

## **CHAPTER XX. TOO LATE**

IN the street they held an informal council of war. Sir James had drawn a watch from his pocket. "The boat train to Holyhead stops at Chester at 12.14. If you start at once I think you can catch the connection."

Tommy looked up, puzzled.

"Is there any need to hurry, sir? To-day is only the 24th."

"I guess it's always well to get up early in the morning," said Julius, before the lawyer had time to reply. "We'll make tracks for the depot right away."

A little frown had settled on Sir James's brow.

"I wish I could come with you. I am due to speak at a meeting at two o'clock. It is unfortunate."

The reluctance in his tone was very evident. It was clear, on the other hand, that Julius was easily disposed to put up with the loss of the other's company.

"I guess there's nothing complicated about this deal," he remarked. "Just a game of hide-and-seek, that's all."

"I hope so," said Sir James.

"Sure thing. What else could it be?"

"You are still young, Mr. Hersheimer. At my age you will probably have learnt one lesson. 'Never underestimate your adversary.'"

The gravity of his tone impressed Tommy, but had little effect upon Julius.

"You think Mr. Brown might come along and take a hand? If he does, I'm ready for him." He slapped his pocket. "I carry a gun. Little Willie here travels round with me everywhere." He produced a murderous-looking automatic, and tapped it affectionately before returning it to its home. "But he won't be needed this trip. There's nobody to put Mr. Brown wise."

The lawyer shrugged his shoulders.

"There was nobody to put Mr. Brown wise to the fact that Mrs. Vandemeyer meant to betray him. Nevertheless, MRS. VANDEMEYER DIED WITHOUT SPEAKING."

Julius was silenced for once, and Sir James added on a lighter note:

"I only want to put you on your guard. Good-bye, and good luck. Take no unnecessary risks once the papers are in your hands. If there is any reason to believe that you have been shadowed, destroy them at once. Good luck to you. The game is in your hands now." He shook hands with them both.

Ten minutes later the two young men were seated in a first-class carriage en route for Chester.

For a long time neither of them spoke. When at length Julius broke the silence, it was with a totally unexpected remark.

"Say," he observed thoughtfully, "did you ever make a darned fool of yourself over a girl's face?"

Tommy, after a moment's astonishment, searched his mind.

"Can't say I have," he replied at last. "Not that I can recollect, anyhow. Why?"

"Because for the last two months I've been making a sentimental idiot of myself over Jane! First moment I clapped eyes on her photograph my heart did all the usual stunts you read about in novels. I guess I'm ashamed to admit it, but I came over here determined to find her and fix it all up, and take her back as Mrs. Julius P. Hersheimer!"

"Oh!" said Tommy, amazed.

Julius uncrossed his legs brusquely and continued:

"Just shows what an almighty fool a man can make of himself! One look at the girl in the flesh, and I was cured!"

Feeling more tongue-tied than ever, Tommy ejaculated "Oh!" again.

"No disparagement to Jane, mind you," continued the other. "She's a real nice girl, and some fellow will fall in love with her right away."

"I thought her a very good-looking girl," said Tommy, finding his tongue.

"Sure she is. But she's not like her photo one bit. At least I suppose she is in a way--must be--because I recognized her right off. If I'd seen her in a crowd I'd have said 'There's a girl whose face I know' right away without any hesitation. But there was something about that photo"--Julius shook his head, and heaved a sigh--"I guess romance is a mighty queer thing!"

"It must be," said Tommy coldly, "if you can come over here in love with one girl, and propose to another within a fortnight."

Julius had the grace to look discomposed.

"Well, you see, I'd got a sort of tired feeling that I'd never find Jane--and that it was all plumb foolishness anyway. And then--oh, well, the French, for instance, are much more sensible in the way they look at things. They keep romance and marriage apart----"

Tommy flushed.

"Well, I'm damned! If that's----"

Julius hastened to interrupt.

"Say now, don't be hasty. I don't mean what you mean. I take it Americans have a higher opinion of morality than you have even. What I meant was that the French set about marriage in a businesslike way--find two people who are suited to one another, look after the money affairs, and see the whole thing practically, and in a businesslike spirit."

"If you ask me," said Tommy, "we're all too damned businesslike nowadays. We're always saying, 'Will it pay?' The men are bad enough, and the girls are worse!"

"Cool down, son. Don't get so heated."

"I feel heated," said Tommy.

Julius looked at him and judged it wise to say no more.

However, Tommy had plenty of time to cool down before they reached Holyhead, and the cheerful grin had returned to his countenance as they alighted at their

destination.

