



The Secret Adversary

by Agatha Christie

(Continued from last week.)

seeing his two pursuers, of whom the German was one, industriously tracking him down the red herring.

Tommy sat down quietly on the doorstep and allowed a few moments to elapse while he recovered his breath. Then he strolled gently in the opposite direction. He glanced at his watch. It was a little after half-past five. It was rapidly growing light.

He betook himself to a Turkish bath establishment which he knew to be open all night. He emerged into the busy daylight feeling himself once more, and able to make plans.

First of all, he must have a square meal. He had eaten nothing since midday yesterday. He turned into a shop and ordered eggs and bacon and coffee. Whilst he ate, he read a morning paper propped up in front of him. Suddenly he stiffened. There was a long article on Kramenka, who was described as the "man behind Bolshevikism" in Russia, and who had just arrived in London—some thought as an unofficial envoy.

In the center of the page was his portrait.

"So that's who Number 1 is," said Tommy. "Not a doubt about it; I must push on."

He paid for his breakfast, and he took himself to Whitehall. There he sent up his name, and the message that it was urgent. A few minutes later he was in the presence of the man who did not here go by the name of "Mr. Carter."

And as briefly and succinctly as possible he detailed the experiences of the last few days.

Half-way through, Mr. Carter interrupted him to give a few cryptic orders through the telephone. All traces of displeasure had now left his face. He nodded energetically when Tommy had finished.

"Quite right. Every moment's of value. Fear we shall be too late any day. They wouldn't wait. Would clear out at once. Still, they may have left something behind them that will be a clue. You say you've recognized Number 1 to be Kramenka? That's important. He handed a photograph to Tommy, and smiled at the other's exclamation. "I'm right, then. Who is he? Irishman. Troublesome. Unpleasant M.P. All a blind, of course. We've suspected it—but couldn't get any proof. Yes, you've done very well, young man. The 29th, you say. Is the date. That gives us very little time—very little time indeed."

"But—" Tommy hesitated.

Mr. Carter read his thoughts.

"We can deal with the general strike menace, I think. It's a toss-up—but we've got a sporting chance! But if that draft treaty turns up—we're done, England will be plunged in anarchy. Ah, what's that? The car? Come on, Beresford, we'll go and have a look at this house of yours."

Two constables were on duty in front of the house in Soho. An inspector reported to Mr. Carter in a low voice. The latter turned to Tommy.

"The birds have flown—as we thought. We might as well go over it."

Going over the deserted house seemed to Tommy to partake of the character of a dream. Everything was just as it had been. The prison room with the crooked pictures, the broken jug in the attic, the meeting room with its long table, but nowhere was there a trace of papers. Everything of that kind had either been destroyed or taken away. And there was no sign of Annette.

"What you tell me about the girl puzzles me," said Mr. Carter. "You believe that she deliberately went back?"

"It would seem so, sir. She ran upstairs while I was getting the door open."

"I'm, she must belong to the gang, then; but being a woman, didn't feel like standing by to see a personable young man killed. But evidently she's in with them, or she wouldn't have gone back."

"I can't believe she's really one of them, sir. She seemed so different."

"Good-looking, I suppose?" said Mr. Carter with a smile that made Tommy flush to the roots of his hair. He admitted Annette's beauty rather shamefacedly.

"By the way," observed Mr. Carter. "Have you shown yourself to Miss Tuppence yet? She's been bombarding me with letters about you."

"Tuppence? I was afraid she might get a bit rattled. Did she go to the police?"

Mr. Carter shook his head.

"Then I wonder how they twiggled me."

Mr. Carter looked inquiringly at him, and Tommy explained. The other nodded thoughtfully.

"True, that's rather a curious point. Unless the mention of the Ritz was an accidental remark?"

"It might have been, sir. But they must have found out about me suddenly in some way."

"Well," said Mr. Carter, looking round him, "there's nothing more to be done here. Good-by. Remember you're a married man now, and take reasonable care of yourself."

"Thank you, sir," Tommy stepped in, and was swiftly borne to the Ritz, dwelling the while on the

pleasurable anticipation of starting Tuppence, but his enthusiasm received a check. He was informed that Miss Cowley had gone out a quarter of an hour ago.

CHAPTER XI

The Telegram.

Rattled for the moment, Tommy stroffled into the restaurant, and ordered a meal of surpassing excellence. His four days' imprisonment had taught him anew to value good food.

