

*Worrals on the
War-path*

Venture
BOOKS FOR GIRLS

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War-path*

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WORRALS OF THE W.A.A.F.
CAPTAIN W. E. JOHNS

WORRALS CARRIES ON
CAPTAIN W. E. JOHNS

WORRALS FLIES AGAIN
CAPTAIN W. E. JOHNS

WORRALS ON THE WAR-PATH
CAPTAIN W. E. JOHNS

WORRALS GOES EAST
CAPTAIN W. E. JOHNS

THE YOUNG PRETENDER
DOROTHEA MOORE

13 THREE BRIDGES STREET
DOROTHEA MOORE



Worrals on the War-path

CAPTAIN W. E. JOHNS

Venture
BOOKS FOR GIRLS

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TORONTO

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TORONTO

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ILLUSTRATIONS

“Our rendezvous is the fork of the tracks from Malene and Vignes.”

“Little goes on that I do not know about,” declared Duclos smugly. “You would do well to remember that.”

“I saw from the uniform that it was Duclos. He lay still—horrible.”

“Come,” said the bearded man, beckoning with a gnarled forefinger. “They don’t waste words, do they?” sneered Frecks.

“Mademoiselle is in trouble, eh?” “Yes, monsieur. It is about Jean Lasalle, who was arrested this morning.” The officer’s eyes narrowed. “You know him?”

The cargo was being unloaded and quickly transported to the cave by Louis and his comrades.

Worrals sat on a rock and watched the Nazis. First they made a general survey; then examined the plane more closely.

“Mademoiselle is aware that the bulls are dangerous —?”

The first fifty yards was so bad that in her heart Worrals became convinced that it would take hours to reach the bottom.



A WORD ABOUT WORRALS

FOR the guidance of those who have not read the earlier books about “Worrals” of the W.A.A.F. it should be explained that it was not by her own deliberate intention, or that of the Intelligence Branch of the Air Ministry, that she became engaged in special duties which might be put into the broad category of espionage. It came about by accident—more or less; and it depended upon a number of circumstances which in turn were largely the result of special qualifications. Because her father had been in the Diplomatic Service, she had lived, and gone to school, in both France and Germany, at the age when learning is easy. Consequently she spoke both French and German fluently. Later, she had learned to fly at her own expense. It was natural therefore, that she should join the W.A.A.F., and this she did in the ordinary way.

It was only after she was in the service, and it was discovered that she was a qualified pilot, that she was transferred from ordinary routine to flying duties. The same with her friend, “Freckles” Lovell. Even then their work did not go beyond the delivery and ferrying of training types. It was force of circumstances, when pilots were at premium during the Battle of Britain, that caused them to be moved on to service types.

It may not be strictly true to say that it was by accident that Worrals became involved in the enemy spy adventure that brought her to the notice of the Higher Authority, because had she not possessed the special qualifications referred to above, and an astute brain that enabled her to employ them to the best advantage, her first personal clash with the enemy could not have happened. But it did happen, and her shrewd and fearless handling of the situation was not overlooked by the Air Council. The result was almost inevitable. In war, operatives with exceptional attainments are ever in demand, and once her name had been docketed in the Intelligence Branch of the R.A.F., it could only be a question of time before fresh employment was found for her in the field for which her accomplishments made her so well adapted. In any of the services, once this state of affairs comes about, it is—as the old soldiers say—just one thing after another.

One final point. The reader should understand that this exploit occurred before the Nazis’ occupation of Southern France.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

THE *mise-en-scène* of this story, the area of Central France named the Cévennes, is so little known, even to the tourist, that a brief description may be helpful, particularly as the physical features of the districts are so remarkable that the sceptical reader might be pardoned for supposing that the locality exists only in the imagination of the author.

To quote from the guide-book and say that the Cévennes are a huge mass of limestone mountains, forming, as it were, the backbone of France, conveys no idea of the wild grandeur of the actual picture. It would seem that in some remote age the whole of the centre of France was pushed up by tremendous external pressure, as a flat piece of dough might rise if the sides were forced inwards. In this way there was formed a wide ridge, about eighty miles long and from three to six thousand feet high. Owing to the steepness of the foothills the whole district has remained primitive, desolate, and even to-day it is crossed by few roads.

In the early ages the centre of the Cévennes was one vast plateau, but in the course of time rivers rising in the peaks have eaten their way through the porous volcanic rock, cutting chasms with perpendicular walls, so that the original plateau is now divided into a number of smaller ones. These barren plateaux, called *causses*,^[1] are rarely visited, except perhaps by an occasional shepherd or a tourist sufficiently daring to brave the dizzy footpaths. The *causses* vary in height from 3000 to 4000 feet. The largest is the Causse Méjean—more than a hundred square miles of country as lonely as any to be found in Europe.

[1] The word *causse* is derived from the local word *cau*, from the French *chaux*, meaning lime, the rocks being limestone.

The chasms which divide these plateaux are terrifying indeed. One of the most spectacular is the Gorge of the Tarn, which is from 1300 to 1700 feet deep. The walls are sheer, but covered with verdure where there is a foothold for plants. The river flows through the bottom, and those who dare brave the rapids may pass through this terrific corridor in a small boat. In addition to the gorges, water has cut its way into the rock so that the plateau has become honeycombed with caves, subterranean rivers and lakes.

In some places the plateaux present a flat or undulating surface; in others, erosion by wind and rain has carved the rock into fantastic shapes—monstrous animals, ruined cities, and the like. So utterly lonely is this territory that it was the last stronghold of wolves in France. In the Forest of Mercoire may be seen the lair of an enormous wolf, called the Bête du G randau, which not so many years ago terrorised the neighbourhood.

To enhance the wildness of the scene there are ruins of prehistoric dwellings, castles, hermit sanctuaries, ancient chapels and abandoned villages. With the exception of the little town of Florac the few inhabited villages that remain are wretchedly primitive, some accessible only on foot. But the people, hardened by centuries of struggle against the barrenness of the soil, and the rigours of the climate, have long been noted for their fierce independence. They live chiefly on potatoes, rye bread, and milk from the sheep that somehow manage to eke out a precarious existence on the sparse herbage.

WORRALS HAS AN IDEA

DEEP night lay across the fair land of France, night as black as the soul of its Nazi conqueror. Only here and there a star gleamed mistily, wanly, as though afraid of what it might reveal. Everywhere, everything was silent, as if all living creatures were afraid to breathe lest the sound be heard by the ever-watchful German masters. Only one thing moved—the Spectre of Fear, and he stalked triumphant through cottage and château, from the fertile fields of Flanders to the rocky, sun-washed shores of the Mediterranean Sea.

But wait! Something else was stirring. Two shadows had, it seemed, come to life, on a narrow track that fringed a gorge so deep, with walls so sheer, that had it not been for the towering crags that cut into the sky beyond the chasm, it might have been the end of the world. Somewhere in the distance a dog barked; not the friendly, warning bark of a dog disturbed at a comfortable fireside, but the savage threat of a creature of the wild. The figures stopped, and once more melted into the colourless background.

A voice spoke softly, a girl's voice, a strange sound, you might think, to be heard at such a place at such a time.

“Where there are dogs, there are usually men not far away. What do you make of it, Worrals?” it asked, a trifle anxiously.

Flight Officer Joan Worrals, better known in the W.A.A.F. as “Worrals,” glanced at her luminous wrist watch.

“Eleven-twenty,” she murmured thoughtfully. “I should say we're getting near Carnac. This path gets dizzier and dizzier. The moon should be up in ten minutes. I think we had better wait for it. We are all right for time. Let's have another look at the map—here, among the rocks.”

There was a faint rustle of paper as the map was unfolded and spread open on the ground. Lying flat the girls examined it in the light of a small electric torch, keeping the beam within a narrow circle with their hands.

“In mountain country like this, one track is much like another, and it's the easiest thing in the world to get off your course,” remarked Worrals quietly. “But if I haven't made a mistake, and I don't think I have, we ought to be somewhere here.” She marked a spot with the point of a pencil. “Remember, it's four years since I was here, and then I only saw the place in

daylight,” she went on. “Our rendezvous is the fork of the tracks that come up from La Malene and Vignes. Fortunately, they meet just this side of Carnac, which can’t be more than a mile away. We’ll wait for the moon.” Worrals folded the map, slipped it into the bundle which she carried, and glanced at the sky. “I hope the weather holds. We’ve been lucky so far, but I don’t like the look of those clouds.”

“I could nibble a biscuit,” suggested Betty Lovell, her companion, more often known in the Service as “Freckles,” on account of the freckles with which her face had been plentifully endowed.

“I’ve never seen the time when you couldn’t,” returned Worrals evenly. “Help yourself, but go slow, we haven’t many left. They’re in your bag.”

