

## CHAPTER XI

### JIMMY DECIDES TO BE HIMSELF

It was less than a quarter of an hour later--such was the speed with which Nemesis, usually slow, had overtaken him--that Jerry Mitchell, carrying a grip and walking dejectedly, emerged from the back premises of the Pett home and started down Riverside Drive in the direction of his boarding-house, a cheap, clean, and respectable establishment situated on Ninety-seventh Street between the Drive and Broadway. His usually placid nervous system was ruffled and a-quiver from the events of the afternoon, and his cauliflower ears still burned reminiscently at the recollection of the uncomplimentary words shot at them by Mrs. Pett before she expelled him from the house. Moreover, he was in a mild panic at the thought of having to see Ann later on and try to explain the disaster to her. He knew how the news would affect her. She had set her heart on removing Ogden to more disciplinary surroundings, and she could not possibly do it now that her ally was no longer an inmate of the house. He was an essential factor in the scheme, and now, to gratify the desire of the moment, he had eliminated himself. Long before he reached the brown-stone house, which looked exactly like all the other brown-stone houses in all the other side-streets of uptown New York, the first fine careless rapture of his mad outbreak had passed from Jerry Mitchell, leaving nervous apprehension in its place. Ann was a

girl whom he worshipped respectfully, but he feared her in her wrath.

Having entered the boarding-house, Jerry, seeking company in his hour of sorrow, climbed the stairs till he reached a door on the second floor. Sniffing and detecting the odour of tobacco, he knocked and was hidden to enter.

"Hello, Bayliss!" he said sadly, having obeyed the call.

He sat down on the end of the bed and heaved a deep sigh.

The room which he had entered was airy but small, so small, indeed, that the presence of any furniture in it at all was almost miraculous, for at first sight it seemed incredible that the bed did not fill it from side to side. There were however, a few vacant spots, and in these had been placed a wash-stand, a chest of drawers, and a midget rocking-chair. The window, which the thoughtful architect had designed at least three sizes too large for the room and which admitted the evening air in pleasing profusion, looked out onto a series of forlorn back-yards. In boarding-houses, it is only the windows of the rich and haughty that face the street.

On the bed, a corn-cob pipe between his teeth, lay Jimmy Crocker. He was shoeless and in his shirt-sleeves. There was a crumpled

evening paper on the floor beside the bed. He seemed to be taking his rest after the labours of a trying day.

At the sound of Jerry's sigh he raised his head, but, finding the attitude too severe a strain on the muscles of the neck, restored it to the pillow.

"What's the matter, Jerry? You seem perturbed. You have the aspect of one whom Fate has smitten in the spiritual solar plexus, or of one who has been searching for the leak in Life's gaspipe with a lighted candle. What's wrong?"

"Curtains!"

Jimmy, through long absence from his native land, was not always able to follow Jerry's thoughts when concealed in the wrappings of the peculiar dialect which he affected.

"I get you not, friend. Supply a few footnotes."

"I've been fired."

Jimmy sat up. This was no imaginary trouble, no mere malaise of the temperament. It was concrete, and called for sympathy.

"I'm awfully sorry," he said. "No wonder you aren't rollicking.

How did it happen?"

"That half-portion Bill Taft came joshing me about my beezzer till it got something fierce," explained Jerry. "William J. Bryan couldn't have stood for it."

Once again Jimmy lost the thread. The wealth of political allusion baffled him.

"What's Taft been doing to you?"

"It wasn't Taft. He only looks like him. It was that kid Ogden up where I work. He came butting into the gym, joshing me about--makin' pers'nal remarks till I kind of lost my goat, and the next thing I knew I was giving him his!" A faint gleam of pleasure lightened the gloom of his face. "I cert'nly give him his!" The gleam faded. "And after that--well, here I am!"

Jimmy understood now. He had come to the boarding-house the night of his meeting with Jerry Mitchell on Broadway, and had been there ever since, and frequent conversations with the pugilist had put him abreast of affairs at the Pett home. He was familiar with the personnel of the establishment on Riverside Drive, and knew precisely how great was the crime of administering correction to Ogden Ford, no matter what the cause. Nor did he require explanation of the phenomenon of Mrs. Pett dismissing one

who was in her husband's private employment. Jerry had his sympathy freely.

"You appear," he said, "to have acted in a thoroughly capable and praiseworthy manner. The only point in your conduct which I would permit myself to criticise is your omission to slay the kid.

That, however, was due, I take it, to the fact that you were interrupted. We will now proceed to examine the future. I cannot see that it is altogether murky. You have lost a good job, but there are others, equally good, for a man of your calibre. New York is crammed with dyspeptic millionaires who need an efficient physical instructor to look after them. Cheer up, Cuthbert, for the sun is still shining!"

Jerry Mitchell shook his head. He refused to be comforted.

