

WORRALS FLIES AGAIN

by Captain
W.E. JOHNS



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The picture she had glimpsed was of two men, both young. One she could see clearly; in a crouching position, framed as it were in a small square window, he was speaking in a low voice to someone inside the cellar.

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W.E. JOHNS

Author of The "Biggles" books



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The picture she had glimpsed was of two men, both young. One she could see clearly; in a crouching position, framed as it were in a small square window, he was speaking in a low voice to someone inside the cellar.

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“*Entendu!*” Madame Mundier strode to the door. Worrals followed. Lucien brought up the rear.
“You stay here Papa, in case the Boches come and want something.”

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Schaffer swung round, his face was distorted with fury. Snatching up a cup, he hurled it at the half-wit. “Shut up!” he shouted.

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Dropping on his knees, he then did something with his hands. Almost at once a narrow shaft of feeble yellow light appeared, and with it came a strange sound.

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Actually, she saw nothing but the eyes, dark, piercing, watchful eyes, as cold as stones. “I might forget the face, but never those eyes.”

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Frecks screamed, “Worrals!” Her voice was lost in a sound which, once heard, is never forgotten—the tearing, rending smash of a crashing aeroplane. The Midget somersaulted, as Frecks knew it must.

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CHAPTER I

WORRALS HAS A VISITOR

FLIGHT-OFFICER JOAN WORRALSON, better known to her friends in the W.A.A.F. as “Worrals,” tossed her hat on her bed, sank into a chair and regarded her friend and room-mate, Section-Officer “Frecks” Lovell, with brooding eyes.

“There are times,” she remarked sombrely, “when I could scream. I don’t know what you think about it, but on occasion there is a character of monotony about service life that gives me the willies. Drill, breakfast, more drill, lunch, tea, lectures, dinner, bed. Next day; drill, breakfast . . .”

“Hey! Snap out of it,” protested Frecks indignantly. “The aerodrome _____”

“If I look much longer at that uninspiring expanse of dull, dreary, dirty turf, I shall throw myself on it and tear the grass with my teeth.”

“The trouble with you is, you’ve been spoilt. You’ve had more than your fair share of excitement,” Frecks pointed out with disconcerting frankness, and more than a suspicion of truth.

“I’m afraid you’re right,” agreed Worrals sadly. “Excitement is like a drug. The more you have the more you want, and when you can’t get it the old nerves begin to twitch. For three months I haven’t done a blessed thing except . . .” She broke off as a knock came on the door.

“Come in,” she invited. “Yes, what is it?” she went on as an aircraftwoman, the hutment orderly, entered.

“Please, the C.O. is outside. He wants to see you immediately.”

Worrals arched her eyebrows. “Outside? Outside where?”

“He’s waiting outside the hut.”

Worrals turned astonished eyes to Frecks. “Did you hear that? Old Frostyface has come to see *me*. I wonder what he’s got on his mind—it must be something pretty urgent.”

Frecks regarded her friend suspiciously. “What have you been up to? Come on—come clean.”

“I wish you’d stop going to the flicks, then perhaps you’d learn to speak English again,” grunted Worrals irritably. “For your information, I haven’t done anything; I’ve been too bored even to break a standing order.”

“Well, don’t keep the old bear waiting. Find out what he wants,” suggested Frecks brightly.

Worrals clapped her cap on her head and strode down the corridor to the outside door, where a glance revealed that the orderly had spoken the simple truth. Squadron-Leader McNavish was there, pacing up and down, striking viciously at the turf with his cane. He looked up sharply as Worrals appeared.

“Ah, there you are,” he rapped out, and Worrals knew at once from the broadness of his Scotch accent that something serious was afoot. “Well, come on, come on. Don’t stand there staring,” rasped the C.O. “I’ve something to tell ye.”

“Yes, sir.” Worrals, who knew the C.O. as well as he knew himself—perhaps better—perceived that it was no time to argue. She stepped briskly down to the path.

“Now listen, my gal,” growled the C.O., in what Worrals knew was intended to be a confidential whisper. “I shouldn’t have come over here, but I wanted to give ye a spot of advice. There’s a feller in my office wantin’ to see ye—one of these Intelligence people from the Ministry. He’s got a scheme which, no doot, he thinks is clever, but which to me sounds completely daft. Don’t ye take it on. Let him work his own schemes.”

“What is this scheme, sir?” enquired Worrals smoothly.

“He’ll tell ye that himself. I can’t refuse to let him put it up to you, but dinna do it. Mebbe I shouldna say it, but a wise soldier never volunteers for anything. He gets nothing if things go right, and all the kicks if they go wrong.”

“Perhaps I’d better hear what this Officer has to say, sir,” returned Worrals noncommittally.

“Of course—of course. But dinna take anything on. Tell him ye’ve got a sick grandmother——”

“But I haven’t got a grandmother,” interrupted Worrals reproachfully.

“Make it an aunt, then—an uncle—anybody, if ye must be so particular. Who do these confounded people think they are, coming down here and upsetting my establishment?” Grumbling deep in his throat, the C.O. marched fiercely towards the Station Office, followed closely by Worrals.

An officer, a squadron-leader, rose as they went into the C.O.'s office. He was middle-aged, but his face wore an anxious expression that often results from carrying a heavy load of responsibility.

"Flight-Officer Worrals—this is Squadron-Leader Marcus Yorke," barked the C.O. "He has come down specially to see ye."

The Squadron-Leader held out his hand. "Pleased to meet you, Miss Worrals," he said pleasantly. "I know you well by reputation. Don't think that the useful work which you have done for the Intelligence Branch has not been noticed by the Higher Command. Let's sit down and have a little chat."

Worrals accepted the invitation, but Squadron-Leader McNavish took up a position with his back to the fireplace, obviously prepared to regard the proceedings with disfavour.

"Now, Miss Worrals," resumed Squadron-Leader Yorke, "am I right in supposing that you have a leaning towards dangerous duties?"

Worrals caught the C.O.'s eye, and nearly laughed at the dour expression on his face. She looked back at the Intelligence officer. By this time she had a shrewd idea of what was coming, so she proceeded warily.

"I wouldn't exactly say that, sir," she parried.

"Well, let us put it this way," continued the visitor, unperturbed. "You have certainly shown an extraordinary aptitude for Intelligence work of the most perilous kind, and that being so, we feel—I am speaking on behalf of the Air Council—that you might prefer to be taken off purely routine duties for a while, and put on something more in accord with your obvious abilities. I understand that you speak several languages—French, fluently."

"I lived in France for over a year before the war, sir," explained Worrals.

"Good. No doubt you understand the French character. In the ordinary way, we should not dream of asking a member of the Women's Service to undertake the duties I am about to outline to you, but the fact is, we feel that there may be a time when a girl might succeed where a man would fail. In other words, in view of your previous exploits, we suspect that it is possible for a girl to evade suspicion where a man——"

"Just a moment, sir," interrupted Worrals coldly. "Are you suggesting that any useful work I may have done in the past was due entirely to the fact that being a girl I enjoyed privileges that would have been denied to a man?"

The Squadron-Leader had the wit to see that he had struck a wrong note, and made haste to correct himself. "No, of course not. Your success was due entirely to merit. All the same, it seems possible that the enemy has not yet

realised that our girls are as good as our men. If that is so, then we ought to take advantage of it.”

“I see,” replied Worrals slowly. “And now, sir, suppose we cut out the compliments and get down to business. You want me to do something. When I know just what that is I shall be in a position to consider it. It may save time if you tell me right away.”

For a moment the Squadron-Leader looked somewhat disconcerted at this direct approach; then he smiled faintly and continued.

“Yes, perhaps that would be the best way,” he agreed. “Very well. Here is the proposition. It is no haphazard affair, but a definite assignment, and—I own freely—not one to be undertaken lightly. If things go wrong, it is unlikely that we shall be able to help you. From first to last, you will have to stand on your own feet. I need hardly tell you that it matters little to the Nazis, when it comes to anyone suspected of espionage, whether the operative is a man or a woman. I’m not going to attempt to deceive you. You would be well advised to consider my proposition carefully before you reach a decision. The life of an agent in war is one of constant peril. The Nazi counter-espionage system is ruthlessly efficient. Now I’ve told you the worst, we’ll get on.” Squadron-Leader Yorke lit a cigarette and resumed.

“For some time past we have had under consideration a scheme whereby information gathered in the occupied countries—where, I may say we have many friends—could be brought home with the least possible loss of time. There is, of course, radio, but German ears are always on the air, and not only is the signal intercepted, which often renders the information useless, but it is only a question of time before the German wireless experts track down the secret sending station. There is also visual signalling—by means of torches at night, for example. These signals may also be seen by the enemy, and what is even more annoying, bad visibility may interfere with the operations. Imagine how impotent an agent must feel, when, having at great risk acquired some vital information, he is unable to transmit it because a blanket of fog has descended.”

Worrals nodded. “Yes. I see the difficulties.”

“Good. In the transmission of information speed is everything. We propose, therefore, to maintain an aircraft in occupied territory. In the event of important information being received, the pilot will fly it straight across to England.”

Worrals stared. “Maintain an aircraft in occupied territory? It sounds fantastic. You haven’t forgotten that aircraft make a noise, or that the Nazis have ears?”

The Squadron-Leader smiled. "No, we haven't forgotten that. But chance has put a curious opportunity our way. Do you happen to know the châteaux country—I mean, the big mediæval châteaux on the Loire?"

"I can't say I know the country well, but I've been there. In fact, I've been over some of the castles: They are open to tourists."

"Do you happen to know the Château Delarose?"

Worrals shook her head. "I've never even heard of it."

"I was prepared for that—the castle is rather off the beaten track, and is not very well known. It stands about a mile back from the River Loire, between Tours and Blois, and is, in fact, one of the oldest of them all, dating back to the twelfth century. As you may suppose, the castle, for the greater part, is a ruin, or practically so; but one wing has been maintained, and is still occupied. The château is the property of Count de la Rose. His son escaped recently and is now in service with the Fighting French Forces. It was he who suggested that the château might make an ideal rendezvous for British agents in France. There are, it appears, enormous cellars. Leading down to them from the remains of the moat, now dry, is a sort of ramp, down which the great wine barrels were once rolled. The cellar could easily accommodate a small aircraft—particularly one with foldable wings. We had in mind a Merton Midget, a popular type of light plane before the war. It is slow, of course, but light, and comparatively quiet. You begin to grasp the idea?"

Worrals nodded again. "Yes. It seems a sound scheme."

"The country around is flat and open, which simplifies the matter of night landings," resumed the Squadron-Leader. "Someone will have to fly the aircraft out, land, get the machine into the castle cellars, after which the doors will be closed. The pilot will then have nothing more to do except wait until a message is received. He—or she—will then fly it home."

"Who is going to decide that the message is of such a vital nature that it is worth flying home?"

"The agent who delivers it. The pilot may not even see him. That depends on circumstances. In any case, the pilot will not be able to read the message, since it will be in code. If a piece of paper bearing the letter U, meaning urgent, is received, it must be got home immediately at all cost. As a matter of detail the letter U will be followed by other marks, but these need not concern the pilot. The Roman figure after the letter U merely denotes the identity of the operative sending the message. The letters that follow that number simply indicate the code used—that is for our

information. Flights will only be made during the hours of darkness. It would be folly to attempt such a flight in daylight.”

“I understand,” said Worrals quietly. “And you want me to be the pilot?”

“Er——” The Squadron-Leader glanced at the C.O., who was still standing with his back to the fireplace. His expression was positively savage. “That was the idea,” admitted the Squadron-Leader. “You see,” he went on quickly, “having once got to the place, you could take on the role of a visiting relation. Even if the Germans raided the place they would hardly expect a young girl to be concerned with espionage, much less of being a pilot. Naturally, you would be provided with identification papers—forged papers, of course.”

“There are certainly points about the scheme,” murmured Worrals. “Who is living in this castle now?”

“Only the custodian, an old man named Alphonse Mundier, his wife Louise, and a son named Lucien. The son, I am sorry to say, is not quite right in the head.”

Worrals frowned. “You mean he’s a lunatic? I don’t mind Nazis, but I draw the line at having a half-wit around.”

“Oh, he isn’t as bad as that,” returned the Squadron-Leader. “He’s merely a bit—shall we say—peculiar. He’s quite harmless.”

“I hope you’re right,” returned Worrals earnestly. “All the same, wouldn’t he be better out of the way?”

The Squadron-Leader shrugged. “I don’t think it matters. He may turn out to be useful. He understands the danger of the Nazis, and detests them—you needn’t worry on that score. Moreover, he knows every hole and corner in the castle, as he should, having been born there. Am I to understand from your remarks that you are willing to undertake the duty of air messenger?”

“Losh! Give the girl time to think,” snapped Squadron-Leader McNavish, making negative signs to Worrals from behind the Squadron-Leader’s back.

“I don’t think there’s much to think about, sir,” returned Worrals blandly. “It all sounds very interesting. I’ll fly the plane with pleasure.” She looked at Squadron-Leader Yorke. “One point occurs to me. Do you think it at all likely that the Nazis will have a record of me, a description, as a result of what has happened in the past?”

The Squadron-Leader thought for a moment. “You mean, would any of the German secret agents recognise you if they saw you?”

“Yes.”

“I doubt it. After all, you weren’t in France very long, and most of your work was done at night. While we’re discussing identification, though, you might have a good look at this photograph. If you can carry the face in your mind, it may stand you in good stead.” Squadron-Leader Yorke took a wallet from his pocket, extracted a photograph and passed it.

Worrals took it and studied it closely. It was a head and shoulders portrait of a man, a civilian, with a thin, cruel face, and large, outstanding ears. The eyes, small and piercing, were set close together.

“I might forget the face, but never those eyes,” said Worrals quietly, returning the photo. “Who is he?”

“Wilhelm von Brandisch, head of the Gestapo in occupied France, and, in our opinion, one of the most dangerous men in the German Secret Service. You’ll need all your skill and resource if ever you run up against him. Incidentally, you can usually hear him as well as see him, for he suffers from a chest complaint that is audible as a dry, rasping cough.”

“I’ll remember it,” said Worrals. “Just one other thing. If my memory serves me the Merton Midget is a two-seater. Is the spare seat to be occupied by anyone?”

“Not as far as we know. Why?”

“Would there be any objection to my taking a friend with me? I am thinking of the girl who helped me on my previous affairs of this sort. She is absolutely reliable, and also happens to be a pilot. There ought to be a reserve pilot in case anything happened to me. Suppose I happen to fall sick?”

Squadron-Leader Yorke rubbed his chin. “Hm. The possibility hadn’t occurred to me. I shouldn’t think there would be the slightest objection. On the contrary, it sounds a wise precaution.”

“It’s nice to have someone to talk things over with.”

“She may not like the idea,” the Squadron-Leader pointed out.

A ghost of a smile lifted the corners of Worrals’ mouth. “I don’t think you need worry about that. She’s more likely to kick if she’s left behind.”

“Very well. Subject to confirmation by the Higher Command, you can call that settled. Just one final point. May I take it that as you will be on the spot, so to speak, you will be willing to undertake emergency work in France should the occasion arise? Of course, such a contingency might

never occur, but it is as well to be clear on these matters while we are in a position to discuss them calmly.”

“You be careful, Worrals. I knew there was a trick in it,” snorted Squadron-Leader McNavish.

Worrals smiled broadly. “It’s nice of you to take such an interest in my welfare, sir, but I shall avoid unnecessary risks. I’m sure Squadron-Leader Yorke will not ask me to attempt the impossible.”

“Of course not,” agreed the Squadron-Leader readily. “We shall give you as little trouble as possible. When could you be ready to start?”

“Just as soon as you like.”

“The machine is ready.”

“Then we may as well make it to-night.”

“Splendid. Make your own arrangements. I’ll see you again before you start. There will be one or two details to settle.”

“Very well, sir, if that’s all. I’ll go and pack my small kit.”

“Good.” Squadron-Leader Yorke held out his hand.

Worrals shook it, saluted, and returned to her quarters. Frecks was lying on her bed, reading.

“On your feet, partner,” ordered Worrals curtly. “We’re off.”

Frecks started. “Off? Where to?”

Worrals tossed her hat on a peg. “To France,” she answered briefly.

CHAPTER II

AT THE CHÂTEAU DELAROSE

It was just before eight o'clock the same autumn evening when Worrals and Frecks, with heavy coats over their uniforms, after a final consultation with Squadron-Leader Yorke, left the C.O.'s office and walked quietly through the gathering dusk towards a small, dark-painted, high-wing cabin monoplane, with side by side seating for two passengers and luggage dicky behind. It bore no markings of any sort. Where it had come from they did not know; that was one of the details that had been arranged by Squadron-Leader Yorke. Beyond packing two small suitcases, already in the plane, and writing a few letters to friends to say they would be away for some time, the girls had had nothing to do in the way of preparation. Several officers stood about regarding the little aircraft with curiosity. As the girls appeared, one of them stepped forward, a slim, youthful flying officer.

"Hello. Here's Bill Ashton," murmured Frecks. "What are you going to tell him? You've been getting pretty pally of late, and he'll think it odd if you leave him high and dry without an explanation."

"I'm afraid we shan't be able to tell him anything," answered Worrals. "Either this trip is secret or it isn't. Squadron-Leader Yorke was emphatic that no one, not even our relations, must know what we are doing."

"That's going to be a bit tough on Bill. I'm afraid he'll take a pretty poor view of it. Apart from having a crush on you, he's been a pretty good—not to say useful—pal in the past."

"All the same, he mustn't know about this," declared Worrals. "He'd probably start raising all sorts of objections—you know, not the sort of work for girls, and all that sort of rot."

Bill came forward. Speaking directly to Worrals he said, with surprise in his voice, "Hello, kid. Are *you* going to fly that kite?" He inclined his head towards the Midget.

"I am," answered Worrals crisply.

"Where are you going?"

"Sorry, Bill, but we've undertaken a secret mission—nothing very dangerous. In those circumstances, you won't embarrass us by asking

questions, will you?"

Bill didn't reply immediately. He looked at Worrals, then at the aircraft. "If I can help, just let me know," he said quietly. "I assume the C.O. knows all about it?"

"Of course. At a pinch, he might let you into the secret—but not yet."

"How long are you going to be away?"

"We don't know."

Bill nodded seriously. "Be careful, kid," he said holding out his hand.

Worrals smiled as she took it. "We'll be back," she said evenly. Then, to Frecks, "Come on. Let's get away."

A mechanic swung the little airscrew, and the soft purr of the engine, after the strident bellow of the service aircraft, brought a frown to Frecks' face.

"Are you sure that engine's all right?" she queried anxiously.

"Sounds all right to me," answered Worrals. "We don't need power so much as manoeuvrability. In any case, we've got to go light on petrol. We shan't get any over the other side—at least, we can't reckon on it. What we have in the tank has got to see us there and back."

This was, in fact, the case. In discussing the project with Squadron-Leader Yorke, knowing that aviation spirit was practically unobtainable in France, they had been unable to devise a means of refuelling. The aircraft, with a full tank, had a range of seven hundred miles. The distance to the château on a direct course was rather less than three hundred miles, so if everything went according to plan there would be enough petrol for the return trip with a slight margin. Worrals would, of course, have preferred to have an emergency supply, but as there was no way of arranging this they had to be content with what they could carry.

In a few minutes the aircraft was climbing slowly into a nearly overcast sky. Here and there a star gleamed mistily, showing where there was a break in the clouds, and towards one of these Worrals set a course. She was quite satisfied with the weather. There was no wind, and the clouds would provide a screen that would hide them from watchers on the ground. Flak, she knew, was to be expected, for the ground defences on the French coast would be directed by sound detectors. Hostile aircraft would constitute a greater peril, for they might be expected both above and below the cloud layer; but here again she determined to take refuge in the cloud itself should the danger materialise. There could be no question of fighting. The little aircraft was not adapted for such work, and consequently carried no weapon of any sort.

They would have to rely on skill and judgment, not force, to see them through, and both girls were aware of it.

Worrals reached the break in the cloud and went through into the lonely world beyond, where a slim crescent moon cast a silvery sheen on the flat upper surface of the cloud, which rolled away on all sides to a vague horizon. Her altimeter registered seven thousand feet. Having reached her immediate objective, she glanced at the scrap of paper on which she had made her calculations, and then set a compass course direct for the château. She had decided that there was no point in making a detour. Danger would be present everywhere; it would be more intense over the often-bombed Channel ports of the French coast, but as her course missed these by a wide margin she was content to take her chance on a straight run through.

Half an hour passed. Neither of the girls spoke. There was nothing to say. Frecks produced two pieces of chewing gum from a pocket, passed one to Worrals and put the other in her mouth. A little while later Worrals nudged her, and nodded towards several light patches that had appeared on the clouds. She knew that they had been heard, and that searchlights on the ground were probing the billowy vapour in a vain effort to find them.

“We’re over the French coast,” she said distinctly. “Watch the surface of the cloud for enemy machines to break through. I’ll watch topsides.” As she spoke, she turned her eyes to the starry dome overhead. Here and there spasmodic crimson flashes were already stabbing the darkness, and lines of white tracer shells, looking like chalk lines drawn on black paper, broke the background; but while they remained at a reasonably safe distance she held steadily on her way. Only once, when the crimson daggers suddenly turned to vivid orange, did she swerve slightly, knowing that the brighter the orange flashes, the closer were the shell bursts. Skimming the cloud-top, the Midget purred on, unconcerned by this hostile reception. Once the aircraft seemed to bounce on unseen buffers, causing the engine to change its note.

“That one was close-ish,” murmured Worrals. “It must have been bang underneath us.”

A moment later Frecks touched her on the arm. “Get a load of that,” she said quietly, pointing, and Worrals, following the direction of the finger, saw a dark form rising like a sinister fish from the sea of cloud. She recognised the slim silhouette of a Messerschmitt and, cutting the throttle for a moment, allowed the Midget to sink into the clammy moisture of which the cloudbank was composed. With her eyes now on her instruments, she sped on through the opaque vapour.

“Gosh! It’s cold in this stuff,” grumbled Frecks.

“We should probably find it a bit too warm outside,” returned Worrals meaningly, and continued on her course.

Ten minutes later she lifted the nose and soared again into the clear air. It was an anxious moment, and both girls made a swift, apprehensive reconnaissance of the atmosphere; but as far as they could see they had the sky to themselves, and Worrals settled a little more comfortably in her seat.

“I think we are through the worst,” she announced. “Keep your eyes skinned all the same.”

Hardly had she spoken the words when a dark object hurtled out of the sky far overhead, and disappeared instantly from sight into the cloud, as completely as a stone dropped in a pool of deep water.

“Phew!” gasped Frecks. “Did you see that?”

“Hurricane,” returned Worrals evenly. “One of our boys doing a spot of private hunting. I don’t think he saw us—I hope not, at any rate. He’d probably wonder what on earth we were, and have a crack at us to be on the safe side. After all, we’re over hostile country.”

“How much farther have we to go?” inquired Frecks, glancing at the watch on the instrument panel.

“About half an hour, I reckon. At the end of that time we shall have to go down for a look round. I’m hoping to pick up the Loire. If we can see the river it will give us our bearings, and we shall be all right.”

The rest of the flight was uneventful. The time passed slowly, as it always seems to in the air, but at length Worrals remarked, “We ought to be there, or thereabouts,” and, cutting the throttle, put the aircraft in a shallow glide.

Once more the cloud enveloped them in its clammy heart, a chilly clutch that lasted for a good five minutes; then the air cleared, and the sombre, blacked-out landscape of occupied France appeared below, vague, grim and forbidding. Worrals kept the aircraft in its glide, eyes questing the ground which, as they lost height, became more distinct. Long roads appeared, looking like grey threads dropped haphazard; irregularly-shaped black patches marked the position of woods.

“Good! There’s the river,” muttered Worrals. “I was hoping to get down without using the engine again, but I was a bit too optimistic. I’ve undershot a trifle.” As she spoke, she eased the throttle open—not wide open, but enough to give the aircraft the extra distance required. Five minutes later, still losing height, she cut it again. Neither of the girls spoke. Both were staring down into the void, their eyes following the majestic curves of the

river, and from this trying to pick out the group of high elms which they had been informed marked the position of the château. It was another anxious period. For some time they could see nothing distinctly, only the river. Worrals snatched a quick glance at a map that lay open on her knees. Frecks held the torch.

“That’s the bend all right. . . . It must be the one,” muttered Worrals in a low voice, as though talking to herself. “The trouble is, there are too many blessed groups of trees. Still, it shouldn’t be difficult. The château is exactly a mile south-east of that sharp bend where the river turns south.” She glanced at the altimeter. “We’re down to a thousand,” she observed. “I don’t want to use the engine again. . . . Hello. I can see something. . . . It might be trees—it might be anything. This sort of thing will be easier once we have seen the place in daylight. That group must be the one—there’s open country in front of it, which bears out the description. We shall have to risk it. I’m going down.”

“If we land a mile south-east of the bend, we shan’t be far away,” put in Frecks casually.

Worrals smiled. She was not deceived. She knew that Frecks knew how much depended on the next two or three minutes. She focused her eyes on the group of trees and thought she could just make out the dim outlines of a large building, although she was perfectly aware that this might be imagination.

The aircraft was now very low, moving through the air almost noiselessly.

“Well, here we go,” muttered Worrals, and, switching off the engine altogether, side-slipped gently towards an extensive treeless area of land that rolled away from the front of the isolated group of trees.

Dark shadows appeared to float up to meet the aircraft. Worrals flattened out. For a little while the light machine glided on like a tired bird, sinking slowly. The wheels bumped, with a sound that sounded harsh after the silence. They bumped again, and then settled down. The machine vibrated. Slowly the vibration died away and the aircraft ran to a standstill. Silence fell, silence utter and complete.

“Stay where you are,” ordered Worrals quietly, and, opening the door, stepped out on to the springy turf. Nothing moved. Not a light showed anywhere. For a full minute she stood motionless, listening, her eyes probing the darkness. Then she turned back to the cabin.

“You get into the pilot’s seat, Frecks, while I reconnoitre,” she said. “If you hear me shout you’ll know I’ve run into trouble. In that case, start the engine, and be ready to make a snappy take-off. I’ll try to get back to you. If I can’t—well, save yourself.”

“But I thought Squadron-Leader Yorke said the old caretaker would be about to meet us?” whispered Frecks.

“No, not exactly that,” returned Worrals. “He said he would be about, prepared to receive us. That might mean in the *château*. He couldn’t know just when we were coming, so it would hardly be reasonable to expect him to stand about here all night on the off chance of our arriving.”

“Does he know who to expect?”

“No—I asked Squadron-Leader Yorke about that. There was no time, or no way to advise him. All I know is, that the people here are on our side. They are expecting somebody to turn up; a password, which Squadron-Leader Yorke gave me, will let them know who we are and admit us to their confidence. I gather that the Squadron-Leader hasn’t seen these people himself—only the son of the house, the young Count de la Rose.”

“Where is he now?”

“I’ve no idea. But we can’t stand talking here. We came in so quietly that it’s unlikely the old man would hear us—certainly not if he was in the castle; castles have thick walls. Stand fast—I’ll go and find him.”

Worrals unstrapped the helmet which she had worn during the flight, took it off, shook out her hair, and tossed the helmet into the cockpit. She did not, however, remove her dark overcoat. “Shan’t be long,” she said, and walked away in the direction of the tall trees which broke the skyline in the near distance—a matter of perhaps a hundred yards.

As she approached, the clouds broke, and this enabled her to make out more distinctly the scene that lay ahead. She saw now that her calculations had been correct, for beyond a short double avenue of tall elms, thickened by great bunches of what she knew from experience to be mistletoe, rose the massive pile of a castle, the front windows of which looked through the avenue towards the stately River Loire.

The *château* was typical of its period. Built in the days when the great barons held sway, the massive stone walls, with narrow slits to admit light and enable defenders to hurl projectiles on attacking forces, rose up to end in round projecting turrets. In the centre, from foundations to battlements, twin bastions arose to protect the drawbridge, long fallen into ruin.

Worrals soon found that it was no easy matter to approach the ancient structure, for the drive between the elms, and other openings that might once have been paths, were choked with rioting brambles that made advance impossible. There must, she knew, be an open path, for the château was inhabited, and, assuming that it was on the far side, she started to circumnavigate the undergrowth with a view to locating the proper entrance. She had not gone far, however, when she came upon a feature which she hoped would shorten her journey. This consisted of a small wood of mighty yews, as old, apparently, as the château. Before the dim aisles, sunless even in summer, the rank undergrowth had fallen back, making progress not only possible, but fairly simple.

Holding up a hand to protect her face from possible low-hanging branches, Worrals moved swiftly in the direction of the château, occasionally using the torch she carried, with the beam deflected downwards, to survey the ground for possible obstruction. In this way she soon emerged into what had once been the gardens, now a trackless wilderness of weeds from which arose grey pieces of statuary, like spirits of the long dead past surveying the ruin of their former greatness. With aching heart, for it was impossible not to regard the ravages of time without emotion, Worrals went on, picking her way between overgrown edges of box, sagging arbours, and what had obviously once been ornamental pools of water. The weeds, she noticed, had advanced to the very walls of the château, and had even tried to climb up them.

Through this melancholy scene she eventually reached the building, only to find, as invaders may have found in days gone by, that this did not reveal an entrance. Pushing on, she found a tiny sally-port, a massive oak door studded with iron. After banging on it with her fists without making the slightest noise, so solid was it, she continued on to the angle of the building which brought her to a veritable maze of outbuildings, stables and the like, all in the last stages of dilapidation. Keeping contact with the castle wall, however, she came upon that which she hoped to find—an open pathway, presumably the one used by the inmates of the château. This took her to a short flight of stone steps, at the top of which a narrow streak of yellow light showed beneath the door.

Worrals mounted the steps with a sigh of relief, for the business had taken far longer than she had expected, and she knew that Frecks would be getting worried about her long absence. As she reached the top step, a strange sound—or rather, an unexpected sound—reached her ears. It seemed to come from the outbuildings, and reminded her of something she had not heard for a long time—the nuzzling of stabled horses. The sound was

natural enough, she decided, supposing that the old custodian maintained a nag for some purpose or other—perhaps to ride to market. It was, therefore, with an easy confidence that she knocked on the door. There was no answer. Realising that her knuckles made practically no sound on the heavy timbers she groped for and found the handle, a ring of iron. This she turned, and the door swung open on well-used hinges. Before her, lighted by a single candle stuck in a sagging metal sconce, stretched a dismal stone corridor. From one of the rooms that led off it, not far away, came a murmur of voices. Closing the door, Worrals called in a low voice, in French, “Monsieur Mundier, are you there?”

The voices ended abruptly, as though cut short by the knife of a guillotine. A chair scraped. Footsteps shuffled. A face appeared, as it were, from the wall, the face of an old man, furrowed with age, or trouble, or both. His collar hung open at the neck, and the stained velvet jacket he wore, cut in the style of a bygone generation, hung loosely on his spare figure. Canvas shoes, unlaced, flapped on his feet. So much Worrals noticed as the man slowly emerged.

“*Bon soir, monsieur,*” greeted Worrals quietly. “Am I speaking to Monsieur Mundier?”

