



The Secret Adversary

by Agatha Christie

(Continued from last week.)

"Trading under the name of the Young Adventurers, Ltd. Is that the idea, Tuppence?"

"It's all very well to laugh, but I feel there might be something in it."

"How do you propose to get in touch with your would-be employers?"

"Advertisement," replied Tuppence promptly. "Have you got a bit of paper and a pencil?"

Tommy handed over a rather shabby green notebook, and Tuppence began writing busily.

"Shall we begin: 'Young officer, twice wounded in the war—'"

"Certainly not."

"Oh, very well, my dear boy. But I can assure you that that sort of thing might touch the heart of an elderly minister, and she might adopt you, and then there would be no need for you to be a young adventurer at all."

"I don't want to be adopted."

"I forgot you had a prejudice against it. Now listen—how's this? Two young adventurers for hire. Willing to do anything, go anywhere. Pay must be good. (We might as well make that clear from the start.) Then we might add: 'No reasonable offer refused—like flats and furniture. How would that strike you if you read it?'"

Tommy was holding the paper thoughtfully. His face burned a deeper red.

"Shall we really try it?" he said at last. "Shall we, Tuppence? Just for the fun of the thing?"

"Tommy, you're a sport! I knew you would be! Let's drink to success." She poured some cold drops of tea into the two cups.

"Here's to our joint venture, and may it prosper!"

"The Young Adventurers, Ltd.," responded Tommy.

They put down the cups and laughed rather uncertainly. Tuppence rose.

"I must return to my palatial suite at the hotel."

"Perhaps it is time I strolled round to the 'Ritz,' agreed Tommy with a grin. "Where shall we meet? And when?"

"Twelve o'clock tomorrow. 'Piccadilly Tube station.'"

The two young people went off in opposite directions. Tuppence's hotel was situated in what was charitably called Southern Belgravia. For reasons of economy she did not take a bus.

She was half-way across St. James park, when a man's voice behind her made her start.

"Excuse me," it said. "But may I speak to you for a moment?"

Tuppence turned sharply, but the words hovering on the tip of her tongue remained unspoken, for the man's appearance and manner did not bear out her first and most natural assumption. She hesitated. As if he read her thoughts, the man said quickly:

"I can assure you I mean no disrespect."

Tuppence looked him up and down. He was a big man, clean shaven, with a heavy jaw. His eyes were small and cunning, and shifted their glance under her direct gaze.

"Well, what is it?" she asked.

The man took a card from his pocket and handed it to her with a bow.

Tuppence took it and scrutinized it carefully. It bore the inscription, "Mr. Edward Whittington." Below the name were the words "Esthonia Glassware company," and the address of a city office. Mr. Whittington spoke again:

"If you will call upon me tomorrow morning at eleven o'clock, I will lay the details of my proposition before you."

"At eleven o'clock," said Tuppence doubtfully.

"At eleven o'clock," Tuppence made up her mind. "Very well. I'll be there."

"Thank you. Good evening."

He raised his hat with a flourish, and walked away. Tuppence remained for some minutes gazing after him. Then she gave a curious movement of her shoulders, rather as a terrier shakes himself.

"The adventures have begun," she murmured to herself. "What does he want me to do, I wonder? There's something about you, Mr. Whittington, that I don't like at all. But, on the other hand, I'm not the least bit afraid of you. And as I've said before, and shall doubtless say again, little Tuppence can look after herself, thank you!"

And with a short, sharp nod of her head she walked briskly onward. As a result of further meditations, however, she turned aside from the direct route and entered a post office.

Tuppence wrote rapidly: "Don't put in advertisement. Will explain tomorrow." She addressed it to Tommy at his club, from which in one short month he would have to resign, unless a kindly fortune permitted him to renew his subscription.

It wanted some five minutes to eleven when Tuppence reached the block of buildings in which the offices of the Esthonia Glassware company were situated. To arrive before the time would look overbearing. So Tuppence decided to walk to the end

of the street and back again. She did so. On the stroke of eleven she plunged into the recesses of the building. The Esthonia Glassware company was on the top floor. Tuppence knocked. In response to a voice from within, she turned the handle and walked into a small rather dirty outer office.

A middle-aged clerk got down from a high stool at a desk near the window and came toward her inquiringly.

"I have an appointment with Mr. Whittington," said Tuppence.

"Will you come this way, please?" He crossed to a partition door with "Private" on it, knocked, then opened the door and stood aside to let her pass in.

Mr. Whittington was seated behind a large desk covered with papers. Tuppence felt her previous judgment confirmed. There was something wrong about Mr. Whittington. The combination of his sleek prosperity and his shifty eye was not attractive.

He looked up and nodded.

"So you're turned up, all right? That's good. Sit down, will you?"

Tuppence sat meekly with downcast eyes whilst Mr. Whittington sorted and rustled amongst his papers. Finally he pushed them away, and leaned over the desk.

