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COURIER TO MARRAKESH

By Valentine Williams

London

Hodder & Stoughton

Limited

and have no relation to any living person

First printed November 1944

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conformity with the authorized
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The Eye in Attendance
The Three of Clubs
Death Answers the Bell
The Red Mass
Mr. Ramosi
Mannequin

Chapter I

I was dreaming my dream again. Always the same dream—at least, ever since that day at Rabat—with the plane plunging and shuddering and the sleet hissing past the windows. The rough going hadn't scared our little gang particularly. We had had more than one such on our tour of the war areas—crossing the Irish Sea to Belfast, for instance, or our flight in the sirocco from Gib to Casablanca.

That terrifying dream. Always the same scene. Jack, peering into his cards and joshing me out of the corner of his wry comedian's mouth, and Laura and Dirk across the gangway, helping Diana with her crossword puzzle. I would always wake up before the actual crash, but filled with such a sense of impending disaster that I would lie there gasping with fright.

This time, somehow, the dream was different. I was still playing gin rummy with Jack, but he was shouting at me, and in such a curious voice. It was high-pitched and hoarse, and seemed to come from a distance....

Then suddenly I was awake. I gazed about me wildly. This wasn't my little hospital room where I had groped my way back to consciousness. All was dark about me save for a panel of starry sky in the open window at the foot of my bed, but I could make out gay curtains and bright leather cushions on a couch against the wall.

Memory came struggling back. The long, cold bus-ride from Rabat; Captain Stracer, who met me at the terminal, warning me that I was to dine with the American General before my concert; dinner at the General's and the thrill of being the only woman in a roomful of officers vying with each other to make a fuss of me; and to crown all, the shabby movie-house, crammed from floor to roof with men in uniform, the never-ending encores, the charming friendliness of everyone. As a final reminder, the slender tower of the Kutubiah beyond my window, which Stracer had pointed out to me on my arrival, told me that I was at Marrakesh and that the voice quavering out of the dark was the muezzin calling to dawn prayer.

The hotel had given me one of a series of ground-floor rooms, each with its own little porch looking out across the hotel gardens at the city and the snowy Atlas peaks beyond. In dressing-gown and slippers I ran outside. The air was frosty and still, its emptiness filled by that disembodied voice reverberating against the mountains across the jumble of minarets and domes and flat-topped houses dimly white beyond the gardens. "La illaha illa'llah!" it flung in a closing challenge to the paling sky and ceased.

Silence then. Already, over to eastward, the sky was faintly lemon. The birds were stirring in the palms below the porch and little sounds began to mount from the city, waked into life by the muezzin's call. This was the real Orient, I told myself, not the bogus thing, debased and defaced by the West, which I had found at Algiers. My spirits soared. I was at Marrakesh and I had a whole week in which to explore this magic city.

For so the doctor at Rabat had stipulated when the Special Service people had come along with this emergency date at Marrakesh: they wanted me to fill in for a party of entertainers held up somewhere along the route. I had sustained a severe nervous shock, my nice Medical Corps major pointed out; there could be no question of my resuming my regular concert routine at present—the Special Service people spoke of further dates after Marrakesh. If he consented to this one concert, it must be on the clear understanding that I was to take things easy for at least a week afterwards and rest every afternoon.

Special Service was quite agreeable. The idea was that from Marrakesh I might go across to Sicily or even Naples—it would take all of a week to book dates. For myself I felt equal to anything; all I wanted was to get out of that damned hospital and into the war again, and so I told the Major. But he was adamant and we left it at that: the one appearance at Marrakesh, a week's lay-off, and then, if all went well, these dates in Italy. Even so, I was thrilled. To go to Naples, right in the zone of the Armies—I felt I could hardly wait.

Well, I had paid my respects to the American General and given my concert, and here I was at Marrakesh, free to loaf for a whole week. If only Hank were still here! He had certainly been at Marrakesh three weeks before, because he had wired me from there to Rabat. Such a sweet message. He was appalled by my accident, of which he had only just heard as he had been away, but glad that it was no worse. Would I please take things easy and make a good recovery? He was trying to get leave to come up and see me. But he never appeared, and, as he gave me no reply address, I could only write him to his A.P.O. number when I knew I should be at Marrakesh myself, but had no further word from him. When

he didn't show up at my concert I guessed that he must have gone away again. The curious thing was that neither the General nor Captain Stracer nor anyone else I questioned seemed to know anything about him. But, of course, it was a man-size Army now and Hank was only a lowly captain—the trouble was that I had no idea what his job was or where he was stationed.

It was most disappointing. Hank was a dear friend of mine, and if he had been on the spot to take me round, it would have made my holiday quite perfect. Apart from this, I had made a little plan for Hank. I was counting on him to take me to hear this marvellous Marrakesh singing woman, the Sheikha Zuleika, of whom my Swiss friend, Herr Ziemer, had told me, coming on the bus from Rabat.

But, with or without Hank, the exciting thing was to be in circulation again. I had been so restless at home. Before Pearl Harbour life for me had been pretty full, what with my concert and radio work; after five years of it I could still get a kick out of seeing my name on posters outside Carnegie Hall, the Detroit Auditorium, places like that: *Andrea Hallam and Her Guitar: In Songs of the Nations*. But with our entry into the war things began to happen to Americans outside the narrow circle of safety at home: the Pacific, North Africa, Italy, the Aleutians. I would have liked to have joined up with the Wacs or the Waves, but was sternly told at Washington that my job was to keep up morale, singing to the armed forces. They seemed to like me at the Stage Door Canteens, the camps and naval bases, not only my cowboy and hill-billy numbers, but even the old French and Italian ballads, the Spanish saetas and Portuguese fados, in my repertoire. It may have been my red hair, of course; our sailors and soldiers have never been known to have any particular allergy to redheads. But my heart was not at peace and I never rested until I persuaded Washington to send me overseas to sing at the camps.

That crash at Rabat ended a wonderful trip our little gang had, that summer of '43, first in England and Northern Ireland, and afterwards in North Africa. Of our party of five, Jack and Dirk were burnt to death when our plane made a forced landing flying from Algiers to Marrakesh. Of the three girls, I was the unlucky one. Laura and Diana, film starlets from Hollywood, were flung clear and merely bruised. Even so, I counted myself fortunate to have come out with only a damaged shoulder but with the old face intact, thank goodness! Some French soldiers dragged me out unconscious as the plane caught fire. The two men were pinned under the wreck. Laura and Di, the plucky kids, went on with the tour. Everybody was as nice as possible to me at Rabat, but, looking back, it seems to me that I only picked up the threads of my existence once more when this Marrakesh engagement came along.

It was chilly on the porch and presently I went indoors. Digging a warm sweater and a pair of slacks out of my one small suitcase, I slipped into them and set about brewing myself a cup of tea. I had my own tea-basket, the present of a British Guards officer who gave me quite a rush in London. He even wanted to marry me, coming out with his proposal, bless him, as casually as though asking for a match. A nice creature and quite unbelievably good-looking, but not for me, not for little Andrea. If I had been the marrying sort I could have settled down with Hank Lundgren at Milwaukee. It was in the fall of '39, soon after war broke out in Europe, that he came up with his proposal. I was only twenty-three then, but already I had carved out for myself a little niche as a singer of folk-songs, many of which I had collected during the three years I spent in Europe on the travelling scholarship I had won in Chicago.

I liked Hank tremendously, but the songs came first. Folk-songs were to me what butterflies and orchids are to the collector, and I could scarcely wait for the war to end to return to Europe on a further voyage of discovery. So I told poor Hank no, and when we entered the war he disappeared into the Army. He went to Europe very soon, probably on account of his languages: he spoke Swedish—he was of Swedish farming stock—German, too. We used to write to one another, but he never spoke of his movements in his letters to me; only of mutual acquaintances he had met, the weather, things like that: actually I had no idea that he was in North Africa until I had his wire from Marrakesh.

I was sipping my tea and thinking about Hank when my ear caught a faint, moaning sound outside. It was a dull kind of a whisper, rather like a child grizzling to itself. I put down my cup and went outside. On the porch next to mine a woman was lying in a long chair, one hand shielding her eyes against the sunrise, the other pressed to her side. She was dressed in one of those long house-coats to the ground, in white, and her bare feet were thrust into sandals. Her hair, jet black, was gathered in a thick coil resting on her shoulder. She was groaning faintly. "Madame!" I said to her. Then, realising that she was in pain, I swung a leg over the rail and landed at her side.

Chapter II

I said in French, "I have the room next to you. I'm afraid you're ill. Is there anything I can do?"

She took her hand away from her face. Dark eyes gazed into mine. Still clutching her side, she motioned with her head towards the open door behind her chair. "If you would be so kind," she murmured weakly. "The bottle of drops on the bathroom shelf."

I flew for the bottle with its dropper and little glass. The bottle bore the label of a Casablanca pharmacy inscribed in ink: *Gouttes pour la Comtesse Mazzoli*. "Ten drops," she said in a faint voice. I measured them out and gave her the glass. She did not move after she had taken the drops, lying there with her eyes closed. She was no longer young, for all the wealth and flawless blackness of her hair; but it was easy to see that she had been a dashing creature in her time with her faintly olive skin and lucent black eyes. Presently I saw that her eyes were open. "Thank you, my dear," she said. "I'm afraid I alarmed you."

"Are you feeling better, madame?" I asked.

She nodded. "I've been having these spasms of pain, but they pass. They fetched the hotel doctor to me last night, an imbecile who insists that I should undergo an operation. As you see, I'm all right again now."

"I've just made some tea, if you'd care for a cup?"

"It would be very nice if it isn't troubling you too much."

When I came back with her tea she said, "You speak French well, but you're not French. The English take their tea with them all over the earth. You're English, I think?"

I shook my head. "I'm an American—in spite of the tea."

She crooned a little laugh. "How proudly you say that," she remarked in very good English. "Like my Roman ancestors with their 'Civis Romanus sum!' Stand round a little where I can see you!" She had a warm, caressing voice and a smile that lit up her whole face. She nodded approvingly as I stood in front of her, somewhat conscious of my trousered legs. "Your colouring is lovely, my dear. You might be a Venetian with your auburn hair and white skin—our Titian would have liked to paint you. What are you doing at Marrakesh?"

"I came here to sing to the troops."

She gave me an indulgent smile. "I'm afraid I'm not young enough to appreciate your American jazz."

"I sing folk-songs, madame. Ballads. To the guitar."

She looked at me quickly. "You're not the one who had the aeroplane accident? Andrea—Andrea—what is the other name?"

"Andrea Hallam, madame. You know me?"

She laughed. "Ah," she said, "only last week, at Naples, I met a great friend of yours, an American officer. A great, blond Viking of a man with a foreign-sounding name."

"Not Lundgren, was it? Captain Lundgren?"

She clapped her hands together happily, like a child. "Yes, yes, so was the name—Captain Lundgren. I met him at a luncheon given for me by my son, who is an officer on the Italian General Staff in liaison with your Army at Naples."

Several American officers were there. When he found out that I was leaving shortly for Morocco, he told me about you and your accident, and when I said I might be going to Rabat, I had to promise to look you up. But, alas! I did not go to Rabat after all. Against that, however, I have the good fortune to meet you here." She gave me a mischievous smile. "He was most empresse, the Captain. He told me you were a great artiste—oh, he said many nice things about you. I think he must be—how does my son say you call it in America?—one of your beaus."

I laughed. "Hank and I are very old friends." She smiled. "Ank—so Dino called him. Such a funny name! Wait, I show you my Dino."

She drew from the pocket of her coat a small gold cigarette-case and let me see a snapshot pasted inside. It showed a very dashing young man, tall and slim in the smart Italian cavalry uniform, smiling engagingly and revealing the whitest of teeth in a deeply tanned face. "He's very good-looking," I said.

She laughed and shut the case. "A bad boy! He breaks all the women's hearts. He is my only child. I had not seen him since Italy entered the war, because I was in France and he was called up to do his military service. But on the fall of Mussolini he threw in his lot immediately with the Allies, and it was through him I was able to obtain permission to go to Naples and visit our estates outside the city. You see," she went on, "though we are Italians, we have always been anti-Fascist, we Mazzolis. I turned my back on Italy before the madness of Mussolini and the weakness of our King launched our unfortunate country into a senseless war. I made my home in France until Hitler seized the whole country after the Allied landing in North Africa, and I escaped to Casablanca, where I have a small property. I, have only come back now because I have pressing business to attend to, here in Marrakesh, and very soon, perhaps tomorrow, already, if I can find a place on the plane, I go back to Italy." She laughed rather scornfully. "And to think that, having come all this way, I should go into a nursing-home just so that some idiot of a French surgeon can earn fifty thousand francs by cutting me up!"

But I was burning with curiosity about Hank. "Did Captain Lundgren say anything about coming to Marrakesh?" I asked.

She glanced up in surprise. "Why, haven't you seen him?"

I shook my head. "If he was here, he'd certainly have been at my concert last night."

"But he is here—at least, he was yesterday afternoon. Because I saw him."

"Where?"

"In a car with some officers as I drove from the airport—about five o'clock, it would have been."

"Are you sure it was he?"

She laughed. "Your big, blond bear isn't easy to mistake, my little one."

I stared at her in bewilderment. "Well, all I can say is that none of the Americans here seem to know anything about him."

She smiled at me. "Don't look so tragic, child. He may be attached to the French—had you thought of that? I seem to remember that there were French officers in the car with him. If I were you I should enquire for him at the Bureau des Renseignements."

"The Bureau des Renseignements?"

"That's it. There's a branch in every Moroccan town of any size. The hotel porter will direct you."

The ringing of the telephone within the bedroom interrupted her.

"It's that dolt of a doctor," she announced. "He said he'd call first thing to see what sort of a night I had." She gave

me back my tea-cup and went inside. Putting her hand over the mouthpiece, she spoke to me from the room. "He's still talking about an operation," she explained. "He wants some famous surgeon—a Dr. Clauzel—to see me."

"Wouldn't it be wise to have a second opinion?" I said.

"But I have no time to go into hospital now, I tell you."

"Isn't that something for the doctors to decide?"

She gave an impatient shrug. But into the telephone she said, "After lunch, then. But tell Dr. Clauzel not a minute later than three, because I have an appointment at five."

She hung up and stood there an instant, clutching her side. "I'm afraid the pain is coming back," she told me. "I'm doing nothing this morning—I think I'll rest quietly in bed until Dr. Clauzel comes. Run away now, child! Perhaps you would come back after lunch and hear what the specialist says."

As I returned to my room I am afraid I was thinking more about Hank and why the heck he hadn't let me know that he was at Marrakesh than about the poor Countess and her pains.

Chapter III

I may seem dumb, but it never occurred to me that Hank might be off on some hush-hush job. As I say, I hadn't the faintest idea what his particular line in the Army might be, but seeing that he was in the radio-manufacturing business in private life, I had always imagined that he had something to do with communications or, maybe, the Quartermaster Corps. Since the Countess Mazzoli had met him in Naples, he might well be attached to the Fifth or the Eighth Armies, in which case it was quite understandable that no one at Marrakesh knew anything about him. A lot of transport went through Marrakesh and he might have been merely passing through when the Countess had seen him on the previous day. However, her suggestion that he might be working with the French here seemed worth following up. The thought uppermost in my mind was that I was to be only a week at Marrakesh and time was slipping away. I should never forgive myself if I discovered that Hank had been here all the time and we had never met.

If I had been longer than a few hours in Marrakesh I should probably have known enough about the Bureau des Renseignements to have stayed clear of it. But in my ignorance of Moroccan affairs all I saw was that, since 'Bureau des Renseignements' means 'Information Bureau' in French, the Countess's idea was a good one. Even the French sentry on the door and the orderly who made me fill out a pass did not bother me, because it seemed natural that a military information bureau should be run by soldiers. After a longish wait I was conducted upstairs to a door inscribed *Le Colonel P. Freitas, État-Major*.

The Colonel was a lanky, angry-looking French officer with a dyspeptic red nose, high, bald forehead, and straggling moustache. His manner as he enquired my business was extremely brusque. When I explained that I wanted to locate Captain Lundgren, American Army, who was believed to be at Marrakesh, he said, "I regret. I have no information."

"He was at Marrakesh yesterday," I pointed out. "As the Americans don't seem to know anything about him, I thought he might be attached to the French."

He shrugged his shoulders. "I suggest you apply to General Headquarters, North Africa."

I bristled a little. "Look, Colonel," I said in my best French, "this is purely a personal matter. I'm an artiste, a singer, and I came to entertain the American troops. This Captain Lundgren happens to be a friend of mine, and if he's at Marrakesh I'd like to see him. But I couldn't possibly start bothering Headquarters Algiers about a thing like this."

His air was stony. "I regret. I am unable to assist you."

"Is there anyone at Marrakesh who can?"

"I have no information to give you."

It was like talking to a brick wall. "So you said before. I'm asking you to direct me to someone who has."

"Such information does not fall within the functions of this organisation," he answered tartly. "The Bureau is not responsible, and formally refuses to assume responsibility, for the activities of foreign agents in territory subject to French rule."

"Excuse me," I broke in. "Captain Lundgren isn't a foreign agent. He's an American officer. One of your allies, Colonel."

"This is French territory. The fact that you and your English friends often overlook this fact does not alter the position."

I stared at him, his tone was so bitter. "Why do you speak of the English as though they were only friends of ours? Aren't we all in this together?"

He sucked in his drooping moustache. "Some of us have long memories. Alliances we must accept, but certain friendships we are willing to forgo." He thrust my pass at me. "I have the honour to bid you good day, mademoiselle."

I felt the tears pricking at my eyeballs as I left him. They were tears of sheer rage. How dared he, how dare any Frenchman, take such a tone after the way France had let England, her ally, down, and at a time when British and American boys were giving their lives to complete the job that France had left unfinished? What kind of an information bureau was this, anyway? I felt like going right back in there and giving the old buzzard a piece of my mind. To ease my feelings I blew my nose.

Before I had time to put my hanky away a figure in khaki came bounding up the stairs, three at a time. I recognised the forage-cap and battle-dress of a British officer. "Perhaps you can tell me," I said. "Am I right here for the Marrakesh Information Bureau?"

He was a tall, young man, wearing a captain's stars, with a straight nose and very black eyebrows. He had a cool, grey eye that now surveyed me carefully and, as I thought, rather haughtily.

"This is the Bureau des Renseignements," he replied with caution.

"Is it, or isn't it, the Information Bureau?"

He appeared surprised. "Not in the sense you mean, the American sense. You're American, aren't you?"

"I am."

He gave a superior smile. "I thought so. This outfit has nothing to do with an information bureau as you and I understand it. It's the organisation that handles all native affairs and acts as liaison between the French administration and the natives." With humorous gleam in his eyes he went on, "You wouldn't by any chance have been asking old F. where to buy silk stockings or something?"

"Certainly not. And who's old F.?"

"Colonel Freitas. I could tell you'd been having a set-to with the blighter when I spotted you just now having a quiet blub."

"Having a *what*?"

"A short cry into your hanky. He *is* a stinker, isn't he?"

"He certainly is. But I wasn't crying."

"Okay. I've no idea what you tackled the old serge-polisher about, but I believe I can tell you what he said to you. He informed you that whatever it was you wanted, it couldn't be done, and to kindly get the hades out. Or words to that effect. Am I right?"

I laughed. "You must have been listening at the key-hole."

"I don't have to. I know the old boy. He takes a pretty dim view of us, and that goes for you Americans, too. You see, he had a brother in the French Navy when our chaps went after their Fleet at Mers-el-Kebir, and it has warped his outlook. He turns thumbs down on principle on all requests from you or us. He's not the only one of his kind, as you've probably discovered if you've spent any time in French Morocco. The French Committee at Algiers is weeding these babies out, but it takes time. Old F. isn't the top man, but he's a complete whizz at his job. He knows these monkeys like nobody's business, especially the large and somewhat unsavoury gaggle of local sheikhs." He broke off. "What's your trouble?"

"I'm trying to locate an American officer I know, a Captain Lundgren."

He looked up quickly, breaking into a smile. "I say, not our Hank?"

I was radiant. "That's him. You know him?"

He laughed with a flash of white teeth against his sunburn. "I say, you wouldn't be the girl whose picture he carries, the one with the banjo?"

"It's a guitar."

"Sorry; I meant to say guitar. He told us you were absolutely stunning, and now that I look at you I see that for once our Hank wasn't indulging in the old American custom of shooting a line. You were in a plane wreck, weren't you? What a ghastly experience for you! Are you over it now?"

"Quite, thanks. I was singing here last night."

"I know. I couldn't go as I was on duty."

"Tell me about Hank!"

He wagged his head. "I'm afraid you're both out of luck—especially Hank."

"You mean, he isn't here?"

"That's right."

"He was in Marrakesh yesterday afternoon."

"Was he?"

"And again three weeks ago, because he wired me from here. Did he go back to Naples?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "He comes and goes like the wind."

"He was in Naples last week."

"Was he?"

I began to get mad. "Well," I said, "if you won't talk, you won't."

He nodded calmly. "That's right."

"And I'll tell you something else," I declared wrathfully. "I believe that old F., as you call him, knows all about Hank and his comings and goings, and won't say, either." He made a deprecatory movement of his shoulders. "And don't tell me there's a war on," I added, "because in America, too, we know there's a war on. It's what they tell us when the laundry doesn't come home or the groceries are left at the wrong house, and I'm sick of hearing it."

He gave a dry laugh. He had taken off his cap with its gay scarlet insert and gilt badge and was staring down into the lining. "Well," he remarked, "there's not much of a war on in this ghastly hole—at least, not so you'd notice it; but there is across the water in Italy."

"Sure, and that's where Hank is, though why everybody should make such a mystery out of it is beyond me. I may be going to Naples myself, so perhaps I'll meet up with him."

"Too bad he isn't here," he commented. "Who's looking after you in Marrakesh?"

"Captain Stracer. He's Special Service. Do you know him?"

He nodded briefly. "Kind of earnest, isn't he?"

I laughed. "Very. And full of rules and regulations. He gave me one long lecture on security on the way from the bus to the hotel. Do you suppose I could ask him to ring Headquarters and find out something about Hank for me? I mean, I don't want to miss Hank again if I go to Naples."

He shook his head. "Lay off Hank. And for the love of Mike, not a word to Stracer about your having tackled old F.!"

"Why not?"

He almost jumped down my throat. "Good God, girl, don't you realise you're under Army orders? You can only approach the French through the Americans—that means Stracer, and so on, up the ladder. If Stracer knew you'd been enquiring for Hank at the B.D.R. he'd throw a thousand fits. They'd court-martial the pair of you, I shouldn't wonder."

I was appalled. "You're not serious?"

"Aren't I, though? Look, do you want some good advice? Maybe you'll come across Hank in Italy: till then, forget him!"

I stared at him in perplexity as realisation slowly bubbled up inside me. "Forget him?"

"That's what I said—forget him!" His tone changed. "Look, if you're going to be here for a day or two, I'd love to show you round. Today's a wash-out, unfortunately, as I've a brace of British M.P.s on my hands."

"Are you in the Provost-Marshal branch?"

He laughed aloud. "Not military police, darling—members of Parliament. You know, bluebooks and post-war planning—that stuff."

"Public Relations, are you?"

He groaned. "You may well ask. You'd think I was by the stream of trippers they make me nursemaid. No, I'm Intelligence, the same as Hank."

The truth at last! Why hadn't I guessed it before? Wasn't Intelligence just a polite way of saying Secret Service? So that was why everybody had been so cagey! But how could I ever have pictured Hank, my sweet, lumbering old Hank, in

the Secret Service? It was too thrilling.

The young man went on, "Today I have to buy these two blokes lunch, show them the sights, and take them to tea at el Glaoui's. He's the Number One wog in these parts, Pasha of the Atlas and no end of a loud clamour."

Well, it was clear that I had missed Hank. An idea came into my head. "Have you been long at Marrakesh?" I asked.

"Six months, on and off. Before that I was in the real war. Dunkirk, then Crete. Why?"

"I wondered whether you knew anything of a singer called the Sheikha Zuleika."

"Of course. She's supposed to be the best of the Marrakesh singing women."

"Is she very wonderful?"

He gave a shrug. "That depends. Moorish singing's an acquired taste, rather like olives. If you like your singing through the nose..."

"A man I met on the bus told me she's extraordinary. I'm crazy to hear her."

"That could be arranged, I think. Where are you stopping?"

I told him the name of my hotel and he said he would call me. "If you're at a loose end this afternoon towards sundown," he suggested, "why not take a look at the Djemma el Fna—the market-place, you know? It's as good as a fair, with snake-charmers and fire-swallowers and jugglers and I don't know what. It's smelly but picturesque. You'll enjoy it."

I nodded. "I read about the Djemma el Fna in my guide-book."

"The hotel will get you a guide, or you might make our friend Stracer take you." He paused. "You'll want to watch your step in Marrakesh. There are some queer birds about." He glanced at his wrist-watch. "I must fly. I have to beard old F. in his den about this bun fight up at the Glaoui's." For a moment his bright glance rested on my face. "To blazes with parliamentary institutions!" he cried. "Why aren't you lunching with me instead of these dreary politicians?"

"Because I'm lunching with Captain Stracer, for one thing."

He made a face at that. "We both seem to be out of luck, don't we? How about lunch tomorrow if I can shake my old men of the sea?"

"I'd love it."

"Good. What did you say your name was?"

I laughed. "I didn't. But it's Andrea Hallam."

"Of course, the girl with the guitar. Mine's Leigh, Nicholas Leigh. I'll ring you." With that he crammed on his cap, gave me a brisk salute and, with a perfunctory rap on the Colonel's door, disappeared inside.

I was quite sorry to see him go. With his cheerful cynicism and complete self-assurance he was unlike most young men of his age I had met. He had a knack of putting you at your ease which was very likeable—I felt as though we had known one another for years. He was Secret Service, too, evidently: I felt quite excited to think that I had been talking to a British Secret Service man. As I went off to lunch with Stracer I wondered what that conscientious officer would say if he knew how I had spent my morning.

Chapter IV

Rabat had evidently passed on the doctor's orders about me, because Stracer sternly vetoed my suggestion that he should take me to see the market-place later in the afternoon. For the rest of the day I was to relax and get over the fatigue of my concert: tomorrow, if I felt equal to it, would be time enough to visit the Djemma el Fna. Going to my room after lunch to lie down, I suddenly remembered the Countess and my promise to look in on her and hear Dr. Clauzel's report.

Both doctors—the hotel doctor and the specialist—were with her when I tapped at her door. I would have gone away; but she called to me from her bed to come in. Dr. Clauzel, a tall, bearded Frenchman with an air of authority, was saying, "But Madame la Comtesse must understand that it's not a question of days, but of hours."

She looked very ill. Her face had a greyish tinge and her forehead was damp. But her spirit was indomitable. "My dear Dr. Clauzel," she cried almost lightly, though she was obviously in pain, "I didn't come all the way from Naples on urgent family business in order to go into hospital. Surely the operation can wait for a day or two. Tomorrow, perhaps."

He shook his head. "Tomorrow will be too late, madame, if the appendix should burst. Come, Dr. Bartolomé here has made all the necessary arrangements. A room is reserved at my clinic and the ambulance will be here at four-thirty. Be reasonable, my dear madame: no private affairs can be more urgent than your health, your life, perhaps. And if you find yourself lacking a little in courage, I feel sure that your friend"—he glanced towards me—"will be happy to escort you to the hospital. At half past four precisely, then, the ambulance will be at the door. Please do not keep it waiting, for I shall be ready to operate at once." He turned to the hotel doctor. "Come, cher ami!" At the door he beckoned me outside. "If you've any influence with her, see that she comes into hospital," he said. "She's playing with her life."

I went back to the Countess. She was tossing restlessly. "I hope you're going to be sensible," I said.

"I don't know what to do," she answered. "The man I've come all this way to see expects me at five. And that's only the beginning."

"Can't you put him off? Do you want me to telephone him?"

"He has no telephone."

"Could I take a message?"

She shook her head. "I must see him myself."

"But that's out of the question. You heard what Dr. Clauzel said?"

She sighed. "I must bow to fate, it seems. Yet I must have at least a word with this man. Wait!" She clutched my hand. "The place where I was to meet him is on the way to the clinic. I could stop and explain matters to him, that is, if you really would go with me, because, to tell you the truth"—she gave me a wan smile—"I feel in need of support."

"But of course, madame," I said.

She insisted on walking to the ambulance when it came, but, once we had helped her in, seemed glad enough to stretch out on the bed. We were crossing a busy square when she said to the native chauffeur, who spoke French, "Stop at the silk shop on the next corner."

Like all native shops the store, abutting on a crowded lane, was open to the street. Seeing the ambulance stop, the proprietor, a fat Arab in monkey-jacket and baggy trousers, waddled out to us. The Countess asked for Safi. "At once, madame!" The merchant bustled back to his shop.

A cavalcade of Moors, about a dozen picturesque figures swathed in burnouses, suddenly appeared at the entrance to the lane. There was a lot of confusion and shouting as the heads of the cortège tried to clear a passage, the people scattering to right and left before them. I noticed that the natives in the street bowed low before one of the riders, a little

old man with eyes that peered sharply from under the hood of his burnous. His burnous, of the purest white, was of the finest weave, and his mule, a magnificent animal, was white, too. As I watched, a native ran forward and obsequiously kissed the old man's knee. Our driver turned his head. "It's el Kintafi, important sheikh, who lives in the mountains," he explained. "Now he goes to the mosque to say his prayers."

The merchant was back, smiling greasily, at the kerb. Safi was not there, he announced in lisping French; he was to be found at the Café el Kahira up the street, and he pointed along the lane. I was suddenly aware that the Countess was bowed forward, as she sat up among her pillows, her hands pressed to her side. "I can't go on," she gasped between clenched teeth. "This pain ... Oh, what am I to do?"

"Where is this café?" I asked the merchant.

"Very near, mademoiselle. Just at the top of the street before you come to the Djemma el Fna. Very small café—Café el Kahira."

I turned to the Countess. "You go on to the hospital. I'll see this man for you. What am I to tell him?"

She flung me a grateful glance. "Oh, would you?" She fumbled at her neck. "Ask for Safi—will you remember the name? He will give you a small package." She laid a heavy locket on a gold chain in my hand. "This will tell him you come from me." She was growing breathless. "You will bring this package to me at the clinic, yes? The Clauzel clinic, 47 rue Suleiman..."

Wondering what I had let myself in for, I slipped the locket into my bag. It was a handsome antique piece set with small pearls and displaying the miniature of a girl with the ringlets and sloping shoulders of the Byronic period. "You may count on me," I said.

One of the cavalcade of Moors, which was still blocking the lane, was having trouble with his mount, a wicked-looking mule that was snorting and squealing and lashing out with its hoofs. The rider, a huge man in a burnous of coarse brown frieze, kept his seat and, raising the heavy crop he carried, brought it down brutally on the beast's head. He was so close to us that he had to swing his mount aside to avoid our fender and I had a glimpse of a gross, hairy face, of burning, savage eyes, under his monk-like cowl. The sudden movement lifted the edge of his robe as it hung down over his saddle and I perceived that one of his feet, as it rested in the broad Moorish stirrup, was encased in a clumsy surgical boot.

There was a sharp ejaculation at my side. The Countess was peering through the window as the cavalcade went clattering by. I had opened the door when she called to me. "One thing more," she said in a curiously strained voice. "I want you to give Safi a message from me." She made a little pause, twisting her thin hands together. "Tell him this." She was gazing at me with a sort of consuming intentness. "Tell him, 'Bianca says, Be careful. He is here.'"

She made me repeat the words after her. I felt like saying, with Alice in Wonderland, 'curiouser and curiouser.' But she was so agitated and evidently in so much pain that I couldn't bring myself to question her. I only said, "I won't forget. And you'll be seeing me at the clinic very soon."

"Thank you," she murmured, "thank you a thousand times!" I got out then and watched the ambulance speed away, with the Countess sunk back among her pillows, her eyes closed.

Chapter V

I found the Café el Kahira, though if I hadn't been on the lookout for it, I might have passed it by, it was such a tiny slip of a place, wedged between a cobbler's and a brassworker's. A prodigious racket of drums beating and pipes squealing close by suggested that the Djemma el Fna must be right around the corner.

The little café, very fly-blown and dirty and open on the street, was deserted save for a man in a grubby turban who was busy at a stove. When I asked in French for Safi, he wiggled a brown finger at me and called over his shoulder, "Ya, Ahmed!" A little ragged urchin shambled in from the back. The man gave him an order in Arabic and signed to me to follow the child.

Under the impression that we were going somewhere quite close at hand, I followed the youngster. But rather to my consternation he led me straight out into the thick of a milling crowd on the Djemma el Fna, where we threaded our way through hordes of natives grouped about snake-charmers and sword-swallowers and even a cluster of strange, painted boys who shook their hips rhythmically to the click of their brass castanets and the discords of a native orchestra. As my British captain had told me, it was all most picturesque, but also extremely dusty and smelly. Although there were many Europeans on the square, including a sprinkling of American soldiers, the jostling mass of natives was somewhat alarming, especially as my little guide spoke no French and I couldn't ask him where we were going.

And then unexpectedly I came face to face with Herr Ziemer, the very friendly Swiss who had sat next to me on the bus from Rabat. He was a dark, squarish man with a pair of those outsize tortoise-shell glasses, an architect from Zurich, as he told me, who was working in the Department of Native Arts at Rabat and was visiting Marrakesh to report on some restoration work. He evidently knew the country well and proved a fascinating companion on our long ride across the *bled*. His English wasn't very good, but he was the first to laugh at his mistakes. I could have spoken German with him, of course, but it seemed better not, on a French bus in war-time.

He beamed all over at the sight of me. "So, Mees Hallam, and how do you like the so famous Marrakesh market-place?"

There is something honest and down-to-earth about the Swiss and I fairly fell upon Ziemer in his badly fitting tweeds and funny little Tirolean hat. "You're the very man I'm looking for," I cried. "Will you kindly ask this pocket dragoman in your best Arabic where he's taking me?"

He glanced about us, and seeing my little guide eyeing us sulkily from a distance, beckoned him over. His air grew puzzled as he questioned the boy—they had quite a conversation. At last he turned to me. "He says you come to some café asking for a man named Safi. Is it right?"

"Sure."

"Well, he take you to Safi," was the placid answer. "This Safi, he works for Hajj el Fasi, the storyteller, on the far side of the square, in front of the little mosque. You know this Safi, yes?"

I shook my head. "No, I just have a message for him."

It must have sounded strange, but he displayed no curiosity. "You like I go with you, perhaps?"

I jumped at the offer. "If it wouldn't be taking you out of your way..."

His air was slightly worried. "It is only that I have an appointment with the Government architect..." He drew out his watch. "Oh, weh, oh, weh, already I am late!"

"Please don't trouble yourself," I told him. "I'm all right now that I know where I'm going."

"Then auf wiedersehen, dear Mees Hallam." He fumbled for my hand and kissed it. "I telephone you, yes, because I do not forget you like to hear the Sheikha Zuleika sing some evening." He lifted his little green hat and disappeared into the crowd.

As we approached the mosque I perceived the storyteller, a grave old man in a green turban and flowing beard, who sat back on his heels, haranguing a rapt audience that faced him, standing or crouching, in a semicircle. Behind him a little, thick-set figure in a vivid orange robe squatted on the ground. Signing to me to wait, my small boy went across to the man in orange and presently came back with him. "Mademoiselle asked for me," said the man. "I am Safi."

I took the locket from my bag and showed it to him. "I come from the Countess Mazzoli," I explained. "You were to give me something for her."

He nodded and, with a quick glance about him, said, "Follow me, mademoiselle!"

"There was also a message," I put in.

"Not here," he told me. Dismissing my little guide with a coin, he led the way past the storyteller and his circle to where a narrow passage ran along the side of the mosque. Into this he plunged, walking so fast that I had all I could do to keep up with him. We came to a street of shops and, on the far side, struck at once into a labyrinth of little lanes.

I was beginning to feel pretty indignant. I had undertaken what looked like a fairly simple commission for the Countess Mazzoli; I hadn't expected to go trapesing like this into the heart of the native city. For presently the clamour of the Djemma el Fna was behind us and, as the streets narrowed, soon there was no more wheeled traffic, but only an occasional Moor on a mule, or a small boy digging his heels into the flanks of a diminutive donkey. The noises of modern Marrakesh fell away and we were in the midst of the sounds of Moorish life: the clack of slippers as women, shrouded to the eyes, padded by, some, like Rebecca at the well, with pitchers on their shoulders; the high jabber of voices on the house-tops; the thump of knockers pounding the outer doors of the eyeless, forbidding houses. At last I halted and called to the little man, who, as usual, was racing ahead. "Where are you taking me?" I demanded.

"Not far now," he replied.

"But where are we going?"

His mournful Oriental eyes reproached me. "But to the Sheikh Abdul's, mademoiselle. It is he who has the package for madame."

"And who is the Sheikh Abdul?"

But he merely shrugged his shoulders and went swinging forward again. I likewise indulged in a shrug—a mental one. I had come thus far; I might as well see the thing through.

We stopped at last in front of a door that broke the line of a high, whitewashed wall. It was an enormously solid door, bound with iron, with a colossal knocker which Safi plied vigorously. He had to knock several times before a quavery voice responded from within. Safi shouted in Arabic and, with the crash of drawn bolts, the door swung outward. A wizened old man looked out from a dim entry. Safi thrust him aside and we went in, the janitor pulling the door to and fastening a great bar across—it gave me rather an unpleasant feeling. "Wait!" Safi bade me and, pushing the old man in front of him, vanished along a passage in the corner.

I was feeling very uneasy. The house was dead quiet, save for the faint drip of water somewhere out of sight. Who was this Sheikh Abdul and what had he to do with the Countess Mazzoli? I remembered her speaking of a property she owned at Casablanca: he could be a native lawyer with whom she had dealings. If I'd realised the wild-goose chase she was wishing on me, I'd have told her to find someone else to run errands for her, I reflected crossly.

"Ps-st!" Safi was beckoning from the passage. In a moment bright sunshine dazzled my eyes as we emerged into a small patio where orange trees glowed about a tiled fountain and a line of rooms opened all along one side. On the threshold of one of these a man in a white turban and striped burnous stood waiting. Safi nudged me. "Sheikh Abdul!" he said and trotted away.

I went forward, conscious of the sharp scrutiny of the man in the doorway. So many Moors have light skins that it was impossible to tell whether he was Moorish or European, a small, dapper individual, with keen, virile features. His cropped hair and small moustache gave him a certain soldierly appearance. He said in perfect English, "You come from the Countess Mazzoli?"

"Yes," I replied. "I was to collect a package for her."

He looked hard at me. "When does she arrive in Marrakesh?"

"She arrived yesterday."

His expression cleared. "Ah!" He shot me another suspicious glance. "Why didn't she come herself?"

"She had to go into hospital for an operation."

His face filled with concern. "An operation? Is it something serious?"

"Appendix. They wanted to operate at once."

He nodded dourly. "Come in!"

It was a lofty room, tiled half-way up and sparsely furnished with divans piled with cushions and one or two of those low Moroccan tables. Waving me to a divan, he clapped his hands and gave an order in Arabic to a native servant who came from a door in the corner. Then sitting down opposite me, "You're American, aren't you?" he asked.

"That's right," I agreed.

"You have known the Countess Mazzoli long?"

I shook my head, then told the circumstances of our meeting. "You were expecting her, weren't you?" I said, and he nodded. "Because," I went on, "she certainly gave me to understand that this man Safi at the Café el Kahira had the package. But Safi brought me here."

He nodded. "So were his orders." He was staring at me tentatively. "How do I know that you come from the Countess Mazzoli?" he said at length. Without replying I drew forth the locket. At the sight of it his expression softened. He took the locket from me and, turning it over in his fingers, remarked with a sigh, "Yes, she always wears it." He slipped the locket under his robe. "She gave me a message to deliver as well," I told him. "It would be for you, I suppose?"

He nodded. "What is the message?"

"I was to tell you, Bianca says, Be careful. He is here."

He stiffened on the instant, his eyes full of dismay. "*Here*—at Marrakesh? Since when? Where is he?"

He snapped these questions at me with machine-gun speed. I shrugged my shoulders. "I know nothing about it. I've given you the message as the Countess asked me to deliver it."

He sprang up with an irresolute air, scowling, his fists clenched. The servant came back with a brass pot of coffee and two little cups in filigree holders, on a tray, served us, salaamed, and departed. It was Turkish coffee, very hot and sweet and faintly perfumed with orange blossom. My companion tossed his down and began to pace the floor. I was growing fidgety. I wanted to be out of that house, wondering at the same time how I should ever find my way to the clinic. "Where's this hospital?" he asked me suddenly.

"The Clauzel clinic. 47 rue Suleiman is the address."

He bent his brows at me. "Did you tell anyone you were going to meet Safi?" he enquired. And when I hesitated he went on with a smile, "The question may be important. This is a delicate matter involving a lady who is a dear friend of mine and I must consider her interests."

"Look," I said rather impatiently, "when I offered to help the Countess out, I didn't expect to be sent from pillar to post like this. At the café they gave me as a guide a small boy who knew no English. When he landed me in the middle of that howling mob at the Djemma el Fna I naturally wanted to know where he was taking me. I happened to meet a man I know who speaks Arabic and got him to question the boy. I hope I didn't do wrong. Countess Mazzoli never said a word

to me about this being a delicate matter, as you call it, and..."

"Who was this friend of yours?" he broke in curtly.

"Just a man I met on the bus. A Swiss architect. His name is Ziemer."

A silence fell between us. He was staring past me, his brows furrowed with thought. I broke the silence. "If you have this package, won't you please give it to me," I said, "and have someone call me a taxi, because I really must be going?"

He nodded then. "Wait! I'll fetch it." He went quickly out by the inner door.

By now it was clear to me that this man was no Moor. At first I thought he might be an Englishman, but his English, flawless as it was, had a slight foreign inflection when he became excited. Moreover, he wasn't the British type. His shorn head and rather arrogant mien were more suggestive of a German, and a German officer at that. But what was a German officer doing at Marrakesh, living as a Moor, under a fictitious name, in the heart of the Arab city? Was he a spy, the Countess his accomplice? I realised that there might be a simpler explanation. The Countess had spoken of urgent family business: it might be an illicit love-affair—after all, he had hinted that her reputation was implicated. Whatever the truth was, the whole business had an unpleasant flavour of intrigue, and I couldn't help feeling that the Countess needn't have dragged me into it. I made up my mind that she would have to do some explaining before I handed the package over: at least, she owed me that, under Army orders as I was.

Then my companion returned, a sealed blue envelope in his hand. "There's a car at the back," he told me. "My servant will drive you to the rue Suleiman. Can I rely on you to give this to the Countess personally?" The envelope bulged in the middle as though it contained something round and flat such as a compact or small jewel-case. I slipped it into my bag. "I'll take it to her at once," I promised. "By this time she should have come out of the operation."

"You are too kind," he told me in his stiff way. He clapped his hands. "I'll tell Selim..."

The servant appeared. My companion was giving him his instructions when a loud hammering resounded from outside. A moment later Safi burst in from the patio, eyes popping, gabbling Arabic, his short arms waving. I gazed at the Sheikh in alarm. But he was icy calm. Silencing Safi with a gesture, "Go with Selim," he bade me. "He will take you to the car. But go quickly!" He flung an order at the servant and hurried out through the door in the corner.

Outside there was a furious chatter of voices and someone screamed in terror. Swiftly Safi drew a curtain across the entrance to the patio. Selim was plucking my sleeve. I wanted no encouragement, but ran out with him through the door by which the Sheikh had disappeared. There was no sign of the Sheikh. I have no very clear idea as to how we got out of the house. In a yard at the back Selim thrust me into a battered flivver and sprang to the wheel. As we were moving out of the yard a dark-skinned man in a tarbush and European clothes burst from the house, calling after us and fumbling at his hip. But if there was a shot I didn't hear it as we sped through an open gate into the street, turning on two wheels and, whirling across a little square, scattering a knot of women carrying laundry to a fountain, swung into a broad avenue.

Selim drove like a madman. At one place a woman snatched a small boy from under our very wheels, as it seemed to me, and at another we ran down a big brown dog. We could have avoided him, but Selim drove straight on. The crack as we hit the poor brute made my blood run cold and, though it sprawled howling and snapping in the roadway, we never stopped. Meanwhile, we seemed to have cast off our pursuer. Ten minutes later, feeling rather sick and shaken, I was at the clinic.

I thought that the girl at the reception desk looked at me oddly when I asked for the Countess Mazzoli. She said she would call the matron and put me in the waiting-room, where presently a placid Frenchwoman appeared. When I asked if I could see the Countess Mazzoli, she wanted to know if I were a relative, and when I replied, No, just a friend whom she was expecting, she said in a hushed voice, "But, mademoiselle, I regret. The poor lady is dead. She died on the operating-table."

Chapter VI

I sat in my room at the hotel and smoked a cigarette in a blank and shocked frame of mind. I could scarcely realise that the Countess, so vital, so resolute, was dead; but, apart from this, I wondered what on earth I should now do with the sealed envelope that lay on the dressing-table. The Countess had apparently informed the matron at the clinic that she knew no one at Marrakesh—which was, of course, untrue—and had given as her next of kin her son, Count Dino Mazzoli, at Naples. He had been notified by wire of her death and would presumably arrive in due course. The proper thing would be to hand the envelope over to him; I had no intention of giving it back to the Sheikh.

But I felt I could not even do this until I knew what was at the back of all this business. What if these two were just a couple of German spies, using me as their go-between? That sudden alert at the house might have been the police, the man who pursued us a detective. I still couldn't see what else I could have done except go with Selim as the Sheikh had ordered me; but I realised that by letting myself be hustled away I was up to the neck in it all. Nevertheless, I'd have to report it. But how was I to proceed without landing myself in all kinds of trouble?

Various American officers whom I had met at the General's and at my concert had rung me in my absence. Turning my dilemma over in my mind, I glanced through the sheaf of messages I had picked up at the desk. Le Capitaine Stracer had called, too, but I shied off Stracer. He was too G.I.-minded for me. What I wanted was advice—at least, to begin with—not an inquest. Then my eye fell on Leigh's name among the messages. Le Capitaine Leigh had telephoned and left a number where he could be reached. Why not consult my British captain? He seemed to be an understanding person—besides, he was in the Intelligence. I called the number. A bland British voice answered. Captain Leigh was out. He might look in before dinner: was there any message? I glanced at my watch—half past six. I left my name and number: would Captain Leigh ring me as soon as he came in?

It looked as though I would have to settle this matter for myself. I eyed the blue envelope tentatively. It was a stout linen envelope bearing no address and the three red seals along the flap were plain. On a sudden impulse I slid my finger under the flap.

There was no letter or any scrap of writing inside, only a small round object, wrapped in tissue paper, which, as I shook the envelope, fell out into my hand. I pulled the wrapping away and saw a small round leather box.

It was of pigskin, dark with use and fairly battered. The first thing I noticed was the letter 'F,' surmounted by a coronet, embossed on the lid. The lid was secured by a leather tongue and press fastener. I undid the fastener and, raising the lid, saw to my astonishment, for I was prepared to find at least a jewelled box or something of the kind, a collapsible drinking-cup of some white metal. I lifted the cup out. It was a bare inch or so in height when collapsed, but extended stood about six inches high. The whole box, with the lid closed, was no more than about three inches deep. The cup was empty and, as I discovered on taking it out, so was the case.

I was conscious of a strong sense of relief. There was nothing compromising about an old cup. Perhaps it had some sentimental meaning for the poor Countess—I remembered how the Sheikh's expression had softened at the sight of her locket. I was putting the cup back in its case when the telephone rang. I snatched the receiver, thinking it was Leigh. But it wasn't Leigh. Instead, I recognised the 'gay, guttural' English of my friend Herr Ziemer.

I was not much in the mood for Herr Ziemer: my "Hello there!" wasn't very enthusiastic. But he was bubbling over with excitement. "A great chance," he said. "Tonight the Sheikha Zuleika sings at the house of a Moorish notable. If you like, I shall take you."

"Oh, dear," I replied. "Must it be tonight?"

"Are you perhaps already engaged?"

"No. But I'm not much in the mood for a party. Someone I know has just died."

He seemed very disappointed. The Sheikha Zuleika was going away—I would not have another opportunity of hearing her sing. Finally, I let him persuade me. After all, the Countess was dead, and now that I knew what the envelope contained, the matter could wait over till the morning. And in my rather gloomy frame of mind the prospect of sitting around in the hotel by myself all the evening was not very entrancing. "And please to bring your guitar," said Ziemer. "Our host is el Kintafi—you hear of him, perhaps?"

"I saw him this afternoon, riding to the mosque."

Ziemer laughed. "El Kintafi is very good Moslem. If you like, you may sing to the ladies of his household after dinner. You never visited Moorish harem, no?"

"Never. I'd be thrilled."

"Then please make haste. Dinner is at eight and we have some way to travel."

"Where are you speaking from?"

"From the lobby. I have an auto outside. Come as you are—no need to dress up. But take, please, a warm coat—it is cold in the mountain where we shall go. Hurry, please!"

It did not take me five minutes to scramble out of my suit to a dark frock and to fling on some powder. As for the little leather box with the cup, I thrust it, envelope and all, under some rolled-up stockings in a pocket of my suitcase and locked the case. Snatching up my fur coat and my guitar, I hurried along to the lobby.

A longish drive under the full moon brought us to el Kintafi's kasbah, as Ziemer called it, a rugged castle skied on a hill-top with a courtyard where wild-eyed retainers with torches escorted us up a rough stone staircase to our host. The little old man I had seen riding the white mule that afternoon greeted us with great dignity and presented two fattish young men, who, Ziemer whispered to me, were two of his sons. We dined in a long room with walls of unhewn masonry and open bays overlooking the moonlit hills. There were rugs on the walls and floor and, to light us, oil lamps that flared in the icy draught blowing from the mountain. Ziemer and I were the only Europeans present in a company of about a dozen Moors, and I was the only woman.

We squatted on cushions at a low round table on which servants placed a bewildering succession of enormous earthenware dishes under wicker covers shaped like a witch's hat. We ate with our fingers and dried them on bread sliced from flat round loaves like those you see in Bible pictures. Everything was very hot and very good, if rather unfamiliar, with the courses all mixed up. There were several kinds of chicken, some stewed with dates; a marvellous pigeon pasty; and a whole lamb throned on rice, the famous Moroccan couscous. We drank nothing with our meal, but afterwards mint tea was served, the chieftain brewing it himself in a huge enamel teapot. Then everybody sat back and the Moors, loosening their belts, made distressing belching noises while the servants went round with perfumed water, soap, and towels, and we all washed our hands.

