



THE

**MUSSOLINI
MURDER
PLOT**

BERNARD NEWMAN

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THE MUSSOLINI MURDER PLOT

“On October 3rd, 1935, Italian troops marched into Abyssinia. I wonder if Mussolini knows how near he stood to death on that eventful day? And I wonder if he realizes that he has me to thank for his escape? Mussolini is admittedly a nuisance, but as Saint Benito he would be insufferable! Yet, many times I have wondered if I were right in saving him from the sudden death which threatened him.”

With this opening bombshell, Captain Newman plunges into the narration of a wildly exciting mystery which utilizes fact in the manner of fiction and fiction in the manner of fact.

The League of International Amity, early in 1935, gave formal warning to the world that any statesman who led his nation into war would be tried and, if condemned, executed. The Abyssinian venture proved that the organization was not jesting. Mussolini was duly condemned to death, and the sentence came within an ace of being carried out.

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MURDER PLOT**

by
BERNARD NEWMAN



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THE MUSSOLINI MURDER PLOT

CHAPTER ONE

SUPPOSE MUSSOLINI had been killed on the first day of the Abyssinian War! He very nearly was.

On October 3, 1935, Italian troops marched into Abyssinia. I wonder if Mussolini knows how near to death he stood on that eventful day? And I wonder if he realizes that he has to thank me for his escape? Presumably not, for no Italian decorations or orders have been bestowed upon me—on the contrary! Not that I want them; Mussolini is no hero in my reading of history, and many times I have wondered if I were right in saving him from the sudden death which threatened him.

This is a strange story which I have to tell. Quite frankly, I do not expect it to be believed. "Truth is stranger than fiction," emphasizes many a wagging head—but nobody really believes it. Maybe in this case it is just as well. Does it sound grandiloquent when I suggest that, if accepted as true, my story might lead to international complications? And, sooner or later, we have got to resolve our quarrel with the Italians, whether we or they like it or not. Let us pretend, then, that this story is a mere romance—that when I speak of Italy, I really mean Ruritania, and that Mussolini is merely a colloquial name for Dando.

In my previous books, *Spy* and *Secret Servant*, I have mentioned my association with Inspector Marshall, of the Special Branch of Scotland Yard. Our work together led inevitably to a deep friendship; with many essentials in common, we held widely different views—which is a good foundation for friendship. Naturally I have been keenly interested in his very fascinating job, and since I retired from Intelligence work I have been informally associated with him in some of his cases. I want to emphasize that I am not a detective. I have the deepest respect for Dr. Thorndyke, and even compared with Lord Peter Wimsey I feel a bit of a fool. Still less do I play the Watson to Marshall's Holmes. Marshall is not an Inspector French or a superintendent Wilson—he is just a keen, active, intelligent police-officer. I have been of use to him, not for any flashes of inspiration or miracles of deduction, but because of my knowledge of Europe and my most un-English command of languages—the latter the heritage of an Alsatian mother. Had Marshall been an ordinary C.I.D. officer I could scarcely have helped him; the Special Branch, concerned with political crime, is acutely interested in foreign affairs, and there I was on familiar ground.

I have had it in mind to set down a record of some of the cases in which we have been associated—a remarkable range, covering raids on Russian premises, expulsion of alien suspects, and more than one case of political assassination. If only on account of its topicality, however, I have written up the last first. It is not the least interesting, and to me it was certainly exciting. I ought to warn readers again, however, that this is no conventional detective story; there is no body discovered in the first chapter, no succession of clues and red herrings, no dramatic arrest and *dénouement* in the last chapter. My title alone indicates this; Mussolini, of course, was *not* murdered. My story is therefore one of preventive action—a more important side of police work than the mere detection of crime. And, if not so spectacular, at least as fascinating.

My story of the Mussolini murder plot begins on a summer evening in 1935. Marshall and I had been playing tennis at Mason's house at Harrow. Mason—who also appears in my previous books—is a Foreign Office wallah—a principal secretary, to be precise. He is now on the verge of bigger things, and at any time will begin to collect C.B.s and M.V.O.s. Nevertheless, he is a grand fellow, and I hope that one day he will become Permanent Secretary. I have doubts, however—he is a little unorthodox in some of his opinions and methods.

We had had a great game. Mason's wife, Leonie, was of county standard, and easily held her own in a men's four—particularly as I am a mediocre player. I like hitting a ball hard, but am not nearly so certain about its direction. Every other smash is a winner, but the other is a lost ball. Marshall and I have a kind of permanent feud with Mason and his wife, but we don't often win.

As we sat in the cool of the evening, the conversation drifted to the subject of anonymous letters. I forget by what roundabout route we had arrived at such an unsavory destination. Mason, quite naturally, despised the whole idea.

“Oh, yes, we get a large number at the F.O.,” he said, in answer to my question.

“And what do you do with them—W.P.B.?”

“Yes—almost without exception.”

“I think you're wrong,” Marshall put in. “I'm not condoning the habit of writing anonymous letters—it's despicable, of course. But I must say that the Yard finds them useful sometimes. The devil is to sort out those that matter from the tripe.”

“You really make serious use of them?”

“Of course,” he reported. “Anonymous letters and squeaking are the detective’s stand-bys. Read the prosecution scene in a burglary—first in a book, then in a verbatim police-court account. The detective in the book begins to talk about clues and deductions; in the second he begins, ‘From information received . . .’ Where does he receive the information from? Some ‘friend’ of the burglar; sometimes he comes along to sell his information, sometimes he writes it, anonymously.”

“But what about the proverbial honor among thieves?” asked Mason.

“There isn’t any,” said Marshall, emphatically. “A darn good job for us, too. If there were, we should have a job to catch anybody. Half our convictions in major cases are based on information from other thieves. But that wasn’t really what I was meaning in this anonymous letter business—I was out to show that you can’t ignore them. Let me quote an outstanding case. You remember that Virginia Water case last year? Body found in bracken, no clue—not even to identity. We worked, issued appeals, and so on. And at last a letter arrived—but it was anonymous. Yet it put us directly on the track of the murderer.

“I don’t remember the letter word for word, but it ran like this: the writer explained that it was quite impossible for him to come forward personally, but on the day of the murder he had been at Virginia Water and had seen a man with a girl answering the murdered girl’s description: in particular, he had seen them disappear among the fatal stretch of bracken. His description of the man was so good that we got on to his track.”

“But how about evidence?” I asked.

“We had to build up our case from other sources,” he replied. “We issued appeals in the press and through the B.B.C. for the writer of the letter to come forward, but he didn’t. But we did get another letter from him. He repeated that it was impossible for him to come forward, as he was a married man, and had been taking another girl to Virginia Water that day!”

“Oh, but that’s an unusual case,” Mason protested. “I can see the fellow’s point of view. If I were taking a girl out on the sly—I’m not, Leonie—and saw something which turned out to be criminal, imagine my position. My duty as a citizen demands that I should come forward. But if I do, my wife catches me out.”

“Well, we might square that part for you,” said Marshall dryly. “But my point is just this—that the W.P.B. isn’t the place for an anonymous letter. Every one must be considered on its merits. We have a man who’s darned

good with them; he's a psychologist, and what he can read into some of those letters is marvellous. I got a man three years for forgery last month—and I was put on his track by an anonymous letter, which turned out to have been written by a neighbor who was jealous of his wife's fur coat."

"But what about threatening letters?" I said to Mason. "You must get plenty of them."

"Oh, yes, they're a class by themselves," he agreed. "Any that look serious we pass on to Marshall and his gang."

"You ought to pass on the lot," Marshall grumbled. "How do you know whether they're serious?"

"Well, as they are usually from political malcontents, generally alien, we ought to know as well as you. But ninety-nine per cent are ridiculous."

"Threats are never ridiculous," Marshall argued.

"But all statesmen receive them."

"Yes, and some of them can thank their lucky stars that there's a Special Branch to protect them from the madmen at large. But, of all the batch you've sent us recently, the pick of the bunch is that from the League of International Amity."

"The League of what?" I demanded.

"Oh, but that was merely puerile," Mason insisted. "It should never have come to you at all—the W.P.B. was definitely the place for that."

"Well, we should have got it elsewhere. The Prime Minister had one, the First Lord of the Admiralty, the Secretary for War—"

"But surely," I broke in, "surely Mr. Baldwin doesn't see these things himself?"

"Of course not. His job's big enough without complications. I doubt if any minister is allowed to see his threatening letters. In any case, you can say what you like about our politicians, but they don't usually lack physical courage—they wouldn't be where they were unless they were pretty tough. Some of the threats are fearsome—they are scarcely conducive to cool thinking. You should see the Home Secretary's weekly batch!"

"But what about this League of Amity?" I reverted.

"I can show you one if you like," said Marshall. "I've got one in my bag—it came from the Air Ministry just as I was coming out."

He went into the hall, and returned carrying a single sheet of paper, which he handed to me. Leonie had taken no part in our discussion, but was obviously interested, and we read it together.

“League of International Amity [I read out its heading], The Council of the League has come to the considered opinion that leaders, not peoples, are responsible for war. Peoples are helpless, friendly flocks, and only if they are misled by pan-nationalist propaganda do they think of war. The Council has decided that any man who leads a nation to war of aggression (as defined by the Covenant of the League of Nations) commits a crime against humanity, and is personally responsible for the subsequent murder of thousands of people. Therefore he must die.

“The League hereby gives notice to all statesmen that whoever commits the said crime against humanity shall be tried and sentenced to death, and the League undertakes to carry out the execution.”

“Well, and what do you think of that?” Marshall chuckled.

“I think it’s almost right,” said Leonie, unexpectedly.

“What?”

“At least, there’s a lot in it. The leaders are more responsible than they pretend. It is perfectly true that people are not naturally warlike. Would the English people ever have fought the German people, if somebody had not egged us on?”

“Possibly not,” Mason agreed, “but the French might have fought the Germans, leaders or no leaders.”

“Have you done anything about this?” I broke off.

“Nothing much,” said Marshall. “We’ve never heard of this League—can’t find anybody who has. There are, of course, dozens of pacifist leagues, some genuine, some merely cranky. But this is a new one to me.”

“Probably some students’ foolery,” was Mason’s comment. “Its ingenuousness breathes youth in every line. ‘The said crime against humanity—’ a glorious touch, to make the thing look like a legal document. And the unquestioned assumption that anyone could ever decide which was a war of aggression and one of defence. Why, I will undertake to prove any war in history either or both.”

“There’s something reminiscent about it,” I mused. “Wasn’t there something in the papers a couple of years ago?”

“Yes, I remembered that,” Marshall grinned. “I looked it up—but it was a different league; a students’ organization—it’s gone bust now, as they always do.”

Yet somehow the incident remained in my mind. I can claim this seriously, for Marshall and Mason admit that they dismissed it completely. Somehow the ultimatum impressed me—ingenuous it certainly was, shrieking of the immaturity of youth, yet I felt that its sincerity was evident. I ought to emphasize that I was not in the slightest degree troubled. It is one thing to pass pious resolutions, and quite another to execute them—or even to agree on them when the moment for action arrives. I have belonged to youth organizations myself.

I was reminded of it twice within the succeeding weeks. A Fleet Street acquaintance button-holed me one day.

“I say, Newman,” he began, “you know a lot about stunts. Have you ever heard of the League of International Amity?”

“Yes,” I admitted.

“I thought as much. Well, what about it? What is it?”

“Tell me your end first.”

“I only know that my chief has had a letter from it, saying that if he leads the nation into war, he will be executed. My God, can you imagine the chief leading the nation to anything? Except perhaps bankruptcy.”

I had to tell him that I knew no more than he did. He was not treating the thing seriously, of course—merely wanted to dig up something about the League so as to be able to guff it amusingly.

Then in Paris I met my old friend Favre, of the *Sûreté*. Some casual prompting made me ask, and I was not surprised to find that the leading French statesmen had received the warning too! When I asked what had been done, Favre’s action was expressive but not quite polite.

But nothing further happened until the early autumn, when the Abyssinian crisis showed obvious signs of coming to a head. During the intervening weeks I had almost forgotten the ultimatum by the extraordinary league. Only occasionally did my thoughts flash back to that evening at Mason’s house. I suspected, as he had done, that the organization, being obviously a youthful one, would fall to pieces when it came to grips with a real problem. I did, however, ask Mason and Marshall to keep me posted as to any further development—which in itself shows that this ultimatum, ridiculous as it sounded, had made some small impression upon me.

A second letter, shorter, but of the same character as the first, was received at the Foreign Office—and presumably at the other principal offices of state in England and foreign countries—on September 3. It was brief and very much to the point.

If the Italians invade Abyssinia [it read], this will be unquestionably an act of unprovoked aggression, contrary to the Covenant of the League of Nations, the Kellogg Pact, and many other treaties to which Italy is a party; consequently, in accordance with the resolution of the Council of the League, Signor Benito Mussolini has been tried and has been condemned to death, should the Italian troops actually invade Abyssinia.

You are requested to use your good offices to persuade Signor Mussolini, even at this last moment, to countermand his orders for war, to save his honor and to save himself.

Mason, Marshall, and I had another heated, three-cornered argument on the subject of this letter. I took it far more seriously than they did—in fact, my chief claim to credit in the Mussolini murder plot is that I saw its potential dangers before most other people.

“But, damn it,” Mason emphasized, “you admit yourself that it’s nothing more than a cranky organization—probably one of the international student affairs that spring up on all sides. They never get anywhere, because they are all so personal. A fellow starts a movement of this kind, not so much because he is impelled by the ideals he proclaims, but because he wants to go down to history as a kind of Gandhi. Then, when his movement begins to assume some sort of international proportions, he finds that in other countries the local leaders there want to be Gandhis as well; consequently they quarrel between themselves and the movements collapse. In any case, did we not argue it out before—that these student organizations have a habit of talking gloriously—very often using phrases which they do not completely understand—but when the moment of action comes, they fade away?”

“I agree for the great part,” I said. “I agree that such is the habit of student organizations. But, nevertheless, remember that there have been student organizations which have changed the course of history. Remember that it was a Bosnian student organization which started off the World War—Gavrilo Princip was only seventeen when he assassinated the Archduke Franz Ferdinand at Sarajevo. I can’t explain the why and wherefore, but there’s something about these communications that makes me feel that they are serious. Serious in intent, that is. Whether the people who drafted them are able to do anything is quite another matter. I agree that these things are so ingenuous as to be almost comic, and yet I have a sneaking feeling that they ought not to be ignored.”

“But what would you do?” Marshall interposed. “How the hell can we track them down when the only clues we have are two pieces of paper?”

“Well, Dr. Thorndyke or one of the other detectives would do that quite easily,” I suggested. “By the way,” I continued, turning to Mason, “I take it there is no doubt whatsoever that the Italians are about to invade Abyssinia—that this business is not one huge flop?”

“No,” said Mason seriously, “I am afraid it is absolutely certain that they are going to do it. We’ve tried everything we know through diplomatic channels, but it has all been useless. Within a week or two the Italians will have crossed the frontier. I doubt if there will even be the formality of a declaration of war—they will just march straight in.”

“Well, it’s a dirty business,” Marshall commented. “I’m not very fond of Mussolini, you know. Speaking for a moment as a private individual and not as a police-officer, I must say that my opinion is that it would be a very good thing for the world if someone *did* bump him off, if only as an example to the rest. As I look at it, this Abyssinian business is only the beginning of things.”

“That’s right enough,” Mason agreed. “If Mussolini gets away with Abyssinia, the consequences will be serious. Italy’s territorial aims are not all to be found in Africa—there are always Slovenia and the Dalmatian Coast. That would mean, of course, a European War. And, further, we have to keep an eye on Hitler. If Mussolini manages to get away with his big bluff, think what an encouragement that would be. I am open to make a prophesy—I am speaking quite unofficially, of course. If Mussolini succeeds in getting his Abyssinia adventure well under way without serious interference from the League of Nations or the Great Powers, then Hitler in his turn will try something big. In the first instance I think he will march troops into the Rhineland; then, when he has got away with that—as he would be almost certain to do—he will turn his attention to the East.”

“The Polish Corridor?” I queried.

“I doubt if that would come first; his business eye is on Silesia. The Polish Corridor has affected nothing but German pride. Silesia had affected German pockets—the pockets of big business men. And remember that it is the big business men of Germany who are behind Hitler. Actually, however, I anticipate that he would patch up some sort of an arrangement with Poland, so as to be able to get at Russia.”

“So it seems I’m right, then?” Marshall argued. “If Mussolini isn’t stopped now, this is only the beginning, and we shall find ourselves landed in another European war.”

“But that’s a very different thing—stopping him—to bumping him off,” I protested. “The proper way to deal with Mussolini is to discredit him, not to murder him. If you murder him, you will make him a martyr, and then he is far more dangerous dead than alive.”

“But the Italians have no one to replace him.”

“Yes, they have,” I contradicted; “you forget General Balbo. I have met him. He is a man far more able than Mussolini. He is one of the original marchers on Rome—for, in spite of the legends in Italy, Mussolini wasn’t there. With the Fascist organization behind him, and with the legend of Mussolini and his memory as a martyr to sway the masses, General Balbo would be able to do precisely as he pleased.”

“But I thought Balbo had been banished to Libya,” said Marshall.

“Quite, simply because Mussolini was jealous of him, particularly after his success in that spectacular round-the-world flight. A dictator cannot have a rival. But, nevertheless, if Mussolini goes at any time, you can be perfectly certain that Balbo is the man who will take his place. They may put up the Crown Prince as a figure-head, but Balbo will be the boss.

“Now in Germany the situation is very different. There is no obvious candidate for Hitler’s job. Who would follow him? Would it be Goering or Goebbels or Hess? You remember the story I told in my Polish book^[1]—I believe you did me the honor of reading it. I was cycling across East Prussia and got to Hindenburg’s own village, Neudeck. I had actually been invited to stay with the old man, but very unfortunately he had died a few weeks before I got there. But a man in the village, who certainly ought to have known what he was talking about, told me that Hindenburg actually died twenty-four hours before his death was announced. During that time Goering and Goebbels were squabbling as to which of the two should become Chancellor while Hitler became President. It was only when they seemed likely to come to blows that Hitler decided to solve the problem by taking on both offices himself.”

[1] See *Pedalling Poland*.

“And that is really true?” Marshall queried.

“Well, my informant was an honorable man, and a man who ought to have known,” I said.

“And it’s a story that is current in certain circles in Germany,” Mason added. “I actually heard it from quite an independent source—and a good one at that.”

“Anyway, to get back to Mussolini,” I said, “my argument is that it would be very dangerous to make a martyr of him. Then all his faults, if any, would be forgotten, and his memory would be the most dangerous thing to European peace. Why, just look at the kudos he has got out of attempts on his life! Some of them were pitifully crude. I could make a shrewd guess that more than one was a put-up job, merely to excite the public. There was one man arrested for firing a rifle at Mussolini, and it appeared that he must have fired round a corner—which is unusual! Why, if Mr. Baldwin felt that his popularity was waning, he’d only have to get someone to have a pop at him, and he’d be top of the world. It’s low, and we don’t use the method in England, but in Italy it’s quite reasonable.

“But there is another danger that I can see about the present scheme, a very practical one,” I continued. “It appears that this plot is being hatched in England. There is a suggestion that there is an international league behind it, but nevertheless its headquarters appear to be in London. I noticed that the letters which were received in Paris were posted in London.”

“That’s true enough,” Mason agreed. “They’ve had these things in Germany too—and they were posted in London.”

“Well, you see what that means,” I explained to Marshall. “England is already suspect in Italy—the people have already been goaded to fury against us because of our attitude to their Abyssinian adventure. If, therefore, a plot of British manufacture succeeded in murdering Mussolini—well, the balloon would then definitely go up!”

“But just because the plot was engineered in England, it doesn’t follow that it’s an English plot,” he said.

“No,” I agreed, “but you must not expect the masses to reason logically. I have recently returned from Yugoslavia. Just run over there and see and *feel* the sentiments of hatred towards Hungary on account of the murder of King Alexander.”

“But it was a Macedonian or a Croat who murdered him—a Yugoslav subject.”

“Yes, but the organization behind him had found sanctuary in Hungary; consequently, nine-tenths of the Yugoslavs believe that the organization was encouraged by Hungary—that is describing their suspicion very mildly. The

same thing would happen in this case. It is perfectly certain, to my way of thinking, that if this plot succeeded we should be in a real mess.

“Mind you, I don’t want to pretend that England isn’t capable of holding her own with Italy. Although some of the other nations have the habit of looking at us with a kindly smile, reminiscent of past glory, we can still give Italy a darned good hiding without disturbing ourselves tremendously. But of course it wouldn’t end at that. Inevitably it would mean a European war. Don’t you agree, Mason?”

Mason did. He agreed with me, too, that the murder of Mussolini would be a world disaster, however desirable from the personal or moral point of view. In any case, quite naturally, Mason held strong opinions about the assassination of political leaders. Gradually we convinced Marshall—I ought again to emphasize perhaps that he had been speaking purely privately, and all we had to do was to reconcile his private opinions with his official duty.

“But what ought I to do?” Marshall asked. “If you think it important, I’ll certainly try to trace this organization again. We failed last time. There is nothing to go on. We combed dozens of similar organizations, but couldn’t find anyone who had ever heard of this one. The only clues we have are two sheets of paper with perfectly plain typing on them—not even a line of writing. Why, even your Dr. Thorndyke would find that a bit of a poser, surely. Of course, the obvious thing to do would be to warn the Italian police.”

“That’s the very last thing we want to do,” I argued. “If we did it, then it definitely proclaims the plot as of British origin. In any case, it is almost certain that they know as much about it as we do—if the Germans and French have received these letters, you can bet your bottom dollar that the Italians have as well.”

“But would they take any notice of them?”

“I doubt it. You tell me that our own statesmen—who, with all their faults, are very mild and harmless—receive threatening letters at the rate of a dozen a week. In that case it’s very reasonable to suppose that Mussolini receives hundreds, for the Fascist United Front only means that opposition has been literally squashed out of the open—it exists surreptitiously.”

“Then my only other suggestion is that you should go to Italy yourself,” said Marshall. “You have the great advantage—which has been darned useful to us more than once—of having no official connections. I can’t go; but you can, without committing anybody. Further, you speak the language. Why not go and have a look round? Mason will give you introductions to

the right people, and you could easily fish for information and find out what is happening.”

I had to confess that this had been my own idea. From the very moment of seeing the second warning I was quite convinced that some drastic action was essential; and I was the obvious man to take it. It was a confounded nuisance. I did not need Mason’s introductions, for I was already acquainted with Italians who would be able to give me all the information I needed. As the train pounded through the night across France, I was alternately optimistic and despondent. There is something in my blood which urges me on when exciting enterprises are afoot. At the same time, there is a sober strain in my ancestry which makes me say to myself, “You fool, why don’t you sit down and enjoy yourself at home? Haven’t you had enough excitement to last you for the rest of your life?” That is the worst of being the son of an Alsatian actress and an English farmer.

Of course, at first sight, my present task was simple enough. I had only to investigate the situation on the Rome front, and to hand out a diplomatic warning. If I had had the slightest hint of the difficulties and dangers which were to follow this poking of my nose into other people’s business, then I might have passed on through Italy to take a second Balkan holiday.

I sensed a difference in my reception in Rome—just a trifling coolness on the part of my friends which I had never remarked before. It is very strange what propaganda can do. A year ago Italy had been extraordinarily friendly towards England. The people had been brought up to regard England as the traditional friend of their country. Italy had even inserted a Saving clause into the Triple Alliance, by which if England were involved in the prospective war, then Italy should have the right to back out. But now, very definitely, England was the bad man of Europe.

I tried hard to keep off Abyssinia, on which I held strong opinions, because it was obvious that my friends were not in the mood to receive serious argument. I was really dismayed at the effect of this continuous propaganda. One acquaintance of mine was a newspaper correspondent who had been busily engaged on writing this anti-British propaganda. One night I caught him in confessional mood, and he told me that when first instructed to write this bilge his soul revolted, and he did it only under protest. Gradually, however, he said, the stuff he wrote began to influence him, and by this time he had almost begun to believe it to be true! It was only in his more sober moments that he realized that his work was one great sham.

The first part of my mission was easy enough. I met my friends—I will not mention them by name for fear of causing them annoyance or

inconvenience—after all, they are employees of a Fascist State and must at least profess Fascism or lose their jobs. I think I did credit to Mason's diplomatic training in the casual way in which I brought the subject after dinner round from the English-Italian football match to the protection of Mussolini. Without any mention of the absurd League or the letters that I had seen, I was able to elicit the information that the principal Italian statesmen had been literally bombarded with letters of this kind. One of my friends reeled off a whole list of fancy leagues of various origins which had threatened Mussolini with the direst consequences should he dare to invade Abyssinia. Of course, he argued, a man like Mussolini was bound to make enemies—a man with new ideas, who placed the welfare of the state above that of selfish individuals, he was bound to give offence to people who only thought of themselves.

His tremendous success, too, was bound to arouse jealousy among lesser people. Throughout his career he had been a regular recipient of anonymous letters. No, of course, they were never shown to him, but his personal bodyguard was a sufficient protection against any potential consequence. True, there had been many attempts made to assassinate the Duce—two of them had very nearly succeeded—but the arrangements for his protection were now as nearly perfect as was humanly possible.

That was all right so far as it went, and it certainly relieved me of a good deal of responsibility. As a matter of interest, however, I made what inquiries I could about the current arrangements for guarding the life of Mussolini. Certainly they were on a big enough scale. Whenever he left his private house in the Via Nomentana, I found, there were at least forty plainclothes guards on duty—in advance, by the side, and in the rear of the Duce. In addition, of course, were the uniformed police, who were always told when their master was to pass along any route.

I hung on in Rome for three days, and while I was there Mason's prophesy came true—the Italians marched into Abyssinia without the formality of a declaration of war. Rome was literally buzzing with excitement; the complete absence of news led to ready invention, as it always does. Great crowds gathered in the great square before the Palazzo Venezia, expecting Mussolini to appear on the balcony, but they were disappointed. One of my friends did inform me, however, that he would appear and make a patriotic speech the following evening. I had intended to go back to London, feeling that I was simply wasting my time, but I decided to stop and listen to Mussolini. He was one of the European figures I had never met, and had never heard him make one of his mass-compelling orations.

I shall have to give a name to my friend, after all; he appears periodically throughout my narrative. I will call him Count Aderno, which is nothing like his real name; I have suitably disguised any incidents which might lead to his identification. He calls himself a Fascist, but is really a Royalist. I believe that he clings to his job so as to keep on the inside of the Fascist régime. He was only a Fascist in so far as he thought that Fascism would bring good to Italy. He had faith in Mussolini, but was no hero-worshipping fanatic. Certainly he inspired confidence, and was angry at the absurd propaganda which turned other friends away from me.

Was it merely curiosity, or was it an instinct, that made me suggest to my friend that I would like to go into the Palazzo Venezia and stand on the Duce's balcony? He made the necessary arrangements without demur, and asked me to call at the palace the following morning. By this time it was obvious that something of importance was afoot, for the balcony over the portal had been covered in purple drapery. The square was absolutely deserted, for police and soldiers were turning away all traffic, either pedestrian or other. Not until the time of the speech would the square be open again, and then only after the various patriotic processions had marched to their appointed places.

Aderno halted at some of the principal rooms of the palace, but I was scarcely so interested as I ought to have been. He talked to me interestingly of the various renovations and restorations which had recently been made—it had been necessary to replace portions of the stonework, which had suffered from atmospheric effects in much the same way as our own Houses of Parliament in London. A uniformed attendant walked before us, conducting us on our journey round the building. I had particularly asked that I might see the balcony from which Mussolini would speak. My excuse, obvious enough, was that, as I would see Mussolini from the point of view of the crowd, I would like to get an impression of what the scene would look like to him.

The attendant threw open a draped window and made way for us to step on to the balcony. Aderno looked hard at the purple drapery.

“That's not a very good job,” he said. “Who did this?”

“Three workmen,” said the messenger; “they took long enough about it; they ought to have done it well enough. But this draping is certainly very ragged. I'll get someone to help me straighten it up.”

“As a matter of interest,” I put in, “exactly what will happen this afternoon?”

“Well,” said my friend, “a great crowd, of course will be gathered down below, and suddenly, without any warning, the Duce will make his appearance. He will come from this side.”

“Excuse me, sir,” the attendant broke in, “he will come from this side. He usually takes a drink from this table just before entering the balcony; he walks on to the balcony and stands in the middle here. First he gives the salute to the crowd below—and it is a tiring business, I can tell you, for their acclamations are strong and long. Then he will begin to speak. Oh, but you should hear our leader speak; he is magnificent; his voice thrashes the air; his arms flung about in dramatic gestures; and sometimes, such is his power, he will speak to the people gently, leaning on the balcony, so.”

And then followed drama and tragedy; for the man, suiting the action to the word, leaning on the purple-covered balcony, suddenly fell forward. I saw a stone mullion and a flat stone hurtle through the air before him as the stone rail of the balcony collapsed. The messenger made a desperate effort to recover his balance; both Aderno and I sprang forward. We were too late; our grasping hands missed him by inches. As he fell, his body turned, and I saw his eyes, wide with terror; he gave a great cry—the cry of a man who knows that death awaits him.

We rushed to the edge of the balcony, avoiding the rail. Just as I looked down, the body crashed to the pavement below. It was immediately still, without a twitch or shudder, and the blood from its battered head began to trickle towards the gutter.

I saw police rushing to the spot, standing helplessly beside the body which might so easily have been the body of Mussolini.

CHAPTER TWO

MY shock was more than the natural horror of seeing a man meet a sticky death. I was thinking furiously, agitated at a suspicion which had so suddenly become a reality. This was no fool students' organization; the conception of the thing was diabolically clever. It was easy to see how it had been done—those “workmen,” who had taken so long to arrange the purple draperies, had prised the mortar from the center of the balustrade. I guessed—rightly—that these “workmen” would never be traced. (The men who *should* have done the job, incidentally, were later discovered, drugged, in a tavern.)

The cleverness lay in the death chosen for Mussolini. The Italians are a superstitious race, and not all Fascist propaganda can overcome inherited traditions. Had Mussolini toppled to death at the moment of announcing the advance into Abyssinia, then credulous minds would have drawn the obvious moral—a sign from Heaven. It seemed that someone else had realized the danger of making a martyr of Mussolini, and had devised this method of countering it.

My thoughts would have wandered into realms of conjecture, but it was essential to be very practical. The square, as I have said, was deserted except for police. The body was immediately carted off, and the mess cleared up. Aderno and I were surrounded by police—it was as well that he was there to vouch for me. We gave lengthy statements, and they questioned us till satisfied that we knew nothing more.

“You will say nothing of this, of course,” said the chief of police.

He was insistent, and I promised—there was no reason why I should not. I was not surprised to find that the Fascist policy was to hush up this unpleasant matter; it was not even referred to in the morrow's newspapers. It is very useful when you can so control a press.

I lunched with Aderno, who was pale and concerned. I wanted to get his ideas.

“It is strange,” I said. “Yesterday we were talking of threats, and now—”

“People who intend murder do not send warnings first,” he broke in. “This has nothing to do with anonymous letters. Yesterday, I confess, I found your curiosity a trifle irritating. But now—had you not gone to the balcony, then the Duce must have died. Now that this thing has happened,

the affair is serious. You must be frank with me. After all, although our countries are estranged, it can only be temporary. And we ourselves are still friends.”

If ever I had remarked any trace of coolness in him it had passed; he was now my warm-hearted, if quick-tempered, friend, the man who had given me a glorious holiday in his native Sicily.

“You are a man who has been mixed up in many strange affairs,” he continued. “Yesterday I thought you had come to Rome out of sheer curiosity—to see how Rome took the war. But now—tell me frankly, why did you come to Rome just now?”

“It was largely curiosity,” I hedged. “But I do confess some interest in that ultimatum—you remember, that League?—because it was so widespread. Our own statesmen had it, too.”

“But this is absurd,” Aderno declared. “You, a man of strange experience, know something of the ways of assassins. Does it ring true? This fool business of high-faluting warnings—is it not a farce? That ultimatum screamed aloud of students’ follies.”

“Don’t overlook Princip at Sarajevo,” I said.

“Quite a different thing—a youth who considered himself a patriot striking down a tyrant. That is quite understandable. But not this sententious all-for-the-good-of-the-world business! Nobody ever committed murder for a hazy ideal. No, it is when you mention Sarajevo that you get nearer home. I remember my chief saying, years ago: ‘If death ever comes to the Duce, round up all the Yugoslavs in Italy’.”

“Rubbish!” I insisted. “Why on earth should the Yugoslavs be concerned in this? What have they to do with Abyssinia—most obviously this affair is connected with Abyssinia.”

“All the Abyssinians in Italy are already under guard,” he said grimly. “No, it is only from Yugoslavia that hatred comes to Italy. And this crime was dictated by hate. The Yugoslavs alone hate us, and acknowledge it.”

“Well, can you blame them?” I asked. “You haven’t been very generous to your Slovenes in Istria. And when your Duce proclaims the new Roman Empire, and waves a Dalmatian flag, you can’t expect the Yugoslavs to feel very easy. But to accuse them of this is madness. I was in Yugoslavia this summer. There is a wave of revulsion from ideas of assassination—remember the death of King Alexander and its effects.”

I argued with him, but without effect. He pooh-poohed the idea of an international peace organization, and returned continuously to Yugoslavia.

But at least the air was clear between us—I was even able to pump him, cautiously but successfully. I was certainly able to persuade him as to my sincerity in wishing to avoid the sudden death of Mussolini—although he would scarcely have appreciated the motives which prompted me!

Mussolini made his promised speech to a wildly enthusiastic, sycophantic crowd. *The Times* of the following day made the casual comment: “Signor Mussolini again showed his grasp of the dramatic effect of surprise. The great crowd gazed with wild anticipation at the customary balcony, duly draped in purple for the coming of the Duce. He, however, suddenly appeared at a window to the right of the balcony. The drama was appreciably heightened by this astute piece of production, and ancient Rome can seldom have witnessed such scenes of enthusiastic welcome and adulation.”

I wonder what they told Mussolini, to make him change his plan? I don't know, but I am reasonably certain that they didn't tell him the truth!

I hesitated what to do. I was convinced that the League was responsible for the attempt on Mussolini's life—Aderno's Yugoslav suggestion was laughable. The Yugoslavs would never be so mad as to force a quarrel with Italy, even when Italy was about to be embroiled in Africa. Yugoslavia has a definite and reasonable apprehension of Italy, and is only too anxious for the goodwill of the rest of Europe.

I felt that I could assume, however, that the League had shot its bolt. I knew something of the type of organization I suspected: everything would be built up to a grand and dramatic climax; when that fizzled, the whole scheme would fizzle too. I had recently been in Sarajevo and continuously I made mental comparisons. There the murder of the Archduke had been almost an accident. Chabrinovitch had thrown his bomb, which had done no more than wound an aide-de-camp. The Archduke's car had dashed on, and Princip, the driving force of the conspiracy, had abandoned hope of action and was in a welter of despair. The fates played a strange trick that day; had it not been for Potiorek's mistake—if mistake it really were—there would have been no assassination. Potiorek had to change the Archduke's return route; he told everyone concerned—except the driver of the car! The man followed his original instructions, and Potiorek halted him precisely in front of Princip, the one man in Sarajevo who had death in his heart.

Princip had given up hope, till evil fortune gave him a second chance. Otherwise his organization would inevitably have collapsed—already, at the mere thought of action, most of its members had disbanded themselves. There would be no second chance for these people—the Italian police would

see to that! The Fascist police is as good as any in the world at this kind of thing.

Yes, the danger was over, I considered. For their purpose, the time factor predominated. Mussolini must be “executed” at the initial moment of the Abyssinian campaign; otherwise the moral effect would be completely lost. Had their original scheme succeeded, I had to admit to myself that it might have produced good, if the resultant confusion had been carefully handled. But if Mussolini were murdered when the Abyssinian campaign was well under way, then his death would be merely a political assassination, deplored as such by civilized peoples, and with all the consequent dangers of martyrdom which I had envisaged.

