of Plainfield from the residential section. Amy had borrowed a rickety, cast-off baby cart for Tommy some days ago, and it came in handy now, for it would be too far for his short legs to trudge.

Down Market Street they went, proudly pushing their charge, past the Soldiers' Monument, without which no Ohio town is complete.

Just before they came to the bridge, they passed a big, yellow brick building with a huge sign across it. "DEPARTMENT of CORRECTION, City of Plainfield," it read.

"I always hate to pass the jail." Amy quickened her step.

"You needn't worry. There's no robbers or thugs in there, now," comforted Joan. "Don't you read the *Journal*? Cookie had a peachy story about its being empty. It seems our fair city is getting so well-behaved that the few city arrests that are made don't fill up this jail at all, so they're taken to the county one. This place isn't needed, so it's empty."

They had hardly crossed the bridge when Master Tommy was tired of the cart and decided to get out. He began to howl his loudest, and since they did not want to present a roaring boy to Mrs. McNulty, they were forced to let him out. Then he insisted upon pushing the buggy himself.

The McNulty homestead had been converted into apartments a few years before. There were a few apartments in Plainfield, and the McNulty one, because of its central location and history, was considered the best. Just as they approached the steps leading up, Tommy banged the buggy into a tree. As he had pushed with all his might he tumbled smack down on the sidewalk. He shed real tears, which mingled with the dirt his face had collected from the sidewalk. One fat knee had gone through the faded overalls, and was stained with blood. The girls picked him up, soothed him and repaired the damages as best they could.

They parked the cart at the steps, hauled Tommy up and rang the McNulty bell. The colored maid eyed them curiously, and answered indifferently that Mrs. McNulty was in. They followed her through a hall that smelled of incense and into a crowded living room, where on a chaise longue, old Mrs. McNulty was reclining. She was so ugly that Joan thought she looked like a witch, in spite of the gray, marceled hair and the trailing lavender robe she had on. She was holding a green bottle to her nose. "Yes?" she lifted her eyebrows. "What is it?"

Both girls started to speak at once, then halted, and ended by being embarrassed. Amy was seized with an uncontrollable desire to giggle. Finally,

Joan, giving Amy a withering glance, managed to explain that the Day Nursery needed larger quarters and that the Historical Building had been suggested. She ended her plea by pushing Tommy forward and saying that there was no room for him in the present Day Nursery.

Perhaps it had been a mistake to bring him along. He was not very appealing, with the tear in his overalls, and his dusty sandals on the purple velvet of the rug. He reached for the green bottle, and when it was lifted out of his grasp, he opened his mouth to yell.

“A nasty boy.” Mrs. McNulty continued to sniff at the bottle. “Doesn’t look clean.”

Joan swooped him up before he let out the yell entirely, and tickled him to make him laugh instead. It was too bad, after they had worked so hard to make him presentable.

“And you’ve come to see whether I’ll change my mind about the relics in the building?” went on the old lady. “Of course, I can’t keep the county from giving up part of the building if they decide to, but in that event, I shall most certainly withdraw the things I have there.”

Joan faced the woman over Tommy’s mop of yellow hair. “But what are old relics compared to live babies?” she demanded.

“The relics mean a great deal to me and—to the county, too,” she said, quietly. “Why, the little bed that my father’s father slept in when he was a baby is in that building. I’ll not change my mind.”

She was dismissing them, and there was nothing to do but take the hint and depart.

Tommy, perfectly subdued, smiled up at them when they put him in his cart. Both girls were silent as they started down toward the bridge. What was going to happen to Tommy now?

CHAPTER XI

THE DAY NURSERY

The *Journal* staff was genuinely sorry to learn that Tommy had failed to soften old Mrs. McNulty's heart. Miss Betty didn't even smile when Joan told her the tragic details of the visit. Joan had gone right over to the *Journal* office as soon as they returned from Mrs. McNulty's. Since it was Amy's day to take care of Tommy, she remained at Joan's home, helping the little fellow scatter his stone blocks over the grass in the side yard. The first few days they had taken Tommy over to call on the *Journal* folks, but that soon proved too hectic. There were so many things for him to reach for over there, and the editor seemed to think he interfered with the staff's work. So Joan had gone alone to tell the news.

"It's the McNulty pride," stated Tim from his desk. He had rather hoped Joan might stumble upon a feature story for him in the old lady acting as fairy godmother to the little boy, and he was a bit disappointed. "She could have given up that space in the Historical Building and saved the day. But she's so proud of having those things in there."

"It was Tommy's clothes," decided the society editor. "The old lady's probably used to seeing kids Tommy's age decked out in white dimity and sky-blue ribbon. I'll tell you what. Let's take up a collection and outfit the youngster. It won't change Mrs. McNulty's heart—too late for that. But if he looked better, perhaps some wealthy resident would take a liking to him and produce a place for a bigger day nursery. Here, I'll start the finery fund." She pulled open her desk drawer, took out her red pocketbook and gave Joan a shining quarter.

"Here's a twin to that one." Cookie, who had heard it all, was reaching into his pocket.

The *Journal* staff wasn't rich, but it was generous. Every one in the editorial and business offices gave something. Gertie could give only a nickel.

"Busted?" teased Tim. "When the ghost walked just yesterday?"

That was the staff's way of saying that yesterday had been pay day. But Gertie always spent the contents of her envelope on clothes as soon as she got it, and was always in debt.

When the printers and pressmen strolled through on their way home, they were approached and most of them contributed. Dummy gave a quarter. He did like children. Joan remembered the day of the picnic. And Chub added his bit.

Mack gave a whole dollar.

The total was overwhelming—almost ten dollars and fifty cents! To-morrow morning, Joan and Amy would take Tommy to Davis' Department Store and outfit him.

They chose Davis' for two reasons. It was Plainfield's largest store—four stories high, with an elevator. And Tommy's mother was working there. They stopped for a brief chat with her at the handkerchief section. Joan and Amy sat down on the round, twisty stools before the counter, while Tommy gurgled at seeing his mother in this unexpected place.

Her dark eyes shone with pride as they always did when she saw Tommy. She carried him over to show him to the floorwalker and other bosses.

When she came back, she was beaming. "Mr. Dugan liked Tommy so well he said for you girls to tell whoever waits on you that the things are for me," she told them. "And you'll get the employee's discount."

Then Tommy was perched upon the glass show case, where he swung his sandaled feet unconcernedly while the other salesgirls admired his blue eyes and sunny smile. Joan's mother had mended the torn overalls with a neat patch so that they didn't look too forlorn.

Finally, good-bys were said, and they went on up in the elevator to the second floor, where the things Tommy's size were sold.

It was fun to select everything new for him. And with the discount they could buy a lot. Little underwear suits of cross-barred material, short socks in a variety of colors, sturdy little slippers, two play suits, and a white suit with tiny trousers, for best. It had a yellow duck embroidered on the pocket.

They decided to dress him up so his mother could see him when they passed her counter again. The ducky suit was buttoned on the fat, squirming Tommy, Dutch-blue socks were pulled up around his plump, pink legs, and the new slippers were put on. All the clerks in the children's section chimed in with the two girls in adoring the little boy. He looked like a different child.

Tommy himself staggered about, almost bursting with importance over his new possessions. Joan and Amy turned from him to hand his sodden little garments to the girl behind the desk to be wrapped with the new things. It didn't make a very big package and they decided to take it along with them instead of having it sent.

"I'll lug the package," offered Joan, "if you'll steer Tommy."

They looked around for the little boy—but he was gone!

Why, he had been right there just a moment ago, while they were waiting for the package. They hadn't taken their eyes off him for more than a second, really.

Yet he was gone.

They roamed about aimlessly, calling and peering behind counters and back of the life-sized dolls that stood about, stiffly displaying children's frocks.

"The little boy?" questioned one salesgirl who looked no older than Amy. "Maybe he wandered over into the Misses and Small Women."

They went over into that department, shouting "Tommy!" at every few steps and glancing behind all the figures. They even peeped into the fitting rooms—little curtained-off places. In one, a stout mother, who was watching her young lady daughter try on a dress, screamed as Joan suddenly popped her head in. She murmured an apology, explaining that she was hunting for a little boy.

"Well, we haven't got him," came the cross answer.

"That woman almost had a *fit*, as well as a *fitting*, the way you scared her!" giggled the salesgirl.

She could joke. Tommy hadn't been in her charge. She hadn't lost him. Why, it was a terrible thing that had happened, Joan slowly began to realize. They had searched the entire floor, and Tommy simply wasn't there. They had lost him—and he was a ward of the city. Mrs. Hollis had impressed that fact upon her when they were making their arrangements to take Tommy by the day. What would happen to them? Would they be sent to jail themselves? And his poor mother! How would she stand the shock?

"He looked like he was a millionaire baby in those clothes," reflected Joan. "Maybe he's been kidnaped, and we'll have to pay a ransom."

All the store employees on that floor had joined in the search by this time. Finally, the young salesgirl suggested that they ask the elevator man whether any one had left the floor with Tommy. Maybe he had noticed him and would remember.

"Well, all right," agreed Joan, half-heartedly. "Though I hardly believe it will do any good."

They strolled over to the elevator. The man who ran it was old and wore a black skullcap. He sat on a tall-legged stool while he operated the car.

"Why, yes," he answered to their question. "There was a little boy—about three years old, I should judge—in a white suit. He came off of this floor awhile ago, with a bunch of women, and I just naturally supposed he was with them."

Of course, Tommy was only two, but he did look more grown-up in the new clothes.

"Did he go up or down?" Joan demanded.

"Up, I think." He jerked his black-capped head in answer.

The two girls dashed into the little car and got off at the next floor. It was the women's wear department. Again they hunted through all the fitting rooms, behind the counters and show cases and everywhere. But no Tommy.

There was still the fourth floor. The last one. Would he be there? Joan was weak with fear. They squeezed into the elevator again. "Furniture, Victrolas, Radios," thundered the elevator man, as the iron gates opened out.

So many suites of highly polished furniture, so many big, shadowy beds and high bureaus, behind which a little boy could be hidden. Suddenly, the blare of a radio going full blast told them that the music department was just beyond. They went on there. A radio was peeling out "The Stars and Stripes Forever" to a rapt audience of two.

A wizened old lady, in stylish clothes that looked out of place on her, was sitting in one of the wicker chairs provided in the radio department. On her lap was a little boy in a white suit that still had the price tag on one trouser leg, Joan noticed. He was clapping his hands to the music. It was Tommy. The woman was old Mrs. McNulty, Joan recognized at a glance.

The girls breathed audible sighs. However, relief at finding Tommy was drowned out by other mixed emotions when Joan remembered about Mrs. McNulty.

"Come away, Tommy." She held out her hands. "I don't believe that lady likes boys."

But this cunning, clean little Tommy had captured the old witch. He refused to move, and snuggled closer against Mrs. McNulty's flat old chest.

"But I do!" contradicted the old lady. "I never saw this child before, but I know that he has a soul for music."

"He's the same one that we brought to see you yesterday," Joan told her.

"Yesterday!" repeated Mrs. McNulty. "I don't recall. Oh, yes, when I had that terrific headache. Are you the girls who called? And is this precious child that nasty little boy?"

The girls nodded.

"I never would have believed it." Every line of the old face looked surprise.

"How did he get here?" they both asked, then.

"He just came walking into this department," was the answer. "And went right up to the radio and stood there and listened. Bless his heart." She actually hugged him and kissed the top of his head.

Joan knew she should say something, but she didn't know just what. "Clothes do make the man," she began, remembering that quotation from her English

class. “The *Journal* staff all contributed and we picked out his things this morning before he got lost.”

“Is he a relative of yours?”

“Oh, no!” It was evident that Mrs. McNulty hadn’t half listened to them yesterday, so Joan told the whole story over again, beginning with her visit to the Juvenile Court, then telling about the crowded Day Nursery, and how the Judge had permitted her and Amy to take Tommy by the day. “Couldn’t you reconsider about the Historical Building?” she finished up.

“No. I think the county needs that building. It’s educational. I will not give up an inch on that.” The old head wobbled positively. “But I will help out about the Day Nursery. In a city the size of Plainfield, there ought to be some place else we could get.”

Suddenly a half-memory stirred Joan’s brain. “There is!” she assured her. “I’ve thought of the dandiest place.” She bent her lips to Mrs. McNulty’s ear.

The old witchlike face was frozen with horror at Joan’s whispered words, but after a minute she smiled, and when she smiled, she was uglier than ever. “I never would have thought of it, but I believe it *would* do. I know the mayor personally, and I know he’ll fix it so we can have it.”

“Have what?” Amy wanted to know.

When they told her, she shuddered. But Joan was sure it would make a wonderful day nursery.

In less than two weeks, everything was ready. Aunt Effie hadn’t had to have the operation after all, so Tommy stayed on with them until the last minute. Joan and Amy, each hugging a package under her arm, hurried along north on Market Street. They’d been raiding the Ten Cent Store for something for Tommy. Something for Tommy meant that all the other babies in the new, bigger and better Day Nursery would enjoy the new playthings, too.

The old sign was gone from the city jail, and a freshly painted one sparkled at them in the sunshine. “DAY NURSERY,” it said.

The girls turned in through the big double doors, with the ease of familiarity, went up the broad, winding stairs, and opened the first door.

The two large front rooms opened out together. In the first one were about a dozen snowy white cribs, holding sleeping babies—all sorts and ages. Tiny, wrinkled ones with tight fists. Big, roly-poly ones with roguish faces. Some with dark eyes and skin. The barred windows cast striped shadows across the counterpanes.

There were gay rag rugs upon the floor, scores of Jessie Wilcox Smith pictures around the walls, boxes of scarlet geraniums in the windows before the ruffled

dotted curtains. Low white shelves in one corner held toys. All about were small tables and chairs. Along one wall were hooks holding the daytime clothes, with a pair of shoes, slipped off for the nap, on the floor underneath each hook. On another wall was a row of tiny toothbrushes, all colors, and a row of shiny tin cups. The whole place had a clean baby smell.

“You’d never think the jail could be so nice,” Amy declared as she always did when they came into the rooms. “How *did* you ever think of it, Jo?”

Mrs. Barnes was over in a far corner beside a crib where she was settling a rosy one-year-old for a nap. They could see her assistant in the other room, sitting in a low chair with a basket of mending on her lap.

“Oh, hello, Joan and Amy.” Mrs. Barnes looked up as they came in. “Here’s a new one. Her name is Mary, and she just came this morning. Isn’t she a darling?”

The girls went over to view the newcomer.

“Tommy’ll be so glad to see you, when he wakes up,” went on Mrs. Barnes. “He jabbers about you all the time. Come and take a peep at him. He’s in the other room, now.”

More bars, more curtains, more geraniums, more cheerful rugs. More cribs with sleeping babies.

“I have twenty now,” she said, like a proud mother. “Look here!”

Tommy, one chubby hand thrust under a flushed cheek was peacefully sleeping, clad only in his new underwear. The girls were surprised to see that he was in a low, wooden bed, instead of an iron crib like the rest. The bed was of dark wood and the headpiece had a carved bird on it.

“Is this bed a new donation?” asked Joan.

“Yes, indeed,” the matron nodded. “Master Tommy’s sleeping in the bed of Mrs. McNulty’s father’s father. She had it sent over from the Historical Building this morning. Said it might as well be somewhere where it would be used.”

Oh! That’d make a great feature story for Tim! Maybe Lefty would come and take a picture of Tommy in the antique bed. Joan’s thoughts ran on.

“And look at this,” the matron pointed to a tiny Victrola on the floor beside Tommy—a child’s toy that really played little records. “Mrs. McNulty is convinced that he is to be a musician.”

“It’ll be a scoop for Tim,” she told Amy, as they walked home.

Amy looked blank.

“Don’t you know what a scoop is?” Joan asked.

“Of course I do.” Amy tossed her head. “It’s a coal basket.”

Joan told her that a scoop was the *Star*'s having a story that the *Journal* should have had and did not. She explained it absent-mindedly. She was busy thinking what a fine story this bit of semi-civic news would be for Tim. So appropriate, too, for he could bring in Mr. Hutton's name. Yes, Tim would be glad. The paper wasn't doing so well lately, he had confided to her. Uncle John was worrying about how to boost the circulation. Maybe this would help.

CHAPTER XII

RICH BOY, POOR BOY

The *Journal* started a contest to boost circulation. The boy readers were asked to write in on the subject of their favorite baseball player. The scheme worked, too, for the lists showed many new subscribers since the boys had been sending in their letters. Every day now, Tim was writing a story about how the letters were coming in and which player was leading in popularity for that day—a funny little column, so full of wit and real sport news that even Mr. Nixon noticed it.