The singers came in soon after, four stoutish women with much painted faces, jingling with necklaces and bracelets, two carrying tambourines. They made a low obeisance to the chief and squatted on the floor. Then Ziemer nudged me. "Zuleika!" he whispered.

A fat woman, painted and bedizened like the others, came sidling in, hips swaying, while she tapped a tiny drum she held between her fingers. Leigh had warned me that Moroccan singing was nasal. It certainly was that. Thumping her little drum to mark the time, shaking her large breasts and undulating her hips, Zuleika quavered and whined her way up and down a scale of half-notes, while her tambourine women rattled and banged their tambourines, and their companions, together with some of the guests, clapped their hands in unison. Her song was not unlike a Spanish saeta, but less melodious and slower in tempo. It was a pretty grotesque performance, but the Sheikha had a true sense of rhythm and, her ungainly shape notwithstanding, her movements were full of grace.

When she had done, Ziemer, who had been whispering to the chief, informed me that el Kintafi wanted to hear me. My guitar was thrust into my hands and there, in the flickering lamplight, watched by dark eyes all around, I sang them a real Spanish saeta. It was an improvisation like the best of them, one I had jotted down from the lips of a frenzied youth

during a Holy Week procession at Seville when ultra-realistic images of the martyred Christ are borne through the streets. Such chants are, of course, directly descended from the music the Moors brought to Andalusia, and the chief and his guests listened to me in impressive silence. When I had finished, Ziemer told me the chief would be pleased if I would sing the same song for Leila Hadra, his principal wife, in the women's quarters.

Chapter VII

If I had been disillusioned by the Sheikha Zuleika's singing, it was nothing to my chagrin on being ushered into el Kintafi's harem. The chief escorted me himself, unlocking with a huge key which he took from his girdle a door at the top of the stairs by which we had mounted to the dining-room. I saw a large, bare room, freezingly cold, where a lot of little women in flowing garments of vividly contrasting colours huddled round a couple of small charcoal braziers. The place was furnished as incongruously as a First Avenue junk-shop. The main feature was an immense brass bed; there was a decrepit upright piano with a player attachment, and beside it, an enormous shiny mahogany wardrobe. The walls were covered with clocks. There must have been a dozen of them, from a French clock, all gilding and ormolu, to a prosaic dollar alarm. The only thing in the way of a picture was an advertisement of an American sewing-machine company. Some mattresses, spread with striped silks, were strewn about the floor.

Leila Hadra was an imposing figure in a long robe of green velvet and a broad chased silver belt. She wore diamonds in her ears and on her fingers. She was no longer young, her complexion a pale brown, her lips full, her air imposing. The other women, one of whom was nursing a small baby, crowded round as the chief introduced me. He then without further ceremony withdrew, leaving me the target of all those staring eyes. But Leila Hadra called a name and a pallid woman in a pale blue caftan stepped forward. "You are American?" she said to me in broken English. "I am Austrian. From Trieste, before Italy took it, after the last war. My name is Mina. You sing for Leila Hadra, not?"

I was not a little astonished to find a European there, though I have since heard that such things are not uncommon in Morocco. She must have been quite pretty once with her blue eyes and blonde hair, still corn-yellow under her elaborate head-dress. But now she was much faded, her air sickly and unhappy. I was tempted to ask her how on earth she came to enter a Moorish harem, but she had turned away to speak to Leila Hadra. So I tuned up the old guitar and, seated on a stool which an enormous, smiling Negress thrust under me, sang my saeta over again.

When I had done, they all swarmed around me, clapping their tiny hands and chattering like little birds. Leila Hadra, with a gracious smile, said something to Mina, and all the women tittered and applauded. Mina turned to me. "Leila Hadra finds your song very nice," she translated. "Much better you sing even than Sheikha Zuleika, she says. She like you to sing now American songs. But first we dress you like Moorish lady, Leila Hadra says!" I was a bit startled at this proposal, but before I could demur the chief wife, with much condescension, gave me her hand and piloted me to a door in the corner, Mina and the Negress following. As we reached the door it was opened from within by an enormously fat Negro in white with a scarlet sash and a turban. Seeing him there, a man, in the women's quarters, I suddenly realised that he must be one of the guardians of the harem, in other words, a eunuch. I was enchanted. Dear me, Hallam, I told myself, you're certainly going places in the Orient!

The blackamoor bowed us into a small room dimly lit by a solitary candle. They had prepared for my coming evidently, for various garments were laid out in readiness on a divan. For a moment I had the alarming thought that the eunuch would consider it part of his duties to assist me to disrobe, but, much to my relief, he bowed himself out and I slipped off my dress. Mina and the Negress helped me into long white pantaloons, a pale green silk under-shirt, and over it all a magnificent orange-yellow caftan heavily brocaded with flowers. Then came the curious head-dress with tails hanging down and a pearl pendant drooping on the forehead, and lastly a rich silver belt. Alas, there was no mirror in which to survey myself! I guess I looked all right, for the Negress gurgled her admiration and even Leila Hadra relaxed into a patronising smile. Only Mina remained grave. All the time I was changing she kept staring at me, and I had the feeling that she wanted to tell me something, but was afraid to speak.

With hand loftily extended Leila Hadra waited to escort me back. I turned to collect my hand-bag, which I had left

with my clothes on the divan. But the Negress intercepted me, making signs with her hands that my things would be quite safe in her charge, and we rejoined el Kintafi's ladies.

How they squeaked and chirped and clapped when I appeared in all my magnificence before them! Leila Hadra wanted American songs, did she? I gave them half a dozen verses of 'Frankie and Johnnie,' followed by 'The Arkansaw Traveller,' and as a final encore, 'Pistol-packin' Mamma.' I don't know what they made of it, but I certainly was a hit with those harem lilies. Then the Negress brought refreshments—a milky drink that tasted of almonds, stuffed dates, some sticky stuff like Turkish delight, and various other kinds of candy. As Leila Hadra insisted on yet another number I sang them 'Chagrin d'Amour' in French, then, thinking that Ziemer would be waiting, told Mina I really should be going back. She explained to Leila Hadra and took me off to the little room.

The Negress would have accompanied us, but Mina turned on her quite fiercely and she stayed outside. No sooner was the door closed than Mina burst out, "I wanted to warn you, but Leila Hadra, always she watch me." She pointed at my handbag, where it lay with my things on the divan. "Quick," she said, glancing towards the door with frightened eyes. "The eunuch is not to be trusted, or that black woman, either. See if they have taken anything!"

I fairly leapt for my bag. I had not a great deal of money with me, for I had planned to go to the bank in the morning and draw on my Letter of Credit; but my passport and Army credentials were there. The moment I opened the bag I saw that it had been ransacked, for the key of my hotel room, which, being heavy, I had put at the bottom, now lay on top. My passport and other papers were all right; but they had been removed from the pocket where I kept them. Yet nothing had been taken, not even money—the fifty-dollar bill I kept against emergencies and the four hundred-franc notes I had brought with me from Rabat were still folded away in the little inside purse.

I told Mina this. "What were they looking for?" she demanded. I was silent for a moment. A sheerly incredible thought had sprung into my mind. The blue envelope!

Mina was staring at me. "This man who brought you here, how do you know him?"

"Herr Ziemer? I met him on the bus coming from Rabat yesterday."

She started to help me out of the caftan. "You are American. You fight Hitler. You want he should be beaten?" she said between her teeth.

I laughed. "You bet."

"And you go with this Ziemer?"

I swung about to look at her. "What's the matter with Herr Ziemer?"

Her face was sullen. "What's the matter with all Nazis?"

"Herr Ziemer isn't a Nazi. He's a Swiss."

She gave a dry laugh. "He can call himself what he likes. Don't ask me how I know it, but I can tell you he is one of Clubfoot's men. That is enough for me." She held out my frock to me and I stepped into it.

"And who might Clubfoot be?" I asked, pulling up the zipper.

She stared at me out of tragic eyes. "So many have asked this question and found the answer only when they were already in his power. So it was also with me. Oh, maybe, because you see what I am today, old before my time, the cast-off favourite of this old fool of a chief, the slave of that daughter of the house-dog, Leila Hadra, you think I am always like this." Her voice rose a tone. "But once I was honoured and respected. I had a husband, a house of my own, two maids, and my own carriage, until this man came into our life and brought destruction on us all."

She was gazing in front of her now. "All this was many years ago," she said, "in the time of the last war, when you were not even born, I think. But Clubfoot does not change. Human beings—poor creatures with broken hearts like me—

they change. But not Clubfoot. Because the man is not human," and passion suddenly made her shrill. "He is a monster, a wild beast, and everywhere he goes he leaves a trail of treachery, of broken faith, of blood—yes, blood!" She broke off, gasping.

I went to her and took her hand. "What happened to you, Mina? Don't you want to tell me?"

She shook her head. "Of what use? It is an old story now." She stared into space. "I was on the roof last night when he arrived," she said, lowering her voice. "I saw him as he went clip-clop across the yard, dragging his twisted foot, a little greyer, perhaps, his great barrel of a body a little heavier, but the face the same, that terrible, hairy face, like some great baboon, before which all men have trembled in the days of his power." She shuddered and buried her face in her hands.

"But who is this man, Mina, and what does he do?" I said.

"At the time I speak of," she answered wearily, "he was head of the German Kaiser's personal secret service and, if what they said was true, was more powerful than the Emperor himself. Today, and what he does here in Morocco"—she shrugged her shoulders—"who shall say? But what I can tell you is that last night when he came, el Kintafi greeted him like a brother. And el Kintafi is no friend of the Allies. Always his dream has been to drive the French away and make himself master of the Sous and—who knows?—perhaps Sultan tomorrow. So it would suit Adolf Hitler's plan to have the tribesmen rise and expel the French, so that Germany may seize the country. And so I think that now old Clubfoot works for Adolf Hitler. He may change masters, but always, he must have power. So is the man. So is Grundt."

"Grundt?" I queried.

She nodded. "So is his real name. Grundt—Dr. Adolf Grundt."

"And you say he is here at the kasbah?"

She shook her head. "Not any more. He spent the night, but left this evening before dinner."

"What makes you think that Herr Ziemer is one of his men?"

She gave me a secretive glance. "I overheard Clubfoot ask el Kintafi whether he had seen Ziemer, and el Kintafi said, Not yet, but he was expecting Ziemer for dinner. That was this evening when I was on the roof and they were talking in the courtyard after they came back from the mosque."

"Wait!" I cried. "You say that this man Clubfoot went to the mosque with el Kintafi?"

"Yes. For the Friday prayers."

"In native costume?"

"But assuredly, to go to the mosque."

"Then I saw him.."

I broke off, smitten with a sudden vision of the Countess peering glassy-eyed from the ambulance at that clubfooted Moor on the lashing mule. Now I knew what her strange message meant—she was warning the Sheikh Abdul that the clubfooted German was at Marrakesh. And Ziemer, who had seemed so harmless, was one of this man's associates!

A chill fastened on my spine and ran slowly down. I had no idea what Ziemer might have discovered from my little guide, but at least he had learnt from me that I had a message for Safi. He could have followed us to the Sheikh Abdul's and in some way found out about the envelope; the uproar at the house might have been caused by his unexpected arrival. In that case the invitation to dinner, all the hocus-pocus of making me change into Moorish costume, were part of a deliberate plan based on the belief that I still had the envelope with me. The only crumb of consolation I could discern was that I had had the forethought to leave the envelope behind, securely locked away in my suitcase at the hotel. In

sudden panic I gathered up my coat and bag.

Someone was at the door. A velvety voice cried softly in Arabic. "It's the eunuch," Mina explained. "He says the car is waiting." She spoke in shrill Arabic through the door. As she helped me on with my coat she whispered in an agonised voice, "I cannot know what there is between Ziemer and you, but, for the love of the dear God, not a word to him of what I have told you, or that she-devil, Leila Hadra, will put poison in my food." As I would have moved to the door she stayed me with her hand. "Oh, you who are so young and talented and so beautiful," she said passionately, "you don't belong among these wicked men, so remember what I have told you. Be on your guard!" Tears stood in her eyes.

She bundled me out then, and we followed the eunuch to where Leila Hadra, surrounded by the other women, waited to take leave of me. Her smile was oily and unrevealing as she gave me a limp hand. Instead of taking me back to the room where we had dined, the eunuch plodded before me down the staircase to where the car that had brought us was waiting in the bright moonlight. There was no sign of Ziemer, but one of the Sheikh's sons, who spoke a little French, emerged from the black shadow at the foot of the stairs. Monsieur Ziemer, he told me, had been unable to wait; the car would take me back to my hotel.

I was really scared now. I let my glance rove from the young Moor's inscrutable countenance to the dark faces of the servants all about. It was getting on for midnight and I was alone, in some inaccessible fastness of the Atlas. I realised I had no choice but to confide myself to the native driver, who was already warming up the engine against the biting mountain air. I entered the car, poor Mina's warning ringing through my brain, wondering whether I would not be forthwith whirled into the presence of the terrible clubfooted German. But the car brought me at breakneck speed down the series of hairpin bends by which we had reached the kasbah until at last the lights of Marrakesh encircled us and I found myself, unexpectedly, outside my hotel.

The chauffeur held the door for me as I stepped out. I had a shock when I saw him in the light. It was the same dark-skinned man in a tarbush who had pursued Selim and me when we had escaped from the Sheikh Abdul's house that afternoon.

Chapter VIII

I didn't stop to question him, but fled into the hotel. The desk was deserted and the lounge, with most of the lights turned off, empty save for a uniformed figure asleep, with legs outstretched, in a chair. It was Leigh. Overjoyed at seeing him, I walked across and, when he did not stir, gently prodded his foot with the toe of my slipper.

He was awake at once, staring at me dully until he recognised me. "So, it's you!" he exclaimed and held his wrist-watch to the light. He scrambled to his feet. "And where the devil have you been, may I ask?"

I looked at him in surprise, his tone was so brusque. I felt suddenly deathly tired. Dropping into the chair beside him, "At a Moorish dinner party," I said.

"Don't fence with me!" he snapped. "You know what I mean. Where were you all the afternoon?"

His attitude alarmed me. I remembered he was in the Intelligence; he could have heard something. Telling him my story my own way, was one thing; having it dragged out of me piecemeal by an irate Intelligence officer was another. I should have to watch my step, I decided. "Why?" I asked casually.

"Why?" His eyes sparkled. "Perhaps you don't see anything unusual in trapesing round Marrakesh arm-in-arm with an enemy agent?"

"Who's an enemy agent?"

He gave an angry laugh. "You sneak away from the Djemma el Fna in broad daylight with a well-known spy and you ask, Who's an enemy agent? Your little pal Safi's an enemy agent, that's who!"

"Safi?" I repeated, as though I heard the name for the first time.

"Yes, Safi, a gent whose name stinks to such an extent in this town that if I'd reported you, as I should have done, you'd now be in the clink. You needn't trouble to deny that you were with him, because I was at the Djemma el Fna myself with my M.P.s this afternoon and I spotted you."

"If he's as notorious as you say he is, I wonder you didn't follow us."

He scowled. "You can leave me out of this. Just what's the little game?"

"There isn't any game, as you call it."

"No? Then what exactly were you two after at that house in the street of Sidi Tahir?"

That would be the Sheikh Abdul's house, of course. "I thought you said you didn't follow us?" I said. I realised my fatal admission at once.

He seemed to pounce. "So it *was* you?"

Although his manner was so emphatic, he kept his voice down, his head thrust forward, his eyes never leaving my face. For the moment I lost the thread of what he was saying. I was thinking about the envelope. If I could produce it, it would immensely strengthen my story—I realised that it was bound to come out now. I stood up. "Excuse me one moment!" I said.

He stepped in front of me. "Stay where you are, please."

"You can't detain me," I cried, furious. "I'm going to my room."

"Not until you've answered my question!"

"I'd like to see you stop me!" I moved to one side. Still he barred the way. "Let me pass!" I told him.

He stood back then. "All right," he said sulkily. "If you prefer to be arrested..."

I laughed in his face. "You can't touch me. I'm an American."

"The French can. I've only to go to the telephone across there and they'll pull you in, American or not. It's a murder charge, remember."

I quailed. "A *murder* charge?"

"Accessory before the fact. You and Safi." He shot me a keen glance from under his dark eyebrows. "Or perhaps you don't know about von Rode?"

I stared at him. "Who's von Rode?"

"The Sheikh Abdul, if you like it better. He was found dead in that house this evening. He'd been shot through the heart."

I sank back into my chair in a maze of horror. Then the Countess Mazzoli's warning had come too late. I sprang up. "I didn't know," I cried, "but I think I can tell you who shot him. It was a man called Ziemer, who says he's a Swiss but who I believe is really a German agent. It was he who took me to dine at el Kintafi's tonight."

A look of utter amazement filled his eyes. "You went to el Kintafi's?" he exclaimed in a shocked voice.

"Yes. And while I was in the women's quarters, one of his women, an Austrian called Mina, warned me against Ziemer. She says he works for some clubfooted man, a famous German spy—Grundt, she says his name is. Grundt arrived at the kasbah yesterday—Clubfoot, as Mina calls him—and spent the night. He went away again this evening before we arrived for dinner. He's a terrible-looking man, as big as a house, with a huge clubfoot. I'm scared to death every time I think of him."

He fingered his lip. "Grundt? Clubfoot? That's a new one on me. You say you saw him at the kasbah?"

I shook my head. "It was in the street, before I went to the Djemma el Fna. He was riding to the mosque with el Kintafi in Moorish dress. The Countess saw him, too, and made me take a warning to this man who calls himself the Sheikh Abdul..." I broke off gasping.

"Steady!" said Leigh. "Let's take this in order. We'll start with this Ziemer bloke. Where did you pick *him* up?"

"On the bus coming from Rabat."

"What's he doing here?"

"He says he works for the Native Art Department at Rabat."

"That's easily checked. A dark chap, thickset, with big specs, is he? A man like this forced his way into the Sheikh Abdul's this afternoon, the janitor says. And incidentally he left his hat behind—a jaunty green affair with a feather in the band."

"That's him! That's Ziemer! He was at the market-place this afternoon and knew I was looking for this man Safi. I believe he was after a certain envelope the Sheikh Abdul gave me. That's why he asked me up to el Kintafi's, supposedly to hear the Sheikha sing, but in reality so that they could go through my things while I was singing to the women in Moorish costume."

The young man was as calm as I was excited. "Hold everything!" he bade me and, crossing the lounge, vanished into one of the phone boxes. I found a cigarette and was half-way through it before he was back. "That's in hand," he announced. "Now suppose you sit back and tell me the whole story, from the beginning!"

"Did you mean what you said about the French putting me in jail?" I questioned rather nervously.

He gave me a level glance. "Up till now I've managed to keep you out of it; I'm the only one who's wise to your being in this at present. They know that Safi was at the house because the janitor identified him, but Safi has vanished into thin air. They also ascertained from the janitor that Safi had a girl, a European, with him, but I don't think they have your description."

"And if they have?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "It won't be too good. You see, our friend Colonel Freitas is in charge of the investigation, and, of course, he has seen you. It won't do to let you fall into old F.'s clutches."

"I should say not!"

He smiled. "Let's hear the story and we'll see what's best to be done."

I had not got very far with my account of my meeting with the Countess when he stopped me. "Would the first name be Bianca?"

"That's right."

He nodded. "There were letters signed 'Bianca' in the stuff von Rode left behind when he bolted from Casablanca. We were wondering who she might be."

"Just who is von Rode? A German, isn't he?"

He laughed. "I'll say so. Colonel Heinz von Rode, an officer of the old Prussian Army, one of the original Reichswehr lot. He was the only member of the German Armistice Commission to escape when the Allies landed at Casablanca. We've been searching for him for months." He chuckled. "It amuses me to think of you running him to earth when the whole of the British and American Intelligence Services have drawn a blank. I wonder how long he was at Marrakesh, living right under our noses. But go on!"

He had discarded his inquisitorial manner now and was content to sit back in his chair, a cigarette between his fingers, and let me tell my story in my own way. He listened to me in silence while I told of opening the envelope and finding the cup in its leather case inside. But when I described the case he became strangely excited. "Stamped with an 'F' and a coronet?" he said tensely. "Are you sure of this?"

"Quite sure."

"It wasn't an 'R' for von Rode?"

"No. I wondered why it wasn't an 'R' myself."

"What did you do with it?"

"It's locked away in my suitcase in my room. At least, I hope so."

He sighed his relief. "I was afraid you were going to say you'd handed it over to the fair Bianca."

"I couldn't do that. You see, she died this afternoon."

That shook him again. He was incredulous at first: it was nothing but a trick of Ziemer and his clubfooted boss to throw me off the scent and to ensure the box remaining in my possession. But, "I know Dr. Clauzel," he said, and was off to the phone again. "It's true, right enough," he informed me when he came back. "It appears she has a son, Dino Mazzoli, somewhere in Italy."

"That's right, too," I struck in. "He's on the Italian General Staff at Naples and a friend of Hank Lundgren's. Countess Mazzoli met Hank at a luncheon party given by her son."

Leigh gave me a startled look. "Are you sure of this?"

"She told me so herself. When Hank heard she was going to Morocco he asked her to look me up at Rabat."

He cocked his head at me. "Well, well, you don't say!" His tone changed. "How about taking a dekko at this leather case? Would you like to fetch it? Or wait! I believe I'll go with you."

My eyes followed his as he glanced towards the reception desk. There was still no sign of the night clerk, but as we stood there in silence I was aware of a rhythmic, wheezing sound proceeding from the rear of the reception office. "Come on!" said Leigh, and took my arm. As we passed the desk he showed me, through a glass window, the night clerk—some kind of a Frenchman in a tarbush, a Syrian maybe—slumbering at a desk in a room behind the office, his head on the blotter. Leigh winked at me and sang softly under his breath, "Ah, ne t'éveille pas encore!" I looked at him in surprise: there was something odd at hearing the *Berceuse* coming from the lips of this matter-of-fact young man.

My room was in a corridor at the back of the lounge. With some trepidation I unlocked the door. The maid had turned down the bed, laid out my pyjamas, and switched on the bedside lamp. Its ray, filtered pinkly through the silken shade, showed the room as I had left it, my suitcase standing on its side beside the dressing-table. Leigh took the key out of the door and closed it. "Everything okay?" he enquired.

"I guess so." I was digging in my powder-box for my bunch of keys, their customary hiding-place since one fatal day in San Francisco when I contrived to lose every key I possessed in the world out of my bag on Market Street. I found the

key I wanted, blew the powder out of it, and, hoisting my suitcase on the bed, unlocked it.

Leigh's voice broke the ensuing silence. "Well?"

"They beat us to it," I told him.

"No!" In a bound he was at my side.

I lifted up my Spanish shawl. "I left this spread over the top. Now I find it rolled up anyhow on one side."

"And the leather case?"

I showed him the pocket where I'd stowed it away, empty now, with the stockings I had stuffed on top of it strewn around.

"You're sure it's gone?" he said.

"See for yourself!" I answered, and while his hands ruffled through the contents of the case, I ran to the bureau. Every drawer had been turned upside-down, and in the closet two of my frocks had been knocked off their hangers and were bunched on the floor.

"Strewth!" said Leigh.

It was then I took the decision that, if I'd only known it, was to have such far-reaching results. If I had been calmer and, above all, if Leigh in his patronising English way hadn't opposed me, I might have acted differently. But I was badly rattled. I couldn't get Colonel Freitas out of my mind. I could see him looking at me down that long, red nose of his, questioning, ferreting. I had a vision of myself thrust into some filthy cell...

I scooped an armful of my frocks from the closet and, elbowing the Englishman out of the way, dumped them into my suitcase on the bed. I followed suit with the contents of the bureau drawers.

Leigh stared at me in surprise. "What are you up to now?" he asked.

"Getting out!" I told him, and went into the bathroom for my tooth-brush.

He followed me to the door. "What's the idea?"

"I'm not waiting for your Colonel Freitas, that's the idea. I'm checking out."

He looked at his watch. "At this time of night? You're crazy."

I pushed past him with my hands full of bottles which I flung into the suitcase. "The box is gone," I said, "and that lets me out." I started to clear the dressing-table.

"But where are you going in the middle of the night?"

"I'll find another hotel. Have you got a car here?"

"Yes, but..."

"Then you can drive me!"

He said, "Listen, you can't do this. If old F. really gets on your track, don't you see that doing a bolt like this in the middle of the night is the clearest admission of guilt?"

"I can't help that. I'll go to American Headquarters or the Consul or someone in the morning, but I'm not staying here." I put my dressing-gown, pyjamas, and slippers on top of the case. "Do you want to shut that?"

He didn't budge. "You don't seem to realise that this is a serious business," he said. "The entire Allied Intelligence is involved."

I swung the case on the floor, knelt on it, and with some difficulty got it shut. "You know the facts," I replied. "You can do what's necessary. I'm not in the Secret Service: I'm a singer and, as we say in America, I'm blowing!" I carried the case across to my guitar-case and gathered up my coat. "Now where's that car?"

He threw me a furious look. "D'you want to get me court-martialled? I'll have nothing to do with it, I tell you. And what's more, you're staying right here!"

I laughed and picked up my suitcase. "We'll see about that."

At that moment the bedside telephone rang.

Chapter IX

We exchanged a glance that spoke volumes. "Who could be calling you at this hour?" said Leigh, his eyes on the telephone. It screamed again.

"Don't answer it!" I told him.

"All right, all right!" he calmed me down, and stepping to the door, opened it. "I'll be right back."

He vanished into the corridor. The pealing of the telephone tore at my frayed nerves and I hurried after him. But before I could reach the corridor he came tiptoeing back. He swept me into the room, closed the door and shot the bolt. "Old F.," he announced, tense. "With a brace of gendarmes. They're at the desk and the night clerk is ringing the room."

I was distraught. "You've got to get me out of this," I exclaimed. "You've got to."

He shook his head. "Not a hope. That wog at the desk didn't see you come in. When your phone doesn't answer, he's bound to come along with his pass-key to find out if you're back." His gaze was dubious. "There's nothing for it. I'd better go out there and tackle old F."

"You'll do nothing of the sort!" My eye fell on the french window. "The porch isn't far from the ground." I ran to the window and plucked it wide. He sprang forward. "Are you crazy?" he called after me.

The telephone had stopped ringing. In the silence we both heard the stealthy creak of a board in the corridor outside, the hesitant rap on the door, the soft voice, "Mees Hallam!" Then the handle was tried. When I saw it turn I lingered no more. As a key rattled in the lock, I snatched up my two cases and dashed outside. I was already at the balustrade when my arm was squeezed, my cases were taken from me and pitched into the bushes, and Leigh's voice spoke low in my ear. "Jump when I tell you!" He slung a leg over the rail and sprang down, landing in a tangle of shrubs. It was a matter of split seconds. The moon, riding high and bright, shed its light over everything. It showed me Leigh with arms outstretched below. "Now!" he hissed.

I weigh a hundred and thirty in my birthday suit, and the ground was farther than I had judged; but he caught me and held me fast. For an instant later a step rang hollow on the planking above our heads. He pulled me down under cover of the porch and we crouched there, scarcely daring to breathe, until silence fell again, followed presently by the distant slam of a door. Then he released me.

"If it had been old F. you wouldn't have got off so easily," he said, glowering at me. "A nice mess you've landed us in!"

"Where's this car of yours?"

"In the side-street." He gathered up my two cases. "But first we have to find a way out of this damned thicket."

We were in a neglected corner of the hotel grounds, a wilderness of shrubs and nettles. Leigh went ahead with my baggage—I could hear him swearing as brambles brushed his face or hooked themselves into his sleeve or jacket. At last, scratched and hot, we came out on a path through the trees that brought us to a palm grove with a gate at the end. Beyond was a road—a peaceful backwater—where two or three cars were parked at the kerb. Leigh opened the door of one and threw my cases in the back. He was already at the wheel when I came up. A gesture of his head bade me get in.

I paused. "Where are we going?"

"Where do you think at this hour of the night?" he retorted. "To my place, of course." And when I still hesitated, "Will you please get in," he growled, "or do you want to start another argument like you did in the bedroom?"

He was in a fine rage. Having won my point, however, I could afford to be docile and climbed in beside him meekly enough. "Do you live in a hotel?" I enquired as we started off. "I do not," was the brusque reply. "I've a flat, and if you expect American standards of luxury, you'll be disappointed. Half the time there isn't any water and the electric light is apt to fail at any time and be off for days."

"I shall still feel that I'm imposing on you."

He grunted. "Don't worry. We'll fix you up somehow."

"Who's we? Is your wife out here with you?"

"I haven't got a wife. I'm sharing the flat with another man."

"Oh? What's he likely to say?"

"He won't mind. He's an American. Now will you please shut up and let me drive!"

The flat was on the first floor of a modern-looking apartment house in what seemed to be the European section of the city. Leigh went first, switching on lights, and showed me into a big living-room where, with a muttered, "Wait there!" he left me. It was a man's room, with pipes strewn around, a desk with a battered portable, a bookcase overflowing with books. One or two modernistic paintings of Moroccan scenes were on the walls and a large photo of the President, flanked by a poster head of Winston Churchill, with a quotation from that speech of his about fighting on the beaches, tacked above the couch. It did something to me to come upon the face of the President there. That fighting chin, the firm, good-humoured mouth, warmed my American heart; it was like coming home. I sank down on the couch, conscious of having found a temporary haven from the clutches of that terrible old F., and almost immediately was asleep.

Voices awakened me. Leigh must have come back while I slept, for my feet had been lifted so that I lay full length and a khaki great-coat was spread over me. I struggled up into an atmosphere fragrant with tobacco smoke. The first thing I saw was a man in a dressing-gown squatting cross-legged on the floor, a pipe in his mouth. He was talking to Leigh, who was filling his pipe from a tobacco-jar on the bookcase. The man in the dressing-gown saw me first. "Hello, she's woke up!" he exclaimed, and bounced to his feet.

Leigh swung round. "This is Major Riley, who shares the flat with me, Miss Hallam," he said. He looked rather sulky.

"Don't be so damned British, Nick," the other retorted, and held out his hand to me. "I'm Maurice Riley, commonly known as Snafu Riley, and you're Andrea Hallam. Just a couple of Yanks a darn long way from home. How are you feeling?" He was a little, wiry man with grizzled dark hair and an ugly, good-tempered face.

"I'm all right," I replied. "I'm afraid I've been asleep."

"How about a drink? There's some Scotch."

"No, thanks." I held my watch to the light. "Good heavens, it's nearly five o'clock. I must have slept for hours."

Riley chuckled and sat down beside me on the couch. "You've had quite a time, Nick says."

I nodded.

"If old F. knows anything about what you've been up to, I'm not surprised at his wanting to get hold of you," he remarked with a laugh.

I swung to him in a panic. "You're not going to hand me over to that horrible man?"

He considered the bowl of his pipe. "He's not so bad. You're in what has always been the most turbulent section of the country, remember. It's only been fully pacified within the last fifteen years, and ever since France packed up, German agents have been as busy as bees round here, flinging the money about, corrupting the chiefs, and stirring up the natives against all non-Moslems, Christian and Jew alike. The B.D.R. has had one whale of a job, keeping the lid down. No wonder old F.'s like a cat on hot bricks."

"I don't give a hoot what he's like. I'm not a spy and I won't be treated like one."

He patted my shoulder. "Take it easy, kid. Here!" He thrust a pack of cigarettes at me.

I took a cigarette and lit at the match he offered. "You're going on to Naples, aren't you? When?"

I shook my head. "They haven't told me yet."

He glanced across at Leigh. "I was telling Nick—I think we should get you out of Marrakesh right away. This morning, if we can fix it."

"I'm all for it!"

He laughed at the eagerness in my voice. "Nick has told me your story. Our Joint Intelligence over at Naples ought to hear it without delay. That's why I want to run you out of Marrakesh. I'm not scared of anything old F. could do to you, but once you get caught up in the machinery of the French law—wow!" He drew on his pipe reflectively. "I suppose von Rode—Sheikh Abdul—didn't say anything to explain the importance of the cup in the leather case he gave you for the Countess Mazzoli?"

"Not a word. Except to tell me to take great care of it, because it was valuable. Why he should describe a battered old cup as valuable is beyond me!"

He nodded serenely. "Quite. But you must remember that in our job values are often quite mixed."

I looked him in the eye. "You're Intelligence, too, are you?"

He gave me back a humorous glance. "And why do you suppose they call me Snafu?"

I shook my head. "'Snafu' is Army slang, I know; But I forget what it means."

He chuckled. "S.N.A.F.U.: Situation Normal; All Fouled Up." He laughed again. "Since that's been my permanent state ever since I landed in North Africa with Mark Clark, you'll gather that as a nickname it's not altogether inappropriate." He consulted his watch. "Who's on the transport run to Naples today, Nick, do you remember?" he asked Leigh.

"Fresno," said Leigh.

He nodded. "Excuse me!" he said to me, and went out.

My eye sought Leigh's. But he seemed to avoid my gaze. "Can I ask you a question?" I said.

He paused to brush a flake of tobacco from his lip. "Go ahead!"

"Why didn't you tell Colonel Freitas that you'd seen me with Safi on the square this afternoon?"

He gave a shrug. "By the way," he said, "there's no Dr. Ziemer working with the Department of Native Art at Rabat."

"You haven't answered my question," I reminded him.

Another shrug. "Well, I didn't know about von Rode then."

"But if Safi was so notorious as you say he is?"

His eyes clouded over. "There were reasons ... Also I was willing to give you the benefit of the doubt, I suppose."

"Why?"

"I don't know. Maybe you don't look like a spy."

I said, "You know I haven't thanked you for coming to my rescue tonight. But for you I'd never have got out of the hotel."

He wasn't one to smile much; but when he wanted, his smile could be charming. His eyes twinkled as he smiled now. "You're a stubborn person," he remarked.

"Am I?"

"As stubborn as a mule. I only know of one person who's as pigheaded as you are, and that's Snafu."

"He's nice," I said.

He positively glared at me. "Nice?" he echoed. "He's one in a million. As clever as a wagonload of monkeys with their tails burnt off and as brave as a lion. He doesn't know what fear is. He and I got into a spot of bother in a pub down on the waterfront at Casa before the chaps landed. Not just wogs—Germans. If you'd seen Snafu clear that bar with nothing but a champagne bottle wrapped in a napkin! My hat, he was wonderful!" He broke off. "This is your lucky day—the bath water's functioning. How about a bath while I rustle up some breakfast?"

"It would be heavenly!"

"I put some towels in the bathroom for you and you'll find your suitcase in my room, across the corridor, if you want anything out of it." He gave me a tentative look. "You wouldn't have such a thing as a pair of slacks with you, would you?"

"Sure."

"Then put 'em on!" He pulled open a door and pointed. "The bath's at the end of the corridor. Step on it! Breakfast in half an hour!"

Chapter X

A pleasant breakfast aroma lay on the air when I returned to the living-room. I felt considerably restored, morally as

well as physically. The hot water had soaked most of the fatigue out of my bones. I had made a quick change into my slacks and a fresh shirt-blouse and repaired my ravaged complexion. I was ready for anything and much cheered by the prospect of shaking the dust of Marrakesh off my feet. The only little qualm I had was the thought of Stracer, his rules and regulations.

Major Riley, freshly shaved, in khaki blouse and slacks, was at the desk, laboriously pounding out a letter on the typewriter; clinking noises proclaimed Leigh's presence in the kitchen. From the doorway I contemplated the little man, picturing him, bottle in hand, cleaning up that Casablanca bar. His air was scholarly rather than tough, but his eyes, black and penetrating, sparkled with vitality, and his body seemed all gristle, without a spare ounce of flesh anywhere. Catching sight of me standing there, he waved a greeting. "To say that you look like a million dollars," he observed with precision, turning back to his machine, "would be sheer meiosis, because, as you know, to a public servant, Washington-trained, a million dollars is as a drop in the ocean. Suppose I tell you, then, that you look like all the noughts in Uncle Sam's war budget!"

I dropped him a bob. "Thank you, sir!"

"The name," he corrected, "is Snafu." He punched out a word or two reflectively. "What do you make of Nick?" he questioned, scrutinising what he had written.

"He'll grow up. Just now, he's inclined to be bossy."

He chuckled. "That's precisely what he says about you. Did you know he was at Dunkirk?"

"Yes. I believe he did mention it."

"He was one of the last off the beaches. I bet he didn't mention that he got a D.S.O. as a second loot at the age of twenty-five—it's that red-and-blue ribbon he wears. That's some going for a one-pip, Andy my girl, if you know the British Army."

"He struck me as being—well, kind of cautious."

He grunted. "Did you ever see a hunter at a fence, feeling with its hoofs for the take-off? Well, that's caution, too." He pulled his letter from the machine, ran his eye over it, and signed it with a pen he undipped from his shirt pocket. "You're a friend of Hank Lundgren, Nick says," he remarked during this operation.

"Yes. I'm looking forward to seeing him in Naples."

I spoke hopefully. But he was as cagey as Leigh. His face seemed to smooth out, just as Leigh's had done when I tackled him about Hank, and he left the bait untouched. Ignoring my remark, he said, "How would you feel about Nick escorting you to Naples?"

"Don't you consider me capable of travelling alone?"

He shook his head. "That's not the point."

"It's very much to the point. If you want me to see your Intelligence people at Naples, all right. But I've no intention of going there under guard..."

"Now, wait a minute!" he broke in.

"Let me finish. I've done nothing wrong. Whatever your Colonel Freitas may think, I'm not a suspicious character. But I'm not a Secret Service agent, either, and, what's more, I don't want to be one. I'm a singer and I was brought out here to sing to the troops, and that's what I'm going to do. I know nothing about Intelligence work, and from what I've seen of it I don't want to. So that's that!"

He shook his head again. "You don't understand. You've got to realise that from the moment you undertook that

mission for the Countess Mazzoli you were a marked woman."

I wasn't going to let him frighten me. "That sounds dramatic," I retorted, "but it simply isn't true. Or at any rate it isn't true any more now that Ziemer has got hold of that leather case."

"I'm not thinking of Ziemer, or even of this enigmatic club-footed man who, I confess, baffles me. I'm thinking of the Countess Mazzoli and her friends."

"What friends?"

He made a pause, absently fingering the keys of his typewriter. "You've probably heard that there has always been a certain amount of friction between the Hitler boys and the old Prussian Army, which of course has supplied Germany with her Army commanders," he said. "Since the Russian campaign flopped, this friction has come to a head and a strong anti-Hitler movement has developed among a small but influential group of the high-ups on the German General Staff. These Generals realise that Germany has lost the war; what they're after now is to try to salvage as much as they can of the wreck. The plan is to throw dust in the eyes of the free nations by getting rid of Adolf and the Nazis and have the Generals fix the peace."

"I know," I said, "so that they can start another war in their own time."

"Precisely. Adolf has made repeated attempts to crush the opposition. Some of the ringleaders died mysteriously, others were broken. But some survive, either because Himmler and his bloodhounds have failed to snuffle them out or because their political connections are so strong that Adolf simply dare not go after them." He raised his head and looked at me. "One of them was von Rode!"

I sat up at that. "Von Rode? I remember Leigh told me, he was one of the old lot."

"And how? Well, he was a leading spirit in the anti-Hitler group, a darn good soldier too, Chief of Intelligence to one of the Armies on the Russian front until he fell foul of Adolf. Adolf was scared to turn Himmler loose on him, for von Rode, besides having powerful Army pals, was related to some of the big German industrialists, who, as you may know, have always been back of the Nazi Party. So, to get rid of him, he was packed off to the Armistice Commission at Casablanca. When we pinched the whole boiling of them at the Casablanca landing, von Rode was the only one to escape. He clearly waited for the hue-and-cry after him to die down to send out word where he is hiding."

"To the Countess Mazzoli?"

"Evidently, since she seems to have been his lady friend. She had good connections—you say that her son is working as liaison between the Eyties and the Yanks at Naples; she had property at Casablanca, therefore a good motive for travelling. She was a natural intermediary to contact her cher ami and collect that blue envelope."

"For the Generals?"

His face froze up. "For one of them—shall we say?—who's just now in Italy."

"But what possible importance could an old drinking-cup like that have?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "It was important enough to the German Secret Service—that is to say, to the Hitler crowd—for this guy Ziemer to run considerable risks and even kill a man in order to lay hands on it. As a matter of fact, for months past the German Secret Service has sent agent after agent into French Morocco trying to pick up von Rode's traces—Clubfoot appears to be one of them. There was even a report that Admiral Canaris, its head, had fallen into disgrace with Adolf for failing to produce von Rode."

He had fallen to doodling with his pen, drawing one little windmill after the other on a scribbling-pad already decorated with identical efforts—the dinkiest little windmills with sails set and birds circling and a clump of trees in the foreground. "Did you ever hear of General von Fritsch?" he said, breaking a long silence.

"Wasn't he a German General before the war, whom Hitler fired?"

He nodded. "It was he who built up the Reichswehr in the tradition of the old Prussian Army. He hated Adolf's guts and didn't care who knew it. Adolf was afraid of him and even wanted to make him a Field-Marshal after Fritsch resigned over the Blomberg scandal. Blomberg was a Field-Marshal, one of Adolf's toadies, who married his mistress with Adolf and fat Goering as witnesses at the wedding, and Fritsch wouldn't stand for it. Adolf had to get rid of Blomberg, but Fritsch went, too. The next the world heard of him he was reported killed in action on the Polish front, supposedly on patrol with the artillery regiment of which he was honorary Colonel." He shook his head and added a final wiggle to one of his windmills. "Adolf never forgives or forgets," he said.

"You mean he was murdered?"

"Sure," he answered, doodling on. "They gave him a grand military funeral in Berlin. But Adolf didn't attend—that would have been a bit too much, even for the German slave mind." He finished off another windmill and said, "Von Rode was Fritsch's closest friend. He was commanding this artillery regiment of Fritsch's when Fritsch was killed." His pen stopped and he looked up at me sharply. "Well?" he questioned.

I gazed back at him, nonplussed. "Well what?"

"What about the initial on that leather case?"

I stared at him, then gasped as the truth hit me. "You mean this was von Fritsch's drinking-cup?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "The 'F' and the coronet—Fritsch was a Baron and the German nobility like to sprinkle coronets about. How heavy was the case with the cup inside?"

"Quite light. Not more than a few ounces. The cup itself weighed almost nothing. It was made of some very light, hard metal."

He shook his head and with his pen added a touch to one of his little pictures. "You'll want to watch your step, Andy, my girl."

His voice had an ominous ring, but I wasn't going to be scared. "Why?" I demanded. "They can't know anything about me, now that the Countess is dead."

His pen halted abruptly. "Safi isn't dead. He's very much alive, and at large!"

I gave him a startled look—I'd forgotten about Safi. "Von Rode ran the Intelligence Section of the Armistice Commission," he said, back at his doodling, "and Safi was at Casa with him, one of his trusted men. Safi knows that you brought a message from the Countess to von Rode and has by this time certainly reported back to that effect."

"Reported back to whom?"

"To a certain party in Italy, the one who sent the Mazzoli to Marrakesh to fetch that envelope," he answered casually.

He cast his pen aside and swivelled round in his chair to face me. "You've got to get this right," he said. "Hitler's not the only danger to the future of the world. The reactionary elements everywhere are fighting a rearguard action to save the world from democracy, people who have this cock-eyed idea that a military government in Germany, purged of the Nazis, is preferable to a victorious Russia. Our friend Colonel Freitas is a case in point. He's much closer in spirit to a Prussian Colonel such as von Rode than he is to Uncle Joe Stalin, and, let me tell you, there are a lot of French officers in North Africa who feel the same way. Oh, I know that the French are supposed to be our Allies and the bulk of them are all right. But until we know more about von Rode, and especially the exact significance of this leather case of his, in the anti-Hitler movement, we can't afford to let the investigation get into the hands of the Colonel Freitas. I'm telling you this because I don't want you to get the idea that I'm going behind the back of a colleague and an Ally; also it's one of the reasons why I'm anxious to get you out of this town as quickly as possible. Another reason is that this being French

territory, our powers are considerably restricted and I can't guarantee your safety as long as you're in Marrakesh."

"I'm an American citizen," I cried. "Nothing can happen to me!"

He shook his head. "You don't know this town as I do. In Marrakesh, lady, anything can happen. Through no fault of yours you're up to the neck in this game of ours, and let me tell you, my dear, it's a game with no punches barred. There's nothing to choose between your Dr. Grundts and your Colonel von Rodes. These Prussian Army gangsters are fighting for their very existence, and, once they know you've got the General's cup, they'll stop at nothing. This city is swarming with every kind of spy and informer, and as long as you're here your life isn't worth—that!" He snapped his fingers. "That's why I want you out of Marrakesh as soon as possible. Once you're in Naples our people and the British can look after you."

I opened my lips to speak, but no words came. Up to that moment Secret Service had been to me a theme of sensational movie plots, of harebrained adventures in the comic strips. I was sheerly incapable of imagining a humdrum American like myself being pitchforked into the situation which Riley had laid before me. The whole thing had a nightmarish quality, and the worst part was the matter-of-fact tone in which he had warned me of the dangers of my position.

He got up from the desk to fetch himself a cigarette from the pack on the couch. As he passed my chair he laid his hand gently on my shoulder. I felt utterly woebegone but let him give me a cigarette. Then he looked at his watch. "There's an Army Air Transport plane leaving for Naples in an hour or so," he said. "The pilot's a friend of ours. He's on his way over here now. If we can talk him into taking you and Nick along as passengers..."

He went back to the desk and picked up the letter he had written, slipped it into an envelope and licked it down, afterwards stamping it across one corner with a rubber stamp he took from a little stand. From where I was I could see the bold red 'SECRET' standing out on the white paper. He put this envelope into a second which was already addressed and stuck down the flap. "I've given you a note for Jake Maxted, who's my opposite number at Naples," he explained. "Nick will take you round to him when you arrive. All you'll have to do is to spill your story; the rest is up to Jake." He handed me the letter.

I found the address rather odd. I read:

Lt.-Colonel J. L. Maxted,
S.L.O.,
Naples.

Riley answered my unspoken question. "It's this alphabet soup war. S.L.O.—Special Liaison Operations. It's a tag that gives Staff humorists a heaven-sent opportunity, especially as we're an Army stepchild, that's to say, we're not G.2. We're a show on our own and"—he shot me one of his glittering glances—"very hush-hush. It's a joint Anglo-American outfit and you'll find British officers working alongside Jake, all sweetness and light, like Nick and me here—Nick's seconded from the British Intelligence Corps." He gave me his easy smile. "You see, I'm letting you into all the family secrets."

The typed address swam before my eyes. A jostling procession was pouring through my brain: von Rode with his watchful eyes; little Safi; Ziemer, beaming through his big glasses; the shadowy figure of the murdered General whose cup, like a token from beyond the grave, I had held in my hands; and, looming above them all, the ape-like cripple whose savage face haunted my waking and sleeping hours,—all these shapes, grey and intangible as Japanese ghosts, which Riley's talk with me had conjured up. I essayed a final stand. "But I can't run away like this," I protested uneasily. "I'm under Army orders. I should be posted as a deserter."

"Deserter nothing! I'll fix that!" said Riley.

"It's all very well, but there's an officer in charge of me. He's arranging my tour. What's he going to say?"

"Who is he?"

"Captain Stracer, of the Special Service."

He laughed loudly. "Oh, for pity's sake! Leave him to me, honey! The important thing is to get you on that plane..."

A buzzer whirred—three shorts and a long, the Victory signal, insistently repeated. Leigh poked his head in from the kitchen. "That'll be Fresno," he remarked. "I'll go."

The next moment a strapping young American lieutenant stormed in. "Listen, Dick Tracy," he cried to Riley, tapping his wrist-watch, "I'm due at the airfield"—he peered at the watch-face—"in exactly thirty-eight minutes. What's the idea, dragging me round here at this hour of the morning? Make it snappy, big boy, because all I can give you is five min..."

At that instant he caught sight of me and stopped abruptly. He glanced from me to Riley and from Riley back to me again, then shook his head solemnly. "I don't believe it," he declared. "They don't come that way any more—leastwise, not in this heathen country."

Riley laughed. "Miss Hallam—Lieutenant Clarke," he introduced us and added quickly, "Listen, Fresno. I want you to do me a favour."

Still staring at me, the young man shook his head. "Nothing doing, Snafu. You know what happened the last time. I'm not ferrying any more of your funnies..."

"But Miss Hallam isn't an agent, you dope! She's here from America to sing to the troops and wants to get to Naples in a hurry."

"No. We've a full load. Sorry." Then he caught my eye—I suppose I was watching him pretty desperately. "Well..." he said dubiously.

Riley clapped him on the back. "Attaboy. I knew you'd be able to slip a couple of passengers in somehow."

He recoiled. "What? Are there two of them?"

"Nick Leigh's going with her."

"Nick? For pity's sake, is he going to sing to the troops, too?"

"This is off the record," said Riley glibly, "but as a matter of fact our people at Naples wanted a word with her and Nick has got to take her round."

The young man grunted. "I might have known there was a catch in it somewhere. You'll have to sit on the mail-bags," he said to me.

"I'll sit anywhere," I told him.

"Hard, cutting edges," he explained with a gloating air. "Backgammon boards, food in cans, books, hunting knives—all the stuff the folks send to soldiers..."

"I guess I can take it," I assured him.

He slid an appraising eye over me. "Maybe you're right at that," he agreed with a cheerful grin. "It's a matter of shape, really. The other day I had a W.A.C. officer as a passenger, one of those tall, thin numbers, and they tell me the poor girl had to take all her meals standing up for a week after." He chuckled and turned to Riley. "You'll have to fix things with Air Transport, you know, Snafu."

"It's done," was the suave rejoinder. "If it's jake with you, it's jake with them. Nick will attend to everything at the airfield."

"Then I'd better phone through and say there'll be two more passengers."

"Nick did that already. He thought he'd save you the trouble."

The young man gave a hollow laugh. "You two babies are certainly on the beam," he observed with feeling. Then, eyeing me, "Isn't she—well, a bit conspicuous?"

Leigh, who just then came from the kitchen with a loaded tray, answered the question. "I'll fix her up with a flying-suit. She can change in the car before we go out to the plane," he said, and I realised why he had wanted me to change into slacks.

Fresno nodded his approval. "That's the idea. We don't want to have the whole damn ground staff trooping after her like a lot of cats on the prowl." He raised his head and sniffed. "Do I smell breakfast?"

"Are you sure you can spare the time, old boy?" Riley enquired with solicitude and winked at me.

Fresno consulted his watch. "Ten minutes, anyway," he conceded gravely. Plumping himself down at the table, he invited me with a look to take the chair beside him. "I want to see you eat," he confided, "just to be sure that you're real." With an earnest air he wagged his head at Riley across the table and made loud wolf noises. "Oh, boy, oh, boy," he murmured. "Do you know how to pick 'em!"

