The Secret Adversary

by Agatha Christie

(Continued from last week.)

Mr. Carter nodded gravely.

"Yes, you're entitled to know that, I think."

He leaned back in his chair, crossed his legs, brought the tips of his fingers together, and began in a low monotone:

"In the early days of 1915 a certain document came into being. It was the draft of a secret agreement—treaty—call it what you like. It was drawn up ready for signature by the various representatives, and drawn up in America—at that time a neutral country. It was dispatched to England by a special messenger selected for that purpose, a young fellow called Danvers. It was hoped that the whole affair had been kept so secret that nothing would have leaked out. That kind of hope is usually disappointed.

"Danvers sailed for England on the Lusitania. He carried the precious papers in an oilskin packet which he wore next his skin. It was on that particular voyage that the Lusitania was torpedoed and sunk. Danvers was among the list of those missing. Eventually his body was washed ashore, and identified beyond any doubt, the packet was missing!

"The question was, had it been taken from him, or had he himself passed it on into another's keeping? After the torpedo struck the ship, in the few moments during the launching of the boats, Danvers was seen speaking to a young American girl. No one actually saw him pass anything to her, but he might have done so. It seems to me quite likely that he entrusted the papers to this girl, believing that she, as a woman, had a greater chance of bringing them safely to shore.

"But, if so, where was the girl, and what had she done with the papers? We set to work to trace her out. It proved unexpectedly difficult. Her name was Jane Finn, and it duly appeared among the list of the survivors, but the girl herself seemed to have vanished completely. Inquiries into her antecedents did little to help us. She was an orphan, and had been what we should call over here a pupil teacher in a small school out West. Her passport had ben made out for Paris, where she was going to join the staff o fa hospital. She had offered her services voluntarily, and after some correspondence they had been accepted. Having seen her name in the list of the saved from the Lusitania, the staff of the hospital were naturally very surprised at her not arriving to take up her billet, and at not hearing from her in any way.

"Well, every effort was made to trace the young lady—but all in vain. No use was made of the draft treaty—as might very easily have been done—and we therefore came to the conclusion that Danvers had, after all, destroyed it. The war entered on another phase, the diplomatic aspect changed accordingly, and the treaty was never redrafted. Rumors as to its existence were emphatically denied. The disappearance of Jane Finn was forgotten and the whole affair was lost in oblivion."

Mr. Carter paused, and Tuppence broke in impatiently:

"But why has it all cropped up again? The war's over."

"Because it seems that the papers were not destroyed after all, and that they might be resurrected today with a new and deadly significance."

Tuppence stared. Carter nodded.

"Yes, five years ago, that draft treaty was a weapon in our hands; today it is a weapon against us. It was a gigantic blunder. If its terms were made public, it would mean disaster. . . . It might possibly bring about another war—not with Germany this time! That is an extreme possibility, and I do not believe in its likelihood, myself, but that document undoubtedly implicates a number of our statesmen whom we cannot afford to have discredited in any way at the present moment. He paused, and then said quietly:

"You may perhaps have heard or read that there is Bolshevist influence at work behind present labor unrest?"

Tuppence nodded.

"That is the truth. Bolshevist gold is pouring into this country for the specific purpose of procuring a Revolution. And there is a certain man, a man whose real name is unknown to us, who is working in the dark for his own ends. The Bolsheviki are behind the labor unrest—but this man is BEHIND THE BOLSHEVIKI. Who is he? We do not know. He is always spoken of by the unassuming title of 'Mr. Brown.' But one thing is certain, he is the master criminal of this age. He controls a marvelous organization. Most of the peace propaganda during the war was originated and financed by him. His spies are everywhere."

"A naturalized German?" asked Tommy.

"On the contrary, I have every reason to believe he is an Englishman. He was pro-German as he would have been pro-Boer. What he seeks to attain we do not know—probably supreme power for himself, of a kind unique in history. We have no clue as to his real personality. It is reported that even his own followers are ignorant of it. Where we have come across his tracks, he has always played a secondary part. Somebody else assumes the chief role. But afterward we always find that there has been some nonentity, a servant or a clerk, who has remained in the background unnoticed, and that the elusive Mr. Brown has escaped us once more."

"Oh!" Tuppence jumped. "I wonder—"

"Yes?"

"I remember in Mr. Whittington's office. The clerk—he called him Brown. You don't think—"

Carter nodded thoughtfully. "Can you describe him at all?"