“*Oui, mademoiselle, c’est moi,*” answered the old man in a lifeless but surprisingly cultured voice.

Again Worrals breathed a sigh of relief, and murmured the introductory phrase that would, Squadron-Leader Yorke had told her, reveal her mission. “How the time flies,” she said. “But it was a good night for a journey.”

Monsieur Mundier started so violently that Worrals experienced a pang of alarm. He appeared to shudder, and at the same time threw up his hands despairingly.

“*’Cre Dieu,*” he gasped. “A girl.” Then, recovering somewhat, he muttered, “This way, quickly.” Catching Worrals by the arm, he literally snatched her into the room behind him and closed the door. “Look!” he cried in a strangled voice. “The imbeciles! They have sent a girl.”

In a vague sort of way—vague because she was more than a little dazed by this extraordinary reception—Worrals observed that there were two other people in the room, an elderly buxom woman who, a wooden spoon in her hand, had half turned from a great iron pot that overhung an open fire, and a young man, unshaven, in rags, whose lower jaw sagged foolishly. As for the chamber itself, it appeared from the mixed furniture to be both a sitting-room and a kitchen. An enormous dresser, black with age, occupied one entire wall, and apparently served as a general depository, for on it were

piled, among other things, crocks, copper pots and pans, and knitting. One shelf was lined with books, carelessly assembled. All this Worrals took in at a glance, and her first thought at that moment was that the whole plan had been imperfectly understood. She was aware that the custodian and his wife, while expecting a visitor, an agent from England, did not know who it would be and she could understand that they would, quite naturally, expect a man; all the same, she could not reconcile her reception with what Squadron-Leader Yorke had told her. He had pointed out that, having announced herself, she would have to make her own plans, and this, in more awkward circumstances than she expected, she proceeded to do.

“No doubt you expected a man,” she said quietly. “I understand that. But I’m not without experience in this kind of work, and once we get to know each other all should be well.”

Madame Mundier nodded, as if she, at least, had grasped the situation. “Welcome, mademoiselle,” she said. “It is only that you have chosen a terrible time to arrive. We ourselves are still suffering from shock.”

Worrals opened her eyes wide. “Why, what is it? What has happened?”

“*Les Boches*,” muttered Monsieur Mundier in tones of hopeless resignation.

“Germans? Where?” asked Worrals sharply.

“Here, in the château,” answered madame in a weary voice. “They arrived to-day. They are of the horse artillery, with some engineers. The horses are in the stables.”

The youth with the sagging jaw broke into a peal of insane laughter.

CHAPTER III

SWIFT DEVELOPMENTS

Worrals, not without an effort, kept her head.

“Monsieur Mundier,” she said coldly, “let us remain calm. Where are the Germans now?”

“In the great hall, where they sleep on straw,” answered the old man.

“How many are there?”

“Fifty, with two officers.”

“Have they made any attempt to go into the cellars?”

“Yes. They went looking for wine, but there was none—nor has been for many a year.”

Worrals drew a deep breath, perceiving how narrow had been her escape. Had she arrived a day earlier the aircraft would have been in the cellars, and discovered.

“How long are these Germans staying?” she asked.

Monsieur Mundier shrugged his shoulders helplessly. “As if they would tell me.”

“Very well, we shall have to make the best of it,” declared Worrals.

“But you will not stay here now?” The old man looked aghast.

“Why not? I haven’t come all the way here just to go home again.”

Lucien—she realised that the youth must be he—again laughed his hideous laugh.

“I wish you’d ask your son not to make that unpleasant noise,” snapped Worrals irritably, for her nerves were on edge.

“He does it all the time,” answered the old man despondently.

“Where is the entrance to the cellars?”

“Some way from here.”

“Is it possible to put my plane in—I can’t leave it in the field?”

Monsieur Mundier thought for a moment. “It might be. The Germans have a sentry by the stables.”

“Listen, monsieur,” said Worrals firmly, “My plane is in the field in front of the house. At dawn it will be seen, so we can’t leave it there. We must put it in the cellar. Is it possible to do that without approaching too close to the sentry?”

“It might be.”

“I wish you’d try to be a little more definite,” muttered Worrals. “If once we can get the plane out of sight, I can change my clothes. We can then take our place here as your nieces who have called to pay our respects. My friend will be getting anxious.”

Monsieur Mundier started. “What? Are there two of you?”

“Yes.”

The old man groaned and threw up his hands.

“I can’t see that it makes any difference whether there are one or two,” snapped Worrals. “One thing is certain—I have got to put the plane away. And the sooner I get out of this uniform the better. Will you please show me the entrance to the cellars?”

“You must not use the engine.”

“That won’t be necessary. If you’ll help we can pull it—it is small and light.”

Madame Mundier now entered the conversation, and she did so with a firmness of purpose that gave Worrals new hope. Frenchwomen, she knew, were resourceful and practical—often more so than their male companions.

“Come, mademoiselle, I will show you,” said madame, taking off her apron and throwing it on a chair. “Lucien will help us. He is not as foolish as he looks.”

Lucien chuckled, a sound that made Worrals wince. “Yes, I’ll help. I know all the places,” he gurgled, rubbing his hands in joyful anticipation.

Worrals would rather have dispensed with his assistance, but she felt that already too much time had been lost in argument. “Come on, then,” she said tersely. “Let us go. And madame—and you monsieur—if I am to be your niece you had better start calling me Jeanne. Madame, you lead, and take the shortest way to the field beyond the elm trees. The aeroplane is there.”

“*Entendu!*” Madame Mundier strode to the door. Worrals followed. Lucien brought up the rear.

“You stay here Papa, in case the Boches come and want something,” said madame from the door. “We must keep them in a good temper.”

“That’s sound policy,” agreed Worrals.

In single file they went down the corridor to the door by which Worrals had entered. Closing this behind them, madame skirted the end wall and took a steep path downwards which Worrals would not have suspected was there, and would have hesitated to take had she found it. It was, said madame, the depression that once formed the moat. Hugging the wall, which was built of enormous blocks of stone, she touched in passing an iron grille beyond which yawned an inky cavity. “The dungeons,” said she.

Lucien caught up with Worrals. “I show them to you some day,” he babbled.

Worrals thanked him with a warmth that was entirely insincere. She had no love for places of horror at any time—certainly not with a half-wit for a companion.

Meanwhile, Madame Mundier went on and, climbing a bank near the fallen drawbridge, struck off across the overgrown gardens. She paused before an old stone seat, and touched a deep groove in the carved arm.

“They say,” said she, “that your English King Richard made that mark as he sat here sharpening the edge of his sword.”

“Richard? Not Richard Cœur de Lion?” whispered Worrals, remembering that the great king died in the year 1199.

“That is what they say,” replied madame calmly. “He was buried not far from here. It was a chapel then. Afterwards it was a prison for the military; now it is an internment camp. Times change.”

“As you say,” answered Worrals, “times change.” Horrified at the thought that so great an English king should find a last resting place in such a spot, she wondered vaguely what he would think could he return to life and see war in its modern, brutal form. But there was little time for such poignant reverie. Madame strode on like one who knew every inch of the ground—as, indeed, she had every reason to, and, traversing a glade, came to the edge of the field.

Worrals could just make out the indistinct outline of the aircraft. She now took the lead and walked rapidly towards it. As she approached, Frecks, who must have been on the watch, emerged.

“For the love of Mike!” she exclaimed angrily. “What on earth have you been doing?”

“Fixing things up,” answered Worrals. “There is an unexpected development.”

“What is it?”

“The Huns are in residence.”

Frecks nearly swallowed her chewing gum. She spat it out quickly. “*What* did you say?”

“I said the Nazis have parked themselves on us. However, it may not be for long—we hope not, at any rate. Let’s fold the wings. We’re going to put the machine in the cellars. You’d better get under the tail, Frecks,” went on Worrals, when they were ready to move. She then placed madame and her son in the best positions and gave the order to march. Madame indicated the direction. The work was not particularly heavy, but it was slow, and Worrals was glad when at last they halted at the base of the towering pile. She was anxious to see just what accommodation there was for the machine, how it was arranged, and how inconspicuous, or otherwise, was the entrance to the cellars. Madame Mundier was unbarring heavy double doors, and she made a good deal of noise about it. The hinges, when she dragged the doors open, positively screamed. “It is all right; the Germans are too far away to hear,” she said calmly. “This part of the château is all in ruins.”

“All the same, we’ll have a spot of oil on those hinges to-morrow,” declared Worrals.

No effort was required to move the aircraft into the cellar. Indeed, exertion was required to prevent it from running in too fast, for a stone ramp inclined downwards.

“In the great days of the wine harvest the horses, with their loads of grapes, came right in,” announced madame.

Once inside Worrals switched on her torch, and was amazed at what she saw. The vaulted chambers seemed to stretch away from the entrance in all directions for a great distance, so far that the extremities were lost in darkness. Old wine presses, and enormous vats, cobweb-draped and mostly fallen into ruin, spoke eloquently of the former importance of the château.

“If the ceiling was a bit higher you could park a dozen Halifaxes in here,” declared Worrals in an awed whisper. “What a place! It’s a bit too spooky for me, though.”

She spoke in English, but Lucien, standing some distance away, laughed his horrible cackle.

Frecks clutched Worrals’ arm. “What on earth was that?” she gasped.

“Only Lucien,” returned Worrals. “It’s a habit of his. You’ll get used to it.”

Frecks wiped imaginary perspiration from her brow. “Oh, no I shan’t,” she muttered. “Don’t ever leave me alone with him.”

"He's harmless," asserted Worrals with more assurance than she felt.

Lucien came forward. "*Bon*, eh?" he chuckled.

"*Magnifique*," agreed Worrals, taking the suitcases out of the dicky seat. "That's all we need do here to-night, madame," she went on. "We'll go inside now and change our clothes. By the way, is it possible to get down into these cellars from the château?"

"Yes," Lucien answered. He chuckled. "I'll show you."

"Ah-huh," grunted Frecks. "Not me, you won't."

They left the cellars by the outside doors, and, having closed these, the girls followed madame back to the room where Worrals had found the family. It was an enormous place, in proportion with the size of the building. Monsieur Mundier was stirring the soup with the wooden spoon. He glanced up as the others entered. "Is all well?" he asked anxiously.

"Yes," answered his wife.

"Good. Now let the girls change their clothes and forget that they are English," said the old man. "They must do it at once. The Boches may come in here."

Madame Mundier nodded, and invited the girls to follow her across the kitchen to a narrow door beyond which a stairway of the type known as spiral wound upwards into darkness. It seemed to go up interminably, crossing several broad stone corridors, but eventually ended in a chamber furnished with antiques which Worrals did not doubt were genuine. The room was spotlessly clean, but most of the furniture was in a bad state of repair. Some tapestry work had crumbled to dust. A huge four-poster bed, in which six people could have slept, occupied about a third of the room. One tiny window, over which madame made haste to draw a curtain, for she was carrying a candle, overlooked the gardens towards the distant river.

"You will be comfortable here—yes?" enquired madame anxiously.

"Perfectly comfortable, thank you," replied Worrals.

"Good. Then I will leave you to change. Put your uniforms where they will not be found should anyone come here. Afterwards, keep straight on down the stairs and they will bring you back to the kitchen. There will be soup waiting. Take no notice of my husband. He is upset, I think, because girls have come to do the work. *Au revoir*."

"*Merci, madame*." Worrals threw open her suitcase and from it took the clothes she proposed to wear during her sojourn in France. The two main garments were a well-worn skirt and blouse, of medium quality, both of

which were, in fact, of French make, for she had bought them while on holiday in that country. They were precisely the garments worn by the majority of young middle-class French girls, and she had no fear of their being questioned. The fact that they were well worn was an added advantage, for she had no desire to appear smart. On the other hand, she dare not look slovenly, for the simple reason that no French girl, whatever her social position, turns out looking untidy—a characteristic for which instinctive skill with the needle may be largely responsible. She had lent to Frecks an ordinary cotton frock, bought at a French seaside resort; it fitted well, but had also seen better days. The change complete, uniforms were packed away, and the girls regarded each other, Frecks with a smile, Worrals in more serious mood. She had no delusions as to the danger of their occupation, and bore the weight of her responsibility with the gravity it demanded.

“I think we’ll do,” she remarked. “We may as well go down now and dig ourselves in with the family.”

“Isn’t it getting rather late?”

“No matter. We needn’t stay long,” Worrals pointed out. “We’ll just exchange references, so to speak, and have a bowl of soup.”

“I wish things were a bit more normal,” muttered Frecks. “I find it hard to feel at home with these people.”

“The old couple are all right,” declared Worrals. “They’re typically French. We shall soon get to know them. Lucien, with that crazy laugh of his, is going to be a pain in the neck, I’m afraid, but we can’t do anything about it. It isn’t his fault, anyway. No doubt, if we humour him he’ll be all right. He probably has bad patches—he seemed sane enough when we were towing the machine in. It’s unfortunate that these Nazi troops are here, but on a job like this, as we know only too well, the unexpected is always happening. The thing is to be ready for anything, and take it as it comes.”

“Suppose we bump into these Boches?”

“Just behave normally—there’s nothing else we can do. Maybe they won’t worry us. There’s a chance that we may pick up some useful information from them—information useful to our own people I mean. Come on, let’s go down.”

Taking the candle in her hand, Worrals led the way downstairs. “These stone walls are a bit grim,” she observed.

“You’re telling me,” returned Frecks sarcastically.

“We shall get used to them.”

“I hope so,” returned Frecks fervently.

“From now on we speak French,” reminded Worrals. “Don’t forget yourself and start babbling English. Also remember that we’re sisters, and that I’m a year older than you are. I’m Jeanne, and you’re Marie.”

As they descended the final flight of steps the faint murmur of voices reached them from the other side of the heavy door.

“Now for it,” muttered Worrals. “Behave naturally.”

So saying she pushed the door open and looked into the kitchen. She saw at once that more visitors had arrived. Half-standing, half-sitting on the edge of the massive refectory table with the confident assurance of conquerors, bowls of soup in their hands, were two German officers. They glanced up as Worrals approached. One raised his eyebrows in surprise. Then he smiled.

“*Bon soir, mademoiselle,*” he said in atrocious French—or rather, with an accent that could be cut.

Worrals smiled in turn. “*Bon soir, monsieur,*” she returned evenly, and stepped into the room.



"Entendu!" Madame Mundier strode to the door. Worrals followed. Lucien brought up the rear.

"You stay here Papa, in case the Boches come and want something."

CHAPTER IV

STRANGE EVENTS

THE truth of the matter was, Worrals was not particularly surprised to find the Germans there. She knew that they were almost certain to encounter them sooner or later, so she was prepared for the eventuality.

“You didn’t tell me you had daughters, madame,” said the younger of the Germans, who did not measure up to Worrals’ idea of a Nazi. He was short, rather fat, and blond, although he had already lost most of the hair on the front of his head. His service cap was tilted well back to reveal this, as though it were something to be proud of. His eyes were of no special colour. His lips hung slightly apart, so that under a straw-coloured moustache large white teeth were always visible. This rather harmless-looking face was rounded off by a pair of spectacles, which gave Worrals reason to suppose that the soldiers in the château were reserve, not first-line troops. She took it upon herself to answer.

“We are not madame’s daughters, but her nieces,” she remarked. Then, indicating Frecks, “This is my sister, Marie.” She then found two bowls which she filled with soup, passing one to Frecks.

The German who had opened the conversation, resumed. Worrals noticed that he was the senior, being an Oberleutnant, whereas his companion was a Leutnant.

“We haven’t seen you before,” he observed in a manner so condescending that Worrals longed to kick him.

“We have only just arrived,” she answered.

“From where?”

“Oh, we didn’t have far to come.”

“Are you staying here long?”

“It all depends. How long do *you* expect to be here?” Worrals spoke without looking up, as if the matter were of no importance. Actually, she was anxious to have the information.

“We stay here until we get fresh orders instructing us to move,” answered the German.

“It must be rather dull for you, so far from a town.”

“We’ve had worse billets,” answered the German in an off-hand way.

The French family made no attempt to join in the conversation, seeming content to listen. Madame Mundier took some stockings from the dresser and began to darn them. Her husband stared into the fire, sucking an empty pipe. Lucien watched Worrals with an interest that was embarrassing.

“Isn’t it time good soldiers were in bed?” enquired Worrals lightly.

“I should have been in bed by now had not Fritz, my comrade here, fetched me out. He is duty officer to-night. There was a signal that needed my attention.”

Worrals sipped her soup thoughtfully. She was well satisfied with this conversation, for already it had told her much. The blond German was not merely talkative, but was inclined to be boastful, and this, together with what was probably an exaggerated idea of his importance, made him even garrulous. He should, she thought, be a simple fellow to handle. She was not so sure about his companion, though, who was, she suspected, a suspicious man by nature. His movements were as quick as a snake. He had dark eyes that never twinkled, but were always cold and watchful, like those of a beast.

“So you have work to do to-night?” prompted Worrals.

The Nazi shrugged his shoulders, lighting a black cigar without so much as by your leave, although there were women in the room—two of them eating. “It was something special,” he announced. “That being so, of course Headquarters had to get in touch with me, personally.”

“It must have been something *very* important,” murmured Worrals, trying to keep sarcasm out of her voice.

“It was. A suspicious aeroplane was heard coming this way, and I was asked to keep a look out in case it landed. The English are always sending spies over.”

Worrals’ nerves tightened, but there was nothing in her expression to reveal it.

“Well, and did you find anything?” she asked blandly.

“We heard nothing of the plane. As a matter of fact, I’ve only just got the message—it happened that I was out when it came. I have had a look round, but no plane landed here.”

Again Worrals shivered inwardly as she realised how narrow must have been their margin of escape.

“The plane may yet come,” she suggested.

“I doubt it. Evidently it didn’t come this way.”

“You’ll hear it if it comes, I suppose?”

“Oh, yes. I’ve told the sentry to listen. He’ll let me know at once if he hears anything. Most likely it was all a false alarm. Personally, I don’t think these English are as clever as they try to make out, or as some of our people seem to think.”

Worrals sneered. “*Pouf!* These English. They were never friends of ours. They think of nothing but themselves—and money. It does not need your Doctor Goebbels to tell us that with propaganda. We know. I always knew.”

The German grinned. “You must have met some of them?”

“Plenty. This district was full of them before the war—tourists. Imagine it, young men with nothing better to do than wander about looking at old castles—and, of course, plates of food.”

“I think I may have found one of them to-night,” remarked the Nazi, with a careless air, as if he were in the habit of picking up stray Englishmen.

Worrals looked up sharply, nearly caught off her guard, as she realised an instant later. She wondered if the German was telling the truth, or lying to create an impression of importance.

“Did you say you had found an Englishman?” she asked incredulously.

The German shrugged. “He may be. I’m not sure, but I’m taking no chances. He may be a French de Gaullist. He hasn’t said much. He says he’s French. Even if he is, he has no business to be wandering about at this time of night, near German troops.”

“Perhaps he landed from the plane?” prompted Worrals.

“No. He must have been walking for days by the look of him. He’s dirty and half-starved.”

“Where did you find this fellow? It was pretty smart of you to pick him up.”

The Nazi cleared his throat. “Well, we are not exactly asleep, you know, but I must confess there was a bit of luck to it. Fritz and I, with a patrol, were standing under a tree where it was pitch dark, when along comes this fellow out of the bushes. I was suspicious the moment I saw him. Luckily, he walked right into us, so we grabbed him.”

“And what have you done with him?” queried Worrals, pushing aside her empty soup bowl as if she didn’t care whether the question was answered or not.

“We brought him here, to the guard-room, for the night. To-morrow we’ll hand him over to the right people. They’ll soon find a way to make him speak.” The German chuckled, a sound that made Worrals wince. “I expected to find incriminating papers on him, perhaps plans,” continued the Nazi, “but he was too clever to be caught with such things on him—that’s if he is what I suspect him to be. All we could find, and it was in the lining of his hat, was this. What would you make of it?”

The German opened his wallet, took out a sheet of paper folded twice, and tossed it on the table.

Lucien got up and shuffled out of the room.

Worrals glanced at the paper in a casual sort of way. She was not particularly interested, for not for one moment did she suppose that the paper could be directly concerned with her. But as she looked at it her heart seemed to lurch, and then stop. Instantly it went on again with a rush that sent the blood racing through her veins. For there, written boldly in pencil on the margin of the paper, was an unmistakable letter U, followed by a figure seven in Roman numerals, and again by the letters K.G.

With a hand that trembled slightly in spite of her desperate efforts to prevent it, she reached for the paper, unfolded it and looked at it, first one side and then the other. Both sides were covered with small print, and she saw that the document was a page—page 137 to be precise—torn from a book, a leaf from the popular edition of Boudray’s *L’Histoire de la Révolution*. The text appeared to consist chiefly of numbers of executions at various dates, but of actual handwriting there was none.

Worrals tossed the paper back on the table. “It doesn’t make sense to me,” she remarked. “It looks like an ordinary piece of paper.”

The German smiled knowingly. “You can never tell,” he said shrewdly. “It may be a secret code.” He glanced round as the door was opened, but it was only Lucien, nibbling a raw turnip. He looked rather like an animal.

“What has the fellow to say about it?” asked Worrals.

“He says it’s nothing. He says he put it in his cap the other day to keep the grease on his hair from going through the cloth.”

“It sounds possible.”

“Anything is possible. There might be nothing in it; on the other hand, we’ve been taught to hand things like this to the proper department. Our expert will decide if the paper means anything. The fellow’s life will depend on it.” As he spoke, the German replaced the paper in his wallet, which he returned to his pocket.

Worrals yawned. "Well, I'm going to bed," she announced. "It's late, and we had a long walk to-day."

"We'll be getting along, too," answered the German. "Come on, Fritz."

As they turned to go, heavy footsteps came running down the outside corridor. A voice called shrilly, "Oberleutnant Schaffer—Oberleutnant Schaffer!" The footsteps stopped and the door was flung open. A German soldier stood on the threshold. His manner was agitated and his face pale. Saluting and bowing at the same time in the German fashion, he advanced quickly into the room. "Herr Oberleutnant," he gasped, "the prisoner."

"Yes, what has happened?" The blond officer caught the soldier by the shoulder.

"The prisoner has escaped," panted the soldier.

Schaffer swore. "Fool!" he shouted. Then, recovering himself: "It isn't possible. You are making a mistake. How can a man escape from a room when the walls are three feet thick, and there is no window large enough for a rabbit to get through?"

"But he's gone, Oberleutnant."

"Then you must have opened the door. I gave orders that the door was not to be opened."

"But no one has opened the door, Oberleutnant. Here is the key, in my pocket. It has never left me. In any case, the relief guard is outside the door."

Schaffer looked at his companion. "It is impossible, Fritz. Someone must be lying," he rasped.

"Why should anyone lie, Rudolf?" enquired the dark officer.

Lucien broke into a peal of ghastly laughter.

Schaffer swung round, no longer a self-possessed little man. His face was distorted with fury. Snatching up a cup, he hurled it at the half-wit. "Shut up!" he shouted.

Lucien received the cup in his chest. He fell, and lay on the floor whimpering pitiably.

"You beast!" cried Frecks.

Worrals turned on her. "Silence," she said crossly. "It has nothing to do with you. The fool deserved it, laughing at such a time. You heard what has happened? The spy has escaped."

Oberleutnant Schaffer recovered his composure with an obvious effort. "We shall look into this," he decided harshly and, followed by the others,

strode out into the corridor. The heavy door slammed, and footsteps receded down the passage. As they died away to silence a hush settled on the room. The atmosphere seemed to become more intense, not easier. Lucien got up, ran to the door and beat on it with his fists, making animal noises. His mother dragged him back and soothed him into a chair. She looked at Worrals with a strange expression on her face. Monsieur Mundier still sat staring into the fire.

Worrals walked over to him. "Did you see that paper, monsieur?" she asked almost fiercely.

The old man raised his eyes. "*Oui, mademoiselle,*" he answered in a dispassionate voice.

"You know what it means?"

"Yes."

Madame Mundier stepped forward. "My husband is upset because the British have sent girls to deal with the situation," she said curtly. "He thinks it is beyond them."

"I like that!" cried Worrals indignantly. "We are at least trying to do something. Sitting staring into the fire won't get us anywhere. If you ask me, I'd say it was Monsieur Mundier who was beyond it."

"He has suffered much," returned madame sadly.

Worrals shrugged. "Very well. But let us not quarrel among ourselves. Our man has at least escaped, and that's something to be thankful for. He must have been on his way to us when he was caught. Where do these Germans sleep?"

Madame raised her eyebrows. "Why do you ask?"

"Because I must get that paper from Schaffer's pocket."

"Impossible!" Monsieur Mundier spoke with such vehemence that Worrals was startled.

"I'm sorry, m'sieur, but I cannot agree with you," she flashed back in a brittle voice. "Tell me where these Germans sleep and I will at least explore the chances of getting the document."

"If you succeed, they will know one of us has taken it," muttered the old man.

"That doesn't follow. What of it, anyway?" demanded Worrals. "Good gracious! What does it matter what they think as long as we get it?"

Monsieur shrugged his shoulders with an air of finality that said more eloquently than words that he was not prepared to argue.

Lucien chuckled and left the room.

Worrals looked at Frecks helplessly. She saw that the whole scheme was working out on lines very different from what she had been led to expect. This, she felt, was due largely to the attitude of hopeless abandon adopted by Monsieur Mundier. Clearly, no assistance was to be expected from him—at any rate, for the time being; and that being so, there was no point in their remaining in his company. She decided to retire, and in the quiet of her room adjust her plan of campaign to meet the new conditions. For a minute or two she stared thoughtfully at the books piled on the dresser. Then, turning to Frecks she said, “Come on, Marie. *Bon soir, madame. Bon soir monsieur.*” Turning, she walked to the turret stairway.

“I can’t get the hang of this,” muttered Frecks as they ascended. “Madame is the only one of the party who seems to have any sense, and she is too concerned with the old man to do much. What ails him?”

“I should say he is suffering from the same complaint as a lot of other Frenchmen. They’re intensely patriotic, and the collapse of France stunned them. At the moment, the poor old man, apart from being disappointed that we, instead of men, turned up to-night, is too fed up to make an effort. The French are rather like that when they get depressed. He’ll get over it.”

“The arrival of the Germans may have upset him.”

“Probably,” agreed Worrals as they went into their room and closed the door. “The thing that upsets me most is, I don’t see how we can do any flying while the Boches are here.”

“By the way,” remarked Frecks, “didn’t it strike you as queer, the way that prisoner escaped? It seemed to amaze Schaffer.”

“Yes, I felt there was something funny about it myself,” agreed Worrals, “but the immediate question is, how are we going to get hold of that paper?”

“Have you any ideas?”

Worrals thought for a moment. “Obviously, we can’t do much until we find out where the Germans sleep. That shouldn’t be difficult.”

“I’m afraid madame was right when she said that if we did get the paper Schaffer would go off at the deep end. We should all be suspected.”

“There may be a way to get over that,” said Worrals quietly, sitting on the bed. “If we are ever in a position to take the paper from Schaffer’s wallet, then it would be possible, at the same time, to insert a substitute. In that case he wouldn’t know the paper had been taken.”

“But he’s seen it!” cried Frecks. “He wouldn’t be fooled by a fake.”

"I'm not so sure," muttered Worrals. "Now I'll tell you something. The paper was a page, page one-three-seven, torn from the popular edition of *L'Histoire de la Révolution*, one of the commonest books in France. It was published about sixty years ago and has been reprinted hundreds of times. You'll find a copy in nearly every house in France."

Frecks frowned. "What are you getting at?" she asked in a puzzled voice.

"Merely this," replied Worrals. "In view of what I have just told you, it would not be surprising if there was a copy of the book among those downstairs on the dresser."

Frecks started. "You mean—there *is* a copy?"

Worrals nodded. "That's just what I do mean. The possibility occurred to me when I was arguing with Monsieur Mundier. I had a good look at the books, and there, sure enough, I spotted a copy. If, after the family has gone to bed, we went down and removed page one-three-seven, then wrote on the margin the letters that appeared on the document now in Schaffer's possession, we should have a duplicate so perfect that Schaffer would not suspect that a substitution had taken place."

"I say! That's an idea," breathed Frecks.

"We shall have to have ideas, too, if we're going to see this business through," murmured Worrals. "I think the first thing to do, before finding out where Schaffer hangs his tunic, is to get hold of page one-three-seven from the book in the kitchen. That's the first step. We'll leave the next until that's accomplished."

"But why wait for the family to go to bed?" queried Frecks. "Why not confide in them? They're supposed to be in the business with us."

"I know," answered Worrals slowly. "To tell the truth, I'm not quite happy in my mind about them. At the moment, the fewer people who know what we're doing, the better."

"Okay," agreed Frecks. "Let's start. It must be midnight, so the folks downstairs should have retired by now."

"We'll soon find out," returned Worrals. "Take your shoes off—we shall have to move quietly." So saying, she removed her shoes, and then, taking her torch, moved towards the door.

Frecks followed. At the head of the stairs they paused to listen. The only sound was the rustle of a dry leaf that had drifted in through one of the unglazed windows and was being propelled along the stone floor by an unseen draught. Worrals glanced at it, surveyed the crypt-like passage for a

moment with her torch, and then went on down the narrow steps, her stockinged feet falling noiselessly on the solid stone.

In a silence so intense that it seemed to worry the ear drums, the descent was made without incident, and at length Worrals halted outside the kitchen door. Kneeling, she looked under it to confirm that the light had been extinguished, and was relieved to find that it had; only a faint crimson glow fell across the paved floor, cast by the embers of the dying fire. Slowly, with infinite care, she opened the door, to be greeted by the warm aroma of the soup pot, still hanging over the white ashes in the grate.

Turning, she whispered, "All clear," and walked confidently to the books.

Having noted its position, she was able to put her hand immediately on the one she wanted. She picked it up and laid it on the table. With Frecks looking over her shoulder she ran swiftly through the pages, slowing down as she reached the number 137. Suddenly she stopped and caught her breath sharply. She bent forward, peering. She turned over another page, then back again.

"What do you make of that?" she breathed.

"Make of what?" whispered Frecks.

"Look for yourself," answered Worrals in a curious voice. "Page one-three-seven has been cut out."



Schaffer swung round, his face was distorted with fury. Snatching up a cup, he hurled it at the half-wit. "Shut up!" he shouted.

CHAPTER V

SINISTER PROCEEDINGS

FRECKS stared at the gap in the book as though it fascinated her. When she looked up her eyes were clouded with bewilderment.

"I don't get it," she said in a dazed voice. "Except," she added, "that the page in Schaffer's possession must have been taken from this book."

"It looks that way," acknowledged Worrals, "but it doesn't necessarily follow, although, as there is a limit to coincidence, there must be some connection. We mustn't jump to conclusions. What I should like to know is, who took the page out of this book, and why. The obvious answer is, the spy, the man who escaped. . . . No. That won't do; it doesn't make sense. He was coming to the château, not going away from it. The dickens of it is, we are now stumped for a duplicate page."

"Yes, what are we going to do about that?" lamented Frecks.

"There is only one thing we can do about it, and that is take the next page—one-three-nine. Page one-three-eight was on the back of one-three-seven."

"Schaffer will spot the change."

