

THE RETURN OF  
GREY SHADOW

*George Ernest Rochester*

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AIR RANGERS  
THE BLACK HAWK  
DESPOT OF THE WORLD  
JACKALS OF THE CLOUDS  
PIRATES OF THE AIR  
FLYING COWBOYS  
THE TRAIL OF DEATH  
THE BLACK SQUADRON  
THE FLYING SPY  
THE FLYING BEETLE  
CAPTAIN ROBINHOOD—SKYWAYMAN  
WINGS OF DOOM  
GREY SHADOW  
THE BULLDOG BREED  
BROOD OF THE VULTURE  
SKY PIRATES OF LOST ISLAND  
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THE MYSTERY OF THE FLYING V RANCH  
THE SQUADRON WITHOUT A NUMBER  
SCOTTY OF THE SECRET SQUADRON  
DEAD MAN'S GOLD  
THE SECRET SQUADRON IN GERMANY  
NORTH SEA PATROL  
VULTURES OF DEATH  
THE WORST SQUADRON IN FRANCE  
TRAITOR'S ROCK  
THE BLACK MOLE  
THE FREAK OF ST. FREDA'S  
PORSON'S FLYING SERVICE  
SHADOW OF THE GUILLOTINE  
THE AIR TRAIL  
THE SKY BANDITS

# THE RETURN OF GREY SHADOW

*by*

**GEO. E. ROCHESTER**

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# CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. TRAPPED! . . . . .	<a href="#">7</a>
II. THE THREE PLOTTERS . . . . .	<a href="#">33</a>
III. THE LONELY COTTAGE . . . . .	<a href="#">59</a>
IV. STRANGERS IN KLADEN . . . . .	<a href="#">81</a>
V. THE DOOR OPENS . . . . .	<a href="#">101</a>
VI. ON THE RUN! . . . . .	<a href="#">141</a>
VII. "YOU KNOW THE RENDEZVOUS". . .	<a href="#">162</a>
VIII. 'PLANE OF A HUNDRED SECRETS . . .	<a href="#">183</a>
IX. "THE PLANS ARE THERE!". . . . .	<a href="#">205</a>
X. WHISPERING WIRES . . . . .	<a href="#">230</a>

# THE RETURN OF GREY SHADOW

## CHAPTER I

### TRAPPED!

THE night was dark and bitterly cold. Outside a dimly-illuminated hangar, somewhere behind the lines in France, a D.H.9 stood with engine ticking quietly over.

Inside the little flight office, warm and stuffy because of the glowing stove, four men were gathered—or, rather, three men and a youth.

One of the men was Major Lester, leader of the Secret Squadron, a band of German-speaking British pilots who carried out dangerous tasks on the other side of the lines. Another was Captain Cox, the squadron adjutant, and the third was Beefy Bates, a pilot of the Secret Squadron. The youth was Captain John Scott—Scotty to his pals—the youngest pilot of the squadron.

Unlike his three companions, Scotty was not in uniform. Beneath a long and ragged overcoat, which reached almost to his ankles, he was wearing the shabby attire of a German peasant.

“You know your orders, Scotty,” said Major Lester. “Bates will take you over and land you on the moors south of Saarburg. From Saarburg, or from the most convenient railway station, you will proceed to Hamburg, where you will call on Johann Litz in the Nordstrasse. Litz is a sick man, and his call for assistance is urgent, so you will waste no time in getting to Hamburg.”

“I understand, sir,” nodded Scotty.

“Then good-bye and good luck,” said Major Lester, holding out his hand. “You will report back here when Litz is sufficiently well enough to carry on with his duties.”

A few moments later Scotty and Beefy Bates were walking through the darkness towards the hangars where the D.H.9 was warming up.

“Who exactly is this fellow Litz?” demanded Beefy curiously.

“A British Secret Service agent whose real name is Captain Weston,” said Scotty. “He runs a little ship chandler’s shop down by the docks in Hamburg, and he’s engaged in spying on the movements of German warships in the Elbe. He’s fallen ill and has sent a message through in code for someone to come and help him until he’s fit enough to get about again.”

“And you’ve clicked for the job, eh?” said Beefy. “Who’re you supposed to be when you arrive in Hamburg, anyway?”

“Emil Litz, Johann’s nephew from Ansbach,” replied Scotty. “I’m exempt from service with the colours owing to my lungs being groggy. The forged identification papers I’ve been given are stamped to that effect by the German military tribunals of Nuremberg and Munich.”

“Well, it sounds a straightforward enough job,” said Beefy. “But, all the same, I wish they’d chosen somebody else for the job instead of you.”

“Why?” demanded Scotty.

“Because the German anti-espionage service is getting as hot as mustard and there’s a reward of one hundred thousand marks on your head, dead or alive,” said Beefy grimly. “You’ll have to watch your step in Hamburg, old hoss, every minute of every hour of every day.”

“You can trust me for that,” said Scotty quietly. “I’ll be careful for Johann Litz’s sake, as well as my own.”

They reached the D.H.9, and, buttoning his leather flying coat up about his neck, Beefy swung himself up into the forward cockpit, whilst Scotty climbed nimbly up into the rear cockpit.

Running his engine up on brief but searching test, Beefy signalled to the waiting mechanics to whip away the chocks from in front of the undercarriage wheels. Next moment the D.H.9 was roaring across the darkened aerodrome to lift and go soaring up and up into the night.

Swinging on the climb, Beefy headed eastwards towards the trenches. They came into view, a long and tortuous line lit by star-shells and Verey lights, with here and there the slowly sweeping horizontal beam of a searchlight picking out the tangled barbed wire and shell-pocked shambles of No Man’s Land.

At eight thousand feet the D.H.9 roared across the line. And now the darkness was split by the golden beams of German searchlights which came stabbing up through the night, wheeling and scissoring in an attempt to pick up the fast-flying raider.

To port and starboard of the machine came the vivid, crimson flash of exploding shrapnel from the German anti-aircraft guns far below. But as yet they were firing blindly, for no searchlight had succeeded in picking up the raiding Englander.

Suddenly a darting, golden beam caught the machine, passed on, then whipped back to bathe the raider in brilliant illumination. Other searchlight beams flashed swiftly across the sky to concentrate on the D.H.9, but already Beefy had whipped forward his control-stick and was going earthwards in a screaming, twisting dive which shook off the golden beam.

Then back came the control-stick, the nose of the machine lifted, and as Beefy and Scotty roared on into Germany, the searchlights and anti-aircraft batteries began to close down one by one behind them. The D.H.9 was safely through the first barrage.

Not a light showed anywhere on the ground far below as the D.H.9 thundered on, for the Germans had long since learned by bitter experience to keep all lights shrouded from the hawk-like eyes of the British night flyers. Not that Beefy was engaged on a bombing raid this night. His job was to ferry Scotty safely across the lines into Germany and land him on the lonely moors south of Saarburg.

It was necessary to fly entirely by watch and compass, but every pilot of the Secret Squadron was an expert navigator, and at length the D.H.9 came gliding silent down through the darkness with engine ticking over, to land on the night-enshrouded moors.



“Well, here we are, old hoss!” exclaimed Beefy, when the machine had come bumping and jolting to a stop. “I’ll give you fifteen minutes to get away from here before I rev up and take off. Cheerio, and the best of luck!”

Scotty took Beefy’s hand in quick, firm clasp, then swung himself stiffly to the ground. For a moment or two he stood staring about him with eyes which by this time had become well attuned to the darkness. But nothing moved, nothing stirred, and not a sound broke the hushed and brooding stillness save the quiet hum of the gently running engine.

Satisfied that their secret landing had gone unobserved, Scotty spoke a final word of farewell to Beefy, then moved away from the machine and was swallowed up in the darkness.

Some fifteen minutes later, as he was tramping sturdily along a moorland road which led in the direction of Saarburg, Scotty heard the distant mounting roar of the D.H.9’s engine as Beefy opened up the throttle for the take-off.

The sound increased in volume, lifting up and up into the night sky; then, as Beefy swung westwards towards the far-distant trenches, the roar of the engine died gradually away, leaving the moors enwrapped once more in the silent pall of night.

Beefy had gone, and Scotty was alone in enemy country. It was far from being the first time the young pilot had played the dangerous rôle of spy, but as he trudged on towards Saarburg Scotty knew that until his mission was over Death would be always at his elbow waiting to pounce should he make one single false step.

It was dawn when Scotty reached Saarburg. Even at that early hour there was bustle and activity in the streets, factory workers commencing and leaving shifts mingling with grey-clad German soldiery.

None took any notice of Scotty slouching along in his peasant’s garb and ragged overcoat, and he reached the railway station unaccosted. In the booking-hall he paused a moment to stare with quizzical eyes at a notice plastered on the wall:

“REWARD!

ONE HUNDRED THOUSAND MARKS!

“The above reward will be paid to anyone giving information which will lead to the arrest of Captain John Scott, of the British Secret Squadron, who is known to engage in espionage work within the frontiers of Germany.

“Anyone found guilty of wilfully withholding any such information will be shot.

“By Order of  
THE GERMAN HIGH COMMAND.”

“Ah, a bad one, him!” said a wheezy voice at Scotty’s elbow. “It will be a good day for the Fatherland when he is taken and shot!”

Scotty turned to look at the speaker, a ragged, unshaven old derelict of the streets, much too old for work and for military service.

“It’s a sin and a shame the things he’s done,” went on the old fellow, switching his bleary eyes from the notice to Scotty. “Or, at least, the things they say he’s done. Blowing up Zeppelin sheds and railway bridges and such like. And they do say that once he led his own aeroplanes into Germany and pretended they were all Germans. He and his friends stayed here in Germany for weeks, and blew up dozens of munition works and factories and did no end of damage. Ah, but he’s a low-down, cunning villain, that Englander, I’m telling you!” His voice dropped to a whine. “I come and look at that notice every day and wonder what it would be like to have a hundred thousand marks to spend, because I have not a pfennig, and I have not eaten for two days——”

Scotty cut short the whining discourse by pressing a small coin into the old beggar’s hand, this obviously being what the latter had been leading up to. Then, drifting away towards the booking office, Scotty took a ticket for Hamburg, and inquired how best he could get there in these days when the military and military requirements took precedence over every other form of traffic.

Finding there was a train leaving within thirty minutes, he passed on to the platform, where two grey-clad non-commissioned German officers were seated at a table by the barrier of the departure platform.

“Your papers!” said one of the pair harshly to Scotty as the young pilot tendered his ticket.

Scotty knew perfectly well there was nothing to be alarmed at in this demand to see his identification papers, for it was a military order in Germany that all travellers must produce their papers and state their business on demand.

So, producing the expertly forged identification papers which described him as being Emil Litz, farm labourer, of Ansbach, and exempt from service with the Colours owing to lung trouble, Scotty handed them over.

Taking them, the German non-commissioned officer commenced to scan them. Watching him with apparent bovine patience, Scotty could have sworn that the man’s fingers suddenly tightened on the papers. The involuntary movement was scarcely perceptible—if indeed it was a movement at all, but, all the same, it rendered Scotty vaguely uneasy.

For another long minute the German continued to scan the papers; then, raising his head, he stared hard at Scotty, obviously to see if he answered the description penned on the papers.

“What takes you to Hamburg?” he demanded.

“My uncle, Johann Litz, lies ill there, and I go to help him with his little shop until he is well again,” answered Scotty glibly.

The German grunted and picked up a rubber stamp. Thumping the stamp down on the papers, he returned them to Scotty.

“Very well, pass through!” he growled.

Pocketing his papers and ticket, Scotty passed through the barrier towards where the train was waiting drawn up alongside the platform.

But, in spite of being passed through the barrier, his uneasiness was persisting, for he couldn't rid his mind of that slight involuntary tightening of the German's fingers when the man had been examining the papers.

What had caused that sudden, almost imperceptible movement? Scotty asked himself. Was it something to do with the papers? It must have been. Yet the papers were in perfect order and the man had not questioned them.

Pausing at the open door of a compartment, Scotty glanced covertly back along the platform. Only one German non-commissioned officer was now seated at the table by the barrier. The other—the one who had dealt with Scotty's papers—had evidently gone off somewhere, for his chair was vacant and he was nowhere to be seen.

His eyes grim and his face set, Scotty stepped into the compartment and settled himself down in a corner seat. There was something about this business that he didn't like. Forced as he was to be on the look-out for danger at every turn, he knew he might well be imagining peril where none existed; for if the Germans suspected him of being other than he professed to be, the chances were that he would have been detained at the barrier and held for interrogation and further identification.

On the other hand, however, the Germans were no fools, and if they were suspicious of him, they might easily be giving him sufficient rope in anticipation of his hanging himself with it.

The compartment in which Scotty was sitting began to fill up, and he took covert but careful stock of his fellow-travellers. There was a stout old lady accompanied by a small boy with a close-cropped head and a perpetual sniff; a couple of young soldiers evidently going on leave from the garrison; and a severe-looking lady of the schoolma'am type.

Nothing much to worry about in that bunch, thought Scotty. But just before the train started a heavily built man carrying a carpet bag got into the compartment and slumped himself down on the seat opposite Scotty. Unfolding a newspaper the man commenced to read, and a few moments later the train jolted into motion, sliding out of the station on the first stage of its run to Frankfurt, where Scotty was to change trains for Hamburg.

To Scotty, the carpet-bagger looked like a commercial traveller, but he wished he could be sure. There was certainly nothing in the man's attitude to arouse the slightest suspicion, for after digesting the contents of his newspaper he folded his hands across his paunch and appeared to doze off.

He came out of his doze as the train was running into Frankfurt, and on descending to the platform, Scotty heard him inquiring in a loud voice for the train to Erfurt. But not until he had watched the man board the Erfurt train and seen the train actually pull out of the station with the man aboard, was he satisfied that he wasn't being shadowed.

What Scotty had failed entirely to see, however—what, in fact, it had been practically impossible to see—was the merest glance of the eyes which had passed between the carpet-bagger and another man on the crowded platform.

This second man, limping as though crippled and poorly dressed as an artisan, followed Scotty unobtrusively to the Hamburg train and got into the same compartment, which soon filled up with passengers. Like the carpet-bagger, this man took not the slightest notice of Scotty, and scarce once glanced in his direction during the long run northwards to Hamburg.

It wasn't until after midnight that the train eventually pulled into Hamburg, and passing through the barrier, Scotty turned the collar of his ragged overcoat up about his ears and walked out into the street.

Save for an occasional military or naval patrol and a few soldiers and sailors out on late pass, there were few about at that late hour. Boldly accosting a policeman, who stared suspiciously at his ragged attire, Scotty inquired the way to the Nordstrasse. Following the directions given him, he eventually arrived at a mean and narrow street down by the docks where, above a little shop with dirt-grimed windows, he read in the feeble illumination of a street lamp:

### JOHANN LITZ. SHIP'S CHANDLER.

There was not a light to be seen anywhere in the shop or in the windows above, but in response to Scotty's knock there came a shuffling of feet on the other side of the door, and the door opened to disclose an aged and dirty-looking old hag carrying a candle.

"What's your business at this hour?" snapped the crone, holding the candle so that its yellow illumination shone full on Scotty's face.

"I come to see my Uncle Johann Litz, who lies ill here," said Scotty. "He's expecting me."

"Is he?" snapped the woman, thrusting forward her seamed and wrinkled face with its wispy grey hair in order to take closer stock of this nocturnal visitor. "He's said nothing to me about it. You'd better wait there while I tell him."

She closed the door in Scotty's face, leaving him to wait whilst she went to report his arrival to Johann Litz, whose real name was Captain Weston, of the British Secret Service.

That she was some old hag whom Weston had got in to minister to his needs whilst he was ill, Scotty didn't doubt, and as Weston couldn't have been certain when assistance would reach him in the form of a colleague such as Scotty, he had evidently said nothing to the woman about expecting anyone.

The moments passed, then suddenly the door opened again and the hag reappeared, candle in hand.

"You're to come with me," she said.

Scotty followed her into the dark and shadowy interior of the little shop, the atmosphere of which was redolent with the smell of tar and hemp and creosote.

Carefully closing and locking the door, the old woman led the way up a narrow, rickety staircase and into a low-ceilinged, sparsely furnished bed-room where a man, unshaven and haggard, was lying on a low, truckle bed.

An oil-lamp was standing on a little table by the side of the bed, and as Scotty advanced into the room, the invalid raised himself on his elbow and peered at him.

"How are you, uncle?" asked Scotty.

"I'm bad, nephew, bad," said the other; then to the old woman: "Get out of here. Go downstairs and brew some coffee. And close the door behind you!"

Waiting until the old hag had shuffled from the room and descended the creaking staircase Johann Litz turned to Scotty again.

"I dare do all that may become a man," he muttered.

"Who dare do more is none," said Scotty, completing the quotation from *Macbeth* which Litz had suggested as the password when he had sent his message across the lines into France asking for assistance.

Satisfied that Scotty was the colleague who had been sent to help him, Litz relaxed on the pillow with a smile.

"So you've got through safely," he said. "Good man. It's been weary waiting here. Who exactly are you?"

"Scott, of the Secret Squadron," answered the pilot.

The sick man started.

"By Jove, so they've sent you, have they?" he ejaculated. "I know you by repute, of course. But take your coat off, and when the old hag's brought up the coffee we'll have a talk."

"Who is she?" demanded Scotty, divesting himself of his overcoat.

"A woman I got in to look after me when I became ill," said Litz. "She knows nothing about our real activities, of course——"

"Listen!" cut in Scotty sharply.

"What is it?" demanded Litz, as the pilot stood with head inclined in listening attitude.

"I thought I heard someone knocking downstairs," answered Scotty. "Are you expecting visitors?"

"No, no one at this hour," said Litz quickly. "I didn't hear any knocking. It's probably a shutter banging somewhere."

Scotty stared at him. The man's voice was quick and jerky—nervous, almost, Scotty would have said.

"You're certain you're unsuspected?" demanded Scotty.

"Yes, quite certain," answered Litz. "You think I sound a bit nervy, eh? I am. It's been ghastly lying here wondering when you or someone would reach me. There's work to be done. Important work. I'm certain the German Grand Fleet is planning a sortie out into the North Sea. We've got to get on to that right away. Even now we may be too late. I tell you these Germans are planning something, and here am I, bed-ridden and helpless——"

"What exactly is wrong with you?" interjected Scotty.

Some seventh sense was warning him of danger. Whether or not it was because Litz was talking wildly and at random, he didn't know, but the feeling was strong upon him that there was something wrong here somewhere.

"What are you suffering from?" he repeated.

"Pneumonia," answered Litz quickly. "I caught a chill and neglected it, and this is the result. I've had a bad time—a rotten time—but now that you're here to carry on, I won't worry so much——"

"Be quiet!" rapped Scotty.

Above Litz's voice he had caught the creak of a floorboard out there on the landing—a creak which seemed to have been caused by some heavy foot which was certainly not that of the woman's. Turning, he stepped swiftly towards the door. As he did so, Litz's voice came harsh and rasping from the bed:

"Stay where you are, you hound!"

Scotty whirled, then froze rigid and motionless. For Litz had raised himself on his elbow and was covering him with a heavy automatic.

"Move a muscle and you're a dead man!" snarled Litz.

"Are you mad?" snapped Scotty.

"No, nor ill, neither!" jeered Litz.

Breaking in on his words, the door of the room crashed violently open, and there on the threshold, drawn revolver in hand, stood a grim-faced German officer and half a dozen grey-clad German soldiers armed with rifles and fixed bayonets.

"Here he is!" cried Litz, flinging back the dirty blankets and swinging his feet to the floor. "Come and take him!"

Scotty's eyes flickered swiftly round the room. Escape by the door was impossible, and the window was a couple of jumps from where he was standing. Before he could reach it he would either be overpowered or else mercilessly shot down.

But the alternative was arrest and then a firing squad, for the Germans would take thundering good care that this time he didn't slip through their fingers as he had done in the past.

Even as the thought flashed through his mind, Scotty hurled himself sideways towards the window. Simultaneously Litz's gun roared into life and something like white-hot metal drove through Scotty's shoulder with a force which sent him staggering.

Before he could recover, the Germans were on him, crashing with him to the floor, a fighting, struggling, heaving mass.

Wounded as he was and against such overwhelming odds, Scotty could do nothing, and a few moments later, panting and dishevelled, he was jerked roughly to his feet and held in the grip of the soldiers.

"So!" exclaimed the officer, surveying Scotty with the liveliest of satisfaction. "Our little trap has proved successful, yes, in spite of your effort to escape!"

"Yes, and you watch him!" grated Litz. "D'you know who he is? He's none other than Captain John Scott, of the British Secret Squadron—the dog on whose head there is a reward of one hundred thousand marks!"

“Is that so?” said the officer softly. “Captain John Scott, eh? What a capture! There will be rewards and promotions all round for this, Stendal!”

“So your name’s Stendal, is it?” cut in Scotty, staring at the man who had pretended to be Captain Weston, alias Litz. “You’re a German Secret Service agent, I suppose?”

“You’re right, I am!” admitted Stendal harshly. “I suppose you’re wondering where your precious fellow-countryman Weston, alias Johann Litz, has got to. Well, he’s in the military prison, if you want to know. We caught him four days ago, and set this little trap for gentlemen like you. We examined his code book, and it was we who sent the message across the lines asking for assistance in the name of Johann Litz.”

“Yes, and we’re also sending out false information in the name of Johann Litz,” put in the officer, grinning. “Now that you’ve turned up and been captured, we’ll send it out in your name for a time, then we’ll report that you’ve had an accident or been killed in a dock-side brawl or something, and ask if someone else can be sent. In that way we’ll net another clever Englander spy. Oh, it’s a very simple but very effective trap this, my friend!”

“I’m glad you think so,” said Scotty dryly, his face white with the throbbing agony of his wounded shoulder.

“Think so!” cut in Stendal snarlingly. “Of course it’s an effective trap. Look how you’ve walked into it.” His voice became a sneer. “You—the clever Captain Scott. Why, you fool, you’ve been shadowed from the moment you presented identification papers in the name of Litz at Saarbürg railway station. You never dreamt your Johann Litz had been captured, did you? You never thought the message we sent for assistance was a fake? Oh, no, we’ve been a bit too smart for you this time, you dog. Well, take him away, Herr Offizier——”

Abruptly he broke off as there came a sudden fierce crackling and wraiths of pungent smoke curled and drifted in through the open doorway.

“What’s that?” he gasped, dashing to the door.

Next instant he recoiled, choking and coughing, for the rickety staircase which led upwards from the shop below was a raging holocaust of flame.

“The house is on fire!” gasped Stendal, stark terror in his streaming eyes. “The woodwork’s rotten and bone dry—it’ll go up like a furnace. We’ve got to get out of here—we’ve got to get out!”

He blundered desperately towards the window. By this time the fierce crackling of the flames had risen to a hungry, terrifying roar, and the landing and bed-room were thick with dense and suffocating smoke.

It is a true saying that nothing communicates itself so quickly to others as panic, and the panic Stendal was in sent the soldiers rushing pell-mell to the window, the glass and framework of which they frenziedly smashed with the butts of their rifles.

“Steady, you fools!” screamed the officer. “See to the prisoner, curse you! Where is the prisoner?”

All he could see was the struggling soldiery at the window, each man of whom was fighting savagely to escape from that veritable deathtrap.

With one hand pressing his handkerchief over his mouth and nostrils, and with drawn revolver in the other hand, the almost demented man blundered out on to the fiercely burning landing in search of Scotty, who had completely vanished during that first mad rush the soldiers had made for the window.

Was it imagination, the officer asked himself desperately, or did he glimpse a figure wreathed in the roaring, leaping flames at the head of the blazing staircase?

His gun crashed into life, but the figure had gone, and with a choking oath the officer turned and blundered back into the room, reeling towards the window through which Stendal and a couple of the soldiers had already vanished, dropping down through the darkness into the little stone-pathed yard below.

In thinking he had seen a figure wreathed in the leaping flames at the head of the staircase, the officer had been quite correct—and that figure had been Scotty. The young Englishman had had one split instant in which to act when the officer had been swept aside by the soldiers' rush for the window. Oblivious of the agony of his wounded shoulder, sensing only the opportunity to escape, he had shot through the open doorway and bounded for the head of the blazing staircase.

For an instant he poised himself there, then, bunching himself together and with eyes tight shut, he launched himself forward, hurtling down through the flames to crash sickeningly at the foot of the staircase as the officer's revolver roared into life above.

How Scotty got to his feet he did not know. He seemed to feel himself jerked up by a powerful hand, then next thing he knew he was staring into the face of the aged crone, who was saying urgently:

"For goodness' sake pull yourself together, man. You've got to run for it!"

"Run for it?" gulped Scotty, still half-dazed. "Run where?"

"Out there!" snapped the crone, thrusting him roughly out into the night. "We're friends. I'm English. Go with the boy—he'll lead you to safety!"

Scott was dimly aware that a slim and ragged street urchin had gripped him by the sleeve.

"Quick, m'sieur—across the street!" said the lad breathlessly, tugging at Scotty's sleeve.

Following the ragged urchin, Scotty dived across the street and down a narrow, high-walled side-turning as inky-black as the pit. The cold night air had served to revive him. Gripping the boy by the arm, he said:

"Who are you and where are we going?"

"I'm taking you to safety, m'sieur," answered the lad urgently. "Please, hurry, because these Boches will throw a cordon round here as soon as they learn you have escaped!"

Scotty relapsed into silence and hurried grimly on. The narrow, high-walled lane terminated suddenly at a rotting wharf and there stretched in front of Scotty the dark waters of the river.

"Quick, sir, I've got a boat here!" exclaimed the lad, darting forward and unfastening a boat's painter.



He dropped down into the boat, followed by Scotty, and hugging the black shadow of a warehouse, he commenced to scull quietly but expertly downstream.

“Look here, kid, who the dickens are you?” Scotty burst out. “And who’s that old woman?”

The lad laughed.

“I’m not a boy, m’sieur,” he said. “I’m a girl in boy’s clothing. My name is Marie—Marie Leroux. And the old woman is not really a woman. She is Grey Shadow, the British spy!”

Grey Shadow and Marie Leroux!

The startling revelation caused Scotty to stare in dumbfounded astonishment, for Grey Shadow and the French girl Marie were two of the most brilliant spies in the service of the Allies.

Scotty had often heard of them, but he had never met them, for they were as mysterious and elusive as shadows, here to-day and gone to-morrow and invariably playing a lone hand in the very heart of enemy country. And now had come this amazing meeting with them in the blazing shop where he, Scotty, had been trapped by the Germans.

“But how on earth did Grey Shadow come to be on the premises back there, and why did he let me walk slap-bang into such a trap?” demanded Scotty in bewilderment.

“He’ll tell you that himself, m’sieur,” said Marie.

And Grey Shadow did, later that night, when Marie had tied up the boat and led the way through dark and narrow sidestreets to a miserable basement kitchen which was also used as a living-room.

When Scotty followed the girl into the kitchen he saw Grey Shadow, still in his crone’s rags, seated at a rough, wooden table drinking acorn coffee and eating black bread and aniseed cheese.

“So you’ve got here,” said Grey Shadow with a smile; then, with a quick change of tone, he went on: “But you’re hurt. Let me have a look at that wound. Marie, get some hot water.”

And whilst he bathed and bandaged Scotty’s wounded shoulder, he said:

“About a week ago Marie and I were in Konisberg. I received a letter from Weston, whom I knew well. The letter was in code. In it Weston said he was uneasy. He fancied he was being watched, he said, but he was hesitating to let British Headquarters know in case it turned out to be a false alarm. Marie and I came to Hamburg at once, but we were too late. Weston had been secretly arrested and Stendal was installed in the Nordstrasse in his place. I didn’t know Stendal. I had never heard of him. I rather guessed what his game was, but I couldn’t be certain. So I got the job of looking after him.”

“How?” demanded Scotty.

“By becoming friendly with the old hag who was working for him, doctoring her coffee so that she was forced to take to her bed, then turning up at Stendal’s place as her sister,” explained Grey Shadow. “That was two days ago. When you arrived tonight, I admitted you not knowing whether you were German or English or who you

were. The moment the soldiers demanded admittance, I knew jolly well you must be English. I crept upstairs after them, heard you arrested, then I soaked the staircase with paraffin and creosote and set it on fire.”

“But why?” demanded Scotty.

“To create—shall we say—a diversion and give you a break,” laughed Grey Shadow. “I knew the whole bunch would make a dash for the window the moment they realised they were trapped—and that meant a chance for you. And you took it on the jump, by Jove!”

“But if I hadn’t I might have been trapped and burned to death!” exclaimed Scotty, staring.

“Not you,” said Grey Shadow confidently. “Even had you been last out of the window, you’d still have escaped the flames. They all got out, every one of them, but if you’d followed them you’d be where Weston is now.”

“In the military prison,” said Scotty sombrely.

“Yes,” nodded Grey Shadow. “He was tried this evening and sentenced to be shot!”

There was a moment of silence. It was broken by Scotty.

“Can’t we save him?” he demanded.

“Marie and I are going to try,” replied Grey Shadow. “Are you with us?”

Scotty thrust out his hand.

“To the end!” he cried.

Grey Shadow’s hand met his in firm clasp and thus was sealed an alliance which was destined to lead along many a dark and perilous path of high adventure.

## CHAPTER II

### THE THREE PLOTTERS

THE hour was midnight. Intense, bitter, freezing cold held the German town of Hamburg in icy grip. Few were astir and scarce a sound disturbed the stillness of the darkened streets save the tramp, tramp of some naval or military patrol.

Silence, deathly and profound, enwrapped the grim, gaunt bulk of the vast military prison where, in the darkness of the narrow-stone-floored death cell, a man—an Englishman—lay shivering on his low plank bed.

The man was Captain Weston, of the British Secret Service. He had been sentenced to death as a spy, and was to be shot at dawn.

He was not afraid to die, for the grim phantom of Death stalks always by the side of a spy. It was this waiting which was the worst; this waiting whilst slowly, wearily, the interminable hours of the night dragged by until the little square of barred window, high in the wall, should grey with the first faint light of dawn.

If only he could sleep, he thought. But he could not, for the icy chill of the death cell was like that of the tomb, and there was no warmth in the single, threadbare blanket with which he'd been provided.

So with hands clasped behind his head, he lay staring up into the darkness, listening to the muffled tramp, tramp of the sentry out in the corridor, the heavily booted tread now receding, now returning as the man marched to and fro on his beat.

There wasn't an earthly chance of escape. The prisoner knew that, for the sentries on duty had been doubled, and extra guards had been drafted to the prison.

"But I wish the whole thing was over!" burst out Colonel Prag, governor of the prison, as he paced the floor of a warm and well-furnished room in his private quarters. "It'll be a relief to me when this night has passed and the dawn has come!"

Captain August von Zollern, his handsome, elegantly uniformed aide-de-camp, adjusted his monocle and stared at him in surprise.

"But what are you afraid of, sir?" he asked.

"Afraid of?" repeated Colonel Prag furiously, his florid features crimsoning to a deeper hue. "Need you ask what I'm afraid of, you fool? I'm afraid of losing the prisoner—of having him snatched from under my very nose by that cursed Scott of the British Secret Squadron, who is believed to be here in Hamburg!"

Captain August von Zollern laughed softly, almost contemptuously.

"Oh, come, sir, that's impossible," he chided. "We've combed and recombined Hamburg for Scott, and have found not the slightest sign of him. He's obviously fled. And even if he hasn't what could he—one man—do? Absolutely nothing at all. He couldn't get Weston out of this prison unless he arrived with half the British Army at his back."

"Yes, that's what you say," growled the governor. "But he's got spies out of the prison before—absolutely spirited them away like some confounded modern Scarlet Pimpernel. Yes, that's what he is. A wraith, a phantom, a Will o' the Wisp. He's as bad

as that other cursed British spy, Grey Shadow. There's a pair of 'em, and it's about time the blundering imbeciles of our Intelligence Service ran 'em to earth!"

He resumed his angry pacing of the floor, then suddenly he halted and swung again on Von Zollern.