“We’ll make a regular columnist out of you, Martin,” he teased. “That and sports seem to be your long suits. Guess you like ’em better than straight news stuff. But stick at the cub job. You have lots to learn.” He glanced at Tim’s copy in his hand. “Don’t say an accident took place; weddings take place, accidents occur. And remember *Journal* style—‘street’ gets lower case, ‘Avenue,’ upper case.”

Mr. Nixon couldn’t give a real compliment to save his soul, Joan thought, but Tim was grinning understandingly, and promised to remember about street and Avenue. That meant that Avenue was spelled with a capital, while street was not. Purely *Journal* style.

From the very first day of the contest they were swamped with letters. Miss Betty and Mack took turns reading them, but soon they were too busy to get them read every day, and the letters began to pile up.

“Shut your eyes and pick one for the prize,” suggested Mack. That was like him.

“That wouldn’t be fair,” objected Miss Betty.

She went to Editor Nixon about it. He glanced around the office, a worried pucker between his bushy brows. His eyes lighted upon Joan, who was spending most of her time in the *Journal* office these days, now that Tommy was safely off her hands. (She had to watch for new developments on the Dummy mystery.) Burke had hunted through the envelopes for hers one pay day! The editor was now so accustomed to seeing her around that now he practically gave her an assignment.

“Look here,” he waved his fat, blue pencil toward her. “Why can’t you and the office pest read over these baseball fan letters?” He meant Chub.

Wasn’t it lucky that English had always been Joan’s favorite and easiest

subject at school? She could judge the letters with a critical eye. Chub wasn't much use that way. He didn't recognize bad grammar even when it stared him in the face. But he was a big help, for he knew the baseball stuff. "This one sounds good," he'd say. "But it's something he's read somewhere. He hasn't thought it up himself."

The *Journal* was offering two prizes. The first was to be a check for twenty-five dollars. Uncle John had offered it himself. The second prize was two seats to the best baseball game of the season in Ohio, to be played that year in Cleveland. Not only that, but the lucky winner would be introduced to Babe Ruth and would be given a baseball autographed by the famous player. The second prize, so every one thought, was about as nice as the first prize, and was worth as much in actual money, for all expenses were to be paid for the trip, the car fare, tickets, and so on, having been donated. It was the kind of prize to fascinate a boy. And yet, twenty-five dollars was a lot of money.

When the contest ended, Joan and Chub had narrowed the letters down to two which were decidedly better than the rest. This afternoon's paper was to announce the prize winners. Mr. Nixon had handed the two best letters back to Joan, with, "You might as well do it all. You decide which one's best. They both look good to me."

Joan sighed again as she stared at the two letters before her. "I wish one of the rules of the contest had been for the boys to use pen names," she said to herself. "Then I wouldn't know who was who."

She was sitting at the long, crowded table that stretched across the middle of the editorial room; the desks were all around the windows and walls. She had cleared a space on the table; it was here, every day for the past weeks, she and Chub had read the letters written by the boy readers of the *Journal*.

Joan realized she would have to make up her mind, now, for Tim, who was writing up the announcement story, was looking over his typewriter at her for the names. The two letters seemed almost equally good, but one written by fifteen-year-old Eric Reynolds was slightly better than the other one, which was signed, "Jimmy Kennedy, age thirteen." Joan knew of the Reynolds family—they lived in a big place, with a sunken garden and a tall, iron fence all around. Too bad a rich boy like Eric had submitted a letter. Well, she might give him the second prize—the trip to the game and the autographed ball. He didn't need the money, and from Jimmy Kennedy's address on South Washington Street, she knew that he lived in one of the soot-streaked, gray-painted houses, which had their back yards cut into triangles by the railroad running along there. Jimmy ought to have the money prize. Yet his letter wasn't quite as good as Eric's. But Eric was rich,

and Jimmy was poor. Rich boy, poor boy! It reminded her of

Rich man, poor man,
Beggarmen, thief,
Doctor, lawyer,
Merchant, chief!

“Mark ’em ‘first’ and ‘second,’” Tim shouted. “I’m going to run the whole letters, just as written.”

Joan patted Em before she decided. Em loved this table, too. Now, she was curled upon a heap of papers from small surrounding towns that Miss Betty clipped for social items, and was batting her topaz eyes, almost asleep. Then, Joan bent over with the stub of blue pencil Mr. Nixon had given her, and with quick decision, she wrote a Roman I on Jimmy’s letter and a II on Eric’s.

There, she had done it! Mr. Nixon was standing by Tim’s typewriter, waiting for the copy. It was the last bit, for the composing men were ready to lock up the forms. “End that sentence,” he commanded Tim. “We’re waiting on that story.” He vanished through the swinging door.

Joan continued to sit at the table. Things were always so hurried until press time, and then the rush was over. She and Chub often worked puzzles and tried writing headlines and doing all sorts of things at this time of the day. Chub always had a new enthusiasm, and Joan found most of them interesting. Somehow, the things boys did were always more fun than what girls did. For awhile, Chub had been studying a book, *How to Be a Detective*, and was always trying to make a mystery out of everything. Dummy, of course, was a real mystery. No one could deny that. Now, Chub had sent away for a book of magic.

To-day he came up to the long table, with an ink bottle in his hand. He put it on the table and uncorked it. “It’s magic ink,” he informed her. “I made it. The book showed how—out of different chemicals. It writes just like any ink, but only lasts a day or so, and then it becomes invisible. To get it back, you have to hold it over heat.”

He was about to demonstrate its powers when Em, suddenly awake, stood up and patted her front paws at the bottle, sniffing and scratching.

“What ails her?” asked the office boy.

Joan wrinkled up her nose. “It’s that ink. It has a funny smell—she hates some smells like gunpowder, but this is sort of like sassafras. She likes it. She thinks it’s catnip, I guess.”

Em had succeeded in wetting one paw. Then she rolled over and over upon the floor, rubbing her nose with her paws, her eyes beaming, purring loudly all the while.

Mr. Nixon came out front again, and Chub, afraid of being pressed into service, made an exit. Mr. Nixon called Miss Betty to his desk. Joan saw her shake her head. Then he motioned to Joan, and she went over. "Wonder if you could do something for me? I want a story about these two boys who won the prizes. Miss Betty's tied up with a church wedding, and Tim's busy, too. Think you could do it? Get their pictures, and find out something about 'em. Your brother can write it up. You've got the addresses. Get Burke to give you some petty cash for street car fares."

"Oh, I'll walk," Joan told him. It was like asking for money to have Burke dole out nickels and dimes when she wasn't really on the pay roll. Just being sent out like this was pay enough for her. She had some change in her pocket, anyway. She dived into a phone booth to inform Mother importantly that Mr. Nixon was sending her out. Mother would hate to hear about the assignment, but Joan was thrilled. Of course, it wasn't a real assignment, for Tim would write it up, but she was really helping him, now.

It was too far to walk. She boarded a red and yellow street car at the corner, and went north on Market Street, past Mrs. McNulty's. Joan wished she had on the new flowered organdie Mother had made for her. Still, the pleated tan silk skirt with sweater to match, a gay triangle scarf around her shoulders and a jaunty béret on her head looked very nice, indeed. This costume seemed more grown up than most of her clothes. What if she had on the old plaid skirt and a middy! She got off right in front of the Reynolds residence. Going places was always fun till she got there. Then she was often seized by an attack of bashfulness. Now, she walked up the bluestone path to the house and rang the bell before she got panicky. The door was opened by a colored man in a white coat. "Master Eric's up in his room," he said in reply to her question. "Mrs. Reynolds is giving a party on the west porch. I'll call Master Eric." He showed her into a living room as large as the editorial room at the *Journal*. Joan's dusty oxfords sank into the velvet of the Chinese blue rug on the floor. There was a grand piano and on its polished surface was Eric's picture—an almost life-size of his head only. Joan heard the voices of the guests on the porch, the clink of china, and she smelled the food. A uniformed maid, bearing a tray of dishes, entered from the sun porch.

Eric came down the stairs. He was a tall boy, with dark hair, slightly wavy, that he tossed back from his forehead with a quick movement of his head. He

had dark eyes, and a nice smile, but he was rather pale. He was shyly surprised when she informed him that he had won the second prize, though he did not seem so pleased about it as she had expected. Was he disappointed that he had not won first? He should have, but he did not need the money. She knew he'd enjoy the big game, for he must like baseball to have written such a splendid letter.

Eric's mother, a tall woman with glasses on a gold chain—came in, too. "I'm serving luncheon to my guests." Her voice was cold and ungracious. "But I suppose I can arrange to have Eloise serve you and your friend, also, Eric."

"Oh, no, thank you," declined Joan. "I had my lunch long ago, and I have another call to make. But I would like a picture of Eric."

The boy seemed relieved that she was not going to stay. Mrs. Reynolds hurried off. The maid came into the room again, with steam coming from the tray.

"Won't you have a cup of tea, Miss?" she asked Joan, holding out a cup, and as Joan shook her head, she offered it to Eric.

"None for me, either." He put out his hand to wave the cup away, and the girl jerked the cup back, causing a few drops to fall on his hand.

Eric's face got whiter than ever. He cradled his fingers in his other hand. "My fingers!" he spoke as if in agony.

"Why, it couldn't have hurt much," Joan remarked.

"No, it didn't," he admitted, "but it might have."

Afraid of getting hurt! What a sissy! And Joan had rather liked him until then. She asked him a few questions for the paper, and left, with the big photograph tucked under her arm.

The street car back to town carried her past the *Journal* office. A few blocks more and she was at Washington Street. Joan knew her Plainfield. She realized that the first thing a reporter must do is to learn the city. She studied maps and knew the names of all the streets and even some of the alleys. She wanted to learn as much as she could, so that she could soon be a real reporter.

Jimmy's house was just like a dozen others on the street. The front of it looked shut up, but when Joan knocked it was immediately answered by a boy, who looked young for thirteen. "Are you Jimmy Kennedy?" she asked. "I came to tell you that you won the first prize—"

"I ain't Jimmy. I'm Johnny," the boy interrupted. He turned and shouted into the house at the top of his voice. "Hey! Everybody! Jimmy's won the first prize."

Instantly, it seemed to Joan, boys of all ages appeared. There were only five altogether, however, she found out when they quieted down and she could count

them. Jimmy was the oldest. Johnny, who had shouted the news, was next. Then, there were Joe and Jeff, and little Jerry, the four-year-old baby of the family. The boys' mother appeared from the kitchen, drying her hands on her apron. "For shame, you boys, not to ask the newspaper lady in." (She thinks I'm grown up! thought Joan.) "Come in, my dear, and we'll have some lemonade all around to celebrate. Sure, it's grand news that Jimmy will be getting a prize. That Jimmy, he's that crazy about baseball! He's been wild to go to that game and get that signed baseball."

The mother seemed to have the prizes mixed, but Joan said nothing. How glad the mother'd be to have him win the money. They all sat around the oilcloth-covered table. Young Jerry squirmed into Joan's lap. She managed to drink her lemonade and eat the sugary cookies without spilling any on his dark Dutch-cut hair or sailor suit. He had great, blue eyes like all his brothers, and looked like "Sonny Boy" of movie fame. Jimmy had more freckles than any of the others. He seemed bashful, though jolly, but somehow not so elated over the prize as she had thought he would be. But boys were funny that way. They never showed how they really felt. Perhaps, after all, he was just embarrassed and a bit bewildered to have won twenty-five dollars. She glanced around the cluttered, shabby kitchen and was satisfied that she had decided right about the prizes. They could buy something nice with the money, or put it away for Jimmy's education.

When Joan asked for a picture, Mrs. Kennedy set her glass down on the table. "I declare, I don't believe we've got a recent picture of Jimmy," she announced, sadly. "The latest one was taken when he was about ten, Johnny's age, in his surplice for the choir." It showed a boy who looked very much as Jimmy did now, except that he wore a Buster Brown collar.

"Don't give it to her, Mom!" protested Jimmy. "Everybody'll think I'm a baby. Do they *have* to have a picture?"

"The editor wants one," Joan assured him. "There's no time to get the staff photographer to take one." She did not say that the *Journal* would probably not bother sending Lefty out to take a picture. He had more important ones to take. Besides, it was always cheaper to borrow a picture. "But I'm sure Lefty—that's the photographer—can fix this up," she went on. "He can change the collar to the kind you're wearing now."

"Can he, honest?" Joe was all eyes. "By magic?"

Mrs. Kennedy took the picture out of the frame for Joan, and she left to get back to the office. When the picture came out the next afternoon, Jimmy Kennedy was wearing a grown-up collar and a four-in-hand tie, instead of a

Windsor. Joan had known Lefty could do anything. The big picture of Eric and the smaller one of Jimmy were the same size in the paper reproduction, and Jimmy's looked just as nice as Eric's, which had been taken by the town's best photographer.

Tim wrote up a dandy story, too, from the data Joan could give him. "Gee, you saw enough to write a novel about it!" he said, as she reeled off the number of lamps, candlesticks, and clocks that graced the Reynolds home. "I'm glad it's a boy story this time," he smiled. "I sure got tired of writing up babies!"

The *Journal* sent the check to Jimmy and the game tickets to Eric. Joan was in Uncle John's office when he signed the check, for it was not an ordinary check like the ones Burke made out for stamps and clean towels. It was a special check and had to be signed by Uncle John himself, with his odd, illegible scrawl, John W. Martin. He always made an old-fashioned *M*. He had to hunt around for fresh ink, as the inkwell on his desk was full of dry, black chunks. He found a bottle behind the books on the desk and used that.

Both boys promptly wrote in with brief, polite notes of thanks. Joan read them over when they were published in the *Journal*, each one a bare stick (two inches of print). They seemed too short and too polite. What was the trouble? They were not at all the frankly delighted, boyish notes that you would have expected Eric and Jimmy to write.

Two days later, Gertie appeared in the little hallway between that office and the editorial one. "A Jewish gentleman, very much out of temper, is demanding to speak to Mr. Martin," she announced. Then she saw that Tim's desk was vacant. "Isn't the cub here?"

Joan looked up from the damp proof sheets of the society layout for Sunday. She was helping Miss Betty and was pasting the typed captions under the proper picture. She shook her head at Gertie, as she carefully pressed down on a strip of copy paper, bearing the title, "To be Married This Week."

Gertie left, but reappeared in a flash. "Say, this gink won't take no for an answer. Madder'n a hornet. Says he wants to talk to some one who knows something about those prizes the boys won."

Joan forgot the brides and jumped up, grabbing a pad and pencil. She started to the nearest phone booth, knowing that Gertie would switch the call back to her. She clamped the head phones over her ears, and had her hands free to make notes. A tumult of quick Jewish phrases sounded in her ears. "Hey, you Mr. Martin, what you think this boy try pull trick like this?"

"Who is it, please?"

"I tell you two, t'ree times. It's Abie. You know me. I got Abie's Pawnshop on

Main Street, near Spring.” His voice drifted away, as though he were talking to some one else. “Well, all right, you talk, then, and tell Mr. Martin come quick, or I have you put in jail.”

Another voice, surprisingly familiar, inquired whether she were Mr. Martin.

“No, this is *Miss* Martin,” Joan felt important, but puzzled over that voice. “Can I help you?”

“This is Eric Reynolds,” came the answer. “Will you please have some one from your office come over here and help me out. I’m in trouble.”

CHAPTER XIII

ERIC

Eric Reynolds! The winner of the second prize was in trouble and was calling on Joan to help him. Still, he did not know her name was Martin or that she was the girl who had interviewed him at his home a few days ago, when she had informed him that he was one of the winners.

What could the mysterious trouble be? Of course, she must go and help him, if she could, even though he was a sissy. "I'll come," she said, and heard Eric's "Thank you very much," as he hung up.

She could at least find out what Eric or Abie had wanted with Tim. No use to bother any one in the office with this until she knew more. Probably Abie wanted to give Tim a scolding about something. Cub reporters were always being summoned for all sorts of things. Perhaps something Tim had written for the paper had aroused Abie's ire. Still, what had Eric to do with it? And what was a rich boy like Eric doing in a pawnshop?