"He might, and he might not. He may not have noted the number of the page. If he did, when he sees page one-three-nine he will imagine that he made a mistake. We'll take page one-three-nine and chance it. An imperfect substitute is better than none at all."

As she spoke Worrals deftly tore page 139 from the book, folded it twice, as page 137 had been folded, and then, with a pencil, reproduced on the margin the cyphers as perfectly as she could—U. VII. K.G. "That's it," she said, slipping the paper inside her blouse. "The next thing is to find that bounder Schaffer—or rather, his tunic." She replaced the book on the dresser, and had taken a pace towards the door when a sound brought her to an abrupt halt. The noise was slight enough, a mere scrape, but it was sufficient to make her nerves tingle. In a flash she had switched off the torch and, catching Frecks by the wrist drew her into a corner where sundry garments hung from wooden pegs. "Don't move," she breathed.

Silence fell. It lasted for perhaps a minute, and Worrals was beginning to wonder if she had made a mistake when the noise was repeated, slightly louder this time. It was followed by a faint creak which could only mean that the door was being cautiously opened. Only a spark remained of the fire; this threw an almost imperceptible glow in the immediate vicinity of the grate, but nothing more. The rest of the room was inky black.

Frecks stood rigid, hoping that the beating of her heart would not be heard by the intruder, whoever it was. That someone else was in the room was no longer in doubt. Her taut muscles twitched almost painfully as a cinder collapsed in the fire with an astonishing amount of noise. After that there was a faint rustle, and a sound, she thought, of gentle breathing. She was by no means sure of it, knowing well that in such conditions the imagination can play strange tricks. Silence fell again. Minutes, how many Frecks could not tell, passed with infinite slowness. It seemed ages before Worrals' vice-like grip on her wrist was relaxed.

"It's gone, whatever it was," breathed Worrals. "Anyway, I can't stand the strain any longer." Her torch clicked and the beam stabbed the darkness like a luminous sword. Slowly it explored the room, the floor, the walls. There was nothing there. "This is certainly a creepy establishment," she said in a low voice. "But there, we've done a bit of creeping ourselves, so we can't complain if someone else does the same thing." The beam of her torch continued to probe the darkness, moving slowly over the furniture. Suddenly it stopped, went back a little, and came to rest. "Can you beat that?" she muttered.

"Beat what?"

"The book's gone."

"You mean the history?"

"Yes."

"Nonsense," returned Frecks incredulously. "Who would have taken it?"

"That," replied Worrals succinctly, "is just what I'd like to know. But it's gone, taken away right under our noses."

Frecks made a sound rather like a moan. "Let's get out of this," she pleaded. "The place is giving me the heeby-jeebies. I've had about as much as I can stand for one night."

"I think you're right," agreed Worrals, and led the way back up the turret steps.

Neither of the girls spoke again until they were in the bedroom. Worrals closed the door and lit the candle.

"I don't understand what's going on," she said slowly. "One thing is certain, though; something is going on here that we know nothing about, and while we're in the dark we've got to step warily. I've got a feeling that there is another actor in this party, one whom we don't know; we don't even know which side he is on. The escape of the spy, the cutting of the page from the book, and the mysterious disappearance of the book, are all, I'm certain, linked up in some way. This is no ordinary house."

"And no ordinary household," put in Frecks drily.

"You're right there," agreed Worrals feelingly. "Goodness knows what hidden chambers or passages there may be in a building of this size and age. It sits in the middle of a small jungle, and a score of people could come and go without our knowing anything about it. Of one thing I am convinced. The Germans here are ordinary troops, and it was sheer bad luck that their arrival coincided with our own. That spy was evidently coming here. He didn't know the Germans were here any more than we did, or he would have been more careful. Schaffer flatters himself that he was smart to make the capture, but actually it was an amazing piece of luck. He and his patrol happened to be standing under the trees and the spy bumped right into them. In the ordinary course of events, there would have been no such patrol—we're miles from any military objective. The Nazis here are simply occupation troops, and, judging by their officers, mediocre ones at that. Schaffer is quite right, of course, when he says the place is alive with British spies, and French agents acting for us." Worrals smiled. "When he made that remark he little dreamed how right he was. Lucien worries me. He'd be a good-looking lad if he wasn't crazy; as it is, he's a disturbing influence. But this won't do. I'm concerned about that message which has fallen into Schaffer's hands. Were it not for that, I'd go to bed and sleep on the whole uncanny business, but in the circumstances we can't afford to do that. The matter is urgent. We've got to get the paper from Schaffer *to-night*. Tomorrow he will hand it over to the German Intelligence people, and once that happens we shall have lost it for good. Come on."

Frecks started. "Where?"

"I'm going to have a prowling round."

"What—now?"

"Yes—now. You can stay here if you like."

"Alone? Not me," returned Frecks emphatically. "I'll come with you. But one more shock will about finish me off."

At that moment there was a gentle knock on the heavy oak door.

Frecks swung round with a gasp. "Don't open it," she ejaculated.

Worrals went to the door and swung it wide. Lucien stood on the threshold, holding a candle, grinning sheepishly and making signs with his free hand.

"What do you want?" snapped Worrals.

Lucien winked, chuckled, and jerked his thumb over his shoulder.

"Go to bed, Lucien," said Worrals severely.

Lucien shook his head, and beckoned urgently. "The Germans," he whispered.

Worrals sighed. "He's got something on his mind. We shan't get any peace until we find out what it is. I'll go with him and see what it's all about."

Lucien smiled, and, to Worrals' surprise, for a moment looked almost normal. Still beckoning, he began to back away. Then, seeing that Worrals and Frecks were following, he turned and walked on in a quick, shuffling gait. He, too, Worrals noticed, was in stockinged feet.

Instead of going down the steps that led to the kitchen, he turned along the draughty corridor, descended a short flight of wooden stairs, traversed the full length of another corridor, and then, holding up a warning finger for silence, quietly opened a door. It led into an unfurnished room so vast that the flickering light of the candle did not reach the far wall. All Worrals could see there was a small galaxy of stars shining through an old Gothic tracery window. A boarded floor, not the usual stone pavement, was under her feet.

Lucien, walking mincingly on tiptoe, crossed over to one of the panelled side walls, and opened silently an unsuspected door which led, as far as Worrals could see, into a closet about ten feet square. Dropping on his knees, he then did something with his hands. Almost at once a narrow shaft of feeble yellow light appeared, and with it came a strange sound. In a moment Worrals realised that it was the heavy breathing of sleeping men. Lucien now lay flat, and the crack of light widened considerably. Looking up, he made signs that Worrals was to look through the crack. He blew out the candle.

Worrals, her pulses racing with curiosity, also lay down and looked through the narrow opening. A startling scene, but one not altogether unsuspected in view of Lucien's behaviour, met her eyes.

Below was evidently the great hall that had been taken over by the Germans. It was lighted by two hurricane lamps that stood one at each end of a long trestle table. Near it, rifles were stacked at regular intervals. Straw

had been thrown down all round the walls, and on this was a long line of recumbent, blanketed forms. Immediately below the trap door through which she was peering—for that, obviously, was what it was—a small area had been railed off with hurdles hung with sacks. In this a camp bed and some folding furniture had been erected. In the bed a man lay sleeping. Only his head was visible, but it was enough to reveal his identity. The blond head and bald forehead could only belong to Schaffer. Within easy reach of the bed was a huge high-backed chair, clearly a piece of furniture belonging to the château, and upon this Worrals now concentrated her attention to the exclusion of everything else, for on it lay the German's uniform—that is, all except the tunic, which had been hung squarely over the high back.

Worrals drew away. She wanted to think. She forgot all about Lucien. She forgot everything except the tunic, in the pocket of which was—unless it had been removed, which seemed unlikely—the document which she was so anxious to secure. She made a sign to Frecks to survey the room in order that she might get a grasp of the situation, and then concentrated on her problem of how to get the tunic. Realising that there must be a door for the men to get in and out of the hall, she looked again, without disturbing Frecks, and made out a big door at one end of the room. It was ajar, and even as she stared at it she saw a sentry, with rifle at the slope, march past with measured tread. She realised at once why Lucien had not taken the more easy course of approaching the hall direct, without using the trap door. Obviously, there could be no getting past the sentry without being challenged; to attempt to do so would be a dangerous and futile procedure. Only by means of a rope would it be possible to enter the hall from the trap door, and that would be no easy matter, for the distance from the ceiling, in which the trap was placed, to the floor, was not less than thirty feet. With a rope, if she could find one, she might descend, but she was by no means sure that she would be able to climb up again. Frecks alone would not have the strength to pull her up, and she did not relish the idea of entrusting the task to Lucien. An alternative scheme, rather an obvious one, then suggested itself. With a line, and a hook attached, it might be possible to engage the tunic and draw it up, but it would be manifestly impossible to replace the tunic on the chair in the position it now occupied. If it were merely thrown down, or even if it were hung carelessly on the back of the chair, in the morning when he awoke Schaffer could hardly fail to notice that the garment had been interfered with. In view of the escape of the spy, he would at once suspect the reason, and so be far more likely to discover the substitution of the faked document than he would be in the ordinary way. There was always a risk, too, of one of the soldiers waking up and seeing the

tunic in mid air—a spectacle that could hardly fail to excite his attention. It was a knotty problem, and Worrals wrinkled her forehead in an effort to solve it.

Frecks seemed to divine her thoughts. “So what?” she breathed.

Worrals didn’t answer. She looked at Lucien, who was sitting on the floor like a small boy who has done something clever, but from whom nothing further was to be expected. Nevertheless, Worrals interrogated him.

“Have you a rope?” she whispered, making signs to indicate the purpose for which she needed it.

Lucien shook his head.

“That settles that,” murmured Worrals for Frecks’ benefit. She turned again to Lucien. “You have a long string perhaps?”

Again Lucien shook his head.

“A fishing line, with a hook?” persisted Worrals hopefully.

Lucien signified that he possessed no such article.

Worrals could have groaned with impotence. Squatting on the edge of the trap, she stared down into the hall, not looking at any particular object, but rather seeking inspiration. Suddenly a movement caught her eye, and she stiffened. One of the soldiers had raised himself on his elbow, and was looking to right and left along the line of sleeping men. She touched Frecks, who had also seen the movement.

“Suppose that had happened just as one of us was going down on a rope,” she breathed.

“S-sh. . . What’s going on?”

The man had now risen to his feet, and with his dark blanket draped over his shoulders like a cloak was moving warily, silently, down the hall. There was something so furtive in his manner that Worrals watched spellbound. Even so, she little suspected how the affair would terminate. Making no more noise than a shadow the man walked to the end of the hall, to the officer’s quarter. Reaching it he paused to glance first at his sleeping comrades, then at the door. To the spectators it was like watching a silent screen play.

A moment later his motive became apparent, and it so took Worrals aback that her lips went dry with shock. The draped figure, moving swiftly now, stepped over the barrier. Without taking the tunic from the chair he opened the breast pocket, took out the wallet, extracted the folded sheet of paper, closed the wallet, replaced it in the pocket and fastened the button.

Then, turning, he glided away, not to his place on the straw as the watchers expected, but to the far end of the hall where the light failed to penetrate. The figure merged into the sable shadows and disappeared.

For a full minute after it had gone Worrals sat and stared like a person mesmerised. Then she looked at Frecks, and raised her shoulders in a gesture of helplessness. She missed Lucien.

“Where’s he gone?” she asked sharply.

Frecks shook her head. “I didn’t see him go.”

“Nor I.”

Worrals closed the trap, which she discovered was a sliding arrangement, not a door. “We may as well go to bed,” she said quietly. “I seem to be bungling this business properly. It looks as if Monsieur Mundier might be right, after all. This is no job for girls.”

“I don’t see what else we could have done,” muttered Frecks indignantly.

“Nor I if it comes to that,” returned Worrals wearily. “Unfortunately, the Higher Command doesn’t take that view. It is concerned only with success. We’d better try to find our way back to our room.”

They found it after a time, during which they often had to retrace their steps. The candle was still burning. Worrals looked at it in amazement.

“Frecks,” she said in a curious voice, “am I going crazy?” She pointed at the candle stick, which stood on the bed, in the centre of the counterpane. “Who would put a candle in a place like that? Did you?”

“Me? No. Of course not.”

“Unless I’m out of my mind, when we left the room the candle was on the mantel.”

“It was,” confirmed Frecks. “I put it there myself. Why should anyone move the candle, much less stand it on the bed?” Her voice was high with wonder.

Worrals, staring at the bed, took a quick pace forward. “I think I can answer that question,” she said grimly. “Take a look at that!” She pointed at a sheet of paper lying conspicuously beside the candle. It was folded twice across the middle. On the margin, in bold letters, was the cypher U. VII. K.G.

“It’s the fake one. You must have dropped it there,” said Frecks in a voice that was not quite steady.

Worrals picked up the document and with a swift movement unfolded it. “No,” she said crisply. “The dummy is page one-three-nine. This is page

one-three seven. It's the original."

Frecks stared at the paper, then at Worrals. She drew a deep breath. "That's marvellous," she said in a voice heavy with sarcasm. "All we have to do now is fly it home. I hope, when we get there, we shall have the sense to stay. As far as I'm concerned this is the last straw."

Worrals passed her hand wearily over her forehead. "Flying home is our next worry," she announced. "We've got our first message, but with Germans in the place it would be madness to get the plane out. Why must the unexpected always happen?" she went on bitterly. "Squadron-Leader Yorke made no provision for Nazis being here, nor did he, I feel sure, expect a message to be handed to us so quickly. Why, we haven't even had time to sit down and get our breath."

"The tragedy is we've no way of letting him know how things stand," moaned Frecks.

"He'd probably tell us to work it out ourselves, even if he could get in touch with us," replied Worrals slowly. "An agent's job is to deal with these problems as they arise. If espionage were easy, there'd be nothing to it. It's because these things happen that it's so dangerous. Ah well; I'm dead tired, but there's one thing we ought to do before we go to bed."

"What's that?"

"Pass Schaffer the faked message."

"But that's ridiculous. How can you?"

"I'm not pretending that we have a means of putting it in his pocket; but the man who took the original paper left nothing in its place. That will mean trouble when Schaffer misses it. He'll know his pocket has been picked. I'm going to drop the dummy through the trap. It will fall on the floor, of course, but it will be found, and Schaffer will suppose that he dropped it. He'll wonder how it happened, no doubt, but what else can he believe? Anyway, it's worth trying. There's no need for us both to go. Stay here. I'll be right back." Picking up her torch Worrals left the room.

She was away only about five minutes. "That's that," she announced with satisfaction, as she closed the door. "It fell right beside the bed. Now we'd better try to snatch a spot of sleep. At the rate things are going, we shall need it."

Frecks yawned. "Are you telling me?" she murmured.



Dropping on his knees, he then did something with his hands. Almost at once a narrow shaft of feeble yellow light appeared, and with it came a strange sound.

CHAPTER VI

A DISTURBING VISITOR

WORRALS was the first to awake the following morning. She looked at her watch, but as she had forgotten to wind it it had stopped. Feeling that it was late, she roused Frecks, and then began to dress, pausing only once to look down through the open window at the lovely rolling countryside, with the famous river, which in the past had seen so much blood and suffering, meandering through it, unruffled by men and their foolish bickerings. It was a fine morning, with a mellow autumn sun tinting in warm tones of brown and buff the leaves of the trees, and painting ruby red and gold the apples that hung on lichen-covered branches in an untended orchard.

“If things move as fast to-day as they did yesterday, we look like having a busy time,” murmured Frecks moodily as she dressed. “What are you going to do about that urgent message? It ought to go back to Squadron-Leader Yorke. That’s why we came here.”

“True enough,” agreed Worrals. “But I see no sense in committing suicide trying to take off from the middle of an enemy camp. The Squadron-Leader would agree, I am sure, if he knew how we were fixed. I shall let him know at the first opportunity. Perhaps he’ll move us to another place. If you’re ready, we’ll go down and see if there is any breakfast about. It’s no use expecting bacon and eggs—the French are in a bad way for food; the Boches have eaten them out of house and home. If the Germans ask what we are doing here, we can tell them that we’ve come to help Aunt Louise gather the apples. I noticed some ripe ones in the orchard. We shall have to pretend to do something, and that’s as good a job as any.”

To Worrals’ disgust, they found the two German officers in the kitchen having breakfast. Madame Mundier was there, waiting on them, but of Monsieur Mundier and Lucien there was no sign.

The Germans glanced up as the girls entered, while madame filled two bowls with insipid looking gruel and, setting them on the table, indicated that this was their breakfast. There was no tea, coffee, or other beverage; neither was there any conserve. A small piece of dark-coloured bread, but no butter, stood on a trencher. Worrals just had time to make a mental note that

she could repair this deficiency to some extent when she made her next trip across the Channel when Schaffer spoke.

“I wanted to speak to you,” he said mysteriously, addressing Worrals. “You remember I showed you a paper last night—the one I took from the spy who escaped?”

“Yes, I remember,” answered Worrals readily.

“So! It was a page torn from a book.”

“*L’Histoire de la Révolution.*”

“Exactly.” The German nodded ponderously. “What I want to ask you is, do you remember the number of the page?”

Worrals pretended to think for a moment. “It was page one-three-nine, was it not?”

Schaffer turned to his companion triumphantly.

“There you are!” he cried. “I said it was one-three-nine. Fritz Lowenhardt here will have it that the page was one-three-seven.”

“Does it make any difference?” enquired Worrals innocently.

“It might,” answered Schaffer darkly.

Lowenhardt stepped into the conversation. “But that doesn’t explain how the paper got out of your wallet on to the floor,” he said coldly.

Schaffer winked at Worrals and jerked a sarcastic thumb towards his companion. “He has a wild idea that somebody picked my pocket during the night. Absolute rot. No one could get past the sentry. But there, what does it matter? The paper has gone off to Headquarters, so it’s their worry now. I have troubles enough of my own.”

Worrals would have liked to know to which headquarters Schaffer referred, but dare not ask.

At this juncture there was a sharp knock on the door, and a German soldier, a motor-cyclist messenger by his uniform, entered. He saluted, raising his right arm in the Nazi manner. “*Heil Hitler!* I have a message for Oberleutnant Schaffer,” he announced.

“That’s me. What is it?” returned Schaffer.

The messenger took a despatch from his case and delivered it. This done, he stepped back and waited.

Schaffer ripped open the envelope. As he read the message an expression of disgust crossed his face. “That’s my luck. Just as I’ve struck a

comfortable billet,” he grumbled. He looked up at Worrals. “You will be sorry to hear, my pretty one, that I have to leave you,” he remarked.

Worrals was anything but sorry. Her heart gave a bound of satisfaction. This was better fortune than she had dared to hope. The Germans were going. She could barely conceal her exultation. Everything would be all right after all. She would be able to use the aircraft.

Schaffer pushed his chair back and rose to his feet. “Come, Lowenhardt,” said he. “Get the men together. We must be on the march in half an hour.”

Lowenhardt, ever secretive, said nothing. He nodded curtly to madame and left the room. Schaffer, in an effort to be gallant, bowed stiffly from the waist and followed his companion.

“Thank goodness,” breathed Worrals as the door closed behind the grey uniforms. “What a slice of pie!”

Even madame smiled.

Worrals turned to her. “We must pretend to be doing something while we are with you,” she said. “Can you find tasks for us? If not, may I suggest one?”

Madame raised her eyebrows.

“Suppose we start picking the apples?” offered Worrals. “Should any new Germans arrive it will appear to be a natural occupation. At the same time it will give us a chance to look round.”

“Certainly,” agreed madame. “I was wondering how to get the apples picked. I will give you baskets.” She bustled away and presently returned with two big wicker baskets.

“*Bon,*” murmured Worrals. She glanced at the door. Dropping her voice, she said, “To-night I must make a journey.” She pointed at the frugal fare on the table. “Perhaps I shall be able to bring back with me a few small things—some coffee, for instance.”

Madame’s face lighted up. “That will make you the friend of monsieur,” she said.

“I’ll see what I can do about it,” promised Worrals. “Come on Frecks.” Picking up a basket, she made her way to the garden, and so on to the orchard. From time to time she stopped to make a close scrutiny of the château and the surrounding country—or as much of it as could be seen. Frecks was unusually quiet.

“What’s the matter?” asked Worrals presently.

Frecks wrinkled her forehead. "Didn't it strike you that those orders to Schaffer to move were a bit sudden?"

"No, it didn't," admitted Worrals frankly. "There's nothing odd in soldiers getting orders to move. What put that idea into your head?"

Frecks shrugged her shoulders. "I don't know. Officers usually know overnight if there is a chance of their being moved suddenly. Until that messenger arrived, Schaffer behaved as though he was under the impression that he would be here for some time. Call it presentiment if you like, but as he opened that movement order I had a feeling that it was linked up with his sending that document, page one-three-nine, to Headquarters."

It was Worrals' turn to look puzzled. "I wonder," she said slowly. "Of course, if the German Secret Service suddenly got a suspicion that spies were operating from here, they might well get the troops out of the way to give the spies a chance to betray themselves. Come to think of it, there were strange goings-on here last night. First there was the mysterious plane heard coming in this direction. Then a suspicious character was caught, only to escape. Then there was the paper. Your hunch may be right, Frecks, and I'm glad you mentioned it; but there's nothing we can do at the moment except keep our eyes open. If the Boches are suspicious, they will soon send some agents here to investigate. Meanwhile, we may as well pick some apples."

The girls proceeded with their self-appointed task and the next two hours passed pleasantly enough. Then Frecks descended from her tree and shook herself. "Don't you think it's time we were getting back?" she suggested. "It must be close on lunch-time—if they still have lunch in France. Incidentally, I don't like the look of those clouds that are blowing up; I should say we're in for some rain."

"Yes," answered Worrals in a far-away voice. Balancing herself on a bough, she was gazing steadily across the field in which she had landed the aircraft.

"What are you looking at?" asked Frecks.

"I spotted someone coming towards the château, but it's only a nun."

"Then why stare at her?"

"Because she has stopped either at, or very close to, the spot where the machine stood last night, while you were waiting for me. She has picked something up. We couldn't have dropped anything, I suppose?"

"What could we have dropped?" replied Frecks, a trifle sarcastically.

"No, of course we couldn't have dropped anything," agreed Worrals and, descending from the tree, shook pieces of bark and other debris from her

hair. She munched an apple thoughtfully.

“Come on,” urged Frecks.

“No hurry,” returned Worrals. “Madame will probably give us a hail when lunch is ready.” She smiled suddenly. “You know,” she went on confidentially, “Squadron-Leader Yorke was pretty cute. Looking at us, no one would suspect that we are—what we are.”

“What worries me is, the same may apply to other people about this establishment,” replied Frecks. “What about the fellow who stole the paper out of Schaffer’s pocket last night, for instance? Who was he?”

“Not all the guessing in the world will answer that question,” averred Worrals.

Helping each other with the heavily laden baskets, and stopping often to rest, the girls returned slowly to the château. Leaving the baskets in the wide corridor, they went on into the kitchen.

Even as she opened the door the murmur of voices reached Worrals’ ears. One she recognised at once as madame’s; the other, thin and reedy, she did not know. Entering the room, she saw that it was the nun—or at any rate, judging from her habit, a member of a religious order. Sitting well back in the chimney seat, her dark gown could hardly be seen; only the white coif revealed her presence.

Worrals dropped a little curtsy. “*Bon jour*,” she said respectfully.

“*Bon jour*,” returned the nun, and then coughed, a dry, rasping sound that touched a chord in Worrals’ memory, without, however, awakening real interest.

“These are my nieces who have come to help me pick the fruit,” explained madame. Turning to the girls she added, “This, my children, is a Sister of the Little Poor, who has kindly called to see how we are faring in this time of trouble.”

As madame spoke, the Sister stepped from her fireside seat so that Worrals was able to see her face clearly for the first time. Actually, she saw nothing but the eyes, dark, piercing, watchful eyes, as cold as stone. They seemed to bore into her own and read her inmost thoughts. She hoped fervently that this was not the case, for her thoughts were chaotic. Indeed, her whole body had gone strangely numb, as though it had been subjected to a tremendous shock. Words floated vaguely in her brain, words that she recalled, as in a dream, saying to Squadron-Leader Yorke at their first interview. She was looking at a photograph. What was it she had said so lightheartedly? “I might forget the face, but never those eyes.” The photo

was a portrait of Wilhelm von Brandisch, whom the Squadron-Leader had described as the cleverest man in the German Secret Service.

The nun coughed again, a sound now doubly sinister. It jarred on Worrals' nerves like a discord, making her wince.

At that ghastly moment Worrals was thankful for one thing. Frecks had not seen the photo, so there was no risk of her betraying herself. She had only herself to watch, but that was far from easy. Her limbs were as cold as if they had been exposed to an icy blast, and as heavy as lead. She could not have imagined it possible for one human being to so affect another. With a terrific mental effort she forced herself to behave normally, but even so she had a ghastly feeling that her manner was forced, false, as though she were an actress in a play not quite sure of her part. Two voices seemed to be whirling in her head. One was telling her that her imagination was playing tricks; the other, that she could not be mistaken; that the woman was not, in fact, a woman, but a man, von Brandisch. What was he doing in the château if they were not already suspect?

The nun had by this time crossed over to the dresser. "Ah! Books," she said approvingly. "What pleasure they give us. And here, I see, you have one of my favourites, one that must be of interest to every woman of France." As she spoke she reached forward.

Worrals was behind her, so could not see her hand, but she knew—she knew not how she knew—what the title of the book would be. The extraordinary thing was, the book should not be there, for it had disappeared overnight. An instant later she saw that she was right. The nun turned, the book in her hand. There was no mistaking it. It was the *Histoire de la Révolution*.

Worrals was stunned. So the book had been returned! When? By whom? An icy hand seemed to settle on her heart, leaving her strangely breathless. She dare not look at Frecks, who by this time must have recognised the title of the book, and so become aware that the situation was not as innocent as it appeared to be. Only Madame Mundier, obviously unaware of the true identity of the visitor, was unperturbed.

"A wonderful book," she said with respect in her voice.

"Yes, indeed." The nun sat on a chair and, resting the book on the table, began turning over the pages.

Worrals watched spellbound. She knew perfectly well where the nun would stop—her guilty conscience told her that. Fascinated, she watched the nun slowly turning the pages—132—133—134 . . . the turning of the pages

became slower . . . 135—136, 137. . . . The nun stopped, her eyes on the page.

Worrals, no longer capable of coherent thought, also stared at the page—or rather, the number of it. It was page 137. The page was there. Yet only the previous night, not only was the page missing, but the whole book had mysteriously disappeared.

The nun herself seemed surprised. She turned over to the next page—page 139. That also was there. Moreover, it was obvious that the page had never been removed, for it is impossible to remove a page from a book and replace it without leaving some trace of the operation.

Worrals passed her tongue over her lips, which had gone dry. She felt that she was dreaming, and the sensation was unpleasant, so unpleasant that she felt quite ill. But the spasm passed. Turning her back so that the nun could not see her face, which she felt sure was pale, she said, “Where would you like us to put the apples, Auntie? We have a fine lot.” She spoke carelessly, but her voice sounded strangely unreal.

“We’ll find a place for them presently, when we’ve had lunch,” answered madame.

“I suppose, like all girls, you are fond of sweets?” put in the nun, in her thin voice.

Worrals stiffened. She felt that another shock was coming, but she had no idea what it was.

Frecks answered, and glancing at her Worrals saw that either she was acting remarkably well, or else she suspected nothing.

“I love sweets,” declared Frecks enthusiastically.

“And you like, perhaps, the stuff they call chewing gum?” murmured the nun, her face breaking into a ghastly smile.

“Oh, yes,” answered Frecks.

“The sort that is wrapped in paper like this?” The nun opened her hand to reveal a tiny piece of pink paper.

“Rather!” agreed Frecks.

Worrals’ heart stood still. She could see the trap clearly, but it was impossible to do anything.

“Then it must have been you who dropped this piece of paper,” remarked the nun smoothly.

“Probably,” answered Frecks. “I’ve dropped pieces all over the place.”

“I found this piece in the field.”

“Quite likely,” nodded Frecks. “I’ve been over there.”

Very deliberately, the nun unfolded the paper to expose the name of the make, and the address. It was printed in English.

“Now how would a French girl come into possession of chewing gum that was made in England?” asked the nun with affected wonder, but her eyes were on Frecks’ face.

To Worrals’ amazement, Frecks did not gasp, or exclaim, or do anything foolish, although by this time she must have seen her peril. On the contrary, she laughed merrily.

“I can easily answer that, although you may think it rather naughty of me,” she said calmly. “I have a boy friend. Before the English ran out on us he was a *poilu* in the Army. These English have everything in their canteens; they must always be eating even when they are at war. One day my friend bought for me some of this chewing gum, from an English canteen. I liked it so much that he bought me more. By eating it slowly I have made it last a long time.” Frecks sighed. “I’ve just eaten the last piece,” she lamented. “Well, there will be no more. That is the only reason I am sorry that the English have gone.”

Worrals began to breathe again. She knew now that Frecks was acting, had been acting all along, and had played her part superbly.

“Of course—of course,” said the nun, smiling, and putting the scrap of paper into the black bag that swung from her girdle. “But you must be waiting to start your lunch, so I will be on my way.”

“Are you sure you won’t stay and eat with us?” invited madame. “It is very little that we have, but you are welcome——”

“*Non, non*. I know how hard it is to get food.” The nun stood up, and walked towards the door. “*Adieu, mes enfants*,” she said.

Worrals dropped a curtsy, and Frecks followed suit. “*Au revoir*.”

“*Au revoir, madame*,” called the pseudo-nun.

“*Au revoir*,” answered madame. “Thank you for calling. Come again.”

“If it is possible, I will.”

“When?” asked madame.

“Who knows?” returned the nun, and went out, closing the door behind her.

Worrals stood still, her legs suddenly weak now that the immediate danger was passed. Frecks sank into a chair and pushed her fingers through her hair. “Phew!” she gasped. “Am I a story-teller?”

Madame, seeing that something was wrong, looked from one to the other. “What do you mean?” she asked in a low voice.

Worrals held up a warning finger. She went out into the corridor, ostensibly to get an apple, but really to confirm that the nun had gone. She saw her making her way down the mossy drive that led to the road, so she returned to the kitchen.

“Madame,” she said soberly, “I am afraid we are suspected.”

“Who was that woman?” asked Frecks tersely.

“It wasn’t a woman,” returned Worrals. “It was a man. His name is Wilhelm von Brandisch. He is in the service of the Gestapo.”



Actually, she saw nothing but the eyes, dark, piercing, watchful eyes, as cold as stones. "I might forget the face, but never those eyes."

CHAPTER VII

ADVENTURE UNDERGROUND

MADAME MUNDIER turned pale, and seemed to age visibly in a moment of time.

It surprised Worrals that the bare name of the dreaded organisation could have such an effect, and it was in this very factor, she suspected, that much of its power lay. In just the same way, she reflected, were the people of the Middle Ages intimidated by the cold-blooded agents of the Spanish Inquisition. Her own reaction was one of irritation rather than fear.

Patting madame on the arm she said, "I wouldn't let that wretch frighten me. He's just a snake."

"You think his presence here might be an accident?" queried madame.

