



THE AFFAIR OF THE  
BLOODSTAINED  
EGG COSY

JAMES ANDERSON

Allison & Busby Limited  
11 Wardour Mews  
London W1F 8AN  
*allisonandbusby.com*

First published in Great Britain in 1975.  
This paperback edition published by Allison & Busby in 2021.

Published by arrangement with Poisoned Pen Press,  
Scottsdale, Arizona, USA.

Copyright © 1975 by JAMES ANDERSON

The moral right of the author is hereby asserted in accordance with  
the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

*All characters and events in this publication,  
other than those clearly in the public domain,  
are fictitious and any resemblance to actual persons,  
living or dead, is purely coincidental.*

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced,  
stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by  
any means without the prior written permission of the publisher,  
nor be otherwise circulated in any form of binding or cover  
other than that in which it is published and without a similar  
condition being imposed on the subsequent buyer.

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from  
the British Library.

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

ISBN 978-0-7490-2752-0

Typeset in 10.5/15 pt Sabon by  
Allison & Busby Ltd



The paper used for this Allison & Busby publication  
has been produced from trees that have been legally sourced  
from well-managed and credibly certified forests.

Printed and bound by  
CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon, CR0 4YY

## PROLOGUE

‘How well do you know Adolf Hitler?’

The man who asked the question was short and dapper and wore a military uniform heavy with insignia. He turned away from the window of his office as he spoke and surveyed the only other occupant of the room with a look of slight distaste.

This was an older, somewhat seedy-looking man in a blue serge suit and a dirty collar. He was smoking a cigarette and lazily blowing smoke rings towards the ceiling.

‘Not well at all,’ he said. ‘I’ve met him twice. Why do you ask?’

‘Last week your department supplied me with the transcript of a speech he had just made to a secret meeting of Nazi party officials.’

‘Concerning the Duchy?’

‘Yes.’

‘What about it?’

‘I just wondered if you were able to read between the lines of that speech.’

‘Well, it’s obvious he wants the Duchy.’

‘That has been obvious for a long time. On this occasion, however, he laid considerable stress on her strategic importance – and on her military weakness.’

‘Indicating that he intends to act soon – to annexe her?’

‘We believe so. Which would, of course, be disastrous to our interests.’

‘Would it? Well, if you say so.’

‘I do. It was decided many months ago that if any country was to annexe the Duchy, it had to be ourselves. But there was no great urgency. Because there is an obstacle.’

The older man sucked at his cigarette and puffed three or four smoke rings upwards. ‘England,’ he said.

‘Precisely. Or Britain, to be more accurate. Britain recognises the importance of keeping the Grand Duke on the throne and the Duchy, to put it crudely, on her side. She will certainly be prepared to act to ensure this. Just how much she will be willing to do we’ve never known. However, Hitler’s speech has changed the situation entirely. Now it is essential we act quickly. As the American cowboy films so quaintly put it, we must beat him to the draw. But first of all we have got to find out just how far Britain is prepared to go in the Duchy’s defence.’

‘Which, I suppose, is why I was so peremptorily summoned here this morning.’

The short man sat down in a chair near the other, leant forward, and spoke in a low voice. ‘There is shortly to be a secret meeting between a representative of the Grand Duke – probably Martin Adler himself – and a British government minister. Can you discover where and when

that meeting is to take place – and what is decided at it?’

The older man’s eyes narrowed and he eased himself slowly upright in his chair. ‘That,’ he said, ‘will not be simple.’

‘Of course it won’t be *simple*. But can you do it?’

‘Perhaps.’ The older man was silent for a moment, then added: ‘There is one agent – and one agent only – in the world who might succeed. Not one of my own people – a freelance. If this agent is available, then the answer is probably yes. But it will cost a great deal of money.’

‘The cost is immaterial. Just find out what we want to know.’

‘Which is – precisely?’

‘Exactly what arms and equipment Britain agrees to supply, and – most important – how soon she can deliver: we must know how quickly we have to act. Also, what Britain would do in the event of the Duchy being invaded: would she intervene directly by sending troops? On the answer to these questions depends our course of action. It is entirely up to your department to get them.’