Joan trotted along up Market Street and around the corner on Main. It was just a few blocks to Abie's Pawnshop. Every one called him just Abie. The shop was in the cheap part of Main Street—the wrong side of Buckeye, which divided the two districts. The shop was a tiny place, crowded with everything from furs to fruit dishes. Three gold balls, a bit tarnished, hung in front, and inside at the right was a wire cage, where Abie, framed by a background of watches and clocks, usually held forth. To-day, however, he was in the center of the shop. Eric Reynolds was there, too, holding a black violin case under his arm.

"Hey, are you *Mr. Martin*?" Abie growled when he saw her.

Joan explained that Mr. Martin was her brother and that she had come in his place, as he was busy on an assignment.

"Your brother—he signed this, hey?" Abie brandished a bit of paper under her nose. He was a small man, in shirt sleeves and a vest, with a heavy gold chain across his plump stomach. The chain was wobbling, he was so angry. "This boy here—" he indicated Eric with a jerk of his pudgy thumb—"he wants to buy violin off me and he gives me check for twenty-five dollars—and it *ain't signed*."

Not signed! Why, she had watched Uncle John sign it. Anyway, how did Eric happen to have the check? Had the awards really been mixed, after all? Perhaps,

even now, Jimmy was speeding toward Cleveland to the big game. Or—perhaps Eric had stolen the check, for some reason. But surely he had plenty of money. He looked especially stylish in the sweater and hose-to-match set he was wearing to-day. But how did he get the check?

She remembered having seen Jimmy's name on it. And now, Eric had it, and somehow it was blank where Uncle John had signed his name.

It certainly was a *mystery*. The word reminded her of Dummy. Could he have mixed the prizes, thinking that he would get the paper in bad with the public? The mistake might, too, for, of course, a paper awarding prizes ought to award them correctly. Dummy could certainly think up strange things to do—for she was sure he had had a hand in this.

"Is this Miss Martin?" Eric asked. Didn't he recognize her in the old middy? "You're the girl who came to see me, aren't you? Will you kindly tell this man that your brother did sign this check when he sent it to Jimmy, and that it's perfectly O.K.?"

"My brother is Mr. Martin," Joan smiled. "But not the one you think. That's my uncle. The girl called Tim to the phone, and he wasn't there, and I got your message to come around. But—" she broke off her explanation. "The check was signed. I saw it. It was sent to Jimmy, though." And she had been so anxious that no more mistakes should be made.

"I can explain," the boy began. "You see, I was disappointed when I didn't get first prize, because I wanted, not the honor, but the money." He looked embarrassed but went on. "My music teacher told me there was a really good violin here at Abie's shop. It was twenty-five dollars, and I have only a small allowance. My parents wouldn't get it for me. They didn't know I'd been taking secret lessons since Christmas. Professor Hofman gives them to me, free. Mother wants me to be an athlete and she suggested my trying in the contest, and I did in hopes of winning the money."

Abie was getting impatient during this recital. Evidently he had heard the explanation before. He was waving his hands. "It ain't signed," he muttered.

"Yes, but how did you get the check?" Joan asked Eric.

"Well, it's funny," he drawled. Did he talk slowly, naturally, or was he trying to infuriate Abie? Eric was such an odd boy, you never could be sure about him. "I didn't want the tickets, but it seems that the other boy did. I was certainly surprised to have a voice over the phone ask me if I wanted to sell the tickets and passes for twenty-five dollars. It was Jimmy. I told him I'd give them to him. But he insisted that we swap prizes. I did it, because I wanted the violin so much. It hardly seemed right, but Jimmy said my letter was better than his."

“It was,” Joan admitted. “But I gave the money prize, to him, because he was—poor.”

“I don’t care anything about baseball,” Eric stated. “I wouldn’t dare play ball, for fear I’d break my finger and couldn’t play the violin. Professor Hofman says my fingers are—are precious.” He almost whispered the last word.

He wasn’t a sissy, only a genius. What if her decision had kept him from fulfilling his ambition? She could sympathize with him, for didn’t she want to be a newspaper reporter, while Mother thought it unladylike? She had put a stumblingblock in his way when she had decided the prizes, thinking he did not need money.

“So I took the check,” Eric continued, “since Jimmy said he didn’t need it and would much rather have the tickets. We met at the bank, and the man there explained how Jimmy was to write payable to me on it. And I wrote ‘Payable to Abie Goldstein’ on it and brought it here. We didn’t show the check to any one there; just asked. I didn’t notice it then, and when I got here, there was no signature. Jimmy hadn’t mentioned anything about it.”

“He’s been coming in here, looking at that violin, two, t’ree times every week for long time,” nodded Abie. “To-day, he say he take it. I think it lot money for him to have, but he look rich, and I give it him. Then he give me check not signed. I not so dumb as I look, maybe! I tell him I put him in jail for that! I call Mr. Martin at the *Journal*, like he say—and you come.”

He seemed to consider her a poor substitute. She remembered now that Abie had shouted something about putting some one in jail when she had talked to him over the telephone. She did not doubt but that the irate little man would do something awful to Eric if he could not prove his innocence. To think how she had misjudged Eric. She must help him now, for in a way, it was through her that he was in this mix-up. It was certainly a mystery, though. How could a check be signed one day and unsigned the next? Even Dummy could hardly do such a thing.

It was clear that she must do two things. She must get hold of Jimmy, somehow, to prove that Eric’s story was true, and then get Uncle John to untangle the knotty problem of the signature. She went back of the counter to Abie’s phone. It was on the wall. She had to tilt the mouthpiece down and then stand on tiptoe. Joan doubted whether Jimmy had a telephone and when Information Operator assured her he did not, she asked for the nearest one. Miss Betty often did that. The telephone next door proved to be that of a Mrs. Kelly who was willing to send one of her children over to deliver a message to Jimmy Kennedy. “Tell him to come to the *Journal* office as quickly as possible,” Joan

told her. "It's important."

"Sure and he'll be there quick as you like," came Mrs. Kelly's answer. "He'll likely use his bike and he's fast as the wind on that."

Then, the three of them started over to the *Journal* office. Before he left, Abie called his assistant to "mind the shop." Joan and Eric led the way, and Abie followed, his hands wildly waving. Eric seemed a little sober now at the outcome of the exchange of prizes. He said nothing but still hugged the violin.

Uncle John was busy and while they were waiting Jimmy appeared. Tim was back now, the paper was out, and Joan explained things to him. When they went into Uncle John's office, Tim went in, too. They seemed to fill the little room, the sanctum sanctorum. Em was there, curled up on the window sill, her tail hanging straight down. Silhouetted against the light, she looked like a spook. Joan picked her up and held her. Uncle John got up from his swivel chair that creaked gratefully when he hoisted his stout self from it and greeted them with raised eyebrows. Joan started to explain the situation, but Abie, flashing the check, broke in with his mumblings.

Uncle John took the check. "Well, what's it all about? This is the check I sent to the Kennedy boy."

"Yes, but I wanted the tickets to the game—they're hard to get—and the trip to Cleveland and the autographed ball," Jimmy said. "And when I didn't win 'em, and read in the *Journal* that a kid named Eric Reynolds did, I went to the drug store and telephoned him."

"And we traded prizes," put in Eric. "But the check wasn't signed."

"Well, this is a mystery," Uncle John examined the check. "I'm positive I signed it. This is the same check, I'm sure."

"Oh, yes, sir." Jimmy twisted at his blouse pocket and produced an envelope. "Here's what the letter and the check came in, addressed to me. The letter's at home, but I brought the check along in this to keep it clean for Eric."

"Yes, it's the same check," Uncle John said, holding it out.

The bit of paper brushed against Em's long white whiskers as Uncle John placed it on his desk. The cat squirmed in Joan's arms. She wrinkled up her black face and began to sneeze and hiss, wrenching herself away, as if to spring toward the check.

"Why—" Joan put Em down and the cat immediately rolled over and over on the floor, casting sidewise glances at them from her big yellow eyes. Then Joan picked up the check, held it to her own nose and sniffed. "Why, it does! It smells like saffras!"

"Well, and what has that to do with it?" snapped the pawnshop owner. "Maybe

the boys was drinking sassafras sodys at the drug store and spilled some on it. What does that prove, if you're so smart?"

But Joan would not give up. "Did you?" she turned to the boys.

They both shook their heads. "I don't like sassafras," Eric said.

Joan opened the office door and called Chub. He came right in, for he had been standing outside, listening and watching their shadows on the frosted door window. "Chub," she demanded, "where did you hide that magic ink?"

Chub blushed until his face was almost as red as his hair. "I—I suppose I shouldn't of, but I hid it behind those books on the General Mag.'s desk."

The general manager was Uncle John, of course. "I did use the ink behind the books," he stated. "I thought it was a misplaced supply bottle, and well, I must have signed the check with the vanishing ink? Here, give it to me, and I'll sign it again—" he started to dip his pen into the filled inkwell.

"No, Uncle John, please! Let us prove it!" Joan begged. "Chub, do your stuff. Let's see you magic the signature back again."

Tim produced the match Chub asked for, and he cupped his hands while the younger boy held the tiny flame near the check. Breathlessly, the others watched. Abie's brown eyes were bulging. He did not know what to expect. Eric and Jimmy were frankly interested. Uncle John was amused. Joan and Chub were the only ones watching with real assurance.

The match went out in spite of Tim's shielding hands. Three times matches were lighted and three times they went out. Chub began to get red in the face and beads of perspiration stood out on his cheeks. Even Joan got a little worried. Maybe Chub's magic wasn't any good. Then they couldn't prove that this check had been signed and that Eric was all right. She had to prove it!

"We have to have a steady, even heat," Chub decided. "I did it over the kitchen stove at home. But there're no gas jets here."

"I know! The flames that dry the print!" Joan started out to the composing room, and the rest trailed along, quite a little procession, it was, with Joan and Chub leading.

The big room was fairly silent now, for the paper had just been run off the giant presses. But the rows of tiny blue flames along the top of each roller, which dried each page as it was flipped over, had not yet been turned out. Joan had always thought the flames very pretty—that little bit of bright color in this dim, cement-floored room, which was like a vast cave somehow, and usually thunderous with the roar of the presses.

Chub, as master of ceremonies, held the piece of paper up in front of the flames, moving it gently back and forth, so that it would not be scorched or

burned.

The others pressed close about the office boy. Soon, there appeared upon the check down in the right-hand corner, the scrawled signature, "John W. Martin," old-fashioned *M* and all.

"It's certainly magic!" cried Joan.

"Yes, but don't leave that ink around again," Uncle John warned Chub.

"Very fine trick," said Abie, while the others murmured their surprise.

"Now, let's see, is this exchange the boys are making O.K.?" Uncle John asked, when they were all back in his little office again, and he had the check with its restored signature in his hand.

"Jimmy, don't you know twenty-five dollars is a lot of money?"

"Well, I suppose it is," admitted Jimmy. "But you see, I just entered the contest 'cause I wanted the ball and the trip to the game. Mom thought I won that, and I didn't tell her any different, because we traded. It'd cost me twenty-five dollars to go to the game, and Babe Ruth wouldn't sign a baseball for me, without I had that prize announcement letter telling him to. Anyway, I didn't think my letter would win first, but I hoped it would win second."

"Eric's was the better one, really," Joan remarked.

"Every one seems agreed." Uncle John passed the check over to Abie. "I guess the violin is the boy's."

"Won't you play something?" Joan begged Eric. "Do let him, Uncle John. The paper's out, and no one's busy."

At Uncle John's nod, Eric took the violin from its case and tucked it under his chin. A dark lock of his hair tumbled upon his forehead and made his thin face look even whiter than usual. "A regular violin face," Joan thought to herself. "I wonder I didn't think of it before. And I thought he'd be a speedy ball player, because he was thin. Fine reporter I'd be!"

Eric played. A dreamy but spirited thing that made you think of lads and lassies doing an old-time dance on a green countryside. Joan could picture the colors of their costumes as the couples whisked about, hopping, and smiling to each other. Every one in the little office stood perfectly still while Eric played.

When he finished, the bow drooped limp and lifeless in his hand. Uncle John strode toward the door. "Very nice, indeed," he said, and his voice was gruff. "But this is hardly a concert hall."

Abie was clapping his hairy hands. "Wonderful! Wonderful! Five dollars and even more you would pay to hear such playing like that!"

"The kid's clever, no joke," Tim remarked as he went out. "And their

swapping the prizes will make a peach of a follow-up story.”

Eric held out his hand to Joan, right there in front of Jimmy and Chub. “Thank you very much,” he said in his grown-up way, “for helping us out—for solving the mystery.”

Joan laughed. “Don’t thank me. Thank Em. She did it.”

They all looked over to the corner where Em was unconcernedly licking her black paw.

“It’s the second time she proved herself a heroine,” Joan thought to herself. She had led Joan to the charity play story—and now this. Dummy had hid the story, she was sure, and had been only pretending in his argument with Mack. You couldn’t tell about the proofreader. Yet, here was another mistake that had happened and Dummy had not been to blame.

CHAPTER XIV

SACRED COW

“That is the curse of the newspaper game,” said Mr. Nixon one busy lunch time, a few days later, as he banged down the receiver of his desk phone.

The office was deserted except for Cookie, over in his corner, and Joan, who had strolled in expecting to find Miss Betty. But the society editor had gone to report a lecture at the Music Club luncheon. Tim and Mack were out, too; Cookie did not look up at the editor’s remark. So it seemed that he must be talking to Joan.

“What is?” she asked.

“What?” his bushy brows went up. “I guess I was talking to myself. It’s a sign of old age. But I meant—Sacred Cow.”

Sacred Cow. Joan didn’t understand. Cookie was busy, but she just had to ask him. He was always nice about questions.

“Why, just a ‘puff’—you know, free publicity for advertisers. They never seem to ask for it at a reasonable time, but always when we have to do everything but hold the presses to give it to them.”

Then, of course, Joan knew. Those squibs Miss Betty sometimes stuck into the society columns about what good dinners the Tea Room served. That was Sacred Cow.

“The story is only a means of getting the store’s name in the paper,” Cookie went on. Then he called across to the editor, “What is it this time, Nix?”

“Window display at Davis’,” was the answer. “And every one’s going to be busy this afternoon. Want it in to-day’s paper, too—and I’ve no one to send.”

Cookie was not sent out on stories any more; he was too old.

Joan suddenly felt as she had when she had been tempted to change Tim’s story about Tommy and the overcrowded Day Nursery. That had turned out all right. Should she take a chance again?

“Mr. Nixon,” she approached his desk timidly, “couldn’t I go?”

“You?” The editor looked up. “But you can’t write.”

“Oh, yes, I can,” Joan assured him. “I can compose right on the typewriter, too, just the way the rest of the reporters do. I—I,” she hated to tell him this, but she couldn’t miss such an opportunity, “I wrote part of that Day Nursery story for Tim. You see, I know more about babies than he does.”

“Babies—” repeated the editor. “This is a baby window display. Girl, I like your spunk and I believe I’ll let you try. Run along.”

Joan wanted to ask a dozen questions. Which window was it? Was she to see any one in particular? What kind of a write-up did he want? One of those chummy intimate chats that Miss Betty sometimes wrote, or a stiff, formal article?

But she didn’t ask any of them. He had said she could go. If she bothered him, he might change his mind. She said only, “O.K.,” the way Chub always did, and went over to Tim’s desk. There she helped herself to a yellow pencil, furnished by the *Journal*, and a folded pad of copy paper. She would take plenty of notes. She had helped often around the *Journal*, but this was the first assignment that she was to do all by herself and as luck had it, she had on her tan sweater outfit. Chub, appearing suddenly, slapped her on the back as she went out, with “Good luck!”

At the corner she almost ran into Mack, who was coming out of a restaurant door. “Where’s the fire?” he asked, seeing her hurry. In her enthusiasm, she could not resist saying, “I’m covering a story for the paper, Mack.”

He stared at her. He was an odd creature, she reflected. Any one else would have been decent about it. But, of course, he disliked her because she was the sister of his rival.

“Did you notice who was with me, just now?” he asked.

Joan shook her head. She had vaguely seen a big sort of man strolling off, but had been too occupied with her own thoughts really to notice.

Mack continued to stare at her. “I believe I’ll tell you, kid. You see, I found out that you and that office boy think Dummy’s a crook. Well, so do I. So I thought I’d do some investigating on my own hook. I was just trying to pump Tebbets about him. Keep quiet about all this.”

“All right.” Joan was too engrossed in being sent on her first real assignment to bother much about anything, even about the office mystery. At least, Mack wasn’t laughing at them for thinking Dummy a spy—the way Tim probably would have. Rather the sport editor now seemed very much in earnest. Of course, he wanted to be the one to solve the problem in order to shine in Miss Betty’s eyes.

