

## **CHAPTER XXII - A LETTER FROM MURRAY.**

The girl opposite him looked up from the card before her. The lines of her face were softened by the suggestion of a contented smile. "My gracious!" she exclaimed. "What's the matter now? You look as though you had lost your last friend."

Jimmy quickly forced a smile to his lips. "On the contrary," he said, "I think I've found a regular friend--in you."

It was easy to see that his words pleased her.

"No," continued Jimmy; "I was thinking of what an awful mess I make of everything I tackle."

"You're not making any mess of this new job," she said. "You're making good. You see, my hunch was all right."

"I wish you hadn't had your hunch," he said with a smile. "It's going to bring a lot of trouble to several people, but now that I'm in it I'm going to stick to it to a finish."

The girl's eyes were wandering around the room, taking in the faces of the diners about them. Suddenly she extended her hand and laid it on Jimmy's.

"For the love of Mike," she exclaimed. "Look over there."

Slowly Jimmy turned his eyes in the direction she indicated.

"What do you know about that?" he ejaculated. "Steve Murray and Bince!"

"And thick as thieves," said the girl.

"Naturally," commented Jimmy.

The two men left the restaurant before Edith and Jimmy had finished their supper, leaving the two hazarding various guesses as to the reason for their meeting.

"You can bet it's for no good," said the girl. "I've known Murray for a long while, and I never knew him to do a decent thing in his life."

Their supper over, they walked to Clark Street and took a northbound car, but after alighting Jimmy walked with the girl to the entrance of her apartment.

"I can't thank you enough," he said, "for giving me this evening. It is the only evening I have enjoyed since I struck this town last July."

He unlocked the outer door for her and was holding it open.

"It is I who ought to thank you," she said. Her voice was very low and filled with suppressed feeling. "I ought to thank you, for this has been the happiest evening of my life," and as though she could not trust herself to say more, she entered the hallway and closed the door between them.

As Jimmy turned away to retrace his steps to the car-line he found his mind suddenly in a whirl of jumbled emotions, for he was not so stupid as to have failed to grasp something of the significance of the girl's words and manner.

"Hell!" he muttered. "Look what I've done now!"

The girl hurried to her room and turned on the lights, and again she seated herself before her mirror, and for a moment sat staring at the countenance reflected before her. She saw lips parted to rapid breathing, lips that curved sweetly in a happy smile, and then as she sat there looking she saw the expression of the face before her change. The lips ceased to smile, the soft, brown eyes went wide and staring as though in sudden horror. For a moment she sat thus and then, throwing her body forward upon her dressing-table, she buried her face in her arms.

"My God!" she cried through choking sobs.

Mason Compton was at his office the next morning, contrary to the pleas of his daughter and the orders of his physician. Bince was feeling more cheerful. Murray had assured him that there was a way out. He would not tell Bince what the way was.

"Just leave it to me," he said. "The less you know, the better off you'll be. What you want is to get rid of this fresh guy and have all the papers in a certain vault destroyed. You see to it that only the papers you want destroyed are in that vault, and I'll do the rest."

All of which relieved Mr. Harold Bince's elastic conscience of any feeling of responsibility in the matter. Whatever Murray did was no business of his. He was glad that Murray hadn't told him.

He greeted Jimmy Torrance almost affably, but he lost something of his self-composure when Mason Compton arrived at the office, for Bince had been sure that his employer would be laid up for at least another week, during which time Murray would have completed his work.

The noon mail brought a letter from Murray.

"Show the enclosed to Compton," it read. "Tell him you found it on your desk, and destroy this letter." The enclosure was a crudely printed note on a piece of soiled wrapping-paper:

TREAT YOUR MEN RIGHT OR  
CONSEQUENCES

I. W. W.

SUFFER THE

Bince laid Murray's letter face down upon the balance of the open mail, and sat for a long time looking at the ominous words of the enclosure. At first he was inclined to be frightened, but finally a crooked smile twisted his lips. "Murray's not such a fool, after all," he soliloquized.

"He's framing an alibi before he starts."

With the note in his hand, Bince entered Compton's office, where he found the latter dictating to Edith Hudson. "Look at this thing!" exclaimed Bince, laying the note before Compton. "What do you suppose it means?"

Compton read it, and his brows knitted. "Have the men been complaining at all?" he asked.

"Recently I have heard a little grumbling," replied Bince. "They haven't taken very kindly to Torrance's changes, and I guess some of them are afraid they are going to lose their jobs, as they know he is cutting down the force in order to cut costs."

"He ought to know about this," said Compton. "Wait; I'll have him in," and he pressed a button on his desk. A moment later Jimmy entered, and Compton showed him the note.

"What do you think of it?" asked Compton.

"I doubt if it amounts to much," replied Jimmy. "The men have no grievance. It may be the work of some fellow who was afraid of his job, but I doubt if it really emanates from any organized scheme of intimidation. If I were you, sir, I would simply ignore it."

To Jimmy's surprise, Bince agreed with him. It was the first time that Bince had agreed with anything Jimmy had suggested.

"Very well," assented Compton, "but we'll preserve this bit of evidence in case we may need it later," and he handed the slip of paper to Edith Hudson. "File this, please, Miss Hudson," he said; and then, turning to Bince:

"It may be nothing, but I don't like the idea of it. There is apt to be something underlying this, or even if it is only a single individual and he happens to be a crank he could cause a lot of trouble. Suppose, for instance, one of these crack-brained foreigners in the shop got it into his head that Torrance here was grinding him down in order to increase our profits? Why, he might attack him at any time! I tell you, we have got to be prepared for such a contingency, especially now that we have concrete evidence that there is such a man in our employ. I think you ought to be armed, Mr. Torrance. Have you a pistol?"

Jimmy shook his head negatively.

"No, sir," he said; "not here."

Compton opened a desk drawer.

"Take this one," he said, and handed Jimmy an automatic.

The latter smiled. "Really, Mr. Compton," he said, "I don't believe I need such an article."

"I want you to take it," insisted Compton. "I want you to be on the safe side."

A moment later Bince and Jimmy left the office together. Jimmy still carried the pistol in his hand.

"You'd better put that thing in your pocket," cautioned Bince.

They were in the small office on which Compton's and Bince's offices opened, and Jimmy had stopped beside the desk that had been placed there for him.

"I think I'll leave it here," he said. "The thing would be a nuisance in my pocket," and he dropped it into one of the desk drawers, while Bince continued his way toward the shop.

Compton was looking through the papers and letters on his desk, evidently searching for something which he could not find, while the girl sat waiting for him to continue his dictation.

"That's funny," commented Compton.

"I was certain that that letter was here. Have you seen anything of a letter from Mosher?"

"No, sir," replied Edith.

"Well, I wish you would step into Mr. Bince's office, and see if it is on his desk."

Upon the assistant general manager's desk lay a small pile of papers, face down, which Edith proceeded to examine in search of the Mosher letter. She had turned them all over at once, commencing at what had previously been the bottom of the

pile, so that she ran through them all without finding the Mosher letter before she came to Murray's epistle.

As its import dawned upon her, her eyes widened at first in surprise and then narrowed as she realized the value of her discovery. At first she placed the letter back with the others just as she had found them, but on second thought she took it up quickly and, folding it, slipped it inside her waist. Then she returned to Compton's office.

"I cannot find the Mosher letter," she said.