

CHAPTER V. MR. JULIUS P. HERSHEIMMER

"WELL," said Tuppence, recovering herself, "it really seems as though it were meant to be."

Carter nodded.

"I know what you mean. I'm superstitious myself. Luck, and all that sort of thing. Fate seems to have chosen you out to be mixed up in this."

Tommy indulged in a chuckle.

"My word! I don't wonder Whittington got the wind up when Tuppence plumped out that name! I should have myself. But look here, sir, we're taking up an awful lot of your time. Have you any tips to give us before we clear out?"

"I think not. My experts, working in stereotyped ways, have failed. You will bring imagination and an open mind to the task. Don't be discouraged if that too does not succeed. For one thing there is a likelihood of the pace being forced."

Tuppence frowned uncomprehendingly.

"When you had that interview with Whittington, they had time before them. I have information that the big coup was planned for early in the new year. But the Government is contemplating legislative action which will deal effectually with the strike menace. They'll get wind of it soon, if they haven't already, and it's possible that that may bring things to a head. I hope it will myself. The less time they have to mature their plans the better. I'm just warning you that you haven't much time before you, and that you needn't be cast down if you fail. It's not an easy proposition anyway. That's all."

Tuppence rose.

"I think we ought to be businesslike. What exactly can we count upon you for, Mr. Carter?" Mr. Carter's lips twitched slightly, but he replied succinctly: "Funds within reason, detailed information on any point, and NO OFFICIAL RECOGNITION. I mean that if you get yourselves into trouble with the police, I can't officially help you out of it. You're on your own."

Tuppence nodded sagely.

"I quite understand that. I'll write out a list of the things I want to know when I've had time to think. Now--about money----"

"Yes, Miss Tuppence. Do you want to say how much?"

"Not exactly. We've got plenty to go with for the present, but when we want more--"

"It will be waiting for you."

"Yes, but--I'm sure I don't want to be rude about the Government if you've got anything to do with it, but you know one really has the devil of a time getting anything out of it! And if we have to fill up a blue form and send it in, and then, after three months, they send us a green one, and so on--well, that won't be much use, will it?"

Mr. Carter laughed outright.

"Don't worry, Miss Tuppence. You will send a personal demand to me here, and the money, in notes, shall be sent by return of post. As to salary, shall we say at the rate of three hundred a year? And an equal sum for Mr. Beresford, of course."

Tuppence beamed upon him.

"How lovely. You are kind. I do love money! I'll keep beautiful accounts of our expenses all debit and credit, and the balance on the right side, and red line drawn sideways with the totals the same at the bottom. I really know how to do it when I think."

"I'm sure you do. Well, good-bye, and good luck to you both."

He shook hands with them, and in another minute they were descending the steps of 27 Carshalton Terrace with their heads in a whirl.

"Tommy! Tell me at once, who is 'Mr. Carter'?"

Tommy murmured a name in her ear.

"Oh!" said Tuppence, impressed.

"And I can tell you, old bean, he's IT!"

"Oh!" said Tuppence again. Then she added reflectively,

"I like him, don't you? He looks so awfully tired and bored, and yet you feel that underneath he's just like steel, all keen and flashing. Oh!" She gave a skip. "Pinch me, Tommy, do pinch me. I can't believe it's real!"

Mr. Beresford obliged.

"Ow! That's enough! Yes, we're not dreaming. We've got a job!"

"And what a job! The joint venture has really begun."

"It's more respectable than I thought it would be," said Tuppence thoughtfully.

"Luckily I haven't got your craving for crime! What time is it? Let's have lunch--oh!"

The same thought sprang to the minds of each. Tommy voiced it first.

"Julius P. Hersheimer!"

"We never told Mr. Carter about hearing from him."

"Well, there wasn't much to tell--not till we've seen him. Come on, we'd better take a taxi."

"Now who's being extravagant?"

"All expenses paid, remember. Hop in."

"At any rate, we shall make a better effect arriving this way," said Tuppence, leaning back luxuriously. "I'm sure blackmailers never arrive in buses!"

"We've ceased being blackmailers," Tommy pointed out.

"I'm not sure I have," said Tuppence darkly.

On inquiring for Mr. Hersheimer, they were at once taken up to his suite. An impatient voice cried "Come in" in answer to the page-boy's knock, and the lad stood aside to let them pass in.

Mr. Julius P. Hersheimer was a great deal younger than either Tommy or Tuppence had pictured him. The girl put him down as thirty-five. He was of middle height, and squarely built to match his jaw. His face was pugnacious but pleasant. No one could have mistaken him for anything but an American, though he spoke with very little accent.

