

With a Little Help

by Edith Maxwell

Rule 6. The detective novel must have a detective in it; and a detective is not a detective unless he detects. His function is to gather clues that will eventually lead to the person who did the dirty work in the first chapter; and if the detective does not reach his conclusions through an analysis of those clues, he has no more solved his problem than the schoolboy who gets his answer out of the back of the arithmetic.

Josie Page gazed at the new wing of the Free Hospital for Women and swiped at a tear. The main part of the Brookline institution was decades old and provided health care to all women at no cost. The addition, built only four years ago in 1922, was for well-off ladies who could afford to pay for their private rooms and better treatment. If only her mother could have been treated there, she might still be alive today.

Josie squared her twelve-year-old shoulders. Mother was gone, and that was that. Her satchel was packed with a good haul from today's work near the entrance to the new wing, and the fall light was already dimming at three-thirty. It was time to head home to Father and her little brothers.

She slowed her step as the streetcar clanged to a stop and two ladies stepped down. These were not society matrons in fur coats and heavy gold jewelry. Matrons didn't arrive on the streetcar. These two were both tall and looked under thirty. One had a tousled cap of honey-colored hair unadorned by a hat and didn't carry a handbag. The other, in a navy cloche and open coat over a blue dropped-waist dress, smoked a ciggie. They paused in front of the entrance to the addition.

Josie pretended to fumble in her pockets for streetcar fare until the trolley moved along. The two women were well dressed. Maybe she could relieve that handbag of a small purse.

“Amelia, we have to get to the bottom of the suspicious death,” Cloche said. “And I can’t figure out how we’re going to do it.”

“We must,” Amelia said. “But you’re the lady PI, Dot. You’re supposed to know these things.”

Josie tried to hide her interest. Suspicious death? A lady private investigator? This afternoon had just grown a lot more intriguing.

“Let’s continue with our plan,” Dot said. “We’re not going to learn the truth about that patient expiring without any apparent cause if we don’t apply some shoe leather to the hallways of the hospital.”

Amelia shuddered. “Do you know how much I hate hospitals?”

“Be that as it may. We’re a team, remember? It’s Wednesday, and you can’t fly until the weekend. Come on.”

Amelia shrugged and followed Dot through the door.

Fly? Josie thought the tousled hair looked familiar. That woman had to be the daring lady pilot, Amelia Earhart. Josie had read a story about her in the newspaper. She wanted to follow the pair inside, except she needed to get along. Father had no idea she’d quit school. He thought she merely had a job after classes ended where she earned the money she brought home. She would keep her new occupation a secret from him as long as she could.

But Josie was intrigued. She thought she might return here tomorrow afternoon. With any luck, she’d encounter the PI and the aviator again.

#

Inside, Dot succeeded at moving them past the gorgon at the front desk. If Dorothy Henderson couldn’t talk her way past an obstacle, no one could.

“Remind me how you came to know of this woman’s death,” Amelia said to Dot.

“Mrs. Ursula Fleming was an acquaintance of Aunt Etta’s from some literary salon she frequents. When my aunt asks me to investigate, she always has a sound reason for doing so.” Dot steered them past an orderly with a mop who was adding a new layer of acrid-smelling cleaning solution to the tiled hallway.

Amelia sniffed the scent and shuddered but kept going. “Do any of the people in charge think this Ursula’s demise was suspicious?” She kept her voice low.

“No. Etta requested the police look into the matter, but she said they didn’t investigate at all.” Dot matched her soft voice. They didn’t need any snoopy eavesdroppers. “They called Ursula a sick old lady who died of natural causes.”

“Was she Etta’s age?” Amelia asked. “Your aunt isn’t particularly old. What is she, fifty?”

“Fifty-five and in excellent physical shape. She devotes herself to staying fit, certainly. I believe Ursula might have been all of sixty, if that. Some people wear that age poorly. Not Ursula, according to Etta.”

