

CHAPTER XIX. JANE FINN

"MY train got in half an hour ago," explained Julius, as he led the way out of the station. "I reckoned you'd come by this before I left London, and wired accordingly to Sir James. He's booked rooms for us, and will be round to dine at eight."

"What made you think he'd ceased to take any interest in the case?" asked Tommy curiously.

"What he said," replied Julius dryly. "The old bird's as close as an oyster! Like all the darned lot of them, he wasn't going to commit himself till he was sure he could deliver the goods."

"I wonder," said Tommy thoughtfully.

Julius turned on him.

"You wonder what?"

"Whether that was his real reason."

"Sure. You bet your life it was."

Tommy shook his head unconvinced.

Sir James arrived punctually at eight o'clock, and Julius introduced Tommy. Sir James shook hands with him warmly.

"I am delighted to make your acquaintance, Mr. Beresford. I have heard so much about you from Miss Tuppence"--he smiled involuntarily--"that it really seems as though I already know you quite well."

"Thank you, sir," said Tommy with his cheerful grin. He scanned the great lawyer eagerly. Like Tuppence, he felt the magnetism of the other's personality. He was reminded of Mr. Carter. The two men, totally unlike so far as physical resemblance went, produced a similar effect. Beneath the weary manner of the one and the professional reserve of the other, lay the same quality of mind, keen-edged like a rapier.

In the meantime he was conscious of Sir James's close scrutiny. When the lawyer

dropped his eyes the young man had the feeling that the other had read him through and through like an open book. He could not but wonder what the final judgment was, but there was little chance of learning that. Sir James took in everything, but gave out only what he chose. A proof of that occurred almost at once.

Immediately the first greetings were over Julius broke out into a flood of eager questions. How had Sir James managed to track the girl? Why had he not let them know that he was still working on the case? And so on.

Sir James stroked his chin and smiled. At last he said:

"Just so, just so. Well, she's found. And that's the great thing, isn't it? Eh! Come now, that's the great thing?"

"Sure it is. But just how did you strike her trail? Miss Tuppence and I thought you'd quit for good and all."

"Ah!" The lawyer shot a lightning glance at him, then resumed operations on his chin. "You thought that, did you? Did you really? H'm, dear me."

"But I guess I can take it we were wrong," pursued Julius.

"Well, I don't know that I should go so far as to say that. But it's certainly fortunate for all parties that we've managed to find the young lady."

"But where is she?" demanded Julius, his thoughts flying off on another tack. "I thought you'd be sure to bring her along?"

"That would hardly be possible," said Sir James gravely.

"Why?"

"Because the young lady was knocked down in a street accident, and has sustained slight injuries to the head. She was taken to the infirmary, and on recovering consciousness gave her name as Jane Finn. When--ah!--I heard that, I arranged for her to be removed to the house of a doctor--a friend of mine, and wired at once for you. She relapsed into unconsciousness and has not spoken since."

"She's not seriously hurt?"

"Oh, a bruise and a cut or two; really, from a medical point of view, absurdly slight injuries to have produced such a condition. Her state is probably to be attributed to the mental shock consequent on recovering her memory."

"It's come back?" cried Julius excitedly.

Sir James tapped the table rather impatiently.

"Undoubtedly, Mr. Hersheimer, since she was able to give her real name. I thought you had appreciated that point."

"And you just happened to be on the spot," said Tommy. "Seems quite like a fairy tale."

But Sir James was far too wary to be drawn.

"Coincidences are curious things," he said dryly.

Nevertheless Tommy was now certain of what he had before only suspected. Sir James's presence in Manchester was not accidental. Far from abandoning the case, as Julius supposed, he had by some means of his own successfully run the missing girl to earth. The only thing that puzzled Tommy was the reason for all this secrecy. He concluded that it was a foible of the legal mind.

Julius was speaking.

"After dinner," he announced, "I shall go right away and see Jane."

"That will be impossible, I fear," said Sir James. "It is very unlikely they would allow her to see visitors at this time of night. I should suggest to-morrow morning about ten o'clock."

Julius flushed. There was something in Sir James which always stirred him to antagonism. It was a conflict of two masterful personalities.

"All the same, I reckon I'll go round there to-night and see if I can't ginger them up to break through their silly rules."

"It will be quite useless, Mr. Hersheimer."

The words came out like the crack of a pistol, and Tommy looked up with a start. Julius was nervous and excited. The hand with which he raised his glass to his

lips shook slightly, but his eyes held Sir James's defiantly. For a moment the hostility between the two seemed likely to burst into flame, but in the end Julius lowered his eyes, defeated.

"For the moment, I reckon you're the boss."

"Thank you," said the other. "We will say ten o'clock then?" With consummate ease of manner he turned to Tommy. "I must confess, Mr. Beresford, that it was something of a surprise to me to see you here this evening. The last I heard of you was that your friends were in grave anxiety on your behalf. Nothing had been heard of you for some days, and Miss Tuppence was inclined to think you had got into difficulties."

"I had, sir!" Tommy grinned reminiscently. "I was never in a tighter place in my life."

