The Secret Adversary

by Agatha Christie

(Continued from last week.)

Tuppence walked briskly along towards the Serpentine, first glancing at her watch. It was nearly six o'clock. She remembered that she had had no tea, but felt too excited to be conscious of hunger. She walked as far as Kensington gardens and then slowly retraced her steps, feeling infinitely better for the fresh air and exercise. It was not so easy to follow Sir James' advice, and put the possible events of the evening out of her head. As she drew nearer and nearer to Hyde park corner, the temptation to return to South Audley mansions was almost irresistible.

At any rate, she decided, it would do no harm just to go and look at the building. Perhaps, then, she could resign herself to waiting patiently for ten o'clock.

South Audley mansions looked exactly the same as usual. What Tuppence had expected she hardly knew, but the sight of its red brick stolidity slightly assuaged the growing and entirely unreasonable uneasiness that possessed her. She was just turning away when she heard a piercing whistle, and the faithful Albert came running from the building to join her. He was purple with suppressed excitement.

"I say, miss, she's a-going!"

"Who's going?" demanded Tuppence sharply.

"The crook. Ready Rita. Mrs. Vandemeyer. She's a-packing up, and she's just sent down word for me to get her a taxi. I thought maybe as you didn't know about it."

"Albert," cried Tuppence, "you're a brick. If it hadn't been for you we'd have lost her."

Albert flushed with pleasure at this tribute.

"There's no time to lose," said Tuppence, crossing the road. "I've got to stop her. At all costs I must keep her here until—" She broke off. "Albert, there's a telephone here, isn't there?"

The boy shook his head.

"The flats mostly have their own, miss. But there's a box just around the corner."

"Go to it, then, at once and ring up the Ritz hotel. Ask for Mr. Herschheimer, and when you get him tell him to get Sir James and come on at once, as Mrs. Vandemeyer is trying to book it. If you can't get him, ring up Sir James Peel Ellgerton, you'll find his number in the book, and tell him what's happe. g. You won't forget the names, will you?"

Albert repeated them glibly. "You trust to me, miss, it'll be all right. But what about you? Aren't you afraid to trust yourself with her?"

"No, no, that's all right. But go and telephone. Be quick."

Drawing a long breath, Tuppence entered the mansions and ran up to the door of No. 20. How she was to detain Mrs. Vandemeyer until the two men arrived, she did not know, but somehow or other it had to be done, and she must accomplish the task single-handed. What had occasioned this precipitate departure? Did Mrs. Vandemeyer suspect her?

Tuppence pressed the bell firmly. She might learn something from the cook.

Nothing happened, and, after waiting some minutes, Tuppence pressed the bell again, keeping her finger on the button for some little while. At last she heard footsteps inside, and a moment later Mrs. Vandemeyer herself opened the door. She lifted her eyebrows at the sight of the girl.

"You?"

"I had a touch of toothache, ma'am," said Tuppence glibly. "So thought it better to come home and have a quiet evening."

Mrs. Vandemeyer said nothing, but she drew back and let Tuppence pass into the hall.

"How unfortunate for you," she said coldly. "You had better go to bed."

"Oh, I shall be all right in the kitchen, ma'am. Cook can—"

"Cook is out," said Mrs. Vandemeyer, in a rather disagreeable tone. "I sent her out. So you see you had better go to bed."

Suddenly Tuppence felt afraid. There was a ring in Mrs. Vandemeyer's voice that she did not like at all. Also, the other woman was slowly edging her up the passage. Tuppence turned at bay.

"I don't want—"

Then, in a flash, a rim of cold steel touched her temple, and Mrs. Vandemeyer's voice rose cold and menacing:

"You d—d little fool! Do you think I don't know? No, don't answer. If you struggle or cry out, I'll shoot you like a dog."

The rim of steel pressed a little harder against the girl's temple.

"Now then, march," went on Mrs. Vandemeyer. "This way—into my room. In a minute, when I've done with you, you'll go to bed as I told you to. And you'll sleep—oh, yes, my little spy, you'll sleep, all right."

There was a sort of hideous geniality in the husky voice which Tuppence did not at all like. For the moment there was nothing to be done, and she walked obediently into Mrs. Vandemeyer's bedroom. The pistol never left her forehead. The room was in a state of wild disorder, clothes were flung about right and left, a suit case and a bathbox, half-packed, stood in the middle of the floor.

Tuppence pulled herself together with an effort. "Come, now," she said. "This is nonsense. You can't shoot me. Why everyone in the building would hear the report."

