

CHAPTER XIX GOOD MONEY FOR BAD

At luncheon Josie appeared at the table, fresh as ever, and Mary Louise began to relate to her and to her grandfather the occurrences of the morning. When she came to tell how Sol Jerrems had declared the money counterfeit, Josie suddenly sprang up and swung her napkin around her head, shouting gleefully:

"Glory hallelujah! I've got him. I've trapped Old Swallowtail at last."

They looked at her in amazement.

"What do you mean?" asked Mary Louise.

Josie sobered instantly.

"Forgive me," she said; "I'm ashamed of myself. Go on with the story. What became of that counterfeit bill?"

"Mr. Jerrems has it yet. He is keeping it to show to a commercial traveler, who is to visit his store to-morrow. If the man declares the money is good, then Ingua may buy her things."

"We won't bother the commercial traveler," said Josie, in a tone of relief. "I'm going straight down to the store to redeem that bill. I want it in my possession."

Colonel Hathaway regarded her gravely.

"I think our female detective, having said so much and having exhibited such remarkable elation, must now explain her discoveries to us more fully," said he.

"I'd rather not, just yet," protested Josie. "But what have I said in my madness, and what did my words imply?"

"From the little I know of this case," replied the Colonel, "I must judge that you believe Mr. Cragg to be a counterfeiter, and that his mysterious business is--to counterfeit. In this out-of-the-way place," he continued, thoughtfully, "such a venture might be carried on for a long time without detection. Yet there is one thing that to me forbids this theory."

"What is that, sir?"

"A counterfeiter must of necessity have confederates, and Mr. Cragg seems quite alone in the conduct of his mysterious business."

Josie smiled quite contentedly. Confederates? Last night's discoveries had proved that Old Swallowtail had two of these, at least.

"Please don't lisp a word of this suspicion at present," she warned her friends. "If I am right--and I have no doubt of that--we are about to uncover a far-reaching conspiracy to defraud the Government. But the slightest hint of danger would enable them to escape and I want the credit of putting this gang of desperadoes behind the bars. Really, I'd no idea, when I began the investigation, that it would lead to anything so important. I thought, at first, it might be a simple murder case; simple, because the commonest people commit murder, and to the detective the deed is more revolting than exciting. But we may dismiss the murder suspicion entirely."

"Oh, indeed! What about Ned Joselyn's mysterious disappearance?" asked Mary Louise.

"Joselyn? He disappeared for a purpose," answered Josie. "I saw him last night--monocle and all--acting as old Cragg's confederate. Ned Joselyn is one of those I hope to land in prison."

Her hearers seemed quite bewildered by this positive statement.

"Where were you last night?" inquired Mary Louise.

"At that five acres of stones we once visited, which is Mr. Cragg's private property. Hidden somewhere in the hillside is a cavern, and in that cavern the counterfeit money is made. I have heard the printing-press turning it out in quantity; I saw Ned Joselyn come away with a package of the manufactured bills and heard Old Swallowtail implore him to 'play square' with the proceeds. There was another of the gang present, also; a man whom I had considered quite an innocent citizen of Cragg's Crossing until I discovered him with the others. I think it was he who operated the press. It has been a very pretty plot, a cleverly conducted plot; and it has been in successful operation for years. But the gang is in the toils, just now, and little redheaded Josie O'Gorman is going to score a victory that will please her detective daddy mightily." Josie was surely elated when she ventured to boast in this manner. The others were duly impressed.

"You don't mean to arrest those men alone, do you, Josie?" asked the Colonel somewhat anxiously.

"No, indeed. I'm not yet quite ready to spring my trap," she replied. "When the time comes, I must have assistance, but I want to get all my evidence shipshape before I call on the Secret Service to make the capture. I can't afford to bungle so important a thing, you know, and this ten dollar bill, so carelessly given the storekeeper, is going to put one powerful bit of evidence in my hands. That was a bad slip on old Cragg's part, for he has been very cautious in covering his tracks, until now. But I surmise that Mary Louise's pleading for Ingua, this morning, touched his pride, and having no real money at hand he ventured to give the storekeeper a counterfeit. And old Sol, having been caught by a counterfeit once before--I wonder if Old Swallowtail gave him that one, too?--became suspicious of the newness of the bill and so played directly into our hands. So now, if you'll excuse me, I'll run to town without further delay. I won't rest easy until that bill is in my possession."

"I'll go with you," said Mary Louise eagerly.

Half an hour later the two girls entered the store and found the proprietor alone. Mary Louise made a slight purchase, as an excuse, and then Josie laid ten silver dollars on the counter and said carelessly:

"Will you give me a ten dollar bill for this silver, Mr. Jerrems? I want to send it away in a letter."

"Sure; I'd ruther hev the change than the bill," he answered, taking out his wallet. "But I wouldn't send so much money in a letter, if I was you. Better buy a post-office order."