A few blocks more and she was at Davis’ Department Store. She got panicky. Maybe she shouldn’t have come. After all, she wasn’t a real reporter. Oh, what an adorable window! Chubby, lifelike baby figures, clad in abbreviated sun suits, playing in real sand. This must be the window. Joan pressed her face against the glass and took in details. Writing this up would be fun! Wouldn’t Tommy look

cunning in one of those suits?

That reminded her that Tommy's mother was in Davis', just inside the door at the handkerchief counter. She would ask her about the window.

"Mr. Dugan, the floorwalker, will be glad to tell you about the window, Joan," Tommy's mother said. "He adores kids, and that window is a pet of his."

Mr. Dugan was lovely (Joan's word), a tall man in striped trousers and a cutaway coat, who looked more like an usher at a stylish wedding than a floorwalker. He took her to the window and explained about the suits, saying that Davis' was the first store in Plainfield to show them. Joan made a note of that on her pad and underscored it.

"You see, in these suits, the babies get all the necessary vitamins from the sunshine."

Joan bent over her pad. "Vitamine—" she didn't know how to spell it, but she could look it up when she got back to the office.

Mr. Dugan saw her dilemma. "V-i-t-a-m-i-n-e," he spelled, without even smiling. He went on and told her about the New York lecturer who would talk to the mothers on the importance of sunshine.

When Joan thanked him for his kindness, he said, "I've enjoyed it all, too, for I never was interviewed by such an inspired young newspaper reporter. Most of them are so bold and prepossessing that you hate to tell 'em anything."

That was because this was her very first assignment and she had been scared to pieces. Of course, it was probably just good luck that Mr. Dugan had proved so amiable—what Tim called a "lucky break."

She hurried back to the *Journal*, meeting Amy just at the big double doors of the red-front Five and Ten. She was on her way to buy a heart-shaped powder puff, special that day for only ten cents. She urged Joan to come in and indulge, too.

"I can't," Joan displayed her yellow notes, importantly. "I've got a dead-line to make."

"You funny kid. Your nose is shiny."

Joan didn't mind her laughing. She was too happy over her assignment to let anything worry her. Amy knew that she had not started powdering yet, except when she went to parties.

Luckily, Tim was still out on his assignment, and she could have his typewriter undisturbed. It wasn't a good machine; it worked hard and the commas were all headless, which made the composition rather confusing. Chub came over and hung around her typewriter, while Joan worked on her story. She had read scores of fashion notes, store openings, and so on, following Miss Betty

through all her literary adventures, so that she now had a fairly clear idea of how to go about writing up the Davis display window.

Just as she had with the Day Nursery story, she made the youngster who was to wear the sun suit, and receive its benefits, very real and fascinating. No one could resist the story's appeal. Every mother who read it would say, "That's just the thing for Billy and Betty," and would go right down to the store. She had the facts, too, and even quoted the New York lecturer and Mr. Dugan.

She looked up every word she was the least doubtful about in the worn, coverless dictionary. She remembered that Miss Betty counted four triple-spaced typed pages to a column. Recalling Miss Betty's recent write-up of a toggery shop, she planned to make this the same length, about a third of a column, and figured that would be a little more than a page of typewriting.

At last the story satisfied her and she retyped it. She had made too many changes in the original to hand that draft in, although she knew that was the way real reporters did. What name should she put in the upper left-hand corner? If she put simply Martin, every one would think Tim had written it, and he would be blamed if there were any mistakes in it. "Joan" would be too informal, so she decided on J. MARTIN, and typed it in capitals, the way Tim did.

She left a space for the "head." The *Journal* headlines were written right on the copy. What kind would it have—a No. 1 italic, or a two-column boldface? Joan had often tried to learn headline writing but discovered that finding words to fit the spaces was harder than cross-word puzzles.

She knew that a news story should, if possible, answer the questions: Who? What? Where? When? and How? in the first sentence, and she had devised such a "lead." She remembered that Cookie once told them about a young reporter, who, in writing about a young man who had been drowned, started his story by telling how the youth had left home that morning, and gone on a picnic with his chums, how they had enjoyed lunch, and then hired a boat to go rowing. Not until the last paragraph did the reader learn that the young man had been drowned. That was the wrong way to write news stories, Cookie explained.

Was her story good enough? For a moment, she was tempted not to hand it in, after all. Still, Mr. Dugan would look for it in the *Journal*.

She placed it timidly upon Mr. Nixon's desk. He was talking over the telephone, listening with one cheek held against the mouthpiece to shut out the office noises. He nodded at her and began to read copy on the story while he listened to the telephone conversation, answering with monosyllables. It might be a tip for a big news story he was getting, or it might be Mrs. Editor on the other end of the wire, telling him about the baby. Once Chub had told Joan that

Mrs. Editor had telephoned that the baby had a tooth—her first. The connection had been poor and for a few moments the office was thrown into consternation, because the editor had understood her to say, “Ruthie has the croup.” Perhaps, though, Chub had made that story up. You never did know what to believe, for the *Journal* family liked joking so well.

The editor slammed down the receiver and walked toward the composing room with Joan’s story. How would she ever live until the middle of the afternoon when the paper came out? Miss Betty had come back and was working feverishly to get her copy in. Tim came, too, and when he wasn’t busy, Joan told him she had interviewed a Sacred Cow.

“Too bad I wasn’t here to help you,” he said.

Joan kept thinking about her story. The linotype men must be through with it by now. It had been written off by one machine, she was sure—for only the long stories were split up by pages and handed around in order to keep all the linotype men busy. Then the proof was “pulled” and Dummy read that. He would have her copy to follow and would see her name on it. Would he know who J. Martin was?

She heard the presses going—and a sick feeling clutched her. Suppose she had made some terrible mistake in the story?

One minute she wanted to run out after the papers as she often did. But that would seem over-anxious. The next minute, she wanted to run home and not even look at the story. Oh, wouldn’t some one ever go back after the papers?

Finally, Chub and Gertie emerged through the swinging door. Gertie had a bunch of papers over her arm, and so did Chub. Hers were for counter sales in the front office. Chub handed one to each member of the staff, as was his custom. Then he came to Joan, sitting there, silently twisting her tie.

“Here’s yours.” He handed her a copy, damp and limp, it was so fresh from the press.

She took the paper. She remembered that day, so long ago it seemed, though it was only a month and a half, when she had read Tim’s first story, and now—she was going to read her own. Her own first story. In the *Journal*. “Thank you, Chub,” her voice came in a whisper.

Chub looked at her, staring at the paper. “Gosh, ain’t you going to hunt up your story? Ain’t on the front page, for I saw the page proof of that. Here let me help you hunt. Don’t you know a reporter,” he drew the word out, deliciously, as though he were chewing a caramel, “should read over his stuff *after* it’s printed?”

“Yes, I know.” Her hand actually shook as she turned the pages. Together they

scanned the paper, down one column and up the next, their eyes darting from one headline to another. At length they found it buried on one of the inside pages, but with an italicized headline that made it a really, truly feature story. There it was, just as she had written it.

Only one word was changed. She had used the word “ladies” and in the paper, it was “women.” She remembered now that the booklet, *Journal Style*, had said, “Do not use the term ‘lady,’ except to designate the wife of an English lord.” Of course, that was just part of the *Journal* policy, but she wished she had not forgotten.

“That’s a good story, Joan.” Mr. Nixon was smiling at her. “I guess the Davis Department Store won’t have any kick on the kind of stuff we give ’em.”

“What page?” Miss Betty was turning over her copy of the *Journal*. After she had discovered it and read it, she announced, “That’s a dandy story, Jo.”

“It is that.” Cookie added his bit.

Tim glanced at it, rather casually, Joan thought, and decided, “It’s pretty good for just a sub-cub reporter.”

Even Mack was nice enough to nod.

Joan could only grin like a Cheshire cat, blinking in the bewilderment of so much praise. Then, hugging the paper to her, she started home to show it to Mother. Mrs. Martin was busy cutting up an old dress, but she put her work aside and sat down in the porch rocker to read the story.

“Why, Joan,” she finished it at last. “I didn’t know you could do things like this. It sounds as good as what Tim writes. I believe you’d make a better reporter than he, after all. I feel as though I had seen Davis’ window, myself. I’ll go around past there on my way to the Auxiliary Meeting, just to see it. I want to.” She smiled. “Guess I’ll have to let you be a newspaper woman, after this.”

That from Mother!

To cover her confusion at Mother’s words, Joan dashed into the dining room and started setting the table, though it wasn’t nearly time. As she placed the silverware around, she began to wonder about Mack. She wasn’t sure whether she was glad or sorry that he knew they suspected Dummy of being a spy.

CHAPTER XV

JOAN MEETS ALEX

Even Tim seemed to have more respect for Joan after her write-up of the Davis kiddie window. Mr. Dugan had been satisfied, too, and had sent Joan a tiny sun suit of bright green hue, for her to give to Tommy. He said it was in appreciation of the nice write-up she gave them. Miss Betty was always being given all sorts of things, even a tip once from a wealthy woman, whose party she had written up extravagantly. "It happened I was a little short of news that day!" Miss Betty explained.

Joan was helping Tim more and more. She had gradually fallen into the habit of getting the stuff for the Ten Years Ago To-Day column ready for him every day.

Miss Betty was right when she said that the articles in the files were like stories. To-day, she found an engrossing one—all about a man who had disappeared right here in Plainfield. The man had been a bookkeeper, Mr. Richard Marat, and had discovered a deficiency in his books, and, fearing arrest, had fled—no one knew where. Reading ahead in the files, Joan learned that experts had examined the man's books, had found no deficiency and had reported that the man had simply made a mistake. Joan couldn't help feeling sorry for him, whoever he was, running away like that when he'd done nothing wrong. She knew how helpless one felt when a mistake happened that wasn't expected like that. She read parts of it aloud to Tim.

"Hair slightly gray, blue eyes—um, that would fit a lot of people," Tim said. "It's not specific enough. That's the most important thing to learn in the newspaper world—get details." Joan finished her typing and Tim was pleased when she handed it to him.

Tim was in a good humor. He whistled as he reached for his hat. "Want to go along?" he asked. "The paper's on the press and things are dull, so Nix's sending Lefty out to the Boyville School to take pictures of the boys' band in their new uniforms. And I'm to go along to see if I can't get a feature out of it."

She would adore it. "But—Amy's waiting for me—" she faltered. She had on the flowered organdie of palest yellow. She and Amy had planned a call on a visiting girl. But a chance to go with Tim! They could do the other, any time.

"Take her along," he invited. They found Amy waiting on the sidewalk engaged in conversation with Lefty, who was in his old car at the curb. Amy had

on an organdie, too—hers was pale pink. “Hop in, kids,” he held open the sagging door. “Sure, you can both go along.”

Lefty was nice, and rather young. Not so young as Tim, of course, but still, young. Joan and Amy climbed in. It might be just taking a ride to Amy, going out ten miles or so in the country on this sunshiny afternoon, but to Joan it was covering an assignment. Now that she was a reporter, too! Amy began chattering away, saying that this was the first time she had ever sat behind Tim and noticed what good-looking ears he had. Tim reddened at this, but did not get peeved. Amy always flattered the boys and they seemed to like it. Lefty was occupied with the driving. Joan wished that Chub could have come along, too.

Soon they passed through a tiny village. Nothing much there but a brick school, a few houses and stores, and an ugly frame building that bore the words, “Black Stump Volunteer Firemen’s Hall.”

“Is Black Stump a village?” Amy asked.

“Sure is,” Lefty nodded. “You are now in its busy center.”

“It’s a queer name for a town,” Joan remarked.

A little farther along, they came to a large estate on the right side of the road, hidden behind a Christmas tree hedge that seemed to stretch for miles. It was the home of Mr. West, one of the wealthiest men in the country. Through the vine-covered entrance gates, they had a peep at a winding path, leading over a rustic bridge and past a sparkling pond.

Then, the red-roofed buildings of the Boyville School came into sight as they started up grade. Lefty turned in between the two bleak posts and passed a big, bold sign, which announced:

BOYVILLE

PLAINFIELD TOWNSHIP TRUANT SCHOOL

At the desk inside the main building they were greeted by Mr. Link, the principal, a stern, gray-haired man, as erect as a general, and Mr. Bassett, his drooping little clerk.

“The band is waiting at the East Cottage,” Mr. Link said. “Come this way.” He opened a door at the back of the room and led them out into a cavelike place. It was a tunnel, with round, sloping walls of cold, gray stone and about as high as a tall man. Dampness rushed at them from the frigid walls.

The principal noted their puzzled expressions as the four stepped into the chill, queer place. “This tunnel is a part of our subway system,” he explained. “All our buildings are connected with this tunnel underground. It saves a lot of time and trouble. Food is taken in large thermos cans from the main kitchen to

the cottage dining rooms. The tunnel even runs to the old isolation hospital, across the lots from these buildings. But we don't use that hospital any more, for we had so few contagious cases, we found it better to take them to Plainfield."

Now he was opening a door, leading them up into a vast place that reeked of soap and water. Past a pantry and dining room, where tables were set with white cloths and napkins, rolled into rings, marked each place. "The boys are just outside this cottage," said the principal.

Cottage! It certainly wasn't the cozy place the word suggested, this bare, unlovely building. They followed Mr. Link up to the second floor of the cottage, where there was a living room, with the boys' study books in apple-pie order on the table. Joan caught a glimpse of the dormitory through an open door, with rows of scrupulously neat cots. Had the boys smoothed those beds? She marveled, but Mr. Link had said that the boys helped the matron with all the household tasks.

The second floor was on a level with the ground, and when they came out the front of the cottage they spied the band, about twenty boys in uniforms of French blue, with red-lined capes, costumes which Amy pronounced "simply gorgeous!" The boys' shiny instruments sparkled in the sun. Lefty pulled out the slender black stems of his tripod and set it up. Tim took charge of the boys, who obeyed him meekly, eyeing the principal all the time. He had the smaller boys sit on the lower step, the taller ones behind, the two buglers on each end, with the gold cord hanging just so. Then Lefty squinted into his camera—he was so slow and deliberate, at times.

Tim was chatting with the principal. "No, we don't use the honor system," Mr. Link was saying. "I don't believe it would work. The boys are bad boys, or they wouldn't be here. We treat them like the prisoners they are."

Joan decided to wander about a bit by herself, while the pictures were being taken. She strolled back into the cottage, without the others missing her. As she ventured along she suddenly heard a swish, swish, and looking over to the corner of the living room, she spied a boy of about her own age, kneeling beside a pail of soapy, gray water, scrubbing the floor.

"O gosh!" He jumped to his feet. His face got red. "I—I—" he could do nothing but stutter and seemed overcome with embarrassment. He was so different from Chub, who was plump and had red hair and freckles. This boy was tall and lanky, with a shock of very light hair and big blue eyes. He stared down at the scrub brush in his rough, red hands. "I—I'm on the clean-up crew this week," he said.

"I came with my brother—he's a cub reporter—and the photographer to take

pictures of the band boys,” Joan explained. “Their uniforms are nice.” She could not help but compare them with the blue overalls and faded shirt that he was wearing. He was barefooted, too.

“Ye-ah. They’re nice. We wear uniforms, too—brown ones with brass buttons.”

He seemed loath to turn back to his work while she was there, so she turned and started on. “Say,” he called after her, “do me a favor? Tell me something. Do you know much about a newspaper?”

Did she? When she had lived next to one all her life! She nodded, too surprised at his question to speak.

“Well,” he went on, “do you know where I could go to school to study running a linotype machine?”

Joan didn’t know. “But I’ll find out and write you,” she promised. He seemed to want to know so badly!

Instantly, his thin face lighted up. “Gosh, would you? I’d sure like to get a letter. The other fellers do, sometimes, but I never have. Just address it, ‘Alex White,’ and I’ll get it.”

“Don’t your parents write you?” Joan was curious.

“Haven’t any,” came the quick answer. “They both died when I was little, and I lived with Aunt Florrie, and she used to switch me every time I played hooky to hang around the pressroom at the *Journal*—”

“The *Journal*!” gasped the girl. “Why, I live next to it!”

“Then I’ve been in your alley a million times, I guess,” drawled Alex White. “I used to sell papers. Know Papa Sadler?”

Of course. Every one did. Papa Sadler was the name the boys gave to the jolly, middle-aged circulation manager, who managed the newsboys, collected their receipts, and paid them their commissions. Joan recalled how Papa Sadler and his “gang” had enjoyed the picnic. Once Alex had been one of those happy-hearted boys who swarmed around Papa Sadler, quarreling for the best routes and showing off and having fun! How had he happened to end up here?