"Now, my dear young lady, let us come to business." His large face broadened into a smile. "You want work? Well, I have work to offer you. What should you say now to \$500 down, and all expenses paid?"

Mr. Whittington leaned back in his chair, and thrust his thumbs into the armholes of his waistcoat.

Tuppence eyed him warily.

"And the nature of the work?" she demanded.

"Nominal—purely nominal. A pleasure trip, that is all."

"Where to?"

Mr. Whittington smiled again.

"Paris."

"Oh," said Tuppence thoughtfully. To herself she said: "Of course, if father heard that he would have a fit! But somehow I don't see Mr. Whittington in the role of the gay deceiver."

"Yes," continued Whittington. "What could be more delightful? To put the clock back a few years—a very few, I am sure—and re-enter one of those charming pensionnats de jeunes filles with which Paris abounds."

Tuppence interrupted him.

"A pensionnat?"

"Exactly. Madame Colombier's in the Avenue de Neuilly."

Tuppence knew the name well. Nothing could have been more select. She had had several American friends there. She was more than ever puzzled.

"You want me to go to Madame Colombier's? For how long?"

"That depends. Possibly three months."

"And that is all? There are no other conditions?"

"None whatever. By the way, you are English, are you not?"

"Yes."

"Yet you speak with a slight American accent?"

"My great pal in hospital was a little American girl. I dare say I picked it up from her. I can soon get out of it again."

"On the contrary, it might be simpler for you to pass as an American. Details about your past life in England might be more difficult to sustain. Yes, I think that would be decidedly better. Then—"

"One moment, Mr. Whittington! You seem to be taking my consent for granted."

Whittington looked surprised.

"Surely you are not thinking of refusing? I can assure you that Madame Colombier's is a most high-class and orthodox establishment. And the terms are most liberal."

"Exactly," said Tuppence. "That's just it. The terms are almost too liberal. Mr. Whittington, I cannot see any way in which I can be worth that amount of money to you."

"No?" said Whittington softly.

"Well, I will tell you. I could doubtless obtain someone else for very much less. What I am willing to pay

for is a young lady with sufficient intelligence and presence of mind to sustain her part well, and also one who will have sufficient discretion not to ask too many questions."

Tuppence smiled a little. She felt that Whittington had scored.

"There's another thing. So far there has been no mention of Mr. Beresford. Where does he come in?"

"Mr. Beresford?"

"My partner," said Tuppence with dignity. "You saw us together yesterday."

"Ah, yes. But I'm afraid we shan't require his services."

"Then it's off!" Tuppence rose. "It's both or neither. Sorry—but that's how it is. Good morning, Mr. Whittington."

"Wait a minute. Let us see if something can't be managed. Sit down again, Miss—"

He paused interrogatively.

Tuppence's conscience gave her a passing twinge as she remembered the archdeacon. She seized hurriedly on the first name that came into her head.

"Jane Finn," she said hastily; and then paused open-mouthed at the effect of those two simple words.



"If You Will Call Upon Me Tomorrow Morning at Eleven o'clock, I Will Lay the Details of My Proposition Before You."

All the geniality had faded out of Whittington's face. It was purple with rage, and the veins stood out on his forehead. And behind it all there lurked a sort of incredulous dismay. He leaned forward and hissed savagely:

"So that's your little game, is it? Tuppence, though utterly taken aback, nevertheless kept her head. She had not the faintest comprehension of his meaning, but she was naturally quick-witted, and felt it imperative to 'keep her end up,' as she phrased it.

Whittington went on:

"Been playing with me, have you, all the time, like a cat and mouse? Knew all the time what I wanted you for, but kept up the comedy. Is that it, eh? He was cooling down. The red color was ebbing out of his face. He eyed her keenly. "Who's been blabbing? Rita?"

Tuppence shook her head. She was doubtful as to how long she could sustain this illusion, but she realized the importance of not dragging an unknown Rita into it.

"No," she replied with perfect truth. "Rita knows nothing about me."

"How much do you know?" he shot out.

"Very little indeed," answered Tuppence, and was pleased to note that Whittington's uneasiness was augmented instead of allayed.

"Anyway," he snarled, "you knew enough to come in here and plump out that name."

"It might be my own name," Tuppence pointed out.

"It's likely, isn't it, that there would be two girls with a name like that? Quit fooling! How much do you know? And how much do you want?"

The last few words took Tuppence's fancy mightily, especially after a meagre breakfast and a supper of buns the night before. She sat up and sniffed with the air of one who has the situation thoroughly well in hand.

"My dear Mr. Whittington," she said, "let us by all means lay our cards upon the table. And pray do not be so angry. You heard me say yesterday that I proposed to live by my wits. It seems to me that I have now proved I have some wits to live by! I admit I have knowledge of a certain name, but perhaps my knowledge ends there."

