



*A
Blessing
to
Cherish*

LAURAINÉ
SNELLING

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Scripture quotations are from the King James Version of the Bible.

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I dedicate *A Blessing to Cherish* to three women
who have held big places in my life,
both in writing and in living.

First to my mother, Thelma Moe Clauson Sommerseth, who lived the example for me of loving unconditionally. Her sister, Inga Detschman, lived her life with joy and saw the good side of life and all that is living. Ingeborg grew from these two women.

The third worked on these books with me from word one and, like the two above, has gone on to glory. Sharon Asmus, my editor at Bethany House, helped in more ways than she probably realized with ideas, story wisdom, and constant encouragement. While she kept so much information on her computer, her brain held far more. When she was no longer here, I was almost hesitant to keep going on this series without her.

God gives us people in our lives
for so many reasons and so many blessings.
I rejoice in these gifts.

Chapter 1



APRIL 1913

Grandma, tell us a story.”
Ingeborg Bjorklund loved that request, because she had so many to tell. “Which one would you like?”

Inga and Emmy, both in their usual position on the porch floor, grinned at each other and nodded. “The one where you met Mr. Gould.” The two girls, one nearly white-blond, the other dark of hair and eyes due to her Sioux heritage, wore white aprons over their faded summer shifts, their crossed legs giving them something to prop their elbows on. The back porch, in the shade of the cottonwood tree, was their favorite summer gathering place.

“You’ve heard that story so many times.” Sitting on the two-person porch swing, Ingeborg shook her head, her smile so full of love for these two girls that her face no doubt glowed. She wore her deep golden hair, now bearing streaks of silver, braided and wrapped around her head like a crown.

“But I haven’t.” Thorliff, her elder son, sat on the top step, leaning against the porch post with his arms crossed over his bent knee. He grinned at his daughter and her best friend. “Good choice.” He winked at the man in question, who sat

on the porch rail behind the swing. “Don’t you think so, Mr. Gould?”

“Oh, I most certainly do,” David Gould agreed.

Ingeborg could feel his teasing gaze on the back of her neck. Leave it to these girls. “Should I begin with ‘Once upon a time’?”

“How about ‘A long time ago in a city far away’?” Gould offered.

Refusing to let him fluster her, Ingeborg continued. “All right, a long time ago in a city far away, a young woman, newly immigrated from Norway, was searching the streets of New York City for the way back to the docks where her son had accidentally stolen an apple and she had promised to pay for it. She now had the penny in her reticule, but by this time she was hopelessly lost. The streets and sidewalks were covered in slush, and a cold wind sneaked through her coat, so she was cold all through. The docks were not within sight, and she had no idea how to find her way back to the boardinghouse where her family was waiting to board a train to North Dakota. She knew if she started crying, she would melt into a puddle of tears, but what could she do? She waited on a street corner, trying to decide which way to go. Since she spoke little English, she could not ask for directions or read the street signs.”

“Why didn’t her husband go with her?” Thorliff asked. “Or just take the penny himself?”

“She snuck out while he was gone, because he said she was foolish to want to do such a thing and she should let it go.” Her voice hardened even after all these years. “She was mighty upset with him.”

“But maybe he was right. After all, a penny.” Thorliff, the boy who had stolen the apple, shifted his weight against the porch post.

Inga turned and shook her head at her father. “Shh, Pa, let Grandma tell her story.”

He held up both hands, palms out. “Sorry. Just need to get my facts straight.”

“You’re not interviewing her for a story for your newspaper, you know,” Inga said, her tone scolding.

“I don’t know. I think I have an idea beginning to stir.” He nodded slowly as he spoke.

Ingeborg stared at her son. The excitement on his face confirmed something was bubbling behind his Bjorklund-blue eyes.

“Come on, Grandma, back to your story,” Emmy urged.

“Now, where was I?”

“Lost in New York City in a snowstorm,” Gould answered.

“I finally decided which direction to go, but just as I stepped forward, someone bumped me, and I started falling into the street. Suddenly two strong hands grabbed my upper arms, and a man lifted me right back up on the sidewalk. Without thinking, I said, ‘Takk,’ and he answered, ‘You are welcome’ in Norwegian. I looked up into the man’s face and stuttered, ‘How do you know Norwegian?’”

Gould chimed in. “And he said, ‘That’s a long story, miss, but my nanny taught me.’ I half-carried her back to the protection of the building, because every time she put her weight on her foot, she started to collapse again.”

Both girls stared at him, their mouths in matching O formations.

“And so the charming young man hailed a cab and helped me up into the carriage. He asked where I needed to go, and I told him the docks to find the apple vendor to pay him what I owed.”

“And did you find him?” Thorliff asked.

“We did. Mr. Gould tried to ignore my penny, but I insisted and . . .”