"No," declared Worrals. "It would be foolish to try to deceive ourselves. He has learned about the spy being picked up, and has certainly seen the paper, the page torn from *L'Histoire de la Révolution*, although it was not the original message. I imagine that it was to locate the book from which the page was torn that he came here—at least, that was certainly one of the reasons, because he proved that by his actions. It was no fluke that he took the book from the shelf. No doubt he also wanted to look round. He thinks there is something queer going on here, and if it comes to that, he is right. There are more things going on here than even I understand. Last night, that book, *L'Histoire de la Révolution*, disappeared."

"The person who took it must have put it back," said madame.

"Oh, no," returned Worrals swiftly. "The original book is still missing. The person who took it was shrewd enough to replace it with another—for which, I may say, we have every reason to be thankful. Had von Brandisch found that the page had been torn from this copy of the book he would have asked some awkward questions."

"He asked some awkward ones as it was," remarked Frecks.

"You mean about the chewing gum? That was luck on his part and carelessness on yours," Worrals pointed out bluntly. "He came upon that wrapping paper by accident because he happened to come across the field. You should have had more sense than to drop it there. If you are going to

litter the place with English printing it won't need an expert to bowl us out. Still, I think you squared things up with your tale about a boy friend. That was a good effort—it nearly took me in. The question that now arises is, has von Brandisch really accepted that explanation? Is he satisfied that there is nothing here for him to worry about, or will he set spies to watch the place? The wisest course is to assume that he will, which means that we have to be more careful than ever. Our greatest difficulty is going to be the flying. To try to operate an aircraft while German agents are around would be silly. But what about lunch, madame? If you can give us something to eat, we will then get on with our work.”

“Doing what?” asked Frecks.

“For one thing, we'll have a look at the aircraft, to make sure that it is all right. Then, I think, we'll take a look round from the top of the château to see if there are any strangers in the district. Lucien can show us the way. That reminds me, where is Lucien, madame?”

“He wanders about,” answered madame. “I don't know what he does.”

“And monsieur, your husband?”

“He has gone to Tours, to see if he can exchange apples for other things.”

As it happened, Lucien returned while they were at lunch—if such a frugal meal as that set before them could be so described. After a foolish grin at the girls, he helped himself to a bowl of vegetable soup, cut from the loaf a slice of dark-coloured bread, and then, surprisingly, went out with them. The girls assumed, naturally, that he would sit at the table.

“It is his way,” explained madame with a shrug.

“It doesn't matter,” replied Worrals. “Perhaps you can show us how we can get to the cellars without going outside? I'd rather not use the external doors unless we are compelled to, in case we are being watched.”

Madame assured her that she could show her the entrance to the cellars, and as soon as the meal was over she announced that she was ready to do so. “I'm afraid m'sieur is going to get wet,” she observed, glancing at the window, against which drops of rain were now splashing.

Worrals went to the window and looked out. The sky was entirely overcast with the promise of continued rain. “Pity,” she said. “With such poor visibility, we shan't see much from the roof of the château. Wait while I fetch my torch. We shall need it.”

She was soon back, and with the torch in her hand she invited madame to lead the way.

They had not far to go. In an unfurnished room madame opened a door, and pointing to a flight of steps, leading downwards, she said, "Keep straight on when you get to the bottom. You will then come to the main cellar where you will find the aeroplane. Disregard the small cellars—there is nothing in them except spiders and rubbish."

"*Merçi, madame.*" With the beam of the torch cutting a wedge in the darkness, and closely followed by Frecks, Worrals descended. "Phew! What a labyrinth," she remarked after they had gone a little way. "I should hate to get lost down here without a light. They were very fond of cellars in the old days."

"They had plenty of uses for them, mostly unpleasant ones," returned Frecks grimly.

After that they went on in silence, Worrals concentrating on making sure that they were not losing direction. The dust of ages lay on the floor, so that their feet made little sound. Occasionally a small iron grille in the upper part of the outer wall allowed a little grey light to enter, which suggested that the cellar was not always entirely underground. Once, too, they passed several rusty iron chains fastened to the wall with huge spikes.

"This must be where they kept their prisoners years ago," murmured Worrals, and went on.

A few seconds later she stopped. Resting her hand on Frecks' arm she whispered, "Can you hear something?"

Frecks halted. From the distance came a faint murmur, a mere hum, intermittent, as of wind in trees.

"Sounds like somebody talking," breathed Frecks.

Worrals flicked the light out. "Let's go on," she whispered. "We can feel our way. There's no hurry."

Slowly, a step at a time, the girls went on, the sound increasing slowly in volume as they advanced. There was no longer any doubt as to what it was. Two people, no great distance away, were engaged in conversation. Still moving on, the girls reached a point where a tiny shaft of light revealed a section of the aircraft, looking drab and singularly out of place in such surroundings. The voices came from a little way beyond it.

Worrals decided that it was time to seek cover, and with this object in view she edged closer to the wall, keeping near to a row of huge cylindrical objects, reaching nearly to the ceiling, that she knew were wine butts. She was only just in time, for suddenly the darkness gave way to a feeble grey light, while the squeak of rusty hinges suggested that a door or window

communicating with the outside air had been opened. Crouching into the cavity between two butts, and dragging Frecks in with her, Worrals peeped cautiously in the direction from which came the light. At the same time the faint aroma of tobacco smoke reached her nostrils.

She had only a momentary view of the scene which, nevertheless was photographed on her brain, before the light was blotted out and darkness returned. The picture she had glimpsed was of two men, both young. One she could see clearly, a peasant by his dress; in a crouching position against a colourless background of brambles, framed as it were in a small square window, he was speaking in a low voice to someone inside the cellar. The light was too weak to reveal the second person clearly; only the face could be seen, and that dimly, as through semi-opaque glass, due partly to the bad light and to some extent to a haze of tobacco smoke. This also was the face of a young man, a face that bore a curious resemblance to Lucien; but there was nothing weak or idiotic about it; it was keen, alert, full of vitality, such a face as Lucien might have possessed had he been normal. This thought only occurred to Worrals in a subconscious way, for before she could really study the face the unknown visitor had departed, and, simultaneously, the shutter or door had blotted out the picture.

Perplexed, Worrals stood still, wondering what would happen next. She thought—correctly as it turned out—that the person in the cellar would have to pass close to them as he retreated from his position. And this he did. Without a light of any sort, he passed so close to the place where the girls stood that they could have touched him. They could not see anything, but they could hear soft footfalls and the sound of breathing. Once, while the man was very close, to Worrals' unspeakable alarm, the sounds ceased abruptly, as if the mysterious prowler had halted; but almost at once they were resumed, and the footsteps faded away into the inky recesses of the cellars.

Worrals emerged slowly from her place of concealment. "This château is certainly a popular rendezvous," she said bitterly in a low voice.

"A regular meeting-place," agreed Frecks ruefully. "Who do you suppose they were?"

"I've no idea," answered Worrals. "I was a trifle too late to see anything properly." As she spoke, she switched on the torch and advanced to the place where the clandestine meeting had occurred. A faint grey line showed the position of the exit through which the mysterious visitor had departed. Investigating, Worrals found a simple iron latch. Opening the shutter she saw a narrow stone passage, little better than a large drain, leading upwards

at a sharp angle to what was presumably ground level. The upper end of the passage was choked with weeds and brambles.

“This was never a proper door,” she told Frecks. “It was either a window to admit light and fresh air or else a slide to allow firewood to be rolled in. The door is really only a shutter.”

“It’s possible to get in and out this way, at all events,” asserted Frecks.

“Yes,” agreed Worrals. She stooped quickly and picked up something from the floor. “The man inside was smoking,” she remarked. “This is the end of his cigarette.” She examined it closely, holding it to the grey light, and then read the name of the brand aloud. “‘Parker’s Navy Blend.’ An English cigarette!” She laughed shortly. “What do you make of that? The place fairly teems with English people. What with you dropping English chewing gum wrappers, and other people littering the place with English cigarette ends, the château should soon be a popular resort for the Gestapo.” Worrals put the cigarette end in her pocket and scrambling up the sloping floor soon reached ground level, to find herself confronted by an almost impenetrable tangle of weeds, briars and bushes, through which drops of water fell with a steady pattering sound. Her eyes made out a line of crushed weeds, showing the way the unknown visitor had gone.

Frecks joined Worrals outside what she described, aptly, as the bolt-hole. “Goodness!” she exclaimed, “The rain seems to have set in properly. We shan’t see much from the battlements if we go up.”

Worrals turned sharply and looked Frecks full in the eyes. “I say, Frecks, you’ve given me an idea,” she said in a curious voice.

“Go ahead. Spill it.”

“Ever since von Brandisch came I have been worried about getting that message home. I’ve got an uncomfortable feeling that he’ll have this place watched at night. It’s unlikely that he’ll bother about watching it in broad daylight, because it would be an obvious assumption that whatever is going on here is being carried on under cover of darkness.”

Frecks wrinkled her forehead in an effort to understand. “What on earth are you driving at?”

Worrals pointed through the briars at the leaden sky. “That’s the answer,” she said. “Visibility is pretty well zero. I can fly through the murk. My compass will take me home, and not a soul will see me.”

Frecks was so completely taken aback that for a moment or two she could only stare. “You mean—you’re going home—*now*?”

“Yes, right away. The sooner I get that message back the better.”

“I? What about me?”

“There’s no need for us both to go. The machine will fly better solo. I’ll make the trip alone. There would be nothing for you to do if you came. You could do a far more useful job here, keeping an eye on things. Moreover, the absence of one of us might pass unnoticed—but not both.”

“Yes, I see that,” agreed Frecks slowly. “All the same, it strikes me as being a desperate operation.”

“Desperate ailments call for desperate remedies,” returned Worrals tritely. “No. That’s exaggerating. There’s nothing to it, really. I ought to be home in just over a couple of hours—do the return trip, say, in six.”

“You mean you’ll come back in daylight, too?”

Worrals thought for a moment. “That depends on the weather. If it remained like this, I would rather do that, because I think there is less chance of a watch being kept on the château by day than by night. Of course, if the weather clears, I shall have to return after dark. In that case you might keep an ear open for me; I should come over high and glide down, but if you are listening you ought to be able to hear me. If by any chance it is not safe for me to land, you might flash me a warning from the castle roof, taking care to keep the torch below the level of the battlements, in case people are watching.”

“All right,” agreed Frecks. “If you’ve made up your mind to go, the sooner you start the better. Are you going to fly in those clothes?”

“No fear, I shall put on uniform; then, if things go wrong, the Boches won’t be justified in shooting me as a spy.”

“You think there is a chance that they may do that—even in uniform?”

“I think so. Strictly speaking, by the rules of war, officers found operating with secret agents are liable to the same penalties. I’ll just have a look at the machine while I’m here. Then I’ll change and push off.”

Worrals closed the shutter, switched on the torch and walked quickly to the aircraft. As she approached it, she uttered a little cry.

“What is it?” asked Frecks anxiously.

“Someone else has an interest in the machine by the look of it,” muttered Worrals. “Look at that!” She pointed to a folded strip of paper that had been pinned in a conspicuous place on the door of the cockpit. On it, in the manner of an address, was the cypher, U.I.K.G.

“It’s another message,” said Worrals curtly. “I can’t say I like the way these messages appear out of thin air. Why pin it on the machine, anyway?”

"If you hadn't been going to make a flight, we might not have found it for days," Frecks pointed out.

Worrals turned. "I say, Frecks, you've got something there," she said sharply. "It would almost seem as if the fellow who put the message here *knew* that I had decided to fly home this afternoon. I have an uncomfortable feeling that somebody has overheard our conversation." As she spoke, Worrals unfolded the paper.

"What does it say?" enquired Frecks.

"Nothing. It's another page out of the book—the *History of the Révolution*—page four-two-one this time. I rather expected that."

"Why?"

"Because the last two letters of the cypher indicate the code employed, and they are the same as before—K.G. Incidentally, the number of the messenger is one, you notice, so the head lad can't be far away."

"The message might have been brought by the fellow you saw leave the cellar."

"Possibly. It's no use guessing. Apparently we shall just have to take these messages as they come. I'll put it with the other and take it home with me. In a way, I'm glad about this. Two messages make the trip more justifiable."

Worrals swung round as there came a slight sound behind them, but it was only Lucien, grinning foolishly as usual.

"I wish you wouldn't creep about like that, Lucien. You made me jump. What are you doing here?"

"I came to look at the aeroplane," answered Lucien sheepishly.

"All right, as you're here, you can be useful. I am going to make a flight. Help Marie to get the aeroplane ready." Then, turning to Frecks, Worrals went on, "Get the doors open, and fix the machine ready for flight. I shall be back in five minutes."

Worrals hurried away, but in a few minutes she was back, dressed as she had been on arrival—that is, with a long dark coat over her uniform. The little aircraft, ready for flight, stood close to the open doors.

"I'll just have a look round outside to make sure nobody is about," announced Worrals, and was moving forward when Lucien spoke.

"There is nobody," he said.

"Are you sure?"

Lucien nodded. "I sit up there and watch." He jabbed a grimy thumb in the direction of the roof.

"Good. Then we'll haul the machine out," decided Worrals, and the little aircraft was soon dragged clear.

It was now raining in earnest, but there was no wind, which suited Worrals, for visibility was restricted to less than a hundred yards. "This is marvellous," she said. "I know I've got a clear run for the take-off, so I may as well start up here. Don't forget to close the cellar doors after I've gone. Get round to the prop and give me a swing."

As Frecks ran to the airscrew, Worrals climbed into the cockpit. A strange feeling of elation came over her. "All right!" she shouted.

Frecks turned the airscrew, and stopped with it balanced on compression. "Contact!" she called.

"Contact!" answered Worrals crisply.

The engine sprang into life, and the machine moved forward. Frecks stepped aside, waving good-bye.

The next moment the Midget was racing tail up into the rain, the purr of the low-powered engine muffled by the blanket of moisture. In a few seconds the aircraft was a swiftly vanishing grey shadow. Even as Frecks watched the clouds enfolded it, and it was lost to sight and sound.

CHAPTER VIII

HEAVY GOING FOR FRECKS

FOR a little while Frecks stood staring at the spot where the aircraft had disappeared, suddenly conscious of an unpleasant feeling of being alone. For the first time she realised what it was like to be on her own in a hostile country, and how much she had leaned on Worrals for moral support. Turning to speak to Lucien, she saw that he was closing the doors leading into the cellar. She made haste to help him, and when it was done, for the sake of something to do, she asked him if he would show her the best way to the roof of the château.

Lucien agreed. The expression on his face had softened somewhat, as if he appreciated her confidence—or it may have been that he was trying to commiserate with her on the loss of her comrade. At any rate, Frecks was suddenly sorry for him, and wished that he had been more normal so that they might talk over the situation. Trying to memorise the route, she followed him up successive flights of steps which ended in a small, square chamber. From this a low, narrow door gave access to the roof, which would have been a level open space of considerable extent had it not been for three massive chimney stacks, built of brick, and obviously of later date than the main structure. All round the outside a slightly raised stone step, worn in the middle by centuries of marching feet, followed the battlements. She caught her breath as she mounted the step and looked down; as is usual in such cases she had not realised that it was such a long way to the ground. However, her lofty position commanded a wonderful view of the grounds, and the countryside beyond, although the view was curtailed, of course, by the drifting rain. At the moment it was a desolate, depressing spectacle, and there seemed to be no point in remaining. On a fine day, she thought, it would be a different matter.

Turning to Lucien, who had remained with her, she said, "It's no use staying up here and getting wet through. There is nothing to be seen. Now I know the way, I shall be able to come back if the weather clears."

Together they went down to the kitchen, where madame was ironing linen. Glad of something to do, Frecks helped her for a while. Lucien wandered off.

The afternoon passed slowly. Frecks wondered what had become of Monsieur Mundier, but did not like to ask. Tea-time came; there was no real tea, but madame made an infusion of what turned out to be dried currant leaves—an insipid concoction. She hoped Worrals would remember to bring some tea and coffee back with her. Soon afterwards the rain stopped, so she went back to the roof to watch the weather, for upon this depended the time of Worrals' return, and that, for the time being, was all that concerned her. With her elbows on the battlements, she studied the sky, which she thought showed signs of clearing. She did not know whether to be glad or sorry. Fine weather would mean that Worrals' return would be delayed until after dark, but she thought that might be safer than attempting the return passage in daylight. What she hoped would not happen was that the weather would clear suddenly after Worrals had started for the château, for if it did she would be seen by watchers on the ground. It looked as though this might happen. The rain had stopped; the sky was still overcast, but visibility, while still low, had improved. It was now five hours since Worrals had taken off; Frecks knew that she must have been home for some time, but whether she had started on the return trip was a matter for conjecture.

Frecks studied the landscape, what she could see of it, section by section, but noting nothing of interest, she decided to go down to the yews that fringed the landing ground, so that if Worrals should return in daylight she would be there to help her in. Making her way down to the garden, picking the least wet path, she dawdled towards the sombre trees, through which, she discovered, the rain had not penetrated. It was nearly dark under the thick branches, but finding a stump that commanded a view across the field she sat down to await events.

She had been there for perhaps half an hour, lost in her thoughts, when she was startled to hear the swish of footsteps approaching through the rough grass. She had barely time to crouch back against a gnarled bole when a man appeared, smartly dressed in a dark suit, overcoat and bowler hat—a form of dress that somehow seemed out of place in such surroundings. Nevertheless, she was content, for the sudden appearance of the man had alarmed her; she had feared that it might be a German soldier, and was relieved to find that it was not. Then, when almost opposite her retreat, the man halted and stared intently across the moisture-laden turf. To Frecks' consternation he turned suddenly and called out something to another person whom she could not see. She did not catch what he said, and when, a second later, she realised that he had spoken in German, her nerves seemed to flutter, leaving her breathless.

But worse was to come. Standing as she was in the gloomy recesses of the yews she knew that she could not be seen, but the man, who had been skirting the edge of the wood, was in the open. His voice had seemed strangely familiar, but even when he turned, revealing his profile, Frecks could not for the moment place him, although she felt that she had seen the face before, and recently. Then the man coughed, a thin, dry cough, and at the sound Frecks caught her lip in her teeth, shrinking back still closer to the tree. It was easy enough to understand why recognition had not been instantaneous. The last time she had seen the man he had been wearing a nun's habit. It was von Brandisch.

The shock of this discovery was so shattering that for a few seconds Frecks was unable to think clearly. Her heart seemed to be throbbing in her throat; not on her own account, for knowing that she was staying at the château von Brandisch would not think it odd if he saw her in the grounds; it was what the German's presence there portended that upset her. And, moreover, Worrals might arrive back at any moment, for dusk was now closing in. A certain amount of mist, the result of the recent rain, still clung to the ground, but should Worrals arrive, to land without being seen or heard by the Gestapo agent was obviously out of the question.

Von Brandisch, without so much as a glance at the wood, strode on and disappeared from view.

Frecks stood still, her brain in a whirl. To whom, she wondered, had he called? She was soon to know, and with the knowledge came utter dismay. For some minutes she had been subconsciously aware of a loud tapping sound, but with more important things to think about she had paid little attention to it. If she had thought about it at all, it was to suppose that a labourer was chopping wood.

The sound ended abruptly, to be followed almost instantly by even more disturbing sounds—the low mutter of voices and the swish of heavy boots in wet grass. A minute later those responsible came into view, following in the footsteps of von Brandisch. The party consisted of six German soldiers under Oberleutnant Schaffer, who seemed in a bad humour. Three of the men each carried a short, thick stake, sharpened at one end. Another carried a mallet. The other two between them carried a heavy coil of wire.

Frecks could not imagine what they were doing. Not even when Schaffer stopped where von Brandisch had stood, and pointed to the ground, did she understand. The first dim suspicion came when two of the men began driving one of the stakes into the ground. When another fastened the end of the wire to it, and then set off at right angles across the field, uncoiling the

wire as he went, her worst fears were confirmed. The field was being “trapped.” Wires were being stretched across it to trip the wheels of an aircraft that attempted to land. A machine falling into such a trap must inevitably turn a somersault.

Frecks had already been seriously shaken, but this final discovery was a crowning horror. A numbing sensation seemed to creep through her limbs, paralysing them, causing her lips to become dry, like blotting paper. Her brain seemed to whirl, rendering her incapable of coherent thought. Dazed, she could only watch while the wire was stretched taut and fastened, after which the men picked up their equipment and moved on. It was only for a short distance. Again came the dull thud of the mallet driving in another stake, each blow finding an echo in Frecks’ thumping heart. Something seemed to have gone wrong with her hands. Looking at them, she saw that they were trembling violently.

“I’m out of control.” She forced the words through clenched teeth. “Pull yourself together,” she told herself fiercely. “You’ve got to do something.”

Her first idea—a crazy one, as she quickly realised—was to rush out and tear down the wires. Perhaps Lucien had some wire cutters? The Germans would, of course, see that the wires had been cut. No matter. Before they could restretch them, Worrals would have a chance to land, should she come over. Then she recalled Worrals’ instructions about making a signal from the roof of the château if for any reason it was unsafe to land. Yes—that was it. That was the obvious thing to do. It would soon be dark, and Worrals could not fail to see the flashing torch. No matter if the Germans saw it too; Worrals would realise that something was wrong, and turn away—perhaps return to England.

Regardless of the noise she made, regardless of nettles and briars that clutched at her legs, she tore through the tangle that had once been a garden. When, panting, she reached the château, Lucien was standing near the door. He moved to bar her progress, making signs that he had something to say, but Frecks pushed him aside and ran on. She had only one idea, and it was fixed—to get to the roof of the castle. Uppermost in her mind was the fear that Worrals might return before she could reach it.

First she had to go to her room to get the torch, for Worrals had left it there. Such was her state of mind that for a moment she could not find it, and her anxiety almost became blind panic. Then she saw it, lying on the bed. Snatching it up, she dashed out and sped up the steps that gave access to the roof. Even as she emerged she could hear a sound that told her she might already be too late. It was the soft whine of a gliding aircraft.

Running to the battlements she saw that unless Worrals turned all her efforts would be in vain. The Midget—there was no mistaking the little plane—clear cut against the sky, had just passed over the roof at a height of not more than fifty feet. It was now gliding on, with the obvious intention of landing, directly away from the château—a position from which, Frecks knew, it would be impossible for Worrals to look back unless she leaned right out of the cockpit, which was highly improbable.

There was nothing Frecks could do—nothing, that is, except watch, hoping against hope that Worrals would turn and make another circuit of the château before landing. In her heart she knew that this was most unlikely, for it would mean using the engine again, an action which, on account of the noise, Worrals would be loath to take.

The aircraft, still losing height, glided on. For a few seconds Frecks lost sight of it as, banking slightly, it passed behind the high elms. When next it came into sight it was gliding low on even keel, the wheels only a few feet above the ground. The matter was no longer in doubt. Worrals was going to land.

Regardless of the consequences, and knowing full well the futility of what she was doing, Frecks screamed, “Worrals!” At the same time she flung out her arms as if by some magic she could arrest the progress of the aircraft.

Her voice was lost in a sound which, once heard, is never forgotten—the tearing, rending smash of a crashing aeroplane. The Midget somersaulted, as Frecks knew it must; flinging pieces of wood and fabric to right and left it rolled on, and then seemed to bury itself in the ground. Men appeared from under the trees. Shouting, they ran towards it, only to stop with renewed cries as a tongue of flame, curiously bright in the gloom, licked from the engine along the side of the shattered fuselage.

For a moment the little flame crept on, turning from orange to blue, and then to white. It grew larger. Then, as it reached escaping petrol, with a dull *whoosh* a great sheet of flame leapt high into the air. The flame died down immediately, leaving a furiously blazing bonfire.

The men who had run out backed away, holding up their arms to protect their faces from the fierce heat. Frecks could see them clearly in the lurid light, and knew only too well that they were powerless to do anything. There is no approaching a burning aircraft until the flames have devoured all that there is to burn.

How long Frecks stood staring at the terrible picture she did not know. She didn’t care, for the simple reason that she was incapable of thinking

anything. She could not even properly grasp what had happened; the calamity was too terrible, too horrible, and there is a limit to what the human brain can realise. As in a ghastly nightmare from which she could not awake she watched the flames die down, saw the men move forward again, trying to reach something that lay smouldering on the ground near the machine.

Frecks turned away and walked slowly down the steps towards her room. Her movements were those of a sleep walker, slow and deliberate. She could not think, or even try to think. She was unconscious of her limbs. In some strange way she was detached from it all, a distant spectator of something so frightful that it could not be true. Thoughts, not her own, drummed through her brain in endless repetition. Worrals is dead. . . . Worrals has gone. . . . There is no Worrals. . . .

Reaching her room, she sank into a chair and buried her face in her hands. She felt that she ought to cry; she wanted to cry, but no tears came. Something had happened to her—she knew not what. She could only sit and stare at the floor, while the pattern of the ancient carpet burned itself into her brain. After a while she got up and looked through the window. It was now deep night, but the crescent moon threw a wan light over a scene that still seemed unreal. A crimson glow marked the spot where the Midget had crashed. She stared at it for a little while and then returned to her chair.

Sitting there, a strange calm seemed to come over her. At last she was able to think, and out of the depths of her depression one salient thought emerged. The Germans must know the truth by this time, must know that an aircraft had been operating to and from the château, and that Worrals was the pilot. In that case, they would realise beyond all shadow of doubt that she, Frecks, was an accomplice. It meant that her arrest was imminent. Indeed, now she came to think of it, she wondered why von Brandisch had not already ordered her to be seized. The prospect did not frighten her. Far from it. She considered it with perfect equanimity. Now that Worrals was gone, she cared not what became of her. In fact, she pondered miserably, the sooner the Germans shot her and made an end of the whole business, the better. She wondered vaguely what the Mundiers thought of it all, and whether they, too, would be arrested.

Time passed. The waiting seemed eternal. Silence seemed to have settled on the château, a silence broken only by rain again pattering on the window. Frecks drew the curtain, lit her candle, and then began to walk up and down, going over again and again in her mind those last few seconds before the Midget crashed. Was there anything more she could have done? Once she

paused in her stride, wondering if it were possible that Worrals could have survived. No, she decided, it was not possible.

Then at last came the sound for which she had been waiting. Slow footsteps sounded on the stairs. They halted outside her door. Someone coughed, a dry, rasping cough. Then came a knock.

Frecks crossed to the door and flung it wide. Von Brandisch stood on the threshold.

“Good evening, mademoiselle,” he greeted. “I would like a few words with you.”

Frecks frowned. “I beg your pardon, sir,” she returned haughtily. “I am not in the habit of allowing strange gentlemen to enter my room.”

Von Brandisch smiled faintly. “I am Hauptmann von Brandisch, of the German Intelligence Service,” he said softly. “You may have heard of the Gestapo? Now may I come in?”

Frecks bowed. “Enter, monsieur,” she invited.

Von Brandisch walked into the room.



Frecks screamed, "Worrals!" Her voice was lost in a sound which, once heard, is never forgotten—the tearing, rending smash of a crashing aeroplane. The Midget somersaulted, as Frecks knew it must.

CHAPTER IX

WHAT HAPPENED TO WORRALS

WHEN WORRALS had taken off into the murk she was fully prepared for a difficult flight, not so much on account of enemy opposition as the weather conditions. Still, she reflected, she couldn't have it both ways. If the weather cleared, enemy aircraft would soon be on her track. If it became worse, there would be no enemy aircraft to worry her, but it might take her all her time to find the aerodrome.

Actually, it all proved easier than she expected. If there was any enemy opposition she saw nothing of it, but as visibility was restricted to a hundred yards or so this was no matter for wonder. Although she flew low, the ground was frequently blotted out. She did not know when she crossed the coast. She did not once see the sea, and when finally her watch told her that she must be over England, and she glided down in search of the ground, it took her some time to pick up a landmark that she recognised, and so set a course for home.

Ten minutes later, tired with the strain of flying in such appalling conditions, she landed and taxied as near as she dare to the Squadron Office. Mechanics ran out to meet her.

"Have a good look round, and refuel," she ordered. "I shall be leaving again presently." She strode on to the Squadron Office.

Squadron-Leader McNavish stared when she walked in and saluted.

"Ye're soon back," he ejaculated.

"I hope to leave again almost immediately, sir," replied Worrals. "I have brought two messages. I have certain information, too, for Squadron-Leader Yorke. Is he on the station?"

Squadron-Leader McNavish reached for the 'phone. "Aye, he's here. Knowing you might be over at any time, he has taken quarters on the station. I expect he's in the Mess. I'll get him." The C.O. gave an order over the telephone and then looked up at Worrals.

"Are ye all richt?" he asked anxiously.

"Quite, sir."

“Things going fine, eh?”

Worrals smiled. “I wouldn’t exactly say that, sir—but they might have been worse.”

Squadron-Leader Yorke hurried in. “My word!” he exclaimed. “This is quick work.”

Worrals produced the two messages. “Things have moved rather fast, sir,” she admitted.

The Squadron-Leader glanced at the slips of paper.

“Are they what you wanted, sir?” enquired Worrals.

“Yes—absolutely. I’ll get my assistant to decode them forthwith. Excuse me.” The Squadron-Leader went out, but returned almost at once. “Well,” he said cheerfully, “how did you find things?”

Worrals sat down and gave him a concise account of what had happened at the château from the time of their arrival. The Squadron-Leader looked grave when she told him about finding the Germans there, and more than once during the narrative his eyes opened wide.

“You’d better come back, both of you,” he said abruptly when Worrals had finished. “The work is getting too dangerous.”

“That’s for you to decide, sir,” returned Worrals obediently.

“All the same, it’s a pity,” muttered the Squadron-Leader, pacing up and down. “You see,” he went on, turning to Worrals, “it isn’t merely a matter of flying to and fro. That is only a part of the operation. What matters even more is the fact that the château is—as you may have realised—the centre of a system. Our plans have been laid on it, and all our agents in the district are involved. Such organisations are not easily arranged. To scrap the scheme means letting every one of our men know that the château, as a rendezvous, is finished—no easy task.”

“In that case, sir, why scrap the scheme?” put in Worrals. “The Germans have gone, and I don’t think that I am actually under suspicion—not yet, at any rate.”

The Squadron-Leader shook his head doubtfully. “All the same, if von Brandisch is about, it would be safer to sit on a box of high explosive than go on living in the château.”

“May I make a suggestion, sir?”

“Certainly.”

“Let us postpone the decision for the time being. I’ve got to go back, anyway, to pick up my friend. If when I get there I find things are too hot, or

if at any subsequent date it becomes obvious that the German Intelligence people are definitely watching the place, making further operations impracticable, then I'll either come straight home or get in touch with you and leave you to decide if it's worth while going on."

