

## CHAPTER XIX THE PRINTING OFFICE

After breakfast Josie sallied out upon the street and found a hardware store. There, after some exploration, she purchased an asbestos table-mat. With this she returned to her room and locked herself in.

The chambermaid had "been and gone," but Josie's drawer was still locked and its precious contents intact. The girl scraped the surface of the table-mat with her pen-knife until she had secured enough loose fibre to serve her purpose and then she proceeded to restuff the fuse with the asbestos fibre the entire length of the section from which she had removed the powder. Then she pushed the end of the fuse into the hole in the bomb, wired it as before, and replaced the long fuse in its grooves.

"Now," said Josie, surveying her work with satisfaction, "if they light that fuse, and expect it to explode the bomb in an hour or more, they'll be badly fooled. Also, I shall have prevented another catastrophe like the explosion at the airplane factory."

She replaced the bomb in its bag, placed the bag in the black satchel, tucked in the soiled shirts to cover it and with her improvised key managed to relock the satchel. Watching for a time when the corridor was vacant, she went to 45, entered the room and replaced the satchel on its shelf, taking care to arrange the newspaper before it as a mask.

She had taken the chair from the closet and was about to leave the room when she heard footsteps coming down the hallway, accompanied by a whistle which she promptly recognized.

"Caught!" she exclaimed, and gave a hurried glance around her. To hide within the room was impossible, but the window was open and the iron fire-escape within easy reach. In an instant she had mounted it and seizing the rounds of the iron ladder climbed upward until she had nearly reached the next window directly above, on the third floor. Then she paused, clinging, to get her breath.

Kauffman was annoyed to find the door of his room unlocked. He paused a moment in the middle of the room and looked around him. "Confound that chambermaid!" Josie heard him mutter, and then he opened the closet door and looked in. Apparently reassured, he approached the open window, stuck out his head and looked down the fire-escape. Josie's heart gave a bound; but Kauffman didn't look upward. He drew in his head, resumed his whistling and busied himself repacking the sample suspenders in his suitcase.

Josie hoped he would soon go out again, but he seemed to have no intention of doing so. So she climbed her ladder until she could look into the window above, which was also open. The old lady she had seen at breakfast was lying upon the bed, her eyes closed. Josie wondered if she was asleep. The door leading from the room to the hallway also stood open. The weather was warm, and the old lady evidently wanted plenty of air.

While Josie hesitated what to do a boy came up the alley, noticed her on the fire-escape and paused to look at her in astonishment. The girl couldn't blame him for being interested, for her attitude was certainly extraordinary. Others were likely to discover her, too, and might suspect her of burglary and raise a hue and cry. So she deliberately entered the room, tiptoed across to the hall and escaped without arousing the old lady. But it was a desperate chance and she breathed easier when she had found the stairs and descended to her own floor. Safe in her own room she gave a little laugh at her recent predicament and then sat down to note her latest discoveries on her tablets.

Josie O'Gorman was very particular in this regard. Details seemingly of trifling moment but which may prove important are likely to escape one's memory. Her habit was to note every point of progress in a case and often review every point from the beginning, fitting them into their proper places and giving each its due importance. A digest of such information enabled her to proceed to the next logical step in her investigation.

"These items all dovetail very nicely," she decided, with a satisfied nod at the quaint characters on the tablets--which all the world might read and be no wiser. "I must, however, satisfy myself that Tom Linnet actually printed those circulars. The evidence at hand indicates that he did, but I want positive proof. Also, I'd like to know which one of the gang employed him--and paid him so liberally. However, that suggestion opens up a new line of conjecture; I don't believe Tom Linnet got all his wealth merely for printing a few circulars, helping to address them, and keeping his mouth shut. But--what else has he been paid for?"

She brooded on this for a while and then determined to take one thing at a time and follow it to a conclusion. So she once more quitted her room and descended by the elevator--openly, this time--to the office. It was now noon and the hotel office was filled with guests, and the clerks and bellboys were all busily occupied. Josie wandered carelessly around until she found the stairway leading to the basement. Watching her opportunity she slipped down the stairs.

The basement was not as barren as she expected to find it. There was an open central space, on one side of which were rooms for the barber shop, baths, and a pool room, all more or less occupied by guests and attendants. On the opposite

side, at the rear, were baggage and storerooms. Just beside her she noted a boot-black's stand, where a colored boy listlessly waited for customers.

"Shine, miss?" he inquired.

"No," said Josie in a businesslike tone; "I'm looking for the printing office."

"Secon' door, miss," indicating it with a gesture; "but dey ain't nobody dere. De room's mos'ly kep' locked."

"I know," said Josie, and advancing to the door drew out her keys.

Her very boldness disarmed suspicion; the boy was not sufficiently interested to watch her, for a man came out of the barber-shop and seated himself in the boot-black's chair.

This sort of lock didn't phase Josie at all. At the second trial she opened the door, walked in and closed the door behind her.