"Get my note? Sit down and tell me right away all you know about my cousin."

"Your cousin?"

"Sure thing. Jane Finn."

"Is she your cousin?"

"My father and her mother were brother and sister," explained Mr. Hersheimer meticulously.

"Oh!" cried Tuppence. "Then you know where she is?"

"No!" Mr. Hersheimer brought down his fist with a bang on the table. "I'm darned if I do! Don't you?"

"We advertised to receive information, not to give it," said Tuppence severely.

"I guess I know that. I can read. But I thought maybe it was her back history you were after, and that you'd know where she was now?"

"Well, we wouldn't mind hearing her back history," said Tuppence guardedly.

But Mr. Hersheimer seemed to grow suddenly suspicious.

"See here," he declared. "This isn't Sicily! No demanding ransom or threatening to crop her ears if I refuse. These are the British Isles, so quit the funny business, or I'll just sing out for that beautiful big British policeman I see out there in Piccadilly."

Tommy hastened to explain.

"We haven't kidnapped your cousin. On the contrary, we're trying to find her. We're employed to do so."

Mr. Hersheimer leant back in his chair.

"Put me wise," he said succinctly.

Tommy fell in with this demand in so far as he gave him a guarded version of the disappearance of Jane Finn, and of the possibility of her having been mixed up unawares in "some political show." He alluded to Tuppence and himself as "private inquiry agents" commissioned to find her, and added that they would therefore be glad of any details Mr. Hersheimer could give them.

That gentleman nodded approval.

"I guess that's all right. I was just a mite hasty. But London gets my goat! I only know little old New York. Just trot out your questions and I'll answer."

For the moment this paralysed the Young Adventurers, but Tuppence, recovering herself, plunged boldly into the breach with a reminiscence culled from detective fiction.

"When did you last see the dece--your cousin, I mean?"

"Never seen her," responded Mr. Hersheimer.

"What?" demanded Tommy, astonished.

Hersheimer turned to him.

"No, sir. As I said before, my father and her mother were brother and sister, just as you might be"--Tommy did not correct this view of their relationship--"but they didn't always get on together. And when my aunt made up her mind to marry Amos Finn, who was a poor school teacher out West, my father was just mad! Said if he made his pile, as he seemed in a fair way to do, she'd never see a cent of it. Well, the upshot was that Aunt Jane went out West and we never heard from her again.

"The old man DID pile it up. He went into oil, and he went into steel, and he played a bit with railroads, and I can tell you he made Wall Street sit up!" He paused. "Then he died--last fall--and I got the dollars. Well, would you believe it, my conscience got busy! Kept knocking me up and saying: What about your Aunt Jane, way out West? It worried me some. You see, I figured it out that Amos Finn would never make good. He wasn't the sort. End of it was, I hired a man to hunt her down. Result, she was dead, and Amos Finn was dead, but they'd left a daughter--Jane--who'd been torpedoed in the Lusitania on her way to Paris. She

was saved all right, but they didn't seem able to hear of her over this side. I guessed they weren't hustling any, so I thought I'd come along over, and speed things up. I phoned Scotland Yard and the Admiralty first thing. The Admiralty rather choked me off, but Scotland Yard were very civil--said they would make inquiries, even sent a man round this morning to get her photograph. I'm off to Paris to-morrow, just to see what the Prefecture is doing. I guess if I go to and fro hustling them, they ought to get busy!"

The energy of Mr. Hersheimer was tremendous. They bowed before it.

"But say now," he ended, "you're not after her for anything? Contempt of court, or something British? A proud-spirited young American girl might find your rules and regulations in war time rather irksome, and get up against it. If that's the case, and there's such a thing as graft in this country, I'll buy her off."

Tuppence reassured him.

"That's good. Then we can work together. What about some lunch? Shall we have it up here, or go down to the restaurant?"

Tuppence expressed a preference for the latter, and Julius bowed to her decision.

Oysters had just given place to Sole Colbert when a card was brought to Hersheimer.

"Inspector Japp, C.I.D. Scotland Yard again. Another man this time. What does he expect I can tell him that I didn't tell the first chap? I hope they haven't lost that photograph. That Western photographer's place was burned down and all his negatives destroyed--this is the only copy in existence. I got it from the principal of the college there."

An unformulated dread swept over Tuppence.

"You--you don't know the name of the man who came this morning?"

"Yes, I do. No, I don't. Half a second. It was on his card. Oh, I know! Inspector Brown. Quiet, unassuming sort of chap."