I could have kissed him—he sounded so American. He was like a breath from home—home which at that moment seemed to me to be such a long, long way off.

Chapter XI

The wind from the mountains bucketed the plane about as we headed out towards the coast. With mixed feelings I watched the minarets and gardens of Marrakesh slide away with the tilting landscape. Fresno had found us a couple of folded blankets to serve as cushions, and Leigh and I huddled together in the rear of the machine among a vast pile of mail-bags. Three American soldiers travelled with us. They paid no attention to me in the helmet and flying-suit Leigh had brought me out to the car, but settled down at once to an interminable game of cards.

It was the first time I had flown since my accident and I was pretty nervous. Leigh seemed to notice it, for he said, "Once we're clear of the high ground, she'll steady down." He gave me a sidelong glance. "All this is pretty irksome to you, isn't it?"

"I've been in a plane before, you know."

He laughed. "I meant this von Rode business."

I shrugged my shoulders. "I'm still wondering why I should have let your friend Major Riley give me orders."

He wagged his head. "Snafu is a very persuasive person."

"He may be; but you realise that, as far as the Army is concerned, I'm A.W.O.L. How's he going to explain things to Captain Stracer?"

"Don't worry. Snafu will go much higher than Stracer. You mightn't think it to look at him, but Snafu's a very influential bloke. He routed my master out of his bed to tell him he'd have to release me for this stunt, and that, if you

know my General, is some accomplishment. And look at the way he fixed up this trip for you at half an hour's notice!"

"I'm still not sure I shouldn't have done better to stay and face the music. Stracer, your General, Fresno—they'll all believe I'm a spy like those revolting-looking women in crinolines who used to operate out of Washington in the Civil War."

He chuckled. "And why not? You'd look an absolute peach in a crinoline."

"I'm serious about this. I'm not a spy, and I don't want to be one, or have anything to do with all this hush-hush business."

He shook his head, his expression sober. "I don't see what you can do about it. You're in this now. You're practically an ace. You've pulled off a big coup."

I stared at him in alarm. "What on earth are you talking about?"

"About von Rode, naturally. Didn't you find him for us, after we'd utterly failed to nose him out? No wonder Snafu insisted on rushing you off to Naples with the story!"

"He must know far more about it than I do. I told you two all I know. Why couldn't he have sent a report or gone himself?"

He cocked his head sagely. "It's psychology, my sweet. We've had a bit of a black eye over this von Rode business, with the gallant Colonel tucked away right under our noses all this time. Old Snafu's putting up a smoke-screen."

"A smoke-screen?"

"Sure. And you're it! There's all the difference in the world between a bald report, filtering in in snippets from the cipher-room, and an exciting, dramatic story presented in person by an attractive girl. Snafu, as I see it, counts on them concentrating on you and not on our shortcomings; and he's right, as he always is. While you're agitating their endocrines, he'll be busy as a bee at Marrakesh, following up the movements of your clubfooted man and his bottle-washer, Herr Ziemer, and the nefarious activities of el Kintafi. Then he'll crash in with a red-hot report to Naples just about the time the boys are through with you."

His nerve left me gasping. "Well, isn't that just fine!" I said dryly. "But what about me?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "That's up to Jake Maxted." He gazed at me reflectively. "How many languages do you speak?"

"French and German, and a fair amount of Italian and Spanish. Why?"

"I was just thinking that they could probably use you."

"Then you can forget it right away. And you don't have to put any ideas into Colonel Maxted's head, either!"

He laughed. "If it's written in the stars, darling, you can't escape. This is an extraordinary war. There's never been a war like it in the history of man. There's literally no end to its ramifications. It reminds me of those mythical monsters that lived in water-holes and pulled in the passer-by with their tentacles. Take my case. I never wanted to be a soldier. I thought, and still think, that war is the most abjectly stupid way of settling differences. I believed that we were through with wars and had planned my career accordingly. I was going to the Bar—international law, as I'd taken modern languages at Oxford—and later, I meant to try for Parliament, as a Labour member, and devote myself to helping the under-dog. When war broke out I'd just passed my Bar exam, and was devilling at the commercial Bar. Well, I joined up. My idea was to fight, to kill Germans. All right, I did see a spot of fighting in France. But then they discovered that I knew languages and whisked me off to an Intelligence course. I emerged from it in time to get out to Greece. I was an Intelligence officer in Crete, and that was quite exciting while it lasted; but afterwards I was dumped down in Cairo, which was deadly, and then at Marrakesh, deadlier still. I used to think I was a civilian who became a soldier, but I now

discovered that, instead of doing a soldier's job, I was virtually a civilian doomed to fiddle around with a lot of paper work in an office where I'm ever so much safer than I should be were I sitting in my chambers in the Middle Temple, with the Luftwaffe over London. But that's how this war is. If these things can happen to me," he concluded, giving me a wistful smile, "I don't see why you, a singer, shouldn't do a job in the Secret Service."

"I do," I answered promptly. "You're a soldier, and I'm not. And I don't see why I should get into something that doesn't appeal to me and for which I'm totally unfitted, just to save your Major Riley's face."

"Oh, come," he protested, "there's more to it than that."

"Not as far as I'm concerned."

He shook his head. "You don't understand. In this war no one can decide things for himself. You'd realise that if you'd been in London during the blitz. The land-mines came down and changed the whole course of people's lives, and nobody could do anything about it."

"England was in the firing-line," I said.

"The whole world's in the firing-line," he retorted. "You're lucky enough in America to have the war still kept away from your shores, but unless you, unless all of us, get the firing-line spirit, we shan't win. We have to adjust ourselves: I had to adjust myself..."

"Because Intelligence is part of the Army set-up. Someone has to do the paper work, and I expect you do it very well."

He shook his head. "I didn't mean that." He paused. "Do you realise that, as the result of this war, I've not a near relative in the world?" He took out his wallet and extracting a frayed clipping handed it to me silently. It was from the Births, Marriages, and Deaths column of the London *Times*. I read:

"On the 10th inst. at Chelsea, through enemy action, Dr. Montgomery Leigh, M.D., F.R.C.S., Clarissa, his wife, Daphne, aged 16, and John, aged 12, their children, and Betty and Doris, their devoted maids."

"Oh, Nick," I exclaimed, "not your father and mother?"

He nodded and, taking the clipping back, restored it to his wallet. "The whole family," he answered simply. "I was in France at the time, watching the French Army go to pieces, and I couldn't get home, even for the funeral." He paused. "I was the only one left. I had to adjust myself to the thought. I'm still adjusting myself," he said, and added, "It was a nice family."

The tears stood in my eyes. I couldn't speak, and, anyway, I didn't know what to say. He buttoned his wallet back in his tunic pocket. "I don't speak of it as a rule," he explained. "I only showed it to you to make it easier for you to adjust yourself, if you're called upon to make a decision."

"What decision?" I said. He shrugged his shoulders. "I wish you wouldn't talk in riddles," I went on impatiently. "What decision do you mean and why shall I have to adjust myself?"

"Better wait until Jake has talked to you," he replied, and lifted my hand as it lay on my lap. "You have beautiful hands, Andrea," he said. "I always look at people's hands first. It's easy to see that you're an artiste."

But I was in no mood to have him change the conversation so easily. I plucked my hand away. "It's because I'm an artiste, as you call it," I retorted crossly, "that I object to being dragged into things I don't understand."

"Do we always have to quarrel?" he said, and added, "I know so few girls, and out here, not any. It seems stupid, when I meet someone I like, that we should always be fighting."

I laughed. "I may be obtuse, but do I get the general idea that you're paying me a compliment?"

He shook his head gravely. "No, I'm not. I liked you from the first moment I set eyes on you, back there on the stairs at the B.D.R. I think you're what Snafu calls 'a real person.'"

"I hate pretence, if that's what you mean."

He nodded. "That's why you like Hank, isn't it?"

"Yes. Hank's a grand guy and a splendid friend."

"Are you engaged to him?"

"Good gracious, no!"

"Why not?"

"Because I don't want to get married, that's why."

"He's crazy about you, and you're bound to get married some time, a girl as beautiful as you are."

I laughed. "Captain Leigh, you overwhelm me!"

"But it's true, isn't it?" he said, with that attractive smile of his.

I looked up at the wisps of vapoury cloud streaming past the windows. "Some day, I suppose," I answered. "But it would have to be the right man."

He cocked his head at me. "I bet you're devilish selective."

"Not in the least. As far as I'm concerned he could be as ugly as sin and as poor as a church mouse. All I ask is that I should want him as much as he wanted me."

He laughed. "Poor Hank!"

"What do you mean, 'Poor Hank'?"

"Too easy-going. You're a pretty spoiled person where men are concerned, you know, and you don't really like it, though you think you do—at least, not in anyone you're prepared to love."

"What do you know about it?"

"Only what I've learnt by observing you. You're pretty nice to observe when you're not in one of your rages, you know. Your face in repose is quite beautiful." He spoke with great simplicity, as he always did.

"I must say," I remarked cuttingly, "you have a perfect gift for backhanded compliments."

He shook his head gravely. "I didn't mean it as a compliment, either backhanded or forehanded. I'm not very good at talking to girls, you know. But then I've been in the war for four years and—well, I haven't had the time or the opportunity, or even the incentive, I expect. Or it may be that, like you, I'm hard to please. I think I should want to be loved a great deal, too. The trouble is that the right person seems so hard to find."

I felt his eyes on me and, looking up, I caught their glint through his long lashes. There was a sort of hunger in his gaze that sent the blood into my cheeks. To change the current of his thoughts, "Tell me more about your life at home!" I

bade him.

He shook his head. "There's nothing much to tell, really. Not a great deal happens to happy people, you know, and we were a very happy family until this war came along. We weren't particularly well off—my father had a good practice with two partners; but the point is, he and my mother knew how to live. They were both wonderfully handsome people to begin with—Mother was the loveliest person you ever saw, and the sweetest—and they had the cult of beautiful things. They both had wonderful taste and it was a charming house for a kid to grow up in—eighteenth-century rooms, flowers everywhere, nice furniture, some really good pictures. It's all gone now, but when I look back on it, I have the remembrance of beauty and happiness and peace. It seems cruel that two people who loved beauty so much and shared it with others should have met such an ugly death." He shrugged his shoulders. "But what's the good of talking about it? Let's talk of something else."

I shook my head at him. "That's where you make your mistake. It's bad for you to hug your grief to yourself—you'd ease your mind a lot if you sometimes took people into your confidence." He gave another unwilling shrug and I went on, "I've been studying you, too, and it seems to me that you're like someone who has raised a high wall around himself to keep people out."

He gave me an unexpected smile. "Maybe you're right. But not everybody, Andrea. Not Snafu, and not you." He wriggled his shoulders. "But don't let's talk about me any more. Let's talk about you!"

And he made me tell him all about my childhood in Upper New York State, in the sleepy little town where my father was Professor of English at the local university. While the motors droned and the plane bucked and bounced in the air I found myself describing our house on Main Street and the library where Dad used to entertain the Faculty and the students on Sunday evenings, the beauty of the maples in the fall, our sleighing parties, and the camp in the Adirondacks with its scent of balsam and spruce and its glassy lake where I spent the summer holidays as a kid. There was something soothing about him as a listener, and by and by I forgot all about my nerves, and even the ordeal awaiting me at the end of our journey as I told him about my scholarship and the carefree years I had spent roving through Europe. Then nothing would satisfy him but that I should sing for him, and so, unaccompanied, as the first thing that came into my head, I sang "Ma Curly-headed Baby." I thought that the noise of the motors would have drowned my voice, but presently I was aware of the soldiers looking up in wonder from their cards, and the next thing I knew they had come back to where we sat and gathered round. I had to croon through a lot of old favourites for them—"Wabash Moon," "Sylvia," "My Old Kentucky Home"—before Fresno, coming aft with a container of hot coffee, rescued me and they trooped back to their pinochle.

After that, with Nick's greatcoat as a pillow, I slept, and did not wake until the plane was coming down in the dark and Nick told me we were at Naples. It was a vile night. The rain lashed at the windows and great patches of water glittered in the flarepath lights below. No sooner had we taxied to a halt than the lights were turned off and we scrambled out of the plane into pitch darkness. "Black-out," Nick told me as we followed a stalwart figure in a gleaming waterproof cape across the tarmac. "The Luftwaffe's still quite active over Naples."

The guide brought us to a wooden building. There, in a bare waiting-room, at Nick's suggestion, I divested myself of my flying-kit while he went off with my papers. After that there was a long trudge through the wet and the dark, behind a little Italian soldier carrying our baggage, to a waiting staff car. A girl in uniform materialised out of the gloom, and in the momentary flash of Nick's torch light I saw her salute and recognised the British A.T.S. cap badge. "Good evening, Sally," said Leigh.

"Hullo there, Nick," she replied and opened the car door. "The office, is it?"

"That's the ticket. And step on it, like a good girl!"

Her laugh resounded softly. "You won't thank me," she retorted. "Jerry blew the power plant when he packed up, and between that and the black-out this blasted town's as black as the ace of spades at night. Not to mention the fact that the streets are full of holes. However, I'll do my best."

We set out in the darkness and the rain.

Chapter XII

At that time Naples was still without power and light. There is something definitely terrifying about a great modern city suddenly plunged backward into the candle-and-lamp age. I had seen the London black-out, but in London, behind the screened windows and curtained entries, there was brightness and warmth and gaiety, and even in the darkened streets the traffic rolled and you were conscious of the beating of a mighty heart.

But Naples was dead. It was dank and cold and silent as I saw it that night, *la città morte*, a sodden, blackened corpse like those I heard our driver telling Nick they were still finding under the wrecked buildings. Car-lines without cars; lamp standards but no lights; broad streets deserted save for the military police or a rare pedestrian and a few groping jeeps; and here and there, between the bombed and burnt-out houses, the glimmer of a lamp, a moving candle-beam, behind a blind.

I found myself looking forward to the coming meeting with increasing dread. It deepened my sense of depression as we bounced and jarred through the gloom. I had not the faintest idea of the sort of place in which a secret organisation would establish its headquarters; my thoughts zigzagged wildly from a bleak room with a spotlight over the victim's chair à la Gestapo to some creepy old *château* of the Boris Karloff order with sliding panels and trapdoors.

Actually, our destination proved to be a modern office building with a pompous entrance-hall, as lavish of gilding and marble as a Wall Street bank's. A few electric bulbs, naked and forlorn, operating off Army trucks chugging in the street, showed orderlies coming and going under the eye of military police. But upstairs on the third floor—we had to walk the three flights as the elevator was out of action—they were working by candle-light. Everywhere the soft light, the long, dancing shadows, of great-grandmother's day. Candles beyond the steel gate that, barring the office from the rest of the building, confronted us as we emerged breathless from the staircase; candles in the long room, filled with girls in uniform and the chatter of typewriter and telephone, which we glimpsed on our way to Colonel Maxted's office; and in the sanctum itself candles that cast their gentle radiance over the panelled walls and green leather chairs of a modern business executive's surroundings.

My dread began to leave me. I felt like a candidate being interviewed for a job, everything was so matter-of-fact—the prosaic surroundings, Maxted's easy manner. The atmosphere of the room, with carpet so soft that all sound was deadened, was restful, too; it made the story I had come to relate seem insanely remote by comparison. Maxted, big, burly, and reassuring, appeared to be expecting me. He no more than glanced at Riley's note which I presented, said it was a great pleasure to meet me after hearing me so often on the radio, introduced the tall English officer who was with him as Brigadier Doler, and bade me sit down—all in one blustering, cheerful breath.

As I took a chair he flung a glance, friendly as a robin's, at Leigh. "First thing out of the box," he demanded, "where's she going to sleep?"

"I thought I'd better book her a room at the *Agricola*, where I always stop, Colonel," said Nick. "As the hotel phone's dis., I got the duty wallah at the airfield to send a D.R. ek dum with a note from me to the bint in the office."

Most of this was so much Greek to me, but Maxted appeared to understand it. "That takes care of that," he remarked. The Brigadier, who had remained silent up to this, now chimed in. He was quite distinguished-looking with his long head and firm, clean-shaven mouth, but his air was somewhat saturnine and he seemed to be perpetually absorbed in his thoughts. "She's your pigeon, Nick," he said to Leigh. "It's up to you to keep an eye on her while she's here."

The young man shot me a twinkling glance from between his lashes. But to Doler he replied dutifully, "Very good, sir."

I found all this back-and-forth over my head, as though I was a horse they were dicking about, distinctly embarrassing. Maxted glanced at the desk clock. "Has she eaten?" he enquired of Leigh.

Nick regarded me reproachfully. "You haven't had anything since breakfast, except a cup of coffee, have you?" he remarked. "Fresno produced a sandwich for you on the plane, but short of hitting you over the head, we couldn't get you to wake up sufficiently to eat it."

Maxted interrupted him, his voice raised in a stentorian shout. "Oh, Sybil!"

Glasses in a square, plump face above a khaki collar and tie glittered in the shadows by the door. "Sandwiches for Miss Hallam," Maxted ordered. "And a highball, I guess?" he went on, turning to me.

"I could do with one," I admitted.

"And a whisky and soda," he added to the face at the door. "Send over to the mess!"

"If she'd be more comfortable she could have her supper in my room," said Doler.

"In the General's office, Sybil," Maxted amended.

The face withdrew. "Two languages," the Colonel pronounced, considering me with a solemn air. "It's got so that we're all bilingual round here." He pushed a box at me. "Cigarette? And now," he continued, as I helped myself, "suppose you tell us in your own words just what happened at Marrakesh!"

Leigh, who had effaced himself on a chair against the wall, was out of my line of vision. I addressed myself to the two officers facing me—Maxted, with his domed forehead and dipping lines framing his mouth suggesting the professor, and Doler, mephistophelean and aloof, staring down at his slim hands folded about his knee. Once or twice the Colonel stopped me with a question—he was especially interested in the leather case—and even the Brigadier stirred himself from his rumination to ask for details as to shape and size; but for the most part I spoke without interruption. When I came to our encounter with el Kintafi's troop in the street and the Countess's instant reaction to the clubfooted man, I saw Doler suddenly raise his head and exchange a glance with Maxted.

When I had finished, the Colonel said to me, "Do you think you could make us a sketch of this leather case?"

"I don't see why not," I answered.

"To scale?" the Brigadier put in.

"As far as I can remember it, certainly."

Maxted pulled open a drawer, found a sheaf of lined foolscap sheets and slid them across to me. "Go ahead!" he said.

I used to like to draw at school. With the Brigadier's gold pencil I blocked out a fairly accurate representation of the leather case, actual size, as far as I could recall it, with a further sketch of the lid, with the 'F' and the coronet duly displayed. When I had finished, Maxted set to work on my first sketch with a foot-rule that was on the desk. "Say, three inches in height, would that be right?" he questioned.

"So I should judge," I told him, and he made a note beside the drawing.

"And how deep is the lid?"

"About an inch—no more."

He jotted down another note. "That would leave, say, two inches for the base—correct?"

"Just about."

He paused, his pencil poised. "You're being as accurate as you can about this, I hope, because it's important..."

"Two inches would be right, I think," I assured him, and he jotted down the figure as before.

After that I had to sketch the cup itself, in both forms, collapsed and extended, and there was more measuring and further questions. The reappearance of the face addressed as "Sybil," which now materialised into a brisk and bustling British W.A.T., interrupted us. Miss Hallam's sandwiches were there, she informed Maxted. "All right," said Maxted, and, standing up, bade me go along with Sybil. Leigh rose to accompany me, but the Colonel told him to stay—Sybil would look after me. Then he introduced me to the W.A.T. girl: Miss Hallam—Section Officer Stavelly—and I followed her out.

As we crossed the passage I caught a glimpse of an Italian officer, tall and slim in his grey-green uniform, pacing up and down. His face was ashen in the candle-light and for an instant his eyes, tragic and sorrowful, rested on my face. Then my guide pulled open a door and showed me into another luxurious office where my supper stood on a tray beside a lighted candle on the desk. "I'm not going to stay and gas a lot of rot to you, because you must be famished," Miss Stavelly confided. "Also those weasels at the Treasury keep us short-handed, but definitely, and I'm rushed off my feet. The General's bell is busted, like everything else in this perishing town, but if you'd like another drink or anything, open the door and bellow 'Sybil,' the way my boss does."

An idea was nagging at my mind. As she was going I said, "That Italian officer outside, it wouldn't by any chance be Count Dino Mazzoli?"

She fairly brimmed over with smiles. "You know him? We all think he's terribly good-looking. And charm? Devastating, but definitely." She became confidential. "He's fearfully cut up. His mother died over in Morocco: he had the wire this morning. I tried to say something sympathetic to him just now, and I thought he was going to burst into tears, right there in front of me. Emotional lot, these Eyeties, don't you think? But quite thrilling!" She gave me a bright nod. "I'll be seeing you!" Her stout shoes noiseless on the pile carpet, she slipped out, while I sank my teeth reflectively into a sandwich.

I was thinking about that forlorn figure in the corridor. Except for the people at the clinic, I must be almost the last person to have had any conversation with his mother before she died. The mournful expression of his eyes, as blackly limpid and as soulful as the dead woman's, haunted me. There was interest, too, in the glance he had given me. He was certainly a wonderful-looking young man, and terribly smart in his green-and-silver uniform, his shiny riding-boots and spurs....

I have often thought that I must be like that politician of whom someone said that when he acted on his impulses he was invariably wrong, and when he did not that he was invariably too late. All my life I have acted on impulse, and while it has got me into plenty of scrapes, I have had a lot of fun. Because I was never one for sitting still and twiddling my thumbs. Action is what I have always craved. After all, we can rest when we are dead, and we are dead for a long time.

I took a drink of my highball. Surely it would console him in his grief to know that his mother had spoken of him on her last day on earth? Why shouldn't I have a word with him? Wasn't he a friend of Hank's? Whatever intrigues the Countess had been mixed up in, he, at least, was all right, vouched for by the Allies....

I set down my drink and crept to the door. At first I thought he had gone, for the dim corridor seemed deserted. But then I sighted him. He was standing in the shadow near the secretaries' room, head down, shoulders humped, despair in every line of his attitude. As I watched I saw him brush his hand across his eyes. "Ps-st!" I called softly.

He glanced round in surprise and, seeing me, came forward, "Count Mazzoli?" I said.

He bowed and clicked his heels. "Signorina!"

I stepped back into the room. "Come in here a minute!" He followed me in, taking off his cap. Now that he was in the light I recognised him from his photograph. He certainly was a stunning-looking fellow, six feet tall with the grace of a panther and the features of a Greek god. He knows a lot about women, this one, was my thought, as I caught the sultry, all-embracing look he bestowed on me. "I wanted to tell you," I said, "I was with your mother at Marrakesh a few hours

before she died. She spoke of you so affectionately and showed me your picture. I thought you'd like to know."

His face lit up. "Oh, signorina, tell me, please, what happened. I had only the telegram to say she had died." His English was very fluent.

"It was appendicitis," I told him. "She didn't want to go into hospital for an operation, and I'm afraid she left it too late."

He flung up his hands in a tragic gesture. "She was always so strong-willed, the Mama. She seemed so well when she was here the other day. But then I have scarcely seen her since I was a little boy."

"She was quite ill at the hotel—we had rooms adjoining. I think it was really I who persuaded her to go into hospital." For a moment I wondered whether I should tell him about the envelope. After all, he was on our side now and working with the Anglo-American Intelligence. But the matter was out of my hands, I reflected, and decided to say nothing. "When I went to the clinic to enquire for her," I told him, "I found that she had died under the operation."

His eyes glistened. "La povera!" he sighed. "She was one of the most beautiful women in all Italy. When she took me driving as a child here in Naples, on the Riviera di Chiaia, people would stop and stare at her. She spoke of me, you say, signorina?"

"She told me of a lunch you gave for her at which an American friend of mine, Captain Lundgren, was a guest."

His black eyes rested for a moment on mine. "So you know 'Ank?" he said, smiling. "'Ank is a very good friend of mine. You are, of course, American. But, signorina, tell me more about the Mama!"

I gave him the few details I had heard from the matron. He was frowning. "My place is over there," he declared, "to take charge of her effects and bring her home for burial in our family vault. Also she owns a property at Casablanca. But, dio mio, as the French feel towards us Italians at present, who shall say whether they will give me, an Italian officer, a visa?"

He fell into a gloomy silence. To console him I said, "Your mother struck me as being a woman of great courage, Count. One misses people of character like her."

He nodded. "It is a sad blow to lose a mother, and in Italy, you know, the mother has a special position—she comes even before the wife. But, to be frank with you, the Mama and her family had drifted apart. There were aspects of her life which we could not approve. The grief I feel at her disappearance is for someone who gladdened my childhood with the light of her beauty. When she was here the other day we met almost like strangers."

I found his candour rather embarrassing and felt relieved when the door swung ajar to reveal Leigh. His face hardened when he perceived Mazzoli and the Italian uniform. "Are you Count Dino Mazzoli?" he demanded of the Italian.

"I am," replied the Count.

"They're hunting the place for you. Colonel Maxted is waiting to see you."

"Thank you." He turned to come to attention in front of me and, stooping, kissed my hand. "A rivederci, signorina," he said, "and thank you for your great kindness." He swung about and went quickly out.

I picked up a sandwich. "How did that fellow get in here?" Nick wanted to know.

I swallowed some of my whisky and soda. "He looked so unhappy that I thought I'd tell him about meeting his mother," I replied.

His eyes seemed to pop. "You mean to say you told him about that leather case?"

"Of course not."

He glowered. "All the same it was darn indiscreet to talk to him at all. What do you know of the fellow, anyway?"

"He's working in with us, isn't he? That should make him all right."

"His mother was playing round with Germans."

"That doesn't make him a spy. Besides, he has had nothing to do with her for years. He told me so himself."

"We know all about the Countess Bianca now. She walked out on old Mazzoli years ago and had a string of lovers ever since. To be fair, I'm told there's no reason to assume that young Mazzoli had any inkling of his mother's affair with von Rode."

"There you are, then!"

"That's not the point. The point is that you didn't trouble your head about it either way, but just went barging in. Well, in this outfit, that kind of thing simply won't do!"

I laughed and started in on the last of the sandwiches. "But I'm not in this outfit, as you call it."

"No, I suppose you aren't," he retorted in a sulky voice, and added, "not yet."

"So you don't have to feel responsible for me. And while we're on the subject, do please understand that I'm not your pigeon, or anybody else's pigeon, as that General of yours put it back there!"

He gave me a hurt look. "Good Lord, Andrea, that was just a figure of speech. Army lingo, if you like."

But I wasn't going to be put off. "I don't care what it was," I said. "I've no intention of having a chaperon, telling me who's nice and who isn't nice for me to talk to, whether it's you or anybody else." And picking up my whisky glass I drained it and set it down on the tray with a defiant bang.

Leigh had retreated behind his haughtiest expression. I could see that he was about to launch forth on another tirade when the Stavely girl put her head in at the door and announced that the Colonel was asking for me.

Chapter XIII

Again I was given a chair and a cigarette. Maxted was on the phone—a long-distance call, by the way he was shouting. We waited until he had finished. "That was Snafu," he said as he hung up. "The French were up at the kasbah this morning and had old Kintafi on the carpet. He denies all knowledge of his clubfooted visitor, who by this time is over the Atlas and far away, I guess. And so's his little chum, Ziemer, too, I imagine."

Brigadier Doler sucked thoughtfully at an empty pipe. "That would explain that German sub hanging about off Agadir," he remarked.

Maxted nodded with an absent air. He had thrown himself back in his chair and was contemplating me with a speculative light in his eye that I felt boded me no good. "I wonder if you've any idea what we two elderly gents do here except look like a couple of high-priced American business executives," he asked me.

"I imagine you collect intelligence," I said.

"Correct. As a matter of fact, we're not unlike the city desk of a daily newspaper. We're always on the lookout for

news, sending out reporters—only we call 'em agents; marking up the diary; studying our rivals—in this case, the enemy; and continually weighing and matching against the available information the stories our boys bring in. Our particular area happens to be Italy—the part where the Hun is; but in every theatre of war there's a city desk like ours with its finger in the pie, telling the chaps the enemy's strength, picking bombing targets, nosing out the whereabouts of the submarine packs, and generally, as old Wellington put it, seeing what's on the other side of the hill and passing the word along." He stopped and sliced his cigarette ash into a tray. "How would you like to be one of our reporters?" he enquired.

I shook my head. "I couldn't think of anyone more unsuited. I'm a perfect fool when it comes to the war. I try to read the communiqués, but I don't understand them really. And I know absolutely nothing about foreign affairs."

"You don't have to. The position is that you've brought us in a great story. Well, you're the one to handle it..."

"It's out of the question," I protested. "I've no experience; I shouldn't know what to do."

"...and at the same time to render your country and the whole Allied cause a real service," he went on. And when I was silent, "It's about that leather case and cup," he said. "We want to know more about it. You'll understand why when I tell you that it apparently means so much to Mr. Hitler that he sent a personal representative to Marrakesh to get hold of it."

A cold shiver seemed to run down my spine. "Grundt, do you mean? The man with the club foot?"

"Correct. It mayn't be so easy to catch up with him, but there's one person we can get after who must know the inside story of General Fritsch's cup, and that's a certain party who sent the Countess Mazzoli after it."

"Who's that?"

He smiled. "No names, no pack-drill, as the Brigadier would say. It's a German General now in Italy—let's call him General X. Note that he has been informed that you brought von Rode a message from the Countess yesterday!"

"How do you know that?"

He ferreted in his "In" tray and held up a flimsy. "We intercepted a telegram from Safi. It's in conventional code, but we were able to break it." He laid the form back in the tray. "We let that telegram go through to General X. That's why Snafu was concerned for your safety. Now, it occurred to me that if you were to call on General X with that cup..."

I stared at him. "But, look here, I haven't got it. I told you it was stolen from me at the hotel in Marrakesh."

A mischievous twinkle appeared in his eye. "I'd see that you had it all right, if you undertook the job." And then, as I gazed at him blankly, he continued, "I'm having a replica made from those sketches of yours. Between us we ought to produce something that would fool our man sufficiently for our purpose."

"And what is that?" I asked.

He shot a glance at Doler, who, as usual, appeared to be miles away. "Look," said Maxted, "he knows about you and, by the time you get there, he'll be expecting you—we'll take care of that. You're a woman and a very attractive one, if you don't mind my saying so, and our friend the General is a bachelor and pretty susceptible, if all they tell me is true. A fellow like that is always apt to talk more freely to a woman than to a man; besides, he'll regard you as an ally, the chosen emissary of his late emissary, the Countess Mazzoli. I think you're cool enough and clever enough to exploit a situation like that and discover what the Trefoil League's real interest in this Fritsch relic is."

"What's the Trefoil League?"

He hesitated. "I let something out there, something pretty secret. The Trefoil League is what the anti-Hitler clique among the Generals calls itself—the Dreiblatt Bund in German. Their badge is a three-leaf clover." He flung his hands apart. "Well, Andrea, there's the set-up; What do you say?"

"Where does your General X live?"

"In a villa outside Rome at present. But we'll get him down to the coast to meet you."

"To the coast?"

"We'd land you by submarine, you and Nick Leigh, who has volunteered to go with you."

"Behind the German lines that would be?"

"Sure. But you don't have to worry about that. We'll have one of our people waiting. He'll meet you, take you to the rendezvous, and get you off again."

I was fairly on the spot. Here was the decision which Leigh had hinted I would have to take—here was where I had to adjust myself, as he had put it. My throat was dry, my hands cold. I twisted my head around to look at Leigh, who sat in his old place against the wall. But he was staring down at the carpet.

Maxted came to my aid. "Before you give me your answer," he broke in, "my friend the Brigadier wanted to say a word."

With a perfectly unrevealing countenance Doler knocked out his pipe into the wastepaper basket. "It's just this," he said. "I'm all for your taking on this mission, but, as I told Jake Maxted, I think it's only fair that, before you accept, you should know the sort of people you may find yourself up against."

"That's right," the Colonel agreed.

"I'm not thinking of General X and his crowd," the Englishman proceeded. "I'm thinking of the clubfooted beggar, this Dr. Grundt." He shook his head sombrely. "A bad actor. He's the most dangerous German living today, and I'm not forgetting Hitler or Goebbels or any of that lot. I call him that because in the last war, powerful though he was, he had the Kaiser, who was still guided by some human instincts, to restrain him. But in his present position he has only Hitler to consider, who has always fallen for adroit flattery, at which old Clubfoot is a past master, and who's probably half-crazed by this time, anyhow."

He was silent for a moment, tracing patterns with the stem of his empty pipe on the desk. "I know what I'm talking about, because I was one of a number of our chaps who were up against him in the last war," he continued. "He had at least a dozen of our people murdered—three of them friends of mine. We thought him a mad dog then, but today, with the example of savages like Himmler before him, and Hitler's personal army of spies under his orders—well..."

"He can't be so young if he was in the last war," Maxted interrupted.

"He must be well on in his sixties," said Doler. "I don't know where he has been keeping himself since the war started. I heard that he was out of favour with the Nazis to begin with—that was probably due to his associations with the old monarchy. In the period between the wars he kept cropping up all over the place, always mixed up in espionage—in South America, in Belgium, in the Balkans, I don't know where else. During the Spanish war I read a report about a spy centre run by the Franco people in Tangier under somebody known as 'El Cojo,' which means 'the lame one' in Spanish; his German nickname used to be 'der Stelze.'"

He shrugged his shoulders and began filling his pipe from his pouch. "To judge by what Miss Hallam saw of him, handling a bucking mule and keeping his seat despite that lame foot of his," he went on, "the old devil is as lively as ever. But he's not a man who'd ever grow old. He's as strong as a full-grown gorilla, with all a gorilla's guts and courage, and as clever as be damned. He knows how to pick men and to use them, too, by Gad, and if things go wrong, he always contrives to wriggle out somehow himself, and the devil take the hindmost." He struck a match. "There's the picture of the man our friend General X is up against, Miss Hallam. I don't say he'll cross your path, but I thought you ought to be warned." With that he lit his pipe and fell silent.

"We must allow for accidents, of course," Maxted told me in his matter-of-fact way. "But hitherto General X has

managed to remain completely in the background and I don't see why he shouldn't continue to do so. And in any case we have a first-class man on the spot, in almost daily contact with the General and in constant communication with this office. He's bound to let us know in time if anything goes wrong. Meanwhile, if you're in on this, we'll have a further conference tomorrow and go over all the plans; the replica of the cup in its leather case should be ready in the afternoon and, by the way, I gave orders that neither should look too new."

I forced a smile. "You must have been very confident of my answer, Colonel," I said.

His face softened. "It's for our country," he answered. "And it's a good country."

I shrugged my shoulders. "All right," I told him, and tried to make my voice sound not too despondent.

He beamed and, leaning forward across the desk, laid his hand for a moment on mine. Only that—he didn't speak. In his deliberate way Doler took his wallet out, detached an English five-pound note from a wad of money and pushed it at the Colonel. "Congratulations, old boy," he remarked. "You certainly know how to state a case."

Maxted was gazing at me almost tenderly. "I know our American girls!" he retorted as he pouched the money.

I glanced over my shoulder to where Nick sat. He was smiling contentedly and, as he caught my eye, jerked his hands upward in the 'Thumbs up!' sign.

I felt that it was the beginning of a partnership.

Chapter XIV

I hated Naples, and I hated the Hotel Agricola in particular. In normal times it might have been a comfortable enough house of the cheaper kind, perched on a slope overlooking the city, the sort of place patronised by American schoolmarm and other tourists of moderate means. But now, with no electric light, no heat, and no hot water, it was as grim as what we New Yorkers call a cold-water walk-up. My room was freezing and reeking with damp as the rain never stopped. Even with the extra blankets the chambermaid brought I thought I should never get warm.

I told Nick I was going to sleep late. We met in the lobby at noon. I was in a bad mood. In place of a bath all I had got to wash in was about a pint of tepid water, and there had been no coffee for breakfast. It was still raining in torrents. The weather deepened my gloom. Lying in bed, watching the rain streaming down the windows, I had had ample time to realise what my rash promise to Jake Maxted had let me in for. I liked action, did I? Well, action was what I was going to get. It was all very well for Jake to talk as though a trip behind the enemy lines were as simple as taking the subway from Times Square to the Battery. Suppose our submarine were attacked? What if Jake's man didn't turn up to meet us? What if General X spotted the cup in its leather case as a fake? My imagination was working overtime that morning, and the effects were direly depressing.

I had a first clash with Nick about where we were to lunch. I had had about as much as I could stand of the hotel and was all for going out. But he wanted us to be on hand in case Maxted sent for us and declared that the food was bad everywhere. So we lunched in the restaurant, and a vile lunch it was. It had stopped raining when we came out. I suggested going for a walk, but again Nick objected. One of us ought to be on call and he had to go and report himself at some headquarters or other. "But I tell you what, Andrea," he said, with the sort of bright, false air parents adopt with a fractious child, "I'll drop by the office while I'm out and find out when old Jake's expecting us. Then, if there's time, I'll pop back here and take you for a walk or a drive or something."

We had a regular set-to about it. A watery sun had appeared and there were blue patches in the sky, but over the bay the rain-clouds were still ominously banked. I wanted to go out while it was still fine, just for half an hour, to get a breath of air; but Nick wouldn't hear of it. The hotel phone wasn't working and Jake would have to send a car or a D.R.

—which meant, apparently, a despatch-rider; one of us must be available. He kept harping on our meeting with Jake, but I had the feeling that he was determined I shouldn't leave the hotel without him. In the end he declared he was already late for his appointment and went off, promising to be back in an hour.

That was around two o'clock. I sat in the deserted lounge in my fur coat, reading some tattered Italian magazines, and waited. Three o'clock came and no sign of him. I would have gone out, but the rain had begun again, a steady downpour. Then it was four o'clock and no Leigh, nor any word from Maxted. To warm myself I ordered some tea. I had just finished it when I perceived a tall Italian officer in a cape streaming with wet coming through the revolving door from the street.

It was Dino Mazzoli. He walked straight across to me and bowed over my hand. "This," he said, smiling with a flash of his beautiful teeth, "is my lucky day. To find you at home like this..." He slung off his cape. "But where is Captain Leigh?"

"He went off somewhere to report himself—he promised to be back long before this."

He clicked with his tongue in vexation. "Che peccato! I wanted him to bring you to my apartment for a cocktail."

"How charming of you! Sit down and have some tea or something. He must be back soon."

He pushed back his sleeve to consult an elegant wrist-watch. "It's only that I had a little surprise for you," he said. "An old friend of yours is running in around five..."

"An old friend of mine?"

"Ank!"

"Hank!" My spirits shot up—I was radiant. "Why, isn't that wonderful!"

He looked at me dubiously. "The trouble is that he is only in Naples for a very little while. He told me he could not stay more than an hour. If you want to see him, we should really go off at once."

I sprang up. "Why not? I'm ready. I'll leave a note for Captain Leigh to come on there. What's the address?"

"Let me write the note. The house is not easy to find; I must give him directions."

"Go ahead. While you're doing that I'll dash upstairs and get a hat."

A smart Italian roadster was parked outside in the rain. I was so excited at the prospect of seeing Hank that I paid no attention to where we were going. "Wasn't Hank surprised to find that you knew me?" I said.

He laughed. "I could hear him gasp over the telephone. 'Dino,' he said, 'I must see her if it's the last thing I do. I'm leaving Naples again at seven, but if you'll get her over to the house around five, I'll run in for an hour. Go call her right away!' Well, I tried to, but your hotel telephone is out of order, so I jumped in my car and by a marvellous stroke of luck caught you in." He shook his head. "I felt I couldn't disappoint my good friend 'Ank.'"

"Dear Hank!" I said. "It'll be lovely to see him again."

Mazzoli had the first floor of an old palazzo in a narrow, dirty street. The black marble staircase was most impressive, likewise the big salon with its massive furniture and flagged floor spread with rugs. A man was warming his back at a log fire that blazed in the tremendous fireplace. "The Captain not arrived?" Mazzoli said to him in Italian. The other shook his head. He was a burly individual in a black business suit with a shifty eye, not the fashionable Dino's class at all, and I was intrigued by a sort of vague deference which Mazzoli displayed towards him. "Unfortunately our friend does not speak English," Mazzoli told me, and introduced the other as Signor Pesce, of the Ministry of the Interior. Signor Pesce bowed and, making room for me by the fire, helped me off with my coat while Mazzoli went to a sideboard where a line of bottles were set out and started mixing a drink.

I was aware that Signor Pesce was eyeing me furtively. "You are also a friend of Captain Lundgren's?" I asked him in Italian.

"Ma si, ma si," he answered vaguely, and relapsed into silence. It was twenty minutes past five by the Louis XVI clock on the mantelpiece—I found myself wishing that Hank would come. Mazzoli brought the cocktails and we all sat down by the fire. Mazzoli broke a long silence by remarking to Pesce in Italian that one good thing about the weather was that it kept the Luftwaffe away. He and Pesce began speaking about the air-raids over Naples.

I didn't care much for my cocktail. It was made with some sweetish syrup which I found rather sickly. The room was very hot, and I began to feel drowsy, as the voices rattled on in rapid Italian; I actually caught my head nodding as Mazzoli was telling a long story about some air-raid he had been out in. The last thing I remember is their voices breaking off, as they turned to regard me, of Pesce staring at me out of his hard, dark eyes....

I was having that old dream of mine again. Everything about me was vibrating and the throb of motors was in my ears. I had a choking feeling in nose and throat, and as I struggled up I discovered a sort of gas-mask strapped to my face. A voice said in English, "You won't need that any more. Let me take it off!" and with the touch of hands on my hair the mask came away.

It was no dream. I was in a plane, in darkness save for the glimmer of the instrument panel over the pilot's seat up front. Then a red flare outside flooded everything with a ruby radiance and I saw Mazzoli standing there, steadying himself on a strut, an oxygen mask hanging on his chest. "That's the signal," he told me. "We're going down!"

I felt deathly sick, too sick even to wonder how I had come there. With engines out, we were screaming down to a huddle of lights, the black outline of sheds. The engines picked up once more and we bounced to a landing, turned and taxied back towards a winking beam. I was conscious of Mazzoli helping me to my feet, of a confusion of voices outside, of arms extended to assist me down the short iron ladder into a dim circle of uniformed and helmeted figures. Only when I stood on the ground did I realise that the uniforms, like the shouted orders I had heard, were German.

Chapter XV

These and other details of our landing came back to my mind only later—in fact, not until next morning when I opened my eyes to find a buxom Italian woman in a blue print dress setting down a breakfast tray beside my bed. I was in a small, rather bare bedroom which was flooded with sunshine pouring through french windows opening on a balcony. The woman would have closed the window, but I stopped her. Indeed, the little breeze that puffed at the curtains was delicious. My head ached, my throat was dry—it was a regular hang-over. "Where am I?" I said to her as she proceeded to shake out my clothes and arrange them over the back of a chair.

The question appeared to surprise her. "But at the Villa Rosalba, signora," she answered.

"Whose house is this?"

"Dr. Lunghetti's. But the German Excellency has it at present."

"What German Excellency?"

She gave a placid shrug. "A General. My tongue will not tie itself round these German names." She paused. "Count Dino said the signora would take a bath. I have heated the furnace. The bathroom is across the landing." She pointed to an old-fashioned bell-pull beside the bed. "If the signora wants anything, she can ring." She pattered out in her list slippers.

I sank back among my pillows. I found myself enveloped in a long cotton night-gown. I could not remember putting it on or, indeed, going to bed at all; but I had a vague recollection of riding in a car and of driving up an avenue past a series of terraced gardens with rose-bushes that sparkled with raindrops as our headlights caught them. Gosh, how my head throbbed! I had been drugged, of course. That smooth Dino, baiting the trap with Hank—how he must have chuckled to see how blithely I walked into it! He must have been playing a double game from the first, hand-in-glove with his mother. Well, I wasn't the only sucker. He had hoodwinked Jake Maxted and Doler, too....

Then the truth flashed upon me, like a light switched on in a dark room. I could have told the *bonne* who Dr. Lunghetti's tenant was. It was General X, and I had been kidnapped and brought here to tell him the whole story of my visit to von Rode. Now I had the explanation of those German uniforms I had seen at the airfield, and what is more, I knew roughly where I was. Maxted had told me. General X, he said, was staying at a villa outside Rome.

As I was digesting this discovery with a sense of blank dismay, I became aware of a sound that must have been in the air ever since I awoke without my being fully conscious of it. It was a dull rumble, a sort of persistent thudding. I had heard the noise of distant gun-fire before—at East Hampton, at Santa Monica in California, from out at sea when the fleet was having its exercises. I sprang out of bed and ran out on the balcony barefoot, my voluminous nightie ballooning around me. Beyond the gardens spread out in terraces below, low hills clothed in their autumn tints were laid against the deep blue Italian sky. Out of doors that faint rumble became a steady mutter that beat softly on the ear-drums, with now and again a deeper, isolated thump that seemed to make the air quiver. With a thrill that brought a lump to my throat I knew that I was hearing the guns of the Fifth and Eighth Armies battering their way to Rome.

I stayed there a long time in the warm sunshine, my face turned towards the blurred rim of the hills. The voice of the guns brought into my mind a picture—a picture, all plumed with fire and smoke, of men and tanks plunging forward, over there beyond the horizon. My heart went out to them—to our American kids, so light-hearted, so recklessly brave; to the dogged British, Canadians, turbaned Indians, all of them, gritting their teeth and slogging on while death whirled down at them out of the cloudless Italian sky. While I stood there musing I found myself thinking about this other band of brothers, into whose intimacy Fate had so strangely cast me—Snafu and Nick, Jake and the moody Brigadier. They were a part of it, too! I suddenly realised how privileged I should consider myself, useless and not at all brave as I was, to be found worthy to be of their number.

That distant gun-fire did something to me. If my surmise was right, and I was pretty sure it was, this was General X's villa. I had been dodging the issue, but now I could face it squarely. Even though my meeting with the General was not to be as Jake had planned, the line I had to follow was clear. It was to find out what was the interest of the Trefoil League—the Dreiblatt Bund—in that cup, and, this established, to hit upon some means of getting the information back to Naples. I quailed a little at the thought of General X. Did he know about the envelope von Rode had given me; and if he did, what would happen when I came before him empty-handed? I hadn't forgotten what Snafu had said about 'these Prussian Army gangsters,' as he called them. "They're fighting for their very existence and they'll stop at nothing," he had warned me. Ouf!

Well, Nick Leigh had hit the nail on the head. This was a war that seemed to drag all sorts, civilians as well as the fighting forces, into its radius. For a moment his lissom figure, so dapper in British battle-dress, stepped into the forefront of my mind. How right he was to want to keep me under his eye at Naples, and what a fool I made of myself, going behind his back and blabbing like a romantic idiot to that rat Mazzoli! When we were together he had often enraged me with his superior English air, but now I found myself wishing that he was still with me. For, with all his annoying ways, he was loyal and dependable and full of resource—he would have known how to handle a situation which I felt desperately unfitted to face alone.

I had a pang when I thought of Nick. It annoyed me to find how stubbornly he dwelt in my mind. We had known one another only for a matter of days and most of the time, it seemed to me on looking back, we had spent in quarrelling. It was no good my telling myself, however, that I was entirely in my rights to object to the way he had tried to restrict my movements at Naples. He was not to blame. He had his orders and, apart from this, I owed him much. But for him I would in all probability be sitting in a French jail; it was he who had brought me to Snafu and escorted me safely to Naples; and I had only my own darn pigheadedness to thank for my present plight.

I wondered what he thought of me now. Not very much, I told myself. My conscience plagued me. We knew so little

of one another, yet when my mind went back to our talk on the plane, it seemed to me that, in some curious way, he was closer to me than any man I had ever met. And I had let him down; he would not easily forgive me for falling for a professional lady-killer like Dino Mazzoli. Nick had high standards—what Snafu had told me about him made that much clear. Thinking back, I realised that it was my failure to come up to them that had made him often so brusque with me. *Well*, I said to myself, *he's through with you now, Hallam, and serve you damn well right, because you behaved like a heel*. And cursed myself for a fool because the tears sprang to my eyes.

The sound of voices drew my attention to the gardens below my balcony. Two figures were descending a stairway cut in the hillside between the terraces. One was Mazzoli, bareheaded; the other, in greenish-grey with a cap flaunting a silver eagle, was a German officer. They halted and their voices drifted up to me. They were speaking English; it occurred to me possibly because Mazzoli spoke no German, his companion no Italian.

"... It seemed best to me to bring her here," I heard Mazzoli say.

"Without taking the trouble to ascertain whether von Rode actually gave it to her?" demanded the German.

"To ask her would have aroused her suspicions at once," said Mazzoli.

"You could have asked your Colonel Maxted..."

"I didn't venture to, for the same reason, and he didn't take me into his confidence."

"A fine muddle! Safi reported that the girl saw von Rode; if she didn't get it, the others did. But you didn't wait to establish the facts. Maybe Naples was too warm for you already."

I saw Mazzoli stiffen. "Pardon, Colonel, my orders were to bring her here without delay."

"You can explain that to the General when he returns from Rome this morning. Trust you Italians to make a muck of things!" And on a rising note he snarled, "Verdammt italienische Schlamperei!"

His tone was incredibly offensive. Mazzoli may not have understood the actual German—'Schlamperei' is an almost untranslatable Austrian word signifying slackness and muddling and incompetence, all rolled into one—but he gleaned the sense. He winced visibly, but made no reply, and they moved on down the steps out of sight.

I found myself strangely excited. The scrap of conversation I had overheard told me several things. First, that, as I had surmised, I had been brought here to be confronted with Jake's 'General X'; second, that apparently they had no idea of what had taken place between von Rode and me; and third, that Mazzoli was in the secret of the cup, whatever it might be.

I had met Mazzoli's type before—an inferiority complex a yard wide covered, as by a shield, with a colossal vanity. One knew what the Germans thought of their Italian Allies and I had heard enough to make it clear that in the eyes of his German brother-in-arms the elegant Dino, the pampered pet of the Neapolitan ladies, was just another chocolate soldier. I had seen for myself how Mazzoli writhed under this treatment; anyone who could give his shattered ego a good, big boost, I decided, might find an ally in him. Not a very reliable ally, perhaps, I thought as I went indoors to my breakfast, but one that might have his uses, if properly worked on. And I was in sore need of an ally just then. With the General's return imminent, I guessed that the showdown could not be far off.

The air had done my head good and, having eaten nothing since lunch the day before, I found myself looking forward to my breakfast. I discovered that I had a lot to learn about Axis ersatz. The coffee was undrinkable, a bitter brew that tasted like herbal tea, the diminutive roll soggy and brownish inside, the speck of butter a rancid oily concoction. However, I managed to eat the roll and I drank up the warm milk, which, at any rate, was the genuine article. Meanwhile, my new-found courage pulsed within me, like the guns pulsating in the sky.