It was a small room, dimly lighted and very disorderly. Scraps of paper were strewn around the floor. Dust had settled on the ink-rollers of the foot-press. A single case of type stood on a rack and the form of a bill-of-fare--partly "pied"--was on a marble slab which formed the top of a small table. On an upturned soap-box was a pile of unprinted menu cards. Josie noted a few cans of ink, a bottle of benzine, and a few printing tools lying carelessly about, but the room contained nothing more.

Having "sized up" Tom Linnet's printing room with one swift glance, the girl stooped down and began searching among the scraps that littered the floor. They were mostly torn bits of cardboard or crumpled papers on which trial impressions had been made.

Josie expected momentarily to be interrupted, so she conducted her search as rapidly as was consistent with thoroughness. She paid no attention to the card scraps but all papers she smoothed out, one by one. Finally, with a little cry of triumph, she thrust one of these into her handbag. She made this discovery just back of the press, and glancing up, she noted a hook that had formerly been hidden from her view, on which were impaled a number of papers--the chef's "copy" from which various bills had been printed. Running through these papers she suddenly paused, pulled one away from the hook and tucked it into her bag.

She was fairly satisfied, now, but still continued her search amongst the litter. It was not easy to decipher writing or printing in that dim light, but her eyes were good and the longer she remained in the room the more distinctly she saw. There was an electric globe suspended over the press, but she dared not turn on the

light for fear of attracting attention. Several scraps on which writing appeared she secured without trying to read them, but presently she decided she had made as thorough an examination of the place as was necessary.

She left the room, locked the door again and boldly mounted the stairs to the office, meeting and passing several men who scarcely noticed her. Then she took the elevator to her room and washed her grimy hands and prepared for luncheon.

At the table she slipped another of the printed bills into her bag, to use for comparison, and afterward ate her lunch as calmly as if she were not inwardly elated at the success of her morning's work. Josie felt, indeed, that she had secured the proof necessary to confound the traitors and bring them to the bar of justice. But there might be other interesting developments; her trap was still set. "There's no hurry," she told herself. "Let's see this thing through--to the end."

Indeed, on reflection, she realized that several threads of evidence had not yet been followed to their source. Some points of mystification still remained to be cleared up. Her facts were mingled with theories, and she had been taught that theories are mighty uncertain things.

On leaving the dining room, Josie got on her hat and jacket, went out to the street and caught an Oak Avenue car.

"Oh, Josie!" cried a well-known voice, and there sat Mary Louise, on her way home from the Shop.

Josie gave her a haughty look, walked straight to the far end of the car and sat down in a vacant seat. The car was half filled with passengers.

Mary Louise pushed forward and sat beside her friend. Josie stared straight ahead, stolidly.

"No one here knows you," whispered Mary Louise, "won't you speak to me, Josie?"

No reply.

"Where are you stopping? What are you doing? How are you getting along on the case?" pleaded Mary Louise, so softly that no one else could overhear.

Josie maintained silence. Her features were expressionless.

"I know you told me, in case we met, not to recognize you," continued Mary Louise, "but I'm so anxious for news, dear! Can't you come home, to-night, and have a good talk with me? You owe me that much consideration. Josie."

The car stopped at a street intersection. Josie stood up.

"Not to-night," she replied, and alighted from the car just as it started to move again.

"Bother Mary Louise!" she muttered, "she has made me walk three whole blocks."

Mary Louise was human and she was provoked. There was really no need for Josie O'Gorman to be so absurdly mysterious. Had she not known her so well, Mary Louise would have felt that Josie had deliberately insulted her. As it was, she blamed her friend for inexcusable affectation. "I'm not sure," she reflected, "that a girl can be a detective--a regular detective--without spoiling her disposition or losing to some extent her maidenly modesty. Of course, Josie has been brought up in an atmosphere of mystery and can't be blamed for her peculiarities, but---I'm glad I'm not a detective's daughter."

Josie, however, wasn't worrying over any resentment her friend might feel at the necessary snub. She was on a keen scent and already had forgotten her meeting with Mary Louise. Three blocks farther on she turned into the walk leading to an old but picturesque residence, at one time a "show place" of Dorfield and the pride of the Dudley-Markhams, but now overshadowed by modern and more imposing mansions.

Josie rang the door-bell and presently the door was opened by a young and rather untidy maid.

"I'd like to see Professor Dyer," said Josie.

"He's gone to Washington," was the reply.

"Indeed! Are you quite sure?"

"Yes," said the maid; and then Mrs. Dyer's head appeared in the opening and she gave Josie a curious if comprehensive examination. Then:

"If you're from one of the schools, I'm sorry to tell you that Professor Dyer went to Washington by the early train this morning. I don't know how soon he will be back. Professor Harrington of the High School is in charge. But perhaps it is something I can do?"

"No, thank you; I can wait," said Josie, and went away.

"So," she said to herself, as she made her way back to town in a street car, "if Dyer has really gone to Washington, he hopes to get possession of the old desk and its hidden papers. Pretty important to him, those papers are, and I wouldn't blame him for chasing them up. But--has he really gone? Mrs. Dyer thinks so; but all evidence points to the fact that she's not in her husband's confidence.

Now, if Dyer is on his way to Washington, what did last night's secret meeting mean? His absence will complicate matters, I fear. Anyhow, I must revise my conclusions a bit."