

AGATHA CHRISTIE'S



The Secret Adversary

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Adapted from the novel by Agatha Christie

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*For Lady Westholme
and for coming full circle.*

The Secret Adversary

MYSTERY. Adapted from the novel by Agatha Christie. WWI has ended and Tommy, a former soldier, and Tuppence, a former Army nurse, are out of work and money. The two decide to hire themselves out as adventurers willing to do anything and go anywhere with no unreasonable offer refused. The duo is soon hired by a British Intelligence agent to find a missing American woman, recover an important treaty, and discover the true identity of the mysterious “Mr. Brown.” While on the trail, the intrepid pair becomes enmeshed in a thrilling adventure filled with intrigue, deception, double-crossing, and harrowing escapes as they pursue their elusive secret adversary.

Performance time: Approximately 120 minutes.



Agatha Christie (1890-1976)

About the Story

Agatha Christie was born in southwest England to a wealthy upper-class family. Christie was schooled at home and was an avid reader from a young age enjoying books by Edith Nesbit and Lewis Carroll and, later, mystery novels by Wilkie Collins and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. *The Secret Adversary* (1922) was Christie's second published novel and introduces the detective couple, Tommy and Tuppence, who form The Young Adventurers, Ltd and appear in three other Christie novels and one collection of short stories. Christie included dedications in only two of her novels, both of which featured Tommy and Tuppence. Her dedication in *The Secret Adversary* reads, "To all those who lead monotonous lives in the hope that they experience at second hand the delights and dangers of adventures." The only other dedication appeared in her last novel featuring Tommy and Tuppence in 1968, *By the Pricking of My Thumbs*. The author of 66 detective novels and 15 short story collections, Christie is best known for her bestselling novel *And Then There Were None* and her play *The Mousetrap*.

Characters

(6 M, 6 F, 13 flexible, opt. extras)

(With doubling: 3 M, 4 F, 13 flexible)

PRUDENCE "TUPPENCE" CROWLEY: Former Army nurse and Young Adventurer; female.

TOMMY BERESFORD: Veteran of WWI and Young Adventurer; male.

JULIUS P. HERSHEIMMER: Wealthy American cousin of Jane Finn who is intent on finding her and joins forces with Tommy and Tuppence; male.

JANE FINN/ANNETTE: Missing American girl and cousin of Julius Hersheimmer who is thought to be in possession of a treaty; female.

DANVERS: American agent who gives Jane Finn a treaty onboard the Lusitania before it sinks; male

MR./MRS. CARTER: A British Intelligence agent who Tommy and Tuppence agree to work for in order to find the missing Jane Finn and recover the treaty; flexible.

RITA VANDERMEYER: Society woman who works with Mr. Brown; female.

SIR JAMES PEEL: Lawyer assisting Tommy and Tuppence who often escorts Rita Vandermeyer about town; male.

ALBERT: Young boy who works for Rita and assists Tuppence in gaining employment as a maid in Rita's home; male.

ANNIE: Young woman who serves as a maid in Rita's home; female.

DR. HALL: Doctor who oversees the care of Jane Finn; flexible.

NURSE EDITH: Jane Finn's nurse; female.

MR./MRS. WHITTINGTON: Attempts to hire Tuppence but disappears after she tells him her name is Jane Finn; flexible.

INSPECTOR JAPP: Inspector at Scotland Yard; flexible.

CONRAD/CONTESSA: Doorman at the meeting house of Mr. Brown; flexible.

BORIS/BORISOVA IVANOVITCH: Russian working with Mr. Brown; flexible.

GERMAN: German working with Mr. Brown; flexible.

IRISHMAN/IRISHWOMAN: Irish agent working with Mr. Brown; flexible.

NUMBER 14: English criminal working with Mr. Brown; flexible.

KRAMENIN: Russian working with Mr. Brown; flexible.

SHIP CAPTAIN: Captain of the Lusitania; male.

LANDLORD: Landlord of Esthonia Glassware; flexible.

WAITRESS: Café waitress; female.

CAFÉ PATRON 1, 2: Café customers; flexible.

EXTRAS (opt.): As Londoners.

NOTE: For flexible roles, change the script accordingly.

Options for doubling

CAFÉ PATRON 1/ALBERT (male)

CAFÉ PATRON 2/NURSE EDITH (female)

WAITRESS/ANNIE (female)

LANDLORD/DANVERS (male)

SHIP CAPTAIN/DR. HALL (male)

Costumes

Costumes should be representative of clothing worn in 1919 England. American styles from the time can be worn by Julius Hersheimer. Russian, German, and Irish styles from that time can be worn by the respective members of Mr. Brown's associates. All household and community service characters should wear clothing depicting their station and/or job.