Mazzoli must have heard that I was stirring, for scarcely had I emerged from my bath when the servant—her name, I ascertained, was Mafaida—was at the door. Count Brno's compliments and would I join him at the belvedere at the foot of the gardens in a quarter of an hour's time?

There is one weapon of retaliation that every woman possesses, and that is to keep a man waiting. I had no clothes except those I stood up in—the night-dress I was wearing, to judge by its coarse texture and ample dimensions, must have been furnished by Mafaida—and I had washed out my undies and stockings in the bathroom. I took a certain grim satisfaction in letting the dashing Dino kick his heels in the belvedere while I gave myself a much-needed manicure in the interval of waiting for my things to dry on the balcony. It was more like three-quarters than a quarter of an hour before I was ready.

The villa was quite small and very elegant. A white stairway wound down to a pillared hall with statuary between the columns and glimpses, right and left, of attractive reception-rooms. There was no one about; the only sound a vast chirping of canaries, somewhere out of sight. A door faced me. I opened it at random and had a shock. A soldier popped out like a jack-in-the-box, barring the way with his rifle. Behind him I saw a gravelled space and a drive curving away under trees.

It was the first German soldier I had had the chance to study at close quarters. He was not a very good representative of the master race, a fat, undersized youth with a loutish, pimply face under the coal-scuttle helmet, and so young that his voice cracked as he squeaked, "Halt! Wohin?"

"Zum Garten, bitte!" I said.

He pointed with his rifle past me at another door across the hall. "Dort!" he barked, and pulled the door to in front of my nose.

The encounter sobered me. With the uneasy feeling of being a prisoner I found my way out to the gardens and down the steps to where a summer-house—what the Italians call a belvedere—commanded a ravishing view of the surrounding hills. It stood in a little clearing with a railing and a marble bench, from which the ground sloped steeply to the road. Mazzoli was hunched on the bench, smoking a cigarette in nervous puffs. As I came down the steps he flung his cigarette away and with an impatient gesture consulted his watch.

Then he saw me and sprang up. "I thought you would never appear," he cried fretfully. "You must learn to be punctual while you are here. We live under German discipline in this house."

I laughed. "So I gather from the way I heard the German Colonel speak to you a while back."

He glared at me. "You had better not let him know that you were eavesdropping."

"He has rather a loud voice, hasn't he? I could hear him from my room. Do you really permit them to talk to you in that tone?"

He gave a sulky shrug. "Colonel Mülder is a very senior officer." He looked away, but I made him meet my eye.

"It must be hard on you, a man of education and refinement, to have to put up with the insults of these barbarians," I said softly.

A spasm of anger passed across his face, but he remained silent.

"Poor Count Dino," I went on. "You played me a dirty trick, but I can't help feeling sorry for you. You must have wonderful self-control to stand there and let an ill-bred fellow like that accuse you of cowardice."

His eyes flashed. "If you knew what we Italians have to put up with at their hands! This German swine, this Mülder, for example—there are times when I could shoot him down with my revolver."

"I wonder you don't." I let my glance rest soulfully on his face. "I don't think you look like a coward." And I added, "You know, it often takes a woman to see these things."

The hurt melted from his eyes. He reached for my hand, bowing his sleek, black head as he pressed ardent lips to it. "You are as wise as you are beautiful, signorina," he said with a melting look. Then he pointed at the bench. "Let us sit

down, shall we? You are to see his Excellency at noon and before that I have to talk to you."

"For what took place at Naples," he said as we sat side by side, "I do not excuse myself. I acted under orders. I had to act swiftly, for the military police were on the track of that plane that brought you here, a German plane concealed in the hills above Naples. Now you may be wondering why I, an Italian officer working with you and your Allies, should have taken such drastic measures over the head of Colonel Maxted. We are dealing here with a German domestic situation so delicate that, for the moment, any foreign intrusion would be absolutely fatal. You understand, Signorina Andrea?"

"No, I don't. I'm a singer, an artiste. What have I to do with your politics?"

He hesitated. "This is not an ordinary political question. On it the future of the world may depend."

"Now you're talking riddles, and I don't like riddles as between friends."

He shrugged his shoulders. "I may not say more."

"Okay. I only wanted to help you, to defend you against this charge of the German colonel's."

His face darkened. Then he laid his hand on my arm. "I find you very simpatica, my little Andrea. Do you also find me simpatico?"

I looked away. "Do you have to ask me that? ..." And I added archly, "Dino?"

The pressure of his hand increased. "I will tell you, then, because you can help me greatly. It's a question of getting rid of Adolf Hitler. You must not ask me more. Now tell me what happened at Marrakesh? You saw the Sheikh Abdul, didn't you? What became of it?"

"What became of what?"

"Of what the Mama sent you to collect, per bacco!"

I shook my head. "What was I supposed to collect?"

He frowned. "That is a question I must not answer."

"More mystery, Count?" And I removed his hand firmly.

He gazed at me intently. "Do you mean to tell me that my mother didn't mention it?"

"Mention what?"

He hesitated. "A certain package which the Sheikh would give you."

"Now I come to think of it, she did say something about a package he might give me for her."

In high excitement he seized my hand. "But that was it, cara mia. A package of papers, a dossier!"

I was feeling a trifle bewildered. I had got at the truth at last, but the truth didn't fit the facts. What had that battered old cup to do with a file of papers?

Meanwhile, Mazzoli was trembling with eagerness. "What did you do with it?" he cried. "Answer me quick—did you give it to Colonel Maxted?"

I shook my head. "I never had it."

He shrank away in dismay. "You never had it?"

"I'd only been a few minutes with the Sheikh when we were interrupted and he sent me away."

"Without giving you the dossier or saying anything about it?"

"That's right."

He turned his eyes up to heaven. "Maledetto! Then the Gestapo have it." He had gone pale: his expression was terrified. "What a disaster!" he murmured. "And what is his Excellency going to say?"

There was a footstep behind us. The German Colonel stood there, a thickset figure contemplating us with a malicious smile. He saluted me, clicking his heels with a perfunctory bow as he introduced himself, German fashion, snarling his name: "Oberstleutnant Mülder." To Mazzoli he remarked with heavy sarcasm in his thick English, "Dear comrade, in the German Army noon means twelve o'clock. It is now seven minutes and a half past that hour and his Excellency is waiting. If I might make so bold as to interrupt this charming rendezvous..."

Mazzoli veiled his eyes. "Come!" he bade me and led the way behind the Colonel up the steps. As he passed me he put up his handkerchief and wiped away the perspiration beading on his livid face. He looked like a man going to execution.

Chapter XVI

As we entered the house from the back, a large man, a civilian, was being shown out at the front door by an orderly in a white linen coat. At the sight of him Colonel Mülder called out, "Hallo! Herr Blom!" Pausing only to say to Mazzoli, "His Excellency will see you alone," and to me, "Wait there!" he hurried forward. I was aware that the civilian had turned and was looking at me, a big, blond individual, in a crumpled sack suit, who was wearing sun-glasses. Mazzoli threw me a despairing glance and picking up his cap, which lay on a chair, proceeded to adjust it in the hall mirror. Then, squaring his shoulders, he strode to a door beside the staircase, knocked, and went in.

Colonel Mülder's nasal voice struck on my ears. "... a sweet little American," he was saying to the civilian in German. "Don't you want to meet her?"

But the civilian had turned away, presenting a broad back to me. "After what I saw in Berlin last week," he growled in thick German, "I've made up my mind never to speak to an American again. I'll see his Excellency when he is less busy. Servus, Herr Oberst!" He strode out past the orderly, who bowed deferentially and closed the door.

Mülder rounded on me. Thrusting his face into mine, he snarled, "You heard what he said? After the barbarous way your fliers bombarded Berlin, never will he speak to another American. That's a neutral opinion for you. The gentleman is mainly Scandinavian." His voice rose to a passionate squeal. "You see what decent-minded neutrals think of the slaughter of our women and children by you American savages and your British friends!" He plucked open a door, thrust me into a small salon. "His Excellency will see you presently."

The salon, very coquettish in the French rococo style, was in a state of surprising disorder. Newspapers and magazines were strewn around, there was a hunk of sausage flanked by a bottle of Rhine wine on the mantelpiece, a pair of bedroom slippers beside a set of spurs on the ormolu table, and a trail of cigar ash on the Aubusson carpet. The Hun, I reflected, was certainly making himself at home in Italy. The newspapers and magazines were German—it gave me an odd sensation to find a *Voelkischer Beobachter* only three days old and Berlin weeklies like *Die Woche* and the *Illustrierte Zeitung* of the previous week. A letter lay open on the table. The envelope beside it was addressed to 'Generalmajor Bodo von Halberstadt.' It bore no stamp but had the writer's name scrawled in one corner: 'Erna von Halberstadt.' The writer was clearly the recipient's wife, for the letter began, 'Mein lieber, treuer Mann.'

I had no scruples about reading it. "As you know," she wrote, "we are not permitted to speak of such things in

letters. But since our friend Herr Blom has kindly undertaken to deliver this into your hands, I can tell you of the night of horror that Berlin has just passed through. The cursed English and American fliers were over again last night and the devastation they wrought is past imagining. It is only by the mercy of the dear God that I am still alive to write you these few lines, dearest Bodo...."

There were four closely written pages in the old-fashioned German script which the Nazis have discarded, a chronicle of fire and havoc, sandwiched with banal stories of Tante Emmy's narrow escape as she was leaving the sewing circle on the Nollendorf Platz, of Cousin Kurt's heroism with the fire-fighting squads. I didn't read it to the end; I couldn't bring myself to finish it. That voice from stricken Berlin stressed all too poignantly the numb dread that had welled up in me, seeing the trail of the Hun scattered all through that dainty Italian villa. It was as though I was already in that hermit land of the Nazis, at the mercy of Hitler and his myrmidons. For a moment I was so overcome that I sank down upon the couch and, covering my face with my hands, said something like a prayer to God to have me in His keeping. Then, because I was resolved not to panic, I sat back and, as I squarely faced my plight, was suddenly aware of a small ray of light.

How could I have forgotten it? Jake Maxted had a man in touch with General X—or von Halberstadt, as his name appeared to be—in constant communication with the Naples office, Jake had told me. By this time my disappearance from Naples must have been discovered—Mazzoli's as well. Would they have the sense to connect the two events? Of course, Mazzoli—I realised it now—had never left that note at the hotel for Leigh, telling him where I had gone, and I had never thought to check up with him. But even so, wouldn't they guess what had happened? If they did, since they were evidently in contact with this agent of theirs, they would surely find the means of putting him on my track. Meanwhile, I would have to play for time. Mazzoli had apparently fallen for my assertion that I had received nothing from von Rode, neither this dossier, whatever it might be, nor anything else. In any case, I should have to stick to my story. What a mercy that neither the General nor any of them appeared to know just what took place between me and von Rode at Marrakesh! Should I be able to bluff them and go on bluffing them until such time as Jake's man turned up? I wondered, and, gnawed by desperate anxiety, was still wondering when Colonel Mülder beckoned me from the threshold.

His air was fussed. I understood why when, as he opened the door beside the staircase, a voice harsh with anger burst upon my ears and we walked in on a scene as taut as a violin string with emotion. Mazzoli, white to the lips, the perspiration glistening on his forehead, was facing two German officers who stood at a desk. The elder of the two, grey-haired and very distinguished-looking, was shouting in German to his younger companion, who listened with a deferential air, "And you can tell the fool from me that if he and that mother of his have let them get hold of it, I'll have him court-martialled and shot!" he thundered.

With a face of stone the younger officer translated this into Italian. Mazzoli said nothing. He appeared to be past speech—he looked as if he had been put through a wringer. Colonel Mülder took advantage of the momentary lull to clatter to attention and bellow: "Das amerikanische Fräulein, Exzellenz!"

The General turned a cold blue eye on me. He was quite elderly but held himself as straight as a larch. His face had a strained expression; he looked like a man on the verge of a nervous breakdown. "Does she speak German at least, Mülder?" he asked fretfully.

I answered for myself. "Ich spreche Deutsch," I said.

He grunted. "Well, thank God for that. What's your name?" he barked.

"Andrea Hallam."

"Age?"

"Twenty-six."

"You're an American. From where?"

"New York City."

"What are you doing out of your own country in war-time?"

"I was brought over to sing to the troops."

"Your troops in North Africa, would that be?"

"That's right."

He grunted again. "You speak German well. Where did you learn it?"

"In Germany. I had a travelling scholarship before the war."

He pointed silently at a chair and sat down. Now for it, I told myself, as I sat down in turn.

"What took you to Colonel Maxted's office at Naples?" he asked.

I hesitated, then found what looked like a safe answer. "I know the Colonel's family back home. I thought I'd just drop in on him and say hello."

"You weren't accompanied by a British Intelligence officer, by any chance?"

"There was a British officer with me, but I don't know what he does."

"Didn't he bring you across from Marrakesh by air?"

"Yes. He knew I was anxious to reach Naples quickly to fill an engagement and was kind enough to get me a seat on the plane."

With a crash that made me jump, he brought his fist down on the desk. "Don't lie! You're an American agent!" And before I had time to speak he shouted at me, "We have our own methods for dealing with spies, so you'd better make up your mind to speak the truth." He rapped with his hand on the desk. "Who sent you to get in touch with the Countess Mazzoli at Marrakesh?"

"Nobody," I told him. "I met her purely by chance at the hotel at Marrakesh. She had to go into hospital for an operation, and asked me to take a message to a certain Sheikh Abdul."

"So! And what was this message?"

"I was to tell him, 'Bianca says, Be careful. He is here!'"

At that he raised his eyes quickly and sought out Mülder, who was leaning against the window, paring his nails. Their glances met. Then the General said to me, "And what did you do with the package the Sheikh gave you for the Countess?"

"He didn't give me any package."

He dropped his eyes, took a paper from a tray and held it up for me to see. "Is that so? Safi, who took you to the Sheikh Abdul, doesn't bear out your story. He states definitely that the Sheikh gave you this package."

I had to think quickly. He was; waiting for my answer, his merciless eye probing in my face. It could be as he said, that Safi knew about that blue envelope; but on the other hand, it might be a lie, to trap me into an admission. I gathered up all my courage. He wasn't going to bluff me. "I don't care what Safi or anybody else says," I declared. "The Countess did tell me that the Sheikh might give me something for her, but the fact is, he didn't. Maybe there wasn't time. I was only with him a few minutes when we were interrupted."

His fist crashed down again. "You lie! You know as well as I do that you collected that package and took it straight across to Colonel Maxted at Naples. Else why did you go to his office?"

"I told you already—I thought it would be friendly to call on him as I know his family in America."

"Herr Gott!" His voice rose to a scream. "Did one ever hear such lies? For the last time, will you tell me the truth? You gave that package to your chief, Colonel Maxted, didn't you?"

I had the desperate feeling of being cornered. But I knew that my only chance was to stick to my guns. "He's not my chief, and I never had any package," I declared, praying that my voice didn't wobble.

He flung up his arms. "Will you stop lying to me? I want the truth, and, by God, I mean to get it!" In a sort of blind rage he began to fling the papers about on his desk.

Colonel Mülder's nasal tones struck across the room. "Would the Herr General allow me to handle this?"

The General gave him a morose look, and Mülder went on in his oily voice, "I've just remembered—one of the guard was formerly at Dachau. He should know how to make her talk." He shot me a surreptitious glance and sniggered. "There's a lot of truth at the end of a steel birch, Exzellenz."

The expression in his eyes sickened me. In horror I turned to the General. He did not even look at me. Putting on his spectacles, he took a file from a tray and opened it. Without lifting his eyes from his papers he said to Mülder, "Handle it your own way. But be quick about it. And caution the man to keep his mouth shut!" and immediately became absorbed in his documents.

I looked about me wildly. My only refuge was Mazzoli, but he was staring moodily in front of him and I realised that he hadn't understood a word of what had been going on. Colonel Mülder was signing to me to go with him. "Come, Fräulein!" he invited, his round face beaming. At that moment the door was flung open so violently that it banged against the wall. I saw Mülder whirl about, the General look up from his papers and with a muttered ejaculation spring to his feet.

A huge figure stood in the doorway. It was a vast man in a black hat and a dark business suit, who leaned heavily on a cane. He might have been a tank, the way he shouldered Mülder aside as he came into the room, limping as he went. I instinctively glanced at his feet. My blood seemed to turn to ice when I perceived that one of them was encased in a monstrous surgical boot.

Chapter XVII

Now that I saw him in European dress I perceived what a fantastic-looking individual he was. It was not only his enormous bulk; it was the extraordinary sense of latent menace he managed to convey as, with his head cocked at an angle, his glance swept the room. Once at Seville, at the first and last bull-fight I ever attended, the bull, bursting out of his cage as the bars went up, had paused in the same way to cast a wicked eye about him before rushing at the nearest banderillero. But the clubfooted man was more like a huge ape than a bull. I saw at a glance what poor Mina had meant. Apart from his terrifying ugliness, his amazing hairiness of face and hands, there was something baboon-like about the flail-like arms, the tremendous barrel of a chest, even to the eyes peering out from under the low, jutting brows with a hint of bursts of uncontrollable fury in their depths.

He hobbled forward a pace or two, then halted, letting his face melt into a treacly smile revealing yellowish teeth under the bristly upper lip. Mülder was the first to break the hush that had fallen upon us all. "Herr," he screeched indignantly, "how dare you permit yourself to burst in unannounced?" "Who let him in? What does he want here?" the General trumpeted from the desk; while the interpreter, a mild-looking little officer with gold eyeglasses, said in a loud voice, "Unheard-of behaviour!"

"Are there no sentries, zum Donnerwetter? What's become of the sentries, Mülder?" von Halberstadt thundered.

Forthwith the Colonel sprang into action. Shouting "Orderly!" he rushed out of the door, his stentorian voice ringing through the house.

The clubfooted man looked after him with a shrug, then faced the General again. "I fear I intrude," he remarked in grating tones. "I am Dr. Grundt."

The General's face flamed with anger. "I don't give a damn who you are," he roared. "And take off your hat when you speak to me. Don't you know who I am?"

The clubfooted man doffed his hat, revealing a close-shorn grey scalp. With an apologetic smile, "Oh, ja," he answered gently, "you're Major-General Bodo von Halberstadt, Knight of the Iron Cross with Oak Leaves"—he paused, and added with a testing glance—"about to be cashiered from the Service."

Von Halberstadt seemed to choke. With eyes blazing he cried, "Who let this madman in here?" He swung to the interpreter officer. "Herr Leutnant, fetch me the sergeant of the guard!"

But at that moment the door opened and Mülder whirled in. "The S.S. are here, Excellency," he said, tight-lipped. A very tall young man, in gleaming black and silver, came in behind him and placed himself purposefully in front of the door. I recognised the uniform, though I had never seen it before. It was the famous black uniform of the so-called 'Schutz-Staffel'—Hitler's private guards.

The clubfooted man produced a wallet from an inside pocket and, leaning on his stick, clumped across the floor to the desk. He drew a card from the wallet, which he hid before the General. I saw the blood drain from von Halberstadt's face as he read it. Without speaking, he handed the card back. With a little chuckle the cripple replaced it in his wallet. "It's a pity about the Dreiblatt Bund," he said, and von Halberstadt's mouth set hard. Grundt's glance swung to me. "Did she give you the dossier?" he asked the General casually.

Von Halberstadt started and stared glassily at me; and if looks could kill, I must have dropped dead on the spot. The cripple called softly over his shoulder, "Rollo?"

The young man at the door leapt to attention. "Herr Doktor?"

"Is Rieber there?"

Rollo opened the door a crack. At his call of "Rieber!" another equally stalwart figure in the same black and silver appeared on the threshold. "These two officers are under arrest," Grundt told the trooper, indicating them with his stick. "You will receive their swords and conduct them to Rome in one of the cars. You will hand them over against receipt to the Provost Marshal. He has his instructions."

The S.S. man saluted. "Zu Befehl, Herr Doktor!"

Von Halberstadt passed his tongue nervously over his clipped moustache. "I trust my orderly may be permitted to pack a suitcase," he ventured almost humbly. My eye sought out Mülder. All the starch seemed to have gone out of the loud-voiced Colonel. His face was blotchy and he was mopping it with his handkerchief.

Grundt gave his cackling laugh. "A gun might be better, General, by the time the Führer has done with you." His tone was even. "Speak to Rieber—he's now in charge."

The General made no answer, but with a set face crossed to where the S.S. man was waiting, and the two officers followed Rieber out. His rugged features impassive, the cripple looked after them, then turned to me with a dry laugh. "There goes the nineteenth century," he rasped in English. He was looking at Mazzoli. "But who have we here?" he demanded.

The little interpreter, who had been, bobbing about in the background with a bemused air, now thrust himself forward. "Captain Mazzoli, of the Royal Italian Army, if your Excellency pleases," he elucidated, fawning; and Mazzoli, who had been staring at Grundt with a sort of fascination, came to attention with an ingratiating smile and saluted. I

remembered that he knew no German and realised that he could have had no very clear idea of what it was all about.

The clubfooted man scowled. "Mazzoli, eh?" he said with sudden interest. "Not a relation of the lately deceased Countess Mazzoli, by any chance?"

The interpreter spoke up. "The son, your Excellency. Unfortunately the Captain does not understand German, but if your Excellency desires to question the officer, I am a qualified interpreter in Italian..."

"I am not an Excellency," Grundt struck in irritably, his eyes on Mazzoli, "and I speak Italian." With sudden fierceness he rounded on the little interpreter. "And who the devil are you?" he barked.

The officer jumped, then, stiff as a board, bawled out, "Zu Befehl, Lieutenant Kloss, officially approved officer interpreter in Italian at Communications Centre, Rome." And with a simper he added, "The Major-General specially applied for my services. He brought me out with him in his car from Rome this morning."

"Then you can go back to Rome!" Grundt told him.

Kloss goggled at him. "But, your Excellency—pardon, Herr Doktor—my orders were..."

"Get out!" The cripple took a lurching stride towards him, cane uplifted, and Kloss scuttled for the door. Grundt turned to Mazzoli. "What are you doing here?" he demanded sternly in Italian. "And why aren't you with your unit?"

The scene that ensued was so utterly fantastic, so sheerly horrible in its dénouement, that looking back on it, as I always must when I think of the ill-fated Dino, I sometimes ask myself whether I did not dream it all. Though he knew no German, I should have thought that Mazzoli would have guessed that something untoward had befallen the General and his aide and that, consequently, he too was in trouble. But, bruised and humiliated as he had been, all he saw, I think, was that his two tormentors had been sent about their business and that he was at last free to speak, as man to man, in his own language. Italians love to dramatise themselves, and the dashing Dino was obviously aching to be taken notice of again, to show off a little, as he loved to do. Grundt had no need to question further. To my astonishment Mazzoli launched forthwith into a long and flowery speech, extolling the services he had rendered to von Halberstadt and to what he called "those of his Excellency's political complexion."

He dwelt on the risks he had run at Naples and, with tears in his eyes, boasted of how his beloved mother, though in failing health, had not feared to make the journey to Marrakesh to aid the cause. He boasted of his cleverness in carrying me off and spoke of himself as one who, like d'Annunzio, delighted in living dangerously, bragging of his military record—Libya before the war, Spain with the Italian contingent, and Libya again in the present war until he was invalided out with varicose veins and the silver medal for gallantry.

Italian is the most musical of languages and educated Italians speak it beautifully. Dino's harangue was like a poem, exquisitely phrased, superbly delivered; with his good looks and agreeable voice it was a pleasure to listen to him. But I was watching Grundt, and I saw his face darken, his expression grow grimmer, as the narrative proceeded. Mazzoli, however, noticed nothing as he held forth, his limpid eyes flashing, his features aflame with enthusiasm. It was his moment and he was squeezing every ounce of drama out of it.

He came to an end at last, rather breathless and smiling engagingly into the cripple's stolid and unrevealing countenance. After a little pause, Grundt said, "So the Captain was in Libya with Graziani?"

"Ma si, ma si, Eccellenza," was the eager reply. "For a whole year."

"That would have been while Graziani was pacifying the country, I think?"

"Yes, Eccellenza!"

The clubfooted man gave a knowing smile. "You hanged a lot of Arabs, I have heard, Captain."

Mazzoli shrugged his shoulders. "The Marshal had an iron hand."

"With sacks over their heads, I think?"

"So was our habit, yes, Eccellenza."

"And did you conduct some of these executions yourself?"

"Many," was the indifferent answer.

"Then you have the way of a hanging, one might say?"

He indulged in a knowing smile which the cripple amiably returned. "To some extent, perhaps," he agreed.

Grundt spoke quietly over his shoulder. "Rollo?"

"Herr Doktor?" came the stentorian answer from the door.

"Two men with a stout rope!"

He gave the order in German. An incredible suspicion seized me and I shot a glance at Grundt. But his air was tranquil and, meeting my eye, he smiled complacently. Dino, of course, comprehended nothing. He had cheered up considerably and was polishing the nails of one hand on the palm of the other with much of his old aplomb.

Rollo had clanked out. We waited. My heart had begun to thump, for Mina's words were in my mind: "This man is a monster. He stops at nothing." Grundt, his stick tucked under his arm, was glancing over the documents on the General's desk, humming under his breath.

Then Rollo came back. With him were two soldiers in the same black and silver, one with a length of clean, new rope slung across him. "The detail you ordered, Herr Doktor!" Rollo announced.

"Here!" said Grundt over his shoulder.

Then Dino understood. As the two S.S. men stomped across the floor, his eyes widened, his mouth fell open, and with a dreadful, inarticulate cry he sprang back. Grundt's stick jerked out at Mazzoli. "Take him out and hang him!" he ordered the troopers. As stolid as robots they closed in on Dino. He backed away, but the desk blocked his progress and they were on him.

"No, no," Mazzoli cried, shrill with fear. "Eccellenza, you can't mean it! Madre de Dio, you can't do this to me! Eccellenza, I implore you!" He was plunging and struggling in the grip of his captors. Now, with a sudden twist of his body, he broke away and flung himself at Grundt's feet.

I could restrain myself no longer. I sprang forward and faced the cripple. "You can't be serious?" I exclaimed. "Make them let him go! Arrest him if you have to, but don't torture him with this make-believe!"

The two S.S. men were trying to drag Mazzoli to his feet. But he was clutching Grundt's legs, his face a mask of terror, the tears running down his cheeks, while he called on the Madonna and all the saints in a stream of incoherent words. It was too ghastly. Grundt scowled at me and his lip seemed to curl. "Make-believe?" he echoed sternly. "When you know me better, Fräulein, as you are certainly going to, you'll realise that old Clubfoot doesn't deal in make-believe! There's only one punishment for traitors and that's the rope! Take him away!" he snarled with sudden venom at the troopers.

But I stood my ground. "Let him be tried at least! You can't put a man to death like this in cold blood. Besides, he may still have valuable information to give you. Have you thought of that? Herr Doktor, let me entreat you..."

"Valuable information?" he rasped. "He has told me all I want to know. Why waste your breath on a rat like that, liebes Fräulein? You heard him say he's an expert at hanging; then let him see what it's like to play the leading rôle for

once!" With a savage laugh, as the unhappy Dino was still frantically clinging to his legs, he uplifted his twisted foot in its heavy boot and dashed it in Mazzoli's face, sending him reeling across the carpet. "Away with him and string him up!" he bade the guards.

The S.S. men had already got their victim on his feet and were dragging him, still struggling and screaming, from the room. His cries resounded through the house even after they had taken him out and, pressing my hands to my ears, I sank down on a chair and burst into tears. I did not faint, but I felt on the verge of utter collapse. I was aware that Grundt was watching me curiously, but for a while he did not speak. Then, giving me a little encouraging pat with his stick, "Dry your eyes and listen to me, Fräulein," he said at last. "You and I have to have a little talk."

Chapter XVIII

With a grunt he lowered himself into the General's chair. There was a box of cigars on the desk and he dipped into it. He reminded me of a monkey the way he pawed that cigar in his hairy fingers, sniffing at it and crackling it next to his ear. With a disgusted look he dropped the cigar back into the box. "The muck that some people smoke!" he growled. "Really, I'm astonished at von Halberstadt, from one of the best families in Prussia, too. But there, a man must travel to appreciate a good cigar." He cocked his eye at me. "I have sometimes reflected that your great country, Fräulein, was only launched on the path of world power when you annexed Cuba." He chuckled.

He spoke in German, in a full and resonant voice, the voice of one who is at peace with the world, as though he had dismissed from his mind the scene of violence we had just witnessed. "Na ja," he observed; "I'll just have to smoke one of my own." He drew a case from his pocket and chose one from a row of cigars it contained. He held it up for me to see—an enormous cigar with a fat red-and-gold band. "Now that," he remarked, "is what I call a cigar. Our beloved Führer gave me a cabinet of them for my birthday. He doesn't smoke himself, but he knows my little weakness. They are genuine imported havanas—no Halberstadt home-rolled rubbish for old Clubfoot, Fräulein—a present to our Leader from Franco, the Spanish dictator, who gets them direct from the Spanish Embassy in Cuba." He wagged his head. "Our good friend Churchill would like to get his lips round one of these, I bet. A great man, Churchill, but then perhaps I'm prejudiced. I can always appreciate a man who likes a decent cigar"—he cleared his throat—"though that must not be construed as any criticism of our esteemed Führer. Ach, nee!" So saying, he held the cigar to his lips and, biting off the end with a rip of teeth like a dog tearing a bone, spat out the tip in a wide arc.

Broken as I was, he aroused my interest. He was such a vital person, so frankly cynical, with moods so quickly changing, that it was impossible to guess what was going on in his mind. With loving care he now applied himself to the lighting of his cigar. It was quite an operation. First it had to be warmed in the match-flame moved back and forth by those ape-like fingers, then, as the match was laid to it, nursed to a gentle glow. At long last, he was content. Filling his lungs with smoke, with a grunt he expelled a long cloud and, taking the cigar out of his mouth, absently scrutinised the tip. He cackled unexpectedly. "Did you ever see such an old bonze as this von Halberstadt?" he wheezed. "But I took him down a peg, hein? And this solemn ass of a Colonel?" He cocked his eye at me. "Shall I tell you the greatest sensation in the world, Fräulein? It's puncturing inflated reputations?" And suddenly he was roaring with laughter. "Ach, du lieber Gott," he chortled, "the wind-bags I've burst in my time!"

He studied the end of his cigar for a moment and went on. "Such jackasses are all right for waging war. But not to survive it—at least, not such a war as this. For remark, liebes Fräulein, this is not a war such as the last. They speak of a world revolution, but it's more than that. We are assisting at the rebirth of our civilization, and those who do not recognise the fact, pouf! they will be blown away."

He took a thoughtful puff and went on: "I had a master once—the last of the German Emperors. A brilliant man in his way and unscrupulous enough to have been a great ruler. But, du lieber Gott, the man lived in the past! He was never in touch with the times, and when his little world of uniforms, and parades, and, na, the whole military Rummel collapsed, what else remained for poor Wilhelm to do but cut and run?"

He frowned. "Bah! All these Generals and Admirals, with their gold lace and brass buttons and flocks of staff officers like fleas on a house-dog, are as bad. Already they're part of an age as remote from what's passing in men's minds today as that of our great Frederick or Napoleon. Tomorrow the world will be controlled by an air mechanic in a oily jacket and ruled by the scientific brain behind him. Today it's not the winning of the war, but the winning of the peace that counts, and the side that wins the peace will win it because it looked ahead, intelligently, courageously, ja, ruthlessly, even. Such will be the verdict of history, my little American miss, and history will not be wrong!"

He paused to blow his nose, with the noise of a trumpeting elephant, on a large red handkerchief he took from his pocket. "What was the secret of the great conquerors of history—Alexander the Great, Genghiz Khan, Napoleon?" he went on, tucking his handkerchief away. "I will tell you. They knew where the point of leverage was to be found. Napoleon's fulcrum was the French Revolution, as Hitler's was the world revolution that began in 1914. The mastery of the post-war world will go to the statesman who can discern the fulcrum. There are only two I know of today who possess the necessary degree of vision, and the force to apply it—Adolf Hitler and Joseph Stalin." He brandished his cigar. "You think to yourself that old Clubfoot talks like a fool—he forgets Winston Churchill and your worthy President. But I do not forget them—ach, nein, liebes Fräulein! It is only that, for all their brave talk of democracy and freedom and the Atlantic Charter, these men are politicians. But politicians and political parties are dead. They're as dead as the Generals with their gold braid and red stripes. There will be no place for them in the post-war world as the genius of my master has planned it."

It seems incredible after the grim scene I had witnessed, but I found myself responding to the strong magnetism emitted by this extraordinary man. To see him in a breath of fragrant tobacco smoke, discoursing as calmly as though he was sitting in his club, it was hard to believe that, but a few minutes before, he had sent the ill-starred Dino to his death. His expression was untroubled, his smile unforced; I had to take hold of myself to resist his blandishments. I had seen how he had played with the unsuspecting Mazzoli. Was I to be his next victim? It occurred to me that he had been talking in order to give me a chance to recover my composure. Well, I was calmer now. Thoroughly on the alert, I sat up and waited, wondering what he was leading up to.

"Ja!" he remarked and laid his cigar aside on the ash-tray. Chin on his crossed hands, elbows on the desk, he contemplated me, his expression enigmatic. "Fate played you a strange trick at Marrakesh," he observed and smiled secretively. "Do you realise that for a little while the fate of this post-war world I've tried to describe to you was in your hands?" I stared at him. He nodded and picked up his cigar again. "The destiny of the universe," he said. "Or, to be more precise, the destiny of Adolf Hitler, whom I am privileged to serve, which is the same thing."

I shook my head. "I'm afraid I don't understand."

He cackled his strident laugh. "You don't have to understand, my little one. You have to understand only two things. One is to keep your mouth shut; the second, that if that cup in its leather case should by any chance fail to reach me, it will go hard with you, very hard, my dear Miss Hallam, so hard, indeed, that you'll wish that you and your guitar had stayed in America." His voice had sunk to a whisper. "And what did your Intelligence people make of your story?" he enquired in a casual tone.

Since Mazzoli had told him of my arrival at Naples, escorted by a British Intelligence officer, I knew that denial would be useless. "I'm afraid they didn't say," I answered. "You see, I had only one brief interview with them, and then Captain Mazzoli stepped in."

He drew on his cigar. "The matter is immaterial, since the invaluable Ziemer forestalled them. Tell me, what did you make of my young man?"

"You can't expect me to be very enthusiastic about someone who broke into my hotel and ransacked my baggage. Or was that you?"

He guffawed loudly. "Aber, Fräulein, can you see me climbing in at windows, with my size and my clump-foot? In any case, I leave such things to subordinates. That was Ziemer or one of his people. Ziemer should arrive today or tomorrow; he'll be agreeably surprised to find you here." He chuckled. "I must say I'm anxious to see him. As a rule, I make a point of personally instructing my young men. But this was an emergency, and Ziemer was highly recommended

to me by Killinger, our Minister in Bucharest. You don't know Killinger?"

"No."

"Not very intelligent, but good for dealing with Rumanians. He was one of the Nazi strong-arm squad before Hitler came to power. Ziemer pulled off one or two small jobs for him in the Balkans. A man of action, this Ziemer, it would appear; he dealt with the von Rode situation very adequately." He relapsed into silence, smoking with quiet enjoyment. "Have you any idea of where you are here?" he asked suddenly.

I shook my head. "We're about fifteen miles from Rome. You may as well know, as you'll be making some stay. This is a week-end villa which our excellent von Halberstadt grabbed for himself—he used to bring a lady along at times, they tell me." He chuckled. "We must try to make you comfortable here, Fräulein. You will have the run of the gardens and my young men will be only too delighted to keep you company. Nothing unpleasant will happen to you as long as you make no attempt to escape or to communicate with the outside world. I would remind you that there are sentries and their orders are to shoot. And no gossiping about what happened at Marrakesh, *verstanden?*" His eye was suddenly hard and glittering. "My advice to you," he went on, resuming his placid tone, "is to forget all about your Marrakesh adventure. Meanwhile, I trust you have everything you want here?"

"I have nothing," I said. "Not even a toothbrush. Nothing but the clothes I stand up in."

"Um Gottes Willen, what was I thinking of?" He glanced over the desk, found a bell-push and pressed it. Like a jack-in-the-box the young man called Rollo appeared.

"Miss Hallam has no clothes," said Grundt. "Send down to San Marcello and fetch someone with a selection of what is necessary. She needs toilet articles, too! Go with Rollo, my dear," he told me, "and give him a list of what you require. But excuse me!" He introduced us, formally giving the S.S. man some title I did not catch—'Rottenführer,' or something of the kind. "You will present your comrades to Miss Hallam," Grundt bade him, "and draw their attention to the fact that she is under my especial protection while she is here."

The young man threw up his chin. "Zu Befehl, Herr Doktor. And," he added, "I came to tell the Herr Doktor that a gentleman was asking for him."

"Who is it?"

"A civilian"—the S.S. man's tone was faintly contemptuous—"a Herr Blom from Rome."

"Blom? You didn't send him away, I hope?"

"No, Herr Doktor. He's in the library."

"I'll see him at once." He poked me with his stick. "Go with Rollo, my dear!" As I stood up, he beckoned me over with his head while Rollo continued on to the door. "A splendid-looking young fellow, was?" he said in a hoarse whisper. "He was one of the famous Berlin battalion that carried out the purge. And wait till you see the others—such

Chapter XIX

There was considerable activity outside. S.S. men were unloading equipment from a closed van which, with a couple of cars, all of them spattered high with white mud, was parked on the drive. At the same time soldiers in field-grey were loading a truck with baggage and musette bags which others brought from the house. It was apparent that the Army was moving out, the S.S. moving in, with the latter already in complete charge of the villa. My loutish sentry was gone, and in his place a helmeted guard in black walked smartly up and down in the sunshine. A table with a telephone had been placed in the little circular hall, just inside the front door, and at this Rollo now seated himself. "Your list,

please, Fräulein," he requested, pencil in hand.

I discovered that he spoke no English. While I was racking my brains to recall the German for such things as lipstick and vanishing cream, Grundt came limping across the hall with his visitor. I had not forgotten Herr Blom, and remembering what I had heard him say to Mülder about my fellow-countrymen, I promptly looked away. But not before being aware of dark glasses turned in my direction as the caller followed Grundt into the General's room.

Rollo summoned a guard and gave him my list and the messenger roared away in one of the cars. Then Rollo said, "Come, Fräulein, I must present my comrades. We shall find them in the gardens."

Outside the rear entrance to the villa, at the top of the stairs descending to the belvedere, was a grassy plot with a sundial and a clipped box hedge. Here five or six young S.S. men were sunning themselves. Two, stripped to the waist, lay on their backs on the turf; one was doing handsprings, while another, on his knees, was rubbing some stuff out of a bottle on the hair of a comrade who sat on the ground. One of them, catching sight of us approaching, called to the others, "Achtung, Kinder! Here comes Miss America!" whereupon they all scrambled to their feet and formed a line.

There was a lot of heel-clicking as Rollo introduced them one by one. Some of their first names had an oddly primeval German ring—Traugott, Wahnfried, Baldrian, Kuno, names like that. They were all young—in their early twenties, I would have said—and without exception tall and fair-haired with sun-burned faces and beautifully developed bodies. I remarked their hair particularly. They wore it rather longer than American boys of their age are accustomed to wear it and looked as though they had just emerged from the barber's chair, so carefully was it groomed, so neatly rippling, so glossy with oil, and in some cases with such a bleached look on the top of their heads that if it had been a woman, I would have sworn she had used peroxide. I noticed one young man running a comb through his hair and taking a rapid peek at himself in a pocket-mirror before being presented. From a casual glance I would have said that they were to a man well satisfied with themselves, with the sort of sex-conscious air you see in a strutting cock-pheasant.

Most German youths of their class I had met in the past could speak a certain amount of English, but these young men knew none. When Rollo told them I spoke German, they crowded round and started to rain questions at me.

"How's Chicago?" one cried and made ta-ta-ta-ta noises, imitating a machine gun. "Is it true that Herr Roosevelt has freed all the gangsters from the prisons in order to get men to fight for the Engländer?" another wanted to know. "What about the food riots in the American cities?" was a third question. "Have they rationed buffalo meat?" a fourth youth demanded.

The questions were shot at me from all sides while they began to shout and argue with each other, producing the most grotesquely nonsensical statements, as, for instance, that the 'blacks,' as they called them—they meant the Negroes—had seized Detroit and that the President had dedicated one of the rooms at the White House as a synagogue.

I turned to Rollo at last and said that if they wanted to hear about America, I would tell them about America. He quieted them down and I started to describe conditions at home, the tremendous development of our war industry, the miraculous achievements of the shipbuilding yards, the abundance of food, notwithstanding rationing. But it was almost immediately evident that they did not believe a word I was saying. "Quatsch!" cried one, and "Propaganda!" another, and in a moment the circle was in a turmoil of jeering voices. "Wait till we finish with the English," one exclaimed, "and America will feel the German fist!"

"Just now," I couldn't help putting in, "it looks as if Germany were feeling the Allied fist."

It was a stupid thing to say, for a ripple of hostility ran through their ranks at once. "If the English cities could stand air bombardment, our German cities can stand it," Rollo declared angrily. "The Führer has a stick in pickle for the English," someone shouted; and another broke in with, "Our new secret weapon will settle Churchill's hash, and then America—look out." "Our parachutists will land in thousands. We'll kill all your men and rape all your women," another promised. "In that case I claim the gracious Fräulein, Kinder," a merry voice proclaimed, and there was a general shout of laughter.

Then they fell to questioning again. "What did I think of Germany's victories?" "Wasn't it wonderful to see a whole

people—ninety million Germans—solidly massed behind their Führer?"; "Didn't Americans realise that Germany could never be beaten?" They all spoke at once, not waiting for me to answer. I could not but feel that they were talking for the sake of talking, partly under the mass suggestion of their little group, partly under the sharply watchful eye of Rollo, who seemed to be their officer, but also in part to keep their courage up, rather like people who, walking home in the dark, will sing together. I was not sorry when a whistle blew—it was the mess call, Rollo informed me—and they all trooped off.

I flung myself down on the grass in the warm sunshine and smoked the last of my American cigarettes. I realised that I had been looking into the face of Germany's Nazi-trained youth—the pick of the basket, at that, for these were the so-called Elite Guards, brought up in the schools of the Hitler Youth, their Aryan descent strictly certified, and forbidden marriage except with young women of pedigrees as guaranteed as their own. They were a fine, strapping lot, not quite so impressive as the propaganda pictures, perhaps, for there were weak chins and low foreheads and shifty eyes among them. But apart from their looks, I told myself, they were nothing but a pack of louts, untravelled and half-educated, with barbarous instincts, fit only for killing and being killed. These were the instruments of monsters such as Himmler and Heydrich, the hyena of Lidice, I reminded myself, reflecting that maybe some of them had taken part in the Lidice massacre just as Rollo had been one of the murder squads in the Berlin purge. At the thought the sun suddenly seemed to lose its warmth and a chill breeze seemed to sweep the gardens.

I found myself contrasting these young Germans with the boys I knew back home, so frank, so kindly, so independent-minded. And Nick Leigh drifted into my thoughts again. I could almost see him looking Rollo over out of those cool, grey eyes of his; I could fancy him taking an almost fanatical pleasure in twisting the necks of these young German ruffians, one after the other. But Nick was far away, and even if he wanted to have anything more to do with me, it was doubtful if I should ever see him again. Face downward on the grass, my elbows on the warm earth, the deep blue Italian sky overhead, and the drone of bees in my ears, I felt very lonely and afraid.

I saw no more of Clubfoot then. Presently Mafalda called me in to a lunch of some muddy-looking spaghetti, a finger's breadth of Belpaese cheese, and a small bunch of grapes which I took alone in a little library behind the hall. It was a sunny room, snug and compact, and cheered by a cageful of canaries, whose twittering I had heard before, singing blithely in a bow window among a mass of ferns in pots. But my thoughts were sombre; I could not get poor Dino out of my head. I left my lunch almost untasted.

Most of the books in the library were Italian law works—Dr. Lunghetti appeared to be a lawyer; but there were a certain number of English books as well, biographies and the like, and two or three shelves of German. These last I took to represent the General's taste in literature, for they were all of the propaganda order—*Mein Kampf*, of course, and Rosenberg's *Der Mythos des Neunzehnten Jahrhunderts*, and a score or more of war books of the Boy Scout type with such characteristic titles as *Tanks to the Front!*, *Hurrah! To Africa!*, or *The Eagles swoop on Cringing Albion*.

Mafalda had carried off my tray and I was curled up on the sofa, seeking refuge from my thoughts in Lytton Strachey's *Eminent Victorians* which I had found on the shelves, when the library door creaked. One of the S.S. men stood there and, after a cautious backward glance into the passage, came in. He had a packet of cigarettes in his hand. "I thought you would care for some cigarettes, if you haven't any," he remarked.

It was the youth I had seen titivating in his pocket-mirror in the gardens before lunch. He had stood, I remembered, somewhat aloof from the others when they were pumping questions at me, a slim boy with a round face and chubby, dimpled chin. I swung my legs to the floor. "That's awfully kind of you," I told him. "I was just wishing for a cigarette."

"You can keep the packet," he said, handing it to me. "They're not bad. Bulgarian." He smiled. "About the only thing the Bulgars have done for the Axis is to send us their cigarettes. Am I disturbing you?"

"Not in the least. Sit down. I'm afraid I didn't catch any of your names this morning. Won't you have one of your own cigarettes?"

"My name is Treubold, Werner von Treubold," he replied, taking a cigarette. "We're an old Mecklenburg family, but I don't use the 'von' any more. We modern Germans are like you Americans in this respect—we no longer set any store by such things. My grandfather," he added, as he struck a match and held it for me, "was quite an important figure in the

suite of the old Emperor, Major-General Werner von Treubold, after whom I was called. Dr. Grundt knew him."

He lit his cigarette and shook the match out, regarding me gravely. "You're the first American girl I've ever met," he announced.

"I hope I'm not a disappointment," I laughed.

"On the contrary," was the stolid answer, "I find you very attractive. For the first time I regret that our two nations are at war. I consider that we two, you and I, are fine specimens of our respective races. It is idiotic that we should want to kill one another, nicht?"

"All wars are idiotic," I remarked. "Unfortunately, there are always idiots who can't or won't see it."

He smiled. "I find your frankness very refreshing!" He gazed at me out of his china-blue eyes. "I couldn't help seeing the way you looked us all over this morning. I am wondering what you made of my comrades."

I shrugged my shoulders. "They have some very original ideas about America," I couldn't help remarking.

"You mustn't be too hard on them. They have not my advantages of birth, remember. This Rollo, for instance, his father is a warder at the Alt-Moabit jail in Berlin: well, you've probably seen for yourself what a very limited person he is. They haven't been brought up, as I was, in cultured surroundings. Many foreigners frequented my father's house in Berlin—diplomats, people like that. But the comrades have never had any contact with the outside world; they're apt to believe everything our radio and newspapers tell them."

I laughed. "And what about you, Herr von Treubold?"

His glance appealed to me. "It's perhaps a strange request upon so short an acquaintance, but would not the gracious Fräulein call me Werner? For something tells me that we could become good friends." He gave me a languishing look.

"Werner, then," I said. "Do you believe everything that Dr. Goebbels puts out?"

"I recognise that propaganda in war-time does not necessarily bear any relation to the truth, Fräulein Andrea."

"Meaning that you know you're being lied to all the time?"

He gave a shrug. "Newspapers everywhere print nothing but lies, and the radio is as bad." He broke off. "The comrades are all right, but when it comes to a discussion they have nothing but arguments which they've learnt parrot-fashion, and to contradict them is to risk being reported to this sheep's-head of a Rollo. I feel so greatly the need of someone with whom I can talk freely. Watching you in the gardens this morning, the thought came into my mind that we are both prisoners, in a sense, Fräulein Andrea. If I could be sure that you wouldn't give me away..." He took my hand.

I let him hold it. A faint hope had begun to flutter within me. It was evident that I had made an impression upon the young man. How could I turn it to my advantage? We were only fifteen miles from Rome—was there anyone in Rome to whom I could smuggle out a message? "You appear to have a very low opinion of me as a friend, Werner," I replied.

"Oh, no, no," he cried.

"Why should I give you away? I was brought here against my will to be bullied and threatened by your odious Dr. Grundt. If I knew there was someone in this house, an intelligent, cultured spirit with whom I could exchange ideas, I think I could stand the loneliness better. But since you seem to believe I'm not to be trusted..." I withdrew my hand.

"It's not true," he protested. "Only one must be cautious—you don't know how we of the Bodyguard are watched. What I wanted to tell you was that all my life it has been my dream to visit America, but now I am wondering whether I shall ever be able to realise it."

"Why do you say that?"

He shot me a worried glance. Lowering his voice, he said, "I think we have lost the war. This means that no German can show himself anywhere in the world—we will have become the pariah race. Except those Germans who have tried to combat the Nazi evil."

I stared at him, scarcely able to believe my ears. Here was indeed an unexpected ally and right in the immediate entourage of Hitler himself. "Why, Werner!" I exclaimed.

"Up till now," he said, "there has been nothing that I could do. But if I could help you in any way, maybe you could mention it to the right people, when you get back to your country, so that one day, when the war is over, they will give me the visa for America, ja?" He leaned nearer, dropping his voice to a cautious whisper. "If you wanted to get a message out to anyone, maybe I could help you."

I gazed at him, electrified. He was taking the words out of my mouth. "The American Intelligence must have agents in the German zone of Italy," he went on. "Did not the office where you called at Naples give you the name of someone, at Rome, or Florence, or, farther north, at Milan or Turin, where you could report?" He drew so close to me that his breath was warm on my cheek. "Give me the name and address and I'll see that he's notified, that you're a prisoner here, in this house."

Maybe, the series of shocks I had sustained impaired my judgment. For a moment I was overwhelmed by a tremendous sense of elation. I would use this young man, his snobbishness, his overweening conceit, for my own purposes. I cannot say now to what extent I should have taken him into my confidence, whether I should have hinted that Maxted had a man in contact with von Halberstadt, because at the same instant I happened to catch a sort of gleam in his eye which brought my whole plan crashing down like a house of cards. It was only the briefest of flashes, a look of eager cunning that came and went in his face, but it was enough. I suddenly perceived the trap, and went cold with apprehension as I realised how narrowly I had avoided it.