Silence fell as the girls settled down to wait.

Lying among the rocks near the edge of the gorge, Worrals allowed her mind to drift back over the events of the three weeks during which a vague idea had crystallised into grim reality. Had Squadron Leader Marcus Yorke, of the Air Intelligence Service, not come to the aerodrome, she reflected, it was unlikely that she would have mentioned it. Even then she did not suppose that it would be taken seriously by the Higher Command. She had found the Intelligence Officer at Station Headquarters with the C.O., Wing Commander McNavish, who had recently been promoted.

“Hullo, Worrals,” greeted the Squadron Leader. “I was hoping to see you while I was here. Having a quiet time?”

“Too quiet,” answered Worrals. “I won’t interrupt you now, but may I have word with you before you leave?”



“Our rendezvous is the fork of the tracks from Malene and Vignes”

Wing Commander McNavish flicked the short, bristling moustache that gave him the appearance of an angry fox terrier. His steely-blue eyes gleamed frostily.

“What’s this?” he barked. “Something going on behind my back?”

“Oh no, sir,” answered Worrals, looking shocked at the idea.

“Then come in and say what ye have to say,” ordered the C.O.

“Thank you, sir,” returned Worrals sweetly. “Flight Officer Lovell is with me.”

“All right, come on, the pair of ye,” grunted the C.O. “What is it, a plot?”

“Not exactly, sir,” replied Worrals. “So far it’s only an idea.”

“Ah,” breathed the C.O. “Another crazy scheme, eh?”

“Suppose we leave Squadron Leader Yorke to judge, sir?” suggested Worrals. “He’ll soon decide if it’s crazy or not.”

“Go ahead, Worrals,” invited the Squadron Leader.

“Listening to the news on the wireless last night, I was particularly interested in the story of the convoy that has just got through to Malta,” began Worrals. “I gather that some of the ships carried fighter aircraft for the Malta garrison—in fact, the announcer said as much.”

Squadron Leader Yorke looked puzzled. “Yes, that’s no secret,” he confirmed.

“It struck me,” continued Worrals, “that to send aircraft to Malta by sea must be a long and hazardous undertaking.”

“How else would you get them there?” inquired Squadron Leader Yorke. “No single-seater fighter has a petrol capacity sufficient for it to fly direct, non-stop, to Malta—more’s the pity.”

“But with one intermediate landing stage, to refuel, a fighter could not only get through, but make the trip in a few hours,” said Worrals pointedly.

Squadron Leader Yorke smiled sadly. “True, but where, may I ask, would you land? If we leave out Spain, which is right off the course, every inch of territory between here and Malta is in the hands of the enemy.”

“I’m perfectly aware of that,” declared Worrals. “That’s what started me thinking. I don’t see why a machine shouldn’t land in France——”

“France!” The C.O. blinked. “France! The gal’s crazy,” he told the Squadron Leader.

“Just a minute, sir—let me finish,” requested Worrals firmly. “You will agree, I think, that I am a practical pilot—even if you don’t believe in women pilots——”

“All right—all right—never mind about that,” barked the C.O. “Come to the point.”

“Speaking as a pilot of some experience I feel sure I could devise a scheme whereby, in an emergency, one or more squadrons of fighters could

be rushed through to Malta in reasonable safety. If that were possible, it might, at a pinch, make a lot of difference to the war in the Mediterranean, and possibly in the Near East.”

“I should jolly well think it would,” put in the Squadron Leader warmly. “Go on Worrals. You excite my curiosity. Suppose you were in charge of such an operation, how would you work the miracle?”

“I don’t like the word miracle,” protested Worrals. “I’m dealing in hard-boiled facts, not impossibilities. My scheme would involve a straightforward, if somewhat irregular operation. I happen to know France very well.” She spoke directly to Squadron Leader Yorke. “Have you ever been in that part of unoccupied France known as the Cévennes?”

“I’ve heard of the place, but I can’t say that I know the district.”

“Few English people do, and, I imagine, few Germans,” went on Worrals. “I once spent a month there, and it comes to this. Right in the heart of France there is an open area as lonely as you would find anywhere. There are, to my certain knowledge, plateaux that could be used as landing grounds for aircraft. I won’t pretend that they are everything that could be desired, but I know at least one that would serve in an emergency. I don’t suppose there is a German within fifty miles of the place—although no doubt there soon would be if we started operating from there. But by that time we should have achieved our object. The planes would have gone through, and whatever the Nazis did afterwards it would be beyond their power to stop them.”

“A plateau, eh . . . in the middle of France,” murmured Squadron Leader Yorke thoughtfully. “No trees?”

“None. The only obstacles would be rocks, and they could be moved.”

“But surely, if the country is as open as that, machines landing and taking off would be seen?”

“Not necessarily. The district is too big for that.”

“But there must be *some* people there?”

“Yes, shepherds and peasants; but if I know anything about them they would be on our side. They’re probably the toughest people in France—and the most intensely patriotic. But I was not thinking of operating so much by day as by night, and only then on rare occasions. If the scheme succeeded once, it might be worth while.”

“Just how would you go about this?” asked the Squadron Leader.

“Well, this is what I would do,” went on Worrals, warming up to her subject. “First, it would be necessary for someone to go over and prepare the ground—or at any rate, clear a runway, by moving any loose rocks. That done, the landing area would be marked out with a few small lights—electric torches would do. Then a transport plane would fly down with the equipment—fuel and oil, a pump, and a length of hose. The people on the spot would have to handle things so that the machine could get away again before dawn. The equipment would be hidden amongst the rocks, or better still, in one of the caves with which the place is honeycombed. The transport machine might have to make several journeys to bring a big supply of petrol. Naturally, the more petrol that could be brought, the greater the number of fighters that could go through. Having got everything hidden the operatives take cover. They would have a portable radio. When fighter aircraft were required urgently at Malta the people at home would simply have to send a signal to say that the machines were on their way, giving the approximate time of arrival of the first one. The operatives switch on the lights to show them where to land. After that, machines would arrive at intervals of, say, fifteen minutes, right through the hours of darkness. As each machine landed it would be refuelled, after which it would push right on to Malta. Given enough petrol it might be possible to get two complete squadrons through in one night. Of course, you couldn’t go on doing this sort of thing for long without the enemy getting to know about it, but what would it matter? The fighters would have gone through, after which the operatives would destroy the equipment and get home by such means as they could devise.”

The two senior officers were silent for a full minute. They simply sat and stared at Worrals. Squadron Leader Yorke was the first to speak.

“For sheer cheek you take the biscuit,” he remarked, slowly. “All the same, Worrals, I think you’ve got something here. As far as I can see there is only one serious snag.”

“What is it?”

“You spoke of operatives. From where are we to get people who have the three essential qualifications for the job—an intimate knowledge of the district, an ability to speak French, and a broad grasp of air pilotage?”

Worrals smiled faintly. “You’d only need one such person, with an efficient assistant.”

Squadron Leader Yorke started. “You’re not suggesting that *you* do it?”

“Why not? I speak French, I know the district, and I can fly. Added to that, as you know, I’ve had a certain amount of experience in operating in enemy territory.”

“I’ll no hear of it,” swore Wing Commander McNavish, bringing his hand down on the desk with a crash that made the inkwell jump. “The thing’s preposterous. Ye’ll lose your life.”

“You said that last time, sir,” reminded Worrals.

“Aye, and sooner or later I’ll be right.”

Squadron Leader Yorke stepped into the argument. “I think I’ll be getting back to headquarters,” he said abruptly.

“You think the scheme is not unreasonable?” coaxed Worrals.

“That’s hardly for me to say,” replied the Squadron Leader. “At any rate, it’s too big a project for me to give a decision, but you’ve given me something to think about. One of our big worries in the Mediterranean zone has been the delivery of fighter aircraft replacements. Bombers can fly out, but not single-seaters. If we could pull this off it might have even more far-reaching effects than even you realise. It’s dangerous—deuced dangerous——”

“What isn’t, in a war like this?” put in Worrals with a shrug.

“As you remark, what isn’t?” murmured the Squadron Leader drily. “But I must be getting along.”

“So must I,” said Worrals. “I’ve got to take a machine back to the makers for reconditioning this afternoon. I missed my breakfast; I don’t want to lose my lunch.”

“What you’ll lose, my gal, if you go on playing with fire, is your life,” snorted the C.O.

“Did no one ever tell you that, when you were collecting all those ribbons on your chest?” asked Worrals evenly.

The C.O. bristled. “That’s nothing to do wi’t. I’m a man.”

“Being a man doesn’t——”

“Get out o’ my office,” flared the C.O., starting to his feet.

Worrals saluted. “Yes, sir,” she said meekly.