"I'm being held personally responsible by our High Command for the safe custody and execution of the prisoner," he barked. "To that end I've done everything it's humanly possible to do. I've filled the prison with soldiers. I've doubled all the guards, and I'm having the prisoner kept under constant observation throughout the night. Is there anything else I can do?"

"No, sir, nothing," agreed the aide-de-camp.

"That's what I say!" grated Colonel Prag, picking up his grey, military cloak. "But, all the same, I wish it was dawn and the whole cursed business safely over. Come on, we'll have a look at the fellow and satisfy ourselves that everything's quiet."



In a dirty basement kitchen situated in a mean and narrow street some distance from the prison, sat a strange trio. One was an old, old crone, seamed and wrinkled of face, and with a dirty shawl drawn over her scant and wispy grey hair. She was seated on a stool by the fire, puffing away at a blackened pipe the while she talked to her two companions—a ragged, crippled youth with an iron-shod foot, and a slim bare-legged girl in boy's ragged clothing.

The crone was talking in a low and earnest voice, and appeared to be giving her two hearers certain instructions.

"Now, you quite understand what you're to do?" she mumbled at length.

"Yes," answered her two companions.

"Very well, I'll get off," said the crone, rising and depositing her pipe on a shelf by the fire. "If all goes well I'll join you before the dawn."

Drawing her rags and shawl closer about her against the bitter chill of the night, she quitted the kitchen. Ascending the area steps to the street, she turned her shuffling gait in the direction of the prison.

Waiting until she had gone, the crippled youth pulled on a ragged overcoat. Then, accompanied by the bare-legged girl, he let himself out by a rear door and mounted some stone steps to a yard where stood a handcart with a few empty sacks thrown on to it.

Pushing the handcart out of the yard, the pair set off along a dark and narrow backstreet, out of which they turned into a wider thoroughfare, deserted at that late hour.

They trundled the handcart briskly along, the girl blowing on her hands and shivering in the bitter cold, the crippled youth limping sturdily at the shafts.

As they turned into another street they were stopped by a greatcoated, military patrol, the sergeant of which said harshly:

"Who are you and where are you going at this hour?"

“My name is Hans Schmidt, Herr Sergeant, and this is my little brother Kaspar,” answered the cripple. “We go to Kupter Farm for the bad potatoes which our mother makes into bread to sell.”

Bad potatoes to be made into bread. Yes, to such an extremity was Germany reduced during those dark days of war owing to the remorseless blockade of her coasts by the British Navy, whereby not a solitary food ship could slip into any German port.

To the potatoes was added bran and sawdust for the making of black bread which was fast becoming the staple diet of the country.

“Show me your papers!” ordered the sergeant.

Obediently the cripple produced his identification papers. As he had said, they described him as being one, Hans Schmidt, exempt from service with the Colours owing to incurable lameness.

“On your way, then!” grunted the sergeant, handing back the papers after he had examined them. “Here, one moment. You”—to the bare-legged girl—“have you no boots?”

“No, Herr Sergeant,” she said humbly.

“Donner, no boots in this weather!” exclaimed the sergeant. “You must be frozen. Indeed, you look it. Here, take this!”

He rummaged in a pocket beneath his greatcoat and produced a coin, which he pressed into the girl’s hand. Then, dismissing the latter’s stammered thanks with a wave of his mittened hand, he barked out an order to the patrol, and they tramped on along the iron-hard road, leaving the cripple and the girl to trundle their handcart away into the darkness.

The old crone reached the great iron gates of the prison yard, outside of which two greatcoated sentries armed with rifles and fixed bayonets were pacing.

“How do I get in?” she demanded, planting herself full in the path of one of the sentries and peering up into his face.

“In?” repeated the sentry angrily. “In where, you old fool? You be off, you miserable old bag of bones!”

He thrust her roughly aside, and would have continued with his pacing had not the hag seized him by the arm.

“I want to go in!” she screeched. “I want to see the gentleman in charge. I’ve got something for him!”

“You’ll get something you’re not wanting if you don’t clear out of here!” retorted the sentry savagely, trying to wrench his arm free from the crone’s claw-like grip. “Go on, be off with you, or I’ll have you arrested!”

“It’s you who’ll be arrested if you don’t tell me how I can get in!” shrilled the crone. “I tell you I’ve got something for the gentleman in charge—something which old Hiob Spritz says is important!”

“What’s the trouble?” demanded the other sentry, coming quickly up. “What’s the matter with her?”

“The crazy old fool says she wants to get into the prison,” explained the first sentry wrathfully. “She says she wants to see the gentleman in charge. I suppose she means Colonel Prag, the governor!”

“That’s him!” shrilled the hag triumphantly. “That’s who I want to see. Old Hiob Spritz told me to be sure to ask for Colonel Prag, the governor of the prison. Old Hiob said I was to be certain I saw nobody except the governor, so’s I can tell him what I know and give him what I’ve brought him!”

“What have you brought him?” demanded the second sentry angrily.

“Hah! I’d be likely to tell such a one as you, wouldn’t I, and have it blabbed all over Hamburg by your long tongue?” screeched the hag. “It’s quite plain to me that neither you nor this other, stupid, staring donkey know who I am. Well, I’ll tell you. I’m Hanna Scheffel—old Hanna Scheffel, who was looking after Herr Stendal whose shop was burned down in the Nordstrasse the night the Englander spy escaped from there.”

The two sentries exchanged startled glances. It was in the little shop of a certain Herr Stendal that Captain John Scott, the much-wanted Englander spy, had been trapped a few nights ago. But a mysterious fire had suddenly broken out and demolished the shop, and the Englander spy had escaped in the excitement.

And now this wretched old hag was claiming to have been Herr Stendal’s housekeeper, and she was demanding to see the governor of the prison. It might be rash, indeed, thought the sentries, and might have serious consequences for themselves to drive her away without first ascertaining her business.

“Look here, Frau Scheffel,” said one of them civilly, “what exactly do you wish to see the governor about?”

“About the Englander spies,” returned the crone promptly. “About the one who escaped and about the one who lies in the prison here.”

“You have news of the one who escaped?” demanded the sentry excitedly.

“Yes, but only for Colonel Prag, the governor,” answered the hag grimly. “Old Hiob Spritz, who lives in the same building as me and who used to be a schoolmaster before he came down in the world, told me to open my lips to nobody but the governor, and I’m not going to. So take me to him!”

The two sentries conversed for a moment in low, earnest voices. Then one of them turned to the woman and said:

“You had better see the sergeant of the guard. But I’m warning you, if you’re telling lies or if this is some stupid joke, you will get into very serious trouble. You will be put in prison or you may even be shot!”

“Pah! Have done with your foolish talk else it’ll be you who’ll be getting shot!” snarled the hag. “And I don’t want to see any sergeant. It’s Colonel Prag, the governor himself, who I’m here to see!”

“All in good time, my old ——,” grinned the sentry. “This way!”

He escorted her to the little wicket gate in the big, iron gates. Thrusting it open, he bawled for the sergeant of the guard, who emerged hurriedly and angrily from the nearby guard-room.

“Stop that row, hang you!” grated the sergeant. “What the blazes d’you want?”

The sentry explained whilst the sergeant stood glaring at the be-shawled old hag in the darkness.

“See the governor!” exploded the sergeant before the sentry had concluded. “Donner und blitzen! I’ve never heard of such a thing. Off with you, you mad old harridan, before I hand you over to the police. And as for you,” he went on furiously, swinging on the sentry, “I’ll see you get a dose of punishment cells for this. Wasting my time——”

“He’s not wasting your time, you stupid ape!” screamed the crone, her wrinkled old face convulsed with fury. “I tell you I’m here to see the governor about the Englander spies, and whoever stops me does so at their peril, as you’ll find out to your cost. I’ve got to see him, and I’ve got to see him now, because every minute is precious. Let me pass, curse you!”

She drove in through the wicket gate, a vicious fluttering bundle of rags, and would have passed the sergeant had not that furious individual gripped her by the arm.

“Let me go, rot you!” she screamed, struggling desperately in the sergeant’s grasp. “Are you a friend of the Englanders that you’re frightened to let me tell the governor what I know? Let me go, you traitor—let me go, you dirty, treacherous dog——”

“Stop it, will you, stop it?” grated the sergeant savagely, his face crimson with rage as the high-pitched, screaming voice of the hag brought the rest of the guard pouring out of the guard-room. “If you don’t stop it, I’ll strangle you!”

But the hag didn’t stop it. On the contrary, she fought like a mad woman, screaming and yelling and creating such a din that the officer of the guard came running angrily to the scene followed by a couple of non-commissioned officers.

“What is it?” shouted the officer. “What in the name of goodness is going on here? Stop it, d’you hear—stop it at once!”

The presence of the officer quietened the hag, and having got her hustled into the guard-room the officer listened to her story.

“You say you are the woman who looked after Stendal in whose shop the Englander spy was trapped,” said the officer, when the woman had concluded, “and you say you have news for the governor’s ears alone, and, also, that you have something to give him?”

“Yes, that’s it!” screeched the hag. “My word, what it is to find somebody with sense at last. You’ll take me to the governor, sir, won’t you?”

“No, I cannot!” replied the officer. “The governor will refuse to see you or anyone at this hour of the night. But if you will tell me what your message is, I will see that it is conveyed to him without delay!”

That started the crone off again.

“Rot you, you’re no better than the others!” she shrieked, her bleary eyes aflame with passion. “I tell you, what I have to say is for the ears of the governor alone, and for no one else’s. Every minute you waste here the Englander spy may be getting farther away, and it is you who are to blame—you and these other stupid fools!”

The officer glared at her, rage and indecision in his eyes. It might well be, he reflected savagely, that the stubborn old harridan knew something of vital importance

which she was determined to divulge to no one but Colonel Prag himself.

If such was the case, woe betide anyone subsequently held responsible for preventing her seeing the governor. On the other hand, however, her alleged information might easily turn out to be absolutely valueless, and, in that event, the governor would certainly vent his wrath on the idiot responsible for admitting her to his presence.

It was the devil's own problem to solve, thought the officer, as he stood glaring at her. Should he take her to the governor, or shouldn't he? He decided to consult some superior officer.

"Wait here!" he rapped, and departed at a run.

"Hah! That's better!" exclaimed the hag triumphantly. "I suppose he's gone to fetch the governor!" Subsiding on to a stool by the red-hot stove, she spread out her hands to the warmth. "A nice lot of gentlemen you are," she grumbled. "Haven't you got a mug of hot coffee to offer a lady?"

Some of the guards laughed, and one of them picked up a mug in order to pour her out some of the acorn coffee which was simmering in a pan on the stove. But the sergeant stopped him with an oath.

"You'll get no coffee here," he said furiously to the woman. "What you will get will be a few years in prison!"

"Ah, is that so?" spat the hag. "No, my fine sergeant, it'll be you who'll go to prison and me who'll be riding round in my fine carriage and pair, you'll see!"

A sudden quick tread of feet cut in on her words, and Captain August von Zollern strode into the guard-room followed by the officer of the guard. At sight of him the sergeant and the soldiers came rigidly to attention and stood like ramrods.

"Is this the woman?" snapped Von Zollern, staring at the bundle of rags by the stove.

"Yes, sir!" said the officer of the guard.

Von Zollern addressed himself to the hag.

"I understand you wish to see Colonel Prag, the governor of the prison," he said curtly. "I am the colonel's aide-de-camp, and will take your message!"

"That you'll not!" snapped the hag. "I'm seeing the governor or nobody."

"But my dear, good woman," began Von Zollern, "you can't possibly see the governor at this time of night——"

"Can I not?" snarled the hag, getting swiftly to her feet. "Then I'll go. It seems as though this place is full of traitors who care nothing whether Englander spies are caught or not!" She spat viciously on the floor and her voice rose to a scream: "There, that's what I think of you—of all of you. You've got safe jobs here and that's all that matters to you. It'd do the lot of you a power of good to be sent out yonder to the trenches along with the other poor lads who're dying out there——"

Von Zollern seized her by the arm.

"Stop it!" he said sternly. "Come I will take you to Colonel Prag. But I warn you, if you are wasting our time you will bitterly regret it!"





Colonel Prag was standing with his back to the cheerful fire in his room when Von Zollern led the hag into his presence a few minutes later.

“The woman refuses to speak to anyone but you, sir,” reported Von Zollern.

The prison governor thrust forward his head and stared angrily at the crone.

“Well, what d’you want to say?” he grated.

“Are you Colonel Prag?” she demanded.

“I am, confound you!”

The woman nodded as though satisfied, and fumbling in the voluminous folds of her ragged skirt, she produced a small, red-backed notebook which she handed to the governor.

“There you are, sir, that’s for you!” she said. “When I worked for Herr Stendal in the Nordstrasse before his shop was burned down a few nights ago, he used to give me food to take home. Among the food was a stale loaf of black bread. I was cutting the loaf open to-night when I found that little book hidden inside. Old Hiob Spritz, who was once a schoolmaster and a very clever man, said I must bring the book at once to you. He said it had codes in it, whatever that might mean, sir!”

Colonel Prag seemed scarcely to be listening. He had opened the little notebook and was staring excitedly at the neatly written, but seemingly meaningless rows of hieroglyphics inside.

“Mein geist, Zollern, but look at this!” he ejaculated. “They are codes used by Weston. They must be. The shop was occupied by Weston before we arrested him as a spy. The cunning hound has had the book well hidden!”

Von Zollern was examining the book over his chief’s shoulder.

“Yes, they’re codes, sir, undoubtedly,” he agreed. “But very elaborate and difficult ones by the look of them. I wonder what our cipher experts will make of them?”

Colonel Prag caught the note of doubt in his aide-de-camp’s voice.

“You mean, you think these secret codes may baffle them,” he said harshly. “Yes, I agree there is that possibility. It will not be the first time these cursed British codes have beaten our so-called experts. I wonder——”

Abruptly he broke off, staring ahead of him with hard and glittering eyes. Then, as though becoming suddenly conscious again of the hag’s presence in the room, he looked at her and rapped:

“You have done very well indeed in bringing this book to me. I am very pleased with you, Is there anything else you have to tell me?”

“No, sir, except that old Hiob Spritz said the book might help you to catch other Englander spies in Germany,” replied the crone. “He did not know, of course, because he could not read the writing in the book, but he said you gentlemen would be able to read it and that was why I was to bring it to you at once, which I have done——”

“Yes, yes!” cut in the Governor testily. “You have acted like a true daughter of the Fatherland, and I will see that you are handsomely rewarded. If you have nothing

further to tell me you can now go. Call back at the prison to-morrow and there will be some money waiting for you. Zollern, get rid of her!”

Escorting her from the room, Von Zollern handed the hag over to a guard outside with instructions to see her off the premises. Then he returned quickly to the room where Colonel Prag was still intently examining the book.

“Zollern,” said the colonel harshly, “when Weston dies at dawn the secret of these codes may die with him. It is a poor chance, I know, of learning their secret, but I am going to question him.”

“You’ll get nothing out of him!” said Von Zollern confidently.

“Perhaps not!” returned his chief. “But in any case it is my duty to question him. When I hand this notebook over to the cipher experts of our Intelligence Bureau, the first question put to me will be if I interrogated Weston about the codes. If I answer that I did not, I will find myself in serious trouble. Have him brought here, please!”

“Very good, Herr Colonel!” said Von Zollern, and withdrew.

Left to himself, Colonel Prag continued to study the little notebook, a faint smile on his lips. The minutes passed, then came a tramp of heavily booted feet in the corridor outside, the door opened, and Von Zollern marched into the room, followed by Captain Weston in the midst of an escort of four armed soldiers and a sergeant.

“Captain Weston,” said Colonel Prag, when the prisoner was confronting him, “have you ever seen this book before?”

He handed Weston the notebook. Taking it, the prisoner looked at it curiously, then opened it at the first page. As he stared at the neatly written hieroglyphics, his fingers tautened and his face became strangely set.

“I am waiting for your answer, Captain Weston,” said the prison governor harshly. “Have you ever seen that book before?”

“Yes,” faltered Weston. “Yes—it is mine!”

With a triumphant glance at Von Zollern, Colonel Prag turned again to the prisoner.

“You agree that the book contains secret codes used by you whilst you were engaged in British espionage work in this country?” he demanded.

“Yes,” admitted Weston unsteadily.

For a long moment Colonel Prag studied him intently, then he said:

“Listen to me, Captain Weston. I’m afraid it lies in my power to promise you little. But in return for your divulging the key to these codes, it is possible that the German High Command may be persuaded to take a more lenient view of your activities and commute the death sentence to one of a long term of imprisonment in some fortress. What does lie in my power, however, is to postpone your execution whilst your case is being reconsidered, and this I will do in return for the key to the codes.”

Weston looked at him, hope dawning in his haggard eyes.

“D’you mean that?” he cried hoarsely.

“Yes, I mean it,” answered Colonel Prag.

Von Zollern said nothing, but his face expressed both anger and contempt—anger at Colonel Prag whom he knew was lying, and contempt for Weston who was rising

eagerly to the bait.

“If only I could be sure you meant it?” cried Weston desperately. “You don’t know what it’s been like there in the death cell—the waiting—the counting of the hours. Listen, I’ll tell you what I’ll do. Cancel my death sentence, and I’ll not only give you the key to these codes, but to every code used by British spies in Germany!”

Colonel Prag’s eyes gleamed.

“You can do that?” he rapped.

“Yes, I can do it!” cried Weston, his face working tremulously. “But I’ll only do it on condition that the death sentence is commuted!”

“The death sentence will certainly be commuted in return for the key to every British secret code!” answered Colonel Prag harshly. “I can give you my word on that as an officer and a gentleman. I pledge you my honour you will not be shot if you will divulge this information!”

“Then I’ll divulge it!” gasped Weston. “I’ll take you now to where the papers containing these code keys are hidden!”

“Take us?” repeated Colonel Prag questioningly, his eyes hardening.

“Yes, you know that big, tumbledown house which stands alone in Atem Wood three kilometres outside the town,” babbled Weston. “The house has long been deserted, and I used it as a base for my activities before I moved to the little shop in the Nordstrasse. The papers are hidden there in a sealed cylinder behind the stonework. You would never find them, because no one but myself knows the stone behind which they are hidden.”

“But cannot you describe the exact location of this particular stone?” demanded Colonel Prag harshly.

“No, I cannot,” cried Weston. “The papers are hidden down in the cellars, and it would be impossible, even on a plan, for me to pin-point the exact stone behind which I placed them.”

Colonel Prag stood in silence a moment, his eyes on the haggard-faced prisoner.

“Very well,” he said abruptly, “we will proceed now to the house in Atem Wood and find these papers. But I warn you, if you are lying——”

“What would I gain by lying?” broke in Weston desperately. “I’m a doomed man now, and my only chance of life is to produce the papers!”

“That is quite correct!” remarked Colonel Prag icily, making up his mind.

He turned to Von Zollern and rapped out an order, the result being that some fifteen minutes later two powerful automobiles turned out through the prison gates and roared along the dark and deserted streets towards the outskirts of the town.

Colonel Prag was taking no chances of the prisoner escaping, and both cars were packed with armed guards, Colonel Prag, Von Zollern, and the handcuffed Captain Weston, being the only officers.

Reaching Atem Wood, three kilometres beyond the town, the cars were pulled up and the whole party proceeded towards the lonely and long deserted house which Weston had confessed to being his previous base.

Von Zollern led the way, drawn revolver in one hand and electric torch in the other. He was followed by the grey-cloaked Colonel Prag, then came the handcuffed Weston in the midst of his guards.

The house had once been a fine old building comparable with a large English manor house, but it had long since fallen into a state of utter ruin and decay.

Reaching the house, Weston perforce had to act as guide, and he directed that Von Zollern should lead the way down a dark flight of stone steps which wound down into the cellars.

With the beam of Von Zollern's torch splitting the darkness, the whole party descended the steps to where the cellars stretched away in front of them like some great, arched vault.

"Where are the papers hidden?" demanded Colonel Prag, drawing his military cloak closer about him, for the damp and bitter chill of the cellars was as icy as that of the tomb.

"Straight on," said Western unsteadily. "If Captain von Zollern will move straight on we will come to them!"

At the head of the soldiers and their prisoner, Von Zollern moved on into the cellars, the golden beam of his torch shining on the moist stone pillars and dripping arched roof-work.

In the pall-like darkness at the rear of the party, not one of them saw the figure of a man dressed as a German soldier glide silently from behind a pillar and tread softly in their wake.

What they did see, however, and what brought them up in astonishment and vague alarm, was a tiny lurid flame which suddenly glowed into life on the cellar floor away in front of them.

Sizzling and spluttering, the tiny flame moved swiftly across the damp, stone floor; then came a frenzied yell of realisation from Von Zollern:

"Back—back, you fools! We're trapped!"

With the words there came a sudden reverberating roar, accompanied by a terrific, blinding sheet of brilliant flame which illuminated every part of the cellars.

Shouting and yelling in panic, the soldiers broke and fled, stampeding wildly for the cellar steps before the roof should collapse upon them.

In the terror of the moment officers, discipline, and prisoner were forgotten, for it was every man for himself. Even Von Zollern and Colonel Prag ran. Pushing and jostling amongst their men, they blundered up the cellar steps and out into the blackness of the night.

"We were lured into a trap—a cursed trap!" bellowed Colonel Prag in fury. "Where's Weston? Where is the hound? Mein blut, but he'll find shooting's too good for him after this! Bring him to me, the treacherous dog!"

The frightened soldiers were jabbering frenziedly amongst themselves. It was a terrified sergeant who reported the gist of their excited talk to Colonel Prag.

"The prisoner is not here, sir," he stammered. "He's gone!"

“Gone?” screamed Colonel Prag. “What the blazes d’you mean, you blundering fool—gone?”

“I—I mean he’s gone!” stammered the wretched sergeant. “He’s not here!”



On the other side of the wood a car was already speeding rapidly away into the night. At the wheel sat Grey Shadow, with Scotty at his side. In the rear, a bare-legged girl in boy’s clothing was filing industriously at Captain Weston’s handcuffs.

“But how in the name of goodness did you do it?” gulped Weston.

“It was merely a matter of co-operation between the four of us,” answered Grey Shadow over his shoulder. “Scotty and Marie and I placed a keg of powdered magnesium thinly impregnated with gunpowder down in the cellars yesterday and laid a trail of gunpowder to the keg——”

“Yes, but where did you get the magnesium and gunpowder from?” interjected Weston.

“From the cache of explosives which you were using for sabotage work down at the docks before you were arrested,” replied Grey Shadow. “The cache was in the wood, as you know, and the Germans never even suspected its presence.”

“Yes, I understand,” said Weston. “Go on.”

“Well, Scotty and Marie slipped out of Hamburg to-night pushing a handcart, in case they were stopped and questioned,” proceeded Grey Shadow. “On reaching the deserted house, Scotty changed into German uniform. He and Marie were hiding down in the cellars when you arrived with your escort. It was Marie who fired the train. By that time Scotty was mingling with the soldiers. The moment the explosion took place—quite a harmless explosion, really—Scotty grabbed you by the arm, as you know.”

“Yes; and muttered in English, ‘This way, Weston!’” took up the released prisoner. “I couldn’t believe my ears when I heard those words, but after reading your message to me in that code notebook I was expecting something of the sort to happen, so I shot off into the darkness with him without hesitation.”

“And he got you out of the cellars through the hole we’d knocked and dug through the farthest wall,” laughed Grey Shadow. “Well, that’s about all there is to it, Weston!”

“What—d’you mean—all?” demanded Weston. “I still don’t know how you got that code notebook into Prag’s hands!”

“I took it to him in the same hag’s guise as I used when I was working for Stendal,” explained Grey Shadow. “I told him I’d just found it. I knew perfectly well he’d show it to you. The code I used was the one you and I made up ourselves—that queer mixture of Arabic characters and shorthand. I knew you’d be able to read my message to you the moment Prag showed you the book. And you carried out my instructions, which were to pretend to break down and offer to show Prag where secret papers were hidden down in the cellar of that house back there. If Prag had put off his search of the cellars until daylight, it wouldn’t have mattered. We’d still have been waiting for you.”

“Yes, but where did you get this car?” demanded Weston, who was still mystified.

“From my own garage, where I’ve hidden my crone’s rags,” replied Grey Shadow. “Amongst other things, Weston, I’m supposed to be a commercial traveller who’s been invalidated out of the German Army with war wounds. Hence the car.”

“You’re certainly a man of many parts,” said Weston appreciatively.

Grey Shadow laughed, and pressing on the accelerator, took the car roaring on into the night. They were still in deadly peril, as each one of them knew, for before another hour had passed a cordon of police and military would have been thrown round the whole district.

## CHAPTER III

### THE LONELY COTTAGE

FOR nearly an hour Grey Shadow drove through the darkness. He kept the powerful touring car hurtling along narrow, twisting country roads, driving like a man possessed.

Time and again the car missed disaster by inches only as, with tyres screaming, it either skidded round some bend or else lurched perilously as it thudded violently against the grass verge at the side of the road.

At length, however, the car slid to a stop by the gate of a field in which stood a little cottage. Driving the car into the field and backing it behind a clump of bushes where, come the dawn, it would be screened from the view of anyone passing along the road, Grey Shadow switched off his engine and he and his three passengers alighted.

Cautiously the little party moved through the darkness towards the cottage. Not a light showed anywhere, and not a sound broke the hushed and brooding stillness of the sleeping countryside.

As they neared the cottage Grey Shadow halted his companions with a low, warning word.

“Wait here while I see if the coast is clear!” he muttered.

Silently as a shadow he glided away around the rear of the cottage, to reappear a few moments later and insert a key in the lock of the front door.

Opening the door, he stepped silently into the inky blackness inside and stood listening with ears attuned to catch the slightest sound. But nothing moved, nothing stirred, and with a word to his companions to enter, Grey Shadow struck a match and stepped boldly into the stone-floored kitchen.

Pulling the blind down over the window, he lighted an oil-lamp which stood on the table. Then turning to the bare-legged girl, he said:

“I’m quite certain we’ve had no visitors since we were last here, Marie, but you’d better take a look round upstairs.”

Obediently the girl departed, running up the dark and rickety staircase which led to the two little bedrooms above.

“And now,” said Grey Shadow, “we’ve got to decide what’s to be done. You, Weston, you’ve got to get out of Germany without delay. You’ve escaped from the military prison and long before noon to-day a description of you will have been circulated throughout the length and breadth of Germany.”

“I’d have been in that confounded prison still if it hadn’t been for you and Scotty!” burst out Weston impulsively. “Even now I can scarcely believe I’m free. I don’t know how to thank you and Scotty and Marie for getting me out——”

“Then don’t try,” cut in Grey Shadow, with a laugh. “We don’t want any thanks. We only did our job, man. But apart from your getting out of the country for your safety’s sake, there are important papers which must be delivered to the British Admiralty in London without a moment’s delay!”

He turned to Marie, who had returned downstairs to the kitchen.

“Everything all right up there, Marie?” he asked.

“Yes m’sieur,” answered the girl.

“Then light the spirit stove and let’s have some coffee,” said Grey Shadow.

Whilst Marie busied herself making coffee, Grey Shadow, Weston, and Scotty drew their chairs up to the table and commenced to discuss the best and quickest way of getting Weston out of Germany.

“Even as the crow flies there’s about three hundred miles of hostile country between here and the trenches,” said Weston. “I don’t see how I can possibly get out under a week at least!”

“You’ve got to get out within the next twenty-four hours,” said Grey Shadow grimly. “Those papers I’ve got concern the movements of German U-boats in the North Sea, and they’ve got to reach London immediately. You’ll have to get out of Germany via Denmark, Weston!”

“But Denmark’s a neutral country,” protested Weston.

“I know it is,” assented Grey Shadow. “But the Danish frontier is only eighty kilometres from here. What’s more, we’ve got a British Secret Service agent at Copenhagen. I’ll tell you where you can find him and he’ll arrange a quick passage to England for you aboard some vessel!”

“If I can reach him,” commented Weston grimly. “Don’t think I’m trying to put obstacles in the way, but how d’you propose I’m going to get across the frontier? Hamburg being comparatively close to the Danish frontier, the Germans will be expecting me to make a dash in that direction, and every frontier guard will be on the look-out for me. It’ll take a rattling good disguise to get me through!”

Grey Shadow laughed.

“You’re not going through—you’re going over,” he said. “You’re going to fly over, I mean. With the papers you’ll be carrying, it would be far too risky your attempting to get through either by road or by train!”

“Here, but hang on a minute!” ejaculated Weston. “You say I’m going to fly over. Where’s the machine?”

“We’ve got to leave that to Scotty,” said Grey Shadow. “I know where there are some, and it’s up to him to bag one. All I can do is to provide him with a German uniform. I’ve got a secret wardrobe of all sorts of clothes here.”

“Look here, what exactly is this cottage?” demanded Weston. “D’you own it, or something?”

“Yes,” said Grey Shadow. “When I’m here I’m supposed to be an artist who’s been invalided out of the Army with wounds. I only come here occasionally, and the people in the village three kilometres away think I come for peace and quietness. That accounts for my somewhat rare visits. I’ve got more than one hideout such as this in Germany!”

Weston stared at him.

“What an amazing fellow you are!” he burst out admiringly. “No wonder the Germans call you the Shadow—Grey Shadow. Have they ever managed to get a



description of your real self?"

"Never!" cut in Scotty, answering for Grey Shadow. "You see, he's never what you might call his real self. He's one thing one day, and another the next. Yesterday he was a wretched old hag. To-day I suppose he'll be a bearded artist complete with palette and brushes!" He turned to Grey Shadow. "But what's this about me bagging a bus to take Weston across the frontier?" he demanded.

"I'll tell you," said Grey Shadow.



The upshot of the conference which ensued was that shortly after dawn Scotty made his way to where the car was parked behind the clump of bushes. Beneath the long, grey greatcoat which he was now wearing was the high-necked uniform of the German Air Service.

Starting up the car, Scotty settled himself down in the driving-seat and drove away along the road past the cottage where Weston was to lie hidden until he, Scotty, should return.

Scotty had plenty of time at his disposal, and he drove slowly in the direction of Lubeck. After a leisurely breakfast at an hotel there, he took a stroll round the town in order to kill some further time.

It was mid-morning when eventually he left Lubeck and drove in the direction of Salzwald, three kilometres beyond which was a German flying school.

Judging the time to a nicety, Scotty reached the hangars of the flying school just before lunch. Alighting from his car, he stood a moment watching the few machines which were in the air, then strolled towards the flight office.

A fat duty officer, seated writing at a table in the little office, raised his head and stared inquiringly at Scotty as the young pilot walked in.

"Well?" he grunted.

"I wish to see Captain Feldmann, please," said Scotty. "He is an instructor here, I believe."

"Feldmann—Feldmann?" repeated the fat duty officer, puzzled. "We have no instructor of that name here."

"Are you sure?" exclaimed Scotty in well-simulated surprise.

"Yes, of course I'm sure!" snorted the duty officer. "I'd know if there was a Captain Feldmann here, wouldn't I?"

"Yes, I suppose you would," assented Scotty. "But it's rather extraordinary. Before he was wounded, Feldmann was with us on the Western Front with the Royal Prussian Jagdstaffel No. 5. I had a letter from him only a few weeks ago saying he was out of hospital and expected to be posted here as instructor."

"Why, no, we never heard anything of that!" exclaimed the duty officer, staring at Scotty with a new interest and respect. "But tell me, Herr Hauptmann, are you a member of the famous Royal Prussian Jagdstaffel No. 5?"

“Yes,” nodded Scotty. “I am Captain Ernst von Stahl, at present on leave at my home in Wandsbek. That is how I come to have motored over to see Captain Feldmann. I am sorry he is not here.”

“So am I,” agreed the duty officer fervently. “We could do with such a one as him here. Perhaps it was intended he should come here, then the High Command changed their minds. That must be the way of it, I should think. The High Command are always changing their minds. It’s perfectly sickening at times the way they keep changing their minds. Do you not think so, Heir Hauptmann?”

