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# THE SECRET ADVERSARY

BY

AGATHA CHRISTIE

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UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA LIBRARY

NEW YORK

DODD, MEAD AND COMPANY

1930

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# TO WITCHCRAFT AND BACK AGAIN

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TO ALL THOSE WHO LEAD
MONOTONOUS LIVES
IN THE HOPE THAT THEY MAY EXPERIENCE
AT SECOND HAND
THE DELIGHTS AND DANGERS OF
ADVENTURE

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# THE SECRET ADVERSARY

## PROLOGUE

IT was 2 p.m. on the afternoon of May 7, 1915. The *Lusitania* had been struck by two torpedoes in succession and was sinking rapidly, while the boats were being launched with all possible speed. The women and children were being lined up awaiting their turn. Some still clung desperately to husbands and fathers; others clutched their children closely to their breasts. One girl stood alone, slightly apart from the rest. She was quite young, not more than eighteen. She did not seem afraid, and her grave, steadfast eyes looked straight ahead.

"I beg your pardon."

A man's voice beside her made her start and turn. She had noticed the speaker more than once amongst the first-class passengers. There had been a hint of mystery about him which had appealed to her imagination. He spoke to no one. If anyone spoke to him he was quick to rebuff the overture. Also he had a nervous way of looking over his shoulder with a swift, suspicious glance.

She noticed now that he was greatly agitated. There were beads of perspiration on his brow. He was evidently in a state of overmastering fear. And yet he



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did not strike her as the kind of man who would be afraid to meet death!

"Yes?" Her grave eyes met his inquiringly.

He stood looking at her with a kind of desperate irresolution.

"It must be!" he muttered to himself. "Yes—it is the only way." Then aloud he said abruptly: "You are an American?"

"Yes."

"A patriotic one?"

The girl flushed.

"I guess you've no right to ask such a thing! Of course I am!"

"Don't be offended. You wouldn't be if you knew how much there was at stake. But I've got to trust some one—and it must be a woman."

"Why?"

"Because of 'women and children first.'" He looked round and lowered his voice. "I'm carrying papers—vitally important papers. They may make all the difference to the Allies in the war. You understand? These papers have *got* to be saved! They've more chance with you than with me. Will you take them?"

The girl held out her hand.

"Wait—I must warn you. There may be a risk—if I've been followed. I don't think I have, but one never knows. If so, there will be danger. Have you the nerve to go through with it?"

The girl smiled.

"I'll go through with it all right. And I'm real

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proud to be chosen! What am I to do with them afterwards?"

"Watch the newspapers! I'll advertise in the personal column of the *Times*, beginning 'Shipmate.' At the end of three days if there's nothing—well, you'll know I'm down and out. Then take the packet to the American Embassy, and deliver it into the Ambassador's own hands. Is that clear?"

"Quite clear."

"Then be ready—I'm going to say good-bye." He took her hand in his. "Good-bye. Good luck to you," he said in a louder tone.

Her hand closed on the oilskin packet that had lain in his palm.

The *Lusitania* settled with a more decided list to starboard. In answer to a quick command, the girl went forward to take her place in the boat.

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# CHAPTER I

## THE YOUNG ADVENTURERS, LTD.

"TOMMY, old thing!"

"Tuppence, old bean!"

The two young people greeted each other affectionately, and momentarily blocked the Dover Street Tube exit in doing so. The adjective "old" was misleading. Their united ages would certainly not have totalled forty-five.

"Not seen you for simply centuries," continued the young man. "Where are you off to? Come and chew a bun with me. We're getting a bit unpopular here—blocking the gangway as it were. Let's get out of it."

The girl assenting, they started walking down Dover Street towards Piccadilly.

"Now then," said Tommy, "where shall we go?"

The very faint anxiety which underlay his tone did not escape the astute ears of Miss Prudence Cowley, known to her intimate friends for some mysterious reason as "Tuppence." She pounced at once.

"Tommy, you're stony!"

"Not a bit of it," declared Tommy unconvincingly. "Rolling in cash."

"You always were a shocking liar," said Tuppence severely, "though you did once persuade Sister Greenbank that the doctor had ordered you beer as a tonic,



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but forgotten to write it on the chart. Do you remember?"

Tommy chuckled.

"I should think I did! Wasn't the old cat in a rage when she found out? Not that she was a bad sort really, old Mother Greenbank! Good old hospital—demobbed like everything else, I suppose?"

Tuppence sighed.

"Yes. You too?"

Tommy nodded.

"Two months ago."

"Gratuity?" hinted Tuppence.

"Spent."

"Oh, Tommy!"

"No, old thing, not in riotous dissipation. No such luck! The cost of living—ordinary plain, or garden living nowadays is, I assure you, if you do not know ——"

"My dear child," interrupted Tuppence, "there is nothing I do *not* know about the cost of living. Here we are at Lyons', and we will each of us pay for our own. That's that!" And Tuppence led the way upstairs.

The place was full, and they wandered about looking for a table, catching odds and ends of conversation as they did so.

"And—do you know, she sat down and *cried* when I told her she couldn't have the flat after all." "It was simply a *bargain*, my dear! Just like the one Mabel Lewis brought from Paris——"

"Funny scraps one does overhear," murmured

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Tommy. "I passed two Johnnies in the street to-day talking about some one called Jane Finn. Did you ever hear such a name?"

But at that moment two elderly ladies rose and collected parcels, and Tuppence deftly ensconced herself in one of the vacant seats.

Tommy ordered tea and buns. Tuppence ordered tea and buttered toast.

"And mind the tea comes in separate teapots," she added severely.

Tommy sat down opposite her. His bared head revealed a shock of exquisitely slicked-back red hair. His face was pleasantly ugly—nondescript, yet unmistakably the face of a gentleman and a sportsman. His brown suit was well cut, but perilously near the end of its tether.

They were an essentially modern-looking couple as they sat there. Tuppence had no claim to beauty, but there was character and charm in the elfin lines of her little face, with its determined chin and large, wide-apart grey eyes that looked mistily out from under straight, black brows. She wore a small bright green toque over her black bobbed hair, and her extremely short and rather shabby skirt revealed a pair of uncommonly dainty ankles. Her appearance presented a valiant attempt at smartness.

The tea came at last, and Tuppence, rousing herself from a fit of meditation, poured it out.

"Now then," said Tommy, taking a large bite of bun, "let's get up-to-date. Remember, I haven't seen you since that time in hospital in 1916."

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"Very well." Tuppence helped herself liberally to buttered toast. "Abridged biography of Miss Prudence Cowley, fifth daughter of Archdeacon Cowley of Little Missendell, Suffolk. Miss Cowley left the delights (and drudgeries) of her home life early in the war and came up to London, where she entered an officers' hospital. First month: Washed up six hundred and forty-eight plates every day. Second month: Promoted to drying aforesaid plates. Third month: Promoted to peeling potatoes. Fourth month: Promoted to cutting bread and butter. Fifth month: Promoted one floor up to duties of wardmaid with mop and pail. Sixth month: Promoted to waiting at table. Seventh month: Pleasing appearance and nice manners so striking that am promoted to waiting on the Sisters! Eighth month: Slight check in career. Sister Bond ate Sister Westhaven's egg! Grand row! Wardmaid clearly to blame! Inattention in such important matters cannot be too highly censured. Mop and pail again! How are the mighty fallen! Ninth month: Promoted to sweeping out wards, where I found a friend of my childhood in Lieutenant Thomas Beresford (bow, Tommy!), whom I had not seen for five long years. The meeting was affecting! Tenth month: Reproved by matron for visiting the pictures in company with one of the patients, namely: the aforementioned Lieutenant Thomas Beresford. Eleventh and twelfth months: Parlourmaid duties resumed with entire success. At the end of the year left hospital in a blaze of glory. After that, the talented Miss Cowley drove successively a trade delivery van, a motor-lorry and a gen-

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eral. The last was the pleasantest. He was quite a young general!"

"What blighter was that?" inquired Tommy. "Perfectly sickening the way those brass hats drove from the War Office to the *Savoy*, and from the *Savoy* to the War Office!"

"I've forgotten his name now," confessed Tuppence. "To resume, that was in a way the apex of my career. I next entered a Government office. We had several very enjoyable tea parties. I had intended to become a land girl, a postwoman, and a bus conductress by way of rounding off my career—but the Armistice intervened! I clung to the office with the true limpet touch for many long months, but, alas, I was combed out at last. Since then I've been looking for a job. Now then—your turn."

"There's not so much promotion in mine," said Tommy regretfully, "and a great deal less variety. I went out to France again, as you know. Then they sent me to Mesopotamia, and I got wounded for the second time, and went into hospital out there. Then I got stuck in Egypt till the Armistice happened, kicked my heels there some time longer, and, as I told you, finally got demobbed. And, for ten long, weary months I've been job hunting! There aren't any jobs! And, if there were, they wouldn't give 'em to me. What good am I? What do I know about business? Nothing."

Tuppence nodded gloomily.

"What about the colonies?" she suggested.

Tommy shook his head.

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"I shouldn't like the colonies—and I'm perfectly certain they wouldn't like me!"

"Rich relations?"

Again Tommy shook his head.

"Oh, Tommy, not even a great-aunt?"

"I've got an old uncle who's more or less rolling, but he's no good."

"Why not?"

"Wanted to adopt me once. I refused."

"I think I remember hearing about it," said Tuppence slowly. "You refused because of your mother——"

Tommy flushed.

"Yes, it would have been a bit rough on the mater. As you know, I was all she had. Old boy hated her—wanted to get me away from her. Just a bit of spite."

"Your mother's dead, isn't she?" said Tuppence gently.

