

### **CHAPTER XIII. THE VIGIL**

SIR James brushed past Julius and hurriedly bent over the fallen woman.

"Heart," he said sharply. "Seeing us so suddenly must have given her a shock. Brandy--and quickly, or she'll slip through our fingers."

Julius hurried to the washstand.

"Not there," said Tuppence over her shoulder. "In the tantalus in the dining-room. Second door down the passage."

Between them Sir James and Tuppence lifted Mrs. Vandemeyer and carried her to the bed. There they dashed water on her face, but with no result. The lawyer fingered her pulse.

"Touch and go," he muttered. "I wish that young fellow would hurry up with the brandy."

At that moment Julius re-entered the room, carrying a glass half full of the spirit which he handed to Sir James. While Tuppence lifted her head the lawyer tried to force a little of the spirit between her closed lips. Finally the woman opened her eyes feebly. Tuppence held the glass to her lips.

"Drink this."

Mrs. Vandemeyer complied. The brandy brought the colour back to her white cheeks, and revived her in a marvellous fashion. She tried to sit up--then fell back with a groan, her hand to her side.

"It's my heart," she whispered. "I mustn't talk."

She lay back with closed eyes.

Sir James kept his finger on her wrist a minute longer, then withdrew it with a nod.

"She'll do now."

All three moved away, and stood together talking in low voices. One and all were

conscious of a certain feeling of anticlimax. Clearly any scheme for cross-questioning the lady was out of the question for the moment. For the time being they were baffled, and could do nothing.

Tuppence related how Mrs. Vandemeyer had declared herself willing to disclose the identity of Mr. Brown, and how she had consented to discover and reveal to them the whereabouts of Jane Finn. Julius was congratulatory.

"That's all right, Miss Tuppence. Splendid! I guess that hundred thousand pounds will look just as good in the morning to the lady as it did over night. There's nothing to worry over. She won't speak without the cash anyway, you bet!"

There was certainly a good deal of common sense in this, and Tuppence felt a little comforted.

"What you say is true," said Sir James meditatively. "I must confess, however, that I cannot help wishing we had not interrupted at the minute we did. Still, it cannot be helped, it is only a matter of waiting until the morning."

He looked across at the inert figure on the bed. Mrs. Vandemeyer lay perfectly passive with closed eyes. He shook his head.

"Well," said Tuppence, with an attempt at cheerfulness, "we must wait until the morning, that's all. But I don't think we ought to leave the flat."

"What about leaving that bright boy of yours on guard?"

"Albert? And suppose she came round again and hooked it. Albert couldn't stop her."

"I guess she won't want to make tracks away from the dollars."

"She might. She seemed very frightened of 'Mr. Brown.'"

"What? Real plumb scared of him?"

"Yes. She looked round and said even walls had ears."

"Maybe she meant a dictaphone," said Julius with interest.

"Miss Tuppence is right," said Sir James quietly. "We must not leave the flat--if

only for Mrs. Vandemeyer's sake."

Julius stared at him.

"You think he'd get after her? Between now and to-morrow morning. How could he know, even?"

"You forget your own suggestion of a dictaphone," said Sir James dryly. "We have a very formidable adversary. I believe, if we exercise all due care, that there is a very good chance of his being delivered into our hands. But we must neglect no precaution. We have an important witness, but she must be safeguarded. I would suggest that Miss Tuppence should go to bed, and that you and I, Mr. Hersheimer, should share the vigil."

Tuppence was about to protest, but happening to glance at the bed she saw Mrs. Vandemeyer, her eyes half-open, with such an expression of mingled fear and malevolence on her face that it quite froze the words on her lips.

For a moment she wondered whether the faint and the heart attack had been a gigantic sham, but remembering the deadly pallor she could hardly credit the supposition. As she looked the expression disappeared as by magic, and Mrs. Vandemeyer lay inert and motionless as before. For a moment the girl fancied she must have dreamt it. But she determined nevertheless to be on the alert.

"Well," said Julius, "I guess we'd better make a move out of here any way."

The others fell in with his suggestion. Sir James again felt Mrs. Vandemeyer's pulse.

"Perfectly satisfactory," he said in a low voice to Tuppence. "She'll be absolutely all right after a night's rest."

The girl hesitated a moment by the bed. The intensity of the expression she had surprised had impressed her powerfully. Mrs. Vandemeyer lifted her lids. She seemed to be struggling to speak. Tuppence bent over her.

"Don't--leave----" she seemed unable to proceed, murmuring something that sounded like "sleepy." Then she tried again.

Tuppence bent lower still. It was only a breath.

"Mr.--Brown----" The voice stopped.

But the half-closed eyes seemed still to send an agonized message.

Moved by a sudden impulse, the girl said quickly:

"I shan't leave the flat. I shall sit up all night."