Outside the door she burst out laughing. “I love Old Frostyface best of all when he pretends to be angry,” she sighed. “Let’s go and snatch a bit of lunch.”

In her heart she did not expect to hear any more of the scheme, even though it might be taken up by the Higher Command; but three days later she was called to the Air Ministry where, in Squadron Leader Yorke’s office, the matter was reopened.

“Sit down, Worrals,” invited the Squadron Leader. “Cigarette?”

“No thanks—I don’t use them.”

“You’ve got an idea why I’ve sent for you, I suppose?”

“Don’t tell me you’re going to take up my scheme?”

The Squadron Leader nodded. “We are. But it’s more a job for Operations than Intelligence, so, unfortunately, I’ve had instructions to take you along to the Special Operations Branch.”

“Why do you say unfortunately?”

“Because if they get hold of you they’ll probably try to keep you, which means that Intelligence will lose you.”

Worrals smiled. “Thanks for the compliment. Who’s in charge of Special Ops.?”

“Air Commodore Raymond. Matter of fact, he was on Intelligence until recently. He’s a good scout, and knows what he’s talking about. Let’s go and see him.”

A few minutes later Worrals found herself in Special Operations Headquarters being regarded by a tall, elderly, serious-faced man. After inviting her to be seated he came straight to the point.

“About this scheme of yours, Miss Worrals. Were you serious when you told Squadron Leader Yorke that you were prepared to undertake the job?”

“Certainly, sir,” answered Worrals without hesitation.

“How well do you know the district?”

“Fairly well. I spent a holiday there, a month, during which time I did a lot of pottering about.”

“By yourself?”

“Mostly, but in the difficult places I had a guide named Louis Capelle.”

“What do you mean by the difficult places?”

“Well, he showed me some of the caves and took me through the Gorge du Tarn in his boat. He’s a professional guide—or he was, when I was there.”

“Where did he live?”

“In La Malene.”

“I see.” The Air Commodore stroked his chin thoughtfully.

“Why are you so interested in this man, sir?” inquired Worrals.

“Because—I may as well be frank—there are aspects of this project that I don’t see how you can handle yourself.”

“I have a friend, Flight Officer Lovell——” began Worrals, but the Air Commodore interrupted.

“So I understand. But I was thinking of something different—a male assistant, a Frenchman for choice.” The Air Commodore leaned back in his chair and regarded Worrals seriously. “In the first place, it’s getting late in the year, and while it might be possible for two girls to sleep rough in the Cévennes in the summer, you would be in a bad way if you were caught in the mountains by bad weather. Then there is the matter of fresh food. And finally, the installation of such equipment as you would require would demand considerable physical strength. Of course, we could send a man, or two men, with you, but for obvious reasons a Frenchman would be better. He would probably be able to get food, and find accommodation in the event of bad weather, and be helpful in many ways.”

“Yes, sir, I see that,” agreed Worrals slowly. She turned suddenly to Squadron Leader Yorke, who had remained in the room. “How about Lucien, the Vicomte Delarose?” she suggested.

“Who’s he?” demanded the Air Commodore.

Squadron Leader Yorke answered. “A young French nobleman who, with some patriotic friends, has been of great service to us in the espionage branch. Worrals—that is, Flight Officer Worrals—has worked with him before.”

“He might be the very man for us,” said the Air Commodore, looking interested. “Is he over here?”

“No, as a matter of fact he’s in France.”

“But you could get in touch with him?”

“Yes.”

“Good.” The Air Commodore turned to Worrals. “Naturally, the fewer the people who know about an operation of this sort, the better, but I should feel happier in my mind if I knew you had inside help. I take it that you would be prepared to work with this fellow Lucien again?”

“Certainly, sir,” agreed Worrals. “He’s absolutely reliable. Indeed, I understand that he has done so much for Fighting France that the Boches have put a price on his head.”

“In that case let’s get down to details,” said the Air Commodore.

And so the matter had been settled. Ten days later the girls had baled out from a night-flying aircraft piloted by Worrals' friend, Flying Officer Bill Ashton, who had been brought into the scheme as ferry pilot between the base in England and the scene of operations in France. With food, maps, a small portable radio and a compass, they had jumped over the open country near Alais, on the fringe of the Cévennes, and having landed safely headed at once for the mountain rendezvous where Squadron Leader Yorke had made arrangements for them to contact Lucien. They had been in France nearly four days, sleeping by day in the woods, and, avoiding habitations, travelling by night. They still wore their service uniforms which, however, were well hidden beneath drab-coloured raincoats. The Air Commodore had been in favour of disguises, but, as Worrals pointed out, they were engaged in a purely military operation, not espionage. Should they be captured they would—or should—be treated as prisoners of war, not as spies.

“I wouldn't give much for your chance, all the same, if Von Brandisch gets his hands on you,” Squadron Leader Yorke had said earnestly. “You twisted his tail the last time you were in France—and Gestapo agents don't like having their tails twisted. It makes them spiteful.”

“If I'm going to be shot I'd rather take it in uniform,” declared Worrals. And that's how it was left.

The girls were now within striking distance of their objective, and so far had encountered no serious obstacles. Worrals stood and picked up her bundle as the misty point of a crescent moon rose slowly above the gaunt mountain peaks.

“Let's get along,” she said.

A SONG IN THE NIGHT

THE girls continued on their way, cautiously, keeping to the track, which was little more than a depression worn into the rock by the feet of travellers and sheep through centuries of time. On one hand, three thousand feet below, lay the broad plain of the Rhone valley, a vague panorama that rolled away into the infinite distance. On the other hand was the terrifying Gorge of the Tarn, a sheer drop into the depths of the plateau whence came at intervals the babble of water rushing over a boulder-strewn bed. The moon climbed up for its nightly toil across the heavens, but only served to emphasise the stark loneliness of the scene.

“Well, we’re on the Cévennes. What do you think of it?” asked Worrals.

“It’s terrific—so terrific that to tell the truth it rather frightens me,” answered Frecks.

“It is pretty grim, I must admit,” agreed Worrals. “Apart from the appalling solitude one can somehow feel the relentless march of time. At home, whether we notice them or not, we see changes, but up here the years roll on barely leaving a mark. The river cuts its bed a little deeper, perhaps, and the rain wears another inch, maybe, from the faces of the cliffs. That’s all. If it looks like this now, think what it must be like in winter, with storms tearing through the gorges and the wind howling over the open plateaux.”

“I’d hate to be caught up here in dirty weather,” murmured Frecks.

“There’s a certain amount of cover—if you know where to look for it.”

“I don’t see it. Where?”

“Under our feet. I don’t know about this particular *causee*, but most of them are honeycombed with caves which, if my old guide, Louis Capelle, is to be believed, have never been properly explored.”

“Why not?”

“Say, rather, why should they be? A stranger would be a fool to venture in without a good reason, and the local people have something else to do beside poking about in the rocks, on what, to them, would be a profitless task. But that looks like the fork ahead, where the ground begins to drop

away. Lucien is due to show up at midnight. We may as well find a seat on the rock, and wait.”

“I hope he isn’t late,” said Frecks. “It’s getting chilly. Suppose he doesn’t turn up?”

“We shall have to wait until he does,” replied Worrals imperturbably.

“What a place to make a date,” observed Frecks. “Who’s idea was it?”

“Mine. Where would you have us meet—in Paris, under the noses of the Nazis? Hark!” Worrals laid her hand on Frecks’ arm as somewhere not far away a piece of rock clattered. “Someone’s coming; we’ll keep out of sight until we’re sure it’s Lucien.”

A moment later a voice began to sing, in a low tenor voice, the famous old French refrain:

*“Sur le pont d’Avignon
L’on y danse, l’on y danse . . .”*

“It’s Lucien,” said Worrals with intense satisfaction, as the singer came into sight. “That’s our password.” She took up the song:

*“Sur le pont d’Avignon
L’on y danse tout en ronde.”*

The newcomer stopped dead for a moment, and then came on quickly.

“*Bon soir*, Lucien,” greeted Worrals.

Lucien stopped again. “Name of a name!” he gasped. “Mademoiselle Worrals—*Et Frecks aussi. Je suis très content!*”

“You seem surprised,” commented Worrals. “Weren’t you expecting us?”

“But no.”

“Then who were you expecting?”

“I don’t know.” As he spoke Lucien shook the girls’ hands. “My instructions were to find accommodation in the village, and be here to-night, at midnight, for further orders.”

“The chief was too wise to mention names, I suppose, in case of accidents,” went on Worrals. “But this is no place to stand talking. What about the accommodation?”

“I have found a pigsty of a house in Carnac. I came a week ago, on a bicycle.”

“Was it wise to take a house? Surely that will excite local curiosity?”

“Perhaps not. I am posing as an artist—and the people here are used to artists.”