I laid my hand on his arm and, gazing into his eyes, said, "I know what you're risking and I can't tell you how grateful I am to you. But the trouble is I don't know any American agents, in Rome, or anywhere else. I'm not a Secret Service agent. I'm a singer, Werner, and I'm in this predicament through an unfortunate series of events which Dr. Grundt has forbidden me to speak about."

He stiffened a little. "I see," he remarked dryly. He asked no questions and I felt sure that Grundt, who had wished him on me, had told him the whole story. He stood up then—it was as crude as that. "Well, if I can help you, you must let me know," he said with rather a frosty air. "Fräulein!" He made a brusque bow and stalked out. Soon after that Mafalda pattered in to say that a box of clothing had arrived for me and was in my room.

In the last stages of depression, I went upstairs. There was a package of things from the drug store on the dressing-table and, on a chair, a large black sample-case such as travelling salesmen carry. In the sample-case were frocks and underwear, a couple of night-dresses, and half a dozen pairs of stockings—silk stockings, much to my surprise—also a selection of shoes (I had given Rollo my size) in their boxes. The dresses were not at all bad and I picked out two that fitted me reasonably well, a plain black Milanese silk and a flowered crêpe de Chine.

It was while going through the dresses that I made a curious discovery. On the front of one of the frocks—a red affair which I had discarded—a scrap of paper was pinned. At first I thought it was the price tag, but then my eye caught my own name—Andrea. Below it was a scrawl in German. It was not very legible, but I made it out. The paper read, 'Andrea. 2te Reihe, 5tes Band.' That was all.

I trembled with excitement. It was obviously a message and it was addressed to me. But what did it signify? The words themselves were plain enough: 'Andrea. 2nd row, 5th volume,' the message meant in English. Who was trying to communicate with me? Was it another trap?

suddenly remembered those German books in the library downstairs. This could refer to them. Had someone deposited a message for me in the fifth book in the second shelf? And was it Jake's man, trying to get in touch with me? Well, the way to decide it was to go down to the library again and find out.

There was no particular risk. It was merely a question of returning to the library and running my eye over those German books. But my encounter with young Treubold had thoroughly upset me and I had to pause at the door of my room to get control of myself, before venturing out. It was just as well I did so, in my then jittery state, for as I looked out I was aware of Rollo striding along the corridor away from me. My room was on the first floor, near the head of the stairs, and as I peered out I saw him stop at a door at the end of the corridor, facing its length, and produce a key with which he let himself in, closing the door behind him.

I lingered no more, but darted down the stairs. I had the sensation that hidden eyes were marking my every movement. The house itself was very quiet, but somewhere in the distance a mandoline jangled and voices were raised in discordant song, and behind that always the very faint thudding of the guns. Not a mouse stirred on the ground floor and from Clubfoot's room there was no sound, but I could hear the gravel grate under the ironshod heel of the sentry outside the front door.

I stole into the library and made straight for the bookcase with the German books. With a beating heart I pulled out the fifth volume on the second shelf. It dealt with the experiences of a German prisoner of war in France. *Kopf Hoch!* I read on the title-page, *Erlebnisse eines Deutschen in der französischen Gefangenenhölle*, or, in English, 'Head up! Experiences of a German in a French prisoner-of-war inferno.'

Well, I shook the book and no note fell out. From front to back I scrutinised it, page by page, and there was no passage marked, no trace of any message. In case the books had been switched around I examined the other books in the row with the same result. Yet the instructions were precise enough: '2nd row, 5th volume,' the piece of paper had said; but with the actual volume in my hand I was none the wiser. Sick with disappointment, I was in the act of restoring the book to its place when my eye fell on the title printed on the back, condensed to two words in place of the unwieldy full title: *Kopf Hoch!* and I suddenly grasped the purport of that brief scrawl.

Kopf Hoch!—'Head Up,' or as we would say, 'Chin Up!' That was the word the writer had wanted to convey to me, to keep my courage alive, to bid me not despair, to let me know, I could even dare to hope, that help was on the way. My spirits lifted and I could have burst into song like the canaries in their cage, as I stood there, in the gathering twilight, and stared at that wisp of grubby paper. That the writer was Jake Maxted's man I had no doubt, but who could it be? It was obviously someone who was in touch with Farese's, the dress-shop at San Marcello which, Mafalda told me, had sent up the clothes, and, equally obvious, someone acquainted with the villa, or how would he have known about that book in the library? I thought of Dr. Lunghetti, the proprietor of the villa. He was Italian and might well be working for us—I must ask Mafalda about him.

I set a match to the scrap of paper, reflecting, as I watched it burn, that never in my life had two words meant so much to me.

Chapter XX

Clubfoot had gone to Rome and would be away for the night. Mafalda was my informant as she waddled into the library with my solitary supper. She muttered an apology for the poor fare—a bowl of soup, a salad of finocchio, a pear, a little carafe of red wine. Things would be better in the morning, she promised; this excellent 'Dottore' was going to bring back with him pasta, real coffee, sugar, even. It was easy to see that the old devil had already exercised his wiles on Mafalda. She even made a stab at 'tying her tongue' round his name, 'Garundt,' as she pronounced it with quite a warm inflection in her otherwise toneless voice. Any idea of mine that she might have conveyed that message to me died as I listened to her. It was a pleasure, she confided to me, to wait on a signor who did not behave as though he was in the caserna or shout at a body to make himself understood in his barbarous tongue.

Dino's fate lay heavy on my mind as I ate my minestrone. I felt I would know no peace until I discovered whether Grundt's sentence had actually been carried out. "And Count Mazzoli," I asked, "did he go to Rome, too?"

Her old sulky manner returned at once. Yes, she said, the Signor Conde had gone to Rome. With the Signor Dottore? I questioned. She shrugged her shoulders. It might be; she couldn't say. Then she flared out. With all kinds of officers, German and Italian, trapesing in and out of the place, who was she, with the whole burden of the house on her hands, to bother her head with the movements of visitors? She was hot with anger, but she avoided my eye and her face was shadowed with fear. I knew then that Grundt's order had been executed, and that Mafalda knew it, too.

She would have stumped out forthwith, but I pacified her, complimenting her on her soup, which was, indeed, quite excellent. I asked her about the proprietor of the Villa Rosalba. 'The padrone,' as she called Lunghetti, was living in a house he owned in the town, she told me. I said he must have great confidence in her to leave her in sole charge of the villa during his absence. She nodded, mollified—after serving as his housekeeper for the past fifteen years, why should he not have trust in her? But he came up to the villa from time to time for a look round. He had dined several times with the German Eccellenza, and that very morning, within half an hour of her telephoning to notify him of the arrival of the new tenant, he had appeared and had waited half an hour for 'il Dottore,' who was engaged with another caller, just to pay his respects. The padrone was always correct in such matters. He and 'il Dottore' had got on famously, to judge by the laughter she had heard from the study. When the padrone came out he was puffing at a big cigar and, meeting her in the hall, had given her fifty lire.

I realised that Lunghetti could have left that scrap of paper for me—with the complicity of the dress-shop, of course. I asked Mafalda whether he spoke German. Ma si, the padrone was a scholar—he knew many different languages. Was he a Fascist? I enquired. It was a fatal question: Mafalda shied off straightaway. As things were today, she grumbled, only a fool would ask, and only a soothsayer could guess, which side an Italian favoured. With pasta at the price of gold and not enough olive oil to fry an egg with, a hard-working widow had all she could manage to keep body and soul together without worrying who was for Benito and who was for the King. With that she whipped up my empty soup-bowl and swept out, leaving me no wiser than before. I swore under my breath. Out there, I thought to myself, listening to the distant throbbing of the guns against the windows, our boys are dying: much do these Eyeties care, sunk in their apathy and indifference.

My supper disposed of and cleared away, Rollo broke in on me as I was enjoying one of Treubold's cigarettes. His rather reserved manner showed me that he had not forgotten my ill-advised retort in the gardens. He came to warn me against showing a light in my bedroom. "Most nights your American fliers or the British come over," he explained, adding with a cold smile, "It would be too bad if the gracious Fräulein were the victim of a Flying Fortress. And, by the way," he went on, with a meaning look, "there was a telegram for the Herr Doktor. Herr Ziemer, whom I think you know, has arrived at Spezia. He should be here tomorrow."

The rather spiteful smile with which he imparted this information lingered with me after he had clanked out. I was vaguely curious as to how he could have known about Ziemer and me, but concluded that Grundt must have told him. The news of Ziemer's impending arrival depressed me. I was in no hurry to renew our acquaintance. Apart from the way he had made a fool of me, I was fearful as to how much he would be able to tell Grundt about my doings at Marrakesh after the party at el Kintafi's. As the saying goes, I felt that if I never saw the glib Herr Ziemer again, it would be too soon for me.

The villa was unheated, and with nightfall the growing chill in the library drove me to bed. Something extraordinary happened on my way upstairs. I suddenly heard my own voice!

Now, I have to explain that, having worked so much for the radio and the recording companies, I know my own voice when I hear it. I have listened to it often enough, not only my singing voice, but also my speaking voice, for in recording my songs, especially the foreign numbers, I invariably preface them with a few words of introduction, explaining what the song is about. It is a distinctive voice and, if I do say so myself, not a bad voice, clear and pretty crisp and reasonably free of the lisp that creeps into so many feminine voices when transcribed.

Well, as I have said, as I wended my way upstairs my own voice met me. It came from the direction of the corridor, which was in darkness except for the light of a rather dull bulb that illuminated the staircase. Every word was distinct, so distinct that I could even detect a faint nervous vibrato in my tone. It was a broken sentence, beginning in the middle of a word and cut off short by the closing of a door. I looked along the corridor. One of the S.S. men, his back to me, was just letting himself into the locked room into which I had seen Rollo disappearing earlier in the evening. It was from this

room that my voice was coming. As I have said, there was hardly any light in the corridor, and I did not wait to make sure, but slipped quickly into my room, closing the door noiselessly behind me. From my hasty glimpse, however, I was almost certain that the S.S. man was Rollo.

Leaning against the door in the darkness of my bedroom, my heart thudding in my ears, I found the broken sentence I had heard my own voice speak beating against my brain. I don't know how many thousand words the average human being utters in the course of a day, and I daresay most people would be hard put to identify a single sentence played back to them from their daily output of speech. But as it happened I recalled quite clearly not only the words in question, but also the exact circumstances in which I had spoken them, even to the suspicion of tremolo in my voice. For the sentence I had intercepted was this: "... afraid they didn't say. You see, I had only one brief interview with them, and then Captain Maz..."

It was my reply to Grundt that morning when he was pumping me about my visit to Maxted's office at Naples.

Radio-wise as I was, I knew at once what it meant. There was a concealed mike in Grundt's room connected with a recording machine installed in that room at the end of the corridor. Rollo must have let himself into the room just as someone inside was playing back my conversation with Grundt and I had intercepted a snatch of it between the opening and closing of the door.

So that was how Rollo had known about me and Ziemer! Obviously Grundt intended to have a record of every word that passed between himself and me. I could well believe that a man such as Clubfoot, high in Hitler's confidence, had to safeguard himself against the possibility of a rival getting the Führer's ear. But wait a bit! Such an apparatus would take quite a bit of installing. Since Grundt's arrival, however, I had been up and down the stairs a dozen times without observing any signs of men at work. Then it must have been here already when Grundt turned up. Maybe, von Halberstadt put it in. What a gang! And what a system! Suddenly the atmosphere of the house seemed to become unbreathable.

I undressed in the dark and lay long awake. I was thinking of what Grundt had told me, that in that battered old cup I had held Adolf Hitler's destiny in my hands. It was so much Greek to me, but I felt sure that Maxted and the others would understand, if only I could get word out to them. For an amateur I hadn't done so badly as a secret agent, I reflected, but a spy with no means of getting his report away was as useless as a car without gas.

I wished that Nick might somehow show up and prove to be Jake's mystery man. But that, I realised, was just a vain dream. Nick was at Naples, if he had not already returned to his post at Marrakesh—I could hear him telling Snafu, with that fine edge of contempt he could get into his voice, about the way I had treated him. Well, I could make amends now, if only I could find some means of contacting Naples, through Jake's man or on my own. Not that Nick was likely to care. I wondered if he still even gave me a thought. Probably not. He had his job to do and I had failed him; by this, as like as not, he had retired again behind that high wall of his, nursing the tragedy that had almost wrecked his life.

The sight of my hands as they lay outside the coverlet, those hands he had admired, brought him so vividly before me, I could almost feel the touch of his fingers. If only I could show him that I wasn't altogether the spoiled and trivial person he must think me! Lying in my bed I began to spin a story for myself. I pictured myself escaping from the villa and snaking my way through the German lines into the American or British outposts, out there beyond the hills. I imagined myself, perhaps bleeding from a slight but picturesque wound, rising up before an astonished sentry, a huge Texan, maybe, or a stocky little Highlander, and proclaiming, "I'm Andrea Hallam, of the United States Secret Service. Take me to your officer!" How they stared at the command post when I was marched in and how they fell over themselves, clearing the wires for the report I rushed to Naples. Leigh would be in Naples and on duty when my report came in, and, reading how, at the risk of my life, I had solved the riddle of the General's cup, would feel simply terribly for having misjudged me....

But day-dreaming, I told myself, would take me nowhere. More realistically, I weighed the chances, if I could only escape from the villa, of reaching Rome, no more than fifteen miles away. I was growing sleepy, but I clung to my idea. There were Americans in Rome—an American College and American women married to Italians, and ... wait a minute! didn't Uncle Sam have a Minister to the Vatican! He would live in the Vatican City, which, I remembered, was neutral ground. Once there I would be safe. Drowsing now, I contemplated myself riding up to the entrance of the Vatican City

on a bicycle, ringing at a vast, frowning gate, and asking for the Pope. I had read in the newspapers about some British prisoners of war who had escaped from a camp doing just that. After that, everything got mixed up in my head, I was taken before the Pope, who snarled at me from behind a huge cigar; and when the American Minister came in, lo and behold! it was Herr Ziemer, beaming craftily through his horn-rimmed glasses....

It seems to me I must have listened to those noises in the sky for quite a time before I realised what they were. It was a deafening report quite close at hand that brought me to my senses, a single crash merging immediately into an earsplitting din. For an instant I thought we were being bombed, but I had heard the anti-aircraft guns at work in London and recognised the staccato bark of the Bofors or its German equivalent. Above the clatter of the guns I was aware of the throbbing of many engines aloft. When I was in London my English friends used to claim that they could distinguish a British from an enemy plane by the sound of the engines—the one made a steady hum, the German had a broken rhythm. The vast droning that came to me out of the night was steady enough and I thrilled to it.

All the same, I felt pretty scared. There were shouts outside and the blowing of whistles. Frightened as I was, the commotion gave me a gloating sensation—I liked to fancy Rollo and his young bullies cowering under the tremendous suggestion of air power the deep diapason of our bombers conveyed. Though I reminded myself that our chance of being bombed, in the middle of the open country as we were, was pretty remote, I prepared for any emergency by getting out of bed and into my fur coat and shoes and taking from my bag the flash-light I always carried.

A moment later it happened. The air was suddenly filled with a whistling, piercing shriek, there was a tremendous thud, a vast crash of broken glass, and the whole house shook. I ran to the door and opened it. Rollo came sprinting along the corridor. "Don't be scared!" he cried as he passed my door. "I think it's only one of our anti-aircraft shells!" And he went plunging down the stairs, three at a time.

I shone my light along the corridor. There was no sign of damage that I could perceive. Then I saw that the door of the locked room at the end of the corridor was ajar. I could guess what had happened. Rollo had been in there when the crash occurred and, bolting out to investigate, had forgotten to shut the door.

Down on the ground floor feet went trampling and I heard Rollo shouting orders. On the instant my mind was made up....

It was quite a small room, its sole window blocked by a papier-mâché screen fitted in the frame—some kind of a service-room, to judge by the ironing-board, the sink in the corner. A single light with a green shade was burning over a square kitchen table on which stood a recording machine, side by side with a phonograph, a pair of earphones close by. A rack on the wall above the table was stacked with records. With one ear cocked for any sound from outside, I looked longingly at the disc that lay on the phonograph. I would have dearly loved to play it, but I didn't dare. However, I put the earphones on, and at once heard Rollo's voice. Almost his first words told me that my surmise was correct: he was speaking in Grundt's room. "I want the garage cleared and that damaged car brought out at once," I heard him order. "Report to me here in the Herr Doktor's room in an hour's time. And call the repair shops at San Marcello to send a truck to tow the Benz away...."

I laid the earphones down. I did not dare linger there, now that I had verified my suspicions. The corridor was clear. As I was leaving the room I noticed that the key was in the door. I hesitated a moment, then took the key. The door had a spring lock and I pulled it to. If Rollo came back and found the door shut, the chances were that he might not remember forgetting to close it, and would think he had mislaid the key somewhere in the confusion of the night's events. I had no particular purpose in annexing the key except that I had a feeling that it might come in useful. With it tied in my handkerchief in the pocket of my coat I strolled downstairs. Rollo was in Grundt's room, screaming abuse into the telephone at some anti-aircraft battery, as I judged by the scraps of conversation that reached me through the open door; his language was interlarded with dirty schoolboy words. Treubold, who was in the hall, closed the door with an expressive shrug as he saw me. An anti-aircraft shell had fallen on the greenhouses and blown in the garage doors, damaging one of the cars, he informed me, but there were no casualties. If I cared to sit around, there would be cocoa going presently for the comrades who were clearing away the damage; but I said I was tired and went back to bed.

I opened my eyes next morning to see Mafalda at my bedside with my breakfast-tray. I guessed it was late by the height of the sun over the hills. It was almost eleven, she informed me; but what with last night's "bomba," from which the good Lord and Saint Marcello had miraculously protected all in that house, everything was at sixes and sevens and the Dottore had arrived from Rome an hour before, demanding breakfast. It was 'una meraviglia' what he had brought with him, the good Dottore. The signora would see. Real coffee and white bread for breakfast, for example. She had a dress-box under her arm. "Dressing-gowns for the signora to try on," she announced. "Farese's forgot to send them up with the other things yesterday." She laid the box down on the bed and padded out.

So Grundt was back and presently Ziemer would arrive. Despite the glorious sunshine the prospect of the morning was bleak. I drank some black coffee—real coffee, as Mafalda had pointed out—and felt revived. Then, lying back among my pillows, I opened the box from Farese's. It contained two Japanese kimonos in cheap and flimsy silk, one white, the other black. On the front of the black kimono—my heart seemed to miss a beat—a corner torn from the white margin of a newspaper was pinned. There was no Andrea this time. Only two words, in the same scrawl as before: 'Belvedere. Mittag.'

It was an appointment. I was to be at the belvedere at noon. Could it be that at last I was to meet Maxted's mystery man face to face? I glanced at my watch. Like most Italians, Mafalda's idea of time was approximative: it was already twenty minutes to twelve. I leapt from my bed.

A quarter of an hour later I was scurrying down the stairs. I heard words of command and the tramp of feet as I reached the hall, and through the glass panel of the front door, past the sentry's steel helmet, caught a glimpse of Rollo drilling the S.S. men. At least the coast was clear—and Grundt's door was closed. Would there be a sentry out back to stop me from entering the gardens?

There was no sentry. But mindful of the eyes that might be watching in that house of spies, I forced myself to linger a moment before sauntering out into the dazzling sunshine. With my heart hammering in my ears I strolled slowly down the steps, stopping from time to time to inhale the scent of the roses clambering over the pergolas. At last the little temple came in sight. There was the marble bench where the unhappy Dino and I had sat and talked, and beyond it the oval dome of the summer-house. Through its open bays I could see that it was empty.

I looked at my watch. It was just on noon. I went into the belvedere and sat down. At the same moment a burly figure in a light grey suit stepped out from behind the door, a man who was wearing sun-glasses. It was the Swede, Herr Blom.

I shot up in sudden alarm. But he only laughed and took off his glasses. The tone of his laugh, the way it crinkled up his face, told me even before I looked into his eyes that it was Hank.

Chapter XXI

I was thunderstruck. So Hank, the old son of a gun, was Jake's contact man! Snafu must have known it, Nick too. How much heartache, they would have spared me if they had only tipped me off! Gosh, what a cagey lot they were!

In blank astonishment I stared at him while wave upon wave of relief went tingling through me. Part of my surprise arose from the thought that, twice already, Herr Blom, as he called himself, had been quite close to me without my recognising him. Of course, his sun-glasses hid his eyes, which would certainly have given him away, and I had never troubled to look at him properly. I might have known his voice if I had heard him speaking in English, but that singsong Scandinavian German of his would have fooled anybody.

Now that I saw him without his baffling glasses, I recognised my Hank all right. No wig or false beard—no nonsense of that kind. Yet he certainly contrived to look different. To begin with, he had grown a moustache, a really dreadful, gingery affair, sprouting bushily at the ends. He had also done something to his hair. It was no longer the

tangled, towy mass I remembered, with one drooping lock which, when I proved especially exasperating, he would dash out of his eye with a desperate gesture, but was now cropped close to the side of his head and on top reduced to a bristly pad where the clippers had been run over it. This drastic style, which the French call 'en brosse,' lent my poor Hank, normally the most easy-going, good-natured of men, a square-headed, almost brutish appearance, which was in itself disguising. Added to this, he had put on a little weight, and his loose grey suit accentuated it. What with a most peculiar round hat and shoes that were yellow rather than brown, he was the most un-American-looking creature you ever saw. He reminded me of the nondescript type of Continental business man one used to meet on European trains.

The caution which had become second nature to me in that house overcame my first movement of surprise. It suddenly occurred to me that Grundt's office might not be the only place at the villa provided with a hidden mike. The only suspicious object in the belvedere was the hand-lamp that occupied the centre of the table. Pressing a finger to my lips, I pointed to it, at the time signing to Hank with my head to come outside. He did not get my meaning at once, so I formed the word 'mike' with my lips, at the same time pointing again at the lamp.

He understood then. Gingerly he tested the lamp. It was secured to the table by a wire that ran through a hole pierced in it. He nodded and in silence followed me out. He would have stopped at the marble bench, but I was taking no chances and led the way along the nearest terrace until we came upon a seat buried among the rambler roses. I turned to him then. He glanced at me shrewdly. "Wired for sound?" he said.

I nodded. "I guess so. Anyway, we don't want to take any chances."

He nodded and, seating himself on the bench, drew me down beside him. "That was smart of you, Andy!"

I squeezed his hand. "Hank, you old lunk," I exclaimed rather tremulously, "you've no idea how glad I am to see you."

He slipped his arm about me, giving me a little hug. "Haven't I, though? We reckoned that Mazzoli would bring you straight here and Jake ordered me to investigate. I drove straight over from Rome, but I couldn't get you even to look at me."

"I thought you were some horrible pro-Nazi, making cracks at the Americans."

He chuckled. "That was just a smoke-screen, honey, for old Mülder's benefit. Do you mean to say you didn't recognise me?"

"You look like one of the Katzenjammer kids. Besides, how was I to guess I'd ever see you here? Nobody warned me, darn it—not Jake, or Snafu, or Nick Leigh, or any of them."

His eyebrows went up at that. "Gosh," he remarked, "you seem to be quite one of the family, don't you?" He stroked my hand thoughtfully. "You'll have to put me wise, Andy. You could have knocked me down with a bazooka when I had Jake's message about you. The trouble is, I have so little time. I have to see Grundt before lunch and then I must get back to Rome."

I stared at him in dismay. "Oh, Hank! So soon? Can't you take me with you?"

"We'll talk of plans presently. First bring me up to date!"

I made my story short. His face registered in turn surprise, dismay, and, finally, downright alarm, as I proceeded. He whistled noiselessly when I had finished. "Geewhiz, you certainly seem to have gotten yourself into a spot," was his comment. "And to think that I was at Marrakesh the very afternoon you arrived, but only for a few hours!" He shook his head dolefully. "I don't want to scare you, Andy, but do you realise that you've landed right in the stratosphere, in the very air that Adolf Hitler himself breathes?" He outlined another whistle and repeated, "Geewhiz!"

He fondled my hand for a moment, watching a starling that swayed on a rose-branch above our heads. "Let's talk about you to begin with," he said. "The position is better than I thought from what Jake said in his signal. You say Ziemer is expected here. Well, the way I look at it, once old Clubfoot has the cup in his hands, he isn't going to worry

particularly about you."

"That's all very well, Hank," I answered. "But I'm thinking about the cup. I can't help feeling that I'm responsible for it falling into Clubfoot's hands. If only we knew what was behind it! What did Grundt mean by telling me that the fate of post-war Europe depended on it?"

He looked at me intently. "He said that, did he?"

"He certainly did. From what I was able to extract, first from Mazzoli and then from the General, Countess Mazzoli was sent to Marrakesh to fetch some kind of collection of documents from von Rode. But what von Rode gave me for her was this old cup in its leather case."

He glanced about us. The gardens, shimmering in the warmth of the noonday sun, were wrapped in silence, broken only by distant sounds of shouted orders where the S.S. men were at their drill. Even the guns were stilled that morning. "Have you never heard of microfilm, Andy?" he said. "With microfilm, you can reduce a whole raft of documents down to the size of a postage stamp." He lowered his voice almost to a whisper. "It's only my guess, but I believe that the Hitler dossier is inside that leather case."

Fear lent my voice a sharp edge. "What Hitler dossier? What are you talking about, Hank?"

He looked over his shoulder once more. "All the Nazi leaders keep dossiers against each other," he said. "Fritsch was supposed to have had one on Hitler. Sheer dynamite, if what they say is true—that's why for years Hitler didn't dare to touch him. Anyone who could have got hold of it could have blown Adolf sky-high. That's why the Trefoil League were so desperately anxious to lay their hands on it. I'm only guessing, mind you, because this is the first I've heard of the Fritsch dossier being in the picture. Jake knew all about von Rode having it, I bet, but he didn't tell me."

"But, Hank, Fritsch has been dead for ages. If von Rode had this dossier, why didn't he come out with it before?"

He laughed. "I've asked myself that question while you were talking. I think the answer is, he didn't have to. The war was going too well—Hitler still had his uses. It was only when the old intuish went sour in the Russian campaign that the anti-Hitler boys on the German General Staff decided that if they couldn't prevent Hitler from losing the war, at least they were going to see that Germany didn't lose the peace. But by that time the Allies had landed in North Africa and von Rode had gone into hiding."

"I don't quite see what use the Hitler dossier will be to us. I mean, if we publish it, the German people will think it's just enemy propaganda, won't they? I should have thought it much smarter to have let von Halberstadt and his friends handle it."

He wagged his finger at me. "We're not playing with those babies, honey. There isn't going to be another German General Staff peace. Besides, who said anything about publishing that dossier?"

"Then what?"

He dropped his voice. "Political warfare, Andy. That's part of our job in S.L.O., if you know what S.L.O. is."

"Sure I know, because Snafu told me. But I didn't realise that you were in it, too."

"I've been with them for the past eighteen months, on loan from G2."

"I don't believe I'm quite clear as to just what political warfare is."

"The idea of it is to soften up the enemy's resistance. To find cracks in his front, like this Trefoil plot, for instance, and open them wider. That Hitler dossier is right up our street. No need to publish anything; just see that selected extracts are shown to the right people, both in Germany and outside. That dossier is supposed to contain the complete file of Hitler's dealings with the German industrialists who financed him, his correspondence with Mussolini, documents establishing his responsibility for the famous Party purge, details of his private fortune and where it's tucked away

abroad—gosh, in the Balkans alone it would be worth ten divisions of troops to us."

I sighed. "When I think I had that darn cup in my possession for hours and never had the sense to lock it away in the hotel safe..."

He smiled at me affectionately. "Honey, how were you to know?"

"Well, Ziemer will arrive with it any moment now. What are we going to do about it?"

He continued to smile at me. "As far as you're concerned—nothing!"

I gazed at him in indignation. "We aren't going to sit back and let Grundt hand Hitler that leather case, now that we know what it contains?"

He shook his head, still smiling. "I didn't say that, Andy."

"Would it be useful if I managed to find out what Grundt and Ziemer say to one another when Ziemer arrives?"

He laughed. "You bet. But how? You don't kid yourself Grundt is going to let you in on his talk with Ziemer, do you? Once that leather case is in his hands, he'll forget your very existence."

I told him then of the recording-room upstairs at the villa and showed him the key. "I was wondering if, when Ziemer arrives and goes in to Grundt," I said, "I couldn't manage to listen in."

He shook his head firmly. "Much too dangerous. If those S.S. gorillas caught you at it, you'd simply disappear. They couldn't afford to let you live. And I'll tell you why. If I know anything of the way the Nazis operate, neither von Halberstadt nor Grundt put in those mikes; it was the Gestapo. In every German unit of any importance there's a Gestapo man tucked away. Mülder, as von Halberstadt himself admitted to me, was a Gestapo man and, of course, all of these S.S. boys at the villa, though nominally under Grundt, take their orders from Himmler."

"You mean, Grundt doesn't know about that mike planted in his room?"

"You'd think he would, since every important official in Nazi Germany is subjected to this sort of espionage. Maybe he knows and doesn't give a damn—he's that kind of a guy." He slid his arm about my shoulders again. "No, Andy darling," he told me, "all you have to do is to sit around and wait as patiently as you can for me to get you out of here. The devil of it is that I must hare back to Rome now. I've a good enough cover, but I realise that I'm pretty vulnerable, really—I have to be darn careful not to arouse suspicion. I was due back yesterday afternoon, but I phoned through that I was sick and went to the hotel at San Marcello for the night, just to be near you." He wagged his head forlornly. "You've no idea what I felt like when I ran into you yesterday in the hands of those brutes, looking so wan and miserable, so unlike your real self. You got my messages through the dress shop, did you?" He laughed. "The title of that book caught my eye while I was waiting in the library."

"I'll say I did. Hank, however did you swing it?"

He laughed. "It's amazing what you can do in this country with a cake of soap and a quarter of a pound of coffee." He pushed up his sleeve to see his watch. "Grundt will be waiting—I'll have to leave you."

I could not repress a sigh. "Must you really go back to Rome, Hank?"

He clamped his hand down on mine. "I've a job of work to do, Andy—this anti-Hitler movement, its roots are right here, among the German General Staff in Italy. Von Halberstadt's arrest will properly put the cat among the pigeons and I must be on the spot."

"But aren't you running a terrible risk?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "I've a reasonably good cover, representing a Swedish metal concern—a Swedish

cousin of mine, who's the head of the firm, fixed it for me. I speak Swedish, you know, and they all take me for a Swedish business man. The idea was that I should have a cover that would bring me in touch with the German-Italian Metal Control, because von Halberstadt is a member of it. I managed to sell him on the idea that I could probably bring certain influential business people in Sweden round to his idea of getting rid of Hitler and fixing up an arranged peace. I'm only just back from a trip to Stockholm, which is why I couldn't come to Rabat as I promised. Actually, the General was so impressed with my story that he got my German visa for me."

He consulted his watch again. The thought that we were to part so soon gave me a desperate feeling. "Be careful of Grundt, Hank!" I pleaded.

He chuckled. "Honeychile, he eats from ma han!"

"He knows you're a friend of the General's, doesn't he?" I persisted.

"Sure; but I think I've convinced him that our friendship was purely for business reasons. You know, Andy, for some reason or other, the old bozo seems to have taken quite a shine to me."

"That's just when he's at his most dangerous, my dear. If you'd seen him playing with that poor Dino..."

He jumped as though he had been shot. "Dino's not here still, for the love of Pete?" he exclaimed in sudden alarm. "Mafalda told me, when I telephoned last night, that he'd gone to Rome. That's why I thought it safe to come here this morning. I'd had one narrow squeak already when I bumped into him in the hall yesterday, but I was able to turn my back on him before he could recognise me...."

I realised that I hadn't told Hank about Dino. "Dino's dead, Hank," I said, and told him then. There was a good, tough, Svensk strain under his placid exterior: he was shocked but not scared. "Poor devil!" he murmured.

"Did Dino know about this mission of yours, Hank?" I asked him.

He shook his head.

"Not on your life. He thought I was with our Intelligence, up at the front." He glanced at his watch again, then held out his hand to me. "You'll see me very soon again, Andy, my love," he said rather huskily.

I laid my hand in his. The tears came into my eyes. "For God's sake, Hank," I implored him, "don't trust that man. That poor forsaken Mina at el Kintafi's warned me. She said he would stop at nothing. And she was right. We know what happened to Dino Mazzoli. Don't do anything foolhardy, Hank! Promise me!"

But I might as well have been talking to a stone for all the impression I made on him. His little grim laugh told me as much as, wrapping his big hand around mine, he said, "Don't worry, sweetheart! It's going to take brains, not brawn, to pull off the two jobs before us—to get you out of here and to intercept the General's cup before it goes to the Führer's headquarters. How are you off for funds?"

I told him I had francs and dollars, but no Italian money, on which, after a precautionary glance over his shoulder, he peeled off a note from a wad he drew from his wallet and tucked it into my bag. "There's a thousand lire, just in case," he said. "And wait!" He scrawled a line on a scrap of paper and slipped it in with the note. "I've given you the address of a café in Rome where you can get in touch with me. Just ask the padrone for 'Enrico'—'Enrico,' Italian for 'Henry,' will you remember?—and he'll do the rest. Just in case of any slip-up."

A dry sob tore at my throat. "Oh, Hank," I cried, "I can't bear to hear you talk like that. If anything happens to you, what's to become of me?"

"Look, Andy," he answered gently, "there's one thing to remember about Jake—he likes to have two strings to his bow. If I should fail, you can take it from me that somebody else, already on the job, would take over. But I'm not going to fail. I believe I can handle Grundt. He doesn't know it yet, but he's going to ask me to stay right here at the villa."

"But you said you were going to Rome?"

"Sure, but I'll be back tonight. I aim to be around when Ziemer arrives. This thing wants thinking out, because the villa is surrounded by guards. The problem is to get you out of the house. Rome is only half an hour away by car, and once there, we'll see about smuggling you down to Naples. It's risky, but it can be done; I've made two trips to Naples myself."

"You make it sound so easy, but I'm scared, I tell you, scared for you. You don't know what this man Grundt is like."

He laughed. "But I do very well. I also know that I have a lot of valuable information about the Trefoil League which he'd give his eye-teeth to possess. So Kopf hoch, Andy! We'll have you out of this tonight or tomorrow—it depends when Ziemer arrives. Did you hear the guns yesterday morning?"

I nodded forlornly. "I did. And they thrilled me!"

"The boys are still quite a piece on the other side of Rome—we're about fifteen miles north-east of the city here; you can only hear the guns when the wind blows from the south. We shall have Rome sooner or later, you know, and if the worst comes to the worst, we shall just have to hide you away until our chaps arrive." He had suddenly gone rather pink. "You know, Andy," he declared, "I could break Jake Maxted's head for dragging you into this. It's a dirty business and you don't belong."

"War's a dirty business, Hank, but Jake didn't drag me in particularly. Nick Leigh says that everybody's in this war, one way or another, and he's right. I could have backed out of it if I'd wanted, but yesterday when I heard those guns I was glad I didn't. I'm a wretched little coward, really, but I couldn't help feeling—well, proud of being in this thing with people like Jake and Snafu and Nick. And that goes for you, Hank, now that I know you're in it, too."

"Baloney!" he said, flushing still more. "It's all part of our job. But it's not yours. You belong on the home front, where you can sing your songs to the folks and keep the wheels turning. Because, after all," he added rather shyly, "Uncle Sam has masses of F.B.I. men and secret agents, but only one Andrea Hallam and her guitar."

It was nonsense, of course, but I liked to hear it. Dear Hank! He could say such sweet things. And what a staunch friend he was! I knew that he wanted to be off to keep his appointment with Grundt and that in a minute we must say goodbye—to meet again, God knows how or where, because, for all Hank's confidence, I felt a stab of fear every time I thought of Grundt. Hank realised it, I think, and deliberately lingered there to help me over the moment of parting, his large, freckled hand clasping mine. There were times in our friendship when I could even contemplate settling down at Minneapolis as Mrs. Henry Lundgren with a raft of Swedish relations, and this was one of them, so grateful did I feel to him for that brief spell of peace among the rambler roses and the chatter of the birds.

Suddenly he broke the silence that had fallen between us. Letting go my hand, which was covered, anyway, by my jacket, he launched without warning into German. At the same time his manner changed; his voice became prosy and pompous. "The gracious Fräulein is wrong," he declared. "The real issue of this war is between Germany and the Soviet. Should Germany go down, the only victor will be Comrade Stalin."

My first surprise passed at once as I, too, now heard that dragging footstep on the path behind the arbour where we sat. But Hank paid no attention. I lost the thread of what he was saying, telling myself only that I must not turn round. The limping step stopped. I forced myself not to look up. Hank droned on, then Grundt's rasping voice struck in. "Do I disturb you?"

Hank jumped to his feet, swung about. "Herr Doktor!"

Leaning on his stick, Grundt peered at us through a tangle of roses. "I am happy to see that you found a companion to pass the time with while waiting," he remarked to Hank, smiling enigmatically from one to the other of us. "You must have found many subjects in common with the young lady, lieber Herr, since they tell me you passed the sentries below a good hour ago."

"Gott," said Hank casually, "they told me you were engaged. Meeting this young woman in the gardens, I took the

opportunity of correcting some of the errors she shares with her fellow-countrymen."

Clubfoot chuckled and lurched forward to where we stood in front of the bench. "To err is human," he observed, "to forgive divine. Much is to be forgiven to such hair and eyes, eh, Herr Blom?" And he gave me a friendly pat with his stick.

I was fascinated to see the smooth way in which Hank slid into his rôle of prosperous Continental business man. And his reply revealed how ably he had fathomed the cripple's peculiar sense of humour. "It's not for a neutral like myself to enquire what an American is doing here, within the German lines, in war-time," he said, "but at least I must congratulate you upon your excellent taste in enemies."

Grundt laughed uproariously. "Excellent!" he trumpeted. "But you flatter my age as well as my taste, lieber Freund! You must let me say, however, that when I was as young as you still are I should have found something better than politics to discuss with a pretty girl in an arbour."

Hank smiled through the gold spectacles with which he had replaced his sun-glasses. "I cannot allow one like yourself, so obviously in the prime of life, to draw this distinction between our ages," he remarked. "The Herr Doktor, must give me credit for not wishing to trespass upon his preserves. Otherwise"—and he leered engagingly at me—"I might have found a topic more agreeable to discuss with the American miss."

Clubfoot chuckled. "The young lady seems to have made an impression upon you, geehrter Herr. And why not? She has brains as well as beauty. And imagination!" He swung to me. "Nicht wahr, liebes Fräulein?" He patted Hank on the shoulder. "I'll tell you what I'll do. Now that you're here, I shall keep you for lunch and the little American shall lunch with us. No, positively," he said, raising a hairy hand to quell the objection which Hank was evidently going to make, "I take no refusal. I brought back with me from Rome a superb prosciutto, a magnificent ham which the good Mafalda is even now in the act of baking, to be served with a red wine sauce from a private recipe of my own. In half an hour, Fräulein," he threw me over his shoulder as he slipped his arm in Hank's. "Meanwhile," he said to Hank, "let us stroll a little in this pleasant sunshine which warms my old bones so agreeably. For it appears to me that we have certain matters to discuss, you and I."

Arm-in-arm they brushed past me. Hank did not so much as look in my direction, his head inclined to hear what Grundt, hobbling along at his side, was saying. I knew that he could not do anything else, but it made me realise acutely the barrier that the part he was playing reared between us. I wished I could feel as sure as Hank seemed to be that Grundt accepted him at face value. But, conscious as I was of the latent menace which the cripple radiated with every word he spoke, I felt sick with fear.

Chapter XXII

There were just the three of us at lunch. I had not been in the charming dining-room before, such a pretty room, small and intimate, with a lovely Venetian mirror and glass pictures of scenes from the Italian comedy covering one wall. There was quite a gala air about the meal—a lace tablecloth, flowers in a crystal centre-piece. Mafalda waited on us. She had certainly done the Signor Dottore proud. We had hors d'oeuvre to begin with—anchovies and sardines and olives and artichokes in oil—followed by an enormous dish of spaghetti, and then the pièce de résistance, the ham. To drink we had a couple of cobwebby bottles of Rhine wine which Grundt brought to the table and opened himself, rolling his eyes and smacking his lips as he poured a little of the wine into a glass to sample it. "Steinberger Cabinet 1923," he announced and sniffed the glass almost tenderly. "Goering sent me a case. Our fat Reichsmarschall knows wine, verdammt, and the man who knows wine, knows how to live. Nicht wahr, Herr Blom?"

Hank, his napkin tucked into his collar, beamed through his spectacles.

"Who loves not women, wine and song,

Remains a fool his whole life long,"

he quoted in German.

Our host chortled. "Well roared, my Swedish lion! No matter that my fairy godmother forgot to tuck into my cradle those gifts that make a great lover or a great singer, in compensation she endowed me with a respect for the juice of the grape that has carried me over many a long rough road. Drink, Kinder!" he bade us jovially, as he filled our glasses. "You'll not find such another drop of Rhine wine from the Brenner to the toe of Italy."

Grundt placed Hank on his right and me on his other side, facing Hank. As we took our places I found myself reflecting on the irony of it all. Here was I, an enemy subject, and highly suspect at that, and Hank, an American Secret Service man with his very life hanging by a hair, the guests of Hitler's own espionage head, who, at the drop of a hat, could send the pair of us to our deaths. Yet up to the moment of Rollo's unexpected interruption we might have been three friends lunching together at the Waldorf-Astoria, so unruffled was the atmosphere, such an attentive and, indeed, light-hearted host did Clubfoot prove himself to be. So complete was the self-assurance of this strange individual that, leaving Hank out of it, it seemed to break down the invisible barriers of war separating at any rate me, as an avowed American, from him, a German, and as the meal proceeded I found the fears with which I had sat down to it imperceptibly evaporating.

It was in Hank's rôle as a Swede to appear as a heavy eater. But our host eclipsed him. With his napkin round his neck and his elbows on the table he fairly gorged himself with food. Mafalda had to bring him another smoking mound of spaghetti, which he demolished singlehanded, and if he had one helping of the ham, which he carved himself, he must have had four. Under the influence of food and drink he seemed to expand. He talked incessantly, his ogre face bowed over his plate, sauce trickling brownly down his chin, pausing only to shovel food into his mouth or to take draughts of wine from his glass. He spoke with the utmost frankness of the war, not of the actual military operations, but of the problems which the peace would bring. Like most Germans, I imagine, he had apparently discarded all hope of a German victory. His view was that, in the light of the tremendous forces employed on either side, a stalemate was inevitable—he spoke of "an irresistible force faced by an immovable mass."

"Adolf Hitler," he declared—and I noticed that, in talking to us, with no other German present, he did not deign to give him any title—"has one idea, for which he merits a place in history. No matter that it is momentarily lost to view, not only under pressure of military events, but also because among the jackasses who are his so-called advisers there's not one capable of grasping its staggering vision—I am speaking of the New European Order. Only a European, and especially a European like Hitler, with his roots in that welter of races overlaying the very heart of the European continent and formerly called Austria, could have conceived this idea. Only a European can carry it out—either Hitler himself, unless it might be"—he paused to look at us with a strangely challenging air—"unless it might be that, in the changes wars bring, he should be swept away, or, in that event, whoever should come after him."

Sopping up the sauce on his plate with a large piece of bread, he went on eagerly: "The spadework has been done. The German Army, carrying its victories to the uttermost ends of Europe proper, has smashed to atoms the last vestiges of a civilisation that began to crumble at Waterloo. Like its burnt and blackened cities—Warsaw, Rotterdam, Coventry, Hamburg, Berlin—among whose ruins you stood last week, Herr Blom, Europe must be rebuilt. But it must be rebuilt, not as a ganglion of warring States, but an entity, the final realisation of that old German dream that never found complete fulfilment, the Holy Roman Empire. And which, among the four great Powers at war, is the only one, historically and practically, fitted to be the architect of this tremendous undertaking but the rightful heir of that Empire, the Third German Reich?" And he stuffed his piece of bread into his mouth with a flourish.

"England," he continued with his mouth full—"England? Bah! The English never were and never will be Europeans—for example, as we or the French are. Your Englishman is the original isolationist, in the American meaning of the word. For him, as that amusing rascal, Mussolini, put it, 'the niggers begin at Calais,' and in any case, the British Empire, already in complete disintegration, can look forward only to the United States becoming its heir. As for your esteemed Republic, Miss Hallam, it has already squeezed Europe dry—so much was clear from the moment your Government restricted immigration. Besides, America now turns her face to wider horizons—Latin America and, if your people have the tenacity to settle the hash of our little yellow Allies, the Far East. She hasn't the experience or the wish or, in the post-war period, will she have the leisure to bother with the reorganisation of Continental Europe." He chuckled.

"Europe for the Europeans' seems to me to be as good a slogan as 'The Americas for the Americans' or 'Asia for the Asiatics,'" he remarked, and proceeded to carve himself another slice of ham.

I looked at Hank, wondering what he made of this harangue, especially after so recently seeing for himself what some of disintegrating Britain's young men had done to Berlin. But he was silent, his air imperturbably stolid, listening to Grundt with polite interest and at the same time enjoying his lunch.

"You, lieber Herr," Clubfoot resumed, falling to again, and addressing Hank, "with the fear of the Bear planted in your bones, like all good Swedes, are doubtless thinking about Russia. But Russia has no place in Europe. It may sound like heresy, and I should not want to be quoted, but, between you and me, Russia wants no place in Europe, so long as Europe leaves her alone to work out her own salvation." He pointed at him with his fork. "Mark my words, lieber Freund—what is going to keep the Bolsheviks out of Europe will not be any coalition of the Powers, but the natural instincts of the Russian people. The Russians are not a Western people. They're an Oriental people and they think and feel as Orientals. The two great dictators of the United Nations, Roosevelt and Churchill, had to travel half-way round the globe to draw Tovarish Stalin into their counsels. But has Stalin visited the White House? Has he been to London? He has not, and I'll tell you why. He doesn't mind Molotoff or Litvinoff, mere party hirelings, hobnobbing with the West; but Stalin, dictator though he is, is a Russian first, and he has no intention of losing face with his fellow-citizens and at the same time giving a false angle to the whole of Russian policy by kowtowing to the West. No, verflucht! The so-called Stalin Imperialism is nothing but a bogy to frighten Washington and London with, to keep them up to scratch in the war, and once peace comes, it will go the way of Peter the Great's delusion that he could westernise Russia. Let Stalin have his military frontiers—Gott! who should bother about a lot of Poles and Finns and Balts, anyway?—and you'll see, when the shooting's over, he'll retire behind his stockade and pull up the ladder and resume his interrupted work of making the new Russia. No, Kinder," he concluded, reaching for the sauce, "Europe for the Europeans, the Americas for the Americans, and Asia for the Asiatics—and that includes Russia. Under this device, with 'German diligence, German courage,' as we sing in our national hymn, to guide her, Europe will arise from the ashes. In hoc signo vinces!"

He lifted the bottle beside his plate. "Come," he said, "I'll give you a toast!" And he filled first my glass, then Hank's, and lastly his own. He raised his glass. "To the New Europe!" he cried, his eyes aflame.

My glance sought Hank. He was looking past me, and turning my head, I perceived Rollo, trim and tense, his face a disciplined mask, in the doorway. Glass in hand, Grundt looked round. Seeing Rollo, he frowned. "I do not like to be disturbed at table, my friend," he said.

The S.S. man threw up his chin. "The Herr Doktor will excuse me. An Italian, a civilian, who says he comes from Naples, is asking for General von Halberstadt. He's an official of the Ministry of the Interior."

Clubfoot's frown melted. "Ei, ei, from Naples, eh? And one of his Excellency's men? This sounds interesting. Bring him in, my good Rollo!"

Rollo saluted and was gone. Hank stood up. "No doubt the Herr Doktor would prefer to be alone. And I must really be on my way back to Rome."

A hairy hand waved him back to his chair. "Don't be in such a hurry, my friend. Mafalda has promised us a zabaglione—her masterpiece, she claims: I brought the marsala from Rome myself. Besides, would it not interest you to discover what contacts our clever friend von Halberstadt has in Occupied Italy?"

Hank was about to reply when the door opened, and with a shrug he resumed his seat. His face behind the gold spectacles was set, and, as he sat down, he groped for his napkin and wiped his mouth. I had a sudden instinct of danger. Rollo held back the door to usher in a man in a dark suit. I knew at a glance that sallow face, that hard eye. The name had gone from my mind, but Rollo supplied it. "Inspector Pesce!" he announced.

It was the Italian who had been at Dino Mazzoli's apartment that afternoon in Naples.

A telepathic sense, some kind of sympathetic wave from Hank to me, told me that Hank was unwilling to face this man. Though his features registered nothing, I was vividly aware, as though it was carried from him to me, of the tension

that gripped him. As I watched I saw him lift his napkin casually to his mouth and under cover of it explore his teeth with a match, so that the lower part of his face was concealed. Then I knew that my intuition was right.

The Inspector glanced about him with a suspicious air. "Eccellenza von Halberstadt?" he questioned.

"His Excellency is no longer here," was Grundt's reply. "I have replaced him. I am Dr. Grundt, of the German Geheimdienst. We are colleagues, I think, Inspector?" His manner was quite affable.

Pesce narrowed his eyes. "You know me?"

"You are of the Ovra, are you not?" The Ovra is the Fascist secret police, similar to the German Gestapo.

The Inspector nodded. Clubfoot extended a hand. "Your papers, please!"

Pesce produced a wallet. He was about to open it when it was whipped from his fingers. "You permit me?" said Grundt amiably.

There was a moment's silence while Clubfoot went through the contents of the wallet, the Inspector never taking his somewhat jaundiced eye off him. "I see that you have credentials from the British and American military authorities," Grundt remarked presently.

"My cover, signor. I was working with Captain Mazzoli."

"On the affair von Rode?"

"Si, signor!"

"And what brings you here now?"

He gave an uneasy shrug. "The military were after me. That was Mazzoli's doing with this crazy idea of his to abduct the American girl."

"How did you get out?"

"I was able to procure a launch and reach Civita Vecchia." And when Grundt remained silent, "If you will send for Captain Mazzoli..." he went on, and for the first time glanced round and saw me. "The American signorina will confirm what I say," he told Grundt. "She met me with Count Mazzoli." He turned back to me. "Is it not so, signorina?"

Then, to my cold dismay, his eye fell on Hank. "Dio mio," he exclaimed, "if it isn't Captain Lundgren, the friend of the American signorina!" he tittered. "Did you go along with Mazzoli as chaperon?" he demanded.

I was in a panic. But Hank was quite cool. Dropping his napkin he said casually, "How are you, Inspector?"

Grundt struck in irritably. "Why do you address the gentleman as Captain Lundgren, when his name's Blom?" he said to Pesce.