Helped out by questions from Sir James, he gave an abbreviated account of his adventures. The lawyer looked at him with renewed interest as he brought the tale to a close.

"You got yourself out of a tight place very well," he said gravely. "I congratulate you. You displayed a great deal of ingenuity and carried your part through well."

Tommy blushed, his face assuming a prawnlike hue at the praise.

"I couldn't have got away but for the girl, sir."

"No." Sir James smiled a little. "It was lucky for you she happened to--er--take a fancy to you." Tommy appeared about to protest, but Sir James went on. "There's no doubt about her being one of the gang, I suppose?"

"I'm afraid not, sir. I thought perhaps they were keeping her there by force, but the way she acted didn't fit in with that. You see, she went back to them when she could have got away."

Sir James nodded thoughtfully.

"What did she say? Something about wanting to be taken to Marguerite?"

"Yes, sir. I suppose she meant Mrs. Vandemeyer."

"She always signed herself Rita Vandemeyer. All her friends spoke of her as Rita."

Still, I suppose the girl must have been in the habit of calling her by her full name. And, at the moment she was crying out to her, Mrs. Vandemeyer was either dead or dying! Curious! There are one or two points that strike me as being obscure--their sudden change of attitude towards yourself, for instance. By the way, the house was raided, of course?"

"Yes, sir, but they'd all cleared out."

"Naturally," said Sir James dryly.

"And not a clue left behind."

"I wonder----" The lawyer tapped the table thoughtfully.

Something in his voice made Tommy look up. Would this man's eyes have seen something where theirs had been blind? He spoke impulsively:

"I wish you'd been there, sir, to go over the house!"

"I wish I had," said Sir James quietly. He sat for a moment in silence. Then he looked up. "And since then? What have you been doing?"

For a moment, Tommy stared at him. Then it dawned on him that of course the lawyer did not know.

"I forgot that you didn't know about Tuppence," he said slowly. The sickening anxiety, forgotten for a while in the excitement of knowing Jane Finn was found at last, swept over him again.

The lawyer laid down his knife and fork sharply.

"Has anything happened to Miss Tuppence?" His voice was keen-edged.

"She's disappeared," said Julius.

"When?"

"A week ago."

"How?"

Sir James's questions fairly shot out. Between them Tommy and Julius gave the

history of the last week and their futile search.

Sir James went at once to the root of the matter.

"A wire signed with your name? They knew enough of you both for that. They weren't sure of how much you had learnt in that house. Their kidnapping of Miss Tuppence is the counter-move to your escape. If necessary they could seal your lips with a threat of what might happen to her."

Tommy nodded.

"That's just what I thought, sir."

Sir James looked at him keenly. "You had worked that out, had you? Not bad-- not at all bad. The curious thing is that they certainly did not know anything about you when they first held you prisoner. You are sure that you did not in any way disclose your identity?"

Tommy shook his head.

"That's so," said Julius with a nod. "Therefore I reckon some one put them wise-- and not earlier than Sunday afternoon."

"Yes, but who?"

"That almighty omniscient Mr. Brown, of course!"

There was a faint note of derision in the American's voice which made Sir James look up sharply.

"You don't believe in Mr. Brown, Mr. Hersheimer?"

"No, sir, I do not," returned the young American with emphasis. "Not as such, that is to say. I reckon it out that he's a figurehead--just a bogy name to frighten the children with. The real head of this business is that Russian chap Kramenin. I guess he's quite capable of running revolutions in three countries at once if he chose! The man Whittington is probably the head of the English branch."

"I disagree with you," said Sir James shortly. "Mr. Brown exists." He turned to Tommy. "Did you happen to notice where that wire was handed in?"

"No, sir, I'm afraid I didn't."

"H'm. Got it with you?"

"It's upstairs, sir, in my kit."

"I'd like to have a look at it sometime. No hurry. You've wasted a week"--Tommy hung his head--"a day or so more is immaterial. We'll deal with Miss Jane Finn first. Afterwards, we'll set to work to rescue Miss Tuppence from bondage. I don't think she's in any immediate danger. That is, so long as they don't know that we've got Jane Finn, and that her memory has returned. We must keep that dark at all costs. You understand?"

The other two assented, and, after making arrangements for meeting on the morrow, the great lawyer took his leave.

At ten o'clock, the two young men were at the appointed spot. Sir James had joined them on the doorstep. He alone appeared unexcited. He introduced them to the doctor.

"Mr. Hersheimer--Mr. Beresford--Dr. Roylance. How's the patient?"

"Going on well. Evidently no idea of the flight of time. Asked this morning how many had been saved from the Lusitania. Was it in the papers yet? That, of course, was only what was to be expected. She seems to have something on her mind, though."

"I think we can relieve her anxiety. May we go up?"

"Certainly."

Tommy's heart beat sensibly faster as they followed the doctor upstairs. Jane Finn at last! The long-sought, the mysterious, the elusive Jane Finn! How wildly improbable success had seemed! And here in this house, her memory almost miraculously restored, lay the girl who held the future of England in her hands. A half groan broke from Tommy's lips. If only Tuppence could have been at his side to share in the triumphant conclusion of their joint venture! Then he put the thought of Tuppence resolutely aside. His confidence in Sir James was growing. There was a man who would unerringly ferret out Tuppence's whereabouts. In the meantime Jane Finn! And suddenly a dread clutched at his heart. It seemed too easy.... Suppose they should find her dead... stricken down by the hand of Mr. Brown?

