

CHAPTER XXI SURPRISES

Josie went to dinner as soon as the dining room opened. When she came out she met Abe Kauffman going in. He stopped and spoke to her.

"Sell any brains yet?" in a jocular way.

"Not to-day," she replied, with her innocent, baby-like stare.

"Well, I didn't sell any suspenders, either. There are no spenders for suspenders. Ha, ha, ha!"

"That doesn't seem to worry you much," asserted Josie, pointedly.

He gave a shrug.

"Well, to-morrow morning I leave by the 5:30 train east, so if I don't see you any more, I hope the brains will find a market."

"Thank you."

She went on, glad to escape the man. "He told me about leaving on the 5:30, and is probably giving everyone else the same information, so he can't be connected with the explosion," she reflected. "Clever Mr. Kauffman! But not clever enough to realize he is near the end of his infamous career."

Josie's plans, perfected during that afternoon, primarily involved the shadowing of Abe Kauffman every moment, from now on. Abe Kauffman and his black satchel. For it grew dark early at this time of year, and already the brief twilight was fading. So the girl hastened to her room and exchanged her gray walking suit for a darker one that was inconspicuous and allowed free movement. Then she slipped her little pearl-mounted revolver--her father's gift--into her handbag and decided she was ready for any emergency.

Having extinguished the light in her room, she glanced from the window into the alley below, where the shadows were now gathering deeply.

"I think Kauffman will go down the fire-escape and drop into the alley," she mused; "but he must first come to his room for the black satchel, in any event, and from that instant I must never lose sight of him."

Suddenly she discovered a form pacing slowly up and down the otherwise deserted alley. Fearful that other detectives were on the watch, and might disrupt her plans, she strained her eyes to discover this person's identity. There was but one light to relieve the gloom, and that was far down the alley, a spot the prowler

for some time avoided. Finally, however, he came to a point where the light touched his face and Josie instantly recognized Tom Linnet.

"He is waiting for someone," she decided, "and Kauffman is still at dinner--killing time because it's yet too early to undertake his nefarious task. Tom Linnet may be the tool he has selected, and I ought to get in touch with the boy, somehow, before he meets the arch conspirator. Kauffman is the one I prefer to land."

With this in mind, she hurried down, passed out at the front office doorway and turned into a narrow drive at the south of the hotel, which led to the rear alley. A great business block, now dark and deserted, loomed on the other side of the driveway, which was used by the baggage and supply wagons in the daytime.

When the girl reached the corner of the alley she found herself in very deep shadow; so she ventured to protrude her head far enough to look after Tom Linnet. To her surprise the party he had been waiting for had already joined him, for she discovered two dusky forms pacing the alley.

It could not be Kauffman. While she hesitated whether to steal closer or maintain her position, the two advanced almost to her corner and paused there--in the blackest spot they could find.

"I tell you I won't do it!" said Tom, in a hard, dogged tone that was tense with excitement. "I'm through, and that's all there is to it."

"That's a mistaken notion," was the quiet reply. "You're too deep in the plot to draw back, and the pay is well worth while."

"I don't want any more money," growled Tom.

"You'll get two thousand for this night's work. Cash. And there is no risk; you know that."

"Risk? God, man! Can't you guess how I dream of those poor devils I sent to their death in the airplane job? I hate the money I got! I--I--"

"See here," said the other voice impatiently, "that was a mistake, and you know it. We didn't intend murder, but the explosion was delayed. No one will get hurt tonight."

"Not through me," declared Tom.

"If you fail us, you'll come to grief."

"If I come to grief, so will you. Peach on me, and I'll blow the whole deal." There was a moment's silence.

"Would three thousand satisfy you?" demanded the tempter.

"No," asserted Tom stoutly; "I'm goin' to quit. What's done can't be undone, but I'm through with you. It--it's too blamed terrible, that's what it is! Leave me alone an' let me turn honest. Why don't you do the job yourself?"

"I think I will," said the other calmly. "If you intend to turn down a good thing, I'll do my own work and save the money. But remember, Linnet, silence is your only salvation. Don't talk at all; if you do, you're liable to say the wrong thing--and you can't afford to do that."

"I'm no fool," responded the night clerk, a shade of relief in his tone. "But don't come to me again, Professor. I'm done with you."

Professor! Josie felt a distinct shock. She had to flatten herself against the wall, too, and remain rigid, for the man abruptly turned the corner and marched down the driveway. Half way to the brilliantly lighted street he dodged behind the building opposite the hotel, threading his way through narrow back yards. Josie followed, swift and silent. Finally they reached a place where the man was forced to pass beneath the rays of a lamp and Josie was near enough to see his face. It was, in reality, Professor John Dyer.

That assurance was all the girl wanted, just now. She let him go his way and turned to regain the hotel. It was not quite eight o'clock, yet she felt it important to keep an eye on Kauffman and the bomb. The bomb, especially, for until Dyer took possession of the infernal contrivance he could do no mischief.

In the hotel lobby she entered a public telephone booth and called up Jim Crissey; then she went straight to her room. She could hear a low whistling in 45, which informed her that Kauffman had not yet gone out and that he was in a cheerful mood.

"I'm beginning to understand their method of work," Josie reflected. "Kauffman prepares the bombs, or brings them here under the guise of a suspender salesman; Dyer arranges for their being placed, having secured information as to where an explosion will do the most damage to the government, and Tom Linnet is used as the tool to do the actual work. Mrs. Charleworth probably assists Dyer in getting special information, and advises the gang, but doesn't take an active part in the perpetration of the crimes. Her brains and position would naturally place her at the head of the conspirators in Dorfield, although I'm pretty sure Kauffman, as the agent of the Master Spy, can dictate what they must do."

Kauffman slammed his door and locked it. He was going out. Josie opened her own door a crack to look after him. He was walking deliberately down the corridor, openly carrying in his left hand the black satchel.

To Josie this seemed the essence of effrontery. He had no intention of using the fire-escape, after all. He trusted in bravado, as so many careless criminals do. As she stealthily followed him, she observed the man stop in the office and exchange commonplaces with one or two guests whom he knew.

In reality, this was his safest plan. The black bag did not look suspicious. Presently the bomb would be turned over to Dyer and Kauffman's responsibility would then end. His very boldness was calculated to prevent suspicion.

Leaving the hotel, Kauffman walked leisurely up the lighted street. Only when he turned a corner did Josie momentarily lose sight of him. There were many pedestrians at this hour and they masked the girl's form and for a while enabled her to keep near to the man she was shadowing. The only thing that puzzled Josie was the fact that Kauffman was proceeding in a direction exactly opposite that taken by Dyer a short time before. Dyer went south and Kauffman was going north.

When the business section of Dorfield was passed, the streets became more deserted. They were not well lighted either, which favored Josie the more.

Kauffman kept steadily on, and as the houses along the way thinned, Josie decided he was headed directly for the steel works. That upset her calculations a bit, for she knew he had not seen Dyer since the latter's interview with Tom Linnet, nor had he seen Linnet; therefore he could not know that any arrangements he had previously made with them had fallen through. The German's present actions, however, indicated that he had decided to place the bomb himself, without the assistance of his fellow conspirators. Had he been warned of Linnet's defection? Had he means of communicating with Dyer unknown to Josie? Dyer was a mystery; even his wife believed he was now on his way to Washington.

Surprises, in Josie's line of work were not uncommon, and this was no time to consider whys and wherefores. The one thing she was sure of was that the bomb was in the black satchel and the black satchel in Kauffman's hand. No matter where the other conspirators might be or how they were implicated in tonight's plot, as long as she kept her eye on the bomb, she would be able to control the situation.