“Yes, perhaps so,” laughed Scotty. “But now that I am here, do you think I might have lunch before returning to Wandsbek?”

“Yes, certainly, of course!” assented the duty officer with alacrity, pushing back his chair and rising. “It will be an honour to have a pilot of the famous Royal Prussian Jagdstaffel No. 5 lunching with us. You must meet our commandant—Colonel Pudel. Come, I will conduct you to the mess.”

Grabbing his hat, he ushered his guest out of the office, then waddled by his side in the direction of the mess.

“Between you and I,” he confided, “Commandant Pudel is a bit of an ass. He’s one of those know-all sort of fellows, and he’ll probably try to patronise you. But don’t you take any notice of that. In fact,” he added wistfully, “it would please one or two of us no end to see him taken down a peg or two.”

On meeting Commandant Pudel and sitting at lunch with him, Scotty inwardly found himself forced to agree with the duty officer that Commandant Pudel was a bit of an ass.

The commandant was a heavily built, pompous individual blessed with an exaggerated idea of his own importance. He’d never seen the Western Front, but the way he talked about it to Scotty anybody would have thought he’d seen active service there since the outbreak of hostilities.

Scotty, veteran of a hundred stirring air fights above the battle smoke of the Western Front, listened to him with a patience and an interest which plainly disappointed the fat duty officer, who was sitting near them.

What the duty officer obviously wanted was to hear Scotty flatly contradict some of Commandant Pudel’s fatheaded views; but, although Scotty felt strongly tempted to do so on more than one occasion, he was playing his own game with a definite end in view, so he held his tongue.

Consequently, by the time they had reached the coffee stage, Commandant Pudel was inwardly voting the young pilot an extremely intelligent and likeable fellow—which was exactly what Scotty wanted.

“Well, I suppose I’d better be getting back to Wandsbek,” said Scotty at length, a trifle regretfully. “I’m more than obliged to you for your hospitality.” He paused a moment; then added: “I wonder if I might be permitted to trespass upon it a little further?”

“Certainly! Anything you like!” announced Commandant Pudel magnanimously, waving his cigar and blowing out a mouthful of smoke. “What is it?”

“I’d like to take a machine up for ten minutes or so,” confessed Scotty. “I miss it, being on leave.”

Commandant Pudel laughed tolerantly.

“I understand,” he said. “We flying men are all the same. You can’t keep us out of the air——”

He broke off, staring icily at the duty officer, who had sniffed audibly; for, to the latter gentleman’s certain knowledge, Commandant Pudel hadn’t been in the air for a fortnight or more.

“Lieutenant Zumperken, have you a cold?” demanded the commandant.

“No, sir,” replied the duty officer hastily.

“I heard you sniff.”

“I’m—I’m sure I’m very sorry, sir!” stammered Zumperken.

“I’m glad to hear it!” snapped Commandant Pudel. “If you have a cold you had better see the medical officer; if you have not a cold, as you state, then kindly refrain from making beastly noises at the luncheon table!”

Having thus squashed the presumptuous Zumperken, Commandant Pudel turned again to his guest.

“You were saying you would like to go up,” he said. “Certainly, by all means! There are plenty of machines.”

How ridiculously easy it was, thought Scotty, as, some little time later, he strolled out towards the hangars with Commandant Pudel.

But there wasn’t the slightest reason why the commandant or anyone else should be suspicious of him, and his request to be permitted to go up had been a perfectly natural and reasonable one.

It was also with infinite satisfaction that Scotty noted that the short winter afternoon was already drawing to a close. It was to this end that he had purposely sat long over lunch, keeping the voluble commandant talking whilst the time passed.

Scotty had already been provided with a leather flying coat and helmet, and a few minutes later he was settling himself down in the pilot’s seat of an old Albatross which was standing with engine ticking over.

“Don’t be too long!” boomed Commandant Pudel. “We’ll soon be finishing flying for the day.”

Scotty nodded, and after a glance at his instrument board he opened up the throttle. The waiting mechanics whipped away the chocks from in front of the undercarriage wheels; then, with a deep-throated roar of engine, the Albatross tore across the flying field, to lift and go soaring up and up into the dusk.

“Talk about taking coppers from a blind man’s tin!” grinned Scotty exultantly. “Gosh! I’ve never knocked a bus off so easily in my life!”

He kept the Albatross heading straight from the hangars as he lifted her up and up into the greying dusk. Not until a full five kilometres lay between him and the aerodrome did he turn; but, instead of heading back towards the hangars, he swung southwards towards Lubeck.

When thirty kilometres or more lay between him and the aerodrome, he brought the Albatross gliding down through the now fast-deepening dusk, to land on a flat stretch of ground near the little village of Muldorf. As he switched off the engine and swung himself stiffly from the cockpit, a group of villagers came running towards him.

“Where is the post office?” he demanded. “I must telephone.”

An admiring throng conducted him to the post office, where he got through on the telephone to Commandant Pudel’s flight office.

“Is that you, Zumperken?” he said, recognising the gusty voice of the fat duty officer. “Von Stahl speaking. I’m down near Muldorf with a jammed rudder and engine trouble. Is Commandant Pudel there?”

“No, he’s rushing round in circles beside the hangars, bawling at everybody to know where the dickens you can have got to,” replied Zumperken. “But I’m glad you’re safe. Is the machine damaged? Not,” he added, “that I care a cuss whether it is or whether it isn’t!”

“No, the machine’s all right,” said Scotty. “Will you bring the commandant to the phone?”

“Yes, hold on,” assented Zumperken.

There was a minute or two of waiting, then over the line came the booming voice of Commandant Pudel:

“Hallo, hallo! Is that you, Von Stahl? Where in thunder are you?”

“I’ve had a forced landing near Muldorf, with a jammed rudder and engine trouble,” replied Scotty. “Yes, I know I’m the dickens of a long way from your flying field. I couldn’t help it. You ought to see that your machines are kept in better condition. This bus is worse than a crate. What’s that? No, she’s not damaged, but we can’t get her off to-night now. I’ve picketed her down, and I’ll stay at the inn here until morning, when you can send a mechanic and a pilot over in my car to put her right and fly her back. I’ll go straight on from here in my car. Yes, yes, don’t worry, I’ll see the villagers don’t touch her. Good-night!”

With a faint smile, Scotty replaced the receiver. Everything had gone according to plan. He had an old but perfectly good machine at his disposal. Its absence from the aerodrome was satisfactorily accounted for, and neither Commandant Pudel nor anyone else would worry about it until morning.

There was a small garage in the village, and having replenished his tank with what petrol was available, Scotty started up his engine again.

Then, swinging himself up into the pilot’s seat, he opened up the throttle and took off.

It was some twenty minutes later that Scotty came gliding down with engine ticking over to land in the field beside the lonely, wayside cottage where Grey Shadow, Marie, and Weston were waiting for him.

The cottage door was locked, but Grey Shadow opened it to Scotty’s knock, locking it again the instant the pilot had stepped across the threshold.

“Good man!” he exclaimed, when Scotty had reported the success of his mission. “Well, Weston’s ready, so you’d better get off at once for the Danish frontier. The sooner Weston’s safely across there, the happier I’ll be!”

Something in his voice caused Scotty to look at him quickly and ask:

“Has anything happened?”

“Yes, we’ve had a visit from the military,” answered Grey Shadow grimly. “A sergeant and a couple of soldiers turned up here this afternoon. They were looking for Weston, and they searched the cottage.”

“But didn’t find him, obviously,” said Scotty, glancing at Weston. “Where were you, Weston?”

“Hiding in a false wall in the room upstairs,” replied Weston. “Thank goodness we spotted the soldiers coming along the road! Marie’s been keeping a look-out at an upstairs window all day.”

“But what brought them here?” demanded Scotty, turning to Grey Shadow.

“The merest chance, I hope,” replied Grey Shadow, with a shrug of his shoulders. “The military are apparently convinced that by this time Weston’s got clean away from Hamburg, so they’re searching every lonely building for miles around. All the same, the sergeant who came here asked me some very pointed questions as to who I was and what I was doing here, so the sooner we’re away, the better!”

“You’re clearing out to-night as well, then?” asked Scotty.

“Yes, Marie and I will make for Kladen, on the shores of the Baltic,” said Grey Shadow. “There’s a big Zeppelin station there, and our Admiralty want it destroyed. You’d better make for Kladen by easy stages after you’ve dropped Weston across the Danish frontier. We’ll meet you there in a couple of days’ time. It’s only a little German fishing village, so we’ll have to watch our step——”

Abruptly he broke off, standing rigid and motionless, his head inclined in listening attitude.

“Listen!” he said sibilantly.

His three companions froze, listening with straining ears. In the sudden hushed, tense stillness there came a faint click, followed by a creak.

“Someone’s trying the latch of the front door,” breathed Grey Shadow, his face set. “Marie—upstairs, quick!”

Without a sound, the girl sped swiftly upstairs. But before she could gain the topmost stair, there came the crash of what sounded like a rifle-butt against the door, and a voice roared:

“Open this door in the name of the military!”

Grey Shadow glanced at Scotty and Weston.

“Stand steady!” he said. “They’re here to arrest me or they wouldn’t have come back. They must have been watching the cottage——”

“But hadn’t I better hide?” cut in Weston quickly. “It’s not so much myself I’m thinking about, it’s the importance of these papers I’m carrying. I’m bound to be recognised by the description of me that’s been circulated——”

“Open this door in the name of the military!” roared the voice again, and there came the crash of rifle-butts against the panels.

“Hiding won’t help you or any of us now, Weston,” said Grey Shadow quickly. “They’ll occupy the cottage until their Intelligence experts have examined every inch of it. I’ve one trump card to play, and it may see us through. Scotty, both you and Weston be ready to make a jump for the machine the instant I give the word. The machine is probably guarded. Shoot, and shoot to kill, if anyone attempts to stop you boarding her. And, remember, Scotty, if we come out of this alive, our rendezvous is Kladen!”

He stepped towards the door, which was beginning to splinter inwards under the savage onslaughts of the rifle-butts. As he turned the key back in the lock, the door crashed violently open, and half a dozen soldiers, armed with rifles and fixed bayonets, poured into the cottage, led by a sergeant who carried a drawn revolver in his hand.

“Up with your hands!” roared the sergeant. “We’ll shoot you dead if you resist!”

Obediently Grey Shadow elevated his hands, as did Scotty and Weston.

“Mein geist, but you’ll pay for this, you blundering blockhead!” began Scotty savagely. “What d’you mean by rushing in here like this——”

“You shut your mouth!” shouted the sergeant. “Your officer’s uniform doesn’t fool me. Proper flying officers don’t come visiting lonely cottages like this after nightfall, coming slipping down without any navigation lights and without their engine running. There’s something cursed queer going on here and—— Mein blut, it’s Weston!”

The latter words came in a harsh, triumphant snarl as, with head thrust forward, the sergeant stood glaring at Weston in the yellow illumination of the oil-lamp standing on the table.

“So you were hiding here after all!” he went on in savage exultation. “And that machine out there has come to take you away. Don’t deny it, curse you. I’m not a fool. Get back against that wall, the three of you, and keep your hands raised. We’ll shoot you dead if you move a muscle!”

“Might I ask what exactly has brought you back here?” asked Grey Shadow steadily, as he, Scotty, and Weston stepped back against the wall with their hands raised.

“Yes, I’ll tell you what’s brought me back!” jeered the sergeant. “I wasn’t satisfied with your answers this afternoon. I’ve been making inquiries about you in the village. You’re a mystery. You’re supposed to be an artist, and sometimes you’re here and sometimes you’re not. But you were never here before the war. I found that much out. Never here before the war, d’you understand? I made up my mind to detain you for further interrogation and identification. So back we came and we saw that aeroplane out there land. I knew then there was something wrong about this place, so I decided to arrest the lot of you—and, mein blut, we’ve found Weston!”

He laughed harshly and turned to his men.

“Bring in those two men who are guarding the rear,” he ordered, “then three of you have a look round upstairs. There may be some more of these beauties in this cursed thieves’ kitchen!”

One of the soldiers went off, to reappear a few moments later with two colleagues who had been guarding the rear of the cottage.

“Keep them covered!” ordered the sergeant. Then when five rifles were covering Grey Shadow, Scotty, and Weston, who were lined against the wall, he detailed the three remaining men to search the room upstairs.

Marie, crouched in a corner of the room directly above the kitchen, heard the heavily booted feet of the soldiers ascending the wooden staircase.

Her fingers were clutching the knob of a long, well-oiled bolt. Under normal circumstances, the knob was cunningly hidden beneath a knot in the floorboards. But these were far from normal circumstances, and, through Marie, Grey Shadow was about to play his trump card.

The girl heard the three soldiers clump into the adjoining room, from which they presently emerged. The beam of the electric torch which one of them was carrying, split the darkness of the room in which she was crouching.

The beam flickered about the bed and furniture as the three men advanced into the room. Then suddenly it came to rest on the tensed and crouching form of Marie.

“Come on out of it, you brat!” ordered one of the soldiers harshly.

He and his two companions were in the centre of the floor and were standing directly above the kitchen. Marie half-straightened up, her hand whipping back the bolt she was holding.

Simultaneously the three soldiers gave a startled yell as they felt the floor drop sheer away beneath them. In the kitchen below it seemed as though the greater part of the ceiling had suddenly slammed down like some enormous trapdoor, as indeed it was.

Down into the kitchen went hurtling the three soldiers. They crashed full on their sergeant and five comrades who were standing in the centre of the room.

Rifles exploded as their owners went sprawling, the table went over with a crash, and the oil-lamp was shattered on the stone floor.

“Get going!” yelled Grey Shadow, his voice audible above the uproar created by the raging, struggling German soldiery.

Neither Scotty nor Weston needed any second bidding. They dived for the door followed by Grey Shadow. Next instant they were out into the night, running desperately for the machine.

Upstairs, Marie had darted round the square gap in the flooring and had swung herself agilely out of the window to drop down into the darkness.

Racing round the side of the cottage, Grey Shadow gripped her by the arm.

“Well done!” he cried exultantly. “Quick, this way!”

With his hand on the girl’s arm, they vanished swiftly into the darkness.

Meanwhile Scotty and Weston had almost reached the machine. As they neared it, a couple of German soldiers loomed up out of the darkness, rifles at the ready.

“Halt!” rasped one of the pair.

Scotty’s gun roared into life. He did not shoot to kill, but the bullets tore through the guard’s shoulder, causing him to drop his rifle with a yell of agony and rage.

Weston's gun was also ablaze, and with a choking grunt, the second guard collapsed to the ground to lie a huddled, crumpled heap.

"Into the rear cockpit!" rapped Scotty, as shots and shouts came from the direction of the cottage. "I'll swing the prop myself!"

He leapt for the propeller as Weston scrambled up into the rear cockpit. The still warm engine picked up with a shattering roar as Scotty swung his weight on the propeller. Next instant, as the machine surged forward under the pull of its whirling screw, Scotty leapt for the forward cockpit and scrambled in.

A ragged fusillade of shots rang out from the direction of the cottage and bullets whistled past the machine in the darkness. But the Albatross was already tearing across the field, and as Scotty inched back the control-stick, the machine lifted and soared up and up into the night.

An hour later, with engine throttled down and propeller ticking over, the Albatross came gliding down through the darkness to land on Danish territory.

"Well, good-bye and the best of luck!" said Scotty, thrusting out his hand to Weston. "You should make Copenhagen and then England safely enough now. I'll get off again right away, because if I'm nabbed here I'll be bunged into an internment camp!"

"Good-bye and thanks a lot," said Weston a trifle unsteadily. "I only hope Grey Shadow and Marie have got safely away. I hated leaving them——"

"We had to!" cut in Scotty firmly. "Those papers you've got must reach the British Admiralty at all costs!"

A few minutes later he was in the air again, heading back towards Germany. But as he sat crouched over the controls he, too, was wondering if Grey Shadow and Marie had got safely away to keep the rendezvous at Kladen.



## CHAPTER IV

### STRANGERS IN KLADEN

THERE is no railway station at Kladen, the little German fishing village situated on the lonely shores of the Baltic north of Butzow. But half a kilometre from the village is a little wayside halt where, during the war, a slow local from Butzow stopped twice a day.

The short winter afternoon was drawing to a close as Marie waited on the platform for the arrival of the train. She had discarded the lad's ragged clothing which she usually wore and was clad in an old jersey and ragged skirt.

Old Franz Hufer, who combined the duties of station master, ticket-collector, porter and general factotum, peered inquisitively at the girl through the window of his little office.

Having lived in Kladen for the last twenty years or more, old Franz reckoned he knew everyone both there and in the surrounding district. To the best of his recollection, however, he had never seen this shabbily-dressed girl before and, being the sort of individual who likes to know the why and the wherefore of everything, he sallied forth on to the platform.

"You are waiting for the train, mein fräulein?" he asked affably.

"Yes, mein herr," replied Marie timidly.

"You are waiting to meet someone, yes?" went on old Franz inquisitively.

"Yes," answered the girl.

Old Franz frowned. He wasn't getting on very well, he reflected crossly. The girl wasn't volunteering much information. He decided to come bluntly to the point.

"I haven't seen you around these parts before," he said. "Do you live here?"

"Yes, at Kladen with my grandmother," answered Marie. "We have just moved there from Wolgast."

Old Franz grinned and nodded. Now he knew. One of the fishermen's cottages in Kladen had recently become occupied by an old woman named Frau Gritz and her grand-daughter.

"You will be young Fräulein Gritz, then," said Franz. "And for whom are you waiting, my pretty?"

"My brother Kaspar," answered the girl proudly. "He is a sailor in the navy, and he's been given fourteen days' leave from the big battleship *Friedrich der Grosse*, which is lying at Wilhelmshaven."

"Indeed, that is very nice!" beamed old Fritz, nodding and stroking his whiskers. "He will have many stirring tales to tell you, I do not doubt." His expression changed suddenly into a scowl, and he went on in a snappish tone of voice: "But I do not know that he will have so many tales to tell you, after all. Instead of going out into the North Sea against the Englanders, and engaging them in battle, our warships lie skulking in

Kiel and Wilhelmshaven. That is not the way to win this war. Our sailors should take a lesson from those brave heroes yonder.”

He pointed through the gathering dusk towards where, far in the distance by the flat sea coast, lay the long airship sheds, hutments, and quarters of the great new Zeppelin station which had recently been established at Kladen.

“The Zeppelin men are not afraid to go out against the Englishers,” went on old Fritz. “From here they fly all the way to London, and drop their bombs and do enormous damage. That is the way to win the war.”

He moved away along the platform as the train clanked into the station. Only three passengers alighted—an old woman, an elderly fisherman, and a bronzed and fit-looking young man in the uniform of a German naval rating.

“Hallo, little sister!” cried the young sailor heartily, encircling Marie with his arm and giving her a bear-like hug. “Donner, but it is good to see you again!”

“And to see you, Kaspar,” replied the girl.

With his arms around Marie’s ragged shoulders, the sailor moved to the little wooden barrier, where he tendered his railway voucher to old Fritz, who said, in kindly tones:

“Welcome home on leave, Herr Gritz! I have been hearing about you from your sister. I hope you have a good time.”

“Thank you very much, mein herr!” answered the sailor.

A few moments later he and Marie were walking along the frost-bound road towards the village.

“Well, Marie, and how are things going?” he asked.

“Very well, indeed,” she said. “We are settled in at the cottage, and Grey Shadow is certain no one suspects us for a moment.”

The sailor laughed appreciatively.

“That’s great!” he exclaimed.

They continued to converse in low, earnest tones until they reached the village. Half-way along the straggling main street the girl halted outside a low-roofed white-washed cottage. Opening the door, she walked into a warm, neatly furnished little kitchen, followed by her companion.

The blind had been drawn, and a lighted oil-lamp was standing on the table. Seated on a chair by the fire, her knitting-needles clicking busily, was an old woman with a seamed and wrinkled face and wispy grey hair. At sight of the girl and the sailor she laid aside her knitting and rose.

“Hallo, Scotty!” she exclaimed, in a masculine voice, holding out her hand. “I’m glad to see you!”

“And I’m jolly glad to see you!” exclaimed Scotty, for such was the real identity of the sailor. “By Jove, this old woman’s disguise of yours is an absolute masterpiece! I wouldn’t have known you.”

“That’s a blessing!” replied Grey Shadow, with a laugh. “If you wouldn’t have known me, it’s a pretty safe bet that no German will. But I’ve got the kettle on, so the first thing we’ll do is to have some tea.”

Anyone seeing the girl, the young sailor and the old woman sitting there in the lamp-lit kitchen, having tea, would never have suspected for one moment that the trio were the three most dangerous and most wanted spies in Germany.

“We can’t move yet,” said Grey Shadow. “There are six Zeppelin sheds and only two Zepps. Four more Zepps are expected any day now. Our orders are to wait until these four turn up before we strike.”

“Are the two Zepps which are already here carrying out raids?” asked Scotty.

“Yes, they are,” replied Grey Shadow. “But whenever they take the air I send out a warning to the British Admiralty. We’ve got a powerful wireless transmitter hidden in the bed-room upstairs.”

“Have you made any plans yet for our raid on the sheds when the time comes?” asked Scotty.

“Yes,” nodded Grey Shadow. “We must strike under cover of darkness, of course, and we’ll do it the first night the weather is too bad for the airships to be out. In the meantime, Marie is watching the movements of the guards and sentries, and we’re checking up on the exact manner in which each shed is guarded. We’re leaving nothing to chance.”

They continued talking until a late hour, by which time almost everyone in the little village of Kladen was abed and asleep. Then changing into boy’s ragged attire, and pulling on an old overcoat, Marie slipped quietly out through the rear door of the cottage to resume her nightly vigil near the Zeppelin sheds.

There was more than one reason why this particular job had been assigned to her. In the first place she was slim and wiry, and there was less chance of her being seen in the darkness than would be the figure of a man. Secondly, in the event of her being caught near the sheds, she could easily plead that it was sheer curiosity which had taken her there, whereas such a plea would be worse than useless in the case of either Grey Shadow or Scotty.

Reaching the outskirts of the village, Marie climbed a fence which bordered a field and struck off through the inky-black darkness towards the dimly-illuminated huts which housed the personnel of the Zeppelin station.

So well had she taken stock of the ground during daylight hours that she could almost have found her way to the sheds blindfold. Making a detour, and moving silently through the darkness, she reached the rear of No. 1 shed in which was housed the mighty L 108, one of the two Zeppelins already at the station.

Silently as a shadow, Marie crept along the side of the vast shed, until she could hear the tramp, tramp of the sentry pacing the tarmac in front of the huge sliding doors of the shed which rarely shut, for mechanics, fitters, and riggers were constantly at work on the great Zeppelins.

Marie’s job to-night was to ascertain if possible, whether or not an armed guard was kept inside the sheds in addition to the sentries outside. So seizing her opportunity when the sentry’s back was turned, she slid swiftly and silently round the corner of the shed and in through the open doorway. She was taking a frightful risk, but she trusted to the dark shadows inside the vast shed to hide her from the view of anyone who might be on duty there.

There were only four electric lights burning in the shed, so widely spaced as to cast only a dim illumination throughout the vast interior, and, crouching under the very nose of the mighty Zeppelin, Marie listened with bated breath and straining ears. Not a sound broke the intense stillness, save the muffled tramp, tramp of the sentry outside, and an occasional faint creak from the giant airship.

Satisfied that if there was a guard on duty in the shed, the man was nowhere in her immediate vicinity, Marie commenced to move stealthily forward. Suddenly she tensed, her heart pounding. For from out on the tarmac in front of the shed was coming the heavy tramp of many feet. Next instant a harsh, guttural voice gave an order in German:

“Squad—halt—right turn—fall out for duty!”

A squad of mechanics and riggers had arrived to commence night duty in the shed. With a gasp of dismay, Marie realised she was trapped. She had one split instant in which to act. Without hesitation, she leapt for the nearest cover, which was that afforded by the open door of the control car.

Even as the girl dived into the control car, the lights in the shed blazed into brilliant illumination, and the dungaree-clad mechanics and riggers entered.

The lights shone in through the windows of the control car, and in the clear illumination Marie looked swiftly about her in search of some place in which to hide. On the port and starboard side were lockers, their lids padded to serve as seats. With a fervent prayer that the lids might not be locked, the girl sped across the car.

To her vast relief, the lid which she tried was not locked. Raising it, Marie scrambled inside, lowering the lid a moment before a heavy tread of feet and a rumble of voices entered the car. She found she was lying on top of some iron cylinders, which she rightly assumed to contain oxygen for use when the airship was flying at a high altitude.

Marie realised there could be no possible chance of escape until the squad should go off duty, and she feared that might not be until the dawn, when to get away without being seen would be impossible.

Slowly, wearily, the time dragged past. That Scotty and Grey Shadow would be growing anxious about her, she knew. But in the dangerous game which the three were playing, perilous predicaments such as this were all in the day's work, and there was nothing her companions could do to help her.

Stealthily stretching herself out until she was as comfortable as possible, Marie gave herself up to the inevitable. By this time dawn could not be far distant, and it looked as though the only thing to be done would be to remain hidden in the locker until nightfall.

It was a perilous prospect, but having reconciled herself to it, Marie pillowed her head on her arms and settled down to her long spell of imprisonment.

After what seemed an interminable age, she heard the tramp of the night squad going off duty, and silence settled on the airship. Cautiously raising the lid of the locker, she peered out. The forward windows of the control car were facing the open doors of the shed, and the car was flooded with the grey light of day.

The girl wondered whether to slip out of the control car and attempt a dash for freedom. If only she could dodge the sentry outside the shed and get away without being seen, all would be well. But if she were spotted she would inevitably be traced to the cottage in the village and that would mean the immediate arrest of Scotty and Grey Shadow on suspicion.

As Marie swiftly debated the matter in her mind, the problem was suddenly solved for her, for she heard voices approaching the control car. As she lowered the lid of the locker into place above her, heavily booted feet entered the car.

Again there ensued a long and weary period of waiting during which the girl heard men moving about the control car. As the time passed the activity aboard the airship increased, then suddenly Marie tensed, for by the swaying motion of the airship she knew it was moving forward out of the shed. The Zeppelin was going up!

She was trapped aboard a Zeppelin which was about to take the air, and she found herself wondering whether the ship was bound on a practice flight, or on a bombing raid.

Listening intently, she heard a voice in the control-room giving orders in harsh, authoritative tones; then suddenly the engines hummed into life; the floor of the control-room tilted; and Marie knew that L 108 was soaring swiftly up and up into the sky.

Suddenly heavily booted feet strode towards the locker; the lid was flung back, and Marie sat up to find an astonished and startled face looking down into hers.

“Donner und blitzen!” ejaculated the German, grabbing the girl by the arm. “Where in thunder have you come from?”

Marie thought swiftly. Her disguise as a ragged boy was perfect, she could act the part to the manner born, and, with any luck, these wooden-headed Boches would never discover she was a girl.

“I—I just wanted to see the fun,” she snivelled, as she was hauled forcibly out of the locker. “I wanted a ride in a Zeppelin, so—so I stowed away.”

A grim-visaged man, wearing a thick, leather flying-jacket, strode forward. Marie had seen him in the village, and recognised him as Captain Lorenz von Spath, the commander of L 108.

“What is this?” demanded Von Spath harshly. “Who is this boy?”

“A stowaway, sir,” reported the man who had found Marie. “He’s been hiding in the locker here.”

Von Spath glared at Marie, his face livid with rage.

“What d’you mean by stowing away aboard my ship?” he grated. “Mein blut! I’ve a good mind to thrash you within an inch of your life! Where are you from, confound you?”

“The village, sir,” stammered Marie. “I’ve often watched the Zeppelins, sir, and—and I wanted to ride in one, so last night I hid myself aboard——”

“Then curse you and your impudence!” exploded Von Spath. “You wanted a ride, you say! Well, mein geist, you’re going to get one! We’re bound for England to bomb London! And if we go down in flames, you’ll perish with us!” He turned to the member

of the crew who had found Marie. "Carry on with the oxygen cylinders!" he said harshly, and, turning on his heel, he rejoined the wheelsman.

Left to herself, the girl moved to the slanting window of the control car and looked out. The Zeppelin was at no great height, and was moving steadily westwards.

Turning from the window, she looked at the flight orders pinned up inside the control-room. They were as follows:

"L 108 will carry out raid over London. Ascend at Kladen at 11 a.m.

"Nordholz Zeppelin Station will send out L 92, L 94. Tondern will send out L 98, L 100, L 102. Ahlhorn will send out L 104, L 106.

"Ostend observations at 3, 6, 9 p.m. and 2 a.m. Ostend night observation cannot be absolutely relied upon. Wind measurements from Heligoland Bight obtainable if required. Weather map will not be wirelessed. Careful wireless discipline should be maintained. In case of storms, no attempt should be made to get above them. If impossible to circumvent them, carry on far below pressure height.

"(Signed) Senior Airship Officer,

"Ahlhorn."

So eight Zeppelins in all had been detailed to bring death and destruction to London.

As L 108 drove steadily westwards, the crew's hostility towards the ragged stowaway gradually evaporated, for, after all, they never suspected that he was other than German like themselves.

One of the petty officers gave the stowaway an old leather coat to wear over her ragged overcoat, and from him Marie learned that the Zeppelin carried a crew of twenty-four officers and men, five tons of petrol, and three tons of high-explosive and incendiary bombs.

When the coast had slid away below her tail, and she was out over the North Sea, heading towards Heligoland, the airship began to lose height. At less than five hundred feet she flew over Heligoland Bight, and exchanged signals with outpost aeroplanes. Through the windows of the control-room, Marie could see L 98, L 100, and L 102 approaching from Tondern in the north, and L 104 and L 106 approaching from Ahlhorn in the south.

L 92 and L 94 from Nordholz were already cruising over the Bight, and when the five approaching airships had arrived and signals had been exchanged, the course was laid for England.

As the airships were beginning to lose sight of each other in the deepening dusk, L 94 wirelessed her fellow-raiders:

"Am compelled to abandon flight owing to breakdown of after port engine."

Through the control-room window, the girl saw the vast and shadowy bulk of L 94 turn in the dusk and head back the way she had come, whilst the others drove remorselessly on towards the shores of England.

Suddenly a voice rang through L 108's control-room:

“Searchlights on the port bow, sir!”

There was a rush to the windows, and the Germans stood staring towards where the darkness was riven by searchlight beams wheeling and scissoring in an effort to pick up the enemy raiders crossing the coast at that point.

“The Margate and Ramsgate anti-aircraft batteries!” exclaimed Von Spather.

L 108 was north of the searchlights, driving straight up the Thames Estuary. Suddenly the darkness around her was split by dazzling beams which came stabbing up through the night from the Thames shore batteries, and around the ship came the crimson glow of exploding shrapnel from the anti-aircraft batteries far below.

“Climb to eighteen thousand feet!”

Von Spather’s voice rang harshly through the control-room as, binoculars in hand, he swung for an instant from the open look-out window.

Higher and higher mounted the airship as she drove on through that terrifying barrage. Then suddenly the control car was flooded with brilliant illumination, so dazzling that it momentarily blinded the eyes.

A searchlight had found L 108!

Another golden beam and another fastened on the raider, holding her like some glittering silver cigar high in the night sky.

Audible above the whine of her engines sounded the crash and scream of exploding shrapnel. Surely she could never live through such a dreadful inferno as this.

The crew were standing grim-faced and motionless at their posts. The wheelsman’s eyes were fixed on Van Spather, who was leaning far out of the look-out window.

Suddenly Von Spather wheeled swiftly from the window. Away to port he had seen a great bank of light—it was a searchlight penetrating a cloud.

“Wheel hard to port—all engines full throttle!” he cried.

The Zeppelin drove for the cover of the cloud bank. Golden, swirling wraiths of cloud eddied into the control car, and then the illumined cloud was all around her, enveloping her and spreading out below her like some sea of molten gold. The searchlights tried desperately to follow her. But she was safely hidden from them, and they became less certain, less concentrated, some wandering off this way and some wandering off that in their efforts to find her.