He was in the middle of conveying a particularly choice morsel to his mouth, when he caught sight of Julius entering the room. At the sight of Tommy, Julius' eyes seemed as though they would pop out of his head.

"Holy snakes!" he ejaculated. "Is it really you? Say, man, don't you know you've been given up for dead? I guess we'd have had a solemn requiem for you in another few days."

"Who thought I was dead?" demanded Tommy.

"Tuppence."

"Where is Tuppence?"

"Isn't she here?"

"No, the fellows at the office said she'd just gone out."

"Gone shopping, I guess. But, say, can't you shoot that British colon of yours, and get down to it? What on God's earth have you been doing all this time?"

"If you're feeding here," replied Tommy, "order now. It's going to be a long story."

Julius drew up a chair to the opposite side of the table, summoned a hovering waiter, and dictated his wishes. Then he turned to Tommy.

"Fire ahead, I guess you've had some few adventures."

"One or two," replied Tommy modestly, and plunged into his recital. Julius listened spell-bound. At the end he heaved a long sigh.

"Bully for you. Reads like a dime novel!"

He, in his turn, assumed the role of narrator. Beginning with his unsuccessful reconnoitering at Bourne-mouth, he passed on to his return to London, the buying of the car, the growing anxieties of Tuppence, the call upon Sir James, and the sensational occurrences of the previous night.

"But who killed her?" asked Tommy. "I don't quite understand."

"The doctor kidded himself she took it herself," replied Julius dryly.

"And Sir James? What did he think?"

"Being a legal luminary, he is likewise a human oyster," replied Julius. "I should say he reserved judgment."

"He went on to detail the events of the morning."

"Lost her memory, eh?" said Tommy with interest. "By Jove, that explains why they looked at me so queerly when I spoke of questioning her. Bit of a slip on my part, that! But it wasn't the sort of thing a fellow would be likely to guess."

There was a moment's pause, and then Tommy reverted to Mrs. Vandemeyer's death.

"There's no doubt it was chloral! Let's go round to the scene of the crime. I wish we could get hold of Tuppence. The Ritz would enjoy the spectacle of the glad reunion."

Inquiry at the office revealed the fact that Tuppence had not yet returned.

"All the same, I guess I'll have a look round upstairs," said Julius. "She might be in my sitting-room."

He disappeared.

Suddenly a diminutive boy spoke at Tommy's elbow.

"The young lady—she's gone away by train, I think, sir," he murmured shyly.

"What?" Tommy wheeled round upon him.

"The taxi, sir. I heard her tell the

driver Charing Cross and to look sharp."

Tommy stared at him, his eyes opening wide in surprise. Emboldened, the small boy proceeded. "So I thought, having asked for an A.B.C. and a Bradshaw—"

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"I heard her tell the driver Charing Cross and to look sharp."

Tommy interrupted him: "When did she ask for an A.B.C. and a Bradshaw?"

"When I took her the telegram, sir."

"A telegram?"

"Yes, sir."

"When was that?"

"About half-past twelve, sir."

At that moment Julius came back. He held an open letter in his hand.

"I say, Hershimmer—Tommy turned to him—Tuppence has gone off clutching her own."

"Shucks!"

"Yes, she has. She went off in a taxi to Charing Cross in the deuce of a hurry after getting a telegram."

His eye fell on the letter in Julius' hand. "Oh; she left a note for you. That's all right. Where's she off to?"

Almost unconsciously, he held out his hand for the letter, but Julius folded it up and placed it in his pocket. He seemed a trifle embarrassed.

"I guess this is nothing to do with it. It's about something else—something I asked her that she was to let me know about. See here, I'd better put you wise. I asked Miss Tuppence to marry me this morning."

"Oh!" said Tommy mechanically. He felt dumb. Julius' words were totally unexpected. For the moment they benumbed his brain.

"I'd like to tell you," continued Julius, "that before I suggested anything of the kind to Miss Tuppence, I made it clear that I didn't want to butt in in any way between her and you."

Tommy roused himself.

"That's all right," he said quickly. "Tuppence and I have been pals for years. Nothing more."

He lit a cigarette with a hand that shook ever so little. "That's quite all right. Tuppence always said that she was looking out for—"

He stopped abruptly, his face crimsoning, but Julius was in no way discomposed.

"Oh, I guess it'll be the dollars that'll do the trick. Miss Tuppence put me wise to that right away. There's no humbug about her. We ought to go along together very well."