Tommy nodded.

Tuppence's large grey eyes looked misty.

"You're a good sort, Tommy. I always knew it."

"Rot!" said Tommy hastily. "Well, that's my position. I'm just about desperate."

"So am I! I've hung out as long as I could. I've touted round. I've answered advertisements. I've tried every mortal blessed thing. I've screwed and saved and pinched! But it's no good. I shall have to go home!"

"Don't you want to?"

"Of course I don't want to! What's the good of

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being sentimental? Father's a dear—I'm awfully fond of him—but you've no idea how I worry him! He has that delightful early Victorian view that short skirts and smoking are immoral. You can imagine what a thorn in the flesh I am to him! He just heaved a sigh of relief when the war took me off. You see, there are seven of us at home. It's awful! All housework and mothers' meetings! I have always been the changeling. I don't want to go back, but—oh, Tommy, what else is there to do?"

Tommy shook his head sadly. There was a silence, and then Tuppence burst out:

"Money, money, money! I think about money morning, noon and night! I dare say it's mercenary of me, but there it is!"

"Same here," agreed Tommy with feeling.

"I've thought over every imaginable way of getting it too," continued Tuppence. "There are only three! To be left it, to marry it, or to make it. First is ruled out. I haven't got any rich elderly relatives. Any relatives I have are in homes for decayed gentlewomen! I always help old ladies over crossings, and pick up parcels for old gentlemen, in case they should turn out to be eccentric millionaires. But not one of them has ever asked me my name—and quite a lot never said 'Thank you.'"

There was a pause.

"Of course," resumed Tuppence, "marriage is my best chance. I made up my mind to marry money when I was quite young. Any thinking girl would! I'm not

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sentimental, you know." She paused. "Come now, you can't say I'm sentimental," she added sharply.

"Certainly not," agreed Tommy hastily. "No one would ever think of sentiment in connection with you."

"That's not very polite," replied Tuppence. "But I dare say you mean it all right. Well, there it is! I'm ready and willing—but I never meet any rich men! All the boys I know are about as hard up as I am."

"What about the general?" inquired Tommy.

"I fancy he keeps a bicycle shop in time of peace," explained Tuppence. "No, there it is! Now *you* could marry a rich girl."

"I'm like you. I don't know any."

"That doesn't matter. You can always get to know one. Now, if I see a man in a fur coat come out of the *Ritz* I can't rush up to him and say: 'Look here, you're rich. I'd like to know you.'"

"Do you suggest that I should do that to a similarly garbed female?"

"Don't be silly. You tread on her foot, or pick up her handkerchief, or something like that. If she thinks you want to know her she's flattered, and will manage it for you somehow."

"You overrate my manly charms," murmured Tommy.

"On the other hand," proceeded Tuppence, "my millionaire would probably run for his life! No—marriage is fraught with difficulties. Remains—to *make* money!"

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"We've tried that, and failed," Tommy reminded her.

"We've tried all the orthodox ways, yes. But suppose we try the unorthodox. Tommy, let's be adventurers!"

"Certainly," replied Tommy cheerfully. "How do we begin?"

"That's the difficulty. If we could make ourselves known, people might hire us to commit crimes for them."

"Delightful," commented Tommy. "Especially coming from a clergyman's daughter!"

"The moral guilt," Tuppence pointed out, "would be theirs—not mine. You must admit that there's a difference between stealing a diamond necklace for yourself and being hired to steal it."

"There wouldn't be the least difference if you were caught!"

"Perhaps not. But I shouldn't be caught. I'm so clever."

"Modesty always was your besetting sin," remarked Tommy.

"Don't rag. Look here, Tommy, shall we really? Shall we form a business partnership?"

"Form a company for the stealing of diamond necklaces?"

"That was only an illustration. Let's have a—what do you call it in book-keeping?"

"Don't know. Never did any."

"I have—but I always got mixed up, and used to put credit entries on the debit side, and vice versa—so they fired me out. Oh, I know—a joint venture! It struck

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me as such a romantic phrase to come across in the middle of musty old figures. It's got an Elizabethan flavour about it—makes one think of galleons and doubloons. A joint venture!"

"Trading under the name of the Young Adventurers, Ltd.? Is that your idea, Tuppence?"

"It's all very well to laugh, but I feel there might be something in it."

"How do you propose to get in touch with your would-be employers?"

"Advertisement," replied Tuppence promptly. "Have you got a bit of paper and a pencil? Men usually seem to have. Just like we have hairpins and powder-puffs."

Tommy handed over a rather shabby green notebook, and Tuppence began writing busily.

"Shall we begin: 'Young officer, twice wounded in the war——' "

"Certainly not."

"Oh, very well, my dear boy. But I can assure you that that sort of thing might touch the heart of an elderly spinster, and she might adopt you, and then there would be no need for you to be a young adventurer at all."

"I don't want to be adopted."

"I forgot you had a prejudice against it. I was only ragging you! The papers are full up to the brim with that type of thing. Now listen—how's this? 'Two young adventurers for hire. Willing to do anything, go anywhere. Pay must be good.' (We might as well make that clear from the start.) Then we might add:

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'No reasonable offer refused'—like flats and furniture."

"I should think any offer we get in answer to that would be a pretty *un*reasonable one!"

"Tommy! You're a genius! That's ever so much more chic. 'No unreasonable offer refused—if pay is good.' How's that?"

"I shouldn't mention pay again. It looks rather eager."

"It couldn't look as eager as I feel! But perhaps you are right. Now I'll read it straight through. 'Two young adventurers for hire. Willing to do anything, go anywhere. Pay must be good. No unreasonable offer refused.' How would that strike you if you read it?"

"It would strike me as either being a hoax, or else written by a lunatic."

"It's not half so insane as a thing I read this morning beginning 'Petunia' and signed 'Best Boy.'" She tore out the leaf and handed it to Tommy. "There you are. *Times*, I think. Reply to Box so-and-so. I expect it will be about five shillings. Here's half a crown for my share."

Tommy was holding the paper thoughtfully. His face burned a deeper red.

"Shall we really try it?" he said at last. "Shall we, Tuppence? Just for the fun of the thing?"

"Tommy, you're a sport! I knew you would be! Let's drink to success." She poured some cold dregs of tea into the two cups.

"Here's to our joint venture, and may it prosper!"

"The Young Adventurers, Ltd.!" responded Tommy.

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They put down the cups and laughed rather uncertainly. Tuppence rose.

"I must return to my palatial suite at the hostel."

"Perhaps it is time I strolled round to the *Ritz*," agreed Tommy with a grin. "Where shall we meet? And when?"

"Twelve o'clock to-morrow. Piccadilly Tube station. Will that suit you?"

"My time is my own," replied Mr. Beresford magnificently.

"So long, then."

"Good-bye, old thing."

The two young people went off in opposite directions. Tuppence's hostel was situated in what was charitably called Southern Belgravia. For reasons of economy she did not take a bus.

She was half-way across St. James's Park, when a man's voice behind her made her start.

"Excuse me," it said. "But may I speak to you for a moment?"

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# CHAPTER II

## MR. WHITTINGTON'S OFFER

TUPPENCE turned sharply, but the words hovering on the tip of her tongue remained unspoken, for the man's appearance and manner did not bear out her first and most natural assumption. She hesitated. As if he read her thoughts, the man said quickly:

"I can assure you I mean no disrespect."

Tuppence believed him. Although she disliked and distrusted him instinctively, she was inclined to acquit him of the particular motive which she had at first attributed to him. She looked him up and down. He was a big man, clean shaven, with a heavy jowl. His eyes were small and cunning, and shifted their glance under her direct gaze.

"Well, what is it?" she asked.

The man smiled.

"I happened to overhear part of your conversation with the young gentleman in Lyons'."

"Well—what of it?"

"Nothing—except that I think I may be of some use to you."

Another inference forced itself into Tuppence's mind:

"You followed me here?"



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"I took that liberty."

"And in what way do you think you could be of use to me?"

The man took a card from his pocket and handed it to her with a bow.

Tuppence took it and scrutinized it carefully. It bore the inscription, "Mr. Edward Whittington." Below the name were the words "Esthonia Glassware Co.," and the address of a city office. Mr. Whittington spoke again:

"If you will call upon me to-morrow morning at eleven o'clock, I will lay the details of my proposition before you."

"At eleven o'clock?" said Tuppence doubtfully.

"At eleven o'clock."

Tuppence made up her mind.

"Very well. I'll be there."

"Thank you. Good evening."

He raised his hat with a flourish, and walked away. Tuppence remained for some minutes gazing after him. Then she gave a curious movement of her shoulders, rather as a terrier shakes himself.

"The adventures have begun," she murmured to herself. "What does he want me to do, I wonder? There's something about you, Mr. Whittington, that I don't like at all. But, on the other hand, I'm not the least bit afraid of you. And as I've said before, and shall doubtless say again, little Tuppence can look after herself, thank you!"

And with a short, sharp nod of her head she walked briskly onward. As a result of further meditations,

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however, she turned aside from the direct route and entered a post office. There she pondered for some moments, a telegraph form in her hand. The thought of a possible five shillings spent unnecessarily spurred her to action, and she decided to risk the waste of ninepence.

Disdaining the spiky pen and thick, black treacle which a beneficent Government had provided, Tuppence drew out Tommy's pencil which she had retained and wrote rapidly: "Don't put in advertisement. Will explain to-morrow." She addressed it to Tommy at his club, from which in one short month he would have to resign, unless a kindly fortune permitted him to renew his subscription.

"It may catch him," she murmured. "Anyway, it's worth trying."

After handing it over the counter she set out briskly for home, stopping at a baker's to buy three pennyworth of new buns.