At a height of eighteen thousand feet she emerged from cover and drove swiftly on towards London.

The sight which now met Marie’s eyes was a terrifying one. Ahead and all around the airship the darkness was rent by the sweeping beams of searchlights and the lurid flash of exploding shrapnel which was coming up thicker than ever from the outer defence batteries of London.

Suddenly the girl tensed, choking back a cry of horror. For away to starboard a red light had appeared, glowing high in the darkness. Swiftly the light spread until it looked like some huge ball of fire—then it dropped and went plunging down and down through the night, a gigantic flaming torch which left in its wake a long, swirling crimson trail. One of the Zeppelins had been hit and was hurtling earthwards to its doom, enraptured in flames.

Von Spather was leaning far out of the look-out window again, his binoculars pressed to his eyes as he peered down. Directly below stretched the dark and mighty mass of London, with not a light showing anywhere. Suddenly he straightened from the window and rapped:

“Bombs away!”

Trapdoors out in the catwalk dropped open and the first salvo of high-explosive bombs whistled down into the darkness.

Peering down, Marie saw a sudden burst of lurid flame far, far below, and she knew that the bombs had fallen either on some street or buildings, bringing death to innocent citizens.

The airship was dropping her bombs rapidly now, for she was hovering over the very heart of the metropolis. Suddenly a voice rang through the control-room:

“Last bombs away, sir!”

Instantly came Von Spather’s voice in response:

“Course due north—all engines at full throttle!”

Under opening throttles the hum of the engines rose to a shrill, high-pitched whine, and as the spokes of the wheel spun under the hands of the steersman, L 108 commenced to drive northwards at full speed.

Then, above the whine of the engines, came a sudden reverberating crash, illumination like forked lightning shot through the control car and the airship reeled drunkenly.

“Take her up!” yelled Von Spather. “They’ve got our range. Another salvo like that, and we’re doomed!”

Another salvo of shrapnel burst almost alongside the great hull of L 108. Above the tumult sounded the smash of splintering glass and woodwork, and the metallic clang of flying shrapnel striking the iron parts of the car.

A white-faced, breathless rigger swung himself frantically down into the control car.

“Four of the centre gasbags have completely run out, sir!” he gasped to Von Spather, whose face was gashed and bleeding from flying splinters of glass.

The reeling airship had already developed a heavy list, and was stalling badly. There came a shout from the elevator helmsman:

“I can’t keep our height, sir! She’s going down rapidly!”

Every man aboard knew the deadly peril they were in, for, the centre gasbags having run out, the airship’s frame was no longer firm and secure. She was in imminent danger of breaking in two.

“Lighten her!” yelled Von Spather. “Throw everything movable overboard—cylinders, tools, wireless set—Mein geist! She’s going!”

Up in the hull, a main girder had snapped with a loud report.

“Throttles to half!” screamed Von Spather. “Dive her under full elevator control!”

The nose of the airship dropped to an acute angle, and she drove down and down through the darkness, swaying with a helpless, sickening motion, but still under some



semblance of control.

“Stand by the throttles and elevator controls!” shouted Von Spath. “We’ll try to level her up before we crash. Thank goodness we’re out over open country now!”

A petty officer gripped Marie by the arm.

“Get up the ladder into the hull!” he said hoarsely. “It’ll give you a better chance—the cars’ll buckle under us when we crash. Hang on, for your very life’s sake!”

The girl needed no second bidding. Gaining the ladder, she scrambled up into the warping hull. Wrapping her arms tightly round a girder, she hung there waiting for the inevitable crash.

Suddenly the nose of the airship lifted sickeningly. For a long-drawn moment the whole hull seemed to hang motionless. Then came a deafening crash, Marie was flung violently from her hold and amidst a roaring, terrifying welter of sound she went plunging down and down into the black and bottomless abyss of unconsciousness.



When next she opened her eyes she found herself lying in bed in a hospital ward, her closely-cropped head swathed in bandages.

Seeing the girl awake, a nurse left the bed-side to return with a khaki-clad doctor and a major of the British Royal Flying Corps.

“How do you feel?” asked the major in German.

“Not very strong,” answered Marie with a faint smile. “And my head is aching abominably. Where am I?”

“In a London hospital,” replied the major. “You’re lucky to be alive. We found you amongst the wreckage of the L 108, which crashed on the outskirts of London. What was a girl like you doing aboard a Zeppelin?”

Marie was silent. Then she answered the major’s question with another.

“Were there many survivors?” she asked weakly.

“Eight only, I’m afraid,” said the major.

“And—and the commander?”

“Was amongst the killed,” answered the major.

## CHAPTER V

### THE DOOR OPENS

GREY SHADOW and Scotty sat in their little cottage. They were still in their disguises, and both were very worried men. They were strangely silent as they sat there over the fire listening to the mournful wailing of the wind in the chimney and to the thunder of the breakers on the near-by beach.

With a sudden, abrupt movement Scotty pushed back his chair, and, rising to his feet, commenced to pace the floor.

“If only we knew what’s happened to her!” he burst out. “That’s the rotten, maddening part of the whole wretched business. If the Germans have got her surely they’d have traced her here, and we’d have had a visit from them. And if they haven’t got her, where on earth is she, poor kid?”

“Goodness only knows, Scotty,” answered Grey Shadow sadly. “It’s the most extraordinary thing I’ve ever struck in my life. I’m perfectly certain we’re not being watched, which seems to indicate that the Germans haven’t got her.”

“Then where on earth can she be?” demanded Scotty desperately. “It’s exactly a week ago to-night that she slipped out of here to keep watch over at the Zeppelin sheds, and from the moment the door of this cottage closed on her she vanished as completely as though the ground had opened and swallowed her up.”

“If we weren’t what we are we could have made proper inquiries about her in the village,” went on Scotty bitterly. “As it is, we’ve had to lie low and let our neighbours think she’s gone off on a visit to relatives. But, by Jove,” he concluded dismally, “I’d give everything I’ve got in the world to know what’s happened to her.”

Abruptly he broke off, his head turned towards the door.

“There’s someone out there!” he muttered.

Grey Shadow said nothing. Seated tense and rigid by the fire, his eyes were fixed on the door which was slowly opening inch by inch.

A gust of bitter cold air swirled into the kitchen, causing the flame of the oil-lamp on the table to flicker and send grotesque, fantastic shadows dancing around the walls.

Scotty’s hand had slid to his pocket wherein lay a loaded automatic, for there was something about the stealthy opening of the door which showed quite plainly that whoever was out there was no ordinary visitor.

Then suddenly a head came into view round the edge of the door.

“Marie!” cried Scotty and Grey Shadow in unison, the latter leaping to his feet.

As the girl stepped into the kitchen, carefully shutting the door behind her, Scotty jumped forward and gripped her affectionately by the shoulders.

“Gosh, but it’s good to see you again,” he cried. “Where on earth have you been all this time?”

“England,” said Marie. Then added: “London!”

“England—London,” repeated Scotty incredulously. “How the dickens did you get there?”

“I was taken there aboard the Zeppelin L 108,” said the girl. “You know the night I went to watch the Zeppelin sheds. Well, I was nearly caught in L 108’s shed, and I hid aboard her. There were mechanics and riggers working on her all night, and I had to remain hidden. When morning came the ship was taken out of the shed, and next thing I knew we were in the air and heading for England on a bombing raid.”

“Well, I’ll be jiggered!” ejaculated Scotty. “So that was the way of it, was it? But L 108 was shot down over London. How did you escape with your life?”

“I was up in her hull when she crashed,” explained the girl. “There were eight survivors out of a crew of twenty-four. She didn’t crash in flames, you know. It was only her centre gasbags which had run out and she was beginning to break up in the air.”

“Oh, is that all?” said Scotty satirically. “Anyway, how have you got back here?”

“I was ferried over the lines last night and landed in Germany by an aeroplane of the Secret Squadron,” replied Marie. “I travelled by train as far as Wurstadt, the next station to Kladen, and I’ve walked the rest of the way. I wanted to get here secretly under cover of darkness, because I didn’t know what might be happening.”

“Nothing’s been happening except that we’ve been terribly worried about you,” said Grey Shadow. “We’re thundering glad to see you back again. But tell me, what yarn did you pitch those Germans aboard L 108 when they found you hiding in the ship?”

“I told them I was just one of the villagers, and that I’d stowed away on purpose to have a ride in a Zeppelin,” replied Marie. “They never suspected the truth for an instant.”

“You’re certain of that?” pressed Grey Shadow.

“Yes, absolutely certain,” said Marie earnestly. “Even when the airship crashed, and I was taken out of the wreckage and taken to hospital, the nurses and doctors thought I was a German. Only one or two officers of the British Intelligence Service Headquarters in London knew the truth. It was they who arranged for the machine to bring me back to Germany.”

“And here you are!” laughed Scotty. “Well, you’ve turned up just at the right moment, as well. We’re blowing up the Zepp sheds to-night!”



Until a late hour that night Scotty, Grey Shadow, and Marie sat in the little kitchen perfecting every detail of their plan for destroying the Zeppelin sheds and the six great airships which were housed there.

“We’ll start with Shed No. 1,” said Grey Shadow. “The gale’s blowing from Shed No. 1 directly across the others. If we do the job properly the Germans won’t have the slightest chance of salvaging a single ship.”

“And what do we do after the raid?” asked Marie.

“If everything goes well we’ll stay on here for a few days,” replied Grey Shadow. “Then Scotty will leave the village ostensibly to join his ship, the *Friedrich der Grosse*, at Wilhelmshaven. You and I’ll go as far as Butzow to see him off. At least, that’s what we’ll tell the neighbours here, and none of us’ll ever come back. To rush off the moment the sheds are destroyed will be to raise the hue-and-cry after us at once.”

“And if anything goes wrong to-night?” asked the girl, hesitatingly.

“Nothing must go wrong,” replied Grey Shadow grimly. “If it does, then the three of us’ll finish up by standing with our backs against a wall, facing a firing party.”

There was stark truth in the words, for such was the fate meted out to every Allied spy caught in Germany. Moreover, so desperately anxious was the German High Command to lay their hands on Scotty, Grey Shadow, and Marie that they had placed the price of one hundred thousand marks on the head of each of the trio, dead or alive.

The hour of midnight had struck when the trio slipped quietly out through the rear doorway of the cottage, which they left safely locked up, and in complete darkness.

Grey Shadow was no longer attired as an old woman, but was wearing a fisherman’s dark blue jersey, dark serge trousers, and rubber-soled shoes, whilst Marie was wearing ragged male attire.

Carrying a small black box, which he treated with the utmost care, he and his two companions set off through the inky-black darkness of the storm-swept night, making towards the outskirts of the village.

Each knew that it was a pretty safe bet that none of the villagers would be stirring at that late hour and on such a night, but as they moved along, with heads bent to the storm, they kept a sharp look-out for any nocturnal prowler.

As they reached the outskirts of the village the full fury of the storm swooped upon them, buffeting them violently and driving stinging lashing rain into their faces. But apart from the physical discomfort occasioned by it, the fury of the elements was in their favour, for in the darkness and driving, blinding rain it would have taken a very sharp pair of eyes indeed to have spotted them.

Scaling a fence which bordered a field, they struck off through the darkness towards where a few faint and tiny glimmers of light marked the distant, rain-lashed windows of the huts and quarters of the airship station personnel.

Because of the careful observations they had made during daylight hours, the trio could have made their way to the Zeppelin sheds almost blindfolded, and making a detour, they eventually arrived at the rear of Shed No. 1.

“There’re sentries guarding the front of each shed,” muttered Grey Shadow to his two companions. “It’s the sentry on duty outside this particular shed that we’re going to deal with. Consequently, it’s the sentry on duty at the adjoining shed of whom we’ve got to be careful, in case the fellow hears anything. So off you go, Marie, and watch him. If he attempts to raise the alarm, you know what to do.”

Obediently Marie slipped away, and was swallowed up in the blackness of the night.

“Ready, Scotty?” muttered Grey Shadow.

“Yes,” replied Scotty, in a low voice.

“Right-ho! Lead on!”

Drawing his automatic from his pocket, Scotty crept cautiously along the side of the vast shed. He was followed by Grey Shadow, who still carried the small black box which he had brought with him from the cottage.

Within a pace of the front corner of the shed, Scotty and his companion crouched rigid and motionless in the darkness. Long before this their eyes had become well attuned to the darkness, and they could see the dim and shadowy figure of the German sentry pacing the rain-swept tarmac in front of the shed.

As still and silent as though they themselves were but part of the darkness, Scotty and Grey Shadow watched the man as he came marching along the front of the shed to halt, turn, and go marching back again.

Certain at length of the sentry's movements, and timing himself to a split second, Scotty straightened up and glided swiftly in the man's wake as the latter turned and commenced to march away along the front of the shed again.

Any slight sound Scotty might have made was lost in the wailing of the wind and the patter of rain on the tarmac. His clubbed automatic was in his hand, and the sentry never suspected for an instant that anyone was closing with him until, without warning, Scotty's arm was flung swiftly round his neck from behind and the butt of Scotty's automatic cracked him hard and expertly on the temple.

With a grunt the German collapsed, his knees caving in. Had it not been for Scotty's arm round his throat the man would have crumpled, a limp and huddled heap, to the tarmac.

“Got him—good man!” exclaimed Grey Shadow in a low, tense voice, looming up beside Scotty in the blackness.

“Grab his rifle!” muttered Scotty, for the crook of his arm was pressing the rifle against the body of the unconscious sentry, preventing it from falling with a clatter to the tarmac, where there was a risk of it exploding.

Grey Shadow quickly relieved him of the rifle, then gripping the sentry under the armpits, Scotty dragged him round the corner of the shed and lowered him to the ground.

The whole episode had taken less than sixty seconds, and before another three minutes had passed Scotty had donned the German's greatcoat and army cap and was pacing the tarmac in front of the shed, rifle on shoulder, whilst Grey Shadow tied and gagged the unconscious man.

So smoothly and swiftly had the attack been carried out that the sentry on duty outside the adjoining shed had evidently heard nothing, for he showed no signs of coming to investigate.

As Scotty and Grey Shadow had anticipated, the great, sliding doors of the shed were locked on a night of storm such as this. But Grey Shadow had come prepared for such an eventuality, and having securely trussed the sentry, he produced a small bunch of skeleton keys and attacked the lock of a little wicket door which afforded entry into the shed through the big, sliding doors when they were locked.

Grey Shadow's movements were covered by Scotty who continued to march up and down, up and down on the sentry's beat. Then suddenly the little wicket door swung open, and with a guarded word to Scotty, Grey Shadow vanished into the shed carrying with him the small black box which he had brought from the cottage.

Carefully closing the door behind him, Grey Shadow stood a moment looking about him, for, as was the usual custom in German Zeppelin sheds, a few dim electric light bulbs had been left burning high up in the shed.

L 110 was the Zeppelin housed in this particular shed, and her gigantic bulk seemed to fill almost the whole of the vast building, the atmosphere of which was warm and heavy with the mingled fumes of petrol, oil and fabric dope.

Having satisfied himself that he was alone in the shed, Grey Shadow made his way swiftly towards the control car. Swinging himself up into the car, he produced a small electric torch and clambered up the ladder which led into the mighty hull, where were stored the hydrogen-filled gasbags of the ship.

With the beam of his torch to guide him, he moved aft towards the centre part of the hull. Then, crouching down, he opened the small, black box and released a safety catch which set some mechanism ominously ticking.

Meanwhile Scotty was still marching up and down on sentry-go outside the shed, for should the absence of a sentry from Shed No. 1 be noted, the alarm would be raised at once.

Not that a sentry's absence was likely to be noted on such a night as this until his relief turned up, reflected Scotty, but it was never the way of Scotty, Grey Shadow, and Marie to leave anything to chance when they could possibly avoid it.

Grey Shadow should be just about through by now, thought Scotty, as he marched up and down. It shouldn't take long to fix that small, black box of deadly high-explosive in the hull of the airship——

Abruptly Scotty halted in his marching, peering with narrowed eyes towards two men who were looming up in the darkness beside him. The pair appeared to be approaching from the direction of the huts and quarters, and Scotty had the fraction of a second in which to decide upon his course of action. Harshly his voice rang out in German:

“Halt—who goes there?”

Instantly came the answer:

“Duty officer visiting rounds!”

Scotty's fingers tightened on the rifle which he had brought to the ready. The worst had happened. The duty officer, who rarely visited the sentries before 2 a.m., had chosen this night of all nights to make an earlier tour of the rounds.

There was only one thing for Scotty to do now, and he did it.

“Advance, Heir Offizier!” he said in German, hoping desperately that in the darkness he would be able to bluff this thing through.

The duty officer advanced. He was accompanied by a sergeant. The pair of them were wearing streaming, black oilskins which glistened in the darkness.

“Anything to report?” demanded the officer.

“No, sir,” replied Scotty, rigidly at attention.

He was uncomfortably aware that the sergeant was peering closely at him in the darkness.

“Everything is quiet?” asked the officer.

“Yes, sir,” replied Scotty.

With a muttered exclamation the sergeant whipped an electric torch from his pocket and snapped the beam full in Scotty’s face.

“Donner und blut, I thought so!” he ejaculated. “I didn’t recognise your voice. Who in thunder are you?”

“What the blazes are you talking about?” snapped the officer.

“This man!” grated the sergeant. “He’s a stranger to me. Fritz Roggen was the sentry here!”

Scotty backed away, playing desperately for time. He must hang on at all costs until Grey Shadow appeared.

“Fritz Roggen was unwell, Herr Offizier,” he began. “I came to relieve him——”

“That’s a lie!” shouted the sergeant. “I’ve never seen you in my life before—you’re not on the strength of the station. There’s something wrong here, Herr Offizier!” He yanked out his revolver. “Drop that rifle and put your hands up, you dog!” he snarled at Scotty. “Drop it or I’ll drill you!”

Scotty dropped the rifle all right, sending it with a clatter to the tarmac, but simultaneously he hurled himself forward in a perfect Rugby tackle. His arms wrapped themselves round the sergeant’s knees, bringing that startled individual down with a crash. The revolver exploded as the sergeant’s finger jerked convulsively on the trigger, but the bullet whistled yards wide.

Smashing his fist savagely into the sergeant’s face, Scotty snatched the revolver from the man’s grasp, and leapt to his feet. As he did so, the officer closed with him, flinging his arms round him, and bawling at the top of his voice for assistance.

It was no time for nice measures, for Scotty knew perfectly well that the other sentries and the rest of the guard would already be running towards the scene of the affray; so, bringing his knee up sharply, he drove it with savage force into the officer’s stomach. It was either that, or shooting the fellow at such close quarters that he must have blown a hole clean through him.

Tearing himself free from the grasp of the winded, gasping officer, Scotty leapt back. As he did so an automatic roared into life behind him from somewhere by the doors of the shed, and the voice of Grey Shadow cried in strident German:

“Run, comrades—run for your lives!”

Turning, Scotty dashed away into the rain-swept darkness, for now that he knew Grey Shadow was safely out of the shed, it was madness to remain there any longer.

As for Marie, Scotty knew that she, too, would have heard Grey Shadow’s warning cry, and would be fleeing for safety through the darkness.

When he had put a good hundred yards or more between himself and Shed No. 1, Scotty halted and looked back. He could see nothing through the darkness, but from the

direction of the tarmac came a hubbub of excited, questioning voices, audible above the tumult of the storm.

Then, without warning, there came a terrific explosion, and Shed No. 1 erupted in a blinding sheet of lurid flame which leapt high into the night.

The roof of the vast shed was blown clean off by the violence of the explosion, and was whirled like some enormous, warped and twisted leaf before the gale.

The sides of the shed crashed outwards, loosing roaring sheets of flame, and what a few seconds before had been a mighty airship was now a terrifying holocaust of white-hot flame.

Already Shed No. 2 was burning fiercely, and, fanned by the gale which was blowing directly across the sheds, the roaring flames seized hungrily on Shed No. 3.

It was evident from the first that not a Zepp could be saved, so fierce was the heat of the leaping, crackling flames, fed by hydrogen from their exploding gasbags, and fanned by the gale into a roaring, blazing inferno which beggared description.

Scotty lingered a few minutes longer; then, shedding the sentry's greatcoat which was no longer of any use to him, he turned on his heel and vanished into the darkness, and eventually slipped into the cottage, to find that Grey Shadow and Marie had reached it before him. Grey Shadow was donning the old woman guise again, and Marie was heating up a pan of coffee on the fire.

"Well, we've certainly made a good job of it," said Grey Shadow grimly. "The whole station'll be completely burned out by morning. But what happened outside the shed, Scotty? And who were those two fellows you were scrapping with?"

Scotty quickly explained what had happened. Grey Shadow's face grew grave.

"Well, it might have been worse," he said, when Scotty had concluded. "But I don't like that sergeant having seen your face. If they take it into their heads to make a house to house search and find you here, we're done. You've got to clear out, Scotty!"

Abruptly he broke off as there came a sudden imperative knock at the door.

"My hat! That can't be them as quickly as all this!" ejaculated Scotty.

"I'm afraid it is," said Grey Shadow grimly. "It certainly sounds like them. Anyway, it's too late to try a bolt now. Open the door, Marie."

Obediently the girl stepped to the door and turned back the key in the lock. As she did so, the door was flung violently open, and the sergeant, whom Scotty had struck, strode into the kitchen, followed by a squad of armed soldiers.

At sight of Scotty the sergeant's eyes glittered triumphantly.

"So you are here, you dog!" he grated. "You're under arrest—the three of you! The cottage is surrounded, and at the first sign of resistance we'll shoot you dead!"

"What're you talking about?" quavered Grey Shadow, in the shrill, petulant tones of an old woman. "What d'you mean by coming in here like this?"

"You shut your mouth!" cut in the sergeant snarlingly. "You're in it as well, you hag! Search them for weapons, men!"

The search was carried out swiftly and effectively, but no weapons were found, for the trio had already hidden them on their return to the cottage.



“There you are, you see!” shrieked Grey Shadow indignantly. “Now perhaps you’ll tell me what you mean by forcing your way in here at this time of night——”

“Silence!” thundered the sergeant. “If you don’t shut your mouth, you hag, I’ll shut it for you! You know what we’re here for. The Zeppelin sheds were blown up to-night, and that hound there”—he indicated Scotty—“was masquerading as one of our sentries. You’re a bunch of spies——”

“You’re a liar!” screamed Grey Shadow shrilly. “That’s my grandson, that is, and he hasn’t been out of this cottage to-night, except to run down the road a few minutes ago, when we were roused from our beds by the shouting of the neighbours. Don’t you dare call us spies, or you’ll be sorry for it, so I’m telling you!”

“You can tell me till you’re black in the face—you’re still coming along to the police station!” grated the sergeant. “I’d take you to the cells at the air station, only the whole place is burned out, thanks to you——”

“What d’you mean—thanks to me?” screamed Grey Shadow passionately. “What makes you say we know anything about the fire out at the air station?”

“Because you’re the only strangers in Kladen!” snarled the sergeant. “When it was found that the fire had gained the upper hand, and that nothing could be done, the commandant of the airship station gave orders that every stranger in the district was to be held for identification and interrogation. A cordon of police and military has already been thrown round the whole district, but it isn’t necessary. You’re the strangers we’re after—the only strangers in Kladen, according to the villagers. As for you”—he glared at Scotty—“I can positively identify you as the man who attacked me!”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” said Scotty coolly. “When did I attack you?”

“To-night, out at the airship station, curse you!” shouted the sergeant. “But I’m not going to waste any more words on you. You’re coming along to the police station!”

He barked out an order to his men, and they closed in on Scotty, Grey Shadow, and Marie.

On reaching the police station they were relieved of their identification papers and locked in separate cells. An hour or more passed, when the door of Scotty’s cell opened and the sergeant appeared.

“According to your identification papers, you’re Gaspar Britz, naval rating attached to the *Friedrich der Grosse*,” he said.

“Yes,” assented Scotty, “that’s who I am.”

“Oh, is that so?” sneered the sergeant. “Then how d’you account for the fact that the captain of the *Friedrich der Grosse* has just informed our commandant by telephone that no such man as Kaspar Gritz is serving with the *Friedrich der Grosse* or is attached to her in any way. The name—your name—is completely unknown aboard the ship. So what have you to say to that, you spy?”



Commandant Trupp, senior officer commanding the German Zeppelin station of Kladen, leaned across the table in a little, sparsely furnished room of the village police

station and stared at the three prisoners ranged in front of him under armed guard.

“Do you deny your identity?” demanded Commandant Trupp harshly. “Do you deny that you are three British spies?”

It was the old woman who answered.

“No, we don’t deny it, commandant dear,” she leered.

The commandant glared at her.

“Stop talking like that, or I’ll have you flogged!” he grated. “You’re a man, so talk in your natural voice!”

“It’s as well for you that you haven’t attempted to deny your identity,” he went on harshly, “for it would have availed you nothing. We’ve searched your cottage, and we’ve found a wireless transmitter hidden in a bed-room upstairs.”

“Is that so?” drawled Grey Shadow.

“Yes, it is so!” shouted Commandant Trupp, crashing his clenched fist to the table. “What’s more, it was you three who blew up the Zeppelin sheds last night, destroyed six Zeppelins, and burned hutments and quarters to the ground. Do you deny that?”

“Not if you say so,” replied Grey Shadow.

His mocking tone brought Commandant Trupp to his feet, his face livid with rage.

“Mein blut!” exploded the commandant passionately. “We’ll change your tune for you before long, you schweinhund! You’re leaving to-night for Hamburg, the three of you, to be tried by court-martial as enemy spies. And I’ll tell you now what the sentence will be. You’ll be shot, d’you hear—shot, confound you!” He broke off, panting and glaring at Grey Shadow. Then, having recovered his breath, he went on harshly:

“If the punishment cells out at the airship station had not been destroyed in last night’s fire I would have the three of you transferred there until the car and escort arrive to take you to Hamburg. As it is, you will remain here in the police cells under armed guard until your escort arrives!”

He turned to the armed guards in charge of the three prisoners.

“Take them away!” he grated.

In the midst of their guards Grey Shadow, Scotty, and Marie were marched from the room. The little police station boasted only two cells, so Grey Shadow and Marie were locked in one, and Scotty in the other.

Bolts on the outside of the heavy iron doors were then shot home, and out in the short length of corridor sounded the tramp, tramp of the two armed sentries left there on guard.

Seating herself on the three-plank bed with which the cell was furnished, the girl looked at Grey Shadow. The latter was leaning against the wall of the cell, staring up at the little barred window set high in the wall.

Lowering his gaze to Marie, who was still clad in boy’s ragged attire, Grey Shadow laughed.

“Well, this looks a pretty safe cage, and no mistake,” he said.

“Yes, that’s what I’m thinking,” replied the girl.

“It was the worst of bad luck Scotty being recognised out at the airship station last night and the three of us being pounced on and arrested before we could clear out of Kladen,” said Grey Shadow. “However, we’re not done yet. What time d’you reckon it is!”

“About noon I should think,” said Marie.

“Yes, it can’t be more,” nodded Grey Shadow. “That ought to give us sufficient time. D’you think if you stood on my shoulders you could reach that window?”

“I think I could manage it,” replied Marie, glancing up at the little square of barred window. “But we can’t get out that way.”

“I can’t; but you might squeeze through if the bars weren’t there,” said Grey Shadow. “Anyway, you’re going to try!”

Pulling off one of his old, dilapidated shoes, he ripped out the inner sole and produced a flat file of thin but highly tempered steel.

“One of our most elementary precautions, eh?” he said, with a laugh. “The three of us have been most rigorously searched by our guards, but they never thought of this trick. I’ve had the file hidden in my shoe from the first day we arrived in Kladen.”

This was indeed the case, for in the perilous game which they were playing in the very heart of enemy country neither Scotty, Grey Shadow, nor Marie left anything to chance, but took every possible precaution not only to avoid arrest, but to be able to slip out of German hands in the event of their being caught.

“Up you get, and tackle those bars,” said Grey Shadow. “The window looks out on a patch of garden which fringes the beach. I know that through keeping my eyes open when walking about the village, so you’re not likely to be seen by anyone outside!”

A few moments later the girl had scrambled up on to Grey Shadow’s shoulders and was filing away at the bars with the sharp, keen file. She found the task easier than she had anticipated, for the bars were rusted and worn with long exposure to rain and storm beating in from out the Baltic.

She told this to Grey Shadow who said:

“Yes; I don’t suppose they’ve ever been touched or examined since they were put there. I doubt if the cells are used much in a peaceful little fishing village such as this.”

Whilst Marie filed at the bars Grey Shadow was keeping his ears attuned to follow the steady tramp, tramp of the armed guards out in the corridor, and suddenly he said:

“Quick, down you get! Someone’s coming!”

The girl swung herself lightly down to the floor, handing the file to Grey Shadow, who slipped it swiftly back into his shoe. Scarcely had he done so than the bolts scraped back in their sockets, the key was turned, and the heavy iron door swung open to admit a grey-clad German soldier who carried a tin tray on which were two hunks of black bread and a couple of tin mugs of water.

The soldier was accompanied by two armed guards, who watched carefully whilst Grey Shadow and Marie helped themselves to their frugal rations.

Then the guards and the soldier withdrew, the door clanged shut, the bolts were shot home, and Grey Shadow and the girl were left to themselves once more.

Nor were they disturbed again whilst the winter afternoon merged slowly into dusk. By the time the greying shadows of the waning day were darkening the cell, the bars of the little window had been filed clean through.

“Now off you go!” said Grey Shadow, who had been talking to the girl in a low, guarded voice. “You know exactly what to do, and if anything goes wrong I know it won’t be your fault. If things don’t work out as we’ve planned, make for the Danish frontier. It’s nearer than the trenches, and you’ll easily slip out of Denmark. Good-bye, and the best of luck!”

His hand met Marie’s in a firm, brief clasp. Then, hoisting the girl up on to his shoulders again, he placed the palms of his hands beneath her feet and thrust her up towards the little square of window.

Even for one as slight of build as Marie, it was a tight squeeze to get through the window. But she managed it, and, after a cautious look round in the deepening dusk, dropped to the ground outside and fled crouchingly down the patch of garden.

Reaching the sand-dunes which separated the beach from the garden, Marie lay hidden there, watching the rear of the gaol whilst dusk deepened slowly into night.

She was in an agony of impatience to be gone, for every moment of delay meant that she might be too late to carry out the perilous job which lay ahead. But she dared not move until it was at least comparatively dark, for the whole village knew of her arrest, and should she be seen by any of the villagers, then everything would be ruined.

She stirred at length, and, creeping away along the sand-dunes, made a detour through the darkness which brought her to the outskirts of the village within a short distance of the little cottage which she, Grey Shadow, and Scotty had occupied before their arrest.

In order to carry out the instructions Grey Shadow had given her, it was necessary for Marie to reach the little walled-in yard behind the cottage where coal and driftwood were stored in a small, stone coal-house.

This journey must, of necessity, be fraught with the direst peril, for not only had she two back lanes to traverse, but she knew perfectly well that the cottage must still be in the occupation of the military.

However, no matter what the risk, she knew she had to reach the cottage yard; so, moving stealthily forward, she entered the first of the back lanes which had to be traversed.

Hugging the black shadow of the wall, she glided swiftly along. Then suddenly she halted, freezing rigid and motionless in the inky-black shadow of a doorway, for a heavy tread and a rumble of voices were approaching through the darkness.

A few moments later two men passed within a pace of her, so close that she could have touched them by stretching out her hand. She heard quite plainly what they were talking about, and it was about herself, Grey Shadow, and Scotty.

Not that that was surprising, she thought, as she glided on again through the darkness, for the burning of the airship station and the arrest of the three spies would serve the villagers as a topic of conversation for years to come.

Reaching the end of the lane, Marie turned into the next, which ran behind the row of cottages, one of which had been occupied by Grey Shadow, Scotty, and herself.