The civilian was still for a few seconds. Then he stubbed out his cigarette and got to his feet. He brushed a few specks of ash from his waistcoat, and ambled towards the door. ‘I’ll be in touch,’ he said, and went out.

# CHAPTER ONE

## A Resignation

Jane Clifton was fuming. Some customers were absolutely intolerable. And Mrs. Amelia Bottway just about took the cake. Jane replaced the red dress on the hanger, took down a green one, and returned to Mrs. Bottway.

‘Perhaps you would care to try this one, madam.’

‘Oh, really, you are the most stupid girl! I told you distinctly not green.’ She had a piercing voice.

Jane reddened, then swallowed hard. ‘I’m sorry, madam. I didn’t hear you. I’m afraid this is the last one of your size in a bright-coloured satin.’

‘Well it’s no good to me at all. None of them ’ave been. You’ve been wasting my time. It’s disgraceful.’

‘I’ve shown you nine gowns, madam. I’m sorry if none of them is suitable, but—’

‘I shall ’ave to try h’elsewhere. Somewhere where they keep a adequate stock – and employ some h’intelligent girls.’ Mrs. Bottway struggled to her feet and fixed Jane with what was plainly meant to be a withering glance.

Jane looked back at her with revulsion, her face fixed in what she called her painted-doll expression. The foul-

mannered, ugly old barrel, she thought to herself. How dare she speak to me like that?

‘You foul-mannered, ugly old barrel,’ she said loudly and distinctly, ‘how dare you speak to me like that!’

She hadn’t meant to say this: the words had just come. But they were out now, and Jane suddenly felt very much better.

For several seconds Mrs. Bottway did not react at all. Then slowly her face started to go purple. Jane suddenly realised that she was the centre of attention. There were three or four other customers in the shop, and, together with the assistants, they were all staring at her speechlessly.

Mrs. Bottway, whose complexion by now resembled an overripe plum, at last got her mouth open. ‘You—’ she said, ‘you – you – you ’ussy.’

Jane watched her with a cool and curiously detached air. She marshalled her thoughts: might as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb.

‘Mrs. Bottway,’ she said, ‘you and your sort sicken me. You are insolent, bad-tempered, and arrogant. You’ve got pots of money and not the first idea how to spend it. You ask for a satin dress in a bright colour. I ask you – with your figure! You’d look even more grotesque than you do now.’

She got no further. For from behind her came a voice raised in a screech. ‘Clifton!’

Jane swung round to confront the proprietor of Mayfair Modes, Monsieur Anton. ‘Clifton – you wicked, wicked girl. You will apologise to madam this instant.’ He was almost hopping with rage.

Jane interrupted quietly. ‘I shall apologise to nobody. I

meant every word of it. Don't bother to say any more. It's too late. You can't fire me. I resign!

And she strode to her cubicle, jammed her hat on her head, grabbed up her coat and handbag, and made for the door. Just inside it, she turned.

'Mr. Anton,' she said loudly, 'I have a week's wages due to me – three pounds, seven shillings and sixpence exactly. But don't bother to send it on. Put it towards the cost of a new wig.' And with her head held high, Jane marched out into Bond Street.

She walked off briskly, struggling into her coat as she did so, and cursing herself for a prize idiot. Fancy throwing up a steady job, walking out without a reference – and no hope of getting one now! – not even claiming what was rightfully hers; when she had just £9 18s 7d in her bank account and 11s 3 1/4d in her purse.

But it had been worth it. Their faces! Jane suddenly laughed out loud – greatly to the surprise of a plump, bowler-hatted little man she happened to be passing.

'Jane – wait!' The voice came from behind her and Jane spun round to see a small, red-haired girl darting along the pavement towards her.

'Gerry!' she exclaimed.

Lady Geraldine Saunders, only daughter of the twelfth Earl of Burford, rushed up to Jane and caught her by both hands. 'Jane – darling – what a simply devastating performance!'

Jane stared. 'You were there?'

'You bet I was there. I called in to ask you to lunch. I was just waiting quietly for you to finish with that ghastly person when you suddenly blew up. It was magnificent. Jane, tell me, does that funny little man really wear a wig?'

‘Not that I know of. But everyone will think he does now, won’t they?’

