



# PUBLICITY

## THE FIRST INSTALLMENT OF TOMMY AND TUPPENCE: A DETECTIVE SERIES

*Agatha Christie*

Reader response to the origin story of Tommy and Tuppence Beresford – Agatha Christie’s 1922 novel, *The Secret Adversary* – in the 2021 *Green Bag Almanac & Reader* exceeded expectations. Like all of you (it seems), we liked it (or most of it<sup>1</sup>). And, like some of you (at least), we wanted to know what came next for Tuppence and her loyal and affectionate collaborator. Christie did too. The first of several short sequels to *The Secret Adversary* appeared in 1924 (and we’ve reprinted it here). In her memoirs, Christie recalled that it “was fun to get back to them.”<sup>2</sup> The collected Tommy-and-Tuppence short stories, which were published as *Partners in Crime* in 1929, are renowned as vehicles for many allusions to Christie’s fellow detective fiction authors and their most famous characters.<sup>3</sup>

– The Editors

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*The author bio in the original publication of this story in The Sketch is:*

*Author of “The Man in the Brown Suit,” “The Man Who Was Number Four,” “The Grey Cells of M. Poirot,” “The Mysterious Affair at Styles,” “The Murder on Links,” “The Secret Adversary,” etc.*

*That is good enough for our purposes here, since you know who Christie is already.*

<sup>1</sup> See Agatha Christie, *The Secret Adversary*, 2021 *Green Bag Alm.* 109, 411 n.31 (annotation by Alexis Romero); see also Ross E. Davies, *Many Friends and a Secret Adversary*, 2021 *Green Bag Alm.* 1, 2; cf. *Our Mistake*, 24 *Green Bag* 2d 287 (2021).

<sup>2</sup> Agatha Christie, *An Autobiography* (1977).

<sup>3</sup> See, e.g., Charles Osborne, *The Life and Crimes of Agatha Christie* 70-72 (2001).

# The Sketch

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ONE SHILLING.

“It’s extraordinary to me,” said Mrs. Thomas Beresford, stifling the sixth yawn in half-an-hour, “how different everything always is from what you think it’s going to be.”

“A very profound statement, Tuppence,” said her husband. “But not original. Eminent poets, and still more often eminent divines, have said it before — and, if you will excuse my saying so, have said it better.”

“Four years ago,” continued Tuppence, taking no notice of the interruption, “I would have sworn that, with sufficient money to buy things with and with you for a husband, all life would be one grand sweet song, as one of the poets you seem to know so much about puts it.”

“Is it me or the money that palls upon you?” inquired Tommy coldly.

“Palls isn’t exactly the word,” said Tuppence kindly. “I’m used to my blessings, that’s all. One never thinks what a boon it is to be able to breathe through one’s nose until one has a cold in the head.”

“Shall I neglect you a little?” suggested Tommy. “Take other women about to night clubs — that sort of thing?”

“Useless,” said Tuppence. “You would only meet me there with other men. And I should know perfectly well that you didn’t care for the other women; whereas you would never be quite sure that I didn’t care for the other men. Women are so much more thorough.”

“It’s only in modesty that men score top marks,” murmured her husband. “But what is the matter with you, Tuppence? Why this yearning discontent?”

“I don’t know. I want things to happen. Exciting things. Wouldn’t you like to go chasing German spies again, Tommy? Think of the wild days of peril we went through once. Of course, I know you’re more or less in the Secret Service now, but it’s pure office work.”

“You mean you’d like them to send me into darkest Russia disguised as a Bolshevik bootlegger, or something of that sort?”

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“That wouldn’t be any good,” said Tuppence. “They wouldn’t let me go with you, and I’m the person who wants something to do so badly. At the present minute I’m doing nothing but spend money. It’s a good sport, but it gets monotonous in the end to one of my simple tastes. How do you like this hat, by the way? I bought it yesterday.”

“You’re always buying hats. Is it a cloche?”

“All hats are cloches.”

“You’ve got thirteen cloche hats already. I can’t see what you want with a fourteenth.”

“I love buying hats,” said Tuppence. “I always did. Besides, thirteen is an unlucky number.”

At that minute the door opened, and a tall lad of fifteen who seemed undecided as to whether he was a footman or a page-boy inquired in a truly magnificent manner –

“Are you at home, Madam? The front-door bell has just rung.”