I had managed to extract one piece of information from Aderno. Mussolini had only one public engagement on the morrow—he was to drive to Naples to bid an official farewell to cargoes of troops sailing for East Africa. I restrained my impatience to get back to London, therefore. If nothing happened tomorrow, then definitely I could assume that the danger had passed. My self-imposed task would be accomplished—by a slice of sheer chance for which I could claim not the slightest credit.

To my surprise, the newspapers the following morning gave full details of Mussolini’s projected journey to Naples. I decided to go on ahead. Aderno had a speedy Fiat, and I borrowed it from him. The streets of Naples were already crowded, so I drove back beyond the outskirts of the town. There the throng was but casual, consisting of small groups of peasants from the scattered cottages round about. A policeman selected a good place to park the Fiat where it would form an admirable grandstand.

The country peasants seemed placid and unenthusiastic after the exuberant crowds of Rome. They had come out to see the Duce either from curiosity or because they had been told to come—and in Italy, if you value a quiet life, it pays to do as you are told. They walked aimlessly up and down the road, in little groups, seeking points of vantage; like sheep, they tended to herd together along a single stretch of road, squatting down to wait with fatalistic patience.

Then I saw a girl who obviously did not belong. Surely that coat and skirt had been cut in London? Her neat, trim figure contrasted vividly with the luxurious curves of the local women, and her complexion singled her out—only British, American, and Hungarian girls have complexions which are naturally bonny without being exuberant.

I heard her asking my policeman, in halting Italian, when the Duce would come. I wondered why she had to come to this out-of-the-way spot,

preferring it to the greater excitement of the Naples demonstrations. But I had no hesitation in speaking to her—we British may be self-contained at home, but we are always ready to make a little bit of England abroad. The day was tiring and sultry, so I asked her to rest in the Fiat, and to share its viewpoint with me.

Naturally she agreed, obviously surprised to find me English.

“But there, where *don't* you find an Englishman?” she remarked. “Probably that’s why we have done so well in history—because we’re always on the spot.”

“I’m afraid we’re scarcely on the spot today,” I said. “The real excitement is in Naples—here we shall only see the great man rush by.”

“Oh, but I couldn’t stand the crowd—it’s too hot.” She took her hat from her head, and turned her face to the timid breeze from the sea. My first impressions were of the pleasantest. Her face was intelligent rather than beautiful; it had nothing of the doll-like prettiness of the young Italian girls, or the Madonna flatness of the grown women; her hair was brown, dressed from a parting low on the side completely over the head in a waving swoop; it crowned a clean and honest face, with eyes which, serious now, could at will twinkle merrily.

Our conversation was casual enough, in true British fashion. She was making a short holiday tour of Italy, apparently, and was in Naples by chance. She hinted that she held decided views about Mussolini, but could not resist her curiosity to see him. I had my own field-glasses with me, and luckily found a pair of opera-glasses belonging to Aderno in the Fiat.

Suddenly there were signs of activity. Two policemen on motorcycles rattled down the road at a great pace; my own policeman and his colleagues made themselves busy, “controlling” the little groups of rustics who had gathered, with sheep-like docility, in a confused heap. Half a mile nearer Naples the road was almost deserted—I noticed through the glasses two isolated men of the laboring class squatting patiently on the grass verge.

Two noisy cars full of police dashed by—a car is not a car to a Latin people unless it makes plenty of noise. The peasants began to wake from their somnolent stupor. A third car was greeted with salutes and *vivas*, but it was a false alarm. Through the glasses I saw a fourth car following; it was moving so rapidly that vision was difficult, but I thought I glimpsed a black-tuniced figure with a round hat.

The Duce swooped by; the peasants cheered and saluted, then looked at each other—what to do next? Was this all? Yes, mothers explained to

petulant children, the Duce had passed—he was in that last car.

I was following the car through the glasses. Suddenly I caught my breath sharply—and heard a loud gasp from the girl standing beside me. Almost opposite the two laborers the car suddenly swerved, there was a bang, as if of a bursting tire. I could sense rather than see the chauffeur wrestling to control the wobble of the car. Still at a high speed, lurching dangerously, the car skidded, mounted the verge of scrubby grass, and crashed into a telegraph post!

I dropped my glasses and began to run; I saw a black form, which had been flung out into the roadway. I saw two laborers standing by it, their hands raised in horrors. Then another car full of police dashed by, knocking down two of the excited peasants who had flowed into the road.

I was on the spot only a few moments after the police. My heart was beating furiously, impelled rather by emotion than the unusual exertion. The body of Mussolini lay helpless, face down to the ground; he was not dead, for his fingers dug feverishly into the gravel. One of the police raised his head, and I recoiled. He seemed to have slid a yard or more along the road, and his face was a bleeding pulp, almost unrecognizable as human features.

The police waved me away, and I turned to the car. The chauffeur crouched over his wheel, dead. I heard a police-officer calling out orders—the approaching crowd of peasants was held back; the two laborers had apparently disappeared from the scene.

I was thinking furiously. Yesterday it had been planned for Mussolini to die, and today he would die by accident. There *is* such a thing as coincidence, but this seemed rather too strong to believe. Yet had I not seen the accident happen?

I went to look at the tires. Yes, the near-side front tire had burst—no wonder the car swerved, at such a speed. Then a strange protrusion caught my eye, and I ran my hand over it. My fingers touched metal! A slight wriggle, and it was mine; flattened, but definitely a bullet. No one had seen me; no one thought of the chauffeur—all eyes were concentrated on the man who lay on the roadway, injured to the point of death. I slipped the bullet in my pocket.

A moment later the car burst into flames. There was a dash now to release the chauffeur, but he was inextricably entangled with the wreckage, and he was dead. The police rushed for the extinguisher of their own car, but evidently the gasoline tank of the wrecked car was broken, and in five minutes it was a smoking skeleton of metal.

There was nothing I could do, and the police on the spot made it very obvious that they would prefer the scene to themselves. Accordingly I hurried back to the Fiat. To my consternation, there was no sign of the girl who had shared its accommodation with me. I hurried as I approached. For the moment I was genuinely concerned, for strange things can happen in Fascist Italy. Reaching the Fiat, however, I found the girl lying in the bottom of the car in a dead faint.

I ought to have anticipated it; the sight had not been pretty, and she had been following it through the glasses. Yet such had been the intensity of my own emotion that I had never even thought of her as I had rushed towards the scene of the accident. She must have been lying in a faint for ten minutes or more. Soon, however, I was able to bring her round, bending her over double so that the blood rushed to her head, and then, completing the revival with the aid of a flask which I found in one of the compartments facing the front seat.

But although the girl came back to consciousness, she was overwhelmingly distressed. Her face had lost its bloom, and was a dull white. Her eyes were staring as if with overwhelming fright. I must admit to some surprise; I had pictured her a healthy, high-spirited girl, and, now I look back, was even surprised that she had not dashed to the scene of the accident with me to see if she could be of assistance. However, this was no time for vain reasoning. I sat her in the back of the car and, despite the sweltering heat of the morning, piled rugs around about her.

Very soon she was herself again, save for her complete pallor and her obvious horror.

“Oh, it was horrible,” she moaned. “Is he dead?”

“The chauffeur is dead,” I replied. “The other, the Duce, is badly hurt, but I don’t think he is dead.”

“No,” she whispered, “I watched through the glasses as you ran. I saw him writhing on the road. Oh, it was all too horrible!”

There was obviously only one thing to do. I must get her back to her hotel as quickly as possible. My friendly policeman was close at hand. It is commonly reported that tips and bribery have disappeared from the curriculum of the Italian police. Nevertheless, I made a note rustle as I pointed out to the policeman the piteous state of my companion. He grasped the situation and, poring over the map with me, pointed out a succession of by-roads by which I could gain Naples. It was obvious from the concourse of people down the road, and particularly because of the very large force of

police, that the main road would be completely blocked for some time to come.

Then I drove the Fiat along country lanes which were intended for ox-drawn wagons rather than delicate mechanism. She responded gallantly to the unaccustomed task, however, and within half an hour we were in the center of Naples. It was quite impossible to drive to the front door of the hotel, because of the throng, and I parked the car at the back and half carried the girl through the servants' entrance. The staff of the hotel—it was only a small one—seemed to have completely disappeared—doubtless swelling the crowd of people in the street below. With my arm firmly about her waist, the girl staggered towards her room. I shut the door and then, to deaden the raucous cries from the street, shut the window also. I led her to the bed, soaked a towel in cold water and pressed it to her forehead. Then I massaged her eyes again, for it was very obvious, without being told, that she had a splitting headache.

For ten to fifteen minutes she rested quietly, I sitting beside the bed. Then she whispered that she was feeling very much better, and sat upright on the bed. At that moment great cheers resounded from outside. Her curiosity and mine intrigued, we walked together towards the window. The street was a forest of raised hands, and powerful lungs thrashed the air with high-pitched clamoring. In the mass of the throng I could not perceive the object of the demonstration. My companion found it first. I felt a sudden grip at my arm, heard a little half-strangled cry, and there she was lying on the floor beside me, once again in a dead faint!

This was a situation to which I was scarcely accustomed. My life has been planned along somewhat sterner lines than the succouring of distressed ladies. However, it was obviously no time for finesse. I picked her up and carried her to the bed again. I stripped off her skirt and coat, for I had the impression that the proper thing to do in the case of a severe faint was to remove a lady's corsets. However, apparently this girl wore none. Again I resorted to the time-honored method of bending her double, flooding the brain with blood. This was again successful. She screamed—a cry of fear.

“Did you see him?” she cried. “He is there, outside!”

“Who is there?” I asked.

“He is! Mussolini! He was killed on the road an hour ago. I saw him. But he is there!”

I left the bedside and strode to the window, staring hard towards the square which bordered the dock quarters.

“I am right?” she queried. “It is Mussolini? It is not a ghost?”

“No,” I answered, “it is no ghost; that is Mussolini, right enough.”

“Then the man we saw?” she cried. “The man we saw—he who was killed or hurt on the Naples Road?”

“Evidently a decoy,” I said.

“But I don’t understand,” she said wearily, drawing her hands across her brow. “I don’t understand this at all.”

“Don’t worry yourself with it now,” I soothed her.

“But I must know—I saw him writhing in the road.”

“It is all very simple really, I expect,” I said. “Mussolini has a good many enemies; many attempts have already been made to assassinate him—the latest only yesterday. His guards naturally take precautions. Sometimes, when Mussolini is advertised to make a journey, he does it by another route and a dummy—a live dummy I mean, of course—a man who resembles Mussolini sufficient to pass—makes a journey in his stead.”

“Oh!” She pondered for a moment; then she whispered fiercely: “Oh, the coward! Think of him allowing another man to go to his death in his place!”

“I’m afraid I don’t agree with you there,” I said. “I am no friend of Mussolini, far from it, but I would never call him a coward. You must remember that, whether you like it or not, he is the most important man in Italy. His life is vital to Italy, according to the present Italian outlook; therefore his life is too valuable to risk. The employment of a deputy is quite a common device in other countries than Italy—it is a device commonly employed, for that matter, in Hollywood, where some film-stars are nervous of the hazardous feats their producers want them to perform, and prefer that more expert acrobats or riders should play those scenes in their place.”

“But to send another man to his death—that could only be the act of a coward,” she insisted.

“I’m sorry, but I still don’t agree. There are lots of words I could think of that describe Mussolini—a coward is not one of them. If you were to doubt his courage you would be torn to pieces by any Italian mob.”

“Oh, but that’s all legend,” she suggested.

“Not entirely,” I said; “legend is invariably founded upon something or other. The foundation may be insecure, but it is there. For example, to hear the average Italian talk, you would think that Mussolini’s record during the war was the finest of any soldier fighting on either side, whereas it was a perfectly ordinary affair, comparable in courage with that of millions of

others. Nevertheless, it was definitely a courageous career—that is the point. You will hear the Italians babble about Mussolini’s forty-seven wounds. You would gather—in fact, many of them so believe—that he was wounded on forty-seven occasions, which would certainly give him a world’s record. Actually he received forty-seven wounds from one shrapnel shell, all at the same time—and in the back. However, that is quite painful enough. So, you see, the legend has at least a foundation.”

“But that was during the war,” she said, “when courage was the fashion. But since then—oh, he has been a coward!”

“Again I can’t agree,” I argued. “There are, of course, degrees of courage and different kinds of courage. Some of them evoke the highest praise, since they are based on the finest human attributes; others are not nearly so admirable, but they are still courage. It requires a certain sort of courage to be a dictator at all; it requires a certain sort of courage to pretend that whatever you said prior to a certain date was wrong, whereas everything said since that date is apostolic; it requires a certain type of courage to squash all opposition; it certainly requires courage to send to exile, or even to death, men who merely happen to disagree with your opinions. That is a sort of immoral courage. It seems to me that Mussolini has it in large quantities, mixed with the normal physical courage. He himself probably doesn’t realize that there is a difference between the two things—he certainly doesn’t realize which one controls him at any given moment.”

“But how can people exist under such things?” she muttered.

“To you and I, accustomed to comparative freedom, this state of affairs in Italy appears utterly wrong and even disgusting. We are accustomed to a degree of cleanliness in politics. Sometimes, in fact, we are squeamish. We may know of a cabinet minister who is a wonderful success at his job, but if he should happen to get embroiled in a particularly nasty divorce case or should be pointed at as a sexual freak, then his career is ruined, and for good—no matter how brilliant at his job he may have been. He must not only be free from offence, but free from suspicion of offence. We like our politicians, too, to be consistent—and there is no more telling argument against a man who has changed his political faith than to fling against him what he said ten years ago. That, of course, is the difficulty of the would-be Mussolinis of England. Mosley is a very able man—because we dislike his policy and methods, we mustn’t deny him that. But, of course, he hasn’t the advantage that Mussolini has.

“In Italy, archives have deliberately been burned. It is a crime punishable by perpetual exile to republish some of Mussolini’s earlier writings and

sayings. He began his career, as you know, as a Socialist of the most virulent type. During his Swiss exile he was arrested for violence and for forgery. He led strikes, he defended the assassination of kings. In 1912, when an attempt was made on the life of the King of Italy, he published an article which began: 'Attempted assassinations are the accidents of kings; why weep for the king? Who is the king? A useless citizen.' Now these are the ideas that he denounces most bitterly today; consequently it is a crime even to mention them in Italy, and I doubt if one-tenth of the population knows anything at all of Mussolini's early career. As he has utter and complete control of the press and every other form of propaganda, Mussolini can make quite certain that people do not know and never will know."

"But what about foreign news?" she asked. "Surely he must know what the rest of the world thinks of him?"

"Not even that," I said, "the only items from foreign newspapers which he reads are press-cuttings, carefully selected by his secretarial staff, and pasted in the form of a short newspaper—and these cuttings, needless to say, are from the few newspapers of the world which occasionally have a word of approbation for him. The number, of course, varies from time to time. Sometimes, when he has the fit upon him that he would like to be a constructive European statesman, then the newspapers welcome him and give prominence to his sayings. At others, naturally, they treat him at his proper worth. But," I broke in on my own argument, "this is heavy talk after a couple of faints and with a headache."

"I have been glad of it," she said; "it has kept me from thinking of anything else. Oh, this afternoon was horrible, horrible!"

She was lying on the bed, her face turned towards me. She had pulled the counterpane over her. I was glad to see the color returning to her face. Her hands had ceased their frightened trembling.

"I think I could leave you now," I said. "I hope you will excuse my unceremonious method of reviving you. I had an idea that it was essential to loosen the strings of corsets, but fortunately I couldn't find any."

The color returned more vigorously to her cheeks as she smiled.

"I am tremendously grateful to you," she said. "You know, don't you?"

"We shall meet again, of course. This has been a strange introduction," I laughed. "By the way, we have not been formally introduced. I don't even know your name."

"Stirling," she said.

“Stirling,” I said. “That’s a fine name. And may I know your other name?” I asked.

“Margaret.”

“Ah! Margaret Stirling. I shall not forget that.”

“And yours?” she asked.

I told her.

For one moment her eyes flickered. I could almost see her brain working. Where had she heard that name before? Then she placed me.

“Oh! I remember, I read your book. No wonder you were not so concerned over this afternoon’s affair—it must have been child’s play after your own adventures. You will not think me too weak and foolish, I hope?”

“Of course not,” I reassured her. “But now I think you ought to try and get a little rest. I will leave you—I’ll go into the town and see what is happening. Are you sure you want to stay here, or could I give you a lift back to Rome?”

“Oh! I must get out of here at once. The place has unnerved me, somehow.”

“Then suppose we have an early dinner, and go to Rome in the cool of the evening,” I suggested.

She welcomed the idea enthusiastically, and it was agreed that I should call back for her at six o’clock.

But when I knocked at her door there was no reply. A hotel servant came running towards me with a letter.

“The English lady left rather hurriedly an hour ago,” she explained.

“Left?” I repeated. “But she was to come with me.”

“She left with two gentlemen,” she said, “and here is a letter for you.”

I ripped it open.

Dear Captain Newman [it read], I am awfully sorry, but I have just heard news which compels me to leave immediately.

I want to say again how really grateful I am for your kindness this afternoon, and to say that I hope we shall meet again in happier circumstances.

Margaret Stirling, the note was signed. And she had gone away hurriedly with two men! There was some lurking suspicion at the back of my mind, but nothing fitted in, because the idea was simply impossible. I

stuck the letter in my pocket. As I did so, my finger touched something hard—the bullet I had pulled from that motor-car tire on the Naples Road.

I hurried back to Rome, and in the morning went round to see Count Aderno. The morning newspapers merely reported a motor-car accident on the Naples Road and gave the name of the Fascist officer who had been severely injured. There was naturally no mention of the fact that he was got up to resemble Mussolini.

“I am going to leave Italy while I’m safe,” I said to Count Aderno, grimly. “When I go to Mussolini’s balcony it falls through, and when I go to see him ride by the way there is an accident. Even you will begin to suspect that, if there is a plot, I’m in it!”

He smilingly reassured me.

“Well, mind and keep your Duce in cotton wool, or else install him in a tank, until the present excited feelings have cooled down!”

“Don’t you worry about him,” he said, “we’ll take care of him. And, of course, so far as you’re concerned, don’t talk nonsense. You saved the life of Mussolini and the honor of Italy by your curiosity about the balcony; and as to the accident yesterday—well, that, of course, was sheer coincidence.”

Accident! So the Italian police had discovered nothing more. I decided it was just as well. I wanted to know a little more about those two laborers before I handed over the bullet which reposed in my pocket.

CHAPTER THREE

BACK in England, I immediately called a meeting of my very unofficial council. With Leonie and Mason and Marshall sitting round an autumn fire, I related my adventures, omitting nothing. The drama of my tale gripped me—for, after all, I am primarily an actor, not a detective or a spy; Leonie was the most responsive of my audience. I saw her eyes stare and hands clutch as I described the scene on the balcony of the Palazzo Venezia, where the unfortunate attendant had crashed to death. I saw her grip Mason's arm when I spoke of the smash on the Naples road, and the imitation Duce lying writhing on the ground, and of my own astonishment when, an hour later, I saw Mussolini addressing the throng. Yet, when I had finished, her first question was about Margaret Stirling!

"What was she like?" Leonie asked.

I tried to describe her, but was rather hazy, apparently, by the questions which followed. Then I turned to Marshall.

"But what about you?" I asked. "Have you got on the track of this League? At least we are now sure there is such a thing."

"Oh yes, you've convinced me of that," he agreed. "No, I haven't tracked it yet—but I shall, very soon, now."

"How?"

"Why, you've given me the clue yourself. *I'm going to find this girl Margaret Stirling, and have her shadowed night and day.* She will lead me to the League."

"What rubbish is this, Marshall?" I demanded.

"It isn't rubbish, and you know it. Come, man, look at it calmly. I realize that it's awkward, since you've fallen in love with the girl—"

"Rubbish!" I protested. "I only saw her for an hour."

"You've fallen in love with the girl," he repeated. "I know that—you taught me that psychological trick yourself. When you spoke about her, your voice made a natural rise of about half a tone in pitch. Didn't you notice that, Leonie?"

"I did, Bernard—that was what interested me," she said. "Don't you remember how you caught Willoughby out that way—how he blushed when

you said that a rise in vocal pitch was a sign that a man was physically and sexually moved?"

"You've fallen in love with the girl," Marshall repeated inexorably. "Why *do* you do these things? Isn't the case complicated enough already? However, let me get back to where I was—now where was I? This League, on reasonable assumption, is an affair of youngsters, deadly serious in their well-meaning, but dangerous. Your Miss Stirling fits the bill admirably. What was she doing at that particular spot on the Naples road—answer me that!"

"Sheer coincidence," I protested. "Just like my own presence there was."

"Rubbish! You can't have too many coincidences—this isn't a detective novel. Your own presence there we will admit as a coincidence because we know it was. But is it likely, I ask you—there are only a few thousand British people in the whole of Italy—is it likely that coincidence would bring a second one to the very spot at the appropriate moment?"

"And then, you have admitted yourself, her conduct was strange. A healthy and spirited English girl, but she flops in a faint while you rush off to lend a hand! And faints again when she finds that the plot has misfired! And then, after making an appointment for dinner with you, she disappears—with two friends. Was it a coincidence that there were two laborers near the spot where the car crashed—you must admit that it is at least highly probable that they fired the shots into the tires. No, sir, there's too much coincidence in this case to be natural."

"But why should she rush off like that?" I persisted.

"I think I can guess at that," Mason interposed. "You must remember that you are a known man—not merely as an actor. You *would* rush into print last spring—"

"I like your idea of rushing into print!" I scorned.

Righteously, for my memories called *Spy* were not published until the spring of 1935, seventeen and a half years after the end of the War episodes they described!

"Well, never mind that. But the girl had read your book—maybe her two friends had read it, too. She may not have considered for the moment the implications or potentialities of her chance acquaintanceship with you—Captain Bernard Newman, a successful British Intelligence Officer. Her friends, we will assume, did. And a British Intelligence Officer was just about the last man they wanted on their heels—particularly one who has a

reputation for poking his nose into Scotland Yard's best cases. So, naturally, they decided to move on quickly."

"This is all fantastic," I insisted. "She had made an appointment with me for dinner."

"Yes, she fooled you nicely," Marshall grinned.

"I don't believe a word of it," I declared.

"You will, when I get busy!" Marshall said grimly. "This is the best approach I've struck. I'll have a level bet with you that we're half-way to the solution of the mystery when once I've laid my hands on your Margaret Stirling."

"How will you start?"

"Ah, I thought that would interest you," he teased. "Well, it ought to be simple. If she went to Italy, she had a passport—I could easily trace her through that. But I suspect that it won't prove quite so simple—my jobs never are simple," he continued ruefully. "Probably she gave you a false name. You were badly had at Naples, old man. You ought to have seen through the girl."

"I don't believe it!" I still protested. But I did. I could see the terror in her eyes at the time of the smash, her emotion at the sight of the "resurrected" Mussolini. These things did not fit in with what I felt and knew to be her true character.

"I think Marshall is right," Mason said. "We've got to find this girl. She confirms our suspicions—that there is an English basis to the plot. And that might mean real disaster. The situation is delicate enough now—Italy already resents the mere talk of sanctions; God knows what she will do when we impose them. By the way, Marshall, did you get anything out of that 'ultimatum'—the paper, and so on?"

"Precious little," Marshall grumbled. "The paper is Hertford Bank. It is sold by Ryman's at all their branches in enormous quantities. The machine is a portable Underwood. There are quite a number of portable Underwoods in use, you know," he concluded plaintively.

"But," Mason persisted, "I've read about people being traced by typewriters—faults and characteristics, and so on."

"Oh, you can identify a particular typewriter all right," said Marshall. "But you've got to find it first. I'm trying. I've got one man writing private letters all day to all the peace societies, pacifist leagues, students' associations, and international organizations he can trace. It's only a faint hope, but worth trying. All the replies he gets are compared with the

‘ultimatum.’ I’m waiting particularly for one typed on Hertford Bank paper.”

Not until this stage did I have an idea which ought to have occurred to me weeks earlier. I have a friend, I. O. Evans, who knows as much about freak movements as anyone in the world—he has written a book about them, and has belonged to a large number himself, particularly those with world peace as their object.

I drove out to his house in Wimbledon, but was directed to a field near Windsor. Here I found him; despite the chilly October wind, he was squatting beside a bivouac tent in shorts, writing captions for the back of cigarette cards.

I gave him the outline of the story, but was disappointed to learn that he did not know the League. However, I led him on to talk about freak organizations and ideas.

“Of course, every organization is liable to become freak on the slightest provocation,” he said. “Their ideas are often excellent in their own sphere, but enthusiasts gradually assume that their pet theory will solve all the world’s problems. The Nudists, for example, claim that their cult would ease our problems by abolishing clothes, which cause complexes. Other people want compulsory free love. One brainy fellow devised a new religion to be ruled by a priestess, to be chosen as ‘Queen of Hearts,’ as an ‘object of worship,’ because of her feminine build—she was to have a wide pelvis, and so on. The choice of the lady was to be effected by ‘detached scientists, with a tape-measure and a pair of dividers.’ I should think the scientists would have to be *very* detached! Imagine choosing a girl as a sort of unofficial goddess just because she’s got a bulgy behind!”

Evans is a good story-teller, and I thought that this was a fantasy; but he assured me that it was literally true. Later, in fact, he showed me an issue of an extinct magazine called *Youth*, which fully outlined the new “religion.”

But I recalled him to anti-war societies, my immediate quarry.

“So a scheme like this murdering Mussolini business—you wouldn’t dismiss it as crazy?”

“Crazy?” he echoed. “It’s remarkably sane compared with most of the dozens I’ve met. There must be a good hundred anti-war societies. One of them wants to ban kiddies from playing with tin soldiers, which are supposed to make them warlike. So is eating meat. Even thinking about war is taboo in one movement. One brainy group wanted all pacifists, whenever they met soldiers in the street, to give them a ‘reproachful glance.’ Can you

imagine the equilibrium of the War Office being upset by a few ‘reproachful glances’?”

“These are certainly crankier than the one I’m after,” I admitted. “But tell me about the organizations using political methods.”

“Well, you ought to remember one, at least. You remember that, when I was doing my *Woodcraft and World Service*, we discussed John Hargrave, head man of the Kibbo Kift, and his wonderful scheme for overawing London and coming to power at the head of an unarmed army of unemployed, a quarter of a million strong? Why, you must remember it—you were commissioned by a Sunday newspaper to interview him about it—I remember that you did it by phone, and complained about the size of your bill!

“But your people might more easily be distantly related to the war-time society for helping pacifists to desert. They did actually manage this on dozens of occasions. They passed their refugees to Ireland, where they were reasonably safe.”

“I’ll have more details of that,” I said. “All the other people you’ve mentioned apparently only talked—these people *did* something. There won’t be direct connection with my affair—but some members of one may belong to the other.”

So I left Evans with a few pointers, but nothing more. These I handed to Marshall, but unfortunately they were barren of results.

I spent a lot of time with Marshall at this period. I longed for action—I hated to feel so helpless. I had almost forgotten the peril of Mussolini. The Passport Office did not help; three women named Margaret Stirling had been issued with passports within the last five years. Eagerly I scanned the photographs in the records, but none of them even faintly resembled my quarry. One was married, another an elderly schoolmistress, and the third a Jewess of aggressive appearance. As Margaret Stirling was obviously an assumed name therefore, it was almost hopeless to notify the immigration officers at the ports. And the description I gave, as Marshall pointed out, fitted about ten thousand British girls.

It was useless to return to Italy, I argued. I could not act as a permanent bodyguard to Mussolini—in any case, as a result of the “incident” I had witnessed in Rome, I could guess that his guard was now well-nigh invulnerable.

Although I refused to admit it, I knew very well that my viewpoint had changed—I was more concerned about Margaret than Mussolini.

But as the days passed without yielding the slightest clue, Marshall returned again to my experience at Naples.

“You were a mutt, old man,” he declared. “The more I think of it, the more disgusted I am. When I think of the really big things you’ve done—and then you fall over a soft thing like this! And all because of a skirt! I never thought it of you.”

“But what could I have done?” I protested.

“You could have got the girl’s real name,” he said. “I suppose you never imagined that such a perfect creature would stoop to give a false name? If you had done that, I would have her by now.”

“But how could I?”

“Well, isn’t Italy one of those countries where they encourage tourists and make them feel at home by demanding passports as soon as they arrive at a hotel? Well, then, all you had to do was to question the hotel people. The more I think of it, I believe we’ve got to begin at that end. Look here, this sabotage case I’m on comes into court on Thursday, then I’m clear. I’ve got some leave due—if you like, I’ll hop over to Naples; unofficially, of course.”

“Good!”

“You’ll have to come too, of course. I don’t speak a word of the language.”

I agreed; this inaction was too galling. The sabotage case lasted only a few minutes—the suspects threw in their hands and pleaded guilty—and two days later we were in Naples.

Marshall undertook the direction of the case—I merely acted as his interpreter. Our story was that we were tracing a gang of international forgers. Although “unofficial,” Marshall was quite prepared to use his official card.

“Now Captain Newman arrived here on October 5th?” he began, interrogating the clerk.

“That is correct—the day of the Duce’s visit.”

“There was a young lady staying here, an English lady?”

“Yes.” The clerk turned to the page in his book. “She arrived the previous day.”

“Two men were with her?”

“Oh, no. She came alone.”

“But she left with two men?”

“Yes. But they only arrived on the morning of the Duce’s visit. They were touring Italy, and heard of his visit, so, of course, came to see him.”

“But they were friends of the English lady?” Marshall insisted.

“They were friends, but they met here by accident. The lady—”

“Just one moment,” Marshall interrupted. “Let us get the names right. Under what name did the lady register?”

“Here it is—Stirling, Margaret Stirling.”

“And the men?”

“One was named Grantern, Ulysses Grantern. The other registered as Paul Harim.”

“I suppose you saw the passports of all three?”

“I saw them all, but only retained Miss Stirling’s for police inspection. She stayed the night, so that was usual.”

“Was there anything peculiar about it?”

“Nothing at all. The name was quite clear—it was printed in capitals, of course, and the photograph was certainly that of the lady.”

“Did you happen to notice the date of the passport?”

“Our form calls for a note of the date and place of issue. Here it is—June 6, 1933; Foreign Office, London.”

“Ah!” Marshall’s satisfaction was deep. “Now we’ve got her,” he turned to me. “It’ll be easy to go through the passports issued on that day.”

“But it seems that her name *was* Margaret Stirling,” I said. “The clerk saw it on the passport.”

“I’ve got an idea that covers that,” he argued. “Just look at your own passport. Look:

‘Surname and Christian name:	BERNARD CHARLES
<i>Nom et prénoms.</i>	NEWMAN’ ”

“Well?”

“At any stationers you can buy one of those acid and alkali ink erasers. Suppose you bought one, and neatly took out the word ‘NEWMAN.’ Then the clerk here would be prepared to swear that your name was BERNARD CHARLES.”

“I see. So her name might be Margaret Stirling—Smith, or anything like that?”

“Of course. Anyway, let’s get on with the clerk. He seems reasonably reliable. Now, as to the men, how is it that you have not recorded details of their passports?”

“It was like this, signor. The two gentlemen arrived early in the morning, and booked rooms for the night. I took their passports, of course, but did not enter them—you may imagine the crush, consequent upon the visit of the Duce? I received a sudden requisition, too, that day, to quarter twenty officers who were awaiting transports. So I held over the passports, to do them all together in the evening. So, when the two gentlemen suddenly went away, I handed them back. They paid for their rooms, but did not occupy them. Thus, according to police regulations, it was not necessary to deposit passports.”

“I see. So you can tell us nothing about the passports?”

“Oh, but I can. That of the gentleman named Grantern was an American passport. The other I noticed particularly, for I had only seen one like it before—it was a Nansen passport.”

“A Nansen passport!” Marshall ejaculated.

After the War, it will be recalled, Europe was teeming with people who had no nationality—Russian *émigrés*, Balkan and Central European people who refused to accept new sovereignties, the flotsam and jetsam of the human tide. No one would own them—but they were human, and must live. So the League of Nations opened a special branch for their welfare. It did great work, for their condition was appalling. Among other things, it made them legally alive by issuing special League of Nations passports. Dr. Fritjof Nansen was in charge of this work, so they are colloquially called Nansen passports.

“Ah, now we’re getting warm,” Marshall continued, not trying to conceal his satisfaction. “There can’t be too many of these Nansen passports. Good. Carry on. Let’s go back to what the clerk was saying—when the two men arrived.”

“It was slightly peculiar,” the clerk continued, “though it seemed nothing until you asked questions about them. As they registered, the lady was sitting in the hall—on that chair over there. But she did not seem interested—at least, did not seem to know them. But as the porter carried off their luggage, she jumped up suddenly and greeted them.”

“In what language?”

“In English, I think. I know only a few words.”

“What language did they speak generally?”

“The lady spoke a little Italian, and French very well—and, of course, English. The American gentleman naturally only spoke American—they always do. But the other, this Signor Harim—he was different. I do not know his nationality, but he spoke Italian quite well, and his English seemed to be fluent.”

“You do not know his nationality, you say?”

“No. I should guess that he was an Eastern European—most of the Nansen passports went there.”

“Well, what happened then?”

“The gentlemen had a wash, and then a late breakfast. The lady sat with them. After that they said they would walk round and look at Naples, and of course see the Duce when he arrived.”

“They went off together?”

“Yes. They left their car in our garage.”

“How long was this before the Duce arrived?”

“Oh, a long time—three or four hours, perhaps.”

“And then?”

“Late in the afternoon—I could not swear to the hour, I was so rushed that day—they came to say that they had decided to push on. They paid for their rooms and recovered their passports. The lady went with them.”

“Can you describe these two men?”

“Only generally. The American was about your own build, fair, with very wide-open eyes. The other man was the same height, but very thin—pitifully thin. His hair was dark, and rather long, and his clothes were careless—the American was well dressed, in a gray flannel suit. His eyes, too—Harim’s I mean—were rather strange. I can’t quite say how.”

“Please try,” I persuaded.

“Well, they wavered strangely. He would be talking to you, and suddenly his eyes would wander. Almost like a madman’s, you would say—except that he was certainly not mad.”

I added further questions, but we had almost exhausted the clerk’s usefulness—he had, of course, been tremendously helpful. The proprietor of the hotel had just arrived. We told our forgery story, and he agreed to give us every possible assistance. But “Privately, gentlemen, privately!” he insisted.

To this end he lent us his own room for further interviews. First we had in the chambermaid—she who had handed me Margaret’s note. She recalled

Margaret readily.

“Oh, but she was a charming lady,” she said.

“I suppose that means that she got a particularly good tip!” was Marshall’s comment.

“Did she talk to you at all?” I asked.

“Oh, yes, signor. On the evening of her arrival we talked for quite a while.”

“What about?”

“Well, of course, everyone was talking about the coming of the Duce, to see the Blackshirt Division sail for Africa. It was to be a big event.”

“And Miss Stirling was interested?”

“Oh, yes, very. She had never seen the Duce, she said; she asked many questions as to the best place to see him, and so on.”

“And what did you advise?”

“She had a map, and a plan of the town. I showed her the route he would take, and told her to go to a café round the corner from here. There she would see the Duce’s arrival very well. As it happened, she could have seen him from her own room.”

“You did not advise her to go outside the town?”

“Certainly not. There would be so little to see—only a car rushing by. No soldiers, no band, no—”

“Precisely. But she did go outside the town.”

“Yes; after you left her, she told me. She had wearied of the crowd, she said, and someone told her where to go.”

“What happened after I left her?”

“It would be about an hour later when the two gentlemen returned. They knocked at her door and went in. A few minutes later she called me to help her to pack—they had decided to move on, as Naples was so crowded.”

