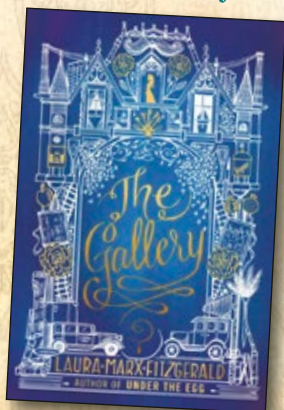


Only two people know about the masterpiece hidden in the Tenpenny home—
and one of them is dead.

THE OTHER IS THEODORA TENPENNY. When Theo spills a bottle of rubbing alcohol on her late grandfather's painting, she discovers what looks like a priceless masterpiece underneath. That's great news for Theo, who's struggling to hang on to her family's two-hundred-year-old townhouse and support her unstable mother on her grandfather's legacy of \$463. There's just one problem: Theo's grandfather was a security guard at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and if the painting is as valuable as she thinks it is, then her *grandfather* wasn't who she thought *he* was.

Untangle
Laura Marx Fitzgerald's
next mystery:



★“Fans of Konigsburg’s *From the Mixed-Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler* and Balliett’s *Chasing Vermeer* will thrill at the chance to solve a new mystery centered around art.”
—*Library Media Connection*, starred review

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Under the Egg

Laura Marx Fitzgerald

PUFFIN BOOKS



It was the find of the century.
Or so I thought at the time.

This was back when a great day meant finding a toaster oven on the curb with a sign reading **WORKS GOOD**. Or scoring a bag of day-old danishes (slightly stale), which taste like heaven after months of plain oatmeal.

Manhattan's treasures aren't hard to find. You just have to look. Ignore the skyscrapers and shop windows for a minute, and look down. You'll see, people here shed possessions like dandruff. I'm not complaining. I've found clothes, toys, school supplies, enough books to open my own library branch. The sidewalks of New York are like an outdoor shopping mall where everything is free.

One time I found two Barneys bags full of moth-

eaten cashmere sweaters. It only took \$3.25 in quarters to shrink them at the Laundromat, and I was able to use the thick, felted wool to make a new winter jacket, stuffed with feathers from some old down pillows. All the leftover sweater arms I sewed together into leggings. The scraps I patched into a schoolbag with my name, Theodora Tenpenny, embroidered with thread I pulled out of a hotel sewing kit I found in my grandfather's dresser.

Another time I found a mint-condition snowboard. It makes a decent bookshelf.

Of course, this was back when I thought the greatest things you could find on the streets of New York were things.

But I'm getting ahead of myself.

I was coming back from the hardware store on one of those sweltering July days when you can't decide which is hotter: the sun beating down on you or the pavement radiating beneath you. From the sticky sound of each step, I could tell that the soles of my sneakers were starting to melt. What was left of my sneakers, that is.

My Keds had seen me through the seventh grade, but they couldn't keep up with my summer growth spurt. I'd already slit the canvas to free my toes and strained the laces to their limit, but as I flapped my

way past Hudson Street's Korean tapas bars and bespoke bicycle boutiques, it was clear that something had to give. Most likely the seams.

By then I saw it. Just as I turned the corner onto our street, Spinney Lane.

A pair of shoes, perched on top of a mailbox. Not the neighborhood's usual discarded pair of glamour queen high heels, but sneakers, brand-new and, on closer inspection, exactly my size: 5½ extra wide. Yes, the colors were garish, and the owner had, for some reason, hand-painted them with graffiti. But they fit. That's all that mattered.

I grabbed them before they could attract any competition, and peeling my skirt (really a yellowed cotton petticoat I'd found in the attic) off my sweaty thighs, I plopped down on the hot curb. But as I pulled off my Keds, I could hear my grandfather Jack's voice: "What? Plenty of life in those shoes! Well, if you must, here—hand me those laces. I can find a use for them."

I stopped for a moment to savor my treasure-finding triumph, when the taxi in front of me peeled away, revealing the spot where I last saw my grandfather alive.

It had only been a couple of months ago, but it felt like years already. I had rounded Spinney Lane,

as I always did on my way home from school. But this time, I saw that the street was at a standstill behind a barricade of ambulances and police cars. Truck horns blared and whined. A bike messenger and cabdriver pointed fingers and cursed in various languages. I peered into the middle of the commotion and saw . . . Jack.

My own blood went cold.

It didn't matter how fast I ran to him. He was already halfway gone.

As soon as my face crossed into his line of vision, he struggled to lift his head. "It's under the egg," he rasped, his once-icy blue eyes now foggy. "Look under the egg."

The EMTs told me to keep him talking. "What is, Jack?" I said, my mind whirling between the things I knew I should say and the things I really needed to ask. "What's under the egg?"

"There's . . . a letter." His speech became more labored. "And a treasure." He closed his eyes, summoning the strength to whisper, "Before it's too late."

The rest of the day exists only in fragments. The ambulance ride. The young doctor's sweaty hand on my shoulder. The police escort home, despite my insistence that I was perfectly all right to walk. The strange little song my mom hummed as the cops

spoke to her. I knew that she had stopped listening and returned to the theorems in her head.

That was the day the Tenpennys of 18 Spinney Lane went from three to two. And really from two to one. Because without Jack, everything we had now weighed on me.

Which is why Jack told me, with his last words, where to find the one thing that would change everything.