Being so near her goal, she now began to run swiftly and silently along the lane, arriving safely at the door which gave access to the walled-in yard behind the cottage.

Pushing open the door, Marie peered into the yard. There was a light in the rear window of the kitchen, token that the cottage was occupied—undoubtedly by the military.

Silently as a shadow, the girl slipped into the yard and vanished into the little stone coal-house. It was inky-black inside, and Marie had neither torch nor matches. But she knew what she had come for, and she knew where it was hidden.

Swiftly she ran her hand over one of the walls in the darkness, feeling the rough stonework until her fingers paused on a stone which protruded very slightly from the others.

Gripping the stone with her fingers, she levered it out until she could get a firmer grip on it. Then, pulling it out of the wall, she placed it gently on the floor, and drew from the cavity in the wall a heavy automatic and a small tin canister fitted with a length of fuse and a protected flint striker.

Slipping the automatic and canister into the pockets of her ragged jacket, Marie replaced the stone in the wall and slipped from the coal-house.

Before venturing from the yard, she peered along the darkened lane. As far as she could judge, it was deserted, and next instant she was running through the darkness back the way she had come.

She had drawn the automatic from her pocket and was carrying it in her hand.

In the blackness of the narrow back lanes she reached the outskirts of the village without molestation. Then she struck off across country, running swiftly through the darkness.

Even now, for all she knew to the contrary, she might be too late, for the car which was to have taken her, Grey Shadow, and Scotty to Hamburg for trial might already have left.

Marie doubted that, however, for she felt certain that the discovery of her escape from the cell would cause no end of a delay whilst the guards were bully-wragged, and a search made for her.

That her escape had not yet been discovered seemed evident from the quietness of the village, for there was no doubt that the whole place would be roused once the hunt for her was on.

As she raced on through the darkness she suddenly halted, peering back through the night in the direction of the village. Was it imagination, she wondered, or had she heard a faint and distant commotion, such as voices raised in shouting.

She listened intently, ears straining to catch the slightest sound. Yes, there was the noise again, voices shouting faintly in the distance, and the barking of dogs roused by the hubbub.

Her face set, Marie turned and sped on.

Of one thing she was now convinced, and that was that the car had not yet left Kladen with Grey Shadow and Scotty, for the distant hubbub had been sufficient to tell her that her escape had just been made known to the villagers.

On and on through the darkness she ran, now wading some stream swollen with winter rains, now running laboriously across the heavy going of land under plough.

And thus she came at length to the winding, twisting road which led southwards from Kladen. It was to save time that she had taken a short cut across country in order to reach the road at this point.

Following the road for less than a quarter of a kilometre she came to an old stone bridge which spanned the rushing waters of a turbulent stream. Pausing, she stood peering about her in the darkness for a few moments while she drew deep, labouring breaths into her lungs.

Nothing moved, nothing stirred in the lonely countryside; and, satisfied that none was about, the girl quitted the road and groped her way down the river bank until she was under the arch of the bridge.

Drawing the canister from her pocket, she placed it against the foot of the old stonework. Next instant there came the swift scrape of the flint, a bright spark ignited the powder fuse into glowing, spluttering life, then Marie was off, running and scrambling madly along the river bank.

Not until a full hundred paces lay between her and the bridge did she halt and look back. For a moment nothing happened; then came a sudden, reverberating roar, a terrific sheet of lurid flame enveloped the already shattered arch of the bridge, and in the black darkness which followed Marie heard the crash of falling stonework hurtling down into the turbulent waters of the stream.

Running back towards the scene of the explosion, she found the roadway strewn with heavy stones and shattered masonry over which she stumbled in the darkness.

But the greater part of the bridge had gone, and between her and the opposite bank of the stream was a black and ominous void. Neither vehicle nor pedestrian could cross now, and in order to proceed south a vehicle would have to make a wide detour of some forty to fifty kilometres along a rough and badly kept road which ran through the forest of Zoff.

This was exactly as Grey Shadow had planned, and so far Marie had carried out the instructions of the Master Spy to the letter.

There was, however, still work to be done here at the bridge, for it would never do to have the prisoners' car come speeding from Kladen to go hurtling down into the stream before the driver could realise his danger and pull up.

There was always the chance of some pedestrian or farm cart or heavy lorry, bound for the burned-out airship station, coming along and discovering the danger in time to raise the alarm; but Marie knew she dared not bank on that.

So she set to work, dragging pieces of stone along the road from the bridge, and leaving them so that they were bound to impede the progress of any car before it could reach the bridge.

This, she knew, would cause the driver of the car to descend to the roadway to find out exactly what had happened. Then the shattered bridge would be discovered, and the car would proceed no farther.

Marie was bent double, tugging away at a heavy piece of stone, when suddenly she tensed, rigid and motionless. Next instant she had darted silently away into the darkness, and was swallowed up in the night.

It was the sound of a heavy step coming along the road which had startled her, but she did not go far. Crouched on the other side of the ditch which bordered the road, she heard the unknown mutter to himself as he stumbled over some of the loose stonework.

A farm labourer, or someone attracted by the sound of the explosion, thought Marie, although she knew that the nearest cottage was a couple of kilometres away.

Long before this her eyes had become well attuned to the darkness, and she could see the dim and shadowy figure of a man picking his way carefully towards the spot where the bridge had commenced.

As the man saw the black void suddenly appear before his very feet, Marie heard him give vent to a startled exclamation, and say aloud in German:

“Donner, the bridge has gone!”

The man stood there, peering down towards the rushing waters of the stream below, muttering to himself as though completely at a loss as to how to account for this extraordinary disaster.

Then suddenly he turned and stood staring back along the road in the direction of Kladen. Marie, also, was staring in that direction, her face tense with expectation, for speeding swiftly towards the shattered bridge were the powerful headlights of what sounded like a high-powered automobile.

It was the car bound from Kladen to Hamburg with Grey Shadow and Scotty. Marie was convinced of that, as, tense and expectant, she moved farther back from the roadway in order to be out of range of the swiftly approaching headlights.

The man who had discovered the disaster was now running stumblingly back over the shattered stonework which littered the roadway, his obvious intention being to warn the driver of the car to pull up before it was too late.

As the powerful car roared towards where the bridge had stood, Marie saw the man plainly illumined in the glare of the headlights, standing in the centre of the road with arms upflung.

Next instant there came a scream of brakes and the shriek of skidding tyres; then, as the car came to a sliding stop, a voice bawled in German from the driver's seat:

“What the blazes is the matter with you? What d'you want?”

“It's the bridge!” shouted the peasant. “The bridge is down!”

From the car, a powerful tourer packed with soldiers, a grey-cloaked German officer and a grey-clad driver descended to the road.

“The bridge is down, you say?” rapped the officer. “How has that happened?”

“I cannot say, Herr Offizier,” stammered the peasant, doffing his cap. “I was walking towards my cottage, which lies away yonder on the other side of the bridge,

when I thought I heard a roar and saw a flash of light, and when I reached here the bridge was down.”

“Mein blut!” swore the officer, his hand whipping to his revolver holster as he peered about him in the darkness. “Can it be more sabotage? Is the whole countryside infested with these cursed British spies?” He turned to the peasant. “Did you meet anyone, or see anyone, on the road?” he demanded.

“No, Herr Offizier, no one!” stammered the peasant.

With a muttered word to the driver to accompany him, the officer drew his revolver and picked his way gingerly over the strewn stonework to the edge of the void.

“It must have been blown up!” he said harshly. “It could scarcely have collapsed like this of its own accord.”

“Do you fear an ambush, Herr Offizier?” asked the driver uneasily, staring about him in the darkness. “An ambush to rescue the prisoners?”

“Don’t be a fool!” grated the officer, but his voice also held an uneasy note. “We’re in Germany, not in enemy country. Come, let us get back to the car!”

With more haste than seemed quite conducive with dignity, he made his way back to the car where he took jolly good care to keep out of the glare of the headlights as he said to the driver:

“Well, what’s to be done? We’ve got to get the prisoners to Hamburg without delay. Is there any other way out of this cursed district?”

“Yes, Herr Offizier; but it will mean making a long detour,” replied the driver.

“Never mind about that, so long as you know the road!” snapped the officer. “Here, you!” to the peasant. “Get yourself along to Kladen as quick as you can, and tell Commandant Trupp that the bridge is down. Tell him that Captain von Steinmann—myself—strongly suspects that it is the work of spies. Go on, get going!”

“Yes, Herr Offizier, I go at once!” stammered the peasant, and moved quickly away in the darkness.

“Right, let’s get off!” rapped the officer to the driver. “Our job is to get the prisoners to Hamburg, not to chase spies!”

He mounted to the seat next to the driving-seat, and slammed the door. Slumping himself down at the wheel, the driver slammed his door, and, letting in the clutch, commenced the difficult job of turning the long, powerful car on the narrow road.

Neither he nor anyone else in the car saw a ragged figure flit from out the darkness and sidle silently on to the heavy luggage grid at the rear of the car.

Nor were they aware, when the car had been turned and was roaring back the way it had come, that they were carrying with them an extra passenger, who was none other than the prisoner who had escaped from the village gaol that same afternoon.

Seated handcuffed in the car, with Scotty, also handcuffed, beside him, only Grey Shadow knew that Marie might be clinging to the luggage rack behind him.

He did not know whether the girl was there or not, but he fervently hoped she was. For in Marie lay Grey Shadow’s and Scotty’s one and only hope of escape.

A kilometre before reaching Kladen, the powerful automobile swung westwards along the only alternative road which would take them south towards Hamburg.



It was a road rarely used except by farm carts and local traffic, and was in a very bad state of repair, as Marie found to her cost, for she was bumped and jolted outrageously on the luggage grid as the car sped on over the rough and uneven going.

An hour passed, an extremely painful hour for the girl, and by that time the car was speeding along the narrow road which led through the very heart of the forest of Zoff.

The going here was worse than ever, and the car bumped and jolted so much that at times Marie was almost shaken from her hold. But speed, speed, was what the officer in charge of the escort wanted, and the driver of the car was doing his best to give it him.

On either side of the road loomed a dark and seemingly impenetrable mass of trees, and Marie knew that in the depths of that forest a man might well be lost for days and never be found. Stealthily she drew her automatic from her pocket, for she knew the moment was almost at hand when she must play her next part in the perilous task which had been hers that night.

Grey Shadow had told her that about half-way through the forest of Zoff the road rose steeply, and it was here that she had to act. Her heart beat faster, and she felt a queer dryness in her mouth as the powerful automobile began suddenly to take a steep incline, for she knew that this was the spot.

The drone of the engine changed suddenly to a deeper roar as the driver changed down to second gear. Marie was sprawled on the luggage grid, her automatic pointing down at the rear, nearside wheel.

Although it was impossible to see the racing wheel in the darkness, the range was so short that it was almost impossible to miss, so with a fervent prayer in her heart, Marie pressed the trigger.

The bang of the exploding cartridge was audible above the roar of the engine, and the car lurched and swerved as the bullet tore through the tyre, completely deflating it.

“What was that?” muttered one of the soldiers in the car to the soldier sitting next to him.

“A backfire!” replied the other.

In front, the driver was speaking to the officer.

“I’ve got a puncture, sir, I’m certain,” he said.

“Rot!” snapped the officer. “It’s this infernal road. Donner und blut, man, you’ll have us into the trees in a moment!”

“I can’t help it, sir. I’ve got a puncture, I’m certain,” replied the driver desperately. “I can hardly hold her!”

Meanwhile, on the luggage grid, Marie had slithered round and was pointing her automatic down at the offside rear wheel. Next instant the car again apparently backfired with a loud report, and this time there came an unmistakable jolt as the weight of her settled heavily and abruptly on the offside wheel rim.

“That’s the offside tyre gone now, sir,” said the driver in despair. “I’ve got to stop!”

“Then stop, confound you, and get down and have a look!” snapped the officer.

Before the car had stopped with a jerk of hastily applied brakes, Marie had shot off the carrier and dived for the cover of the trees.

Crouched in their black shadow, she watched the driver examining the rear tyres by the light of an electric torch. Then she saw him straighten up and return to the front of the car where he said to the officer:

“Both tyres have gone, sir, and I’ve only one spare wheel. I’ll have to jack her up, fit the spare wheel, and repair the other puncture!”

The officer swore furiously at that, but there was no help for it. The car couldn’t go on with flat tyres, and in that lonely countryside there wasn’t a garage for miles.

So while the driver sorted out the necessary implements from his tool-box, the officer descended to the road and told the escort to alight with their manacled prisoners so as to make easier the jacking-up of the car.

“But keep hold of them!” he said harshly. “They’re a couple of slippery devils, and I’ll have the lot of you shot if one of them gets away!”

With that he started to walk up and down, smoking a cigarette, whilst the six armed guards who formed the escort grouped themselves about the handcuffed Grey Shadow and Scotty.

Having taken all this in from her near-by cover, Marie crept stealthily and silently away back along the road. When she judged that a good fifty yards separated her from the car, she stepped out into the middle of the narrow roadway and raised her voice in a shrill, high-pitched scream: “Help—murder—for pity’s sake help!”

The effect of that sudden, startling scream, heard in the very heart of the forest of Zoff in the dead of night, was enough to temporarily unnerve anybody.

Dashing his cigarette to the roadway, the white-faced German officer glared into the darkness in the direction of the yell, whilst the petrified escort stood staring with frightened eyes in the same direction.

Almost instantly came another scream of stark and mortal terror:

“Help—oh, for pity’s sake help!”

“Two of you come with me!” rapped the officer, whipping his revolver from its holster. “You, Kugel, and you, Talmann!”

The two soldiers named followed him at a run down the road, hastily unslinging their rifles from their shoulders. But hearing their running feet approaching, Marie was already slipping swiftly back towards the car in the shadow of the trees which fringed the road.

When within about fifteen paces of the car, she slid behind a tree. Next instant her automatic roared into life, the bullets whistling over the heads of Grey Shadow, Scotty, and their escort.

Marie was purposely firing high, but that sudden blaze of shots from so close a range so put the fear of death into the German escort that they broke and scattered wildly for cover, whipping their rifles from their shoulders as they did so.

“Jump for it, Scotty!” yelled Grey Shadow, who, before leaving Kladen, had been stripped of his old woman attire and given a jersey and trousers brought from his cottage.

Broken, muttered, disjointed words in English during the car journey had put Scotty wise as to the position, and without an instant’s hesitation he dived with Grey Shadow

for the black cover of the trees, hurling himself flat on his face within a few paces of the girl as a ragged fusillade of shots from the German guards crashed out.

Next instant he was up again, and with Marie and Grey Shadow beside him, he blundered on into the impenetrable blackness of the forest.

## CHAPTER VI

### ON THE RUN

IN the midst of a distant thicket the three felt themselves safe for the moment. Marie had her job to do—file through the handcuffs of her companions.

“They’ll be after us as soon as daylight comes,” said Grey Shadow grimly, as the file bit deeper and deeper into his manacles. “They’ll put the bloodhounds on our trail, for certain, so we’ve got to strike water as soon as possible.”

“There is a stream runs through the forest somewhere, isn’t there?” asked Scotty.

“There’s more than one, if we can find ’em,” answered Grey Shadow, as the file severed the handcuffs and they fell from his wrists. “Thanks, Marie! Come on, we’d better be going.”

Scotty had already been freed from his handcuffs by Marie, so, rising to their feet, the trio quitted the thicket and set off deeper and deeper into the forest.

More than once they paused to listen with straining ears in the hope of hearing the sound of running water, and in dread of hearing the noise of pursuit. But nothing broke the hushed and brooding stillness save an occasional faint rustle of the undergrowth, made by some four-footed prowler of the wilds, or the eerie, ghostly cry of some night bird high in the tree-tops.

Although it was still dark in the forest, the trio knew that dawn must be almost at hand, when suddenly Grey Shadow halted, saying tersely:

“Listen!”

Scotty and Marie listened with bated breath and straining ears. Through the deathly stillness they heard the faint but unmistakable splashing of water.

“There’s a waterfall around here somewhere,” said Grey Shadow, “and I reckon it’s in this direction. Come on!”

With renewed hope in their hearts, the hunted fugitives set off again. As they progressed, the sound of falling water came ever more plainly to their ears until at length they emerged on the bank of a narrow but swiftly-flowing stream, swollen with winter rains.

“Well, which is it to be?” asked Grey Shadow grimly. “Shall we wade upstream or downstream? Upstream will probably lead us deeper into the heart of the forest, and downstream towards the fringe of it.”

“Let’s make for the fringe of it,” suggested Scotty. “If the worst comes to the worst we might have a better chance of getting away in open country.”

“Yes, there should be a railway or some other means of transport somewhere there,” nodded Grey Shadow. “Downstream it is, then.”

Stepping into the icy cold waters of the stream, the trio commenced resolutely to plough their way down it, for only thus could they baffle their pursuers, should bloodhounds be used to track them down. As they waded on, the tree-tops began to

stand out more and more clearly against the lightening sky, and soon the grey light of dawn commenced to steal through the trees.

Grey Shadow, leading the way, suddenly halted, half-turning, to lay his hand on Scotty's arm.

"See there!" he exclaimed.

Following the direction of his pointing finger, Scotty and Marie saw a thin wisp of smoke drifting up above the trees a short distance from the opposite bank.

"What d'you make of it?" asked Scotty.

"A woodman's cottage, I should imagine," answered Grey Shadow. "Anyway, it's worth investigating. We might find food and a change of clothing there."

He struck off across the stream, which became waist-deep in the middle, and which was so swiftly flowing that he was forced to pause and hoist Marie up on to his back, else the girl would undoubtedly have been swept away.

Gaining the opposite bank, the trio plunged into the cover of the timber and cautiously worked their way through it in the direction of the wisp of smoke.

Less than a hundred paces from the bank they came to the fringe of a clearing, in which stood a small, low-roofed cottage, surrounded by a sagging, wooden fence, behind which a few skinny hens were rooting about.

Keeping hidden amongst the trees, they studied the cottage intently in an effort to learn something of its occupant. By the side of the cottage was a large pile of brushwood, and, pointing to it, Grey Shadow said:

"He's a broom-maker, by the look of it, and as he must sell his wares somewhere, there's evidently a village or a market town not far away. Anyway, we've got to eat and get a change of clothing, so come on!"

Boldly he strode from cover and across the clearing, followed by Scotty and Marie. Pushing open a creaking gate in the rickety fence, he marched up to the door of the cottage. Before knocking, he drew from his pocket a heavy automatic, which had come into Marie's possession after the girl had escaped. The weapon was empty, but in the hands of a determined man it looked formidable enough to put the wind up anybody.

In response to Grey Shadow's knock, there came a heavy tread on the other side of the door; then the door opened, to disclose a big, powerfully built and bearded man.

"One false move, and I'll blow a hole right through you!" grated Grey Shadow, jamming the muzzle of the automatic hard into the man's stomach. "Put your hands up!"

The man gasped, his eyes dilating in fear and astonishment. Slowly his hands crept above his head.

"Who are you? And what d'you want?" he asked hoarsely.

"Never mind about that!" snapped Grey Shadow. "Get back inside!"

With his gun stuck into the man's stomach, he propelled him back into a small, untidy kitchen, on the table of which was a half-eaten breakfast of black bread, cold sausage, and a steaming mug of acorn coffee.

"Find a piece of rope, Marie, and we'll tie him up!" said Grey Shadow.

“But who are you?” repeated the man unsteadily. “If you’re army or navy deserters on the run, you’ve nothing to fear from me. I’ll not give you away. But if you’re thieves, you’ll find nothing here worth stealing——”

Abruptly he broke off, whipping into action with amazing swiftness. Leaping back, he snatched up a chair and whirled it at Grey Shadow with murderous fury.

Had not Grey Shadow flung himself aside, he would have been brained. Before the man could recover himself, however, Scotty hurled himself forward, his arms wrapping themselves round the man’s knees, bringing him down with a crash to the floor. Next instant Grey Shadow had leapt to Scotty’s assistance.

Bellowing and shouting, the man threshed frenziedly about the floor, striving to hurl his two assailants from him. They cannoned violently into the table, which went over with a crash, and for the next few moments Marie could distinguish little, except a furious waving tangle of arms and legs rolling over and over on the floor.

It seemed to both Grey Shadow and Scotty that they had come up against a madman, for the fellow was fighting with an insane fury, using fists, knees, and teeth.

Already Scotty had taken a savage smash to the jaw which had almost stunned him, and Grey Shadow’s wrist was bleeding from a bite which had only relaxed when he had driven his fist savagely to the man’s throat.

But both Grey Shadow and Scotty were fighting fit, and the man’s violent, insane fury defeated its own ends for he couldn’t keep it up, and gradually his struggles weakened until at length he lay panting and gasping and glaring up at Grey Shadow, who was holding him down on the floor.

“Curse you! I’ll—I’ll have you gaoled for this!” he gasped.

“Have you got that rope, Marie?” panted Grey Shadow.

“No, but here’s some pretty strong string,” said the girl, showing him a ball of coarse string, which the man evidently used for his broom-making.

“Right! Take it, Scotty, and tie him up!” panted Grey Shadow.

The man commenced to struggle again, but a clout to the side of the head from Grey Shadow quietened him. Before he could recover, his arms had been jerked behind his back and his wrists and ankles securely tied.

“Gosh! I’ve had some scraps in my time, but never one to beat that!” ejaculated Grey Shadow, scrambling to his feet. “He’s certainly got guts, Scotty!”

“You’re right; he has,” said Scotty, gingerly feeling his jaw.

“What d’you want here, anyway?” snarled the man. “What’s your game?”

“Never mind about that!” snapped Grey Shadow. “Who are you?”

The man glared at him as though puzzled by the question.

“What’s it matter who I am?” he grated. “What d’you want to know for?”

“I’ve got my reasons!” retorted Grey Shadow. “I want to know who you are, what you do, and all about you. Are you going to talk?”

“No, curse you, I’m not!” roared the man, beginning to struggle frantically in his bonds. “I know what you are. You’re a couple of plain-clothes military policemen, looking for conscripts for the army. Well, you can’t take me—see? My papers’ll prove

it. I'm a long-term convict out on parole, and you don't take my sort for the army—not yet, anyway. But you will before long. Oh, yes, you will before long! Every man will be wanted before those cursed Englanders are finished with you! Now cut these bonds, and clear out of here!”

Grey Shadow and Scotty exchanged glances. So the man was a released criminal—and a dangerous one at that. It accounted for the murderous ferocity he had shown.

Stepping quickly forward, Grey Shadow stooped and yanked open the man's ragged jacket. From an inside pocket he drew a few dirty, folded papers which he proceeded to examine.

“It's quite true,” he said. “His name is Jakob Rost, and he's out on licence from Brunswick Convict Prison. He's got a Government permit here to make and sell brooms in the forest of Zoff.”

“So now, if you're satisfied, perhaps you'll release me and go!” snarled the prisoner.

“Where d'you sell your brooms?” demanded Grey Shadow.

“In Muldorf and Halbeck!” grated the man. “Any more questions?”

“Yes,” said Grey Shadow. “How d'you take your brooms from here to Muldorf and Halbeck?”

“D'you think I get astride one and fly like a witch?” jeered the prisoner. “I've got a horse and cart, you fool, paid for by an assistance committee! Anything else you want to know?”

“Only if you live here alone?” asked Grey Shadow.

“Yes, I live here alone,” snarled the other.

Grey Shadow nodded, as though satisfied, and slipped the papers into his pocket. Then, turning to Scotty, he said:

“You and Marie stay here and rout out some clothes, and have something to eat whilst I get that horse and cart ready.”

“What d'you mean—get the horse and cart ready?” roared the prisoner, commencing to thresh frenziedly about in his bonds again. “You leave that horse and cart alone, d'you hear——”

“Gag him, Scotty!” cut in Grey Shadow, and leaving Scotty to gag the cursing, writhing man, he let himself out by the rear door of the cottage and crossed to a roughly built wooden stable outside of which stood a light cart.

Taking the horse from its stable, he harnessed it to the cart, into which he threw a few empty sacks and all the brooms he could find. Then, tethering the horse ready for a quick getaway, he returned to the cottage to find Scotty and Marie making a scanty breakfast from the remains of the black bread and cold sausage.

“We've saved some for you,” grinned Scotty. “I've routed out all the clothes I can find, but none of 'em'll fit me. They're far too big.”

“That's a pity,” said Grey Shadow. “Never mind, it can't be helped. Let's have a look at them!”

He examined the assortment of dirty garments which Scotty had found, and selecting a ragged jacket and an old pair of trousers, he pulled them on in place of his

own, watched the while by the blazing eyes of the gagged and bound prisoner.

“Come on, we’ll shove him in the stable out of sight,” said Grey Shadow, slipping a piece of cold sausage and a chunk of black bread into his pocket. “I’ll take my breakfast later. We’ve spent enough time here already.”

Between them, he and Scotty carried the squirming prisoner out to the stable and dumped him down on a pile of hay. Then, closing the door on him, Grey Shadow locked up the cottage and mounted to the cart with Marie and Scotty.

“We’ll get as far away from here as we can before abandoning the cart,” he said. “But as the whole countryside is bound to be looking for two men and a boy, the pair of you had better get out of sight under those sacks.”

Waiting until Scotty and Marie had hidden themselves under the empty sacks, he piled the brooms on top of them as an added precaution, then, whipping up the horse, he quitted the cottage and took a rough cart track which led away through the forest.

How far from the cottage either Muldorf or Halbeck lay, Grey Shadow did not know. Nor had he the slightest intention of going there, for his object was to avoid every town and village which he possibly could.

Once clear of the forest he would rattle along at a good pace, keeping to quiet by-ways until he had put as much distance as possible between himself and pursuit.

That Jakob Rost, German convict out on licence, would not die a slow and lingering death of starvation back there in the stable, Grey Shadow knew perfectly well. For sooner or later the hunt for himself, Marie and Scotty would lead the military to the cottage, and Rost would be found.

And what a tale the fellow would have to tell them, thought Grey Shadow, with a grim smile. But by that time, if all went well, he, Marie, and Scotty would be miles away.

Suddenly the grin died on Grey Shadow’s lips and his eyes hardened. For coming towards him along the narrow cart track was a squad of armed soldiers led by a non-commissioned officer.

The squad of soldiers, a dozen or more strong, was taking up practically the whole width of the cart track, and as they appeared to have no intention of getting out of the way, Grey Shadow had no other option than to rein in his horse.

“What’s the idea?” he snarled. “Taking up the whole of the road?”

“You keep a civil tongue in your head!” snapped the sergeant, having halted his squad. “Who are you and where are you from?”

Grey Shadow thought swiftly. He knew that by this time all the available military must have been called out to search for the escaped British spies, and the chances were that this particular sergeant and his squad had never seen or heard of Jakob Rost.

In fact, decided Grey Shadow quickly, the sergeant’s question seemed to bear this out, for if the latter did know Rost he would have recognised his horse and cart, and would probably have worded his question differently.

“I asked you who you are and where you’re from!” rapped the sergeant. “Answer my question, will you?”



“No, I won’t!” retorted Grey Shadow roughly. “What’s it got to do with you who I am and where I’m from. You mind your own business and I’ll mind mine. Get yourself and this cannon fodder of yours out of the way!”

He made as though to whip up his horse. But with an oath the sergeant seized the horse by the head.

“If you don’t answer my question, I’ll put you under arrest, you dog!” he grated, his face crimson with passion.

“Oh, you will, will you?” snarled Grey Shadow, dropping his reins and fishing in his pocket for the papers of Jakob Rost. “That’s about all you’re good for, I suppose, putting people under arrest. Why aren’t you out on the Western Front doing some real soldiering instead of blackberrying in the woods?”

Several of the grey-clad squad sniggered audibly, but relapsed into scared and stony silence as the sergeant swung on them, his face livid.

“Silence, you scum!” he roared. “I’ll give the lot of you a dose of cells if you’re not careful!”

“Now, now, temper, temper!” leered Grey Shadow, quite convinced by this time that the sergeant didn’t know the real Jakob Rost. “Here you are, here’s my papers. Have a look at them, then perhaps you’ll admit that I’m a better man than you’ll ever be!”

He leaned down from the driving-seat of the cart, his papers extended in his hand. Snatching them, the sergeant opened them and scanned them.

“Oh, a convict on parole!” he sneered. “Out from Brunswick Prison on licence. I thought as much. Where are you going?”

“Muldorf, to sell my brooms,” replied Grey Shadow promptly, pocketing his papers which the sergeant handed back to him.

“Have you seen any signs of two men and a boy back there the way you’ve come?” demanded the sergeant.

“Two men and a boy?” repeated Grey Shadow, staring. “No, I haven’t. What’s the trouble? Are you after them?”

“Yes, we are!” snapped the sergeant. “The three of them are British spies, and there’s a price of one hundred thousand marks, dead or alive, on the head of each of them. They’re hiding somewhere in this forest!”

Grey Shadow seemed scarcely to hear this latter remark. He was staring at the sergeant with incredulous eyes.

“One hundred thousand marks on the head of each of them,” he repeated breathlessly. “Three hundred thousand marks in all. D’you mean that?”

“Of course I mean it!” snapped the sergeant. “Haven’t you seen the official notices issued by the High Command? They’ve been stuck up all over Germany for months now, offering one hundred thousand marks reward for the capture of Grey Shadow, the French spy, Marie Leroux, and Captain John Scott, of the cursed British Secret Squadron!”

“And they’re in this forest, you say?” gasped Grey Shadow.

“Yes; they escaped from an escort last night and took to the woods,” said the sergeant. “But get on. If you haven’t seen them, you can’t help us!”

“Can’t I, indeed?” cried Grey Shadow, snatching up his reins. “I can turn round and come with you, can’t I, and that’s what I’m going to do. Come on, hop up, and I’ll give you a lift as far as you like——”

“You’re not coming with us, so clear off out of it!” cut in the sergeant roughly. “Go on, get going!”

“Well, I’ll hunt for them myself,” said Grey Shadow. “There’s nothing to stop me doing that, I suppose?”

The sergeant didn’t trouble to reply, but barking out an order to his men, he continued on his way, leaving Grey Shadow, Marie, and Scotty to continue on theirs.

Hidden beneath the sacks and brooms in the bottom of the cart, both Scotty and Marie had heard every word of the conversation, and they sighed with relief as Grey Shadow whipped up the horse and the cart jolted on again.

“If they’re all as thick in the head as that sergeant,” commented Grey Shadow aloud for the benefit of his two companions, “we ought to get away without much trouble.”

When he had covered another two kilometres he saw that the cart track he was following terminated about fifty paces ahead in a roadway which skirted the edge of the forest.

“We’re almost out of the wood in both senses of the word,” he soliloquized; then suddenly he started as, without warning, a voice rang out sharply:

“Halt!”

With the command, a picket of four soldiers stepped from the cover of the trees, their rifles at the ready. They were accompanied by an officer who carried a revolver in his hand.

“Who are you, where are you from, and where are you going?” demanded the officer.

Insolence here would be fatal, as Grey Shadow very well knew, so he whined:

“My name is Jakob Rost, Herr Offizier. I am a broom-maker, and am on my way to Muldorf with my wares.”

“Your papers!” rapped the officer.

Meekly Grey Shadow produced them and handed them over. As he studied them, the officer frowned. He was a grim-faced, efficient-looking fellow, and the more he looked at him the less Grey Shadow liked him.

“You’re a convict out on licence,” snapped the officer, looking up from the papers. “You live in the wood?”

“Yes, Heir Offizier,” mumbled Grey Shadow.

“Have you seen anything of two men and a girl?”

“No, Heir Offizier, nothing,” answered Grey Shadow. “I have already been stopped by soldiers back there in the forest who asked me the same question.”

“Did they search your cart?”

“Yes, Herr Offizier, they did,” said Grey Shadow, tensing inwardly at the question.

“Then we’ll search it again!” snapped the officer. He turned to his men. “Search that cart!” he ordered.