“Didn’t you like school?” she ventured.

“Nope, couldn’t stand it. Played hooky until the truant officer came, and Aunt Florrie said she wished he would send me here, because she had six kids of her own and I was a bother.” His voice dropped. “I’ll be ever so much obliged to you, if you get me that information,” he said in a funny, formal way. “I’m going to get out on parole soon, for good behavior, and I just gotta know if I can go somewhere and learn the linotype trade.”

“Good-by, Alex White.” With a quick impulse, she reached out and shook his soapy, moist hand. “That’s an easy name. I can remember it.”

It was too bad about Alex. How different things were for him than for Eric Reynolds. Yet, each boy, hardly older than herself, knew firmly what he wanted to be. She guessed Alex’ name had reminded her of Eric—the names were something alike.

She kept thinking about Alex all the rest of the afternoon while the principal showed them over the school. They visited the classrooms and then went through the shops where such things as plumbing, carpentry, and laundry work were being taught.

“But no printing?” Joan asked, suddenly bold.

“That’s right,” laughed Lefty. “Drum up your own trade.”

But the principal answered her seriously. “Well, there is an appropriation that might be used for printing, if the boys showed enough interest. But printing is different from manual labor. It takes real knowledge and skill. Our boys couldn’t learn it, I’m afraid.”

She was sure they could, especially boys like Alex, who wanted to. But Mr. Link was not the type of man to argue with. She was still thinking about Alex when they drove home and passed the beautiful West estate which was almost next door. Wasn’t there some way out for Alex? Why, she felt toward him almost the way she had about Tommy. He was as bad off as Tommy. She wanted to help him too, as they had Tommy. Maybe the *Journal* would do something. Dummy seemed to like kids, and he knew the back office. Maybe he could get one of the linotype men to teach Alex, but that did not seem probable. Besides, Dummy was a villain, even though he did seem nice. Amy often remarked, “He’s either just a nice old man or a deep-dyed villain.”

“Some difference between old man West’s kid and the Boyville School boys, isn’t there?” Lefty said and brought Joan out of her thoughts.

“It wouldn’t be so terrible,” Amy said, “if only they didn’t have to wear those horribly unbecoming khaki uniforms.”

Cookie often said that a fire was the most exciting thing a reporter could be sent to cover. Of course, Tim wasn’t really sent to cover the fire that broke out on the West estate two nights later, but he was there and so was Joan. The *Journal* staff did not work in the evenings. Every one was usually gone by five or so, but the reporters took turns coming back to the office every few hours during the evening to see whether anything had “broken.” Tim had not yet been

assigned to any of this night duty. Mack had been at the office when the report of the fire came in, and he had phoned for Lefty and his camera and special equipment to take night pictures. Lefty, driving up to the curb to pick up Mack, honked also for Tim.

Joan had been sitting on the porch steps, too, with Em cuddled in the lap of her plaid skirt. Now, she jumped up, spilling Em, and dashed after her brother. "A fire! Oh, Tim, let me go, too. Mother's gone to an Auxiliary meeting, and I don't want to stay alone."

That was just an excuse so Tim'd take her.

"All right," he grunted. "If the rest don't mind, I don't."

"O.K. with me." Lefty was always nice.

But Mack said, "Why does that kid have to be forever hanging around?" Was he afraid she would tell the mystery? He had not mentioned it to her again. He probably wanted to solve it himself and reap the glory.

"Pipe down, Mack." Lefty told him. "This happens to be my car and if you don't care to go with us, you might hire a taxi and put it on your petty cash account. That is, if you haven't padded it too much already this week."

That was a snub for Mack! For the *Journal* staff rumored among themselves that Mack often treated Miss Betty to sodas and candy, charging it up to his expense account as car fare or stamps. He did it because he wanted Miss Betty to like him better than she did Tim. They didn't know that it was true, but the remark silenced Mack, for he said nothing as Joan climbed into the back seat. She wished she dared ask them to stop for Amy. At the corner, however, they passed Chub on his way to a movie on "passes." When he saw Lefty and the camera, he did not wait for anything. He hopped up on the running board and climbed over the door into the back seat.

"Gee!" he said, when he heard the news. "Wouldn't you know it would happen on *Star* time?" Since the *Journal* came out in the afternoon, the *Star* would have the story first.

The town of Black Stump was busy now. The big double doors of the Fire Hall stood open, revealing dark emptiness within. Men, women, and children were running about in the road—all in the direction of the fire. Lefty had to honk often and drive cautiously.

Now they could see the red glare in the sky, beyond the blur of the trees. At the entrance to the estate was a cluster of people. Lefty steered over the rustic bridge and past the pond, now dim and dark. As they approached the house, they could feel the heat of the fire, hear the crackle of it and the fall of the timber under the axes of the Volunteers. Lefty parked the car, and the *Journal* men

hurried out, Tim leaving orders that Chub was to look out for Joan. Lefty swung his camera over his shoulder and ran into the flickering, leaping shadows. Chub dashed off and Joan was alone.

People were all about, shouting, talking, screaming. The smoke made Joan's eyes blink as she peered about. She saw that the Volunteers had confined the fire to one wing of the house.

Chub came darting back. "Say, a bunch of kids from the Boyville School are helping the Volunteers. They phoned the principal and he sent about fifty of 'em down. Freed on their word of honor to go back. Trying out a new honor system. They marched down here, two and two, somebody said. They're hustlers. Come and watch."

Joan followed, stepping over the bumpy, mended places in the Volunteer hose stretched along the ground. "I know one of the boys at the home," she told Chub. "Alex White. I wonder if he's here."

By the burning wing, which was Mr. West's library, were three lines of boys, clad in khaki uniforms. They were passing armfuls of books from one to another, along the lines, like a bucket brigade. Firemen working within the burning home, beat their way through the smoke and appeared in the long French windows with the stacks of books.

Joan felt sure Alex was with the boys and scrutinized each face. Finally she located him up near the front, and she and Chub edged up. "Hello, Alex," she said when he looked up.

"Lo," he answered, and didn't seem half so surprised to see her as she had expected. Perhaps he thought that she went with Tim on all his assignments. She wished she did! But luck like this—going with him twice in the same week—wouldn't happen again in a long time.

Mr. West was helping to save the books, too. He was hatless and coatless, and running here and there. He didn't look like a millionaire—this little gray-haired man who, now that his family and home were in no danger, was all eagerness to save his precious books.

"I'm going to help, too," announced Chub, and Alex made room for him in the line.

Joan felt a little put out. Boys had all the fun! She couldn't stay there, for a Volunteer, who looked like a butcher, waved her off.

From near the car she watched Lefty's silhouette as he bent over his tripod, snapping pictures in the light of the flames.

Presently, the fire was out, only a wet odor of smoke in the air, the charred part of the home looking like the injured wing of a great, white bird. Chub came

through the smoke. "Come on and say good-bye to Alex," he said. "He's a good scout."

They started along the winding path toward the entrance gates, where the boys were forming in lines to march back.

"Gosh, what a tough-looking guy," Chub pressed her arm as they neared the pond, where, by the water, half hidden by a clump of bushes, they made out a big figure standing, with brass buttons gleaming like stars. He was talking to another khaki-suited shadow, and his voice sounded threatening. "Lissen, I'm going to beat it, if I want to, and if you try to stop me, you'll be sorry! See?"

The other boy raised his hand as if to strike, but as he twirled about, he discovered Chub and Joan and let his hand drop. It was Alex. He looked as embarrassed as he had when Joan had discovered him scrubbing the floor. "Oh, hello," he said. "This is Charley Falls. He was just having a little joke. Weren't you, Charley?"

Charley did not answer except with a snort of disgust as he turned away. At the gates the boys were already in lines, shuffling their feet, clouds of pale gold dust blowing up in the light of the gate lamps. "Good-by!" Alex called over his shoulder as he ran to join the others. Then, the tramp, tramp of their feet sounded as the boys began their two-mile march back to the school.

Chub and Joan went back and found the photographer busy taking a flashlight picture of the ruins and the crowds. At length, Lefty folded up his tripod and came to the car.

"This Boyville stuff will make a good feature," Mack was saying. "They saved the old man's books, all right. They say he's going to do something big for the Boyville boys. We've decided to follow it up. Drive on up to the school and see whether all the boys return."

Lefty stepped on the starter, and in a second, the car had whizzed around past the smoky house and out through the gates where the boys had started their march. They did not pass the boys, though it hardly seemed possible that they could have reached the school before this. There were lights here and there in the Boyville School and it looked really pretty at night, like a fairy castle, so high on the hill. Even the cold stone gates and plain sign took on a different look in the moonlight, Joan thought, as they turned in and drove up to the main building.

"Just Mack and I'll go in," decided Lefty. "Five of us look like a gang, and that principal's an old bear, anyway."

The ones on the back seat sat and waited. The excitement of the fire and the smoke in her eyes had made Joan rather sleepy. It was silly to have come on to the school. Of course, the boys had all returned. From within, they could hear the

low drone of voices, rhythmic and even.

Mack rushed down the steps. “What a wow of a story! Two of the boys didn’t come back. The boys came across lots by the old hospital building because it was so much shorter than all the way around by the road, and when they got here, two of them were missing!”

“Which ones?” Joan hardly knew she asked the question.

Mack looked at her. Of course, he did not know that she knew any of the boys. He had a bit of paper in his hand, and he leaned nearer to let the dash light fall on it. “Had to bribe one of the kids to tell me that. Couldn’t get anything out of that clam, Link.” He consulted the paper. “Charley Falls and Alex White,” he read. “That’s the kids’ names.”

CHAPTER XVI

THE HONOR SYSTEM

“Going back to the office, Mack, to write this up?” Lefty asked as he got into the car.

The *Journal* men had no way of knowing that the names of the two missing Boyville School boys had meant anything to Joan and Chub, on the back seat. Joan had gasped when she heard the names and then stared out into the darkness, speechless for a moment.

“No, Lefty, please wait!” She reached over and touched his sleeve. “I—we—we’ve just got to go in, Chub and I. We know that boy, Alex White, and he’s nice, isn’t he, Chub? And I—I’m just sure there’s a mistake.”

Mack slammed the door. “Little Mary Mix-up to the rescue.”

But Chub was her champion. “Don’t mind the old crab,” he whispered. “It’s a big story, and he’ll be glad enough to gobble it up, after we dig it up.” Aloud, he said, “That kid Alex wasn’t the kind that would break parole, and I think, too, that there’s something rotten in Denmark. You see, we know more about this than you three do. We heard that Charley boy threaten to run away, and Alex was ready to fight him.”

“I’m afraid Alex got the worst of it—” began Joan.

“Say, let’s leave the kids here in case anything breaks,” burst out Lefty, “and let us drive over the route again, for traces of the missing boys.”

“Oh, what’s the use?” yawned Mack. “Let’s go home and get some sleep. We can read all about the fire in *The Morning Star*.”

Chub was already out of the car, holding the door open for Joan. Inside, in the bright yellow light of the big hall of the main building, they stood still, a bit abashed now that they were there, especially with no plans as to what they should do.

Two long lines of boys stretched along the great, bare room, shuffling uneasily in the “sneaker” shoes they wore. Mr. Link was facing them, a list of names in his hands and his glasses on the end of his nose. “Now, boys, hold your places, and we’ll have the roll call over again to make sure. Abbott!”

“Here!” answered one of the boys, in a droning voice.

“Anderson!”

“Here!” came the same singsong answer as the roll call went on. That was

what the low drone had been that they had heard before. On and on hummed the voice of the principal and the boys responding.

Then, "Falls!"

Silence.

"Falls!" The principal looked up and glanced down the long lines as he repeated the word. He hesitated a brief half second and then went on to the next name.

Chub and Joan stood, scarcely breathing, waiting for Mr. Link to call Alex' name. Perhaps he hadn't heard it before. Perhaps he was late in forming in line. Perhaps he was there now, after all.

"White!" called the principal in a loud voice.

There was no answer.

"White!" This time there was a noticeable annoyance in his voice.

Still, no answer. Again, the principal glanced down the lines, over his glasses, and then went on with the calling of the roll.

Oh, why didn't Tim and the others hurry? Joan pressed her face against the glass of the door where they were standing, and looked out. The path to the stone gates was deserted. Everything looked so lonesome out here in the country, at night like this. The stars blinked sleepily and peacefully, just as though they had not looked down upon the burning of the West library, and were now looking down on perhaps two runaway boys scuttling over the lonely, moonlit roads. No, Joan was confident that Alex had not deserted, had not broken the honor system. It meant too much to him, she was sure. Something must have happened to keep him from reporting at the school with the rest of the boys. Something terrible. What?

"Do any of you know anything about these two who are missing?" asked the principal, sharply.

A boy at the end of the row volunteered. "They was both with us till we got to the old hospital. Charley thought up going home across the lots 'cause it was quicker, and Alex said all right. They marched us along ahead of them, then, and we just kept on marching, like they told us to."

"Plain case of parole breaking," Mr. Link said to his weary-looking clerk. "I told you, Bassett, that it would never do to send them alone. I knew that honor system wouldn't work." His mouth became a hard, thin line. "This'll give us a black eye with the state, I'm afraid. I'm not surprised at Charley Falls, but I thought that White boy had good stuff in him. Might have known he was too innocent looking. He was the one who advocated the honor system, and I fell for it."

“But why didn’t they run off on the way to the fire, if they had planned to desert all along?” interpolated the clerk.

“No boy could resist the thrill of helping at a real fire,” replied the principal.

“Well, be a little lenient,” suggested Mr. Bassett. “The boys may be delayed. Perhaps they went back to help with the fire, or something. Give them until ten o’clock to report.”

The principal stroked his rough chin. “Well, all right. That’ll do for now, boys. Go to your dormitories, but don’t go to bed. We’ll have another fire drill in half an hour.”

The boys filed out, awed and quiet.

Half an hour! It wasn’t long, and they had to find Alex. Perhaps, after all, he had been tempted to go with Charley. But Joan doubted that. She felt sure Alex had been hurt by that awful Charley, or he would have been here to answer to the roll call.

“Come on, Chub.” She pushed against the door, and they went out. The principal had not even noticed them standing there. “Let’s do a bit of sleuthing on our own.”

Lefty’s car clattered up while they were on the steps. “Come on, kids. No use hanging around any longer,” Mack said. “Those boys have probably got to the railroad by now and have hopped the night freight to Chicago. We’ve about as much chance of finding them as a needle in the well-known haystack. We rode all around by that hospital building, and couldn’t find a sign of them.”

When Joan and Chub said they wanted to hunt themselves, Tim surprisingly took their side. “Why not let the kids try? Maybe they’ll find something.”

On the main road, good-natured Lefty stopped the car when they saw the dark, unused hospital building, off by itself in the empty fields, now flooded with patches of moonlight.

“I wish we had a notebook, so we could be real detectives,” mused Joan, as she and Chub started across the dew-wet grass. The others had stayed in the car. “The Dummy mystery is nothing compared to this.”

Chub examined the ground near the clump of bushes by the hospital steps. The branches were brushed back as if a group of boys had pressed against them. There were bits of grass uprooted, as though with the toe or heel of a boy’s shoe, unmistakable signs of a struggle. Joan found a shred of torn khaki on the prickly bush.

“They had a battle all right, those two,” decided Chub. “But Charley couldn’t have carried a big kid like Alex very far. He must have *made* Alex go with him.”

It did seem so. For Alex wasn’t anywhere around. They peeped behind

bushes, and walked around the hospital without finding anything. As they started to the car, they both stood still. A low moan drifted out from somewhere. They both heard it.

“Some sick guy,” guessed Chub.

“No. They haven’t used this hospital for a long time,” Joan said.

“Well, there’s some one in there, now,” insisted the other. “But maybe it’s only an animal, caught in a trap. We might hunt, anyway.”

Around the building they went, but all the doors were securely locked and all the windows, too. Chub climbed up to examine a window higher up than the rest, through which they hoped to gain entrance. “Locked!” he said, with his jaws set like a real detective. How serious he looked in the moonlight, almost nice-looking, too, for his freckles didn’t show.

He jumped to the ground with a soft thud. “I wish the feller’d moan again, so we could tell where he is.”

Then, it did come again. It sounded in a different place. Not in the house at all, as it had the first time, but—*underneath the ground!*

“Spooks!” Chub’s plump face was sober. “I heard it sort of muffled, from right over there, underneath the earth.”