“I wish Albert wouldn’t go to the pictures,” sighed Tuppence, after she had signified her assent and Albert had withdrawn. “He’s copying that Long Island butler now. Thank goodness I’ve cured him of asking for people’s cards and bringing them to me on a salver – the cards, I mean.”

The door opened again, and Albert announced “Mr. Carter,” much as though it were a Royal title.

“The Chief,” muttered Tommy, in great surprise.

Tuppence jumped up with a glad exclamation and greeted a tall, grey-haired man with piercing eyes and a fixed smile.

“Mr. Carter, I am glad to see you.”

“That’s good, Mrs. Tommy. I can only stay a minute or two. I’ve got a proposition to put before you. But first answer me a question. How’s life generally?”

“Satisfactory, but dull,” replied Tuppence with a twinkle.

“Better and better,” said Mr. Carter. “I’m evidently going to find you in the right mood. Ever take the *Daily Leader*?”

Tuppence picked up a copy of the paper from the table and handed it to him. Mr. Carter took it, ran his finger down the second column on the front page, and then beckoned to Tommy.

“Just read out that advertisement, will you?”

Tommy complied.

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“Blunt’s Detective Agency. Theodore Blunt, Manager. Private Inquiries. Large Staff of Confidential and Highly Skilled Inquiry Agents. Utmost discretion. Consultations free. – 118, Haleham Street, W.C.”

He looked inquiringly at Mr. Carter. The latter nodded.

“Been on its last legs for some time,” he murmured. “Friend of mine acquired it for a mere song. We’re thinking of setting it going again – say, for a six months’ trial. And during that time, of course, it will have to have a manager.”

“What about Mr. Theodore Blunt?” asked Tommy.

“Mr. Blunt has been rather indiscreet, I’m afraid. In fact, Scotland Yard have had to interfere. Mr. Blunt is being detained at his Majesty’s expense, and he won’t tell us half of what we’d like to know.”

“I see, Sir,” said Tommy. “This is work for the Department?”

“Didn’t I say so? How careless of me! Six months’ leave from the office. Ill-health. And, of course, if you like to run a detective agency under the name of Theodore Blunt, it’s nothing to do with me.”

Tommy eyed his Chief steadily.

“Any instructions. Sir?”

“Mr. Blunt did some foreign business, I believe. Look out for blue letters with a Russian stamp on them. From a ham merchant anxious to find his wife, who came as a refugee to this country some years ago. Moisten the stamp and you’ll find the number 16 written underneath. Make a copy of these letters and send the originals on to me. Also, if anyone comes to the office and makes a reference to the number 16, inform me immediately.”

“I understand. Sir,” said Tommy. “And apart from these instructions?”

Mr. Carter picked up his gloves from the table and prepared to depart.

“You can run the agency as you please. I fancied” – his eyes twinkled a little – “that it might amuse Mrs. Tommy to try her hand at a little detective work.”

“Tommy,” cried Tuppence, in an ecstasy, as the door closed behind Mr. Carter, “won’t it be fun? We’ll hunt down murderers, and discover the missing family jewels, and find people who’ve disappeared –”

Tommy checked her transports.

“Calm yourself, Tuppence, calm yourself, and try and forget the cheap fiction you’re in the habit of reading. Our clientèle – if we have any clientèle at all – will be solely composed of husbands who want their wives

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shadowed, and wives who want their husbands shadowed. Evidence for divorce is the sole prop of private inquiry agents.”

“Ugh!” said Tuppence, wrinkling a fastidious nose. “We shan’t touch divorce cases. We must raise the tone of our new profession.”

Tommy shook his head doubtfully “The way of reformers is hard,” he murmured.



The young couple took possession of the offices of Blunt’s Detective Agency a few days later. They were on the second floor of a somewhat dilapidated building in Bloomsbury. Tuppence, with an eye to the dramatic effect, undertook the furnishing and general *mise en scène*.

In the small outer office, Albert relinquished the role of a Long Island butler, and took up that of office boy – a part which he played to perfection. A paper bag of sweets, inky hands, and a tousled head was his conception of the character.

From the outer office, two doors led into inner offices. On one door was painted the legend “Clerks”; on the other, “Private.” Behind the latter was a small, comfortable room furnished with an immense business-like desk, a lot of artistically labelled files, all empty, and some solid leather-seated chairs. Behind the desk sat the pseudo Mr. Blunt, trying to look as though he had run a detective agency all his life. A telephone, of course, stood at his elbow. Tuppence and he had rehearsed several good telephone effects, and Albert also had his instructions.

