

CHAPTER XVIII ON THE TRAIL

Josie O'Gorman loved mysteries for their own sake. She loved them because they required solutions, and to solve a mystery is not only interesting but requires a definite amount of talent. Since she was a wee thing perched on her father's knee, Officer O'Gorman had flooded her ears with the problems he daily encountered, had turned the problems inside out and canvassed them from every possible viewpoint, questioning the child if this, or that, was most probable. By this odd method he not only enjoyed the society of his beloved daughter but argued himself, through shrewd reasoning, into a lucid explanation of many puzzling cases. To his pleased surprise, as little Josie grew older she began to answer his questions, taking a part in his professional arguments with himself, and from that time her training as a detective began.

John O'Gorman had never been quite sure whether his fatherly adoration unduly influenced him or whether Josie was indeed an exceptionally talented girl; so, having firmly determined to train her to become a girl detective, he had so far held her in leash, permitting her to investigate various private cases but refusing to place her in professional work--such as the secret service--until she had gained experience and acquired confidence in herself. Confidence was the one thing Josie lacked most. She took her mistakes too much to heart.

The girl was full of enthusiasm, however, and now meant to untangle the mystery of Alora Jones if it were possible to do so, both to please Mary Louise and to enjoy the satisfaction of success. After saying good night to her friends, and before going to her own room, the girl wandered about the big hotel making casual inquiries and obtaining more or less useful information. Afterward, she sat in her room and arranged in her mind the complete history of Alora, so far as she was informed of it, and made notes of all facts which seemed to bear on the present problem.

Next morning she inquired for the housekeeper and found that lady seated in her little office on the third floor of the hotel.

"I'm trying to trace one of the servants who left you Monday night, or early Tuesday morning," she said, after informing the woman that she

was engaged in tracing the missing girl, Alora Jones. "I am not sure what name you knew her by, but her real name was Gorham."

"No one has left us this week," returned the housekeeper, who seemed disposed to converse freely with her visitor.

"Are you sure of that?"

"Why, I'm positive. We treat our help well and they seldom leave us. I'm sure no woman employed in this hotel, down to the lowest kitchen scullion, has resigned or been discharged during the last few days."

"And there is no one still in your service named Gorham?"

"No one. It's an unusual name and I should have remembered it."

"Do any of the guests ever use the servants' entrance?"

"Certainly not. It is reserved exclusively for the employees. Some of our guests have private maids, who occasionally use the rear entrances, and Mrs. Tolliver's trained nurses are allowed to pass out that way, too; but--"

She stopped abruptly, as if some new thought had occurred to her.

"What is it?" asked Josie, who was watching her face.

"Why, I have just recollected that Mrs. Tolliver's night nurse did not show up Tuesday evening, for some reason, and they were obliged to telephone for another."

"Who is Mrs. Tolliver?"

"One of our permanent guests, who is suffering just now from a severe attack of rheumatism. She employs two trained nurses, a day nurse and a night nurse."

"And the night nurse left her post Tuesday morning and did not return in the evening, as she was expected to do?"

"That's it, miss. Mrs. Tolliver was greatly annoyed, but fortunately she was able to secure another nurse at once."

"What was the nurse's name--the one who abandoned her job without notice?"

"Let me see. It wasn't Gorham. I'll call Alice, my assistant; I feel quite sure that she will know."

Alice promptly answered the bell and on being questioned said:

"The nurse was Mrs. Orme. She'd been with Mrs. Tolliver ever since she was took sick, and was the best nurse she's had."

"Why did she leave?" asked Josie.

"I don't know, miss, I'm sure. She were a quiet body, never sayin' much to no one. But quite ladylike, she were, an' most of us liked her."

"Can you describe her?"

"Well, she isn't tall--not so very tall, you know--an' she's got a good form an' good manners. I take it she's about thirty-five, an' handsome for her age. Good eyes, but mostly looks down an' don't show 'em. Very neat an' tidy. Brown hair. She wore gray clothes, you know--the reg'lar nurse's uniform."

"Do you know where Mrs. Orme lives?"

"No, miss; haven't the faintest idea."

"Who is Mrs. Tolliver's doctor?"