Gerry gurgled happily. ‘Oh, how priceless. Jane, you must come and lunch with me at the Ritz. It’s ages since I saw you. I’ve got tons to talk about.’

‘You’ll have to treat me, Gerry, if you really want the honour of my company. I’m absolutely stony broke.’

‘Who isn’t, darling? But I can just run to it. Come on. Let’s hail a cab.’

In the taxi Jane reflected ruefully that her friend’s idea of stoniness was quite a different thing from her own. To Gerry it meant trying to stretch to the end of the year an annual allowance of fifteen hundred pounds. It was ironic that there should be such a contrast between the situations of two girls whose families a few generations previously had been of about equal standing – two girls who had gone to the same school, been ‘finished’, and come out together. But whereas the present Earl of Burford was still the proprietor of estates in the West Country and Scotland, a series of disasters and blunders over a period of sixty or seventy years had gradually eroded the Clifton fortune. So that Jane had to fend for herself.

She sighed. ‘Oh, Gerry, why am I such an ass? Why do I keep throwing over all these jobs? I know it’s irresponsible, but I can’t seem to help it.’

‘Well, nobody could put up with being spoken to like that. You had no alternative.’

‘Oh, but I did. To bite my lip, keep smiling, and say I was very sorry if I hadn’t given satisfaction. That’s what any of the other girls would have done. It’s what I’ve done – often.’

‘I don’t know how you stood it for so long.’

‘Because I wanted to eat. It’s as simple as that.’

A minute later the taxi pulled up outside the Ritz. ‘Come along,’ Gerry said, ‘you’ll feel better after a good lunch. No banting today. Let’s forget our figures and have a real blow-out.’

It was while they were drinking their after-lunch coffee that Gerry suddenly said: ‘I say, I’ve just realised you’re a free woman. You can come down to Alderley for a bit.’

‘Oh, it would be heavenly. But I must start job-hunting again.’

‘Bunkum! You needn’t begin straight away. You need a breather first.’

‘But, Gerry, I explained, I’m practically on my beam ends. I can’t afford—’

‘You’re not going to be any worse off by spending a few days with us. It won’t cost you anything to live while you’re there. Look, I’m motoring down in the Hispano-Suiza tomorrow – oh, of course, you haven’t seen her, have you? She’s absolutely my pride and joy. She’s got a nine and a half litre V12 engine. Does over a hundred miles an hour. Pushrod ohv, two twin-choke carbs – sorry, I’m being a bore. Where was I? Oh, yes, you must come with me, you must, you must.’

Jane laughed. ‘All right. It’s terribly sweet of you. Thanks awfully. But I can’t come tomorrow, really. I must put in a few days job-hunting first. Next Thursday OK?’

‘Lovely.’

‘Actually, it’s just what I need. Who else is going to be there?’

‘Oh, some Americans called Peabody. He’s a fabulously rich Texan. Oil, I think. We’ve never met them, but he’s got one of the biggest collections of old guns in the States and he wants to see Daddy’s. No doubt they’ll both be excruciatingly boring the whole time about frizzens and multiple matchlocks and things. Then Richard’s bringing down a couple of foreign diplomats, and a man called Thornton from the Foreign Office. I gather they’re all going to be engaged in some sort of governmental talks. Richard asked if it would be all right and of course Daddy agreed, though why they’ve got to use Alderley, I don’t know.’

‘How – er, how is Richard?’

‘Fine. He comes down about every fourth or fifth week on average. It must be quite a long time since you’ve seen him.’

‘Over two years.’

‘Really? Yes, of course, the two last times you came he was abroad. He’ll be thinking you’ve been avoiding him.’

‘Anyone else expected?’

‘Well, I’m afraid – and you must brace yourself, darling – that Algy is.’

‘Algy Fotheringay? Oh, Gerry, no! What on earth possessed you?’

‘Not me – Daddy. Algy buttonholed him at the Eton and Harrow match. You know how he’s always trying to cadge invitations. Daddy swears he couldn’t get out of it. I’ve just about forgiven him. But I’m afraid we’re all going to have to spend merry hours listening to Algy talk about himself, his rich and fashionable friends – and food.’

‘If you go on like this,’ said Jane, ‘I may well change my mind.’