Later, in her tiny cubicle at the top of the house she munched buns and reflected on the future. What was the Esthonia Glassware Co., and what earthly need could it have for her services? A pleasurable thrill of excitement made Tuppence tingle. At any rate, the country vicarage had retreated into the background again. The morrow held possibilities.

It was a long time before Tuppence went to sleep that night, and, when at length she did, she dreamed that Mr. Whittington had set her to washing up a pile of Esthonia Glassware, which bore an unaccountable resemblance to hospital plates!

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It wanted some five minutes to eleven when Tuppence reached the block of buildings in which the offices of the Esthonia Glassware Co. were situated. To arrive before the time would look over-eager. So Tuppence decided to walk to the end of the street and back again. She did so. On the stroke of eleven she plunged into the recesses of the building. The Esthonia Glassware Co. was on the top floor. There was a lift, but Tuppence chose to walk up.

Slightly out of breath, she came to a halt outside the ground glass door with the legend painted across it "Esthonia Glassware Co."

Tuppence knocked. In response to a voice from within, she turned the handle and walked into a small rather dirty outer office.

A middle-aged clerk got down from a high stool at a desk near the window and came towards her inquiringly.

"I have an appointment with Mr. Whittington," said Tuppence.

"Will you come this way, please." He crossed to a partition door with "Private" on it, knocked, then opened the door and stood aside to let her pass in.

Mr. Whittington was seated behind a large desk covered with papers. Tuppence felt her previous judgment confirmed. There was something wrong about Mr. Whittington. The combination of his sleek prosperity and his shifty eye was not attractive.

He looked up and nodded.

"So you've turned up all right? That's good. Sit down, will you?"

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Tuppence sat down on the chair facing him. She looked particularly small and demure this morning. She sat there meekly with downcast eyes whilst Mr. Whittington sorted and rustled amongst his papers. Finally he pushed them away, and leaned over the desk.

"Now, my dear young lady, let us come to business." His large face broadened into a smile. "You want work? Well, I have work to offer you. What should you say now to £100 down, and all expenses paid?" Mr. Whittington leaned back in his chair, and thrust his thumbs into the arm-holes of his waistcoat.

Tuppence eyed him warily.

"And the nature of the work?" she demanded.

"Nominal—purely nominal. A pleasant trip, that is all."

"Where to?"

Mr. Whittington smiled again.

"Paris."

"Oh!" said Tuppence thoughtfully. To herself she said: "Of course, if father heard that he would have a fit! But somehow I don't see Mr. Whittington in the rôle of the gay deceiver."

"Yes," continued Whittington. "What could be more delightful? To put the clock back a few years—a very few, I am sure—and re-enter one of those charming *pensionnats de jeunes filles* with which Paris abounds——"

Tuppence interrupted him.

"A *pensionnat?*"

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"Exactly. Madame Colombier's in the Avenue de Neuilly."

Tuppence knew the name well. Nothing could have been more select. She had had several American friends there. She was more than ever puzzled.

"You want me to go to Madame Colombier's? For how long?"

"That depends. Possibly three months."

"And that is all? There are no other conditions?"

"None whatever. You would, of course, go in the character of my ward, and you would hold no communication with your friends. I should have to request absolute secrecy for the time being. By the way, you are English, are you not?"

"Yes."

"Yet you speak with a slight American accent?"

"My great pal in hospital was a little American girl. I dare say I picked it up from her. I can soon get out of it again."

"On the contrary, it might be simpler for you to pass as an American. Details about your past life in England might be more difficult to sustain. Yes, I think that would be decidedly better. Then——"

"One moment, Mr. Whittington! You seem to be taking my consent for granted."

Whittington looked surprised.

"Surely you are not thinking of refusing? I can assure you that Madame Colombier's is a most high-class and orthodox establishment. And the terms are most liberal."

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"Exactly," said Tuppence. "That's just it. The terms are almost too liberal, Mr. Whittington. I cannot see any way in which I can be worth that amount of money to you."

"No?" said Whittington softly. "Well, I will tell you. I could doubtless obtain some one else for very much less. What I am willing to pay for is a young lady with sufficient intelligence and presence of mind to sustain her part well, and also one who will have sufficient discretion not to ask too many questions."

Tuppence smiled a little. She felt that Whittington had scored.

"There's another thing. So far there has been no mention of Mr. Beresford. Where does he come in?"

"Mr. Beresford?"

"My partner," said Tuppence with dignity. "You saw us together yesterday."

"Ah, yes. But I'm afraid we shan't require his services."

"Then it's off!" Tuppence rose. "It's both or neither. Sorry—but that's how it is. Good morning, Mr. Whittington."

"Wait a minute. Let us see if something can't be managed. Sit down again, Miss ——" He paused interrogatively.

Tuppence's conscience gave her a passing twinge as she remembered the archdeacon. She seized hurriedly on the first name that came into her head.

"Jane Finn," she said hastily; and then paused open-mouthed at the effect of those two simple words.

All the geniality had faded out of Whittingto.'s

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face. It was purple with rage, and the veins stood out on the forehead. And behind it all there lurked a sort of incredulous dismay. He leaned forward and hissed savagely:

"So that's your little game, is it?"

Tuppence, though utterly taken aback, nevertheless kept her head. She had not the faintest comprehension of his meaning, but she was naturally quick-witted, and felt it imperative to "keep her end up" as she phrased it.

Whittington went on:

"Been playing with me, have you, all the time, like a cat and mouse? Knew all the time what I wanted you for, but kept up the comedy. Is that it, eh?" He was cooling down. The red colour was ebbing out of his face. He eyed her keenly. "Who's been blabbing? Rita?"

Tuppence shook her head. She was doubtful as to how long she could sustain this illusion, but she realized the importance of not dragging an unknown Rita into it.

"No," she replied with perfect truth. "Rita knows nothing about me."

His eyes still bored into her like gimlets.

"How much do you know?" he shot out.

"Very little indeed," answered Tuppence, and was pleased to note that Whittington's uneasiness was augmented instead of allayed. To have boasted that she knew a lot might have raised doubts in his mind.

"Anyway," snarled Whittington, "you knew enough to come in here and plump out that name."

"It might be my own name," Tuppence pointed out.

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"It's likely, isn't it, that there would be two girls with a name like that?"

"Or I might just have hit upon it by chance," continued Tuppence, intoxicated with the success of truthfulness.

Mr. Whittington brought his fist down upon the desk with a bang.

"Quit fooling! How much do you know? And how much do you want?"

The last five words took Tuppence's fancy mightily, especially after a meagre breakfast and a supper of buns the night before. Her present part was of the adventuress rather than the adventurous order, but she did not deny its possibilities. She sat up and smiled with the air of one who has the situation thoroughly well in hand.

"My dear Mr. Whittington," she said, "let us by all means lay our cards upon the table. And pray do not be so angry. You heard me say yesterday that I proposed to live by my wits. It seems to me that I have now proved I have some wits to live by! I admit I have knowledge of a certain name, but perhaps my knowledge ends there."

"Yes—and perhaps it doesn't," snarled Whittington.

"You insist on misjudging me," said Tuppence, and sighed gently.

"As I said once before," said Whittington angrily, "quit fooling, and come to the point. You can't play the innocent with me. You know a great deal more than you're willing to admit."

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Tuppence paused a moment to admire her own ingenuity, and then said softly:

"I shouldn't like to contradict you, Mr. Whittington."

"So we come to the usual question—how much?"

Tuppence was in a dilemma. So far she had fooled Whittington with complete success, but to mention a palpably impossible sum might awaken his suspicions. An idea flashed across her brain.

"Suppose we say a little something down, and a fuller discussion of the matter later?"

Whittington gave her an ugly glance.

"Blackmail, eh?"

Tuppence smiled sweetly.

"Oh no! Shall we say payment of services in advance?"

Whittington grunted.

"You see," explain Tuppence still sweetly, "I'm so very fond of money!"

"You're about the limit, that's what you are," growled Whittington, with a sort of unwilling admiration. "You took me in all right. Thought you were quite a meek little kid with just enough brains for my purpose."

"Life," moralized Tuppence, "is full of surprises."

"All the same," continued Whittington, "some one's been talking. You say it isn't Rita. Was it——? Oh, come in."

The clerk followed his discreet knock into the room, and laid a paper at his master's elbow.

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"Telephone message just come for you, sir."

Whittington snatched it up and read it. A frown gathered on his brow.

"That'll do, Brown. You can go."

The clerk withdrew, closing the door behind him. Whittington turned to Tuppence.

"Come to-morrow at the same time. I'm busy now. Here's fifty to go on with."

He rapidly sorted out some notes, and pushed them across the table to Tuppence, then stood up, obviously impatient for her to go.

The girl counted the notes in a business-like manner, secured them in her handbag, and rose.

"Good morning, Mr. Whittington," she said politely. "At least, au revoir, I should say."

"Exactly. Au revoir!" Whittington looked almost genial again, a reversion that aroused in Tuppence a faint misgiving. "Au revoir, my clever and charming young lady."

Tuppence sped lightly down the stairs. A wild elation possessed her. A neighbouring clock showed the time to be five minutes to twelve.

"Let's give Tommy a surprise!" murmured Tuppence, and hailed a taxi.

The cab drew up outside the tube station. Tommy was just within the entrance. His eyes opened to their fullest extent as he hurried forward to assist Tuppence to alight. She smiled at him affectionately, and remarked in a slightly affected voice:

"Pay the thing, will you, old bean? I've got nothing smaller than a five-pound note!"