“Good. Then I hope you can fix us with a bed for to-night. We’ve been sleeping rough for four days, and a good rest, before we start operations, seems indicated.”

Lucien hesitated. “I am hardly in a state to receive guests.”

“Any roof is better than none. How do you get on for food?—we may be here for some time.”

“Potatoes, potatoes, and then potatoes,” sighed Lucien. “Sometimes there is a little bread.”

“Looks as if my waistline is going to suffer,” put in Frecks.

“Well, let’s go down to the house,” suggested Worrals. “We have a lot to talk about.”

“How’s your friend, the Marquis?” asked Frecks as they walked on down the track.

“Raoul is very well,” answered Lucien. “But I am afraid for him. He is too fond of pulling the noses of the Boche. One day he will be caught.”

“Where is he?” asked Worrals.

“Here, with me.”

“That wasn’t in orders.”

“No, but we have worked together so much, annoying the Boche, that he refuses to leave me. It pleases him to think he is—how do you call it—a bodyguard.”

“Well, he may be useful,” said Worrals. “We have a difficult job ahead.”

The village came into sight, a mere cluster of primitive cottages as drab as the rocks among which they were built. For the most part they consisted of small square buildings, composed of roughly shaped pieces of rock, with the cracks plastered with mud.

“Quietly,” warned Lucien, and led the way to one that stood a little apart, a mere box, or rather, two boxes, set one upon the other. A ladder of rough timber, leaning against the outside wall near the door, gave access to the upper room.

“The people here don’t exactly wallow in luxury,” observed Frecks.

“They are content in their own way. They have never known any other conditions. I think they prefer it like this,” answered Lucien, as he opened the door.

“A bit of a change from the Château Delarose,” murmured Worrals.

“Nevertheless, a good deal healthier at the moment,” returned Lucien, smiling. “The Boches are in occupation at the château.” He closed the door behind them and lit a crude tallow candle.

Worrals was now able to see that he wore the untidy clothes so often affected by French artists. The furniture, she noticed, such as it was, was as primitive as the building. Most of it seemed to be home made. She remarked an easel, some canvases, and a box of paints, on a bench near the door. An iron bowl, presumably for anyone who cared to wash, stood on a cheap deal table. Exploration revealed a tiny kitchen, and what had evidently been a goat pen, side by side. Some empty sacks lay on the floor.

“At the moment this is my bed,” explained Lucien. “It is rather more agreeable than the loft, which has been taken over by birds—too many birds. I’m sorry I can offer nothing better, but this is typical of all the houses here.”

“We shan’t be here long enough to get uncomfortable,” asserted Worrals.

“What do you mean?” asked Lucien.

“As soon as we have found the right spot we shall roost in the hills,” announced Worrals. “Where is Raoul?”

“Outside. He keeps watch.”

“At this time of night?”

“In France to-day, *mon ami*, it is at night that things happen,” returned Lucien seriously. Then his eyes went round with wonder as Worrals unfastened her raincoat, revealing the uniform beneath. “Do you walk about France in a British uniform?” he breathed. “Is that wise?”

Worrals shrugged. “We are engaged in a military operation,” she explained. “I see no reason—yet—to adopt a disguise. It may be necessary later on, but I hope not. We shall see. How are we going to dispose of ourselves in this rabbit hutch?”

“Raoul and I had better take the loft—with the birds,” replied Lucien smiling. “The kitchen is not as uncomfortable as it appears. What have you brought in your bundle?”

Worrals told him.

He grimaced when she mentioned the portable radio. “It’s death to own such an instrument in France. Was it necessary?”

“How else could we let the people at home know that we were ready to receive . . . but, of course, you don’t know anything about the scheme. I had better explain it right away, or else we shall be talking at cross purposes.”

There and then Worrals gave him an outline of the operation.

“The sooner we get things fixed up the better,” she concluded. “As soon as we have settled on a location, and cleared the ground, the transport machine can come down with the equipment.”

“But this is wonderful!” cried Lucien. “You don’t know how it pleases me that the soil of France should once more feel the tires of British aircraft. I have done some walking on the *causses*. Which one do you propose to use?”

“The Causse Méjean. Unless my memory is at fault there is a flat area in the elbow of the Tarn, not far from here, where the river turns sharply to the east. There are some crags on the westward side, but they should serve as a shield to hide our activities from people below. There is also, I remember, a cave, so the place should suit us in every way. But we shall know more about it when we have made a thorough examination.”

“When do you propose to do that?”

“To-morrow, starting just before dawn. In that way we should be clear of the village before people are about. Our only risk, then, of being seen, would be an occasional shepherd.”

“Most of them have already brought their animals down for the winter.”

“So much the better. We’ve no time to lose because the weather may break any time in October, and we’re in September now. Are you coming with us, Lucien?”

“I should like to. I will bring my paints; that will give an excuse for the party in case we are seen.”

“And Raoul?”

“He had better stay here to watch things, and scout for food. It is not easy to get, although with money one can still buy things. Anything is welcome, believe me, in France to-day.”

“So I imagine.” Worrals stood up. “Well, give our compliments to Raoul when he comes in. If we are going to start early we had better try to get some sleep. We have had a long tramp, and we’re both a bit tired.”

Lucien moved sharply as footsteps crunched outside on the stony path. An instant later there came a furtive double knock, twice repeated, on the door.

“It’s Raoul—that is our signal,” said Lucien, advancing quickly to the door, and opening it to admit Raoul, Marquis de Lur Saronceau.

One glance at his expressive face and Worrals knew that danger threatened.

He wasted no time in salutations. Looking at Lucien he said crisply, "Duclos is coming this way. He walks like one on a definite errand. There are few houses at this end, so he may be coming here."

Lucien moved quickly. He pushed open the kitchen door. "Inside, and remain still," he told the girls quickly but calmly, throwing their bundles in after them.

"Who is Duclos?" asked Worrals tersely.

"The local *gendarme*. We think he is a Vichy man."

There was no time for further explanations. Footsteps crunched again on the path. They were followed by a peremptory knock on the door.

Lucien closed the kitchen door, but did not fasten it, as he returned to the living-room, leaving the girls in darkness except for a narrow slit of yellow light that came through the crack between door and doorpost.

They heard the outer door opened, presumably by Raoul.

"*Bon soir, messieurs*," said a thick voice.

Lucien answered. "*Bon soir*, Monsieur Duclos."

"You keep late hours," said Duclos, speaking, of course, in French.

"We have been reading, and did not notice that it was so late," replied Lucien carelessly. "What can we do for you, *m'sieur*? A glass of wine perhaps?"

"*Merci*."

There was a brief interval, and Worrals could imagine the *gendarme* surveying the room.

"What are you doing in these parts?" he asked.

"I thought everyone knew," answered Lucien. "It is no secret. I came here to paint."

"And this other?"

"He is my friend. He has been ill, and has come here for the air. We have not broken the regulations, I trust?"

"Why did you not report to me with your identity card?"

"I called twice, *m'sieur*, but you were not at home." Lucien's tone of voice was respectful.

"I'll see them now."

There was a rustle of paper.

“Monsieur Jean Lasalle . . . and Pierre Sabatier,” murmured the *gendarme*, evidently reading from the identification cards, which Worrals guessed were false ones supplied by the British Intelligence Service.

“Our papers are in order, I trust, *m’sieur*?” said Lucien.

“Yes,” acknowledged Duclos—somewhat grudgingly, Worrals thought. His next question startled her.

“Have you had visitors to-night, Monsieur Lasalle?”

“Me? Visitors? Here?” Lucien laughed. “The thought, if I may say so without offence, is fantastic.”

“Two strangers were seen making their way across the *causses* by—er—someone at Florac. He tried to follow, but lost them in the hills.”

Frecks nudged Worrals. She was shocked and disappointed that in spite of their efforts not to show themselves, they had been seen.

“I shall be in the hills, painting, to-morrow,” said Lucien. “If I see any strangers I will report to you immediately.”

“You would be well advised to do so,” said Duclos, gruffly.

“Who could they be, these strangers?” asked Raoul.

“That is no concern of yours,” replied Duclos, arrogantly.

“Spies, maybe?” suggested Lucien. “Is it possible that there would be spies in these parts, Monsieur Duclos? I am told you are the best informed man in Carnac, so if anyone should know, it would be you.”

“Little goes on that I do not know about,” declared Duclos smugly. “You would do well to remember that,” he added.

“We shall not forget, *m’sieur*,” said Lucien.

“*Bien*. Get to bed you two. *Bon soir*.”

“*Bon soir, m’sieur*.”

The door closed. For a little while silence persisted, then Lucien slipped quietly into the kitchen.

“You heard that?”

“You bet we did,” declared Worrals.

“You were seen, near Florac.”

“That was careless of us.”

