

CHAPTER XI. JULIUS TELLS A STORY

DRESSED appropriately, Tuppence duly sallied forth for her "afternoon out." Albert was in temporary abeyance, but Tuppence went herself to the stationer's to make quite sure that nothing had come for her. Satisfied on this point, she made her way to the Ritz. On inquiry she learnt that Tommy had not yet returned. It was the answer she had expected, but it was another nail in the coffin of her hopes. She resolved to appeal to Mr. Carter, telling him when and where Tommy had started on his quest, and asking him to do something to trace him. The prospect of his aid revived her mercurial spirits, and she next inquired for Julius Hersheimer. The reply she got was to the effect that he had returned about half an hour ago, but had gone out immediately.

Tuppence's spirits revived still more. It would be something to see Julius. Perhaps he could devise some plan for finding out what had become of Tommy. She wrote her note to Mr. Carter in Julius's sitting-room, and was just addressing the envelope when the door burst open.

"What the hell----" began Julius, but checked himself abruptly. "I beg your pardon, Miss Tuppence. Those fools down at the office would have it that Beresford wasn't here any longer--hadn't been here since Wednesday. Is that so?"

Tuppence nodded.

"You don't know where he is?" she asked faintly.

"I? How should I know? I haven't had one darned word from him, though I wired him yesterday morning."

"I expect your wire's at the office unopened."

"But where is he?"

"I don't know. I hoped you might."

"I tell you I haven't had one darned word from him since we parted at the depot on Wednesday."

"What depot?"

"Waterloo. Your London and South Western road."

"Waterloo?" frowned Tuppence.

"Why, yes. Didn't he tell you?"

"I haven't seen him either," replied Tuppence impatiently. "Go on about Waterloo. What were you doing there?"

"He gave me a call. Over the phone. Told me to get a move on, and hustle. Said he was trailing two crooks."

"Oh!" said Tuppence, her eyes opening. "I see. Go on."

"I hurried along right away. Beresford was there. He pointed out the crooks. The big one was mine, the guy you bluffed. Tommy shoved a ticket into my hand and told me to get aboard the cars. He was going to sleuth the other crook." Julius paused. "I thought for sure you'd know all this."

"Julius," said Tuppence firmly, "stop walking up and down. It makes me giddy. Sit down in that armchair, and tell me the whole story with as few fancy turns of speech as possible."

Mr. Hersheimer obeyed.

"Sure," he said. "Where shall I begin?"

"Where you left off. At Waterloo."

"Well," began Julius, "I got into one of your dear old-fashioned first-class British compartments. The train was just off. First thing I knew a guard came along and informed me mighty politely that I wasn't in a smoking-carriage. I handed him out half a dollar, and that settled that. I did a bit of prospecting along the corridor to the next coach. Whittington was there right enough. When I saw the skunk, with his big sleek fat face, and thought of poor little Jane in his clutches, I felt real mad that I hadn't got a gun with me. I'd have tickled him up some.

"We got to Bournemouth all right. Whittington took a cab and gave the name of an hotel. I did likewise, and we drove up within three minutes of each other. He hired a room, and I hired one too. So far it was all plain sailing. He hadn't the remotest notion that anyone was on to him. Well, he just sat around in the hotel lounge, reading the papers and so on, till it was time for dinner. He didn't hurry

any over that either.

"I began to think that there was nothing doing, that he'd just come on the trip for his health, but I remembered that he hadn't changed for dinner, though it was by way of being a slap-up hotel, so it seemed likely enough that he'd be going out on his real business afterwards.

"Sure enough, about nine o'clock, so he did. Took a car across the town--mighty pretty place by the way, I guess I'll take Jane there for a spell when I find her--and then paid it off and struck out along those pine-woods on the top of the cliff. I was there too, you understand. We walked, maybe, for half an hour. There's a lot of villas all the way along, but by degrees they seemed to get more and more thinned out, and in the end we got to one that seemed the last of the bunch. Big house it was, with a lot of piny grounds around it.