“And, polite young man that I was, I took her penny and paid the vendor, who sputtered and tried to refuse. But I was so disgusted that this young woman was out on the streets alone

that I would have stuffed it down his gullet. I wanted to take her to the hospital to make sure her foot was not broken, but she insisted that it was just sprained and would be better in no time.”

“I knew it wasn’t broken, but it sure did hurt and was swelling up like a balloon. We should have gathered some of that snow and packed it around my foot.”

Gould moved from the porch railing to sit next to her on the swing.

Ingeborg continued, “Instead he hired that hack to drive us around the city, and he showed me all these wonderfully huge buildings and parks and even a college, and I was so amazed. I could have ridden around like that forever, but I gave him the address of the boardinghouse and asked him to take me there.”

“I did so reluctantly. I considered taking her to my home and calling for a doctor to come look at her foot, but she was getting frantic to get back, so I did as she asked. When we got to the boardinghouse, two young men came striding up the sidewalk. I helped her out of the carriage, and she introduced me to her husband and his brother. Her husband was really put out with her, hardly even civil in his thanks to me. After the introduction, she hobbled over to the entry and went inside.”

“I about collapsed just inside the door, but the woman who owned the boardinghouse took pity on me and helped me up to our rooms.”

“That was Grandpa Roald, right?” Inga asked.

Ingeborg nodded. “Right. He was Thorliff’s father.”

“You snitched an apple?” Inga stared at her pa.

Thorliff shrugged. “I would never have stolen anything, but some boys who were playing there grabbed apples off the cart and tossed one to me. I was so proud I caught it, and oh, it tasted so good. And then I looked up, and my new mother was coming after me with fury on her face. You see, she had told me to stay in one place because she had to go back for

something, and I disobeyed and followed those boys, who had invited me to play.”

“I thought I had lost him for good,” Ingeborg said, “and I could have paddled his behind, but I was so thankful to have him back that I hugged him instead.”

“But still . . .” Inga shook her head. “Pa, you sure caused a lot of trouble.”

“Be that as it may, that penny gave me a chance to meet that determined young woman, and now here we all are today.” Gould gave Ingeborg a smile that made her heart flutter.

Thorliff locked his hands around his bent knee. “All over an apple. Now that I think of it, isn’t there another story about an apple that changed history?”

Ingeborg shook her head. “Thorliff Bjorklund, you can’t mix that story with this one.”

“Just a comparison, to test the Bible knowledge of our two girls.” He nodded toward them.

Emmy giggled. “Adam and Eve. But that was different.”

“Very good!” Ingeborg turned and smiled at the man sharing her swing. “How does a glass of lemonade sound?”

“And cookies?” Gould asked hopefully.

All three females laughed. “You knew we baked cookies this morning, Mr. Gould,” Emmy said with a grin.

“I distinctly remember the fragrance of lemon.” He smiled.

“We’ll get them.” Both girls stood straight up without a hand and pulled open the spring-held screen door.

“First summer-warm spring day. It’s been chilly for April.” Ingeborg pulled her shawl closer around her shoulders as a breeze tickled the growing leaves of the cottonwood trees. “To think we’re sitting out here today when it froze a couple of nights ago.”

Thorliff chuckled. “I think spring finally got fed up with playing tug-of-war with winter and scared it away.”

“Interesting mental picture, Thorliff.” David Gould draped

an arm across Ingeborg's shoulders. "Good thing my chicks didn't hatch early. This is the first time I've ever watched a broody hen sit on eggs. Say, are Grace and Jonathan back yet? She's the one who teased me into keeping chickens."

"Well, after you built them such a fancy henhouse and pen . . ." Thorliff chided.

"They had to have a place to live," Gould argued.

"Right. And you needed something to build. Lars says teaching you woodworking is easy; you're an apt pupil." Thorliff took a small pad of paper and a pencil stub out of his chest pocket and wrote some notes. "So I don't forget. How long are you here?"

"I have to leave for New York the first week of May to attend to several business matters. It will be a lengthy stay, but I put it off as long as I could. Why?"

Beside him, Ingeborg sighed. He'd tried to talk her into coming along, but she'd told him the garden wasn't all in and she had too much to do here. It was the truth, mostly.

"We need to hire another teacher for next year. Actually we need two more, but one may have to wait. I'm putting out advertisements and have gotten one reply so far. I sure wish Jonathan's cousin had stayed on. He was an excellent teacher." Thorliff nodded to his mother. "And you, Mor. I think you're one of the favorite teachers at the school."

"But I only teach one class a week."

"I know, but the students sure look forward to it. You want to teach more, we'll find a place for you." As head of the school board, Thorliff was always on the lookout for new teachers. "Hmmm, I just had an idea." He looked at Gould. "You ever thought about teaching a class on economics for, say, a semester at the high school?"

