

CHAPTER XXII INGUA'S MOTHER

"And how do you like your grandfather? Is he good to you?" asked Mrs. Scammel on Sunday forenoon, as she sat on the porch beside her small daughter. Old Swallowtail did not usually go to his office on Sundays, but kept his room at the cottage and wrote letters. To-day, however, he had wandered down the path and disappeared, and Nan and Ingua were both glad to see him go.

"No," answered the child to both questions.

"You don't like him?"

"How can I, when he jes' sets an' glares at me ev'ry time he comes into the house--'cept when he complains I ain't doin' my work proper? It were a sort o' mean trick o' yours, Marm, leavin' me here to slave fer that ol' man while you was off in the cities, havin' a good time."

"Yes," said Nan, "I was frolicking with starvation until I got a job, and it was the sort of job that wouldn't allow having a child around. But since I've been making money I've sent Dad five dollars every week, for your clothes and board."

"You have?"

"Every week."

"Ten cents a week would pay for all the grub he gives me, an' there ain't a beggar in the county that sports the rags an' tatters I does. That new dress I had on las' night was the first thing in clothes he's bought me for a year, and I guess I wouldn't have had that if Mary Louise hadn't told him he order dress me more decent."

Nan's brow grew dark.

"I'll have it out with him for that," she promised. "What does he do with his money, Ingua?"

"Salts it, I guess. I never see him have any. It's one o' the mysteries, Marm. Mysteries is thick aroun' Gran'dad, an' folks suspicion 'most anything about him. All I know is that he ain't no spendthrift. Once, when Ned Joselyn used to come here, there was lots of money passed between 'em. I saw it myself. I

helped pick it up, once, when they quarreled an' upset the table an' spilled things. But since Ned run ayway. Gran'dad's be'n more savin' than ever."

"Ingua," said Nan, thoughtfully, "I want you to tell me all you know about Ned Joselyn, from the time he first came here."

Ingua regarded her mother with serious eyes.

"All?" she inquired.

"Everything, little or big, that you can recollect."

"You'll stick to Gran'dad, won't ye?"

"That's what I'm here for. There are enemies on his trail and I mean to save him."

"What's he done?"

"I've got to find that out. When I was here before, I knew he had some secret interest to which he was devoted, but I was too indifferent to find out what it was. Now I want to know. If I'm going to save him from the penalties of his crime I must know what the crime is. I think this man Joselyn is mixed up with it in some way, so go ahead and tell me all you know about him."

Ingua obeyed. For more than an hour she earnestly related the story of Ned Joselyn, only pausing to answer an occasional question from her mother. When she came to that final meeting at Christmas week and Joselyn's mysterious disappearance, Nan asked:

"Do you think he killed him?"

"I was pretty sure of it till yest'day, when Josie told me a friend of hers had seen him alive an' well."

"Josie O'Gorman?"

"No, Josie Jessup. She's the sewin'-girl over to Mary Louise's."

"I know; but that girl has more names than one. Do you know her very well, Ingua?"

"She's my best chum," declared the child. "Josie's a dandy girl, an' I like her."

"Have you told her anything about your gran'dad?"

"A little," Ingua admitted, hesitating.

"See here," said Nan, scowling, "I'll put you wise. This red-headed Josie O'Gorman is a detective. She's the daughter of the man I work for in Washington--the assistant chief of the Department--and she is here to try to land your gran'dad in jail. What's more, Ingua, she's likely to do it, unless you and I find a way to head her off."

Ingua's face depicted astonishment, grief, disappointment. Finally she said:

"Gran'dad didn't murder Ned, for Josie herself told me so; so I can't see what he's done to go to jail for."

"He has counterfeited money," said Nan in a low voice.

"Gran'dad has?"

"So they say, and I believe it may be true. Josie has wired her father that she's got the goods on Old Swallowtail and has asked that somebody be sent to arrest him. I saw the telegram and made up my mind I'd get the start of the O'Gormans. Dad won't run away. I've warned him they are on his trail and he didn't make any reply. But I wouldn't be surprised if he's gone, this very day, to cover up his traces. He's bright enough to know that if he destroys all evidence they can't prove anything against him."

She spoke musingly, more to herself than the child beside her, but Ingua drew a deep sigh and remarked:

"Then it's all right. Gran'dad is slick. They'll hev to get up early in the mornin' to beat him at his own game. But I wonder what he does with the counterfeit money, or the real money he trades it for."

"I think I know," said her mother. "He's chucked a fortune into one crazy idea, in which his life has been bound up ever since I can remember, and I suppose he tried counterfeiting to get more money to chuck away in the same foolish manner."

