

CHAPTER XXVI THE PLOT

When they were over the stones and in the lane again, walking arm in arm toward the village, Josie's logical mind turned from her own failure to a consideration of the story her father had just told her.

"I can't understand," she remarked, "how Joselyn came into this affair, what happened to him, or why he is once more the secret associate of old Cragg."

"Joselyn," said the old detective, "is a clever grafter--in other words, an unmitigated scoundrel. Now do you understand?"

"Not quite," confessed Josie.

"He's Irish."

"Isn't his name Scotch?"

"Yes, but Joselyn isn't his name. If you're inclined to pick up his record and follow it through, you'll probably find him pursuing his various adventures under many aliases. He doesn't belong in this country, you know, has only been here a few years, so his adventures would probably cover two continents. The fellow always manages to keep just within our laws, although sometimes he gets dangerously near the edge. The world is full of men like Joselyn. They don't interest me."

"Then he belongs to the band of Champions?" asked Josie.

"Yes. In going over Cragg's books and papers in his private office the other night, I found sufficient references to Ned Joselyn to figure out his story with a fair degree of accuracy," said O'Gorman. "He was born in Ireland, got into trouble over there with the authorities, and fled to America, where he met Annabel Kenton and married her. Getting in touch with Old Swallowtail, he joined the Champions and attended to the outside business for Mr. Cragg, purchasing supplies and forwarding them, with money, to the patriots in Ireland. I suppose he made a fair rake-off in all these dealings, but that did not satisfy him. He induced Cragg to invest in some wild-cat schemes, promising him tremendous earnings which could be applied to the Cause. Whether he really invested the money turned over to him, or kept it for himself, is a subject for doubt, but it seems that the old man soon suspected him of double-dealing and they had so many quarrels that Cragg finally threatened to turn him over to the authorities for extradition. That was when

our precious Ned thought it wise to disappear, but afterward another peace was patched up, owing largely to the fact that Joselyn knew so much of the workings of the secret order that it was safer to have him for a friend than an enemy."

"I'm thinking of his poor wife," said Josie. "Does she know now where her husband is?"

"I think not. At first, in order to win the confidence of old Cragg, Ned applied considerable of his wife's money to the Cause, and while she would probably forgive his defalcations he thinks it wiser to keep aloof from her. She foolishly trusted him to 'settle' her mother's estate, and I'm sure he managed to settle most of it on himself. His value to Cragg lay in his ability to visit the different branches of the Champions, which are pretty well scattered throughout the United States, and keep them in touch one with the other. Also he purchased arms and ammunition to be forwarded secretly to Ireland. So you see it was quite impossible for the old man to break with him wholly, rascal though he knows him to be."

"I see," said Josie. "Joselyn has him in his power."

"Entirely so. A hint from him to the authorities would result in an embargo on any further shipments to the rebels in Ireland and so completely ruin the usefulness of the order of Champions. The fellow seems to be a thorn deeply embedded in the side of Old Swallowtail, who will suffer anything to promote the cause of Irish liberty."

"Ingua thinks her grandfather tried to kill Ned, at one time," remarked the girl.

"It's a wonder, with his rabid temper, that he didn't do so," said O'Gorman.

"But perhaps he realized that if he was hanged for Joselyn's murder his beloved Order would be without a head and in sorry straits. Thousands of Irishmen are feeding the funds of the Champions, aside from what Cragg himself dumps into the pot. So the old fellow is in a responsible position and mustn't commit murder, however much he may long to, because it would jeopardize the fortunes of his associates. However, the end is not yet, and unless Joselyn acts square in his future dealings he may yet meet with a tragic fate."

"I wonder what was in that package he took away with him the other night?" mused Josie. "I was sure, at the time, it was counterfeit money."

"It probably contained the monthly printed circular to the various branches of the order. Jim Bennett prints them in that underground cavern and Ned Joselyn sees they are distributed."

"Well," said Josie with a sigh, "you've pricked my bubble, Daddy, and made me ashamed. With all my professed scorn of theories, and my endeavors to avoid them, I walked straight into the theoretic mire and stuck there."

O'Gorman pressed her arm affectionately.

"Never you mind, my dear," in a consoling tone; "you have learned a lesson that will be of great value to you in your future work. I dare not blame you, indeed, for I myself, on the evidence you sent me, came rushing here on a wild-goose chase. One never knows what is on the other side of a page till he turns it, and if we detectives didn't have to turn so many pages, only to find them blank, we'd soon rid the country of its malefactors. But here we are at the Kenton gateway. Go to bed, Josie dear, and pleasant dreams to you."

"Will I see you again?" she asked.

"No; I'm off by the early train. But you must stay here and have your visit out with Mary Louise. It won't hurt you to have a free mind for awhile."

He kissed her tenderly and she went in.