"It was a pretty black night, and the carriage drive up to the house was dark as pitch. I could hear him ahead, though I couldn't see him. I had to walk carefully in case he might get on to it that he was being followed. I turned a curve and I was just in time to see him ring the bell and get admitted to the house. I just stopped where I was. It was beginning to rain, and I was soon pretty near soaked through. Also, it was almighty cold.

"Whittington didn't come out again, and by and by I got kind of restive, and began to mouch around. All the ground floor windows were shuttered tight, but upstairs, on the first floor (it was a two-storied house) I noticed a window with a light burning and the curtains not drawn.

"Now, just opposite to that window, there was a tree growing. It was about thirty foot away from the house, maybe, and I sort of got it into my head that, if I climbed up that tree, I'd very likely be able to see into that room. Of course, I knew there was no reason why Whittington should be in that room rather than in any other--less reason, in fact, for the betting would be on his being in one of the reception-rooms downstairs. But I guess I'd got the hump from standing so long in the rain, and anything seemed better than going on doing nothing. So I started up.

"It wasn't so easy, by a long chalk! The rain had made the boughs mighty slippery, and it was all I could do to keep a foothold, but bit by bit I managed it, until at last there I was level with the window.

"But then I was disappointed. I was too far to the left. I could only see sideways into the room. A bit of curtain, and a yard of wallpaper was all I could command.

Well, that wasn't any manner of good to me, but just as I was going to give it up, and climb down ignominiously, some one inside moved and threw his shadow on my little bit of wall--and, by gum, it was Whittington!

"After that, my blood was up. I'd just got to get a look into that room. It was up to me to figure out how. I noticed that there was a long branch running out from the tree in the right direction. If I could only swarm about half-way along it, the proposition would be solved. But it was mighty uncertain whether it would bear my weight. I decided I'd just got to risk that, and I started. Very cautiously, inch by inch, I crawled along. The bough creaked and swayed in a nasty fashion, and it didn't do to think of the drop below, but at last I got safely to where I wanted to be.

"The room was medium-sized, furnished in a kind of bare hygienic way. There was a table with a lamp on it in the middle of the room, and sitting at that table, facing towards me, was Whittington right enough. He was talking to a woman dressed as a hospital nurse. She was sitting with her back to me, so I couldn't see her face. Although the blinds were up, the window itself was shut, so I couldn't catch a word of what they said. Whittington seemed to be doing all the talking, and the nurse just listened. Now and then she nodded, and sometimes she'd shake her head, as though she were answering questions. He seemed very emphatic--once or twice he beat with his fist on the table. The rain had stopped now, and the sky was clearing in that sudden way it does.

"Presently, he seemed to get to the end of what he was saying. He got up, and so did she. He looked towards the window and asked something--I guess it was whether it was raining. Anyway, she came right across and looked out. Just then the moon came out from behind the clouds. I was scared the woman would catch sight of me, for I was full in the moonlight. I tried to move back a bit. The jerk I gave was too much for that rotten old branch. With an almighty crash, down it came, and Julius P. Hersheimer with it!"

"Oh, Julius," breathed Tuppence, "how exciting! Go on."

"Well, luckily for me, I pitched down into a good soft bed of earth--but it put me out of action for the time, sure enough. The next thing I knew, I was lying in bed with a hospital nurse (not Whittington's one) on one side of me, and a little black-bearded man with gold glasses, and medical man written all over him, on the other. He rubbed his hands together, and raised his eyebrows as I stared at him. 'Ah!' he said. 'So our young friend is coming round again. Capital. Capital.'

"I did the usual stunt. Said: 'What's happened?' And 'Where am I?' But I knew the

answer to the last well enough. There's no moss growing on my brain. 'I think that'll do for the present, sister,' said the little man, and the nurse left the room in a sort of brisk well-trained way. But I caught her handing me out a look of deep curiosity as she passed through the door.