“So did I,” affirmed the girl. “But it’d be no use telling the Journalites. They’d only laugh, and call us sentimental. Besides, I don’t see how it *could* come from the ground.”

“Neither do I.” Chub shook his head. “Unless it’s an animal or—maybe a feller buried alive.”

Joan shuddered. “But we must get into the house, some way. I think it’s some one awful sick, and they *must* be in the house.”

“We’ll have to break the lock. It may even be Alex in there. But whoever it is, they need help.”

“I suppose we just imagined that it came from the ground,” said Joan. “Perhaps the echo sounded along under ground, some way.” It didn’t seem possible, but this had been such a stirring, mysterious sort of night that anything at all might happen.

“Um.” Chub was banging away at the lock on the back door. It wasn’t really locked after all, just held fast with a stout stick, that had to be knocked out of place. Thump, thump sounded over the clear, night air. There, the door swung open, emitting a gust of damp, unused air. It took nerve to go through the empty place, with only the moonlight to guide them—especially a place that had once housed ill people. There still hung an unearthly, hospital smell about it. Joan kept close to Chub, who stalked about each room, calling, “Any one here?” in a voice

that did not quaver. There was never any reply, and finally they had been in every room.

“No use,” decided the boy, and they started toward the back door. Then it came again, the low moan, only it sounded farther away than ever now, and certainly seemed to come from underneath the ground. “The cellar!” Chub led the way down the dark, narrow stairs, feeling for each step. But the place was empty.

“Why, the subway tunnel!” Joan remembered. “I never thought of it until now.” Then she explained, “It’s connected with the main building.”

“But can we find the opening?”

They began to feel around the wall of the room they were in. It was a small cellar, and had apparently at one time been used as a kitchen or laboratory. By an old sunken sink, which gleamed in the dimness like a tooth in a darky’s mouth, a part of the wall moved under their pressure and swung inward, into an opening.

“Hot dog!” cried the boy. “All the earmarks of a real detective story. Sliding panels and everything.”

“It doesn’t slide, and it isn’t a panel,” objected Joan, as she watched him step into the darkness of the aperture. “Oh, dear, I don’t know whether to go or not. If we only had a flashlight or even matches. I feel like Alice in Wonderland! Oh, wouldn’t this be a wonderful place for a person to hide, like that bookkeeper I read of—Richard Marat?”

“It’ll be a good place for Dummy to hide in after we prove him a spy,” conceded Chub’s voice from within the depths. Then he halloed ahead, “Anybody here?”

The answer was a low groan, sounding farther away than before. Joan stepped in, hands stretched out ahead.

She hurried till her hands felt the rough serge of Chub’s coat—at least that was familiar. Nothing else was in this terrible, eerie place. Of course, having been in the tunnel before, she had some idea what it was like, though she could not see. This seemed to be a smaller part of it, for she could almost touch the stone wall on each side with hands outspread. Chub was crouching along, half stooped—he did not know how high the tunnel was. Joan was walking erect, when suddenly something banged into her forehead. Something hard and cold and without anything attached to it. It hit her whack in the middle of her forehead. The surprise as much as the shock quite stunned her for a second. She stumbled, uttered a cry as she fell to one side, landing on the hard cement floor of the tunnel, her arms grasping something—something solid and bulky. A leg! With stocking and shoe with dangling laces! Someone moaned.

“S’matter?”

Joan could tell from Chub’s voice that he was still ahead of her. In a voice weak with pain and fright, she called, “Ch-Chub-bb! Have I got ahold of your leg?”

“No.” His steps sounded on the stone as they came to her.

“T-then whose is it?” Was it part of the hospital equipment, an artificial leg abandoned here in this ghostly place? Or—was it a human leg, left from some horrible accident? Joan shivered and her whole body became icy cold. Just then, her worst doubts were eased, for the moan came again and the leg in her arms stirred of its own accord. She loosened her hold and let it drop, whereupon the owner gave another groan.

Chub was feeling with his hands where the body should be. “Yep, brass buttons all right. It’s a Boyville School kid, and not big enough for Charley. It’s Alex.” His hand had now reached Alex’ head on the floor. He lifted it up. “Are you hurt much, old scout?”

Another moan was the only answer.

“It’s Chub and Joan—from the *Journal*,” went on Chub. “Can’t you speak?”

Joan felt Alex’ hot breath upon her face as he struggled to answer. “That—that blamed Charley—he got away—”

“Did he beat you up and hide you in here?” Chub wanted to know.

“Yes,” Alex’s head wobbled unsteadily in the dark. “Charley put me in there and locked the back door. Guess he forgot about the old tunnel. I was trying to get to the main building that way, and I—must have fainted. My leg’s hurt. But it’s not much farther, though. Think you could help me?”

“Sure thing!” Chub got to his feet to help the injured boy, when whang! something smooth and solid struck him in the back of the head, a terrific blow that made him wince. “Gosh, that Charley guy must be around right here in this tunnel, with an ax or something. Wish we had a match or a flash.”

“I got hit, too.” Joan rubbed her forehead.

“I’ll fix him.” Chub swung his clenched fists wildly about in the darkness, ready to fight, and Joan flattened herself against the chill wall. But though he battled in the blackness everywhere, he succeeded only in butting into the tunnel walls or against Joan or Alex. There seemed to be nothing there. And yet, both he and Joan had been hit, and hit *hard*. Could Charley have some mysterious contraption rigged up to torture them? Determined not to give up, Chub still swung at the air, and finally his fingers touched something smooth and round, just before him, about on a level with his head. Well, at least the unseen foe wasn’t an animal. Still, it might be a bomb. No, too small for that, the boy

decided as his stubby fingers went all over the surface of the thing. Then his sudden laugh filled the cave.

“I-it’s an electric light bulb hanging down from the ceiling,” he announced. “Wait a minute. I’ll see if it turns on.”

It didn’t, so they were still in darkness. Chub and Joan pulled Alex to his feet. He could not muffle his cries. Joan’s heart ached for the hurt boy. Then, with an arm around the neck of each, Alex managed to walk along. They decided not to attempt getting him up the cellar stairs. Better to go on to the main building.

“Gee, I’m glad it’s you, Jo, and not that simp of an Amy,” Chub said, as they went along.

It was a slow and painful procedure, but as Alex had said, it was not very far, and at last they reached the door that must lead to the main building. It was barred, and she and Chub thumped mightily on it. Would no one ever, ever hear? Would they have to go all the way through the tunnel again and across the fields to the car, and the long way around? Alex might not be able to stand such strain. He was weak, and seemed to be bleeding, for Joan felt something warm and thick trickle against her hand when she brushed against him. His coat felt stiff in spots, too.

Chub would not give up. He kicked and pounded on the door till finally they heard a bolt being slipped on the other side. The door gave way and the three of them almost tumbled out into the big hall of the main building. The boys were lined up there again, and the principal was calling the roll, in the same singsong drone as before.

“Edmonds!”

“Here.”

“Falls!”

Alex broke away with a painful effort and bolted weakly forward. “He got away! I tried—I tried—” His voice trailed off as he toppled down into a khaki heap on the bare floor.

The principal, himself, picked him up. “My poor boy, whatever happened?”

The clerk went hustling out to summon the school nurse. When she arrived she bandaged Alex’ wounded leg. Soon the boy was revived enough to answer the questions put to him by the principal. He was very pale, but eager to tell what had happened.

“You saved the honor system, White,” Mr. Link said when he heard the story, and he patted Alex’ shoulder.

Just then, “the Three Musketeers from the *Journal*,” as Chub called them later, appeared at the big doors across the room. All three blinked in the yellow light

and stared at Joan and Chub and the scene before them.

“How did you get here?” was written on each of their faces. And how Mack’s eyes snapped when he heard about the subway tunnel!

“We waited and waited for you two to come back,” Tim explained. “Then we went all through that hospital and couldn’t find you. We came back here to telephone the police you’d disappeared.”

“What luck!” Lefty was setting up his tripod. “I have one more exposure left.” Mr. Link and Alex posed together for the picture.

“You can say that I believe in the honor system, now, after this night,” the principal told Tim. “Falls got away but White’s behavior proves to me the system is worth while. We’ll always use it, from now on. And I’ll see to it, myself, that this boy has some fitting reward.”

Alex smiled—a weak grin, but a broad one.

Joan smiled, too. She supposed that Amy would hope that the reward would be pretty uniforms. Seeing that Mr. Link seemed a different person, she asked, “Do you think that the appropriation might be used for a printing office? Alex is wild to learn to run a linotype machine, and there are no schools in Plainfield.”

The principal met her steady gaze, and then glanced back to the boy. “Why, I’m sure of it. There’s no reason why a fourteen-year-old boy shouldn’t learn to run a linotype machine if he wants to! Boyville will have its own printing office just as soon as possible. You’ve earned it, Alex.”

The *Star* had the story of the fire, of course, but not the part about the honor system and about Alex’ bravery. So Joan felt she had helped Tim again.

Cookie had said once, “Fires are like bananas—they come in bunches!”

It did seem so, for only a few days after the West estate fire, the office, which had been placid enough a minute before, began to buzz.

“Big fire on Main Street,” shouted Mr. Nixon, slamming down his desk phone and jumping up. “And Mack’s out to lunch.”

There was no one to send but Tim. Lefty heard the news and came rushing through the office, from out back where he had been in his dark room. He was slipping the strap of his camera over his neck as he hurried along.

“You’ll have to go, Martin,” Mr. Nixon said. “You’ve been doing better lately. A fire’s broken out in one of the buildings on Main Street—near the Presbyterian Church.”

Tim, grabbing his hat off the hook, started for the door on a run.

“Get details,” the editor yelled after him. “You know, the origin of the fire,

owner's name, who discovered it, loss, and amount of insurance. And, for Pete's sake, be accurate."

Get details! Joan, propelling herself out of the office, almost upon Tim's heels, bumped into Amy.

"Amy, there's a fire on Main Street," she gasped. "And Tim's going to cover it."

"Cover it?" echoed Amy. "What with?"

"Write it up, that means," explained Joan, with mock patience. "Come on and go with me. We can watch and get details too. Oh, maybe Tim'll make the front page!"

CHAPTER XVII

TIM MAKES THE FRONT PAGE

From the *Journal's* point of view, it was a wonderful fire. It was only a ramshackle, vacant building that was burning, but it was right in the heart of the downtown section of Plainfield. When Joan and Amy reached the corner, they had to step over solid rounds of hose, stretched taut across the street. The red and yellow street cars were stalled for blocks, and down the street was the blazing, leaping fire.

The two girls pushed their way through the throng until they were at the edge of the crowd, right before the burning building. The fire engines were snorting at the curb. Firemen in their black rubber coats and hats were shouting orders. The friendly traffic policeman from the *Journal* corner had left his post and was busy waving his white-gloved hands about, to keep the crowds back within a certain distance of the fire.

Joan counted the engines and squeezed Amy's hand. "All the companies in town are here."

The girls stood watching the fire for some time. The heat rushed out at them. The crackle and roar sounded like the ocean—or the way Joan imagined the ocean would sound. The bright flames flung flickering, eerie shadows over drab Main Street. Now, the firemen must be getting it under control, for great gobs of black smoke were oozing out of the building. The smoke smarted their eyes and the smell of the fire filled their nostrils. They saw Lefty up in a window of a building across the street, taking pictures.

Joan had spotted Tim now. He was standing in the gutter, where the spray from the hose occasionally splattered him with a few stray drops. He had his pad and yellow pencil in his hand and was trying to ask questions of a fireman standing in the fire engine, unwinding the hose, too busy to do more than motion Tim to go away. Wasn't it a good thing he had been to the recent West fire and knew how to write this one up?

"Ed Hutton sure is in luck to have the old place go up in smoke," Joan heard a man who was pressing against her in the mob, say to his companion. "I guess the place is plastered with insurance. He was intending to build here, anyway."

Edward Hutton was the *Journal's* candidate for governor. Did the man mean that he was the owner of the building? She wondered whether Tim knew that. She tried to signal to him that she had found out something, but he was jamming

his pad and pencil into his coat pocket with a disgusted thrust and was leaping over the hose to back out of the crowd.

“Let’s go.” Amy pulled her arm. “A fire isn’t really exciting when it’s just an empty building. Of course, people lived upstairs, but they’re all out, some one said. Anyway, poor people in flats aren’t interesting.”

“When something happens to a poor person, it’s just as much news as though it happened to a rich person. In fact, I think poor people are more interesting,” Joan said, heatedly. “I’m going to ask one of the firemen whether the people did get out all right or not.”

“Jo, I’m going home, if you’re going to start up conversations with strange men that you haven’t been properly introduced to.” Amy broke away. “Besides, there’s nothing to see, and the smoke makes my eyes red. I know I look a sight.”

“All right, you can go,” Joan said. “I’m going to stick around until the all-out alarm is sounded.”

Then she thought of the policeman. No harm to ask him. It was always all right to ask a policeman anything. The crowd had thinned a bit, most of the onlookers feeling like Amy that the fire wasn’t much. A report was buzzed around that the fire was out.

“What is it, sister?” asked the policeman, when Joan tugged at his sleeve. He was a nice Irish policeman, and he talked to her out of one side of his mouth, while he waved his billy club, and shouted orders at the crowd out of the other side of his mouth.

“Officer,” Joan felt very small as she looked up at him, for her head reached only to his middle button, “is that building owned by Mr. Hutton?”

“It is that,” he answered.

“And did people live in the second floor?” she raised her voice and stood on tiptoe.

“They did that. But what did you want to know for?”

“I have to get all the details,” Joan informed him, earnestly. “I’m covering the story for the *Journal*.”

“Is that right?” smiled the officer. “Well, I thought you was just a kid, but you never can tell these days with short hair and shingled skirts. You must be new at the job, though.”

Why, he thought she was grown up! It was because of the tan sweater costume. Perhaps it would be just as well not to undeceive him just yet. “I am rather new,” she admitted. That was true enough. “Can’t you help me get details?”

“I don’t know the folk’s names, myself, but why don’t you ask Joe Kinney there—he’s a brand-new fireman. It’s his first fire, too. So he’ll probably talk. Most of the older firemen get like us police fellows—steer clear of reporters.”

“Oh, thank you so much.” Joan gave him a beaming smile, and followed Joe Kinney as he came out of the burning building and went back to the fire engine. She hoped he wouldn’t talk very fast because she had no pad or pencil and would have to keep all the facts in her mind.

“Mr. Kinney!” Surely it was all right to call a fireman “Mister.” “I’m from the *Journal*. Can you tell me about the fire?”

The man merely looked at her, blinked his eyes, and then fell back against the fire engine, his rubber helmet falling off and revealing wavy, red hair.

Joan had expected him to be impressed with the fact that he was about to be interviewed by a young girl reporter, but she did not expect him to fall completely over.

“Gosh, Kinney’s gone out like a light,” yelled another fireman. “Overcome by smoke, that’s all.” He slipped his arm under the other’s shoulder and drew him up to a sitting position against the step of the fire engine at the curb. “Stand back, folks. Give him air. Somebody get the first aid kit.”

Joan clung to the edge of the crowd that the officer was shoving back again. One fireman rushed up with a wet cloth and splashed Kinney’s face. Another one held a small bottle up to his nose. After a bit, Kinney opened his eyes. He got up to his feet. “There’s something moaning up there on a bed on the second floor,” Joan heard him whisper. “I’m going back.”

“Poor Joe thinks he’s going to be a hero right off the bat,” laughed the fireman with the bottle. He pulled at Kinney’s arm. “There ain’t a soul up there, Joe. ’Twas Mrs. Flattery, herself, that sent in the alarm and she told us everybody was out of the building. She said her kid was monkeying with the electric wiring.”

But Fireman Kinney was not to be dissuaded.

He stumbled on toward the smoking building and went inside, while the other firemen shook their heads. “Plum craziness,” one said. “But I’ll go along,” and he followed.

Joan was almost hurled off her feet by the mob that was eagerly watching for Kinney’s return. They could see him as he passed at a window, his hair a brilliant spot through the blackness of the smoke. Then, a little later, he appeared at the window for another moment, and he was carrying something in his arms. The crowd gave a gasp.

The firemen rushed to the building to greet Kinney and to take his burden from him—it was a big, black dog, slightly overcome by the smoke. As soon as

the dog was out in the open air, he pricked up his long ears, thrust out his red tongue and looked around at the people.

A boy darted out from the crowd, and threw himself upon the dog. "It's Blue," he blurted. "My very own Blue!" And the dog covered him with licks from his tongue.