The two walked on, past doors open to private rooms, past aproned nurses in white, past a closed door marked SURGERY. NO ADMITTANCE. Dot had already outlined the bare facts of the case to Amelia and wondered for a moment why she didn’t remember. Still, her friend had a busy life in her daytime role as teacher and social worker at the settlement house, and her thoughts were usually on her next gravity-defying flight. Going aloft in a flimsy airplane was not for Dot. She’d been strong-armed into accompanying the aviator once in the name of an urgent crime-fighting inquiry. Her nerves and stomach had barely survived the experience.

“Here we are.” Dot pointed to the NURSES ONLY sign on a closed door to their left. “Follow my lead, all right?” She rapped on the door.

Amelia nodded.

A young woman in a crisp white apron who didn't even look twenty opened the door. "Yes, miss?" Her hat was the slouchy cap of a student nurse

Dot pulled up to her full height and spoke with as much authority as she could muster. "I am Miss Dorothy Henderson with the HS Agency. I need to speak with Nurse Madeline Day, if you please."

The girl opened her mouth, closed it, and finally spoke. "I'm sorry miss, she's not in. Perhaps you'd like to talk to Matron?"

"Is Nurse Day in the hospital, or has she left?" Dot asked.

"She's, um, well, I'm not supposed to..." Her voice trailed off as she shot a quick, panicked glance behind her at the large room full of white-clad women. Some attended to paperwork, while others sterilized equipment or measured medicines. The door was open to an office at the back, which also had a large window in the wall, revealing a stern-looking and robustly figured woman in white at the desk.

A nurse bustled up behind Amelia, who stepped to the side. "Is there a problem?"

"Nurse Day, these ladies would like to speak with you." The girl's face and shoulders relaxed.

"Very well," the nurse said. "Back to your tasks, now, please."

"Yes, Nurse!" The girl scurried away in relief.

"I'm Nurse Day." The woman clasped her hands in front of her, her starched cap firmly pinned to blond hair in a sleek bun, her eyes an icy blue. "How can I help you?"

Dot introduced Amelia and herself. "We'd like to discuss the circumstances of Mrs. Fleming's passing."

Commented [MP1]: Wouldn't she call her Nurse?

Commented [EM2R1]: Yes. Fixed.

Nurse Day blinked and her shoulders tensed. “If you’re with the police, they have come and gone. They agreed with the doctor and the medical examiner and officially declared her death to be uncomplicated.” She cocked her head. “You don’t look like you’re police officers in the least.”

“We’re not.” Amelia smiled with her gap-toothed grin. “But we’re close friends of Mrs. Fleming’s beloved niece, Winnie, who is distraught with grief. We’d only like to have a look at the room where the deceased went to meet her heavenly Father, if you don’t mind, so we can set Winnie’s mind at ease.”

Dot suppressed a snort. Her friend hadn’t exactly followed Dot’s lead, but it was a good ruse. She was happy to play along.

“That’s fine, then.” The nurse gave a nod. “We haven’t yet cleaned out the room. Please follow me.”

Commented [MP3]: used above

Commented [EM4R3]: Changed to: The nurse gave a nod.

As they walked, a solemn procession approached. A male orderly pushed a fully draped figure on a stretcher. A different student nurse accompanied him, her eyes reddened.

“What’s happened, Student Nurse King?” Nurse Day asked her.

“Doctor couldn’t save Victoria Child, ma’am.”

“She’d been ill,” the nurse said. “I’m not surprised.”

Miss King gaped for a moment before closing her mouth and composing her face.

“May she rest in peace,” Nurse Day said. “Come along, ladies.”

“Were you in charge of Mrs. Child’s care?” Dot asked Miss Day as they walked on.

“I was. I supervise half the floor.”

#

Outside the window to Ursula’s former room were the now-bare branches of a stately elm tree. The coverlet on the bed was pulled up but not neatly made. The room had none of Ursula’s personal

effects in sight. Etta had said her friend had had a successful surgery but then developed complications and had stayed in the wing for several weeks. Wouldn't someone close to her – Etta, even – have brought in a favorite photograph, a cherished book of poetry, a vase for flowers?

“You were quite deft, my friend, by convincing that nurse to leave us alone in here,” Dot said.

“Thanks. It was nothing.”

