

*The Filigree*  
**Slippers**  
by Jean Foster Akin



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CHILDREN'S DIVISION

*The Filigree Slippers*

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For Dean,  
my anchor  
And for our children,  
Nate and Fiji  
who give joy to my life





## Chapter One

In a quiet little village, there stood a lovely little shop called *Some Enchanted Evening*. A sweet, round, little lady by the name of Mrs. Murphy owned the shop, and magnificent things were crafted and sold there.

From the ceiling hung glittering chandeliers, and on wooden tables stood gleaming silver candleholders and shimmering porcelain

(poʹ-sel-in) clocks. In glass cases rested sparkling necklaces, fine music boxes, and rings whose jewels shone and flickered in the light of the lamps that were hung about the shop. Vanity tables were tucked here and there throughout the rooms, and ladies often came in to sit at them, imagining how lovely it would be to own such a table so they could have a place at home to sit and comb their hair and put on their makeup and jewelry.

These beautiful things were not made one after another on huge factory machines, by the way, but were made one by one, and very carefully, by special people called craftsmen.

The craftsmen made each clock, each necklace, and each music box with their own hands—and each chandelier, vanity table, and candleholder looked a little different from the one before. The shop twinkled day and night with crystal teardrops, glowing strands of pearls, flashing diamonds, emeralds, rubies, sapphires, topaz and citrine gems, and warm brass pendulums.

One of the craftsmen who worked at *Some Enchanted Evening* was a man by the name of Hubert Minkle. Hubert's job was to make jewelry from thin silver threads, which he shaped into pleasing designs called filigree (fill-uh-gree).

His jewelry looked as though it had been made from sparkling silver lace! Sometimes, Hubert would finish a piece and set colored gems into it, and people would come from miles and miles away to gasp and sigh at the beauty of his work and to buy their favorite pieces.

Hubert Minkle made filigree necklaces for ladies' throats and filigree rings for ladies' fingers and filigree brooches for ladies' coats. When men came into the shop looking for unique gifts for their loves, special pieces of jewelry that they could not find anywhere else, they soon learned to ask if Mr. Minkle was available to create something

for them to bring back to their wives and daughters and mothers.

"Mr. Minkle," Mrs. Murphy would call as she approached his worktable at the back of her shop. "A gentleman was just in looking for a silver tiara for his bride to wear on their wedding day—I think you're just the man for the job."

Hubert would blush at that, and Mrs. Murphy would smile and pat his shoulder affectionately, her blue-green eyes crinkling with warmth for this shy, kind soul.

One evening, Hubert was pleased to notice one of his necklaces adorning the neck of the town judge's wife as she passed him on her way



to her limousine. And when he'd been working at *Some Enchanted Evening* several months, his jewelry was being ordered from all over the countryside and from far away cities. Soon, women in towns and cities Hubert had never even heard of began recognizing Hubert's work. At parties, women wearing Hubert's jewelry would often be asked by other women, "Is that a *Minkle*?" But Hubert was a bashful man, young and lacking in confidence, and he blushed a deep purple when Mrs. Murphy told him how much his jewelry was loved by those who lived far and near.

Hubert lived alone in a small apartment near the park with his cat, Pinkerton. Each morning, tiny Pinkerton rubbed his furry little nose on Hubert's face to wake him, and after a cup of coffee, Hubert headed off to work, and toiled quietly at his bench at the back of Mrs. Murphy's shop. All around him, men and women labored carefully over the things they did best: an older man worked on cuckoo clocks, and a young woman worked on painting diminutive flowers and birds on watch faces. Another man sat polishing the wooden legs on a tea table he

had just constructed. Hubert Minkle sat at his own bench with his tools, heating pieces of silver over a flame, and pulling the softened metal into long glittering filigree strands. Then he twisted the strands into beautiful shapes and designs, forming statuettes and jewelry, as well as dazzling tiny buttons for little girls' dresses, and shiny boxes for holding coins or other valuables. As he finished each creation, Hubert would hold it up to the candle's flame, and light would shine through the coils and swirls of glorious silver! Oh how Hubert loved his work!

Every day at noon, Mrs. Murphy went to the front door of the shop,

locked the door, and hung a sign: "Having Lunch. See You At 1 o'clock!" Then she went upstairs to her apartment with one or two of her workers, and they returned to the shop carrying a feast she had prepared in the kitchen above.

In a cozy room at the very back of the shop, Mrs. Murphy sat down with all the men and women who worked for her, and they shared a meal of homemade biscuits and jam, muffins and butter, small sandwiches, fresh fruit, and two or three pots of Irish tea. There was lively conversation and laughter around the table, and everyone was relaxed and pleased in each other's

friendship. Though Hubert always appeared contented, he often felt a tad lonely in his hushed apartment with only downy little Pinkerton for company; Mrs. Murphy's noontime meals were a special part of his day, when he truly felt like he was part of a real family.

At five o'clock in the evening, Mrs. Murphy walked through the shop, saying good night to all the craftsmen who worked in the back, and to the young ladies who worked behind the counters up front. The craftsmen rose from their work tables and stretched and yawned; they lowered the lamps, put away their tools, and covered their unfinished work

with soft cloths. The young ladies in front made sure all the hat pins and watches, the earrings and bracelets, and the rings and the brooches were arranged neatly on their velvet beds inside the glass display cases. Mrs. Murphy adjusted tables that had been moved during the day, straightened mirrors so they wouldn't hang crooked on the walls, and made sure all the windows were closed against the damp night air. The floors were swept, the counters dusted, and then everyone bid the others farewell as they emptied out onto the street, all heading off to their own homes and their own families for the evening.

Hubert said goodnight to his

friends and to Mrs. Murphy, and hurried along the sidewalk, his head bent as he made his way through the crowds of people on their way home to supper. When he reached the village park, in the center of town, he turned onto one of its flower-edged paths, and only then did his step slow. He strolled happily along the pathways, stopping to listen to the musicians there playing happy tunes, and then he headed home to his apartment. There he ate a solitary supper of hot tea, some bread and cheese, and an apple while Pinkerton curled at his feet, nibbling at the tuna his master had brought home for his evening meal.

After supper, Hubert would take another cup of tea to his little sitting room by the front bay windows, and lowering himself into a comfortable chair, he would read a good book, sip his tea, and occasionally look out the window at the people still ambling about in the village park across the street.

Nothing ever changed for Hubert; his life was quiet and all who knew him would have said that his life was quite uneventful. Why, he was so calm, so gentle, so serene a man, no one would ever have believed that within his heart there lay a wild passion!



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