“Where to?”

“To Rome, she said.”

“Could you describe the two men?”

She did so, agreeing substantially with the clerk’s description, even to a notice of the thin man’s eyes. “There was one little thing I remember,” she added, “when they went out, they were clean. The American, especially, was beautifully clean. His face was pink, and shone like a baby’s. But when they

returned they were dirty—their clothes were clean, but their faces and hands were dirty.”

“Did you comment on it?”

“Oh no, it wasn’t my business. I supposed they had been tinkering with their car. Americans often do—I have seen them on the pictures.”

This was all she had to say, but Marshall was grinning.

“If I got half as much from an interrogation at home I should be in the seventh heaven,” he chuckled. “These people are good. I never knew that the Italians were so observant.”

The waiter who had served the late breakfast was, however, disappointing. He was an old dullard, and it took a long time even to recall our quarries to his memory. Even then, all he could say was that they had their breakfast, and talked with the lady while they had it.

The garage attendant was more intelligent. As it had not stayed the night, he had not noted the number of the car. But he was quite certain that it had an Italian registration and was an Italian car—he would have remarked a foreigner, if only from natural interest. No, the gentleman had not tinkered with the car in the garage. He advanced the opinion that it was a hired car.

“Why do you say that?”

“When the American drove off, he did not seem to be too familiar with it. And in the street his gears made my teeth rasp. And, too, there is an atmosphere about hired cars, is there not?”

This completed our tally of information at the hotel. We walked out to the scene of the smash, but there was nothing to be learned. Yet Marshall was highly satisfied.

We returned to Rome. There again I enlisted the service of Count Aderno, who, using our adaptable fiction about international forgers, was able to enlist the services of the official police. As I suspected, they were remarkably efficient, and obviously kept a severe check over the movements of foreigners in Italy. They soon traced our men by the hired car, which had been returned to its garage immediately on its return from Naples. The garage proprietor reported that the two men had left in some considerable hurry; they had taken their suitcases with them and had hired one of his taxis to the station. The detectives engaged on the scent were able to trace them as far as the Paris train. They had definitely mounted the Paris train, it was reported to us—although, of course, that was no guarantee that they had gone to Paris. However, it was as much as we could expect, and Marshall and I that evening took the same train in belated pursuit.

The Rome police kept in touch with us on the journey. They had telegraphed inquiries forward, so that it could be reported to us whether the men had diverted from the projected journey. The reports that reached us were purely negative, and we arrived at the frontier station of Domodossola, fairly confident that we were still on the trail of our quarry—although unfortunately many days behind.

We conducted the inquiry ourselves among the frontier staff, and concentrated upon the ticket-collectors rather than the customs officials. It was on the Swiss side of the frontier, however, that we got definite news. Here was a frontier officer who distinctly remembered a traveller who carried a Nansen passport. The ticket-collector on duty also remembered him, and confirmed that apparently the man had every intention of making for Paris.

“You will recall that man of whom the gentleman is speaking, Francois?” he called to a companion who had just entered the retiring room of the station staff.

“Yes, I recall him,” Francois agreed, when the details had been explained to him.

“He did go on to Paris, didn’t he?” asked the first.

“Yes, it seemed so; but he returned three days later, wherever he went to.”

“What!” I cried.

“Yes,” said Francois. “I was on duty here—it would be a week or so ago—and I particularly remember the man. He was of rather striking appearance. I don’t mean his physical features exactly, but his atmosphere. Anyway, I remembered him.”

“And he went back to Italy, you say?”

“Yes, he did.”

“You remember where he was going—was it Rome?”

“No,” he said, “I don’t remember exactly, because you will realize that in the books of international tickets I am only concerned with the control over my own stretch of line. I don’t know where he was going to, but I do remember that at the end of his book of coupons there were some Yugoslav billets.”

Naturally I pressed him further, but he was unable to give more information; I could not really expect it—it is unreasonable to suppose that a ticket-collector, even on an international train, could remember what ticket

is held by a particular passenger. It was only the man's natural intelligence, good memory, and something in the appearance of our quarry with the Nansen passport that gave us even this clue. Neither of the ticket-collectors could recall the American in any way.

That evening Marshall and I sat in council. It was obvious that we must go to Yugoslavia, but Yugoslavia is rather a large country. The idea of merely going there without the slightest clue scarcely appealed to Marshall's practical mind. Eventually I decided to put a phone call through to Mason. We had sent on to him urgently the information that we had gathered in Naples, and I had little doubt that he had made good use of it.

After a delay of about two hours I got hold of Mason at his home. He was very excited when he heard me. He broke in at once to say that he had been trying to get in touch with me—had even put through a telephone call to Rome! He said that he had been doing some detective work on his own—at the Passport Office, of course, he could be just as effective as any policeman, since it is but a department of the Foreign Office; and Mason, as I have said, was quite a big noise in the Foreign Office.

I would be interested to know, he said, that he had traced the real name of my girl—and I could have sworn that there was a twinkle in his eyes as he made that announcement. Our information from Naples had made it quite easy to trace—she was a girl named Margaret Stirling Hay. He had immediately rushed round to her home, and had gathered some personal details which scarcely seemed to have anything to do with the case—although of course he would give them thorough investigation; but the last her friends had heard of her had been a postcard from Sarajevo. Asking what my excited exclamation meant, I told him that our man with the Nansen passport had been seen en route for Yugoslavia. Our next move, I said, was perfectly obvious. Marshall and I would move on to Sarajevo at once. Mason agreed, promising to follow up, very vigorously, all the information he had, and I gave him the address of a hotel at Sarajevo to which any further information might be sent.

So, for the second time within three months, I found myself in Sarajevo. On the first occasion I had come merely for pleasure, to see the country, roaming about it haphazard on a bicycle. Now I was there with serious business intent, desperately anxious and at the same time very excited.

Marshall naturally wished to follow official procedure, and to place the whole thing in the hands of the local police. He considered that the suspicions that were now directed upon our quarry were so strong that we would be justified in denouncing the man to the Yugoslav police. The

situation, he insisted, was quite different from the denunciation to the Italian police.

I demurred, however.

“I knew you would,” he grumbled. “You’re not thinking of the men or of Mussolini at all; you’re thinking of that damned girl of yours. I always say it’s merry hell when a woman enters into a police case.”

However, as I was in charge of the expedition, he had to agree to let me follow my own methods, and actually I don’t think we lost anything by doing so. As I have related in my book, *Albanian Backdoor*, on the recommendation of Stephen Graham, I had been welcomed by Sarajevo journalists. With one of these I had struck up an acquaintance that had very nearly become a friendship, even in the few days I spent in Sarajevo. Glanoc was a patriotic Serb, deeply conscious of the destiny of Yugoslavia, and at the same time was a very intelligent man and industrious journalist. It seemed to me that his assistance would be just as valuable as that of any policeman. Sarajevo is not a tremendously large town, and I was open to wager that nothing of outstanding interest ever happened in it beyond the acquaintance of my friend. In any case, he spoke English, which he had learned by himself and was particularly anxious to air it; consequently, as he had previously told me he kept a very sharp look-out for English and American visitors to the town, and inflicted his acquaintance upon them—showing them the town in return for English conversation.

I decided to trust him implicitly—he was one of the men who you do trust implicitly, although your acquaintance with them be but short. Booking rooms at the Hotel Central, I telephoned to him and he came rushing round, obviously delighted to see me again. After presenting Marshall and ordering refreshment, I began to outline the case. I did not tell him all the details, but enough of the affair to make him realize that it was something really serious. I emphasized the danger to Yugoslavia. I knew that his sentiments towards Italy were not particularly friendly—he merely reflected the general atmosphere in Yugoslavia—but at the same time he was a man of sound sense, and he agreed that if war between Italy and Yugoslavia must come, then it ought to come in some way as would not lose the sympathy of the rest of Europe for Yugoslavia. His country, he affirmed, was resolved to give Italy no legitimate excuse or occasion for war—and this I knew to be true.

He agreed, therefore, that it would be just as dangerous if the plot were to be discovered laid in Yugoslavia as if it were discovered in England—even more dangerous, in fact. Were the plot considered by the Italians to be

English, then the result would be a heightening of the hatred that the Italian propagandists were inculcating in their fellow-countrymen.

Not even Fascist Italy would think of making the plot the grounds for an armed attack on England—but they might easily think along such lines if Yugoslavia were the country involved.

He promised to rush round and pump all his sources of information. If the men were English—or American, for that matter—he ought to have no difficulty in tracing them. A friend of his in the police department where passports were examined had often given him information that English people had arrived in the town, knowing how eagerly he desired to practice his English. Within a few hours, he said, he ought to be able to put us on the trail.

There was nothing that we could do by ourselves. I had in my previous journey accumulated two or three hundred words of Serbo-Croat, and could order a meal or demand drinks with reasonable fluency, but I was quite incapable of conducting a conversation of any kind. My aptitude for languages does not cover the Slav tongues, so I took Marshall out to see some of the sights of Sarajevo. He was naturally enchanted with the Moslem bazaar, which is the feature of the old town—a series of narrow alleys which might have been removed *en bloc* from the middle of Damascus, so eastern is their atmosphere. And yet I was very delighted with Marshall when, after half an hour in the bazaar, he said: “But before we go any further, I’d like you to take me to the place where the Archduke Franz Ferdinand was bumped off in 1914.”

So I took him to the fateful street-corner where, by a “mistake” the Archduke’s car had been halted on that day of June 28th, 1914—had been halted by apparent accident within a yard of the patriotic Bosnian youth who had determined to kill the representative of tyranny. Marshall and I sat on the little stone seat at the end of the bridge that bears Princip’s name. I showed him the street along which the car had been driven, and how it should have continued on its way back, when by that fatal mischance—or carelessness, or treachery—on the part of Governor Potiorek—the car had turned to the right. On the wall I pointed out was a little tablet commemorating this fateful day. It read: “On this historic spot Gavrilo Princip struck the blow for Serbian liberty, June 28th, 1914.”

Marshall was rather startled at that; it was not quite the wording that he himself would have composed. He had scarcely appreciated the esteem in which Princip is held in Sarajevo—where, quite naturally, he is considered to be a national patriotic hero.

As we sat on the Bridge of Princip, we saw the passing life of Sarajevo, where Rolls Royce motorcars were driven along the street side by side with lumbering ox-wagons, where smartly dressed soldiers mingle with peasants in their national costumes, and where—particularly intriguing to Marshall, who had never been further east than Rome—every other woman wore the dark veil and the shapeless dress which are the symbols of the Mohammedan woman. It was a scene that would never tire me, yet even when I was prepared to move on, Marshall was so fascinated that he asked if we could stay a little longer; and a few minutes later I had to confess that his request was a lucky inspiration.

From time to time we had noticed people glancing at the tablet on the wall; the townspeople, of course, gave it no more than a passing glance, but one or two visitors—one little group under the charge of a guide—had appeared and had gazed at it with the appropriate awestruck wonder, and had listened to a dramatic reconstruction of the scene. Now, however, there approached to this street-corner of tragedy two men, whose behavior was peculiar. It was not that they did anything outstandingly abnormal, but something in the atmosphere that emanated from them. One of them appeared to know the spot and to be telling the story to his companion. I saw him pointing to the barber's shop on the steps of which Princip had stood, waiting for the tyrant's coming. Then they turned to the tablet once more, reading it over and over again. The eyes of the younger of the two men fascinated me—they were gleaming as if with religious fervor as they gazed at this plain, everyday scene, which once witnessed tragic moments which reshaped or mis-shaped the course of the world's history.

“Just look at those two men,” I whispered to Marshall. “Do you think that they answer the description?”

“Not quite,” he said, “they're not tall enough.”

“But that description might be wrong,” I argued. “You remember the Italian who gave it to us was a short fellow—and little men always tend to describe middle-sized men as big.”

“Nevertheless, I should never have looked at those two men on that description at all,” Marshall insisted.

“But look at his eyes—this man nearest to us,” I said, “don't they fit the impression they gave us at Naples?”

Marshall had to agree that they did. Here definitely were the eyes of the fanatic—not the maniac, but the man who believes religiously in a cause; a man who would count martyrdom a glory and a gain.

However, there was nothing we could do. As I considered it, I had to agree with Marshall that physically they did not fit the description in the slightest degree; the second man, in fact, was utterly unlike the American described by the hotel people at Naples; his complexion was sallow, and his clothes were cheap and shabby. I had to decide, therefore, that a peculiarity of eyes was quite insufficient as a point of identification.

The two men eventually walked off. I toyed with the idea of following them, but Marshall persuaded me that it was ridiculous, since it was impossible that they could be the men we wanted. So we continued our tour of Sarajevo. First to the Arabesque Town Hall, where the Archduke had been received, and where he had so violently reproved the unfortunate Mayor of Sarajevo: "You read addresses of welcome to me," thundered the Archduke, "and a few minutes ago your people were throwing bombs at me! What foolery is this?" And then—for we were in the mood to revisit all the scenes connected with that day of history—we walked up to the cemetery where Princip is buried. Some of his confederates were hanged by the Austrians; Princip and others, being under age, could not be hanged, but were imprisoned in Austria—and died after suffering terrible privations and even torture.

After the war, their miserable bodies were collected and brought back to Sarajevo, and now eleven of them are reinterred in a simple yet impressive tomb of honor in the cemetery. I have related in my travel book something of the extraordinarily affecting ceremony which is held there every year on the anniversary of the tragedy. Marshall, of course, could not see that, but I could at least show him the tomb and describe the scene.

The tomb itself lies on the edge of the cemetery, quite near to the road. We entered by the gate, and it so happened that we were temporarily silent. We had only a dozen yards to walk, for the tomb was very near to the gate, when suddenly I grabbed Marshall's arm and hurriedly pulled him behind an evergreen bush, one of many dotted about the cemetery in conventional fashion. Marshall had the sense not to utter a word. Kneeling behind the bush, he strained his eyes in the direction indicated by my pointing finger. Then he turned to me with a look of genuine amazement.

For a strange scene was being played at the tomb of Princip. So far as we could see, the only living occupants of the cemetery were two men—the two men we had recently noticed at the Street-Corner of Tragedy. And if their behavior had been peculiar then, it was overwhelmingly remarkable now. I saw the elder of the two standing before the tomb, speaking so quietly that we could not hear, and yet obviously dramatically, for his arms moved

expressively as he spoke. It seemed to me that he was making some kind of oration, and his companion listened open-mouthed to every word. The speech concluded, the two men knelt down and were immersed in silent prayer for a full two minutes. Then they stood up and saluted ceremonially—turning to all points of the tomb, they saluted eleven times, one for each of the heroes buried there. Then they turned, almost with military precision, and marched away. Just before they reached the gate they had to pass us by. They did not see us, but we did see them—and this time the excitement in the eyes of both of them was remarkable—a fierce religious glow.

All this might be meaningless, but obviously it must be followed up. I left the trailing of the two men to Marshall, who is as good at this kind of thing as any police-officer in the world. I myself hurried to Glanoc's office and told him what we had seen and what we suspected. From my description, in spite of urgent inquiries, he was quite unable to place the two men, so we sat impatiently, awaiting news from Marshall.

It came not until some hours later, after nightfall. Marshall told me afterwards that he had tried to phone us, but had been unable to make the operator understand what he wanted. At last he had written out a little note, given a few *dinars* to a boy, and sent him off to us. The note described how he had trailed the two men, first to a house in a street whose name he had been unable to observe, but which he could readily find; and then, afterwards, to the eastern end of the town. There, he said, the men had entered a little café; the name over it was "Bendbasha." We should easily recognize it, because it was on the extreme edge of Sarajevo, and was a picturesque wooden structure, literally overhanging the river.

I knew the "Bendbasha" well. I had spent happy evenings there on the occasion of my previous visit. Glanoc and I hurried round, but entered quite separately, agreeing to work independently so as not to arouse suspicion. I went in first, and saw Marshall seated at a table, but he gave no sign of recognition—although with an inclination of his eyebrows he indicated the two men. They had now been joined by others, and seven or eight men were seated round a little table drinking the minute glasses of *rakia*, the local liqueur, with occasional intermittents of thick, black coffee. As I ordered my own drink, the waiter, a friendly man who spoke some German, said: "Oh! We have another English visitor here—that gentleman sitting over there"—pointing to Marshall. This gave me a perfectly legitimate excuse to join Marshall.

The entertainment at "Bendbasha" I have described elsewhere. There was a little gipsy orchestra and a lot of dancing—queer dancing, belly

dancing, as it is termed in the Balkans. The dancer, who is usually a buxom wench, plants her feet apart and wriggles her body, sometimes complete with rolls of fat, in a manner which is almost comic to the unsophisticated observer, but which has its ritual of artistic presentation, which must be just as keenly observed as that of the ballet or the bull ring. Our men were in front of us, so it was quite easy for us to watch them and the entertainment at the same time. They did not appear to have noticed us—there was no reason why they should.

My journalist friend entered, and I remarked that he had been cute enough to pick up a lady friend in the few minutes since I had left him. It was easy enough to indicate the two men to him, but I saw no sign of recognition in his eyes. Evidently, however, he was acquainted with others of the group, for one or two of them called across the café to him.

After half an hour or so he made an excuse to speak to one of the group. His lady friend had been joined by another, so that when he was invited to sit at their table temporarily he could easily do so. I was not near enough to hear what was happening, nor could I have understood it in any case, but from what I could see he appeared to be handling the situation very cleverly. At first talking freely himself, he got the others to talk freely as well, and at last I saw that our two men were energetically involved in the conversation. The tone of the whole group was hushed, heads were bent low so that no one at the neighboring tables might hear.

At last the whole group arose. Glanoc first called at his old table to make some explanation to his deserted partner, and then went out with the group. Marshall and I stayed on; there was nothing we could do until his return. An hour passed, however, and I decided at last that we had better go round to his home and await him there.

Glanoc was a Bosnian and a Moslem, and entry to his home was not quite so easy as it might have been. As was the Moslem custom, he had married early, but was still living under the family roof. I knew his house and found it without difficulty. Great stone walls enclosed a courtyard. We rang a bell at the door and waited. There was little sign of activity in the house, and I thought at first that its occupants must have gone to bed. After five minutes' ringing and waiting, however, a boy appeared. Fortunately he recognized me—on the occasion of my previous visit he had been very intrigued at my costume, for I was cycling in shorts, and apparently he had never seen knees so prominently displayed. No explanation was necessary, for immediately he slammed the door and we heard his wooden sandals clattering over the courtyard hurriedly. Marshall thought that the slamming

of the door was inauspicious, but I pointed out to him that it would be most improper to enter yet awhile. The boy would go to the house to announce that strange men were without, and we must wait until the women of the house had had an opportunity of making themselves scarce or of veiling themselves.

Sure enough, in another two minutes the boy returned and invited us to enter. On the threshold of the house Glanoc's father was waiting to meet us. I had met him before, a staunch Moslem, who placed the ethical code of Mohammed above the law of Yugoslavia and enjoyed—or, shall I say, possessed—two wives. He received me with the solemn and dignified courtesy which is so typical of the Moslem. Bowing sedately and muttering formal words of welcome, he led us into the house.

The furniture of the room consisted exclusively of one long divan which ranged round three of the walls, and a luxurious carpet spread over the floor. We sat on the divan in a corner of the room; our host—who wore the traditional Turkish costume of short waistcoat and exceedingly baggy breeches—instinctively drew up his feet and squatted cross-legged on the divan. Our conversation was limited, but I recalled that he had at least a smattering of German—for Bosnia, of course, was an Austrian province until the end of 1918. He had already heard from his son that I had returned to Sarajevo, and acquiesced graciously when I said that I hoped he would not mind if we waited for his son to return, despite the lateness of the hour.

With coffee, *rakia*, and rather stilted conversation another hour passed. Then Glanoc returned, and it was immediately apparent from his excitement that he had news. His father, in the most nonchalant way, did not appear at all interested in our business. His son greeted him with the customary mark of respect, and then the old man bowed solemnly to us and bade us good night.

“Well?” I queried, as soon as he had disappeared through the curtain. And immediately Glanoc burst excitedly into his story.

“I believe you are right!” he said. “At first I thought it was nothing more than one of those ridiculous student plots, which spring up twice a week all over Europe—particularly eastern Europe. But now I believe you're right—I believe there is really something serious afoot.”

“Well, come on, man—tell us about it,” I cried impatiently. “What happened? Who are those fellows?”

“I never saw them in my life before, but as soon as I saw their companions I realized there was a definite connection with what you saw at the grave of Princip. Now you know, of course, that Yugoslavia, like most

Balkan countries, is a veritable hive of leagues, patriotic and otherwise. For hundreds of years our patriotic societies had to be secret, and the habit continued. Some of them, of course, are now out in the open—you have, I think, already met our Narodna, Odbrana, a highly decorous organization, and also our Cetnice, who sport the skull and cross-bones as their emblem? Well, among these patriotic societies there is one which calls itself the ‘League of Princip.’ It is an ultra-patriotic society. It believes in Yugoslavia and nothing else. It is just the sort of society that your own Lady Houston might found and run if she were a Yugoslav; it is harmless enough, because its members do nothing but talk. Its headquarters are, naturally enough, here at Sarajevo, but it professes to have branches in most Yugoslav towns. I doubt, however, if the total membership is more than a few thousand.”

“But what does it do?” I asked.

“Oh, it just talks,” he replied. “It talks airy platitudes about Yugoslavia one and indivisible. It says harsh things about the Croats. It flings invectives against Hungary for harboring the murderers of our King. And, of course, it is not exactly friendly towards Mussolini, who has so often announced his intention of some time or other conquering Slovenia and the Dalmatian Coast. It is one of those leagues which nobody takes the slightest notice of; it has its counterpart in every country in the world. We know all about it, of course, but its meetings are never worth more than an inch at the bottom of a column.

“But, as you saw, I was able to get to the table because I knew two or three of the men concerned. They are ardent patriots—but so am I, although I do not belong to these ridiculous societies. I want to be quite clear. As I think you know, I am a great admirer of Princip. I know that people in England regard him as a mere murderer, a political assassin, but he was something far bigger than that—he was a liberator. Bosnia and Herzegovina and Dalmatia and Croatia and Slovenia were peopled by Serbs or their kinsmen, and yet they were under Austrian dominion. You in England will agree that it is wrong for civilized people to be oppressed by other people. You have had to struggle for your own freedom, and have never begrudged us ours.

“It is not wrong for a people to want its freedom—to fight for it, if necessary. Now consider Austria in 1914. Suppose you had held all the conferences, plebiscites, and other devices that pacifists recommend today, could you have persuaded Austria to have given up a square yard of Bosnia to Serbia? Of course not, and the whole world knew it. Any man of intelligence knew that it could only be by force that the Serbs could be

reunited. That is the tragedy of the world, that it is only by force that justice can be done.

“Well, Princip, although only a boy, recognized this, and he determined to call the attention of the world to the oppression of the Serbian provinces by Austria-Hungary. He was well aware that his deed might provoke war, though he never visualized a European war, much less a world war. He imagined a struggle between Austria on the one hand and Russia and Serbia on the other. That, of course, is the worst of hasty reformers—they cannot control the events they inaugurate.

“I am a Yugoslav, and to me Princip is a hero, because he was one of the engineers of our liberty. I would do as much as anybody in Yugoslavia to defend that liberty—I would do as much as any of these members of leagues who talk so much about it. But when your two men began to talk, I sensed a different atmosphere.”

“Were they Serbs?” I said, glad that he had come to the point.

“No, they were Slovenes.”

“You could understand them?” Marshall queried.

“Oh, yes. Slovene is no more than a different dialect of the Slav tongue.”

“And what did they say?” I asked.

“It wasn’t so much what they said, but the manner in which they said it,” he answered. “One of them, in particular—the elder man—continually drew the conversation round to Mussolini. To him Mussolini was the arch-enemy, ranking far above Hungary. He declared that he had special knowledge that, when the Abyssinian campaign was concluded, Mussolini intended to make a new drive in Europe and that Dalmatia was his first intended claim.

“He told us, too, horrible stories of the persecution of Slovenes who have the misfortune to be cut off from Yugoslavia and who reside in Italy. You know, of course, that in Istria there are well over half a million Slovenes, and that ever since the war Italy has resorted to all kinds of drastic methods to Italicize them. Slovene schools have been closed and people have been forbidden to talk, except in Italian. There has been a continuous succession of persecutions—not so violent as the atrocities in Macedonia and Dobrudja, but nevertheless very disturbing and highly uncomfortable to the unfortunate Slovenes who have had to undergo them.

“The second man was a Slovene named Kranj from Liubiana, and it appeared that he had relatives on the other side of the Italian frontier, and had heard directly from them some terrible stories of persecution. He seemed to be completely under the influence of the other, who said that he

was actually a Slovene from Istria. His name is Savona, and he said that he had escaped into Yugoslavia some weeks ago, when the Abyssinian expedition was in the offing. Why should he fight Italy's colonial battles? he argued—quite rightly, of course. You know, probably, that many thousands of Slovene deserters from the Italian army have sought refuge in Yugoslavia since the campaign began?"

"But what of all this?" I said. "It is all very true, I know, but tonight, did it lead anywhere?"

"Only talk, as usual," he said, "but the talk veered round three or four times to the subject of Mussolini, and they agreed more than once that someone would be conferring a benefit on the world if Mussolini were assassinated. The elder of the two Slovenes, Savona, was quite eloquent on the subject. He compared the situation today to 1914, and declared that what was wanted was another Princip, to strike down the tyrant and to lay the foundations of a greater Yugoslavia which would include the oppressed Slovenes of Italy.

"Naturally, everybody agreed with him. I imagine that all over Europe people are saying that someone ought to bump off Mussolini. I know that the opinion is held by quite mild and worthy people, who are thinking only of right and justice."

"You agree, of course, that if there is anything in this business, we must stop it?" I queried.

"Of course," he agreed. "We have a definite quarrel with Italy, and personally I do not doubt that one day it will come to a head. But when it does so, we must face Italy with the sympathy of Europe behind us. That was our difficulty in 1914. You in England gave us half-hearted support because you disapproved of Princip's action. If we provoke another war by a political assassination—particularly one of such magnitude—then you and dozens of other countries would wash your hands of us. The murder of Mussolini would be a moral gain but a political disaster, and at all costs it must be stopped."

"The passport—I suppose you weren't able to find anything about their passports?"

"No," he replied. "But I should be very surprised if either of these men had a Nansen passport. Why should he? However," he continued, "there is only one thing to do, obviously; we must denounce them to the police, and then we shall be at the root of the conspiracy, if conspiracy it is."

But I demurred. I argued that the thing ought to be dealt with privately. If the police took action, news would inevitably leak out—and the very fact that there had been a plot against Mussolini in Yugoslavia would have a deadly effect. I could see Marshall's eyes twinkling as I argued in this manner. He knew very well that it was not my real reason at all. Before acting precipitately I wanted to find out how deeply these people were involved with the other plotters who had been so narrowly foiled at Naples. I wanted to get Margaret clear of it.

As I had brought the first news, however, I was in charge of the plot, so to speak, and Glanoc at last agreed. It was decided between us that we should deal with the two men ourselves. They had arranged to meet again the following evening. Glanoc would endeavour to lead them on and then when we had them by themselves, we would confront them with a full knowledge of their plot—this alone ought to be quite sufficient to deter them. We would threaten them with all kinds of penalties. We could pretend that we had official action behind us—there Marshall would come in very useful. Their liberty would depend entirely upon their good behavior. They would, of course, be watched, and on the slightest suspicion would be arrested. We would describe some of the least pleasant methods of the Yugoslav police—who have had ample experience in dealing with terrorist organizations, and do it very adequately.

Thus agreed, we went to bed. Early in the morning we met again, and Marshall found without difficulty the house to which he had trailed the two men. We had decided to take turns in hanging about. Glanoc was quite certain that they would turn up on the evening as they had arranged—their proselytizing work was still incomplete—but we wanted to see where they went in the daytime. They might be no more than subordinates in the plot, and might lead us to its source.

We dallied inconspicuously through the day. It must have been inconspicuously, for no one seemed to take any notice, but it seemed like a public exhibition to me. The two men did not appear; evidently they had decided to lie low. At the appointed time—11 p.m., much later than the previous night—we made for the "Bendbasha." The little group of members of the League of Princip had gathered, but of the two Slovenes there was no sign.

We waited. As before, we sat independently, Glanoc with his friends. The company at the café dispersed—this had been the idea of the late meeting; only one waiter, tired and bored, remained. We waited an hour and more. Then another, while two of the group went off in search of our men.

The waiter wanted to close down, but we sat on stolidly. Yet when the messenger returned our stolidity vanished. Our men had left their lodgings at dawn, carrying their luggage with them!

CHAPTER FOUR

WE rushed off to the station. Fortunately, there are not many trains through Sarajevo in a day, and by the very hour of their departure from their lodgings we were soon able to get on the right track.

Hurried inquiries at the station failed to reveal the slightest trace of the two men we sought. Glanoc immediately got on the telephone to the aerodrome—Marshall was rather surprised to find that a one-eyed town like Sarajevo, as he described it, had an aerodrome. Here information was immediately forthcoming. Yes, certainly, said the clerk at the other end, two men answering the description Glanoc gave had taken the early morning plane to Liubliana yesterday. In the first instance they had asked if there was not an air service direct to Bled, but they had been told that they would have to continue by train from Liubliana.

As Glanoc blurted this information out to us, I noticed that he had turned very pale.

“Well, we must be after them,” I said. “But what’s the matter with you?”

“Yes, we must be after them,” he agreed. “You know, I don’t like that man—the one who called himself Savona. I never did. I’m just wondering. Suppose this were some kind of fake plot—a cover for quite a different thing? Suppose all their talk was a blind? *The court is at Bled—suppose these men are aiming to kill King Peter, and not Mussolini?*”

“Rubbish,” I said. “Who would want to kill your king?”

“Who would want to kill King Alexander?” he repeated. “But they did, nevertheless. Yes, we must be after them; but before we do it I’m going to put a trunk call through to Bled. I agree that this thing ought to be kept quiet, but not at the expense of the life of my king.”

We hurried to his office, which was not far away, for greater convenience. The call came through with surprising rapidity—the trunk telephone is not freely used in Yugoslavia, and the hour was quiet. Glanoc seized the instrument eagerly, but after a few perfunctory remarks rang off.

“It’s all right,” he said, “the Court moved back to Belgrade three days ago. Now we set off for Bled.”

We drove out to the aerodrome by car. I would have expended all the funds I carried on the private hire of an aeroplane, but none was available.

The morning service was due, however, in two hours, and we had to possess our patience as best we could.

The aeroplane did not look quite so comfortable or so substantial as those of Imperial Airways, but it flew. We reached Liubliana ten minutes before schedule and then, as there was no train due for several hours, chartered a car and rushed towards Bled. Bled, of course, is a charming little resort on the shore of a picturesque lake in the heart of the Slovene Alps. I had visited it before, and would have come again with pleasure had I not been so anxious. Because of language difficulties, I had to leave all the work of interrogation to Glanoc. A journalist, however, is just as good at this kind of thing as a policeman, and within an hour he had discovered that our quarry had not actually stayed in Bled, but had taken the little omnibus which plies daily to Bohinj, at the head of the Save valley.

By this time it was almost nightfall, but we hired another car, and ordered the man to drive to Bohinj. But the luck which had held good throughout the chase now deserted us. The car swung precariously along the mountain road—a pleasant road by day, but treacherous by night. Our driver erred on the side of caution, and at one point, naturally anxious to avoid the precipitous slope to his left, he clung too closely to the mountain-side, grazed an outstanding rock, and then skidded, striking the rocky face of the cliff violently.

It took Marshall and me a minute or more to force ourselves through the windows of the car, for the doors were jammed. Our driver, we discovered was unconscious, though not seriously injured. Glanoc had remained in the car, and from the inside helped us to extricate him. By the time we had brought him round, with liberal applications of water from the river below, and had carried him to the nearest farm-house half a mile away, it was almost midnight. We asked at the farm if there was any other conveyance that could carry us towards Bohinj. There was not. The farmer had a peasant cart, but obviously this ought to be used to carry the injured man back to Bled.

The valley is but sparsely populated, for it is very narrow, and cultivable or even arable land is scarce. The Slovene peasant farmer offered us hospitality for the night. We were tired, and accepted it; whatever our quarries were about, it was inconceivable that they should be doing anything drastic in the middle of the night, in the heart of the Slovene mountains.

At dawn, however, we were up and on the way. In his journey with the injured man into Bled, the farmer had called upon an acquaintance a mile or more down the road, and had asked him to call for us. We had to wait for an

hour or more before the man appeared, and then his ancient horse, attached by rope to his ramshackle wooden vehicle, seemed incapable of anything more than a slow walk.

Consequently, it was after eight o'clock in the morning when we arrived at the little hamlet of Bohinj. Here, at least, there would be no difficulty in tracing our men, for the hamlet consists of a couple of hotels and not more than a dozen houses.

At the first hotel, in fact, we got home. "Yes," said the proprietor, "the two men were staying here." He turned up his register and showed us their names. Relief must have shown on our faces, for he demanded with natural curiosity to know what was afoot. We did not attempt to satisfy him, however, but demanded where they were to be found.

"Oh, you won't see them till tomorrow," he said. "They've gone for a couple of days' climb—left soon after dawn today. I packed them three days' rations and lent them rucksacks, and they went off in the direction of the Triglav. They will spend the night in the hut—it is still open."

"What's the matter?" asked Marshall, noting the evident concern of Glanoc and myself.

"This is the matter," I replied, spreading a map before him. "You see where we are now; here is the little lake—here is Bohinj. At the other end of the lake you see this high ridge formation of mountains, terminating in this peak called the Triglav—well, that's where our men have gone. *And if they go down on the other side they're in Italy.* Now do you see why it's serious?"

Marshall did, of course, and made no demur when we proposed to follow them. He was no mountaineer, but what I could do, he could do, he argued. We gave hasty orders to the landlord, who immediately began to prepare more rucksacks, filled with rations. We looked anxiously at our shoes, to find that the landlord actually had spare pairs of boots, some of which fortunately fitted. The men had no more than three hours' start of us, and if we were energetic and had a little luck, we might easily be able to overhaul them. Our advantage was that they would not know that they were being followed, so that if they carried out their program and stayed the night at the hut, we should certainly catch them up there.

I was rather surprised to find that it was possible to get even as high as the hut, for this was October. But although the peaks were well covered with snow, the slopes were remarkably clear, small patches showing only on the northern side. The landlord appeared quite confident that it would be

possible to reach the ridge and to descend to the Italian side; only two days before an Italian deserter had made the journey in the opposite direction.

While we were making the final arrangements with the landlord and going anxiously over the map with him, Marshall had picked up a book, and I noticed that he slipped it into his pack.

“What’s that?” I said.

“I’ve borrowed a Baedeker’s guide,” he said. “It’s very interesting. I didn’t realize exactly where we were, but this is a pre-war guide to Austria-Hungary—and, of course, this district was Austria-Hungary before the war. It says here that the ascent of the Triglav is laborious, but not very difficult for expert climbers. The night is spent at the Maria Theresia Hut, seven hours from the hotel. Good! I can do seven hours, even if it is uphill!”

Actually it took us eight. We were badly equipped for such an energetic journey. Our packs hung heavily, and the unaccustomed boots seemed like pieces of lead—with the nasty habit of irritating at different places with each step we took. However, we had something definite to beckon us on, although we were all out when eventually we reached the little wooden chalet belonging to the Alpine Club. At first we had walked briskly; so confident were we that the end of our chase was definitely in sight, that we had enjoyed the scenic wonders about us—first the climb to the fine waterfall, which is the source of the great River Save, and then the more serious ascent up a rocky valley towards the Triglav itself.