Grey Shadow had one split second in which to decide on his course of action. Two of the soldiers were already slinging their rifles on their shoulders as they stepped forward to search the cart. The other two were standing with their rifles covering Grey Shadow, whilst the officer was standing with his revolver in his hand.

Grey Shadow stared over the officer’s head in the direction of the trees, then let out a yell.

“Look!” he bawled, pointing with his whip towards the trees.

Startled, the officer wheeled. The two soldiers who were covering Grey Shadow also turned their heads quickly in the direction of that pointing whip. But already the whip had descended with stinging force on the horse’s flank, sending the startled animal bounding forward, the light cart rocking and swaying behind it.

Crouched low on the driving-seat, Grey Shadow was plying the whip and yelling madly to keep the terrified horse going at a breakneck gallop. Behind him came a shout, the crash of rifles, and bullets whistled past his head. But he was no easy target, and next moment the maddened horse had gained the road and was racing along it at a tearing gallop.

The soldiers had rushed to where the cart track met the road, and, dropping on one knee, were training their rifles on the fleeing cart. Next instant there came the crash of musketry, bullets whined past Grey Shadow’s head again, and something tore its searing, agonising way through his shoulder.

“Winged me!” he muttered, through compressed lips.

A sudden dip in the road took him out of the line of fire, and when the madly galloping horse breasted the next rise the distance between the cart and the soldiers was too great for their bullets to have any effect.

It was madness, now, however, to remain with the cart a moment longer than was absolutely necessary, for the instant the picket back there along the road could reach a telephone, the alarm would be raised and every road would be patrolled. But what was to be done? As Grey Shadow kept the horse going at a breakneck gallop, he knew that he was in one of the tightest corners he had ever been in during the whole of his eventful career.

Suddenly his eyes glinted. Three kilometres or more now lay between him and the scene of his encounter with the picket, and coming rattling along the road towards him was an army lorry, driven by a grey-clad driver who had another soldier seated beside him.

Reining in his horse almost to its haunches, Grey Shadow pulled it across the road so that the cart would prevent the lorry from passing.

“There’s an army lorry coming with two soldiers aboard,” he said, loudly enough for Scotty and Marie to hear him. “I’m stopping it. Be ready to jump it. D’you understand?”

“Yes,” came the muffled voice of Scotty, as he cautiously raised a piece of the sacking in order to peer out.

The driver of the lorry brought his vehicle to a sudden stop, with a grinding of brakes and a protesting screech of skidding tyres.

“Hi, you!” he bawled. “What in thunder d’you think you’re doing? Get that cart out of the way, can’t you?”

But Grey Shadow made no response. He was sitting slumped on the driving-seat, the while his exhausted horse stood with head drooping and trembling in every limb.

“Hi, there, is anything wrong?” bellowed the driver of the lorry. “What the blazes is the matter with you?” Still Grey Shadow made no response, and, turning to his companion, the driver said: “There’s something the matter with that fellow. He looks ill or something to me, and his horse looks about done in. Come on, let’s see what’s wrong.”

He and his companion swung themselves down to the roadway and approached the cart.

“Here, you, what’s the matter?” demanded the driver, standing staring up at Grey Shadow.

Next instant he got the shock of his life, for hurling himself from the driving-seat of the cart, Grey Shadow crashed down with him to the road.

The German was undermost, the back of his head striking the road with a force which temporarily stunned him. With a shout of alarm, his companion leapt forward, but he, too, got the shock of his life when Scotty suddenly sprang over the side of the cart and went down with him to the road.

The German struggled desperately, but a smash to the jaw from Scotty’s clenched fist knocked the senses clean out of him for the time being.

“Quick—into the lorry with them, and tie them up with their own belts until we can get away from here!” rapped Grey Shadow. “Come on, Marie!”

The two Germans were picked up and pushed unceremoniously into the back of the lorry, then whilst Marie and Grey Shadow saw to the tying up of them, Scotty started up the engine, and turning the lorry, took it racing back the way it had come.

A kilometre along the road he turned down a narrow by-road, and there he and Grey Shadow stripped the two Germans of their uniforms and donned them themselves.

With the two Germans trussed hand and foot and gagged in the bottom of the lorry, and Marie keeping guard over them, Grey Shadow and Scotty sped steadily southwards throughout the day.

Not once were they accosted, for their lorry and their uniforms were above suspicion. By nightfall they were a hundred kilometres and more away from the forest of Zoff, and leaving the lorry with its former driver and his companion abandoned in a field, the trio vanished into the darkness.

## CHAPTER VII

### “YOU KNOW THE RENDEZVOUS”

IN the basement kitchen of a tenement building in a mean and squalid street in the German town of Coblenz sat Grey Shadow, Scotty and Marie.

All three were in ragged attire, Marie wearing, as usual, boy's clothes.

“I reckon we're safe enough here,” said Grey Shadow, sitting hunched over the fire. “Marie's supposed to be a homeless brat who sleeps where he can and lives how he can. According to your papers, Scotty, you're exempt from military service owing to chronic lung trouble. You've got a room at the other end of the town, and the three of us have never been seen together since we reached Coblenz—and by to-morrow we'll be gone.”

“Then you've received orders from Headquarters?” said Scotty questioningly.

“Yes, in code letter this morning,” answered Grey Shadow. “The letter's supposed to be from a brother of mine living in Essen.” He paused a moment, then went on: “Have you ever heard of a certain Captain Eberhard von Ruhlen?”

“Yes; he's a member of the German Imperial Staff, isn't he?” said Scotty.

“He is,” assented Grey Shadow grimly. “And he's just about the smartest officer they've got. Well, he leaves Berlin to-morrow for Metz with documents of the very highest importance for Prince Rupprecht of Bavaria, who is in command of the southern sectors of the German Line. Those documents contain, for the information of Prince Rupprecht, the estimated supply of shells, guns, and ammunition upon which he can rely, together with the number of German troops being held in reserve to assist him.”

Scotty gave vent to a low whistle.

“My hat!” he said softly. “Those documents would be worth a million pounds or more to our Government!”

“Their value to our people cannot possibly be estimated,” answered Grey Shadow gravely. “With such information in their possession, our Government could draw up counter-plans which might very well bring about a swift finish to the war. Our job is to get the documents from Captain Eberhard von Ruhlen before he can deliver them to Prince Rupprecht.”

Scotty stared at him.

“That's a lot easier said than done,” he commented grimly. “How's Von Ruhlen travelling from Berlin to Metz? By car?”

“No, by train,” replied Grey Shadow. “A special coach for him and his guards is being attached to the Berlin-Metz express.”

“His guards?” repeated Scotty, in dismay. “D'you mean to say he'll have an armed guard travelling with him?”

“I do!” replied Grey Shadow. “Our Intelligence Service has warned us of that. What's more, the documents will not be carried in the usual dispatch-case, but will be

carried by Von Ruhlen on his person.”

“Then what it amounts to is this,” said Scotty. “Von Ruhlen, carrying important documents, and guarded by soldiers, is travelling in a special coach by express train from Berlin to Metz and you and I and Marie have got to rob him of the documents en route. I’m glad you said it’s the stiffest job we’ve ever tackled. I’m hanged if I can think of a stiffer one. Have you any idea how we’re to set about it?”

“I’ve got the germ of an idea,” replied Grey Shadow slowly. “All day long I’ve been turning scheme after scheme over in my mind, and this is what I’ve figured out. Now, listen!”

His voice sank almost to a whisper as he proceeded, and the heads of the trio drew closer together. For upwards of an hour the low-voiced conference went on, then eventually Grey Shadow straightened up in his broken-backed chair, and said:

“Right-ho, then, that’s settled! We’ll make the attempt on the lines we’ve just planned. But if there’s the slightest slip on the part of any one of us it’ll mean not only failure, but capture and a firing party.” He rose from his chair. “And now I’ll let you out,” he said. “I’ll see if the coast’s clear first, then you’d better leave one at a time.”

Lighting an old, china-bowled pipe, he turned down the cheap and smoky oil-lamp, and unlocked the door. Lounging up the area steps to the street, he stood a few moments peering about him in the darkness. Then, satisfied that none was about at that late hour of the night, he descended to the kitchen again, and said:

“All clear, Marie, so off you go! You know the rendezvous to-morrow?”

“Yes!” replied the girl.

“Good-night, then, and good luck to you!” said Grey Shadow.

Next moment the girl had gone, slipping silently as a shadow up the area steps to vanish into the night.

Left to themselves, Grey Shadow and Scotty stood talking a few moments in low, guarded voices. Then, with a parting word, Scotty also went, and was swallowed up in the night, leaving Grey Shadow to lock the door, blow out the lamp, and throw himself down on the rickety bed to snatch an hour or two’s sleep.



Early morning found Grey Shadow limping through the streets of Coblenz, making towards the railway station. Arriving there, he bought a ticket for Mayen, twenty kilometres distant.

As he passed through the booking-hall he saw two grey-clad German non-commissioned officers seated at a table by the barrier of the departure platform.

“Your ticket and papers!” demanded one of the Germans gruffly.

Producing his railway ticket and identification papers, Grey Shadow handed them over. The papers were expert forgeries, and described him as being one Wilhelm Blatt, a carpenter, exempt from military service on account of his club-foot.

“What are you going to Mayen for?” demanded the German, stamping the papers and handing them back.

“What in thunder’s that got to do with you?” retorted Grey Shadow roughly. “I go to visit my sister who is ill, if you must know. Queer times, these, when a man can’t travel without being asked this and that everywhere he turns!”

Still grumbling, he limped through the barrier and on to the platform. The train for Mayen was waiting, and some ten minutes later it pulled out with Grey Shadow aboard.

Arrived at Mayen, Grey Shadow made his way leisurely and by devious routes to a small garage situated in the Schmalstrasse, a quiet and narrow thoroughfare near the centre of the town.

A middle-aged man, wearing dirty, greasy clothes and carpet slippers, was sitting on the running-board of a car, reading a newspaper. Beside him rested a stout walking-stick. Raising his head, he stared hard at Grey Shadow as the latter approached; then he rose to his feet, leaning heavily on his stick.

This man was Johann Prinz, proprietor of the garage and an ex-soldier, having been invalided from out the German Army owing to war wounds—or so, at least, his papers described him. But actually he was a British Secret Service agent, his real name being Captain Stratton.

Many such as he were secretly established in Germany, their job being to act as a link of contact between British Headquarters and active spies such as Grey Shadow and Scotty. It was a perilous job in the extreme, and one which required a nerve of steel, for death lurked always in the background in the form of exposure, arrest, and summary execution at the hands of a firing squad.

“Yes, my friend, and what can I do for you?” asked Johann Prinz, as Grey Shadow limped up to him.

Grey Shadow’s answer seemed curiously irrelevant.

“‘Life every man holds dear,’ ” he muttered, “ ‘but the brave man——’ ”

Abruptly he broke off, staring at Johann Prinz as though inviting him to continue. Johann Prinz, who had given a start of surprise, swiftly completed the quotation from Shakespeare, which was the password.

“‘Holds honour far more precious-dear than life,’ ” he muttered.

There followed a moment of silence, during which both men studied each other closely; then, turning on his heel, Johann Prinz said: “Come inside!”

Grey Shadow followed him through the garage to the rear, where an outside flight of steps led up to a living-room and bed-room above the garage.

Waiting until Grey Shadow had stepped into the living-room, Johann Prinz closed and locked the door. Then, turning to his visitor, he said quietly:

“You require assistance?”

“Yes; a car and a change of clothing,” replied Grey Shadow—“the fastest car you’ve got.”

Johann Prinz nodded, and, leading the way into the bed-room, he opened a secret wall cupboard, in which was hidden a varied assortment of clothing and uniforms.

“Help yourself,” he said. “I’ll go and see to the car.”

That was all. There was no inquiry as to Grey Shadow’s business; no questioning as to why he wanted the change of clothing and the car. For it wasn’t Johann Prinz’s job to

ask questions of such as Grey Shadow. His job began and ended in affording them every assistance he possibly could.

Within the hour he returned to the rooms above the garage, to find that an extraordinary change had taken place both in the looks and in the dress of his visitor. Gone was Grey Shadow's club-foot, and gone was the stubble of whisker from his chin. He was smoothly shaved, and in the smart and well-fitting civilian suit which he was wearing few would have recognised in him the rough and limping fellow who that morning had travelled from Coblenz to Mayen.

"Excellent!" said Johann Prinz, with an appreciative smile. "The car is ready for you. She's an old-looking Stutz tourer, but she belies her looks. She's got plenty of power, and she'll hold her own with anything on the road. I've just been tuning her up. Is there anything else I can do for you?"

"Yes; I want fresh identification papers," said Grey Shadow—"papers which exempt me from military service if you've got any of that sort."

Johann Prinz nodded, and took from a drawer in the secret wall cupboard a sheaf of papers. Sorting swiftly through them, he selected a set, and said:

"What about these? They describe the bearer as being one Ernst Zornmann, works manager of the Stahl Engineering Works at Anhalt, exempt from military service on account of being engaged in munition work."

"They'll do splendidly, thanks!" chuckled Grey Shadow, taking the papers and quickly scanning them before slipping them into his pocket. Donning a heavy greatcoat, he pulled on a soft felt hat. Then picking up a bulky paper parcel, he handed it to Johann Prinz and said: "Shove that somewhere out of sight in the car, then I'll get off if there's nobody hanging about. It's an old overcoat and hat which I bagged from your wardrobe. Thank goodness you keep a pretty extensive range of clothing here."

"I pick up anything I see which I think might come in useful," said Johann Prinz.

He went downstairs and stowed away the parcel under a rug in the rear of the car. Then, having taken a good look round, he returned to the room to report to Grey Shadow that the coast was clear.

"You're sure there's nothing more I can do for you?" he asked. "Money, maps, an automatic——"

"No, I've got everything I want, thanks," cut in Grey Shadow. "There's only one thing I'd like to know. In the event of anything happening to me, can that car down there ever be traced back to you?"

"No, never," replied Johann Prinz confidently. "I'm always very careful about that sort of thing."

"That's all right, then," said Grey Shadow. He thrust out his hand. "Good-bye, and many thanks!"

Johann Prinz took the outstretched hand in brief, firm clasp.

"Good-bye and good luck to you!" he said.

A few minutes later, from the window of his room, he watched Grey Shadow turn out of the garage yard at the wheel of the powerful Stutz and drive slowly away along the street.



He permitted himself a moment or two of speculation as to the nature of the mission upon which his late visitor was engaged: then, quitting the room, he went down to the garage and resumed his interrupted reading.



Once clear of the outskirts of Mayen, Grey Shadow drove leisurely in the direction of Prum, where he lunched at the best hotel he could find.

He sat long over the meal, poring idly over a bulky railway directory which the waiter brought him at his request.

It was late afternoon before he mounted to the driving-seat of the car again, and having had his petrol tank replenished, he left Prum and drove back towards Mayen, making a detour which would take him well wide of that town.

By this time afternoon was merging into dusk, and Grey Shadow drove faster and faster through the gathering darkness, until eventually he reached the main road at a point about midway between Mayen and Coblenz. Here he slowed down and cruised quietly along under side-lights only until he reached a small wood which fringed the side of the road.

Stopping the car, he sat with engine ticking over, peering through the darkness towards the black shadow of the wood. His ears were attuned to catch the slightest sound, but he heard nothing at all, until, without warning, the figures of Scotty and Marie loomed up in the darkness beside the car.

“Good!” exclaimed Grey Shadow softly. “Hop in!”

Marie climbed nimbly into the rear of the car whilst Scotty swung himself up into the seat next to Grey Shadow. They sat talking for a few minutes in low, guarded voices, then, turning the car, Grey Shadow took it speeding back through the darkness the way he had come.

An hour passed and still the car roared on through the night, avoiding the towns of Mayen and Cochem as it rushed southwestwards in the direction of Metz, one hundred kilometres and more away.

But the car was not bound for Metz. Between Cochem and Wittlich it swung off the main road, and, under side-lights only, cruised quietly along a narrow by-road which bridged the main railway track near the lonely little wayside halt of Solz. A quarter of a kilometre from the bridge which spanned the track, Grey Shadow brought the car to a stop. Switching out his lights, he glanced at the luminous dial of his wrist-watch.

“The time is ten minutes to nine,” he murmured. “The Berlin-Metz express, with Captain Eberhard von Ruhlen aboard, is due to pass here at twenty-five minutes past nine. That gives us exactly thirty-five minutes. We’ve got to get busy right away!”

He turned to Scotty.

“Go and see if everything’s quiet along at the wayside halt,” he said. “I looked the local trains up at Prum this afternoon. The last of the day to stop at the halt is a slow local which leaves there at ten minutes past eight. The place ought to be locked up for the night by now, but we’ve got to make sure. Off you go!”

Descending from the car, Scotty made his way towards the lonely little wayside platform with its wooden office, the windows of which were in complete darkness. Cautiously lifting the catch of the barrier gate, he passed through on to the platform. There was not the slightest sign of life anywhere, and the door of the office was fastened, token that the place had been locked up for the night, as Grey Shadow had anticipated.

“There’s no one about anywhere,” reported Scotty on his return to the car.

“That’s fine!” exclaimed Grey Shadow. “I’ll leave the car outside the station.”

Without switching on his lights, he let in the clutch and drove slowly forward through the darkness, turning the car outside the station so that it faced towards the road again.

“You stay here on guard, Marie,” he said softly. “Scotty and I’ll get along to the signal-box yonder.”

The dimly-illuminated windows of a signal-box glimmered high in the darkness a short distance away by the side of the railway track. Passing through the barrier on to the platform, Grey Shadow and Scotty walked swiftly along the side of the track until they reached the foot of the wooden ladder which led up to the door of the signal-box.

They paused a moment whilst they pulled their hats well down over their eyes and drew from their pockets their loaded automatics. Grey Shadow glanced at his watch. The time was five minutes past nine. He and Scotty had exactly twenty minutes before the Berlin express was due to come thundering past.

“Ready, Scotty?” muttered Grey Shadow.

“Yes,” breathed Scotty, his finger curling round the trigger of his gun.

Next instant the pair of them were swiftly and silently mounting the wooden steps. Reaching the door of the box, Grey Shadow felt softly for the handle, then sent the door crashing violently open.

A dungaree-clad signalman wheeled from the gleaming control levers over which he had been standing. At sight of the two menacing figures standing there in the doorway, the man’s eyes dilated in fear, and he stood as though frozen.

“Up with your hands or you’re a dead man!” grated Grey Shadow.

The signalman’s hands crept waveringly above his head.

“Don’t move!” warned Grey Shadow, kicking shut the door behind him, and advancing into the box. “Is the Berlin to Metz express running to time?”

The signalman gulped, his somewhat prominent Adam’s apple sliding piteously up and down his scraggy throat.

“Answer me, you dog!” blazed Grey Shadow.

“Yes—yes; she’s running to time!” stammered the German hoarsely.

“Have you signalled her through yet?”

“Yes; the—the line’s been cleared for her right through to Treves.”

“Then put the signal here against her!” rapped Grey Shadow. “We want her stopped at the halt out there.”

The signalman stared at him, white-faced and mute. Then desperately he burst out:

“Who are you?”

“Never mind that!” grated Grey Shadow. “If you don’t push that signal lever over by the time I’ve counted three, I’ll shoot you dead! One—two——”

The nerve of the signalman broke before those glittering eyes and that finger pressing steadily on the trigger. With a choking cry he whirled and thrust forward one of the levers. From outside came the rattle of a wire, and the signal light changed colour. Simultaneously Scotty was on the man, whipping an arm round his throat and driving his knee savagely into the small of the fellow’s back. In that same instant the butt of Grey Shadow’s gun cracked the man expertly on the temple, knocking him out.

Lowering his unconscious burden to the floor, Scotty whipped out a handkerchief and lashed the man’s hands securely behind his back, whilst Grey Shadow swiftly tied his ankles and gagged him. Then, leaving the German lying securely trussed and gagged on the floor of the signal-box, they dashed down the steps and raced for the platform.

“Quick! Here’s a bunch of skeleton keys!” panted Grey Shadow. “Get the door of the office opened and the lamp lighted!”

Leaving Scotty to tackle the lock of the office door, Grey Shadow dashed out to the car, whipping off his greatcoat as he ran. Ripping open the bulky paper parcel which he’d brought from Johann Prinz’s rooms, he produced an old greatcoat and hat such as were worn by German railway officials.

Clapping on the hat, Grey Shadow struggled into the greatcoat. As he did so there came to his ears the distant whistle of a powerful locomotive.

“Here she comes!” exclaimed Grey Shadow. “You know what to do, Marie. Scotty and I’ll make a dash for the car, but don’t wait for us once you get the dispatches. You’re quite sure you can handle the car?”

“Yes; quite sure, m’sieur,” answered the girl grimly.

“Right-ho, stand by!” rapped Grey Shadow, and dashed for the platform.

He found that Scotty had unlocked the door of the untidy and smelly little office, and lighted a smoky oil-lamp inside. The office had two windows, one of which looked out on to the road, and the other on to the platform. Neither window had a blind.

A greasy old greatcoat was hanging on a peg behind the door. Snatching it down, Grey Shadow flung it to Scotty.

“Bung it over the window!” he rapped. “Jam it between the top of the window frame and the upper sash. That’ll hold it. Here she comes!”

The powerful loco of the night express came sliding alongside the platform, and came to a stop with a prodigious hissing of steam and jolting of coach couplings.

“Now for it!” muttered Grey Shadow.

His face grim and set at the thought of what the next few minutes might bring, he stepped quickly out of the office.

Outside on the platform, Grey Shadow hurried along the side of the train, his hands plunged in the pockets of his seedy, official greatcoat, the collar of which was turned well up about his face.

As he passed the special coach of Captain von Ruhlen, he glanced in at the warm and luxurious interior. Four grey-clad German officers were sitting there, and two armed German soldiers were patrolling the corridor.

Grey Shadow hurried on towards where the guard of the train was leaning out of his little window.

“What’s the stop for?” demanded the guard, taking Grey Shadow for the official in charge of the little wayside halt. “What’s the trouble?”

“I’ve an urgent message for Captain Eberhard von Ruhlen, who is travelling on this train,” replied Grey Shadow. “He is wanted immediately on the telephone. You should have been stopped back yonder at Cochem, but they were too late. The message has been sent on from there. Will you please inform Captain von Ruhlen of this at once?”

“Yes, certainly!” replied the guard, hastily withdrawing his head and hurrying away along the corridor of the train.

Quickly retracing his steps along the platform, Grey Shadow waited by the door of the special coach. A minute or two elapsed, then a tall and arrogant-looking officer, wearing a monocle, swung himself down to the platform, followed by two other officers.

“I am wanted on the telephone, you say?” rapped the monocled officer.

“Yes, Herr Hauptmann, if you are the Captain Eberhard von Ruhlen,” replied Grey Shadow, rigidly at attention, for all railway officials throughout Germany were under the authority of the military.

“I *am* Captain Eberhard von Ruhlen,” replied the officer. “Where is the telephone?”

“This way, Herr Hauptmann, this way,” fawned Grey Shadow, respectfully leading the way towards the little office. “If you will please to step inside!”

He pushed open the door and stood aside whilst Von Ruhlen stepped into the office, followed by the two officers, both of whom were armed, as Grey Shadow knew full well.

None of the three Germans had yet seen Scotty, who was leaning against the wall, immediately behind the open door. The receiver of the telephone was standing unhooked, and as Von Ruhlen moved towards it Grey Shadow stepped into the office, swiftly closing and locking the door behind him. In the thud of closing the door, none of the Germans heard the faint click of the key turning in the lock.

“We don’t require you in here!” said Von Ruhlen harshly, picking up the telephone receiver and staring coldly at Grey Shadow.

“And who the blazes is that fellow there?” he went on angrily, seeing Scotty for the first time. “Get out of here, the pair of you!”

“Yes, Herr Hauptmann,” said Grey Shadow humbly.

But with the words, he and Scotty whipped into action, Grey Shadow’s fist smashed upwards, taking the nearest German fairly and squarely under the chin. He went down as though poleaxed, crashing to the floor to lie, a limp and huddled heap, out to the wide.

Nor could the second member of Von Ruhlen’s escort come to his assistance, for he was backed against the wall, glaring murderously at Grey Shadow, who had his

automatic rammed savagely into his stomach.

“One word or move and I’ll blow a hole right through you!” grated Grey Shadow.

Von Ruhlen was struggling like a madman in Scotty’s grip, striving desperately to let out a yell of alarm. But Scotty’s throttling arm was about his throat, choking back the warning cry, and next instant the butt of Scotty’s gun crashed savagely against the side of the German’s head.

The whole episode had taken less than five seconds, and as Von Ruhlen slithered limply to the floor Scotty was on him tearing open his cloak and well-fitting tunic in a frenzied search for the precious documents.

He found them in an inner pocket of the tunic—a bulky, heavily sealed envelope, addressed to Prince Rupprecht of Bavaria, at Military Headquarters, Metz.

There was a chance, however, that this might be a dummy packet, so Scotty ripped it open. One glance at the documents inside assured him that they were the ones he and Grey Shadow were after. He straightened up, leapt to the open window, and thrust the packet out to Marie.

“Right, Marie—get going!” he panted.

Clutching the packet, Marie darted off towards the car.

“And good-night to you!” grated Grey Shadow.

With the words, he smashed his fist to the jaw of the German whom he was covering, sending the man reeling sideways along the wall.

Before the German could recover, Grey Shadow had leapt for the open window, through which Scotty was already scrambling, pausing only long enough to wrench the telephone from its fastenings, severing all telephonic communication from the halt.

As Grey Shadow followed Scotty through the window, the raging German recovered himself sufficiently to yank out his gun, and the little office reverberated to the roar of exploding cartridges, as the frenzied man rushed for the window, firing as he ran.

From the platform came shouts of alarm, and fists battered furiously against the locked door. But already Grey Shadow and Scotty had gone, leaping aboard the already moving car. Next instant, as Grey Shadow grabbed the wheel from Marie, the big Stutz shot away into the night.



On and on roared the powerful car, hurtling at breakneck speed through the night, until eventually it pulled up by the side of a lonely moorland road, twenty kilometres or more out of Wittlich.

A British D.H.9 was waiting out there on the moors, having come gliding silently down from out the night. It was piloted by Beefy Bates, of the Secret Squadron, and warmly indeed did Beefy wring Scotty’s hand.

“By Jove, but it’s good to see you again, old hoss!” he said fervently. “And you’ve got the doings, eh? Thanks!”

He slipped the precious packet of documents into his pocket. A few minutes later he had taken off, and, climbing high into the night sky, was thundering westwards towards the line—and France.

Far behind him, on the darkened ground below, two men and a girl were left to carry on for England the perilous game which they were playing in the very heart of enemy country.

## CHAPTER VIII

### PLANE OF A HUNDRED SECRETS

ON a gnarled old oak within a stone's throw of a little wayside cottage was nailed a notice which glimmered white through the darkness. In bold lettering, it read:

“REWARD!

“ONE HUNDRED THOUSAND MARKS!

“The above reward will be paid to any person giving information which leads to the capture of any one of the three notorious enemy spies known as Grey Shadow, Captain John Scott, of the British Secret Squadron, and the French girl, Marie Leroux.

“Anyone found guilty of wilfully withholding such information will be shot.

“By Order of

“THE GERMAN HIGH COMMAND.”

Thousands of such notices were displayed prominently throughout Germany, yet in the little wayside cottage, so close to that oak tree, sat the three spies themselves.

The blind was carefully drawn over the window, the doors were locked at front and rear, and the trio were sitting having their supper.

And a harmless little family party they looked, for Grey Shadow was disguised as an old woman, with a seamed and wrinkled face.

Scotty was wearing the coarse, grey uniform of a young German soldier, and if anyone had demanded to see his identification papers they would have found that those expert forgeries described him as Hans Graustark, of the 3rd Bavarian Rifle Brigade, home on ten days' leave from the Western Front.

As for Marie, in the boy's ragged attire which she was wearing, the girl might well have passed for the “old woman's” grandson, that being what any inquirer would have been told.

“But I reckon we're safe enough,” said Grey Shadow, carving a slice of black bread from a loaf and handing it to Marie. “The pair of you always keep well out of sight during the day-time, and this cottage is lonely enough, goodness knows. As for the car out there in the barn at the back, the story is that we're minding it for a gentleman who had a breakdown near here.”

“And even that's covered,” remarked Scotty, “because if anyone does find the car and insists upon tracing the owner, they'll find it belongs to Emil Stephan, the eminently respectable timber merchant of Odenwald.”

The trio laughed, for Emil Stephan's real name was Captain Fenton, of the British Intelligence Service.”

“Now, about this job we’ve got on hand,” said Grey Shadow. “First of all, I’ll go briefly over the facts, than we’ll decide what’s the best thing to be done. According to information supplied us through Fenton, the German Falkenjager Aircraft Works, at Wurzburg, have designed and built a single-seater fighting scout which is supposed to be considerably faster than anything we ourselves have got on the Western Front. The machine is now ready for its first test flight, and our orders from the British Air Ministry are to grab the machine and fly it across the lines into France.”

“Oh, is that all?” said Scotty dryly.

Grey Shadow laughed and went on:

“It looks the very dickens of a problem to tackle, I’ll admit, for the machine’s guarded night and day. But here’s some further information. Captain Ernst von Brutter, the finest German test pilot in the country, leaves Karlsruhe to-morrow morning for Wurzburg in order to carry out the test flight.”

“He’ll be flying from Karlsruhe to Wurzburg, I suppose?” said Scotty.

“No, he’s not and I’ll tell you why,” replied Grey Shadow. “Our British bombers are carrying out almost daily raids towards Karlsruhe, and every German machine there is needed. The test of the new Falkenjager scout may take two or three days to complete so Von Brutter travels to Wurzburg by train.”

“I see,” said Scotty thoughtfully, “and you think we might get at the machine through Von Brutter. Is that the idea?”

“I don’t know,” said Grey Shadow. “I think there might be a line of approach there, but we’ve got to talk it over. There’s one thing very definite. We’ve got to grab that Falkenjager scout somehow or other! It’s so advanced in design that I reckon there’s a hundred things worth knowing about.”

Until a late hour that night the low-voiced discussion went on in the kitchen of the lonely little cottage. Scheme after scheme was mooted and examined in its each and every detail until at last a plan of campaign was decided upon.

“But it’s going to be touch and go the whole time,” said Grey Shadow gravely. “The slightest slip will mean disaster!”

“Yes,” admitted Scotty grimly. “But it’s the only way, I’m afraid.”

Grey Shadow pushed back his chair and rose.

“Right-oh! You snatch an hour’s sleep,” he said. “We’ll have to be away from here before dawn. I’ll waken you when I’ve got everything ready.”

Whilst Scotty stretched himself out on the old-fashioned, broken sprung sofa in the kitchen, Grey Shadow went upstairs to the little bed-room above, leaving Marie to clear away the supper dishes and wash up.

Moving the heavy iron bedsteads, Grey Shadow lifted one of the floorboards. Carefully packed in the cavity revealed, was an assortment of clothing, ranging from a beggar’s rags to the smart and well-cut uniform of an officer of the German Air Force.

It was Fenton who had left this uniform with Grey Shadow and Scotty when he had brought them their orders and left them the car.

“It may come in useful,” he had said. “But be very careful how you handle this job. Captain Ernst von Brutter, the test pilot, is well known at the Falkenjager Works at



Wurzburg.”

This fact, of course, completely washed out any idea which Scotty and Grey Shadow might have had of one of them getting in ahead of Von Brutter at the Falkenjager Works and attempting the perilous game of impersonating that gentleman.

But down there in the kitchen, Scotty and Grey Shadow had hatched out another scheme in which the uniform must play its part. So, taking it from the cavity in the floor, together with the coarser grey uniform of a German private soldier, Grey Shadow replaced the floorboard and pushed the bed back into place.

Having carefully examined the skilfully forged identification papers which Fenton had left in the pocket of the Air Force uniform, Grey Shadow stepped to the little window of the room, on the cracked and foot-wide inner sill of which stood a plant-pot.

