

The Secret Adversary

By AGATHA CHRISTIE

(Continued)

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!"

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. 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.

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. Hershelmer!"

"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!"

At Holyhead, after consultation, 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 Trearddur 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 way 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. 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 someone following us."

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 here, if that doesn't beat the band!" Tommy looked. Standing out and half obscuring the path was a huge boulder which certainly bore a fanciful resemblance to a "begging" terrier.

"That's it—'br sure." Tommy looked at the rock with a kind of agonized passion. "D—n it!" he cried. "It's impossible! Five years! Think of it!"

Bird-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!" Julius looked at him with a widening smile.



He Thrust His Hand Into the Crevice.

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 discolored packet. "It's the goods all right. Sewn up in olekin. 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 olekin. 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 color.

"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."

CHAPTER XIII Tommy Makes a Discovery.

For a moment or two they stood staring at each other stupidly, dazed with shock. Somehow, inexplicably, Mr. Brown had forestalled them. Tommy accepted defeat quietly. Not so Julius.

"How in tarnation did he get ahead of us? That's what beats me!" he ended up.

"I don't see that it matters anyway," said Tommy wearily. "He may have found out some months ago, and removed the papers, then—No, by Jove, that won't wash! They'd have been published at once."

"Sure thing they would! No, someone's got ahead of us today by an hour or so. But how they did it gets my goat. It's no good arguing about how it was done. The game's up. We've failed. There's only one thing for me to do."

"What's that?" "Get back to London as soon as possible. Mr. Carter must be warned. It's only a matter of hours now before the blow falls."

Half an hour after arrival, haggard and pale, Tommy stood before his chief.

"I've come to report, sir. I've failed—failed badly." Mr. Carter eyed him sharply. "You mean that the treaty—"

"I'm afraid so," said Mr. Carter gravely. He stretched out his hand to a sheet on the table.

"Tuppence?" faltered Tommy. "Read for yourself."

The typewritten words danced before his eyes. The description of a green toque, a coat with a handkerchief in the pocket marked "P. L. C." He looked an agonized question at Mr. Carter. The latter replied to it:

"Washed up on the Yorkshire coast—near Ebury. I'm afraid—it looks very much like foul play."

"My G—d!" gasped Tommy. "Tuppence! Those devils—I'll never rest till I've got even with them! I'll hunt them down! I'll—"

"I'm taking up your time, sir," he said with an effort. "There's no need for you to blame yourself. I dare say we were a couple of young fools to take on such a job. You warned us all right. But I wish to God I'd been the one to get it in the neck. Good-by, sir."

Back at the Ritz, Tommy packed up his few belongings mechanically, his thoughts far away. He was still bewildered by the introduction of tragedy into his cheerful commonplace existence. What fun they had had together, he and Tuppence! And now—oh, he couldn't believe it—it couldn't be true! Tuppence—dead! Little Tuppence, brimming over with life! It was a dream, a horrible dream. Nothing more.

They brought him a note, a few kind words of sympathy from Peel Edgerton, who had read the news in the paper. (There had been a large headline: EX-V. A. D. FEARED DROWNED.) The letter ended with the offer of a post on a ranch in the Argentine, where Sir James had considerable interests.

"Kind old beggar," muttered Tommy, as he flung it aside.

The door opened, and Julius burst in with his usual violence. He held an open newspaper in his hand.

"Say, what's all this? They seem to have got some fool idea about Tuppence."

"It's true," said Tommy quietly. "You mean they've done her in?" Tommy nodded.

"I suppose when they got the treaty she—wasn't any good to them any longer, and they were afraid to let her go?"

"Well, I'm darned!" said Julius. "Little Tuppence. She sure was the pluckiest little girl!"

But suddenly something seemed to crack in Tommy's brain. He rose to his feet.

"Oh, get out! You don't really care, do you! You asked her to marry me!"



"Oh, Get Out! You Don't Really Care, Do you?"

you in your rotten cold-blooded way, but I loved her. I'd have given the soul out of my body to save her from harm. I'd have stood by without a word and let her marry you, because you could have given her the sort of time she ought to have had, and I was only a poor devil without a penny to bless himself with. But it wouldn't have been because I didn't care!"