As we approached the hut, situated on a rough natural ledge on the mountain slope, we hesitated as to the correct procedure. Should we surround the place, commanding it from suitable vantage points, or should we make a bold entry? We decided on the latter. We held the greatest weapon of warfare in our hands—the weapon of surprise. Our men did not even know that they were suspected, much less followed. We marched into the hut—only to be bitterly disappointed. The men were not there. We found no one but an old shepherd who led a lonely life at the hut during the summer, keeping a precarious watch on a hardy flock of goats, which somehow or other found sufficient sustenance on the semi-barren slope of the mountain. Even he was packing up—there was snow on the heights, and bad weather ahead, he said, and it was almost time for him to return to winter quarters in the valley below.

Yes, our two men had been here, he agreed. They had arrived about two hours earlier. They had considered for a while remaining the night in the hut, but as they were not going to attempt the Triglav, but intended to pass down on the other side, they had decided that they had ample time to do it.

This was disastrous news. We were already very tired after the unaccustomed exertion, yet if we called ourselves men at all we had to press on. We asked the old man if he would come with us to show us the way, but no amount of financial persuasion would induce him to leave his beloved goats. He in his turn endeavored to dissuade us from the journey. There was bad weather ahead, he repeated—he had pointed this out to the two men earlier, and this had been the deciding point in their decision to complete the journey during the day. It had to be ours, too. However, he did walk to a spot half a mile from the hut, whence he could point out to us the rough path which we must follow.

Now we began to climb seriously, and I was definitely concerned. I was the only man of the three who had any mountaineering experience, and we were tackling a difficult job with wholly inadequate equipment. Twice we faced slopes where I would have preferred to have had ropes, and it was only the fortunate fact that previous parties had left behind them *pitons*, or iron spikes, stuck in the rock, that enabled us to carry on.

Marshall and Glanoc, unaccustomed to mountain-work, were slipping and sliding in alarming fashion, and I was not really surprised when Glanoc suddenly slipped on a piece of smooth rock and slid down its slope for twenty or thirty yards. It did not seem to be a serious mishap, however—I suspected that he might have lost a portion of the seat of his trousers, but was surprised when he made no response to our call. Perforce I scrambled down after him to find him moaning, half-conscious; apparently, although the slide down the rock had not hurt him, he had tripped up while trying to regain his feet at the bottom, and had fallen another couple of yards, and a casual examination showed me that he had broken his left arm and probably his shoulder-bone as well.

For the moment I almost decided to throw up the sponge; it seemed as if fate were working against me, to annoy me with this continuous series of mishaps; but Glanoc, as soon as he was completely conscious, was quite emphatic. He would find his way back to the hut—at least there was ample time for that—but we had little more than three hours of daylight left. We must push on at all costs, and so on. I admired his pluck, and he expounded his arguments so forcefully that I had no option but to agree.

For an hour we toiled wearily. To the north loomed the triple peak of Triglav—the name literally means “three heads.” The Triglav is a mountain which is regarded by the Slovenes with an affection amounting almost to devotion. Most of the local peasant customs, which are so intriguing, have a

legendary origin in the gods which once dwelt on the slopes of this sacred mountain.

By the time we reached the *arrête* Marshall was almost done for—except in spirit. I began to curse myself for a fool. It was absurd to take plains-men into mountain country—I ought to have called in a couple of Frontier Guards, who were used to this kind of thing. I called myself all the hard names I could think of; and, looking back, consider that I earned them and more. Yet, of course, that did not ease my present situation.

Often, too, I looked anxiously at the sky. Clouds hung heavily above us, and I was hoping continuously that the old man at the hut had been too premature in his forecast about the weather.

“At least now we have hope,” Marshall said. “We have only to go downhill now.”

He did not realize that going downhill is sometimes more difficult than going uphill and is certainly just as fatiguing. Visibility for the moment was limited by the rock masses round about us, but suddenly, over the edge of a great cliff, a magnificent vista disclosed itself to the west. I caught Marshall by the arm and pointed.

“Look,” I commanded, “that is Italy!”

This encouraged him, although actually it fostered vain hopes. We had to catch our men *before* they got into the valley below.

If Marshall’s body was weary, his eyes were keen, and he had noted ample traces of recent human passage. But I was becoming desperately anxious. I was scarcely thinking of the two men we were trailing; I was wondering now if we ourselves would reach the Italian hut on the western slope before nightfall.

With unbelievable suddenness the light faded. I looked at my watch in alarm. According to the calendar we had a good hour of daylight left; it had vanished in a few short moments. Then the first flakes of snow began to fall. The breeze, which had been fresh, stiffened. It had been bitterly cold throughout the greater part of our journey, but at least our clothes were warm. But now the cold increased; within two or three minutes the snowflakes had increased in intensity to such an extent that all the rocks about us wore a white carpet. The flakes descended in such size and flatness and continuity that it was almost impossible to see more than a yard ahead. We struggled on, but now all trace of the path had disappeared. For two or three hundred yards we made our way, guided by the little cairns of stone which mountaineers use as signposts. By that time even these were covered

with snow, and it was impossible to distinguish them from normal protuberances of rock.

Marshall stopped and looked at me in dismay.

“It looks as if we’re in for it,” he said seriously.

“I’m afraid it does,” I replied. “I’m sorry I led you into this. I’ve been a damned fool—for your first mountain, to make you tackle one like this! Well, we’ve got to do the best we can, and hope that the snowstorm will soon pass over. If it does, then we shall manage; if it doesn’t, well”—and I made an expressive gesture.

“And what about the two we’re after?” asked Marshall.

“I’m afraid it’s no good considering them,” I said. “Either they are already half-way down the valley—in which case we shall never catch them—or else they’re in the same boat as ourselves. We can’t think about them; let’s think of ourselves. We want some sort of shelter. No use looking for the path any longer; let’s find an overhanging piece of rock that will at least give us shelter from the wind.”

We found one without much difficulty, and huddled together in its narrow shelter. We had eaten rapidly at the hut, but now drew a little food from our pack. Anxiously we looked at our watches, but the storm showed no sign of abating. We had to make up our minds to the fact that we were there for the night.

It was not a pleasant prospect. There was, of course, no method of making a fire, and in this bleak and exposed spot there would be every opportunity of dying of exposure. Fortunately both Marshall and I were of strong physique and in excellent condition. We sat down for more than an hour before we were impelled by the cold to get up and move about. We could not move far; the shelter we had found was nothing like a cave, but merely a sloping rock, and to escape the continuous downfall of snow we had to walk almost touching the rock.

Darkness was now complete, and to make matters worse, the wind shifted—shifted to the north, driving the heavy snow into our fraction of shelter. Very soon the position became impossible.

“This is hopeless,” said Marshall; “we might just as well be out in the open. We shall be frozen to death before morning. Couldn’t we have a look round the other side of this cliff to see if there’s anything better there—anything to get out of the wind? I can stand the snow.”

I agreed, and we felt our way cautiously along the face of the cliff. Turning a corner, we found a better shelter from the wind. Suddenly

Marshall caught at my arm.

“Stand still a minute!” he whispered abruptly. “I could swear I saw a light!”

“Are you sure?” I demanded.

“Yes—a light over there,” he persisted, and I sensed rather than saw the direction of his pointing finger.

“But I don’t see it now,” I protested.

“No,” he agreed, “it was only for a few seconds or so—probably a match lighting a cigarette.”

“You’re quite certain of it?” I said. “I never heard of a will-o’-the-wisp in a snowstorm, but we don’t want to go fumbling about the mountain in these conditions and in the dark.”

“I’m quite certain of it,” he said. “It couldn’t have been more than a hundred yards away.”

“In that case we’ll make for it,” I agreed. “We must go inch by inch, of course, and trust nothing. If you saw a light it must have been made by the two men we’re after. Right, we’ll go for them. In fact, we’ll hail them; they suspect nothing. And, of course, we shall give them no hint. To them we are two English climbers who, like themselves, have got lost in the blizzard. We may not be able to talk to them—that will make things easier. They don’t know us—never even glanced at us at Sarajevo. On the whole, it’s just as well that Glanoc went back. Had he been here we should have had to have done something drastic, and the idea of a scrap under these conditions isn’t exactly attractive!”

I gave a lusty hail, and a few seconds later heard a reply howled through the wintry air; Marshall said it sounded not more than a hundred yards away, but, nevertheless, the making of that hundred yards was a matter of the greatest difficulty. The snow was already lying to a depth of several inches, and was still beating down in tremendous flakes of such density that the darkness of the night seemed doubly dense. The wind was so bitter that I found it impossible to walk with head erect. Every minute or so I would give a shout and wait for the answer; then I would crawl a few yards further, sometimes literally on my hands and knees, Marshall following carefully in my track. It must have taken us a good ten minutes to negotiate that hundred yards, despite the fact that for the last quarter of it we were sheltered from the piercing wind.

For the last minute or so, too, we were guided by a thin light which periodically disappeared—evidently the men were striking matches one after

the other. A match was still burning when at last we reached our quarry, and by its feeble light I recognized the younger of the two men I had seen at Sarajevo.

They rained questions upon us, but as I only understood about one word in ten, the conversation was rather difficult. At last, however, I discovered that the younger man, Kranj, had a smattering of German. As freely as his limited German would allow, we exchanged experiences. I hardly expected him to confess that he was on the way to Italy. Instead, he told me that they had been anxious to make the last ascent of the Triglav for the season. He agreed, seeing my astonishment, that they must have been mad even to think of it, as the summit was snow-covered even before they began to climb. However, I laughingly protested that we were equally mad, particularly as we had been warned by the old man at the Alpine hut that bad weather lay immediately in front of us.

The two Slovenes, either by accident or design, had chosen a much better position than our own, and, apart from my joy in catching up to our quarry, I was glad that Marshall's keen eyes had observed the fitful and feeble light of a match. Their refuge was almost a little cave in the rock, completely sheltered from the snow and well protected from the even more terrifying wind. There was even room for the four of us to lie down and still keep clear of the snow, which was piling up round about. We lay down huddled together, for we were almost exhausted. The cold was bitter, but like the French Royalist *émigrés* who took in each other's washing, we strove to impart to each other the warmth of our bodies, taking it in turn to lie outside.

When the cloudy dawn first showed its dim light, we got up and took stock of our position. Now it was almost impossible to look out of the cave, for a great wall of snow had been driven by the wind, almost cutting off access. Breaking clear a passage with our hands, we stared about us in dismay, for the mountain was a vast sea of snow, which still poured down in gigantic flakes, reducing visibility almost to nothing. The two Slovenes looked at one another in consternation. We had sufficient food for another two days, and Marshall and I knew that Glanoc would have raised the alarm, and at the earliest feasible moment a relief expedition would come to our rescue; but of course, the Slovenes did not know this, nor did I propose to tell them. In any case, a day or more might elapse before rescue became possible.

I will not attempt to describe the weary hours that followed, as we sat in the tiny cavern, shivering with cold. If only there had been some means of

making a fire, then I would have been more hopeful.

And as the day passed with the snow still beating down mercilessly, the wind shifting fitfully, driving the drift ever nearer towards our precious shelter, I began to lose my earlier optimism. It was not possible to walk more than three steps in a line in our shelter, but it was essential to do this to keep alive. Already my toes were numb and seemed to have lost all physical feeling. The younger Slovene was complaining that his fingers had lost their circulation.

We sang and we shouted; we used our food economically—Marshall and I fed apart from the other two—I was glad to see that they took the initiative in this. For the moment we had food, they would argue mentally; it was not until we came to a real extremity that we would all share together. I, myself, had no illusions as to what would happen at that time. Marshall and I were better provided, and it seemed to me to be infinitely more important that we should survive than these two men, who between them might so easily wreck the peace of the world. There were going to be no mock heroics on my part when the real crisis approached.

Darkness fell once more, with the snow still beating mercilessly down. I dreaded the thought of the night, for the icy wind, beating through the rarefied atmosphere of the mountain, sent fitful eddies into our shelter and seemed to freeze our very vitality. We had eaten but sparingly, but all our food of course, was cold and stale. Marshall and I, as I have said, were fortunately both in good condition, and to my surprise it was the young Slovene, Kranj, who appeared in distress first of the four of us.

“This is getting serious,” I said to Marshall as we squatted down for the night, covering ourselves as best we could with our coats. “If it doesn’t stop snowing tomorrow it will be even more serious.”

“It’s serious enough now,” said Marshall. “I’ve just remembered that my leave expires at midnight tonight. I’ve got to report at Scotland Yard tomorrow morning!”

CHAPTER FIVE

THERE was no thought of sleep; the cold was too intense. Throughout the night Marshall and I talked in low tones, treating the matter almost as a joke, in the traditional manner of Englishmen up against an emergency.

Some time in the early hours of the morning, the young Slovene began to moan in pain. As I suspected, he was on the verge of collapse, and it seemed fairly obvious that he was in the grip of pneumonia. Unfortunately, there was nothing that we could do. Our matches were almost exhausted, and not until daylight did we glimpse his true condition; then in a moment we knew that he was dying.

I hope that never again will I have to endure the agony of the hours that followed. I had no cause to love the man—it was because of him that I found myself in perilous plight, evidently near to death; yet to stand by so helplessly, watching a man die, was one of the greatest agonies I ever experienced—particularly when I thought that in another few hours it might be my own turn. More than once I was tempted to strangle him, to put him out of his misery; but there restrained me that instinctive humanitarian feeling which prompts even the useless preservation of life; so we sat and watched him die—hour after hour of agony, retching violently for every breath. His body was one unrelieved torment. I turned up his trousers and showed Marshall the blue flesh, stiff as if frozen. Never had I seen such an appalling case of frostbite.

Towards the end he became unconscious. I heard him muttering in a low tone, and could have kicked myself because I knew no Slovene. Could I but have listened, the whole plot might have been revealed; but I did at least hear one word which I understood and which comforted me, in that at least it proved that we were on the right track. It was a word that did not need translation—the name of Mussolini.

I commented on this to Marshall—avoiding the actual use of the name so that I should not arouse the suspicion of the other man, Savona. He appeared to be utterly flabbergasted at the death of his friend; he squatted by the body, staring at the face, distorted in agony even in death. I tried to speak to him, to comfort him, but he knew no German and my small stock of Yugoslav words was utterly inadequate for such an occasion.

Another day and night of terror followed. Marshall and I felt our vitality slowly sinking as the hours of freezing darkness passed. There remained to us food for no more than another day, even on the moderate rations we had mutually allocated. Still the snow streamed down; even in daytime our cave was almost dark, for the snowdrift had piled against the entrance to a depth of seven or eight feet, and only a small hole at the head of the cave admitted a trifle of light and a sufficiency of rarefied air.

Our drinks, too, were almost exhausted. We were compelled to suck occasionally a little unmelted snow, thus further chilling our systems. Marshall carried a little flask of brandy, but we retained this until the emergency should become even more desperate.

A thin wisp of daylight forced its way in through the crevice almost above us. We would have lain where we were, for our energy was almost exhausted, but our willpower fortunately was strong. That is one of the natural attributes of the Englishman—his pig-headedness, which is sometimes a nuisance, but sometimes a very decided quality. We had got so near to the completion of our task and we hated to be beaten. So Marshall and I pulled ourselves together. He was lighter than I was, and I mounted him on my shoulder so that he could reach to the small opening between rock and snow, and with his arm battered about the snow, dragging it down, enlarging the orifice so that more light and air should reach us. The other man made no attempt to help us. Soon I saw that that was not his fault for, when we had admitted a reasonable measure of daylight, I saw the signs of approaching death on his face.

His agony was shorter than that of his companion. He tried to rise, but fell forward on his face. We did what we could for him, but it seemed obvious that his case was hopeless. He had apparently escaped frostbite, but was fighting for breath, his eyes rolling in the agony of pain and despair. He lay helpless; and we sat helpless by his side.

“Well,” said Marshall slowly, “between us we’ve made a fine old muck of this! Oh, yes, I know it isn’t our fault; we couldn’t help this snowstorm, but it’s a hell of a mess we’re in. I estimate that with a bit of luck we can last out for another twenty-four or thirty-six hours. Well, it’s still snowing; it’s quite hopeless for any rescue-party to attempt to come to us until it stops, and even then they’ve got to find us.”

“I’m even more angry with fate than you are,” I said. “Here we are with the plot absolutely in our grip. One of the men already died on our hands, and the other man will be dead in a few hours, or minutes. Five minutes’ heart-to-heart talk, and we should get what we’ve been after all the while;

and now both men must go and die! Yes, we haven't managed this affair very well, Marshall. Assuming that we ever get out of it, when our records are written up it won't be one of the cases that we shall be very anxious to shout about."

"Assuming that we ever survive!" Marshall echoed.

Another helpless hour passed, and the sick man relapsed into a hazy unconsciousness. Soon he, too, began to babble in his misery. I could scarcely hear him, and took no trouble to do so, since I could not understand. But suddenly in his unhappy delirium he shouted out aloud, and I sat up suddenly. Before Marshall's wondering gaze I crawled over to the side of the dying man and listened hard to the muttering which he had now resumed.

"What on earth's the matter?" said Marshall.

"Everything's the matter!" I cried excitedly. "There's something wrong here; *this man's talking in Italian!* What's more, if it isn't native Italian, then I'm a Dutchman!"

What it meant I could not even attempt to guess, but I knew one thing—that we must talk with this man before he died. Out came Marshall's precious flask, and a few drops of generous brandy were forced down the man's throat. Trying everything we knew, we literally forced the man back to consciousness. Then I began to ask questions of him—in Italian, of course.

Marshall literally kept him alive for half an hour while he talked, supporting him through his paroxysms of gasping for breath, and forcing a drop of precious brandy down his throat. His story was not cohesive; it even had many contradictions; his mood changed; a dozen times in the half-hour. Sometimes he would bend to my will and speak as I commanded—at others, as the spirit restored a flickering vitality, he would defy me and would contradict all that he had said. Nevertheless, I was satisfied. When a man is about to die, and knows that he is about to die, it is difficult for him to lie, and it is very easy to know if he is lying.

"All right, you can let him go now," I said to Marshall at length, "I've got as much out of him as I expect to do. You'd better save what's left of the brandy; we may need it—and it's very essential that we two, or at least one of us, should survive."

Nevertheless, Marshall and I were so near the point of exhaustion, that even the trifling effort had sapped our strength inordinately.

“Don’t ask me questions for the moment,” I said. “Let’s have a rest. We both need it; we’ve got plenty of time to talk afterwards.” So we lay down close together for warmth.

I must have dozed. It had been impossible to sleep at night, and most of our rest had come in fitful naps during the daytime. Suddenly a weird gurgle awakened me, and I turned to find Marshall locked in a life and death embrace with the man I had presumed must by now be dead. Savona had Marshall by the throat. Marshall in his present weak state could scarcely resist, but Savona from some mysterious force had gathered strength—the last strength of a man before he dies. Without rising to my feet I struggled with him; he relaxed his grip on Marshall’s throat and tore savagely at me. I recoiled, and he turned to Marshall again, and his clawing nails tore red furrows down Marshall’s cheek. Together we attacked him; he fought with a concentrated fury and strength which I would never have credited. Then, as I knelt weakly upon him, I saw his face—the full force of our feeble light beating down upon it. I saw his eyes staring into mine, and recognized at least a partial explanation of that amazing reserve of strength, for the man was unmistakably mad.

Three days before, either Marshall or I would have taken on the man single-handed without the slightest hesitation; but now, enfeebled by exposure, handicapped by the bitter cold, with frostbitten limbs, we were in no condition to resist the onslaught of a madman. Though we were two to one, we fought so cumbrously and without plan that the advantage was with him. My own fists were nerveless, frozen, fragments of flesh. I aimed one clumsy blow at his throat, only to miss him and hit Marshall in the pit of the stomach. He was temporarily winded, and Savona flung himself upon me like a fury, his eyes gleaming with madness and his nails clawing like a beast. I got the better of him by a method an Englishman is not supposed to use—I kicked him hard in the stomach. I could do no other, for my hands were mere blocks of ice, completely insensitive and useless.

He fell to the ground, and I thought that all was over; yet as I bent over him he rose again. This time he made no move to attack me—which was just as well, for I was trembling with exhaustion. Instead he rushed to the rough slope of snow which Marshall had battered down, and with inhuman energy scaled it in two or three steps—it was almost like a jump to the top of the snowdrift. How he could even stand was amazing. I saw him hesitate for one second on the edge of the drift and then, with a great shout, dart forward. I crawled after him, slipping and sliding up the barrier of snow; but when, after anxious moments, my face peered above the top, there was no sign of him. Three or four yards in front of me was a hole in the snow—and

the driving snowflakes were already spreading a thin white blanket over the body of the madman.

“Where is he?” asked Marshall, at last recovering his wind.

“He’s gone—dead, I think,” I replied. “It’s just as well, for God knows what we should have done with him. I’ve got enough evidence to hang him, almost—but if we had handed him over to the police of any country, the plot would certainly have come out. Then there would have followed international complications—and more; that much was probable before, but it is certain now. Yes, I’m damned glad he’s gone. Hell, who would have thought that a man nine-tenths dead could have fought like that, even if he were mad? It was almost incredible.”

It was indicative of Marshall’s extreme exhaustion that a good half-hour elapsed before he asked me what I had learned from the man who had just died in such melodramatic fashion. Yet, as I told him the story, its interest overcame his mental stupor, and he even raised himself to a sitting position so as to follow me the more intently.

“You remember that Glanoc had some slight undefined suspicion of this man?” I began, talking slowly to ease my labored breathing. “It was obvious that he was the leader of the two, and was definitely on top of this—” and I looked askant at the stiffened corpse lying within the cave. “Well, Glanoc’s suspicion was only too well founded. The man outside—his name was really Savona—was an Italian.”

“An Italian?” Marshall repeated. “Then why did he want to murder Mussolini?”

“He didn’t.”

“I see; he wanted the other man to?”

“No, this man Kranj was nothing more than a stool-pigeon. It was never intended that he should murder Mussolini or anybody else.”

“Oh, go on,” said Marshall, wearily. “I haven’t got the hang of it at all.”

“Be patient,” I said, “my brain is working as slowly as yours. It was like this. This Italian Savona is an Istrian—that is to say, he comes from that part of Italy just over the mountain frontier from Yugoslavia. His home actually is about twenty miles away from here. In fact, he comes from Caporetto, the village of disgraceful memory. That explains why he speaks Slovene with reasonable fluency—because most of the people in his village are actually Slovenes. But he is a member of the Dalmatian League—I think I’ve told you about that before—or else Glanoc did; it is a patriotic league with the avowed intention of restoring to Italy something like the old empire of the

Cæsars, and in particular of making a start by conquering and annexing Dalmatia—which, as you know, was once the property of Venice, quite apart from its association with the Roman Empire at its height. This Dalmatian League is one of the ultra-super-patriotic organizations that you find in different forms in every country. Mussolini is, or was, a patron or president or something of the Dalmatian League—you may recall the outcry in Yugoslavia when once he appeared on his favorite balcony waving a Dalmatian flag.

“Well, this man was determined to bring things to a head. He seems to have acted completely on his own, or at any rate only in conjunction with one or two kindred spirits. I should doubt if the Dalmatian League knew anything about his scheme at all.^[2]

[2] This actually proved to be the case. Later, when I was in communication with Aderno, I got him to make the fullest inquiries and was satisfied that the Dalmatian League could be absolved of all direct blame. As Aderno put it, the Dalmatian League is utterly mad, but not quite so mad as that. I need hardly say so, too, that neither the Italian Government nor any officer of the Fascist Party was in any way privy to the rather absurd plot which had been so dramatically unfolded to me.—
B.N.

“You know, of course, that it is common talk in this part of the world that, once Mussolini has finished with Abyssinia, he will turn immediately to Yugoslavia as his next victim. This man Savona wanted to make quite certain that this would actually be the case. In particular, he wanted to give Italy a satisfactory *casus belli* for a conflict. There does not exist a single valid reason why Italy should attack Yugoslavia. Savona evidently realized this, and determined to provide one.”

“Even now I don’t quite see,” Marshall began, as I halted for a moment in my complicated narrative.

“No. Give me a chance,” I protested. “I only stopped to take breath—this air seems to get more rarefied and vitiated every minute. No, this Savona came into Yugoslavia some time ago deliberately to get hold of a fellow who would propose to assassinate Mussolini; to lead him into Italy and there to let him be captured while in the act of preparing an attempt.”

“Good God! Is that so?” Marshall ejaculated. “Ah, now I begin to see.”

“Yes, it was a scheme that was certain of success. Although the Yugoslav Government has behaved very correctly, the population of Yugoslavia as a whole hates the Italians. You can’t blame them. It was obvious that Savona would have no difficulty in getting hold of some patriotic fanatic and leading him on. He appears to have handled his plot very cleverly. He was prepared to go well into Yugoslavia, but actually found this man”—and again I indicated the stiff corpse—“at Liubliana. The Slovenes, of course, are supposed to be at loggerheads with the Serbs, but there are no two opinions as to what they think about the Italians! Remember that there are half a million Slovenes still in Italy, among these very mountains. Now these Slovenes have had a very thin time since Italy took them over after the War.

“Italy’s policy has been to turn the Slovenes into Italians. It’s one of the things that can’t be done. But I expect I’ve spoken to you about the dodges the Italians employed—Glanoc did, anyway—Slovene forbidden to be spoken, men imprisoned for speaking their native language—men even tortured, according to some accounts. And the tin hat was put upon it, of course, when Italy began to send troops to Africa, conscripting men freely.

“That gave our friend Savona an excellent opportunity—a wonderful excuse for coming in to Yugoslavia. He was able to proclaim himself as a Slovene deserter who refused to fight for Italy against Abyssinia. As such he would be welcomed by the people if not by the Government—which, however, could scarcely refuse him sanctuary, since he was one of their own people. I gather—of course, you understand that he gave me only the gist of all this, but it’s fairly easy to fill in the blanks—that he has been going round Yugoslavia talking to all the patriotic societies he could find.”

“But why?” Marshall queried. “Once he got his man, why worry about others?”

“To implicate them, of course! Isn’t this 1914 all over again? Oh, he was smart, was Savona! When the two men were eventually arrested in Italy—for Savona, if only for form’s sake, would be arrested as well—the Italian Government would demand an inquiry. The Yugoslav Government would probably concede this reasonable demand, and to their horror would find that dozens of Yugoslav nationals were involved. You can see the pretty mess then. It seems to me that Savona has studied the history of 1914 fairly closely, and it wasn’t surprising that he took his man to Sarajevo for final inspiration.

“Kranj appears to have been a perfectly honest fellow. You remember that we both liked the look of him; in fact, he appears to have been another Princip, and even described himself as such. At the price of certain death—

and there could be no doubt about the price being enacted—it was necessary that someone should remove the tyrant who held the sword poised over the head of Yugoslavia. He would be honored as a patriot and martyr; his name would go down in history like that of Princip. One day there would be monuments to him in Yugoslavia, and bridges and streets called after his name.”

“But surely, all this was very badly timed,” said Marshall. “Surely, Italy doesn’t want to raise a quarrel with Yugoslavia now, while she’s got her hands full in Abyssinia?”

“I did think that myself,” I agreed. “Nevertheless, I can imagine the mental reasoning of the man. It is at this time, he might have mused, that it would be easiest to enrage a foreigner against Mussolini and to find a stool-pigeon of the right type; therefore, I had better lay my trail now, get him over to Italy, where I can keep him hanging about for a few weeks before arranging the arrest. Or else I can get him arrested at once and he can simply be held until the right moment.

“There is even another possibility,” I continued. “You talk about Italy’s hands being full with Abyssinia; but are they? After all, the number of white troops there is not large—they are leaving most of the fighting to their niggers, apparently. I can imagine the man arguing with himself like this: the Little Entente dare not function, because of French influence, therefore, it would be a question between Italy and Yugoslavia alone. And even allowing for the Expeditionary Force in Abyssinia, Italy’s army—finely equipped with the most modern weapons and still outnumbering the Yugoslavs by two to one—would be so formidable that Yugoslavia would submit without a blow. That, as I say, is the way I can imagine him as arguing. I think he would have found himself utterly mistaken.

“Before the Italians annex Dalmatia, they would have to kill off every Serb, Croat and Slovene in Yugoslavia. And fighting the Serbs wouldn’t be quite the same as fighting the Abyssinians. Man for man, the Serb is the finest fighter in Europe—that was the opinion of the Germans, and they ought to know. Although deficient in tanks and aeroplanes, the Serbs are adequately armed.

“And look at the country in which they would fight—look around you, if you get a chance when this snow clears away—if it ever does clear away. This is the kind of country where man counts more than machines. Can you imagine a tank climbing up this mountain?

“Anyway, whatever his real reason was—and maybe now we shall never know—he certainly acted as he did, and his plan almost succeeded. If he had

once got this fellow over into Italy literally loaded with evidence—Savona mentioned that he had actually got a letter from Kranj, loudly proclaiming his determination to remove the tyrant—well, then, it is certain that Italy would have had a moral weapon which she could have used in her own time with considerable effect. She could have even delayed the news of the arrest until the Abyssinian war was over—there is no Habeas Corpus Act in Italy, you know. But Kranj must have been a fool if he imagined that such a war would have been confined to Italy and Yugoslavia. Yes, I don't think there is another man in the world I would rather have seen dead than this Savona."

"So we have done a bit of good, after all," said Marshall.

"Well, I don't think we can claim any credit," I replied. "After all, we've done nothing."

"But if we hadn't seen them at Sarajevo," Marshall broke in, "I suppose they were there, by the way, for propaganda purposes?"

"Yes," I agreed; "it must have been very thrilling, to the man who imagined himself to be a sort of Gavrilo Princip the second, to kneel at his grave and salute his memorial. And, of course, it would have a tremendous effect when it all came out later. But, nevertheless, although we saw them there and trailed them here, I don't think we can claim much credit. It was the snowstorm that beat them, not us. They didn't even know that we were after them."

"No," Marshall agreed, "but, nevertheless, if there had been no snowstorm we should probably have caught them up before they could have done any damage." And we comforted ourselves with this reflection.

Very tired after our long spell of talking, we lay back. Although it was now the middle of the afternoon, the cold seemed to be more intense than ever—that is, to those parts of my body which were not completely numbed. We lay thinking of what we had learned, and pondering on the strange tricks of fate. Apparently we need never have interfered at all. Nature, the greatest detective of all, had taken it upon herself to defeat the plot. Not only had we done nothing, but, short of something very like a miracle, soon we too must die.

I felt signs of movement beside me, and saw Marshall attempting to crawl across the floor of the cave.

"What's the matter?" I asked.

"Well, there's one obvious thing I haven't done," he said, "and if I can only find sufficient use in my fingers I'm going to do it. I haven't searched this chap. I ought to have done it automatically, hours ago, but somehow I

don't feel very automatic. The Charge Room at Cannon Row seems about ten million miles from here. I used to think that it was draughty, but my God, it was little hell compared with this place!"

He reached the side of the body, and his still clumsy fingers began to explore the man's pockets. From an inner pocket he withdrew the man's passport and two letters. One of them was apparently unintelligible to him, but as he looked at the other in the uncertain light I saw his eyes flash with excitement.

"A letter with a London postmark!" he cried.

"Well, what of it?" I asked.

But he was already probing inside the envelope, his poor fingers making heavy weather of so simple a task. When he withdrew the letter he cried aloud in triumph.

"Look at that," he shouted; and, crawling towards me, he handed me the sheet of paper.

I looked at it in surprise. On it was typewritten the one word "NE"—which is Yugoslav for "NO."

"But what does all this mean?" I queried.

"I've been looking for that for weeks," he said. "Don't you see—*this is a sheet of Hertford Bank paper?*"

CHAPTER SIX

I STARED at the sheet of paper, while Marshall was examining the envelope minutely.

“Yes, this is it!” he cried. “If this envelope wasn’t typed by the same machine as those ultimatum things we received, then may I never give evidence in a police-court again.”

“It isn’t very likely, anyway,” I said, shortly.

For my brain was working furiously. This discovery had put an entirely new complexion on things. I had imagined that the plot which we had accidentally unearthed was entirely unconnected with the other—that sheer coincidence had led us into it. I know that it is customary for critics to sneer at coincidence, but I also know that there is such a thing; it has helped me—and hindered me—on more than one occasion, and I was quite prepared to believe that it was by its extraordinary machinations that we had become involved in this affair.

But now I had to reconsider the matter from completely new angles. One coincidence is possible, but two suggest the improbable. The postcard which unwittingly dragged us to Sarajevo, and our subsequent encounter with the two men who were now dead, might have been a coincidence; but that this sheet of paper and the tell-tale typewriting should be found upon one of the bodies—regretfully I had to dismiss coincidence as an utterly inadequate explanation. However I tried to pretend to myself, I had to admit that Margaret in some way or other must be connected with these men.

My thoughts were very bitter as, the excitement of the find over, both of us sank down to the ground again. The snowing appeared to have stopped, but we felt that it would be impossible for any attempt at rescue to reach us for hours, even days. And we felt in our hearts that we would never survive another of those terrible nights. As I lay down, I had almost made up my mind that it was to die. I was bitter in my thoughts because of my failure. As I looked back over the history of the affair, I saw how grossly incompetent I had been. Reading over what I have written, my efforts seem to resemble those of a bungling boy scout recruit rather than those of a man who (I think I could claim it) had tackled some strange situations and accomplished some unusual tasks. There seemed to be some substance in Marshall’s previous

charge—that I had allowed a woman, or the mere memory of a woman, to tempt me from what I knew to be the right course.

The mere memory of a woman! I had seen and known Margaret for but three or four brief hours, and yet it seemed that I was very near to her. Women had played no great part in my life. My first affair had not been happy—some of my readers will recall my strange encounter with Suzanne, which I have detailed in *Spy*. I had now turned forty, and had never been tempted to marriage by the many beautiful and brilliant girls I had met. And yet this girl, whom I had met in such strange circumstances, and who was not specially beautiful, had caused me to think more deeply than all the rest put together. If anyone had talked to me about love at first sight, I would have laughed in their faces; and yet something of that kind had afflicted me. As I tried to analyze it, it seemed to be no form of physical passion, but a high sense of comradeship. Margaret, I felt instinctively, was a girl of loyalty and integrity, of mental ability, who would be a true comrade through life. If I had fallen in love with her at all, then very definitely I had fallen in love from the head downwards.

That she was involved in this plot I could not possibly doubt. This meant that she was in danger—real, definite, serious danger; and I, like a fool, could not help her.

“I say, Marshall, do you think you could possibly write?” I asked, a little later. “My own fingers are completely gone—I can’t feel my arms at all.”

“I’ll try, if you like,” he said. “I don’t feel much like it, and it will be strange writing, but I still have some sort of sense in my hand.”

After what seemed an incredible time, he fished out some paper and a pencil from his pocket. He grasped the pencil awkwardly in the palm of his hand like a baby—his fingers had lost their use. At my dictation he wrote a short note to Mason, merely hinting at our discovery—we did not want the finders of our bodies or the Yugoslav police to know of the plot, so wrote down just enough and no more; Mason, already fully acquainted with our ideas—for I had written to him in the plane from Sarajevo—would easily piece the story together.

At the end I added one brief sentence. *Get Miss Hay out of this, at all costs.* I read over the letter, written in great clumsy letters, like the first writing of a child.

I did not want to die. I had faced death before, and had not been too nervously concerned. But now I wanted to live, desperately. Yet, as the short hours of daylight flitted by, I felt that all hope had gone. I cursed bitterly at the fate which had forced such a miserable death upon me.

Looking back again over what I have written, my story appears to be casual and nebulous. I seem to have missed the continued thrill which pervaded my atmosphere about this time. At this stage in my story, too, I realize once again the deficiencies of the straightforward method of narration which I have adopted. Here is a dramatic situation—two men holding the key to a vast plot, and yet imprisoned by a blizzard upon a mountain, expecting death at almost any moment. Had I adopted the customary form of narration, assuming the omnipotence of the author, I could have legitimately exploited the literary device of suspense. As it is, the device is useless. I cannot work upon your feelings, simply because you know very well that I did not die, otherwise I would not be writing the story. This deficiency is serious, for I fear that I shall give you a poor idea of the agony of those last hours on the Triglav. Marshall, staggering to the slope of snow, announced that it had definitely stopped snowing, and that the wind had dropped. Nevertheless, it seemed impossible that rescuers could arrive until at least the following day; and by that time we would certainly be dead.