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# CHAPTER III

## A SET BACK

THE moment was not quite so triumphant as it ought to have been. To begin with, the resources of Tommy's pockets were somewhat limited. In the end the fare was managed, the lady recollecting a plebeian twopence, and the driver, still holding the varied assortment of coins in his hand, was prevailed upon to move on, which he did after one last hoarse demand as to what the gentleman thought he was giving him?

"I think you've given him too much, Tommy," said Tuppence innocently. "I fancy he wants to give some of it back."

It was possibly this remark which induced the driver to move away.

"Well," said Mr. Beresford, at length able to relieve his feelings, "what the—dickens, did you want to take a taxi for?"

"I was afraid I might be late and keep you waiting," said Tuppence gently.

"Afraid—you—might—be—late! Oh, Lord, I give it up!" said Mr. Beresford.

"And really and truly," continued Tuppence, opening her eyes very wide, "I haven't got anything smaller than a five-pound note."



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"You did that part of it very well, old bean, but all the same the fellow wasn't taken in—not for a moment!"

"No," said Tuppence thoughtfully, "he didn't believe it. That's the curious part about speaking the truth. No one does believe it. I found that out this morning. Now let's go to lunch. How about the *Savoy?*"

Tommy grinned.

"How about the *Ritz?*"

"On second thoughts, I prefer the *Piccadilly*. It's nearer. We shan't have to take another taxi. Come along."

"Is this a new brand of humour? Or is your brain really unhinged?" inquired Tommy.

"Your last supposition is the correct one. I have come into money, and the shock has been too much for me! For that particular form of mental trouble an eminent physician recommends unlimited *Hors d'œuvre*, Lobster *à l'américane*, Chicken Newberg, and Pêche Melba! Let's go and get them!"

"Tuppence, old girl, what has really come over you?"

"Oh, unbelieving one!" Tuppence wrenched open her bag. "Look here, and here, and here!"

"Great Jehosaphat! My dear girl, don't wave Fishers aloft like that!"

"They're not Fishers. They're five times better than Fishers, and this one's ten times better!"

Tommy groaned.

"I must have been drinking unawares! Am I dreaming, Tuppence, or do I really behold a large quantity

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of five-pound notes being waved about in a dangerous fashion?"

"Even so, O King! *Now*, will you come and have lunch?"

"I'll come anywhere. But what have you been doing? Holding up a bank?"

"All in good time. What an awful place Piccadilly Circus is. There's a huge bus bearing down on us. It would be too terrible if they killed the five-pound notes!"

"Grill room?" inquired Tommy, as they reached the opposite pavement in safety.

"The other's more expensive," demurred Tuppence.

"That's mere wicked wanton extravagance. Come on below."

"Are you sure I can get all the things I want there?"

"That extremely unwholesome menu you were outlining just now? Of course you can—or as much as is good for you, anyway."

"And now tell me," said Tommy, unable to restrain his pent-up curiosity any longer, as they sat in state surrounded by the many *hors d'œuvre* of Tuppence's dreams.

Miss Cowley told him.

"And the curious part of it is," she ended, "that I really did invent the name of Jane Finn! I didn't want to give my own because of poor father—in case I should get mixed up in anything shady."

"Perhaps that's so," said Tommy slowly. "But you didn't invent it."

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"What?"

"No. *I* told it to you. Don't you remember, I said yesterday I'd overheard two people talking about a female called Jane Finn? That's what brought the name into your mind so pat."

"So you did. I remember now. How extraordinary——" Tuppence tailed off into silence. Suddenly she aroused herself. "Tommy!"

"Yes?"

"What were they like, the two men you passed?"

Tommy frowned in an effort at remembrance.

"One was a big fat sort of chap. Clean shaven, I think—and dark."

"That's him," cried Tuppence, in an ungrammatical squeal. "That's Whittington! What was the other man like?"

"I can't remember. I didn't notice him particularly. It was really the outlandish name that caught my attention."

"And people say that coincidences don't happen!" Tuppence tackled her Pêche Melba happily.

But Tommy had become serious.

"Look here, Tuppence, old girl, what is this going to lead to?"

"More money," replied his companion.

"I know that. You've only got one idea in your head. What I mean is, what about the next step? How are you going to keep the game up?"

"Oh!" Tuppence laid down her spoon. "You're right, Tommy, it is a bit of a poser."

"After all, you know, you can't bluff him forever.

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You're sure to slip up sooner or later. And, anyway, I'm not at all sure that it isn't actionable—blackmail, you know."

"Nonsense. Blackmail is saying you'll tell unless you are given money. Now, there's nothing I could tell, because I don't really know anything."

"Hm," said Tommy doubtfully. "Well, anyway, what *are* we going to do? Whittington was in a hurry to get rid of you this morning, but next time he'll want to know something more before he parts with his money. He'll want to know how much *you* know, and where you got your information from, and a lot of other things that you can't cope with. What are you going to do about it?"

Tuppence frowned severely.

"We must think. Order some Turkish coffee, Tommy. Stimulating to the brain. Oh, dear, what a lot I have eaten!"

"You have made rather a hog of yourself! So have I for that matter, but I flatter myself that my choice of dishes was more judicious than yours. Two coffees." (This was to the waiter.) "One Turkish, one French."

Tuppence sipped her coffee with a deeply reflective air, and snubbed Tommy when he spoke to her.

"Be quiet. I'm thinking."

"Shades of Pelmanism!" said Tommy, and relapsed into silence.

"There!" said Tuppence at last. "I've got a plan. Obviously what we've got to do is to find out more about it all."

Tommy applauded.

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"Don't jeer. We can only find out through Whittington. We must discover where he lives, what he does—sleuth him, in fact! Now I can't do it, because he knows me, but he only saw you for a minute or two in Lyons'. He's not likely to recognize you. After all, one young man is much like another."

"I repudiate that remark utterly. I'm sure my pleasing features and distinguished appearance would single me out from any crowd."

"My plan is this," Tuppence went on calmly, "I'll go alone to-morrow. I'll put him off again like I did to-day. It doesn't matter if I don't get any more money at once. Fifty pounds ought to last us a few days."

"Or even longer!"

"You'll hang about outside. When I come out I shan't speak to you in case he's watching. But I'll take up my stand somewhere near, and when he comes out of the building I'll drop a handkerchief or something, and off you go!"

"Off I go where?"

"Follow him, of course, silly! What do you think of the idea?"

"Sort of thing one reads about in books. I somehow feel that in real life one will feel a bit of an ass standing in the street for hours with nothing to do. People will wonder what I'm up to."

"Not in the city. Every one's in such a hurry. Probably no one will even notice you at all."

"That's the second time you've made that sort of

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remark. Never mind, I forgive you. Anyway, it will be rather a lark. What are you doing this afternoon?"

"Well," said Tuppence meditatively. "I *had* thought of hats! Or perhaps silk stockings! Or perhaps——"

"Hold hard," admonished Tommy. "There's a limit to fifty pounds! But let's do dinner and a show tonight at all events."

"Rather."

The day passed pleasantly. The evening even more so. Two of the five-pound notes were now irretrievably dead.

They met by arrangement the following morning and proceeded citywards. Tommy remained on the opposite side of the road while Tuppence plunged into the building.

Tommy strolled slowly down to the end of the street, then back again. Just as he came abreast of the buildings, Tuppence darted across the road.

"Tommy!"

"Yes. What's up?"

"The place is shut. I can't make any one hear."

"That's odd."

"Isn't it? Come up with me, and let's try again."

Tommy followed her. As they passed the third floor landing a young clerk came out of an office. He hesitated a moment, then addressed himself to Tuppence.

"Were you wanting the Esthonia Glassware?"

"Yes, please."

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"It's closed down. Since yesterday afternoon. Company being wound up, they say. Not that I've ever heard of it myself. But anyway the office is to let."

"Th—thank you," faltered Tuppence. "I suppose you don't know Mr. Whittington's address?"

"Afraid I don't. They left rather suddenly."

"Thank you very much," said Tommy. "Come on, Tuppence."

They descended to the street again where they gazed at one another blankly.

"That's torn it," said Tommy at length.

"And I never suspected it," wailed Tuppence.

"Cheer up, old thing, it can't be helped."

"Can't it, though!" Tuppence's little chin shot out defiantly. "Do you think this is the end? If so, you're wrong. It's just the beginning!"

"The beginning of what?"

"Of our adventure! Tommy, don't you see, if they are scared enough to run away like this, it shows that there must be a lot in this Jane Finn business! Well, we'll get to the bottom of it. We'll run them down! We'll be sleuths in earnest!"

"Yes, but there's no one left to sleuth."

"No, that's why we'll have to start all over again. Lend me that bit of pencil. Thanks. Wait a minute—don't interrupt. There!" Tuppence handed back the pencil, and surveyed the piece of paper on which she had written with a satisfied eye:

"What's that?"

"Advertisement."

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"You're not going to put that thing in after all?"

"No, it's a different one." She handed him the slip of paper.

Tommy read the words on it aloud:

"WANTED, any information respecting Jane Finn. Apply Y. A."

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# CHAPTER IV

## WHO IS JANE FINN?

THE next day passed slowly. It was necessary to curtail expenditure. Carefully husbanded, forty pounds will last a long time. Luckily the weather was fine, and "walking is cheap," dictated Tuppence. An outlying picture house provided them with recreation for the evening.

The day of disillusionment had been a Wednesday. On Thursday the advertisement had duly appeared. On Friday letters might be expected to arrive at Tommy's rooms.

He had been bound by an honourable promise not to open any such letters if they did arrive, but to repair to the National Gallery, where his colleague would meet him at ten o'clock.

Tuppence was first at the rendezvous. She ensconced herself on a red velvet seat, and gazed at the Turners with unseeing eyes until she saw the familiar figure enter the room.

