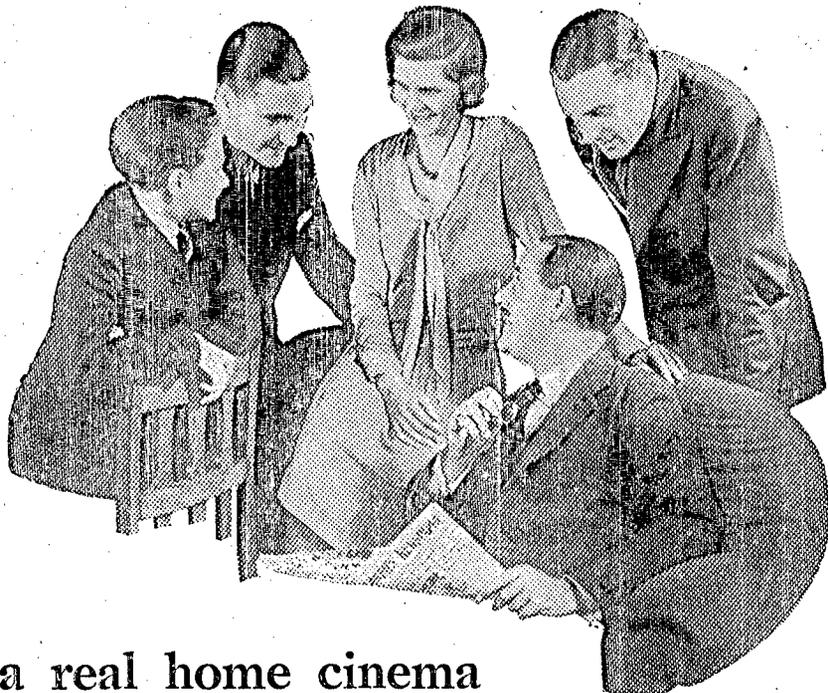


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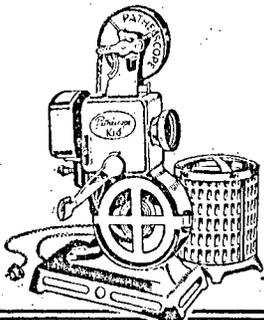
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CHAPTER 21
In the Taxi.

Soon the two were safely in the cab. "Tell me your important news, Felicity," said Tony. He had given the driver the British Museum as his destination, meaning to change it when he had talked over with Felicity the best thing to do.

For answer the girl reached into her pocket, took out a grimy, crumpled note, and handed it to Tony.

"Dear Miss," Tony read, "I don't like the look of things. You and your uncle have always been good to me. I'd never have gone into this if I'd known what was in the air. They'd do for me if they knew, so don't let them know I told you. The night he died old Mr Speers gave me a letter to take to your uncle. Young Speers was paying me, so I didn't deliver it but read it myself instead."

"He's a fine specimen," remarked Tony.

"Read the rest," cried Felicity eagerly.

"It was a letter saying that he felt his end was near, and goodbye to his old friend Mr Cartwright, and that he was glad to know that by his latest will all his money, bar a shilling, went to his friend Josiah Cartwright, and wishing him luck with his Orphanage."

Tony looked up at Felicity excitedly as he reached this point.

"That letter would prove everything!" he cried. "It shows beyond a possible doubt that the old man never made the will which young Edgar Speers pretends he did."

"Yes!" returned Felicity, her eyes shining. "Go on reading!"

"I admit I thought the old man's letter would be useful to me," continued Tony, reading on; "I could use it to have a hold over young Mr Edgar in case he didn't do the right thing by me. So I hid the letter in a safe place and waited to see how things would turn out. I tell you, Miss, I don't like the way they've treated your poor old uncle and you. From some remarks young Speers let drop I don't think either you or your uncle will live to tell the tale once they've made you sign the papers they've got. A million pounds is a lot of money, and I was to have my share; but I never figured on being let in for murder. I didn't bring the letter with me, but I thought I ought to tell you. I hear someone coming and must close. Hoping you will be willing to forgive me for what I did, like the sweet young lady you have always been, I remain, respectfully yours, John Larkin."

"Well, the double-dyed idiot!" cried Tony with exasperation, as he looked up from the scrawl in his hands. "All this long letter and not a single word to tell you where that last letter is hidden!"

"Yes, isn't it maddening!" cried Felicity. "I've thought and thought, but it's impossible to decide where the letter is. The most probable thing is that he left it in some hiding-place in old Mr Speers's house, don't you think so?"

Tony glanced through the scrawled note once more.

"You are probably right," he returned. "He says he didn't bring the letter with him. That rather points to a hiding-place in the last spot he was in before he came here. That means Byewell House. We ought to go down there and look for it!"