"For me," replied the Inspector with an expansive shrug, "he's Captain Lundgren, of the American Army Intelligence, a close friend, as it would seem, of the signorina, for it was by telling her that the American captain would be there that Mazzoli persuaded her to come to his apartment."

Hank laughed, easily. "Inspector Pesce is quite right. I had to go to Naples some weeks ago on a secret mission concerned with a shipment of precious metals on board one of the ships sunk in the harbour there. I passed myself off as an American officer, taking the Swedish name of Lundgren, as the ship in question came from Sweden and I expected to have to talk Swedish."

Pesce wagged his head. "Per bacco, it was a good disguise. It fooled the Intelligence people, for, if I remember rightly," he said, turning to Hank, "you even visited the Anglo-American Intelligence office."

Hank laughed again. "And stood the test. If I have to take a risk, I like to diminish it as much as possible. I flatter myself that in my rôle as an American captain I was reasonably foolproof. It is our Swedish way to be thorough in whatever we undertake."

Grundt, who had been following the conversation with a completely unrevealing countenance, nodded. "An excellent principle, lieber Freund. I take it that this very hazardous excursion of yours was made with the knowledge of our Intelligence people in Rome?"

"In general, yes," Hank answered promptly. "But they left the details to me."

"Quite, quite," said Clubfoot, dandling his head. "And so the little American Fräulein is an old friend of yours?" He beamed at me engagingly.

Hank did not blink an eyelid. "Only through her phonograph records, which have a large sale in Sweden. I wrote to tell her how much I admired her singing and sent her some records of our Swedish folk-songs. We exchanged a few letters, but alas! there was no more to it than that."

I held my breath. It was wonderful the way Hank kept his head, producing one fairy-tale after the other. If only his imagination held out! But Grundt scared me; his harsh voice was scaled down to such a fluty tone, his manner so silken. He bared his teeth now in a friendly smile. "What an agreeable surprise it must have been for you to meet her in the flesh this morning!" he remarked.

Remembering the act Hank had put on for Grundt's benefit in the gardens, I perceived the trap and trembled inwardly. But Hank was ready for any emergency. He gave a rueful laugh. "It might have been if I'd known who she was," he declared. "It wasn't until you mentioned her name to me later that I realised who I'd been talking to."

Clubfoot clicked with his tongue. "What a pity you didn't think of telling me you knew the young lady! We might have got her to sing for you before lunch."

"I hope that is only a pleasure postponed," said Hank, simpering at me. He glanced at his watch with slow deliberation, then, with a muttered, "Ach, du lieber Gott!" jumped to his feet. "If the Herr Doktor will excuse me, I fear I must forgo the zabaglione and get back to Rome. I had no idea it was so late."

I waited breathlessly. Would Grundt let him go? I still couldn't believe that Hank could get away with a bluff as brazen as this. Clubfoot hauled himself out of his chair. "But of course, lieber Herr. The car is ordered," he said, and I breathed again. They shook hands, then Hank crossed to me. "Auf wiedersehen, Miss Hallam," he said. "And the next time we meet I trust you will sing for me."

His stiff little bow, his faintly ogling smile, were perfectly in character. I steeled myself to follow his example, though my heart sank. Glad as I was to see him out of Clubfoot's clutches, I hated to part from him like this. "You'll have to provide the guitar," I laughed. "Auf wiedersehen, Herr Blom."

"With or without guitar," he assured me stolidly, "the pleasure would be the same."

"Addio, Inspettore!" He shook hands gravely with Pesce and went to the door, which Rollo opened for him. Then Grundt called him back. "One moment, lieber Freund," he cooed in his most velvety tone.

There was a reluctance in the way Hank turned that bespoke his misgiving. "It has just occurred to me," said Clubfoot, "that our people in Rome will be much interested in the Inspector's report on conditions in Naples, especially"—and his eyes shifted to Pesce with a speculative gleam—"as he seems to have been right on the inside of the Allied information services. Unfortunately, I cannot spare the time for a chat with him as I'm expecting an important visitor. Would you, therefore, permit him to travel to Rome with you?"

"But, of course, Herr Doktor," Hank replied. Pesce said nothing, but his sallow face seemed to go a shade yellower.

"I shall ask you to take the Inspector to Colonel Leinitz at our Intelligence Headquarters and explain the

circumstances to him," Grundt went on. "I'll telephone him that you're coming. And Rollo shall go with you to show you the way." He called, "Rollo!"

The S.S. man sprang forward. "Herr Doktor?"

"You will escort these gentlemen to Colonel Leinitz in Rome. And wait! Take two of your men with you!" He turned to Hank. "The roads are none too sure in these troubled times," he explained glibly. "I feel that I'm responsible for seeing that you and the Inspector are safely delivered at Colonel Leinitz's office." Dropping into Italian, he said to Pesce, "Go with Herr Blom, Inspector. I can assure you that our Intelligence people will be more than interested in your story." With hand raised in salute, he dismissed them. "Gute Reise, meine Herren!"

I caught Hank's eye for a fleeting moment as he turned to go. His glance told me plainly that the game was up. I had no idea who Colonel Leinitz might be, but it was not hard to guess that at the end of their journey the Gestapo would be waiting. Dazed with the wreck of my hopes, I watched them file out behind Rollo.

The door closed and I was alone with Grundt. Without speaking, he lowered his vast body into his chair and, clawing for his cigar-case, found a cigar. He smiled no more as he sat hunched over the littered luncheon table, chewing on his unlit cigar and glowering in front of him. The change in his appearance shocked me. Under their shaggy eyebrows his eyes had a yellow glint and his suety face was mottled with patches of red.

I was paralysed with fright. I did not know what to do—whether to sit down again or to go. Since he seemed to have forgotten all about me I feared that either action would draw his attention to me. Then suddenly he seemed to be aware of my presence. He did not move his head to look at me where I stood between table and door, but flung me a bloodshot glance out of the corner of his eye from under his tangled eyebrows. He growled at me in a choking voice, "So you'd bring your spies in here, would you?" He shook his head like a bull. "But wait," he roared. "I'll deal with you, you jade, and your clever Herr Blom as well. But first we'll see what Ziemer has to tell me about you."

At that moment the door behind his chair was edged open by Mafalda's tray—it was the zabaglione in three tall glasses. "Eccolo, Signor Dottore," she crooned, "a zabaglione such as, I'm certain, you've never tasted."

Grundt ignored her. Shooting out a hairy finger at the door, he bellowed at me, "Out of my sight! Heraus!"

Mafalda, who was in the act of placing one of her glasses of zabaglione in front of him, hesitated in bewilderment. The next moment the glass and with it the tray was dashed from her hands with a sweep of Grundt's enormous arm. Above Mafalda's shrill "Madonna mia!" and the clang of the falling tray, I heard a series of reports outside.

Chapter XXIII

They were not very near—one shot followed by a regular burst in quick succession; then silence. With a roar Grundt sprang up, knocking over his chair, and, with the aid of his stick, went scrambling for the door, leaving Mafalda clucking like a frightened hen as she groped among the debris of her tray. I ran out behind Grundt and came upon him at the front door shouting at the sentry; at the same time from all sides S.S. men appeared. One cried, "They came from the direction of the drive," and Grundt was about to rush out at the front when another said, "By the gardens to the main gate! It's quicker!" and, with Clubfoot hobbling behind, they all swung about and poured out of the house by the rear entrance. Standing in the little circular hall, I flattened myself against a pillar and let them stream by. My heart thumped madly; I hardly dared ask myself what those shots signified.

A moment later I heard the scream of brakes, the rasp of tyres on the gravel outside, and Rollo stormed in at the front door. His face was the colour of paper, his eyes were blue pinpoints. "Where's the Herr Doktor?" he snarled at me, and when, almost past speech, I could only point towards the gardens, he sprang to the telephone on the table by the door and, with shaking hand, dialled a number. "San Marcello?" I heard him snarl. "Give me the adjutant! It's urgent."

And then, on his next words, I found myself leaning back against my pillar, telling myself that I must keep a tight hold on myself. For Rollo was shouting into the telephone that a suspect had escaped, a tall, blond Swede in grey civilian clothes, name of Blom. All cars were to be stopped and searched, a platoon of troops was to be sent up to the Villa Rosalba forthwith, a special guard placed at the railway station.... Slamming the receiver back on its hook, he bolted out into the gardens. I breathed a little prayer for Hank. "Dear God," I whispered to myself, "let him get safe away!"

I lingered there until a vast bellowing voice that went ringing through the gardens warned me that Clubfoot was returning to the house. The little salon was empty and I slipped in there, leaving the door ajar and surveying the hall through the chink. Presently Grundt, his livid face shining with perspiration, his eyes murderous, clumped into the hall, Rollo, pallid and confused, with him.

"The Herr Doktor will allow me to insist that my orders were incomplete," the S.S. man was saying in a quavering tone, "otherwise I would have handcuffed him. As it was, when the car stopped for the main gate to open, he deflected the attention of Treubold, one of my men who sat with him and Pesce on the rear seat, by offering him a cigarette. As Treubold was helping himself from Blom's cigarette-case, this ruffian struck my comrade an extremely brutal blow on the chin, rendering him temporarily unconscious, and immediately leapt from the car and vanished into the woods."

"Then you'd better find him in the woods, Herr Rottenführer," was the answer through clenched teeth, "because if he's not in my hands within the next three hours, you'll find yourself headed for the Russian front, to learn that when I give an order I expect to be obeyed." And when Rollo would have burst forth into further explanations, "No more excuses, you dog!" he roared, his heavy cane raised threateningly. "And don't let me see your face again until he's under lock and key!" Pausing only to mop his streaming face with his large red handkerchief, he limped away to his office.

I waited until Rollo had stamped out into the gardens again and crept up to my room. With the door locked, stretched full length on the bed, my hands behind my head, I gave myself up to my thoughts. It was not easy to think clearly. The shots we had heard still reverberated in my ears. I would not face the possibility that Hank was dead. He was too resourceful, too full of life and pluck, to die. He deserved to have got away; it must have taken quick thinking and a tremendous amount of resolution to have made that dash for freedom. Sombre as my musings were, I found myself smiling at the thought of that flawless young Treubold finding himself at the receiving end of Hank's enormous fist. I could imagine the kick Hank must have got in knocking that smug youth cold.

Well, any idea of Hank coming back to rescue me was out now. True, the case would have been no different had he been delivered up to the tender mercies of Colonel Leinitz at Rome. But, though his cover as Herr Blom was exploded, it would be something to know that he was still at large. I felt sure he would find some means of communicating with Maxted at Naples. Meanwhile, I might as well look the position in the face. I should have to depend on my own ingenuity to get out of that house. I knew from Mafalda that twice a week she went to San Marcello to shop. One of von Halberstadt's orderlies used to drive her down, and I toyed with a crazy notion of disguising myself and taking her place, or maybe of finding a chance to conceal myself in the shopping car. Once clear of the villa I felt pretty confident of reaching Rome, even if I had to walk; and once in Rome, if only Hank had managed to get away, I should be able to get in touch with him through the address he had written down for me. I found my bag and got out the scrap of paper. 'Jockey Bar, via della Mantella,' I read. The address meant nothing to me—I had spent only a fortnight in Rome and that as a sightseer; but the name of the café suggested a pretty modest establishment on the lines of the little coffee-bars in Paris they call bistros.

I set a match to the scrap of paper and lay down again. The next thing I knew was waking with a start to find the hands of my watch pointing to a quarter to five—I had slept for nearly two hours. In a maze of uncertainty I dabbed on some powder and lipstick, dawdling over these operations because I was mortally afraid of what I might learn on facing them downstairs again. In particular, I dreaded to encounter Rollo. If he were his old, arrogant self, I knew I must prepare for the worst.

But when at length I descended, the house was as still as a church. There was not an S.S. man in sight, neither Rollo nor anyone else. As I stood on the bottom step of the staircase the murmur of voices reached me through the closed door of Grundt's room beside the stairs; at the same time I noticed a hat and a raincoat on one of the hall chairs, flanked by a small suitcase. At the sight of the hat I caught my breath. It was a green Tirolean hat with a gay feather tucked into the

band. I could guess who the Herr Doktor's visitor was, but to make sure I stooped and glanced at the label fastened to the handle of the suitcase.

It was inscribed 'A. Ziemer.'

I don't think it took me two seconds to make up my mind what to do. If Hank had had the courage to seize his moment, I could have the courage to seize mine, I told myself. The unusual hush reigning throughout the villa suggested that Rollo and his men were all outside, hunting the woods for Hank. How soon they would return I had no means of telling, of course, but what I did know was that such a chance would not come again.

I would have to act swiftly but with caution. I must explore a little. I went first to the garden entrance, but the instant I unlatched the door a voice called warningly, "Zuruck!" and a sentry barred the way. Hastily I stepped inside again and, greatly daring, took a rapid peek round over the ground floor, penetrating into the kitchen and, beyond it, into an old coach-house which had been turned into a mess-hall for the S.S. men and, beyond that, into a sort of barn fitted with tiers of bunks where they slept. Not a soul was about; even Mafalda was nowhere to be seen, the only sound in the villa that low rustle of voices from Grundt's room. Upstairs it was the same thing. The villa had only one story above the ground floor, and the three other rooms on my corridor were deserted, including the master's bedroom which I identified as Grundt's by the large 'A.G.' stamped on the suitcase standing yet unpacked by the door, and another room which, from the photos of nude ladies pinned up everywhere, I took to be Rollo's.

A moment later, with my heart pattering, I was letting myself into the recording-room at the end of the corridor.

I drew the door noiselessly to behind me, grabbed the earphones. At once Grundt's deep tones jarred on my ears. "Nevertheless," he said, "the envelope addressed to the Countess Mazzoli which contained it has been opened. How do you explain that, Herr Ziemer?"

"Don't ask me! Ask the girl!" Ziemer's voice was lighter, more, resonant; I remembered that he was a much younger man than Grundt. "That was the way I found it, hidden in her suitcase."

A pause, then Grundt said, "You are not inquisitive by nature, it would seem, my friend?"

"How does the Herr Doktor mean?" the reply came back.

I could almost see the great shoulders raised in a shrug. "You are not curious to know what my interest is in—na, in what you brought?"

"Not in the least. I was given a job to do and I did it. The rest does not concern me."

"You did not think it worth while to investigate a little—perhaps with a sharp knife?"

"If that is your suggestion, allow me to point out that the leather would certainly show traces."

"Such traces could be effaced. And I remark again that the outer envelope has been opened."

"By the girl, of course. You say she's here in the house. Well, send for her and she'll confirm what I say."

I stiffened to attention, prepared to snatch the earphones away and bolt back to my room. Breathlessly I waited for Clubfoot's reply. It was scarcely less alarming. "Do you know a certain Blom, who passes himself off as a Swede?" he asked unexpectedly.

"How was the name?" said Ziemer.

"Blom. I've reason to believe, however, that his real name is Lundgren, Captain Lundgren, and that he's an American Secret Service agent. He appears to be on intimate terms with the American girl."

"Never heard of him," said Ziemer. "But what should I know of her gentlemen friends? I only picked her up on the

bus. How is the little lady, by the way?"

"Her health is satisfactory—so far. But people who think they are cleverer than I rarely make old bones, lieber Freund"—a pause—"as I trust you will remember."

Even over the wire the menace in his voice struck a chill into me. I was tempted to pull the earphones off and seek refuge in my room. But the conversation fascinated me, and I listened on. Ziemer laughed off the threat. "The Herr Doktor may rely on me, at least, not to forget it," he answered. "But may I ask how this American captain comes into the picture?"

"He's a friend of von Halberstadt—they're connected with the Metal Control in Rome. As far as I can make out he was the link between the von Halberstadt crowd and the peace party in Sweden. But I think he's a Yankee spy."

Ziemer clicked with his tongue. "Um Gottes Willen, it looks bad for the little Andrea! Has she been in touch with the fellow?"

"She has. He was here today and talked with her: unfortunately at the time I was not in possession of the facts about him. It was Pesce, of the Italian Ovra, another of those rats von Halberstadt employed, who furnished me with the information about Lundgren. It seems he knew him in Naples."

"And where is this Captain What's-his-name now?"

A sort of growl travelled over the wire. "The triple ass of a jumped-up corporal who commands my guard let him escape as I was sending him up to Rome under escort," was the rasping rejoinder. "But he won't run far. All the roads are blocked and planes are reconnoitring the woods..." He broke off to shout stentorically, "Herein!"

Instinctively my hands flew to the earphones, for the next words I heard were spoken in a new voice, a clipped parade-ground tone, and I knew that Rollo or one of his men had entered the study. "Zu Befehl, Herr Doktor," I heard, "the Herr Rottenfuhrer took the Italian inspector on to Rome, according to orders. Deputy Rottenfuhrer Richer sends his compliments and requests permission to withdraw the search parties before darkness falls."

"And the man Blom?" came in the familiar snarl.

"Zu Befehl, Herr Doktor, unfortunately he has not yet been recaptured."

My heart leaped. Good for Hank! He had been gone a full three hours already—he might have slipped through the cordon after all. And night was coming on...

A roar from Clubfoot almost deafened me. "Himmelkreuz-sakrament!" he bellowed. "Is the sheep's-head out of his mind? Not a man is to come in until the prisoner has been found. Go back to Rieber and tell him so from me! Not a man, verdammt, if they have to search the woods all night! One moment before you go! Put this gentleman in the library to wait and bring the American girl to me!"

I listened no more, but, whipping off those headphones and pausing only to close the door as quietly as I could manage, fled back along the corridor to my room. As I reached it I heard voices and footsteps in the hall below and I had barely got the door shut when a heavy tread came creaking up the stairs.

Werner Treubold was the messenger. He did not look his Aryan best. His lower lip was puffed up and discoloured and there was a large piece of plaster on his dimpled chin where Hank's fist had connected with it. Brusquely, his eyes smouldering with spite, he rapped out Grundt's summons and waited for me to descend with him. With the premonition strong upon me that the crisis was at hand, I gritted my teeth and followed him downstairs.

It was already dusk. The room was full of shadows. Crouched over the desk at the end Clubfoot's ape-like silhouette was black against the angry red sky in the two tall windows at his back. The evening was warm and oppressive. Thunder growled in the hills and through the windows, half-open, their latches holding them apart, the evening fragrance of the gardens drifted in.

The first thing I saw was the General's cup. It stood in all its naked shabbiness fully extended on the desk and I perceived its battered case lying under one hairy hand. The taste of defeat was bitter in my mouth. The risks that Hank, that we all had taken, had been in vain. The dossier was going back to Hitler.

The door closed softly behind me as Werner withdrew. Grundt beckoned me closer and held up the cup for me to see. "You recognise it, Fräulein?"

I nodded. "But wait!" he said, and, stooping, groped on the floor. It was the telephone cord he was after. Winding it about his massive fist, he gave it a violent jerk and by sheer animal strength tore it from the wall. "So!" he grunted. "Now we may speak at our ease. Walls are notoriously indiscreet, especially when they have telephone lines running through them, and we are no longer alone in the house." He straightened up and fixed me with his eye. "So that is the cup you received from von Rode, is it?"

I nodded again. He showed me the blue envelope. "Who opened the envelope that contained it?"

"I did," I answered. "I was to take it to the Countess Mazzoli; but when I learned that she was dead, I naturally looked to see what the envelope contained."

"And when you found the cup in its leather case, you took it, like a good little ally, to your friend Captain Leigh, of the British Intelligence Services at Marrakesh—that was the way of it, wasn't it?" He watched my face eagerly.

I shook my head firmly. "No, it wasn't. For one thing there wasn't time. From the Sheikh Abdul's house I went to the hospital and heard there that the Countess Mazzoli was dead. It was then that I opened the Sheikh's package, but almost immediately after Ziemer called and took me to dine at el Kintafi's. I locked the cup away in my suitcase before I left, but when I returned to the hotel later in the evening, it had disappeared."

He nodded enigmatically. "So? And you ask me to believe that the cup was never in the hands of the Allied Services at Marrakesh?"

"Certainly, because it's the truth."

"And were you not working in co-operation with your friend Captain Lundgren, at Marrakesh?"

I took my courage in both hands. "Certainly not. I'd never set eyes on the man until I met him in the gardens here this morning. As he told you, we'd merely exchanged letters."

His thick fingers drummed on the desk. "A remarkable coincidence meeting him here, wasn't it? But let that pass. Who sent you to Marrakesh to pick up the Countess Mazzoli?"

"Nobody. I knew nothing about her until we met, purely by accident, at the hotel at Marrakesh. She was taken ill and I..."

He raised his hand. "Tush, tush, we don't want to go over all that again."

"If you don't believe me," I said, "ask Herr Ziemer—when he arrives," I added quickly as an afterthought. "He was at Rabat. He'd heard about the plane-crash I was in, because he told me so; he also knew that I spent a month in the hospital there. He will also tell you that I went to Marrakesh at short notice for the sole purpose of giving a concert. I don't believe he was at the concert himself, but he must have heard about it, because everybody else in Marrakesh seems to have been there."

He was balancing the leather case in his hand while I spoke. "Ziemer has already arrived," he now informed me. "I have questioned him and you will be interested to know that your story substantially agrees with his. Therefore..." His voice trailed away as, with an abstracted air, he collapsed the cup and fitted it into its case, which he stowed away in his pocket. Only then, glancing up, did he appear to notice that I was standing. "But sit down, Fräulein, sit down!" he bade me.

I found a chair. So far the interview had gone off better than I had dared hope. Maybe, Hank was right when he had predicted that, once he had the cup in his possession, Grundt would not bother further about me. For a full minute he contemplated me in a forbidding silence, his cropped head advanced, his hands joined before him. Beyond the open windows the lightning played and a long roll of thunder reverberated. The crimson had faded from the sky and black clouds bulked menacingly. The room was growing darker, but Grundt did not seem to notice it. At last he said, "You put me in mind of the Captain in a story about our great Prussian king, Frederick the Great, Fräulein. Riding through the camp one day, he was handed a petition by a certain Prussian Captain, a poor old fellow, grey-haired and scarred, in a threadbare uniform. The petition set forth that the Captain had served with distinction in all the King's campaigns without receiving the slightest recognition. The King made enquiries and, finding that the Captain's statements were true, sent him a high decoration by one of his aides. Some time later, riding through the camp again, he caught sight of the grizzled old Captain and noticed that he was not wearing his cross. On returning to his quarters Frederick summoned the aide, who explained that he had been unable to carry out his Majesty's command because the Captain was never to be found—he was always either on duty in the front line, on the sick-list, or absent on furlough. 'Let him go!' said Frederick. 'The fellow has no luck!'" His features broke into a grim smile. "That's the trouble with you, my little Hallam. You have no luck!"

This was the mood of his I feared most, when he spoke in riddles, with that crafty smile of his. I waited tensely, wondering what his anecdote was leading up to. "It was a bad day for you when you agreed to act as that old harpy's messenger," he proceeded. "You see, you came into possession of information which must not be shared with anyone, least of all by a citizen of a nation at war with the Reich. There are war-time secrets so vital that positively no risks can be run where their security is at stake; and this is one of them. Evidently I could swear you to secrecy—but I am not so foolish as to rely on that; or I could shut you up for the duration of the war. But neither of these steps would afford the absolute safeguards that are required. And therefore..."

Then I saw the automatic in his hand and sprang to my feet. At the same moment a blinding flash of lightning lit up the whole room, followed instantly by a clap of thunder immediately overhead so violent that I thought a thunderbolt had fallen on the house. It must have prevented me from hearing the door open, for the next thing I was aware of was an angry growl from Grundt. He was glaring at the door. "Not now, Ziemer," he boomed, raising his voice above the sudden deluge of rain that drummed on the roof and windows. "Can't you see that I'm engaged, verdammt?"

I whipped round. It wasn't Ziemer who stood in the doorway. It was Nick.

Hank was right. Jake Maxted did have two strings to his bow.

Chapter XXIV

That green hat I had seen in the hall should have told me something, because, as I suddenly remembered Nick mentioning, Ziemer had left his hat behind him at the Sheikh Abdul's. This detail sprang into my mind quite irrelevantly, as such little things do in moments of crisis, as I stood and stared at this unbelievable apparition. Grundt had switched on the desk-lamp and in the reflected light of its green shade I gazed, with lips parted and breath coming rather fast, at that figure in the doorway, telling myself that day-dreams just didn't come true that way.

Except that he had furnished himself with a pair of those outsize tortoise-shell glasses such as I had seen Ziemer wearing, he had disdained any disguise. But then with his dark hair and tanned face he was not especially British-looking at any time. He had not shaved for several days and his stubbly chin and badly cut store suit gave him an insignificant, not to say run-down appearance. But there was not the faintest resemblance, either in face or build, between him and Ziemer, and I guessed that the office back in Naples must have somehow discovered that *Grundt didn't know Ziemer by sight*. Nevertheless, I couldn't see Grundt accepting him on credit. He would surely have demanded proofs of identity. But maybe the cup in itself was proof enough; besides, if Nick had the cup, he could equally well have Ziemer's papers, which could easily be fixed with a change of photographs. But what had happened to Ziemer? And what—the question burst like a flare in my mind—what had possessed Nick to hand over the cup?

These thoughts whirled into my mind as, against the beating of the rain, Nick spoke from the door. He saw me, of course, but he did not appear even to look at me. "Excuse me, Herr Doktor," he said airily to Grundt, "but if you have no objection, I propose to return to Rome."

His German was flawless. He spoke with a touch of the nasal intonation of Rollo and his fellows, which probably explained why I hadn't recognised his voice upstairs. I had expected Grundt to lower his gun, but he had merely swung it round so as to cover Nick. "You will go to Rome when I give the word, and not before," he growled back. "And now get out!"

But Nick stood his ground. With a jaunty air, his hands thrust into his jacket pockets, he advanced into the room. "But I've done my job. Why should I stay?" he protested. "And, Herr Doktor," he went on in a complaining note, "do you have to point that gun at me? It makes me nervous."

I saw Grundt's fingers flex themselves tighter around his pistol. He kept it levelled at Nick. "Take your hands out of your pockets when you speak to me, Herr," he thundered.

Nick was quite unperturbed. "Oh, pardon me!" he said and took his hands away.

"So!" Clubfoot rumbled. "And now be off! When I want you I'll send for you."

Nick, however, still lingered. "If you'd only give me some idea as to when I could get away..." he suggested casually.

Clubfoot's eyes blazed; I could see that another outburst was at hand. But at that moment the heavy hangings at the window behind him, to the right of his chair, bellowed flapping into the room.

For a fraction of a second Grundt shifted his gaze from Nick, glancing over his shoulder at the curtain, and in the same instant I saw Nick's hand flash to his pocket. But Grundt was the quicker. He caught sight of the gesture at the same time as I did: there was murder in his eyes as he cocked up his gun. "Put your hands up, you dog, and keep them up," he shouted; and as Nick, darting for the first time a glance at me, slowly complied, Grundt went on in a strange, stifled voice, "You've done your job, ach ja, but it's the last job you'll do. You know too much, my friend, you and your little American miss. You'd go to Rome!" He cackled his discordant laugh. "Herrgott, do you take me for a fool? Do you imagine I'd share the weapon you've placed in my hands with you two? Rome, is it? You're going on a longer journey than a little trip to Rome, friend Ziemer, and you're taking the girl with..."

He did not finish the sentence. I never saw the gaunt, dripping figure that stepped out from behind the curtain until it was behind Grundt's chair with arm upraised to strike. The blow descended with sickening force and Grundt collapsed face forward over the desk.

It was Hank. Smears of mud and leaves, he streamed water, and one hand, his left, dripped blood through a grimy handkerchief bound about it. In his right hand he grasped what looked like a broken rail.

"Hank!" Nick was there, on the other side of the desk. He stooped and detached the gun, which Grundt still grasped, from his relaxed fingers. The huge German groaned stertorously, but did not move. "Perfect timing," said Nick. "Out like a light!"

"That car of yours, out front, Nick," said Hank rapidly. "We'll take it."

"Steady, old boy," Nick replied. "There's a sentry to deal with."

"I attended to him," said Hank. "We'll have to watch out for the one on the garden side. Come on!"

"But the main gate at the end of the avenue—they keep it shut; and there's a double post..."

"We'll crash it. And we'll take a chance on the sentries—everybody will be under cover in this downpour. Let's go!" He slipped his arm into mine. "What do you know, honey? I told you I'd be back for you."

"Hank," I cried, "your hand? You're bleeding. Let me have a look at it!"

"No time now. It's a nice clean wound—rifle bullet, as I made my getaway." He propelled me gently towards the door.

At the door I looked back. Grundt hadn't stirred. "You killed him, Hank," I said.

Hank laughed. "No such luck! Look, you can see his bellows going from here."

Nick was peering into the corridor. "It's all quiet," he said, putting his head round the door. "Let's get out of here before anyone comes!"

"Aren't you going to take the cup?" I asked. "It's in Grundt's pocket."

Nick chuckled. "Jake's boys did a lovely job. It's fake, darling." He caught my arm. "Chin up now! This is where we loop the loop!"

That sentry was a horrible sight. He looked like a wax figure that someone had thrown out of a window, sprawled on the gravel with his head twisted at an extraordinary angle. "Nice work," Nick commented. "Commando stuff, eh, Hank?"

The rain was coming down in a single sheet. We made a dash for the car, a sturdy Benz limousine with German Army markings. Hank wanted to take the wheel, but Nick insisted upon driving. "Your hand, man," he said. "Besides, they'll recognise you. But they've nothing against Herr Ziemer as yet." He made us get in the rear. "Sit on the floor," he ordered, "and don't let them see you. Leave the rest to Baby!"

With that he started up the engine. We shot down that drive like a bat out of hell. The avenue cannot have been very long, for when in a moment I risked a peep ahead I saw the gate stretched across the road at the foot of a steep descent. Between us and the gate a helmeted figure in a raincoat stood in the rain and brandished his arm. Nick did not slacken speed but sounded the klaxon furiously. The guard did not budge nor did he open the gate. "Hang on for a bump!" Nick warned us over his shoulder as the car leapt forward down the hill. Hank dragged me to the floor, shielding me with his big body. There was a shout from the sentry, a terrific jolt that spilled Hank and me all over the floor, a rending, splintering noise.... "That crazy loon!" Hank's voice said in my ear.

We were whirling along an arrow-straight road narrowed by the dripping woods that edged it. I knelt on the rear seat to look back. The gate hung in tatters; two soldiers were taking aim with rifles, while two others were wheeling out motor-cycles which they mounted even as I watched. I ducked as a bullet splintered the rear window, then Hank pulled me down. The car was plunging about, but Nick held it to the road. Hank said quietly, "Two guys on motor-bikes behind, Nick."

"I see them," was the equally calm rejoinder. "We're doing eighty—that should hold 'em for a bit."

"We'll have to get off this road, feller. There's a German post at the next village about two miles on." Hank glanced back. "Keep stepping on it; I think they're gaining. Where the road curves there's a track leading off to the left. God knows what it's like in this weather, but we'd better turn off there. This car's hot and we'll have to ditch it, so we may as well ditch it out of sight in the woods."

Round the bend in the road we came upon the track clambering steeply into the forest. With screaming brakes Nick made the turn. It was a wood of pine and fir, and the track was sandy to begin with but soon grew rutty. In a little clearing where there was a huge pile of brushwood Hank tapped Nick on the shoulder. "Better stop here before we get bogged," he said. "In behind that wood-pile, quick!"

Nick slowed down, swung the big limousine off the track. It went lurching forward, then the wheels started to sink in the soggy soil. Hank and I sprang out and pushed; the car was barely behind the wood-pile when the wheels ceased to bite and the engine conked out. Hank was already throwing brushwood over the car. Nick and I pitched in; out of the distance it seemed to me I could detect the approaching stutter of a motor-cycle engine. Nick heard it, too, for instantly

he ran forward, his arms full of branches which he spread over our wheel-marks where they left the track.

Evening was on us. The grey, unfriendly sky shed a pale light over the clearing. The noise of the motor-bikes was now loud in the woods; they were coming up the track. We crouched down behind the car with its covering of brushwood and saw two troopers go jarring and bouncing by, their whole attention seemingly centred on the water-filled ruts of the road. They roared out of sight. Hank sprang up. "As soon as they miss our wheel-marks they'll be back," he told us. "They'll look for us here, on this side of the main road. The first thing we have to do is to get across the road and into the woods on the other side. Come on!"

He set off on a course out of sight of but parallel with the track by which we had come, striding ahead so fast that by the time he halted, motioning us down, I was completely out of breath. It was dark in the little gully where we crouched, but through the bushes we could see the glitter of the pools of water on the high-road not twenty yards away. More motor-bikes went snorting by, then an open car shot past like a meteor, a glimpse of Rieber, pallid and dour, at the wheel. When the car had gone by, Nick jumped up. "Stay there, you two," he whispered. "I'm going out for a little dekkoo."

"Not on your life," said Hank. "You're in better shape than I am with this damaged paw of mine. You stick here with Andy, and if there's any shooting, beat it back into the woods!"

But Nick was already out of the gully. "Don't budge until you see me wave," he warned. We watched him slip from tree to tree, then lost sight of him. A minute later, there he was in the middle of the road, waving to us. "Now!" said Hank. Together we scrambled through the brambles as far as the line of trees bordering the highway. The road was empty. We darted across.

The rain was letting up. The trees grew thicker here and it was hard going in the growing darkness under the overhanging branches. After ten minutes of it, by tacit accord, we plumped down in a hollow left by the roots of a fallen fir to regain our breath. I could see that Hank's hand was paining him, and though he protested that it was all right, I made him let me remove his grubby bandage. His hand was badly swollen and stiff with clotted blood. I moistened my handkerchief in a pool and wiped the blood away. The bullet had clipped the palm, just below the little finger, leaving a raw flesh-wound. My hanky was too small and by now too grimy to use as a bandage, but Nick produced a clean one with which I bound up the injured hand.

Nick, lying back against a tree, his hands clasped behind his head, spoke up. "If I were President of the United States, Hank," he said, "you should have the Congressional Medal for conking that revolting man-ape. After I was put in the library to wait, I very soon discovered that the house was empty, but those sentries bothered me. I had to find an excuse to break in on the old devil to find out what was happening to Andrea, but he had me covered from the moment I entered the room. Do you realise that he was all set to knock the pair of us off, Andrea and me, simply because we knew the secret of the dossier? Just like those pirates who used to kill the men who helped them bury their treasure." He wagged his head approvingly. "That was a mighty timely entrance of yours, Hank, old hoss!"

Hank laughed. "That thunderstorm was a godsend. I had to scale a practically perpendicular bank to do it, but I managed to get from the woods into the gardens and via the terraces as far as the house. My plan was to slip in through the garden entrance. But I found they'd posted a sentry there and, what was worse, he was standing with his back to the door, under the porch, so that I couldn't sneak up to him. So I moseyed around to the front. There I was in luck, because the sentry had taken refuge from the rain under a tree; to anyone who has been through the Commando training he was what is commonly known as a sitter. That let me inside the house, but, hearing voices in Grundt's room, I thought I'd have a prowl round before muscling in. Through one of the windows what do I see but the Herr Doktor drawing a bead on my old palsy-walsy, Nick Leigh! I didn't discover you, Andy, until I was inside. I said to myself, 'They can't do that to our Nick,' I said, and—well, you know the rest."

"And how!" said Nick. "I thought I was going to hear the angels sing that time, and so did Andy, I bet. Muchas gracias, señor!"

Hank had raised his head and was listening. All was still about us save for the melancholy dripping of the trees. He said: "Von Halberstadt and I used to go hiking in these woods, so I know my way around pretty well. West of this there's a lake with a boat-house which looked pretty much deserted when I passed that way with the General. I thought we might

hide up there for the night, if we can raise it in the dark." With that he stooped to the bottom of our hollow and the flashlight in his hand revealed a deepish puddle of water. Suddenly something floated on its surface—it was one of those round English biscuits. It swam round slowly, then wavered to a stop. In the flash-light beam Hank's finger indicated a nick on the outside of the biscuit, at right angles to the edge. "The north," he explained, his finger following the direction of the nick.

"A compass?" said Nick.

Hank nodded. "Float it and it always shows the north. Handy little thing to have about you if you don't eat it by mistake." He laughed and put the biscuit back in his pocket, then climbed out of the hole. "Stir yourselves, chaps," he said. "We have six miles to go and we'll have to travel fast."

Chapter XXV

In a pitch-black place that smelt of tar and old ropes Nick and I were hunched side by side, listening to the slap of water from the lake. The boat-house was raised up a few feet on concrete pillars and in the space beneath, at the top of a slip descending to the water's edge, three or four rowboats were stored. Here, behind the boats, with the timber floor of the boat-house above our heads, was our refuge for the night. It could have been worse, for it was warm and dry with a sandy floor, and though the location of the boathouse was, God knows, desolate enough, we were concealed from the view of any stray prowler.

Not that I cared much. We seemed to have plodded for hours in the dark through the sopping undergrowth, with branches snapping back in our faces and brambles hooking themselves into our clothes. We stopped very often while Hank, finding a convenient puddle, consulted his biscuit, and once lay a good hour under some bushes, listening to heavy feet that went rustling through the leaves close at hand. For the last mile or so we had to follow an open road until we saw the feathery outline of the boat-house silhouetted against the moon. But by that time I was too exhausted and too soaked through to worry what became of us.

Now, with knees up to my chin, I sat in the dark beside Nick and, having removed stockings and shoes, tried to rub some life into my numb feet. Hank had disappeared. He didn't say where he was going, but just vanished. Nick thought he had gone to look for food, because I had complained of feeling hungry—there wasn't a bite of anything to eat between the three of us.

Nick's voice came out of the gloom. "Andy!"

"What is it?"

"I brought you your locket."

"What locket?"

"Didn't you lose a locket at Marrakesh?"

"No."

"Or send one to be repaired?"

"No."

"All I can say is that a locket was left for you at your hotel with a note in French to say, 'A être remise à madame!'"

"Have you got the locket there?"

"Sure. Hold out your hand."

In the beam of his flash-light he trickled a fine gold chain with a heavy locket attached into my hand. I started. "Nick, this is the Countess Mazzoli's locket!"

"The Countess Mazzoli's locket?" he repeated, puzzled.

"Yes. She made me take it with me to von Rode to show him that I really came from her. I left it with him. How did you get hold of it?"

"Snafu picked it up at your hotel and sent it across to you at Naples, thinking you were still there. We all thought it was an heirloom or something."

"Have you the note there?"

"I thought it wiser not to bring it. It wasn't signed, anyway."

"Do you know what I think?" I said. "Von Rode meant to send the locket back to the Countess with the cup, but forgot. He knew I was going to see her that evening; he couldn't tell that I should find she had died when I called at the hospital. He must have sent the locket after me to return to her. After all, that's what it says in the note: 'To be returned to madame.'"

"You may be right," he agreed. "But in that case it must have been almost the last thing he did, because he was shot within half an hour of your leaving the house. And apparently the envelope with the locket didn't turn up until next day, but that's not surprising if you know Moroccan servants and Moroccan hotels as I do." He smiled at me. "Well, at least you've a souvenir of your Marrakesh adventure, and a very charming one. What are you going to do with it?"

"Wear it," I told him, and slipped the chain about my neck. "And I hope it'll bring me better luck than it did the poor Countess and her German Colonel."

"I hope so, too," he answered, "because I think we're going to need it."

With that he put out his flash-light and I fell to work upon my aching feet again. Presently a match-flame flickered. "Cigarette?" he said. But when he saw what I was at, without a word he handed me the cigarette he had just lighted for himself and, as the flame expired, dropped on his knees and laid hold of my foot. "Just relax," he told me. "I learned all about massage when I was up at Oxford. I ran for my college and I picked up a lot of useful hints from an old rubber we had called Artie. Artie had a secret compound of his own. It stank to high heaven of turps and witchhazel and I don't know what, but it was mighty effective. I wish to goodness I had some of it now."

As he talked his hands were kneading my chilled feet. By and by I began to feel the circulation coming back. "You should have been a masseur, not a lawyer," I said. He laughed. "Who knows what's going to happen to all of us in the post-war world? I might bob up as Mayfair's leading masseur. They must have the devil of a time, those chaps. Just now I feel like one of those blind masseurs, rubbing away at you in the dark. How's it coming?"

"They're much warmer now."

He stopped then, but insisted on spreading his jacket over my knees. I tried to prevent him, telling him he would catch cold. But he only laughed and said, "It's the Sir Walter Raleigh touch. Men always jump at the chance to imitate that gesture, especially"—he chuckled—"if, like me, they're wearing a pull-over underneath."

For a little while our cigarette tips glowed in the darkness as we smoked in silence. Then I said, "However did you get here, Nick?"

"Sub. They put me ashore below Spezia. Gosh, it was cold on the beach! At Spezia I talked the Eyeties—the Nazi ones—into flying me to Rome. Zierner's papers did that for me; the Italianos are terrified of the S.S."

"But what happened to Ziemer?"

His rather grim laugh rang out of the dark. "Ziemer won't trouble us any more. He's at the bottom of the deep blue sea."

"But, Nick, how?"

"The day you and I reached Naples, one of our destroyers put down a German sub off the Morocco coast. She didn't sink at once and most of the crew were lost when they jumped overboard. In one of the bunks they found a civilian jacket with Ziemer's papers in a wallet in the pocket. They think that Ziemer must have gone over the side with the others and forgotten it in his panic."

"And the cup?"

"No trace. He must have had it on him when he went into the drink."

"Oh, dear," I sighed. "Then the Hitler dossier's gone!"

"That's about the size of it, Andy."

"That was a wonderful copy of the cup you handed over to Grundt."

He gurgled a laugh. "You should know! My sainted aunt, can you see old monkey-face when he comes to and finds that that case is a plant? Because the first saddler can tell him that the leather's brand-new, though faked up a bit, and Italian, not German leather at that." He rippled with quiet enjoyment. "Gad, it almost makes up for losing the darn dossier."

His attitude jarred a little. "You take it very lightly," I said. "This dossier must be of tremendous importance if they let people like you and Hank run such crazy risks to get hold of it."

"Now you're talking like Stracer," he retorted. "The only way to take this war is to take it lightly, the way the troops do, even at the darkest moments at Dunkirk, for instance, or when old Rommel was chasing us back to Alex. If you take it seriously, you go nuts. What most concerns the average chap up in the front line? When he eats next; his leave; his girl that hasn't written; his feet that hurt him. The big worries—the winning of the battles, the morale of the enemy, and all the rest of it—these are things for the top boys, the Generals, Winston and F.D.R. Mind you, I'm not saying I wouldn't have given my eyes to have got to you before Ziemer sneaked the cup, not only on general grounds, but also because it would have been a feather in my cap—the Lord knows, I need one after skrimshanking all these months among the brass-hats of Cairo and N.A. But since it was not to be, I try to take the philosophical view and tell myself that, even if we'd handed the cup over in triumph, its actual significance in the winning of the war and what our masters would have done with it would still be matters as remote from our daily round as any of those stars twinkling over the lake out there." He made a break and added, "I'm only glad I didn't have to choose between going after you or the cup."

I laughed. "I'm afraid I'm not nearly as scrupulous. Even when I believed that you'd made Grundt a present of the real cup, I was thinking only of the frightful risk you were running."

His arm brushed mine and I felt that he had turned to look at me. "It's something to know you cared, even that much."

"Of course I cared."

"Why?"

"Well," I said slowly, "for one thing I was in a bit of a spot myself, with Hank unmasked and everything."

He laughed. "Now you're spoiling it."

I found his arm in the blackness and slipped mine through it. "That wasn't the only reason, either. Nick, I've a bad

conscience about you. I mean about Naples..."

He wriggled his arm. "Oh, Lord, Andy..."

"No," I told him firmly. "I behaved very badly. I realise now that, if I'd played the game by you, you and Hank wouldn't have had to risk your lives coming after me, and the three of us wouldn't be hiding in this hole like hunted hares."

His laugh had a mocking ring. "You don't know this game yet, Andy, my poppet. Jake and the Brig. are quite good chaps, but when they're on the job, you and I and Hank, and a couple of hundred like us, simply don't count. It's not the man that matters—it's his report. So don't flatter yourself, my sweet; it wasn't you we came after, but your report—what you were able to pick up about the cup. And there you get top marks. Hank was telling me your story as we came through the woods, and, take it from me, no agent, not even Doler, who, it seems, was quite a flier in his time, could have done better. We may have lost the cup, but at least, thanks to you, we now know definitely that the Hitler dossier was in the case, and something of the importance the enemy attaches to it. No, my dear, you don't owe the Service a thing."

"Darn your old Service!" I answered. "It's you I'm thinking of, Nick. It's sweet of you to say such flattering things, but nothing alters the fact that I let you down. Dino said he'd leave a note for you, explaining that I'd gone to his apartment to meet Hank; but I bet he did no such thing."

"No," he said, "he didn't."

"You must have thought me an absolute heel. And thoroughly ungrateful. I don't want you to think I've forgotten how you got me out of that mess at Marrakesh."

"That was Snafu's doing, Andy."

"And how would I have ever met Snafu if you hadn't taken me round to him? No, Nick, in spite of all you say, I blame myself terribly. For you and Hank, sticking your heads in a noose like this—for Dino, even..."

I choked a little. He groped for my hand and gave it a little squeeze. "I know about Dino. Hank told me about that, too."

"I had the chance to think things out when I was at the villa," I said, struggling against a lump in my throat, "and I can see what a mess I made of things from the very start. First, I lose the cup; then I get you and Hank into this appalling jam. I made up my mind, if I should ever see you again, to say I was sorry at least. To ask your pardon for behaving like a stupid little fool."

He didn't speak for a moment. Then he said in rather a husky voice, "You don't know me very well if you think I had room for any hard thoughts at such a time, my dear. I was almost out of my mind with anxiety about you, for the hotel had no record of Mazzoli's visit, and it was not until late that night that we managed to pick up his trail. And you don't have to blame yourself for my turning up in Ziemer's place either. That was my idea entirely, and a regular battle I had with Jake and the Brig. to persuade them that your story was worth going after."

I found my hanky and blew my nose. "You're a great solace, Nick. If there's anything in telepathy, maybe I had something to do with putting into your head this idea of impersonating Ziemer."

"Telepathy? How?"

I laughed. "Well, Hank told me about Jake always liking to have two strings to his bow. When I was at the villa I had it all planned out that you were to be the second string."

"Then you did think of a chap sometimes?"

Something in the way he said it touched me extraordinarily—his tone was so eager, yet at the same time so doubting. "So often, Nick," I told him, "so very often. Whenever I felt lonely and scared. And that was most of the time,

let me tell you. I'm such a rotten little coward."

"Bunk!" he retorted. "I never met a girl in my life with more spirit. And the fact that you still make sense after all you've been through proves it." His grip on my fingers tightened. "Quiet!" he whispered. "There's someone at the entrance."

A light hovered at the end of our cubby-hole. Then we heard Hank's cautious, "Don't be scared! It's only me!" A match was scratched and he came crawling in, a lighted candle in one hand, something rolled in a white cloth under his other arm.

"Hank, you old devil," Nick cried, "what do you mean by buzzing off like that without a word?"

"Foraging," was the cheerful rejoinder. He scraped a hole in the sandy floor and set his candle in it, then, squatting down in front of us, unfolded his package. On a white cloth a large sausage, a small round cheese, and two bottles of wine were disclosed. "I had to burgle two farmhouses to raise this," he said. "Sorry, there's no bread. Who has a knife? And, Nick, hand us those pieces of board; we'd best screen the light. Hell, there's no corkscrew!"

"I'll fix that," said Nick. "Let's have one of those bottles!" While Hank erected a sort of wooden fence around the candle, Nick smacked the base of the bottle with the flat of his hand until the cork flew out.

We must have looked like three hoboes that had found a night's lodging as we huddled in our muddied, sodden things around our dim candle, munching sausage and cheese off the end of Nick's knife and drinking from the bottle. The sausage reeked of garlic and the cheese—of goat's milk, I guess—was pretty powerful. But the wine, which was red and fiery, was warming, and presently I was content to sit back against the wall with my eyes closed and just rest my weary limbs, letting the quiet drone of the men's voices soothe me.

Hank said, "I had to take a nose-dive into a hedge coming back here. Four motor-cyclists on the road—S.S. boys. They were travelling too fast to be looking for us. I think they may have been reinforcements for the villa, as they were moving from east to west, in the direction of San Marcello. The Hun's a literal-minded guy and my guess is that he's watching out for us along the Flaminian Way. That's that main road we crossed outside the villa. It goes all the way to Rome and has an electric car-line running along it right into the city. As we're already well to the west of the Flaminian Way, for the moment we seem to be out of the immediate zone of the chase."

"I'll have to take your word for it, old boy," Nick answered. "This is new ground to me. But they're a thorough lot of beggars and, if I know anything about them, they'll be all round us by morning."

"Quite," Hank agreed. "And if we know what's good for us, we'll be on our way while it's still dark." There was a pause and I heard Hank say, "It's all right. She's asleep, poor kid!"

I let it pass. I simply didn't have the energy to break in and tell them that, rather than walk another step that night, I'd cheerfully face the whole of the S.S. headed by Clubfoot himself. Hank went on: "I know it's tough on her, but we can't stay here as I'd planned. There are nets drying outside the boat-house, which means we may expect the fishermen to turn up as soon as it's light. The sooner we hit the road for Rome, the better."

"Rome?" Nick echoed incredulously. "We can't go to Rome, Hank. You're much too well known."

"Not in the section of the city where I propose to take you," was the quiet rejoinder. "The main thing is to get under cover, and Rome's the place for that."

"Sure. But we're not going to let you risk your neck on our account. Better we separate rather than that. I can look after Andy if you tell me where to go. You'd be safer on your own, anyway."

"Bunk!" said Hank. "We're in this together and we'll sink or swim together. I realise that my cover's blown and that I can't return to my apartment, because that's the first place they'll watch. But I'm relying on certain contacts I have with the Italian underground. That's why there can be no question of our separating—I mean, they're a cagey lot and highly suspicious of strangers. It's Rome or nothing, Nick."

Nick was silent for a little. Then he said, "I think you're right, but don't let's kid ourselves, old boy. So far the luck has been with us for the simple reason that Clubfoot has been playing his own game. If you ask me, he never had any intention of letting that dossier out of his hands. That was why he was all set to knock the three of us off. He probably wasn't sure as to how much you knew, but with Andy and me out of the way, he'd have had a clear run. Von Halberstadt and his friends aren't going to say anything about it, and if Hitler asks any questions, Grundt's story is that von Rode fooled them and there isn't any dossier."

"You could be right," Hank agreed. "To judge by the line he gave Andy about the cup, about her having had in her hands the fate of the post-war world, and so forth, I fancy he had something of this in his mind. And under the influence of the wine at lunch today he fairly opened up about Germany's place in Europe after the war, and even hinted that Hitler might disappear."