Setting

On board the Lusitania, 1915. London, 1919, after the end of WWI.

Set

Sets may be as simple or elaborate as your budget allows.

Onboard the Lusitania. Props or set pieces to indicate a ship.

London town square. An outdoor café with a menu on a stand is on one side, with shops and street carts along the rear, and a building with a sign that reads, “Esthonia Glassware.” A potted plant is just outside of the door to the building.

Mr. Brown’s meeting house. The room is dilapidated and dark with cobwebs, dust, and dirty furnishings. A long table with six chairs is CS. One chair is facing away from the audience. Framed artwork is on one wall. Two windows with long floor-length curtains are along the back wall on either side of the table. Later, a sofa or cot replaces the long table and six chairs. There is a telephone on a nearby table.

Rita Vandermeyer’s parlor. Sofa is CS with a coffee table in front of it. Two armchairs flank the sofa. Near SL is a window with a floor-length curtain. Other expensive-looking décor is present (opt.).

Interior of hospital. A large window is CS with part of a tree visible through it. Inside is a hospital bed with a table next to it and an IV stand. Additional décor suggesting a hospital room may be used.

Synopsis of Scenes

ACT I

Prologue: On board the Lusitania, 1915.

Scene 1: Town square in London, 1919.

Scene 2: Town square in London, the next day.

Scene 3: Meeting house of Mr. Brown and his associates, later that day.

Scene 4: Town square in London, the next day.

Scene 5: Home of Rita Vandermeyer, the next day.

Scene 6: Hospital, the same day.

Scene 7: Town square in London, a few days later.

Scene 8: Home of Rita Vandermeyer, a short time later.

Intermission

ACT II

Scene 1: Town square in London.

Scene 2: London café, the next day.

Scene 3: Meeting house of Mr. Brown and his associates, the same day.

Scene 4: London Café, later that day.

Scene 5: Hospital, the next day.

Scene 6: Town square in London, later that day.

Scene 7: Meeting house of Mr. Brown and his associates.

Scene 8: London café.

Props

Lifejacket, for Jane Finn	Wheelchair
Parcel	Suitcases
Trench coat and hat, for Rita	Knife
Waitress order pad	Bottle or vial
Pen	Water glass
Café menu	Tray with food
Purse, for Tuppence	Streetlamp
Money	Trench coat and hat, for Sir James
Tea service	Tray with bread and water
2 Teacups	Rope
Wallet, for Whittington	2 Telegrams
Boxes	Crumpled piece of paper
Folded piece of paper	Everyday clothing, for Nurse Edith
Hat, for landlord	Bandages
2 Slips of paper	Oilskin packet
Badge, for Inspector Japp	Blank piece of paper
Notepad and pen	Matches
Business card	Piece of paper that reads, "With the compliments of Mr. Brown."
Papers	Photograph of Jane
Hat, for Sir James	3 Pairs of handcuffs
Toy gold badge	Wedding band, for Tommy
Shopping bags	Wedding band, for Tuppence
Groceries, assorted	Wine bottle
Tire iron	4 Wine glasses
Feather duster	Sign that reads, "For Lease"
Maid's uniform, for Tuppence	
Tea service trays	
Coat, for Rita	
Handbag, for Rita	

Special Effects

Sound of water lapping
Sound of bombs exploding
Doorbell
Woman's scream
Gunshot

Two young adventurers for hire.
Willing to do anything and go anywhere.
Pay must be good.
No unreasonable offer refused...

ACT I

Prologue

(Curtain down. On board the Lusitania, 1915. There is a spotlight and many shadows. Sounds of water lapping and bombs exploding are heard. A woman's scream is heard. Jane Finn enters wearing a lifejacket. She looks around nervously. Ship Captain enters and crosses to CS.)

CAPTAIN: *(Announcing.)* Attention passengers of the Lusitania! The ship has been hit by a torpedo that we believe was deployed by a German submarine. We are evacuating women and children to the lifeboats now.

JANE: Why is this happening, Captain?

CAPTAIN: We have crossed into the waters around Great Britain. Germany has declared these waters a war zone and decided to fire upon our vessel in retaliation. Now hurry along and follow me. I will get you safely to a lifeboat.