"What crazy idea is that?" inquired Ingua.

"I'll tell you, sometime. Just now I see your friend Josie coming, and that's a bit of good luck. I'm anxious to meet her, but if she sees me first she won't come on." As she spoke she rose swiftly and disappeared into the house. "Stay where you are, Ingua," she called from within in a low voice; "I don't want her to escape."

Josie was even now making her way across the stepping-stones. Presently she ran up the bank, smiling, and plumped down beside Ingua.

"Top o' the morning to you," said she. "How did you enjoy your first evening in society?"

"They were all very good to me," replied Ingua slowly, looking at her friend with troubled eyes. "I had a nice time, but--"

"You were a little shy," said Josie, "but that was only natural. When you get better acquainted with Mary Louise and the dear old Colonel, you'll--"

She stopped abruptly, for looking up she saw standing in the doorway Nan Shelley--by which name she knew her--who was calmly regarding her. The shock of surprise, for shock it surely was, seemed brief, for almost instantly Josie completed her broken speech:

"When you know them better you'll feel quite at home in their society. Hello, Nan."

"What! Josie O'Gorman? You here?" with well-affected surprise.

"You know it. But how came you here, Nan? Has Daddy sent you to help me?"

"Help you! In what way?"

"Help me enjoy country life," said Josie, coloring at her slip.

"Why, I'm on a vacation. You don't seem to understand. I'm--Ingua's mother."

Josie's self-control wasn't proof against this second shock. Her blue eyes stared amazed. With a low exclamation she stood up and faced the woman.

"Ingua's mother! You, Nan?"

"Just so," with a quiet smile.

"Then you ought to be ashamed of yourself," declared Josie with righteous indignation. "You're one of the best paid women in the Department, and you've left your poor child here to starve and slave for a wretched old--," she paused.

"Well, what is he?" asked Nan with tantalizing gentleness.

"An old skinflint, at the least. Shame on you, Nan! Ingua is a dear little girl, and you--you're an unnatural mother. Why, I never suspected you were even married."

"I'm a widow, Josie."

"And Old Swallowtail is your father? How strange. But--why did you come here just now?" with sudden suspicion.

"I've just finished the Hillyard case and they gave me a vacation. So I came here to see my little girl. I didn't know she was being neglected, Josie. I shall take better care of her after this. My visit to Cragg's Crossing is perfectly natural, for I was born here. But you? What are you up to, Josie?"

"I'm visiting Mary Louise Burrows."

"With what object?"

A detective must be quick-witted. Josie's brain was working with lightning-like rapidity. In a few brief seconds she comprehended that if Nan was Old Swallowtail's daughter, home on a vacation, she must not be allowed to know that Josie was conducting a case against her father. Otherwise she might interfere and spoil everything. She knew Nan of old and respected her keen intelligence. Once, when they had been pitted against each other, Josie had won; but she was not sure she could defeat Nan a second time. Therefore it was imperative that old Cragg's daughter remain in ignorance of the fact that Josie was awaiting reinforcements from Washington in order to arrest Nan's father as a counterfeiter. Also Josie realized instantly that Ingua was likely to tell her mother all she knew about Joselyn, including the story she had told Josie; so, without hesitation she answered Nan's question with apparent frankness:

"Really, Nan, I came here on a wild-goose chase. A man named Ned Joselyn had mysteriously disappeared and his wife feared he had met with foul play. I traced him to this place and as Colonel Hathaway and Mary Louise were living here--in Mrs. Joselyn's own house, by the way-- I had myself invited as their guest. Well, the long and short of it is that Joselyn isn't murdered, after all. He simply skipped, and since I came here to worry my poor brain over the fellow he has been discovered, still in hiding but very much alive."

"You suspected my father of killing him?"

"I did; and so did others; but it seems he didn't. But, even with that precious bubble burst, Mary Louise insists on my staying for a visit; so here I am, and your little girl has become my friend."

Ingua knew this story to be quite correct, as far as it regarded her grandfather and Ned Joselyn. Its straightforward relation renewed her confidence in Josie. But Nan knew more than Josie thought she did, having intercepted the girl's telegram to her father; so she said with a slight sneer which she took no pains to conceal:

"You're a clever girl, Josie O'Gorman; a mighty clever girl. You're so clever that I wouldn't be surprised if it tripped you, some day, and landed you on your pug nose."

Which proved that Nan was not clever, for Josie's indulgent smile masked the thought: "She knows all and is here to defend her father. I must look out for Nan, for she has a notion I'm still on the track of Hezekiah Cragg."