

## CHAPTER VIII - A FRIENDLY FOE

It required two days and a night to go by rail from Beverly to Dorfield and as Mary Louise had passed a sleepless night at the school she decided to purchase a berth on the sleeper. That made a big hole in her surplus of eight dollars and she also found her meals in the dining car quite expensive, so that by the time she left the train at Dorfield her finances would be reduced to the sum of a dollar and twenty cents.

That would not have disturbed her, knowing that thereafter she would be with Gran'pa Jim, except for one circumstance. The little man with the fat nose, who had taken the train at Beverly, was still on board. All the other passengers who had been on the train at that time had one by one left it and been replaced by others, for the route lay through several large cities where many alighted and others came aboard. Only the little man from Beverly remained, quiet and unobtrusive but somehow haunting the girl's presence in an embarrassing manner.

He seldom looked at her but was found staring from the window whenever she turned her eyes toward him. At first she scarcely noticed the man, but the longer he remained aboard the train the more she speculated as to where he might be going. Whenever she entered the dining car he took a notion to eat at that time, but found a seat as far removed from her as possible. She imagined she had escaped him when she went to the sleeper, but next morning as she passed out he was standing in the vestibule and a few moments later he was in the diner where she was breakfasting.

It was now that the girl first conceived the idea that he might be following her for a purpose, dogging her footsteps to discover at what station she left the train. And, when she asked herself why the stranger should be so greatly concerned with her movements, she remembered that she was going to Gran'pa Jim and that at one time an officer had endeavored to discover, through her, her grandfather's whereabouts.

"If this little man," she mused, glancing at his blank, inexpressive features, "happens to be a detective, and knows who I am, he may think I will lead him directly to Colonel Weatherby, whom he may then arrest. Gran'pa Jim is innocent, of course, but I know he doesn't wish to be arrested, because he left Beverly suddenly to avoid it. And," she added with a sudden feinting of the heart, "if this suspicion is true I am actually falling into the trap and leading an officer to my grandfather's retreat."

This reflection rendered the girl very uneasy and caused her to watch the fat-nosed man guardedly all through that tedious day. She constantly hoped he would leave the train at some station and thus prove her fears to be groundless, but always he remained in his seat, patiently eyeing the landscape through his window.

Late in the afternoon another suspicious circumstance aroused her alarm. The conductor of the train, as he passed through the car, paused at the rear end and gazed thoughtfully at the little man huddled in the rear seat, who seemed unconscious of his regard. After watching him a while the conductor suddenly turned his head and looked directly at Mary Louise, with a curious expression, as if connecting his two passengers. Then he went on through the train, but the girl's heart was beating high and the little man, while seeming to eye the fleeting landscape through the window, wriggled somewhat uneasily in his seat,

Mary Louise now decided he was a detective. She suspected that he had been sent to Beverly, after the other man left, to watch her movements, with the idea that sooner or later she would rejoin her grandfather. Perhaps, had any letter come for her from her mother or Gran'pa Jim, this officer would have seized it and obtained from it the address of the man he was seeking. That would account for their failure to write her; perhaps they were aware of the plot and therefore dared not send her a letter.

And now she began wondering what she should do when she got to Dorfield, if the little man also left the train at that station. Such an act on his part would prove that her suspicions were correct, in which case she would lead him straight to her grandfather, whom she would thus deliver into the power of his merciless enemies.

No; that would not do, at all. If the man followed her from the train at Dorfield she dared not go to Peter Conant's house. Where, then, COULD she go? Had she possessed sufficient money it might be best to ride past Dorfield and pay her fare to another station; but her funds were practically exhausted. Dorfield was a much bigger town than Beverly; it was quite a large city, indeed; perhaps she could escape the supervision of the detective, in some way, and by outwitting him find herself free to seek the Conant's home. She would try this and circumstances must decide her plan of action. Always there was the chance that she misjudged the little man.

As the conductor called the station the train halted and the girl passed the rear seat, where the man had his bare head half out the open window, and descended from the car to the platform. A few others also alighted, to hurry away to the omnibuses or street car or walk to their destinations.

Mary Louise stood quite still upon the platform until the train drew out after its brief stop. It was nearly six o'clock in the evening and fast growing dark, yet she distinctly observed the fat-nosed man, who had alighted on the opposite side of the track and was now sauntering diagonally across the rails to the depot, his hands thrust deep in his pockets and his eyes turned away from Mary Louise as if the girl occupied no part of his thoughts.

But she knew better than that. Her suspicions were now fully confirmed and she sought to evade the detective in just the way any inexperienced girl might have done. Turning in the opposite direction she hastily crossed the street, putting a

big building between herself and the depot, and then hurried along a cross-street. She looked back now and then and found she had not been followed; so, to insure escape, she turned another corner, giving a fearful glance over her shoulder as she did so.

This street was not so well lighted as the others had been and she had no idea where it led to. She knew Dorfield pretty well, having once resided there for three years, but in her agitated haste she had now lost all sense of direction. Feeling, however, that she was now safe from pursuit, she walked on more slowly, trying to discover her whereabouts, and presently passed a dimly-lighted bakery before which a man stood looking abstractedly into the window at the cakes and pies, his back toward her.