Squadron-Leader Yorke rubbed his chin. "We might try that," he agreed. "There is no doubt that the flying is the dangerous part, on account of the noise made by the machine. Our agents out there are able to take care of themselves because they are mobile, whereas you are, so to speak, tied to the château." The Squadron-Leader continued to walk up and down. "There is one thing we might do to make things easier for you," he resumed. "It should reduce the number of your journeys. Before this scheme was put into operation our chief agent worked from a wood about ten miles distant from the château. He used pigeons to carry his messages. You might well say, why not go on using pigeons? Why use an aircraft? The answer is, it is a matter of extreme difficulty to get pigeons to him. It happened more than once that he received information of vital importance just when he had no pigeons. Sometimes days elapsed before we could get fresh ones over to him. Usually they were dropped by parachute—in a basket, of course. Then again, they did not always fall in the right place; once, the parachute caught up in a tree; the result was, for some time we were under the impression that he had pigeons available, whereas, in fact, he had none, and had no means of letting us know. With important information to send, the wretched fellow spent days hunting for the basket—a most dangerous undertaking, because if the birds had been found by Germans they would not have touched them, but waited until the agent arrived to collect them, when they would have arrested him. If you could leave some pigeons with this fellow on your way out, it would not be necessary for him to send his messages to you for transmission by aeroplane. You see what I'm getting at?"

"But this is only one man, sir. What about the others?"

"He is the head of that particularly locality. Others bring their information to him. At the moment he has orders to pass anything worth while to you."

"I understand, sir. And you think I might meet this man?"

"Oh, no. The wise agent doesn't trust his own mother. It's better, much better, that you should not meet—or at any rate, get to know each other. Then neither of you can give the other away, even by accident. If you will take the pigeons, I will tell you where to drop them. He'll find them."

"Drop them?"

“Yes, there would be no need for you to land. Come over here.” Squadron-Leader Yorke took from his portfolio a large aerial photograph. The most conspicuous feature shown was a wood. He picked up a pencil and made a tiny mark. “You see this dark patch at the corner of the wood?”

“Yes, sir.”

“That is a clump of holly bushes. Drop the basket in the middle of them.”

“And just where is this wood, sir?”

The Squadron-Leader turned to a large scale map of northern France that occupied a wall of the C.O.’s office. Again using the pencil he moved the point slowly across the map. “Pick up this railway,” he said. “Follow it until you come to this level-crossing, then turn south down this road for five miles. As you see, it’s the road from Rennes to Le Mans, so you won’t have to go far off your course. Here’s the wood, which fills a triangle between the main road and a lane. As I told you, it is only about ten miles from the château.”

“Very well, sir,” agreed Worrals. “If the weather doesn’t get too bad, I should have no difficulty in finding the place.”

“Good! We’ll leave it at that. When are you going back?”

“Right away. I think it’s safer to operate in daylight, in bad weather, than after dark, when the château might be watched. In any case, if the weather remains as dull as it was this afternoon I might not be able to find the château in the dark.”

“That’s true. All right, then. I’ll get the pigeons ready. You can take some of the special feather-weight paper, for messages, at the same time. Three birds will be about as many as you can comfortably manage. Simply drop the whole thing overboard.”

“I understand. There are one or two things I have to do, then I’ll be ready.”

Actually, Worrals had only one call to make, and that was at the canteen, where she was able to make a small collection of groceries which should, she thought, make life more endurable at the château—tea, coffee, sugar, butter, and a tin of meat were the main items. These she made into a parcel, and with it under her arm she returned to the aircraft, to find that Squadron-Leader Yorke was already there. He, too, had a parcel, a rather large one. It was covered with stout brown paper. To this was attached a cord, and to this, in turn, a small bundle of camouflaged silk which Worrals knew was the parachute. She stowed the parcels on the floor of the cockpit, and then, after

checking that her tank was full, climbed into her seat. A mechanic swung the airscrew, and after a parting wave to the two Squadron-Leaders—for the C.O. had come out to see her off—she took off and headed south.

The weather was much the same as when she had landed; if anything it was a little more grey. She climbed up into the murk, and then, with her map on her knees, set a course for her objective, the wood near the Rennes-Le Mans road. The Channel was still enshrouded in mist and she saw nothing of it, but a few close bursts of flak warned her when she crossed the French coast. As a matter of detail, she did not see these bursts, or even hear them; the bumping of the aircraft told the story. Once she had a fright when a grey shadow flashed over her head; all she knew was that it was another aircraft, but whether friend or foe she could not tell. It was gone too quickly for her to identify the type.

After that nothing of interest happened and, unable to see the ground, the flight assumed the monotonous character customary in such conditions. When she judged by the time, and the speed she was travelling, that she was near the railway line, she throttled back and glided down. She was well aware that when she came within sight of the ground she would be within the vision of the people there; but this did not disturb her overmuch; visibility was too bad for identification marks to be seen, even if she had carried any, and she knew that to most people—civilians, at any rate—her machine would be just another aeroplane. At five hundred feet the ground appeared, and she levelled out, having satisfied herself from her map that there were no obstructions along her line of flight with which she might collide.

She was a little while finding the railway line, because she had an uncomfortable feeling that she might have overshot it, and she twice turned back over her course to make sure that she had not done so. She knew of no other landmarks that would serve as a guide. However, eventually the railway—or at least, *a* railway, which she thought must be the right one—appeared below, a dark grey line running as straight as a ruler across the landscape. This achieved, it was only a matter of following the simple instructions in order to reach the wood, which in due course appeared according to schedule. She circled it twice before reaching down for the pigeon basket, in the first place to give the agent a chance to reach the holly bushes should he be about, and secondly, to make sure that she had correctly located the bushes.

Owing to the poor visibility very little of the landscape could be seen. As far as she could make out, the area was entirely rural, consisting for the most

part of flat open fields of stubble. Not a house or a human being was in sight. Two horses stood head to tail under a solitary tree, the only sign of life.

Satisfied that her judgment was correct, she lifted the pigeon basket on her lap, swooped over the holly bushes and dropped the basket overboard. The moment it was clear she turned steeply to watch it fall, to make sure that it dropped in the right place.

To her intense annoyance she saw that either her aim had been bad, or the parachute had not opened immediately; or it may have been that the basket had been caught in the slipstream of the airscrew. At all events it was obvious that the basket was not going to drop in the bushes; if it missed the trees towards which it was drifting it would land some distance out in the field. Furious with herself for not taking more care, she watched helplessly while the basket sank slowly earthward, to alight gracefully in the branches of a tree—a beech, she thought, by the spread of the boughs. Not that it really mattered. What did matter was, there on the top of the branch rested the precious basket. If the agent had not actually watched it fall, there seemed a poor chance of his ever finding it. Strangely enough, it was the thought of the unfortunate birds that upset Worrals most. If the basket remained undiscovered they would eventually starve and end their lives miserably.

The thought was more than Worrals could bear, and without pausing to consider fully the risk she was taking she cut her engine and side-slipped steeply with the object of landing in the field. It is true that she made a swift reconnaissance of the landscape, but it was entirely deserted, and this no doubt made the enterprise seem simple. It would be the easiest thing in the world, she thought, to run to the tree, release the basket, put it under the holly bushes, and take off again.

The first part of the programme worked out according to plan. She made a neat landing, finishing her run not more than fifty yards from the tree. She waited for a moment before getting out, hoping that the agent would appear and make a signal that he had seen the basket, in which case she would be relieved of any further responsibility. But the man did not appear, so she had no choice than to proceed with her original project.

As she climbed down, leaving the airscrew ticking over, she accidentally kicked her other parcel, so that it fell out with her. Why she did not put it back in the machine was something she was never afterwards able to understand. It may have been that now she found herself on enemy territory in broad daylight haste seemed of paramount importance; or it may have

been that her mind was so concentrated on the pigeons that she did not stop to think; the fact remains, she found herself running towards the tree with the parcel under her arm before she was really aware of what she was doing. Still the agent had not appeared, so, reaching the tree, she dropped the parcel and made a running jump at the bough. She caught it, hooked a leg over it and pulled herself up.

Reaching the basket, an unexpected difficulty confronted her. The shrouds of the parachute had wound themselves round the branch. She had no knife, and as the cords were too strong for her to break, she had no alternative but to unwind them—an operation that took two or three minutes. She had just completed this irritating task when a sound, or rather, a series of sounds, reached her ears, that caused her to move with such alacrity that she nearly fell. As it was she dropped the basket, which produced an indignant *coo* from the inside. She followed it down, snatched it up, and then stood irresolute, wondering what to do for the best. The sound she had heard was the vibrant hum of high-powered motor vehicles—motor cycles, or cars, she was not sure which—rapidly approaching. Had there been only one she would have paid little attention to it, assuming that a traveller was passing down the road, which was no great distance away; but there was something particularly businesslike about the way the vehicles were being handled that suggested a military force, and Worrals listened with her heart in her mouth, as the saying is. She heard one stop, heard the stand of a motor cycle clatter down. An order was rapped out. That told her all she needed to know. It was no accident. Either surface vehicles had been following the aircraft, or had been detailed to watch the district.

To run across fifty yards of open ground, when German soldiers might appear at any moment, seemed to Worrals to be an ill-advised undertaking, although a few minutes later she regretted bitterly that she had not taken the chance. But by then it was too late. What she did was to snatch up the two parcels and make a dive for the holly bushes, which would provide her with a reasonably safe refuge from which to watch what happened. She was not kept long in doubt.

Over the hedge came two German soldiers. They gave a shout when they saw the aircraft and ran towards it, drawing their revolvers as they ran. More soldiers appeared, with them an officer and a man in plain clothes. “Gestapo,” thought Worrals, nearly sick with dismay at this catastrophe. There was nothing she could do but watch. Her common sense told her to run for her life while there was yet time, but another urge compelled her to remain, hoping that even now the men might leave the machine long enough for her to make a dash for it and get into the air. Vain hope.

The officer and the civilian, having satisfied themselves that no one was in the machine, made a close examination of it while the troops stood guard. Then the civilian reached into the cockpit and brought out the map which Worrals had left there. This he opened wide on one of the wings and made a close study of it, talking all the time to the officer. Worrals could not hear what he said, although the murmur of his voice reached her ears; but when he started tapping the map vigorously with a finger she had a horrible suspicion of what he was saying, of what he had discovered. She remembered that when she had plotted her course to the château she had used a pair of dividers to measure the distance. She could recall distinctly that one point of the dividers had made a tiny pin-hole at the château. At the time it had occurred to her that this was a dangerous slip, and she had intended to rectify it; but with so many other things on her mind she had omitted to do so. If the civilian found that pin-prick, and she was afraid he had, he would know that it had some connection with the mission of the pilot. Upon such small things can lives depend.

Even assuming that the man had found the pin-hole, Worrals was certainly not prepared for his next move. He said something to the officer, who saluted; he then got into the machine, and without more ado took off. Worrals stared at the fast-vanishing aircraft as though unable to believe her eyes. Looking back at the place where the machine had stood, she saw the troops spreading out fanwise, moving towards the wood. She realised at once—and wondered why she had not thought of it before—that they would be certain to make a search, and she called herself some hard names for not making allowances for the possibility. There seemed to be no point now in leaving the pigeons, which would certainly be found by the Germans, so picking up her parcels she fled through the wood, striking diagonally towards the road. She felt that if she could reach it before being discovered she would be regarded with less suspicion than if she were found wandering about the fields. She hoped that her long dark coat, which concealed her uniform, would pass without comment.

Being fleet of foot it did not take her long to reach the road. She had never stood on it before, but her direction was clearly fixed from her study of the map. Her first thought was, naturally, to put as great a distance as possible between her and the scene of her misadventure, but even so, she thought she might as well head for the distant château; so turning to the left, she struck off in that direction.

She had not gone far when she heard the motor cycles being started up, and very soon they were pelting down the road behind her. Her first instinct was to take cover in the ditch until they had gone past, but on second

thoughts she decided against this, one reason being that the ditch was full of water. So, looking neither to right or left, she trudged on. The motor cycles came nearer. To her alarm she heard them slowing down, but still she did not look round. The next moment a motor cycle had pulled up beside her. The rider called something.

Worrals stopped. "Yes?" she asked innocently, speaking, of course, in French.

The motor-cyclist, a German soldier, raised his streaming goggles. "Have you seen a man on this road?" he enquired curtly in the same language.

"No, I have seen no one," answered Worrals, truthfully enough, and continued on her way.

The motor-cyclist accelerated and was soon lost in the mist.

Next came a car. This, too, slowed down, and again Worrals had to stop. This time it was a German officer who spoke. He asked the same question as the motor-cyclist. Had she seen anything of a man? Worrals answered that she had not seen a man; she had not met one, nor had one overtaken her.

"Where are you going?" asked the officer.

"To Tours," answered Worrals.

"Do you know the way?" was the next question—rather a surprising one, Worrals thought.

"Of course," she answered, which again was true. She had studied her map too long to be in doubt.

"How far is it?"

"About five kilometres."

"So! I'm going there myself," declared the officer. "Get in, you can show me the way."

This was a contingency for which Worrals was certainly not prepared; however, she dare not say no, for fear her refusal led to further, and more awkward, questions; so she got into the back of the car and settled her parcels on the floor, praying that the pigeons would remain silent.

"Straight on," she said, and the car shot forward.

To her infinite relief the officer made no further attempt at conversation. She thought he was the same man who had stood with the civilian by the aircraft, but she was not sure, and had no means of finding out—not that it really mattered. Her main concern was to get out of the car with her incriminating parcels without being asked further questions. The car roared

on. The driver continued to stare straight ahead, and Worrals perceived, perhaps for the first time, the wisdom of Squadron-Leader Yorke's decision to send girls rather than men into France. Had she been a man, she would not have been allowed to get away with this. She would have been searched by the motor-cyclist—or at any rate, her parcels would have been examined. As it was, the Nazis did not think it was worth while searching a girl. Thus pondered Worrals, as the car raced on. The result of getting the lift was that in five minutes she was in Tours, having covered in that time a distance which would have taken her a good hour to walk. It seemed that there were advantages in being a girl after all. The car came to a stop against the curb in the main square.

“Get out here,” ordered the officer brusquely.

Worrals lost no time in obeying. The arrangement suited her very well.

The officer considered her two parcels speculatively. “Been shopping?” he asked.

Worrals nodded.

“Managed to get some food, eh?”

“No such luck,” answered Worrals wearily. “Thanks for the ride.” With a parcel under each arm, she walked away into the gloom, for dusk was now closing in.

As soon as she was at a safe distance from the car she looked about her, and was disturbed to find that the square had every appearance of a military depot. Camouflaged cars, lorries, tanks and big guns stood about, while German soldiers were everywhere.

She got out of this dangerous locality as quickly as possible. For one thing, it had started to rain again; the brown paper covering of her parcels was already wet, and she was in fear that if it became soaked it would peel off. A workman showed her the road to Blois, which would take her near the château, the distance to which, as near as she could remember, was between four and five miles. Wondering what Frecks would be thinking, she put her best foot forward and was soon clear of the town.

She had covered about a mile when she saw the dimmed lights of a car coming towards her. She paid no attention to it, for there was a fair amount of traffic on the road, and there was no reason for her to suppose that this car was different from any other. Deep in thought, she was startled, therefore, when the car, as it drew level, came to a skidding stop. A voice hailed her.

It was a nasty moment. Worrals halted and looked towards the car just as a man stepped out. It was Oberleutnant Schaffer.

"I thought it was you," he said. "Where have you been?"

"To Tours," answered Worrals readily.

Schaffer looked at the parcels. "Shopping?" he enquired casually.

Worrals could have kicked him. Why were men so inquisitive? "No," she answered. "Just clothes. We're going to pick the apples for Aunt Louise, so rather than ruin our frocks I've been to fetch our oldest clothes."

"Well," said Schaffer earnestly, "you'd better hurry back. I've just come from the château. A gentleman is there. He wants a word with you."

"A gentleman?"

Schaffer nodded.

"Who is he?"

The German hesitated. "You'll find out," he said in a low voice. "Things have been happening at the château."

Worrals' heart gave a jolt. "What sort of things?"

"An aeroplane has crashed there. The Gestapo thought the place was being used by spies, but"—Schaffer smiled maliciously—"they caught the wrong bird."

Worrals knew well enough that there was no love lost between the German military forces and the dreaded Gestapo, and she sought to profit by it by acquiring more information.

"Don't tell me that the Gestapo wants to see *me*!" she said, affecting a gasp. "Soldiers are all right, but the Gestapo . . ." Worrals shuddered.

Schaffer smiled, but there was fear in his eyes. It was evident that he, too, knew the Gestapo methods only too well.

"I'd better say no more," he muttered cautiously. "You will hear all about it when you get back. I'd give you a lift, but I've got to get back to Tours."

Worrals didn't want a lift. She was already wondering how she was going to dispose of her parcels, and she saw that if Schaffer elected to remain with her it might be difficult.

"Never mind," she said. "It won't take me long to walk."

"Let me know when you come to Tours again," suggested Schaffer in an oily voice. "We might have some fun. You'll usually find me at the Engineers' Headquarters; we've taken over the Hôtel du Midi in the Place Zola."

“Rather,” agreed Worrals, making a mental note to give the hotel a wide berth. “Now I’d better be getting along. Good-bye.”

Again Schaffer hesitated. “Just one other thing. You remember Leutnant Lowenhardt?”

“You mean your friend, the officer who was with you at the château?”

“My comrade, not my friend,” returned Schaffer stiffly. He drew closer, dropping his voice. “Be careful of him—he is not a nice fellow.”

“Really?” Worrals pretended to be surprised. “Why should I be careful when I’m not likely to see him?”

“That’s just it—you may see him; he is still at the château. I shouldn’t tell you this, but it’s just a friendly tip, as you and I understand each other.” Schaffer’s voice dropped to a mere whisper. “Between ourselves, I’m not sure that he is what he pretends to be.”

“What on earth do you mean?”

Schaffer shook his head as if he felt that he had already said too much. “I can’t say any more than that,” he replied curtly. “But watch out. I’ve noticed that when Lowenhardt is around, trouble isn’t far away.”

“Thanks.” Worrals spoke slowly, wondering just what was implied by these vague hints. “Well, I must be getting along. Good-bye.”

Worrals walked on, glad now that she had met Schaffer, for the encounter had given her an idea of what to expect when she reached the château. Walking fast, it took her the best part of three-quarters of an hour to reach it. She then spent another ten minutes working her way round to the cellar in order to hide her parcels. This she did by standing them in an empty hogshead. She was sorry for the birds, but she hoped to improve their conditions in daylight the following day. This done, she made her way to the kitchen.

Only madame was there. When she saw Worrals she turned as pale as death. “Mademoiselle,” she stammered.

“What’s the matter?” asked Worrals wonderingly.

“We thought . . . we thought—you—were dead . . . killed in the aeroplane when it crashed.”

“Good heavens!” gasped Worrals. Strangely enough, this possibility had not occurred to her, and she realised suddenly, with emotion, how Frecks must be suffering.

“Where is Marie?” she whispered.

“In her room.”

“Alone?”

Madame, in an agonised voice, breathed, “No. That man of the Gestapo is with her.”

“Thank you,” returned Worrals. “Don’t worry, everything will be all right. Leave this to me.” Taking a candle, she made for the stairs. Reaching the door of the bedroom she found it open, and saw, as she expected, Frecks and von Brandisch. Not until that moment did she remember that she was still wearing her uniform under her coat. Still, it was too late to do anything about it now. In any case, her only change of clothes was in the room. She walked in.

“Well, well,” she said in a bantering voice, and raising her eyebrows at Frecks. “Nice goings-on when my back is turned, I must say. Who’s your boy friend?”

CHAPTER X

A NEW ASSIGNMENT

FRECKS did not answer. She stared at Worrals as though she were a ghost—as she had every reason to. Her lips moved, but no sound came from them.

Realising perfectly well the reason for Frecks' emotion, which was unavoidable in the circumstances, Worrals did her best to cover her confusion by chatting inconsequentially about the visitor in the same bantering tone as she had first employed. Fortunately, the German's eyes were on her, and he helped her out, giving Frecks time to recover.

"Where have you been?" he asked curtly.

Naturally, Worrals had no intention of letting the German know that she knew who he was.

"And what business it that of yours?" she asked politely.

"I said—where have you been?" Von Brandisch's voice was as brittle as ice.

Worrals sighed. "If you must know, I've been to Tours. You don't object, I hope?"

Von Brandisch considered her thoughtfully. Ignoring the question he said, "Strange events have happened here."

"So I gather," murmured Worrals.

The Nazi raised his eyebrows. "I understood you to say that you had been to Tours? In that case, how could you know what has happened here?"

"I met Oberleutnant Schaffer."

Von Brandisch frowned. "What did he tell you?"

Worrals had no intention of letting Schaffer down, and so make an enemy of a man who might on a future occasion be useful to her.

"Oh, he didn't tell me any details," she said casually. "He merely said that there had been an accident here—something to do with an aeroplane. I didn't pay much attention. I think he really stopped to tell me that I had better hurry home."

"Oberleutnant Schaffer talks too much," said von Brandisch harshly.

“Good gracious! I don’t see what there was in that,” declared Worrals. “I should have learned about it when I reached home, anyway—unless it is a state secret. What are you doing here, anyway? Who are you?”

Frecks found her voice. “Oh Jeanne,” she said nervously. “This is Hauptmann von Brandisch, of the German Secret Police.”

Worrals affected a start of surprise. “Why didn’t you say so at once?” she said crossly. Then, turning to the German, “For what reason, sir, have we been honoured with this visit?”

Von Brandisch coughed, and again the sound sent a chill down Worrals’ spine. There was something horrible about it.

“My time is valuable, so I will come straight to the point,” he said. “We have reason to suppose that this château is being used as a meeting-place by enemy spies.”

Worrals laughed. “Oh, la la! How thrilling. I hope you don’t think *I’m* a spy?”

“You might be,” was the chilling answer. “I had not overlooked the possibility.” The German looked at Worrals through narrowed eyes, so that she squirmed inwardly, uncomfortably aware of the uniform she wore under her coat. Then the German resumed. “No, I don’t think you are a spy,” he announced.

“Why not?” demanded Worrals indignantly. “Perhaps I don’t look very clever, eh?”

“As a matter of fact, you do,” the German surprised her by saying. “That’s why I decided to speak to you. Take your coat off, it’s wet. Then we’ll have a chat.”

“Not only is my coat wet, but I am wet through,” asserted Worrals. “Perhaps you will be kind enough to step outside for a minute while I change?”

The German walked to the door. “Make haste,” he ordered.

Worrals locked the door behind him. “Phew!” she gasped. “Give me my blouse and skirt, Frecks—quick.” She began ripping off her uniform. She threw it in a bundle under the bed and quickly slipped into her French get-up. “Keep it going—we’re doing fine,” she whispered to Frecks, and unlocked the door. “All right!” she called. “You may come in, m’sieur.”

Von Brandisch came back into the room. “First of all,” he began, “have you noticed any suspicious characters about this place—people you don’t know?”

Worrals shook her head. "I haven't seen anybody—just a minute though. We did have a visitor, now I come to think about it—a nun. I had never seen her before, and it struck me at the time that there was something odd about her."

"What made you think that?" asked von Brandisch sharply.

"I don't know exactly. It was just her manner."

"I see. Well, let me know if you see her again," murmured von Brandisch drily. "You haven't by any chance heard an aeroplane land—or even heard one about?"

"I've heard a plane or two go over, but I paid no attention. Why should I? There are always planes about."

"Quite so," agreed von Brandisch. "I take it, then, that you haven't seen or heard anything to lead you to suspect that things here are not entirely what they appear to be?"

"I've never given it a thought."

"You asked me just now if I thought you looked like a spy."

Worrals smiled. "Yes?"

"How would you like to be one?"

"What?" Worrals was really startled.

"You heard what I said. Would you like to be a spy?"

Worrals looked dubious. "No, I can't say that I would. Isn't it dangerous?"

"That depends."

"Who would I be a spy for, and who would I spy on?"

The German smiled mirthlessly. "You might be an unofficial spy for the Gestapo, by keeping a watch on this place."

"Why? Are you short of men?"

"No. But two girls like you would never be suspected of being spies. Moreover, you live here, so your presence would pass without question."

"I see," returned Worrals, speaking slowly, but thinking swiftly. She felt that she needed time to think, for the situation was developing rather too fast for her. She also had an insane desire to laugh, for the same proposition as Squadron-Leader Yorke had put forward, now coming from a Nazi agent—that the girls should play the part of spies because they did not look like spies—was not without a certain quality of grim humour.

“Just what would you expect me to do, if I accepted your proposal?” enquired Worrals.

“Merely keep your eyes open and report at once to me any unusual circumstance.”

“Such as an aeroplane landing?”

“That, at the moment, would be an extremely unlikely circumstance,” returned von Brandisch evenly.

Frecks spoke. “They’ve put wires across the field in front of the garden,” she told Worrals.

“How did you know that?” Von Brandisch fairly snapped the words.

“I saw the men doing it,” answered Frecks naïvely.

“Where were you?”

“In the orchard. I heard hammering and went to see what was happening. I saw the soldiers, but as it was none of my business I came back to the house.”

“Wise girl. What else did you see?”

“I saw a fire,” returned Frecks frankly.

“What did you think it was?”

“It looked to me like an aeroplane burning.”

“You were quite right.” The Nazi spoke as if he found the subject distasteful.

“Was anyone hurt?” asked Worrals, affecting horror.

“A man was killed.”

“An English spy?”

“Unfortunately, no.”

“A German, then?” Actually, of course, Worrals knew perfectly well that a German had been killed—the civilian who had flown off in the Midget.

Von Brandisch left the question unanswered. He rose to his feet. “We needn’t discuss that. In fact, for the present there is nothing more to say. If you see anything unusual, let me know at once. There is no telephone here, so you’ll have to come in person.”

“Where will you be? Where shall I find you?” asked Worrals.

Von Brandisch had taken a notebook from his pocket. He wrote something on a page, tore it out, and passed the paper. “Come to that address in Tours. The sentry will admit you to me. That’s all.”

“Oh—er——” stammered Worrals.

“Yes—what is it?”

“Do we get anything for doing this work?”

Von Brandisch smiled, the enigmatical smile of an Asiatic. “Mademoiselle, what you get will be decided by what you do.”

“I see—thank you,” murmured Worrals, sensing a threat in this cryptic utterance.

The German went out, closing the door behind him. Footsteps and the rasping cough could be heard receding down the steps.

Frecks, who had risen to her feet, sank into a chair. “For the love of Mike,” she gulped. “I can’t keep pace with this. I’m dizzy with shock, sick with fright, and my head’s in a whirl trying to understand what is happening. How the dickens did you get here? I thought you were killed.”

“I think it’s time we compared notes,” decided Worrals, sitting on the bed. “For a start, tell me what happened here.”

Briefly, Frecks narrated her adventures. Worrals heard her out without interrupting.

“You’ll get an idea of the whole business when you hear my story,” she said, and then told Frecks all that had happened. “Apparently, the fellow who landed here in the Midget was killed,” she concluded.

“There’s no doubt about that,” declared Frecks.

“You haven’t heard his name, or exactly who he was?”

“No.”

“He must have been a German, and as he was in civvies we might assume that he was a member of the Gestapo,” said Worrals pensively. “There’ll be a nice old row about it, I expect, although it’s unlikely that we shall hear anything. The only redeeming feature about the grisly business is that my map, on which, like a fool, I marked the château, must have been burnt with the rest. That’s something to be thankful for, otherwise von Brandisch would have known beyond all doubt that this was a spy centre and a landing ground. At present he only suspects—at any rate, he hasn’t any evidence. He’ll wonder how a German came to be in the machine—and why it landed at the château, but if, as you say, the whole thing was burnt out, he won’t learn much. It will give him something to think about. But let’s get down to brass tacks and see how we stand. As far as we, personally, are concerned, the crowning calamity is that we’ve lost the machine, and with it

our only way of getting home. You realise that we're stranded in France? That gives *us* something to think about."

"You think about it—I daren't," moaned Frecks. "It looks to me as if we're completely cheesed."

"Rot," returned Worrals scornfully. "We've got out of worse straits than this."

"Just how do you propose to get back across the Channel—swim? If so, go ahead, it's too far for me."

"We'll talk about that when the time comes," decided Worrals. "At the moment there's no question of going back. We've things to do."

"Such as?"

"Suppose we try to get the situation in focus before we do any guessing?" suggested Worrals. "It would be silly to deny that the situation calls for serious thinking. First of all, we're here, and we've got to make the best of it. Secondly, our original scheme has gone overboard, due to the loss of the aircraft. As things turned out, it was a good thing I did lose it, otherwise *I* should have gone overboard when I landed here. We've lost personal contact with Squadron-Leader Yorke, but I can still get three messages to him, and let him know of our predicament. That, I think, ought to be our first step."

"But how will you let him know?"

"I told you about the pigeons."

"Of course. I'd forgotten."

Worrals continued. "As things stand here, there can be no question of Squadron-Leader Yorke sending a rescue plane for us even if he wanted to, because the landing field has been trapped with wires, which puts it out of action. My own opinion is, the Squadron-Leader will expect us to stay. After all, his agents will still go on delivering messages here, at any rate for the time being, and it's up to us to get them home—not just think about saving our own skins. No doubt the agents are risking their lives to get the information. The next point is, this place is under suspicion. The Gestapo have their eyes on it. We, however, do not appear to be suspected, so we're not in immediate danger—unless von Brandisch is playing a deeper game than we know."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Von Brandisch has appointed us to be his agents here. That, on the face of it, should make things easy for us. But in this business you can't believe

anybody or anything, and for that reason we should be flattering ourselves if we imagined that von Brandisch trusted us. He doesn't trust anybody. He wouldn't hold down his job for long if he did."

"By the same line of argument, *we* can't trust anybody."

"We don't—at least, I don't."

"Not even the people here—the Mundiers?"

"The only person I trust here is you," averred Worrals doggedly. "Consider the position in the kitchen when we first saw von Brandisch, dressed as a nun. There were five people there—the German, madame, Lucien, you and I. Not one of us, except perhaps Lucien, was what we pretended to be. Double-crossing is all part of this cutthroat game, and bearing that in mind we must play our cards according to how the game goes. First thing in the morning I'll send a pigeon to Squadron-Leader Yorke to let him know how things stand—that's our plain duty. I shall have to tell him that the pigeons were not delivered as arranged, and that I have brought them here. Then we'll just carry on. We'll watch everything and everybody. If we slip up, it will be our own fault. It's no use trying to look too far ahead, so I'm going down to see how madame is shaping under the strain. We'll have a cup of coffee and go to bed."

"Coffee?"

"I brought a few groceries back with me. They're hidden in the cellar. Come on—bring the torch."

The expedition to the cache where Worrals had put the parcels was made without incident. Worrals took the wrapping off the pigeon basket, ascertained that the birds were comfortable and gave them food and water. Leaving the basket in the hogshead, she picked up the other parcel and led the way to the kitchen.

Madame was there, alone. She seemed depressed, but brightened up when she saw the contents of the parcel. In a few minutes she had made a pot of coffee, after which she hid the packets in the back of a cupboard, all except some biscuits, which were kept out to eat with the coffee.

One thing had puzzled Worrals for some time—the absence of Monsieur Mundier. It was time, she thought, that this minor mystery was solved. Turning to madame, she asked her frankly where her husband was, and why he had been absent for so long.

The worried look returned to madame's face. "We don't know where he is," she said in a voice heavy with apprehension. "He went to Tours, but did not return. Lucien is trying to find him. He should have been back long ago."

I am waiting for him now. I don't understand what is happening here. I thought you were killed when the aeroplane crashed."

Worrals explained how it was that she had escaped.