In another minute he was laughing at these melodramatic fancies. The doctor held open the door of a room and they passed in. On the white bed, bandages round her head, lay the girl. Somehow the whole scene seemed unreal. It was so exactly what one expected that it gave the effect of being beautifully staged.

The girl looked from one to the other of them with large wondering eyes. Sir James spoke first.

"Miss Finn," he said, "this is your cousin, Mr. Julius P. Hersheimer."

A faint flush flitted over the girl's face, as Julius stepped forward and took her hand.

"How do, Cousin Jane?" he said lightly.

But Tommy caught the tremor in his voice.

"Are you really Uncle Hiram's son?" she asked wonderingly.

Her voice, with the slight warmth of the Western accent, had an almost thrilling quality. It seemed vaguely familiar to Tommy, but he thrust the impression aside as impossible.

"Sure thing."

"We used to read about Uncle Hiram in the papers," continued the girl, in her low soft tones. "But I never thought I'd meet you one day. Mother figured it out that Uncle Hiram would never get over being mad with her."

"The old man was like that," admitted Julius. "But I guess the new generation's sort of different. Got no use for the family feud business. First thing I thought about, soon as the war was over, was to come along and hunt you up."

A shadow passed over the girl's face.

"They've been telling me things--dreadful things--that my memory went, and that there are years I shall never know about--years lost out of my life."

"You didn't realize that yourself?"

The girl's eyes opened wide.

"Why, no. It seems to me as though it were no time since we were being hustled into those boats. I can see it all now." She closed her eyes with a shudder.

Julius looked across at Sir James, who nodded.

"Don't worry any. It isn't worth it. Now, see here, Jane, there's something we want to know about. There was a man aboard that boat with some mighty important papers on him, and the big guns in this country have got a notion that he passed on the goods to you. Is that so?"

The girl hesitated, her glance shifting to the other two. Julius understood.

"Mr. Beresford is commissioned by the British Government to get those papers back. Sir James Peel Edgerton is an English Member of Parliament, and might be a big gun in the Cabinet if he liked. It's owing to him that we've ferreted you out at last. So you can go right ahead and tell us the whole story. Did Danvers give you the papers?"

"Yes. He said they'd have a better chance with me, because they would save the women and children first."

"Just as we thought," said Sir James.

"He said they were very important--that they might make all the difference to the Allies. But, if it's all so long ago, and the war's over, what does it matter now?"

"I guess history repeats itself, Jane. First there was a great hue and cry over those papers, then it all died down, and now the whole caboodle's started all over again--for rather different reasons. Then you can hand them over to us right away?"

"But I can't."

"What?"

"I haven't got them."

"You--haven't--got them?" Julius punctuated the words with little pauses.

"No--I hid them."

"You hid them?"

"Yes. I got uneasy. People seemed to be watching me. It scared me--badly." She put her hand to her head. "It's almost the last thing I remember before waking up in the hospital..."

"Go on," said Sir James, in his quiet penetrating tones. "What do you remember?"

She turned to him obediently.

"It was at Holyhead. I came that way--I don't remember why...."

"That doesn't matter. Go on."

"In the confusion on the quay I slipped away. Nobody saw me. I took a car. Told the man to drive me out of the town. I watched when we got on the open road. No other car was following us. I saw a path at the side of the road. I told the man to wait."

She paused, then went on. "The path led to the cliff, and down to the sea between big yellow gorse bushes--they were like golden flames. I looked round. There wasn't a soul in sight. But just level with my head there was a hole in the rock. It was quite small--I could only just get my hand in, but it went a long way back. I took the oilskin packet from round my neck and shoved it right in as far as I could. Then I tore off a bit of gorse--My! but it did prick--and plugged the hole with it so that you'd never guess there was a crevice of any kind there. Then I marked the place carefully in my own mind, so that I'd find it again. There was a queer boulder in the path just there--for all the world like a dog sitting up begging. Then I went back to the road. The car was waiting, and I drove back. I just caught the train. I was a bit ashamed of myself for fancying things maybe, but, by and by, I saw the man opposite me wink at a woman who was sitting next to me, and I felt scared again, and was glad the papers were safe. I went out in the corridor to get a little air. I thought I'd slip into another carriage. But the woman called me back, said I'd dropped something, and when I stooped to look, something seemed to hit me--here." She placed her hand to the back of her head. "I don't remember anything more until I woke up in the hospital."

There was a pause.

"Thank you, Miss Finn." It was Sir James who spoke. "I hope we have not tired you?"

"Oh, that's all right. My head aches a little, but otherwise I feel fine."

Julius stepped forward and took her hand again.

"So long, Cousin Jane. I'm going to get busy after those papers, but I'll be back in two shakes of a dog's tail, and I'll tote you up to London and give you the time of your young life before we go back to the States! I mean it--so hurry up and get well."