



The Secret Adversary

by Agatha Christie

(Continued from last week.)

"They look each other in stupefaction. Julius spoke first: 'I guess it means the worst. They've got her.'"

"What?"

"Sure thing! They signed your name, and she fell into the trap like a lamb."

"My G-d! What shall we do?"

"Get busy, and go after her! Right now! There's no time to waste. It's a mighty luck that she didn't take the wire with her. If she had we'd probably never have traced her. But we've got to hustle. Where's that Bradshaw?"

The energy of Julius was infectious. Left to himself, Tommy would probably have sat down to think things out for a good half hour before he decided on a plan of action. But with Julius Herschimmer about, bustling was inevitable.

"Here we are. Ebury, Yorks. From King's Cross. Or St. Pancras. (Boy must have made a mistake. It was King's Cross, not Charing Cross) 12:50, that's the train she went by. 2:10, that's gone. 3:30 is the next."

"I say, Julius, what do they want her for, anyway?"

"Eh? I don't get you?"

"What I mean is that I don't think it's their game to do her any harm," explained Tommy, puckering his brow with the strain of his mental processes. "She's a hostage, that's what she is. As long as they've got her, they've got the whip hand on us. See?"

"Sure thing," said Julius thoughtfully. "That's so."

"Besides," added Tommy, as an afterthought, "I've great faith in Tuppence."

The journey was wearisome, with many stops, and crowded carriages. Ebury was a deserted station with a solitary porter, to whom Tommy addressed himself:

"Can you tell me the way to the Mount house?"

"The Mount house? It's a tidy step from here. The big house near the sea, you mean?"

Tommy assented bristly. After listening to the porter's meticulous but perplexing directions, they prepared to leave the station. It was beginning to rain, and they turned up the collars of their coats as they trudged through the slush of the road. Suddenly Tommy halted.

"Wait a moment!" He ran back to the station and tackled the porter anew.

"Look here, do you remember a young lady who arrived by an earlier train, the 12:50 from London? She'd probably ask you the way to the Mount house."

He described Tuppence as well as he could, but the porter shook his head. Several people had arrived by the train in question. He could not call to mind one young lady in particular.

Tommy rejoined Julius, and explained. Depression was settling down on him like a leaden weight. He felt convinced that their quest was going to be unsuccessful. The enemy had over three hours' start. Three hours was more than enough for Mr. Brown. He would not ignore the possibility of the telegram having been found.

The way seemed endless. It was past seven o'clock when a small boy told them that "The Mount house" was just past the next corner.

A rusty iron gate swinging dully on its hinges! An overgrown drive thick with leaves. There was something about the place that struck a chill to both their hearts.

A turn of the drive brought them in sight of the house. That, too, seemed empty and deserted. Was it indeed to this desolate spot that Tuppence had been decoyed? It seemed hard to believe that a human footstep had passed this way for months. Julius jerked the rusty bell handle. A jangling peal rang discordantly, echoing through the emptiness within. No one came. They rang again and again—but there was no sign of life. Then they walked completely round the house. Everywhere silence, and shuttered windows.

"Nothing doing," said Julius. They retraced their steps slowly to the gate.

"There must be a village handy," continued the young American. "We'd better make inquiries there. They'd know something about the place, and whether there's been any one there lately."

"Yes, that's not a bad idea."

Proceeding up the road, they soon came to a little hamlet. On the outskirts of it, they met a workman swinging his bag of tools, and Tommy stopped him with a question.

"The Mount house? It's empty. Been empty for years. Mrs. Sweeney's got the key if you want to go over it—next to the post office."

Tommy thanked him. They soon found the post office, and knocked at the door of the cottage next to it. A clean, wholesome-looking woman opened it. She readily produced the key of the Mount house.

"Though I doubt if it's the kind of place to suit you, sir. In a terrible state of repair. Cellings leaking and all. 'Twould need a lot of money spent on it."

"That's all right. We'll have a look around this evening, anyway. By the way, you've not had a young lady here asking for this key today?"

The woman shook her head. "No one's been over the place for a long time."

"Thanks very much."

They retraced their steps to the Mount house. As the front door swung back on its hinges, protesting loudly, Julius struck a match and examined the floor carefully. Then he shook his head.

"I'd swear no one's passed this way. Look at the dust. Thick. Not a sign of a footprint."

They wandered round the deserted house. Everywhere the same tale. Thick layers of dust apparently undisturbed.

"We'll go over it again tomorrow," said Tommy. "Perhaps we'll see more in the daylight."

"What?"

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folded it up.

"Queer," he said thoughtfully. "I thought that lawyer chap had quit."

CHAPTER XII

Jane Finn explained Julius, as he led the way out of the station. "I reckoned you'd come by this before I left London, and wired accordingly to Sir James. He's booked rooms for us, and will be round to dine at eight."

Sir James arrived punctually at eight o'clock, and Julius introduced Tommy. Sir James shook hands with him warmly.

Immediately the first greetings were over Julius broke out into a flood of eager questions. How had Sir James managed to track the girl? Why had he not let them know that he was still working on the case? And so on.