"Well?"

"Well," returned Mr. Beresford provokingly. "Which is your favourite picture?"

"Don't be a wretch. Aren't there *any* answers?"

Tommy shook his head with a deep and somewhat overacted melancholy.



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"I didn't want to disappoint you, old thing, by telling you right off. It's too bad. Good money wasted." He signed. "Still, there it is. The advertisement has appeared, and—there are only two answers!"

"Tommy, you devil!" almost screamed Tuppence. "Give them to me. How could you be so mean!"

"Your language, Tuppence, your language! They're very particular at the National Gallery. Government show, you know. And do remember, as I have pointed out to you before, that as a clergyman's daughter——"

"I ought to be on the stage!" finished Tuppence with a snap.

"That is not what I intended to say. But if you are sure that you have enjoyed to the full the reaction of joy after despair with which I have kindly provided you free of charge, let us get down to our mail, as the saying goes."

Tuppence snatched the two precious envelopes from him unceremoniously, and scrutinized them carefully.

"Thick paper, this one. It looks rich. We'll keep it to the last and open the other first."

"Right you are. One, two, three, go!"

Tuppence's little thumb ripped open the envelope, and she extracted the contents.

"DEAR SIR,

"Referring to your advertisement in this morning's paper, I may be able to be of some use to you. Perhaps you could call and see me at the above address at eleven o'clock to-morrow morning.

"Yours truly,

"A. CARTER."

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"27 Carshalton Gardens," said Tuppence, referring to the address. "That's Gloucester Road way. Plenty of time to get there if we tube."

"The following," said Tommy, "is the plan of campaign. It is my turn to assume the offensive. Ushered into the presence of Mr. Carter, he and I wish each other good morning as is customary. He then says: 'Please take a seat, Mr.—er?' To which I reply promptly and significantly: 'Edward Whittington!' whereupon Mr. Carter turns purple in the face and gasps out: 'How much?' Pocketing the usual fee of fifty pounds, I rejoin you in the road outside, and we proceed to the next address and repeat the performance."

"Don't be absurd, Tommy. Now for the other letter. Oh, this is from the *Ritz*!"

"A hundred pounds instead of fifty!"

"I'll read it:

"DEAR SIR,

"Re your advertisement, I should be glad if you would call round somewhere about lunch-time.

"Yours truly,

"JULIUS P. HERSHEIMMER."

"Ha!" said Tommy. "Do I smell a Boche? Or only an American millionaire of unfortunate ancestry? At all events we'll call at lunch-time. It's a good time—frequently leads to free food for two."

Tuppence nodded assent.

"Now for Carter. We'll have to hurry."

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Carshalton Terrace proved to be an unimpeachable row of what Tuppence called "ladylike looking houses." They rang the bell at No. 27, and a neat maid answered the door. She looked so respectable that Tuppence's heart sank. Upon Tommy's request for Mr. Carter, she showed them into a small study on the ground floor where she left them. Hardly a minute elapsed, however, before the door opened, and a tall man with a lean hawklike face and a tired manner entered the room.

"Mr. Y. A.?" he said, and smiled. His smile was distinctly attractive. "Do sit down, both of you."

They obeyed. He himself took a chair opposite to Tuppence and smiled at her encouragingly. There was something in the quality of his smile that made the girl's usual readiness desert her.

As he did not seem inclined to open the conversation, Tuppence was forced to begin.

"We wanted to know—that is, would you be so kind as to tell us anything you know about Jane Finn?"

"Jane Finn? Ah!" Mr. Carter appeared to reflect. "Well, the question is, what do *you* know about her?"

Tuppence drew herself up.

"I don't see that that's got anything to do with it."

"No?" But it has, you know, really it has." He smiled again in his tired way, and continued reflectively. "So that brings us down to it again. What do *you* know about Jane Finn?"

"Come now," he continued, as Tuppence remained silent. "You must know *something* to have advertised as you did?" He leaned forward a little, his weary

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voice held a hint of persuasiveness. "Suppose you tell me. . . ."

There was something very magnetic about Mr. Carter's personality. Tuppence seemed to shake herself free of it with an effort, as she said:

"We couldn't do that, could we, Tommy?"

But to her surprise, her companion did not back her up. His eyes were fixed on Mr. Carter, and his tone when he spoke held an unusual note of deference.

"I dare say the little we know won't be any good to you, sir. But such as it is, you're welcome to it."

"Tommy!" cried out Tuppence in surprise.

Mr. Carter slewed round in his chair. His eyes asked a question.

Tommy nodded.

"Yes, sir, I recognized you at once. Saw you in France when I was with the Intelligence. As soon as you came into the room, I knew——"

Mr. Carter held up his hand.

"No names, please. I'm known as Mr. Carter here. It's my cousin's house, by the way. She's willing to lend it to me sometimes when it's a case of working on strictly unofficial lines. Well, now"—he looked from one to the other—"who's going to tell me the story?"

"Fire ahead, Tuppence," directed Tommy. It's your yarn."

"Yes, little lady, out with it."

And obediently Tuppence did out with it, telling the whole story from the forming of the Young Adventurers, Ltd., downwards.

Mr. Carter listened in silence with a resumption of

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his tired manner. Now and then he passed his hand across his lips as though to hide a smile. When she had finished he nodded gravely.

"Not much. But suggestive. Quite suggestive. If you'll excuse my saying so, you're a curious young couple. I don't know—you might succeed where others have failed. . . . I believe in luck, you know—always have. . . ."

He paused a moment, and then went on.

"Well, how about it? You're out for adventure. How would you like to work for me? All quite unofficial, you know. Expenses paid, and a moderate screw?"

Tuppence gazed at him, her lips parted, her eyes growing wider and wider.

"What should we have to do?" she breathed.

Mr. Carter smiled.

"Just go on with what you're doing now. *Find Jane Finn.*"

"Yes, but—who *is* Jane Finn?"

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:

"Secret diplomacy (which, by the way, is nearly always bad policy!) does not concern you. It will be sufficient to say that 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 repre-

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sentatives, 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. Somebody always talks!

"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 possible doubt. But the oilskin packet was missing!

"The question was, had it been taken from him, or had he himself passed it on into another's keeping? There were a few incidents that strengthened the possibility of the latter theory. 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? By later advice from America it seemed likely that Danvers had been closely shadowed on the way over. Was this girl in league with his enemies? Or had she, in her turn, been shadowed and

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either tricked or forced into handing over the precious packet?

"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 been made out for Paris, where she was going to join the staff of a 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. We tracked her across Ireland, but nothing could be heard of her after she set foot in England. 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. Rumours 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:

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

A hint of alertness came into Mr. Carter's manner.

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

Tuppence stared. Mr. Carter nodded.

"Yes, five years ago, that draft treaty was a weapon in our hands; to-day 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. As a party cry for Labour it would be irresistible, and a Labour Government at this juncture would, in my opinion, be a grave disability for British trade, but that is a mere nothing to the *real* danger."

He paused, and then said quietly:

"You may perhaps have heard or read that there is Bolshevist influence at work behind the present labour 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 Bolshevists are behind the Labour unrest—but this man is *behind the Bolshevists.*

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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 marvellous 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 rôle. But afterwards 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.

"Very likely. A curious point is that the name is usually mentioned. An idiosyncrasy of genius. Can you describe him at all?"

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

Mr. Carter sighed in his tired manner.

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"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?"

Tuppence thought.

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

"Exactly. That 'message' was Mr. Brown's way of giving an order to his subordinate. He overheard 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 that 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 consider it as mere bluff on their part, and, rightly or wrongly, have stuck

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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.

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# CHAPTER V

## MR. JULIUS P. HERSHEIMMER

"WELL," said Tuppence, recovering herself, "it really seems as though it were meant to be."

Carter nodded.

"I know what you mean. I'm superstitious myself. Luck, and all that sort of thing. Fate seems to have chosen you out to be mixed up in this."

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. My experts, working in stereotyped ways, have failed. You will bring imagination and an open mind to the task. Don't be discouraged if that too does not succeed. For one thing there is a likelihood of the pace being forced."

Tuppence frowned uncomprehendingly.

"When you had that interview with Whittington, they had time before them. 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.



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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. The less time they have to mature their plans the better. I'm just warning you that you haven't much time before you, and that you needn't be cast down if you fail. It's not an easy proposition anyway. That's all."

Tuppence rose.

"I think we ought to be business-like. 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 quite understand that. I'll write out a list of the things I want to know when I've had time to think. Now—about money——"

"Yes, Miss Tuppence. Do you want to say how much?"

"Not exactly. We've got plenty to go with for the present, but when we want more——"

"It will be waiting for you."

"Yes, but—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,

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they send us a green one, and so on—well, that won't be much use, 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."

Tuppence beamed upon him.

"How lovely. You are kind. I do love money! I'll keep beautiful accounts of our expenses—all debit and credit, and the balance on the right side, and a red line drawn sideways with the totals the same at the bottom. I really know how to do it when I think."

"I'm sure you do. Well, good-bye, 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.

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

"And what a job! The joint venture has really begun."

"It's more respectable than I thought it would be," said Tuppence thoughtfully.

"Luckily I haven't got your craving for crime! What time is it? 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, we'd better take a taxi."

"Now who's being extravagant?"

"All expenses paid, remember. Hop in."

"At any rate, we shall make a better effect arriving this way," said Tuppence, leaning back luxuriously. "I'm sure blackmailers never arrive in buses!"

"We've ceased being blackmailers," Tommy pointed out.

"I'm not sure I have," said Tuppence darkly.

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 great deal younger than either Tommy or Tuppence had pictured him. The girl put him down as thirty-five. He was of

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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.