Thereafter they talked for a little while, for the most part discussing the situation that had arisen owing to the loss of the aircraft. Worrals had just expressed her conviction that Squadron-Leader Yorke would get in touch with them when the door opened and Lucien came in. He was wet through and looked tired. He sniffed the coffee, poured himself a cup and drank it with relish.

"Well?" asked madame sharply.

Lucien put the cup down in its saucer. "Papa has been arrested by the Gestapo," he said heavily. "They are holding him for questioning."

There was a dead silence for a moment.

"Where is he?" asked madame in a dull voice.

Lucien crossed to the fire and warmed his hands. "In Tours, I think, but I don't know where."

Worrals regarded him closely, for she had never before heard him speak in such a normal voice, which, considering the tragic information he had brought, struck her as odd. She hardly knew what to say. Finishing her coffee, she turned to madame and put her hand on her shoulder.

"Don't let this worry you too much, madame," she said quietly. "Everything will turn out all right." Then, to Frecks, "Come on, let's go to bed."

Madame looked up. "And to-morrow?"

Worrals smiled, a smile of confidence that was not entirely genuine. "To-morrow is another day," she said quietly. "We may as well start it fresh. *Bon soir, madame.*"

Deep in thought, Worrals led the way to the bedroom.

CHAPTER XI

DRAMA ON THE ROOF

WORRALS possessed that peculiar faculty of being able to wake up at any desired time, and the following morning she was on the move while the stars were paling in the sky. She did not wake Frecks, but applied herself to a task that occupied her for some time. This was the writing of a condensed report on the situation for the benefit of Squadron-Leader Yorke. Using special light paper and a sharply pointed pencil, and employing no more words than were necessary, she managed to get in the main facts. After she had finished, she read it through carefully, knowing what the result would be if the despatch fell into enemy hands—a by no means impossible event, for military observers, knowing the purposes for which carrier pigeons are employed, shoot them whenever possible. However, in the end she rolled the paper in a capsule, drew the curtain and then awakened Frecks. It was no longer raining. The first flush of dawn was staining the sky with pink and egg-shell blue.

“I’m going to get the pigeon away before people are about,” she told Frecks. “I thought you might like to come.”

“I’m on my way,” declared Frecks, throwing on her clothes.

“Would you like a cup of coffee now, or afterwards?”

“Afterwards,” decided Frecks. “It will be a blessing to know that a message is on the way home. Stuck here without an aircraft, I feel like one of the babes in the wood. If things go wrong nobody will know what became of us.”

“If things go wrong, partner, we shan’t have to worry about what other people think,” remarked Worrals grimly. “Ready? Good. Let’s go.”

“Where are you going to release the bird?”

Worrals considered the question. “I hadn’t given it a thought. If we let it go from the cellar door it will be lost to sight in a moment on account of the trees. From the roof we should be able to watch it for a long way, and satisfy ourselves that it took up the right course for home. I think the roof.”

“Okay,” agreed Frecks.

Walking quickly, the girls made their way to the ground floor, and from thence to the cellar, where Worrals lifted from its hiding place the basket containing the pigeons. The birds gave little coos of satisfaction as this was being done.

“All right, my pretties. You know your job—bless your little hearts,” crooned Worrals, unfastening the flap, inserting her hand, and taking hold of one of the birds. It made no protest.

“I bet he’s tickled to death to get out of that cage,” observed Frecks, as Worrals fastened the capsule to its leg.

“You bet he is—as pleased as we should be to get out of France if we had a pair of wings,” responded Worrals warmly, giving the bird to Frecks to hold while she gave the two remaining birds their breakfast before returning the basket to the hogshead. Taking the pigeon from Frecks’ hands she covered it with a small silk scarf which she had brought for the purpose, and then went on up to the roof.

“There’s only one snag about this form of communication,” Worrals pointed out as they mounted the steps. “It’s a one-way post. There are no pigeons based on the château, so while we can send these messages home, Squadron-Leader Yorke won’t be able to send any back to us. I’m glad it’s a fine day, anyway.”

The girls moved slowly through the buttressed chimney stacks to the battlements. All was quiet, except for the occasional twitter of a bird. Nothing moved. On all sides lay a rolling countryside so beautiful that it was hard even to imagine war.

Worrals turned to face the distant river, lying like a broad rose-tinted ribbon across the landscape. “That’s the way you go, darling,” she murmured, removing the scarf from the pigeon. “Good luck my little one,” she whispered. Then, holding it aloft, “*Bon voyage.*”

The words ended in a gasp of surprise as a large white hand slid past her shoulder and settled over her own, effectually imprisoning it, and the bird. So startled was she that for a moment she could not fully grasp what was happening. Turning her head, for the presence of another body prevented her from moving her own, she looked up into a face that she recognised instantly. It was Leutnant Lowenhardt.

Now the human brain is capable of much, but not of everything, and for a full three seconds, three long palpitating seconds that seemed an eternity of time, bereft of speech and movement Worrals could only stare into the swarthy, sardonic face. A dozen thoughts flashed into her head. She

remembered that Schaffer had told her that Lowenhardt was there, had warned her to beware of him. So this was what he meant! It was no accident that Lowenhardt was there. He was watching them. Von Brandisch, after asking them to watch the château, had detailed him to watch them.

These thoughts flashed, rather than passed, through Worrals' head in that tremendous moment. Then speech and movement returned together. Knowing that she was trapped beyond hope of salvation, her first thought was for Frecks, and the second, for the incriminating document attached to the pigeon's leg. "Run for it, Frecks!" she yelled, at the same time struggling to free her hand so that the bird might get clear. Finding herself impotent in the powerful masculine clasp of the Nazi she lashed out backwards with her heel. Lowenhardt laughed, and the sound drove her to fury beyond control. Getting the restraining hand under her arm she bent forward swiftly and sank her teeth into Lowenhardt's thumb. The German cursed, and struck her a blow that sent her reeling. She fell heavily on the leaded roof, but raised herself on her elbow to see with dismay that Lowenhardt had taken the now wildly flapping bird in his left hand. In his right hand he held an automatic. Scowling, he flung it up and took swift aim. His finger tightened on the trigger. Turning her head Worrals saw that it was aimed at Frecks, who was running along the sentinel's path, apparently in an effort to escape.

With a cry of rage and horror Worrals sprang to her feet and flung herself at the Nazi, impelled by a frantic hope that she might be in time to spoil his aim. As she did so she heard a curious sound, a sound that she knew could not be the report of the pistol, although she could not think what else it could be. It was a twanging vibrant hum, like a bass chord played on a harp.

The sound was followed instantly by another—the sharp, clip-clapping alarm strokes of a pigeon's wings. She could hardly believe her eyes when she saw the bird twisting and turning in a wild, upward spiral. Then came a heavy thud. It took her eyes back down to the leaden roof, to the place where Lowenhardt had been standing. He was no longer standing. He was lying in a grotesque position, his arms outstretched. There was something dreadful about his attitude, and the way he lay so still. In a vague sort of way Worrals noticed that he was not wearing his tunic.

With her eyes, round with horror, on the motionless body, her breath coming in short nervous gasps through ashen lips, she began to back away. She tried to tear her eyes away, but could not. She seemed to be fascinated. From the side of the grey shirt, she observed, there projected what appeared to be a piece of wood, something like a lead pencil, but longer and thicker.

She nearly screamed as her eyes came to rest on it, and she clutched at her mouth with her hand to stifle the sound. Silence had again fallen over the landscape. Only the birds twittered. Nothing moved.

Worrals put her hand against a chimney stack for support. She needed to lean on something, for her legs seemed to be melting under her. “I mustn’t faint,” she told herself desperately. “I mustn’t faint. . . . This is war. . . . He would have killed me. He would have killed Frecks had he not been struck down.” Her breath was still coming fast, as though she had just finished a race. Suddenly she lost her nerve and ran wildly across the roof to where she had last seen Frecks.

“Frecks!” she cried hoarsely. “Frecks! Where are you?”

As there was no answer she ran down the stairs towards the bedroom, but on her way met Frecks coming up, carrying in her hand an iron poker.

Frecks let out a gasp of relief when she saw Worrals. “So he let you go!” she cried.

“Yes,” answered Worrals. “He let me go. What are you going to do with that thing?” She looked at the poker.

“I was going to brain him,” answered Frecks calmly.

“There’s no need for you to do that now.”

“Why not?”

“Someone else has killed him for you.”

“You mean—he’s *dead*?” Frecks’ voice was pitched high with incredulity.

Worrals nodded.

“Who did it?” Frecks breathed the words.

“I don’t know.”

“Shot?”

“Yes—but not with a bullet.”

“With what, then?”

“I don’t know. All I know is I saw him lying there. Something has struck him in the side, just below the shoulder.” Understanding suddenly leapt into Worrals’ eyes. “I’ve got it,” she said tersely. “He was shot by an arrow—no, it wasn’t long enough for an arrow, it must have been a bolt, a thing they used to call a quarrel.”

“You mean he was shot with—a bow—and arrow?”

“A crossbow. Not the sort of bow our fellows used at Cressy, but a more powerful sort. King Richard the First was killed by a bolt from one of them.”

Frecks nodded. “I remember. Who would use such an antiquated weapon to-day?”

“Don’t ask me.”

“Why use such a weapon, anyway?”

“Probably because it has the advantage of being silent,” answered Worrals quietly. “I’ll tell you what. The weapon that fired that bolt, and this castle, must have known each other for a long time.”

“You mean, the crossbow was once part of the armament here?”

“I think that’s pretty obvious.”

“Then the person who fired the bolt was someone associated with the château?”

“That would be a reasonable supposition.”

“But this is awful,” muttered Frecks. “What are we going to do? Von Brandisch will have us all shot. You know how they are about Germans being killed in France.”

“Yes, I know,” murmured Worrals, who was fast recovering her composure. “Still, you’ve nothing to complain about. The man who shot Lowenhardt saved your life; another minute and Lowenhardt would have shot you. He was taking aim when the bolt hit him. We must keep our heads. One thing we’ve got to do—or rather, I shall have to do. You keep away. I’ll handle this.”

“What is it?” asked Frecks quickly.

“Lowenhardt was holding the pigeon when he was shot. The bird got away, but he might have had time to snatch the capsule from its leg. He was holding the bird by the legs. The capsule may be in his hand. If the Germans get hold of that message it will be all up with us, and everyone else in the château. It’s a ghastly thought, but I’ve got to make sure that the bird got away with the capsule, or we shan’t know a moment’s peace. If Lowenhardt got it, it will still be in his hand. I’m going to look.”

“You can’t do it, Worrals.”

“Are we soldiers, or what are we?” snapped Worrals. “Great Scot! After we have all been shouting that women stand alongside men in this war, we can’t jib at a little thing like this. I’m going back to the roof.”

“I’ll come with you,” said Frecks in a queer voice.

Together the girls returned to the roof. Slowly, for the very air seemed charged with tragedy, they approached the spot where the German had fallen.

Suddenly Worrals stopped dead. She caught Frecks by the arm. “It’s gone,” she said in a low voice.

“What’s gone?”

“The body.” Worrals pointed. “A moment ago it was lying there.”

“You must be mistaken.”

Worrals walked forward, looking to right and left. Without saying another word she made a complete tour of the roof.

“Well, now are you satisfied?” she said evenly. “It’s gone, and I for one am not complaining. Come on.”

“Where are you going?”

“First, to the kitchen, to get some coffee. Believe me, I need a drink—my tummy feels to have dropped out.”

“I doubt if madame will be up yet. It can’t be more than six o’clock.”

“No matter. We’ll soon fix some coffee for ourselves.”

Still feeling more than a little shaken they descended slowly to the kitchen, where another surprise awaited them. Lucien was there, in the act of making coffee. There were four cups on the table. He smiled sheepishly when he saw them, but went on with what he was doing.

“You’re up early, Lucien?” said Worrals sharply.

Lucien chuckled, and put on his insane grin. He did not answer the question.

“For whom are you making coffee?” asked Worrals.

Lucien indicated himself and the girls.

“What about the other cup?” went on Worrals relentlessly.

Lucien hesitated. It was only momentary, but it was not lost on Worrals. “For my mother,” he said.

“Lucien, you’re lying,” grated Worrals.

The customary idiotic smile came on again.

“And take that silly grin off your face,” snapped Worrals. “You can’t fool me any longer. We’re all sitting in the crater of a volcano; it’s likely to blow up at any moment, and you know it. If we’re to get out of this thing alive it’s time we got together and pooled our resources. And don’t leave

things like this lying about to let the world know you've been to England." Worrals held out the stub of the cigarette that she had picked up in the cellar.

Lucien's face was a study. The foolishness went out of it in a flash. Expressions of alarm, annoyance and, finally, humour, chased each other across his mobile features. At the finish it was a serious, keen-eyed, good-looking young man who stood by the table, one hand resting on it.

"Congratulations," he said, shrugging his shoulders as only a Frenchman can. "I think perhaps you are right," he went on quietly, in a well-modulated voice.

"Good. Then let us get our identities settled for a start. You know who we are. Who are you?"

Lucien bowed. "Lucien, Vicomte de la Rose, at your service, mademoiselle."

"And madame?"

"My mother—la Comtesse de la Rose."

"Presumably Monsieur Mundier is the Count de la Rose?"

"Precisely, m'mselle."

"And it was you I saw in the cellar yesterday?"

"*Oui.*"

"And your friend?"

Lucien hesitated. "Let us call him Monsieur le Marquis," he said. "His name is not my property to give away."

"I take it that you're the head of the organisation here, working for Free France?"

"Yes."

"And it is your friends who are helping you?"

"That, mademoiselle, is exactly what is happening."

Worrals bit her lip. "We should have been informed of this," she said bitterly. "My chief should have told me. It would have been better for everybody."

"Do not blame him," put in Lucien quietly. "It was at my request that the information was withheld."

"Why? Don't you trust us?"

"For my own mistakes, mademoiselle, I am prepared to pay with my head, but not for those of other people. I prefer to know my associates

before I trust them.”

“So it was for our benefit that you posed as a half-wit?”

“For yours, and the Germans. So far, the pretence has served me well, I think.”

“Did you know that I saw you in the cellar yesterday, letting your friend out through the hatch?”

“Not at the time, but I knew it soon afterwards.”

“How did you find out?”

“I knew you were there.”

“But you couldn’t see us.”

“No, but as I left I caught a whiff of the perfume known as Soir de Paris. I had already observed that you used soap of that perfume. In the dark one’s sense of smell becomes acute.”

Worrals made a mental note to use unperfumed soap in future. “Afterwards, you listened to our conversation, Monsieur le Vicomte?”

“This is no time for titles. Call me Lucien. Yes, I listened. Thus, I learned that you were about to fly to England.”

“So you pinned that message on my aircraft?”

“Yes.”

Worrals began to understand many things. “You know what happened on the roof this morning?”

“Of course.”

“Then it was you who killed Lowenhardt?”

“I did not say that.”

“Was it necessary to kill him?”

“There was no alternative if you were to be saved—if we were all to be saved. Besides, in another moment he would have killed your friend. He was already aiming at her with his pistol, and he would have fired—you need not doubt that. But must we go into this? Forget Lowenhardt. He was a Gestapo spy. He has sent many Frenchmen to their death. For my part, I am glad that he will send no more. I happen to know, too, that he was suspicious of you—that was why he stayed here.”

“One question. Did you find anything in his hand? There was a message on the pigeon—I thought he might have taken it.”

“There was nothing in his hands. I don’t think he had time to remove the capsule.”

“Good. At least we begin to understand each other,” declared Worrals. “I suggest we go a step farther. Things have become so complicated that we ought to have a council of war.”

“I was about to suggest it, mademoiselle.”

“We had better not talk here, in case some Boches stroll in. Give us ten minutes to tidy ourselves, then come to our room, where we shall not be disturbed. We will then decide on a course of action.”

Lucien bowed. “Excellent.”

“See you presently, then.” Worrals walked to the door and, with Frecks following, ascended the spiral staircase to their room.

“That was a staggering card to pull out of your sleeve,” said Frecks, as she closed the door. “How long have you known he was playing a part?”

“I suspected it yesterday, but I wasn’t sure.”

“You seemed pretty certain when you challenged him just now.”

“It was really a shot in the dark, but it happened to come off. I had no proof. One thing is certain; Lucien couldn’t have moved Lowenhardt’s body single-handed. I fancy his friend the Marquis isn’t far away. As they say in books, the plot thickens. A good wash will brace us for the next round.”

CHAPTER XII

COUNCIL OF WAR

TEN minutes later there came a knock on the door. Worrals opened it and admitted Lucien. He was not alone. With him was a tall, aristocratic-looking young man of about twenty years of age. He was dressed in the blue workman's overalls common to the country, and in the ordinary way would have passed for a peasant.

"Permit me to introduce my friend, Raoul, Monsieur le Marquis de Saronceau," said Lucien. "Following our conversation downstairs, I thought it advisable to acquaint him with its nature, with the result that—as you see—he has decided to come out into the open. If you have no objection, he would like to be present at this council of war."

"That's fine," agreed Worrals warmly. "I think you are wise, m'sieur," she added, addressing Raoul. "Between us we should be able to straighten out a situation that has become rather tangled. You were, I suppose, the spy who was caught by Schaffer, and escaped from the guard-house?"

"Yes," admitted Raoul. "It was careless of me to be caught. Fortunately, Lucien was able to effect my escape."

"How?"

"Through a secret door. The château, as you may imagine, is well provided with them."

"Then it must have been you who brought the first message we received?"

"Yes. I am Agent Number Seven," answered Raoul.

"And it was you who recovered the message from Schaffer's pocket?"

Raoul smiled. "Yes. I hadn't time to warn Lucien of my intention; in fact, I did not know that I should make the attempt until the opportunity arose. After my escape, I remained in the château—there are many safe hiding places. I secured a spare German uniform and simply marched into the billet with the rest. It was nearly dark, so there was very little risk."

"Then you put the message on my bed?"

"No. I gave it to Lucien—he did that."

Worrals turned to Lucien. “Why did you go to all that trouble?” she enquired. “Why not give it to me?”

“Because, at that time not being sure of your ability to deal with the situation, I preferred to retain my role as a fool,” replied Lucien. “Had I brought the message, you would have demanded explanations.”

Worrals nodded. “I understand.”

“It was Raoul who stole the book from the kitchen,” explained Lucien. “He then asked me to replace the mutilated book with a perfect one, in case the Germans decided to examine it. It was an obvious precaution. The book, *L’Histoire de la Révolution*, of course, holds the key of the code in which all messages are transmitted. It was arranged by your Squadron-Leader Yorke.”

“So you know Squadron-Leader Yorke?”

“I do, but the others do not,” answered Lucien. “You see, when I escaped from France I went to him with the suggestion that the château might be used as a rendezvous for agents in this part of the country. The plan being adopted, I returned to make the necessary arrangements. Six friends joined me. We don’t use names; instead, each is known by a number. There are some others, mostly servants, who help us. Raoul, my life-long friend, knows the secrets of the château as well as I do—as he should, for we played here as boys.”

“One thing strikes me as odd,” said Worrals. “There are no servants here.”

Lucien smiled wanly. “My family has been impoverished since the Revolution,” he explained frankly. “When the war started, we were reduced to three—an old man, his wife and son. They are now in different places helping our organisation to collect information.”

“You can trust them?”

“Implicitly. The family has been associated with us for five hundred years.”

“Is it asking too much, Lucien, if I enquire how the organisation works? I ask because it may be necessary for me to get into touch with them. Is it possible?”

“Oh, yes. We made provision in case anything went wrong. My friends operate in different German military zones, gathering information as they think fit. When they have news of importance, they make their way back here. It was arranged, however, that in case of danger they should not come here, but go to an old mill by the river. It belongs to us, and is connected with the château.”

“But how could they know if there was danger here? Raoul, for instance, walked right into the Germans the other night.”

“The Germans had not been here long enough for me to put out the warning signal.”

“Signal?”

“The signal that the château was no longer safe was to be a raven—not a live bird, but a stuffed one. Actually, the ravens have all gone from here, but the Germans would hardly know that, so they could see nothing odd about a raven sitting on a corner of the central tower. On the contrary, it would look natural. The central tower can be seen for many miles around. As I live in the château, and rarely leave it, it is my task to put up the warning signal in the event of danger.”

“Then you’d better put it up right away,” suggested Worrals.

“It is already there,” answered Lucien quietly. “Have no fear. None of my assistants will now come to the château.”

“Suppose they have important information?”

“I shall collect it at the mill.”

“Good! That clears the air a lot,” said Worrals. “Now let us consider the situation as it stands. This, as I see it, is the position. With the loss of our plane, the whole scheme in its original form has gone to pieces. In any case, the field is trapped, and cannot be used by aircraft. That means we are stranded here. I have informed Squadron-Leader Yorke of these events by carrier pigeon. He will, I am sure, find a way of getting in touch with us, and he will no doubt send us new instructions. Upon these instructions will depend our future actions. The château is suspect, and for that reason the obvious course would be to abandon it.”

“Given a clear start we could probably cross the frontier into Spain, and then from Portugal get to England,” put in Raoul.

“I think it’s a bit early to talk about running away,” murmured Worrals. “It would be a pity to abandon such an ideal rendezvous. I suggest, therefore, that before we talk of leaving we should examine the situation closely to see if there is not some way by which we could throw the Gestapo off the scent and continue operations.”

“I’m afraid that will not be easy,” put in Lucien.

“In this business, nothing is easy—or if it is I have yet to strike it,” answered Worrals quietly. “We must try to keep things going here until we get a message from England, at any rate. I’m sure Squadron-Leader Yorke

will expect us to do that. I still have two pigeons, so if further messages are received I can despatch them. Is it agreed that we stay?"

Lucien looked at Raoul and they both signified assent.

"Then that's one point settled," resumed Worrals. "The next important thing is the arrest of your father, Lucien. I take it that the Germans will try hard to make him speak?"

"They won't get a word out of my father," answered Lucien confidently. "He is a strange man, but he hates the Nazis and has a will of iron."

"What will they do with him?"

"They will probably shoot him as a hostage—they do that sort of thing." Lucien spoke quite calmly.

"But that's terrible!" Frecks exclaimed.

"My father will not be the first de la Rose to die for his country, mademoiselle. Indeed, it would be rare for a de la Rose to die in his bed. I know my father. He would prefer it that way."

"All the same, we must try to effect his escape," declared Worrals.

"Aren't you rather optimistic?"

"I'm always optimistic," acknowledged Worrals. "If I were not, I should not be here. But let us not discuss our personal qualifications. The next most urgent factor that we have to deal with is the disappearance of Lowenhardt. How shall we account for it? His chief, von Brandisch, must have ordered him to remain here——"

"Yes, I heard him give the order," interrupted Lucien. "I knew, too, that von Brandisch was here yesterday afternoon." Turning to Frecks, he added, "I looked everywhere for you to tell you."

"I was sitting under the yew trees. I saw him," said Frecks.

"I tried to stop you when you came back, to tell you——"

"I was in too much of a hurry to talk to anybody," broke in Frecks.

"I knew Lowenhardt was here because Schaffer told me," put in Worrals. "Moreover, Schaffer hinted that he was up to no good, but in the rush of events I forgot all about it."

"The aeroplane crash gave me a terrible shock," remarked Lucien. "My mother has since explained how it was that you were not in the aircraft. By listening to people talking, I have learned that the man in it was a German secret agent."

"I guessed that," said Worrals.

“How came he to find his way here?”

“Because, like a fool, I made a mark on my map. The fellow came straight to the place, expecting, reasonably enough, that someone would be waiting for the plane. No doubt he hoped to make a capture, instead of which he met his death.”

Lucien went on. “Von Brandisch knows, of course, that it was one of his men who was killed in the plane. He probably knows by this time how he got hold of it, too. What must puzzle him is, why the man flew to the château.”

“He’ll never know that because the only evidence, the map, must have been burnt with the plane,” resumed Worrals. “But let’s get back to this question of Lowenhardt. Von Brandisch is bound to move heaven and earth to find out what has become of him. He will question us. We must decide what we are going to say, and tell the same tale.”

Raoul shrugged his shoulders. “What tale can you tell, except that you know nothing?”

“That won’t work with von Brandisch,” returned Worrals grimly. “We’ve got to think of a way to account for Lowenhardt’s disappearance. People don’t just disappear into thin air—particularly when they are on duty. I’ll think of something presently. I am uneasy about his presence on the roof so early in the morning. What was he doing there? At that time I thought he was watching us, that he had followed us, but thinking it over I am convinced that he was there when we arrived.”

“He was,” interposed Lucien.

“How do you know that?”

“We were watching him,” explained Raoul. “We followed him up.”

“Do you know why he went to the roof?”

“No.”

“He was in his shirt sleeves—why?”

“I don’t know. He took his tunic off after he got to the roof. I found it there—in fact, I still have it.”

“He couldn’t have known that we were coming up,” went on Worrals thoughtfully. “Even if he had known, I don’t see why he should take off his tunic. But we shall have to leave that for the moment. Your mention of the tunic has given me an idea. Are the rest of his clothes available?”

“Er—yes. But what?—”

“That’s our answer,” broke in Worrals eagerly. “We’ve simply got to account for Lowenhardt, or von Brandisch will tear the place to pieces looking for him. It may interest you to know, gentlemen, that Lowenhardt went for a swim in the river early this morning, and was drowned.”

The others stared, as if Worrals had lost her reason.

“This is the scheme,” she went on quickly. “You boys may be surprised to hear that von Brandisch came to us last night and asked us to work for the Gestapo—in an unofficial capacity, of course. No doubt he formed the idea on the spur of the moment—he’d use anybody if it served his purpose.”

“So *that’s* what he came to see you about,” muttered Lucien, still staring at Worrals.

“That was it. We accepted, of course.”

“Beware of a trap.”

“I hadn’t overlooked that possibility, I accepted because I thought the plan might be turned to our advantage—not that I could very well have refused. I am sure von Brandisch would shoot us as soon as look at us, but not while he thinks we are useful to him. I don’t flatter myself that he trusts us farther than he can see us. Still, he has given me the address of his office in Tours. I’m going there to report to him. I shall say that early this morning, from my window, I saw a German officer walking across the field towards the river. In my capacity as spy I watched from a distance to see what he was doing. He did not return. Walking to the river bank I found a heap of clothes, but no officer, from which I concluded that he must have been drowned. I did not touch the clothes, but thought I had better report the matter. Fixing the clothes will be a job for you, Lucien. You can take them across and dump them at the foot of that tall poplar. Now let us consider what von Brandisch’s reaction will be. I think it is reasonable to suppose that he will get in his car and come here to confirm my story. It’s likely that he will bring me with him, to show him where I found the clothes. When he sees them he will identify them as the property of Lowenhardt. Naturally, I shall pretend not to know anything about Lowenhardt. Von Brandisch, for want of a better explanation, will suppose that his agent has been accidentally drowned. At least, that is what we hope.”

“It sounds a grim business to me,” murmured Frecks.

Worrals made a gesture of helplessness. “Of course it’s grim. The whole war is grim. But things will look a lot grimmer if von Brandisch arrests all of us on suspicion. That doesn’t include Raoul, of course, because the Nazis don’t know he is here.”

“Go on,” invited Frecks. “Let’s assume that von Brandisch will think that Lowenhardt has been drowned. What will he do next?”

“I should say he will either send another agent over here, or, as we are on the spot, ask us to do his dirty work. I hope he will choose us. That will, at any rate, give us breathing space until we hear from Squadron-Leader Yorke. The pigeon should be home inside three hours. Unless I am mistaken, Squadron-Leader Yorke will take immediate steps to get in touch with us.”

“How?” enquired Frecks.

“Don’t ask awkward questions,” protested Worrals. “Frankly, I don’t know. He must have ways and means, otherwise, how does he keep in touch with things in France?”

“I think it is a very good idea—I mean this scheme for disposing of Lowenhardt,” said Lucien. “I have only one suggestion to make. If you go to Tours immediately, and report, von Brandisch will know at once that Lowenhardt is not at his post. He may also think that you were a little too smart to find his clothes so quickly. As things are, von Brandisch will not miss Lowenhardt for some hours—probably not until to-morrow. He will think that he is still doing his job, and that suits us. I suggest, therefore, that it would be better not to report Lowenhardt’s disappearance until to-morrow morning. That will give Yorke a chance to get in touch with us. If he acts, I feel sure that it will be to-night, because it would hardly be possible for him to do anything in daylight. Our position would be more secure if we knew what Squadron-Leader Yorke thinks about this, before we start the business with von Brandisch. The Squadron-Leader may recall us; he might even send a plane for us, to land in another field, in which case it would not be necessary for you to take the risk of calling at Gestapo headquarters.”

Worrals thought for a minute or two. “I’m inclined to think you’re right, Lucien,” she decided. “Von Brandisch shouldn’t miss Lowenhardt for one day, and it would be a good thing to know how the Squadron-Leader feels before I jump into the lion’s den. If he is going to get in touch with us, it will be, as you say, to-night. I’ll postpone my trip to Tours until to-morrow. You get Lowenhardt’s clothes and dump them on the river bank. You say the stuffed raven is already on the tower, but I think you ought to warn your friends to be ready to scatter should the worst come to the worst. Raoul can go back into hiding. Marie—that’s Frecks’ name here, don’t forget—and I, will hang about to see what happens.”

“Good,” agreed Lucien. “Let us leave it at that.”

Raoul smiled at Worrals. “It may be some comfort to you to know that if things become difficult for you I shall not be far away. Whether you are in

the château, or in the grounds, I shall be watching.”

“With your crossbow handy, no doubt,” murmured Worrals drily.

“The arbalest—or crossbow, as you call it—is still a useful weapon in the right place,” returned Raoul coolly. “I have others, though, equally efficient, some not quite so antiquated.”

“I’m glad to know it. I have an idea you may need them before this business is finished,” opined Worrals. “All right. You boys get on with your jobs. Marie and I will have a look round.”

CHAPTER XIII

AN ALARMING DISCOVERY

LUCIEN and Raoul departed, but for a little while the girls, having nothing particularly to do, remained where they were, discussing the new trend of events.

“It’s queer, isn’t it,” murmured Worrals, “how these things never seem to pan out as arranged. One must for ever be on the alert for the unexpected, ready to dart off at an entirely new angle at an instant’s notice. I suppose one improves with practice. Even when things are quiet, as they are at this moment, I find myself trying to anticipate the next move. Everything, however small, has a reason. One can’t afford to leave a single thing to chance. Take this business of Lowenhardt being on the roof. What was he doing there so early? I feel uneasy every time I think about it, because he must have had a reason for being there and we don’t know what it was.”

“We’ve never really tried to find out, if it comes to that,” remarked Frecks. “We left the place in a bit of a hurry, if you remember?”

“That’s true,” murmured Worrals pensively. “It wouldn’t be a bad idea if we went back up and made a thorough search. If we find nothing, I shall at least be easier in my mind.”

“We might have asked the boys if they had a good look round,” continued Frecks. “I’m glad they’ve come out into the open; it’s encouraging to know that we’re not entirely alone.”

“I agree,” responded Worrals. “It isn’t worth while going after the boys to ask them about the roof. Let’s go up. We’ll survey the landscape at the same time.” She glanced at her watch. “The time is getting on, so there will be more people about—workmen, and so on.”