Sir James stroked his chin and smiled. At last he said:

"Just so, just so. Well, she's found. And that's the great thing, isn't it? Eh! Come now, that's the great thing?"

"Sure it is. But just how did you strike her trail? Miss Tuppence and I thought you'd quit for good and all. But I guess you can take it we were wrong."

"Well, I don't know that I should go so far as to say that. But it's certainly fortunate for all parties that we've managed to find the young lady."

"But where is she?" demanded Julius, his thoughts flying off on another tack. "I thought you'd be sure to bring her along?"

"That would hardly be possible," said Sir James gravely.

"Why?"

"Because the young lady was knocked down in a street accident, and has sustained slight injuries to the head. She was taken to the infirmary, and on recovering consciousness gave her name as Jane Finn."

"She's not seriously hurt?"

"Oh, a bruise and a cut or two. Her state is probably to be attributed to the mental shock consequent on recovering her memory."

"It's come back?" cried Julius excitedly.

"Undoubtedly. Mr. Herschimmer, since she was able to give her real name. I thought you had appreciated that point."

"And you just happened to be on the spot," said Tommy. "Seems quite like a fairy tale."

"Not Sir James was far too wary to be so."

"Coincidences are curious things," he said dryly.

Nevertheless Tommy was now certain of what he had before only suspected. Sir James' presence in Manchester was not accidental. Far from abandoning the case, as Julius supposed, he had by some means of his own successfully run the missing girl to earth. The only thing that puzzled Tommy was the reason for all this secrecy.

Julius was speaking.

"After dinner," he announced, "I shall go right away and see Jane."

"That will be impossible, I fear," said Sir James. "It is very unlikely they would allow her to see visitors at this time of night. I should suggest tomorrow morning about ten o'clock."

Julius flushed. There was something in Sir James which always stirred him to antagonism.

"All the same, I reckon I'll go round there tonight and see if I can't ginger them up to break through their silly rules."

"It will be quite useless, Mr. Herschimmer."

The words came out like the crack of a pistol, and Tommy looked up with a start. Julius was nervous and excited. The hand with which he raised his glass to his lips shook slightly, but his eyes held Sir James' defiantly. For a moment the hostility between the two seemed likely to burst into flame, but in the end Julius lowered his eyes, defeated.

"For the moment, I reckon you're the boss."

"Thank you," said the other. "We will say ten o'clock then?" With consummate ease of manner he turned to Tommy. "I must confess, Mr. Beresford, that it was something of a surprise to me to see you here this evening. The last I heard of you was that your friends were in grave anxiety on your behalf. Nothing had been heard of you for some days, and Miss Tuppence was inclined to think you had got into difficulties."

"I had, sir," Tommy grinned reminiscently. "I was never in a tighter place in my life."

Helped out by questions from Sir James, he gave an abbreviated account of his adventures. The lawyer looked at him with renewed interest as he brought the tale to a close.

"You got yourself out of a tight place very well," he said gravely. "I congratulate you. You displayed a great deal of ingenuity and carried your part through well."

Tommy blushed, his face assuming a prawn-like hue at the praise.

"And since then? What have you been doing?"

(Continued next week.)

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A Delicious Iceing—Put 1 cup sugar in skillet, let melt, then add 1 cup pure cream. Boil until smooth and you have fine iceing or glazed.

Beef Pot Roast—Three pounds rump beef, one-eighth pound of salt pork, one-sixth pound garlic, one spoonful vinegar, six good sized onions, two cupfuls water, three tomatoes, salt and pepper. Stud the beef with the salt pork. Put it in a quick oven twenty minutes. Then add the garlic, vinegar, onions and water. Put back in the oven and cook slowly until done. Turn over three or four times while cooking. Half an hour before done, add the tomatoes. Thickenize gravy, salt and pepper to taste.

Boiled Spice Cake—One and one-half cups cold water, one and one-half cups sugar, one and one-half cups seeded raisins, three-fourths cup lard, one teaspoon salt, one and one-half teaspoon soda, one and one-half teaspoon cinnamon, one and one-half teaspoon cloves, one-half teaspoon nutmeg, two and one-fourth cups flour, sifted; one-half teaspoon vanilla. Put the above, omitting the flour and vanilla, into a cooking vessel, put on the range and boil ten minutes. Then take off and let cool. When almost cold add the flour and vanilla. Bake in a moderate oven three-fourths of an hour.

Chiffon Pie—Put yolks of 3 eggs, beaten, into a double boiler with one-half cup sugar, rind and juice of lemon, two and one-half tablespoons boiling water and cook until thick. Take off of stove and add stiffly beaten egg whites. Pour into a cooked pie shell and put in oven long enough to brown nicely.

Lemon Pie—Take 1 cup sugar, 2 tablespoons of butter. Cream both. Add 2 tablespoons flour. Stir in the juice of two lemons and yolks of 2 eggs and beat well. Add 1 good cup of milk and fold in whites of 2 eggs beaten stiff. Put in pie tin lined with pastry and bake. After it is baked there is a fluffy cake crust on top of the lemon cream. It needs no meringue.

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