"I guess I know that. I can read. But I thought maybe it was her back history you were after, and that you'd know where she was now?"

"Well, we wouldn't mind hearing her back history," said Tuppence guardedly.

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.

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"We haven't kidnapped 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. But London gets my goat! I only know little old New York. Just trot out your questions and I'll answer."

For the moment this paralysed 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.

Hersheimmer turned to him.

"No, sir. As I said before, my father and her mother were brother and sister, just as you might be"—Tommy did not correct this view of their relationship—"but they didn't always get on together. And when my aunt made up her mind to marry Amos Finn, who was a

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poor school teacher out West, my father was just mad! Said if he made his pile, as he seemed in a fair way to do, she'd never see a cent of it. Well, the upshot was that Aunt Jane went out West and we never heard from her again.

"The old man *did* pile it up. He went into oil, and he went into steel, and he played a bit with railroads, and I can tell you he made Wall Street sit up!" He paused. "Then he died—last fall—and I got the dollars. Well, would you believe it, my conscience got busy! Kept knocking me up and saying: What about your Aunt Jane, way out West? It worried me some. You see, I figured it out that Amos Finn would never make good. He wasn't the sort. End of it was, I hired a man to hunt her down. Result, she was dead, and Amos Finn was dead, but they'd left a daughter—Jane—who'd been torpedoed in the *Lusitania* on her way to Paris. She was saved all right, but they didn't seem able to hear of her over this side. I guessed they weren't hustling any, so I thought I'd come along over, and speed things up. I phoned Scotland Yard and the Admiralty first thing. The Admiralty rather choked me off, but Scotland Yard were very civil—said they would make inquiries, even sent a man round this morning to get her photograph. I'm off to Paris to-morrow, just to see what the Prefecture is doing. I guess if I go to and fro hustling them, they ought to get busy!"

The energy of Mr. Hersheimmer was tremendous. They bowed before it.

"But say now," he ended, "you're not after her for anything? Contempt of court, or something British?

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A proud-spirited young American girl might find your rules and regulations in war time rather irksome, and get up against it. If that's the case, and there's such a thing as graft in this country, I'll buy her off."

Tuppence reassured him.

"That's good. Then we can work together. What about some lunch? Shall we have it up here, or go down to the restaurant?"

Tuppence expressed a preference for the latter, and Julius bowed to her decision.

Oysters had just given place to Sole Colbert when a card was brought to Hersheimmer.

"Inspector Japp, C.I.D. Scotland Yard again. Another man this time. What does he expect I can tell him that I didn't tell the first chap? I hope they haven't lost that photograph. That Western photographer's place was burned down and all his negatives destroyed—this is the only copy in existence. I got it from the principal of the college there."

An unformulated dread swept over Tuppence.

"You—you don't know the name of the man who came this morning?"

"Yes, I do. No, I don't. Half a second. It was on his card. Oh, I know! Inspector Brown. Quiet, unassuming sort of chap."

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# CHAPTER VI

## A PLAN OF CAMPAIGN

A VEIL might with profit be drawn over the events of the next half-hour. Suffice it to say that no such person as "Inspector Brown" was known to Scotland Yard. The photograph of Jane Finn, which would have been of the utmost value to the police in tracing her, was lost beyond recovery. Once again "Mr. Brown" had triumphed.

The immediate result of this set-back was to effect a *rapprochement* between Julius Hersheimmer and the Young Adventurers. All barriers went down with a crash, and Tommy and Tuppence felt they had known the young American all their lives. They abandoned the discreet reticence of "private inquiry agents," and revealed to him the whole history of the joint venture, whereat the young man declared himself "tickled to death."

He turned to Tuppence at the close of the narration.

"I've always had a kind of idea that English girls were just a mite moss-grown. Old-fashioned and sweet, you know, but scared to move round without a footman or a maiden aunt. I guess I'm a bit behind the times!"

The upshot of these confidential relations was that Tommy and Tuppence took up their abode forthwith at the *Ritz*, in order, as Tuppence put it, to keep in



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touch with Jane Finn's only living relation. "And put like that," she added confidentially to Tommy, "nobody could boggle at the expense!"

Nobody did, which was the great thing.

"And now," said the young lady on the morning after their installation, "to work!"

Mr. Beresford put down the *Daily Mail*, which he was reading, and applauded with somewhat unnecessary vigour. He was politely requested by his colleague not to be an ass.

"Dash it all, Tommy, we've got to *do* something for our money."

Tommy sighed.

"Yes, I fear even the dear old Government will not support us at the *Ritz* in idleness for ever."

"Therefore, as I said before, we must *do* something."

"Well," said Tommy, picking up the *Daily Mail* again, "*do* it. I shan't stop you."

"You see," continued Tuppence, "I've been thinking——"

She was interrupted by a fresh bout of applause.

"It's all very well for you to sit there being funny, Tommy. It would do you no harm to do a little brain work too."

"My union, Tuppence, my union! It does not permit me to work before 11 a.m."

"Tommy, do you want something thrown at you? It is absolutely essential that we should without delay map out a plan of campaign."

"Hear, hear!"

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"Well, let's do it."

Tommy laid his paper finally aside. "There's something of the simplicity of the truly great mind about you, Tuppence. Fire ahead. I'm listening."

"To begin with," said Tuppence, "what have we to go upon?"

"Absolutely nothing," said Tommy cheerily.

"Wrong!" Tuppence wagged an energetic finger, "We have two distinct clues."

"What are they?"

"First clue, we know one of the gang."

"Whittington?"

"Yes. I'd recognize him anywhere."

"Hum," said Tommy doubtfully, "I don't call that much of a clue. You don't know where to look for him, and it's about a thousand to one against your running against him by accident."

"I'm not so sure about that," replied Tuppence thoughtfully. "I've often noticed that once coincidences start happening they go on happening in the most extraordinary way. I dare say it's some natural law that we haven't found out. Still, as you say, we can't rely on that. But there *are* places in London where simply every one is bound to turn up sooner or later. Piccadilly Circus, for instance. One of my ideas was to take up my stand there every day with a tray of flags."

"What about meals?" inquired the practical Tommy.

"How like a man! What does mere food matter?"

"That's all very well. You've just had a thunder-

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ing good breakfast. No one's got a better appetite than you have, Tuppence, and by tea-time you'd be eating the flags, pins and all. But, honestly, I don't think much of the idea. Whittington mayn't be in London at all."

"That's true. Anyway, I think clue No. 2 is more promising."

"Let's hear it."

"It's nothing much. Only a Christian name—Rita. Whittington mentioned it that day."

"Are you proposing a third advertisement: Wanted, female crook, answering to the name of Rita?"

"I am not. I propose to reason in a logical manner. That man, Danvers, was shadowed on the way over, wasn't he? And it's more likely to have been a woman than a man——"

"I don't see that at all."

"I am absolutely certain that it would be a woman, and a good-looking one," replied Tuppence calmly.

"On these technical points I bow to your decision," murmured Mr. Beresford.

"Now, obviously this woman, whoever she was, was saved."

"How do you make that out?"

"If she wasn't, how would they have known Jane Finn had got the papers?"

"Correct. Proceed, O Sherlock!"

"Now there's just a chance, I admit it's only a chance, that this woman may have been 'Rita.'"

"And if so?"

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"If so, we've got to hunt through the survivors of the *Lusitania* till we find her."

"Then the first thing is to get a list of the survivors."

"I've got it. I wrote a long list of things I wanted to know, and sent it to Mr. Carter. I got his reply this morning, and among other things it encloses the official statement of those saved from the *Lusitania*. How's that for clever little Tuppence?"

"Full marks for industry, zero for modesty. But the great point is, is there a 'Rita' on the list?"

"That's just what I don't know," confessed Tuppence.

"Don't know?"

"Yes. Look here." Together they bent over the list. "You see, very few Christian names are given. They're nearly all Mrs. or Miss."

Tommy nodded.

"That complicates matters," he murmured thoughtfully.

Tuppence gave her characteristic "terrier" shake.

"Well, we've just got to get down to it, that's all. We'll start with the London area. Just note down the addresses of any of the females who live in London or roundabout, while I put on my hat."

Five minutes later the young couple emerged into Piccadilly, and a few seconds later a taxi was bearing them to The Laurels, Glendower Road, N.7, the residence of Mrs. Edgar Keith, whose name figured first in a list of seven reposing in Tommy's pocket-book.

The Laurels was a dilapidated house, standing back

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from the road with a few grimy bushes to support the fiction of a front garden. Tommy paid off the taxi, and accompanied Tuppence to the front door bell. As she was about to ring it, he arrested her hand.

"What are you going to say?"

"What am I going to say? Why, I shall say—Oh dear, I don't know. It's very awkward."

"I thought as much," said Tommy with satisfaction. "How like a woman! No foresight! Now just stand aside, and see how easily the mere male deals with the situation." He pressed the bell. Tuppence withdrew to a suitable spot.

A slatternly-looking servant, with an extremely dirty face and a pair of eyes that did not match, answered the door.

Tommy had produced a note-book and pencil.

"Good morning," he said briskly and cheerfully. "From the Hampstead Borough Council. The new Voting Register. Mrs. Edgar Keith lives here, does she not?"

"Yaas," said the servant.

"Christian name?" asked Tommy, his pencil poised.

"Missus's? Eleanor Jane."

"Eleanor," spelt Tommy. "Any sons or daughters over twenty-one?"

"Naow."

"Thank you." Tommy closed the notebook with a brisk snap. "Good morning."

. The servant volunteered her first remark:

"I though perhaps as you'd come about the gas," she observed cryptically, and shut the door.