(Captain exits with Jane following behind. Danvers enters and grabs Jane's arm.)

DANVERS: I beg your pardon.

JANE: Oh, my! I didn't see you there.

DANVERS: I'm sorry for that. It's just that I need your help with a matter of great urgency. *(Looks over his shoulder nervously throughout the following exchange.)*

JANE: I'm sure it can wait until we reach the shore. We must get off this boat before it sinks!

DANVERS: I'm afraid I might not make it off this boat.

JANE: But—

DANVERS: There's no time. You are American, is that right?

JANE: Yes, I am.

DANVERS: A patriotic one?

JANE: Of course, I am!

DANVERS: Don't be offended. You don't know how much is at stake. But I've got to trust someone, and it must be a woman.

JANE: Why?

DANVERS: Because they are only putting women and children into lifeboats and I have something that needs to make it ashore. *(Looks around and draws Jane near.)* I'm carrying papers...vitaly important papers. They will change the progress of the war for the Allies. These papers have got to be saved! They've got more chance with you than with me. Will you take them?

JANE: I will. *(Holds out her hand.)*

DANVERS: Wait...I must warn you. There is a risk that I've been followed. I don't think I have, but one never knows. If so, there will be danger. Are you sure you want to go through with this?

JANE: I'll go through with it, all right. What am I to do with the papers once I reach the shore?

DANVERS: Watch the newspapers. I'll advertise in the personal column of the "Times" beginning with the title "Shipmate." At the end of three days if there's no word from me...well, you'll know that I didn't make it off this boat. You should then take the packet to the American Embassy and deliver it into the Ambassador's own hands. Is that clear?

JANE: Quite clear.

DANVERS: Then be ready. I'm going to say goodbye. *(Takes Jane's hand in his and passes her a parcel. Rita enters, with a hat drawn low over her face and wearing a trench coat. She is in the shadows and her identity is unclear to the audience.)* Goodbye and good luck to you.

(Captain enters and spots Jane.)

CAPTAIN: *(To Jane.)* There you are! The last of the women and children are boarding the lifeboats now. The Lusitania is sinking fast. We must hurry.

JANE: All right. Good — *(Turns to say goodbye to Danvers but he has exited. To herself.)* That's odd.

CAPTAIN: Come along, now.

(Captain exits, followed by Jane. Still unidentifiable to the audience, Rita moves out of the shadows, crosses to CS, and slowly exits behind Jane.)

Scene I

(AT RISE: London town square, 1919. An outdoor café with a menu on a stand is on one side, with shops and street carts along the rear, and a building with a sign that reads "Esthonia Glassware." A potted plant is just outside of the door to the building. Londoners are moving about visiting shops, pushing street carts, and eating at the café. Mr. Whittington is eating at the café. Tuppence enters, looks at the café menu, and starts riffling through her purse and going through her pockets looking for money. Tommy enters and spots Tuppence.)

TOMMY: (Calls.) Tuppence, old bean!

TUPPENCE: (Looking up.) Tommy, you old thing!

(Tuppence rushes to Tommy and they embrace.)

TOMMY: I haven't seen you since we encountered each other in that Army hospital three years ago. How is my favorite nurse?

TUPPENCE: A nurse no longer, I'm afraid.

TOMMY: Is the hospital shut down like everything else now that the war is over?

TUPPENCE: I'm afraid so. And what about you? What's a former lieutenant in the Queen's Army doing now that his fighting days are behind him?

TOMMY: (Chuckles.) Well, I was discharged two months ago and have spent my time since spending my Army pay. Now let's sit down at this café, and we'll catch up properly.

TUPPENCE: You just admitted to me that you were broke. How do you expect to pay for your meal?

TOMMY: I have a few shillings left, but I wouldn't mind if an old friend would treat me to lunch. (Smiles flirtatiously.)

TUPPENCE: Oh, Tommy Beresford! You are the same boy I've known since grade school. A whole lot of charm, and not a lot of sense! Don't you see...I am not any better off

than you! I have spent the last few months trying to get a job doing anything at all, and I haven't had any luck.

TOMMY: Well, let's at least sit down and order some tea. Or is that too rich for your purse?

TUPPENCE: I suppose I can spare a few shillings.

(Tuppence crosses with Tommy to the café, where they search for an open table.)

CAFÉ PATRON 1: *(To Café Patron 2.)* And can you believe it, she simply cried when I told her she couldn't have the flat, after all!

CAFÉ PATRON 2: You don't say!