"The house physician, Dr. Pease. His office is No. 633, in this hotel."

"Thank you, Alice."

Josie hunted up Mary Louise.

"Have you ever heard that a trained nurse named Mrs. Orme is in any way connected with Alora's history?" she asked.

"No; I'm pretty sure Alora has never mentioned such a person. What about her, Josie?"

"I think Alora went away with her. Have you any description of Miss Gorham, the governess?"

"Not especially," said Mary Louise, trying to remember. "Alora has sometimes referred to her as 'Old Skinny,' but that doesn't mean anything."

"It means she isn't Mrs. Orme, anyhow," answered Josie, in a disappointed tone.

Mary Louise considered this in her usual careful way. She would like to help Josie, if she could.

"Who do you suppose this Mrs. Orme could be?" she presently asked.

"Some one whom Alora knew years ago, when her mother was alive. Of course her name may not have been Orme, then, and she may not have been a trained nurse. That's why I was inclined to connect her with Gorham."

"Wait a minute, Josie! A nurse, do you say? Why, I remember something about a nurse, no--Alora's mother's nurse. When we were in Italy, where I first knew Alora, she told me that her father, at one time when they lived in New York, had been forced to give money to a woman, and Alora believed he had left America to escape this person's further demands. When I asked who the woman was, she said it was her mother's nurse; but I'm pretty sure she didn't mention her name."

Josie's freckled face now wore a broad smile.

"How simple any enigma proves when you have the key," she remarked, with an air of relief. "The mystery is solved, my dear! It's all as easy as A. B. C."

"In that case," said Mary Louise, more mystified than ever, "kindly oblige me with the key."

"With pleasure. You haven't given me much time to forge a chain, so I'll add each link as it occurs to me. Mrs. Jones, during her last illness, had a nurse; a good nurse, too, in whom she had confidence. When Mrs. Jones sent for her husband, from whom she had been estranged, the nurse was aware of the action. When the husband came--Alora's father--without doubt the nurse remained in the sick room during the interview. Husband and wife quarreled, instead of making up--this guess is justified by the man's disagreeable disposition--and Mrs. Jones hastily wrote a codicil to her will and gave it into the nurse's keeping, with instructions to deliver it to her lawyer. Then the poor lady over-excited, lay back and died, and the man Jason Jones--realized that his lack of diplomacy had euchred him out of a big income for seven years. But he put up a job with the nurse who held his fate in her hands in the shape

of scrap of paper. If she'd give him that codicil--no! that isn't right--if she'd keep it to herself and not let anyone know of its existence, Mr. Jones proposed to give her a share of the money. She considered this easier than working and the bargain was struck. Isn't that a logical chain of events, so far, Mary Louise?"

"But what a terrible thing to do, Josie!"

"Yes, human nature in its worst aspect selfishness, greed, unscrupulousness--and still human nature. Well, the woman followed him to New York and got some of the money, as Alora said; but the nurse wanted more, and was likely to bleed the man more liberally than he liked; so, being afraid of her, he ran away to Europe. Nurse spent her money, couldn't find Jason Jones to get more, and so returned to Chicago and practiced her profession again. Any dummy could figure that out."

"I cannot see," responded Mary Louise, "how that accounts for Alora's disappearance."

"Why, of course the woman knew all about the terms of the will. She was nursing a Mrs. Tolliver in this hotel when she discovered Alora's arrival. How she discovered it doesn't matter. In the morning, when the day nurse arrived to take her place, she left Mrs. Tolliver and went directly to Alora's room. The girl instantly recognized her and would probably have a warm place in her heart for her mother's old nurse. Decided to walk part of the way home with her so they could talk over old times--you and the Colonel being still asleep--but was enticed to the nurse's house and promptly locked up and held as a weapon to force old Jones to pay up. This completes the chain. A woman who would enter into such an ugly deal with Jason Jones as I have described would not hesitate to capture Alora, especially as it proved an easy thing to do."

Mary Louise drew a long breath. "If I could believe that theory, Josie," she said, "it would relieve me of much worry, for I'd know Alora is safe. But--what was it your father said about your imagination?"