“Not at all. There are eyes everywhere in France, by day and by night, watching. We shall have to be careful.”

“Was he suspicious, do you think?”

“It’s not easy to say, but I don’t think so. His manner stinks of Vichy. Like some others, he is all puffed up with his importance.”

“You don’t know for certain that he is a Vichy agent?”



“Little goes on that I do not know about,” declared Duclos smugly. “You would do well to remember that.”

“No. No one would dare to say it, but we were guided by the attitude of the village people. They avoid the man like the plague. They would know; their instinct would tell them, even without definite information. Remember, these people were persecuted on account of their religion for three hundred years. They were hunted like wild animals. There is nothing like persecution to make people shrewd judges of their fellow men, *m’selle*. They can be as close as oysters, too. Duclos, if he is a Vichy agent, won’t get much out of them. He hasn’t been here long. I trust he doesn’t try to—how do you say—throw his weight about, among the people here.”

“What would happen if he did?”

“I wouldn’t like to tell you. I will only say that the people of the Cévennes know how to deal with traitors.”

“Apart from the attitude of the people, is there anything else that makes you think that Duclos is concerned with Vichy?” inquired Frecks.

“No,” admitted Lucien. “But there are several things about this place that are not easy to understand. For many years the local *gendarme* has been one of the people. Until only six weeks ago it was a man named Lescure. He was known to everyone, and liked. Then came an order from Vichy calling for Frenchmen to work in Germany. Here, the order was ignored—it was certain to be. Lescure was called to Vichy. He went. He did not return. No one knows what became of him. Instead, there arrived in his place this fellow Duclos, who is known to no one. As a stranger he would in any case be distrusted for a long while, but he courts unpopularity by his official manner. That is all I know, except . . .” Lucien hesitated. “There are no young men in this village. If there are, I have not seen them.”

Worrals frowned. “What are you suggesting?”

Lucien shrugged his shoulders in the expressive French manner. “Nothing. I only say what I have observed. One day I went to Drigas, on the other side of the Causse Méjean, and it was the same there. No young men—and very few old ones. Only women, who looked at me under their lids with eyes full of suspicion. It is strange. I feel that something is going on, but I could not even guess what it is.”

“I gather you’re not popular here?”

“No stranger is popular in the Cévennes. But what about you? You have been here before——”

“In the Cévennes, but not in this village.”

“Even so, are you not afraid of being recognised as the English girl who once came here?”

Worrals pondered the question, which had, in fact, already occurred to her. “I don’t know,” she admitted. “It was four years ago. I saw people, of course, but I doubt if they would remember me—except perhaps my old guide, Louis Capelle, who at that time lived in La Malene. He would recognise me if he saw me, but we were good friends and I don’t think he would betray me. He hated the German tourists, even in those days.”

Lucien smiled. “Probably because they did not tip him.”

“That may have had something to do with it,” admitted Worrals. “I suppose you haven’t tried to find out what has happened to the men of this place?”

“Name of a dog! Do you think I am mad? In the Cévennes a man would be crazy to walk about asking questions, trying to find out anything about anybody. They trust no one, these peasants, and they are handy with their weapons. It would be easier to get into your Bank of England than to see what is in their hearts. That is why I am afraid for Duclos. If he tries to find out——”

“Why should you be afraid for him?”

“Because if he starts poking his nose into things he will come to a bad end; and if, as we suspect, he is a Vichy man, we don’t want that to happen while we are here. You know what the Nazis do in a case like that?”

“Yes, I know,” said Worrals quietly. “But the hour grows late, Lucien. We really must get some sleep.”

“Yes. I am sorry that this should have happened on your first night. *Bon soir, mademoiselle. A demain.*”

“Goodnight Lucien—goodnight Raoul.”

Lucien went out and closed the door.

“We’re going to have trouble with that fellow Duclos,” prophesied Frecks as she stretched herself out on the sacks.

DEATH STRIKES IN THE MOUNTAINS

WORRALS, who had slept the sound sleep that follows vigorous mental and physical exercise, was awakened by Lucien shaking her gently by the shoulder.

“Six o’clock, mademoiselle. In half an hour it will begin to get light.”

Worrals was wide awake on the instant. “Thanks, Lucien. We’ll be with you in ten minutes. You’ll find a tin of coffee in my bag.” She nudged Frecks. “On your feet, partner.”

In ten minutes they joined Lucien and Raoul in the gloomy candle-lit living-room, and sat down to a frugal breakfast of coffee and rye bread.

“Have you formed a definite plan yet?” Lucien asked Worrals, as he dipped bread into his coffee.

“More or less,” answered Worrals. “I presume you have told Raoul the object of our visit?”

“Yes.”

“Good. Our job then, is to establish a landing ground for aircraft. There is such a place, I think, on the western side of the Causse Méjean, close against the Gorge du Tarn, where I have a clear recollection of a fairly level plain, with no obstructions except some small pieces of loose rock that could easily be cleared away. The place is bounded on the Tarn side by some fairly big outcrops of stone, in which there is a fissure that leads to a cave. I happen to know of it because one day when I was out walking with my old guide, Louis Capelle, we were caught in a squall; he showed it to me and we took refuge there. You would never suspect it was there from the outside. If my memory is not at fault the spot should suit our purpose admirably. I propose to have a look at it right away. You’d better come with us, Lucien, so that you will know just where we are.”

“And Raoul?”

“He’d better stay here to keep an eye on things.”

“I think that would be wise,” agreed Lucien. “Are you coming back here afterwards?”

“No. It is my intention to fix up quarters in the cave, if it turns out as I hope. Not only shall we be on the spot to start work, but we shall relieve you of our presence, which, if we were seen, might become embarrassing. I shall take all our kit along, and as much food as you can spare. You can bring us more if you can get some. I have arranged for some to be brought in the transport plane, so we should be all right after its first visit.”

“You’ll find it cold, sleeping in the cave.”

“Can you spare us a couple of blankets?”

“Yes.”

“Then we shall be all right. We ought to be able to find brushwood near the gorge, and make a bed of it. After we are settled, you can, under the pretence of painting a picture, visit us every day, bringing us news—if there is any. When the plane arrives we shall need your help to stow the equipment.”

“When will the plane arrive?”

“Any time after we send the signal to say that we are ready.”

“You mean—radio?”

“Radio-telegraphy.”

“Dangerous.”

“There is no other way. A pre-arranged group of letters will signify that we are ready. We shan’t be on the air long enough for the enemy to pick us up.”

“I hope you are right. Will the pilot know where you are?”

“He knows we shall be on the west side of the Causse Méjean. We shall have to make a flare path with torches, which I have brought for the purpose, to show him the actual runway.”

“I see.”

Worrals finished her coffee. “And now, if everyone is ready, we had better be on our way. We must be clear of the village before dawn breaks. I am going to take the path that runs from the Plaine de Carnac to St. Prejet, leaving it just before we get to the elbow of the Tarn. If we hold south from there it will bring us to the place I have in mind.” Worrals picked up her bundle. “You had better make sure no one is about, Lucien.”

Lucien went to the door, opened it quietly, and surveyed the deserted track. “All clear,” he whispered. “*Au revoir*, Raoul. Should Duclos come along asking questions tell him that I am painting in the *causse*.”

“*Oui. Au revoir.*”

In a few minutes the little party, with Worrals leading, was striding along the mountain path that wound upwards through grey outcrops of weathered limestone towards the top of the *cause*. It was still dark, but the stars were being extinguished in the east by the first pale flush of dawn. The air, new-washed with dew, was clean and fresh, fragrant with the aroma of herbs that clung to wherever they could find a foothold—wild lavender, shrubby rosemary, and thyme.

For a little while they walked in silence. Then Worrals said quietly to Frecks, “When I last climbed this path I told Louis Capelle that one day I would come back. I meant it, but I little guessed what the conditions would be. It does something to me, this mountain air. I feel I could walk for ever.”

She halted at a great shoulder of rock and gazed down on the village that nestled in a secluded corner of the *massif*. Here and there a light showed, as though the cottages were opening their eyes for another day. A cock crowed. A goat bleated.

“This is where we leave the village behind us,” said Worrals, and continued on her way, still climbing towards the jagged ridge of rock that marked the skyline.

It was light by the time they reached it, the brilliant white light of southern France, and Frecks caught her breath at the scene that greeted her. In the foreground was the plateau of the *cause*, a comparatively level expanse that reminded her vaguely of some of the wilder parts of Dartmoor; only here it was more bleak; the herbage was sparse, and the rocks were on a grander scale. All around, some near, some far, mountains reared gaunt peaks into the turquoise sky.

Pointing, Worrals named some of them. “Mont Mezenc—Pic de Finiels—Gerbier de Joncs, and the wide-spreading Aigoual.”