"That look of hers gave me an idea. 'Now then, doc,' I said, and tried to sit up in bed, but my right foot gave me a nasty twinge as I did so. 'A slight sprain,' explained the doctor. 'Nothing serious. You'll be about again in a couple of days.'"

"I noticed you walked lame," interpolated Tuppence.

Julius nodded, and continued:

"'How did it happen?' I asked again. He replied dryly. 'You fell, with a considerable portion of one of my trees, into one of my newly planted flower-beds.'

"I liked the man. He seemed to have a sense of humour. I felt sure that he, at least, was plumb straight. 'Sure, doc,' I said, 'I'm sorry about the tree, and I guess the new bulbs will be on me. But perhaps you'd like to know what I was doing in your garden?' 'I think the facts do call for an explanation,' he replied. 'Well, to begin with, I wasn't after the spoons.'

"He smiled. 'My first theory. But I soon altered my mind. By the way, you are an American, are you not?' I told him my name. 'And you?' 'I am Dr. Hall, and this, as you doubtless know, is my private nursing home.'

"I didn't know, but I wasn't going to put him wise. I was just thankful for the information. I liked the man, and I felt he was straight, but I wasn't going to give him the whole story. For one thing he probably wouldn't have believed it.

"I made up my mind in a flash. 'Why, doctor,' I said, 'I guess I feel an almighty fool, but I owe it to you to let you know that it wasn't the Bill Sikes business I was up to.' Then I went on and mumbled out something about a girl. I trotted out the stern guardian business, and a nervous breakdown, and finally explained that I had fancied I recognized her among the patients at the home, hence my nocturnal adventures. I guess it was just the kind of story he was expecting. 'Quite a romance,' he said genially, when I'd finished. 'Now, doc,' I went on, 'will you be frank with me? Have you here now, or have you had here at any time, a young girl called Jane Finn?' He repeated the name thoughtfully. 'Jane Finn?' he said. 'No.'

"I was chagrined, and I guess I showed it. 'You are sure?' 'Quite sure, Mr.

Hersheimer. It is an uncommon name, and I should not have been likely to forget it.'

"Well, that was flat. It laid me out for a space. I'd kind of hoped my search was at an end. 'That's that,' I said at last. 'Now, there's another matter. When I was hugging that darned branch I thought I recognized an old friend of mine talking to one of your nurses.' I purposely didn't mention any name because, of course, Whittington might be calling himself something quite different down here, but the doctor answered at once. 'Mr. Whittington, perhaps?' 'That's the fellow,' I replied. 'What's he doing down here? Don't tell me HIS nerves are out of order?'

"Dr. Hall laughed. 'No. He came down to see one of my nurses, Nurse Edith, who is a niece of his.' 'Why, fancy that!' I exclaimed. 'Is he still here?' 'No, he went back to town almost immediately.' 'What a pity!' I ejaculated. 'But perhaps I could speak to his niece--Nurse Edith, did you say her name was?'

"But the doctor shook his head. 'I'm afraid that, too, is impossible. Nurse Edith left with a patient to-night also.' 'I seem to be real unlucky,' I remarked. 'Have you Mr. Whittington's address in town? I guess I'd like to look him up when I get back.' 'I don't know his address. I can write to Nurse Edith for it if you like.' I thanked him. 'Don't say who it is wants it. I'd like to give him a little surprise.'

"That was about all I could do for the moment. Of course, if the girl was really Whittington's niece, she might be too cute to fall into the trap, but it was worth trying. Next thing I did was to write out a wire to Beresford saying where I was, and that I was laid up with a sprained foot, and telling him to come down if he wasn't busy. I had to be guarded in what I said. However, I didn't hear from him, and my foot soon got all right. It was only ricked, not really sprained, so to-day I said good-bye to the little doctor chap, asked him to send me word if he heard from Nurse Edith, and came right away back to town. Say, Miss Tuppence, you're looking mighty pale!"

"It's Tommy," said Tuppence. "What can have happened to him?"