Josie laughed. "This isn't wholly imagination, you goose, for it's based on a knowledge of human nature, as I've hinted. Also it's a scientific matching of the pieces in the puzzle. Why, Mary Louise, in this deduction we have all the necessary elements of the usual crime. A woman--always look for a woman in a mystery, my dear--money, the cause of four-fifths

of all crimes, and a guilty man who is afraid of being forced to disgorge his ill-gotten gains. Then we will add an innocent girl who suffers through the machinations of others. Some of my conclusions may not be exactly correct, but in the main the story is absolutely logical."

"That's what you said last night, Josie, when you thought the governess, Gorham, had abducted Alora."

"True, but I have later information which doesn't entirely upset the theory but changes the actors in the drama. I don't say that further investigations may not alter this present plot in some of its details, but the main facts are too lucid and undeniable to get far away from. I'm now going to interview the house physician and get Mrs. Orme's address."

When she had gone, Mary Louise went to Gran'pa Jim with the tale of Josie's latest discoveries and Colonel Hathaway was so impressed by the theory that he decided to telegraph Peter Conant to catch the noon train and come straight to Chicago.

"The complications suggested by Josie will require a lawyer's advice," he said, "and Mr. Conant knows law and can advise us how to handle the case when we have discovered where Alora is confined."

Meanwhile Josie went to the doctor's office and after waiting some time, was finally admitted to his private room.

"I came to ask for the address of a trained nurse--a Mrs. Orme--whom you recommended to Mrs. Tolliver," she began, her innocent eyes regarding the physician gravely.

Dr. Pease frowned.

"I cannot recommend her again," said he. "Although she's a good nurse, she is unreliable, and left my patient without notice when she was badly needed."

"I merely want to find her," declared Josie. "I'm a stranger in town and I've a letter of introduction to Mrs. Orme."

"I don't know her address. I got the woman through Dr. Anstruther."

"Oh. May I telephone Dr. Anstruther, then?"

"I've no objection. There's a telephone in the outer office. But you're not likely to catch him much before noon. Dr. Anstruther is a very busy man."

Josie went to her own room to telephone. She telephoned Dr. Anstruther's office at intervals all the morning, but did not succeed in getting him until nearly two o'clock. Then he answered that he did not know Mrs. Orme's address, having always secured her services through the Sisters' Hospital.

Josie tried the Sisters' Hospital and learned that Mrs. Orme lived in an apartment at 524 Morgan Avenue. She took a taxicab and drove there, determining to obtain an interview with the woman by posing as a nurse who desired assistance in securing employment. But disappointment confronted her. Mrs. Orme had moved from the apartment ten days ago and her present address was unknown.

"She has taken considerable pains to cover her traces," said Josie to Mary Louise, when she returned from her futile trip.

"I hope you're not discouraged, dear," returned Mary Louise anxiously. "The local detectives have done nothing at all, so you are our only hope, Josie."

The embryo detective smiled sweetly.

"I'm not here on a pleasure trip," she said, "although I enjoy travel and good hotel fodder as well as anyone. This is business, but so far I'm just feeling my way and getting a start. You can't open a mystery as you do a book, Mary Louise; it has to be pried open. The very fact that this Mrs. Orme has so carefully concealed her hiding-place is assurance that she's the guilty party who abducted Alora. Being positive of that, it only remains to find her--not an impossibility, by any means--and then we shall have no difficulty in liberating her prisoner."

"But to find her; can you do that, Josie?"

"Certainly, with a little help from the police, which they will gladly furnish. They know I'm Daddy's daughter, for I have already introduced myself to them, and while they may be slow to take the initiative they are always quite willing to aid in an affair of this sort. Now, it stands to reason, Mary Louise, that the nurse didn't use the streets to promenade with. Alora. That would have been dangerous to her plans. There are so

few people abroad in Chicago at six o'clock in the morning that those who met the two would have noted and remembered them. For the same reason Mrs. Orme did not take a street car, or the elevated. Therefore, she took a cab, and the cabman who drove them will know Mrs. Orme's address."

"But who was the cabman?" asked Mary Louise.

"That," said Josie, "is to be my next discovery."