“Wonderful,” breathed Frecks. “I feel that I am on top of the world.”

“You are on top of France,” answered Worrals, and went on, still keeping to the track.

After they had gone about a mile Lucien uttered a warning “Hist!”

The girls stopped. “What is it?” asked Worrals.

“A man.”

“Where?”

“He’s gone now.” Lucien was staring at a distant outcrop which, far over to the right, thrust into the skyline like a row of broken teeth. “I saw a

movement. It might have been a straying sheep, but I feel sure that it was a man.”

“A shepherd, perhaps?”

“Perhaps.”

The little party moved on again in silence, marching at a steady pace for about twenty minutes, when Worrals, after a thoughtful reconnaissance of the landscape, turned sharply to the left.

“This is where we leave the track,” she announced. “I don’t think we shall see anyone—at least, Louis told me that no one ever came here.”

For some distance the *causee* was plentifully bestrewn with boulders, but these became smaller and smaller, and finally dwindled away altogether, leaving a wide expanse of level rock, from the crannies of which grew a short wiry grass.

“This is the place,” announced Worrals. “We are at least three miles from the nearest cottage, as the crow flies—farther, of course, by the track. If you look across to the far side of the *causee*, beyond the level area immediately in front of us, about half a mile away, you will see over to the right a jumble of big rocks, looking as though they had been thrown down carelessly by a giant. The entrance to the cave is among them. This open stretch is, of course, the proposed landing ground. Just beyond the rocks, the *causee* drops sheer into the Tarn, a matter of a thousand feet, so watch your step if you go wandering about at night. Let’s go across.”

“This is certainly a ready-made aerodrome,” declared Frecks, as they walked across the plateau.

“That’s what I thought when I put forward my suggestion,” replied Worrals. “No one who hasn’t been here would guess that such a place existed. That’s where travel is so helpful.”

They went on to the ridge of weather-worn rock that formed a barrier between the plateau and the Gorge of the Tarn. After hunting about for a little while Worrals found the cave, which from the outside looked like a mere crack in the limestone.

“Lucien, you sit here and keep guard, in case anyone should show up,” suggested Worrals. “It might be a good thing if you really started a painting; if you were questioned it would bear out your assertion that you are an artist.”

Lucien smiled. “Very well, but I won’t promise that my picture will prove me to be an artist.” He settled down on a boulder, and opening a box of oil colours began to paint.

Worrals led the way into the cave, which, after starting as a mere water conduit, quickly widened out to a cavity of considerable dimensions and unknown depth.

“How far does it go?” asked Frecks.

“I’ve no idea,” answered Worrals. “Louis and I merely took shelter here from the rain. I was already too wet to bother about exploring.”

“It seems to go right down into the heart of the *causse*,” declared Frecks, probing the darkness with a torch.

“What does it matter?” returned Worrals. “The part that we can see will be all that we shall need. It will hold a dickens of a lot of petrol.” She lit a candle.

The girls unrolled their bundles, spread their blankets, and for a time busied themselves in making preparations for a troglodyte existence. Worrals found a recess for her portable radio, and concealed it behind a stack of loose rock. Happening to turn, she saw Frecks staring fixedly into the dim recesses of the cave.

“What are you doing?” asked Worrals.

“I could swear I saw something move, down there,” answered Frecks nervously.

“Rot. If you’re going to start seeing things you had better go back with Lucien,” snapped Worrals.

Frecks said nothing, but she did not look convinced.

As soon as the preparations were complete Worrals turned to Frecks and observed: “Well, that seems to be as much as we can do, for the time being at any rate.”

“What are we going to do for the rest of the day?”

“Nothing in particular. There isn’t as much loose rock about on the runway as I expected.”

“How about exploring the cave?”

“I don’t see much point in it,” protested Worrals. “It would be better to have a good look round outside, and make ourselves thoroughly acquainted with the place from every angle.”

“When are you going to let headquarters know that we are prepared to receive the transport plane?”

“To-night, probably, when we are sure that we are really settled in. Once we send the message we must stick to the arrangement.”

The rest of the day passed without incident. Lucien finished his sketch, an impression of the *cause*, which was so good that it brought an exclamation of pleasure from Worrals. A runway was cleared of loose rock; there were only a few small pieces—a trivial task. As the sun fell towards the western horizon a chilly breeze came creeping down from the mountains to settle on the plateau.

“Autumn is in the air,” remarked Lucien, as he put his things together preparatory to departure. “I don’t want to be an alarmist, but unless I’m mistaken that wind has snow on its wings.”

A moment after he had said the words a gunshot crashed, shattering the silence and sending a cloud of rocks and ravens wheeling high into the air above the gorge. So unexpected was the sound, and so violent was the report in the thin air, even though it was obviously some distance away, that everyone jumped. Worrals, after a quick glance at Lucien, scrambled to the top of the rock outcrop, which she knew must command a view across the gorge. The others followed, and when they reached the crest, threw themselves flat to make a careful survey of the landscape beyond. But they saw no sign of movement—apart from the birds that drifted like autumn leaves to their ledges among the rocks.

“Now, what do you make of that, Lucien?” asked Worrals anxiously.

“Someone shooting a rabbit, perhaps.”

“But I thought the people of France were forbidden to possess firearms?”

“That is true, but this is the Cévennes. It would need more than a Nazi regulation to make them give up their weapons.”

“Just where did the sound come from, do you think?”

“It seemed to me to come from the direction of the village—just this side of it.”

“That’s what I thought,” put in Frecks.

“Well, it’s no use getting upset about it,” resumed Worrals philosophically. “It gave me a bit of a shock though. You’d better be getting back, Lucien.”

“Yes, I think so,” agreed Lucien. “If you want me let me know. If I don’t hear from you in the meantime I’ll be along to-morrow morning, with, I hope, some more food. *Au revoir*.” He set off on the return journey to the village.

As the girls made their way slowly to the cave, Frecks remarked, with a shiver, “Queer what a difference the light makes. In the broad light of day this place is really rather striking, but at this time of the evening there is something almost evil about it. It’s sort of—menacing.”

“You get that feeling anywhere, where it is desolate, lonely, as this is.” As she spoke Worrals turned her back on the plateau and went into the cave. Suddenly she stopped, and stooping quickly, picked up something from the floor.

“What is it?” asked Frecks quickly, taking alarm from Worrals’ manner.

Worrals did not answer—at least, not in words. Instead, she held out her hand, palm upwards. On it lay a small round object.

“It’s a button,” said Frecks.

“Yes—a button,” answered Worrals in a curious voice, peering into the cavern.

“It isn’t off me—or you,” said Frecks.

“Nor is it off Lucien’s jacket,” averred Worrals. “This button is made of horn—a home-made one, by the look of it.”

“You mean—you mean, someone has been here . . . while we were out?”

Worrals thought for a moment. “Not necessarily. The shepherds must know of this place. It was probably here when we arrived.”

“If it had been, surely we should have seen it—just as you saw it a moment ago?”

“Perhaps,” agreed Worrals slowly. “Perhaps not.”

Frecks stared down the cave, then looked back at Worrals. “This place is beginning to give me the creeps,” she muttered, moistening her lips.

Outside, twilight was fast closing in. Worrals went to the mouth of the cave and looked out across the melancholy landscape. Suddenly she stiffened. “Someone’s coming this way,” she said tersely.

Frecks, looking over her shoulder, rapped out, “It’s Raoul. By the way he’s behaving something has happened.”

Raoul, running like a man who is nearly spent, was making his way along the foot of the rock barrier. From time to time he stopped to look about him.

“He’s looking for us,” declared Worrals, and running into the open she waved her hand.

Raoul saw her at once, and made an answering signal. In another minute, panting like a runner at the end of a race, he was with them.

“Lucien?” he gasped. “Where is Lucien?”

“He’s gone—didn’t you meet him?” asked Worrals tersely.

“No. I took a short cut. I was in a hurry to get here. *Sacré Dieu!* Have I missed him after all?”

“He will be back in the village by now,” said Worrals.

Raoul threw up his hands in a despairing gesture.

“What has happened?” asked Worrals.

“It’s Duclos,” panted Raoul. “He’s been shot—murdered.”

ALARMING EVENTS

EXCEPT for a slight frown Worrals' expression did not change. "All right, Raoul, take it easy," she said.

"I don't see what we've got to get upset about. We didn't kill him," asserted Frecks.

"There are times, Frecks, when you can be exceedingly dense," murmured Worrals sadly. "Just think for a moment. Whether Duclos was a Vichy man or not, there is bound to be an inquiry, and that's the last thing we want here. If he was a Vichy agent, it will probably go farther than that. The reason for the murder will be sought. We may even have Gestapo agents here. The whole village will be under suspicion. Lucien and Raoul, being newcomers, will be examined closely, and they are in no position to face a stringent interrogation. Remember, they are already on the Gestapo black list, and if it is once discovered who they are it will be a brick wall and a firing party for them in double quick time. Apart from that, it would be hopeless to try to run an air station here with special agents prowling about." Worrals turned to Raoul. "How did the murder happen? Tell me all you know."