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Tommy rejoined his accomplice.

"You see, Tuppence," he observed. "Child's play to the masculine mind."

"I don't mind admitting that for once you've scored handsomely. I should never have thought of that."

"Good wheeze, wasn't it? And we can repeat it *ad lib.*"

Lunch-time found the young couple attacking a steak and chips in an obscure hostelry with avidity. They had collected a Gladys Mary and a Marjorie, been baffled by one change of address, and had been forced to listen to a long lecture on universal suffrage from a vivacious American lady whose Christian name had proved to be Sadie.

"Ah!" said Tommy, imbibing a long draught of beer, "I feel better. Where's the next draw?"

The notebook lay on the table between them. Tuppence picked it up.

"Mrs. Vandemeyer," she read, "20 South Audley Mansions. Miss Wheeler, 43 Clapington Road, Battersea. She's a lady's maid, as far as I remember, so probably won't be there, and, anyway, she's not likely."

"Then the Mayfair lady is clearly indicated as the first port of call."

"Tommy, I'm getting discouraged."

"Buck up, old bean. We always knew it was an outside chance. And, anyway, we're only starting. If we draw a blank in London, there's a fine tour of England, Ireland and Scotland before us."

"True," said Tuppence, her flagging spirits reviving. "And all expenses paid! But, oh, Tommy, I do like

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things to happen quickly. So far, adventure has succeeded adventure, but this morning has been dull as dull."

"You must stifle this longing for vulgar sensation, Tuppence. Remember that if Mr. Brown is all he is reported to be, it's a wonder that he has not ere now done us to death. That's a good sentence, quite a literary flavour about it."

"You're really more conceited than I am—with less excuse! Ahem! But it certainly is queer that Mr. Brown has not yet wreaked vengeance upon us. (You see, I can do it too.) We pass on our way unscathed."

"Perhaps he doesn't think us worth bothering about," suggested the young man simply.

Tuppence received the remark with great disfavour.

"How horrid you are, Tommy. Just as though we didn't count."

"Sorry, Tuppence. What I meant was that we work like moles in the dark, and that he has no suspicion of our nefarious schemes. Ha ha!"

"Ha ha!" echoed Tuppence approvingly, as she rose.

South Audley Mansions was an imposing looking block of flats just off Park Lane. No. 20 was on the second floor.

Tommy had by this time the glibness born of practice. He rattled off the formula to the elderly woman, looking more like a housekeeper than a servant, who opened the door to him.

"Christian name?"

"Margaret."

Tommy spelt it, but the other interrupted him.

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"No, g *u* e."

"Oh, Marguerite; French way, I see." He paused, then plunged boldly. "We had her down as Rita Vandemeyer, but I suppose that's incorrect?"

"She's mostly called that, sir, but Marguerite's her name."

"Thank you. That's all. Good morning."

Hardly able to contain his excitement, Tommy hurried down the stairs. Tuppence was waiting at the angle of the turn.

"You heard?"

"Yes. Oh, *Tommy!*"

Tommy squeezed her arm sympathetically.

"I know, old thing. I feel the same."

"It's—it's so lovely to think of things—and then for them really to happen!" cried Tuppence enthusiastically.

Her hand was still in Tommy's. They had reached the entrance hall. There were footsteps on the stairs above them, and voices.

Suddenly, to Tommy's complete surprise, Tuppence dragged him into the little space by the side of the lift where the shadow was deepest.

"What the——"

"Hush!"

Two men came down the stairs and passed out through the entrance. Tuppence's hand closed tighter on Tommy's arm.

"Quick—follow them. I daren't. He might recognize me. I don't know who the other man is, but the bigger of the two was Whittington."

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# CHAPTER VII

## THE HOUSE IN SOHO

WHITTINGTON and his companion were walking at a good pace. Tommy started in pursuit at once, and was in time to see them turn the corner of the street. His vigorous strides soon enabled him to gain upon them, and by the time he, in his turn, reached the corner the distance between them was sensibly lessened. The small Mayfair streets were comparatively deserted, and he judged it wise to content himself with keeping them in sight.

The sport was a new one to him. Though familiar with the technicalities from a course of novel reading, he had never before attempted to "follow" anyone, and it appeared to him at once that, in actual practice, the proceeding was fraught with difficulties. Supposing, for instance, that they should suddenly hail a taxi? In books, you simply leapt into another, promised the driver a sovereign—or its modern equivalent—and there you were. In actual fact, Tommy foresaw that it was extremely likely there would be no second taxi. Therefore he would have to run. What happened in actual fact to a young man who ran incessantly and persistently through the London streets? In a main road he might hope to create the illusion that he was merely running for a bus. But in these obscure aristocratic



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byways he could not but feel that an officious policeman might stop him to explain matters.

At this juncture in his thoughts a taxi with flag erect turned the corner of the street ahead. Tommy held his breath. Would they hail it?

He drew a sigh of relief as they allowed it to pass unchallenged. Their course was a zigzag one designed to bring them as quickly as possible to Oxford Street. When at length they turned into it, proceeding in an easterly direction, Tommy slightly increased his pace. Little by little he gained upon them. On the crowded pavement there was little chance of his attracting their notice, and he was anxious if possible to catch a word or two of their conversation. In this he was completely foiled; they spoke low and the din of the traffic drowned their voices effectually.

Just before the Bond Street Tube station they crossed the road, Tommy, unperceived, faithfully at their heels, and entered the big Lyons'. There they went up to the first floor, and sat at a small table in the window. It was late, and the place was thinning out. Tommy took a seat at the table next to them, sitting directly behind Whittington in case of recognition. On the other hand, he had a full view of the second man and studied him attentively. He was fair, with a weak, unpleasant face, and Tommy put him down as being either a Russian or a Pole. He was probably about fifty years of age, his shoulders cringed a little as he talked, and his eyes, small and crafty, shifted unceasingly.

Having already lunched heartily, Tommy contented

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himself with ordering a Welsh rarebit and a cup of coffee. Whittington ordered a substantial lunch for himself and his companion; then, as the waitress withdrew, he moved his chair a little closer to the table and began to talk earnestly in a low voice. The other man joined in. Listen as he would, Tommy could only catch a word here and there; but the gist of it seemed to be some directions or orders which the big man was impressing on his companion, and with which the latter seemed from time to time to disagree. Whittington addressed the other as Boris.

Tommy caught the word "Ireland" several times, also "propaganda," but of Jane Finn there was no mention. Suddenly, in a lull in the clatter of the room, he got one phrase entire. Whittington was speaking. "Ah, but you don't know Flossie. She's a marvel. An archbishop would swear she was his own mother. She gets the voice right every time, and that's really the principal thing."

Tommy did not hear Boris's reply, but in response to it Whittington said something that sounded like: "Of course—only in an emergency. . . ."

Then he lost the thread again. But presently the phrases became distinct again whether because the other two had insensibly raised their voices, or because Tommy's ears were getting more attuned, he could not tell. But two words certainly had a most stimulating effect upon the listener. They were uttered by Boris and they were: "Mr. Brown."

Whittington seemed to remonstrate with him, but he merely laughed.

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"Why not, my friend? It is a name most respectable —most common. Did he not choose it for that reason? Ah, I should like to meet him—Mr. Brown."

There was a steely ring in Whittington's voice as he replied:

"Who knows? You may have met him already."

"Bah!" retorted the other. "That is children's talk —a fable for the police. Do you know what I say to myself sometimes? That he is a fable invented by the Inner Ring, a bogy to frighten us with. It might be so."

"And it might not."

"I wonder . . . or is it indeed true that he is with us and amongst us, unknown to all but a chosen few? If so, he keeps his secret well. And the idea is a good one, yes. We never know. We look at each other—*one of us is Mr. Brown*—which? He commands—but also he serves. Among us—in the midst of us. And no one knows which he is. . . ."

With an effort the Russian shook off the vagary of his fancy. He looked at his watch.

"Yes," said Whittington. "We might as well go."

He called the waitress and asked for his bill. Tommy did likewise, and a few moments later was following the two men down the stairs.

Outside, Whittington hailed a taxi, and directed the driver to go to Waterloo.

Taxis were plentiful here, and before Whittington's had driven off another was drawing up to the curb in obedience to Tommy's peremptory hand.

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"Follow that other taxi," directed the young man. "Don't lose it."

The elderly chauffeur showed no interest. He merely grunted and jerked down his flag. The drive was uneventful. Tommy's taxi came to rest at the departure platform just after Whittington's. Tommy was behind him at the booking-office. He took a first-class single ticket to Bournemouth, Tommy did the same. As he emerged, Boris remarked, glancing up at the clock: "You are early. You have nearly half an hour."

Boris's words had aroused a new train of thought in Tommy's mind. Clearly Whittington was making the journey alone, while the other remained in London. Therefore he was left with a choice as to which he would follow. Obviously, he could not follow both of them unless—— Like Boris, he glanced up at the clock, and then to the announcement board of the trains. The Bournemouth train left at 3:30. It was now ten past. Whittington and Boris were walking up and down by the bookstall. He gave one doubtful look at them, then hurried into an adjacent telephone box. He dared not waste time in trying to get hold of Tuppence. In all probability she was still in the neighbourhood of South Audley Mansions. But there remained another ally. He rang up the *Ritz* and asked for Julius Hersheimmer. There was a click and a buzz. Oh, if only the young American was in his room! There was another click, and then "Hello" in unmistakable accents came over the wire.

"That you, Hersheimmer? Beresford speaking. I'm

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at Waterloo. I've followed Whittington and another man here. No time to explain. Whittington's off to Bournemouth by the 3.30. Can you get there by then?"

The reply was reassuring.

"Sure. I'll hustle."

