



The Secret Adversary

by Agatha Christie

(Continued from last week.)

The German indicated the place he had been occupying at the head of the table. The Russian demurred, but the other insisted.

"It is the only possible place," he said, "for Number One. Perhaps Number Fourteen will shut the door!"

In another moment Tommy was again confronting bare wooden panels, and the voices within had sunk once more to a mere undistinguishable murmur. Tommy became restive. The conversation he had overheard had stimulated his curiosity. He felt that, by hook or by crook, he must hear more.

After listening intently for a minute or two, he put his head round the curtain. The passage was deserted. Tommy bent down and removed his shoes, then, leaving them behind the curtain, he walked gingerly out on his stockinged feet, and kneeling down by the closed door, he laid his ear cautiously to the crack. To his intense annoyance he could distinguish little more; just a chance word here and there if a voice was raised, which merely served to whet his curiosity still further.

He eyed the handle of the door tentatively. Could he turn it by degrees so gently and imperceptibly that those in the room would notice nothing? He decided that with great care it could be done. Very slowly, a fraction of an inch at a time, he moved it round, holding his breath in his excessive care. A little more—a little more still—would it never be finished? Ah! at last it would turn no farther.

He stayed so for a minute or two, then drew a deep breath, and pressed it over so slightly inward. The door did not budge. Tommy was annoyed. If he had to use too much force, it would almost certainly break. He waited until the voices rose a little, then he tried again. Still nothing happened. He increased the pressure. Had the beastly thing stuck? Finally, in desperation, he pushed with all his might. But the door remained firm, and at last the truth dawned upon him. It was locked or bolted on the inside.

For a moment or two Tommy's indignation got the better of him.

"Well, I'm d—d!" he said. "What a dirty trick!"

As his indignation cooled, he prepared to face the situation. Clearly the first thing to be done was to restore the handle to its original position. He let it go suddenly, the door inside would be almost certain to notice it, so, with the same infinite pains, he reversed his former tactics. All went well, and with a sigh of relief the young man rose to his feet. There was a certain bulldog tenacity about Tommy that made him slow to admit defeat. Checkmated for the moment, he was far from abandoning the conflict. He still intended to hear what was going on in the locked room. As one plan had failed, he must hunt about for another.

He looked round him. A little farther along the passage on the left was a second door. He slipped silently along to it. He listened for a moment or two, then tried the handle. It yielded, and he slipped inside.

The room, which was unadorned, was furnished as a bedroom. Like everything else in the house, the furniture was falling to pieces, and the dirt was, if anything, more abundant.

But what interested Tommy was the thing he had hoped to find, a communicating door between the two rooms, upon the left by the window. Carefully closing the door into the passage behind him, he stepped across to the other and examined it closely. The bolt was shot across it. It was very rusty, and had clearly not been used for some time. By gently wriggling it to and fro, Tommy managed to draw it back without making too much noise. Then he repeated his former maneuvers with the handle—this time with complete success. The door swung open—a crack, a mere fraction, but enough for Tommy to hear what went on. There was a velvet portiere on the inside of this door which prevented him from seeing, but he was able to recognize the voices with a reasonable amount of accuracy.

The Sinn Feiner was speaking. His rich Irish voice was unmistakable:

"That's all very well. But more money is essential. No money—no results!"

Another voice, which Tommy rather thought was that of Boris replied:

"Will you guarantee that there are results?"

"In a month from now—sooner or later as you wish—I will guarantee you such a reign of terror in Ireland as shall shake the British empire to its foundations."

There was a pause, and then came the soft, sibilant accents of Number One:

"Good! You shall have the money. Boris, you will see to that."

Boris asked a question:

"Via the Irish Americans, and Mr. Potter, as usual?"

"I guess that'll be all right!" said a new voice, with a transatlantic intonation, "though I'd like to point out, here and now, that things are getting a little difficult. There's not the sympathy there was, and a growing disposition to let the Irish settle their own affairs without interference from

America.

Tommy felt that Boris had shrugged his shoulders as he answered: "Does that matter, since the money only nominally comes from the States?"

"The chief difficulty is the handling of the ammunition," said the Sinn Feiner. "The money is conveyed in easily enough—thanks to our colleague here."

"That is settled, then," said the sibilant tones. "Now, in the matter of the loan to an English newspaper, you have arranged the details satisfactorily, Boris?"

"I think so."

"That is good. An official denial from Moscow will be forthcoming if necessary."