"It was like this," answered Raoul. "I had just been down to the *estaminet* to see if there was a chance of getting any eggs, and had gone back to the cottage, when suddenly there was a shot. I ran out, and saw a body sliding and tumbling down the steep slope near the track that leads up to the *causee*—the one you took this morning. Down it came, and finally crashed into the road not a hundred yards from the house. I saw from the uniform that it was Duclos. He lay still—horrible. I went to the body. He was dead. I didn't know what to do, so I waited for help to arrive. No one came."

"Do you mean to say the body was left lying in the road?" asked Worrals incredulously.

"Yes."

"But the whole village must have heard the shot? We heard it here."

“*Sans doute*. But no one came. There wasn’t a sound, but I felt that eyes were watching me. It was uncanny.”

“So what did you do?”

“Nothing. That is, I waited for a little while and then went back to the house. I told myself that it was not my affair. Then I thought of Lucien. He was somewhere up here on the *causee*. The people might say that he had killed Duclos. In any case, he would be expected to say what he was doing at the time. So I came to warn him. I ran till I thought my heart would burst.”

“This is most unfortunate,” muttered Worrals. “Frankly, I don’t care two hoots about Duclos, or his murderer, but this is going to make things very awkward. I had better get in touch with Lucien right away. He must escape while he can. You had better remain here.”

“But if we run away it will look as though we are guilty,” protested Raoul.

“If you stay in the village you will certainly be examined—perhaps be arrested on suspicion,” asserted Worrals. “We daren’t risk that.”

Raoul shrugged his shoulders helplessly. “Curse the fellow.”

“Cursing him won’t help us,” returned Worrals evenly. “You stay here with Frecks. I’m going down to Lucien. You realise that he may know nothing about this murder?”

“I hadn’t thought of that,” admitted Raoul.

“Just where did you last see the body?”

“On the track just above the village, perhaps fifty or sixty metres from the house.”

“Very well. You stay here. I’ll get back as quickly as I can.”

Frecks spoke. “Aren’t you going to send the signal that we are ready for the plane to come?”

“I daren’t do that while this affair is hanging over our heads,” declared Worrals. “You stand fast, and keep out of sight.”

Worrals set off at a brisk pace towards the village.



"I saw from the uniform that it was Duclos. He lay still—horrible."

It was now nearly dark, and the landscape was depressing in its stark desolation; but Worrals was too occupied with her thoughts to be concerned with it. Why, she wondered, had Duclos been killed? What had he done? Who would kill him? She had an uneasy feeling that in these lonely hills something was going on, some sinister plot was being worked out; that among the grey rocks unseen eyes were watching. Lucien had remarked on the absence of young men. Where were they? Then there had been the

incident of the button in the cave. She had not said so to Frecks, because she did not want to alarm her, but she was convinced in her own mind that the button had not been there when they had first entered the cave. It was all very disturbing, but as far as she could see there was nothing to be done about it, except let the problem work itself out. She knew a little of the people of the Cévennes, for she had lived with them for a month, and she knew that Lucien had not exaggerated when he had spoken of their suspicious, secretive natures, the result of years of persecution in the Middle Ages. It would be futile to question them. Not even the Nazis, she reflected, could wring words from their lips, if they decided to be silent.

Camisards, they had called themselves in the old days. In the seventeenth century, Louis the Fourteenth had let loose his devilish dragoons on the land. There had been hangings, and burnings, and torturings; men had been sent to the galleys; yet under the leadership of young Cavalier the Camisards had fought on. Cavalier had finished up as a General in the British army. Then there had come the inhuman du Chayla, to be a public persecutor—a Nazi commissar before his time. At night the Camisards had descended upon his castle at Pont de Montvert and torn it to pieces before burning it to the ground. Du Chayla's body, pierced by more than fifty wounds, was left lying in the road. The Camisards fled to the mountains where, hunted like wild beasts, they lived in caves, but still unbeaten, and unbroken. It would be queer if history repeated itself, thought Worrals. If these people had all set themselves against Nazi domination, or Vichy rule—which was the same thing—things were likely to happen in these mountains of bloody memory.

So brooded Worrals as she hurried along the track towards the village. In the darkness it took her nearly an hour to reach the spot where, according to Raoul, the body of Duclos had been left lying. She paused, and glanced at the place in passing, but could see nothing. Steeling herself she stopped. The road was bare. There was no body, but a gruesome stain marked the place where it had lain. Worrals caught her breath. So they had taken the body away, after all?

Her nerves twitched as a voice spoke in the darkness.

“Have you lost something, mademoiselle?”

Worrals braced herself to answer. “*Non, monsieur*, but I was told that there had been an accident.”

“There has been no accident, mademoiselle,” said the voice.

“But a friend told me he saw a body lying—”

“There is no body.”

“Then Duclos has not been hurt?”

“Duclos? Who is he? We know of no one of that name.”

Worrals began to understand. “Then it was a mistake?”

“We know nothing of Duclos, a body, or an accident. Mademoiselle would do well to remember it,” said the voice harshly.

“I shall remember it,” promised Worrals, conscious of a dryness in the mouth.

“*Bon soir, mademoiselle.*”

“*Bon soir, monsieur.*”

From first to last Worrals had not seen the speaker. Slightly breathless, her fingers trembling in spite of her efforts to remain calm, she hurried on and soon reached the house. Sheer instinct made her approach cautiously; and it was as well that she did so, for a moment later a light flickered from an uncurtained window. A step forward and her face was at the glass. Inside was a man. But it was not Lucien. She could only see his back, but it was wide, broad-shouldered. With a small lantern in his hand he was examining carefully the articles in Lucien’s valise. Suddenly he looked up, glancing suspiciously at the door. Worrals drew back. Her brain was in a whirl. Things were happening too fast. She knew not what to think—what to do. Where was Lucien? Who was this stranger?

While she stood there, her heart palpitating, trying desperately to decide on a course of action, the door was opened quietly from the inside. Just as quietly it was closed, and a tall figure moved like a shadow towards the track. A moment later it was swallowed up by the darkness.

Worrals went quickly to the living-room. “Lucien!” she called sharply.

There was no reply.

She sat on one of the chairs and tried to collect her thoughts; and presently, while she still sat there, she heard light footsteps approaching. A voice began softly to sing:

“*Sur le pont d’Avignon*
L’on y danse . . .”

A quick pace took Worrals to the door. “Thank God you’ve come, Lucien,” she said in a thin dry voice, so strained were her nerves.

“So it’s you,” replied Lucien quickly.

“Why were you expecting someone else?”

“I was told that I had a visitor.”

“You were *told*? By whom?”

“An old man—a stranger to me.”

“Where?”

“At the *estaminet*. Not finding Raoul here I went down to see if he was there.”

“While you were there someone searched your valise.”

Lucien started. “*Mot de Cambronne!* Why, I wonder? But what brings you here?”

“Something terrible has happened. Duclos has been murdered.”

“*Cré Dieu!* Impossible.”

“Why impossible?”

“Because surely I should have heard of it. There were several people in the *estaminet*. Are murders so common here that they don’t speak of them? Surely everyone would have been talking of such an event?”

“You can take it from me,” answered Worrals slowly, “that Duclos has been killed, and everyone in the village knows it. He was shot, this evening. Raoul saw the body lying on the road. He came to the *causse* to warn you, but took a short cut so missed you. You were already on your way back.”

By this time Lucien was inside the house. He closed the door.

“This is bad,” he said in a serious voice. “You’re quite sure about this?”

“Absolutely. I saw the bloodstain; and as I stood by it a man’s voice spoke to me from the darkness, warning me to forget what I had seen, and heard. He must have been among the rocks, or the bushes, that fringe the road. Lucien, this is terrible. We are being watched. We are probably being watched at this very moment. Eyes are everywhere in the darkness, and by day, among the rocks. I can fight when I know what I’m fighting, but this is beginning to get on my nerves. We must decide what we are going to do, and quickly.”

“You think this calls for a change of plan?”

“I do. I’m not going to abandon the project, of course, but you will have to get out of this village. If not, you will lead the watchers to our cave on the *causse*, although I have an uncomfortable feeling that they already know about it. Apart from that, sooner or later the death of Duclos will be made public. That will mean an investigation—certainly if he is a Vichy man. And that, I suspect, is why he was killed. Either he had discovered something, or

the people here realised that he was a spy sent to watch them. Anyway, he's been killed, and we had better all go into hiding—if that is possible.”

“You mean—go to the cave?”