"I really didn't notice. He was quite ordinary—just like anyone else."

Mr. Carter sighed in his tired manner.

"That is the invariable description of Mr. Brown! Brought a telephone message to the man Whittington, did he? Notice a telephone in the outer office?"

"No, I don't think I did."

"Exactly. That 'message' was Mr Brown's way of giving an order to his subordinate, the overhead the whole conversation of course. Was it after that that Whittington handed you over the money, and told you to come the following day?"

Tuppence nodded.

"Yes, undoubtedly the hand of Mr. Brown!" Mr. Carter paused. "Well, there it is, you see what you are pitting yourselves against? Possibly the finest criminal brain of the age. I don't quite like it, you know. You're such young things, both of you. I shouldn't like anything to happen to you."

"It won't," Tuppence assured him positively.

"I'll look after her, sir," said Tommy.

"And I'll look after you," retorted Tuppence, resenting the manly assertion.

"Well, then, look after each other," said Mr. Carter, smiling. "Now let's get back to business. There's something mysterious about this draft treaty that we haven't fathomed yet. We've been threatened with it in plain and unmistakable terms. The revolutionary element as good as declare it's in their hands, and that they intend to produce it at a given moment. On the other hand, they are clearly at fault about many of its provisions. The government considers it as mere bluff on their part, and, rightly or wrongly, have stuck to the policy of absolute denial. I'm not so sure. There have been hints, indiscreet allusions, that seem to indicate that the menace is a real one. The position is much as though they had got hold of an incriminating document, but couldn't read it because it was in cipher—but we know that the draft treaty wasn't in cipher—couldn't be, in the nature of things—so that won't wash. But there's something. Of course, Jane Finn may be dead for all we know—but I don't think so. The curious thing is that they're trying to get information about the girl from us."

"What?"

"Yes. One or two little things have cropped up. And your story, little lady confirms my idea. They know we're looking for Jane Finn. Well, they'll produce a Jane Finn of their own—say at a pensionnat in Paris." Tuppence gasped, and Mr. Carter smiled. "No one knows in the least what she looks like, so that's all right. She's primed with a trumped-up tale, and her real business is to get as much information as possible out of us. See the idea?"

"Then you think"—Tuppence paused to grasp the supposition fully—"that it was as Jane Finn that they wanted me to go to Paris?"

Mr. Carter smiled more wearily than ever.

"I believe in coincidences, you know," he said.

CHAPTER III

Mr. Julius P. Hersheimmer.

Tommy indulged in a chuckle.

"My word! I don't wonder Whittington got the wind up when Tuppence plumped out that name! I should have myself. But look here, sir, we're taking up an awful lot of your time. Have you any tips to give us before we clear out?"

"I think not. I have information that the big coup was planned for early in the new year. But the government is contemplating legislative action which will deal effectually with the strike menace. They'll get wind of it soon, if they haven't already, and it's possible that that may bring things to a head. I hope it will, myself."

Tuppence rose.

"I think we ought to be businesslike. What exactly can we count upon you for, Mr. Carter?"

Mr. Carter's lips twitched slightly, but he replied succinctly:

"Funds within reason, detailed information on any point, and no official recognition. I mean that, if you get yourselves into trouble with the police, I can't officially help you out of it. You're on your own."

Tuppence nodded sagely. "I'm sure I don't want to be rude about the government if you've got anything to do with it, but you know one really has the devil of a time getting anything out of it! And if we have to fill up a blue form and send it in, and then, after three months, they send us a green one and so on—well that won't

"If You Get Yourself in Trouble With the Police, I Can't Officially Help You Out of It."

do much good, will it?"

Mr. Carter laughed outright.

"Don't worry, Miss Tuppence. You will send a personal demand to me here, and the money, in notes, shall be sent by return of post. As to salary, shall we say at the rate of three hundred a year? And an equal sum for Mr. Beresford, of course. Goodby, and good luck to you both."

He shook hands with them, and in another minute they were descending the steps of 27 Carshalton terrace with their heads in a whirl.

"Tommy! Tell me at once, who is 'Mr. Carter'?"

Tommy murmured a name in her ear.

"Oh!" said Tuppence, impressed.

"And I can tell you, old bean, he's IT!"

"Oh!" said Tuppence again. Then she added reflectively: "I like him, don't you? He looks so awfully tired and bored, and yet you feel that underneath he's just like steel, all keen and flashing. Oh!" She gave a skip. "Pinch me, Tommy, do pinch me. I can't believe it's real!"