“We can't very well snoop for clues with Nurse Day watching us.” Dot pulled the door shut and turned the lock.

Amelia plopped into a chintz-covered armchair in the corner. “I need more information. All you told me was that we were on another sleuthing excursion, and that this Mrs. Fleming's death seems odd. Why? Clues to what?”

“I'm not sure. Etta said she hasn't heard a thing about these so-called natural causes. The lady was a widow with no children, so she doesn't have family to prod an investigation. I think we're going to need an informant, and a glance into the medical record.”

“The name of the doctor who declared it a natural death would be useful, as well,” Amelia said.

“Let's get searching. They're not going to want us in here forever.” Dot knelt and peered under the bed.

“Right you are.” Amelia jumped to her feet. She opened the top bureau drawer and ran her hand around the inside.

Dot lifted the bed covers, felt around the edges of the mattress, and lifted it to check underneath. Amelia searched the last drawer and then opened the closet door.

“Empty,” she declared before closing it.

As a knock came at the door, Dot slid her hand between the armchair cushion and the side.

Commented [MP5]: Amelia did that, not Dot.

Commented [EM6R5]: Changed to Dot

Commented [EM7R5]: Added next sentence.

“Ladies?” The doorknob rattled.

Dot fished out a slip of paper and pocketed it. “Are we done?” she whispered to Amelia.

Her friend nodded.

“Look sorrowful and pious,” Dot murmured. She opened the door to Madeline Day, whose knuckles were raised to rap again. “Thank you for giving us these few minutes with the memories of our dear friend’s auntie. We won’t take up any more of your time.” Dot slid past the nurse.

Amelia nodded her thanks as she followed Dot down the hall.

#

Amelia pulled Dot to a halt outside the entrance. “What does that piece of paper say?” She pulled a crumpled cigarette out of her pocket and smoothed it out.

“Light?” Dot snapped open her silver lighter and lit Amelia’s smoke as well as one for herself. She treated herself to a nice long drag, then blew it out as she fished the paper out of her pocket. She read the only word – *Help!* – and frowned, extending the note to Amelia.

“Help?” Amelia handed it back. “She wrote a note asking for help. With what?”

“Maybe someone had threatened her, or she was being poisoned.”

“That’s horrid.” Amelia puffed on her ciggie. “Like that awful man at the Halloween parade, remember? Has he been convicted of his poisonings?”

“Not yet, but he’s still behind bars. The legal system can take a while, you know.”

“I suppose. But we don’t have a while. What if another lady dies? Maybe that Mrs. Child dame was also killed before her time.”

Dot gave a slow nod. “Did you see the student nurse’s reaction when Nurse Day said the deceased was sick?”

“The girl looked like she was about to object.”

“Exactly. We need to get to the bottom of this, and fast.” Dot took another puff.

Amelia checked her wristwatch. “Crikey. I have to run along. I have a meeting at Denison House at five o’clock.”

“Go ahead. I think I’ll head to the library and do some digging for information.”

“Shall we return tomorrow and see what we can see?” Amelia asked.

“We shall, my friend.”

#

Dot made her way to the Boston Public Library. Inside, she hurried between the marble lions guarding the wide steps of the stately, reverent building devoted entirely to books and learning. After she settled into the second-floor reading room, Dot’s task was to discover the name of the head doctor in the wing. She was curious about the regulations governing the medical examiner and if the hospital had a board of directors. Aunt Etta might be acquainted with one or more of them.

An hour later found Dot striding toward Etta’s Beacon Hill home, Dot’s temporary residence, nearly stomping in frustration. She hadn’t been able to uncover a thing. Not the doctor’s name, not the names of the board members, not the regulations governing the medical examiner. By now the streetlights were lit and it was too late in the day to make telephone inquiries. A good long walk followed by a stiff drink, thanks to her aunt’s stash of excellent hooch, would be just the ticket. Dot would start anew tomorrow.

#

Amelia pulled her bright yellow Kissel Speedster to the curb in front of the hospital at a little after one o’clock the next afternoon.