The young men were on the point of coming to blows. But suddenly, with an almost magical abruptness, Julius' anger abated.

"All right, son," he said quietly. "I'm going. I don't blame you any for what you've been saying. It's mighty lucky you did say it. I've been the most almighty blithering darned idiot that it's possible to imagine. Calm down!"

Tommy had made an impatient gesture—"I'm going right away now—going to the London and North Western railway depot, if you want to know."

"I don't care a d—n where you're going," growled Tommy.

As the door closed behind Julius, he returned to his suitcase.

Where was he going? He hadn't the faintest idea. Beyond a fixed determination to get even with Mr. Brown he had no plans. He re-read Sir James' letter, and shook his head. Tuppence must be avenged. Still, it was kind of the old fellow.

"Better answer it, I suppose." He went across to the writing table. With the usual perversity of bedroom stationery, there were innumerable envelopes and no paper. He rang. No one came. Tommy fumed at the delay. Then he remembered that there was a good supply in Julius' sitting room.

He was beginning to be rather ashamed of the things he had said. But the room was deserted. Tommy

walked across to the writing table, and opened the middle drawer. A photograph, carelessly thrust in face upwards, caught his eye. For a moment he stood rooted to the ground. Then he took it out, shut the drawer, walked slowly over to an armchair, and sat down still staring at the photograph in his hand.

What on earth was a photograph of the French girl Annette doing in Julius Hershelmer's writing table?

CHAPTER XIV

In Downing Street. The prime minister tapped the desk in front of him with nervous fingers. His face was worn and harassed. He took up his conversation with Mr. Carter at the point it had broken off.

"I don't understand," he said. "Do you really mean that things are not so desperate after all?"

"So this had seems to think." "Let's have a look at his letter again."

Mr. Carter handed it over. It was written in a sprawling boyish hand.

"Dear Mr. Carter: I think I know who the real Jane Finn is, and I've even got an idea where the papers are. That's the only guess, of course, but I've a sort of feeling it'll turn out right. Anyhow, I enclose it in a sealed envelope for what it's worth. I'm going to ask you not to open it until the very last moment, midnight on the 28th, in fact. You see, I've figured it out that those things of Tuppence's are a plant too, and she's no more drowned than I am. The way I reason is this: as a last chance they'll let Jane Finn escape in the hope that she's been shamming this memory stunt, and that once she thinks she's free she'll go right away to the cache. Of course it's an awful risk for them to take, because she knows all about them—but they're pretty desperate to get hold of that treaty. But if they know that the papers have been recovered by us, neither of those two girls' lives will be worth an hour's purchase. I must try and get hold of Tuppence before Jane escapes."

"I want a repeat of that telegram that was sent to Tuppence at the Ritz. Sir James Peel Edgerton said you would be able to manage that for me."

"One last thing—please have that house in Soho watched day and night. Yours, etc., THOMAS BERESFORD."

"He seems confident," mused the prime minister. A half smile came to the other's lips.

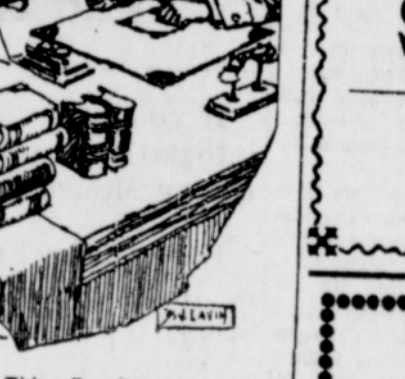
"And it is this—boy who will defeat the master criminal!"

feat the master criminal of our time?" "This—boy, as you say! But I sometimes fancy I see a shadow behind."

"You mean?" "Peel Edgerton. I see his hand in this."

There was a pause, then Mr. Carter continued: "I asked him to come round here. Not that we'll get anything out of him he doesn't want to tell. His legal instincts are too strong. But there's no doubt he can throw light on one or two obscure points in young Beresford's letter. Ah, here he is!"

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(To be continued)

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