After consultation, and with the aid of a road map, they were fairly well agreed as to direction, so were able to hire a taxi without more ado and drive out on the road leading to Treaddur Bay. They instructed the man to go slowly, and watched narrowly so as not to miss the path. They came to it not long after leaving the town, and Tommy stopped the car promptly, asked in a casual tone whether the path led down to the sea, and hearing it did paid off the man in handsome style.

A moment later the taxi was slowly chugging back to Holyhead. Tommy and Julius watched it out of sight, and then turned to the narrow path.

"It's the right one, I suppose?" asked Tommy doubtfully. "There must be simply heaps along here."

"Sure it is. Look at the gorse. Remember what Jane said?"

Tommy looked at the swelling hedges of golden blossom which bordered the path on either side, and was convinced.

They went down in single file, Julius leading. Twice Tommy turned his head uneasily. Julius looked back.

"What is it?"

"I don't know. I've got the wind up somehow. Keep fancying there's some one following us."

"Can't be," said Julius positively. "We'd see him."

Tommy had to admit that this was true. Nevertheless, his sense of uneasiness deepened. In spite of himself he believed in the omniscience of the enemy.

"I rather wish that fellow would come along," said Julius. He patted his pocket. "Little William here is just aching for exercise!"

"Do you always carry it--him--with you?" inquired Tommy with burning curiosity.

"Most always. I guess you never know what might turn up."

Tommy kept a respectful silence. He was impressed by little William. It seemed to remove the menace of Mr. Brown farther away.

The path was now running along the side of the cliff, parallel to the sea. Suddenly Julius came to such an abrupt halt that Tommy cannoned into him.

"What's up?" he inquired.

"Look there. If that doesn't beat the band!"

Tommy looked. Standing out half obstructing the path was a huge boulder which certainly bore a fanciful resemblance to a "begging" terrier.

"Well," said Tommy, refusing to share Julius's emotion, "it's what we expected to see, isn't it?"

Julius looked at him sadly and shook his head.

"British phlegm! Sure we expected it--but it kind of rattles me, all the same, to see it sitting there just where we expected to find it!"

Tommy, whose calm was, perhaps, more assumed than natural, moved his feet impatiently.

"Push on. What about the hole?"

They scanned the cliff-side narrowly. Tommy heard himself saying idiotically:

"The gorse won't be there after all these years."

And Julius replied solemnly:

"I guess you're right."

Tommy suddenly pointed with a shaking hand.

"What about that crevice there?"

Julius replied in an awestricken voice:

"That's it--for sure."

They looked at each other.

"When I was in France," said Tommy reminiscently, "whenever my batman failed to call me, he always said that he had come over queer. I never believed it. But whether he felt it or not, there IS such a sensation. I've got it now! Badly!"

He looked at the rock with a kind of agonized passion.

"Damn it!" he cried. "It's impossible! Five years! Think of it! Bird's-nesting boys, picnic parties, thousands of people passing! It can't be there! It's a hundred to one against its being there! It's against all reason!"

Indeed, he felt it to be impossible--more, perhaps, because he could not believe in his own success where so many others had failed. The thing was too easy, therefore it could not be. The hole would be empty.

Julius looked at him with a widening smile.

"I guess you're rattled now all right," he drawled with some enjoyment. "Well, here goes!" He thrust his hand into the crevice, and made a slight grimace. "It's a tight fit. Jane's hand must be a few sizes smaller than mine. I don't feel anything--no--say, what's this? Gee whiz!" And with a flourish he waved aloft a small discoloured packet. "It's the goods all right. Sewn up in oilskin. Hold it while I get my penknife."

The unbelievable had happened. Tommy held the precious packet tenderly between his hands. They had succeeded!

"It's queer," he murmured idly, "you'd think the stitches would have rotted. They look just as good as new."

They cut them carefully and ripped away the oilskin. Inside was a small folded sheet of paper. With trembling fingers they unfolded it. The sheet was blank! They stared at each other, puzzled.

"A dummy?" hazarded Julius. "Was Danvers just a decoy?"

Tommy shook his head. That solution did not satisfy him. Suddenly his face cleared.

"I've got it! SYMPATHETIC INK!"

"You think so?"

"Worth trying anyhow. Heat usually does the trick. Get some sticks. We'll make a fire."

In a few minutes the little fire of twigs and leaves was blazing merrily. Tommy held the sheet of paper near the glow. The paper curled a little with the heat. Nothing more.

Suddenly Julius grasped his arm, and pointed to where characters were appearing in a faint brown colour.

"Gee whiz! You've got it! Say, that idea of yours was great. It never occurred to me."

Tommy held the paper in position some minutes longer until he judged the heat had done its work. Then he withdrew it. A moment later he uttered a cry.

Across the sheet in neat brown printing ran the words: WITH THE COMPLIMENTS OF MR. BROWN.