Dot repositioned her cloche over [on] her bob. “Must you drive so fast, Amelia?” She’d clutched the hat in her lap on the way there so it didn’t fly away. Amelia never put the auto’s top up unless the weather was inclement. Today was sunny, although the November air was chilly.

“I love speed.” The aviatrix grinned at Dot. “What more can I say? Now, what’s our plan?”

“I’ve gotten absolutely nowhere in my inquiries. We’re going to have to talk our way into the inner workings of the place.” Dot pulled out her smoking kit and lit a cigarette to calm her nerves.

“I wonder if we can have a little chat with that student nurse,” Amelia said. “What was her name, King?”

“Good idea. One of us can make up a female relative who is thinking of coming here for treatment and ask Student Nurse King what she thinks. Or we could pretend one of us needs a stay in a nice private wing of a hospital.”

“That’s even better. We can say we’d like to meet with the supervising doctor.”

“We’ll have to avoid Madeline Day, though,” Dot said.

“Yes.”

A slender schoolboy of perhaps eleven or twelve passing on the sidewalk slowed his pace. Dot thought it was a bit early for school to be out but she shrugged it off. Perhaps the children had a half day on Wednesdays.

“Do you know how your aunt’s friend actually died?” Amelia asked.

“No, but Etta thought it was too sudden. Ursula had had surgery to remove her gallbladder or some such thing and was recovering well. And then last weekend, *bam*, she was gone.”

The lad knelt to retie his shoe.

“I found it odd when Nurse Day said the police agreed that Ursula’s death wasn’t suspicious,” Dot said. “Do you think she was telling the truth?”

“That’s why we’re here, isn’t it? To discover the truth in all its sometimes sordid glory.”

Amelia opened her door and sauntered to the sidewalk, where the schoolboy had begun to move on. “Say, young man, can you watch my car for me? There’s a coin in it for you.”

The lad, in knickers and cap, turned. His face was pretty, with long dark lashes and not a trace of a beard, and he had a satchel slung crosswise across his chest.

“I’d be happy to, miss.” He touched the brim of his cap.

“We’re just going inside.” Amelia gestured toward the hospital. “Be back in an hour or less. That all right?”

“Yes, miss.”

“Thanks, kid.”

Dot and Amelia made their way along the brick walkway to the entrance of the private wing a few yards away. The door opened before they arrived at it. Student Nurse King pushed through. Her face was flushed and her cap slightly askew. Not wearing a coat, she hurried in their direction but her gaze was focused downward and her arms were wrapped around her chest.

“Miss King,” Dot began. “Are you all right?” The poor thing certainly didn’t look all right.

Startled, the girl glanced up. “Pardon me?”

“I asked if you were all right.” Dot kept her voice low and gentle.

Her eyes filled. “No, I don’t suppose I am.”

“How can we help, sweetheart?” Amelia asked. “And what’s your first name?”

“I’m Harriet, miss. I don’t think you can help at all. It’s just...” Her voice trailed off.

“Come and sit, Harriet.” Dot led her to a nearby bench under a bare-branched maple tree. “I’m Dot Henderson, and this is Amelia. Would you like a smoke, dear?”

“No, thank you, Miss Henderson. The one time I smoked with my girlfriends, it made me sick to my stomach,” Harriet said. “Anyway, Nurse Day would have my head. She’s very strict with the students.”

“Tell us what’s troubling you,” Amelia urged.

Harriet studied her hands. She gripped one with the other and spoke gazing at her lap. “It’s Dr. Ross, you see. He...” Her voice trailed off.

“He what?” Dot prodded. She would have lit [light] up a cigarette for herself, but she didn’t want the girl returning to work reeking of tobacco.

“When he thinks no one is looking, he lets his hands free on the students.” She lifted her head and squared her shoulders. “It’s horrid. The man is married! He shouldn’t be doing that.”

Amelia’s mouth turned down as she made a growling sound.

“Have you told Nurse Day or the matron?” Dot asked.

“They don’t believe us. It’s like Doctor is a god or something. And I can’t leave. I need to finish my course, or I’ll never work as a nurse. My family relies on my pay.”