We knew this very well. We had exhausted Marshall's precious flask of brandy; a little food still remained to us, but we were no longer hungry. Our limbs were nerveless and apparently frozen. I had taken off one of my boots so as to ease the foot it contained, and then found it impossible to get it on again. And as night approached for the third time, Marshall and I lay down to die.

We were outwardly calm, but my weakened vitality raged furiously within me. Death had so often been near me, as was inevitable in a life such as mine, in a career I had entered and continued by accident, not by choice. In my earliest days as a spy I had been on the point of facing a firing squad; I was very young then, yet had not been afraid to die—my nerve had been good, and my pride high. Courage is a matter of pride.

Now I was over forty, and my pride was more subdued. People who have read my memoirs have afterwards told me that they pictured me as a man of iron nerve, impervious to fear. That is the opposite of the truth. Such courage as I possess is calculated courage. I envy the man who can walk through danger without thinking or realizing. I have to force myself to do it.

Yet, there is a difference between facing pain and death, as any soldier will tell you. And there is certainly a great difference between facing possible death and certain death. There is no fear in the inevitable. A walk across No Man's Land in the face of enemy machine-guns is a nerve-racking business, with the chance of death at every stride. The wait for certain death

is not nearly so trying—I know this well, for twice I have been condemned to death, and have prepared to die without expectation of escape.

Any man who is a man can control his nerve when he knows what he has to face—it is the unknown which holds terror. A prison chaplain told me that the report that a murderer “walked calmly to the scaffold” is generally true—and the exceptions are scarcely men, but sewer-rats.

Death was now inevitable; yet, somehow, the inward calm which I had known in similar circumstances was lacking. I could not resign myself to the thought that death *was* inevitable—my mind was convinced, but not my spirit. Desire for life flooded my chilled arteries; for a moment I felt stronger—then recognized the last decline.

The inevitable could not be balked. For the last time I raised myself on my elbow; my body was numb—I felt my strength slowly slipping from me. I looked across at Marshall; the look in his eyes told me that he had given up all hope.

We said good-bye to each other casually. Ours had been a good partnership, a dozen times we had been near to death together, but this seemed obviously the end. I felt myself drifting into unconsciousness. Was this death? It seemed like sleep.

Yet in the morning we were still alive. The night had not been so impossible as the previous night, the temperature had not been so appalling, the wind had apparently dropped and certainly the snowing had ceased. As the dim light of dawn slowly invaded our sanctuary, Marshall and I looked at one another, and then whispered greetings—as if to friends who had come back from death. I could not move—my legs and feet were in hopeless condition—but Marshall still preserved some miraculous reservoir of strength from which to draw.

“Maybe we’re not done for after all,” I whispered.

“But surely they’ll never be able to get at us in this wilderness of snow,” he said.

“Yes, Glanoc will send up expert mountaineers on skis—they can get almost anywhere.”

“But how will they find us?” said Marshall.

“They’ll keep shouting, and we’ll shout back.”

“I doubt if they’ll hear us,” Marshall commented. “I know one thing, if I can do it; I’m going to put something on the snow outside the cave—something that will show up and act as a guide.”

He crawled to the body of Kranj and, laboriously working with his fists rather than his fingers, he took off the dead man's jacket. Then once again he tackled the slope of snow, struggled up it and flung the jacket over its crest where it would certainly show up on the carpet of snow. He slipped back exhausted, and we lay down to wait.

Help came sooner than I had anticipated. Apparently Glanoc had reached Bohinj on the night of his accident, gallantly struggling downwards through the darkness. Long before he reached the village, the blizzard had struck the mountain; immediately, therefore, he had begun to organize a rescue-party. The villagers, hardy men of the mountains, had willingly co-operated, and half a dozen of them with skis and blankets had turned out immediately, and had fought their way to the Alpine hut. There, however, they were completely confined by the blizzard, and it was not until the snowing had ceased that they were able to come out and make a search. Actually, we were less than a mile from the hut—so near to safety and yet so far away.

Keen eyes saw the jacket which Marshall had flung upon the snow, and keen ears heard our weak reply to their sturdy hail. Two peasants appeared over the crest of snow; they slid down to us and took in the situation immediately. One of them, leaving behind his woollen cloak, immediately set off for help. The other man remained with us, wrapping us round and round with the woollen cloak, and forcing hot coffee from his flask between our lips. Within half an hour half a dozen men had arrived, and we were carried back to the hut, where a doctor awaited us. He treated us very cleverly—I had anticipated being thawed before a fire; instead he wrapped us separately in successive layers of warm blankets, until we resembled the traditional Eskimo nocturnal outfit. Then he forced warm drinks into us, and left us to thaw by the warmth of our own bodies.

Not until some hours later did he examine us in any detail. At first he looked askant at our limbs, and he told me afterwards that he considered seriously the amputation of several of my toes and fingers.

However, he determined to persevere and, rubbing us with some kind of oil, immersed us in blankets again.

My legs and arms were throbbing—they had been senseless for so long—but at last I went to sleep. I have never slept so deeply, and no one tried to awaken me—I believe it would have been quite impossible. I slept for nearly twenty-four hours, but when I awoke the doctor was delighted to find that I was hungry—apparently this was the best of signs.

Two days later we were moved to Bohinj—cleverly carried down the mountain-side by relays of peasants, who negotiated the abrupt slopes and

precarious paths with skill and courage. The valley was snow-covered, but not to impossible depth, and an ambulance was waiting to carry us to Bled, where in the little hospital we received expert attention.

For very many days, naturally, we were quite incapable of movement. Marshall, strangely enough, had a worse time than I did—although (or, maybe, because) his resistance in the cave had been more sustained and prolonged than mine. Once on the road to recovery, however, we were quite happy. We had, of course, reported events to Mason and were quite confident that he would do everything that was necessary.

But, when once again we reached the stage of animated discussion, we were not quite so pleased with ourselves as we had been. What exactly had we discovered? The sheet of Hertford Bank paper and the irregularities, trifling though they were, of the typewriting, proved without reasonable doubt that the dead Slovene was connected with that League of International Amity which had started us on the chase. This was important—particularly important to me, as it was obvious that Margaret was connected with the League.

But were we any nearer to the root of the trouble? We had prevented—except that the credit was scarcely ours—another attempt on the life of Mussolini; yet, if this League were as international as it appeared, there might be a dozen similar plots in the offing. Glanoc, whose arm was mending well and who was able to get about a little, pursued such inquiries as he could, but he was able to do little more than to prove the details of the story which I had told to Marshall in the cave, after the much-contradicted confession of the dead Italian. It was ascertained without doubt that the man was an Italian, and Glanoc was able to piece together evidence which proved quite conclusively that he was going to use Kranj as a tool and nothing more.

“There’s only one thing,” Marshall commented at the end of a long discussion. “We’ve got to find this girl of yours. Once we’ve got her, then our job’s almost over. We can play a winning hand now, too. We have at last definite evidence—if necessary, we could prefer a charge, a pretty serious charge at that. But I suppose that you’d object?”

“I certainly should,” I said. “We’ve managed this business privately by hook and by luck so far, and we’ll continue to do it. I’m more than ever convinced that if we made it official, and the story got about, it would almost do as much harm as an attempted assassination itself.”

As soon as we were fit to travel, the doctors at Bled insisted upon sunshine and soft air, and we found ourselves travelling luxuriously by

aeroplane to Dubrovnik—the old Ragusa—a gem of a place in the Southern Adriatic. Within a few weeks we were walking about again, and felt surprisingly few effects of our privations and exposure. Very soon we had so recovered our health and vitality that we determined to go back to London.

Back in England, Marshall and I repaired once again to Mason's house. Our informal conference was useful yet unproductive of result. We surveyed all the events of the past weeks, and Mason—who was qualified to take a detached view—gave it as his opinion that the plot was dead. He pointed out that Kranj, the young Slovene, was not apparently attempting to murder Mussolini as the agent of the League, but had been lured into the attempt by the Italian *agent provocateur*. I was glad to hear his opinion, which I wanted to believe. I was sick of the whole business, and wearied of Italy and Italian affairs. I only wanted to find Margaret; and then the whole business, including Mussolini, could go to blazes so far as I was concerned.

Marshall had gathered a few details about her, but had been unable to trace her. She rented a service flat, one of a large block in Kensington, but had been continuously away for several months. Both her parents were dead, and apparently she had sufficient independent means. He had even traced some of her friends, who were quite ignorant of her associations with this League, whatever it was. To them she was a perfectly normal English girl—rather highbrow, some of them described her—athletic and fond of travel. They had not been surprised when she had gone away for such a long period—they had received no more than casual postcards from her.

I did ask one question delicately and in roundabout fashion, but Marshall answered very bluntly, as was his wont. No, he said, he had not heard any mention of an engagement or even of an *affaire*.

For some days I walked about London helplessly. Fate has allotted to me a life of action—it would not have been my own choice; an armchair and a book are to me among the major pleasures of life. I have been in many tight corners and have had many a thrilling encounter. I think I can say that I have enjoyed them, and on the whole have acquitted myself reasonably well. I had accomplished some rather extraordinary exploits—including the impersonation of a German officer at German Headquarters during the War; but here I was faced with a comparatively simple task—the tracing of a girl whose name, home, and friends I knew, and yet I was completely helpless, unable to do anything at all.

A telegram from Aderno revived my waning hopes. I rushed to Croydon, and flew to Rome. He had news of Margaret—not much, but definitely

news. A detective previously engaged on my Naples job—the tracing of the “forgers”—had chanced casually on the name of Grantern in a provincial police report from Turin. Armed with a note to the chief of police, I rushed thither.

He was polite, in spite of the feeling over Abyssinia, and placed his organization at my disposal. The story was simple enough, as I read it in the police report. Some ten days previously there had been a minor accident in one of the principal streets of the town. A boy had been riding a bicycle—one of those “sports” models so popular on the Continent, with narrow rims and ridiculous tires. Trying to cross a tram-line at a narrow angle, his rear wheel had been caught in the metals and he was flung to the ground. There was a stream of traffic, and a following car had run over the boy’s leg.

Accompanied by a sergeant of police I set off at once to interview actual witnesses. First, a policeman who had been on duty in the street, and had seen the accident. He described it simply, in the same fashion as the police report. No, he said, the driver of the car was quite blameless—in fact, it was only by clever driving that he had avoided running over the boy’s body. Actually, the damage was slight—one or two minor ankle-bones broken.

“And the driver of the car?” I queried.

“I took full particulars, of course,” he said. “You have doubtless seen my report? He was an American named Grantern, staying at the Hotel Bristol. He pulled up within a couple of meters, picked up the boy, and carried him to the car. Then he drove to a hospital—I went with him.”

“I understand that a lady was with him?”

“Yes. She was very concerned. She held the boy on her knee all the way to the hospital—he was very frightened. They both stayed while the doctor examined him, and then drove off to fetch the boy’s parents.”

“You took no further action?”

“No. The thing was a palpable accident—I saw it myself, and took the names of other witnesses. Just in case of complications—say, the unlikely event of the boy dying—I took the gentleman’s permanent address.”

“Ah! You have that?”

“Yes,” he said, consulting his notebook. “Here it is—^[3] That was all I did—there was no question of compensation. As a matter of fact, the gentleman treated the boy remarkably well. He appeared to be rich; I saw him give the parents a sum sufficient to buy a new bicycle and leave something substantial over, and he made a contribution to the hospital which would more than cover the boy’s treatment.”

[3] Omitted, as it is not unknown, and would betray Grantern's family.
—B.N.

“And the lady—what of her?”

“I took her name, as a witness. And her address, too.”

“What is it?”

Alas, he gave me no more than the answer I knew already—the address of Margaret's flat.

I went to see everyone concerned—the boy, his parents, the other witnesses. From their descriptions I had ample but quite unnecessary confirmation that the two involved *were* Margaret and Grantern. The boy's parents were overwhelmed with gratitude, and described with vivacity the generosity of the gentleman and the thoughtful charm of the lady.

I took the only precaution available; making banknotes rustle, I got them to promise to wire me immediately if the lady came back. I hinted that if they could get enough information to enable me to trace her, then they would not lose by it. The woman, scenting a romance, promised her help vehemently.

I returned to the policeman who had witnessed the affair.

“I forgot to ask you about the car?” I said.

“I have its number—I can take you to see it, if you like.”

“It is still here?” I cried.

“Yes. It was hired.”

A hired car again! One day our gangsters will realize that a hired car is even better than a stolen one for covering up traces.

The net result of my inquiries was merely that Margaret had been in Turin ten days ago. Where had they gone? The hotel people believed that they were going into France, but could not be sure. Their time of leaving agreed with the departure of a train to Marseilles, but within half an hour were departures to Trieste and Rome.

Why had they come to Turin? They had stayed four days. Why should anyone stay four days in Turin? I could not answer that. No, the hotel people were convinced that Signor Grantern had not been on business—he had had three or four visitors, who had taken meals with him, but these were young

people of the student type. No, they had not been noticed sufficiently for identification.

I described the other man—Harim, with the queer eyes, but awakened no echo of memory. Certainly he had not been among the visitors.

Again I threw up my hands in furious helplessness. The chief of police promised instant information if they re-appeared; Aderno was watching Rome. I could only go to the south of France, where the search was hopeless. In desperation I went on to Paris, to lay my case before my friend of the *Sûreté*. He was sympathetic, but not optimistic.

Why had they gone to Turin? I puzzled as I flew back to Croydon. Why stay four days in such an undistinguished town? Why were their visitors only students? The obvious answers made me uneasy. The League was plotting some new terror. Turin was as good a center as any in Italy. Here Fascism is a hated master; here, in the capital of industrial Italy, is the Italian cradle of democracy. Probably from Turin will eventually emerge the crusade which will free Italy from its incubus—a crusade from a traditional home of liberal opinion. Yes, the League would have no difficulty in finding recruits in Turin.

Such speculation was disquieting, but useless. The fact was that Margaret had appeared and disappeared again, and I knew that my chances of picking up the trail were small, this not being a *roman policier*. I returned home thoroughly dissipated, and for days mooned about disconsolately, waiting without hope for news from the agents, official and unofficial, I had planted in Margaret's track. The only tangible clue I had discovered was Grantern's permanent address. Marshall called up New York, but received a reply that Grantern's present address was unknown—he was touring "somewhere in Europe." I knew that already!

I decided for my own peace of mind that it was time I went back to work. I am by profession an actor, and my several adventures with Marshall have had to me the appearance of drama in real life. I had an old engagement to make a film at Elstree, and, fortunately at the right moment, just when I was at the lowest stage of despondency, the piece was put into production. For once, too, it ran smoothly—the usual wasted days of waiting were cut right out, and we were hard worked for many hours on end, day after day. This was just as well, for I forgot my own troubles.

Then I took a part in a play which was being tried out at Ronald Adam's Embassy Theater at Swiss Cottage.

The play was strong, and I had a good part—a part that suited my mood; that of a man who lost nearly everything in life in a series of misfortunes,

and whose outlook changed rapidly from sunny optimism to the deepest gloom. According to the critics I played it rather well—and certainly I ought to have done!

Now actors have different methods of adjusting their voices. When I am speaking on a lecture platform, as I frequently do, and the lights are on in the hall, I select three or four members of the audience, scattered about, as samples of the rest, and speak to them individually in turn. In a theater the technique must differ. The auditorium is in almost complete darkness, and only blank rows of whiteness indicate the faces of the audience. On the stage, therefore, I usually select some imaginary person in a fairly central position and assume that I am playing to him—or her.

In this case, I selected a point in about the third row of the dress circle, which in this theater swoops down so as to be almost within whispering distance of the stage. One night during the second week—the play was then to be transferred, like many others of Ronald Adam's successes, to the West End—the piece went particularly well, and we took a large number of calls at the end. The house lights, of course, went up, and while we were taking the first call I looked, as was my habit, at the spot to which I had been playing—it was always amusing to pick out the man or woman who had been my unconscious audience and to compare them with what I had imagined. Tonight at least, I suffered no disappointment, for as my eyes strayed to the center of the dress circle, moving back the two or three rows that I had estimated, I saw a girl in a black evening gown—Margaret.

CHAPTER SEVEN

I COULD scarcely contain myself as we took curtain after curtain to the applause of the packed house. At the signal for the last call I rushed from the stage; fortunately this was a modern piece and I was in ordinary clothes, but, of course, my make-up was still on my face. As I pushed and shouldered my way into the crowd, now thronging the foyer, people stared hard at me, and I could see and hear them pointing me out to one another. But I ignored their looks and comments—I was looking for one person only. For many minutes I failed to find her; then, when most of the people had disappeared into the night, I saw her slowly descending the stairs which led from the circle.

It was a strange meeting. I had seen the girl for no more than two or three hours under very strange circumstances. Without reasonable possibility of doubt we had been working on opposite sides in an affair of life and death; yet we met as friends who had been merely parted. I could not restrain myself as I walked eagerly towards her with both my hands outstretched, and instinctively my delight quickened my pulse as she took them in hers. She was looking into my eyes with the shadow of a smile upon her face. For several moments neither of us spoke.

“I had to come,” she said at last. “I only arrived in England this morning and I saw that you were playing here. You did not mind?”

“Mind?” I echoed. “Look, we two have a lot to say to each other. I ought to take off my make-up, but promise that you will not run away. Or shall I put the commissionaire on guard over you? I am not going to lose you again so easily.”

“Never mind about the commissionaire,” she smiled. “I shall not run away.”

I led her to the Members’ Lounge and rushed back to my dressing-room. Within ten minutes I was with her again.

“Now where shall we go?” I said. “Somewhere quiet where we can talk. Will you come to my flat or shall we go to yours?”

“To mine,” she said. “I have ordered supper to be ready for us.”

I looked at her with renewed admiration. This was a girl who thought of things.

Her flat was small, but it included one large room which was lounge and dining-room in one. A capable maid served an excellent supper. Over it we talked little but platitudes, discussing the play in which she had seen me. But as soon as the meal was over, we drew up our chairs to the fire.

“Now, where do we begin?” I asked.

“I suppose we had better go back to Naples,” she said.

“Yes; why did you run away?”

“I had to. When I mentioned to my friends that I had met you and what you had seen, they were very alarmed—they knew your reputation. Of course, I knew something of it as well, but apparently I hadn’t realized what a terrible man you are—particularly if you happen to be on the other side.”

“So you were on the other side,” I suggested.

“Yes,” she whispered, “I was.”

“I refused to believe it for a long time,” I said, “but then things happened which made me know that it was true.”

“You did not think too hardly of me?”

“How could I do that? I could even see your point of view.”

“Oh, I’m glad of that,” she said. “I didn’t want you to think of me as a murderer.”

“How could I?” I reproved gently. “But suppose you begin at the beginning. It won’t do you any harm to get it off your chest. Tell me all about this business.”

“Gladly,” she agreed. “I’ve been wanting an opportunity to do this for a good many months.”

“Tell me about this League of yours,” I suggested.

“Willingly,” she agreed. “Of course, you won’t expect me to reveal its secrets? It was scarcely mine, however. I was only a humble member. It was born in casual manner, as these things usually are. A small group of us students was touring Europe; everybody was talking about the next war, and it all seemed to us so absurd. Everywhere we went, whether the country was France or Germany or Poland or Bulgaria, everybody was most friendly towards us. It seemed impossible that one or more of these countries was destined to fight against us. And I hate war and all forms of war.

“I have good reason to; my father was killed during the last war. I was only a child at the time, but I can still remember my mother’s face when the news came. She was still a young woman, but suddenly she became old. Then later she learned how he died. Apparently he was gassed and wounded

at the same time, and was left out in No Man's Land. His men searched for him by night, but were unable to find him. Occasionally they heard his moans and at last his frenzied ravings. Apparently he lingered in the heat of a Somme summer for forty-eight hours before he died. The very thought of it killed my mother. Do you wonder, with this as the predominant scene of my childhood affecting instinctively every one of my subsequent thoughts—do you wonder that I hate war?"

"I do not," I said simply. "I have no good word for it myself, but if I had had your experience I would hate it even more than I do."

"So when I heard people talking about war I was appalled. I joined all the Peace Societies I could find. And yet when I looked at them, they all seemed so ineffective. They were full of talk, but there seemed no possibility of doing anything. Then I met a man who proclaimed ideas which were very different; he, too, was a man who abhorred war; he had suffered himself, I only through my father. The stories of terror and horror which he could tell were personal ones, and were enough to make even a politician blanch with horror. He was a man who had been so close to death that life meant very little. Then one evening we were sitting in a beer-garden in Bonn, a little group of us, and he began to expound his idea.

"We had seen for ourselves, he pointed out, that people did not want war. Round about us were Germans—honest, clean-living Germans—yet these were the very men who had fought against the British in the last war and might have to face them again. No, peoples did not want war; they were led into war; sometimes by their politicians or sometimes by their business leaders. Just as in the Middle Ages kings, out of mere personal pride or vanity, could plunge countries into war, so even today a little group of men—or in the dictatorship countries a single man—could do the same. What was more, the isolated combat between one country and another was now almost impossible. If any two countries in Europe fought, then the rest were almost certain to become involved.

"The remedy, therefore, was to concentrate on the leaders. They suffered little on account of war. If their country were victorious then they were almost deified. If they lost, then they escaped to neutral countries—where they had taken the precaution to accumulate vast private fortunes. It was not until the leaders of nations had to share the perils of the private soldier that the outlook on war would change. He went further than that, he said, and we agreed: that any man who led his country into war was a criminal—had committed a crime against humanity. There could be no respite from war until such criminals received their deserts. At the moment the machinery

was lacking. The League of Nations and the Hague Tribunal were alike powerless. It was obviously necessary, he argued, that some independent international group should be formed which would pledge itself to arraign these criminals before its own court, and, if found guilty, to condemn them and to carry out the sentence.

“He may have been something of a visionary, but there were plenty of realists among us. We pointed out the difficulty of deciding on the criminal—no one has ever yet been able to define satisfactorily an aggressor. Who was responsible for the war of 1914? France or Germany? There are equally strong arguments on either side. But we agreed in the main with his theory, because we were young and loved life and hated the thought of death for others. So, gradually, from that informal discussion, the League took shape, and soon we were representative of a dozen countries of the world. We were able to agree on the vexed question of the identity of the criminal. We decided that in the event of a war in which both parties had all the attributes of aggressors, we would consult together and if necessary consider the leaders of *both* countries as criminals. On one point we were definitely agreed—that if the League of Nations defined a country as an aggressor, then at least we could go forward in perfect confidence. We were perfectly certain that the League, with all its hesitancy, would never condemn a country as an aggressor unless it very definitely *were* an aggressor.

“So when the Abyssinian crisis came to a head, at least we had a clear lead. Long before the League Council met we had no doubt about its verdict.

“Of course there has never been a clearer case of aggression in modern history. If ever a man fitted into our scheme, that man was Mussolini. By this time our organization had grown. We never had any idea of making it large in numbers—on the contrary; but we did want to make it representative of every country of the world. Most of our members were students. Those from countries outside Europe were studying at European universities.

“No, by its very nature our organization was best if kept small and secret. But as the Abyssinian business crept toward its miserable climax then we came out into the open and issued an ultimatum. It read something like this—or perhaps you have seen it?”

“Yes, I have seen it,” I agreed.

“Then you saw the other one—that proclaiming the coming execution of Mussolini?”

“Yes, I saw that one as well. In fact, I am fairly well acquainted with the next part of your story. I know how your men arranged for Mussolini to fall

from the balcony on the Palazzo Venezia—that was a clever stroke, and, had it come off, might even have done a part of what you hoped. I know now what lay behind that accident on the Naples road—that was not nearly so clever. If Mussolini had really been killed like that you would have done no good whatsoever.”

“But, yes,” she persisted, “it would have been a warning to others.”

“What, a man dies by accident, and so becomes a warning, to other statesmen?”

“No, not by accident; we should have proclaimed to the world that he had been executed and why.”

“Even then,” I insisted, “you would have gained nothing. You would have caused a lot of trouble, and certainly a good many of your people would have got it in the neck—oh, you would have been found out all right; the police of Europe know a great deal more than some people think. You don’t suppose that it was merely an accident which led me on to that balcony on the Palazzo Venezia, even if it were a sheer coincidence that took me to that spot on the Naples road.”

“Yes, we were ready for punishment,” she said. “We had been chosen by lot from amongst our whole company, the half dozen of us who were to carry out the sentence of the League. We were given an opportunity to withdraw, but no one did. We knew very well that, whether we failed or succeeded, we were courting death for ourselves; but that did not matter.”

“I can believe it,” I commented. “Often, when I have seen such enthusiasm as yours, I have wished that I could have such faith in an idea that I would die for it; but I am afraid that there is little of the spirit of the martyr in me. But the point I wanted to make,” I continued, “is just this. Whatever happened—if you *had* killed Mussolini—you would have gained nothing, for the simple reason that you would have turned him into a martyr. Mussolini alive is admittedly annoying, but as Saint Benito he would be positively insufferable. Remember that the works of saints are always infinitely greater after they are dead than when they were alive.”

“But Mussolini isn’t a saint,” she protested.

“No, but you would have made him one. I dare say some of the private lives of the saints wouldn’t stand the closest investigation, but a martyr is always dangerous. All his evils are forgotten and only his good qualities remembered. And, because he is a martyr, his sayings assume apostolic force. His memory becomes a rallying point, even for people who would have had no truck with him during his lifetime.

“Consider, for example, the German, Horst Wessel. There was a young bully with a gangster mind, a sexual pervert, had he lived a little longer he would almost certainly have been bumped off in the moral purge of the Nazis in 1934. He had not a single heroic quality. He did not do a single thing throughout his lifetime which deserved anything but discredit. But fortunately for him, he happened to be the first Nazi to be killed by the long-suffering and persecuted Jews. Consequently he became a martyr; all sorts of noble sentiments are attributed to him—I doubt if he ever uttered one of them, but even if he did, he certainly never lived up to them. Yet, look at the influence that he has had upon Germany—upon German thought and particularly upon German youth—not for any quality of his own, but simply and purely because he was a martyr.

“Now the case of Mussolini is stronger. Here is a man who—delude yourself as you will—commands the respect if not the affection of a fair portion of the Italian race—shall we say somewhere between a half and three quarters. If he were killed he would become a martyr to ninety per cent of the Italians—and if he were killed by a foreigner he would become a martyr to ninety-nine per cent of them.”

“You put your side very forcibly,” she said. “We did consider that point, of course, but it was overruled. In any case, by killing Mussolini at least we would have done something to rid Italy of Fascism—at any rate, of the particular brand of Fascism which led to war.”

“I’m awfully sorry, but I can’t agree with you even there,” I argued. “Fascism, or anything else for that matter, cannot be imposed upon a people unless that people either want it or is unworthy of anything else. And Fascism, or any of its kindred creeds, is so cheap and specious that it can get a grip upon the slight imagination of a race—particularly a semi-illiterate race. Nor is it very easy to get rid of—and it is impossible to get rid of it by force. When Dollfuss in Austria decided to get rid of Socialism he adopted methods of force; he slaughtered a few hundred Socialists, but did he destroy Socialism in Austria? You, who know your Europe, know that he did not, and the Italians would not lose the political creed which has been grafted on to them because the surgeon who performed the operation happened to die.

“But,” I broke in, “let’s postpone this discussion for a little while. It’s very interesting and there’s a good deal more I’d like to say about it, but I want to hear more about you and your friends. Now, how did Kranj come into this affair?”

Her face clouded, and for a moment I thought that she was going to break down.

“Oh, how I hate it all!” she said bitterly. “Why is the world so full of suffering? Kranj was our tragedy. When I read in the newspapers about his death on the mountain, I was appalled. I could visualize his suffering so easily—my imagination is sometimes a little too vivid. For weeks afterwards I scarcely slept. I could see him always writhing in pain on the floor of that cavern, high on the mountain.”

“Tell me about him,” I said softly, after a moment of silence.

“He was one of our members,” she continued, controlling herself, “and was actually one of those drawn by lot to assist in the execution of Mussolini, but our leader refused to let him take part—really it was bad organization—his name should have been omitted from the ballot. Our leader knows international politics very well, and he was not going to have a Yugoslav concerned in the execution of Mussolini. He knew very well that, whatever our League might claim, the death of Mussolini would then be attributed to Yugoslavia, and that war would be the inevitable result. So he forbade Kranj to have anything to do with the execution at all.

“Kranj, who hated Mussolini more than any of us, was bitterly disappointed. Several times he begged and prayed to be allowed to do the work, but the leader always refused him. Then at last there came to—to the place where we were meeting, a letter saying that as our League had evidently failed, he proposed to carry out a scheme of his own—he had found a companion to help. I rushed to Sarajevo myself and pleaded with him to obey the leader’s orders. I thought I had persuaded him, and went back and reported to that effect, but then apparently this other man, this beast Savona, got hold of him—I expect you know the story from this stage onward? You were there on the spot.”

“Yes, I think I know the rest,” I agreed. “I rather suspected something like this. It was obvious that the two men were of different types. Your friend Kranj was the true fanatic, a man who would deliberately court death for himself in the execution of what he thought was his duty.”

“Yes,” she agreed, “he was a man like that. Tell me, did he suffer very much before he died?”

My face could not conceal the truth from her and she looked very troubled. Evidently that imagination of hers was painting pictures again, not pretty pictures either.

“And you, too,” she whispered at last, “you were very near to death?”

“As near as I ever want to be,” I said. “The whole episode wasn’t pleasant. But never mind it now—it’s over. I haven’t quite finished my cross-examination. What about the League—and you—today? Is it dead?”

“No, it is not dead, but it has given up the idea of executing Mussolini.”

“Ah!” The exclamation was sufficient to indicate my relief.

“After the first week we decided that. If we did not execute the criminal at the moment of the crime, then half the force of our stroke was gone.”

“I agree there,” I said. “But is the League disbanded?”

“No. It still exists. Rather—shaken, perhaps, but it still exists.”

“And the leader you talk of—who is he?”

“You must not expect me to tell you that,” she smiled.

“He was one of the two men at Naples—the American, or the man with the Nansen passport?”

“Oh, so you’ve got all that? They said you were dangerous!”

I did not disillusion her; it was a little too early to tell her that, because of her influence, I had muffed up the affair badly, and that the practical Marshall had ferreted out the details.

“You mustn’t question me any more,” she continued seriously. “I’m a member of the League, and I believe in it. I believe in loyalty—so do you. I’m loyal to the League, and shall be. You must not try to tempt me away from loyalty, or we shall quarrel.”

“But I am concerned for you—that you may get into trouble.”

“Don’t worry,” she reassured me. “The past is passed. And I give you my word that all ideas of executing Mussolini have been abandoned.”

“I’m glad of that. It was a technical error, anyway. It is useless to kill Mussolini—your aim should have been to discredit him.”

“Ah, that was talked of!” she cried. “But we could not agree how to do it.”

“There are a dozen ways, if you have the money.”

“We were not short of money. Tell me—what you would have done?”

“Well,” I said, “here’s one idea—take a leaf out of the Italians’ own propaganda book. You could have dropped leaflets from aeroplanes—one man did try it, a year or so ago. You could have drafted a suitable leaflet—a simple one, and not extravagantly hostile. I don’t pretend that it would be a simple thing to draft effectively, but it could be done. You would need relays of leaflets, of course, to follow in succession.

“You would have had to be careful in your choice of pilots. A Swiss—or a Yugoslav!—if he were unlucky enough to come down in Italy, he would have been for it! But a Brazilian or a Guatemalan would have escaped with a small dose of prison, or possibly just expulsion from Italy.”

“Ah, that’s an idea!” she said, her hands clasped together.

“Oh, what a fool I am!” I cursed myself. “Why do I put ideas into your head? I want you clear of this League business.”

I looked across at her, and her frank eyes met mine. Her face was lovely when she smiled. I looked at my watch.

“I had better go,” I said, “or it will be bad for your reputation. But no more running away!”

“Don’t worry,” she smiled. “I shan’t run away again—I expect to be in England for several weeks.”

“I may see you tomorrow?” I asked. “After all, although we have been talking for two hours, we two still have a great deal to say to one another.”

She smiled in assent. “You’ll have to walk, I expect—I doubt if you’ll find a taxi. Still, it’s a fine night.”

She moved to the window and pulled back the blind. Suddenly I saw her face tauten.

“What is it?” I asked, anxiously.

“When we came in, there was a man hanging about opposite,” she said in a low tone. “Look—*he is still there!*”

CHAPTER EIGHT

At least I could deal with such a situation as this without incurring Marshall's jibes. At first I thought to phone him; then I decided that I would not let him know for a while that Margaret was in England.

She was peering through a corner of the window, hidden by the curtain.

"Look," she whispered. "Another man is coming to join him. Perhaps he saw me at the window."

By the dim light of the street lamp I saw two figures in the street below. They talked together for a moment, then entered the door of the block of flats: "They're coming up," I said. "Quick—where's the telephone?" Rapidly I dialled the familiar number: Whitehall 1212. "Put out the lights," I ordered, as I waited. She did so, and I heard the voice of the operator at Scotland Yard.

"I can hear them outside the door," she whispered.

"Put me through to Inspector Marshall," I said, softly. The sudden move of the men had caused me to abandon my reluctance to tell him.

"Who?" replied the operator.

"Inspector Marshall."

"Sorry. I can't hear you."

"I want Inspector Marshall!" I called, in normal tones.

"All right," came a muffled voice from the other side of the door. "Open the door, and you can have him."

I switched on the lights, rushed to the door, and opened it. There stood Marshall, one of his men with him.

"All right, Ellis," he said to his companion. "You can go home to bed now. I can manage this."

He stepped inside and closed the door. I was staring at him in amazement.

"Won't you introduce me to Miss Hay?" he suggested.

"But what does all this mean?" I demanded.

"Mean?" he echoed. "Haven't I been looking for this lady for months? And at your own request too! How was I to know that you would find her

for yourself?”

“But how long—”

“Since she stepped off the boat at Southampton this morning,” he said, blandly. “I might have saved myself the trouble of a call at this absurd hour, but Ellis is new to the job and didn’t know you. However, now I’m here there’s quite a lot I’d like to know.”

“There’s something I want to know first,” I said. “How did you get on Miss Hay’s track?”

“Well,” he replied, “some of my men are pretty good at recognizing people from passports, you know—even from such atrocities as passport photographs.”

“But you never told me that you had been watching the ports all this time!”

“No,” he agreed, smiling. “As a matter of fact, it was a bit of a fluke. Two of my men were at Southampton looking for a Frenchman whom the *Sûreté* want very badly. They didn’t find their man, but they found the lady instead. Well, Miss Hay, you’ve led us a pretty dance. You nearly finished us off—I expect Newman has told you about our little picnic on the Triglav?”

At first she had been concerned, but now she saw that there was nothing to fear. Marshall was my friend, and his atmosphere was easy. Soon we were sitting round the fire, and he interrogated her in much the same fashion as I had done. I admired her cleverness at the way in which she answered his questions without telling him very much. It was consoling to see that, in spite of his authority as a police-officer, she did not reveal to him nearly so much as she had done to me. However, he appeared satisfied.

“Well,” he considered, at the end of her story, “I really don’t think there’s anything I can charge you with.”

“You bloodthirsty creature!” she sparred.

“But I have your word that this League is dead?” he persisted.

“No. But you have my word that the plot to kill Mussolini is dead,” she corrected.

“Oh, well, that’s all that matters. I’m not worrying about your sending ultimata to politicians; that’s not a crime. If you could make ’em take any notice, in fact, you’d be a public benefactor. But seriously, Miss Hay, you do understand, don’t you, that if this kind of thing went on, I should be bound to arrest you. And I *would* arrest you, even if you were my friend, instead of only the friend of my friend. You understand that?”