There was a pause, and then the clear voice of the German broke the silence:

"I am directed by—Mr. Brown, to place the summaries of the reports from the different unions before you. That of the miners is most satisfactory. We must hold back the railways. There may be trouble with the A. S. E."

For a long time there was a silence, broken only by the rustle of papers and an occasional word of explanation from the German. Then Tommy heard the light tap-tap of fingers drumming on the table.

"And—the date, my friend?" said Number One.

"The 29th."

The Russian seemed to consider.

"That is rather soon."

"I know. But it was settled by the principal Labor leaders, and we cannot seem to interfere too much. They must believe it to be entirely their own show."

The Russian laughed softly, as though amused.

"Yes, yes," he said. "That is true. They must have no inkling that we are using them for our own ends. They are honest men—and that is their value to us. It is curious—but you cannot make a solution without honest men. The instinct of the populace is infallible." He paused, and then repeated, as though the phrase pleased him: "Every revolution has had its honest men. They are soon disposed of afterward."

There was a sinister note in his voice.

The German resumed: "Clynes must go. He is too far-seeing. Number Fourteen will see to that."

There was a hoarse murmur.

"That's all right, governor." And then after a moment or two: "Suppose I'm nabbed?"

"You will have the best legal talent to defend you," replied the German quietly. "But in any case you will wear gloves fitted with the fingerprints of a notorious housebreaker. You have little to fear."

"Oh, I ain't afraid, gov'nor. All for the good of the cause. The streets is going to run with blood, so they say." He spoke with a grim relish. "Dreams of it, sometimes, I does. And diamonds and jew'ry rolling about in the gutter for anyone to pick up!"

Tommy heard a chair shifted. Then Number One spoke: "Then all is arranged. We are assured of success?"

"I think so." But the German spoke with less than his usual confidence.

Number One's voice held suddenly a dangerous quality:

"What has gone wrong?"

"Nothing; but—"

"But what?"

"The Labor leaders. Without them, as you say, we can do nothing. If they do not declare a general strike on the 29th—"

"Why should they not?"

"As you've said, they're honest. And, in spite of everything we've done to discredit the government in their eyes, I'm not sure that they haven't got a sneaking faith and belief in it."

"But—"

"I know. They abuse it unceasingly. But, on the whole, public opinion sways to the side of the government. They will not go against it."

Again the Russian's fingers drummed on the table.

"To the point, my friend. I was given to understand that there was a certain document in existence which assured success."

"That is so. If that document were placed before the leaders, the result would be immediate. They would publish it broadcast throughout England, and declare for the revolution without a moment's hesitation. The government would be broken finally and completely."

"Then what more do you want?"

"The document itself," said the German bluntly.

"Ah! It is not in your possession? But you know where it is?"

"No."

"Does anyone know where it is?"

"One person—perhaps. And we are not sure of that even."

"Who is that person?"

"A girl."

Tommy held his breath.

"A girl?" The Russian's voice rose contemptuously. "And you have not made her speak? In Russia we have ways of making a girl talk."

"This case is different," said the German sullenly.

"How—different?" He paused a moment, then went on: "Where is the girl now?"

"The girl?"

But Tommy heard no more. A crashing blow descended on his head, and all was darkness.

CHAPTER V

Tuppence enters domestic service.

When Tommy set forth on the trail of the two men, it took all Tuppence's self-command to refrain from accompanying him. However, she contained herself as best she might, consoled by the reflection that her reasoning had been justified by events. The two men had undoubtedly come from the second floor flat, and that one slender thread of the name "Rita" had set the Young Adventurers once more upon the track of the abductors of Jane Finn.

The question was what to do next? She retraced her steps to the entrance hall of the mansions. It was now tenanted by a small lift-boy, who was polishing brass fittings, and whistling the latest air with a good deal of vigor and a reasonable amount of accuracy.

He glanced round at Tuppence's entry. There was a certain amount of the gamine element in the girl; at all events, she invariably got on well with small boys.

"Well, William," she remarked cheerfully, in the best approved hospital-morning style, "getting a good shute up?"

The boy grinned responsively.

"Albert, miss," he corrected.

"Albert be it," said Tuppence. She glanced mysteriously round the hall. The effect was purposely a broad one in case Albert should miss it. She leaned toward the boy and dropped her voice: "I want a word with you, Albert."