"Buck up, I guess he's all right really. Why shouldn't he be? See here, it was a foreign-looking guy he went off after. Maybe they've gone abroad--to Poland, or something like that?"

Tuppence shook her head.

"He couldn't without passports and things. Besides I've seen that man, Boris Something, since. He dined with Mrs. Vandemeyer last night."

"Mrs. Who?"

"I forgot. Of course you don't know all that."

"I'm listening," said Julius, and gave vent to his favourite expression. "Put me wise."

Tuppence thereupon related the events of the last two days. Julius's astonishment and admiration were unbounded.

"Bully for you! Fancy you a menial. It just tickles me to death!" Then he added seriously: "But say now, I don't like it, Miss Tuppence, I sure don't. You're just as plucky as they make 'em, but I wish you'd keep right out of this. These crooks we're up against would as soon croak a girl as a man any day."

"Do you think I'm afraid?" said Tuppence indignantly, valiantly repressing memories of the steely glitter in Mrs. Vandemeyer's eyes.

"I said before you were darned plucky. But that doesn't alter facts."

"Oh, bother ME!" said Tuppence impatiently. "Let's think about what can have happened to Tommy. I've written to Mr. Carter about it," she added, and told him the gist of her letter.

Julius nodded gravely.

"I guess that's good as far as it goes. But it's for us to get busy and do something."

"What can we do?" asked Tuppence, her spirits rising.

"I guess we'd better get on the track of Boris. You say he's been to your place. Is he likely to come again?"

"He might. I really don't know."

"I see. Well, I guess I'd better buy a car, a slap-up one, dress as a chauffeur and hang about outside. Then if Boris comes, you could make some kind of signal, and I'd trail him. How's that?"

"Splendid, but he mightn't come for weeks."

"We'll have to chance that. I'm glad you like the plan." He rose.

"Where are you going?"

"To buy the car, of course," replied Julius, surprised. "What make do you like? I guess you'll do some riding in it before we've finished."

"Oh," said Tuppence faintly, "I LIKE Rolls-Royces, but----"

"Sure," agreed Julius. "What you say goes. I'll get one."

"But you can't at once," cried Tuppence. "People wait ages sometimes."

"Little Julius doesn't," affirmed Mr. Hersheimer. "Don't you worry any. I'll be round in the car in half an hour."

Tuppence got up.

"You're awfully good, Julius. But I can't help feeling that it's rather a forlorn hope. I'm really pinning my faith to Mr. Carter."

"Then I shouldn't."

"Why?"

"Just an idea of mine."

"Oh; but he must do something. There's no one else. By the way, I forgot to tell you of a queer thing that happened this morning."

And she narrated her encounter with Sir James Peel Edgerton. Julius was interested.

"What did the guy mean, do you think?" he asked.

"I don't quite know," said Tuppence meditatively. "But I think that, in an ambiguous, legal, without prejudishish lawyer's way, he was trying to warn me."

"Why should he?"

"I don't know," confessed Tuppence. "But he looked kind, and simply awfully

clever. I wouldn't mind going to him and telling him everything."

Somewhat to her surprise, Julius negated the idea sharply.

"See here," he said, "we don't want any lawyers mixed up in this. That guy couldn't help us any."

"Well, I believe he could," reiterated Tuppence obstinately.

"Don't you think it. So long. I'll be back in half an hour."

Thirty-five minutes had elapsed when Julius returned. He took Tuppence by the arm, and walked her to the window.

"There she is."

"Oh!" said Tuppence with a note of reverence in her voice, as she gazed down at the enormous car.

"She's some pace-maker, I can tell you," said Julius complacently.

"How did you get it?" gasped Tuppence.

"She was just being sent home to some bigwig."

"Well?"

"I went round to his house," said Julius. "I said that I reckoned a car like that was worth every penny of twenty thousand dollars. Then I told him that it was worth just about fifty thousand dollars to me if he'd get out."

"Well?" said Tuppence, intoxicated.

"Well," returned Julius, "he got out, that's all."