"I'd risk that," said Mrs. Vandemeyer cheerfully. "But, as long as you don't sing out for help, you're all right—and I don't think you will. You're a clever girl. You deceived me, all right. I hadn't a suspicion of you! So I've no doubt that you understand perfectly well that this is where I'm on top and you're underneath. Now, then—sit on the bed. Put your hands above your head, and if you value your life don't move them."

Tuppence obeyed passively. Her good sense told her that there was nothing else to do but accept the situation, and every minute of delay gained was valuable.

Mrs. Vandemeyer laid down the revolver on the edge of the washstand within reach of her hand, and, still eyeing Tuppence like a lynx in case the girl should attempt to move, she took a little stoppered bottle from its place on the mantle and poured some of its contents into a glass which she filled up with water.

"What's that?" asked Tuppence sharply.

"Something to make you sleep soundly."

Tuppence paled a little.

"Are you going to poison me?" she asked in a whisper.

"Perhaps," said Mrs. Vandemeyer, smiling agreeably.

"Then I shan't drink it," said Tuppence firmly. "I'd much rather be shot. At any rate, that would make a row, and someone might hear it. But I won't be killed off quietly like a lamb."

"Don't be a little fool! Do you really think I want a hue and cry for murder out after me? It's a sleeping draft, that's all. You'll wake up to-morrow morning none the worse. I simply don't want the bother of tying you up and gagging you. That's the alternative—and you won't like it, I can tell you! I can be very rough if I choose. So drink this down like a good girl, and you'll be none the worse for it."

In her heart of hearts Tuppence believed her. The arguments she had adduced rang true. It was a simple and effective method of getting her out of the way for the time being. Nevertheless, the girl did not take kindly to the idea of being tamely put to sleep without as much as one bid for freedom. She felt that once Mrs. Vandemeyer gave them the slip, the last hope of finding Tommy would be gone.

Tuppence was quick in her mental processes. All these reflections passed through her mind in a flash, and she saw where a chance, a very problematical chance, lay, and she determined to risk all in one supreme effort.

Accordingly, she lurched suddenly off the bed and fell on her knees before Mrs. Vandemeyer, clutching her skirts frantically.

"I don't believe it," she moaned. "It's poison—I know it's poison. Oh, don't make me drink it"—her voice rose to a shriek—"don't make me drink it!"

Mrs. Vandemeyer, glass in hand, looked down with a curling lip at this sudden collapse.

"I Don't Believe It," She Moaned; "It's Poison."

"Get up, you little idiot! Don't go on driveling there. How you ever had the nerve to play your part as you did I can't think." She stamped her foot. "Get up, I say."

But Tuppence continued to cling and sob, interjecting her sobs with incoherent appeals for mercy. Every minute gained was to the good. Moreover, as she grovelled, she moved imperceptibly nearer to her objective.

Mrs. Vandemeyer gave a sharp impatient exclamation, and jerked the girl to her knees.

"Drink it at once!" Imperiously she pressed the glass to the girl's lips.

Tuppence gave one last despairing moan.

In a Flash the Cold Steel Touched Her Temple.

"You swear it won't hurt me?" she temporized.

"Yes, yes," said the other impatiently. "I swear it."

Tuppence raised a trembling left hand to the glass.

"Very well." Her mouth opened meekly.

Mrs. Vandemeyer gave a sigh of relief, off her guard for the moment. Then, quick as a flash, Tuppence jerked the glass upward as hard as she could. The fluid in it splashed into Mrs. Vandemeyer's face, and during her momentary gasp, Tuppence's right hand shot out and grasped the revolver where it lay on the edge of the washstand. The next moment she had sprung back a pace, and the revolver pointed straight at Mrs. Vandemeyer's heart, with no unsteadiness in the hand that held it.

In the moment of victory, Tuppence betrayed a somewhat unsportsmanlike triumph.

"Now who's on top and who's underneath?" she crowed.

The other's face was convulsed with rage. For a minute Tuppence thought she was going to spring upon her, which would have placed the girl in an unpleasant dilemma, since she meant to draw the line at actually letting off the revolver. However, with an effort Mrs. Vandemeyer controlled herself, and at last a slow evil smile crept over her face.

"Not a fool, then, after all! You did that well, girl. But you shall pay for it—oh, yes, you shall pay for it! I have a long memory!"

"I'm surprised you should have been gulled so easily," said Tuppence scornfully. "Did you really think I was the kind of girl to roll about on the floor and whine for mercy?"

"You may—some day!" said the other significantly.

The cold malignity of her manner sent an unpleasant chill down Tuppence's spine, but she was not going to give in to it.

"Supposing we sit down," she said pleasantly. "Our present attitude is a little melodramatic. Now, let's talk."