"The Flattery kid's dog," murmured the crowd, watching the scene.

Then, there sounded, "Dong! Dong!" That meant "Fire's out."

Goodness, she'd have to hurry back to the *Journal* to tell the details she'd gathered to Tim, for Joan knew that the "dead-line" at the *Journal* was one o'clock. After that, it was too late for stories to get into the paper.

She arrived at the *Journal* office in time to hear Mr. Nixon yell out into the composing room, "Fix a streamer for the Main Street fire story, Tom." That meant that Tim's story was going to have a headline all across the front page in big letters.

Tim was trying not to be excited. He listened respectfully while Joan told her story. "Only the people right up close, who stayed on, knew about the rescue. It'll be a scoop," she finished up.

"Oh, I don't know," he answered carelessly. "Still, anything about dogs always goes big. I got all the other details, of course. I'm glad you got names, though. I think I can make a good story about Kinney's bravery at his first fire."

"That's what I thought, too," agreed his sister.

"You better beat it home to lunch," Tim ordered Joan. "Tell Mother I've got a dead-line to make; that I'll grab something later on."

Joan ate her own lunch in a hurry, and swished through the dish-washing, but even so, by the time she reached the *Journal* office again, it was almost time for the paper to be off the press. They had speeded up things to get out early with the fire story.

Tim was humming to himself as he hunted through the files for the Ten Years Ago To-Day column. "What do you think?" he whispered to Joan, when she came in. "Nixon said that my story was fine."

Gertie from the front office came through the composing room door, giggling as usual. "I declare," she told Mack, "that Dummy's the creepiest thing I ever saw. I just met him snooping around like a cat."

Miss Betty and Tim expostulated, but Mack, queerly enough, chimed in with Gertie's tale. "I always have thought he was an impostor, somehow." Joan was surprised that he said that much.

"We've always thought he was a spy," said Chub, before Joan could stop him.

“A spy,” echoed Gertie. “Why should he spy on us?”

“Berry. Elections,” muttered Tim. Had he heard them talking or did he just guess it, Joan wondered. “Trying to get Mr. Hutton in bad with the public.”

“I don’t believe it. You’re too romantic, Tim,” laughed Miss Betty. “Why, Mack, what are you looking so funny for?”

Mack ran his finger around the back of his collar. “It’s this blamed heat. I never saw an office with such rotten ventilation.”

But Joan thought it was because Miss Betty had told Tim he was “romantic.” Or was it because he was afraid she’d give it away that he, too, thought Dummy a spy? Then she saw through the window, a stream of newsboys going by, with papers under their arms.

“The paper’s out,” she shouted.

“Sure is.” Mr. Nixon came in from the composing room, where he had been wrestling with the job of “putting the paper to bed.” He had a smile on his face. “How does your brain child look to you in black and white, Tim?”

He held out a paper, with the headline, “HUTTON BLDG. ON MAIN STREET BURNS.”

Joan hung over the curve of Tim’s arm, despite jabs from his elbow, and together they read the story. All through the first paragraph, or “lead,” that told the “Who, where, what, when, and why,” of the story, as every lead should, on through Tim’s splendid description of the fire, and the fireman’s brave rescue of the dog, to the jubilant reunion of the boy and dog, which Tim had written in his best style.

“That dog stuff was good,” Cookie said. “The story wouldn’t have been anything without that part. You were pretty smart to get that, Martin.”

Joan glowed as she bent over the story. The very last sentence puzzled her. “What does that mean, Tim?” She put her finger on, “The police feel that the circumstances surrounding the cause of the fire are most suspicious and have started an investigation.”

“Gosh, I never wrote that!” Tim’s face got white. “I ended my story right here with, ‘The building is owned by Edward Hutton of Cleveland, Ohio, who is to be a candidate in the election for governor this fall. The loss is unestimated at present, but it is stated that it was covered by insurance.’”

“Maybe it was printer’s pi,” suggested Joan.

Chub hooted. “Pi’s when the type’s upset, silly. This is a mistake.”

Mr. Nixon had grabbed the paper. “I read proof on this myself, and I swear that wasn’t there—but still— Why, this is terrible, casting such reflections at Mr.

Hutton. Why couldn't you be careful, Martin? You must have written it, and I let it slip."

"But I didn't write it," protested Tim.

"Don't you see," Chub was explaining the situation in an aside to Joan, "that's an awful thing to say about a man, especially one running for governor. It means he set the building on fire to get rid of it, and that's against the law."

"But he didn't," reasoned Joan. "The fireman himself said it was defective wiring, just what Tim said in the beginning of the story."

"It couldn't be from another story, I tell you," Mr. Nixon was shouting at Tim, "because that's the only fire story we had in the paper to-day."

Suddenly Joan remembered that Mr. Johnson had said to come to him the next time anything suspicious happened.

She dashed across the room to the telephone booth and dived into the smoke-choked, dim little place, for she did not bother to snap on the swinging light. She lifted the receiver and called Mr. Johnson's number. She had memorized it for just such an emergency.

"Mistah Johnson not heah," the voice of a colored maid told her. "He's gone to Cincinnati foah a few days."

Then she'd have to work alone. The first thing to do was to get hold of Tim's copy and see whether that final paragraph was there—perhaps the printer had picked it up from some other story—perhaps something left over from the day before. She wasn't sure, but it might have happened, somehow.

When she came out of the phone booth, Mr. Nixon was still talking in his loudest tones. "We've had just about enough of this sort of thing going on here. Uncle or no uncle, this is too much!"

Tim was being fired! Joan had never seen any one get fired before, and had never dreamed it was ever done publicly and so loud as this. Poor Tim! There wouldn't be any college for him now, if he lost the job. Summer jobs were scarce in Plainfield. She had to help him!

"All right, I'll quit," Tim muttered. "No sense to work for a paper that lets such things happen. I tell you I never wrote that paragraph. Whether I can prove it or not, I never did!"

Joan wanted to rush right after him as he strode out of the office, but she must work on the mystery to solve it and save him. She couldn't lose a minute. If Dummy were a spy, she was going to find out right now and make things right for Tim. Perhaps she could prove it before Tim got home.

No need to ask Dummy anything. She wouldn't even nod to him, but just go right to the big hook where the copy was. The usual rumble and clatter came

from the pressroom, but here the linotype men had all gone home, and there was no one except Dummy over there in the corner. With fingers that trembled, Joan flipped the pages until she came to the fire story, with Tim's name up in the left-hand corner. It was a long story, and Tim had pasted the sheets together in one long strip.

The paragraph was there, just as it had appeared in the paper. Could it be that the Dummy had borrowed some one's typewriter and written it? Was he really a spy? He could so easily take the story off the hook, with no one questioning it, add that extra paragraph and get the *Journal's* candidate in bad, which was more his job than proofreading, she was sure.

She'd take the copy right to Mr. Nixon and tell him that no one would have dared change it but Dummy.

As she was hurrying toward the swinging door, she heard a voice. "Oh, Miss Joan!" It was a voice she had never heard before—a smooth, cultured, middle-aged, masculine voice. "I want to talk to you."

Joan turned and stared. There was not a soul in that whole vast place but Dummy over in his corner.

CHAPTER XVIII

DUMMY'S STORY

Joan continued to stare at Dummy. Could it have been his voice? As Gertie had said, he was a creepy sort of person. While she was standing there, the voice came again—and Dummy's lips were moving!

"I hope you're not carrying off that fire story, Miss Joan," he said in a slow sort of voice as though he were not sure of his speech. Joan wondered whether his voice had suddenly been restored to him, but no, he talked too naturally for that. "You're not supposed to run off with copy that way."

"But—" Joan was embarrassed. It was hard to explain to him just why she had taken the story. And hearing him speak gave her a spooky feeling all up and down her spine. It was queer to be talking to him. She had a feeling she should shout and her voice rose without her knowing it. "But," she shouted, "there's something wrong with this story."

"I know it," nodded Dummy, calmly.

Yes, and she knew he knew it! But—Mr. Johnson had told her not to accuse any one. It was hard to know what to do.

Dummy held out his hand, with bulgy blue veins. "Just let me look at that story, please."

But Joan clutched it to the front of her sweater. "What for?" she demanded.

Dummy resented this. "Look here, girl, you have no right to take that off the hook like that, and I want it."

"But—" Well, she would tell him. "There's a terrible mistake in it, and you let it go through." That wasn't really accusing him, she defended herself.

"I know it." Was that a sigh that escaped Dummy's lips? "I just realized that there was something phony about that story. It said the fire was caused by defective wiring and then in that last paragraph, it said something different. It just struck me, now—and I did let it go through."

Forgetting all about Mr. Johnson's caution about accusing, Joan gazed straight into Dummy's mild, blue eyes. "Didn't you put it there?" she asked as innocently as she could.

"Put it there!" Poor Dummy got red all over his face. Was it a guilty kind of red or a mad kind? Joan decided that if he were not showing righteous indignation, then he was one of the best actors she had ever seen. But she knew

he was a good actor. Look how he had fooled them all into believing he was a deaf-mute.

No, he wasn't acting. He was genuinely *mad*. "Are you—are you—" his voice fairly shook, "are you accusing me of putting that libelous paragraph on to that story? Why how could I, and why should I?"

"Well, the hook is right there, and you might have done it." Joan wasn't going to give up without a struggle. "We—Chub and I—figured it all out—" she might as well go on, "that you were a spy from the *Star*, to get Mr. Hutton and the paper in bad."

Dummy's mouth dropped completely open, showing two gold teeth. "You thought that! And may I ask whether you and that red-headed imp have broadcast your insinuations?" he drawled.

"Oh, no!" began Joan, and then stopped. Chub *had* told the office force that afternoon, when Gertie was laughing about Dummy. "Why—" she faltered.

"So-o!" Dummy glared indignantly. "And do you know, young woman, that I could have you put in jail for that?"

Joan turned scarlet. Then she clutched at straws. "But," she sputtered, "you did act spooky. And why did you act like a Dum—like a deaf person?" Oh, my goodness, he had often heard them all call him Dummy. Oh, how horrid they had been!

"Go on and say it. Call me Dummy," said the man, without a smile. "I'm used to it now."

He paused and seemed to be waiting for her to say something.

"Well," she began, "we saw you with Tebbets of the *Star* at the picnic. It did look suspicious—because he's such an awful man, and we thought he had you under his thumb—because, of course, you wouldn't do such a thing unless you *had* to—" she hardly knew what she was saying.

"And what else?" he asked.

"Then, I found the story about the charity play. That was another clew. It was stuffed behind some rolls of paper in the pressroom."

"Was it?" Dummy looked innocent. "I never did find it, though I hunted. You thought I was a spy, did you?" His eyes were glittering as they had the day he and Mack had been arguing over that lost story. "Well, now, I'll tell my story, but as long as you did your talking before the staff, I want to tell my story to them all, too. I'll go tell Mr. Nixon, now."

Mr. Nixon was sitting at his desk. Joan hated to meet him for he was really cross, since he was thoroughly convinced that Tim had made the mistake in the fire story.

Tim's desk was vacant—the green swinging light above it, with the cord knotted to make it the right length, looked mournful and lonely, somehow. The desk was suspiciously clean and bare.

Joan, having gone to trail one mystery, was completely sidetracked by Dummy's proving such a stumblingblock to her theory. She still clutched Tim's story in her hand. She'd let Dummy tell his story, and then as soon as he was through she'd tell her theory just the same. After all, it looked more suspicious than ever, because Dummy had apparently only played deaf and dumb in order to work his misdeeds.

“Look here, Mr. Nixon.” Dummy went right up to the editor's desk.

Mr. Nixon gave one look and then yelled, “Holy Moses! The Dummy can talk.” Then he looked embarrassed a bit, as though trying to remember what he had ever said in Dummy's presence that he shouldn't have. When he got over that feeling, he demanded, “Well, what's the big idea? Are you a deaf-mute or aren't you?”

“I pretended to be one, and I'll tell you why, if you'll only give me a chance. It seems that this young woman has spread a malicious report concerning me—”

“Cut it short,” ordered the editor. He was used to saying that to reporters. It would have been natural to have him add, “Hold it down to five hundred words.”

But Dummy, having been silent for so long a time, found it most agreeable to talk, and he drawled worse than ever.

“Well, I'll begin at the beginning and tell you my right name.” The whole office force, Miss Betty, Mack, and Cookie, clustered around and Dummy waved them into the group. Chub ventured out from the front office, but Mr. Nixon motioned him to go back to his work. “It's Richard Marat,” stated Dummy.

Mr. Nixon looked as though the name were slightly familiar, and he wrinkled up his nose a bit, trying to remember. But mostly he looked rather bored at Dummy. He seemed to think that the *Journal* family had had enough excitement for one day without all this disturbance coming up.

Cookie looked a bit puzzled over the name, but Mack and Miss Betty showed plainly that they had never heard of the name before, as far as they could remember.

Richard Marat! Richard Marat! The name began to burn in Joan's mind. Why, it did sound familiar. She was sure she had heard it somewhere—and not so very long ago, either. There, she had it—! She remembered the “Ten Years Ago To-Day” story.

“Why, that’s the bookkeeper who had such a large deficit!”

Every one looked at her as though she were absolutely crazy, but Dummy leaped forward and took both her hands in his, and looked into her face.

“Just so, little maid,” he said, quaintly. “The first time I noticed you was when I heard you say, ‘My brother wrote that!’ the first day Tim was on the paper. I hoped then that he appreciated his sister’s great interest in him. And when I realized what an inquisitive little miss you were, I was actually scared that you’d somehow discover I was not a Dummy. But it’s to you, perhaps that I owe my good fortune, for you were the one to pick my story out of the files to reprint—but I mustn’t get ahead of my story. Yes, I am Richard Marat, the bookkeeper, who thought he had a deficit. I’ve always been a moody and impulsive sort of person, and when I discovered I had—or thought I had—such a great mistake in my books, I took the easiest way out, and ran away.”

“I remember that,” said Cookie. “It was just about ten years ago, I guess. But you didn’t have a mistake, after all.”

“That’s why he was so quick and accurate, because he was a bookkeeper,” Miss Betty whispered to Mack.

“Oh, lawsy!” said a voice. Bossy had come in through the swinging door, and was standing there, his eyes getting larger and whiter all the time. “Dummy kin talk! There’s quare goin’s on around heah. Dummy kin talk!”

No one paid any attention to Bossy.

“I was afraid of being arrested,” Dummy went on, “and I beat it, as the saying goes. These ten years, I have been wandering, scared as a rabbit. I began to act hard of hearing to escape what I thought might be embarrassing questions, and gradually I pretended to be a Dummy.” He smiled around at the *Journal* staff when he said the nickname they had given him. “That was easier and safest of all, just to be a deaf-mute.”

“I got to hankering for little old Plainfield,” he continued. “And so I came back. Not a soul knew me or remembered and if it hadn’t been for that column here, Ten Years Ago To-Day, I’d probably still be thinking I was guilty of a mistake that never happened. One day last week the column told of a bookkeeper named Richard Marat, who had discovered a deficit in his books, and fearing arrest, had fled—no one knew where. Then to-day, the paper has the story that experts had gone over my books, had found no deficiency and reported that I had simply made a mistake. But I never knew all this until to-day. My panic cost me ten years of weary wandering....”

A piercing, feminine scream sounded from the front office.

“Just like a nice murder story to break after we’ve gone to press!” said Mack.

Every one rushed to the front office. There was Amy, in her pale orchid sweater, standing in front of the rear counter, her face frozen with horror, her mouth open for another scream. Her hands were held, fingers extended stiffly, out in front of her, as though paralyzed.

“What’s all the rumpus?” asked Mr. Nixon from the doorway.

Joan caught a glimpse of Chub’s grinning face. Then she saw that Amy’s hands were held over the counter, where Chub had been inking the hand-roller for the advertising stuff. The wide sheet of inky paper was spread there. Amy’s palms were blacker than Em’s fur.

“He told me to hold my hands over it, and feel how the heat rushed out from it,” sobbed Amy. “And I did. Then he slapped ’em right down on to all that fresh ink. I’ll never speak to him again—”

“He was only fooling, Amy,” cheered Joan.

But Amy’s sobs rose higher. “Look at my hands. I’ll never get the stuff off. I just stopped in to see if you were here, Jo, and he stopped me—”

Mr. Nixon was waving his hands about like a madman. “Such an office! One dumb-bell reporter isn’t enough. The whole force is dumb! I won’t put up with this. I guess I’m still city editor. Clear out of here, you kids.” He turned from Amy to Joan. “And you, too.”