A flash of relief showed before the lids descended once more. Apparently Mrs. Vandemeyer slept. But her words had awakened a new uneasiness in Tuppence. What had she meant by that low murmur: "Mr. Brown?" Tuppence caught herself nervously looking over her shoulder. The big wardrobe loomed up in a sinister fashion before her eyes. Plenty of room for a man to hide in that.... Half-ashamed of herself, Tuppence pulled it open and looked inside. No one--of course! She stooped down and looked under the bed. There was no other possible hiding-place.

Tuppence gave her familiar shake of the shoulders. It was absurd, this giving way to nerves! Slowly she went out of the room. Julius and Sir James were talking in a low voice. Sir James turned to her.

"Lock the door on the outside, please, Miss Tuppence, and take out the key. There must be no chance of anyone entering that room."

The gravity of his manner impressed them, and Tuppence felt less ashamed of her attack of "nerves."

"Say," remarked Julius suddenly, "there's Tuppence's bright boy. I guess I'd better get down and ease his young mind. That's some lad, Tuppence."

"How did you get in, by the way?" asked Tuppence suddenly. "I forgot to ask."

"Well, Albert got me on the phone all right. I ran round for Sir James here, and we came right on. The boy was on the look out for us, and was just a mite worried about what might have happened to you. He'd been listening outside the door of the flat, but couldn't hear anything. Anyhow he suggested sending us up in the coal lift instead of ringing the bell. And sure enough we landed in the scullery and came right along to find you. Albert's still below, and must be just hopping mad by this time." With which Julius departed abruptly.

"Now then, Miss Tuppence," said Sir James, "you know this place better than I do. Where do you suggest we should take up our quarters?"

Tuppence considered for a moment or two.

"I think Mrs. Vandemeyer's boudoir would be the most comfortable," she said at last, and led the way there.

Sir James looked round approvingly.

"This will do very well, and now, my dear young lady, do go to bed and get some sleep."

Tuppence shook her head resolutely.

"I couldn't, thank you, Sir James. I should dream of Mr. Brown all night!"

"But you'll be so tired, child."

"No, I shan't. I'd rather stay up--really."

The lawyer gave in.

Julius reappeared some minutes later, having reassured Albert and rewarded him lavishly for his services. Having in his turn failed to persuade Tuppence to go to bed, he said decisively:

"At any rate, you've got to have something to eat right away. Where's the larder?"

Tuppence directed him, and he returned in a few minutes with a cold pie and three plates.

After a hearty meal, the girl felt inclined to pooh-pooh her fancies of half an hour before. The power of the money bribe could not fail.

"And now, Miss Tuppence," said Sir James, "we want to hear your adventures."

"That's so," agreed Julius.

Tuppence narrated her adventures with some complacency. Julius occasionally interjected an admiring "Bully." Sir James said nothing until she had finished, when his quiet "well done, Miss Tuppence," made her flush with pleasure.

"There's one thing I don't get clearly," said Julius. "What put her up to clearing out?"

"I don't know," confessed Tuppence.

Sir James stroked his chin thoughtfully.

"The room was in great disorder. That looks as though her flight was unpremeditated. Almost as though she got a sudden warning to go from some one."

"Mr. Brown, I suppose," said Julius scoffingly.

The lawyer looked at him deliberately for a minute or two.

"Why not?" he said. "Remember, you yourself have once been worsted by him."

Julius flushed with vexation.

"I feel just mad when I think of how I handed out Jane's photograph to him like a lamb. Gee, if I ever lay hands on it again, I'll freeze on to it like--like hell!"

"That contingency is likely to be a remote one," said the other dryly.

"I guess you're right," said Julius frankly. "And, in any case, it's the original I'm out after. Where do you think she can be, Sir James?"

The lawyer shook his head.

"Impossible to say. But I've a very good idea where she has been."

"You have? Where?"

Sir James smiled.

"At the scene of your nocturnal adventures, the Bournemouth nursing home."

"There? Impossible. I asked."

"No, my dear sir, you asked if anyone of the name of Jane Finn had been there. Now, if the girl had been placed there it would almost certainly be under an assumed name."

"Bully for you," cried Julius. "I never thought of that!"

"It was fairly obvious," said the other.

"Perhaps the doctor's in it too," suggested Tuppence.

Julius shook his head.

"I don't think so. I took to him at once. No, I'm pretty sure Dr. Hall's all right."

"Hall, did you say?" asked Sir James. "That is curious--really very curious."

"Why?" demanded Tuppence.

"Because I happened to meet him this morning. I've known him slightly on and off for some years, and this morning I ran across him in the street. Staying at the Metropole, he told me." He turned to Julius. "Didn't he tell you he was coming up to town?"

Julius shook his head.

"Curious," mused Sir James. "You did not mention his name this afternoon, or I would have suggested your going to him for further information with my card as introduction."

"I guess I'm a mutt," said Julius with unusual humility. "I ought to have thought of the false name stunt."

"How could you think of anything after falling out of that tree?" cried Tuppence. "I'm sure anyone else would have been killed right off."

"Well, I guess it doesn't matter now, anyway," said Julius. "We've got Mrs. Vandemeyer on a string, and that's all we need."