“Yes. I understand. But you need have no fear. So far as I am concerned, Mussolini will live forever.”

“I hope he doesn’t! However, your answer’s good enough for me. Well, I’ll say good night—maybe I shall meet you again?”

“I hope so, Inspector. This is the first time I’ve been in the hands of the police—you were most considerate.”

“I’ll come with you,” I said. “Till tomorrow?” And she smiled the answer.

“She isn’t my girl.”

“No, but she will be. Well, she’s nicer looking than her photograph, and her personality’s charming. And, my goodness, she’s clever! Did you notice the way she answered my questions—very frankly and fully, yet only telling me half the story? I didn’t press her, because I knew I could always get the other half from you.”

So Marshall was not so simple as I had thought! I had underestimated him more than once.

I saw Margaret on the morrow, and the next day. The weeks passed too quickly, and for once I begrudged the time I spent in the theatre. I took her out to Mason’s, and lapped up keenly Leonie’s approbation. If one girl likes another, that’s always a good sign.

Very soon I broke through my natural restraint and no longer tried to hide my feelings. There came a moment when we sat in my flat. I had got up to draw the blinds; the lights were not yet on; only the light of the fire showed me the clean health of her face in its fitful gleam. I put my arm about her, and she did not resist. Another moment, and words would have flowed from my lips—they would have been effective words, too; I am a reasonably good actor, and have played many romantic parts. But suddenly she whispered: “Not yet, Bernard; say nothing now. Life is good just like this. Leave it unchanged, just for now.”

She looked straight at me, and I could not resist her eyes. I felt as happy as if I had proposed and had been accepted. I felt—I knew—that she belonged to me. For the moment I was content. For how long I could not promise.

Weeks passed; weeks of happiness, though I had not so much as kissed her. Neither of us was of the sloppy type. I was too old to fuss about a girl, anyway. Her head was as attractive to me as her body. Youth falls in love instinctively, unreasonably; middle age selects, with discrimination and care.

Youth chooses a woman to sleep with; a man of forty chooses a woman to live with.

She was nearly fifteen years younger than I was, but her personality bridged the gulf. She had a keen sense of humor, but a serious mind; she was keenly interested in European affairs, as I was—and, God knows, the spring of 1936 gave us enough food for discussion.

I cannot decide when I first sensed that the Abyssinian War somehow stood between us. It was as if its gross injustice had bruised her soul; she could not concentrate on her personal happiness because of the misery of others.

“Of course, we mustn’t forget that Italy had a real case against Abyssinia,” I said, instinctively seeking a viewpoint which would favor my own personal interests. “The Abyssinians have been bad neighbors; they are an unruly lot, and the Emperor has been quite unable to keep his people in order. For that matter, half the people are not Abyssinians. At least the Italians have had provocation.”

“So have we,” she rejoined. “The Abyssinians have been bad neighbors to us as well. We have had endless trouble from their frontier tribes. But we don’t slaughter the population and occupy the country just for that. No, it is the hypocrisy of it all. To entertain the Emperor at Rome as a friend and ally; to propose Abyssinia as a member of the League—against the wishes of Britain, who did not consider her fit for that dignity; and then to occupy Abyssinia to ‘defend our own frontiers!’ You were right when you told me at Naples that Mussolini must have some sort of courage. He must be a brave man to call the invasion of Abyssinia a defence of his own frontiers! What hypocrisy! And then they say that the British are hypocrites!”

I could only argue feebly, because I agreed with her. From courage the talk drifted to Fascism, a creed which gives to courage almost the attributes of deity.

“I value courage highly,” she said, “yet it can be overrated. It leads to the assumption that the most courageous man must be right. But have the police a monopoly of courage, for example? The criminals surely have their share, and more. Courage in excess degenerates into brutality. It is like everything else—even virtues; it is good in moderation.”

I quote these trifling samples from our conversation to show that our courtship, if you like to call it such, was not of the conventional kind. When we met, Margaret still offered me her hand, and not her lips. Yet in spite of the unconscious restraint between us, I was happy. I had overcome my first instinct to rush her, and was content that she would be mine.

Once or twice I mentioned the League, but she spoke of it very little. It had failed as ignominiously as the other League at Geneva, she said with a wry smile.

As the Abyssinian War pursued its melancholy course, she became unhappy. By the middle of April it was obvious that the end was near; one day I found her in tears; in her hands was a copy of Low's famous cartoon—a black woman, suckling her child, labelled "Barbarism," and an Italian aeroplane raining bombs and gas; this, of course, was "Civilization."

Two days later I nearly went mad. By the midday post arrived a letter. I recognized Margaret's handwriting and tore open the envelope. As I read, my eyes started and my heart beat strangely.

Bernard,

I have to go away for a short time. Not long—and when I come back, shall we forget other people's troubles for awhile, and think of ourselves? You have been very patient—thank you for these last weeks. Have no fear for me—I am not plotting to execute Mussolini, though he deserves it more than ever. Remember what I promised you about that. I shall soon be back—soon.

Margaret.

I rushed round to her flat, but the maid could tell me little. Before breakfast, she said, her mistress had suddenly ordered her to pack a suitcase. No, she had no idea of Miss Hay's destination.

"But what made her decide to go so suddenly?" I demanded.

"I've no idea, sir. Once or twice before she has gone off in a great hurry."

"What post did she receive this morning?"

"Two letters—one was a printed advertisement. It couldn't have been either of them, sir—she decided to go before she saw them."

I went back home to think. This was a real blow—I could not pretend, of course, that she had gone on holiday. Last night she was perfectly normal—had arranged to have tea today at my flat. While I was cogitating, my mind occasionally dissolving into blanks of pessimism, Mason and Marshall were announced. First I was annoyed, then glad.

Marshall spoke first, and his words made my eyebrows rise.

"So she's gone!" he said.

"What! How the hell did you know that?"

“Oh, all right, all right!” he soothed. “Don’t bite my head off—I’m just as sore about it as you are. I’ve lost her completely, if you must know.”

“Do you mean to say you’ve still been following—”

“Now, just a minute,” Mason broke in. “Let’s sit down. It’s my fault. I phoned Marshall an hour ago that Miss Hay had gone—he hasn’t been following her at all—but he was too late. She was in France by that time.”

“But how did you know she had gone?” I spluttered.

“The League of International Amity told me,” he said.

“What? How?”

“I broke through its code two months ago.”

I stared at him, almost disbelieving my ears.

“Two months ago!” I echoed. “And you never told me! And I thought you were my friend!”

“Now, look here, you’re not going to be a fool,” Mason said firmly. He stood up, facing me squarely, and his personality dominated mine, diminished by two crushing blows. “Just listen to a little horse sense. There was a plot to assassinate Mussolini—a serious one, as you yourself agreed. Well, the first attempts were foiled, but the plotters were merely dispersed—not rounded up. The situation, therefore, had to be watched very carefully.”

“But why?” I clamored. “Margaret had promised—”

“She promised one thing: that there were to be no more attempts to murder Mussolini—that’s all. Her phraseology was very precise, I noticed, on that point. Other things might be just as dangerous, however.”

“I don’t understand—I don’t know what you are getting at,” I said dully.

“No. Let *me* talk for a while,” replied Mason. “Marshall and I have been watching the whole business.”

“But why wasn’t I told?”

“You ought to answer that yourself. You knew of the plot—you played the biggest part in its frustration. But then you went over to the enemy—oh, yes, I know it seems absurd to talk of Miss Hay as an enemy, but there you are—she was on the other side, anyway. And she had never said that the League was dead—she had only promised not to murder Mussolini.”

“Go on—go on. You said you had broken through the code?”

“Yes. You remember an old suggestion of mine, when we wondered how the League communicated with its members? I suggested newspapers—say, the personal columns. You’ve seen the queer things in code. I returned to the

idea again as being even more probable now that they knew that the police had wind of the League, and might open Miss Hay's letters. I got one of our cryptographers on to them and solved them. We even suspected innocent messages—including the texts which some philanthropist inserts in the *Telegraph* every morning. Pass these, however, as one hundred per cent pure. Some of the code messages we did decipher were very amusing—elopements, scandals, lovers—”

“We are *not* amused,” I protested.

“Sorry. I must get on. Well, at last we identified the messages of this League—we found that it signed them.”

“Signed them?”

“Yes. Take the initials of the League—LOIA; the first word was always an anagram of these. Next we had to break through the code. My man—you remember Harrison?—felt that it must be something simple, if only he could trace the master-word. It took him longer than he thought because there was more than one word, and they changed each day. It was quite ingenious. If the advertisement appeared in the *News Chronicle* of Monday, then *News-Chronicle-Monday* was the key to the cipher—simple Playfair code after that. They rang the changes on all the London dailies. As a matter of fact, you yourself gave me the clue.”

“Me? How?”

“You mentioned—in admiration—how Miss Hay took in all the papers. Now that is definitely unusual, even in a well-to-do house. I felt that there must be something bigger behind it than her interest in foreign affairs. There was nothing of interest in the first messages we picked up—half a dozen of them. So I—”

“Look, we're wasting time,” I broke in. “I'll hear all this afterwards. The point is, where has she gone to now?”

“I don't know,” said Mason. “I only know she's gone. Look”—and he pointed to an advertisement in the personal column of the *Daily Herald*. It read: OILA: GRUWHBQO YPAIHBAHYAHZQLOOHAWVPOXZ.

“Harrison has worked it out,” Mason continued. “The message reads: ‘Concentrate rendezvous—immediately.’ So I can't tell you where she's gone—unless you know where the rendezvous is?”

I didn't. Margaret had mentioned a dozen places abroad—she was familiar with most European countries. But I could not recall the vaguest of hints. My mind was not working well; I had been so certain—now I was half-stunned.

“She went by the early morning Paris plane from Croydon,” Marshall began. Then the telephone bell began its insistent ringing.

Marshall answered it, then called Mason to the phone.

“Yes?” Mason began. “Oh, yes, Harrison. What? Another? Yes—yes, I’ll take it down.” I saw him writing on the pad, and when he turned to us his eyes were shining with excitement.

“Things are happening,” he said. “Harrison rang up to apologize. When he found the *Herald* message, he looked no farther—we have never yet had more than one in a day. But today he found another in the *Morning Post*. A queer one—listen to this; Harrison just gave it in clear, of course. ‘Gunther Inside Europe 198—1920. Scheme Three.’ ”

“What the hell does that mean?” Marshall ejaculated. “You say that’s in clear?”

But I had already turned to my bookshelves. John Gunther’s *Inside Europe* is the best book of its kind for many years, and is indispensable to the man who would follow current affairs intelligently. I turned up page 198, and knew that I was on the track when I saw that it was in the middle of the chapter on Mussolini. But I searched in vain for the date 1920—it was not mentioned on the page. Then I assumed that the reference might mean lines 19 and 20, and counted down. I read the lines out aloud to the others: “He is apt to straddle a motorcycle and, like the late Colonel Lawrence, hurl himself across country at night.”

We looked at one another. What had Mussolini’s love for speed to do with the affair? And what did Scheme Three mean? But:

“Ah, now we’re getting to it,” cried Marshall, gleefully. “I see it now—*something is going to happen to Musso on his cycle ride*. But what is Scheme Three?”

“That isn’t difficult,” said Mason. “We know Scheme One—the ‘execution’ plan. There must have been a Scheme Two which we have missed. Now they’ve got a Scheme Three up their sleeves. I wonder what it is? And what Scheme Two was?”

I had an uneasy feeling that Scheme Two was my own suggestion about dropping pamphlets from aeroplanes! But of Scheme Three I had not the vaguest idea. But I felt that Marshall was right—something was going to happen to Mussolini when he rode at night on his motorcycle.

We sat for a moment, silent. I knew their thoughts, but mine were of Margaret. All the vague suspicions I had had were now redoubled—that her happiness and mine were bound up in this miserable affair in Abyssinia and

this precious League. Margaret had never pretended that the League was dead; she had never denied her loyalty to it. When this call came, she must obey it—I knew how strong was her sense of duty. Again I felt helpless, not knowing how to aid her.

“I’ll tell you what my idea is,” said Marshall. “I’m quite certain that Miss Hay wasn’t lying when she said that there would be no more attempts to kill Mussolini. *But suppose they tried to kidnap him!*”

“Ah, that’s an idea, Marshall,” cried Mason.

“But why?” I queried.

“Why?” Mason echoed. “There are a dozen reasons. To kidnap a Colossus at the moment of his victory—what greater ignominy and torture? To condemn him to the banishment he allotted to thousands of others. *Or to hold him to ransom against fair terms for Abyssinia.*”

“Gosh, you’ve hit it!” exclaimed Marshall. “That’s it—that’s a logical sequel to the other—Scheme One. Golly, it would be a darned good idea, too.”

“But it can’t happen—we can’t let it happen,” said Mason, seriously. “All our earlier arguments stand, just as forcibly as before. There’s an added one now, Marshall. After all, although Newman has not played his usual strong hand in this business, he’s still one of us—and his girl’s in this mess. We’ve got to get her out.”

“Yes,” Marshall agreed. “Yes, we must. She’s too good to leave to the mercy of those Italians. She’s fooled Newman very neatly—made him think there was nothing doing—probably thought we had all given up the idea. But we can’t leave her at that. Well, the way out is fairly obvious, I think.”

“What is it?”

“Well, as you say, Newman hasn’t been his old bright self in this affair—it’s always the same when there’s a woman about. You were a mutt yourself while you were courting Leonie. So we must give Newman a chance to win his bride and rehabilitate his tarnished reputation.”

“Get on—out with it,” I insisted.

“You speak Italian: you are an actor. You must go to Italy. *In the night you must become Benito Mussolini and borrow his motorcycle.* Then, whatever was going to happen to Mussolini will happen to you, and we shall know where we are.”

“What?” I cried.

“That’s an idea,” Mason interposed. “Yes, an idea. And you could do it.”

“I couldn’t. I haven’t the nerve!”

“What—the man who lived at German G.H.Q. during the War?”

“I was younger then.”

“H’h,” said Marshall. “A few months ago you dictated a letter to me in peculiar circumstances in that cave on the Triglav. You didn’t show any signs of lost nerve then!”

“But I can’t impersonate Mussolini! You fellows don’t understand—it’s one thing to make up as a character on the stage, before footlights, and quite another to do it in the open.”

“You ride the bike at night,” Marshall suggested.

“Yes,” I howled. “But if your kidnapping theory is correct, I’ve got to face them next day, haven’t I?”

“It wouldn’t matter very much by that time,” he assured, cheerfully. “You’d have broken into the plot, and we should know where we are. Mussolini’s an easy make-up—pad a bit, black uniform, and a blue chin.”

“Yes, yes,” I said testily, “but you’ve overlooked the principal difficulty.”

“Which is?”

“Mussolini’s a little man—I’m not!” I said emphatically.

“Musso little? I always imagined him as big. Who says he’s little?”

“Gunther, *Inside Europe*, page—” I turned it up. “Page 193, lines 13-14. Listen: ‘Most people meeting Mussolini are surprised at his shortness of stature. He is, like Napoleon, only five feet six.’ There! I agree, it is a surprise. I only saw him on the balcony and in a car at Naples, and he looked bigger to me. But there you are—he’s five feet six; I’m five feet ten and a bit.”

“But I don’t see that it matters,” Marshall complained. “How many people know he’s so small?”

“The people we’re dealing with almost certainly do,” I said. “They must have studied him pretty carefully to have got as far as they have.”

“But surely you can *suggest* lack of inches?” Marshall interposed. “A squat figure would reduce your apparent height—and don’t actors use thin soled shoes in such cases?”

“Yes, yes,” I said. “But I tell you that you don’t understand the difference between footlights and daylight. I could suggest Mussolini on the stage easily enough—could make-up so accurately that an audience might

almost be deceived—could choose other players so that I could appear small. But it's quite a different thing to do it in daylight."

"What about the blue chin?" Marshall asked.

"Oh, that's easy, in any light. The height is the principal difficulty; his features are not very distinctive, and could be suggested."

"Well, if you object to my plan, what is your own?" Marshall demanded.

I had none. I did say that the first step should be to telephone at once to Aderno, who should stop Mussolini's solo rides by night. But I knew that this was only a temporary palliative. Aderno, however great his tact and delicacy, could not restrain the headstrong Mussolini for many nights without some explanation. And explanation—the truth, anyway—would be fatal.

Marshall and Mason argued with me. My resistance was weak. I hated the thought of impersonating Mussolini, but I felt that this was the only way I could get into touch with Margaret. And at last I agreed to try the scheme. We gave Aderno a preliminary warning, and I prepared for the journey.

Before setting off, however, I rushed down to an obscure village in rural England. Laymen and novelists talk airily about impersonation, but it is one of the most difficult feats in the world. To make a successful impersonation you must know your victim thoroughly—his physique (especially its peculiarities), his mentality, his habits, his pet phrases, his weaknesses. I knew surprisingly little about Mussolini's private life. I had read three or four books about him—some wildly sycophantic, others violently antagonistic. But I had at least one friend who knew Mussolini personally, and from him I could learn some of the details which would be essential to my task.

In a little English village there now lives a very famous Russian spy of war-time fame—Colonel Victor Kaledin; many of my readers will be familiar with his books—*K.14—O.M.66* is perhaps the best known. Kaledin is one of the most remarkable men I know. He has retired now, and has become a British subject, but his life has been crowded with adventure of the kind which makes the ordinary espionage fiction seem strangely subdued and tame.

I remembered that after the War he had become involved in the confused fighting between White and Red armies in Russia, and that after the triumph of the Bolsheviks he had escaped to Italy. I had often heard him speak of Mussolini, for whom he had worked as an anti-Communist lecturer and as

adviser on Intelligence. He is an observant man, and I knew he could give me the kind of information I wanted.

I put my problem to him. My opponents must know something about Mussolini, but could scarcely know him intimately. If, therefore, I could be primed with the essentials—the things of the surface, about which people would most naturally talk—then I would feel more confident.

“That’s easy,” Kaledin said. “Of course, you understand that it was in 1921 that I worked for Mussolini. But a man does not change his personal foibles even when he becomes a Duce—Mussolini wouldn’t, anyway.

“I warn you, that some of his traits are not nice. His pet phrase, for example, could scarcely be used in polite society. Where you and I would say ‘Good gracious!’ or ‘My God!’ Mussolini cries ‘*Porca putana!*’—‘Pig of a whore!’ Not pretty, but he used to say it a dozen times a day. It’s a common phrase in Italy, of course.”

“Just a minute,” I said. “The thing that’s troubling me most is his height. Tell me, how do you estimate his size?”

“About five feet eight or nine,” Kaledin replied.

“What?”

“Yes. Why?”

“Why, Gunther says he’s only five feet six!”

“Well, he’s wrong. He looks much shorter than he is because he’s so squat. But he’s at least five feet eight—in all probability even a half an inch more.”

This comforted me mightily. To suggest a reduction of four inches in my height would be almost impossible, but two inches would be quite a different matter.

“Oh, you could step into his shoes,” Kaledin continued. “You approximate to his build—you would need to pad a little round the waist. Yes, I’ve played characters with less advantages than you have here.”

Now I questioned him eagerly; my mind was easy—I felt the task within my powers.

“Like most Italians, Mussolini perspires freely,” Kaledin went on. “He suffers from what is now euphemistically called ‘B.O.’—in other words, the stink of sweat—and he uses scent freely to drown the odor. So far as his personal habits are concerned, remember that he comes of peasant stock—and, to his credit, isn’t ashamed of it. Some of his habits, which pass unremarked in Italy, would not be classed as pretty here. I’ll run you through

a few of them—they're very peasant. But I repeat—it's fifteen years since I was with him. Maybe his manners are improved by now.

“Now let me show you how he smokes a cigarette. He always smokes the loosely-filled Italian variety—a putrid smoke!—and chews the end. His spittle soaks down the paper, so that the cigarette won't stand out—it hangs down from his lips, the lighted end almost touching his chin.”

Like all successful spies, Kaledin is very thorough, and he made me smoke half a dozen cigarettes before he declared I had caught Mussolini's mannerisms.

“Is it true he's a vegetarian?” I asked.

“Yes. What is more, he's a very small eater at all times.”

“And his blue chin? Do the cartoonists exaggerate?”

“You and I know how important the cartoonists are. They seize on the outstanding peculiarities of a man, and exaggerate them. Yes, Mussolini has a very definite blue chin—the more he shaves, the bluer it is. It shows almost black—his skin is slightly transparent. But you can overcome that difficulty, of course.

“Now here are a few of his mannerisms,” Kaledin continued. “When talking, he continuously taps the palm of his left hand with the first and second fingers of the right—so. Another favorite trick of his—when he is thinking—is to rub both palms together, in a circular motion like this, as if he were washing them. And this he does frequently—he ruffles his hair forward with his right hand, then pushes it back.”

“What about his hair?” I asked.

“Very dark, but even then thin on top; now, apparently, semi-bald.”

I could cope with that, of course. I did not propose to wear a wig, which would give me away in about five minutes—even earlier, were I kidnapped by force. I would have to make a temporary sacrifice of a part of my hair, and dye the rest. Scalp hair does not grow nearly so quickly as that of the beard near the skin, and a good shave would last for several days.

“Another phrase I have just remembered,” said Kaledin. “‘*Ma che?*’—‘But why?’ He uses it once every five minutes—usually plaintively. Normally he is sub-acid in his conversation, but he is upset very easily. Then he gets excited and domineering. You know, of course, about his personal vanity? And, by the way, when he talks to you he always looks beyond you—never to your face.

“You can’t be too vain. You remember his remark about Napoleon’s ‘limited vision’—that is typical of the man. He imagines himself as a mixture of Napoleon, Julius Cæsar, and Alexander of Macedon—with the greatest qualities of each extracted and concentrated in him.”

We talked along these lines for a couple of hours—naturally I let Kaledin do the talking, for he was not only interesting, but vitally useful to me. I began to feel myself inside the part—I have played others, equally perilous, with less preparation.

“There’s one thing,” Kaledin remarked, “England hasn’t heard the last of Mussolini. When he comes his cropper, it will probably be because of England. He despises England—and it is dangerous to despise England. He talks a lot about the ‘toothless, disreputable, degenerate British,’ and is even more cynical than usual. He has one pet phrase which he quotes very frequently: *Si abliamo Malta, abliamo il mondo*—he who holds Malta, holds the world. Make no mistake about it, he is determined to get Malta. You may have seen those maps he has had published—showing Malta as an Italian possession? Look for trouble when Britain’s hands are full in another part of the world! In the end he’ll get the trouble himself; the British Empire isn’t quite so degenerate as he thinks—and it has very decided ideas about Malta. One reverse would be the end of Mussolini—a bubble needs only one prick.”

“How do you think he would behave if he were kidnapped?” I asked. “Would he rave and storm, or would he turn yellow and squeal, in the usual fashion of bullies?”

“No,” said Kaledin decidedly. “Make no mistake about it—Mussolini isn’t the usual kind of bully. He’s definitely a fanatic, of course, but a courageous one—most fanatics are. Now, if he were kidnapped, he’d probably turn on his very cold manner—‘Very well, and now what are you going to do?’—and that kind of thing. Very superior and haughty, but defiant—and quite confident that his captors daren’t do anything to him. He’d certainly expect to be treated according to his position, and would be angry if he wasn’t. But he wouldn’t bluster—at least, not the kind of bluster that is backed by fear. No, that’s one thing you must say for Mussolini—he has a lion courage. Whatever I think about him in other things, I take my hat off to his courage.”

That was good enough for me. If Colonel Kaledin takes his hat off to a man’s courage, then that man is no coward.

I rehearsed Mussolini’s mannerisms—I have only mentioned a few of the catalogue—till Kaledin was satisfied, and rushed back to town. I was

now confident—Marshall and Mason were astonished at the change in me. I figured it out that I would be kidnapped by members of the League and then taken to the rendezvous, wherever that might be. And Margaret would be at the rendezvous. She would upset my scheme, of course—I could not hope to deceive *her*—but by that time the plot would be spoiled.

Aderno had undertaken to keep Mussolini away from his motorcycle at least until I arrived. I decided to fly to Rome: the top of my head was bare, flanked with thin black hair. In my case was the black uniform of a Fascist corporal, suitably padded to suggest squatness.

I had actually reached Croydon when a young man halted before me.

“Captain Newman?” he said. “You won’t remember me, of course—”

“But I do,” I replied. “At least, I remember your face. You were at a party in Cambridge—Miss Hay introduced us.”

“Right!” he beamed. “Mundy is the name.”^[4]

[4] Actually it isn’t. To avoid family complications, I have heavily disguised it.—B.N.

Now I could place him—the usual undergraduate of the rather serious kind; pleasant, open, moneyed heir, I recollected, to a title and a fortune.

“I went to your flat and chased after you. I phoned a message to stop you—ah, it looks as if I have beaten my own message.” A messenger boy approached me, asked if I were Captain Newman, and handed me a slip: *Please don’t embark till you have seen my messenger—Margaret.*

“You will excuse me using Miss Hay’s name in the phone message?” Mundy continued. “I thought you wouldn’t recognize mine.”

“That’s all right. But what is this about Miss Hay?”

“She gave me a note for you.”

“Is she in England?”

“She returned last night.” He passed over a note: Hertford Bank paper, I noticed, and the same old typewriter which had given Marshall his clues. *Can you come? I need your help—again. Margaret.* The name was written, but the rest was typed. The signature was undoubtedly hers.

“Where is Miss Hay?”

“Staying with some friends in Surrey.”

“Where?”

“About half an hour from here.”

“Yes. But where?”

“I’m sorry. I was told not to say. I understood that there has been some rather queer business afoot. I gathered that you could get Miss Hay clear of a mess.”

“But how am I to get to her?”

“By my car. I’ll drive you there at once.”

“Very well.”

He seemed delighted at my decision. I wondered if he were himself a member of the League? He kept closely by me as I cancelled my passage, arranging to phone if I could be in time for the afternoon plane.

He had a fine high-powered Alvis parked by the airport buildings. While he was starting up I walked round it, admiring its lines of grace and power.

He chatted cheerfully as we drove. I tried to draw him out about Margaret, but obviously he knew little about her difficulty, whatever it was. I watched, too, the direction we took; we headed towards Reigate at as good a pace as the traffic would allow.

“Only about ten minutes from here,” he said.

“Time for a cigarette?” I suggested. “Only gaspers, I’m sorry. I left my case in my overcoat at Croydon.”

I passed the packet to him, and we both lit up while halted in a traffic jam in the main street of Reigate. The packet was then empty, and I flung it casually out of the window.

Not many minutes later, passing through a little village which it is unnecessary to name, the Alvis turned suddenly up a private road, rapidly approaching a pretentious country-house. Mundy rang, and a footman appeared. We left our hats, and Mundy led me forward. Up a great flight of stairs we passed along a stately corridor; then Mundy tapped at a door and entered.

“Come in,” said a girl inside; but the voice was not that of Margaret.

We walked inside the room. A tall fair girl rose to meet us; by her side was a burly giant of a fellow, young and cheerful.

“Captain Newman?” the girl said, in very friendly fashion.

“Yes.”

“I am so glad you have come—it is very good—”

“Where is Miss Hay?”

“Well, I’m afraid there has been a little misunderstanding.”

“Misunderstanding?”

“Yes. Miss Hay is not here. But we thought she would like you to come here.”

“I’m afraid I don’t understand.”

“No, I’m not very clear, am I?” She smiled. “I’d better be blunt. I’m awfully sorry, Captain Newman, but we shall have to ask you to stay here for awhile.”

I glanced round quickly. Mundy and the burly youth were standing by the door, and the hefty fellow handled a revolver. I turned to the girl, who was perfectly self-composed. The situation was amusing—intending to stage a mock kidnapping, I had now been kidnapped in earnest!

“I am afraid that even now I don’t understand,” I repeated. “What does this mean—that I am to be held here by force?”

“I’m sorry to say that is the case,” the girl said. “I hope you don’t mind ___”

“Mind! Of course I mind!”

“Won’t you sit down?” she asked. “I understand your indignation, of course, but, after I have explained, I am sure that you won’t be angry.”

She had a pleasant smile—her personality was very charming, in fact. There was nothing to be done but to accept the situation—the hefty young man still handled his revolver. I sat down, therefore, and demanded the story.

“As you have probably guessed,” she began, “we belong to the League of International Amity.”

“May I have your names, or is secrecy essential to the conspiracy?” I asked, peremptorily. “Mundy I know—and I have a suspicion that I have seen this young man before, although I can’t place him.”

“You probably have—he is Bunny Milhall, the Rigger international. I don’t think you know me—though I have seen you often, on the stage. My name is Kimberley—you know my father, I think, Lord Lynton?^[5] I have heard him speak of you—he was in touch with you during the War, I think?”

[5] All these names, for obvious reasons, have been altered beyond recognition.—B.N.

“Yes. I take it that he is not concerned in this—kidnapping, or whatever it is?”

“No; he is in Scotland. We three are solely responsible. Of course, we know that it’s all very illegal, and that you can claim heavy damages from us after it is all over. It all began with Margaret—”

“But she is not here?”

“No,” she said. “We all had a—summons—we had to meet—”

“Yes, I know that.”

“There! I guessed you would!” she beamed. “I’m so glad because that makes me right.”

“Please go on, Miss Kimberley,” I said, wearily. “I’m still waiting for the explanation you promised.”

“Oh, I’m so sorry. I do dawdle, don’t I? But Mr. Mundy, here, he suspected you—was afraid of you. I did, too. I knew from Father of the wonderful things you’ve done, and when I heard that you had come into our affair I was really frightened. So we suggested to Margaret that she ought to get you away for a week or so.”

“Well? Did she agree?”

“No. She wouldn’t have anything to do with it—she was quite cross, in fact. But we were so concerned that we decided to do it ourselves.”

“But that note?”

“Oh, Bunny forged the signature. He’s awfully good at that.” I turned to Bunny, grinning sheepishly—but still holding the revolver.

“Young man,” I said, “in future you’d better confine yourself to selling the dummy. That’s as near to forgery as it’s safe to go.”

“So Harry—that’s Mr. Mundy—went off to fetch you this morning—we couldn’t arrange things till we had the house to ourselves. We got a scare when he phoned up to say that you’d left for Croydon. But apparently he caught you up.”

“Apparently he did!” I said, grimly. “Well?”

“Well, that’s really all.”

“All? It isn’t. I want to know what you propose to do with me.”

“Oh, you’ll be quite all right,” she smiled. “You won’t be at all uncomfortable. We shall just hold you here for a few days. All the servants are away except Thomas—and he’s with us.”

“Is he a member of the League?”

“No, but he’s a Socialist, so his views on Mussolini are much the same as ours. I knew I could depend on him—he’s quite a good cook, although he’s really a footman. You’ll have to stay in this room, I’m afraid—it’s the only one equipped for a prisoner.”

“Equipped?”

“Yes. Once we had a mild lunatic in the family, and this was her room. The windows are barred, you notice, and there is a special lock on the door. However, we shall keep you company. There are plenty of books, and the wireless—or we could make up a four at bridge, if you like; Thomas could hold the revolver while Bunny plays.”

I had to control myself, or I would have laughed aloud. The character of the piece had changed in an hour from tragedy to pure comedy. Such amiable conspirators as this trio I had never yet encountered.

“Very well, a game of bridge,” I agreed. “If Thomas can be spared from the kitchen, that is. Of course, I ought to warn you that you have committed yourselves very deeply—this is no question of damages, but of imprisonment. You realize that?”

“Yes.”

“And you have thought of its effect on your father’s position?”

“Yes. I can’t help that. I must live my own life.”

I had heard that phrase before! No one can explain precisely what it means. It made me smile.

Mundy slipped out of the room, and the closing of the door confirmed the quality of the lock. Very soon he returned with Thomas, who took over the revolver gingerly.

“Keep your finger off the trigger, man!” I yelled. “Those things go off!”

We settled down to the strangest game of bridge I ever played. I did very well—the cards were against me—but my opponents were so excited that they played extraordinarily badly. But after an hour or so Miss Kimberley called the game off.

“I’m sorry,” she said. “But Thomas will have to go now—it’s time to serve lunch. We’ll have it in here. I say, Captain Newman, you’re a great sport to take things like this.”

“I second that,” chimed in the burly Bunny. “I should go mad.”

“When you’ve been in this business as long as I have,” I said, “you’ll know that it’s useless to go mad. You’ve got to think. There’s always a way

out of a mess, if you can but think of it.”

“But you won’t try to think of a way out of this?” she queried. “It’s all been so friendly—just as I hoped. I should hate to have to be stern.”

I could not help smiling. “I can scarcely picture you as stern,” I said. “Anyway, let’s have lunch first. After that I may have to deliver an ultimatum to you.”

It was an excellent lunch, and I ate with relish. The others were still overcome by the excitement of their unaccustomed position, and even the hefty Bunny, to use the Victorian phrase, “toyed with his food” in a manner very unlike a Rugby international.

“Thomas,” I said, as the last course was brought in, “for a Socialist you serve a remarkably Capitalist lunch!”

We sat over coffee by the fire; except for the hovering Thomas with the revolver—he was far more at home with a salver—we might have been a happy party of friends. We told funny stories; then, turning serious, we discussed world affairs—naturally, with special reference to Abyssinia and Italy. The subject of Mussolini was hesitantly introduced, and I read my little homily on the dangers of Mussolini as a martyr. For the latter part of the time, in fact, I did most of the talking.

“Oh, but this is fascinating!” Miss Kimberley declared. “Oh, Captain Newman, I do wish you were with us, instead of against us!”

“But what about this ultimatum, sir?” asked Mundy.

“I’m not certain, but I think it’s just about to be delivered,” I replied.

They looked up, startled, at the sound of footsteps in the corridor—by their calculations, the rest of the house was empty.

“Before you do anything rash with that revolver, Thomas, take a look at the window,” I said quietly.

The eyes of all four of them swung round to the window; they saw the head and shoulders of a man who held a revolver with a very definite assurance.

“Open the door, or I’ll blow it in!” commanded a voice outside.

“You might as well,” I suggested. “The game’s up—that’s very obvious.”

They had the sense to realize this. They looked at one another sheepishly, wondering what to do next. Thomas, interpreting their silence as consent, unlocked the door, and Marshall and two of his men strode into the room.

“Thanks, Marshall,” I said. “I was expecting you. Just relieve Thomas of that revolver, will you? He might hurt himself.”

The two detectives had acted even as I spoke, and the surprised Thomas found himself firmly gripped.

“Now, what’s all this?” Marshall demanded.

“I’ve been kidnapped, that’s all,” I said. And I outlined the case very briefly.

“Oh! Well, you understand that this is a serious business,” Marshall remarked to the crestfallen quartet. “This revolver makes it worse, of course. You’ll have to come with me.”

“One moment, Marshall,” I interposed. “These young people have been guilty of an error of judgment. They freely admit that error, and promise to be good children in future. Isn’t that so?” I turned for confirmation.

“That’s all very well,” Marshall grumbled.

“They’re very sorry for what they’ve done,” I said.

“They’ll be sorrier still before I’ve finished with them,” Marshall promised.

“Just a minute.” I turned again to the amateur kidnapers. “Now, as I warned you, and as Inspector Marshall says, this is really serious. But have I your promise that you will have nothing more to do with this affair—at least until I give you leave?”

“Certainly,” said Mundy, after a moment’s hesitation. “We couldn’t if we went to jail, so we’re no worse off, anyway.”

The others agreed. But Marshall was not so easily mollified.

“That’s all very well,” he argued, “but it won’t do. They will have to come with me—we’ll see about bail afterwards, if you like.”

“No, Marshall,” I insisted. “You’ll leave them alone.”

“But it’s a clear case—”

“It isn’t: suppose I refuse to give evidence against them?”

“What? You—but what about this chap with a revolver?”