“We understand.” Amelia leaned against the tree, crossing her ankles.

“Is Dr. Ross the head doctor?” Dot asked.

“He’s the only one for this wing.”

“What can you tell us about the deaths of Mrs. Child and Mrs. Fleming?” Amelia asked.

Harriet’s eyes went wide.

“It’s all right, Harriet,” Dot said in her most soothing voice. “It’s just that we saw your reaction when Miss Day said Victoria Child had been ill.”

“She hadn’t been ailing at all,” the student said. “She’d had an operation on her knee, but she was to be discharged in two days’ time. I have no idea why Nurse Day said that.”

“In what way did the lady die?” Dot asked.

“I don’t know, exactly. She had vomited overnight, and the odd thing was that several of her teeth fell out.”

“Was she old?” Amelia asked.

“Not very. I believe her chart said she was forty-six,” Harriet said. “Her teeth had looked healthy during the week I cared for her. And she wasn’t one of the rich biddies we usually treat. I mean, Mrs. Child must have had enough money to pay the bill, but she was nice. Some of our patients, well, I don’t think they’ve ever done a lick of actual work in their lives.”

“How about Ursula Fleming?” Dot asked.

“She was so kind to me.” Harriet swiped at a tear.

“Had she also vomited and lost teeth?” Amelia crossed her arms.

“She’d vomited, but she wore false teeth, so—”

“Student Nurse King!” Madeline Day stormed toward them. “What are you doing out here?”

Harriet jumped to her feet. “I’m sorry, Nurse Day. I’m on my way.”

Madeline’s nostrils flared. “See to it that you are. We don’t want any more of your patients expiring because you neglected them.”

Harriet’s face paled as she hurried back toward the building.

Dot stood. “It’s not her fault, ma’am. I’m afraid we waylaid her. Miss Earhart might need to become a patient here.”

Amelia nodded.

The nurse’s expression changed from angry to welcoming. “I’d be happy to give you a tour of the facilities, miss.”

“Thank you,” Amelia said. “We wondered if we might speak with Dr. Ross, however. I’m rather particular about my medical care.”

“I’m afraid he’s quite busy, miss. As am I. Please telephone our office for an appointment.” She walked briskly to the door and disappeared through it.

Dot glanced at Amelia’s car. The boy charged with watching it was staring at them, with the fair skin of his brow knit into a frown.

“Well, now, that’s a fine kettle of fish.” Amelia, fists on waist, stared at the building. “A doc too busy to talk to his next rich client. A head nurse with no soft corners who might be lying about patient deaths and who changed her mind in a flash about the tour. And a poor girl prey to the doctor’s wicked advances and not even allowed a few minutes’ break.”

“All of that, plus teeth falling out of a dead woman otherwise in the prime of health.” Dot turned to Amelia and lowered her voice to a murmur. “Your guard there seems keenly interested in our conversation. I wonder why.”

“He may have recognized me. I’ve never met a boy who wasn’t interested in airplanes.”

“Very well.” Except they hadn’t been talking about flying. The kid had some other interest in their conversation, Dot was sure. “Do you think we’ll get anywhere if we head inside and try to find this Dr. Ross?”

“If we do, I’ll have to invent my fictional malady.” Amelia grinned. “What is it that I need treatment for, exactly?”

“I did rather spring that on you, didn’t I?” Dot thought for a moment. “Perhaps I should come back in one of my disguises.”

“Go undercover, as it were, just like the lady PI you are. Why not? Listen, I should get back to Denison House. I’m coaching a practice this afternoon.”

“With the Chinese girls?”

“You bet,” Amelia said. “We have a few new ones who’re still learning the game of basketball. Want a lift home?”

“Thanks, but I think I’ll stick around here. Maybe go for a walk to clear my head. I can always take the trolley home.”

Amelia thanked the boy and paid him before driving off.

Dot thought she might make a return visit to the BPL. “What could possibly cause a patient to vomit and then lose teeth?” she asked aloud.

#

Josie pocketed the coin and stared at the lady called Dot Henderson as she walked away. She and Miss Earhart seemed to be working together as detectives. Miss Henderson had mentioned donning a disguise. Had she recognized that Josie was doing the same today?