"It's Miss Ann," he said. "What am I going to say to her?"

"What has she got to do with it?" asked Jimmy, interested.

For a moment Jerry hesitated, but the desire for sympathy and advice was too strong for him. And after all there was no harm in confiding in a good comrade like Jimmy.

"It's like this," he said. "Miss Ann and me had got it all fixed up to kidnap the kid!"

"What!"

"Say, I don't mean ordinary kidnapping. It's this way. Miss Ann come to me and we agree that the kid's a pest that had ought to have some strong-arm keep him in order, so we decide to get him away to a friend of mine who keeps a dogs' hospital down on Long Island. Bud Smithers is the guy to handle that kid. You ought to see him take hold of a dog that's all grouch and ugliness and make it over into a dog that it's a pleasure to have around. I thought a few weeks with Bud was what the doctor ordered for Ogden, and Miss Ann guessed I was right, so we had it all framed. And now this happens and balls everything up! She can't do nothing with a husky kid like that without me to help her. And how am I going to help her if I'm not allowed in the house?"

Jimmy was conscious of a renewed admiration for a girl whom he had always considered a queen among women. How rarely in this world did one find a girl who combined every feminine charm of mind and body with a resolute determination to raise Cain at the slightest provocation!

"What an absolutely corking idea!"

Jerry smirked modestly at the approbation, but returned instantly to his gloom.

"You get me now? What am I to say to her? She'll be sore!"

"The problem," Jimmy had begun, "is one which, as you suggest, presents certain--" when there was a knock at the door and the head of the boarding-house's maid-of-all-work popped in.

"Mr. Bayliss, is Mr. Mitchell--? Oh, say, Mr. Mitchell, there's a lady down below wants to see you. Says her name's Chester."

Jerry looked at Jimmy appealingly.

"What'll I do?"

"Do nothing," said Jimmy, rising and reaching for his shoes.

"I'll go down and see her. I can explain for you."

"It's mighty good of you."

"It will be a pleasure. Rely on me."

Ann, who had returned from her drive shortly after the Ogden disaster and had instantly proceeded to the boarding-house, had been shown into the parlour. Jimmy found her staring in a rapt way at a statuette of the Infant Samuel which stood near a bowl of wax fruit on the mantelpiece. She was feeling aggrieved with

Fate and extremely angry with Jerry Mitchell, and she turned at the sound of the opening door with a militant expression in her eyes, which changed to one of astonishment on perceiving who it was that had come in.

"Mr. Bayliss!"

"Good evening, Miss Chester. We, so to speak, meet again. I have come as an intermediary. To be brief, Jerry Mitchell daren't face you, so I offered to come down instead."

"But how--but why are you here?"

"I live here." He followed her gaze. It rested on a picture of cows in a field. "Late American school," he said. "Attributed to the landlady's niece, a graduate of the Wissahickon, Pa. Correspondence School of Pictorial Art. Said to be genuine."

"You live here?" repeated Ann. She had been brought up all her life among the carefully thought out effects of eminent interior decorators, and the room seemed more dreadful to her than it actually was. "What an awful room!"

"Awful? You must be overlooking the piano. Can't you see the handsome plush cover from where you are standing? Move a little to the southeast and shade your eyes. We get music here of an



evening--when we don't see it coming and sidestep."

"Why in the name of goodness do you live here, Mr. Bayliss?"

"Because, Miss Chester, I am infernally hard up! Because the Bayliss bank-roll has been stricken with a wasting sickness."

Ann was looking at him incredulously.

"But--but--then, did you really mean all that at lunch the other day? I thought you were joking. I took it for granted that you could get work whenever you wanted to or you wouldn't have made fun of it like that! Can't you really find anything to do?"

"Plenty to do. But I'm not paid for it. I walk a great number of blocks and jump into a great number of cars and dive into elevators and dive out again and open doors and say 'Good morning' when people tell me they haven't a job for me. My days are quite full, but my pocket-book isn't!"

Ann had forgotten all about her errand in her sympathy.

"I'm so sorry. Why, it's terrible! I should have thought you could have found something."

"I thought the same till the employers of New York in a body told

me I couldn't. Men of widely differing views on religion, politics, and a hundred other points, they were unanimous on that. The nearest I came to being a financial Titan was when I landed a job in a store on Broadway, demonstrating a patent collar-clip at ten dollars a week. For awhile all Nature seemed to be shouting 'Ten per! Ten per!' than which there are few sweeter words in the language. But I was fired half-way through the second day, and Nature changed her act."

"But why?"