“We had a burglar scare, and I put him on guard. Didn’t you notice that we’ve even barred the windows? How’s that?”

“Well, I’m damned!” Marshall ejaculated. “After all I’ve done for you this morning!”

“Sorry, but that’s the position,” I said. “If you’ll withdraw your men, I’ll say just good-bye to my friends, and come along with you.”

Grumbling furiously, Marshall withdrew. My new friends crowded round me.

“I say, you are a sport!” cried Miss Kimberley. “I’m frightfully disappointed, of course, but you were lovely!”

“What I can’t make out is, how did it all happen?” Mundy complained.

“I warned you that you should not interfere in things like this,” I said. “You were damned before you began.”

“But how?” he cried. “How did you get us—fingerprints or what? I thought we were foolproof. I read up all similar cases in the Crime Club books—”

“Yes, and followed their example in trying to be too clever and complicated. Before we drove off from Croydon I knew that I was being kidnapped—or, at least, that there was something wrong.”

“How?”

“You had taken such a lot of trouble fixing false number-plates to your car,” I said. “The new one wasn’t quite the same size; you left a few scratches, too.”

“But how did the police follow us here?”

“I sent word to them.”

“But how? You never left me for a moment,” Mundy protested.

“No, but after we had a cigarette, you saw me fling the empty packet out of the window—in the main street of Reigate?”

“Well, what of it?”

“There were three boys coming along the pavement just then.”

“But I don’t see—”

“Boys want cigarette cards—you ought to know that. They make a bee-line for empty packets. Well, they wouldn’t find a cigarette card in this: they found a card of mine, with a printed instruction on the back to get in touch with Inspector Marshall at Scotland Yard or to hand the card to a policeman. Can’t you imagine the excitement of those three boys?”

“Good God!” exclaimed the Rugger international. “Cute, that was.”

“But even now,” Mundy began, “even now I don’t see how they followed us—”

“One of the arts you learn in my business is to write in the dark—or in your pocket,” I explained. “On that card was your false number, and the words ‘gray Alvis’.”

“Hell!”

“Yes. That was quite enough. Our police may be a bit slow at tracking Leagues, but they are pretty good at tracking cars.”

“I think you’re right, Captain Newman,” Miss Kimberley said after a pause. “We’re only amateurs—kids at the game. You’ve beaten us with one hand. We ought never to have dared to pit ourselves against professionals. But you’ve behaved beautifully—I shall tell Margaret all about you when I see her.”

“Well, tell me where she is—you owe me that.”

“Oh, I’m so sorry. I can’t.”

“I see. That’s a state secret, eh?”

I called Marshall back into the room.

“This affair is all over,” I said. “Now”—to the three conspirators—“you will take no further part in the scheme, whatever it is, otherwise the consequences will be serious—I warn you. I shall let Inspector Marshall do his worst. All of you will stay in this house and its grounds for a week, and will allow no one to visit you—except, of course, tradesmen. Now that is clearly understood?”

They agreed, and repeated their promise. They shook hands rather shamefacedly, and I walked out to Marshall’s car.

“You’re getting too soft,” he grumbled, as we drove off. “They ought not to get away with it like this.”

“Marshall, Marshall, what has happened to your gray matter?” I chided, smiling. “And I thought you were playing up beautifully when you simulated the big stern policeman so successfully.”

“Simulated? What *was* your idea?”

“Don’t you see? These people know that we’re after the plot. As soon as they dare, *they will send a warning to their headquarters*—to the ‘rendezvous’, probably.”

“Gosh!” Marshall exclaimed. “I never thought of that.”

“You will watch all means of communication, of course. I doubt if they’ll act for a day or so, till they think we’re slacking. Probably it will be a wire or phone call, rather than a letter. Naturally, you’ll stop it. Further, it

will give you directions. Wherever that message is addressed, there I shall be—after I am kidnapped. You can set off to rescue me at once.”

“Good!” Marshall grinned. “I know where I am now. And I’m damned glad to see that your head’s screwed on tightly again.”

I caught the afternoon plane to Paris, and pressed on towards Rome. I was in high humor. The incidents of the morning amused me mightily; I could still see the crestfallen countenances of the three conspirators—to say nothing of the Socialist Thomas. They were true to type—this was real student plotting. But the affair before me promised to be sterner stuff: at the head of this League were men of action, desperate men, who would stop at nothing. I spent hours in mental rehearsal of my new part—one slip might be serious.

During the journey I read all the books on Mussolini I had been able to get. They varied a lot in their outlook, naturally, but this was all to the good. I was amused to read in one book: “Mussolini is the only dictator with a strong regard for family life.” I confirmed that he was a vegetarian—his diet is largely composed of milk and fruit, and he enjoys marvellously good health. Milk is not my favorite beverage, but I could endure it for a few days.

He is fond of riding, fencing, swimming, hiking, I read. The same book mentioned his passion for speed, but placed him always in a high-powered car, not a motorcycle. He is neat, orderly, and hardworking; he speaks French and German almost fluently, and English quite well. He is full of vitality, and salutes with vigor. He is very superstitious and suffers from claustrophobia—the writer suggested that this might be the result of his experiences in a prison cell. Although once an atheist, he now professes himself religious, and prays regularly every day. I suppose he must have prayed quite a lot about Abyssinia.

From a sycophantic biography I culled further details, and committed to memory a good many sentences from his speeches and writings. They would serve as a model for conversation. George Seldes’ *Sawdust Caesar* was also very useful—if only as a valuable corrective to the aforesaid sycophantic biography. I remarked with interest that Seldes attributed to Mussolini the expletive phrase: *Porca Madonna*—which is many degrees less pretty than *porca putana*.

I felt more confident every minute. An hour before a mirror, making slight but subtle facial amendments, and I was prepared to be Mussolini. For the latter part of the journey I pretended that I *was* Mussolini; tried to think

his thoughts, and say his sayings. It came to me very easily—being a dictator was simpler than I had imagined.

I had told Aderno the whole story, trusting him implicitly.

“Well, what is the plan of action?” he asked.

“Fairly simple,” I said. “By the way, does your chief still ride a motorcycle?”

“Very seldom. He prefers a car today.”

“But he still rides a cycle?”

“Yes. Occasionally.”

“Good. Because obviously these people expect a motorcycle, so we’d better give them one.”

“But how will they know when and where the Duce is riding?” Aderno queried.

“Ah, ask me another! You never know with these widespread affairs—they must have someone inside your circle. They certainly knew something about his movements last October. Anyway, you can tackle that point later—or leave it alone. It seems to me that all we have to do is to let it be known very freely that Mussolini is going to ride, then our friends will get to know it. That *must* be so—how otherwise could they hope to take action? Now, when shall we say?”

“I suppose,” he countered, “that these people are actually here—not still at their rendezvous?”

“I should say yes. Rome may be their rendezvous, for all we know. Besides, the moment is *now*. Your troops will be in Addis Ababa any minute—this moment is almost as effective as the outbreak of war. Yes, we must bank on their acting at once. Anyway, if it doesn’t come off, we must try again. What about tomorrow night? What is Mussolini doing then?”

“I don’t know yet, but I do know that he won’t be riding a motorcycle. He’ll certainly be in his office—the news from Abyssinia is intriguing minute by minute.”

“Right. Then we’ll say tomorrow night. I’m afraid you’ll have to do all the preliminary work. You must warn his garage that he wants the bike tuned up for tomorrow night. You must also mention that he is going for a good long spin—say, along the coastal road towards Livorno. You’ll have to be careful—the news must spread, yet it mustn’t reach Mussolini’s own ears, obviously.”

“It’s going to be awkward,” Aderno said. “If I give the orders to the garage, his own personal chauffeur will know. Still, perhaps I can wait till his own car has gone out tomorrow. Anyway, I’ll do my best.”

Mussolini solved our problem by remaining at his desk all day. In the twilight Aderno walked beside me into the Villa Torlonia, Mussolini’s residence on the Via Nomentana—a comfortable little mansion with a good garden. In a little room I donned my black uniform; then, to Aderno’s fascination, began my make-up. It was a tricky job; easy enough to suggest the character in the dark, but I might have to sustain it for a day or two. My blue chin was very effective, and I had practised its poise.

Aderno was delighted with the finished result.

“This is marvelous!” he cried. “You are, of course, too tall—”

“By the way,” I asked, “how big *is* Mussolini?”

“About five feet seven. But you think he is bigger unless you have stood beside him. Have no fear, to foreigners you can impersonate him easily. What?”—his eyes rolled with surprise when I began to imitate some of Mussolini’s pet gestures.

With the eagerness of a schoolboy, after we had eaten and rested, he went himself to fetch the motorcycle. I have forgotten what make he said it was—Italian, of course. I never saw it in the light—but a few whispered instructions gave me command of the controls. I kicked at the starter, and headed north.

I rode through Rome very sedately, my uniform cap pulled down and coat collar up. No one was interested; all the people were hanging about in cafés and buying a fresh newspaper every ten minutes, waiting for news of the fall of Addis Ababa. Clear of the city I began to try out my mount, to see what she would do. Mussolini was a good judge; if he wanted speed, he certainly chose the machinery to get it. With a powerful headlight and a fairly clear road I found myself touching fifty miles an hour without difficulty.

How would my opponents act? I slowed down at the thought—I had no wish to break my neck by being kidnapped at fifty miles an hour. Yet I must keep up his reputation—speed, speed! Reaching the coastal road, I gave my mount her head. Suddenly, in the glare of my headlight, I saw two men signalling frantically. Ah, this was my cue, evidently. Now I would allow myself to be kidnapped.

But the two men were policemen, who proposed to arrest me for exceeding the speed limit! Apparently I was technically in a village, though

I hadn't noticed it. I chuckled inwardly at the idea of Mussolini being arrested! But action was imperative and easy. Squatting still on the saddle so as to conceal my height, I broke into the policemen's duet of castigation.

"*Porca putana!*" I shouted. "Do you not recognize your Duce?"

They shone their lamps upon my face, and I felt them start backwards in shock. Their apologies were abject and humble; they would have crawled at my feet had I ordered them. But:

"It is nothing. On the contrary, you did your duty—you were vigilant. I am really in error—I did not realize that I had reached the village. You need not reproach yourself—I commend you." And I kicked the starter and was off, leaving two excited policemen firmly at the salute.

For another half-hour I rode; I passed through Civitavecchia. Here was a lonely stretch of country beyond—ideally made for a hold-up. I would have been happier had I known my opponents' methods; I had no wish to crash into a barrier.

They were more considerate than that, however. Ahead I saw the rear-lights of a stationary car; a man was in the road swinging a lamp. Perforce I pulled up.

"We have had a breakdown," he said. "Would you leave word at the nearest garage?"

"Of course," I agreed.

He approached closer, thanking me. His lamp shone on my face, and I made no attempt to avoid it.

"YES!" he shouted.

Two men scrambled from the car; one covered me with a revolver, while the other came near.

"You will not move," said the first man. "This gun is loaded; any movement, and the trigger moves also."

The second man was beside me, and suddenly I felt a sodden pad thrust against my nose and mouth. According to the thrillers, if you push a pad of chloroform to a man's nose, he goes out immediately. In real life he doesn't—you must hold it there a good minute.

So I struggled, reasonably convincingly. The cycle fell over with a crash, and I rolled on the ground, two of them with me. They overpowered me after I had got in one or two blows; I was held down while the pad was applied again. I was only just conscious as they lifted me inside the car; then I knew no more.

I came round slowly, under the impression that I was sleeping in an old-fashioned rocking-chair. I struggled for my senses, but half an hour must have passed before I realized that the rocking was more spasmodic than rhythmic—I was at sea.

This was a surprise: yet it could not have been difficult—there are dozens of lonely coves along the west coast of Italy, admirably free from the gaze of coast-guards or Customs officers. The boat appeared to be small; I was lying in its stern, covered with rugs. I tried to pull myself together, but the effects of the drug lingered.

Suddenly I sensed excitement; I was so far recovered that I could raise my head. The boat appeared to be sailing without lights, but the night was not dark. There were shouts across the water, angry hails.

“What is it?” I heard someone say—in English!

“A Customs cutter.”

“I guess we can beat that. Step on the gas, boy!”

This speech did more than the keen sea air to bring me round. If I were not badly mistaken, the speaker ought to be Grantern, the American I had so narrowly missed over six months earlier at Naples.

The boat gathered speed—it seemed to be a high-powered motor-boat, not more than twenty feet in length. The shouts continued; then followed a fusillade of shots.

It was soon obvious, however, that we were drawing clear—we had “stepped on the gas” with a vengeance. I am not familiar with boats, but we seemed to be moving remarkably swiftly. After about half an hour, so far as I could guess, we lowered speed—the Customs cutter had long since been thrown off. By this time I was almost myself again, and was ready to take up my part.

“What does all this mean?” I demanded sternly, sitting up.

They were startled; they had not noticed my revival. Lights flashed, and two of the men stood over me.

“Well, how do you feel?” said one—not the American.

“Give me a drink. And then tell me what this foolery means.”

A flask was passed to me, and its contents did me good.

“I demand to know what this means,” I repeated. “Answer at once!”

“I shouldn’t talk too much just now,” said the American. “We’ll have a real good talk in the morning.”

“*Porca putana*—what is this all?” I roared—in English.

“Sorry, but we can’t talk now. You can have a real mouthful when we land. Now, see here, we don’t want to hurt you, but just keep still and keep quiet—see this?” And he indicated a revolver which he held in his hand.

I decided to accept the situation. “You will regret this, my friends!” I said, with much emphasis.

I lay back; there was still some effect of the chloroform in my head and I was violently seasick.

I made a putrid journey. But soon after dawn I pulled myself together. Raising my head above the gunwale, I saw land peering through the morning mist. As we drew nearer I saw its shape—wooded hills sweeping down to the sea. A landmark caught my eye and I recognized it. Nor was I really surprised to find that my captors had carried me to Corsica.

CHAPTER NINE

WE landed at an unfrequented corner of the bay, a great boulder serving as a quay. I stepped ashore with dignity; I said no word, but my eyes flashed their contempt. We marched across the deserted plain; one of my escort, after ostentatiously displaying his revolver, had put it in his pocket.

Soon we began to climb, rising rapidly above the malarial strip. The track was a mere donkey path, obviously unfrequented. At last we reached a fence of wicker, cunningly interwoven from tree to tree; it enclosed a grassy plot, in the center of which was a one-storyed timber chalet. We walked straight in, sat down at a table, and were immediately served with breakfast by a young man of German characteristics. At least these people had confidence as well as organization; they were so certain that they would succeed in kidnapping Mussolini that they had prepared his breakfast!

The brief meal was concluded in stony silence. I stared straight in front of me, ignoring them. Nevertheless, an occasional unobserved sidelong glance helped me to get an impression of my escort. One man had disappeared—I guessed he was on guard outside the fence. Of the others, one was undoubtedly the American, Grantern—he fitted the Naples picture exactly. So did the other man—he of the peculiar eyes.

There *was* something strange about his eyes; I tried to analyze their peculiarity. In the hours that followed I was able to observe them closely, and found a great interest in their ever-changing complexity. At one moment they were dark with a soft sadness; the next flashing with a religious fire. Always his dominating feature was his eyes—I did not wonder that all the people I had questioned had mentioned them.

The young German removed the dishes, but the silence continued. I did not intend to break it first—my dignity as Duce forbade. The American's patience broke first—I knew it would.

“Well, now,” he said to the other, “what about getting to business?”

The man with the strange eyes turned to me, speaking in Italian.

“You will be wondering what all this means?”

“I asked that question some hours ago,” I replied, icily. “I am still waiting for the answer.”

“I say,” the American broke in, “I believe you speak English? Do you mind—I don’t know any Italian.”

“I have a little English,” I replied, speaking over-deliberately and with occasional inaccurate accentuation. “It is the same to me. Now you will reply my question!”

“First we must tell you who we are”—the other man’s English was excellent.

“I know very well who you are,” I broke in roughly.

“What?”

“Do you think I rule Italy on nothing?” I thundered. “Yes, I know you, though I never have seen you. You are the men who tried to assassinate me at Naples. Your name”—pointing to the American—“is Grantern; and yours”—as if searching my memory—“is Harim.”

“Golly!” the American ejaculated, his face falling. I realized that actually I had said too much—the affair near Naples was theoretically an accident. But they were not to know this—they could not know that the police had not found the bullet.

Even Harim looked concerned, and I knew that the first advantage lay with me. I took the opportunity to stare at him, trying to place his nationality. I failed. “An eastern European,” the clerk at Naples had said. Yet there was nothing of the Slav about him, and his complexion was pale.

“Well, this is a surprise, Dooce!” Grantern continued. “I never knew you knew about that little affair. However, let bygones be hasbeens,” he added cheerfully.

“What is that?” I demanded. “Bygones—hasbeens?”

“Well, sort of let sleeping dogs lie,” he explained.

“What dogs? Where are dogs?” I asked.

“Oh, forget it!” he said, wearily. “You talk, Paul. I’m getting in a mess already.”

“You received an ultimatum from the League of International Amity, and you ignored it,” he began.

“I received an ultimatum from the League of Nations, too, and I ignored that also!” I declared. “Who am I, to take notice of you or them? I lead Italy to her destiny—nothing can prevent me. When my work is finished, then I shall die—but not before. The world will one day know how it has misjudged me—me, the bearer of the torch of civilization.” I had risen, and emphasized my remarks with appropriate gestures. The American sat wide-

mouthed. “Who are you to tell me what I should do? I am not responsible to you, but to history. I declare to the world—”

“One moment, Signor Mussolini,” Harim interrupted. “You are not addressing the world from your balcony now. This is not a theatrical performance.”

Of course, that is where he was wrong. It was! A very successful one, so far.

“This is no time for extravagant phrases,” he continued. “No”—as I would have broken in—“let me speak. You are no longer Duce of Fascism in Italy. You are merely Benito Mussolini, and you are in the hands of men as determined as yourself.”

“Determined to what?”

“Will you let me speak? It was explained to you months ago that there had been formed a League, whose members had vowed to execute any man who led his country into war. We failed.”

“Yes. Leagues usually do fail,” I sneered, with a supercilious smile.

“By accident we missed the moment—”

“Two accidents,” I jibed. “You have forgotten the balcony of the Palazzo Venezia.”

For the moment he was almost rattled; I was very happy, feeling well on top of the situation. At last I was at grips with the root of the plot. If I had failed before, I would not miff it this time. I was playing for time; the longer I delayed then, the more desperately their plot foundered—and the nearer I would be to Margaret.

Harim was fighting to control himself, but I saw passionate anger in these expressive eyes.

“When, in defiance of all covenants, you invaded Abyssinia,” he began again, in a lower tone, but I broke in again.

“Covenants?” I repeated. “Covenants with a barbarous people, who do not understand what the word means? The Abyssinian expedition was despatched purely to safeguard the Italian Empire.”

“Say, that’s good,” said the American. “That’s what we wanted. So, if the Italian Empire is safeguarded, you are satisfied?”

“Just a moment, friend,” Harim interrupted. “We move too fast. Your words are only words, Signor Mussolini, and you know it. Like Serbia in 1914, had Abyssinia granted all your demands you would still have made war—you were not thinking of an Italian Empire, but a Roman Empire.”

“You insult,” I said, coldly. “I do not need to justify my actions to you.”

“I’m afraid you do not understand the position, Signor Mussolini. You are in our power—you will do as we say.”

“Shall I? That is interesting.”

“It is time that someone told you what the world thinks of you. Surrounded by sycophants as you are, you cannot know. The world looks upon you as a bully; you pretended a paternal interest in Abyssinia; you entertained its Emperor as a friend; you proposed its election to the League of Nations. And yet you turn and destroy the state you ‘protected’?”

“State? Rubbish—a land of barbarians.”

“Then why did you support its election to the League? Other nations objected, but you persisted. Now, because of you, the last feeling of security in Europe has gone. What small nation can feel safe, while you are at large? Which will provide your next Abyssinia? You and the other military dictators are entirely responsible for the spate of armaments—”

“Ah!” I sneered. “Tell me—who is the military dictator of France?”

“I have no excuses for France, except the fear of military dictators. That is your danger—the fear and distrust you generate. That you have stifled liberty in your own country is your affair—and your people’s. If they are sufficiently supine to submit to tyranny, I am sorry for them. But you cannot extend your tyranny to Europe. If your Abyssinian gamble succeeds, then within five years Europe must be at war. Had we executed you as we should, the Abyssinian campaign must have collapsed. We failed; the moment was missed. But we knew that another vital moment must come—the moment of victory. That moment is near; tomorrow, or the next day, the Duce should announce to his slaves that his conscripts and black slaves are in Addis Ababa. He will not be able to make that announcement, because he is held prisoner in Corsica.”

“Well,” I demanded, as he halted. “What do you want of me? Am I expected to grovel in front of you? *Porca putana*, you know little of me! Very well, you have me—do your worst. Do you think I do not provide for this? My successor is named. I have made my charge to the Roman race: ‘If I lead, follow me; if I retreat, kill me; if I die, avenge me.’ Your words are big now, but a terrible vengeance awaits you. Then you will squeal—squeal!”

“I think not. But don’t be afraid—we are not going to kill you.”

“What do you propose to do?”

“We propose to hold you to ransom,” he replied.

“I see—a kidnapping. And the price?”

“Fair terms for Abyssinia!”

“Indeed? And what would they be?”

“Withdrawal of your armies from Abyssinia, and the reference of the whole dispute to the League of Nations or the Hague Tribunal.”

“Is that all?”

“Yes,”—he missed or ignored the sarcasm in my tone. “Once that is done, then you will be free. The world would have learned that aggression does not pay.”

“Your demands are most reasonable,” I sneered. “Pray continue—I find the piece highly diverting.”

“By this time, of course, you will have been missed—Italy will be scoured. Tonight the Grand Council will meet. They will be presented with another ultimatum—and they will pay more attention to this one. They will have to decide which means the most to them—Abyssinia or Benito Mussolini.”

“The decision will be very interesting,” I commented, drily.

“It will!” he agreed. “If they decide against you, then that is the end of Benito Mussolini.”

“Ah! So I am to die, after all?”

“If there is no other way out. At least we will offer a personal example to the dictators of Europe.”

“It is time that the farce was ended,” I said, firmly. “You must be mad to think that I would consider such terms for a second. You must know very little of me. You are young and thoughtless. I know your leagues and students’ organizations. Debating societies—all of them.”

“Some of them,” he contradicted. “This one is a little more practical, you must admit. Twice it came within an ace of executing the Duce of Italy. Now it holds him prisoner. That is not a bad record for a debating society.”

“Very well. Despatch your ultimatum.”

“You would not like to add a word of guidance to the Grand Council?”

“I would not. The Council knows my opinions, and will respect them.”

“In that case I will have our message despatched. By this time you will have been missed—I can imagine the ferment in your household. I know nothing of your wife, but your daughter Edda at least will be anxious.”

“Leave my daughter out of this!” I stormed in fury. “You pig-dog, leave her alone!”

I continued to rave at him; here was an excuse for letting myself go. Mussolini’s overwhelming affection for his daughter is well known—was known to Harim, as his introduction of her name proved.

Harim withdrew, presumably to despatch his ultimatum. The German and Grantern remained—the latter regarding me curiously.

“Say, Dooce,” he said, “it’s nice to see this in you. You know, we never think of Mussolini as a family man.”

“Your friend was offensive,” I said, curtly.

“Oh, he didn’t mean any harm. He’s enthusiastic, Paul is, that’s all.”

“What is he?”

“He’s the chief of the League of—”

“Yes, yes. I mean, what nationality is he?”

“Paul? Armenian.”

“Armenian? And you, an American, serve under him?”

“Well, yes. He’s a bigger man than I am. I’m glad to work for him.”

“You realize how he’s involved you?” I persisted. “You realize that death, or something just as unpleasant, awaits you?”

“Only if we don’t get through,” he corrected. “Oh, yes, there’s no false pretenses here. We know the dangers all right. But we’ll chance that.”

“Why do you do this?”

“Well, somebody’s got to do something. Men deserve peace, but they don’t get it. The schemes tried out so far have flopped, so we guessed that they didn’t get to the root. I know that peoples don’t want to fight. Your folks would never have gone for Abyssinia if you and your chaps hadn’t egged them on. So it’s people like you we’ve got to tackle.”

“But you—an American! How are you concerned with Europe?”

“Well, how are you concerned with Africa—but you are. Oh, I know my country has opinions about Europe—but it ain’t that we don’t care about Europe. We think the world of Europe, but we are not going to be drawn into squabbles between Mussolinis and Hitlers. It’s because of you and your like that we keep out of Europe. I know some of our folks go too far—some of them are ostriches with heads in the sand. They won’t touch Europe at any price.”

“They are wise. Europe is no affair of theirs.”

“That’s not sense. Europe’s part of the world, and America’s in the world. And we *are* concerned in Europe’s squabbles, whether we like it or not. If Hitler and you or anybody else starts fighting, and the rest join in, bang goes our trade.”

“I wonder! What about your munitions supplies in the World War?”

“Yes, and what about the debts that aren’t paid for them yet? No, there’s no money in war. All that talk is just a red herring. Pride is at the bottom of war, and you folks make a god of pride. Instead of teaching the Italians that they’re a nice lot of folks, getting on with their jobs, you flush ’em up that they’re really Roman gladiators. You persuade ’em that it’s better to be a gladiator than a farmer. And once you’ve persuaded ’em that they’re gladiators—why, of course, they want to gladiate.”

I smiled: he was so ingenuous that I found it impossible to keep up my pose of icy sternness. I made a short disquisition—culled entirely from Mussolini’s own speeches—on the virtues and advantages of Fascism.

“I’m not arguing about that,” he declared. “I don’t begrudge you your corporate state, if *you* think it’s better than another sort. I begrudge the things that lead to war. You say that the Italians are the salt of the earth; Hitler says the Germans are; Mosley says the English are; Stalin the Russians, and so on. Well, you can’t all be cock of the walk at once—you’ll have to fight it out to see which one has the most wind. That’s what we’re up against.”

“So you think war is wrong?”

“No, I don’t. I don’t think the Abyssinians were wrong, fighting against you; but I do think you were wrong. Make no mistake about it—we’re not fanciful pacifists. There’ll always be bullies in the world—till we’ve shown ’em it don’t pay. That’s the only sort of war that’s justifiable. If I see a bully knocking a child about, I hope I’d interfere. But if I could get at him first, I’d stop him from bullying.”

I was enjoying myself hugely; yet I wished that Mussolini could have been in his proper place, to have heard all this! It would have done him more good than a dozen diplomatic reprimands.

At this point Harim returned. I was rather disappointed—Grantern was really invigorating. However, Harim was the leader—the Duce of the League. I must get him to talk, too.

“Well, it has gone!” he announced, solemnly. “Very soon Rome will get its shock.”

“Rome has had its shocks before, and has survived them,” I said. “Shocks have back-fires, too—prepare yourself!”

“I am prepared!”

“Tell me, why do *you* do this? I have just had an interesting story from your friend.”

“I can tell you in a few sentences, Signor Mussolini,” he replied. “This fight against oppression is inherited in me. I am an Armenian. When I was a child of five, Turkish soldiers came to my village. My father was its head, and they wanted him to talk—about what, I never knew. He would not or could not talk, so they cut out his tongue. I saw it done; so did my mother. Can you imagine the horrors for the three of us?”

“My mother’s screams attracted the attention of the pasha who commanded the soldiers. My mother was a good-looking woman, and the pasha had her dragged to his tent. But she fought and struggled and scratched his face, till at last he cursed her and beat her and flung her to the soldiery. When they had gone, and she became conscious again, she was mad.

“That is my first memory; it still haunts me, day by day. Can you wonder that I vowed to fight oppression—that a dozen deaths would not deter me?”

“But, my dear man,” I began—and he started at the obvious sympathy in my voice. I could not restrain it; he had told his terrible story so simply and yet so dramatically that its effect was overwhelming. He knew how to talk, and a vivid picture of the wicked scene was forced into my mind. “My dear man, this is terrible. You deserve every sympathy. Yet, what has this to do with me?”

“You are that pasha,” he said. “You have nationalized force. You have raped Abyssinia, and are now looking around for another buxom wench. You start with horror at my story; I saw it. You would never do as that pasha did, I know. Individual cruelty and oppression you abhor, you would profess—but you encourage it *en masse*. You would not murder a single man, but would cheerfully murder ten thousand. That is your mentality. You pretend you are big—you think only in quantities. Thus, anything big enough *must* be right. You wouldn’t steal a lire piece from the Emperor of Abyssinia, but you would steal his whole country. Well, you’re wrong. You have openly proclaimed the rule of might, of force. Now you must admit it yourself. We hold you, and you will do as we say—or take the consequences.”

We talked in this fashion most of the morning. Harim was a great talker; a fluent speaker who knew dramatic effect when he saw it. Nevertheless, I

did not allow him all the honors. Gradually abandoning my pose of any aloofness while retaining my assurance, I defended my creed vigorously. Incidentally, I made free use of the mannerisms I had rehearsed—the tapping fingers, the rubbing palms, the stares beyond, and the extravagant gestures. I sat down as much as possible—only rising when the others were sitting. Thus I kept my height away from notice. I had no qualms—my impersonation was entirely successful—I was indisputably accepted.

“Is it true that you’re a vegetarian?” asked Grantern, as noon passed.

“It is.”

“Good! We heard so. Well, we can feed you all right.”

“How long is this going to last?”

“That all depends upon you. Maybe a day, maybe a week, or more. I expect you’d like to be back in Rome as soon as you can—there’ll be a big upset there.”

“Quite. But there will be a bigger upset here. This is all very absurd. I have enjoyed the morning—at least it has been novel. But I warn you that I shall soon tire.”

“Maybe, Signor Mussolini,” Harim interposed. “But we are playing you at your own game, and we hold the better hand—you!”

“And the rest of your organization—where are your members?” I demanded.

“All over the world,” Harim replied. “We set no store by numbers—a mere dozen or twenty in each country. We only enlist those who are serious; there are no falterers.”

“You have women among you?”

“Yes.”

“There was a woman in the affair at Naples, I remember—an Englishwoman. Is she in this, too?”

“All our members are equally involved.”

“What I mean is, is she here in Corsica?”

“She is serving the League, wherever she is.” And I could elicit no better answer.

The day passed slowly; the four of them shared the guard—there were never less than two in the room with me. I made no attempt to escape—it would have been beneath my dignity.

I would have liked to have known what was happening. It was important to maintain my pose until the whole scheme could be wrecked finally. Had Marshall found where I was—had the prisoners of Reigate given him the clue? And—particularly—where was Margaret? At all costs I must hold on until I found her.

In the evening, Grantern produced a portable wireless set, and tuned in to Rome. The excitement in the city was reflected in the programmes, particularly the news bulletins. Harim smiled grimly when the announcer referred to Mussolini, and described his activities during the day.

“Of course, they are keeping it quiet,” he said. “We expected that, of course. I expect they have impressed one of your famous dummies to service—like they did that day on the Naples road.”

“You may be certain that their wits will not fail,” I replied, airily. “I have trained my staff well.”

“Yet they dare not put up a dummy to announce the fall of Addis Ababa,” he said. “There is only one Mussolini—any other would give himself away in action: that is very different from riding in a car.”

I chuckled inwardly. I did not dislike Harim, but I did look forward to seeing his face when he knew!

We prepared for rest.

“You will sleep here,” Harim ordered. “Two of us will be on guard. Do not move, and you need have no fear.”

“Fear—of you!” I taunted. “You are very considerate—I cannot promise you such treatment when you are in *my* hands.”

“I do not fear your tortures—they would mean nothing to me. My life has been so strange, so slight in happiness, that nothing can hold new terrors for me. I am prepared. I hope you sleep well, Signor Mussolini. You have behaved well today, with a dignity that surprises me. Yet I hate you because I hate your type, and what you generate.”

A pleasant good night! I lay down in a camp-bed, and he prepared to rest in another, alongside mine. His toilet preparations were lengthy. He brushed his hair long and hard, and his teeth were almost a ceremony. They were false, but I was intrigued to notice that the upper plate included one gold tooth! Strange touch of vanity, so typical of the East! As he laid the plate on the table, it seemed to me that he regarded the tooth with pride!

My own toilet next morning might have been risky. Had I shaved, I would have removed my blue chin! So I declined their proffered razors, and

washed very carefully. I was completely confident—they were quite without suspicion.

I judged it time for a show of exasperation. I demanded point-blank to be returned to Italy, or to be released. I promised lenient treatment. Harim began a comprehensive reply; he was only half dressed, so it was not so impressive as it might have been.

Suddenly, after a day of talk, action, I heard the sentry at the gate shouting: a moment later, the sound of running feet. The door was flung open, and Margaret stood there, panting.

“Quick!” she cried. “The police are coming—an English inspector is with them. Quick—they will be here in ten minutes.” Then she turned towards me for the first time. I saw the amazement in her eyes, which rolled in frank disbelief.

“You!” she cried. “You!”

“Ah, of course, you haven’t met,” said Grantern, genially. “Signor Mussolini, meet Miss Hay.”

“You fool!” she cried. “That isn’t Signor Mussolini.”

“What!”

“Oh, am I mad? That’s Captain Newman, of whom you warned me six months ago at Naples!”

CHAPTER TEN

HARIM looked from Margaret to me.

“What is this?” he cried. “Am I mad, or are you?”

“Say, Margaret, are you scatty?” Grantern asked.

“No, no!” she emphasized. “I tell you that you have been fooled—”

“Well, I’ll say!” said Grantern. “Howsomaybe, we can soon settle it. Are you Mussolini?”

“No.”

“Well, I’ll be—”

“You’ll be caught if you don’t hurry!” Margaret cried.

Harim was staring at me; his eyes shone with a strange light—even more than usual they dominated him.

“You are not Mussolini?” he whispered.

“No.”

“You have fooled me!”

“We have been playing on opposite sides,” I said. “At the moment—”

But suddenly he flung himself upon me, fighting like a fury. I was much heavier, yet could scarcely hold him. Grantern and the German joined in the fray, striving to pull us apart. He clung like a leech, fighting with unnatural ferocity. His fingers dug into my arms like claws, and at close quarters I saw the fury in his eyes. Paul Harim had always been a fanatic, I knew; now I guessed that he was mad.

They dragged him away; the bout had lasted no more than a minute, but I was almost exhausted. He ran to the door of the room, gesticulating extravagantly.

“You have fooled me!” he shouted. “Very well. You are not Mussolini—I’ll find Mussolini. Return to Scheme One. You hear me, all of you?”

“But I say, Paul—” Grantern began.

“Ah! You fail—I knew you would. Very well. I act myself. Good-bye.”

He turned and ran, stumbling rapidly down the mountain path. “After him!” I ordered. “I’m afraid his mind’s gone.”

We rushed after him, but in his madness he took risks which we avoided. Once or twice we glimpsed him below, but he gained on us rapidly. When we reached the flat plain he was several minutes ahead, and when we charged up to the little cove he was already in the motor-boat, cast off from the land.

“Paul! Paul! Come back!” Margaret pleaded.

“No. There is only one chance!” he shouted. “I will not fail! I will not fail!”

Grantern took up the plea, but Harim laughed.

“Look at Mussolini—look at him!” he jeered. “The other Mussolini—watch him! Read the papers tomorrow—my League shall not fail!”

He gave the boat her head, and turned her to sea. We were helpless—there was nothing in Porto Vecchio which could keep her in sight for a mile. Grantern held out his hands in dismay.

“Well, Captain Newman, it’s up to you now,” he said. “You’ve beaten us—my gosh, how you’ve beaten us! Well, you’ve won. It’s the police for us now, I suppose.”

“No, it isn’t,” I said. “Come round this corner—we’re more sheltered. Let’s talk for a minute. Now, listen, your friend Paul is mad—you saw that?”

“It certainly did seem so,” Grantern agreed grudgingly.

“He’s dangerous. I’ve got to stop him.”

“I’m with you,” Margaret declared.