It was the mention of Madeline Day that had truly perked up Josie’s ears. Madeline lived in her West End neighborhood. She knew Madeline, at least in passing, even though the nurse was much older than Josie, and she hadn’t realized Madeline worked here.

Josie had heard of people vomiting and losing teeth just before or after they died. Her auntie had expired in that way after taking too much of a laxative medicine for being chronically stopped up. Josie thought she remembered hearing a story about Madeline’s younger sister, who was in service to an imperious dowager. The sister had complained of being ill, but the lady refused to give her time off or to call a doctor, and the sister died, also losing teeth despite being only seventeen.

Perhaps Josie should have spoken up to these two. Despite Miss Henderson being a PI, she seemed lost as to the cause of the two women’s deaths. Josie didn’t know where to find either Miss

Henderson or Miss Earhart, unless they showed up again here tomorrow. She could still see the back of Miss Henderson far down the sidewalk. Josie could set off running after her, or maybe she should try to find Miss Earhart at the settlement house.

But, no. For today Josie would keep working. She could poke around in the gossip byways near where she lived a bit more after she returned home. Maybe she'd have more to share with the ladies tomorrow.

#

The next morning, Dot stepped out of a taxi in front of the private wing of the hospital. Rather than dressing as a stylish but businesslike young woman, today she'd worn her most luxurious day dress, which was several inches longer than her normal hemline. She was decked out with heavy gold jewelry, Aunt Etta's mink coat and black velvet hat, and the all-important non-prescription spectacles. She'd marcelled her hair into waves and added powder on her cheeks, plus a different shade of lipstick. A pair of staid black shoes completed the look of an older and much more wealthy lady.

She raised her chin and mustered an imperious smile to hide her frustration in not yet making a speck of progress on who'd killed Ursula – or how. She'd once again come up short at the library in her efforts to learn about Dr. Ross or the mysterious malady both Ursula and Victoria had died of. Etta had said she had a contact in the medical examiner's office. With any luck, by the end of the day they would learn more about the two deaths.

Today Dot was determined to speak with the doctor face to face. Inside, the gorgon at the front desk had been replaced by a student nurse.

"I must speak with Dr. Ross," Dot said.

"I'm sorry, ma'am, but he's—"

“He’ll see me. Tell him Mrs. Elizabeth Rogers is here regarding a sizeable financial contribution I plan to make to this institution.”

The girl’s eyes widened. “Oh, yes, ma’am. Will you please have a seat? I’ll fetch him.” She scurried away.

Was the hospital short on funds? The facility looked to be in good repair, although that might be due to the wing being less than a decade old. The student seemed to know Ross would be eager to speak to a rich donor.

A man strode up. The buttons of his vest strained over a well-fed midsection, and the tiny broken veins in his cheeks indicated a fondness for drink. He made a small bow from [at] the waist.

“Mrs. Rogers, I am Dr. Roland Ross. How can I help you?” He led her into an office and gestured to a chair. He sat behind the broad and nearly empty desk.

“I’ve heard a quite a lot about this new private wing, and I’m considering bestowing some considerable funds toward its operation.”

His eyes lit up, and it seemed he barely kept from rubbing his hands together.

“But first,” Dot went on, “I must inquire about the recent deaths of my friends Ursula Fleming and Victoria Child. They were both in the prime of health, needing only a minor surgical procedure. And they both left here dead. How did that happen?”

His eyes narrowed and his mouth looked like he’d tasted a particularly sour lemon. “The well-being of the ladies unfortunately took a turn for the worse, may they rest in peace. These things happen.”

“You must have signed the death certificates. What did you put as the cause of death?”

“Now, now, Mrs. Rogers. You don’t need to be worrying your head with sordid details like that.”

“But I am.” She folded her hands and waited.

He straightened two pencils and a blank pad of paper. He glanced at the door. He checked his watch and pushed up to standing.

“Would you look at the time? I have surgery in ten minutes. You can contact our business office about your donation, ma’am.”