"It wasn't my fault. Just Fate. This contrivance was called Klipstone's Kute Kollar-Klip, and it was supposed to make it easy for you to fasten your tie. My job was to stand in the window in my shirt-sleeves, gnashing my teeth and registering baffled rage when I tried the old, obsolete method and beaming on the multitude when I used the Klip. Unfortunately I got the cards mixed. I beamed when I tried the old, obsolete method and nearly burst myself with baffled fury just after I had exhibited the card bearing the words 'I will now try Klipstone's Kute Klip.' I couldn't think what the vast crowd outside the window was laughing at till the boss, who chanced to pause on the outskirts of the gathering on his way back from lunch, was good enough to tell me. Nothing that I could say would convince him that I was not being intentionally humorous. I was sorry to lose the job, though it did make me feel like a goldfish. But talking of being

fired brings us back to Jerry Mitchell."

"Oh, never mind Jerry Mitchell now--"

"On the contrary, let us discuss his case and the points arising from it with care and concentration. Jerry Mitchell has told me all!"

Ann was startled.

"What do you mean?"

"The word 'all,'" said Jimmy, "is slang for 'everything.' You see in me a confidant. In a word, I am hep."

"You know--?"

"Everything. A colloquialism," explained Jimmy, "for 'all.' About Ogden, you know. The scheme. The plot. The enterprise."

Ann found nothing to say.

"I am thoroughly in favour of the plan. So much so that I propose to assist you by taking Jerry's place."

"I don't understand."

"Do you remember at lunch that day, after that remarkable person had mistaken me for Jimmy Crocker, you suggested in a light, casual way that if I were to walk into your uncle's office and claim to be Jimmy Crocker I should be welcomed without a question? I'm going to do it. Then, once aboard the lugger--once in the house, I am at your orders. Use me exactly as you would have used Jerry Mitchell."

"But--but--!"

"Jerry!" said Jimmy scornfully. "Can't I do everything that he could have done? And more. A bonehead like Jerry would have been certain to have bungled the thing somehow. I know him well. A good fellow, but in matters requiring intellect and swift thought dead from the neck up. It's a very lucky thing he is out of the running. I love him like a brother, but his dome is of ivory. This job requires a man of tact, sense, shrewdness, initiative, esprit, and verve." He paused. "Me!" he concluded.

"But it's ridiculous! It's out of the question!"

"Not at all. I must be extraordinarily like Jimmy Crocker, or that fellow at the restaurant wouldn't have taken me for him. Leave this in my hands. I can get away with it."

"I shan't dream of allowing you--"

"At nine o'clock to-morrow morning," said Jimmy firmly, "I present myself at Mr. Pett's office. It's all settled."

Ann was silent. She was endeavouring to adjust her mind to the idea. Her first startled revulsion from it had begun to wane. It was an idea peculiarly suited to her temperament, an idea that she might have suggested herself if she had thought of it. Soon, from being disapproving, she found herself glowing with admiration for its author. He was a young man of her own sort!

"You asked me on the boat, if you remember," said Jimmy, "if I had an adventurous soul. I am now submitting my proofs. You also spoke highly of America as a land where there were adventures to be had. I now see that you were right."

Ann thought for a moment.

"If I consent to your doing this insane thing, Mr. Bayliss, will you promise me something?"

"Anything."

"Well, in the first place I absolutely refuse to let you risk all sorts of frightful things by coming into this kidnapping plot."

She waved him down, and went on. "But I see where you can help me very much. As I told you at lunch, my aunt would do anything for Jimmy Crocker if he were to appear in New York now. I want you to promise that you will confine your activities to asking her to let Jerry Mitchell come back."

"Never!"

"You said you would promise me anything."

"Anything but that."

"Then it is all off!"

Jimmy pondered.

"It's terribly tame that way."

"Never mind. It's the only way I will consider."

"Very well. I protest, though."

Ann sat down.

"I think you're splendid, Mr. Bayliss. I'm much obliged!"

"Not at all."

"It will be such a splendid thing for Ogden, won't it?"

"Admirable."

"Now the only thing to do is just to see that we have got everything straight. How about this, for instance? They will ask you when you arrived in New York. How are you going to account for your delay in coming to see them?"

"I've thought of that. There's a boat that docks to-morrow--the Caronia, I think. I've got a paper upstairs. I'll look it up. I can say I came by her."

"That seems all right. It's lucky you and uncle Peter never met on the Atlantic."

"And now as to my demeanour on entering the home? How should I behave? Should I be jaunty or humble? What would a long-lost nephew naturally do?"

"A long-lost nephew with a record like Jimmy Crocker's would crawl in with a white flag, I should think."

A bell clanged in the hall.

"Supper!" said Jimmy. "To go into painful details, New England boiled dinner, or my senses deceive me, and prunes."

"I must be going."

"We shall meet at Philippi."

He saw her to the door, and stood at the top of the steps watching her trim figure vanish into the dusk. She passed from his sight. Jimmy drew a deep breath, and, thinking hard, went down the passage to fortify himself with supper.