"I know my business," she pertly replied, watching him unroll the leather wallet. "No; don't give me that old bill. I'd rather have the new one on top."

"That new one," said he, "I don't b'lieve is good. Looks like a counterfeit, to me."

"Let's see it," proposed Josie, taking the bill in her hand and scrutinizing it. "I can tell a counterfeit a mile away. No; this is all right; I'll take it," she decided.

"Yer like to git stung, if ye do," he warned her.

"I'll take my chances," said Josie, folding the bill and putting it in her purse. "You've got good money for it, anyhow, so you've no kick coming, that I can see."

"Why, that must be the bill Mr. Cragg gave you," Mary Louise said to the storekeeper, as if she had just recognized it.

"It is," admitted Sol.

"Then Ingua can now buy her outfit?"

"Any time she likes," he said. "But I want it reg'lar understood that the sewin'-girl can't bring the money back to me, if she finds it bad. I ain't sure it's bad, ye know, but I've warned her, an' now it's her look-out."

"Of course it is," agreed Josie. "But don't worry. The bill is good as gold. I wish I had a hundred like it."

On their way home Josie stopped to call on Ingua, while Mary Louise, at her friend's request, went on.

"I've two important things to tell you," Josie announced to the child. "One is that you needn't worry any more about Ned Joselyn's being dead. A girl whom I know well has lately seen him alive and in good health, so whatever your grandfather's crimes may have been he is not a murderer."

Ingua was astounded. After a moment she gasped out:

"How d'ye know? Who was the girl? Are ye sure it were Ned Joselyn?"

"Quite sure. He has probably been in hiding, for some reason. But you mustn't tell a soul about this, Ingua; especially your grandfather. It is part of the secret between us, and that's the reason I have told you."

Ingua still stared as if bewildered.

"Who was the girl?" she whispered.

"I can't tell you her name, but you may depend upon the truth of her statement, just the same."

"And she's sure it were Ned Joselyn she saw?"

"Isn't he tall and thin, with a light moustache and curly hair, and doesn't he wear a glass in one eye?"

"With a string to it; yes! That's him, sure enough. Where'd she see him?"

"Don't ask me questions. It's a part of the girl's secret, you know. She let me tell you this much, so that you wouldn't worry any longer over the horror of

that winter night when your grandfather went to the Kenton house and Joselyn disappeared. I think, Ingua, that the man is crooked, and mixed up with a lot of scoundrels who ought to be in jail."

Ingua nodded her head.

"Gran'dad told him he was crooked," she affirmed. "I don't say as Gran'dad is a saint, Josie, but he ain't crooked, like Ned--ye kin bank on that--'cause he's a Cragg, an' the Craggs is square-toes even when they're chill'ins."

Josie smiled at this quaint speech. She was sorry for poor Ingua, whose stalwart belief in the Cragg honesty was doomed to utter annihilation when her grandsire was proved to have defrauded the Government by making counterfeit money. But this was no time to undeceive the child, so she said:

"The other bit of news is that Sol Jerrems has traded the bill which he thought was bad for good money, so you can buy your things any time you please."

"Then it wasn't counterfeit?"

"I saw it myself. I've lived in the city so long that no one can fool me with counterfeit money. I can tell it in two looks, Ingua. So I'd rather have a nice new bill than ten clumsy silver dollars and I made the trade myself."

"Where'd ye get so much money, Josie?"

"My wages. I don't do much work, but I get paid regularly once a week."

She didn't explain that her father made her a weekly allowance, but Ingua was satisfied.

"What do you think I orter buy with that money, Josie? I need so many things that it's hard to tell where to begin and where to leave off."

"Let's make a list, then, and figure it out."

This occupied them some time and proved a very fascinating occupation to the poor girl, who had never before had so much money to spend at one time.

"I owe it all to Mary Louise," she said gratefully, as Josie rose to depart. "It seems like no one can refuse Mary Louise anything. When she asked me to be more careful in my speech didn't I do better? I slips, now an' then, but I'ms always tryin'. And she tackled Gran'dad. If you or me--or I--had asked Gran'dad for that money, Josie, we'd never 'a' got it in a thousan' years. Why do you s'pose Mary Louise gits into people the way she does?"

"It's personality, I suppose," answered Josie, thoughtfully. And then, realizing that Ingua might not understand that remark, she added: "There's no sham about Mary Louise; she's so simple and sweet that she wins hearts without any effort. You and I have natures so positive, on the contrary, that we seem always on the aggressive, and that makes folks hold aloof from us, or even oppose us."

"I wish I was like Mary Louise," said Ingua with a sigh.

"I don't," declared Josie. "We can't all be alike, you know, and I'd rather push ahead, and get a few knocks on the way, then have a clear path and no opposition."