Mr. Beresford obliged.

"Ow! That's enough! Yes, we're not dreaming. We've got a job!"

"And what a job! The joint venture has really begun. Let's have lunch—oh!"

The same thought sprang to the minds of each. Tommy voiced it first.

"Julius P. Hersheimmer!"

"We never told Mr. Carter about hearing from him."

"Well, there wasn't much to tell—not till we've seen him. Come on."

On inquiring for Mr. Hersheimmer, they were at once taken up to his suite. An impatient voice cried "Come in" in answer to the page-boy's knock, and the lad stood aside to let them pass in.

Mr. Julius P. Hersheimmer was a good deal younger than either Tommy or Tuppence had pictured him. The girl put him down as thirty-five. He was of middle height, and squarely built to match his jaw. His face was pugnacious but pleasant. No one could have mistaken him for anything but an American, though he spoke with very little accent.

"Get my note? Sit down and tell me right away all you know about my cousin."

"Your cousin?"

"Sure thing. Jane Finn."

"Is she your cousin?"

"My father and her mother were brother and sister," explained Mr. Hersheimmer meticulously.

"Oh!" cried Tuppence. "Then you know where she is?"

"No!" Mr. Hersheimmer brought down his fist with a bang on the table. "I'm darned if I do! Don't you?"

"We advertised to receive information, not to give it," said Tuppence severely.

But Mr. Hersheimmer seemed to grow suddenly suspicious.

"See here," he declared. "This isn't Sicily! No demanding ransom or threatening to crop her ears if I refuse. These are the British isles, so quit the funny business, or I'll just sing out for that beautiful big British policeman I see out there in Piccadilly."

Tommy hastened to explain.

"We haven't kidnaped your cousin. On the contrary, we're trying to find her. We're employed to do so."

Mr. Hersheimmer leant back in his chair.

"Put me wise," he said succinctly.

Tommy fell in with this demand in so far as he gave him a guarded version of the disappearance of Jane Finn, and of the possibility of her having been mixed up unawares in "some political show." He alluded to Tuppence and himself as "private inquiry agents" commissioned to find her, and added that they would therefore be glad of any details Mr. Hersheimmer could give them.

That gentleman nodded approval.

"I guess that's all right. I was just a mite hasty. Just trot out your questions and I'll answer."

For the moment this paralyzed the Young Adventurers, but Tuppence, recovering herself, plunged boldly into the breach with a reminiscence culled from detective fiction.

"When did you last see the dece—your cousin, I mean?"

"Never seen her," responded Mr. Hersheimmer.

"What?" demanded Tommy, astonished.

(Continued next week.)

Oregon produces only 52 per cent of her pork requirements. One of the questions to come before the livestock section of the agricultural economic conference at O. A. C. January 21 to 26 will be the determination of the extent to which pork production can be increased by better utilization of farm wastes.

THE STORM

(By Howard P. Cromwell)

In early morn the sky was clear,
The sun shone brightly far and near.
No sign of clouds was in the sky,
Although the air was cold and dry.
Very few hours had passed away
Till fleecy clouds began to play,
Up in the sky, around, about;
Just slowly moving in and out.
Then soon the wind begun to blow,
And later came the flakes of snow.
The storm now raged with doleful sound,
Snowflakes were hurled unto the ground;
They piled themselves in drifts so high,
That they hindered the passer by.
They hurried down that cold, dark night,
Till all the ground was dressed in white.
The landscape in the morning sun,
Was surely an attractive one,
In its new cloak, so very cold,
It was delightful to behold.
The shrubbery, trees, and mansions fair,
Sparkled and glistened everywhere.
No painter's skill could e'er portray
The beauties of that winter day.
The storm had wrought a change indeed,
It left the poor birds sore in need,
It stopped some work, for days and days,
And hindered traffic in many ways.
It spoiled the honest workman's plan,
But gave work to the idle man.
Merry skaters did laugh and sing,
While joyous bells were heard to ring.
So in this storm of silver frost,
It was not all a waste or loss.
Few, if any, were made more sad,
While as a rule most all were glad.
The change had really brought good cheer;
'Twas a bright spot in that good year.
So those few days of ice and snow,
Made all folks praise the sun's brigh glow.

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It's just fine. Don't stay stuffed-up with a cold or nasty catarrh.

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