"No, can't say as that has entered my mind. An interesting thought."

Ingeborg nodded to her son. That would keep Gould in town for an entire semester. The thought made her smile.

“The first lemonade of the year,” Inga said as she and Emmy pushed open the screen door. “Grandma, do we have any juice in the cellar for swizzle?”

“I’m not sure. If we do have juice, that would make a fine tapioca pudding.”

“I’ve not had tapioca pudding for years,” Gould said as he took the glass of lemonade Emmy handed him. “Thank you.”

“Will you be here for supper?” Ingeborg asked.

“If I’m invited.”

Ingeborg grimaced. He was so polite, sometimes too much so. “Of course you’re invited. You have a standing invitation.”

“Could we play cards after?” Inga asked.

Ingeborg nodded. “We need to get some baking done for the dinner tomorrow, but of course.”

The girls joined Thorliff on the steps to enjoy the repast. “Grandma, there are buds on the rosebushes.”

“I know. I warned them it could still freeze, but they don’t seem to listen.”

The girls looked at each other and giggled. Thorliff bounced his eyebrows and shrugged.

Let him make fun. She knew not everyone talked to their flowers, but Ingeborg always had. That was why hers always grew so well.

“Grandma, can we start a rosebush for my house? You know, for when I am grown up and married?” Inga asked.

“Well, of course we can, but it will be a mighty big bush by then. So don’t you go getting any ideas for a long while yet.”

“That’s for sure!” Thorliff gave his daughter a stern-father look and nudged her with his elbow.

Inga rolled her eyes. “I’m still a child, but I’m just looking ahead. I love Grandma’s rosebushes.” She inhaled as if sniffing

rose blossoms. “And the ones at Tante Astrid’s. Of course, those really belong to Mrs. Jeffers.” She tipped back her head and stared at the sky. “There are rosebushes all over Blessing from Grandma’s roses and Mrs. Jeffers’. That’s pretty special, isn’t it?”

“It is,” answered Gould. “I’ve heard many comments from visitors about the beautiful flowers here. They say Blessing is a very welcoming place.”

“Well, if people keep wanting to move here, we’re going to need more houses and more jobs.” Thorliff stood and dusted off the seat of his pants. “I have a paper to put together. Takk for the visit and the refreshments.” He looked down at his daughter. “Why don’t you and Emmy come eat at home for a change? Your little brother needs some company.”

The two girls looked at each other, then to Ingeborg, who nodded.

“You go ahead,” she told the girls. “I’ll see you at church in the morning.”

“So, do you need some help with the paper?” Inga asked her father.

Thorliff nodded. “That wasn’t my intention, but it would be appreciated. If you want a ride, I’ll wait a couple of minutes.”

“I’ll get my dress. Last time we cleaned the newspaper office, I got ink on my apron. It never came out, so I’ll get that too.”

When they were all in the cart, Thorliff backed up the formerly dozing horse, which turned around to trot up the lane.

They all waved at Ingeborg and headed for town.

“And so life changes in an instant. I thought we were going to make tapioca pudding and play cards.” Ingeborg reached for the tray, but Gould beat her to it.

“Is there any coffee?” he asked.

“There is always coffee. And if there isn’t, we know how to make a fresh pot.” She watched the cart disappear. “That child always amazes me.”

“I would say she is no longer a child, and the way time flies, she will be wanting those rosebushes sooner than you think.” He carried the tray inside as she held the door.

She pulled the coffeepot to the hotter part of the stove. “About time for new.” She swished the pot around and poured the leftover coffee and grounds into a small bucket, which would later be dumped around one of the rosebushes. She did this even when snow covered the bushes, and as the snow melted, the roses were fed. The bedding from the barn that they banked against the house every fall also helped feed the bushes of lilac, bridal wreath, and snowball.

“We need to get some starts going to plant around your house,” she commented as she prepared the fresh pot of coffee.

“You know, you could let Freda make the supper.”

“I know, but she baked pies this afternoon and started the roast beef for tomorrow, so I told her to go lie down for a while. Her back is bothering her again.”

He nodded. “I know. And you and the girls worked in the garden all morning and much of the afternoon.”

“Planting a garden gives me such joy. Each little seed saved from last year is now starting on its new life. I put them in the ground, and God sends the rain and the sunshine. As if He’s my gardening partner. Or rather I am His. I’ve wondered sometimes if He helped Adam and Eve in their garden. He said He met them in the garden to visit. I think of that when I see the tiny green sprouts, and then you can see the rows of lettuce and radishes. I love to see the beans with their curved stalks and the seed at the end poking out. You can almost see them straighten up and reach for the sun.”

“To most people a garden is work.” His head moved gently from side to side. “You make it sound like pure joy.”

She turned to stare at him. “You are an amazing man.” *How can I help but love you?*