Tommy looked at him curiously for a minute, as though he were about to speak, then changed his mind and said nothing. Tuppence and Julius! Well, why not? Had she not lamented the fact that she knew no rich men? Had she not openly avowed her intention of marrying for money if she ever had the chance? Why blame her because she had been true to her creed?

Nevertheless, Tommy did blame her. He was filled with a passionate and utterly illogical resentment. Tuppence was utterly cold-blooded and selfish, and he would be delighted if he never saw her again! And it was a rotten world!

Julius' voice broke in on these meditations.

"Yes, we ought to go along together very well. I've heard that a girl always refuses you once—a sort of convention."

Tommy caught his arm.

"Refuse? Did you say refuse?"

"Sure thing. Didn't I tell you that? She just rapped out a 'no' without any kind of reason to it. But she'll come round right enough. Likely enough, I hustled her some—"

But Tommy interrupted regardless of decorum.

"What did she say in that note?" he demanded fiercely.

The obliging Julius handed it to him. The note, in Tuppence's well-known schoolboy writing, ran as follows:

"Dear Julius:

"It's always better to have things in black and white. I don't feel I can be bothered to think of marriage until Tommy is found. Let's leave it till then."

"Yours affectionately,"

"TUPPENCE."

Tommy handed it back, his eyes shining. His feelings had undergone a sharp reaction. He now felt that Tuppence was all that was noble and disinterested. Had she not refused Julius without hesitation? True, the note betokened signs of weakening, but he could excuse that. It read almost like a bribe to Julius to spur him on in his efforts to find Tommy, but he supposed she had not really meant it that way. Darling Tuppence, there was not a girl in the world to touch her! When he saw her—His thoughts were brought up with a sudden jerk.

"As you say," he remarked, pulling himself together, "there's not a hint here as to what she's up to. Hi—Hoey!"

The small boy came obediently.

"One thing more. Do you remember what the young lady did with the telegram?"

Henry gasped and spoke.

"She crumpled it up into a ball and threw it into the grate, and made a sort of noise like 'Whoop!' sir."

They hurried upstairs. Tuppence had left the key in her door. The room was as she had left it. In the fireplace was a crumpled ball of orange and white. Tommy disentangled and smoothed out the telegram.

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(Continued next week.)

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Oyster Soup—One quart rich milk, one-third quart water, butler the size of an egg, a little cream if you have it. Add one can of oysters and cook until they ruffle, which they will do after boiling less than one minute.

Corn Omelet—One dozen ears of corn scraped from the cob (or its equivalent in canned corn), four eggs, the yolks and the whites beaten separately, one large tablespoonful of flour, and not quite a pint of milk. Beat all thoroughly together excepting the whites of the eggs, and stir them in lightly at the last. Season well with salt and pepper, pour into a baking dish and put bits of butter over the top. Bake twenty minutes.

Stewed Potatoes—Slice the potatoes; put them in a frying pan in which a spoonful of butter or dripping and a sliced onion are sizzling; add a cup of hot water, season with salt and pepper, cover tight, cook over a hot fire. Will be done in fifteen minutes.

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Beef Loaf—Two pounds beef-steak, one-half pound suet that is chopped fine, salt, pepper and a little sage. Line a deep pan with biscuit dough, put in a layer of beef with small scraps of dough, till the pan is filled. Moisten with water; cover with dough, and bake two hours in a slow oven. To be eaten cold.

Ham On Potatoes—Chop bits of cold broiled or boiled ham very fine. Cut cold boiled potatoes into thick even slices and fry until they are nicely browned on both sides; lay on a hot platter and season with salt, pepper, and bits of butter. On each slice sprinkle a little of the chopped ham, and set into the oven for a moment to heat through.

Cabbage Salad—One small head cabbage, one bunch of celery chopped fine; boil three eggs hard, chop the whites, and beat the yolks to a cream with one-half cup of butter; add one teaspoonful each of salt, pepper and mustard; boil one cup vinegar and stir in quickly. Turn over the cabbage when cold.

Corn Pancakes—Use either canned corn, or in the season cold boiled corn. Chop the corn fine and to every cupful allow two eggs beaten, two tablespoonfuls sweet milk and one tablespoonful melted butter, two of flour, or enough to hold the mixture together, and a pinch of salt. Fry on a griddle as other pancakes. Eat hot with syrup.

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