Removing the plant-pot, Grey Shadow pressed a secret catch. There came a faint click, then he lifted the sill, as though it were the hinged lid of a box.

From this newly revealed cavity beneath the window-sill, Grey Shadow took a small typewriter of German manufacture, then selected an official-looking slip of paper from an assorted sheaf of them.

Placing the typewriter on the bed, so as to deaden any sound made by the tapping of the keys, he inserted the slip of paper, paused reflectively a moment, then rapidly typed a few lines in German signing them with a pen.

That done, he returned the typewriter to its hiding-place, lowered the window-sill, and replaced the plant-pot on it.

He now went swiftly to work, removing his wig of wispy, grey hair, and stripping off the old woman's rags which he was wearing. A specially prepared cold cream took the seams and wrinkles from his face, and fifteen minutes later he was standing clad in the field-grey uniform of a German soldier.

Slipping a loaded automatic into his pocket, he went downstairs to the kitchen and wakened Scotty, who was asleep on the sofa.

“Get changed, Scotty,” he said. “I’ll get the car ready.”

Scotty, wide awake in an instant, went swiftly upstairs whilst Grey Shadow let himself out by the rear door and moved through the darkness to the barn in which the car was parked.

Marie remained on guard, leaning against the front wall of the cottage, her ears attuned to catch the slightest sound of anyone approaching along the road.

But nothing moved, nothing stirred to break the hushed and brooding stillness of the sleeping countryside save an occasional faint, metallic clink from the direction of the barn at the rear of the cottage.

Then suddenly there came a soft step beside Marie, and the grey-cloaked, grey uniformed figure of Scotty loomed up in the darkness.

“Everything quiet, Marie?” asked Scotty.

“Yes,” replied the girl.

“Right-ho! We’re going now,” said Scotty. “I don’t suppose you’ll have any visitors to-night, but if anyone happens to call in the morning and asks you what you’re doing

here alone, say that your grandmother's gone over into Aschaffenburg for the day, and won't be back until late. You understand?"

"Yes," nodded Marie.

"Then good-bye," said Scotty, holding out his hand.

"Good-bye, Scotty, and good luck!" said Marie, taking the outstretched hand.

A few minutes later, with Grey Shadow at the wheel, and Scotty seated in the back, the powerful car slid quietly past the girl and turned out on to the road, along which it roared to be swallowed up in the darkness.

Not until the distant roar of the engine had died away in the night did Marie move. Then she walked back into the little cottage, which seemed more lonely than ever now that her two companions had gone.

On through the night roared the powerful car making towards Karlsruhe, which was reached shortly after dawn. Before pulling up outside the Hotel Prinz Wilhelm, Grey Shadow half-turned his head, and said over his shoulder to Scotty:

"I'll get straight back to Lauda. If I don't make contact with you there, I'll drive on to Wurzburg and wait for you at the Hotel Kolnerhof."

"Yes, I understand," nodded Scotty.

A few moments later Grey Shadow brought the car to a stop outside the Hotel Prinz Wilhelm. Swinging himself down from the driving-seat, he opened the rear door for Scotty to alight, standing rigidly to attention as he did so.

A watchful hotel porter came hurrying out to possess himself of Scotty's travelling-case, and as Scotty followed the man into the hotel Grey Shadow took the car purring on along the street.

The first and best morning train from Karlsruhe to Wurzburg left Karlsruhe at five minutes past ten. So after a wash and brush-up and a leisurely breakfast, Scotty collected his case, and was driven to the station by taxi.

He was in plenty of time, having a good hour to spare before the train was due to leave; but he wanted to be on the spot in order to watch for the arrival of Captain Ernst von Brutter, who would be coming from the aerodrome.

It wasn't until close on ten o'clock, however, that a grey military car, driven by a grey-clad Air Force driver, drew up outside the station entrance.

From it descended a tall, supercilious-looking and most elegantly clad German officer, whom, from the description furnished him by Fenton, Scotty had not the slightest difficulty in recognising as Captain Ernst von Brutter.

Followed by the driver, carrying his bag, Von Brutter hurried through the booking-hall, impatiently presented his railway voucher at the barrier of the departure platform, then passed through and stepped into a first-class compartment of the train for Wurzburg.

Tending his railway ticket at the barrier, Scotty strolled on to the platform. Compartment doors were already being slammed, and the train was on the point of pulling out. But not until the very last moment did Scotty step into the compartment occupied by Von Brutter and settle himself down in a corner seat opposite.

Von Brutter glanced at Scotty, but although he must have seen by Scotty's uniform that the latter was—or, or least, appeared to be—a German pilot, he turned coldly and haughtily to a perusal of his morning newspaper, without so much as a friendly look or nod for this brother-officer.

The complete snob, was Scotty's mental summing up of the German. Nor was Scotty wrong, for Captain Ernst von Brutter was an arrogant, swaggering Prussian of Potsdam.

There were two other passengers in the compartment—an elderly and prosperous-looking German business man, and a young lieutenant of German infantry.

He was a friendly, chatty soul, this latter youth, and he opened conversation with Scotty by proffering him his cigarette-case.

He talked of the War and the Western Front. He was eager to get out there, he said—desperately keen on seeing active service in the trenches.

Looking at him Scotty wondered how long he'd last in that bloody shambles of the fighting front. A day, a week, or perhaps a little longer? The death-roll was frightful, and daily it was mounting by thousands.

The train roared on. The business man snoozed in his corner, the young lieutenant talked, Scotty listened, and the haughty Captain Ernst von Brutter confined himself frigidly to his newspaper.

Then came an interruption. The sliding door which opened on to the corridor was pulled back, and a steward inserted his head into the compartment.

“Are any of you gentlemen taking lunch?” he inquired, pencil and pad in hand.

“Yes, I am!” said Von Brutter curtly.

“And I,” nodded Scotty.

The young lieutenant shook his head. The business man awoke with a start and a grunt, and said he'd take lunch. The steward jotted it down, then, sliding shut the door, he moved on along the corridor to the next compartment.

“Excuse me a moment!” said Scotty, cutting in on the young lieutenant's resumed flow of talk.

Rising, he quitted the compartment, carefully closing the door behind him. Out in the corridor he accosted the steward.

“Will you please arrange that my friend and I have a table to ourselves in the luncheon-car?” he said. “You know—the officer sitting in the corner seat reading a newspaper.”

“Yes, Herr Hauptmann, that shall be arranged,” assented the steward readily, making a note on his pad.

And thus it transpired when, an hour or so later, Captain Ernst von Brutter took his seat in the crowded luncheon-car he found Scotty sitting opposite him.

He continued to completely ignore Scotty until about midway through lunch when there occurred a most unfortunate incident. In attempting to re-cork a bottle of sauce, Scotty most clumsily sent it spinning, with the result that quite a lot of the contents shot over Captain Ernst von Brutter's elegant, grey uniform.

“Confound you, you clumsy fool!” exploded the German, leaping to his feet, his face livid with rage as he dabbed frantically at his tunic with his serviette. “What in thunder d’you think you’re doing?”

“A thousand pardons, Herr Hauptmann,” said Scotty, also rising and reaching across the table as though to help the raging German brush himself down. “It was an accident—but most unforgivable of me.”

“Keep your hands off me, confound you!” grated Von Brutter. “Clumsy, stupid idiot!”

Scotty slowly resumed his seat as a couple of stewards rushed to Von Brutter’s assistance and commenced to wipe him down.

But Scotty had done what he had planned to do. Entirely unobserved in the excitement, and already dissolved in Von Brutter’s glass of wine, was a tiny white tablet which Scotty had dropped into it as he had leaned across the table.

Having been wiped down by the fussing stewards, and the damage repaired as much as possible, the fuming Von Brutter resumed his seat.

“If I had you on my aerodrome,” he said harshly, glaring at Scotty, “you’d eat with the mechanics.”

“If I was on your aerodrome, I’d prefer to,” returned Scotty sweetly.

Von Brutter trembled with rage, then apparently thinking it below his dignity to bandy words with such an impertinent, clumsy fool, he emitted a furious “Pah!” and got on with his lunch.

Covertly watching him, Scotty saw him finish the wine in his glass and waited grimly for the inevitable to happen. Nor had he long to wait, for suddenly the German’s head began to nod, and he leaned heavily back in his seat.

Making an obvious effort to get a grip on himself, Von Brutter sat upright again, but so heavy was his lethargy brought on by the drugged wine which he had drunk that his head drooped somnolently on his shoulders again.

Leaning across the table, Scotty gripped the German by the arm.

“You’re not well,” he said.

“Eh, what’s that?” mumbled Von Brutter sleepily, raising his head a moment to stare glassily and almost without recognition at Scotty.

Next instant his head dropped heavily again and he lolled back in his seat.

“Here, steward, quick!” cried Scotty, leaping to his feet. “My friend is unwell!”

Two stewards came up at the double.

“Come, help me to get him to his compartment,” said Scotty quickly. “Don’t be alarmed. It is nothing serious. He is subject to these attacks. They invariably follow a bout of excitement. There is something wrong with his head owing to his war service,” he concluded in grimly humorous explanation.

Getting Von Brutter under the arms, the two sympathetic stewards supported him from the luncheon-car. It took all their combined strength, for the German’s feet were dragging, and he was almost a dead weight in their grip.

“Never mind about taking him as far as our compartment,” said Scotty. “The first empty compartment will do. Better still, clear a compartment for him. Here, I’ll help to hold him while one of you clears a compartment.”

The nearest first-class compartment was quickly cleared of its occupants and their luggage by the steward, then Von Brutter was made comfortable on the cushioned seat, where he snored lustily in the oblivion of heavy slumber.

“Shall I see if there’s a doctor anywhere on the train, Herr Hauptmann?” asked one of the stewards anxiously of Scotty.

“No, no, there’s no need for that!” replied Scotty quickly. “We’re getting off the train at Lauda, the next stop, and we must be almost there by now. A car is waiting for us, and once we get my friend to his quarters and to bed he’ll be quite all right.”

He hadn’t lost sight of the fact that after the scene in the luncheon-car the two stewards were probably thinking Von Brutter a peculiar sort of friend to have, so he laughed shortly and went on:

“You heard the row he kicked up when I spilt the bottle of sauce over his tunic. If only he’d kept calm this wouldn’t have happened. But that’s impossible, I’m afraid, poor fellow. Owing to a crack on the head he once got, he flies into the most ungovernable of rages and so exhausts himself that he goes off into this heavy sort of slumber immediately afterwards.”

“How long will he sleep, Herr Hauptmann?” inquired one of the stewards, eyeing the snoring Von Brutter as though he were some extraordinary sort of anatomical exhibit.

“He may sleep an hour or two, or maybe more,” replied Scotty, with a shrug of his grey-clad shoulders. “Then he’ll awaken, his usual charming self, and be the most delightful and entertaining of companions until something happens to upset him again. It’s very sad.”

“It is indeed, Herr Hauptmann,” agreed the stewards, eyeing Von Brutter with quite unnecessary commiseration.

“Well, if one of you will remain here with him a moment,” went on Scotty, “I’ll show the other where our bags are, so that they can be brought along here. Hallo, we’re running into Lauda now!”

A few minutes later those who happened to be on the platform at Lauda saw an intriguing and interesting sight, for a strange little procession alighted from the Wurzburg train.

First came a most elegantly clad German officer, his feet dragging, his head lolling, and supported by a couple of train attendants.

Next came another German officer, grey-cloaked and seemingly unconcerned, whilst behind him tagged a steward carrying a couple of bags and with a military cape over his arm.

The procession passed through the barrier, where Scotty handed over a couple of first-class tickets to Lauda, then the party moved on out of the station to where Grey Shadow was waiting with the powerful car in which he had driven Scotty to Karlsruhe.

At sight of the little procession approaching him, Grey Shadow smiled grimly. But there wasn't the slightest flicker of emotion on his face as he stood rigidly at attention, holding open the rear door of the car.

"Captain von Brauer is ill," said Scotty curtly, inventing on the spur of the moment a name to fit the initials stamped on Von Brutter's bag. "You will drive us at once to his quarters!"

"Yes, Herr Hauptmann!" replied Grey Shadow woodenly.

Willing hands ensconced the drugged Von Brutter in the rear of the car and tucked a rug round him. Then handsomely tipping all concerned, Scotty stepped into the car and seated himself beside the slumbering German.

Slamming shut the door, Grey Shadow mounted briskly to the driving-seat, and a moment later the powerful car shot away from the station, speeding through Lauda until it had cleared the outskirts of the town and was roaring along the open road in the direction of Wurzburg.

Then, and not until then, did Grey Shadow give vent to his bottled up mirth. He laughed aloud, and said over his shoulder to Scotty:

"What a typical Prussian he looks. I'll bet he asked for it!"

"He certainly did," answered Scotty. "But I'd rather have handed him a punch on the nose!"

"This was the only way," said Grey Shadow soberly. "How did you manage it?"

Scotty told him, and a few minutes later Grey Shadow turned the car along a narrow by-road to pull up by the side of a small wood which fringed the road.

"Right-ho! We'll dump him here if the coast's clear," he said.

Having made certain that no one was about, Grey Shadow and Scotty lifted Von Brutter out of the car and carried him into the wood, where they dumped him on the ground.

"He'll be hidden safely enough here until he comes round, which should be in about four or five hours' time," said Grey Shadow. "He'll wonder where the dickens he's got to, but he'll suffer from no ill-effects."

"Except the blow to his pride," said Scotty dryly.

Grey Shadow laughed, and hurrying back to the car, they were quickly on the main road again and roaring on in the direction of Wurzburg.

The afternoon was well advanced by the time the car pulled up outside the workshops and hangars of the Falkenjager Aircraft Works at Wurzburg.

"It's up to you again," muttered Grey Shadow, as he held open the door for Scotty to alight. "There's nothing more I can do, so I'll get straight back to Marie with the car."

Scotty nodded and hurried into the office buildings, where he inquired for Herr Mayer, the senior partner of the Falkenjager Company.

"What is your name and business, Herr Hauptmann?" asked a secretary.

"I am Captain Anton von Hagen," answered Scotty curtly. "I am here in place of Captain Ernst von Brutter whom you are expecting."

A few moments later he was being ushered into the presence of Herr Mayer, a stout and heavily built man seated at a flat-topped desk which was littered with papers.

“Captain von Hagen?” said Herr Mayer, staring hard at Scotty. “You are here, I understand, in place of Captain von Brutter. Why is that?”

“Captain von Brutter crashed early this morning and is in hospital with minor injuries,” answered Scotty quickly. “Here are my papers, Herr Mayer, and a letter from Colonel Raubanfeldt, commandant of Karlsruhe!”

He handed over his identification papers together with the letter Grey Shadow had typed on the blank official form, back there at the cottage.

The letter read:

“Air Headquarters,  
“Karlsruhe.

“To Herr Gottfried Mayer,  
“Falkenjager Aircraft Works,  
“Wurzburg.

“This is to inform you that Captain Ernst von Brutter is in the military hospital here following an air crash this morning. By order of the German High Command, I am sending you Captain Anton von Hagen, an experienced test pilot, who will carry out the necessary test flights of your latest machine.

“Signed—COLONEL RAUBANFELDT,  
“Air Commandant,  
“Karlsruhe.”

“A pity!” grumbled Herr Mayer, having read the letter and glanced at Scotty’s identification papers. “I would rather have had Captain von Brutter test our new machine than anyone. Still, it can’t be helped, I suppose!”

“It can’t!” said Scotty frigidly.

“Oh, I’m meaning no offence!” said Herr Mayer, handing Scotty back his identification papers. “You must be good, else the High Command wouldn’t have sent you here. You’d better meet Herr Klaister, the designer of the machine, then we’ll have a look at her. She’s all ready to take the air.”

He pressed a bell on his desk, and during the next ten minutes Scotty was introduced to Klaister, the designer, and several other officials.

The party then quitted the office and went out to the hangars, in front of which a brand-new, rakish-looking little German scout was standing.

By the time Herr Klaister had finished explaining to Scotty the improvements which he had embodied in this latest product of the Falkenjager Works, late afternoon was merging into dusk.

“A bit too late now to take her up, I think,” said Herr Mayer. “We’d better postpone the test until the morning, Klaister.”

“No, let me take her up!” cut in Scotty enthusiastically. “If she’s half as good as she looks the Englanders’ll never live with her in the air. One circuit of the aerodrome, that’s all, then we’ll postpone all other tests until the morning.”

“Yes, let us see her in the air, Mayer!” took up the designer eagerly. “Mein geist, but I’ve been waiting for this moment ever since we started the plans of her.”

The other officials added their voices in support of Scotty and Klaister, and Mayer nodded an assent.

“Very well, then,” he agreed. “One circuit of the aerodrome, Herr Hauptmann, then bring her down.”

Inwardly exultant, Scotty swung himself up into the snug little cockpit of the Falkenjager scout. Her fuel tanks were full and a mechanic was standing by ready to swing the propeller.

Scotty switched on; then, as the mechanic swung on the propeller, the engine picked up with a shattering roar. Running the engine up to full revolutions on brief but searching test, Scotty signalled to the waiting mechanics to whip away the chocks from in front of the undercarriage wheels.

Next instant the little German scout was thundering across the flying field to lift and go soaring up and up into the dusk.

Turning on the climb, Scotty brought her roaring back over the workshops and hangars. But he turned no more, for now he was heading westwards towards the far-distant line—and France.

“Where is he?” roared Herr Mayer some thirty minutes later, during which time he had stamped and raved up and down in front of the hangars. “Where in thunder can the fool have got to?”

A frightened-looking secretary came running from the direction of the office.

“You’re wanted urgently on the telephone, sir,” he gasped. “Captain Ernst von Brutter is on the line!”

“Who?” bellowed Herr Mayer.

“Captain Ernst von Brutter, sir,” stammered the secretary.

“But he’s in hospital at Karlsruhe, you blithering fool!” roared Herr Mayer.

“No, sir, he’s—he’s in an hotel at Lauda,” stammered the secretary.

“Then what in thunder was the meaning of that letter brought me by that imbecile who hasn’t come back with the scout?” bellowed Herr Mayer. “Mein blut, but there’s something wrong here, I’m telling you!”

It wasn’t necessary for him to tell them. Everyone had an uneasy feeling that something was most decidedly wrong. Three days later their worst fears were realised when the German Intelligence Bureau reported that the missing Falkenjager scout had been flown across the lines into France and delivered safely into British hands.



## CHAPTER IX

### “THE PLANS ARE THERE!”

HERR ADOLPH PLATZ, head of the great Zornhofer Muniton Works at Essen, leaned back in his chair, placed the tips of his plump fingers together, and gazed benevolently at the slim and neatly dressed boy standing facing him across the massive, flat-topped desk.

“This is a great honour for you,” he said, in his deep, fruity sort of voice.

“Yes, sir,” said the boy humbly.

“I mean it is a very great honour for you to be standing here like this in my private office,” explained Herr Platz, still smiling with expansive condescension. “Whom do you think we are keeping waiting?”

“I really cannot say, sir,” stammered the boy.

“Four very important Government officials,” said Herr Platz. “They are here to see about contracts—about guns, shells, ammunition. Always the cry is for more, more, and still more. We must keep hammering away at those cursed Englanders upon the Western Front until we smash their lines and break through to the Channel ports of France. Only thus can a great and glorious victory be assured for our Fatherland.”

He paused a moment, then went on, as though delivering a lecture:

“And you, young though you are, will also be doing your share towards winning this glorious victory when you join this vast organisation of ours to-morrow. You will be a little soldier of the home front, whilst I—I am the general!”

The boy looked duly impressed, but if Herr Platz could have known what was going on inside that person’s head he’d have got the shock of his life.

“Very well, you can run along now,” said Herr Platz benignly, bringing the interview to an end. “Report at nine o’clock in the morning to Herr Tuppel, the manager of our general office. Work hard, be courteous, willing, and industrious, and—who knows?—one day you may even occupy this chair of mine! Ha, ha!”

The boy smiled weakly at this very excellent joke, bowed politely, stammered a “Thank you very much indeed, sir,” and withdrew.

As the door of the sumptuously furnished office closed on the retreating form of his small visitor, Herr Platz picked up from the desk in front of him the letter of introduction which the boy had brought.

The letter was written on expensive note-paper, and read as follows:

“To Herr Adolph Platz,

“Zornhofer Muniton Works, Essen.

“My dear Adolph,—This is to introduce Hans Klopfer, whose father, Colonel Klopfer, is, unfortunately, a prisoner of war in England.

“Colonel Klopfer is a very old and esteemed friend of mine, and I shall be more than obliged to you if you will take the boy into your offices, as he is

very keen on learning engineering.

“Later, perhaps, when the boy is older, he can go into the workshops to learn the practical side of the work, but I think he is rather young for that at the moment, and I would prefer him to start in the office.

“He has a grandmother living in Essen, and will reside with her. Believe me, my dear Adolph, anything you can do for the boy will place me very deeply in your debt.

“I am leaving to-morrow for Denmark, on, as you can well guess, highly important and official business, but will communicate with you again on my return.

“With warmest salutations,

“GUIDO FRANZ VON BUTTLAR LISSABON.”

With a fat smile, Herr Platz returned the letter to his desk. Guido Franz von Buttler Lissabon, eh? A baron, a blood relation of the German Emperor himself, and a most important member of the German Government. That’s who Guido Franz von Buttler Lissabon was.

Oh, yes, Herr Platz would be delighted to do anything for such a great and influential gentleman as that. Their acquaintance—one of long standing—had become closer since the outbreak of war, for Herr Platz was handling nothing but Government contracts for shells, guns, and ammunition. And now had come this letter with one—two “My dear Adolphs” in it. Truly, this was friendship indeed being proffered by the great man. And when the war ended—or before—there would be lots of honours given away to those who had served their country well during the dreadful struggle.

Who knew but what he himself might be made a baron, thought Herr Platz. Or at least given some lesser title. But to be made a baron would be nicer—oh, ever so much nicer!

He sat there at his desk a few moments, conjuring up visions of the future—visions in which, as Baron Platz, he strutted importantly amongst the nobility and the swells and the snobs of Potsdam.

He was roused from his pleasant reverie by a secretary, who came softly and hesitatingly into the room, as though afraid to intrude.

“Sir,” began the secretary nervously, “General Schlepper and the other three officers from the High Command are still waiting to see you.”

“What?” grunted Herr Platz, coming out of his reverie with a start. “General Schlepper! Oh, yes. It is this new machine-gun they’ve come to discuss. Have you got the plans there? Yes, all right. Show them in. Oh, and Blumm!”

“Yes, sir?” said the secretary.

“Tell Tuppel there’s a lad named Hans Klopper commencing in the general office to-morrow—and tell him I’m taking a personal interest in the lad, and want him given every opportunity.”

“Very good, sir!” said the secretary.

He bowed and withdrew, to usher into the august presence of Herr Platz, General Schlepper and the other three gentlemen from the German High Command.



Meanwhile, young Hans Klopper had arrived back at the residence of his grandmother, a neat little house, with a green door and green window shutters, situated in the Fernstrasse, one of Essen's most exclusive residential quarters.

He found the old lady sitting in the drawing-room, her knitting-needles clicking busily. She was dressed in a black satin gown, and had a little white lace cap perched on her grey hair.

As the boy entered the room she placed her knitting in her lap and stared at him expectantly.

"Well, what luck?" she demanded.

"I start in the general office in the morning," replied the other.

"Splendid, Marie!" chuckled the old lady. "Friend Platz never doubted the genuineness of that letter, then, nor suspected for one moment that you're a girl?"

"No," replied Marie. "Or, at least, he didn't appear to. He seemed very pleased to be able to do Baron von Buttlar Lissabon a good turn by giving me a job in the office."

"Yes, he's a first-class snob," nodded the old lady. "And a conceited ass, into the bargain."

She pressed a bell. In response to the summons there came a limping tread along the hallway outside, then the door opened and a young man appeared.

The old lady kept no female domestic. Instead, she employed the young man who had appeared in response to her ring. He was supposed to be an ex-German soldier who had been invalided out of the army with war wounds. He looked after the house and garden, did the cooking, and drove the old lady's car for her when she wanted to go out for an airing.

"He's got the job," said the old lady, jerking a most unlady-like thumb towards Marie. "He starts in the morning."

"That's fine!" grinned the young man. He turned to the girl. "Get the information as quickly as you can," he said. "I'm sick to death of washing dishes and sweeping floors and standing in the food queues at the provision shops."

None looking at the three gathered there in that pleasant little drawing-room would have guessed for one moment that they were the three most dangerous and most wanted spies in Germany.

But they were, for the old lady was none other than Grey Shadow in disguise, the young man was Scotty of the British Secret Squadron, and the third was Marie Leroux.

So desperately anxious was the German High Command to effect the capture of the trio that they had placed on the head of each of them the price of one hundred thousand marks, dead or alive.

"But we won't be here much longer, now that we've got Marie into the Zornhofer works," said Grey Shadow, flinging the knitting on to a chair. "I must say that the letter

supposed to be from Von Buttler Lissabon was one of the finest forgeries I've ever seen. The fellow who penned it at British Intelligence Headquarters in London ought to be decorated."

"And old Platz fell for it all right?" asked Scotty.

"Yes, hook, line and sinker, apparently," nodded Grey Shadow. "What's more, Von Buttler Lissabon really does leave for Denmark to-day—the letter was dated yesterday—so old Platz won't be able to get in touch with him even if he wants to."

He turned to Marie.

"When you start in the morning," he said, "just set your mind on one thing and one thing only, and that's to find out where the plans of the new Zornhofer machine-gun are kept. Once we know that, Scotty and I can get busy."

He paused a moment, then went grimly on:

"Our job here in Essen is to get those plans, and we're going to get 'em. According to information which has reached the British War Office in London, this new machine-gun is twice as deadly as any at present in use on the Western Front. The speed of firing is said to be almost double that of any British or French machine-gun, so you can imagine what that'll mean once the Germans start turning them out by the thousand, as they will do."



Promptly at nine o'clock the next morning, Marie reported to Herr Tuppel, manager of the general office of the Zornhofer Munition Works.

Having previously received Herr Platz's message, Tuppel was much more attentive to Marie than he would otherwise have been.

He was a tall, thin, sandy-haired man with rimless spectacles, and having introduced Marie to a sulky-looking, heavily built lout of about sixteen years of age, he said:

"This is Otto, our office-boy. I don't think you can do better than to assist him in his duties for a few days. That will give you time to find your way about and settle down here."

During the next day or two, Marie certainly began to find her way about all right, for having suddenly found himself blessed with an assistant, Master Otto began to make hay whilst this unexpected sun shone.

He kept Marie on the go the whole time, ordering her here and there, making her lick stamps and stick down envelopes, and, in short, shoving on to her shoulders the hundred and one odd jobs which invariably come the way of an office-boy in a busy works.

The girl bore the burden willingly enough, for she liked to get in and around the works. The busy shops with their whirr and clatter of machinery fascinated her, and often she would stand watching some great lathe turning a mighty casting to within the thousandth part of an inch until brusquely ordered on her way by some grim-faced overseer.

Daily, hourly, trucks and wagons pulled out of the railway sidings of the vast works, heavily laden with guns, shells and armaments, to add to the awful slaughter of that dreadful shambles on the Western Front.

But Marie never lost sight for a moment of the secret mission which had brought her to the works and on her third day there she said to the surly Otto:

“It’s a very great pity that our soldiers haven’t got such good guns as the Englanders, isn’t it, Otto?”

Otto, who was supposed to be addressing envelopes, but who was really engaged on a libellous sketch of Herr Tuppel, paused in his drawing and surveyed Marie scowlingly.

“What do you mean?” he demanded. “Who says our soldiers haven’t got as good guns as the Englanders?”

“The newspapers,” said Marie simply.

“Oh, do they?” demanded Master Otto, somewhat taken aback. “Oh—oh, indeed? Well, the newspapers are wrong, then. They don’t know what they’re talking about!”

“Don’t they, Otto?” asked Marie meekly.

“No, they don’t!” asserted Otto angrily. “Everybody knows our guns are far better than the Englanders’. So are our battleships, and so are our aeroplanes. Everything we’ve got’s better than the Englanders’.”

“But the newspapers say that the French forty-five gun is much better than anything we’ve got,” protested the girl, bringing him back to the subject of guns again. “They say the Englander Lewis machine-gun is a lot better than ours, as well.”

“Then they’re a lot of silly fools!” burst out Otto hotly. “The Englanders and the French haven’t got a gun to touch the Zornhofer machine-gun, and you wait until our new one’s ready, that’s all. Just you wait! You’ll see!”

“See what, Otto?” asked Marie humbly.

“See who’s got the best guns,” snorted Otto. “This new gun of ours is the most marvellous gun in the world. It can shoot out thousands and thousands of bullets in a minute.”

“Can it really?” gasped Marie, visibly awed. “But how d’you know this, Otto?”

“Never you mind,” retorted Otto loftily. “I know lots of things around here that other people don’t know—not even the managers and the overseers. I keep my ears open and I hear things. Some people don’t think an office-boy’s got ears; but I have—long ones—and I use them. That’s how I know about the new gun. It’s supposed to be a secret, but I know all about it.”

Marie stared at him incredulously.

“I bet you don’t!” she said.

“I’ll bet you anything you like I do!” retorted Otto savagely. “Don’t you say I don’t, or I’ll give you a kick on the shins. I’ve heard Herr Platz talking about the gun, so there!”

“Oh, you’re poking fun at me now!” said Marie, with a weak attempt at a smile.

“I’m not poking fun at you, you stupid little fool!” snarled Otto. “I tell you I have heard Herr Platz talking about the gun. He had four officers here the other day in his private office, and after they’d been in there for about an hour, Herr Platz ordered a bottle of wine to be taken in, so I took it in on a tray with some glasses, and Herr Platz was walking quickly up and down and saying: ‘Yes, gentlemen, this gun will alter the course of the whole war. I tell you it will do the work of two!’ Then he saw me and shut up; but as I put the tray down I saw a lot of plans and blueprints on his desk, and they were the plans of the new gun Herr Platz was talking about.”

“How d’you know they were?” demanded Marie.

“Well, what other plans could they be but the plans of the new gun, you stupid blockhead?” demanded Otto irritably. “I know the plans of a gun when I see them. I’ve taken hundreds and hundreds of plans from the drawing-office to the workshops, so I ought to know plans when I see them, oughtn’t I? Herr Platz wouldn’t have plans of an old gun on his desk when he was talking about a new gun, would he? What would be the sense of it? Aw, you make me sick, you do!”

“I’m sorry, Otto!” said Marie humbly. “I’m new here, you know, and I don’t know anything like so much as you do about things. But isn’t it dangerous, Herr Platz leaving plans like that lying about on his desk? If they were mine I know jolly well what I’d do with them.”

“They’re not left lying about, you stupid fool!” said Otto. “They’re always locked away.”

“Where?” demanded Marie.

“Where d’you think?” retorted Otto witheringly. “In the big safe in Herr Platz’s office, of course. I’ve seen Blumm, his secretary, putting important documents and plans in there dozens of times. It’s the most marvellous safe in the world, as well. It’s more than twelve inches thick all round, and made of the hardest steel in the world. Nobody could ever open that safe, I’m telling you. Anyway, there’s always someone in the office night and day, because we’re working full shifts. When Herr Platz goes home at nights, his nephew, Herr Reffmann, the night manager, uses the office, so don’t talk a lot of rubbish about us leaving plans lying about.”

“I’m sorry,” said Marie meekly. “I didn’t understand.”

But that evening, when she got home to the neat little house in the Fernstrasse, she reported the conversation in full to Grey Shadow and Scotty.

“Yes, I reckon you’ve got it, Marie,” said Grey Shadow. “The plans are in that safe, for certain. I know Master Otto’s type. He’s the sort who’s always sticking his nose into somebody else’s business, then running round and blabbing about it. I don’t think he could possibly have invented that remark of Platz’s which he said he overheard. It rings too near the truth for that. What d’you say, Scotty?”