“Margaret!”

“Yes. I promised you that there would be no more attempts to assassinate Mussolini. And now this has happened—oh, horrible!”

“And you, Grantern? Harim is bound to be caught—the Italian police are waiting for him. We won’t argue about Mussolini just now, but won’t you come in with us for the sake of your friend?”

“Right!” he said after a moment’s hesitation. “Yes, maybe we could save Paul.”

“Good!” I commended. “Now, let’s use your alternate getaway.”

“How did you know we had one?” he asked, puzzled.

“Because you’re no fool; neither was Harim,” I said.

I was right, anyway. I took charge of our escape—I was as anxious to avoid the police as they were; not even Marshall would have saved us from the delay of a long interrogation. Grantern rapidly described where a small

car was cached. Leaving them safely hidden, I walked cautiously across country to find it—cautiously, because I was still Mussolini, in the uniform of the Fascist Militia!

I found the car, cunningly concealed, and drove it towards them. I met one police patrol, but drove by at high speed. I gave up the wheel to Grantern when I reached them—I could hide myself the better in the rear seat.

“Step on it!” I said. “I leave it to you.”

The car was surprisingly powerful, and shot forward at a great speed; I saw that we were heading south, towards Bonifacio.

“How do we do it?” I whispered softly to Margaret.

“We have a plane at Bonifacio,” she said. “A seaplane.”

“The devil you have!” I cried. “You don’t spare expense anyway.”

“Grantern is very rich—and Harim had made a lot of money.”

“Who will pilot the plane?”

“Grantern. He’s first class.”

In an astonishingly small number of minutes we had reached the ancient town of Bonifacio. Grantern drove direct to the harbor; here the French maintain a small seaplane station. While he was engaged on the formalities of releasing his plane, Margaret ran into the town to purchase a rain-coat for me, to cover my uniform.

The minutes passed, and Grantern was still engaged in the offices—aviation is still suspect, and its intricacies are endless. I grew very anxious: we ought to overhaul Harim before he landed, but his boat was powerful, and he was desperate. And at any moment the police of Porto Vecchio might trace our way of escape.

At last all was ready. The German drove off in the car, making for Ajaccio. Grantern taxied to the land end of the fine natural harbor, turned and let his engines out. A minute later we were in the air.

Conversation in an aeroplane is somewhat difficult—I refer to the open type, of course, not the palatial air-liners. Margaret sat beside me, just behind Grantern. I had accepted his qualifications without question, but it was very obvious that he knew how to handle a seaplane. I learned later that he was a member of that famous “ace” squadron, which made itself such a nuisance to the Germans during the last months of the War.

“Where are you making for?” I shouted to him, as the plane settled to a steady course.

“Well, I can guess where Paul is making for,” he yelled, in reply. “We have a little cove near Livorno—close by where we kidnapped you. But I want to stop him before he gets there—there’ll be hell to pay if we have to land in Italy—I’ve got no papers!”

I sensed rather than knew the terrific speed of the seaplane. At the same time, I was concerned. We had lost a good two hours since the escape of Harim, and that motor-boat was fast—Grantern obviously had an eye for speed. The more I thought about the organization, the more I admired its potentialities. It had all the essentials—determination, wealth and brains; if such a league could succeed, this one could. And, though it had so far failed, I was glad that in the final stages I was to have the backing, not the opposition, of two of its leading members.

I tried to talk to Margaret, but the roar of the engines made it difficult.

“It’s nice to be on your side, not against you,” I roared.

“The other way round,” she replied. “I’m on your side. We *must* stop Paul—it would be sheer suicide. Besides, I promised.”

“What will he do—if we fail to catch him?”

“Make for Rome, I expect. But we *must* catch him.”

“Has he any plan—any Scheme Four?”

“No, but he is very clever—he could improvise something. We *must* stop him.”

The Italian coast was now well within view. Grantern slowed down the plane, and descended to a height of a few hundred feet. Anxiously, through the glasses, we searched the calm surface of the sea, but apart from a couple of fishing-boats its blue languor was undisturbed.

“It was about here I calculated to catch Paul,” Grantern shouted. “It looks as if he had moved some. We’ll have to make straight for the cove, and risk it.”

Again the powerful seaplane forged ahead. The Italian coast rapidly drew nearer. Probably because our eyes were concentrated on the sea below, we failed to notice the newcomers above. Our first warning came in the form of a burst of machine-gun fire.

“My God!” Grantern cried. “Look—three of ’em.”

A few hundred feet above us were three seaplanes bearing the Italian colors. As I looked, a second burst of fire opened.

“But why are they firing?” I questioned.

“They’re not,” Grantern said. “That’s blank—but it’s an order to descend. But if we do, we’re done for. We’ve no papers, and should be arrested. By the time we got clear, we should be years too late.”

“But what will you do?” I asked, as a machine-gun again barked its imperative summons.

“Well, I guess we’ll just have to see if my machinery is better than theirs!”

He handled the seaplane with consummate cleverness. First he must gain height, and I felt that we were rising rapidly. Already we were level with the pursuing planes; again the rat-tat-tat of a machine-gun summoned us to descend.

They, in turn, were rising. One, detached from the others, was still well above us. Suddenly it swooped towards us.

“Gosh! Look out—he’s firing live!” Grantern shouted, as a cluster of machine-gun bullets perforated the fusilage.

Margaret looked at me, wide-eyed.

“But this is mad,” she said. “They don’t know who we are—why do they try to shoot us down?”

“Anything may happen in Italy today,” I replied. “Nerves are on edge—and we haven’t obeyed an order. We’re for it—unless Grantern can get us out.”

Now was his chance to prove that his reputation as a war-time ace was not ill-founded. He had gained sufficient height to manoeuvre. The Italian pilots, after the one serious burst, had held their fire—evidently completely bewildered by the whole business. They had risen with us, and their purpose was clear—they intended to crowd us down. They were so near that we could see the faces of the pilots distinctly, and could see the vehement signals which they made to us.

Grantern, cruising along at a moderate speed, took no notice. The three planes, crowding together, were just on top of us, obviously determined to force us down.

“Now!” Grantern shouted.

I saw him fiddling with the controls, and in a few seconds the plane shot forward at a terrific speed. The Italians followed; again their machine-guns opened—and this time there was no question of blanks. I watched Grantern’s face, firm and set.

Bullets whistled all about us. Many struck the plane, but Grantern ignored them. In spite of my confidence in him, however, it seemed impossible that we should win through.

“Margaret,” I cried, my voice half lost in the roar of the engine and the rattle of machine-guns. “Listen! This may be the end—and I love you!”

“So do I!” she shouted, and there was happiness in her smile.

It was scarcely a romantic moment—death awaited us at any second. But I put my arm about her and kissed her.

Moments passed; we seemed to be making terrific speed, and to be slowly drawing clear.

“Hold tight,” he cried, as a fresh burst of fire whistled about us.

The nose of the plane dropped, and we rushed towards the sea with tremendous momentum. I was alarmed—it seemed inevitable that we must crash. Grantern looked grim and anxious.

“I daren’t look round,” he shouted. “Tell me—are they following us?”

“Yes.”

“Good! Then we’ve got ’em. I can rise quicker than them, and then I’ll show them the tail of my ’bus.”

Within a few feet of the sea the plane suddenly straightened. A few seconds later, and we had turned about rapidly and were rising again. The Italian planes had followed us but, as Grantern said, could not rise so quickly. We heard intermittent bursts of machine-gun fire, but were already out of range.

“Fine work!” I shouted to Grantern.

“Oh, that dead bird drop’s an old dodge,” he grinned. “Some of your boys taught it me during the War. But we ain’t out of the wood yet—they’ll have wireless, you know.”

“What will you do?”

“Draw ’em right away, and then dash back for the cove. We lose a lot of time, of course, but that’s better than being arrested. We should get it in the neck, now!”

We were rapidly drawing clear of the pursuing planes. Grantern was running out to sea again, grinning as he looked at his instruments and glanced back at the three dots in the distance. Suddenly I saw a look of concern cross his face.

“Can you pilot a plane?” he asked.

“No,” I replied.

“Well, you’ll have to learn,” he shouted. “One of them bullets has shot through a control on the port wing. I’ll have to mend it—I couldn’t manoeuvre in another emergency with that gone.”

“But how—”

“Look, you climb over into here.”

Gingerly I clambered out of my seat, and he made room beside him.

“Now, see this joystick?” he said, indicating the control. “Now, when I push it like this, the plane turns on its side—see? Well, I’ll have to climb out on to the wing, and you’ll have to balance while I do it—by turning the ’bus on to its side. See?”

I thought I saw, and made hesitant experiments.

“Don’t do nothing else,” he ordered. “Just that—and only a fraction. And gently—if you wobble, you’ll tip me off.”

“But can you do it?”

“Sure. It’s only a bit of wire that’s broken. Five minutes does it.”

I watched him anxiously as he left his seat and climbed on to the wing. Very gently I pushed over the joystick, to maintain the plane on an even keel. It may have been only five minutes, but it seemed more like five hours to me. Grantern was tremendously cool; it is no mean feat to repair a control while the machine is in the air, but to do it while the control of the plane is entrusted to an amateur. . . .

Steadying himself with one hand on a strut, he worked rapidly with the other. I never saw a man so proficient with a pair of pliers—working one-handed, too. But my relief was very great when I saw him testing the repaired control, and by a grin express his satisfaction.

He crawled carefully back to his place: I wanted to pat him on the back—he had a greater courage than I have.

“That’s O.K.,” he said, as he made a practical test of his repair. “Let ’em come on now. I’ll let ’em catch up, and then race ’em back.”

We slowed down, yet continued to gain height. Gradually the three Italian planes drew nearer. This time there was no machine-gun fire—now, of course, we were not over Italian waters.

“Hold tight!” Grantern shouted.

Banking the plane precariously on its side, he made a rapid about turn at terrific speed. Then he gave his engines their head. Looking back at the

Italians, turning in our course, he grinned.

“O.K.,” he said. “They won’t see us for long now.”

The seaplane roared ahead; the three Italians became mere specks, then were lost. In half an hour we were again off the Italian coast, making straight for the cove. We made an easy landing, and taxied towards the shore. An old man rowed out to meet us.

“Signer Paul—has he arrived?” Margaret asked eagerly.

“Yes, Signorina, over an hour ago.”

“Has he gone?”

“Yes; he took the car at once, and went south, towards Rome.”

We hid our consternation as we clambered into the boat. The position was expected, yet none the less dangerous.

“What about the plane?” I asked.

“I’m afraid it’s good-bye to her,” Grantern said ruefully. “They’re almost bound to find her. I’m sorry to lose the old ’bus—still, come on; there’s a village round the bend.”

We hurried on—every minute might count, not only in our pursuit of Harim, but in the Italian pursuit of us. In the village was a small garage.

“The American signor wishes to hire a car,” Margaret explained.

“But the signor already has one car on hire,” said the puzzled proprietor.

“And now he wants another,” she explained, nonchalantly. “What does it matter—he pays a suitable deposit?”

“Yes,” the man agreed. “But I have only my own car left.”

“That will do,” she said. And in a few minutes it was all arranged, Grantern producing a roll of notes which made my eyes open wide.

“Let me take a turn at the wheel, anyway,” I suggested. “I can drive a car, of course—and you’ve done your bit.”

The car rattled along at a steady pace. We were making for Rome, of course, but had not the faintest idea what to do when we got there.

Grantern chatted quite casually as we drove on at the best pace the car could raise. He was one of the coolest men I ever met; apparently dodging death on a seaplane was no more nerve-racking than plunging into an attempted assassination at Rome. I began to suspect—was he a member of this League really because of a craving for excitement? At last I put the point to him.

“Oh, no,” he said. “I’m in this the same as the others—to stop war. I saw a bit of the last, and I’ve seen its effects since, and I don’t like the whole business. But my reasons ain’t quite the same sort as the others. The last War never hurt me, and I didn’t have anybody killed. It’s all a matter of business. I’m a business man. War kills business—oh, I know all the old stuff about profiteers, but most of the honest business men are hit right hard. I’m in motors: in a war, my sales go up, but do I get my money? No, I do not. I subscribe to War Loans to pay your bills. And then all money is inflated, so that it means nothing at all.

“No, sir, commerce is built up on peace. It’s wars that start these ‘frozen currencies’ and the like abominations. Tell the world that there’s going to be peace for a long while, and business is real business—you know where you are.

“There’s too much waste in war—and it’s got to be paid for. When a big shell explodes, there’s a thousand dollars gone up in smoke—who pays? The munition owner, his workmen, the railway-men, the iron miners, and the like. They don’t see that—you can’t persuade ’em. But it’s true. You might as well play fireworks.

“So you see my meaning? I believe war is all wrong, of course, anyway; it’s just a mass of suffering for folks who never did harm, most of ’em. But mostly it’s waste, and a real business man can’t stand waste. I was glad to come in with these folks—I’ve got no faith in treaties and protocols; we’ve had them before. I reckon we’ve got to get at them on top. I’d like to see this Mussolini on the spot—he’s the sort of bully that talks so big that he has to act big. And he don’t do the scrapping himself, of course—he sets others on. Yes, I’d like another go at him. But today won’t do—and we’ve got to save Paul, anyway. We missed the moment, so must wait till the next. Mussolini will keep, anyway. By the way, you’re still wearing his togs, aren’t you?”

“Yes, under this coat.”

“I was wondering if—”

“I can guess. But damn it, Grantern! It was easy to pass myself off as Mussolini to you because you didn’t know him. In Rome, and in daylight—no, don’t you work out any scheme on that basis. Besides, I’ve had rather enough of playing Mussolini—I would prefer another part.”

We debated the possibilities of Harim’s plan. Neither Margaret nor Grantern had the faintest idea what he would do. But they did know his lair, and as soon as we reached Rome we hurried to it.

It was a small flat in a middle-class district, utterly indistinctive—just the thing, say, for a commercial traveller. An old woman, a kind of *concierge*, apparently looked after Harim when in residence, and never queried his long and frequent absences, which his “profession” aptly explained.

Grantern made straight for a cupboard, and unlocked it. The back of the cupboard—which was let into the wall—was false, and at Grantern’s touch revealed a small space. Grantern thrust in his head and then explored the space with an electric torch.

“I thought so—he’s been,” he said.

“What has he taken?”

“A rifle.”

“But he’s mad!” I exclaimed. “A stranger can’t walk about Rome in daylight with a rifle! A gun, perhaps, but not a rifle.”

“But this wasn’t an ordinary rifle,” he explained. “It took to bits—and then packed in a hand-case like a tennis racquet.”

Again I was impressed by the forethought of the conspirators.

“Come along to my own apartment, quick,” Grantern said, and we hurried off to one of the palatial hotels which Rome boasts. Here, apparently, the American had a suite of rooms.

The hall-porter greeted him.

“Ah, Signor, this is fortunate,” he beamed. “Your friend is waiting for you—I do not know his name, but the one who has been so often before. I told him that you were away, but he was confident that you were returning soon. And he was right!”

“Where is he?”

“He is waiting on the settee outside your rooms. I dared not admit him, without orders.”

The lift bore us swiftly upwards; the settee outside Grantern’s suite was vacant.

“Of course,” said Grantern, answering my questioning look. “He had a key.”

There was no sign of disturbance in the rooms, but Grantern made straight for a small drawer.

“What are you looking for?” I asked.

“A little bottle, labelled ‘Aspirin’. But we’re too late again—it’s gone.”

“I take it that the contents of the bottle were *not* aspirin?”

“You are right,” he said grimly. “Poison—strong poison.”

“So you would have poisoned Mussolini?” I said slowly.

“If necessary, yes. Why?”

It is difficult to explain the natural revulsion against poison, so different from a clear death by a bullet. Margaret was on my side as I tried to crystallize my objections into solid argument.

“Oh, no, I don’t agree,” Grantern protested. “Mussolini used poison gas against the Abyssinians, didn’t he? And he had signed a convention never to use it. We ain’t signed any convention. We didn’t use poison, because it wasn’t dramatic enough for the job. But I would have had no scruples—and certainly Paul wouldn’t.”

“Oh, but leave this—let’s talk that out later,” Margaret cried. “What are we to do now?”

“We’re no nearer getting to his plan,” Grantern said. “He’s got a rifle, a revolver, and poisons—”

“Poisons—more than one?”

“Yes; he’s got the sort you take, and the sort that gets you from the outside—a South American poison, which kills you if it gets in the blood-stream, say through a scratch. A nasty death, too. I saw a peon once in—”

I interrupted his reminiscences.

“Look here,” I said. “First of all, obviously, we must find out what is happening today. There seems a lot of excitement in the streets. I’ll rush round to my friend Aderno at once. You wait here—and think.”

I phoned Aderno, and hurried round to his office.

“You seem to have a facility for coming to Rome on historic days,” he cried, obviously elated.

“Why? What’s today?” I questioned, though of course I guessed the answer.

“Our troops are in Addis Ababa. Tonight the Duce will announce victory to the people!”

There was nothing to do but to tell Aderno the whole story.

“God!” he exclaimed. “Is this business still on?”

“Yes—the last lap,” I said. “Now, I take it that you can prevent any attempt at poisoning?”

“Yes. I will see to that—that is easy.”

“And shooting by revolver can also be ruled out,” Aderno continued. “He would never get near enough.”

“It is a possibility which ought not to be overlooked,” I argued. “Amidst excitement like this, anything might happen.”

“I think not, but I will see to it. There remains the rifle. Is he a good shot?”

“I don’t know.”

“He would need to be, to fire across the Piazza, and hit. Leave it to me—I will have all suitable rooms and windows examined. After all, this is the most serious threat, since it has been done before. Then, of course, the Duce was wounded.”

I presume that he referred to the occasion when, if the official accounts were accurate, the bullet which wounded Mussolini was fired round a corner!

But as I hurried back to Grantern’s hotel, I had a further idea. That South American poison—suppose Harim soaked his bullet in it before he fired. *Then, even if Mussolini were only wounded, he must certainly die.*

I had never felt so helpless; again I plied Margaret and Grantern with questions, seeking any scrap of information which might give lead to action. All was in vain. When the League had first determined to act, Harim had apparently been prolific in ideas. Margaret and Grantern racked their brains to recall the many which had been suggested and discarded. But none of them fitted; they were complicated and needed building up; we had to deal with something improvised—far more dangerous.

Aderno, of course, had taken instant action. All the houses bordering the Piazza Venezia were being carefully watched. Yet this precaution seemed of little value, for I saw touts selling spaces at windows quite indiscriminately. No announcement had yet been made, but everyone seemed to know that there would be a balcony appearance—a matter of routine, apparently.

At a quarter to six a siren sounded, followed by a medley of discordant signals. For awhile Rome was surprisingly calm; there had been so many false alarms during the past week, when it had been rumored day by day that Addis Ababa had fallen, that people hesitated to let themselves go, lest again they should be deceived. But, as siren followed siren, all doubt vanished.

The normal life of the city was immediately suspended. Men and women poured from offices and works into the streets. Nevertheless, the crowds were surprisingly restrained—there was no mafficking, none of the

uproarious scenes of the first Armistice Day. Flags miraculously made their appearance in all kinds of unexpected places—people must have been carrying them in readiness for the great hour. Traffic soon became impossible; I struggled in the Corso Umberto and the Via Nazionale, hopelessly wedged in the slowly moving masses. All roads led to the Piazza Venezia, and when at last I reached it, I found it packed with a dense throng of people. This was not the normal staged demonstration, I noticed—the people were not merely drawn from Fascist organizations, but formed a representative cross-section of Italian life. They felt that Italy, not Fascism, had won the victory.

The rapid Roman dusk was falling as I forced my way back to Margaret and Grantern. Preparations for the expected ceremony were afoot; some of the principal buildings were picked out by flood-lights. I saw army engineers working at searchlights on the roofs opposite the Palazzo Venezia, directing experimental beams on to the famous balcony. It was impossible to stop them, but they could not have played more securely into Harim's hands. Shooting along a searchlight makes for easy marksmanship. And Harim was a first-class shot—and had poisoned bullets!

Excitement multiplied among the teeming multitude packing every inch of the capacity square. Loud speakers maintained a continuous flow of patriotic songs and stirring marches, presumably broadcast. Adventurous youths risked their necks in climbing to precarious points of vantage.

I had an idea, and rushed to the telephone. After two minutes' talk with Aderno, I made my way over a series of roofs to one of the searchlights. Its commander had already received his instructions—a field-telephone had been installed—and at my request he lowered his beam and slowly swept the windows of the adjoining buildings. For one thing at least was clear—it would be quite impossible for Harim to do anything if he were among the crowd below—the idea of getting a rifle to the shoulder among such a press was utterly fantastic.

Harim *must* be in one of the buildings, therefore. The searchlight slowly swept all the area within its orbit; its fellows on the opposite side of the square followed suit. I followed the beams keenly, and had stationed Margaret and Grantern at suitable vantage points. The faces of the spectators showed up clearly in the powerful glare, but we saw no sign of our man. I had to confess failure.

The minutes passed; it was now well after seven o'clock. In desperation I attached Margaret, Grantern and myself to escort of plainclothes police, and rushed from room to room in the occupied buildings. The scene was one

of confusion, but the police used their weight and authority freely. Again my idea failed, and I returned to the little room, which served as our rendezvous, very despondent. Margaret was already there, pale and anxious. A few minutes later, Grantern entered, also reporting failure.

But as soon as our accompanying police had withdrawn, Grantern's countenance changed in a flash.

"I've found him!" he whispered excitedly.

"What? Where?"

"Next door—looks like an office block."

"But what did you do?"

"Nothing. He's at a window, among a crowd of people. He can't do anything—he's got no gun there, I'll swear. Look here, I'd like to get Paul out of this safe—it isn't impossible."

"Try, Bernard, try!" Margaret pleaded.

"He didn't see me—I left it to you," Grantern added. "Right!" I said. "Show me the room. If we can get him away quietly, all the better."

We had to go on to the roof to get into the next house. I had some difficulty in shaking off the policemen who showed us the way, but merely told them that we had found friends.

I entered the room alone—and unnoticed, for the excitement was intense. An adjacent loud speaker was blazing out a patriotic air, and the window was crowded with men and women gazing eagerly across the square. There was danger in the exuberant atmosphere; everything was so uncommon that an untoward sign might easily pass without question.

Grantern was right. Harim was at a corner of the window leaning right over its sill, gazing at the crowd below. Yes, Grantern was right—how could Harim do anything under conditions like these? He had no rifle—and could not have used it if he had.

Gently but persistently I edged my way to his side. I had no plan of action, but expected that my presence would be quite enough—if he had any plan, which was doubtful, he *must* abandon it when he saw me. I would whisper to him to come away—he dare not disobey.

Five minutes earlier, and I could have acted quietly. But, as I sought a passage to Harim's side, there arose a great cheer from below, then a sudden hush. Looking across the square, I saw a figure on the balcony of the Palazzo Venezia. But it was not Mussolini.

“Attention!” a voice rasped through the loud speakers. “Attention! The Duce is about to appear on the balcony!”

There was a dramatic pause; I had missed my opportunity—the people about the window, standing loosely before, were now tightly wedged. Short of calling on the police in the room, I could not possibly reach Harim. And I had promised Margaret to try and save him.

Still, it did not seem impossible. I could at least watch him—and it was incredible that he could do anything, jammed against the window-sill as he was. But at least I would warn him of my presence.

“Harim!” I cried. “Harim!”

He heard me, and turned, and I saw a look of startled surprise in his eyes. However, he reacted very cleverly.

“Well, fancy seeing you here!” he called out. “I’ll see you afterwards—I can’t move here.”

And he turned again to the window; short of arresting him there was nothing to be done. Nevertheless, I was quite convinced that there was nothing he could do, either. He had scarcely the opportunity of drawing even a revolver—and to hit Mussolini with a revolver at that range would need a chance in a thousand.

Suddenly a great burst of cheering broke the silence. Below I saw a forest of hands raised in the Fascist salute. All the searchlights were concentrated on that balcony where I had witnessed that first grim episode. Now it was occupied by the man I had so successfully impersonated—Signor Benito Mussolini, in his hour of triumph.

“Blackshirts of the Revolution, men and women of all Italy, and friends of Italy beyond the mountains and beyond the seas, listen!” he commanded. I obeyed his order—but watched Harim. “Listen! Marshal Badoglio telegraphs: *Today, May 5th, at 4 p.m. at the head of our victorious troops, I have entered Addis Ababa!*”

The expected announcement was greeted with a roar of cheering, in which the people in the room joined. I ignored them, concentrating on Harim. He was pale—I could understand that. He had lost the game; it must have been very galling to watch his enemy enjoying his triumph. All his schemes, so carefully planned, had failed, and now his improvisation, whatever it was, had fizzled. I looked across the square. Mussolini was standing erect, head back. I saw him bend for a moment to brush some dust off his coat, and glance casually upward at the stone pillar of the window, whence the dust was apparently falling.

Then, to my surprise, I saw Harim worming his way out of the little crowd round the window. He was clear before I was, striding towards the door. When I reached it, he was hurrying along the corridor, and up a flight of stairs. I followed, keeping him in sight—it seemed that he ignored or had forgotten me. I found myself on a flat roof, among a maze of chimneys and balustrades.

“During the thirty centuries of her history Italy has lived many memorable hours,” Mussolini was speaking again. “But this of today is certainly one of the most solemn.”

I followed Harim carefully; he hurried to the front edge of the roof and knelt down. A moment later I was beside him—revolver in hand.

“What are you doing, Harim?” I asked.

He looked up, and to my amazement I saw tears streaming down his face.

“Oh, it was cruel, cruel!” he cried. “He moved just as I pulled the string. I hit the wall—did you see him brush the dust from his sleeve?”

I recognized his madness again, though its form seemed to have changed. But I scarcely understood what he was talking about.

“I announce to the Italian people and to the world that the war is finished,” boomed Mussolini. “I announce to the Italian people and to the world that peace is re-established.”

“How did you manage it?” I said to Harim, humoring him—and showing the revolver.

“With Grantern’s rifle,” he answered. “I fixed it here, aimed at the balcony. Then I ran a string down the water-pipe to the window. No one would have known that it was me—and Mussolini would have died if he had not moved. He deserves to die. I fixed the trigger so neatly—look! You can see—these searchlights make it almost as light as day.”

My curiosity intrigued, I bent to look. Fool that I was! I thought that his madness had made him simple; I ought to have recognized it as cunning. In a moment he was on me, his hand gripping my wrist with such excruciating force that I dropped the revolver. Then a lusty punch in the pit of the stomach laid me out; stretched on the hard roof, my breath came in minute fragments, making a queer, wheezing sound.

“It is not without emotion and without pride . . .” I heard Mussolini again.

“This round is mine, I think, Captain Newman,” said Harim—in a very different tone to the childlike babble of a few moments previously. “I shall reload, descend to the window, and pull the string again. He cannot escape twice. As for you”—I was struggling painfully to my knees—“I regret the necessity, but . . . no other alternative.”

I saw the revolver in his descending hand, felt a vicious thump at the back of my neck, and fell again. I was helpless, and only half-conscious—but I had sense enough left to pretend to be wholly unconscious. As if at a great distance, I saw him reloading the rifle, ingeniously fixed to a stone mullion.

“But it is strictly necessary that I should add that it is our peace, the Roman peace, which is expressed in this simple, irrevocable, definite proposition,” roared the loud speakers.

As Harim rose, he looked at me keenly. I lay still, my eyes staring. I saw his face clearly, for the thousands of lights, and the reflected glare of the searchlights made it almost as light as day. Again I saw those eyes, hollows of madness, and cursed myself that I could have fallen so easily.

“I will leave you here,” he said, grinning expressively. “They may think that you did it! That would be amusing!” He struck a match, and held it close to my eyes. But this was an old trick, easy to counter, and I stared blankly.

Satisfied that I was completely out of action, he hurried off. I struggled to clear my brain; but my limbs had lost the power of action.

“Abyssinia is Italian—Italian in fact because occupied by our victorious armies, Italian by right because with the sword of Rome it is civilization which triumphs over barbarism.” So proclaimed Mussolini as I fought for his life.

My brain was clearing, but my body would not obey its commands. The rifle was not two yards away, but I could not move.

“. . . justice which triumphs over cruel arbitrariness . . .”

I felt my fingers moving; if only my knees would lose their languor. Two yards.

“. . . the redemption of the miserable . . .”

I raised my head by several inches; I stretched out my arms, slowly and wearily. My legs began to feel alive.

“. . . triumph over the slavery of a thousand years.” A roar of cheering punctuated Mussolini’s proclamation.

I crawled forward inch by inch. The effort exhausted me, but as I lay on the roof, gasping for breath, my fingers touched the rifle. It was fixed firmly, and I could not move it; nor dare I touch the fatal string. I could only jam my fingers between the trigger and the guard.

Only just in time. I heard confusing sounds through the loud speakers; the great shouts made it clear that Mussolini's peroration was finished. Obviously this was Harim's moment—Mussolini might retire from the balcony at any moment. I stretched my fingers to take the strain.

I felt a sudden tightening of the string, and the sharp pressure of the trigger. At least I knew as much about firearms as Harim did, and the trigger did not move. I felt the string move in vicious jerks, and sensed the fury of the madman below. Then it relaxed, and I was not surprised when, a minute later, I saw Harim rushing towards me.

"Ah, why did I not kill you?" he cried, his rage overwhelming him. He kicked me in his fury; I could not move in my weakness, and my fingers were jammed in the trigger-guard. He trampled fiercely upon me till I thought my ribs must break; then remembered his mission.

He knelt down, and I felt the pressure of his fingers on the trigger. But my own were tightly wedged, and the trigger did not move. Harim tore at my wrist savagely, his nails ripping through the skin. I felt my hold weakening; the loud speakers were silent, but volumes of cheering resounded from below.

Another frantic blow descended on my head; I felt consciousness slipping away. But suddenly came relief—I heard the sound of hurrying footsteps—then realized that Margaret was kneeling beside me. There were sounds of a struggle—evidently Grantern was there as well.

I must have fainted: when I came round, they were both bending over me.

"Where's Harim?" I asked.

"Gone," Grantern replied.

"Gone?"

"Yes. Don't worry. It's all over—there's no harm done."

"Except to you," Margaret whispered.

"Can you get me away?" I asked.

"That should be easy," Grantern said. "Everybody here is just mad—they wouldn't notice an eclipse. Now, see if we can get you up."

With their help I struggled to my feet, feeling remarkably sick. Very gently and carefully they supported me across the roof and down the stairs. As Grantern said, in the prevailing excitement nothing was noticed. As a matter of fact, on the ground floor, first-aid men were treating dozens of cases of faints, carried in from the Piazza.

We left by a back entrance, and made a slow and weary journey through the crowded streets to Grantern's hotel. Here I could be at ease, while Margaret plied me with restoratives and bandaged my wrist.

"You came just in time," I whispered.

"I could not wait," she said. "We came up to the room, and saw Paul just leaving. So of course we followed him—I'm glad we did."

"So am I!"

The telephone bell rang, and Grantern answered the call.

"It was your friend Aderno," he announced, as he replaced the receiver. "They've got him!"

"Harim?"

"Yes. Arrested him in the back garden in the Via something or other—I didn't catch the name. Aderno is coming to see you tomorrow."

"Oh, poor Paul!" Margaret cried.

"I'm not so sure," said Grantern. "They've got him, but what can they do with him? Charge him with being in somebody's back garden? That ain't very serious."

"But the rifle, man—they're bound to find that," I put in.

"They ain't," he answered cheerfully. "The rifle's here," and he indicated its case in a corner of the room. "I took the precaution to dismantle it while you were coming round."

He was a good man, Grantern. I was glad to be working with him.

"So they've got nothing against him," he continued cheerfully, "unless, of course, you give evidence against him."

"I shan't, of course," I said. "I only want him out of the way, for his own good. A mental hospital and complete rest for months are what he needs."

"Probably we can arrange that," Grantern said. "He ought to get away with a fine, or a short term—you can easily square things with Aderno. Then we'll look after him."

"Oh, I'm so glad!" Margaret exclaimed. "So Paul is safe!"

“Yes,” I repeated slowly, “Paul is safe. *But unfortunately he doesn’t know it to be a fact.*”

“Well, what does that matter?” asked Grantern sharply. “He won’t talk, if that’s what you mean. I’d lay my life on that—would I be sitting here calmly if—”

“No, he won’t talk,” I broke in.

“Here, you’ve got something on your chest,” Grantern cried, after a startled silence. “What is it?”

“Harim doesn’t know that the evidence against him has been removed. He doesn’t know that I shall not give evidence against him. He does know that the Italians suspect him—and he knows their police methods.”

“But I tell you that even if they put him on the rack he wouldn’t talk,” Grantern insisted. “I’ve seen that man bear suffering—”

“Just a moment,” I said, interrupting. “I am as certain as you are that he won’t talk. He won’t have to face torture. When you were holding me prisoner in Corsica I noticed his false teeth.”

Grantern regarded me with intense surprise, evidently wondering if my battering had affected my brain.

“On his upper plate there was a gold tooth,” I continued. “I believe this is not an unknown fashion in some countries—either from sheer ostentation, or to help the disguise of the false teeth. But it was sufficiently unusual to attract my attention. There was something peculiar about that gold tooth.”

“Well?” Both Grantern and Margaret were gazing at me wide-eyed.

“For a short period during the War I was in Russia,” I explained. “While I was there, we trapped a German spy. We wanted him to talk—the situation was desperate. But he wouldn’t. The Russians were not quite so squeamish as we were—they gave him a night to think over it, with very plain hints as to what lay before him on the morrow.

“But for the spy there was no morrow—in the morning he was dead—poisoned. The Russians were furious and amazed—he had been thoroughly searched on arrest, of course. When we came to investigate we found a very strange thing. The spy had a gold tooth; it was hollow—stopped by a small screw, and filled with potassium cyanide. He was a very brave man, determined not to talk, even under torture.”

They stared at me in shocked silence. The telephone bell rang again, shrill and insistent. Grantern answered it again, then walked slowly back towards us.

“Aderno again,” he said. “You were right—Paul won’t talk.”

I am sitting writing these lines in the Garrison Library at Gibraltar, weeks after the last events I have described, but I can vividly recall the oppressive silence of our journey back to England. Margaret was overcome by the tragedy of Harim. I was concerned about her grief—and anxious about the world. Mussolini had won. We had failed to call his bluff, and he had called ours. What next? Must we condone the wrong? How could we reach that great friendly, peace-loving Italian people? How could we penetrate the artificial armor of Fascism? Was I wrong in preventing the assassination of Mussolini? Would his martyrdom have been countered by its deterrent action?

No, of course, I was not wrong. Political assassination is indefensible; quite apart from moral objections, it is bound to create more problems than it solves. It is unjust for its victim is seldom so responsible as he seems. We cannot condone murder, however high its motives. And, in the present case, the motives were mistaken and confused—had the League succeeded, it would have accomplished nothing but disaster.

We have to face facts. British opinion on the Abyssinian venture was remarkable for its solidity, but now the drama is over. What next? The League of Nations failed, and Mussolini won—but we cannot sit and sulk for ever.

And it would have been foolish to murder Mussolini, quite apart from his potential dangers as a martyr. Dislike him as you may, you must admit his courage, his energy, his genius for leadership. These are qualities which the world badly needs. Mussolini would not be the first man who has changed the course of his career half way. Maybe even now Mussolini may prove to be the man on whom the stability of Europe and the maintenance of peace may depend.

I took Margaret back to her flat. She was very brave, though tears were not far away. I allowed her to regain her own composure without help or suggestion.

“So ends my first and last excursion into international affairs!” she exclaimed. “Interfering in matters which I don’t understand—what a fool you must think me! The trouble I’ve caused you—I suppose you feel like putting me over your knee and spanking me?”

“Perhaps I ought to,” I said, “but really I feel like putting you on my knee and kissing you.”

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.

[The end of *The Mussolini Murder Plot* by Bernard Newman]