“Very well.” Dot let herself be ushered out and started for the door.

At the desk, Ross leaned over and murmured to the girl. “Tell Nurse Day I need to speak with her in my office immediately.”

Surgery? Somehow Dot didn’t think so.

#

This morning Josie had dressed as the girl she was. It was only ten o’clock, and she’d already succeeded in lifting a fat money clip from a well-dressed gent and had slipped a loaded purse from a gay young lady’s open handbag. Both hauls were secure in her school satchel, their owners none the wiser.

She kept the corner of her eye on the entrance to the private wing of the hospital. She hadn’t yet spotted the lady detective or Miss Earhart, but she hoped she would. She’d picked up a couple of pieces of information in her neighborhood she thought they would be interested in.

Instead, a slender, mink coat–garbed lady emerged. Everything about her shouted “rich,” from the fancy hat to the jewelry. The lady wore a slight frown under her cheaters, but Josie was mostly interested in the unclasped handbag. She was sure it held something that she could benefit from more than this rich dame, who certainly would have more of the same at home.

Josie gauged the woman's trajectory toward the street and positioned herself accordingly. When her mark reached a few others at the curb, all trying to hail a cab, Josie trudged toward her with her gaze on the sidewalk. As she jostled the lady, she tried to slide her fingers into the handbag.

She gasped when an iron grip on her elbow pulled her away from the curb.

"Not so fast, young miss."

Josie looked up, astonished. "Miss Henderson?" She recognized the voice.

The lady stared into her face. "You're the lad from yesterday. I'd know those eyes anywhere. Good at disguises, are you?"

"Well, I..." Josie didn't know if she should launch into the truth or make something up.

Miss Henderson laughed and slipped off her glasses. "I rather am, too, it appears. Come sit with me. Let's have a little chat."

She was still gripping Josie's elbow, so she had no choice but to sit on the bench next to the detective.

"Now, what's your name, and why were you were trying to steal from me?"

Josie swallowed. "I'll tell you, but first I need to give you some information. Madeline Day lives in the West End near my father's house, and she's stepping out with the doctor in there." The words gushed out. "I've heard of others who died after vomiting and then losing teeth, including Madeline's little sister, who worked as a maid for a rich lady. The girl was ill but the lady wouldn't let her see a doctor. Madeline's father is a chemist. I think Madeline is poisoning other rich women to get revenge for her sister's death. You should look into what mercury salts do to a person."

Miss Henderson blinked. "Mercury salts."

"Yes, ma'am."

"You've come up with a lot."

“Thank you,” Josie said

“You should come and work for me instead of picking pockets. You didn’t tell me your name.”

“Josie Page, ma’am, and thank you, but I can’t.” Josie jumped to her feet and sprinted away.

“Wait!”

Josie raised her hand in a wave but didn’t slow her pace. She’d been getting the hang of fingersmithing lately. She was good at it. With Father’s illness worsening, she needed the money for her family. Miss Henderson wouldn’t be able to match her take, she was sure.

#

Dot telephoned Amelia at home that evening and related her encounter with Josie.

“She’s good, that kid,” Amelia said.

“There’s more. Aunt Etta pulled some strings in the medical examiner’s office. The fellow who signed off on those fraudulent death certificates has been fired. They’re doing autopsies on Ursula and Victoria now, but the new examiner knows about mercury salts and said the vomiting and tooth loss is consistent with that kind of poisoning. No wonder poor Ursula tried to ask for help. She must have known she was being poisoned.”

“Can you believe it?” Amelia asked. “Josie solved the whole case for us.”

“She did. Amelia, we were bested by a twelve-year-old girl. We needed a little help, and she provided it.”

Amelia laughed. “Good for her. You should give her a job.”

“I tried to, but she ran away. Also, I wouldn’t be surprised if tomorrow morning’s newspapers report the arrests of Nurse Day and Doctor Ross.”

“And rightly so. It’s a good thing this business is over,” Amelia said. “The weather tomorrow looks perfect for flying, and now you won’t be pressuring me to skip it in favor of helping you.”

Dot laughed. “No, I won’t.”