“I agree with you entirely,” said Scotty. “Anyway, if the safe is burglar-proof, and as tough as it appears to be, it’s a pretty safe bet that the plans are in there.”

The upshot of the long and earnest conference which ensued was that the following morning Marie asked permission to see Herr Platz—a request which was graciously granted by that important gentleman when eventually he found a few moments to spare.

“Well, well, well, and what can I do for you, my little man?” he beamed with elephantine geniality when Marie stood before him. “You’re quite happy here, I hope?”

“Oh, yes, sir!” said Marie meekly. “What I wanted to see you about, was to ask if I can be transferred to the night shift and work in the office with the night staff.”

“Well, bless my soul, that’s a strange thing for a little fellow like you to ask!” ejaculated Heir Platz, staring at him. “Most lads like their evenings free. No, no; you must get home and get your proper sleep.”

“But that’s just what I don’t get, sir,” said Marie.

“Eh, what’s that?” exclaimed Herr Platz. “You don’t get your proper sleep, you say? What d’you mean?”

“It’s my grandmother, sir,” explained Marie diffidently. “She’s very old, and she sleeps most of the day, which means that she sleeps badly at nights, so she keeps me up reading to her, and I don’t really get very much sleep. I haven’t been living with her long, you know, sir—only since I came to Essen.”

“But can’t she get someone else to read to her?” demanded Herr Platz. “A paid companion, or someone? My word, but she must be a very thoughtless old woman—I mean, lady—to keep a little fellow like you up reading to her. It’s not right—upon my word it isn’t!”

“No, sir; but she’s a little bit queer, you see,” explained Marie. “Eccentric, they call it. That’s why she can’t get a companion or anyone to stay with her, and she says she likes me reading to her better than anyone.”

“What d’you read to her?” inquired Herr Platz, with interest.

“We’re reading Hans Andersen’s ‘Fairy Tales’ at the moment, sir,” said Marie. “We’re half-way through ‘Snow White and Rose Red’——”

“Donner und blut!” exploded Herr Platz violently. “But she must be mad! An old woman like her listening to a lot of stupid fairy tales. I’ve never heard of such a thing, upon my word I haven’t!”

“She says it takes her mind off the war, sir,” explained Marie. “She says she can’t bear to think about the war because we’re bound to be beaten. She says our German Emperor ought to be hanged, and she says our Crown Prince Wilhelm is just a blithering idiot who ought to be put in a home.”

“Oh, she does, does she?” spluttered Herr Platz wrathfully. “It’s she who’s the idiot, all right. There’s no doubt about that. But she’d better be careful—very careful indeed. I’ll have a word with my very good friend Baron Guido Franz von Buttlar Lissabon about her when he returns from Denmark. It might be better to remove you from the care of such a dangerous old person. In the meantime you can certainly commence night work here if you’re sure you’ll get a proper sleep during the day.”

“Oh, yes, sir, she sleeps herself during the day,” said Marie. “Thank you very much, sir.”

“Oh, that’s all right!” said Herr Platz, dismissing her with a wave of his plump hand. “‘Hans Andersen’s Fairy Tales,’ indeed. Pah!”

Marie commenced night duty the following evening, and as she took a walk through the lighted workshops with their whirring dynamos, slapping belting, and

incessant roar of machinery, she realized to the full how during every minute of the whole twenty-four hours of every day the great munition and armament factories of Germany were working at full pressure to turn out guns and shells for the weary, warworn troops massed away yonder on the Western Front.

Meanwhile, back at the neat little house in the Fernstrasse, Grey Shadow had divested himself of the attire of an old lady, and donned a well-fitting lounge suit.

Scotty was similarly dressed, and towards midnight he and Grey Shadow put on heavy greatcoats and soft felt hats which they pulled down over their eyes. Then slipping quietly out of the house, they took their car out of its garage at the rear of the house and drove boldly through the streets of Essen to the main entrance of the office buildings of the Zornhofer Munition Works.

Leaving the car outside the building, they walked into the entrance lobby. The uniformed commissioner on night duty emerged from his glass-panelled little office to inquire their business.

“We wish to see Herr Reffmann, the night manager, please!” said Grey Shadow curtly, proffering a card.

Taking the card, the commissioner glanced at it. As he did so he started, and looked at Grey Shadow, with a new interest and respect. For the card read:

Captain Ludwig von Hagermann,  
Police Headquarters,  
Berlin.

“I will send the card up immediately, sir,” said the commissioner. “But perhaps you would like to see Herr Platz, the senior partner. He has remained late to-night and has not yet left the building.”

“Yes, certainly, we would like to see him if he is here,” said Grey Shadow, inwardly wishing the industrious Herr Platz had taken himself off home at his usual time.

In response to the commissioner’s ring, Marie, the night duty office-boy, appeared.

“Take this card up at once to Herr Platz,” said the commissioner, handing Marie the card.

“Yes, sir,” said the girl, and without so much as a glance at Grey Shadow and Scotty, she departed with the card.

Within a few minutes she was back.

“The gentlemen are to come up to Herr Platz’s room now, sir,” she said to the commissioner.

Piloted by Marie, Grey Shadow and Scotty ascended the wide, stone staircase to the first floor where the office of Herr Platz and the general offices were situated.

The trio exchanged not a word, and those who saw them never guessed for an instant that the two stern-faced men and the small office-boy were in league together.

Reaching the door of Herr Platz’s office, Marie knocked, then opening the door she stood aside to usher Grey Shadow and Scotty into the room.



When they entered, she closed the door on them and took up her stand outside, for all this had been most carefully planned at their house in the Fernstrasse.

Herr Platz was seated at his desk talking to his tall, immaculately groomed nephew, Reffmann, when Grey Shadow and Scotty entered the room. Breaking off his conversation with Reffman, Herr Platz rose and said questioningly:

“You are Captain Ludwig von Hagermann of Police Headquarters, Berlin?”

“I am,” answered Grey Shadow, advancing towards the desk, his hat still pulled well down over his eyes, and his hands in the pockets of his greatcoat.

Herr Platz’s stare moved past him to Scotty, who had paused to turn the key in the lock of the door and slip the key into his pocket.

“Might I ask why you do that, sir?” began Herr Platz sharply, as Scotty stepped towards the desk.

“You might!” cut in Grey Shadow harshly. “We are here to talk to you, and we want no interruptions!”

Herr Platz gasped, his eyes dilating. For as though by magic a heavy automatic had appeared in Grey Shadow’s hand and was covering him across the desk.

“One move and you’re a dead man!” grated Scotty, his automatic unwaveringly covering the equally astounded Reffman.

“But—but what is the meaning of this?” gasped Herr Platz.

“Stand back from that desk!” grated Grey Shadow. “If you open your mouth to raise an alarm I’ll shoot you dead. That goes for you, Reffman, as well. One shout—and we shoot to kill.”

“But who are you?” burst out Reffman, his face white.

“Two desperate men who are here to get what they want,” said Grey Shadow. “You, Platz, throw the keys of your safe onto the desk there.”

Herr Platz, quivering like a jelly with fear and rage, took one look at the glittering eyes and stern, set face of the man confronting him, then groped in his pocket for his keys with a trembling hand, and flung them onto the desk.

“Give me your gun and get busy,” muttered Grey Shadow to Scotty.

Slipping his gun swiftly into Grey Shadow’s hand, so that the latter had both Germans covered, Scotty snatched up the keys and turned to the safe.

“Mein blut!” burst out Platz hoarsely in an agony of impotent fury and fear. “What d’you want there? What are you after?”

“Silence!” blazed Grey Shadow. “If you want to come out of this alive you’ll shut up!”

Confronted by those blue-black, menacing barrels which at any instant might vomit swift and lurid death, it would have taken a braver or more fool-hardy man than either Herr Platz or the white-faced, raging Reffmann to have attempted to raise the alarm.

So they stood mute, and trembling with fury, whilst Scotty swung open the heavy door of the safe and rummaged inside.

Meanwhile, outside the door, Marie was standing on guard, her ears straining to catch the slightest sound from inside the office.

Then suddenly she stiffened, for Schroder, the night manager of the workshops, was coming along the corridor towards her.

“Get out of the way!” snapped Schroder, raising his hand to knock.

“You can’t go in there!” exclaimed Marie, dodging in front of him. “Herr Platz has told me to remain here to see that he’s not interrupted for at least half an hour. A gentleman from Berlin has just arrived to see him and they’re in conference. That’s why Herr Platz stayed late to-night.”

“It’s Herr Reffmann I want to see!” snapped Schroder. “Is he in there as well?”

“Yes; and no one must interrupt them, not even by knocking,” reiterated Marie. “Those are Herr Platz’s express orders.”

“Oh, confound it!” grumbled Schroder. “I’ll wait, then.”

“Why not come back?” suggested Marie.

“Because I don’t choose to come back, you cheeky young cub!” snapped Schroder.

Inside the office, Scotty was examining a bulky packet of blueprints which he’d taken from the safe.

“Right!” he said to Grey Shadow, swiftly folding the prints and thrusting them into his pocket. “These are they.”

“You infernal scoundrels!” choked Herr Platz, forced either to give vent to speech or to throw a fit. “You—you——”

Scotty had retrieved his gun from Grey Shadow. Together they stepped slowly backwards towards the door, their guns still covering the two Germans.

Grey Shadow raised his voice.

“Good-night to you, Herr Platz!” he said.

On the other side of the door Marie heard that signal which told her the hold-up had been successful, and that Grey Shadow and Scotty were ready to leave if the coast was clear.

But the coast wasn’t clear. Schroder was still hanging about outside the door. What was more, he was talking to one of the night clerks within a pace of the door.

Raising her hand, Marie knocked once, twice, on the door, slowly and deliberately. Hearing her, Schroder wheeled.

“What’re you knocking like that for?” he began angrily. “I thought you said Herr Platz wasn’t to be disturbed——”

He broke off with a startled oath as Marie darted past him, and raced along the corridor towards the stairs. What he didn’t know was that those two slow, deliberate knocks of Marie’s had indicated to Grey Shadow and Scotty the number of persons in the vicinity of the door.

“I believe that kid’s either off his head, or else is having a game with us!” rasped Schroder. “He told me Herr Platz wasn’t to be disturbed as he was in conference——”

Abruptly he broke off, his eyes bulging in astonishment as the door of Herr Platz’s room was suddenly whipped open, and two men with guns in their hands stepped swiftly out into the corridor, slamming shut the door behind them.

“Get back!” commanded Grey Shadow, giving the startled Schroder a violent thrust which sent the man staggering. Scotty dealt similarly with the dumbfounded clerk, then next instant he and Grey Shadow were racing along the corridor for the stairs.

“Stop them—stop them!” screamed the voice of Herr Platz as he rushed frantically from his room, followed by Reffmann. “Curse you, Schroder! Why didn’t you stop them?”

Roused by the hubbub, the startled night staff were dashing out of their offices into the corridor. At sight of the fugitives racing for the stairs, they realised something was very much amiss, and they set up a terrific hue-and-cry.

Wheeling at the top of the stairs, Grey Shadow fired, the corridor reverberating to the roar of his gun. Purposely he fired high, but the shots had the necessary effect, for with yells of fear and panic his pursuers dived for the cover of the nearest rooms, some flinging themselves face downwards on the floor of the corridor.

Next instant Grey Shadow and Scotty were bounding down the stairs towards the entrance lobby. The commissioner was dashing towards the foot of the stairs, a drawn gun in his hand. He was obviously at a loss as to what to make of all this; but he raised his gun, shouting:

“Get back! Stop where you are!”

Grey Shadow’s gun roared again into life, and, with a shout of agony, the commissioner spun round, his gun falling from his nerveless hand as he clutched at his shoulder.

Next instant Scotty and Grey Shadow were past him. Dashing out through the lobby into the night, they leapt for the car which was already on the move, with Marie at the driving-wheel.

“Right, step on it!” panted Grey Shadow as he and Scotty scrambled aboard.

Marie stepped on it, and, with a roar of high-powered engine, the car shot away into the night. At breakneck speed it tore through the almost deserted streets, for Grey Shadow had taken over the wheel from the girl. The outskirts of the town were cleared, then the car roared on along a silent and deserted country road, to be swallowed up in the night.

When morning came the car was found abandoned in a field thirty kilometres from Essen. Of the three spies there wasn’t the slightest sign. But two days later the plans of the new Zornhofer machine-gun were safely in the hands of the British War Office, in London.

Meanwhile, at the Zornhofer Mmunition Works, the loutish Otto brooded darkly. Then one afternoon he burst out:

“Now I know why he kept on talking about guns. My word, if I’d known then what I know now, I’d have given him guns all right! You bet I would! I’d have shown him something!”

“Shown who something?” demanded Herr Tuppel.

“That assistant of mine!” scowled Otto.

“And what would you have shown him?”

“That!” said Otto ferociously, doubling his fist and holding it under Herr Tuppel’s nose.

Herr Tuppel surveyed it with a pained expression.

“Soap,” he said, “is provided for the use of the staff; also a scrubbing-brush. Proceed to the wash-basins and make use of both!”

Otto mutinously did so.

## CHAPTER X

### WHISPERING WIRES

THE house of Baron von Rostmann was situated about half-way between the village of Neinzen and the wood in which stood a lonely, tumbledown woodcutter's cottage.

It was a large, imposing-looking edifice standing in its own grounds, but in spite of his undoubted wealth, and also because of the dire straits to which his country had been reduced through the Great War, the baron lived in comparatively simple style with a minimum staff of servants.

His son Hugo, a podgy youth of about twelve years of age, lived at home and was coached by a tutor, the mild-mannered and bespectacled Herr Braun.

One afternoon young Hugo and his tutor, Herr Braun, turned out through the drive gates of the house to take their usual afternoon walk. They were strolling along engaged in conversation when a sudden turn in the quiet country road brought them face to face with a ragged, unshaven, gipsy fellow, broad of shoulder and armed with a cudgel.

"Spare a coin, mein herr," growled the man, barring the way.

The mild-mannered Herr Braun took one look at him, then fished in his pocket and produced a few pfennig.

"Is this all?" growled the tramp, taking them and looking at them in disgust. Then menacingly: "Come on, I want more than this. Turn out your pockets, you and the young 'un. I'll have your watch and chain as well!" He made a grab at Herr Braun's watch-chain, wrenching both it and the watch from the tutor's waistcoat pocket.

"How dare you!" cried Herr Braun, leaping back whilst the scared-looking Hugo looked wildly about him for assistance. "Give me back that watch at once!"

"I'll give you more than the watch!" roared the other, rushing at him and catching him a smash to the jaw with his fist which sent Herr Braun sprawling to the road, dazed and half-stunned. With a yell of terror, young Hugo turned to flee. But before he had covered a dozen paces the tramp was on him, gripping him savagely by the arm and snarling: "No, you don't my cockerel. I know who you are. You're Von Rostmann's brat, and unless you stand still and hand over your money I'll cut your throat for you!"

Hugo screamed and struggled madly in the grip of his captor. A vicious cuff to the side of the head nearly stunned him, then to his horror he saw that his captor had tucked his cudgel under one arm and was producing a wicked-looking clasp-knife, which he proceeded to open with his teeth.

At sight of that curved and gleaming blade young Hugo shrieked as though his last moment had come. Then there came a shout from somewhere near at hand, and whirling, the tramp saw a young German soldier pounding towards him along the road.

"Keep your distance, curse you!" snarled the tramp, releasing Hugo and preparing to stave off the soldier, his knife in one hand and his cudgel in the other. But the soldier never hesitated. His face grim and set, he hurled himself at the tramp, bringing him

heavily down to the road. Next instant the pair of them were rolling over and over in the dust.

Herr Braun had staggered to his feet, and with Hugo clutching fearfully at his arm, stood watching the affray, poised for instant flight should the tramp get the better of the soldier.

Suddenly the tramp's knife flashed up and down, the blade seemingly burying itself in the body of his attacker. With a groan the soldier became still. Scrambling to his feet, the tramp kicked him savagely in the ribs, pounced on the cudgel which had fallen from his grasp in the struggle, then turned and cleared at one bound the low fence which bordered the road.

Herr Braun approached the soldier and knelt down beside him. The latter's tunic was stained with blood and his face was bruised and battered, but with the aid of Herr Braun's arm around his shoulders he struggled to a sitting posture.

"Has he gone?" he asked weakly.

"Yes, he has made off, the villain," replied Herr Braun. "But we will get him. The police will be set on his track as soon as we have acquainted Baron von Rostmann of what has happened. But, my friend, how can we ever thank you? You saved the life of Baron von Rostmann's son. I never saw a braver deed. But that can wait. Your hurts must be attended to without delay. Are you badly injured?"

"Bad enough, I think, but it might have been worse," answered the soldier grimly. "Help me to rise!"

Herr Braun and young Hugo helped him to his feet, then the tutor said:

"We will assist you to the baron's house where your hurts will be attended to. The baron will wish to thank you in person for your heroic conduct."

"Oh, that's all right!" said the soldier unsteadily. "I'm glad I happened to come along when I did. I heard the boy shouting."

Leaning heavily on Herr Braun, he was taken to the house where his wounds, which proved to be far less serious than was at first thought, were dressed. Then he was taken to a large room furnished as a library, where Baron von Rostmann was waiting to receive him. The baron was a tall, heavily built man past military age, but still very square of shoulder and erect of carriage.

"I have heard from my son and his tutor how you so courageously came to their assistance," said the baron. "I am deeply indebted to you."

"It was nothing, sir," said the soldier modestly, standing as rigidly to attention as his hurts permitted. "I only did what anyone else would have done, sir, and I am very happy to have been of assistance."

"You acted in a very gallant manner, and I shall see that you are suitably rewarded," returned the baron. "I have already been in telephonic communication with the police, and the search for the rascal has commenced. What is your name and regiment?"

"I am Private Emil Krahn, sir, of the 4th Hanoverian Rifle Brigade," answered the soldier. "I am at present on leave from the trenches."

Had he told the truth, the name would have been very different—Scotty of the Secret Squadron!

“You live in these parts?” asked the baron.

“Yes, sir, with my widowed mother,” answered Scotty. “My father was killed at the first battle of the Marne, and the Government pension permits my mother to live in a little cottage in the woods near here. She got it cheap, sir, and only moved there recently.”

“I see,” nodded the baron. “Well, Krahn, I will make it my business to see that your conduct of this afternoon is brought to the notice of your commanding officer. In the meantime, I will ask you to accept this small token of my gratitude and appreciation.”

He held out a wad of notes of one thousand marks denomination; but, still rigidly at attention, Scotty shook his head.

“If I may say so without offence, sir, I would rather not take money for the service I was privileged to render your son and his companion,” he said. “There is something we could do with more, sir, and that is employment for my young sister. My mother was in domestic service herself, sir, before she married, and she says it is a safe job, and a secure job for any girl.”

The baron looked at the soldier’s pale and earnest face, then glanced at young Hugo, who was standing listening.

“If it had not been for you,” he said, turning again to the soldier, “my son might have been grievously wounded, or worse. That is a debt which I can never repay, and to take your young sister into my service is but a small return. Tell her to see my housekeeper.”

Scotty stepped back and saluted. Half an hour later, carrying a gift basket of provisions for his mother, he was walking down the tree-lined drive towards the gates.

Taking the road which led towards the woods, he reached the cottage where Grey Shadow and Marie were awaiting him.

“Well, what’s happened?” demanded Grey Shadow, who was wearing his guise of an old woman.

“We’ve clicked,” answered Scotty. “Marie can go and see the housekeeper as soon as she likes.”

“Good man!” chuckled Grey Shadow. “And the Herr Baron suspects nothing?”

“Not a thing,” answered Scotty. “It never occurred to anyone that the scrap between you and me wasn’t genuine. You got back here quite safely, I suppose?”

“Yes; and changed at once,” replied Grey Shadow. “I hope I didn’t damage you too badly with the knife; but we had to make the scrap as realistic as possible.”

“Oh, I’ll soon mend!” grinned Scotty.



Later that evening, Marie quitted the little cottage in the wood, carrying a bundle in which were wrapped her few belongings. Making her way to the Baron’s house, she knocked at the rear door which was opened by a pleasant-looking domestic.

“I’m Anna Krahn,” said the girl timidly. “My brother, Emil, told me I was to come and see the housekeeper about a job.”

“Yes, that’s right, come in,” replied the other with a smile. “We have been expecting you. My word, but your brother is the brave one.”

“Yes, indeed, he is,” answered Marie proudly.

She followed the girl into a large and comfortable kitchen where she was interviewed by the housekeeper, a stout and motherly looking woman whose eyes filled with pity at sight of Marie’s ragged jersey and skirt.

“Yes, it has all been arranged that you are to work here,” she said. “You will live in and dresses and uniform will be provided. Gretchen, show Anna her room.”

The pleasant-featured girl who had answered her knock, escorted Marie upstairs to a little, attic bed-room at the top of the house.

“You are lucky to be coming here now,” said Gretchen, “because on Saturday evening you will have a chance of seeing the Crown Prince and other very important officers and gentlemen. They are coming here to dinner.”

Little did she know that it was this forthcoming visit which had caused Scotty and Grey Shadow to stage the faked rescue of Hugo, thus paving the way for Marie’s acceptance into the household.

The conversation that evening amongst the servants was mainly about the big event on Saturday, and Marie listened intently to everything that was said.

She was early astir the next morning and worked so willingly and so well that she earned the commendation of the housekeeper who said:

“Keep working like that, my dear, and you’ll never want for a job.”

During the afternoon Marie was granted an hour off duty, and she hurried home to the little cottage in the wood.

“Well, how’s it going, Marie?” asked Grey Shadow anxiously.

“Very well, so far,” replied the girl. “I’ve located the rooms where they’re going to dine and talk. After dinner their discussion is going to be held in the library.”

“Then we’ll fix things to-night,” said Grey Shadow. “How about it, Marie? Will that be all right for you?”

“Yes, if you wait until I give you the signal to-night,” replied the girl. “My room is a little attic on the top floor at the rear of the house. Who’s coming along, you or Scotty?”

“Scotty,” said Grey Shadow.

The trio sat talking earnestly for a little while longer, then with a paper parcel under her arm, Marie quitted the cottage and hurried back to the house.

“Hallo, what have you got there?” asked the girl Gretchen with a laugh as Marie entered the kitchen carrying her brown paper parcel.

“It’s a dress my mother’s been mending for me,” said Marie.

“Let’s see it,” invited Gretchen, but with a shake of her head, Marie ran past her and upstairs to her room.

Closing the door, she hid the parcel beneath her mattress. Then changing into the uniform which had been provided for her, she went downstairs to resume her domestic duties.



It was about ten o'clock that night when the housekeeper told her she could go to bed. Bidding the good woman and the rest of the servants "Good-night," Marie went up to her room.

Locking the door, she turned out the light and sat down on her bed to wait. As the time dragged by on leaden feet, she heard the other servants come upstairs to their bedrooms and after a while silence settled on the sleeping household.

It wasn't until another hour had passed, however, that Marie rose to her feet and took from beneath the mattress the brown paper parcel which she had hidden there that afternoon.

Working in the darkness, she unwrapped the parcel and took from it a long rope ladder of the finest manila, a tiny electric torch, and two small cardboard cylinders, each of which was sealed at one end and fitted with a fuse at the other.

Crossing to the window, Marie stealthily opened it and leaned out. The night was dark and still, and nothing broke the silence. Pressing the switch of her torch, she allowed the tiny, pencil-like beam of light to split the darkness for an instant before switching off again.

As she peered downwards there came from a clump of bushes below the mournful hoot of an owl. The hoot was a signal, and Marie went swiftly to work. Fixing the light steel hooks of the rope ladder over the bottom of the window frame, she sent the rest of the ladder snaking down into the darkness.

The moments passed, then suddenly she heard the hooks bite creakingly into the woodwork of the window frame as someone below swung their weight on the ladder. Slowly but steadily the climber ascended until his head and shoulders appeared silhouetted at the attic window.

Silently and agilely Scotty swung himself into the room; then Marie went quickly to work hauling up the ladder, which she neatly coiled as she pulled it in.

"The attic next to this is used as a box-room," whispered the girl. "There's a skylight there through which you can get on to the roof."

"Good!" murmured Scotty. "Lead the way!"

Marie guided her companion from the room to the adjoining attic, which was filled with old lumber. Closing the door, the girl pressed the switch of her torch, directing the tiny beam to a skylight in the sloping ceiling.

By the aid of the torch Scotty placed an empty crate below the skylight, and a few minutes later was wriggling his way stealthily through on to the roof.

"For goodness' sake be careful!" whispered Marie uneasily.

"I'll be all right," returned Scotty in a low voice. "You get downstairs, and we'll spot the chimney."

Quitting the attic, the girl crept silently downstairs on shoeless feet, keeping close in against the wall so as to avoid creaking stairboards. More than once she paused, rigid and motionless, to listen with bated breath and ears attuned to catch the faintest sound.

But nothing stirred, and at length she reached the library on the ground floor. By the thin, golden beam of her torch, she crossed to the fireplace and knelt down in front of

the grate. It was summer-time, and in front of the grate stood a large brass bowl filled with tall, dried grasses.

Placing the bowl gently aside, Marie lighted the fuse of one of the cardboard cylinders and thrust the cylinder up the chimney.

Up on the roof, Scotty was squatting by the main chimney stack. There were eight chimney pots and from one of them there suddenly drifted a white cloud of smoke visible in the darkness.

With a chuckle of triumph, Scotty straightened up. Taking from his pocket a small, round microphone attached to a long length of copper wire wound round a spindle, he waited until the smoke had ceased to issue from the chimney. Then, reaching up, he dropped the microphone down the chimney and commenced to pay out the wire.

Down in the library, Marie had slipped the burnt out smoke cartridge into the pocket of her skirt and was crouched in front of the grate. The tiny beam of her torch was directed on the chimney and in the grate she had placed a sheet of paper to catch the slight shower of soot which was falling.

Then into view came the microphone, dangling at the end of its wire. Gripping the wire, Marie gave a slight jerk as a signal to Scotty to pay out no more.

Carefully folding the paper which she'd placed to catch the soot, Marie took it from the grate and removed an oil-silk wrapping from the microphone. Secreting the instrument in the grate, she replaced the bowl of dried grasses in front of it. Then by the light of her torch she made certain she had left no trace of her handiwork.

Her work done, she crept silently upstairs to her room where Scotty was waiting.

"You fixed it all right?" asked Scotty.

"Yes," murmured Marie.

"That's fine," chuckled Scotty. "Now I'll go to earth in the box-room next door until the fun starts to-morrow night. I've got to hide in the house here, because there'll be such a lot of guards around the place to-morrow that there'll not be the slightest chance of getting in."

Late next evening in the large library of the baron's house sat the Crown Prince of Germany, Prince Rupprecht of Bavaria, Herr Kropp, chief of munitions, and a dozen of the foremost German politicians, together with leaders of the German High Command. They were gathered there to discuss, informally, plans for saving Germany from the crushing defeat which stared her in the face.

Plans were mooted for the raising of more troops, for the increasing of the munition and aircraft output, and for a more extensive use of poison gas. Schemes were discussed for sowing disaffection amongst the Allies, for the bringing of hitherto neutral countries into the war on the side of Germany, and for a more extensive bombing of London, and the industrial towns of England.

And up in the box-room at the top of the house sat Scotty, earphones on his head, and a shorthand pad on his knee, scribbling down every word of the conversation.

Scotty had led the wires in through the skylight, allowing them to lie slack on the roof between the chimneys and the skylight so that during the day they had not been observed from the grounds.

As Scotty scribbled down the conversation which came to him, his eyes gleamed, and he tingled with excitement.

And then, over the microphone, came words that sent a chill down Scotty's spine.

"Mein geist, Rostmann, but it grows chilly!" exclaimed Herr Kropp, rubbing his hands as though to warm them. "What about our having a fire, hein?"

Von Rostmann summoned a man-servant.

"Have a fire lit immediately," he ordered when the man appeared.

The man-servant hurried to the kitchen where Marie was sitting with the rest of the servants.

"You!" he said sharply to the girl. "Get busy! A fire is required at once in the library!"

Marie sat motionless, staring at him in dismay. A fire in the library would destroy the microphone hidden in the grate there, and would mean the ruination of all their plans.

"What are you sitting gaping for?" snapped the man-servant. "Jump, and get that fire lighted. The baron and his guests are waiting!"

Seeing there was nothing else for it, Marie collected paper, wood, and a scuttle of coals, and carried them to the library, where she found the party seated over their cigars and coffee.

"This girl's brother saved my son Hugo's life the other day when Hugo and his tutor were attacked by a murderous scoundrel who is, I am sorry to say, still at large," said Von Rostmann.

He plunged into an account of the rescue of young Hugo, whilst Marie knelt down in front of the fireplace and commenced to lay the sticks and coal.

"Listen, this is Marie," whispered the girl, her head bent low over the grate and hoping desperately that none but Scotty would hear. "I've got to light a fire in here. I'm lighting it now——"

Abruptly she broke off, as fingers closed on her shoulder and a pleasant, bantering voice said:

"Come, come, you must not mumble to yourself like that. It almost sounds as though you are grumbling at having to light the fire."

Turning her head, Marie found herself staring up into the smiling features of the Crown Prince.

"I—I beg your pardon, your Highness," she stammered. "I wasn't grumbling——"

She broke off, her heart sinking in despair, for the Crown Prince's startled gaze was riveted on the tiny, dangling microphone in the grate.

"Donner, what is this?" rapped his Highness, releasing Marie's shoulder and making a grab at the microphone.

"Look out, we're caught!" yelled Marie, and with the words the microphone was whisked swiftly from view up the chimney. Simultaneously Marie leapt to her feet and made a frantic dive for the door.

"Stop her!" shouted the Crown Prince, whirling from the fireplace.

But Marie had already gained the door, for the whole thing had happened with such startling suddenness that neither Von Rostmann nor his guests had as yet the slightest idea as to what was happening.

Rushing along the hallway, the girl darted through the kitchen and was out into the night through the rear door before the astonished servants could raise a finger to stop her.

Meanwhile, upstairs in the little attic, Scotty had heard Marie's warning.

With a swiftness engendered by despair, he swung himself up through the skylight to the roof. Hauling the rest of the microphone wire up through the chimney, he whipped one end of it round the brickwork base of the chimney-pot, and quickly knotted it. Then, flinging the slack of the wire down the roof so that it dangled down the side of the house, he scrambled down the roof, gripped the wire, and went sliding swiftly down into the darkness.

The wire cut cruelly into his hands, but he was oblivious to the pain, his one thought being to get away before the alarm could be raised in the grounds. Suddenly the end of the wire slipped through his hands and he dropped a dozen feet down on to a flower-bed. As he straightened up, a guard loomed up beside him in the darkness.

Before the fellow could voice the challenge which was on his lips, Scotty leapt at him his fist smashing with savage force full to the point of the man's jaw. With a grunt, the German went down as though poleaxed; then Scotty was off, running desperately through the grounds in the direction of the boundary wall.

Before he reached it he heard shouts and shots behind him from the direction of the house, and he spurred madly. Reaching the wall, he scrambled over it and went racing along the darkened road until he came to where a powerful automobile was waiting with all lights doused. Grey Shadow, dressed as a German soldier, was at the wheel, and seated beside him was Marie.

"Thank goodness you're safe, Marie!" panted Scotty, scrambling into the car. "If you hadn't got here I'd have gone back for you!"

Next moment the car was roaring away into the night to be swallowed up in the darkness.

"It's a thousand pities about that confounded fire in the library," said Grey Shadow grimly. "It seems to have ruined everything!"

"Not a bit of it," chuckled Scotty. "I got all the main facts. They discussed everything with the most charming frankness and candour."

He paused.

"They'll have to scrap that lot of plans, anyway," he said. "And I don't mind betting they'll be the deuce of a time before they can get going again."

Grey Shadow nodded.

"Perhaps you're right," he said. "Anyway, it's been a jolly good show!"

## TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

A cover was created for this eBook and is placed in the public domain.

[The end of *The Return of Grey Shadow* by George Ernest Rochester]