"Yes," said Tuppence, but there was a lack of assurance in her voice.

A silence settled down over the party. Little by little the magic of the night began to gain a hold on them. There were sudden creaks of the furniture, imperceptible rustlings in the curtains. Suddenly Tuppence sprang up with a cry.

"I can't help it. I know Mr. Brown's somewhere in the flat! I can FEEL him."

"Sure, Tuppence, how could he be? This door's open into the hall. No one could

have come in by the front door without our seeing and hearing him."

"I can't help it. I FEEL he's here!"

She looked appealingly at Sir James, who replied gravely:

"With due deference to your feelings, Miss Tuppence (and mine as well for that matter), I do not see how it is humanly possible for anyone to be in the flat without our knowledge."

The girl was a little comforted by his words.

"Sitting up at night is always rather jumpy," she confessed.

"Yes," said Sir James. "We are in the condition of people holding a seance. Perhaps if a medium were present we might get some marvellous results."

"Do you believe in spiritualism?" asked Tuppence, opening her eyes wide.

The lawyer shrugged his shoulders.

"There is some truth in it, without a doubt. But most of the testimony would not pass muster in the witness-box."

The hours drew on. With the first faint glimmerings of dawn, Sir James drew aside the curtains. They beheld, what few Londoners see, the slow rising of the sun over the sleeping city. Somehow, with the coming of the light, the dreads and fancies of the past night seemed absurd. Tuppence's spirits revived to the normal.

"Hooray!" she said. "It's going to be a gorgeous day. And we shall find Tommy. And Jane Finn. And everything will be lovely. I shall ask Mr. Carter if I can't be made a Dame!"

At seven o'clock Tuppence volunteered to go and make some tea. She returned with a tray, containing the teapot and four cups.

"Who's the other cup for?" inquired Julius.

"The prisoner, of course. I suppose we might call her that?"

"Taking her tea seems a kind of anticlimax to last night," said Julius thoughtfully.



"Yes, it does," admitted Tuppence. "But, anyway, here goes. Perhaps you'd both come, too, in case she springs on me, or anything. You see, we don't know what mood she'll wake up in."

Sir James and Julius accompanied her to the door.

"Where's the key? Oh, of course, I've got it myself."

She put it in the lock, and turned it, then paused.

"Supposing, after all, she's escaped?" she murmured in a whisper.

"Plumb impossible," replied Julius reassuringly.

But Sir James said nothing.

Tuppence drew a long breath and entered. She heaved a sigh of relief as she saw that Mrs. Vandemeyer was lying on the bed.

"Good morning," she remarked cheerfully. "I've brought you some tea."

Mrs. Vandemeyer did not reply. Tuppence put down the cup on the table by the bed and went across to draw up the blinds. When she turned, Mrs. Vandemeyer still lay without a movement. With a sudden fear clutching at her heart, Tuppence ran to the bed. The hand she lifted was cold as ice.... Mrs. Vandemeyer would never speak now....

Her cry brought the others. A very few minutes sufficed. Mrs. Vandemeyer was dead--must have been dead some hours. She had evidently died in her sleep.

"If that isn't the cruellest luck," cried Julius in despair.

The lawyer was calmer, but there was a curious gleam in his eyes.

"If it is luck," he replied.

"You don't think--but, say, that's plumb impossible--no one could have got in."

"No," admitted the lawyer. "I don't see how they could. And yet--she is on the point of betraying Mr. Brown, and--she dies. Is it only chance?"

"But how----"

"Yes, HOW! That is what we must find out." He stood there silently, gently stroking his chin. "We must find out," he said quietly, and Tuppence felt that if she was Mr. Brown she would not like the tone of those simple words.

Julius's glance went to the window.

"The window's open," he remarked. "Do you think----"

Tuppence shook her head.

"The balcony only goes along as far as the boudoir. We were there."

"He might have slipped out----" suggested Julius.

But Sir James interrupted him.

"Mr. Brown's methods are not so crude. In the meantime we must send for a doctor, but before we do so, is there anything in this room that might be of value to us?"

Hastily, the three searched. A charred mass in the grate indicated that Mrs. Vandemeyer had been burning papers on the eve of her flight. Nothing of importance remained, though they searched the other rooms as well.

"There's that," said Tuppence suddenly, pointing to a small, old-fashioned safe let into the wall. "It's for jewellery, I believe, but there might be something else in it."

The key was in the lock, and Julius swung open the door, and searched inside. He was some time over the task.

"Well," said Tuppence impatiently.

There was a pause before Julius answered, then he withdrew his head and shut to the door.

"Nothing," he said.

In five minutes a brisk young doctor arrived, hastily summoned. He was deferential to Sir James, whom he recognized.

"Heart failure, or possibly an overdose of some sleeping-draught." He sniffed.

"Rather an odour of chloral in the air."

Tuppence remembered the glass she had upset. A new thought drove her to the washstand. She found the little bottle from which Mrs. Vandemeyer had poured a few drops.

It had been three parts full. Now--IT WAS EMPTY.