"Doler told us, the man has always been crazy for power," said Nick. "That dossier would have given him the whip-hand of Hitler, and anyone in that position could make himself master of Germany. And Germany's about ready for a new master, the way the war's going for her."

"I should have bopped him harder," Hank commented with a sigh. "I'd have finished him off with his own gun if it hadn't been for that sentry."

"No good crying over spilt milk," Nick declared. "Whether he survives that tap on the nut or not, the fat's in the fire now. He's the Führer's personal emissary and a big shot, and we can count on having the heat turned on full. It's them or us, Hank, and things are going to happen. As we have to disappear, it must be Rome, I agree. But by all accounts Rome is crawling with Germans, and the Gestapo is swarming everywhere."

"So's the Italian underground," Hank replied. "And what's more, I know one or two of the leaders."

"So much the better. But it doesn't alter the fact that we're walking into a regular hornet's nest. Where did you think of taking us?"

"To one Domenico Cerretti, first off. He has a small hotel with a café attached, down near the Trastevere station. It's quite a modest dump, mainly for transients, and the Jockey Bar, as the café is called, is frequented chiefly by workmen from the neighbouring railroad yards—most of them Socialists, by the way, the same as Domenico. His place is, or used to be, one of our collecting stations for escaping prisoners of war."

"It sounds A1 to me. What's this bloke like? Is he to be trusted?"

"As far as any of them are. He never let me down. He was one of my channels for messages to and from Naples; the underground have a secret transmitting centre. I haven't been near the Jockey Bar in a month, but Domenico's still functioning. My idea is that, on reaching Rome, we should head straight for his place. Once there, we send a signal out to Jake and lie up snugly with Domenico while waiting for the reply."

"Fine, as far as it goes," said Nick. "But how do we get to Rome?"

"Here's my plan," Hank answered. "Wait; I'll show you on my map."

I had opened my eyes now and saw them with their heads together over the map which Hank had spread out in the flickering candle-light. I didn't follow everything they said very well, but I gathered that the lake where we were was called the Lago di Molo, and that Hank's plan was to borrow one of the boats and row across to the little town of Molo, on the far shore, where there was an electric car line into Rome. Rome was eighteen miles from Molo, or about an hour and a half by the car. Hank had no time-table, but he thought that the first car would be likely to leave about an hour before dawn, so as to get the peasants into Rome for the opening of the early markets. They argued for a bit as to how long it would take to row across the lake, measuring the distance on the map, and where we should board the car. Then I heard Nick's voice: "How's Andy going to stand the trip? We have to think of that."

"She can rest up for another three hours or so," said Hank. "It's only ten o'clock now and we needn't make a move until one. By that time this damned moon should be down, which is all to the good." And he added, "How about our

following her example, Nick? We can get an hour and a half each; one to watch while the other sleeps."

I spoke up then. "You can count me in," I said.

They both jumped. Nick said, "I thought you were asleep."

"On the contrary," I told them. "I heard what you said about the boat. I don't know a thing about rowing, so I can't help pull us across the lake. But I can do my share of watching while you boys get some sleep."

But they wouldn't hear of it, and Nick, who was going to do the first watch, even made a fuss before he would let me give him back his coat. Then they put the candle out and presently the sound of Hank's regular breathing mingled with the gurgle of the water against the boat-house slip.

I settled down to sleep. As I drew my coat about me my fingers encountered a hard substance. It was the locket. Just the feel of it sent my thoughts flying back to the morning—how far away it seemed now!—when from my balcony at Marrakesh I heard the muezzin calling into the dawn. Well, another dawn was on its way and, remembering how Hank and Nick had argued about Rome and its perils, I wondered what the day it ushered in would bring forth. There was a faint moon radiance at the entrance to our hiding-place and against it Nick was silhouetted, seated cross-legged on the floor, his cigarette glowing redly in the dark. That was the last thing I remember before dropping off to sleep. But somehow the sight of him sitting there gave me a sense of confidence.

Chapter XXVI

Our journey to Rome lingers in my memory in a series of flashes. The sensation of being hunted is soul-searing. It magnifies and distorts the simplest happenings and in a curious way blunts the receptive faculties. Of our trip across the lake I recall only the steady thump of Nick's oars—he wouldn't let Hank row, on account of his hand—the curtain of low-lying mist through which we moved, and the eerie cries that echoed from the surrounding greyness—herons in the marshes, Nick said they were.

We did not forget that we were likely to travel to Rome in the company of farm folk. I had a coloured scarf in my bag which Hank made me wear, peasant fashion, over my head, pointing out that my red hair was bound to figure in any description of me that should be circulated. He and Nick got rid of their collars and ties; with their unshaven chins and rumpled suits they looked shabby enough to pass muster in a throng of lowly people. As a final touch, Nick borrowed my nail-scissors and comb and set to work on Hank. By the time he had finished Herr Blom's luxuriant whiskers had vanished, and a ragged béret we found in one of the boats completed a fairly radical change in Hank's appearance. As for Nick, he rolled Ziemer's gay little hat round a stone and sank it in the lake, and wore Hank's correct black felt, suitably muddled, with the brim turned down.

As a last precaution before we set out they made me burn my identity papers. We were to leave the car outside Rome and make our way into the city on foot, because they suspected that there might be a revision of passes where the tram crossed the urban line. They still had their German permits and so forth, with which, Hank said, they might still bluff themselves out of trouble if tackled by a stray policeman on the street. But I had no German papers of any kind, and in the circumstances my American passport and Army credentials were sheer dynamite. Though Hank spoke confidently of being able to fix us up with some kind of Italian permits once we were in Rome, as I saw my passport curl up in flame I felt that I had burnt my boats indeed.

Then there was the long wait, after we reached the farther shore, in a ruined chapel at the top of a deserted beach, with distant lights along the curve of the lake which Hank said was Lago. Lest the police should be on the watch at the starting-terminus we were not to board the car in the town itself, but at the next stop in the direction of Rome, a village, the name of which I have forgotten. We were to leave the car at some point before it reached the octroi at the Ponte Molle, make a détour, and enter the city by another gate.

It was still pitch dark and the night full of unexpected sounds set my nerves vibrating—the distant rattle of a train, the barking of dogs, the hoot of an owl. I have a recollection of a long trudge over a country road, of joining a rabble of people in a muddy village street, and later, as we sat in the trolley-car-under dim lights, for there was a blackout in Rome, speeding through the flatness of the Roman Campagna, of fighting down the illusion that spying eyes were peering into my very soul.

I need not have tortured myself. The faces of our fellow-travellers, lined and careworn, showed how hard life in war-time Italy pressed on the humble of the earth. These dirt-farmers, as gnarled and brown as old apples, these large-bosomed market-women nursing enormous baskets, had their own troubles to think about, and scarcely gave us a glance. Theirs was the sour, unwilling air of people who day after day get up in the dark. Many slept, with heads lolling on their neighbours' shoulders.

But I had a rude shock when, at a stop outside a little town, I had a glimpse of field-grey outside and a party of German soldiers got on. They paid no attention to us, however, and the peasants ignored them—middle-aged men, who looked like reservists and talked a thick patois together. As it grew lighter and we came into the outskirts of the capital, we became aware of more Germans—sentries outside barracks, soldiers in Army trucks, on bicycles—with here and there a swastika flag.

The sky was streaked with the sunrise when we left the car. It was some kind of suburban centre where we alighted, with a gas station and an open-air market just getting under way. A gendarme in a shiny cocked hat was outside. But he was busy marshalling a milling crowd of people trying to board the car and we slipped past him in the confusion. After that Hank hustled us through the village to a wide avenue with car tracks. Here we took another car that seemed to circle the outer rim of the city to where a file of trucks and market-carts were lined up at an octroi barrier. A small group of people, some with bundles, stood in a queue in front of a little booth where a couple of Italians in uniform cast a desultory eye over the packages. We hopped off the car and joined the queue. Those without bundles were passed in. We went straight through.

We had made it. We were inside the city. I had an immense sense of relief. Rome is one of the early-rising cities of Europe and, though the clocks pointed only to half past seven, already the streets were full of bustle and noise. But there was field-grey in the throngs hurrying to work: Germans were everywhere. And we had still to find cover.

Hank gave us no respite. He edged us straightway to yet a third trolley. I had a cold stab of fear when I found myself, elbow to elbow, in the waiting crowd of passengers, with a monocled German in Luftwaffe blue. But he stepped back politely, saluting, and helped me on to the car.

We were a long time on that car. We seemed to traverse the full length of the city as the tram wound its way along wide avenues, across bridges, and through narrow streets. It was densely crowded, with people clustered like flies on the platforms. Outside the windows Rome spread her honey-coloured buildings in the crystalline sunshine. But I had no eyes for Rome that morning. I watched everyone who boarded the car, praying that our luck would hold. I knew that Hank and Nick must be on edge too, but if they were they did not show it. Hank, his bandaged hand thrust out of sight in his pocket, stolidly read a newspaper which someone had left on a seat, while Nick had taken refuge behind his customary bored air.

On a busy square on the far side of the Ponte Garibaldi, one of the Tiber bridges, we left the car. Without a word Hank struck into a network of noisy and rather squalid streets. This was the Trastevere, or across-the-Tiber, quarter, he told us, the traditional working-class sector of the city. "But since our boys started plastering the railroad yards," he said, "a lot of people have moved out, because the big Trastevere station, about a mile south of this, is one of their targets."

About us the restless life of the city ebbed and flowed, with street-cars clanging and people spilling out from the sidewalks on to the narrow roadway. I felt my confidence revive. Surely we might sink out of sight for a few days among these swarming masses and leave no ripple in the turmoil about us?

We were threading a slatternly street of tall, old houses when Hank said suddenly, "Here we are!" One of the gauntest and shabbiest of the houses had 'Albergho della Mantella, D. Cerretti, Prop.' stencilled in fading paint across its

facade. The Jockey Bar occupied the whole ground floor. Glass doors, flush with the sidewalk, were folded back and within we had a glimpse of a small, clean café with tiled walls where a few customers, some in overalls with uniform caps, sat at the tables. We avoided the café and mounted a steep flight of stairs under a dingy lamp inscribed 'Hotel' to a little office on the mezzanine where a man in shirt-sleeves and a béret was reading a newspaper and drinking coffee. He flung us the briefest glance, said in Italian, "The hotel is full," and went on with his newspaper.

Hank said, "It's Enrico, Domenico!"

The man raised his eyes again. He was an ugly individual with a wide gash of a mouth and a head so sunk between his shoulders that he was almost a hunchback. He had the hunchback's bright eye and waxen pallor. "Why, so it is!" he remarked guardedly. "I didn't know you again." He ran his finger along his upper lip. "It changes you." Then he glanced from Hank to me and Nick, and stood up. "Friends of yours?" he questioned.

Hank nodded and lowered his voice. "We're in trouble. We'd like to disappear for a bit."

Domenico was looking hard at Hank. I saw that his gaze was fixed on a corner of bloodstained bandage protruding from Hank's hand thrust in his pocket.

Without replying, he walked to the wall, opened a door that was concealed in the wall-paper, and held it for us. "If I might trouble you. We may speak more securely in here," he said.

It was a dingy little sitting-room, so ill provided with light by reason of its low ceiling and single, grimy window that the naked electric bulb that hung above the table seemed to be perpetually burning. A statue of the Madonna, elaborately gowned in brocade and tinsel, stood on a niche in the corner with a ruby lamp glowing before it. We sat down round the table and Domenico, producing a bottle of vermouth, filled four glasses.

"Accident?" he said, pointing to Hank's hand.

Hank grinned. "A slight collision with a bullet."

Domenico nodded gravely. "My wife, who has some skill in such matters, will see to it when she comes back from marketing. Meanwhile, how can I serve you?"

"Put us up until we can let Headquarters know where we are," Hank replied.

The Italian shook his head. "Someone has put the eye on you and your friends, signor. Not half an hour ago, on the telephone in the office back there, my old friend Squanci, of the Italian Secret Police, told me of an order about to be issued by which, henceforward, all hotel guests, Italian as well as foreign, are to be reported, not weekly, as hitherto, but daily. It would seem," he went on, lowering his voice, "that the Gestapo in Rome has a new chief, a veritable lion of a man, of whom everybody stands in awe. 'The Limping One,' they call him."

We three exchanged a glance. Domenico went on, "In all directions the control is being tightened. To let you and your friends stay here would be to court disaster. I cannot take you in."

"But we don't have to stay in the hotel," said Hank, looking to us for confirmation. "It will only be for a day or two. At a pinch we could make do with the hideaway the others, the prisoners of war, used, back of the air-raid shelter."

"As well might you and your friends seek to hide on the piazza of St. Peter's when the mid-day gun fires from Sant' Angelo," Domenico retorted with a scornful laugh. "Because this is an old house and it is known that the cellars are deep, has not the Syndic's office sent its accursed surveyors to snuffle and pry until they found the little cellar behind the other and made one great shelter of the two? So that at present, when the alert sounds, which is every other night, there's the traffic of a Roman feria through my café and into my yard—not only the clients and the neighbours, but the very tramps off the street, maledetto! for so the police have decreed. The next prisoner of war who comes here must be shown the door, signor." He made a pause. "For you, Signor Enrico, I will do this. Since the new order has not yet reached me officially, I'll take a chance and take you in for the night, you and your friends. But it will be for the night, and for the night only, and by daybreak you must be on your way. And in doing so much, already, I risk my neck, *corpo di Cristo!*"

"But, amico mio, we have no papers," said Hank. "How far would we get without papers?"

"Signori," replied the Italian, gazing from Hank to Nick, "my body, as you see, is not a thing of beauty. But it's the only one I have. For fifty-eight years, come the feast of San Pancrazio the martyr, I've carried it around, and I'm anxious to keep it above ground as long as I can. Already too many know about the English and American prisoners, and more than once I've had the impression that my place is under surveillance."

"Gestapo?" Nick questioned.

Domenico flung up his hands. "If it were only the Gestapo, signor! At least one has a chance of recognising these Prussian pigs by their air of brutes and escaped jail-birds. It's the others I'm afraid of, the Italians they hire with their gold to spy for them—customers, neighbours, even old friends of mine. As things are in Rome today, signori, no longer can we Romans tell comrade from informer. You, Signor Enrico, know that, as an old Socialist, I had no truck with Benito and his gang, and that since that sinister buffoon dragged our unfortunate Italy into war I've done what I could to help the cause of freedom. But I have my wife to think of and my son, who's in the Carabinieri, and I cannot risk bringing destruction on us all. From my heart I regret it, especially on account of the bellissima signorina, but this is my last word—until daybreak tomorrow you may stay, but not a moment longer."

Hank frowned and plucked his lip. "At any rate, you can send word south about us?"

Domenico met his question with such an incredulous stare that Hank cried, "Well, what?"

"You didn't hear about the communications centre?"

"No; I've been out of Rome."

"It only happened last night. A clean sweep."

"Then Aldo...?"

"Aldo, and Ernestine, and Giulio, and four or five others, arrested last night and sentenced to be shot, up there at the Regina Coeli jail, at daybreak this morning." He made a helpless gesture of the hands. "Henceforth, our friends in the south must look elsewhere for their reports."

Some of the fresh colour had faded out of Hank's face. I stole a glance at Nick. His mouth was grim. Hank cleared his throat. "As I told you, we have no passports, no permis de séjour, no circulation permits, nothing. Can you get us papers, at least?"

Domenico's expression relaxed. "Papers," he answered stolidly, "can be had. But they're not cheap. Fifteen hundred to two thousand lire for a passport, five hundred for a permission to circulate."

"They'd be real at that price, at least?" Nick enquired.

"But assuredly, signor, since it is the Boches themselves who sell them—in partnership with the passport office of their famous new Fascist Republic. Let me have, say, a thousand lire, as a buonamano, a pledge of good faith, and one will see what can be arranged."

Without speaking, Hank extracted a mille note from his wallet and laid it on the table. The landlord pocketed the bill. "Grazie, amico!" he said in a much more contented tone, as though the sight of the money cheered him. Fingering his lip, he said, "Best I lodge you here on the mezzanine, I think. True, there are but the two bedrooms, but one has two beds, and no doubt the signorina will arrange with the signori as to where she desires to sleep...." He made a delicate pause.

I caught Nick's eyes and giggled. But Hank blushed up to the roots of his hair. "You mistake the character of the young lady," he declared loftily. "The single room will be for her. My friend and I will take the double room."

Domenico was quite unmoved. "My excuses to the signorina, if I judged her and the gentlemen by the standards of

conduct prevalent among the habitués of my establishment. The rooms are modest," he went on. "However, you will not expect to find the luxury of the Hotel Excelsior in the Trastevere, and the rooms I speak of possess the advantage of having their own exit to the street. For, with respect to the signorina, this is a house of gallant memories and, in the time of my predecessor, when the police carried out a razzia, the little stair to the alley often proved a boon to gentlemen calling on the more permanent of the lady residents. Moreover, having your own exit, you will not be seen by the other hotel guests, who use the main staircase." He stood up. "Come! I show you."

He led the way out of the sitting-room into a pitch-black corridor. The rooms were off it, small and airless bedchambers looking on an airless shaft. The stairway to the alley was through a door at the end of the passage.

There were fitted basins in the rooms. I said I was going to wash and let the men go off with Domenico to inspect the stair to the street. The water in the hot tap was as cold as in the other, the atmosphere in the room stale and frowsty, and when, with much difficulty, I got the single window open, the air in the shaft was not much better.

I sank down on the bed in one of my black moments of despair. Hank had staked all his hopes on Domenico, and Domenico had, to all intents and purposes, failed us—I could divine as much from Hank's face. True, those two had until dawn to make fresh plans; but I thought of 'The Limping One,' of whom Domenico had spoken, who was undoubtedly ransacking the city for us at that moment, and wondered how safe we were even until morning in this sordid haven. The sensation of being hunted was strong upon me again, and the image of Clubfoot, somewhere out there, among the domes and pinnacles of Rome, spinning his web, like some vast spider, to ensnare us, would not leave me.

The men had come back—I heard them through the thin partition talking to Domenico in their room amid a great splashing of water. Domenico said, "Per Dio, she is indeed a problem. The German outposts are widely scattered through the mountains and all the time refugees get through to the Allied lines. With a good guide to show you the paths..."

Hank's voice struck in. "Too risky!" he said.

"Risky it is," the landlord agreed, "for there's always a possibility of a bullet from one side or the other, not to speak of the shells. But a man who'd be willing to take a chance..."

"We'd take a chance all right," said Nick. "But not with the girl. We're not taking any woman through the barrage."

"I've seen something of these mountains," Hank remarked. "Even if we chanced the bullets and all the rest, she'd never last the course."

"For that the signori are unquestionably right," Domenico rejoined. "If I could help you to bestow her safely somewhere while you made the attempt, I would gladly do so, because I must warn you that these German pigs shoot without trial any enemy agent, whether Italian or foreign, who falls into their hands, and as long as you remain in Rome, your lives are not worth a liarde, per bacco! But, signori, my wings are trimmed. After what I heard from Squanci I dare not approach Antonio and the others myself, and there is nothing I can do except offer you and your friends the advice not to remain in Rome an hour longer than is necessary."

The conversation ended there, and soon after that Nick came banging at my door to say that breakfast was waiting for us in the sitting-room.

Chapter XXVII

The conversation I had overheard upset me thoroughly. Why hadn't I realised the true position sooner? Nick's story that his appearance at the villa was purely in the line of duty didn't fool me, and Hank, too, had risked his life to come back and rescue me; I knew that I was mainly to blame for our present plight. But on top of this I found the thought

sheerly unbearable that they should reject the way of escape Domenico suggested because they couldn't take me with them, and stay on in Rome solely on my account with the firing squad looming in the background.

The matter was squarely up to me, I reflected, as we sat at breakfast. After all, we were at war, and they were experienced Intelligence officers, cogs in the war machine. I had no right to queer their chance of reporting back to duty. To raise the question with them I knew would be useless. Not only would they refuse to listen to me, but I should let myself in for a wordy argument that would only weaken my purpose. This was a decision I had to make for myself. Once I had taken it, if they discovered what was in my mind, they were quite capable of restraining me, even by force. Nick particularly.

So I kept my thoughts to myself and watched them over our cheerless meal of bitter coffee, sour bread, and hard sausage, making valiant attempts to appear unconcerned. After breakfast Domenico's wife—the padrona, Hank called her—made a good job of Hank's damaged hand with iodine and lint and even produced an old glove of her husband's large enough to go over and conceal the bandage. When she had cleared the breakfast, I sat and mended a rent in my stocking which a brier had torn on our wanderings through the woods while Hank and Nick went into a long huddle over Hank's map of the city and the Rome phone book borrowed from the office. We saw no more of Domenico.

A near-by bell was ringing the Angelus and other bells and factory hooters near and far were proclaiming noonday when the padrona brought in lunch—three tiny portions of stew, a very small bowl of salad, a flask of red wine. She apologised for the short rations: the German locusts stripped Rome bare while the Romans went hungry. I ate in silence, listening to the two men arguing about their plans. Their main hope seemed to be the Antonio I had heard the landlord mention. He was apparently head of the sabotage organisation of the Italian underground; Hank knew him and had had dealings with him. Domenico had no recent news of Antonio and wouldn't risk summoning him to the hotel. But as he was to be contacted across the Tiber, at the other end of the city, in the official quarter where Hank might be recognised, Nick was to seek him out with a note from Hank, at the small printing-shop he had near the Corso.

Nick was against Hank budging out at all. But Hank wouldn't listen. There was so little time; we must have an alternate plan in case Antonio failed us—for all they knew, he might have been arrested. Hank was in touch with what he called a 'cell' of workers at the Trastevere machine shops which had helped in the past to smuggle prisoners of war out. They met at a little gymnastic club down near the Trastevere terminus, and Hank's idea was to drop round there while Nick looked up Antonio. As it would not involve going out of the busy Trastevere quarter, the chances were a million to one against his meeting any of his German acquaintances, he assured us. It was evident that Nick disapproved the plan. They wrangled endlessly about it, but Hank wouldn't give way.

When at last they stood up to go, I had a moment of emotion. I knew that they were taking their lives in their hands, though you would never have guessed it—they were so matter-of-fact, so debonair, about it. As they found their hats, jossing one another on their disreputable appearance, I found myself contrasting their self-possession with the unknown dangers lurking outside; wondering, too, whether I should have the courage, if I could hit upon a plan, to go through with it while they were away.

They were to leave the hotel separately. Hank was going first. They might be away for several hours, perhaps until evening, he said. I was to stay home quietly and not worry. "I've had a word with the padrona," he told me, "and if anyone comes snooping she'll tip you off. If that happens, what you'll have to do is to nip out by the back stair and go into the big church at the top of the alley. Wait there until one of us arrives. If neither of us turns up, Domenico will. This is his plan, and he has promised to call for you."

With that he put his arm round my shoulders. "Keep up your courage, Andy! By dawn tomorrow we'll be headed for home." He pecked me on the cheek. "I'll be seeing you, honey!"

"Take care of yourself, Hank, and come back safely!" I told him. "And don't think I'm not grateful for all you've done for me!" And with that I pulled him back and kissed him squarely on the mouth.

Poor Hank! He looked so embarrassed as he ducked out.

I turned back to find Nick regarding me. There was a long silence between us. "Are you in love with him?" he asked

at last.

I shook my head. "What would he say if he knew I was in love with you?" he persisted rather huskily.

The tears had come into my eyes. I couldn't speak for fear of breaking down.

"What would you say?" he asked. "Could you love me a little, Andy?"

I gazed at him through a gathering mist of tears. "I don't believe I ever thought of it. I only know that I like to be with you, even if we do fight, and that I think of you all the time when we're apart. It isn't just that you give me a feeling of security: you give me faith in myself, the strength to do what's right. That's something I never met in any man I ever knew before. Is it love, Nick?"

"You don't have to be told what's right," he said almost roughly. "And certainly not by me. I'm a very ordinary chap, but I think I've loved you since that first morning at Marrakesh when I met you having a little cry on the stairs outside old F.'s office. I only know that I can't bear to think of life without you. It's burning me up, Andy, placed as we are. If I were to lose you now, not knowing, not ever knowing, whether I meant anything to you or not, I would never have the courage to carry on, because life would mean nothing to me."

"Why do you have to say these things to me now, Nick, when we may be parting for always?" I told him. "It's you who run the risk; most likely I should be the one left to carry on. Have you thought of that?"

He gave me such a wistful look. "You'd care, then, if anything happened to me?" he said in a low voice.

I nodded, and then I was in his arms, there in that dim hotel room under the mild gaze of the Madonna in the corner. He laid his face against mine and held me tight. "Oh, Andy, my sweet!" he murmured.

"You've been so terribly hurt by life," I whispered, smoothing back his hair from his eyes. "If it's love to want to try to make someone happy, then I'm in love, darling." He drew my lips to his.

"Promise me," I smiled at him, "that you'll always think of me like this, in your arms, and not in one of my rages, as you called them."

He smiled back at me. "You talk as though I were never coming back. But I'm coming back, Andy, now more than ever, now that I've someone to come back to, and Hank and I will take you home."

"Promise just the same!" I pleaded.

"I promise," he said, and kissed me again.

With a sinking heart I watched him go, smiling so confidently at me, his hand raised in a gay little salute of farewell. Now it was going to be much harder than before to do what I had to do.

It was a name which my eye caught at random in the phone book that brought Simone Montenuovo to my mind.

After Nick left me, I lit a cigarette and mulled the whole problem over. Where could I turn for refuge? The American Envoy to the Vatican must live in the Vatican City. But the Vatican City, as far as I could remember, was a kind of No Man's Land in the middle of Rome, and the Fascists and their German bosses would certainly have guards posted at the entrances to check on people going in and out. And me with no papers, not even a passport! And the same was probably true of the American College, if it were still open; and anyhow, I wasn't a Catholic. Of course, quite a number of American women lived in Rome, married to Italian husbands. But I couldn't think of one I knew—on my solitary, brief visit to Rome as a tourist I hadn't met a single American resident.

I picked up the phone book which Hank had left open on the table and began to glance idly through it in the forlorn hope of stumbling upon some familiar name. I found none, but as I turned a page the name 'Montebello' headed a column.

You know how a name will set up an association of ideas. Montebello-Montenuovo! Why had I not thought of Simone Montenuovo before? Was it because I associated her with Florence as she had married a Florentine professor and her last letter to me was from Florence? But even as I thought of her I seemed to remember her telling me, in that last letter of hers, that her husband had been transferred to Rome. I flicked over the pages furiously. There she was—or rather, her husband: 'Montenuovo, Daniele, Professore, 37 via Pamphili.' The husband's name was Daniele, I remembered that.

It was all of five years since I had last thought of Simone—Simone Sylvestre as she was when we were fellow-students in Paris, at the Beaux Arts. She was in the sculpture school, a dashing, dark-eyed beauty from Lyons, gifted and vital and full of character. We lived in the same shabby maison meublée behind the Pantheon and, when in funds, would sally across the river together for dinner and a theatre on the Right Bank. She had very little money, but she got a lot of fun out of life, for the men were crazy about her, and she used to make me laugh with her stories of the professors at the school who made passes at her. She took everything in her stride, saying that her art came first; love, with a wedding-ring, could come later: she was quite serious-minded at heart. Then our ways parted, for I returned to America, and later she won a scholarship at the French Academy in Rome and wrote me that she was going to Italy. We exchanged letters for a bit, and then I heard no more for a year or so, when she wrote to say she had married a very distinguished Italian chemist, one Professor Montenuovo, and was living in Florence. She told me that he was quite a bit older than she was, but she seemed ideally happy with her Daniele and was expecting a baby. I wrote my congratulations and sent her a small present. It was in acknowledging my gift that she told me, as it now came into my mind, that her husband had accepted an appointment at a laboratory in Rome. A month later war broke out in Europe and I heard no more from her.

Simone and I had been good friends. She was a frank and loyal person, not the sort to let one down. And she hated the Germans. I recalled the way she used to rail against the 'sales Boches.' Since the fall of France and Musso's 'stab in the back,' she was not likely to have much use for the Italians, either, her Italian husband notwithstanding. She might not be able to take me in, but at least she was to be trusted. It was worth trying.

My first instinct was to call her up. But, if Domenico's fears were justified, the hotel telephone might well be tapped. I would have to find my way to the Via Pamphili in person. But first I must discover if she was still in Rome. The directory was three years old—she might have moved away. I must not risk her recognising my voice if she answered the phone; but there could be no harm if the padrona were to ring the number for me and find out if the Montenuovos were still living at that address.

The padrona was alone in the office crocheting. I showed her the number in the book and explained what I wanted. She understood at once and dialled the number. She asked for Signora Montenuovo, then laid her hand across the mouthpiece. "It's the mother-in-law," she announced. "The signora has taken the children out for an hour." Into the telephone she said, "Thank you, signora; one will ring again," and hung up.

I glanced at the clock on the wall—a quarter to three. Now that I knew that Simone was in Rome I didn't mind waiting a little, on the chance of Hank or Nick coming back with news of a better plan: I hadn't quite screwed my courage up to the point of striking out on my own. Just as a precaution, I asked the padrona how to get to the Via Pamphili. She didn't know the street, but produced a plan of the city showing it to be one of the newer streets on the Janiculum Hill. It was not so far, she confided, if one took the car along the Viale del Re, two blocks from the hotel, as far as the piazza this side of the Garibaldi Bridge and another car from there—No. 3—along the Tiber. By the map the Via Pamphili was no more than 'a little jump' from the Mazzini Bridge.

I was writing this all down when we heard someone come galloping up from the street, and the next moment Domenico burst in on us. I quailed when I saw his face. "Where are the signori?" he snapped breathlessly at his wife.

"They went out," she answered, without lifting her eyes from her crocheting.

"Pack my bag," he bade her. "I leave for Bologna in half an hour."

Placidly she laid her work aside and stood up. He grabbed my arm. "Come," he barked and pushed me into the sitting-room.

Chapter XXVIII

Inside the sitting-room, with the door shut, he whipped a flaring orange-coloured poster from his pocket and spread it on the table. "100,000 Lire Reward" was printed in bold letters in Italian at the top, and below my own face with Spanish comb and mantilla stared at me, next to Hank's behind Herr Blom's moustache. There was no photo of Nick. My picture was one that the recording companies back home used in my publicity; the police must have got it from one of the Rome phonograph shops.

The poster was in the two languages, Italian and German, side by side in two columns. I was too flustered to take it all in at once, but I noticed that we were billed as "dangerous enemy agents" and that the inhabitants of Rome were warned against harbouring us under penalty of death. A description of each of us was appended. Mine and Hank's were fairly full, Nick's more sketchy. The piece about me was quite flattering: "striking appearance, oval face, large blue eyes, red hair brushed back from forehead, fluent Italian and German"; but I was startled when I read: "Is probably wearing a heavy gold locket, Italian antique, set with small pearls, on a gold chain." I wondered how on earth they had found out about the locket. Involuntarily my hand stole to my neck.

Domenico thrust something at me. It was a thousand-lire note. "Give the signor back his money," he said in an agitated voice. "Tell him I can furnish no papers. And would to God I had never dipped my hand into this dish, because they're pulling Rome apart to find you. If I had known that it was 'The Limping One' himself who was on your track, I'd have sent you all to the devil before risking my life and the dozens of lives that are in my keeping. Because these animals of Germans have the trick of breaking down the most resolute and I dare not face arrest."

He broke off trembling. "Tell Signor Enrico that I gave nothing away," he went on, "but say that I fear they suspect me. That is why I am leaving Rome at once and that is why I must ask him to quit my house forthwith, on account of my wife, who must stay behind. Say that the mistake was even to have enquired about papers, for where the Limping One is concerned it seems that even the most corrupt of these German dogs are not to be bought. Tell him from me that if you are wise you'll follow my example and get out of Rome, no matter at what risk, as quickly as possible. But you leave my house today—this very afternoon. Addio, signorina!" He dashed out.

I sat for a long time, staring at the poster. I had to make my mind up now. Should I wait until either Hank or Nick came back and chance the police arriving or, taking my courage in both hands, go straight to Simone and throw myself on her compassion? If the police were going to raid the hotel, to stay would accomplish nothing, I reflected; whereas, by going, I would at least make it easier for Hank and Nick if they knew I was safe. But I would have to rely on the padrona telling them where I had gone; I didn't dare tell them in a note.

I peeked into the office, but it was empty. As I stood there I heard a step creaking up the stairs. I drew back into the sitting-room. The footsteps stopped. I waited, but heard no movement in the office. I opened the door into the corridor as softly as I could and looked along its dusky length to the landing at the end. A man was there, his head raised towards the main staircase that wound its way to the floors above. He stood in a ray of sunlight that fell from the glass lantern above the stairs, a solidly built individual with a large moustache, carrying an umbrella. He faced the passage and appeared to be listening.

I was back in the room in a second. He could not see me in the darkness of the corridor, but I knew I couldn't hope to reach the stair to the alley unheard. If he decided to explore in the direction of the sitting-room, I was trapped; whether he entered from the office or from the passage, I wouldn't have time to escape by either door.

The locket! If he were from the police it would be the first thing he would look for. I pulled it from my neck, gazing wildly about me for a suitable hiding-place. The sight of the Madonna in her brave diadem of gems and glittering mantle behind her lamp in the corner gave me an idea. I slipped the locket round the neck of the figure, and though it hung down almost to the feet I noted that the miniature in its dull gold setting was all but invisible against the sparkling tinsel of the robe. Also the lamp hid it from view from the room.

At that moment I heard the padrona calling on the stairs. A murmur of voices ensued outside. Then a heavy step went down to the street. The padrona put her head in from the office.

She glanced over her shoulders a couple of times before she spoke. "There was one here just now who pretended to look for rooms," she said under her breath, "but I think he was from the police, one of these wretched informers, probably. It is best you go before they come to search the house; also my husband wishes that you should not stay tonight. Can you go to this friend we telephoned, in the Via Pamphili, do you think?" she asked anxiously.

"I guess so," I told her. "But what will happen if the police are here when my friends come back?"

"We have a signal for such emergency," was the tranquil answer—"an orange tree in a tub we place on the sidewalk as a warning to our friends to stay away. The padrone put it out before he left to catch his train. The signori are informed and will look out for the tree."

"Will you tell them where I've gone? I don't want to write it, though I'm going to leave a letter for them."

"Gladly, signorina—if I see them."

"You'll see them all right, because, whatever happens, they'll come back for me. Now give me a piece of writing-paper and an envelope."

There was so much I could have found in my heart to say to them, especially to Nick. But I knew it could not be. I kept my note very short. "Dear Boys," I wrote, "don't bother about me any more, but get back to your jobs. A thousand thanks for everything." I signed it, "A.H."

I was about to close the envelope when I suddenly remembered the locket. I did not dare venture forth into the streets of Rome with it round my neck; on the other hand, I was reluctant to take the padrona into my confidence about it, because Italian hotel-keepers as a class enjoy the reputation of being pretty light-fingered and the Hotel della Mantella did not inspire me with any particular confidence. But I was loath to lose my charming souvenir, so decided to leave it up to Nick, who had brought me the locket in the first place. Accordingly, I added a postscript: "N. Say a prayer to the Madonna for me," reflecting as I sealed up the note that my young man's ingenuity would probably unriddle that one.

I wondered whether in the circumstances I would get a bill. It was forthcoming all right, though only for breakfast and lunch for the three of us—a few lire. As I had no Italian money except the two mille notes—the one Hank had given me at the villa and the one Domenico had returned—I tendered one and the padrona went down to the café to change it. She was away for quite five minutes, but when she came back I found she had sent a waiter to spy out the land. His report was that the alley was clear.

A minute later I was in the street.

Chapter XXIX

History was on the march in Rome, and I was in the middle of it. Despite the hollow feeling at the pit of my stomach, the thought stole into my mind as I slipped through the quiet alley where thin cats sniffed at the ash-cans in the warm sunshine. Some day, maybe, I would tell my children the story of how I walked through Rome before the Allies came in—if I survived to have any children. Would they be redheads, or dark-haired with steady, grey eyes? My heart ached when I thought of Nick.

At the top of the alley I passed a church with a high, pompous façade—the church Hank had spoken of, presumably—dodged across a street of small shops and backyards aflap with washing, and emerged into the clatter and clanging trolley-bells of the Viale del Re. I had bound my scarf turban-wise about my head to cover up my tell-tale hair; all the

same, I felt horribly naked and exposed as I brushed my way along the crowded pavements. The golden afternoon air seemed to crackle with tension. The evening papers were out. People tore them from the hands of the newsies, clustered in groups to discuss them or pored over them on the thronged café terraces. On all sides rose voices high-pitched in argument with much gesticulation and waving of cigarettes. Proclamations were everywhere: "Long Live the Italian Socialist Fascist Republic" flared from the walls. At one place, where a knot of idlers was gathered in front of a hoarding, I suddenly perceived my face and Hank's staring from the flaming orange poster they were gaping at. I hastily crossed the road.

I soon gave up any idea of travelling by street car. There were queues at every stop; rather than linger in the open street, I decided it was safer to walk, at least as far as the Garibaldi Bridge. I had a moment of terror when quite a well-dressed man, obviously Italian, unexpectedly sidled up and began to talk to me. I was so convinced that he was going to arrest me that for a second or two I couldn't make out what he was saying. Then I gathered a snatch or two—"Bellissima, is it not lonely to promenade thus all by yourself?" and more on the same lines—and realised that it was merely the modern version of the Roman wolf on the prowl. He stuck with me for a full block before I could shake him off.

But in an odd way the incident was to prove my salvation. I was standing in an eddy of pedestrians at a cross-street waiting for the policeman's whistle when a stern voice said in my ear, "Un momento, signorina!" Swinging round, I found myself face to face with the man with the umbrella who had come to the hotel. I knew him instantly by his large moustache, his solid build. I didn't wait to hear more. Fortunately, I was near the kerb; I dived headlong into the main stream of traffic. I dodged a truck, but was brought up short by a car that shot under my very nose. It braked screaming to a stop. A man's face as brown as a nut was poked out of the window.

I glanced frantically over my shoulder. The man with the umbrella was fighting his way through the crowd to the kerb. In a panic I laid my hand on the side of the car. Only then did I remark the gold lace on the driver's sleeve, the swastika on his cap. It was a German naval officer. He was alone in the car with various duffle-bags and suitcases piled on the rear seat. Now I was indeed between the devil and the deep blue sea. Then I had an inspiration, and gambled on it. "Herr Offizier," I pleaded in German, "I beseech you, help me to get away from that odious man back there! Look, the one with the umbrella! He keeps following me and trying to talk to me."

The officer looked quickly in the direction to which I pointed; then, without a word, leaned forward and swung out the door on his far side. All about us horns were blowing furiously. I sped round the car and jumped in as it shot forward. I heard a shout and had a glimpse of a figure brandishing an umbrella in the roadway. Then the traffic cop's whistle blew. The car, a grey sedan, had a terrific pick-up and we were on our way in a flash. My companion emitted a grunt. "Ach je, they're all the same, the lousy Katzerlmacher!" he remarked genially.

Hope flickered up within me. Despite the swastika on his cap, he was not German but Austrian, and by comparison with a German an Austrian is a human being. Not only his soft accent proclaimed him Austrian, but 'Katzerlmacher' is the Viennese nickname for the Italians, called 'little cat makers,' because in the old days Italians went from house to house selling plaster cats and other small images. My companion was a cheerful-looking individual, tanned saddle-brown, with very black hair and broad shoulders. "You must be from Vienna?" I said.

He shot me a hopeful glance. "Not a Wienerin?" he remarked incredulously.

I shook my head. "From the Reich. But I've lived in Vienna."

"I'm from Wiener Neustadt myself. But the family comes from Trieste. Five generations of seagoing captains, meine Teuerste—what do you say to that?" More formally he went on, "Let me introduce myself—Captain Alois Stegemann, Imperial Merchant Navy, and," he went on, "I'd cheerfully give the three months' pay that's burning a hole in my pocket to be sitting at this moment on the Prater in front of a nice cool mug of beer." He glanced at me challengingly. "You can't have been long in this country to walk about the streets of an Italian city alone like that, a pretty girl like you. What do you do here?"

"I work for one of the German offices," I improvised. "I'm a secretary. At the Joint Metal Commission," I added, pulling all my recollections together.

"Suppose I threw you a tow-line?"

"A what?"

"Schauen Sie, Schatzerl," he laughed. "I arrive from a three-months' tour of duty in the Adriatic straight off my ship. I have a pocketful of pay and ten days' leave. I've never been in Rome before and I don't know a human being here. And now the good God drops an angel-pretty Mädl like you right in my lap—or almost. You're an exile among the macaroni-eaters and so am I. How about taking me in tow and showing me the town?"

We were slowing to a traffic signal on the square in front of the bridge. It was a German staff car and its muddy state showed that he had driven some distance, probably from the sea-port where he had left his ship. The thought uppermost in my mind was that here was someone who might well not have seen the posters about us. If I could persuade him to drive me to the Via Pamphili—not all the way, because I must leave no traces, but somewhere handy to Simone's! But I would have to act fast, because, putting my mind back to the city plan the padrona had shown me, I remembered that we would have to turn left from the square and follow the quays along.

I laughed. "Gott, Herr Kapitän, you certainly lose no time. Are you Viennese always so direct?"

"But always," he retorted with a great laugh, "when the girl is fesch and the time is of the essence, for remark, little one, that every time the clock ticks my leave is slipping away. It's settled, then. The time to drop my kit at the Hotel Excelsior where I have a room reserved and we'll step out together. After all, I saved you from that Katzerlmacher, and you owe me something. Or does an old sea-bear like me frighten you, too?"

"I'm terribly grateful to you and I'd love to show you round. But..."

The traffic moved on. "No excuses," he cried. "But you have to steer me. I'm better with a chart than a map and these are unknown waters to me. Which way to the Excelsior?"

"Herr Kapitän," I said, "I can't go with you now. I have to pay a call."

"Na, schön, pay your call you shall. Where do we go?"

"You can put me down at the Mazzini Bridge. We turn left here and follow the river along."

But when we reached the bridge he didn't want to let me out; he'd drive me to where I was going and wait for me. I said I'd rather go alone.

"Why so discreet?" he demanded. "But there, I know, you're going to meet a man." He rolled his eyes to heaven. "Ach, du lieber Gott, the woman's being unfaithful to me already."

"It's not a man; it's a girl," I told him. "Besides, I can't go driving round Rome with you in an official car. The military police might get after you."

The argument registered. He let me go then, but made me promise to meet him at eight o'clock at the Excelsior for dinner. As a parting shot he exclaimed, "Herr Je, but I don't know your name!"

"Grete," I said at a venture, "Grete Obermaier." I once had a sewing-woman of that name in New York.

"Then, gruss' Gott, Gretl," he cried, "tonight you and I are going to show the lousy Katzerlmacher what an old-fashioned Wiener Bummel looks like!" He kissed his hand to me and drove off, without waiting to ask again the way to the Excelsior, much to my relief.

It seemed a shame to take advantage of him, he was so simple and kindly. Five minutes later I was ringing the bell at Simone's apartment, in a newish block of flats high up on the Janiculum Hill.

A pallid, listless woman in a faded house-wrapper stared at me from the entry. "Signora Montenuovo?" I said. She continued to stare, then gasped, "Andrea—Andrea Hallam."

It was Simone. I could scarcely believe my eyes. Her face was lined, her dark hair unkempt and heavily streaked with grey, her hands, in which she used to take such pride, uncared-for and red-looking. Before I could reply she drew me inside and closed the door.

In the sitting-room she said with a very troubled air, "But how do you come here? What are you doing in Rome?"

"You mustn't ask me any questions, Simone," I told her. "I have no papers and I have to find a place where I can stay quietly for a day or two. I found your number in the telephone book: that's why I'm here."

She seemed to shrink away. "Do the police know?" she asked, almost in a whisper.

I nodded. "I won't hide anything from you. They do. As a matter of fact, they've got out a poster about me. The point is, are you willing to take a risk and take me in, until the hue-and-cry dies away? Or will your husband object?"

She shook her head, gazing at me strangely. "My husband is away," she said.

"That makes it easier, doesn't it? Because I was afraid that, being an Italian..." She was still staring, as though I was a ghost. "I know times are hard, honey," I went on. "I have money. I can pay you. Or perhaps you haven't a room?"

"There's a room," she said. Her tone was very reluctant.

"Maybe, the servants...?" I questioned.

She shook her head. "I haven't had a maid for months. I have to do all the housework, stand in the queues, take care of the children and my mother-in-law, who's old. That's why I look like this; I'm not surprised you didn't know me. How beautiful you are, Andrea! One can see how little the war has touched America."

I put my arms around her. "My poor Simone! If you let me come and stay with you we'll soon have you looking as pretty and chic as you were when we lived at the Hotel Beau Sejour—do you remember? I'll do your nails for you, as I used to, and I've lipstick and powder in my bag which I'll lend you."

She detached herself from me. "If I tell you you can't stay here, what will you do?"

I shrugged my shoulders. "Honestly, I don't know. I can't go to a hotel, on account of the police registration. I'll have to find a park bench somewhere, I guess."

Her black eyes searched my face. "Is it the Gestapo?"

I nodded. "That's about the size of it, my dear. I have friends who, sooner or later, will be able to get me out of Rome, I hope. Of course, I don't know which side your husband is on. But if he's for Badoglio, I thought he might have some connections or other..."

"My husband's not here, I tell you," she answered sharply. "And, anyway, there's nothing he could do..." She began to pace up and down the floor, her poor, work-worn hands twisted behind her back. At last she stopped in front of me. She seemed calmer now. "You must forgive me for appearing so inhospitable, Andrea," she said, "but I've had a hard time ... a hard time. Of course you can stay with us." Her eyes narrowed. "Were you followed coming here, do you think?"

I shook my head. "Positively not, honey. I got a lift in a car to within a block or two of your house and nobody trailed me from there, of that I'm certain. Or saw me go in downstairs, not even the concierge, if you have a concierge."

She gave a bitter little laugh. "We haven't had a concierge for over a year."

I slipped my arm through hers. "Darling, it's such fun seeing you again after all these years. I had the most amusing

adventure coming here..."

And I started to tell her about my Austrian 'sea-bear,' hoping to give her thoughts a new slant. I didn't mention the man with the umbrella, but I acted out the whole scene between the Captain and me, Austrian accent and all. The 'Katzerlmacher' brought a reluctant smile to her lips and before I finished she was laughing. "The same old Andy," she said, "twisting every man you meet round your little finger." She gave a little nervous laugh. "You'd like to wash, I expect. We have a bathroom, but the hot water doesn't function. But I'll heat some water in the kitchen. Then I must see about getting supper. We'll arrange about your room after."

I flung my arms about her. "I'll never forget this, Simone, never. It will only be for a day or two, perhaps not so long even, if things work out as I hope. And there'll be no disagreeable consequences for you, I promise you that." I would have kissed her, but she drew back, crying, "I must look at the soup—it'll be boiling over. I'll bring you your water to the bathroom."

It was a relief to have a proper wash again and, discarding my scarf, to brush out and tidy my hair. An even greater relief was the sense of sanctuary this quiet home with its large rooms and massive, well-worn furniture gave me. The sight of Simone, changed though she was, had revived all my pleasant memories of our old days together in Paris, and I promised myself that, before we parted again, I would do what I could to restore her morale and pride in her appearance.

There was no sign of her when I returned to the sitting-room. But the children were there, such grave, sloe-eyed little creatures who introduced themselves to me without the least self-consciousness: Daniele, who was going to be six, and little Gemma, aged four, both with their mother's olive skin and dark hair. Simone and I had spoken English together—she hadn't forgotten her English, at least—but the children spoke only Italian, making it sound the lovely, liquid language it is, as only Italian children can. To keep young children amused requires quite a bit of concentration, and as I romped with those two youngsters the dangers that had beset me for so long seemed to recede into the background. Except that, every now and then, with a stab of anxiety, I found myself wondering how Hank and Nick were faring and whether the padrona had told them where I had gone. I didn't expect them to call me, but I was conscious of listening for the phone.

The short twilight was over and darkness was falling outside by the time we sat down to supper—Simone and I and the two children and a little wrinkled old lady in a Paisley shawl who pecked at her food in gloomy silence. I was in the mood to talk and be gay, but Simone was curiously distraught. She was plainly overwrought and tired out, which may have accounted for the listless air with which she listened to me. But from time to time I was aware of her looking at me when she thought she was unobserved. She was also highly jittery, turning her head at every unexpected sound like a car backfiring in the street—I thought, maybe, it was the effect of the air-raids. Though we hadn't seen one another for so long, she asked me no questions about myself and was so obviously unwilling to speak of her husband that I began to wonder if they were not separated.

We had eaten our fish—some very tasteless dried cod—and salad and the little boy was changing our plates when the front-door bell pealed through the apartment. Without being bidden, he pattered off to answer it even as, on the heels of the bell, a loud, imperative knocking resounded. My heart seemed to stop. Instinctively, I glanced at Simone at the head of the table. She had stood up, her hands clasped tightly at her breast, the last vestige of colour drained from her face. Then the dining-room door opened and two men peered in, heavily built types in soft hats and sports jackets. They looked straight at me. One said to me, "Hallam, Andrea?" And without waiting for my answer, went on in German, "Gestapo. Come with us, please."

I turned and looked Simone squarely in the face. She would not meet my eye. "Why did you come here?" she screamed at me hysterically. "What else could I do with Daniele in the concentration camp? I couldn't even send you away, for if they ever found out that you'd been here he'd have been the first to suffer. Didn't you know that I married a Jew?" And she sank down in her chair in a storm of passionate weeping.

Then I knew why she had evaded my kiss.

One of the Gestapo men said in clumsy English, "Make yourself no reproaches, Frau Professor. If all Italian wives

were like you, we'd soon clear Italy of this foreign vermin. We Germans treat our friends right and your action will not be forgotten." He motioned with his head to me. "Come on, you!"

How could I have guessed that Professor Montenuovo was Jewish? I couldn't find it in my heart to hold against Simone what she had done. But as I followed the men out, leaving her sobbing piteously with the old woman fussing about her and the children starting to cry, I thought bitterly of the trail of venom that Hitler and his kind had spread throughout the homes of Europe.

Chapter XXX

The Rome black-out struck me as being almost as complete as London's, and, except that we crossed the Tiber, I had no idea where they were taking me. An enormous palazzo with a courtyard, where German sentries guarded the doors and despatch-riders gossiped under the shaded lights, proved to be our destination.