“Me?”

He nodded.

“But Mr. Johnson said—” she began.

“I don’t care what Mr. Johnson said!” he cut her short. “I won’t have this office turning into a kindergarten. Where is that boy? I’ll skin him alive for this.” But the red-haired office boy had vanished from the scene.

There was nothing to do but depart. Amy went ahead, stalking out with dignity, holding her inky hands aloft, her tear-wet nose high in the air.

Joan gave a wild glance around, appealingly. No one dared go against the city editor. Mack was scowling. Dummy looked bewildered. Cookie was sympathetic but helpless. Miss Betty flashed her a smile, in spite of everything.

“I’ll see you to-morrow, Jo,” she said. “I may want you to pay a bill at the toggery shop for me.”

“Sure,” said Joan, weakly.

The editor groaned and they all filed back into the editorial room. Joan couldn’t follow—even though Mr. Johnson had said she could stay at the *Journal* as much as she liked. It was all Amy’s fault, screaming like that and acting so silly. Mr. Nixon had just banished her, too; because she was Amy’s

friend. As they went past the front counter, there was Gertie with an expression of horror on her face as great as Amy's had been over her contact with the inky roller. "To think of the things I've said to that Dummy!" she was wailing. "I've said, 'Oh, you dear, darling Dummy,' and 'Oh, angel of light!' and all kinds of crazy things like that. I have, really. And he heard me all the time!"

But Joan went on. She had troubles of her own. She was anxious to tell Tim about Dummy's not being a dummy. She was disappointed not to find him at home—he had stalked off for a walk, gloomily, mother explained. Joan went on up to her own room to muse over events. She had been ousted from the *Journal*, but she was still vitally interested in the office and its unsolved mystery. She stood by the dresser, looking down at the fire story she still held in her hand. The mystery of the mistakes hadn't been solved. She remembered now that Chub had mentioned mistakes to her the day Tim got the job. That proved it *wasn't* Tim. Maybe it was Dummy, after all. He hadn't explained about being with Mr. Tebbets at the picnic, anyway.

Finally, she heard the front door bang and knew Tim had come in. By the time she got downstairs, she found him slouched in the morris chair in the living room, his long legs stretched halfway across the room, it seemed. He nodded sullenly and silently to her question, "Are you really fired?"

She had to tell him the thrilling news. "Tim, Dummy's not a deaf-mute. He can talk."

Tim sat up. "Are you stringing me?"

"No, really, it's a fact. Every one was so surprised. You should have seen Bossy! Dummy spoke to me, and I was so scared I nearly jumped out of my skin!" she explained. "You see, I had gone to the composing room for your fire story." She suddenly realized that she still had it in her hand. "I wanted to look at that extra paragraph that got stuck on there, to see if it really was on the copy. And it was." She held it up, and glanced at the final paragraph to reassure herself. Then she gave a gasp, as she gazed at the end of the long story in her hand. "Why, Tim! The commas in this last paragraph have heads!"

CHAPTER XIX

THE COMMA'S TAIL

Tim blinked at Joan's words. "What do you mean?" He grabbed the paper and bent his dark head over it. "Why, that's true. The commas are O.K. That lets me out, for this was never written on that ramshackle old machine I wrote on. But old Nix can rot before I'll tell him, if he couldn't believe me, when I was telling the truth."

"I'll tell him—" began Joan and then remembered how Mr. Nixon had ordered her out of the *Journal* office for good and all, in spite of what Mr. Johnson had said. She was powerless to help. Just when they had solved the Dummy mystery. At least, he wasn't the spy. Was there one?

She thought of Chub, but he, too, was in Mr. Nixon's bad graces, and would probably refuse to help.

Well, she really couldn't go back to the *Journal*, not even to save Tim. But Tim could. He needed the job, too. How could he build up his college fund without it? Maybe Mother would have to sell the house to get money for Tim's education. She coaxed him to go back to the *Journal*, until he got peeved. He banged upstairs to his own room and slammed the door shut.

Deserted Joan turned to Mother and the housework. There was always that to fall back on. She made a new kind of pudding out of the cookbook and it turned out well. Mother was pleased to have something extra nice to cheer Tim up over the loss of his job. Mother was sorry about that, but she was glad that Joan's duties, whatever they had been at the *Journal*, had mysteriously come to an end—though she had shown she was proud when Joan wrote up the Davis window.

Tim was impressed with the pudding. "Gee, I didn't know you could make dessert in three colors," he said, and Joan felt as though he had forgiven her for bothering him about going over to see Mr. Nixon. She still wished he would, but she did not refer to the matter.

The next day hung wearily on Joan's hands. Amy did not even telephone. She must be good and mad, for she adored to hold telephone conversations. Joan tried not to look at the *Journal* windows across the way. She did the marketing, and straightened out her bureau drawers. Then she walked to the library and got one of the latest books, but somehow it did not seem half so thrilling as the mystery of the *Journal* office.

She was half through the book by bedtime, and the next afternoon she sat down on the side steps to finish it. Em rubbed against her ankles, so Joan stopped to fill a saucer of milk for the cat, and then she curled her feet under again and started to read.

Suddenly a familiar call broke into her reading.

“Yoo-who!” A window in the *Journal* office was pushed up and there was Chub’s red head. “Come on over, you and Tim. The chief says so.”

He meant Mr. Nixon, of course. But Joan only stared. Chub had nerve to try a joke like that, right when the office was the busiest, for the paper was going to press about this time.

“Say!” called Chub. “Can’t you hear? He wants you both, honest. The press is broken and everybody has to pitch in to get the paper out on time.”

Joan rushed into the house after Tim, her heart pounding fast. Oh, suppose Chub were teasing, after all! This would be a much better joke than telling Amy to feel the heat from the inky roller—and would have even more disastrous results. It took quite a few minutes to convince Tim that it was not a joke. He went reluctantly.

But Chub wasn’t “kidding.” Mr. Nixon met them at the editorial door, and he never even mentioned that he had sent Joan flying from the office only twenty-four hours ago. “The press has gone flooie, and we had to have help,” he explained simply. “I thought you might do some rewrites, Martin, and Joan could help Betty. Everything’s almost done. We’ll have to send the forms out to be stereotyped and printed. We can’t miss an edition even if the Goss giant is out of whack.”

“No halt in publication.” That was the unspoken thought that spurred the staff on. Neither Tim nor Joan referred to the circumstances surrounding their exits from the *Journal*. Every one was busy. The paper must be got out, as usual.

Because the forms were to be carried in trucks across the town to a printing office of a weekly trade paper, which had generously offered to help the *Journal* in its trouble, the news would have to be written up more quickly than if it were to be printed right here in the *Journal*’s own pressroom.

Every one worked. Gertie flew about. Miss Betty showed Joan how to copy one side of a club program and then paste the other side to save copying it. Tim breathed new life into the usually dead rewrites. Mack was pounding out the day’s ball scores. Cookie was doing the obits. Chub trotted his legs almost off, running to the composing room with copy. Dummy was there, directing things from his stool, above the tinkle of the linotype machines. Every one seemed used to his having a voice, already. Joan had no time to think of the mystery or to do

more than wonder about Dummy, not even when Chub confided to her that he had somehow discovered that it was Bossy who had hid the charity play story.

“He knew that Miss Webb had tonsillitis because his sister washes for the Webbs,” Chub explained. “And so he knew the story was wrong and hid it.”

Well, poor, faithful Bossy wasn't a spy. He had been trying to help. But Joan couldn't even think about Bossy when they were in the middle of getting the paper out with the press broken.

Finally, it was all over—the truck with the locked forms had chugged away from the curb. Tim and Joan, now in the *Journal* office, remained there. Cookie sent Chub out for cherry ices in paper cups and treated the entire staff all around. After the tension of the office for the past few hours, the staff was relaxing and the place took on an air of gayety.

Miss Betty and Mack had their heads together over their cherry cups and were laughing over their wielding of the microscopic spoons.

“Oh, Jo,” Miss Betty addressed Joan, “do something for me, will you? That's an angel. Clear off my desk. It's such a mess, I hate to think of doing it.”

“Sure,” agreed Joan, readily, and turned to the desk. It was a mess, truly, snowed in under pages of copy paper, clippings, photographs of babies and of brides, and proofs of pictures.

Joan loved tidying up when one could see the improvement like this. She began by sticking all Miss Betty's notes on the big hook on the side of the desk, where she kept them for a week, and then threw them away, as did all the reporters. The photographs she gave to Chub to file in the tall green files, where they would be taken out when the blushing brides or proud mothers came in to claim them.

Then she was down to the desk top, and blew the dust off. A paper fluttered to the floor. Joan picked it up and could not help reading it—a note from Mack, about a social item that some one had left during Betty's lunch hour. He had typed her a message about it, put down the phone number for her to call, and had added his name.

There was something awfully familiar about the typing. The capitals were all jumped halfway off the line. Why, so were they in that final paragraph in the fire story. She remembered, because since yesterday, she had been studying the idiosyncrasies of that last paragraph until she knew them by heart. But still she couldn't be sure, without getting it to compare.

She rushed from the *Journal* office, and bounded home. Good thing she knew where she had left that story—under the scarf on her dresser. Back in the *Journal* office, she looked from the typed note to the last paragraph of the page in her

hands, and then back again. Yes, both of them did have capitals halfway above the line.

And—she bent over it more closely and wished for a magnifying glass. Her heart thrilled as she looked over at Tim scowling into his machine—that was because Miss Betty and Mack were acting so chummy—and at Chub opening and closing the sliding drawers of the green files as he put the photographs in their proper places. Tim didn't know she was saving him. Chub didn't know she was about to solve the baffling mystery.

She bent closely—yes, it was the same, and the commas were all perfect ones, too. The final paragraph had no more been written on Tim's machine than the note on Miss Betty's desk.

There was a soft noise behind her and she jumped. It was Dummy clearing his throat and looking at her with his mild blue eyes.

"Have you that fire story, Miss Joan?" he asked in a hoarse whisper. "I didn't get to see it, again, and I wanted to."

Joan glanced up. It would do no harm to trust him. He did seem nice. Perhaps it was because he called her Miss Joan. "Look, Mr. Marat," she said, and held up the two pieces of typing. "Who wrote these, would you say?"

Dummy smiled at her respectful use of his name and took them into his own hands. "It's that sport editor," he mused, motioning to the final paragraph in the story. "I know 'most every one's typewriting from comparing the proof sheets with the original copy, and he put this extra paragraph on to this story of your brother's."

He pointed with a crooked finger. "Typing is really just as characteristic as handwriting. That fellow, Mack, is always in such a hurry that he never holds his shift key down when he typewrites, and the capitals are always a bit above the line." The man's face wrinkled up. "Besides, I hated to tell this until I was sure it was serious, but one day, I heard Mack telephoning news tips to the *Star*. The city editor over there, that Tebbets, is his foster uncle, I've just discovered, and he's in their employ. And that day of the picnic, I did some spying myself, following the two of them while they hatched their schemes. Dirty business, but it's sometimes done."

Joan's eyes widened and she opened her mouth to speak, but the proofreader grabbed her elbow. "Keep mum on this, and we'll break it to Nixon when he comes back."

It seemed ages, waiting. Chub asked her a half-dozen times what she was dreaming about, for she hardly listened to his chatter. Her head was going round. They had thought Dummy was scheming with Tebbets at the picnic. Mack must

have been on ahead, in front of his adopted uncle. And Mack had told her he suspected Dummy! Was Mack the spy? It seemed possible. She remembered how peeved he had been that time she had mentioned that his machine had heads on the commas.

Finally, Mr. Nixon came; he had stayed until the edition was safely out and had brought back some loose papers in his hands. The rest were on the truck for the newsboys. Things began to hum again. Gertie's voice, busy on the front office phone, floated out to them. She was assuring the subscribers who were calling that they would get their papers soon, that the delivery wasn't going to be very late, after all.

Dummy took Joan's arm and led her up to Mr. Nixon's desk.

"This young lady has been doing a bit of sleuthing around here," he said, "and has hit on something really big!" And then they told him, Dummy writing the important words on a pad on the desk and motioning with his head toward Mack, so that the rest of the staff wouldn't know what they were talking about. Dummy told Mr. Nixon about shadowing Mack and Tebbets at the picnic, saying he was about to relate all this yesterday when his story had been so untimely interrupted by Amy's screams. "I couldn't explain until I was sure," Dummy stated. "Then when that charity play story was lost, I was sure he was up to mischief again. I tried to get him to confess. We had an argument and he grabbed my pencil away. But I knew then that he was not on the level."

Mr. Nixon wasn't convinced right away. He was puzzled. "I've always believed that young Martin made the mistakes and then was scared to admit them. But—maybe, now—and if Mack is really Tebbets' ward. Tebbets is a hard fellow. He probably bullied Mack into doing it—if he did." And he fussed over the papers and stroked his chin.

Joan said nothing. She was recalling Tebbets at the picnic—how he had spoken to Mack, and how he had ignored cunning little Ruthie. He was just the type of man who could make Mack do most anything.

Suddenly, the editor marched over to Mack with the copy in his hand. Mack was bending over his machine with his green shade over his eyes.

"Look here Mack, did you write that extra bit on this fire story?"

Mack looked up, startled, pulled off the eye shade, and stared. His face was as red as the rouge Gertie used. He didn't need to say a word to show that he was guilty.

Joan could hardly help feeling sorry for him.

"Maybe," she ventured, coming over, "maybe he did it because he was—jealous of Tim."

Miss Betty, who had by this time sensed what had happened, gave a little gasp of protest. "Oh, no," she cried.

Joan suddenly realized that while Mack may have disliked her somewhat on the grounds that she was his rival's sister, still, he had been afraid all along that she and Chub, in their investigations, might suspect him.

"Jealous, nothing!" shouted the editor. "He's on the staff of the *Star*. He's been deliberately trying to ball us up with the administration."

Mack wrenched his hands away. He looked sorry and ashamed. "Let go," he said. "I'm leaving anyway."

Joan always believed that there was some story back of it that excused Mack a little. Maybe he needed the money—or something. But Mr. Nixon did not share her leniency.

"You bet you're going," he roared, and he took Mack by the collar. "But not until you make a full confession to the manager." The editor marched him into Uncle John's office.

Tim hardly knew what to say. He gave Joan a grateful look and murmured, "Gee, kid, I never dreamed there was a real spy."

"Didn't I say so all along?" demanded Chub. "I knew mistakes were happening before Dummy and Tim came to work here." He acted as though he had done all the detective work himself, but Joan was too happy to mind. Tim had intimated that she had really helped him. Why, it was almost as if he had told her she was a good sport.

Even Bossy added his bit. "So it was that feller, Mack, that let wrong stuff get in the papah. Mistakes is bad!"

If Mack had added the paragraph to this fire story, then, Joan thought, he had probably typed a new beginning to that story of the deserted children—the very first mistake she had known anything about.

When Mack came out of Uncle John's office, he did not say good-by to any one, not even to Miss Betty, but just grabbed his hat and went out of the office. Gertie, on seeing him go past her counter, guessed by his manner that something was wrong, and rushed back into the editorial room to find out what, brushing past the printers and linotype men who were filing out, their day's work over.

"Well, Joan was right," said Mr. Nixon, as he seated himself behind his desk again. "Martin, I guess your job's safe enough, now. Want it back?"

Tim nodded his answer. He hardly knew what to say. Mr. Nixon opened up his red date book and wrote something in it. He was giving Tim an assignment for the next day. "Maybe we can make you sport editor around here one of these days. I haven't forgotten what a cracker jack write-up you did of the *Journal*

team victory over the *Star*,” smiled the editor.

Sport editor! Tim could only grin. Joan knew he would be a good one—probably be better at that than at straight reporting. Hadn’t he been the high school star in athletics? He could go on to college now, for his job was safe; Mr. Nixon had said so. And with the spy, Mack, gone, the *Journal* was safe now, too.

But the entire staff—Miss Betty and Cookie and Chub—were rushing up to Joan herself.

“Gee,” said Gertie, over her chewing gum, “if you keep on, Jo, you’ll be the star reporter around here.”

“Yes, indeed,” nodded the editor. “There’ll be a desk waiting here for you soon as you’re through high school, Miss Joan.”

He had called her Miss Joan! What did it matter that through the *Journal* windows, she could see Mother at the side steps, waving for her to come home? Probably it was time to start dinner. Nothing mattered. She had a job promised her!

THE END

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