"What about?" said Mrs. Vandemeyer sullenly.

Tuppence eyed her thoughtfully for a minute. She was remembering several things. Boris' words, "I believe you would sell—us!" and her answer, "The price would have to be enormous." given lightly, it was true, yet might not there be a stubborn substratum of truth in it? Long ago, had not Whittington asked: "Who's been blabbing? Rita?" Would Rita Vandemeyer prove to be the weak spot in the armor of Mr. Brown?

Keeping her eyes fixed steadily on the other's face, Tuppence replied quietly:

"Money—"

Mrs. Vandemeyer started. Clearly, the reply was unexpected.

"What do you mean?"

"I'll tell you. You said just now that you had a long memory. A long memory isn't half as useful as a long purse! Revenge is very unsatisfactory. Every one always says so. But money—well, there's nothing unsatisfactory about money, is there?"

"Do you think," said Mrs. Vandemeyer scornfully, "that I am the kind of woman to sell my friends?"

"Yes," said Tuppence promptly. "If the price was big enough. I should suggest—a hundred thousand pounds."

Her economical spirit did not permit her to mention the whole million dollars suggested by Julius.

A flush crept over Mrs. Vandemeyer's face.

"What did you say?" she asked, her fingers playing nervously with a brooch on her breast. In that moment Tuppence knew that the fish was hooked.

"A hundred thousand pounds," repeated Tuppence.

The light died out of Mrs. Vandemeyer's eyes. She leaned back in her chair.

"Bah!" she said. "You haven't got it."

"No," admitted Tuppence, "I haven't—but I know some one who has."

"Must be a millionaire," remarked Mrs. Vandemeyer unbelievingly.

"As a matter of fact he is. He's an American. He'll pay you that without a murmur. You can take it from me that it's a perfectly genuine proposition."

Mrs. Vandemeyer sat up again.

"I'm inclined to believe you," she said slowly. "What does he want to know, this friend of yours?"

Tuppence went through a momentary struggle, but it was Julius' money, and his interests must come first.

"He wants to know where Jane Finn is," she said boldly.

Mrs. Vandemeyer showed no surprise. "I'm not sure where she is at the present moment," she replied.

"But you could find out?"

"Oh, yes," returned Mrs. Vandemeyer carelessly. "There would be no difficulty about that."

"Then"—Tuppence's voice shook a little—"there's a boy, a friend of mine, I'm afraid something's happened to him, through your pal Boris."

"What's his name?"

(Continued next week.)

SUMMONS

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

L. G. Wiedewitsch and Bertha Wiedewitsch, his wife,
Plaintiffs,
vs
F. W. Phillips and Carrie Phillips, his wife, Melissa J. Jackson, Millie Shearer and W. B. Shearer, her husband, Ellen Vickers and Grafton Vickers, her husband, Alice E. Flood, George W. Phillips and Anna Phillips, his wife, Charles W. Phillips, E. A. Ives, Rosa Caughtry and Robert Caughtry, her husband, Lulu Stewart and George Stewart, her husband, Herbert Smith, and Clara Smith, his wife, Nettie Williams and Charles Williams, her husband, Vivian Tompkins and Robert Tompkins, her husband, Ray Smith and Agnes Smith, his wife, Benjamin Hall, Willis Hall, Carrol Hall, Mildred Hall, Clara Loveland and —— Loveland, her husband, Mary Sanders and George W. Sanders, her husband, W. D. Phillips, Emma J. Patton and William Patton, her husband, A. L. Thomas and —— Thomas, his wife,
Defendants.

To Clara Loveland and —— Loveland, her husband, George W. Phillips and Anna Phillips, his wife, of the above named defendants:

In the name of the State of Oregon, you and each of you are hereby required to appear and answer the complaint filed against you in the above entitled court and cause on or before the last day of the time prescribed in the order for publication of this summons, to-wit:

On or before the expiration of six weeks next from and after the date of first publication of this summons, the date of said first publication thereof being on Feb. 15, 1924, and set forth by way of answer any claim you may have to the real property hereinafter described, and if you fail so to appear and answer said complaint for want thereof the plaintiffs will apply to the Court for the relief prayed for in their said complaint, to-wit:

First: For a decree that that certain deed of conveyance executed and delivered on or about June 3, 1903, by D. T. Phillips and Martha Phillips, his wife, and F. W. Phillips to Emma J. Patton, and recorded on or about Oct. 4, 1905 in Book 71 at page 68 thereof, Records of Deeds for Washington County, Oregon, be reformed and corrected so as to express the true intentions and contract of the parties thereto, prior to and on the date of said execution and delivery of said deed as aforesaid, by describing the real estate therein conveyed to Emma J. Patton as being situated in Washington County, State of Oregon and more particularly described and bounded as follows, to-wit:

Beginning at a point 51 7-35 rods south, 89 degrees, 07 minutes, 30 seconds east and 1560.60 feet north, 0 degrees, 25 minutes east of the southwest corner of the William Mella D. L. C. No. 40 in township one south of range three west of the Willamette Meridian and running thence south 89 degrees, 07 minutes, 30 seconds, east 14 chains; thence north, 0 degrees, 25 minutes, east 7.875 chains to the south line of the Southern Pacific right of way; thence following the south line of said right of way north 89 degrees, 12 minutes, west 14 chains, more or less, to a point due north of the place of beginning; thence south to the place of beginning, containing 10 1-2 acres, more or less;

Also commencing in the center of the Base Line Road at the northwest corner of the land formerly owned by O. L. Deans in said Donation land Claim, deed for which want is recorded in Vol. 63 of Deeds, page 61; thence south about 8 1-2 rods to the right of way of the Southern Pacific railroad; thence west about 31 1-2 rods, to the southeast corner of a tract of land formerly owned by Henry Weinhard; thence north about 8 1-2 rods to the center of the Base Line Road; thence east 31 1-2 rods, more or less to the place of beginning, containing 1 1-2 acres, more or less, in Washington County, Oregon,

and that said deed be decreed to be a deed and to have conveyed from said D. T. Phillips and Martha Phillips, his wife, and F. W. Phillips to said Emma J. Patton all the land last above described.

Second: For a decree that that certain deed of conveyance executed and delivered on or about Jan. 28, 1907, by Emma J. Patton and William Patton, her husband, to Bertha Wiedewitsch, and recorded on or about May 22, 1907, in Book 76 at page 177 thereof, Records of Deeds for Washington County, Oregon, be reformed and corrected so as to express the true intentions and contract of the parties thereto prior to and on the date of said execution and delivery of said deed as aforesaid, by describing the real estate therein conveyed to Bertha Wiedewitsch, as above described, and that said deed be decreed to be a deed to and to have conveyed from said Emma J. Patton and William Patton, her husband to said Bertha Wiedewitsch, all the land above described.

Third: For a decree that that certain deed of conveyance executed and delivered on or about March 13, 1909, by Bertha Wiedewitsch and L. G. Wiedewitsch, her husband, to A. L. Thomas, and recorded on or about Dec. 12, 1910, in Book 91 at page 341 thereof, Records of Deeds for Washington County, Oregon, be reformed and corrected so as to express the true intentions and contract of the parties thereto, prior to and on the date of said execution and delivery of said deed as aforesaid, by describing the real estate therein conveyed to A. L. Thomas, as above described, and that said deed be decreed to be a deed to and to have conveyed from said Bertha Wiedewitsch and L. G. Wiedewitsch, her husband, to said A. L. Thomas, all the land above described.

Fourth: For a decree that that certain deed of conveyance executed and delivered on or about March 13, 1909, by A. L. Thomas to L. G. Wiedewitsch and Bertha Wiedewitsch, his wife, and recorded on or about Dec. 12, 1910, in Book 91 at page 341 thereof, Records of Deeds for Washington County, Oregon, be reformed and corrected so as to express the true intentions and contract of the parties thereto, prior to and on the date of said execution and delivery of said deed as aforesaid, by describing the real estate therein conveyed to L. G. Wiedewitsch and Bertha Wiedewitsch, his wife, as above described, and that said deed be decreed to be a deed to and to have conveyed from said A. L. Thomas to said L. G. Wiedewitsch and Bertha Wiedewitsch, his wife, all the land above described.

Fifth: For a decree adjudging and decreeing plaintiffs herein to be the absolute owners in fee simple of all of said real estate above described, and that the title of plaintiffs to said property be absolutely quieted and that it be decreed that you, and each of you, and all persons claiming by, through or under you or either of you be forever barred and precluded from claiming or attempting to assert, any interest, right, title, claim or lien, in, to or upon said premises or any part or parcel thereof adverse to the title of plaintiffs therein and thereto; and that plaintiffs have such other and further relief as to the Court may seem just and equitable.

This summons is served upon you by publication in The Beaverton Review by order of Hon. George R. Bennett, Judge of the above entitled Court, which order was made and dated Feb. 8, 1924, at Hillsboro, Oregon.

M. B. Bump,
Attorney for Plaintiff.
M. B. Bump, Residence and Post Office address, Hillsboro, Oregon.
Adv. C 11-17

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