At the top of the tremendous marble staircase there was a steel gate. An S.S. guard unlocked it and let us through into a brightly lit hall, noisy with the click of typewriters and the ringing of telephone bells. As we went through the hall a man came out of one of the rooms and crossed in front of me, to disappear into another room. I had a sense of bewildered shock. It was Ziemer, the real Ziemer, who Nick had told me was at the bottom of the sea. Under those powerful lights it was impossible that I could be wrong—the dark hair, the horn-rimmed glasses, even the little strut with which he walked, were unmistakable.

Then Grundt had recovered the dossier and this was the end of all our scheming, of all the insensate risks that Hank and Nick had taken! Nothing else mattered now except that those two should get away. Failure was bad enough; if, to top all off, these faithful partners of mine were to fall a victim of Clubfoot's vengeance, the cup would be full indeed. Of what was going to happen to me, I tried not to think.

These things ran through my mind as I paced endlessly up and down the room where my guards left me—a pompous chamber, tapestry-hung, with a gold ceiling and tall barred windows. Presently, one of the Gestapo returned with a gaunt woman in some kind of a grey uniform and muttering, "Make it quick! He's waiting!", disappeared again. The woman came at me like a tank: "Nackt ausziehen!" she bade me gruffly—and I knew that I was to be searched.

It did not take long, for she was very expert. I had scarcely got into my clothes again when the Gestapo man was back, rapping at the door. "Well?" I heard him say to the woman as she opened. "Not there," she answered, and they went away together.

They seemed to have been in search of something. I couldn't imagine what and vaguely wondered whether Ziemer's return had any bearing on the mystery. I looked through my handbag, the contents of which the searcher had emptied out on the table. All my money was gone. Nothing else had been taken.

Then I was brought to Grundt.

Another enormous room, even vaster than the one I had left, and at the far end, behind an elaborate desk, the lamp at his elbow the only light, the figure that had so often haunted my dreams. Like some gigantic toad he crouched there, and I seemed to discern a hint of the toad in the dull and malicious gleam of his eyes glittering in the soft light from under the creased lids. Something unfamiliar about his silhouette struck me until, as I crossed the long space from the door, I realised that he was wearing a béret pulled down to his ears; the edging of white bandage protruding below it told me why he wore it.

He watched me approach the desk, his bulbous lips pursed round one of his outsize cigars. He began to shake like a

big jelly, and I perceived that he was chuckling to himself. "So, my little Andrea," he growled, "we meet again." He simmered once more. "Quite a day of joyous reunions, for an old friend of yours has turned up, miraculously snatched from the very jaws of death. He has only just left me. Maybe you saw him outside?"

"I saw him," I said.

"Picked up by a Spanish reconnaissance plane, after I don't know how many hours in the sea, and taken to Las Palmas, bringing with him a certain leather case." He chortled. "It must have been written in the stars that it would eventually come into my hands. And now prepare yourself for a little surprise. The case—the real case—is empty."

I gazed at him blankly. He gave his harsh laugh and, reading my thoughts, "There's no trick about it. The case has a false bottom, jawohl, but there's nothing in it." He stuck his cigar in his mouth and clamped his teeth about it. "What have you done with the Countess Mazzoli's locket?" he demanded.

He must have seen the way I started and flushed, for he went on: "You needn't trouble to deny it, Fräulein, because I know you had it. On his way here by plane Ziemer stopped off at Tangier and had a word with Safi, who escaped there and whom our friends the Spaniards are holding in jail. Safi states that, just after you left and before Ziemer secured admittance into the house, he saw von Rode open that locket and insert a tiny package inside. He then gave Safi the locket and told him to take it to you at the hotel for delivery to the Countess Mazzoli at the clinic. What became of it?"

I was rigid with excitement. Then we hadn't lost the Hitler dossier after all! I couldn't speak for a moment, thinking of the locket back there in the sitting-room round the neck of the glittering Madonna. I had to make some answer, but what could I say?

"I don't know what you're talking about," I replied at length. "I had no locket from Safi."

"No?" he said, politely disbelieving. "Yet Safi declares he left it for you. Could it have remained at the hotel? Or did you perhaps hand it over to your Intelligence at Marrakesh or Naples?"

"I know nothing about it, I tell you," I declared firmly.

He dandled his head. "A pity." He fixed me with his eye. "Your two friends were arrested this afternoon."

I sat there frozen. The worst had happened, then. A host of terrifying thoughts went jostling through my mind. Already I could see them facing the firing squad, like those others we had heard of, taken in the raid on the communications centre. Aldo and the rest were due to be shot within a few hours of their arrest, Domenico had told us; maybe Hank and Nick were already dead. Numb despair overcame me.

Clubfoot was considering the tip of his cigar. "Enemy agents masquerading in plain clothes," he remarked. "I needn't tell you what that means."

They were still alive, then. I snatched at his admission. "Where are they?" I managed to ask.

"At Gestapo headquarters." He contemplated me through a cloud of smoke. "Now, if you could produce that locket..."

On that I met his eye. "And supposing I could?"

His complacent smile said, 'Now we're getting somewhere.' "To get anyone out of the clutches of the Gestapo is no easy matter," he remarked. "It requires influence, considerable influence. If I am to exert myself on your friends' behalf, I shall require a little collaboration from you, liebes Fräulein." He leaned across the desk towards me. "You know what I want. Where is it?" And when I remained silent, "Come," he went on with growing irritation, "they tell me you haven't got it on you. What have you done with it?"

I pulled myself together then. "Let's understand one another, Herr Doktor. I'm not admitting that I know anything about the locket..."

He gave a shrug. "So much the worse for your friends, Fräulein."

"... but I'd like to get the arrangement straight. If I produce the locket, you save my friends from execution. What guarantee is there, however, that, once the locket is in your possession, they won't be put to death just the same?"

"None," was the bland retort. "You'll have to take my word for it."

I shook my head. "You'd have to release them first. Not only that, I'd have to know that they were out of the country, over the Swiss frontier, say."

He took his cigar away. "Conditions?" he said, scowling. His thick fingers groped in the ash-tray and picked up a match. "Do you see this match?" He snapped it across. "I can send your friends to their death as easily as that, ja"—he raised his voice threateningly—"and you, too, you poor fool. So let me hear no more of conditions."

But despair lent me courage. "You'd risk nothing by letting them go," I declared, "because you'd still have me as a hostage."

He uttered a sort of angry growl. "I'm taking no more chances with any of you. Produce the locket and the three of you shall go free."

I was at my wit's end by this. I realised that Nick had not been able to return to the hotel or, if he had, had not understood my cryptic postscript, otherwise the locket would have been found on him when he was arrested. I wished I could hit upon some way of recovering the locket from Domenico's without giving the place away; but at the same time I knew Clubfoot's word to be worthless and that, even if I could hand over the locket then and there, the three of us were doomed. My instinct was to play for time, though I realised that time could not save us. "Come, what have you done with it?" he barked.

"It's not here," I quavered.

"You mean, it's not in Rome? Where is it? Did you leave it at the villa, or what?"

"You'd have to let me go and fetch it."

"Go where?"

At that moment a long-drawn-out wailing sound outside seemed to fill the night. I knew what it was; I had heard the London sirens. But Grundt ignored it. "Go where?" he repeated irascibly.

"I can't tell you. I'd have to fetch it myself."

"You'll stay right here." The sirens wailed on and now he seemed to be aware of them. "These cursed fliers!" he growled. "Every night it's the same." The pudgy face was suddenly greyish and he champed nervously on his cigar. He turned to me again. "I'll send one of my men." He picked up a pencil. "What's the address?"

"I can't tell you," I answered, trying to make my voice sound firm. "I'll have to go myself. My two friends are a guarantee that I'll come back."

"The address!" he roared. His eyes blazed and a spasm of rage distorted his features. Gazing at him in terror, I was fascinated by a knotted vein that suddenly stood out pulsating on his temple. Then his hairy hand groped on the desk and a buzzer whirred. "You baggage!" he snarled in a voice strangulated with fury. "You'll see that I have the means of finding your tongue for you."

The alarm continued to howl its mournful warning, the buzzer screamed on. A scared voice called from the door, "Herr Doktor!" and one of my Gestapo guards came running to the desk.

"Take her to the Regina Coeli and put her in a cell," Clubfoot barked. "Report to me at the air-raid shelter there in

half an hour. Verdammt and verflucht, a man can get no rest with these eternal raids! Where can one be safe from these blasted Tommies and the triply damned Americans! Get her over to the jail before they arrive," he bellowed at the guard.

On that the guard plucked my sleeve and we left Grundt there, flinging his papers into a despatch-case and muttering to himself like an angry baboon.

Out into the blackness again, between my two guards, but a blackness that bristled with a confusion of sounds, sirens wailing, whistles shrilling, the patter of running feet on the sidewalks. The other traffic had stopped as we sped with klaxon screaming through the streets, with glimpses here and there of helmeted figures shepherding chattering crowds into the shelters. Presently, through the bedlam of the sirens, we heard the gun-fire. As the sirens died away the bark of the ack-ack grew louder until the whole city seemed to shake with it.

Suddenly, with the scream of protesting brakes, we slowed. A red light waved ahead. We drew up beside a man in a helmet with a brassard on his arm. "Air-raid warden!" he said severely. "Don't you know there's a raid on?"

"German Secret Police," said one of the Gestapo men in guttural Italian and reached for his pocket. But at the same moment there came a burst of orange flame out of the dark, a deafening explosion, and crying, "Ah!" in an odd shrill voice, the speaker pitched forward on his face. Almost at the same time there was a second flash and a detonation on the other side of me and the other guard collapsed sprawling into my lap. The door of the car opened and I saw that helmeted figures surrounded it. Strong arms plucked me from the car and almost flung me into another car that stood, with engine running, not half a dozen paces away.

Forthwith the car shot away from the kerb.

There were two men in the car. One was Hank, the other Nick.

Chapter XXXI

Whatever happens in books, I don't believe that in moments of real crisis anybody makes speeches. I know that "Ouch, my knee!" was all I found to say as I landed in the arms of those two, while Nick, drawing me down on the seat beside him, bade Hank shift his big carcass and make room for me. I put my arms about them and hugged them to me as I sat between them. Nick found my hand, twined his fingers into mine. "Oh, Andy!" he sighed under his breath. Just that and no more.

"Darlings, I can't believe it's really you," I murmured weakly. "Grundt told me you were arrested."

"In a pig's eye we were," Hank proclaimed scornfully.

Nick found his voice. "It was a pretty close call for both of us, all the same," he said. "Hank got back soon after you'd left. When he saw the danger signal—the orange tree out on the pavement—he went straight round to the church to look for you. When I turned up about an hour later, the street was fairly swarming with police and plainclothes men. I met Hank in the church. He had your note to us and the locket."

"*The locket?*" I almost screamed. "*Not the locket?*"

"Sure," was Hank's calm rejoinder. "Before the police arrived, the padrona, bless her heart, popped over to the church just on the chance that one of us had got back. She told me that Domenico had got the hell out and that you'd gone to look up those friends of yours in the Via What-sis..."

"But the locket, Hank?"

"She went back for it. I translated your note to her. She said nothing then, but your postscript evidently gave her the

idea of taking a look at that Madonna in the sitting-room. When she discovered the locket hanging there, she remembered that a locket was mentioned in your description on the poster and brought it straight across to me." He laughed. "That postscript of yours was over my head, Andy, but not the padrona's. She has her wits about her, that cookie!"

"Then we have the locket back?" I exclaimed. "Oh, Hank, I can't believe it!"

Nick opened my hand and I felt the gold chain trickle into my palm. "Keep it, Nick," I said, and gave the locket back to him, "because the Hitler dossier's inside."

"Gosh!" Hank ejaculated in a stunned voice, and "My sacred aunt!" Nick whispered.

Our driver must have had nerves of steel, for though we had no lights but the side-lamps we went rocking at a mad speed through the clamour of the raid. There was a screened blue light on the front of the car that, with some badge on the wind-screen, seemed to give us priority, for, though police and air-raid officials' sheltered against the walls as we hurtled along, no one challenged us. The noise was terrifying, what with the incessant gun-fire searing the sky with orange flashes, the fitful glare and distant thud of bombs jolting the very air, and the drumming of the raiders overhead. As well as I could for the din, I told my story with Hank and Nick discharging questions at me.

"Ye gods, this is tremendous news," Nick exclaimed in an awed voice when I had finished. "I wondered why they stressed the locket in the description of you." He hugged me to him. "My hat, Andy, it was a good thing you left the locket behind or that devil might have bluffed it out of you with his yarn about our arrest."

I shivered a little. "No," I answered, "because I knew he wasn't to be trusted. But if they'd ever got me as far as that jail..."

Hank clapped me on the back. "Honey, you're terrific. If I were Ike Eisenhower I'd make you Chief of Intelligence straightaway. But," he added with a sort of growl, "I'd like to get my hands just once round the throat of that big ape, Clubfoot."

I clung to them desperately. "I'd like to forget him. All that matters now is that I've found you two again. Did you follow me to Simone's or what? And how on earth did you know I was in that car?"

Nick indicated a dim shape that rode beside the driver. "That was Antonio's doing," he answered. "He has things organised to such an extent that these Gestapo babies can't make a move without his knowing. One of his delivery trucks brought me to the church, and Hank and I went back in it to his printing works with the news that you had gone off to the Via Pamphili. Antonio carried on from there. He ascertained that you'd been picked up at your friend's place and taken to Grundt's headquarters at the Palazzo Righi and, within a few minutes of your leaving, knew that you were headed for the Regina Coeli." He wagged his head. "The man's a ruddy wonder, as cool as a cucumber, with everything at his fingertips. The rest you know. Air-raids are a godsend to the Underground everywhere. All the big coups are pulled off when the bombers come over."

"And where do we go from here, Nick?"

"To the coast. A town I never heard of. A place called Nettuno."

A place called Nettuno.

According to Nick, it was a small seaside resort, about forty miles south-west of Rome. I'd never heard of Nettuno, either, yet, could we have peered into the future, we'd have seen the name placarded in headlines the length and breadth of America, yes, and throughout the civilised world. "Hank knows more about the set-up than I do," Nick said.

"It's a long shot," Hank explained. "Two of our agents—Americanos, Antonio calls them—were put ashore there a couple of days ago by submarine, presumably. Antonio was to have contacted them at Nettuno last night, but with all this heat turned on he couldn't make it. His information is that these birds are due to be picked up by sub at the first light tomorrow, and the idea is that we should travel back with them, that's to say, supposing they show up at the rendezvous again tonight."

"And if they don't?" I enquired rather blankly.

Hank emitted a sound between a laugh and a sigh. "Then we're in Antonio's hands, honey. Or God's. You can take your choice."

The answer was not encouraging. I had that desperate feeling of being hunted again. I clung to Nick's hand and felt the answering pressure of his fingers. "Hello," said Hank suddenly, "we're stopping."

The car had halted at a pair of gates in a high fence with stacks of lumber protruding above. In a dark yard fragrant with the scent of sawn wood Antonio opened the door of the car, beckoning us out. At once the car moved away under an open shed. A white ambulance stood in the yard, its nose pointing towards the gate. His arms spread along one of the wings, Antonio addressed us. He was younger than I expected to find him and quite dapper in his béret and dark business suit—he looked more like a lawyer than my idea of a guerrilla leader. But his voice was crisp and he radiated a tremendous air of resolution.

"Attention, please," he said. "We are making for the farm of one Giuseppe Gallini on the marshes behind the beach outside Nettuno. He is a trustworthy member of our organisation and his house occupies a lonely situation away from the main road with only the marshes beyond. It is there that I was to have contacted our two American visitors at midnight last night. I will not hide from you that we run a certain risk, especially towards the latter end of our journey. For one thing, there is an airfield and a large munition dump in the neighbourhood and here and there there are coastal batteries in the dunes. Also I must warn you that, so as not to be disturbed, Giuseppe sells liquor clandestinely to the German troops. However, it will be midnight before we get down there, and at that late hour no one is likely to be abroad; moreover, all being well, you are not likely to be at Giuseppe's more than a very few hours."

"How far is the house from the beach?" Hank asked.

"The width of the marsh—a few hundred metres which you must pass in Giuseppe's boat—and you are at the ruined tower—the Torre Azura, as it is called—that stands on the shore. But time presses. This is the plan. We shall travel down in this ambulance, with you, signori, as the patients, the signorina as nurse, and myself as attendant. The raiders were over the Termini railway yards tonight and our story is that the Sant' Antonio hospital, which is in that vicinity, was hit. You, Signor Enrico, are Cesare Gallini, linotype operator employed in my printing works, who underwent an appendix operation at the hospital two days ago. You are being evacuated to the farm of your cousin Giuseppe at Nettuno. The other signor is Alberto Alinari, street-car conductor, who had the next bed to you in hospital and whom you are taking with you to your cousin's—we shall supply you, signor, with a splint and sling to simulate a broken arm. The signorina speaks Italian, you say? Benissimo! I have papers made out for you, signorina, in the name of Sister Maria Clementina, of the nursing sisters at Sant' Antonio. Is all clear?"

"Absolutely," Hank replied for the three of us.

"One word more. It would be best if you spoke as little as possible, on account of the foreign accent, leaving me to do the talking." He smiled. "You may have full confidence in me and Pietro, who will drive us. It's not the first time we've evacuated patients. Now I must fill out your permits of circulation." He called softly under the shed. "Pietro, the clothes!" and vanished into the dark.

Rather to my dismay, I found myself cast in the rôle of a Sister of Charity. I slipped the habit of coarse serge, resembling in shade the horizon bleu of the old French army, over my suit, and Pietro showed me how to adjust the wide bib and pin on the characteristic white head-dress. After that came the leathern girdle and rosary of heavy beads with cross attached. "So," he said, stepping back to regard me, "if the signorina will remember to keep the eyes lowered as much as possible, all will be well." While Hank, inside the ambulance, was changing out of his clothes into the heavy woollen pyjamas he was handed, Pietro proceeded to fix Nick up with a very convincing splint.

We were ushered into the ambulance, where Hank grinned at us from the stretcher, a blanket up to his chin. "Dio, but he is too red!" Pietro ejaculated, and, groping for face-powder and a puff in a locker, reduced Hank's ruddy tan to a suitable pallor. Then Antonio in a white linen coat came hurrying back. "So, all is in order," he announced, running a rapid eye over us. "I shall hold the papers, for we shall need them en route. Ready, Pietro? Then avanti!"

The night was moonless and overcast. The sirens were wailing the all-clear as we glided out of the yard. Antonio was in front with Pietro, Nick and I with Hank in the back. Soon we were at the octroi. Antonio showed our papers; lamps were flashed on us. But the guards, still under the influence of the raid, were perfunctory and within a very few minutes we were on our way again. I glanced at the watch on my wrist. It was ten minutes to eleven.

My spirits began to rise as we hit the open road. Soon we were climbing—the Alban hills, Hank explained. As we approached a village a red light stopped us. A Fascist militia officer, flanked by a German sergeant, stepped out from behind a barrier. Once more lights were shone inside the ambulance, showing Hank, his eyes closed, breathing fitfully, Nick slumped on the seat. "How was it in Rome tonight?" the Fascist officer wanted to know as he handed Antonio our papers back.

"A veritable inferno, Tenente," was the dramatic reply. "If you could have witnessed the scenes of terror at the hospital! Those poor fellows in the back owe their lives to the heroism of this brave sister, who literally dragged them from the flames."

We were waved on and I breathed again. We were stopped so often after that, usually at road-blocks outside the villages, that I lost count. But each time Antonio was glib and self-assured and each time I dug my nails into my palms under the wide sleeves of my robe until we were suffered to proceed.

We had been more than an hour on the road and were passing through a little old town where the air seemed danker, as though we were nearing the sea, when a red light halted us once more. A long argument ensued between Antonio and the officer in charge of the barricade, a fussy German who spoke Italian, which ended in our turning round and re-entering the little town with a guard on the running-board. We drove to the town-hall, where Antonio followed the soldier in under the arcades.

It was stuffy inside the ambulance and I let down the rear window. A cigarette glowed under the arches and I saw that a man was there, a civilian, surveying the ambulance with the placid tenacity of the idlers you find in all small towns. Nick's voice spoke in my ear: "This is the Town Commandant's office. Nettuno's in the zone of the armies and they sent us back for a special permit." He lowered his voice to a whisper. "Better step back from that window. There's a fellow watching us."

I resumed my seat beside Hank. At last Antonio appeared at the ambulance door with a couple of German officers. I sat with eyes downcast, my rosary between my fingers, while flash-lights blazed. Then the Germans stepped back, Antonio got up again. "That guy's still skulking around," Nick spoke over his shoulder from the window. "And wait! There are two of them. Now they're running into the building after the officers. I believe they spotted something."

We were out of the square now and threading the winding street. "What could they spot?" I said, raising my hand to settle my head-dress. "I guess they're only loafers."

He leant forward suddenly and caught my wrist. "Andy!" he cried aghast. He held up my wrist and showed me my watch clasped about it, the diamond-studded watch I always wore, given me one Christmas by the radio network I was under contract to back home. "Nuns don't wear wristwatches, especially not diamond ones," he reminded me caustically.

I was thunderstruck. "Do you think they could have seen it?" I asked as, whipping off the watch, I thrust it into a pocket of the suit under my habit.

"We'll soon find out," was the grim rejoinder. He lowered the glass between us and the driving-seat and began to speak to Antonio.

I caught Hank's eye. "Cheer up, honey," he said. "Maybe it's a false alarm. And anyway, we're as much to blame as you. One of us should have spotted it."

We were at the barricade again. I could not take my eye off the street behind us. But it was deserted under its sparse lamps. Antonio presented our permit. That German officer fiddled about with it until I could have screamed. Once clear of Rome we had travelled with headlights; but now we were made to turn them off. We were entering a prohibited coastal area, the German reminded us stiffly. This was a blow, because it meant reducing speed. Antonio was as

impassive as ever, but I caught Nick's troubled frown. At last we were given the signal. There were still no signs of pursuit as the barbed-wire gate swung back. We headed out along the arrow-straight road before us.

"Ten kilometres to Nettuno," Antonio informed us. "But we don't enter the town. We turn right-handed where the road crosses the river, before we come to the bridge." He glanced at his watch. "Past midnight already. We shall be a little late. Let's hope the gentlemen will wait."

"You don't know who they are, by any chance?" Hank enquired.

He laughed. "Your pardon, signor, but that is a question that is neither asked nor answered in my organisation. To be frank with you, we find names dangerous."

I was watching the road behind us. Nothing stirred upon it and nothing was visible in our wake when the high skeleton of an iron bridge loomed ahead and we turned off the highway. It was a dirt road we followed, skirting the river, which grew wider as we went along, spreading into marshland. The silence was profound, the only sound the night wind rattling the sand in the roadside scrub and rustling the weeds of the marsh: we seemed to be coming to the end of the world. And then, out of the darkness ahead echoed, faintly at first, the jangle of a harmonica, voices raised in song, the ring of iron heels on the road. "Some of Giuseppe's clients, if I'm not mistaken," said Antonio. "Diavolo! They're drinking late tonight. Gently, friend Pietro! We must not run them down!"

We had to slow to a walk, for the soldiers, six or seven of them, tunics unbuttoned, caps on the backs of their heads, straggled all over the road. I recognised the snatch they were braying, an old Berlin march-tune, to which the Berliners had fitted words. It carried me back to pre-war Berlin, to Sunday afternoons in modest beer-gardens under the limes in flower, with the couples whirling to the strains of the little Schramml orchestra and singing as they danced:

"In Rixdorf giebt's Musika,
Musika, Musika,
Wo tanzt die lahme Rika
Mit ihrem lahmen Franz."

The soldiers scattered before us, laughing and yelling at us in their rough dialect. We heard their voices for a long time after the night swallowed them up. For the first time Antonio looked worried. "It is very necessary, I think, that our friends should arrive," he remarked meaningly.

Now, where the river had been, only marsh lay stagnant under the lowering sky. Presently the track curved away from it, snaking its way through scrub. Then round a bend it suddenly finished at a gate, a yard with farm buildings beyond and across the far end the squat mass of a house.

In the yard Antonio left us. "Put up the car," he bade Pietro, "and let our friends change back into their own things!" The ambulance was tucked away out of sight in one of the barns, and the three of us had shed our disguises and were waiting in the shadow of the buildings when a cautious whistle summoned us to the house. Antonio stood in the doorway conversing in whispers with a grizzled man in shirt and trousers who carried a lantern. "Is all clear?" Hank asked.

"Those men we met on the road were the last of Giuseppe's customers," Antonio replied. "He says we shan't be troubled any more tonight."

"And the visitors?" Nick put in.

"They slept here last night. They gave Giuseppe the customary signal from the tower on the beach and he fetched them across the marsh in his boat. They said they would be back tonight—they must be back, unless some disaster befalls them, for only our good Giuseppe knows the way through the channels. We have time. It is not yet one o'clock and dawn is not until five. For the rest, signori, we cannot be surprised here, for remark"—his hand pointed—"from the door here we command the road which is the only approach to the house and at the back the marsh protects us. And that reminds me. Where's Pietro?"

"Here, Signor Antonio," said Pietro, appearing behind us.

"Did you bring my mandoline?"

"Si, signor!" We then saw that he was nursing a long and heavy object wrapped in an old raincoat. With a laugh Antonio pulled the coat away and disclosed a Tommy-gun. Nick's eye lit up. With an almost affectionate air he took the gun from Pietro.

"It is the Italian army model, signor," Antonio pointed out. "Very simple. See, I show you."

But Nick was already operating the mechanism. "I've fired thousands of rounds out of guns like this," he laughed. "We used to bag them by the truckful in Libya." He showed it to Hank. "Neat, isn't it? And the stoppages are terribly simple."

Hank grinned. "I'll take your word for it, Nick. You're forgetting I'm only what you British called a desk wallah." Nick clapped him on the shoulder and gave Pietro back the gun.

Antonio chuckled. "With that little mandoline I'll guarantee to hold this house against an army. But come in, my friends, and our good host will at least find a little glass of grappa to warm us after our ride."

Chapter XXXII

It was snug in the big farm kitchen with its tiled floor and an iron pot simmering over the logs that hissed and crackled in the open hearth. A wooden stair against the wall led to an upper chamber. Giuseppe had extinguished his lantern and we had only the fire to light us as we sat at the long table, while our host brought us stew from the pot in earthenware bowls and little glasses of a fiery, transparent spirit. I missed Antonio and saw him, a dim figure at the open window beside the door, setting up his 'mandoline' on a low tripod.

Our supper over, Antonio and our host crossed to the window and sat there talking. Then Nick's fingers dipped into an inner pocket and something glinted in the firelight. It was the locket. He laid it face down on the table and with the small blade of his pocket-knife began to explore the back. In dead silence we watched him. Then the back tinkled to the table and we saw, in the recess at the back of the miniature, a tiny packet, not much larger than a postage stamp, wrapped in cellophane. Delicately Nick picked it out, scrutinised it for a moment, then placed it in Hank's outstretched palm. "So much for Hitler!" he remarked. "Now you hold him in the hollow of your hand, old man."

Hank balanced the tiny package on his palm. "So much crime in such a little space!" he murmured and fell to examining the package. Nick stood up abruptly and, going to a window in the back wall, unlatched the shutters and opening the window leaned there, gazing out.

I went across to him. Below us the marsh stretched on all sides, its stagnant pools reflecting the rare stars showing through the cloud-rack, so that the house seemed to float on water. It stood on piles, and from a balcony a stair descended to a decrepit landing-stage where a boat was tied up. Across the marsh an irregular outline made a blob against the greyness of the sky. "That must be the tower Antonio spoke of," I said.

"I guess so," Nick answered. His manner was dispirited. He shivered. "God, how bleak it all is!"

"What's the matter, Nick?" I said and slipped my arm into his. "Aren't you thrilled that we've got the dossier?"

He nodded.

"Then what?" I persisted.

He frowned. "I've got the jitters, I expect. I wish these birds would arrive. This damned place gives me the willies."

"They'll arrive all right. I've never been in a sub. Is it frightfully stuffy?"

He made no answer. Instead he said, "Andy, darling, I want you to remember this scene. The stars winking in the marsh, the way the wind bends the reeds, the old tower over there like a finger sticking up in the sky. Will you?"

"You know I shall, Nick, the way I'll remember all the adventures we've had together."

He shot a quick glance over his shoulder and, seeing that Hank was still poring over the tiny package at the table, took me into his arms. "Thank you, darling," he whispered. "Thank you for everything."

My lips clung to his. "You sound so solemn," I said, leaning back to look into his face. "Do you realise that in a few days' time you and I will be laughing about all this as a thrilling but rather amusing experience?"

He sighed and released me. "Maybe you're right. I don't know what's the matter with me tonight."

We drew apart then, for we both heard the stutter of a motor-cycle outside. A peculiar whistle followed. Antonio and Giuseppe were at the window. "Have no fear," said Giuseppe. "It's one of my customers. But you'd all better go upstairs." He opened a drawer of the bureau under the window on which the gun was resting and put the gun inside. There was a step outside and a voice called, "Papa Giuseppe!"

It was frowsty in the room under the eaves. As the five of us cowered there in the dark the voices in the lower room mounted through the floor:

"And they turned back, you say?"

"Per bacco, since they wanted the road to Nettuno."

"In that case I should have met them on my way here."

"But it is more than half an hour since they were here, amico Fritz."

"Verdammt, then I must push on to Nettuno, I suppose. Such a fuss, with all of us routed up from sleep! The wind cuts like a knife. You wouldn't have a little drop to warm a body, Papa Giuseppe?"

There was the clink of a glass, and soon after the front door slammed and we heard a motor-bike depart. Giuseppe called up the stairs. Antonio and Pietro went down, but Nick lit a candle that stood on a table for a look round. The two camp-beds were unmade. Beside one a saucer with some cigarette stubs was on the floor, an Italian newspaper protruding from under the bed. Nick poked his finger among the cigarette-ends. "American," he announced. "This is where those two guys slept, of course."

I had picked up the newspaper. "Nick," I said tremulously, holding it out to him and pointing to the white margin. A line of little windmills, endlessly repeated, was pencilled in there. "Those doodles..."

His eyes snapped. "By all the gods of war," he exclaimed. "Snafu!"

An old clock hung on the living-room wall with a painted face and an unhurried pendulum. Its solemn tick-tock beat on my ears as I listened to the warm debate between the men that followed the motor-cyclist's departure. According to Giuseppe, who knew the man, he was a despatch-rider attached to one of the German coastal batteries. Evidently, said Antonio with a regretful shrug, the signorina's watch had given us away. The only reason the pursuit had not been taken up sooner was possibly that at the Commandant's office they had waited to call up Rome before acting. But now that our arrival in the neighbourhood was known, he was for effacing all traces of our presence immediately. Pietro would get rid of the ambulance at a place they knew of in the waste land beside the road and Giuseppe would take us across the marsh to the tower. The tower was in ruins and the beach desolate—we could lie up there and await events.

But Nick shook his head. "Unless you can tell us where and at what time our friends are to be picked up, we obviously can't leave," he said. "For one thing we can't afford to miss them"—I guessed he was thinking of the locket; "for another we can't risk their arriving here at the last moment and finding no boat to take them across. For I assume there's only the one boat."

"That's right," Antonio agreed. "But what if your friends do not arrive, signor? The Germans are thorough: they'll ransack the whole neighbourhood house by house."

"If our friends said they'd come, they'll come," Nick declared; and he said to Hank in English, "You know Snafu, Hank! He never broke a date in his life."

They argued some more, then struck a compromise. It was half past two: we would give them until dawn and then make for the tower. After that our plans were vague; they seemed to rest with Antonio. But meanwhile Antonio packed Pietro off to dispose of the car and, setting up the gun again, took his place at the window.

It was around three o'clock when we heard the plane. Its engines throbbed high over the farmstead. "Night patrol," said Antonio. "He must be making for the airfield at Nettuno." Hank was stretched on the floor in front of the fire asleep. Nick sat beside me, staring at the fire and listening to the measured tick of the clock. He never spoke, but he held my hand in a tight grasp that told of spanned nerves.

I had drowsed off when Nick's releasing my hand aroused me. I heard Antonio say from the window, "It's Pietro. He has someone with him," and Snafu walked in on us. He was dressed in peasant clothes—a faded shirt, grimy pants, sandals, and a béret—and was indescribably dirty, his face covered with black stubble. At the sight of Nick he stopped dead and, pulling off his béret, dashed it on the floor. "Well, blow me down," he ejaculated, "if it isn't our Nick! And Andrea in person! And old Hank Lie-by-the-fire! And here I've been busting my guts to get here and give our friend Antonio a line about you three." He prodded Hank with his foot. "Wake up, you old dormouse, and see what the cat brought in."

Hank was on his feet in a flash. "Gosh, Snafu, we knew you were around because Andy spotted your doodles upstairs. But what brings you here?"

Snafu winked. "Just a quiet survey—chain and theodolite stuff. I've a real surveyor with me—but he's staying ashore. I was over in Naples when the project came up. As I've been over the ground before it wasn't hard to persuade Jake to send me, especially when I suggested putting the Rome Underground on to you folks." He glanced at his watch. "We're being called for at four-forty, our time. Rendezvous, that old tower on the beach; signal, a blue light three times repeated at one-second intervals. Sorry if I'm late, but I rather lost my bearings in the dark. If I hadn't run into our little friend trying to lose a large white ambulance..."

At the sight of Snafu my fears began to recede. He was so matter-of-fact, so methodical. He had said he would come to Giuseppe's, and he had come; and if he announced that we were to be picked up at four-forty, then at twenty minutes to five the sub would be there. We had the trip across the marsh in front of us, to be sure, and after that the pull out to the sub; but I felt confident that Snafu would ultimately land us aboard. Hank and Nick had drawn him into a huddle in the corner: I knew by their eager air that they were telling him about the locket. But you could never guess it from Snafu's expression; that poker face, those brightly humorous eyes, gave nothing away.

Then Antonio, relieved of his post at the gun by Pietro, came across to be introduced and the grappa bottle went round again. Snafu and Antonio were deep in talk when Pietro called suddenly from the window. "Signor Antonio," he said in a low voice, "I think there's someone in the yard."

It all happened in a matter of split seconds. I saw Antonio rush to the window and Pietro step back. At the same instant a flash lit the room from outside, a shot awoke all the echoes, and Antonio toppled backwards to the floor.

A figure sprang to the gun. It was Nick. Crouched down, his eye to the sights, "Keep back, all of you!" he shouted. With ear-shattering stutter under that low roof the gun answered to his finger on the trigger. There were tracers among the rounds, golden lines of fire that went curving into the first greyness of dawn. As Hank pulled me away from the window I had a fleeting glimpse of a helmeted figure, rifle in hand, that ran stooping across the yard, spin round as though caught by a jet of water and pitch headlong into the midden in the centre. Another flash blazed outside and something smacked loudly against the shutter. With a laugh Nick ducked, then lifted his head, and the gun spoke again.

He said over his shoulder, "Snafu, Hank, get the hell out, will you, the lot of you! Antonio and I can stand off these monkeys." He bobbed as a bullet shivered the window-pane at his elbow, then let go with another burst.

I saw Snafu then. He was stooping over Antonio, who lay prostrate on the tiled floor, his head on Pietro's knees. Now Snafu stood up. "Antonio's dead!" he announced.

Nick seemed to grind his teeth. "Damn and blast them!" he murmured. "You three get going or you'll miss that sub," he told Snafu. "I'm staying."

"You're nuts!" Hank cried. "You don't think we're going to leave you here?"

"That's exactly what you're going to do," was the grim answer. He glanced round quickly. "Giuseppe," he said in Italian, "the boat!" And as Giuseppe snatched up a pair of oars in the corner and vanished through a door on the far side of the room, Nick went on speaking to Hank. "You're on an official mission, you and Snafu," he said. "You've got to get home and report. Snafu will bear me out."

"He's right, Hank," said Snafu.

"Baloney!" Hank retorted. "He's as much on a mission as we are."

There were no more shots from the yard for the moment. "Listen, Hank," Nick resumed. "Someone has to hold these babies, and it has to be me on account of the gun. You don't know the first thing about it, any more than Snafu does. We can't tell how many of them there are out there, but it's a lovely field of fire and there's a whole box of ammunition. If I can manage to keep the beggars out of hand-grenade range ... Someone get me the mattresses off those beds upstairs!"

Pietro went. Hank said furiously to Snafu, "I'll not stand for it. If he stays, I stay."

"If anyone stayed, it would be me," Snafu rejoined quietly. "But I'm on duty and they're waiting for my report. I have to get back and so have you. That's an order, Hank," he added.

Pietro came down with the mattresses and he and Nick began to prop them up about the gun. The movement must have been noticed outside for a succession of bullets spattered the wall. Nick dodged down, then, raising himself cautiously, fired a burst. "Get going, will you?" he growled at us over his shoulder. "The sub won't wait!"

His hand dipped into his pocket and held something out behind his back. "Here, take it, one of you!" he said. I was nearest to him. He seemed to know it was I, for he murmured without turning his head, "Thanks, darling!" as he laid the locket in my palm.

Hank was beside me and I offered him the locket. "It's safer with you than with us," he said, hanging it round my neck.

Giuseppe spoke from the back of the room. "Signori, the boat is waiting."

"How long to cross the marsh?" Snafu asked him. "About twenty minutes?"

"Less, signor, with two at the oars," Giuseppe replied.

Snafu was looking at his watch. "I'll be back for you with the boat," he said to Nick. "Maybe the sub will be late, or we can hold it." He laid his hand on his shoulder as Nick crouched behind the gun. "Thanks, Nick."

"For God's sake, go!" Nick cried.

And then, without warning, the yard was flooded with light. Nick bobbed down and the rest of us scrambled back out of range of the radiance that made everything as bright as day. A voice boomed from the yard. "Stop the firing, please! Flag of truce!" it trumpeted in throaty English. "By the hokey, I should know that voice," Nick exclaimed. "Blow me, if it isn't old Clubfoot!" He raised his eyes to the level of the gun.

"Keep down, you madman! It's a trap," Hank cried.

From within the dark room we could see the searchlight that sizzled on top of a car drawn up outside the gate. In the dazzling beam something white was agitated from round the corner of one of the barns. As I watched I saw a head emerge and above the flapping cloth withdraw, swiftly. A head wearing a *béret*. For an instant I had a glimpse of the ape-like face, every line, every bristle, pitilessly revealed in the blinding light.

The familiar voice spoke again: "Listen to me, whoever I am talking to—Lundgren, Leigh, or Andrea Hallam, or all three of you. Resistance is useless. You know what I want. Send it out to me under a white flag and you shall go free!"

The *béret* shifted into sight again for a fraction of a second and vanished precipitately in a shower of plaster and splintered wood as Nick fired. As the burst finished, Grundt's voice came back at us. "Fools!" it shouted. "I warned you. Now take the consequences!"

On the order he barked in German the searchlight went out. Nick's tracers made trails of fire in the sudden blackness. Nothing stirred. "Bad shooting!" he said. "Now scram, all of you!" he called over his shoulder and fired a further burst. This time a machine gun answered with a clatter of bullets around the window. Then Hank dragged me away.

Nick did not even look round. It was easier to part thus. This was the front line and I had no place there. These two were Nick's friends, yet they could leave him to his fate, without false heroics, without repining. And he had no rancour in his heart against them, knowing that it was the fortune of war, that, had the positions been reversed, either would have taken his place without hesitation. But, merciful God, why must men expend such faith and courage on this senseless business of slaughter?

I looked Snafu in the face as he held the door for me. He lingered an instant, gazing back to where Nick, his black head wreathed in wisps of blue smoke, stooped over the gun, absorbed by some complicated reloading operation. "Is there no other way?" I said brokenly. "It's terrible to leave him like this."

"And how do you think I feel," he answered roughly—"I who love him like my own son?" Then he thrust me forward. "Get on down!" he cried with sudden fierceness. "Do you want to make us late?"

We were taking our places in the boat, with Hank on the landing-stage ready to shove us off, when we heard a dull bang, followed by an eerie, whizzing sound. "That's a mortar, Snafu," Hank cried. "My God, they'll blow the house to pieces about him."

The explosion roared in the silence. Giuseppe in the bows uttered a sort of scream. "A shell," he wailed. "For the love of the Madonna, signori, let us be going. There are two hundred pounds of ammonal stored in my cellar."

With a cry of "Nick!" Hank swung about and went plunging back up the stairs.

"Hank, you lunatic, come back!" cried Snafu. But Hank went on.

That muffled plop resounded again, and as we flung ourselves on our faces a second shell exploded so close that debris rained down on us. "Pull away!" Snafu yelled to Giuseppe.

I caught Snafu's arm. "For God's sake, Snafu, we must wait for them," I cried.

But he shook me off. "Pull away, Giuseppe," he ordered sternly.

Then as Giuseppe and Pietro dipped their oars, the door banged at the top of the stairs. At first I thought that Hank was alone; then, with a cold feeling at my heart, I perceived the limp form that was slung across his shoulder. Wisps of smoke curled after him from the door. Snafu drew the boat to the landing-stage even as the mortar fired again.

Hank laid Nick down in the bottom of the boat. The shell burst somewhere out of sight, but we were already away, the brown marsh water gurgling at our bows. Nick lay with his eyes closed, his face and hands caked with dust. A little blood curled from his lips.

I looked at Hank as he knelt beside him. Hank's air was unhappy. "That second shell," he said under his breath. "It blew most of the window in. He was lying under the gun. It's his lungs, I guess—a shell fragment."

I dipped my handkerchief in the water and wiped away the blood and grime from the pallid face that I had pillowed in my lap. He looked so weary, lying there—like a tired child that has fallen asleep. Then Snafu was beside us, thrusting his hand inside Nick's shirt. Sternly he called over his shoulder to the boatmen. "Faster!" he said.

Nick never moved, but every time he breathed the blood bubbled at his mouth. Then Giuseppe, pointing shoreward, cried, "Signori!" in a terrible voice, and fell to rowing frantically.

We were deep in the marsh now, gliding forward between tall beds of weeds. Little tendrils of smoke were eddying about the house raised high on its stilts above the waste of waters and there was a faint flicker of flames against the sky while we gazed. They must have switched on the projector in the yard, for suddenly the whole background was bathed in light and the marsh all about us was agleam. "Keep going, keep going!" Snafu shouted furiously to the rowers.

Then Hank said, "Look!" On the balcony above the landing-stage a massive figure was silhouetted against the radiant background. Already tongues of fire were licking the sides of the house and plumes of smoke, borne by the wind, went drifting across the balcony. Through the smoke as we watched, we saw that dark shape hobble to the rail and halt there, peering into the night. And then a slow crimson glare lit the sky and a terrific report roared in our ears with a concussion that shook the air and flung us in all directions. The boat rocked madly. I snatched Nick up and held him close to shield him while water spilled over us. When we looked back we saw only the marsh, desolate in the half-light of the coming dawn, and where the house had been, a vast mushroom of smoke.

Nick had neither stirred nor spoken. He lay under the open bay of the tower, his head in my lap, his breath coming in laboured gasps. Just above us, with elbows planted on the stonework of the opening, Snafu and Hank scanned the sea. Giuseppe and Pietro had scattered to watch the beach.

It was very still in the tower. Nick's uneasy breathing and the quiet lapping of the tide among the stones were the only sounds. Through the gaping roof above our heads the first light of the coming day fell on his face. Presently I saw that his eyes were open. He began to mutter. "They've got to send up the rations," he said in a restless voice. "The men must have their rations."

I stroked the dank hair out of his eyes. "Don't worry, Nick, darling," I told him. "Everything's all right now."

He grew more agitated. "Hurry those boats up!" he cried feverishly. "We've got to clear this beach. Those damned Stukas will be over again as soon as it's light." Then his gaze cleared and he was smiling up at me. "Andy!" he said drowsily. "What happened?"

"They started to shell the house," I said, "and Hank went back for you."

He gave a faint smile. "He would. Where is he?"

"Right here, Nick." I saw then that Hank was beside us. "It was time to shift out of there," he said to Nick. "There was H.E. in the cellar. The house blew up, and Grundt with it."

A vestige of the old mischief flickered. "Nine, ten, and out," said Nick softly. "He wouldn't like that. Thanks, Hank." His hand moved and Hank took it. With sudden agitation Nick glanced about him. "Where's Snafu? What happened to Snafu?"

"Here I am, Nick!"

They exchanged a smile. "Good old Snafu!" Nick murmured and closed his eyes. "So tired," he sighed.

Hank called from the bay above, his voice low and urgent: "Snafu, quick!" At the same instant a bluish radiance bathed the stonework of the tower in a cold glare. Snafu, who was staring fixedly at Nick, stirred and, leaning forward, brushed the boy's forehead with his lips and sprang to Hank's side.

That gesture told me all. Nick's eyes were open again; he was staring at the eerie radiance all about us. "What is it?" he said in a dazed voice.

I couldn't speak for the tears that were pouring down my face. "Oh, Nick," I cried and bowed my head.

"Don't!" he told me gently while his fingers stroked my cheek. "Would it be the sub?" he asked.

I nodded. "Yes, Nick. It has come to take us home."

He tried to smile at me while my tears rained down. "Home for me is where you are, Andy," he whispered.

He died there in my arms as the second star shell spilled its sickly light over the sea.

Chapter XXXIV

He was one of the generation which, born during the first World War, hovered for a little like butterflies in the sun and then were gone. Our romance, so strange, so brief as we measure time, yet in retrospect so inspiring, was as much part of the war as the heartbreak that ended our dream. In the weary months that ensued I would ask myself whether we would have loved one another had we met in the peace-time surroundings of London or New York instead of the heat and dust and hidden strife of war-time Marrakesh. I realised that I had my portion of the sacrifice he had been called upon to make, that I must bear it as willingly as he had done. So I tried to lay aside all bitterness and console myself with the memories he had left me. They lingered in my mind like the echo of music or the glowing colours of the sunset.

I cannot bring myself to write of that sad journey back. It was a British sub that took us off, so that I felt that Nick was coming home as his fellow-countrymen reverently lifted him to the deck; and whatever risks we may have run during our passage down the coast were hidden from us behind the impassive mask the Royal Navy wears on duty. We landed at Naples without incident, and in the days that followed Hank and Snafu did their best to spare me the stress of the endless cross-examination we had to undergo, not only at the hands of Jake Maxted and the Brigadier, but also later, from a succession of important and ultra-hush-hush authorities, both in Algiers and London. The locket with its precious missive we turned over to Jake. Hank told me that the Hitler dossier on microfilm was intact inside its wrapping, but, as Nick predicted, I heard nothing as to what use was made of it, though I guess that Hank and Snafu knew. I didn't care much. My one idea was to get back to America and oblivion and, if I could find them again, to the interest and absorption of my singing career. I scarcely knew a moment's peace until Hank put me on the Clipper in England.

Dear Hank! He must have known about Nick and me, but he said nothing.

The epilogue came about three months later. I was back in my New York apartment in the midst of my old routine, radio work, Stage Door Canteen, singing round the camps and hospitals. The Allies had landed at Anzio and Nettuno—I realised then what Snafu had been up to on that desolate shore—and furious fighting was going on around Cassino. Suddenly out of the blue I was invited to launch a new Liberty ship over at Camden.

I was immensely flattered, but puzzled, too. I knew no one at the shipyard who could have put my name forward; besides, I thought that such invitations went only to prominent people, not to obscure singers like myself. The invitation threw no light on the subject. The ship, even, had no name; 'provisionally known as '27193,' the invitation said. Of course, I accepted and bought a new frock for the occasion.

I had a shock when, after being welcomed in the launching-platform, I raised my eyes to the hull towering above our heads and read the name inscribed on the bows.

It was *Nicholas Leigh*.

Such a surge of emotion swept over me that I had to clutch the rail. For a full minute, while the Navy Band struck into the National Anthem and people all about me began to sing, I thought I should never be able to play my part in the ceremony. But as I gazed aloft at the slender hull all a-flutter with flags I found something lithe and gay and gallant about the lovely ship that put me in mind of Nick. And when the moment came I was suddenly proud and happy as, with all my heart in my voice, I cried, "I christen you Nicholas Leigh!" and swung the cradled bottle.

The bottle shivered, the champagne foamed, the brave ship began to move while the crowd roared. I felt my elbow gripped. It was Snafu. "A tribute from our grateful country, Andy," he said, "and from three Yanks in particular who loved him."

He was in uniform, so spruce that I scarcely recognised him. "I might have guessed it was your doing," I told him. "But I thought you were in Italy."

"They gave me special leave." His gaze travelled past me to where the ship now floated in the foaming basin. "Dear Nick," he said. "Guys like Nick don't die, Andy. But it's kind of nice to know that he's back in the war again, though only carrying freight. A destroyer would have been more in his line, if the Navy regulations had allowed it."

"A lovely thought, Snafu," I said. "Thank you for giving me the proudest day of my life."

He patted my arm but said nothing. He opened his wallet. "I've a clipping I've been keeping to show you. It's from the *Voelkischer Beobachter*—Hitler's paper, you know."

It was a news despatch from Rome.

It read: "By order of the Führer a wreath was laid on the bier of Dr. Adolf Grundt, who, as already reported, succumbed to a heart attack at a leading Rome hotel. The remains will be forwarded to the Reich for interment. The deceased, who was employed on special duties, was a devoted servant of the National Socialist Party, of wide experience and proved capacity, whose loss is universally regretted."

"They admit that he's dead, at least," I said, as I gave back the clipping.

Snafu laughed. "I shan't admit it until I see the old devil with his toes turned up right under my eyes. Even though we were there when that house went up under him." He wagged his head. "It's not the first time that the worthy Dr. Grundt has been officially dead and buried."

He paused, and I saw that he had drawn a flat jewel-case from his pocket. "It's the custom at these functions," he said, "to present the lady who performs the ceremony with a little souvenir. I obtained permission from the shipyard to make the presentation to you myself." And he put the case in my hands.

Inside was the Countess Mazzoli's locket. "Oh, Snafu, darling!" I cried.

"It was Hank's idea," he remarked. "I wanted him to give it to you, but he shied off." He glanced at me sharply. "You haven't asked me about Hank."

"Dear Hank!" I sighed. "He writes to me regularly from England, but I wish he'd come back to America. I miss him."

"He's coming back to America," he said. "He's being transferred to Washington." He gave me a whimsical look. "Why don't you marry him, Andy?"

I laughed. "For the most ladylike of reasons, Snafu. He hasn't asked me—at least, not lately."

He took my two hands in his. "He will. Marry him, Andy. Nick would like it. Goodbye now. I'm flying back tonight." He glanced backward over his shoulder and gave me a hurried kiss. "By the way," he said, "Hank's here, but a brass-hat nabbed him on his way across to you. Here he is now!"

He gave my hands a little parting squeeze and ran down the steps from the platform. Turning, I saw Hank, looking like a Viking in his uniform, fighting his way towards me through the crowd, his blue eyes shining.

[End of *Courier to Marrakesh*, by Valentine Williams]