Still talking, the girls made their way slowly to the roof, to find that the day held every promise of being fine. The clouds had passed, and the autumn sun shed a mellow light over the scene. After they had emerged on to the leaded roof Worrals pointed to a large black bird that sat in a natural position on the central tower.

“The raven,” she observed. “I must say it looks like the real thing. Even from here, if I hadn’t known otherwise, I should have thought the bird was

alive. We'll start at this end and work each section of the roof systematically."

"It would be easier if we knew what we were looking for," remarked Frecks, after about ten minutes, during which time they had come upon nothing unusual.

Worrals said nothing, but continued the search, subjecting the battlements, the chimney stacks, and the roof to a close examination.

"Well, I must admit that there doesn't seem to be anything," she said in a puzzled voice when they had covered the entire roof. She strolled to a corner where a branch of an isolated elm approached to within a score of feet of where she stood. For a moment she studied the tree, for from where she was standing she could see right into it; and she was about to turn away when something caught her eye.

"Hey, Frecks. Come here," she said in a curious voice. "Can you see what I see?"

It took Frecks a minute to find the object. "Do you mean that wire?" she enquired.

"Yes, it jumps from the tree to the roof."

"It's insulated—must be a wireless aerial."

"I hadn't noticed a radio in the house."

"Nor I," answered Frecks. "Perhaps it's an old one."

"Funny. There's no telephone, or electricity here," murmured Worrals. "Let's see where it goes."

She found the spot where the wire made connection with the château, and then began to follow its course along the battlements. "This is no aerial," she said tersely. "Moreover, the wire looks brand new. Frecks, I think we've got something."

Moving quickly now they followed the wire until it turned at right angles, crossed a section of roof, and disappeared, as far as they could make out, into a cluster of chimney pots. The actual stack was not very high, and in a moment Worrals was on it, drawing gently at the wire.

"It goes down one of the chimneys," she told Frecks in an astonished voice. "It's loose, and there seems to be something heavy on the end. I'm going to pull it up to see what it is." She began drawing up the wire hand over hand.

It took her some little while to bring the weighted end into sight. As soon as she saw it she caught her breath, stared at it for a moment, and then

gently lowered it back into place. She jumped down from the stack and walked quickly to the battlements.

“Just as I thought,” she said in a strained voice. “We’re right over our turret. That chimney must be the flue from our room.”

“Here, come on. What was it?” snapped Frecks.

The face that Worrals turned to her was pale. “A microphone,” she said in a whisper.

Frecks shook her head. “I don’t get it.”

“Listen, partner,” said Worrals earnestly. “A microphone is hanging in our bedroom, just inside the chimney, where it can’t be seen. If anyone is at the *other* end of that wire, he has overheard every word we said there just now.”

Frecks looked aghast. “You mean—the conversation we had with Lucien and Raoul . . . could be overheard?”

“Every word of it—that is, if anyone was listening.”

“Are you sure the microphone doesn’t go down to the kitchen—the kitchen is directly below our room?”

“Certain—the wire isn’t long enough.”

“Then we’re sunk.”

“Not necessarily; and I’ll tell you why. I don’t think anyone could have been listening, or we should have been arrested before this. We know now what Lowenhardt was doing, and why he was in his shirt sleeves. He didn’t want to dirty his tunic. He had just finished fixing the mike. It may have been his own idea to listen to our conversation. If so, all might yet be well. But if the mike is connected with the Gestapo office at Tours, then we’re certainly in a mess. I shudder when I think what Lowenhardt might have heard had he not been killed.”

“Then you don’t think we were overheard?” asked Frecks anxiously.

“I look at it like this. Lowenhardt was still on the roof, which means, as the wire goes across to the tree and presumably to the ground, that he was not at the other end of it, although no doubt he soon would have been had he not been interrupted by our arrival. We can soon settle the matter by following the wire and seeing where it ends.”

“Can we do that?”

“Of course. Let’s get to the ground and pick up the wire at the foot of the tree.”

In three minutes the girls were at the base of the elm, but it took them a little while to find the wire, for it had been covered with dead leaves and litter. It was lying loose. Picking it up, and allowing it to slide through her hand, Worrals began to follow it.

“Pray that it doesn’t end at a telegraph pole on the main road,” she said grimly.

“The direction at present is towards the garden.”

“I hope it continues that way,” muttered Worrals.

It did. After traversing the overgrown flower beds it ended at a dilapidated arbour, in front of which a marble cupid, a broken bow in his hand, stood gazing fixedly towards the ruin.

Worrals followed the wire until it disappeared through a tiny hole in the rotting boards. Hurrying inside she traced it to what had once been a box seat. Lifting the crumbling lid she uttered an exclamation of satisfaction.

“Thank goodness! It ends here,” she said. “The batteries and the amplifier are here. What a relief! I was terrified the wire would be connected with von Brandisch’s office. Having got the thing fixed, Lowenhardt must have been about to listen to our conversation.” Worrals took a deep breath. “I can’t bear to think of it. My word! It’s been a close shave—and, incidentally, gives us an idea of the traps into which we can step. What a blessing Lowenhardt never got back here.”

“What are you going to do—dismantle the thing?”

“No, we daren’t do that, in case someone else knows about it. We must leave it just as it is, but we shan’t be able to talk in our room. I shall have to think about this. First of all, we must let the boys know—tell them about the instrument, and warn them that there may be others, although I think that’s unlikely. You go and find the boys and tell them what we’ve discovered, then come back to me. I want to think this over.”

Frecks ran off while Worrals sank down on the seat, and resting her chin in her palms gazed at the floor. Concentrating on the problem, it suddenly struck her that von Brandisch might have ordered the microphone to be installed. At any rate, he might know about it. In that case there seemed to be a strong probability that he would come over, either to listen personally to any conversation, or check the installation, or to hear if Lowenhardt had anything to report. If so, it would be unwise for her to remain there, because should von Brandisch discover her in the arbour he might suspect that she knew about the microphone. She determined to leave forthwith, and was actually on her way to the entrance when a voice, low and urgent, caused her

to pull up short. The sound came from the seat she had just vacated. She realised at once that it was coming from the microphone, and she recognised Frecks' voice.

"Look out, Worrals!" it said. "I'm at the bedroom window. Someone—I think it's von Brandisch—is moving through the trees towards the arbour. I can see Lucien cutting across the garden with a bundle—I imagine it's Lowenhardt's uniform. Do something quickly, or he'll walk straight into von Brandisch. Hurry! Hurry!"

The state of mind into which this urgent request threw Worrals can be better imagined than described. It is always so much harder to think clearly in moments of acute anxiety than when there is time for reflection. How was she to prevent the two men from meeting? She could think of only one way, and that was to call von Brandisch's attention to the arbour so that he would not stop to survey the garden. To achieve this she resorted to the only means she could think of on the spur of the moment. She uttered a piercing scream.

It was answered instantly from somewhere near at hand by a violent crashing in the bushes. She dashed into the open, and there before her, running and jumping through the tangle, was the German. He pulled up abruptly when he saw her.

"What is it?" he demanded harshly.

Again Worrals had to think quickly, for she saw that she had achieved more than she had bargained for, although it was a natural consequence of her scream. Lucien, too, was dashing towards the spot. He still had the bundle under his arm, but fortunately he saw von Brandisch before he himself was seen, and with a swift movement he flung the bundle under a bush. He then came on again. This could not be avoided, for von Brandisch, seeing that Worrals was looking at something beyond him, swung round and saw Lucien.

"What's the noise about?" asked von Brandisch curtly. He seemed both annoyed and puzzled.

Worrals drew a deep breath. "A snake," she gasped. "I was walking along . . . and a snake . . . was coming towards me. I'm terrified of snakes."

She felt that her story was justifiable, for she put the German in the same category as a serpent.

"Snake?" questioned von Brandisch.

"I'm sorry," stammered Worrals, "I shouldn't have screamed like that, but it happened before I could stop it."

“Probably a harmless grass snake,” said the Nazi gruffly, glancing at Lucien who, with his arms hanging loosely at his sides and his jaw sagging, looked more like an idiot than ever.

“Be off, fool,” snarled von Brandisch, and Lucien backed away, whimpering with fear. The German then turned to Worrals. “What are you doing here?” he asked coldly.

“I was just going to look round this old building,” she answered.

“Why?” Von Brandisch fairly snapped the question.

Worrals had the answer ready. “Because early this morning, just as it was getting light, I saw someone prowling about here. I wondered what he was doing, so I just came across to find out. Then I saw the snake. That’s all.”

“Was it a German officer you saw?”

“It might have been. It was not light enough for me to see clearly.”

“All right. You can go now. It is better that you should not be seen talking to me. If you see a German officer send him here. He should have been here now.”

Worrals, of course, knew only too well who the officer was, and why he was not there. “What is his name?” she enquired artlessly.

“Leutnant Lowenhardt.”

“Very good,” said Worrals obediently, and turning away walked towards the château, glad to have an opportunity to think. She went straight up to her room and, remaining outside, signalled Frecks to come to her. She closed the door before she spoke, and even then kept her voice down to a whisper.

“For goodness sake be careful,” she said. “He’s listening. Remember, we’re not supposed to know anything about the microphone in the chimney. One slip now and we’re sunk. That frosty-faced Nazi may stay in the arbour for some time, ready to take down every word we say. Did you let the boys know about the microphone?”

“I told Lucien and he said he would tell Raoul.”

“Good. We’re certainly skating on thin ice. I think we’d better go in now and have a special conversation for von Brandisch’s benefit—if we don’t talk at all, he may think it’s odd. Take your cue from me. Don’t mention names if you can avoid them. Don’t forget that I’m Jeanne and you’re Marie. Go in first and I’ll pretend that I’ve just arrived. When I come in, ask me where I’ve been.”

Frecks went quietly into the room. Worrals gave her time to get settled and then followed.

“Hullo,” greeted Frecks, “Where have you been?”

“I was walking across the garden and I nearly trod on a snake,” answered Worrals. “I ran into the summer house, and while I was there who should come but Hauptmann von Brandisch, who was here last night. He’s looking for Leutnant Lowenhardt. He seems to think he ought to be here. Have you seen him about lately?”

“No,” answered Frecks.

“In that case we’ll have a look round; he may be in the grounds somewhere.”

“Then you are really going to help Hauptmann von Brandisch?” queried Frecks, following up the make-believe.

“Rather,” answered Worrals enthusiastically, winking at Frecks. “Why not? We’ve nothing to lose and everything to gain. There is this about these Germans; if you serve them well they look after you. We may want a favour ourselves one day.”

“I don’t think he altogether trusts us,” went on Frecks.

“Why should he?” returned Worrals. “Why should he trust anyone? But if we do as we are told he’ll soon have more confidence in us. Think how exciting it would be if we could catch an English spy.”

“Do you really think there are spies here?” asked Frecks grinning.

“No, I don’t, or we should have seen something of them—that is, of course, unless poor crazy Lucien is a spy.”

The girls laughed aloud as if this was a great joke.

“But still, it suits me that Hauptmann von Brandisch thinks there are spies here,” resumed Worrals. “When he is satisfied that it’s a false alarm he’ll have no further interest in us, and we don’t want that to happen.”

“What are you going to do now?” asked Frecks.

“We’ll have a look round for Leutnant Lowenhardt. I don’t think he can be here or we should have seen him. If we can’t find him we’ll just go on picking apples for Aunt Louise. Remember, that’s why we came here. Come on, let’s go.”

Actually, Worrals did not go. She tiptoed to the window, from where she could see the harbour. As she expected, she saw von Brandisch leave the ramshackle building and walk briskly towards the road.

“That’s fine,” she breathed. “He’s gone. He supposes we’ve left the room, so there is no further point in listening.”

“What about Lowenhardt?”

“Apparently von Brandisch has decided not to wait for him. After all, it’s fairly obvious that he isn’t here, or he would have been at the microphone. Von Brandisch must be wondering what on earth has happened to him, and that suits our purpose admirably, because he will be all the more ready to listen to our story when we tell him that we have found Lowenhardt’s uniform. Well, we may as well have a stroll round.”

CHAPTER XIV

MORE SHOCKS

THE day passed slowly, and, for a change, without event. The only incident of note was the arrival of an urgent message, brought in by one of Lucien's friends, and collected by Raoul at the old mill by the river. The girls took the message and despatched it forthwith by carrier pigeon. They took the opportunity of explaining in detail to the boys the position in which they were placed by von Brandisch's latest design—the installation of the microphone. This, it was agreed, had done no harm. Lucien congratulated Worrals on finding it, for which they all had cause to be thankful; as he pointed out, had it not been discovered they would by that time all be behind prison bars. "The lesson should make us doubly careful," he said seriously.

"What about Lowenhardt's clothes?" asked Worrals. "I saw you fling the bundle under a bush."

"And there they can stay until to-night," declared Lucien. "This moving about in daylight is too dangerous. I'll take them across to the river to-night, and put them at the foot of the poplar. To-night is going to be an anxious time. We must be on the watch for a message from Squadron-Leader Yorke. You girls needn't stay up. Raoul and I will keep guard. If a message comes, we'll let you know right away."

The expected message did not come, nor was there any sign of a messenger, and for this reason dawn found both girls tired and jaded. At first they had decided to stay awake; later, when nothing happened, they decided that they might as well sleep, but by that time the desire for sleep had passed. They dozed fitfully, starting at every sound, and the fact that they dare not talk about the things with which they were most concerned, for fear someone was listening in the arbour, only made their vigil the more tedious. They were both more than a little glad when dawn came to end it.

Now that it was too late, Frecks wanted to sleep, but Worrals would not permit it. "Let's get dressed and go outside where we can talk," she breathed.

"I don't understand it," she went on, when, dressed, they had put the door between them and the microphone. "Something must have gone wrong.

I felt absolutely certain that Squadron-Leader Yorke would get in touch with us.”

“He might have left us to use our own discretion,” suggested Frecks moodily.

“In the ordinary way, he might have done, because that was my idea in the first place,” returned Worrals. “But in the note which I sent by the pigeon I definitely asked for instructions.”

“The pigeon might not have got through.”

“That’s right; think of something ghastly,” protested Worrals.

“Perhaps when he got the second pigeon, the one with the message, he assumed things had improved here.”

“I’m afraid it isn’t much use guessing,” sighed Worrals. “We can only hang on and hope for the best. Unless we soon do something about it, von Brandisch will be over here to find out what has become of Lowenhardt. We’d better proceed with our plan.” Worrals turned as soft footsteps sounded on the stairs. “I expect this is Lucien and Raoul,” she murmured.

It was. They, too, looked as if they had passed a bad night.

“*Bon jour*,” greeted Worrals. “No message, I suppose?”

“Nothing,” answered Lucien shortly. “We waited up all night, but we neither saw nor heard anything.”

“Well, what are we going to do about it?”

“Have we any choice?” asked Raoul, shrugging his shoulders.

“Yes, we have a choice,” Worrals pointed out. “We can either abandon the whole scheme on the grounds that it has become too dangerous, and try to get to England via Spain and Portugal, or we can carry on. I’ve one pigeon left. When that has gone, there won’t be much point in remaining here, since we shall have neither the means of communicating with Squadron-Leader Yorke or sending any messages that come in.”

“It is really for you to decide,” Lucien said gloomily. “The Nazis think I’m an idiot, so I can with safety stay here. Raoul, after warning our friends to lie low for a while, can go home. For you it is a different matter. You’re all mixed up with the Gestapo, and look like spending the rest of the war in France.”

Worrals pondered the problem. “When in doubt take the bold course,” she decided. “The Squadron-Leader may get in touch with us to-night. Are Lowenhardt’s clothes by the river?”

“Yes.”

“Then I’m going to Tours to report to von Brandisch. You’ll have to keep your wits about you, because I think it is more than likely that he’ll come back here with me. After that things will have to take their course. Frankly, I think we’ve reached a state where it only needs one spark to blow the whole scheme sky high—but there, we knew that from the beginning. Things have got rather worse, that’s all.” Worrals turned to Frecks. “Are you coming with me or would you rather stay here?”

“Which would you prefer?”

“Frankly, I’d rather you stayed here. You could keep an eye on things, and keep in touch with the boys. What you do when I come back depends on whether I come alone or with von Brandisch!”

“All right,” agreed Frecks.

“That settles that, then,” declared Worrals. “If no one has anything more to say, I’ll have a cup of tea and push along to Tours.”

Nobody spoke, so after a depressing breakfast, in spite of her contribution to the larder, Worrals tied a handkerchief over her head and set out for Tours.

It was quite a pleasant walk, for the weather was fair, and an hour later saw her in the ancient town, which was already astir. Accustomed now to the sensation of being in enemy-occupied territory she strode on through the streets with a quiet confidence, and went straight to the address that von Brandisch had given her. It turned out to be a big private house. A sentry stopped her at the door.

“What do you want?” he asked gruffly.

“I have a message for Hauptmann von Brandisch,” replied Worrals curtly.

“He’s busy. He’s already got a visitor.”

“You would be well advised not to keep me waiting here,” returned Worrals sharply. “I have a message of importance.”

The soldier, disconcerted perhaps by Worrals’ confident bearing, took her in, and said something to another German, in the uniform of a storm-trooper, who was standing in the hall. This man had a good look at Worrals and then went upstairs. Two minutes later he reappeared at the head of them.

“Come up,” he ordered.

Worrals went up, not quite so sure of herself now that she was face to face with cold, hard facts. The atmosphere, she felt, was definitely hostile.

From the top of the stairs the storm-trooper took her along a wide corridor, with doors, bearing German names and ranks, on either side. The guide halted. "Wait here," he snapped.

Worrals waited, the guide standing beside her. It was, she thought, rather worse than waiting to have a tooth drawn at the dentist. From inside the room came the harsh mutter of voices, one sometimes raised in anger. Then, suddenly, a command was given. The door was flung open. A German soldier appeared, rifle held tight against his side. He was followed by two other men. The last one was also a soldier, accoutred like the first. Between them was an officer, a British officer in Royal Air Force uniform.

Worrals' eyes switched to his face, and there stopped. Her heart seemed to stop. In fact, everything seemed to stop. She not only knew the officer, but he was her best friend on her home station. It was Flying Officer Bill Ashton.

How long she stared at his face she did not know. Time itself seemed to be standing still. Accustomed as she was to shocks, this was more than human nature could be expected to stand without some violent reaction. If she kept herself under control it was not as a result of deliberate effort on her part. Rather was it because she was incapable of movement.

Bill, in turn, merely stared at Worrals, his eyes round with amazement.

"You seem to have met before," said a dry voice at Worrals' elbow.

Turning, she saw von Brandisch standing in the doorway.

Now Worrals was not so foolish as to deny such an obvious fact. "Yes, I know him," she said. "Or at least, I've seen him before. I was just wondering where it was, but I remember now. It was at Amiens, early in the war, when the British were in France. I was helping my grandmother to run her *estaminet*. This man, and his friends, sometimes came in from the aerodrome. He is in the English Air Force."

Bill smiled sarcastically. "Quite right. I congratulate you on an excellent memory, mademoiselle. I am flattered that you remember me," he went on coldly. "Had I known that you were one of the French Fifth Columnists I should have patronised your dirty tavern less often."

Worrals stepped forward and smacked his face. "*Cochon*," she muttered.

"All right, that's enough," snapped von Brandisch, dragging her back. "Take him away."

"March!" ordered one of the soldiers, and the trio went on down the corridor.

“Come in, mademoiselle,” said von Brandisch quietly.

Worrals followed him into a large apartment furnished as an office.

“This is very interesting,” murmured the Nazi, considering Worrals reflectively.

Worrals shrugged her shoulders. “Coincidence,” she said evenly. “No, it isn’t even coincidence. After all, I knew many British officers in those days. They all came to the *estaminet* to drink. They’re always drunk, these English.”

“We will return to this matter again in a moment,” said von Brandisch. “As you have come here I presume you have something to tell me?”

“Yes. I am afraid something has happened to Leutnant Lowenhardt.”

Von Brandisch frowned. “What do you mean—happened to him? What could happen to him?”

“Leutnant Lowenhardt is certainly not at the château, but an officer’s uniform is lying on the bank of the river not far away.”

“Are you sure of this?”

“Of course, otherwise I would not have come here.”

“What do you suppose has happened? I imagine you have an idea?”

“It is not for me to make guesses, sir,” returned Worrals. “I tell you what I know. The rest I leave to you.”

“Yes—yes, of course,” muttered von Brandisch. “You did well to report this. Presently you can take me to the place where these clothes are lying. In the meantime, this British officer. What do you know about him?”

“Only that he is a British officer. I suppose he was shot down?”

“As it happens, there is a doubt about it.”

“Well, I thought . . . as he was a flyer——”

“The trouble is, if he crashed, he managed to dispose of the aeroplane. We haven’t been able to find it.”

Worrals’ nerves fluttered. In a flash she understood, or thought she did, and she wondered why she had not guessed the truth at once. The obvious assumption was that Bill was the messenger sent by Squadron-Leader Yorke, and something had gone wrong. The Squadron-Leader would take steps to get in touch with the château. He would need a flying officer. He would speak to Squadron-Leader McNavish, who would inform him that there was an attachment between Bill and herself. Bill would be told the facts. He would volunteer to make a parachute descent in order to reach the château.

These were the thoughts that passed through Worrals' head at lightning speed. She looked at the German, who was pacing up and down chewing a match stalk.

"Perhaps this officer has something to do with the spy system you spoke about?" she suggested tentatively.

The Nazi eyed her almost vindictively. "I will ask for your opinion when I need it," he rasped. "You had better forget what you have seen and heard here."

"I am sorry, sir," murmured Worrals meekly. "You told me to come _____"

"Yes, but don't talk so much."

"Shall I go now?"

"No. I may need you. I will deal first with this business of Lowenhardt."

This did not suit Worrals, who, naturally, was now most concerned about Bill. At the risk of having her nose bitten off, she determined to make an effort to get into touch with him, or at least find out where he had been taken.

"This British officer may have been on his way to the château," she said half-apologetically.

"Do you suppose I haven't thought of that?" grated von Brandisch. "He must have arrived by parachute—there was no other way. But he won't talk. I know these British. Nobody can make them talk."

"There may be a way to make him talk, sir," said Worrals humbly.

"What do you mean?"

"A girl might succeed where men failed. Have you ever thought of employing a girl for the purpose?"

Von Brandisch stopped, his eyes on Worrals' face. "No," he said slowly. "I have not." A cold smile spread over his face. "Are you suggesting that *you* could make him talk?"

"I could try."

"But he's seen you here. He wouldn't trust you."

"He might if I told him that I had been forced to do this work. After all, we were quite friendly at Amiens. I might even pretend that I was secretly working for the British, in which case he might confide in me what his mission was. He must be desperate now he knows that it has failed."

“So!” muttered the Nazi wonderingly. “For a girl, you have brains. I suspected it from the beginning. But first we must clear up this affair of Lowenhardt. I don’t understand it. Come with me and show me where you found the clothes. Are they still there?”

“Unless somebody has moved them. I didn’t touch them.”

“Quite right. Come on.”

Von Brandisch shouted for his car. It came to the door, a nervous-looking driver at the wheel. The German told him to drive to the château, and motioned Worrals to get in the rear seat. He got in beside her.

“I feel inclined to give you a chance to tackle this Englander,” he said, as they sped through the countryside. “If I did, just how would you go about it?”

Worrals thought deeply for a minute or two. There was no pretence about it. She had plenty to think about, for Bill’s arrival on the scene had altered the entire outlook. She could make a pretty good guess as to what had happened. The main thing was, his plan had miscarried, and he had been taken prisoner.

“What I would do, Hauptmann, is this,” she decided. “I would pretend to be an employee, say, a waitress, at the place where he has been detained. In that capacity I could make contact with him and endeavour to ascertain how and why he came to France.”

“He would probably lie to you. How could you know he was telling the truth?”

“I wouldn’t know,” confessed Worrals frankly. “There could be only one way of finding out for certain where he was going.”

“How?”

“By letting him escape.”

“Escape! Are you mad?”

“Perhaps. But let us suppose that I told him that my sympathies were with the British. I admit that he would hardly be likely to take my bare word for that. But he could no longer doubt it if I provided him with a means of escape. Whatever brought him to France must have been urgent. What would he do after he escaped? Surely he would proceed with his mission? Naturally, he would be watched. Thus, you could learn his destination.”

Von Brandsich stared at Worrals. “Young woman,” he said, “I am sure now that you have brains. I like your suggestion. It is original. He would not

only betray himself, but lead us to his associates. You are doing well. Continue, and I may be able to pay you for your services.”

“I wouldn’t like to take money, sir,” returned Worrals demurely. “There is one thing I would appreciate though, if you could see your way to do it.”

“What’s that?”

“Release my poor old uncle. He’s an old man, and past caring about the war. His arrest has upset my aunt. Let him go back to the château. If you don’t trust him you could still watch him, but he has no interest outside his house.”

Von Brandisch did not answer, possibly because at that moment the car pulled up at the château.

“We need not go in,” he said curtly. “Let us go straight to the river. Lead the way to where you found the uniform.”

They set off across the fields.

Now, had it not been for the arrival of Bill this would have suited Worrals very well, for as far as the Nazi was concerned the plan was developing as arranged. As it was, thoughts of Bill entirely filled her head; compared with his capture, the matter of Lowenhardt’s disappearance seemed of less importance than it really was.

They reached the wide, stately river, and following the bank came to the lone poplar. Lucien had not failed. At the foot of it lay the grey uniform. Von Brandisch stooped and removed some papers from the pockets. He only glanced at them. “Yes, these are Lowenhardt’s things,” he said, staring into the depths of the river as though he would probe its secrets. “Very strange,” he went on, in a low voice, as though speaking his thoughts aloud. For a little while he stood there, deep in thought; then, turning sharply to Worrals he said, “All right; there’s nothing more we can do here. You did well to report this. Come with me.” Rolling the uniform into a bundle he retraced his steps across the field. He did not speak again until they reached the waiting car.

All the way across the field Worrals had been searching her brain in vain for a way of letting Frecks know that Bill had been captured, in case von Brandisch decided to take her back to Tours. She hoped he would, otherwise she could not see how she was to help Bill; but she did not want von Brandisch to notice her anxiety.

“May I go now, sir?” she said meekly.

“I was just thinking about that,” was the dour answer. “No. I think you’d better come with me. I may need your help with this Englander. Your sister

can keep an eye on things here while you are away.”

Worrals snatched at the opportunity. “In that case I think I had better let her know that I am going with you to Tours, otherwise she will wonder where I am,” she said casually.

“Very well. Make haste. I can give you a couple of minutes.”

Worrals darted into the house. Finding no one in the kitchen, she raced on up to her room.

Frecks was there. “I’ve been watching you from the window,” she announced. “Did everything go off all right?”

“No,” replied Worrals bitterly. “Far from it. I think von Brandisch has fallen for the uniform story, but that’s nothing. Bill is here.”

“*What!*” Frecks literally staggered.

“He’s a prisoner in Tours. I feel sure he was on his way here with a message. I’m going back with von Brandisch in the hope of making contact with him, to find out what the message was. If no more messages come in, let the last pigeon go with a note for Squadron-Leader Yorke that Bill is a prisoner in Tours. He ought to know about that. If I can get Bill away we shall come here—there’s nowhere else for us to go. Warn Lucien and Raoul to stand by for a quick getaway; I fancy we are getting near the end of things here. That’s all. Von Brandisch is waiting for me. See you later—I hope.”

Worrals dashed back to the car and got into the rear seat.

Without a word, von Brandisch slammed the door. The car moved forward down the road.

CHAPTER XV

ON THIN ICE

VON BRANDISCH was silent all the way to Tours. He left the car without making a sign, and Worrals followed him like a well-trained dog to his office, where he threw himself into his desk chair and resumed the conversation.

“Shut the door,” he said gruffly. He did not invite Worrals to be seated, so she stood in front of the desk and waited.

The German’s next act was to reach for the telephone. He called a number, and when it had been obtained, he said to whoever was at the other end of the line—Worrals, of course, had no idea who it was—“Release the Frenchman, Mundier. Tell him to go home and stay there. I may want to speak to him again. That’s all.” He clapped the receiver into its place. Turning to Worrals, he enquired, “Do you understand German?”

“A little,” acknowledged Worrals, wondering what was coming.

“I have just given orders for the release of your uncle.”

“Oh, thank you, sir. I’m sure you won’t regret——”

“Never mind about that,” interrupted von Brandisch. “I did it for one reason only—so that you can devote yourself to what I have in mind.”

Worrals thought he was going to say something about Lowenhardt, but he made no reference to him, either then or at any other time. She could only assume that the alleged drowning incident had been accepted. It seemed that he was not concerned overmuch about the fate of his assistant.

“About this prisoner,” went on von Brandisch coldly, speaking, as usual, in French. “These are the things I want to know. How he got here, his destination, and his mission. It was no ordinary operation—the lack of an aircraft proves that. I suspect he dropped by parachute, but while he chooses to remain dumb I can’t prove it. Interrogation, no matter how hard pressed, is useless with men of his type. Of course, there are tricks for dragging information out of unwilling speakers, but if, as I suppose, he is on a special mission, he will have been warned of them, and have his answers ready. In that case, any information he gives will be useless because it cannot be

believed. You made a suggestion a little while ago, and I'm inclined to think that there may be something in it. Did you know this man well in Amiens?"

"Fairly well. He often tried to flirt with me."

"Do you think you could gain his confidence?"

"That depends on how I am to approach him."

"Of course—that's obvious. What would you suggest?"

"Where is this man now?"

"In a room in the Hôtel de Paris. As we have no prison camp here we use the hotel for political prisoners. I shan't be able to keep him here long; the military will want to take him away, but I'm anxious to learn all I can before he goes. What procedure have you in mind?"

Worrals pretended to think over the question. "It would be no use my going to him direct, because, having seen me here, he would at once suspect a trick."

"Of course."

"In any case, I doubt if he will tell me anything likely to be useful to you. I can only think of one way of gaining his confidence, and that is, as I told you, by pretending that my sympathies are with him. I would say that I was anxious to escape to England."

"You must think the man is a fool, to accept such a specious explanation."

"He could hardly fail to be convinced if I helped him to escape. On what floor is he?"

"The third."

"Is the window barred?"

"Naturally."

"Very well. I would pose as a waitress in the hotel, and in that capacity I could take up his evening meal in a covered dish. In the dish would be a thick cord and a file. I should tell him that I would wait for him below, but he would have to take me with him as part of the bargain. In this way I should learn his destination."

"And we, of course, should be following close behind, to see that you came to no harm," put in von Brandisch suavely.

"I was about to suggest it."

Actually, this latter arrangement was far from what Worrals wanted, but having gone so far with the scheme she could not retract, even if she had

wanted to. Another thing worried her. She was surprised that von Brandisch had accepted her proposed unorthodox tactics so readily. She imagined that it was only because all other methods of making the prisoner speak had failed—unless he, too, was playing a deep game.

“When are you going to start?” asked von Brandisch.

“That is for you to decide.”

The German looked at his watch. “Twelve o’clock. The prisoner will be having his lunch presently. Suppose you take it in? That will give you an opportunity of breaking the ice. If he falls in with the scheme, you can take the rope and file at seven o’clock when he has his last meal of the day.”