Instantly Mary Louise felt her heart sink. She did not need to see the man's face to recognize the detective. Nor did he stir as she passed him by and proceeded up the street. But how did he happen to be there? Had she accidentally stumbled upon him, or had he purposely placed himself in her path to assure her that escape from him was impossible?

As she reached the next corner a street car came rushing along, halted a brief moment and proceeded on its way. In that moment Mary Louise had stepped aboard and as she entered the closed section and sank into a seat she breathed a sigh of relief. The man at the bakery window had not followed her. The car made one or two more stops, turned a corner and stopped again. This time the little man with the fat nose deliberately swung himself to the rear platform, paid his fare and remained there. He didn't look at Mary Louise at all, but she looked at him and her expression was one of mingled horror and fear.

A mile farther on the car reached the end of its line and the conductor reversed the trolley-pole and prepared for the return journey. Mary Louise kept her seat. The detective watched the motorman and conductor with an assumption of stupid interest and retained his place on the platform.

On the way back to the business section of Dorfield, Mary Louise considered what to do next. She was very young and inexperienced; she was also, at this moment, very weary and despondent. It was clearly evident that she could not escape this man, whose persistence impressed her with the imminent danger that threatened her grandfather if she went to the home of the Conants--the one thing she positively must not do. Since her arrival was wholly unexpected by her friends, with whom she could not communicate, she now found herself a forlorn wanderer, without money or shelter.

When the car stopped at Main Street she got off and walked slowly along the brilliantly lighted thoroughfare, feeling more safe among the moving throngs of people. Presently she came to a well-remembered corner where the principal hotel stood on one side and the First National Bank on the other. She now knew where she was and could find the direct route to the Conants, had she dared go there. To gain time for thought the girl stepped into the doorway of the bank, which was

closed for the day, thus avoiding being jostled by pedestrians. She set down her suit case, leaned against the door-frame and tried to determine her wisest course of action.

She was hungry, tired, frightened, and the combination of sensations made her turn faint. With a white face and despair in her heart she leaned heavily back and closed her eyes.

"Pardon me," said a soft voice, and with a nervous start she opened her eyes to find the little fat-nosed man confronting her. He had removed his hat and was looking straight into her face--for the first time, she imagined--and now she noticed that his gray eyes were not at all unkindly.

"What do you want?" she asked sharply, with an involuntary shudder.

"I wish to advise you, Miss Burrows," he replied. "I believe you know who I am and it is folly for us to pursue this game of hide-and-seek any longer. You are tired and worn out with your long ride and the anxiety I have caused you."

"You are dogging me!" she exclaimed indignantly.

"I am keeping you in sight, according to orders."

"You are a detective!" she asked, a little disarmed by his frankness.

"John O'Gorman by name, Miss. At home I have a little girl much like you, but I doubt if my Josie--even though I have trained her--would prove more shrewd than you have done under such trying circumstances. Even in the train you recognized my profession--and I am thought to be rather clever at disguising my motives."

"Yes?"

"And you know quite well that because you have come to Dorfield to join your grandfather, whom you call Colonel Weatherby, I have followed you in an attempt to discover, through you, the man for whom our government has searched many years."

"Oh, indeed!"

"Therefore you are determined not to go to your destination and you are at your wits' end to know what to do. Let me advise you, for the sake of my own little Josie."

The abrupt proposal bewildered her.

"You are my enemy!"

"Don't think that, Miss," he said gently. "I am an officer of the law, engaged in doing my duty. I am not your enemy and bear you no ill-will."

"You are trying to arrest my grandfather."

"In the course of duty. But he is quite safe from me for to-night, while you are almost exhausted through your efforts to protect him. Go into the hotel across the way and register and get some supper and a room. To-morrow you will be able to think more clearly and may then make up your mind what to do."

She hesitated. The voice seemed earnest and sincere, the eyes considerate and pitying, and the advice appealed to her as good; but--

"Just for to-night, put yourself in my care," he said. "I'm ashamed to have annoyed you to such an extent and to have interfered with your plans; but I could not help it. You have succeeded in balking the DETECTIVE, but the MAN admires you for it. I noticed, the last time you took out your purse in the dining-car, that your money is nearly gone. If you will permit me to lend you enough for your hotel expenses--"

"No."

"Well, it may not be necessary. Your friends will supply you with money whenever our little--comedy, shall we say?--is played to the end. In the meantime I'll speak to the landlord. Now, Miss Burrows, run across to the hotel and register."

She gazed at him uncertainly a moment and the little man smiled reassuringly. Somehow, she felt inclined to trust him.

"Thank you," she said and took her suit case into the hotel office.

The clerk looked at her rather curiously as she registered, but assigned her a room and told her that dinner was still being served. She followed the bellboy to her room, where she brushed her gown, bathed her hands and face and rearranged her hair. Then she went to the dining room and, although the journey and worry had left her sick and nervous, she ate some dinner and felt stronger and better after it.