"As I said once before," said Whittington angrily, "quit fooling, and come to the point. You can't play the innocent with me. You know a great deal more than you're willing to admit."

Tuppence paused a moment to admire her own ingenuity, and then said softly:

"I shouldn't like to contradict you, Mr. Whittington."

"So we come to the usual question—how much?"

Tuppence was in a dilemma. So far she had fooled Whittington with complete success, but to mention a palpably impossible sum might awaken his suspicions. An idea flashed across her brain.

"Suppose we say a little something down, and a fuller discussion of the matter later?"

Whittington gave her an ugly glance. "Blackmail, eh?"

Tuppence smiled sweetly.

"Oh, no! Shall we say payment of services in advance?"

Whittington grunted.

"You're about the limit, that's what you are," he growled, with a sort of unwilling admiration. "You took me in all right. Thought you were quite a meek little kid with just enough brains for my purpose. All the same, someone's been talking. You say it isn't Rita. Was it—? Oh, come in."

The clerk followed his discreet knock into the room, and laid a paper at his master's elbow.

"Telephone message just come for you, sir."

Whittington snatched it up and read it. A frown gathered on his brow.

"That'll do, Brown. You can go."

The clerk withdrew. Whittington turned to Tuppence.

"Come tomorrow at the same time. I'm busy now. Here's fifty to go on with."

He rapidly sorted out some notes, and pushed them across the table to Tuppence.

The girl counted the notes, secured them in her handbag, and rose.

"Good morning, Mr. Whittington," she said politely. "At least, au revoir, I should say."

"Exactly. Au revoir, my clever and charming young lady."

Tuppence sped lightly down the

stairs. A wild elation possessed her. "Let's give Tommy a surprise!" murmured Tuppence, and hailed a taxi.

The cab drew up outside the tube station. Tommy was just within the entrance. His eyes opened to their fullest extent as he hurried forward to assist Tuppence to alight. She smiled at him affectionately, and remarked in a slightly affected voice:

"Pay the thing, will you, old bean?"

"I must have been drinking unwares! Am I dreaming, Tuppence, or do I really behold a large quantity of five-pound notes being waved about in a dangerous fashion?"

"Even so, O King! Now, will you come and have lunch?"

"I'll come anywhere. But what have you been doing? Holding up a bank?"

"All in good time."

(Continued next week.)



Whittington Snatched It and Read It. I've got nothing smaller than a five-pound note!"

CHAPTER II

A Setback.

The moment was not quite so triumphant as it ought to have been. To begin with, the resources of Tommy's pockets were somewhat limited. In the end the fare was managed.

"Well," said Mr. Beresford, at length able to relieve his feelings, "what the—dickens did you want to take a taxi for?"

"I was afraid I might be late and keep you waiting," said Tuppence gently. "And really and truly, I haven't got anything smaller than a five-pound note. Now let's go to lunch. How about the Savoy?"

Tommy grinned.

"How about the Ritz?"

"On second thoughts, I prefer the Piccadilly. It's nearer. We shan't have to take another taxi. Come along."

"Is this a new brand of humor? Or is your brain unstringed?" inquired Tommy. "Tuppence, old girl, what

you feel fine in a few moments. You cold in head or catarrh will be gone. Your clogged nostrils will open. The air passages of your head will clear so you can breathe freely. No more dizziness, headache; no hawking, snuffling, mucous discharges or dryness; no struggling for breath at night.

Tell your druggist you want a small bottle of Ely's Cream Balm. Apply little of this fragrant, antiseptic cream in your nostrils, let it penetrate through every air passage of the head; soothe and heal the swollen, inflamed mucous membrane, and relief comes instantly. It is just what every cold and catarrh sufferer needs. Don't stay stuffed and miserable.

CATARRHAL DEAFNESS is often caused by an inflamed condition of the mucous lining of the Eustachian Tube. When this tube is inflamed you have a rumbling sound or imperious hearing. Unless the inflammation can be reduced, your hearing may be destroyed forever.

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has really come over you?"

"Oh, unbelieving one!" Tuppence wrenched open her bag. "Look here, and here, and here!"

Tommy groaned.

"I must have been drinking unwares! Am I dreaming, Tuppence, or do I really behold a large quantity of five-pound notes being waved about in a dangerous fashion?"

"Even so, O King! Now, will you come and have lunch?"

"I'll come anywhere. But what have you been doing? Holding up a bank?"

"All in good time."

(Continued next week.)

"Do Rate Talk to Each Other?" Asks Mr. M. Betty, R. I.

"I got five cakes of Rat-Snap and three pieces around feed store. Got about half a dozen dead rats a day for two solid weeks. Suddenly, they got fewer. Now we haven't any. Who told them about Rat-Snap? Rats dry up and leave no smell. Three cakes, 35c, 65c, \$1.25. Sold and guaranteed by

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