In the adjoining room were Tuppence, a typewriter, the necessary tables and chairs of an inferior type to those in the room of the great chief, and a gas-ring for making tea.

Nothing was wanting, in fact, save clients.

Tommy and Tuppence compared notes ruefully a week after their installation.

“Three idiotic women whose husbands go away for week-ends,” sighed Tommy. “Anyone come whilst I was out at lunch?”

“A fat old man with a flighty wife,” sighed Tuppence sadly. “I’ve read in the papers for years that the divorce evil was growing, but somehow I never seemed to realise it until this last week. I’m sick and tired of saying ‘We don’t undertake divorce cases.’”

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“We’ve put it in the advertisements now,” Tommy reminded her. “So it won’t be so bad.”

“I’m sure we advertise in the most tempting way, too,” said Tuppence, in a melancholy voice. “All the same, I’m not going to be beaten. If necessary, I shall commit a crime myself, and you will detect it!”

“And what good would that do? Think of my feelings when I bid you a tender farewell at Bow Street.”

“It wouldn’t come to Bow Street. Publicity. That’s what we need. Yes – publicity. I wonder now –”



**B**usiness did not improve. Tuppence went about with a dark and brooding look on her face, Albert took to two bags of sweets a day, and Tommy yawned with increasing frequency.

And then, one glorious Thursday morning, the client arrived!

There was a knock on the outer door. Albert, who had just placed an acid drop between his lips, roared out “Come in!” somewhat indistinctly, and then swallowed the acid drop whole in his surprise and delight. For this looked like the Real Thing.

A tall young man, exquisitely and beautifully dressed, stood hesitating in the doorway.

“A toff, if ever there was one,” said Albert to himself. His judgment in such matters was good.

The young man was about twenty-four years of age, had beautifully slicked-back hair, a tendency to pink rims round the eyes, and practically no chin to speak of.

In an ecstasy, Albert pressed a button under his desk, and almost immediately a perfect fusillade of typing broke out from the direction of “Clerks.” Tuppence had rushed to the post of duty. The effect of this hum of industry was to overawe the young man still further.

“I say,” he remarked, “is this the what-not detective agency – Blunt’s Brilliant Detectives? All that sort of stuff, you know? Eh?”

“Did you want, Sir, to speak to Mr. Blunt himself?” inquired Albert, with an air of doubt as to whether such a thing could be managed.

“Well – yes, laddie, that was the jolly old idea. Can it be done?”

“You haven’t an appointment, I suppose?”

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The visitor became more and more apologetic.

“Afraid I haven’t.”

“It’s always wise, Sir, to ring up on the phone first. Mr. Blunt is so terribly busy. He’s engaged on the telephone at the moment. Called into consultation by Scotland Yard.”

The young man seemed suitably impressed.

Albert lowered his voice, and imparted information in a friendly fashion.

“Important theft of documents from a Government office. They want Mr. Blunt to take up the case.”

“Oh, really! I say. He must be no end of a fellow.”

“The boss, Sir,” said Albert, “is It.”

The young man sat down on a hard chair, completely unconscious of the fact that he was being subjected to keen scrutiny by two pairs of eyes looking through cunningly contrived peep-holes – those of Tuppence, in the intervals of frenzied typing, and those of Tommy awaiting the suitable minute.

Presently a bell rang with violence on Albert’s desk.

“The Boss is free now. I will find out whether he can see you,” said Albert, and disappeared through the door marked “Private.”

He reappeared immediately.

“Will you come this way, Sir?”

The visitor was ushered into the private office, and a pleasant-faced young man with red hair and an air of brisk capability rose to greet him.

“Sit down. You wished to consult me? I am Mr. Blunt.”

“Oh! Really! I say, you’re awfully young, aren’t you?”

“The day of the Old Men is over,” said Tommy, waving his hand. “Let me tell you this, Sir – not a person on my highly trained staff is a day over twenty-five. That is the truth.”

Since the highly trained staff consisted of Tuppence and Albert, the statement was truth itself.

“And now – the facts,” said Mr. Blunt.

“I want you to find someone that’s missing,” blurted out the young man.

“Quite so. Will you give me the details?”