"I'll go with you at once," said Felicity. "I know the house fairly well. We'll search everywhere."

"I say, this is a marvellous piece of luck!" cried Tony enthusiastically. "We've got the cup and if we can get the letter we'll have Edgar Speers and Co in a cleft stick. They'll have no choice but to retire."

"Let's take the next train," said Felicity. "Poor darling Uncle! We'll be able to rescue him very soon, I hope."

Tony's face changed. The time had come when he could no longer put off disillusioning Felicity about this so-called uncle of hers. He hated doing it, but it had to be done.

"Felicity," he said reluctantly, "I will stand by you in this as far as you'll let me, but I must tell you that you are mistaken about your uncle. He is hand in glove with this Speers lot. He deliberately tried to drown me last night. In fact, he has been in it all along."

"Whatever are you talking about, Tony?" cried Felicity, her eyes widening. "How could he try to drown you when he has been bound and gagged in a cupboard all the time, poor dear!"

"Perhaps that is what they made you think, but no! (Tony started as a memory came to him.) Do you remember when they took me in to see you the first time and you told me to leave the affair alone?"

"Yes," answered Felicity. "I asked you not to bother about us any more because I realised how dangerous things were for you, and I felt I couldn't allow you to put your life in danger for our sake."

"But, listen to me, Felicity," said Tony earnestly. "Your uncle had been talking to you then. I saw him leave the room just as I came in. He certainly wasn't bound and gagged then."

Felicity stared at Tony for a moment, and then light broke in on her.

"Oh, of course!" she cried. "How stupid of me! You couldn't have known, and we've had so little time for explanations. That man was Edgar Speers. He had been bullying me and telling me the dreadful things that would happen to you unless I persuaded you to drop out of the affair."

"But, Felicity, I saw him quite plainly from the back. He certainly had your uncle's bald head. Surely there can't be two bald heads like that in the world! It would be too much of a coincidence."

"It's not a coincidence at all," returned the girl, "but a very deliberate impersonation. Edgar Speers has been an actor, among other things, less honourable, and he has learned to impersonate people. His idea was, when my uncle had been made helpless, to appear to me as Uncle Josiah and make me agree to his plans. It was very silly of him, for I saw through him at once. He certainly looked like Uncle Josiah, especially in a dim light, but his voice was quite different."

"But the bald head!" cried Tony.

"Papier mâché!" returned Felicity.

"Made by a very famous theatrical wig-maker. They do wonderful things of that sort, you know. I had a good look at it, and it fits perfectly; one could hardly guess that under it is a quite good head of black hair. And you know, darling Uncle's bald head is a bit queer-looking—quite as queer-looking sometimes as the fake. It was an easy thing to copy."

"Well, I'm bothered!" gasped Tony. "I remember now that when Leeson had finished with me, Speers (or, as I thought, your uncle) bent his head down to see if I were still alive, and I thought there was something wrong. Hasn't your uncle a large brown mole on his left ear?"

"Yes," said Felicity. "I noticed that too. Speers forgot to put on the mole, or perhaps it fell off. Anyway, although I knew my uncle's voice too well to be taken in by a mere visual disguise, Speers kept it on, probably thinking that it might take in other people."

"It took me in," said Tony ruefully, "and I apologise to your uncle for doubting him. Do you know where they have put him?" he added after a pause.

"There is a room in that house in Dead Cat Alley seemingly without a door, and with no windows, just some almost invisible gratings to let in a little air. The smugglers must have used it to hide their goods, for unless you studied the space in the house you'd never guess a room was there. It has a sliding steel door made to look like the wall. Uncle is in that horrible room!" Felicity shuddered. "They're starving him and bullying him, but they will never break his spirit."

"Ah!" cried Tony, remembering something. "Where exactly is that room?"

"Just off the room with the trap-door."

"So that's what I heard when I was in the cupboard! I first saw Speers through the keyhole—and took him for your uncle. I was horrified to see him on such good terms with the others, and puzzled my head about that instead of considering what the shouting and pounding on the wall of the other room meant."

"That would have been poor Uncle trying to get out. He soon realised it was no use. He says he would rather die than see his orphans' money go to such ruffians."

"They let you see him, then?"

"Oh yes," returned Felicity. "It is part of their plan to let us meet. You see, they are not ill-treating me, but they ill-treat my Uncle in the hope of getting at us both that way. I confess that when I've seen him there, weak and exhausted, I've done my best to persuade him to give up the money."

"They'd be counting on your help that way, the cads!" said Tony, clenching his fists.

"But Uncle has a streak of obstinacy in him whenever a principle is involved," continued Felicity. "He'll fight to the end before he will let them do this wicked thing."

"Good for him!" cried Tony heartily.

"We must leave him to fight alone for a little while till we have found that letter. Then, armed with that and the cup, our case is proved, and we can ask for police

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