The telephone rang off. Tommy put back the receiver with a sigh of relief. His opinion of Julius's power of hustling was high. He felt instinctively that the American would arrive in time.

Whittington and Boris were still where he had left them. If Boris remained to see his friend off, all was well. Then Tommy fingered his pocket thoughtfully. In spite of the carte blanche assured to him, he had not yet acquired the habit of going about with any considerable sum of money on him. The taking of the first-class ticket to Bournemouth had left him with only a few shillings in his pocket. It was to be hoped that Julius would arrive better provided.

In the meantime, the minutes were creeping by: 3.15, 3.20, 3.25, 3.27. Supposing Julius did not get there in time. 3.29. . . . Doors were banging. Tommy felt cold waves of despair pass over him. Ther a hand fell on his shoulder.

"Here I am, son. Your British traffic beats description! Put me wise to the crooks right away."

"That's Whittington—there, getting in now, that big dark man. The other is the foreign chap he's talking to."

"I'm on to them. Which of the two is my bird?"

Tommy had thought out this question.

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"Got any money with you?"

Julius shook his head, and Tommy's face fell.

"I guess I haven't more than three or four hundred dollars with me at the moment," explained the American.

Tommy gave a faint whoop of relief.

"Oh, Lord, you millionaires! You don't talk the same language! Climb aboard the lugger. Here's your ticket. Whittington's your man."

"Me for Whittington!" said Julius darkly. The train was just starting as he swung himself aboard. "So long, Tommy." The train slid out of the station.

Tommy drew a deep breath. The man Boris was coming along the platform towards him. Tommy allowed him to pass and then took up the chase once more.

From Waterloo Boris took the tube as far as Piccadilly Circus. Then he walked up Shaftesbury Avenue, finally turning off into the maze of mean streets round Soho. Tommy followed him at a judicious distance.

They reached at length a small dilapidated square. The houses there had a sinister air in the midst of their dirt and decay. Boris looked round, and Tommy drew back into the shelter of a friendly porch. The place was almost deserted. It was a cul-de-sac, and consequently no traffic passed that way. The stealthy way the other had looked round stimulated Tommy's imagination. From the shelter of the doorway he watched him go up the steps of a particularly evil-looking house and rap sharply, with a peculiar rhythm, on the door. It was opened promptly, he said a word or two to the

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doorkeeper, then passed inside. The door was shut to again.

It was at this juncture that Tommy lost his head. What he ought to have done, what any sane man would have done, was to remain patiently where he was and wait for his man to come out again. What he did do was entirely foreign to the sober common sense which was, as a rule, his leading characteristic. Something, as he expressed it, seemed to snap in his brain. Without a moment's pause for reflection he, too, went up the steps, and reproduced as far as he was able the peculiar knock.

The door swung open with the same promptness as before. A villainous-faced man with close-cropped hair stood in the doorway.

"Well?" he grunted.

It was at that moment that the full realization of his folly began to come home to Tommy. But he dared not hesitate. He seized at the first words that came into his mind.

"Mr. Brown?" he said.

To his surprise the man stood aside.

"Upstairs," he said, jerking his thumb over his shoulder, "second door on your left."

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# CHAPTER VIII

## THE ADVENTURES OF TOMMY

TAKEN aback though he was by the man's words, Tommy did not hesitate. If audacity had successfully carried him so far, it was to be hoped it would carry him yet farther. He quietly passed into the house and mounted the ramshackle staircase. Everything in the house was filthy beyond words. The grimy paper, of a pattern now indistinguishable, hung in loose festoons from the wall. In every angle was a grey mass of cobweb.

Tommy proceeded leisurely. By the time he reached the bend of the staircase, he had heard the man below disappear into a back room. Clearly no suspicion attached to him as yet. To come to the house and ask for "Mr. Brown" appeared indeed to be a reasonable and natural proceeding.

At the top of the stairs Tommy halted to consider his next move. In front of him ran a narrow passage, with doors opening on either side of it. From the one nearest him on the left came a low murmur of voices. It was this room which he had been directed to enter. But what held his glance fascinated was a small recess immediately on his right, half concealed by a torn velvet curtain. It was directly opposite the left-handed door and, owing to its angle, it also commanded a good



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view of the upper part of the staircase. As a hiding-place for one or, at a pinch, two men, it was ideal, being about two feet deep and three feet wide. It attracted Tommy mightily. He thought things over in his usual slow and steady way, deciding that the mention of "Mr. Brown" was not a request for an individual, but in all probability a password used by the gang. His lucky use of it had gained him admission. So far he had aroused no suspicion. But he must decide quickly on his next step.

Suppose he were boldly to enter the room on the left of the passage. Would the mere fact of his having been admitted to the house be sufficient? Perhaps a further password would be required, or, at any rate, some proof of identity. The doorkeeper clearly did not know all the members of the gang by sight, but it might be different upstairs. On the whole it seemed to him that luck had served him very well so far, but that there was such a thing as trusting it too far. To enter that room was a colossal risk. He could not hope to sustain his part indefinitely; sooner or later he was almost bound to betray himself, and then he would have thrown away a vital chance in mere foolhardiness.

A repetition of the signal knock sounded on the door below, and Tommy, his mind made up, slipped quickly into the recess, and cautiously drew the curtain farther across so that it shielded him completely from sight. There were several rents and slits in the ancient material which afforded him a good view. He would watch events, and any time he chose could, after all, join the

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assembly, modelling his behaviour on that of the new arrival.

The man who came up the staircase with a furtive, soft-footed tread was quite unknown to Tommy. He was obviously of the very dregs of society. The low beetling brows, and the criminal jaw, the bestiality of the whole countenance were new to the young man, though he was a type that Scotland Yard would have recognized at a glance.

The man passed the recess, breathing heavily as he went. He stopped at the door opposite, and gave a repetition of the signal knock. A voice inside called out something, and the man opened the door and passed in, affording Tommy a momentary glimpse of the room inside. He thought there must be about four or five people seated round a long table that took up most of the space, but his attention was caught and held by a tall man with close-cropped hair and a short, pointed, naval-looking beard, who sat at the head of the table with papers in front of him. As the newcomer entered he glanced up, and with a correct, but curiously precise enunciation, which attracted Tommy's notice, he asked:

"Your number, comrade?"

"Fourteen, guv'nor," replied the other hoarsely.

"Correct."

The door shut again.

"If that isn't a Hun, I'm a Dutchman!" said Tommy to himself. "And running the show darned systematically too—as they always do. Lucky I didn't roll in. I'd have given the wrong number, and there would

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have been the deuce to pay. No, this is the place for me. Hullo, here's another knock."

This visitor proved to be of an entirely different type to the last. Tommy recognized in him an Irish Sinn Feiner. Certainly Mr. Brown's organization was a far-reaching concern. The common criminal, the well-bred Irish gentleman, the pale Russian, and the efficient German master of the ceremonies! Truly a strange and sinister gathering! Who was this man who held in his finger these curiously variegated links of an unknown chain?

In this case, the procedure was exactly the same. The signal knock, the demand for a number, and the reply "Correct."

Two knocks followed in quick succession on the door below. The first man was quite unknown to Tommy, who put him down as a city clerk. A quiet, intelligent-looking man, rather shabbily dressed. The second was of the working classes, and his face was vaguely familiar to the young man.

Three minutes later came another, a man of commanding appearance, exquisitely dressed, and evidently well born. His face, again, was not unknown to the watcher, though he could not for the moment put a name to it.

After his arrival there was a long wait. In fact Tommy concluded that the gathering was now complete, and was just cautiously creeping out from his hiding-place, when another knock sent him scuttling back to cover.

This last-comer came up the stairs so quietly that he

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was almost abreast of Tommy before the young man had realized his presence.

He was a small man, very pale, with a gentle almost womanish air. The angle of the cheek-bones hinted at his Slavonic ancestry, otherwise there was nothing to indicate his nationality. As he passed the recess, he turned his head slowly. The strange light eyes seemed to burn through the curtain; Tommy could hardly believe that the man did not know he was there and in spite of himself he shivered. He was no more fanciful than the majority of young Englishmen, but he could not rid himself of the impression that some unusually potent force emanated from the man. The creature reminded him of a venomous snake.

A moment later his impression was proved correct. The new-comer knocked on the door as all had done, but his reception was very different. The bearded man rose to his feet, and all the others followed suit. The German came forward and shook hands. His heels clicked together.

"We are honoured," he said. "We are greatly honoured. I much feared that it would be impossible."

The other answered in a low voice that had a kind of hiss in it:

"There were difficulties. It will not be possible again, I fear. But one meeting is essential—to define my policy. I can do nothing without—Mr. Brown. He is here?"

The change in the German's voice was audible as he replied with slight hesitation:

"We have received a message. It is impossible for

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him to be present in person." He stopped, giving a curious impression of having left the sentence unfinished.

A very slow smile overspread the face of the other. He looked round at a circle of uneasy faces.

"Ah! I understand. I have read of his methods. He works in the dark and trusts no one. But, all the same, it is possible that he is among us now. . . ." He looked round him again, and again that expression of fear swept over the group. Each man seemed eyeing his neighbour doubtfully.

The Russian tapped his cheek.

"So be it. Let us proceed."

The German seemed to pull himself together. He 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 once more 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.

There was no sound from below, and it did not seem likely that the door-keeper would come upstairs. 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

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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 farther.

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 ever so slightly inward. The door did not budge. Tommy was annoyed. If he had to use too much force, it would almost certainly creak. 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 damned!" 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. If he let it go suddenly, the men inside would be almost certain

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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 untenanted, 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, up on 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 manœuvres 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 *portière* 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.

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