TOMMY: *(To Tuppence.)* Funny scraps of conversation one overhears when passing by. Just this morning, I passed a couple of men talking about someone named Jane Finn in a most angry manner.

TUPPENCE: Jane Finn...that's an interesting name, isn't it? *(Spots a table.)* There's a table.

(Tommy and Tuppence sit at a table next to Whittington. Waitress enters.)

WAITRESS: *(Poised to write on pad.)* What'll it be?

TOMMY: I believe we'll each just have some tea and buttered toast.

TUPPENCE: *(To Waitress.)* And make sure the tea comes in separate pots. I want to make sure we each get what we pay for.

WAITRESS: *(Turns, sarcastically.)* A couple who is clearly rolling in money. Lucky me. *(Exits.)*

TOMMY: *(To Tuppence.)* Now then, let's catch up. You mentioned that you've been looking for work since the end of the war. In what line of work are you seeking employment?

TUPPENCE: I've tried everything! I did manage to get a few jobs driving delivery trucks. Oh! And I once had a position driving around a general in the Army.

TOMMY: What a waste of money! The government lets us lowly lieutenants go with nothing but a few pounds to our names and the generals are driven all over town by beautiful girls.

TUPPENCE: What was that you said? Did you just call me beautiful?

TOMMY: (*Flustered.*) What? I-I don't know what you're talking about. (*Waitress enters, carrying a tea service. To Waitress.*) Ah, here's the tea now! What timing! You've earned yourself a fine gratuity from this table.

WAITRESS: (*Sarcastic.*) A gratuity on two slices of buttered toast and tea...how very kind of you. (*Exits.*)

TUPPENCE: (*To Tommy.*) Yes, well, I worked in a government office for a short while and since then have been looking into becoming a land girl, a postal woman, and a bus conductress. But nothing has turned up.

TOMMY: My story is pretty much the same. There just aren't any jobs. I'm just about desperate!

TUPPENCE: So am I. I've hung on as long as I can, but I think I may have to go home to my parents.

TOMMY: Don't you want to?

TUPPENCE: Of course, I don't. I have six younger siblings at home. Do you know how much housework that would mean? I don't want to go back, but, oh, Tommy, what else is there to do? Money, money, money! I think about money morning, noon, and night!

TOMMY: Same here.

TUPPENCE: There are only three ways to get money: inherit it, marry it, or make it. The first is ruled out, as I don't have any rich elderly relatives. And I've tried to meet a millionaire but have had no luck.

TOMMY: (*Smiles.*) So you're looking for a husband, are you?

TUPPENCE: Well, marriage is my best chance. I've made up my mind to marry a man with money...any smart girl would. And I'm not one to trifle with sentimental feelings where love is concerned.

TOMMY: (*Hastily.*) I couldn't agree more. Who needs love anyway when you can have money?

TUPPENCE: So if I can't inherit money, and I can't marry money, then it remains that I must make money.

TOMMY: We've tried that and failed.

TUPPENCE: We've tried all the orthodox ways, but suppose we try the unorthodox. Let's be adventurers!

TOMMY: Adventurers? It has a nice ring to it. How do we begin?

TUPPENCE: That's the difficult part. We might attract the wrong sort of client who would hire us to commit crimes for them.

TOMMY: That's delightful, coming from a clergyman's daughter. It'd be funny if you were caught.

TUPPENCE: I wouldn't likely get caught. I'm terribly clever.

TOMMY: (*Teasing.*) And you're still as modest as you were back in grade school.

TUPPENCE: Don't tease. Now, should we really do this, Tommy? Should we be adventurers?

TOMMY: A joint venture of sorts?

TUPPENCE: That's it! We could call our company The Young Adventurers, Limited.

TOMMY: And how would we get in touch with would-be employers?

TUPPENCE: We'd take out an advertisement. It could read, "Two young adventurers for hire. Willing to do anything and go anywhere. Pay must be good. No unreasonable offer refused." How would that strike you if you read it?

TOMMY: It would strike me as a hoax or else written by a lunatic.

TUPPENCE: I've read worse. Why don't you head over to the "Times" now and submit it. (*Takes out money and hands it to*

Tommy.) I expect it will cost five shillings. Here's half a crown for my share.

TOMMY: (*Holds up his teacup to toast.*) Here's to our joint venture, and may it prosper!

TUPPENCE: (*Toasting.*) To The Young Adventurers, Limited!

(Tuppence and Tommy toasts with their teacups.)

[END OF FREEVIEW]