“Well, you see, it’s rather difficult. I mean, it’s a frightfully delicate business and all that. She might be frightfully waxy about it. I mean – well, it’s so dashed difficult to explain.”

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He looked helplessly at Tommy. Tommy felt annoyed. He had been on the point of going out to lunch, but he foresaw that getting the facts out of this client would be a long and tedious business.

“Did she disappear of her own free will, or do you suspect abduction?” he demanded crisply.

“I don’t know,” said the young man. “I don’t know anything.”

Tommy reached for a pad and pencil.

“First of all,” he said, “will you give me your name? My office boy is trained never to ask names. In that way consultations can remain completely confidential.”

“Oh, rather!” said the young man. “Jolly good idea. My name – er – my name’s Smith.”

“Oh, no,” said Tommy – “the real one, please.”

His visitor looked at him in awe.

“Er – St. Vincent,” he said. “Lawrence St. Vincent.”

“It’s a curious thing,” said Tommy, “how very few people there are whose real name is Smith. Personally, I don’t know anyone called Smith. But nine men out of ten who wish to conceal their real name give the name of Smith. I am thinking of writing a monograph upon the subject.”

At that moment a buzzer purred discreetly on his desk. That meant that Tuppence was requesting to take hold. Tommy, who wanted his lunch and who felt profoundly unsympathetic towards Mr. St. Vincent, was only too pleased to relinquish the helm.

“Excuse me,” he said, and picked up the telephone.

Across his face there shot rapid changes – surprise, consternation, slight elation.

“You don’t say so,” he said into the ’phone. “The Prime Minister himself? Of course, in that case, I will come round at once.”

He replaced the receiver on the hook and turned to his client.

“My dear Sir, I must ask you to excuse me. A most urgent summons. If you will give the facts of the case to my confidential secretary, she will deal with them.”

He strode to the adjoining door.

“Miss Robinson.”

Tuppence, very neat and demure, with smooth black head and dainty collar and cuffs, tripped in. Tommy made the necessary introductions and



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departed.

“A lady you take an interest in has disappeared, I understand, Mr. St. Vincent,” said Tuppence, in her soft voice, as she sat down and took up Mr. Blunt’s pad and pencil. “A young lady?”

“Oh, rather!” said Mr. St. Vincent. “Young – and – and – awfully good-looking, and all that sort of thing.”

Tuppence’s face grew grave.

“Dear me!” she murmured. “I hope that –”

“You don’t think anything’s really happened to her?” demanded Mr. St. Vincent in lively concern.

“Oh, we must hope for the best,” said Tuppence, with a kind of false cheerfulness which depressed Mr. St. Vincent horribly.

“Oh, look here, Miss Robinson! I say, you must do something. Spare no expense. I wouldn’t have anything happen to her for the world. You seem awfully sympathetic, and I don’t mind telling you in confidence that I simply worship the ground that girl walks on. She’s a topper – an absolute topper.”

“Please tell me her name and all about her.”

“Her name’s Violette – I don’t know her second name. She works in a hat shop – Madame Sophie’s, in Brook Street – but she’s as straight as they make them. Has ticked me off no end of times. I went round there yesterday – waiting for her to come out. All the others came, but not her. Then I found that she’d never turned up that morning to work at all – sent no message either. Old Madame was furious about it. I got the address of her lodgings, and I went round there. She hadn’t come home the night before, and they didn’t know where she was. I was simply frantic. I thought of going to the police. But I knew that Violette would be absolutely furious with me for doing that if she were really all right and had gone off on her own. Then I remembered that she herself had pointed out your advertisement to me one day in the paper and told me that one of the women who’d been in buying hats had simply raved about your ability and discretion and all that sort of thing. So I toddled along here right away.”

“I see,” said Tuppence. “What is the address of her lodgings?”

The young man gave it to her.

“That’s all, I think,” said Tuppence reflectively. “That is to say – am I to understand that you are engaged to this young lady?”



Mr. St. Vincent turned a brick-red.

“Well, no – not exactly. I never said anything. But I can tell you this: I mean to ask her to marry me as soon as ever I see her – if I ever do see her again.”

Tuppence laid aside her pad. “Do you wish for our special twenty-four-hour service?” she asked in business-like tones.

“What’s that?”

“The fees are doubled, but we put all our available staff on to the case. Mr. St. Vincent, if the lady is alive, I shall be able to tell you where she is by this time to-morrow.”