“Yes, I think that is a good arrangement,” replied Worrals, her heart beginning to beat faster now that the perilous test was at hand.

“Come,” said the German.

Worrals followed him to his car. A short drive took them to the hotel, where von Brandisch took the officer in charge, an Unteroffizier, aside, presumably to explain the plan to him. From time to time the man nodded, as though his instructions were clear. At the finish he went off, to return presently with a German soldier who carried food on a tray.

“Take the tray,” ordered von Brandisch, “and we’ll go up.”

Worrals started, and turned questioning eyes on the German. “Why, are you coming with me?”

“Of course. I shall remain outside the door to listen to the conversation. Leave it open an inch.”

To say that Worrals was shaken by this pronouncement would be to put it mildly. It had not occurred to her that von Brandisch would overhear the conversation that passed between her and Bill. Now that she had been warned, she herself could keep a guard on her tongue, but she had no means of warning Bill that there was a listener outside the door. Once he had grasped the situation he could be relied upon to follow her lead, but a lot would depend on what he said before she could, by signals, indicate that they were being overheard. This was the trend of Worrals thoughts as, carrying the tray, she followed the Unteroffizier, who acted as guide, up the stairs. Von Brandisch brought up the rear.

The Unteroffizier stopped outside a door bearing the number 33, unlocked it, opened it slightly and stepped quickly aside.

Worrals moved across the threshold, knocked the door with her shoulder to close it, and went on, her eyes on Bill’s face.

“Your lunch, monsieur,” she said speaking in French, at the same time half closing her eyes in a fierce frown, pursing her lips, and inclining her head towards the door.

Bill merely stared—as he had every reason to.

Before he could recover from the shock of so unexpected a visitor, Worrals had stood the tray on the cheap deal table with which the room was furnished, and laid a warning finger on her lips. At the same time, by another slight inclination of her head, she endeavoured to indicate the true state of affairs.

“So we meet again, monsieur,” she went on, still speaking in French. “When you departed from Amiens so quickly last year I did not guess that we should meet again. You have had some bad luck—yes?”

“Fortune of war,” muttered Bill, who was sitting on a chair tilted back on its rear legs. His eyes went to the door, and Worrals knew that he had realised someone was on the other side of it. “You seem to have accepted the new state of affairs very easily,” he went on, also speaking in French—much to Worrals’ relief. Her great fear had been that in his astonishment he might blurt out something in English.

“Things are not always what they seem, monsieur,” she said in a low voice. “Surely you do not think that I would work for the Germans from choice?”

“I would believe anything,” returned Bill, his eyes on her face, as if striving to read her thoughts.

“How did you come to land in a place like this?” asked Worrals casually.

“If that is what your German friends have sent you here to find out, you are wasting your time, mademoiselle,” returned Bill coldly. “You will learn nothing from me.”

“They are not my friends,” said Worrals quickly. “I hate them.”

“I should never have guessed it,” sneered Bill. As he spoke with a stump of pencil he wrote swiftly on a page of his notebook, and turned it so that Worrals could see the words. The message read: “Leave everything and get home—orders.”

Worrals nodded to show that she understood. “I can understand how you feel, monsieur,” she said. “I must go now. There will be trouble here if I stay talking.” Then, as an afterthought, she added quickly in a low voice, “Do you want to escape?”

Bill smiled. “That’s a good idea,” he announced.

"If I help you to get away will you take me to England with you? That should prove how much I love the Germans."

Bill took the cue. "Are you serious?"

"How can you ask that? Don't you realise that I am risking my life to suggest it? If I get you out of this place, will you take me?" As she spoke, Worrals shook her head to indicate that the question should not be answered.

"Get me out and you'll see," returned Bill. "I'll believe it when you do it."

"This evening, when I bring your supper, you will find a rope and a file in the dish. You'll only have to cut one bar of the window and then lower yourself. It will have to be done after dark. I will wait for you below."

"Is this a trick?" demanded Bill. His face was a study. It was obvious that he could not understand how Worrals dare say such things with somebody listening outside the door.

"You still doubt my word," said Worrals sadly. "I take these risks for you yet you will not believe me."

"I will believe you when you do it," answered Bill shortly.

"You promise to take me to England with you?"

"I'll promise anything if you get me out of here."

"Very well. To-night I bring the things. Can I warn your friends that you will be coming?"

"There will be plenty of time for that."

Worrals smiled. Bill was keeping pace with the situation very well. "Why won't you trust me?" she pleaded. "It is known that you have friends here."

"Who knows it?"

"The Germans."

"Very clever of them."

"So you won't tell me who they are?"

"No, I will not," said Bill finally.

"We shall go to them when you get out—yes?"

"We will discuss that when I'm free," replied Bill cautiously. He got up and came close to Worrals. "What's the idea?" he breathed.

"All I ask is that you get me out of France, monsieur," said Worrals loudly, and then added in a faint whisper, "They're letting you go to follow

you.”

“Very well,” said Bill. “Get me out and I’ll take you to England.”

“To-night then?” concluded Worrals. “Now I must go. *Au revoir*.” She turned on her heel and went out, closing the door behind her.

Von Brandisch was standing in the corridor. He locked the door. “You did very well,” he said approvingly. “We may yet succeed in tracking this spy to his lair.”

“I think so,” answered Worrals. “He’s not quite sure of me yet, but to-night, when I take the rope, all doubt will be banished from his mind. He will then lead you to his friends.”

“Come,” said von Brandisch, and returning to the ground floor left the building. The car took them back to his office. “What are you going to do until to-night?” he asked.

“I thought of returning home,” replied Worrals. She was desperately anxious to let the others know what was happening. But this was not to be.

“No. You will stay here,” decided the German curtly. “I will arrange for you to have some food. If you like, you can send a message home by your uncle—that is, if he has not yet started.” He reached for the telephone, and after a brief conversation informed Worrals that Monsieur Mundier was just leaving. “I have given orders that he is to be brought here,” he said. “Go downstairs and speak to him; then, when he has gone, ask for the dining-room.”

“Thank you.”

Worrals left the office and went down to the front door, where, presently, Monsieur Mundier arrived, escorted by a soldier. The old man looked pale.

“Ah, there you are, my uncle!” cried Worrals. “These Germans are not so bad after all. They are allowing you to go home. Come, I will walk a little way with you.”

No objection was raised by the German guard, who, having completed his duty, marched off. As soon as they were clear of the building Worrals spoke rapidly.

“Listen, monsieur,” she said tersely. “I know who you are. I know everything. A message was on its way to us from England, but the messenger, a friend of mine, was captured. He is confined in Tours. I hope to enable him to escape, but that will not be until darkness falls. Our orders are to evacuate the château and go to England, so stand by and tell the others to be ready. You understand?”

“I understand perfectly, mademoiselle. Please accept my apologies for doubting your ability in the first place. No doubt I have you to thank for my release.”

“I was able to arrange it,” answered Worrals. “The Germans think I am working for the Gestapo.”

“Name of a dog!” gasped the old man.

“It won’t be for much longer,” promised Worrals. “I had better not come any farther. Let those at the château know what I am doing, and make arrangements to leave to-night.”

“Very well, mademoiselle.”

“Au revoir, monsieur.”

“Au revoir.”

Worrals returned to Gestapo Headquarters.

CHAPTER XVI

THE LAST ROUND

NEVER did the incongruity of war strike Worrals more forcibly than at seven o'clock that evening, when she mounted the stairs to Bill's room with a covered dish on a tray. The dish contained thirty feet of thin but strong cotton cord, and a file, both supplied by von Brandisch. There were moments when it seemed to Worrals that she was engaged in a foolish practical joke rather than a desperate battle for life.

She had one thing to be thankful for: von Brandisch had not accompanied her on this occasion. In her presence he had rung up the Unteroffizier, and after giving him precise instructions ordered him to assist Worrals by all the means in his power.

"Report back to me here as soon as you have taken in the rope," he told Worrals coldly as she left the office on her mission.

She was by no means happy as she walked to the hotel. It was too easy. The very simplicity of everything made her suspicious. Did von Brandisch really trust her? She could not believe that he did. That he had a scheme of his own she was sure, but it was no use trying to guess what it was. She was probably being watched at that moment, and would be until she returned to the office. He would watch Bill escape from the window, and follow him. Would she be allowed to go with him? She did not know, but she did not think so.

The Unteroffizier met her at the door of the hotel as arranged. The tray, with its queer dish, was produced. Worrals took it, whereupon the Unteroffizier led the way to Room 33. As he inserted the key in the lock he said, unsmilingly, in poor French, "What do you wish me to do—remain with you?"

Worrals shrugged. "Please yourself," she said. "I shan't need help."

"I will remain not far away," decided the German, and pushed the door open.

Worrals went in. "*Bon soir*, monsieur Englishman," she said, and set the tray on the table. Then, moving quietly, she returned to the door and peeped

out, to discover that the Unteroffizier was strolling up and down smoking a cigarette. She returned to Bill, who was regarding her curiously.

“Can we talk?” His lips did no more than form the words.

“Quietly. Stop if you hear footsteps coming.”

“What’s going on?”

“I have made friends with the chief Gestapo agent here. He’s worried because he doesn’t know what you are doing here. I’ve persuaded him to allow you to escape so that he can follow you and learn your destination. The escape is genuine. Here is the rope and a file. Don’t leave before dark—say, about eight o’clock.”

“What are you going to do?”

“That depends on what the Germans decide.”

“And if I reach the ground, what am I to do?”

“Try to dodge those who are following you and then make for the château. Why did you come here?”

“Yorke got your pigeon, and told the C.O. what had happened. McNavish insisted that you must be brought home. Knowing that we were friends, he recommended me as the messenger. I came over and dropped by parachute, but the place is stiff with guards, and they caught me. I was making for the château.”

“You can find your way to it from here?”

“Yes.”

“The Boches know something funny is going on there, and I’m afraid our scheme is finished. What did Yorke say?”

“His orders are definite. You’re all to clear out. The man to whom you were supposed to deliver the pigeons managed to get a message through to the effect that von Brandisch knows who the Mundiers really are. By the way, that chap was near the place when you lost your machine. He saw what happened, but he could do nothing. He knew the place was being watched. He sent Yorke a message that the wood was no longer safe, but it arrived just after you had taken off. Yorke wasn’t surprised that things went wrong.”

“How are we to get home without a plane?” asked Worrals.

“I have instructions what to do. They’re rather involved, so I haven’t time to tell you about them now. If it were not for the others there would be no need for us to go near the château, but we must go there to collect them.”

“Von Brandisch will follow.”

“We can’t prevent that. We have got to collect the others and get them away.”

“I’m afraid von Brandisch hopes that something of the sort will happen, so that with one cast of the net he can catch the lot of us. Still as you say, there’s no other way. We must all go together, and that means going to the château. That’s all. We shall have to leave it at that. I daren’t stay here any longer. If I can get away, I’ll meet you on the pavement and we’ll go together. If I’m not there, go without me. I’ll make my own way.”

“I don’t like that arrangement,” muttered Bill.

“There’s no alternative—s-s-h.”

Heavy footsteps approached the door. It was pushed open and the Unteroffizier came in.

“You’re a long time,” he said suspiciously, looking at Worrals.

“I’m coming now,” she answered.

The German waited, so without another word to Bill she left the room. The Unteroffizier locked the door on the outside.

“You found plenty to talk about,” he growled. “What was he saying?”

“That is something I prefer to keep for Hauptmann von Brandisch,” returned Worrals evenly. “You had better ask him.”

The Unteroffizier scowled, and said no more.

Worrals returned to Gestapo Headquarters where, to von Brandisch, she reported her version of the interview. “He thinks I am on his side now,” she concluded.

The German expressed himself satisfied.

“I take it that I am to meet him at eight o’clock under the window?” went on Worrals casually, as if the matter was of no particular importance to her.

Von Brandisch smiled—an inscrutable smile that gave Worrals a cold shiver.

“No,” he said smoothly. “I think it would be safer if you stayed here.

“Safer? Safer for whom?”

“For everybody,” was the ambiguous reply.

Worrals could see her plan going to pieces, and it took all her will power to prevent her anxiety from showing in her face. “But I understood that I was to go with him, and you were to follow us?” she rejoined.

"I've thought of a better way," murmured von Brandisch, coughing. "Others can do the work. The cars, and motor cycles, are equipped with radio. We can remain here in comfort and follow the situation as it develops. That's better, don't you think?"

Worrals agreed. She could not do otherwise. She could not quite understand the German's manner. It seemed to have changed. Unless it was her imagination there was now a sinister background to everything he said, as if he knew everything, and was confident that he had the situation in hand. Glancing at the clock, she saw that it was a quarter to eight. Bill would soon be leaving the hotel. What would he do when he found that she was not there to meet him? Would he wait? Would he suspect that she was being held, virtually a prisoner? In that case, would he go to the château? These were questions that came to her mind, but it was hard to find the answers.

"We'll test the radio." Von Brandisch pressed a button. An orderly came in, and on instructions proceeded with the testing of the instrument which, it was now revealed, was contained in what Worrals had taken to be a sideboard. From time to time voices came over the air, each different, and Worrals, without being told, knew that these were the voices of the men who had been detailed to keep Bill under observation. They spoke, of course, in German, and here Worrals had one slight advantage. Von Brandisch did not know that she could speak the language fluently, and she took care not to enlighten him.

"Sit down," he invited. "We may be here for some time."

To Worrals, the next ten minutes seemed an age. The feeling that she was in a trap became stronger, but there was nothing she could do except sit and watch the hands of the clock creep to the appointed hour.

At eight o'clock precisely a voice said, "This is Werner, car one-two-five, calling. The prisoner is now descending. . . . He has reached the path. . . . He is waiting." After a short interval, the voice went on, "He is walking up and down. . . . Now he is standing back in a doorway."

Worrals could imagine Bill standing there, wondering what had become of her. Von Brandisch settled in his chair and lit a cigarette. He appeared to be supremely satisfied with his arrangements. Occasionally his cold eyes rested on Worrals, but he said nothing.

"The prisoner is now moving off," came the voice over the radio.

Von Brandisch looked again at Worrals. "I think the prisoner will take the road to Blois," he remarked, speaking in French.

“The prisoner, walking quickly, takes the road to Blois,” said the voice. “He is being followed by Thoms and Schmitt on foot, and at a distance by the cars, which are spaced at hundred-metre intervals. The motor-cyclists also follow.”

Worrals was appalled. She had supposed that von Brandisch would make adequate arrangements, but she had no thought that he would turn out such a strong force. Bill was being followed by men on foot, by cars and by motor-cyclists. How could he hope to evade them? There was something horribly significant, too, about the way von Brandisch had mentioned the road to Blois. He had not mentioned the château, but that, without a doubt, was implied.

Half an hour passed. Every few minutes the voice reported Bill’s progress. Apparently, without any attempt at evasion, he was walking straight up the road towards the château. Surely, thought Worrals miserably, he must know that he was being followed? She had warned him of it.

Ten minutes later the radio voice took on a slightly different note. It was possible to detect a trace of anxiety. “For the moment we have lost sight of the prisoner,” it said. “I have detailed men to probe the ditches beside the road as they go along. Others are in the fields on either side.”

Von Brandisch’s smug smile was replaced by a frown of annoyance. “Fools,” he muttered.

There was silence for a little while. Then a new noise came over the radio. It sounded like a motor cycle being driven at speed. The voice broke in, “One of the motor-cyclists has gone forward. He is acting without orders. I am recalling him.” Another silence and the voice continued: “The driver does not answer my signals.”

Worrals tried hard to keep her face expressionless, for in her heart was a new hope. Something that could only have been intuition told her who was riding the motor cycle that had gone forward. Bill had given his trackers the slip.

Von Brandisch got up and began to pace the room. After another brief silence, he snarled at the radio operator: “Ask Werner if there is any sign of the prisoner.”

The operator complied. Back came the answer. “No. We have for the moment lost sight of him.”

“Tell the fool to get after that motor-cyclist!” shouted von Brandisch, who, apparently, also had an idea who was on it. “Then get in touch with Oberleutnant Schaffer,” he went on harshly. “Tell him to throw a tight

cordon round the Château Delarose—he has enough men. No one must be allowed to come out. Arrest anybody who tries.” Turning to Worrals, he snapped: “Come with me.”

His manner was now definitely hostile, thought Worrals, as she followed him down the stairs and to the street, where his car was waiting, the driver at the wheel. Not only was his manner hostile, but he was less guarded in what he said. For the first time he had mentioned the château. It must have been in his mind all the time, she mused. Schaffer and his troops had also come into the picture. It looked as if there would soon be a small army concentrated on the château. It was clear now that von Brandisch had decided to make a clean sweep, and his preparations were so complete that it seemed impossible for any of them to escape the net. She felt that Bill, ignoring danger, had gone to the château. Von Brandisch evidently thought so too. The car tore along the Blois road at a speed which would take them to the castle in five minutes. At the entrance to the drive several vehicles, military cars and motor cycles, had drawn up. A group of men stood beside them, two a little apart from the others. Von Brandisch shouted and the car came to a skidding stop. The two men, who Worrals now saw were officers, one of them Schaffer, hurried towards it.

Von Brandisch snapped at the driver. “Keep your eyes on this girl,” and then, turning to the others, rapped out: “Well, what’s happened?”

“He’s gone into the château,” answered Schaffer nervously.

“You mean—you let him go in?” rasped von Brandisch.

“Yes, sir. I had no orders to the contrary. You said no one was to come out.”

Von Brandisch nearly choked. “Fool,” he muttered furiously.

“The place is surrounded,” put in the other officer. “No one can get out.”

“That’s something,” grunted von Brandisch. “All right. There’s no point in waiting. Keep the cordon intact, but search the château and arrest everyone in it.”

There was a general move towards the massive pile that loomed darkly against the night sky. Von Brandisch started up the drive alone, but changed his mind and came back to the car. “You had better come with me, I may need you,” he told the driver. “Bring the girl with you.”

Walking between the two Germans, Worrals went up the drive to the château. Lights now showed at several windows, and the murmur of many voices told that the search had started. She smiled faintly in the darkness.

After what Lucien had said about hiding places, she had an idea that those inside the building would not be easy to find.

Von Brandisch led the way to the kitchen. There was no one there. The fire had gone out, but the paraffin lamp stood in its usual place on the table throwing a sickly yellow light over the room. The chauffeur took up a position near the door, while von Brandisch strode up and down impatiently.

Presently Schaffer came. "We can't find anyone," he said in a worried voice.

For a moment von Brandisch's lips became a thin bloodless line. "If you've bungled this you'll be sorry," he grated. "Are you sure they did not leave?"

"Positive, sir."

"Where's Werner?"

"Conducting the search. He is ransacking the place from roof to cellar."

A little while later Werner came. He brought with him an object that gave Worrals a nasty turn. It was the pigeon basket. It was empty, which told Worrals that her request that the last pigeon be released to let Squadron-Leader Yorke know of Bill's arrest had been carried out.

Von Brandisch knew what the basket was, of course. Feathers on the bottom told their own story. "This will be enough to hang the lot of them," he said viciously. "Get on with the search, Werner, and see what else you can find."

Werner went off, to return in a few minutes with a dark bundle under each arm. Without a word he flung them on the table. Von Brandisch stared at them, as well he might, for they were two uniforms—uniforms of the W.A.A.F. He reached out for a tunic and held it up. It happened to be the one that belonged to Worrals.

"What do you make of that?" he said softly, looking her full in the face.

"Very nice," answered Worrals calmly. "May I have it? It looks just about my size."

"I should think," answered von Brandisch, speaking slowly and deliberately, "I should think it would fit you exactly."

Worrals reached for the tunic, not because she had any particular reason for touching the garment, but because she wanted to concentrate the attention of the two spectators on it, for this reason. From where she stood she could see a movement behind von Brandisch, although he, having his back to it, had not noticed it. The great iron fire-back, embossed with the De

la Rose escutcheon, which filled the rear of the grate, was slowly falling back, as though pivoting on a hinge at the base.

“Are you suggesting, Hauptmann von Brandisch, that the tunic belongs to me?” enquired Worrals with feigned incredulity. Actually, she knew perfectly well that he was; she was merely talking to gain time.

The fire-back was now open several inches, enough to reveal the upper part of a face behind it. It was Bill. His hand appeared, a finger beckoning. It seemed to Worrals that he was showing her the way; he could do no more without betraying his presence, and left the next move to her.

“Give me that coat,” snarled von Brandisch.

“Help yourself,” returned Worrals crisply, and swinging the garment round, swept the lamp from the table. There was a tinkle of splintering glass and the room was plunged into darkness.

“Stay at the door!” shouted von Brandisch to his chauffeur.

But Worrals was not making for the door. She had dropped on her knees and plunged under the table; and it was a good thing that she did so, for with a crashing report a weapon blazed; a streak of flame leapt across the room stabbing the place where she had been standing. From beneath the table she dived for the fireplace, not quite sure of what was going to happen, and rather fearful of cracking her head on the iron. Instead, she encountered something soft. A hand closed on her shoulder and drew her forward. A moment later there was a clang, as of heavy metal falling. A torch was switched on, and a hand lifted her to her feet—for she had ducked instinctively as she dived forward.

“Nice work, kid,” said Bill.

Worrals saw that Lucien was also there; it was he who held the torch. “Thanks,” she replied. “Things were getting difficult. Where is the rest of the family?”

“They are waiting for you to join them,” answered Bill. “Lead on, Lucien. You know the way.”

“What about that?” Worrals pointed at the rear of the fire-back.

“Don’t worry, it will need dynamite to move it,” answered Lucien imperturbably. “Of course, the Germans will have it down, but by that time I hope we shall be far away.”

Looking round, Worrals saw that she was in a stone passage, the floor of which sloped down at a steep angle. She had no time to see more, for Lucien, showing the way with the torch, set off at a fast pace.

“There are steps occasionally,” he said. “Watch for them.”

The passage, or, rather, tunnel, was a good deal longer than Worrals expected. She noted that it dropped quickly, but she made no comment. At the end a light showed, and it revealed a strange scene. On what appeared to be a small, square, artificial pool, floated a dilapidated punt. In it sat the Count and Countess de la Rose, still dressed as Monsieur and Madame Mundier. Waiting on a tiny quay were Frecks and Raoul.

“The party is now complete,” observed Lucien as they joined the others. “We have no time for explanations now. We are by no means out of danger. The orders are that we are to leave the château, and, indeed, there would seem to be no point in remaining.” He turned to Worrals. “While you were away, it was decided that we all try to reach England, except Raoul, who prefers to remain in France. It will be safe for him to go home.”

“That suits me,” agreed Worrals.

“In the boat, then, please.”

They all got into the punt. Lucien picked up a worm-eaten paddle and, guided by Raoul with the torch, sent the craft surging over the black water. The roof and sides closed in, and presently the punt was proceeding down a tunnel.

“Not exactly a place for a picnic,” murmured Frecks.

“But it has its uses, as you see,” remarked Lucien, who had heard her observation. “We are fifty feet below the château. The drain—we always call this tunnel the drain—is at the same level as the river, with which it makes connection at the old mill.”

“Why have water, instead of a solid floor?” asked Frecks.

“Because,” answered Lucien, “in the old days, in case of a pursuit, only those with a boat could use it. Our ancestors went to some trouble over these things.”

It was quite a long way to the mill, so Bill and Worrals had time to exchange notes. She told him why she had been unable to meet him as arranged. He answered that he guessed something of the sort had happened. He also explained how he had given the Germans the slip by knocking one of the motor-cyclists off his machine. Even though he knew he would be followed, he had gone on to the château because it seemed to be the only place where he could make contact with the others.

When the punt reached the mill Lucien went forward to make a reconnaissance. He was soon back. “All clear,” he said. “Raoul will leave us

here, and Monsieur Ashton, who has instructions, will take over. We are now in his hands.”

Worrals looked at Bill. “Is that right?”

“Yes,” answered Bill, as they made their way to a lane that ran past the mill. “I don’t know exactly what has been planned,” he admitted. “My instructions were to collect you, and be at a certain spot, a cross-roads not far from here, at ten o’clock to-night. It’s nearly that now, so we had better be moving.”

At this juncture Raoul said good-bye and disappeared into the darkness. Lucien, knowing the way to the cross-roads rendezvous, went on ahead to scout, while the others followed.

“Dead on time,” said Bill, looking at his watch, when they reached the cross-roads. “All we can do now is wait. We had better stand back under these trees in case any Boches come along. The hunt for us will be in full cry by now. Hark!”

From the direction of the château, and no great distance away, came a noise of shouting. A whistle blew.

“It sounds as though you’re right,” remarked Worrals calmly.

“There’s a vehicle of some sort coming down the road—pretty fast, too,” went on Bill. “Keep back.”

As he spoke, sidelamps appeared round the bend, and a moment later a German military lorry pulled up with a squeaking of brakes. To Worrals’ alarm, a German soldier jumped down from the driving seat and looked up and down the roads.

“Anyone about?” called a cheerful voice in perfect English.

For a second Worrals did not realise that it was the man in enemy uniform who had spoken. Apparently none of them did. Then Bill laughed and stepped forward.

“Looking for us?” he enquired.

“Judging from your voice, I should say, ‘Yes,’” came the reply. “Sorry I’m a minute and a half late. How many of there are you?”

“Six.”

The stranger whistled. “Quite a gang. All right, hop in. We’ve some way to go. You’ll find a tarpaulin in there; if we are stopped on the road, get under it, keep still and leave things to me.”

They all climbed into the lorry and settled themselves as comfortably as possible. “Okay. Step on it,” called Bill, and the lorry plunged forward.

Then followed a memorable ride. The lorry roared on without stopping, sometimes jolting and bumping over an uneven surface, but generally making good time on the long, straight roads. Once or twice they passed through darkened villages. Worrals lost all sense of direction. On into the night raced the lorry, until the ride began to seem interminable.

At long last it slowed down and turned sharply up a narrow lane, where the wheels bumped in deep ruts and the branches of overhanging trees swished against the canvas sides of the vehicle. Then, suddenly, it stopped.

“Well, folks, this is it, right on time,” announced the driver.

A voice spoke in the darkness. “Is that you, Joe?” it said casually in English, and Worrals had a queer feeling that she had heard the voice before.

“Yes, there’s quite a gang of us,” answered the driver—whose name, presumably, was Joe.

A dark figure loomed up. “Are you there, Ashton?” said the familiar voice.

“Yes,” answered Bill.

“Got the girls?”

“They’re here.”

Worrals gasped. She had not been mistaken. She *did* know the voice. The newcomer was Squadron-Leader Yorke.

“I’m getting dizzy,” she told Frecks helplessly. “If this goes on, the whole blessed station will soon be here. The calm way these people walk about talking English beats me.”

But Squadron-Leader Yorke was speaking again. “All right, Joe; better not stay here,” he said, and the lorry moved off into the darkness before the refugees could say a word of thanks.

“I’m glad you all managed to make it,” went on the Squadron-Leader. “Pity the show broke down, but that was bound to happen sooner or later. It’s been well worth while. Come on, I’ll soon have you home.”

The party followed the new leader into a field, where the silhouette of a big aircraft came into view. Squadron-Leader Yorke, without any fuss, walked up to it and opened a cabin door. From his manner, he might have been opening the door of a taxi in Piccadilly. “Sorry I can’t give you any lights,” he said. “You’ll find rugs in the seats. You’ll need them, because we’re going up high. There’s a basket on the floor with sandwiches, and coffee in a vacuum flask. I thought you might like some.”

As he spoke, the Squadron-Leader closed the cabin door. Then, using a torch, he saw everyone comfortably settled in a seat. "Don't start on the coffee yet or you may spill it," he said. "My take-off may be a bit bumpy—it's a rough field. Wait till we're in the air. I'm leaving right away." He went on through to the pilot's seat.

"What type of aircraft is this?" Worrals asked Bill. "I don't seem to recognise it."

"S-sh. Special job for this class of work," answered Bill softly. "You may not have realised it, but you're in a pressure cabin with oxygen laid on. We're going higher, much higher, than the flak and the nasty little Messerschmitts . . ." The rest of this comforting assurance was lost in the roar of engines.

A minute later the machine was in the air, climbing at a steep angle. Worrals curled up in her seat and went to sleep—not because she wanted to, but because she simply could not keep awake. Things had happened almost too fast to think, and now it was all over her nerves relaxed. Nor did she wake up until the wheels of the aircraft were trundling over the ground again, and Bill shook her by the arm.

"We're home," he announced. "You two kids had better get straight to bed. We'll talk in the morning."

Frecks yawned. "Not so much of the kids, wise guy," she drawled petulantly.

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And that, except for the inevitable reports and explanations concluded what might be called the affair of the Château Delarose—at any rate, as far as the girls were concerned. Later, they learned from Squadron-Leader Yorke, who did not divulge the source of his information, that the château had been occupied by the German military as a barracks, presumably for the duration of the war. They saw Lucien occasionally, once in the company of the Squadron-Leader, from which they drew their own conclusions, which were that he was still engaged in espionage work. The Count and Countess settled in London, and their flat was a frequent rendezvous for afternoon tea when the girls got leave to go to Town. For the rest, they settled down to routine duties, and with these, for the time being, after their hectic days in France, they were content. As Frecks put it, "Adventure, like chocolate, is best taken in small quantities, otherwise it is liable to lose its flavour."

BIGGLES SWEEPS THE DESERT

A “BIGGLES” SQUADRON STORY

BY

CAPTAIN W. E. JOHNS

Squadron-Leader James Bigglesworth, D.S.O., R.A.F., better known as “Biggles,” is ordered to take his squadron to a remote part of the Libyan desert in order to ascertain why certain British transport aircraft, operating on a trans-Africa route, have failed to arrive at their destination.

Based on an oasis in the desert near the middle sector of the route, Biggles soon discovers why the transport planes have disappeared. A Nazi *Jagdstaffel*, commanded by a noted Nazi ace, Hauptmann von Zoyton, is also based in the desert near the route, obviously with orders to prevent the British machines from getting through. In this he has been largely successful through the medium of a magnetic beam which affects the compasses of machines flying over the route.

Biggles, by the exercise of his great experience, is able to deal the enemy a severe blow, which, however, reveals his presence. Von Zoyton strikes back, and a bitterly fought feud is waged over the wilderness as Biggles tries to keep the route open and Von Zoyton tries to close it. For some time, while each side tries to out-manceuvre the other and force it from the field by the destruction of its base, the result is in doubt; but in the end, Biggles’ skill in conducting offensive tactics, combined with the daring and endurance of his pilots, clears the air, and he is able to report that the route is once more safe.

BIGGLES FLIES EAST

BY

CAPTAIN W. E. JOHNS

The Creator of 28 “Biggles” Books

When Captain James Bigglesworth (“Biggles” to his friends) flew East, he was only a boy, in spite of his twelve months’ active service.

When he came back from his tour of duty, he was still a boy, but older than his years. Into his deep-set hazel eyes, which less than eighteen months before had pondered arithmetic with doubt and algebra with despair, had come a new light; and into his hands, small and delicate—hands that at school had launched paper darts with unerring accuracy—had come a new grip as they closed over the joystick and firing lever.

When you have read this story, perhaps you will understand the reason.

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.

Some illustrations were moved to facilitate page layout.

[The end of *Worrals Flies Again* by Capt. W. E. (William Earl) Johns]