Albert ceased operations on the fittings and opened his mouth slightly:

"Look! Do you know what this is?" With a dramatic gesture she flung back the left side of her coat and exposed a small enameled badge. It was extremely unlikely that Albert would have any knowledge of it—indeed, it would have been fatal for Tuppence's plans, since the badge in question was the device of a local corps originated by the archdeacon in the early days of the war. Its presence in Tuppence's coat was due to the fact that she had used it for planning in some flowers a day or two before. But Tuppence had sharp eyes, and had noted the corner of a three-penny detective novel protruding from Albert's pocket, and the immediate enlargement of his eyes told her that her tactics were good, and that the fish would rise to the bait.

"American detective force!" she hissed.

Albert fell for it.

"Lord!" he murmured ecstatically.

Tuppence nodded at him with the air of one who has established a thorough understanding.

"Know who I'm after?" she inquired gently.

Albert, still round-eyed, jerked breathlessly: "One of the flats?"

Tuppence nodded and demanded a thumb up the stairs.

"No. 20. Call herself Vandemeyer."

Vandemeyer! Ha! ha!

Albert's hand stole to his pocket.

"A crook?" he queried eagerly.

"A crook! I should say so. Ready Rita, they call her in the States."

"Ready Rita," repeated Albert delightedly. "Oh, ain't it just like the pictures! Annie always said as how she was a bad lot."

"Who's Annie?" inquired Tuppence idly.

"'Ouse parlourmaid. She's leaving today. Mark's the time Annie's said to me: 'Mark my words, Albert, I wouldn't wonder if the police was to come after her one of these days.' Just like that. But she's a stunner to look at, ain't she?"

"She's some peach," allowed Tuppence carelessly. "Finds it useful in her layout, you bet! Has been wearing any of the emeralds, by the way?"

"Emeralds? Them's the green stones, ain't they?"

Tuppence nodded.

"That's what we're after her for. You know old man Ryedale, the oil king?"

"It seems sort of familiar to me."

"The sparklers belonged to him. Finest collection of emeralds in the world. Worth a million dollars!"

"Tammie!" came ecstatically from Albert. "It sounds more like the pictures every minute."

(Continued next week.)

You, and each of you, are hereby notified and will take notice that the following described personal property, to-wit: Apperson, Chummy Roadster, Automobile, License No. 14417 for the year 1923, Motor No. 14173, Model 1915, was seized by the sheriff of Washington County, Oregon, on the 11th day of December, 1923, in the County of Washington, State of Oregon, in the vicinity of North Station, near Garden Home, in said county; that said Automobile, ever since has been, and now is, in the possession and custody of said sheriff of Washington County, Oregon, and is being proceeded against in the above entitled Court for the forfeiture of the same for a violation of Chapter 29 of the General Laws of Oregon for 1923, the same being an act relating to the forfeiture and sale of boats, vehicles and other conveyances used in the unlawful transportation or possession of intoxicating liquor within the State of Oregon; and that all persons having or claiming any interest in said Automobile are hereby notified to appear before the above entitled Court in the County Court House of Washington County, Oregon, at Hillsboro, Oregon, by Monday, the 18th day of February, 1924, which said day has heretofore been duly set by the above entitled Court as an answer day herein, and to defend against said proceedings, and that upon their failure to do, a judgment of forfeiture of said Automobile will be entered.

This notice is issued and given to you and each of you, pursuant to an order duly made by Hon. Geo. H. Bagley, presiding Judge of the above entitled Court, on the 15th day of January, 1924.

Witness my hand and the seal of said Court affixed at Hillsboro, Washington County, Oregon, this 15th day of January, 1924.

e 8-10 Deputy,
H. A. Kurath,
County Clerk.

(Seal) By Edw. C. Lane,
e 8-10 Deputy.

In the Circuit Court of the State of Oregon, for the County of Washington.

State of Oregon.

Maxwell Touring Automobile, Motor No. 232295, Model 1922, Oregon License No. 16229, for the year 1923, is hereby notified that said Automobile is being proceeded against in the above entitled Court for the forfeiture of the same for a violation of Chapter 29 of the General Laws of Oregon for 1923, the same being an act relating to the forfeiture and sale of boats, vehicles and other conveyances used in the unlawful transportation or possession of intoxicating liquor within the State of Oregon; and that all persons having or claiming any interest in said Automobile are hereby notified to appear before the above entitled Court in the County Court House of Washington County, Oregon, at Hillsboro, Oregon, by Monday, the 18th day of February, 1924, which said day has heretofore been duly set by the above entitled Court as an answer day herein, and to defend against said proceedings, and that upon their failure to do, a judgment of forfeiture of said Automobile will be entered.

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e 8-10 Deputy.

"Do Rats Talk to Each Other?" Asks Mr. M. Batty, R. I.

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