“What? I say, that’s wonderful.”

“We only employ experts – and we guarantee results.”

“But I say, you know! You must have the most topping staff.”

“Oh, we have,” said Tuppence. “By the way, you haven’t given me a description of the young lady.”

“She’s got the most topping hair – sort of golden, but very deep, like a jolly old sunset; that’s it – a jolly old sunset. You know, I never noticed things like sunsets until lately. Poetry too – there’s a lot more in poetry than I ever thought.”

“Red hair,” said Tuppence unemotionally, writing it down. “What height should you say the lady was?”

“Oh, tallish; and she’s got ripping eyes – dark blue, I think. And a sort of decided manner with her – takes a fellow up short sometimes.”

Tuppence wrote down a few words more, then closed her note-book and rose.

“If you will call here to-morrow at two o’clock, I think we shall have news of some kind for you,” she said. “Good-morning, Mr. St. Vincent.”



When Tommy returned Tuppence was just fitting on a smart little toque of black velvet.

"I've got all the details," she said succinctly. "Lawrence St. Vincent is the nephew and heir of the Earl of Cheriton. If we pull this through we shall get publicity in the highest places."

Tommy read through the notes on the pad.

"What do you think has really happened to the girl?" he asked.

"I think," said Tuppence, "that she has fled at the dictates of her heart, feeling that she loves this young man too well for her peace of mind."

"I know they do it in books," said Tommy "but I've never known any girl who did it in real life."

"No?" said Tuppence. "Well, perhaps you're right. But I daresay Lawrence St. Vincent will swallow it all right. He's full of romantic notions just now. By the way, I guaranteed results in twenty-four hours – our special service."

"Tuppence, you ass, what made you do that?"

"The idea just came into my head. I thought it sounded rather well. Don't you worry, my dear. Leave it all to little Tuppence."

She went out, leaving Tommy profoundly dissatisfied.

Presently he too went out.

When he returned at half-past four he found Tuppence extracting a bag of biscuits from their place of concealment in one of the files.

"You look very weary," she remarked. "What have you been doing?"

"Making a round of the hospitals with that girl's description."

"Didn't I tell you to leave it to me?" demanded Tuppence.

"You can't find that girl single-handed before two o'clock to-morrow."

"I can – and, what's more, I have!"

"Where is she and what was she doing?"

"As to where she is, she's in my office next door; and as to what she's doing – well, early training will tell, and with a kettle, a gas-ring, and half-a-pound of tea staring her in the face, the result is a foregone conclusion.

"You see," continued Tuppence gently, "Madame Sophie's is where I go for my hats, and the other day I ran across an old pal of hospital days amongst the girls there. She gave up nursing after the war and started a hat

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shop, failed, and took this job at Madame Sophie's. We fixed up the whole thing between us. She was to rub the advertisement well into young St. Vincent, and then disappear. Wonderful efficiency of Blunt's Brilliant Detectives. Publicity for us, and the necessary fillip to young St. Vincent to bring him to the point of proposing."

"Tuppence," said Tommy, "you take my breath away. The whole thing is the most immoral business I ever heard of. You aid and abet this young man to marry out of his class —"

"Stuff!" said Tuppence. "Vi's a splendid girl — and the queer thing is that she really adores that weak-kneed young man. You can see with half a glance what *his* family needs — some good red blood in it. Vi will be the making of him. She'll look after him like a mother, ease down the cocktails and the night clubs, and make him lead a good healthy country gentleman's life. Come and meet her."

Tuppence opened the door of the adjoining office, and Tommy followed her.

A tall girl with lovely auburn hair and a pleasant face put down the steaming kettle in her hand, and turned with a smile that disclosed an even row of white teeth.

"I hope you'll forgive me, Nurse Cowley — Mrs. Beresford, I mean. I thought that very likely you'd be quite ready for a cup of tea yourself. Many's the pot of tea you've made for me in the hospital at three o'clock in the morning."

"Tommy," said Tuppence, "let me introduce you to my old friend, Nurse Smith."

"Smith, did you say? How curious!" said Tommy, shaking hands. "Eh? Oh, nothing — a little monograph that I was thinking of writing."

"Pull yourself together, Tommy," said Tuppence.

She poured him out a cup of tea.

"Now then, let's all drink together. Here's to the success of the Detective Agency! Blunt's Brilliant Detectives! May they never know failure!"

THE END