“Yes.”

“But what are we going to do for food?”

“We shall have to manage with what we've got until the plane arrives and brings more.”

“Perhaps you are right,” agreed Lucien. “When shall we go?”

“At once. There is no reason to delay. The sooner we are out of this village the better for both of us. If we clear out, perhaps the people will leave us alone.”

“Very well.” Lucien bundled his things into the valise. “What about Raoul?”

“He is already at the cave. He will stay there, too.”

“Shall we take the bicycles?”

Worrals thought for a moment. “I don't see how we can take them up there. They should be all right where they are. If they are stolen—well, it doesn't matter very much.”

“Very well. I'm ready,” announced Lucien, a few minutes later. “I'm sorry our programme has come to pieces so soon.”

“So am I. Nothing ever seems to go right, on these shows. Let's go.”

They turned their faces towards the *causse* and walked in silence, for one thing because they did not wish to be heard, and for another, there seemed to be nothing more to say. They saw no one, and so, in the light of the stars, they came to the cave. Worrals half expected Frecks and Raoul to be outside, waiting for them, but there was no sign of them, no sound of voices from within, no glow of a fire. Silence reigned.

At the entrance to the cave Worrals stopped. “Frecks!” she cried sharply.

There was no reply.

She went inside and switched on her torch. “Frecks!” she cried again.

Silence.

She spun round to Lucien, who had followed her in. “They've gone,” she said in a tired voice.

WORRALS MEETS A FRIEND

A MOVEMENT behind Lucien made Worrals start. A shadow filled the entrance, blotting out the stars.

“Look out, Lucien!” she called crisply.

Lucien swung round, but the figure continued to move forward into the cave. Worrals turned her torch on it, so that it was possible to make out a tall, bearded man, in the roughest of rough clothes, whose dark eyes rested on them with a singular lack of expression. In the crook of his arm he carried an old-fashioned musket, but he made no attempt to use it, or even threaten.

“Who are you?” asked Worrals tersely, hoping that it was merely a mountain shepherd whose curiosity had been aroused.

Before the man could answer, even if he intended to do so, a soft footfall behind her brought Worrals round facing the other way. Another man stood there. He was younger, similarly dressed, and also carried a gun.

Lucien spoke. “What is the meaning of this?” he asked.

The man who had approached from the interior of the cave, merely said, in a curt voice, “Come.” The other pointed down the cave with his rifle.

Worrals shrugged. “I suppose we shall have to go.”

“So it seems,” answered Lucien.

One of the men now lighted an oil lantern and began walking down the cave. The second man brought up the rear. There was nothing remarkable about the cave—at any rate, to Worrals, who had seen several like it. It was a typical flaw in the limestone, sometimes narrow, sometimes wide, sometimes so high that the roof was lost in shadow. The floor was rough, and dropped steadily towards the heart of the plateau; occasionally water dripped from the roof, or oozed down the uneven walls.

The walk lasted for about ten minutes. Several side turnings were passed, and Worrals knew that it would be a hazardous business to try to get out of the cave without a guide, even if they were permitted to do so. Eventually the cave widened out to a sort of low theatre, with many exits. The smell of stale tobacco hung on the air. The leader took one of the lanes

which, after a short distance, ended in a rough chamber. There, seated on a heap of brushwood, looking forlorn and miserable, were Frecks and Raoul. Worrals was not surprised. On the way down she had supposed that a fate similar to their own had befallen them. Raoul and Frecks rose to their feet as the newcomers entered.

“So they’ve got you, too?” said Frecks. “We had no chance to warn you.”

Their captors walked away, leaving them alone.

“Don’t they put a guard on you?” Worrals asked Frecks.

“No—apparently not. A man told us that if we tried to leave we should lose our way and die of starvation.”

“He was probably right,” murmured Worrals drily. “I’ve seen something of these caves—not this particular one, but others like it. Have they given you any idea why we have been made prisoners?”

“No. No one has been near us since we were brought here, about an hour ago.”

“Well, it’s all very depressing, but no doubt we shall learn something if we have patience.”

Worrals and Frecks sat on the brushwood, and for perhaps half an hour discussed with the others the events of the day. Then the bearded man reappeared, and beckoned with a gnarled forefinger.

“Come,” he said.

“They don’t waste words, do they?” sneered Frecks.

“Why should they?” returned Worrals and followed the guide back to the theatre-like chamber, which now presented an appearance very different from when they had last seen it. It was lighted by half a dozen rough torches, made of some resinous bush that filled the air with aromatic smoke. Seated on a long boulder, in the manner of a jury, were five old men. Behind and around them crowded others, mostly young, numbering about twenty. All were dressed in the rough clothes of the country, and were armed with guns or rifles. A buzz of conversation died away to silence as the prisoners entered, and all eyes were turned on them as they were lined up in front of the five, as before a tribunal.



“Come” said the bearded man beckoning with a gnarled forefinger.

“They don’t waste words, do they?” sneered Frecks.

The centre man spoke, in French, of course, with the curious dialect of the district. He said, “Who are you, and what are you doing on the Causse Méjean?”

Frecks nudged Worrals. “You’d better do the talking,” she prompted.

“Who we are, and what we are doing, is no affair of yours,” answered Worrals. “We have not interfered with you, so why do you molest us?”

“You are not French. From what country do you come?” was the next question.

Worrals realised that she had a decision to make, and decided to tell the truth. “We are English. The men with us are French.”

Nothing was said for a moment, and it was obvious that this announcement had caused surprise.

“Why have you come here?” persisted the interrogator.

“What business is that of yours?” demanded Worrals. “As we have not interfered with you, why not leave us alone? We are not in the least interested in what you are doing.”

“Why are you here?” insisted the old man, in a hard voice.

Worrals shrugged. “Very well. If you must know, we are here to fight the Germans,” she announced.

“Germans—here? What Germans?”

“Any Germans.”

“But there are no Germans here.”

Worrals aimed a shaft at random. “Vichy is working with the Nazis, and Duclos worked for Vichy—did he not?”

The question received a chilly reception. Worrals could almost feel the atmosphere stiffen.

“Why did you come here?” demanded the judge relentlessly.

“That is our business,” argued Worrals.

“How do we know that you are not spies?”

“What is there here to spy on?” challenged Worrals. “As far as I know there is nothing nearer than the factories at Clermont to interest a spy.”

“There might be.”

“You evidently know more about that than we do,” returned Worrals coldly. She saw that argument was getting them nowhere, and sooner or later it would come to a show down. She thought she might as well force the issue. “Either you are on the side of the Nazis or you are against them. I have told you that we are against them. If you, too, are against them, and being Frenchmen I think you must be, let us go in peace. If you are with them then you had better kill us at once, for we are dangerous people.”

There were cold, incredulous smiles at this statement.

“Don’t you believe me?” flared Worrals.

“No,” was the uncompromising answer.

“Let us settle this matter right away,” went on Worrals. “We are in your power, so nothing you admit can injure you. Are you for or against the Nazis?”

“We are against them.”

“Good. Then we are allies. Let us go.”

“What proof have you that you are what you say?”

Worrals ripped open her raincoat, showing the uniform beneath—an action that brought heads straining forward, and caused some of them to click their tongues with surprise.

“Anyone can get a uniform,” said the old man. “It proves nothing.”

At this juncture there was a stir at the back of the chamber as a newcomer entered. An old thick-set man pushed his way to the front. “*Sacré nom de Dieu!*” he cried in a loud voice. “She tells the truth.”

“Louis!” cried Worrals. “I am glad you’ve come. If these men are friends of yours tell them who I am and put an end to this nonsense.” In a swift aside she said to the others. “It’s Louis Capelle, my old guide.”

Louis spoke to the leader of the tribunal in a low voice. The other men crowded round, so the prisoners could not hear what he said.

“It should be all right now,” declared Worrals, speaking in a low voice to her companions. “Louis will vouch for us—that is, if these people are what I suspect they are.”

“What do you suspect they are?” asked Frecks curiously.

“Rebels. Rebels against Vichy. That is why they killed Duclos. I’m beginning to get the drift of things.”

Louis now came over and shook hands warmly with Worrals. “What are you doing here at a time like this? It would be better to tell the truth.”

“I have already told the truth—not that I see why I should tell you anything,” protested Worrals. “Is it not enough that we are working against the Nazis, and the Vichy quislings?”

“No, it is not enough,” answered Louis. “You see, the lives of many people depend upon secrecy. One word to the Nazis of what we are doing here and our wives and children would be killed, and our villages destroyed.”

“What *is* happening here?”

“That is something I cannot tell you.”

“Will you tell us if I tell you just why we are here? Our aims and objects must be the same. Strange though it may seem, we might be able to help you.”

Louis went back and spoke for some time to the man who was obviously the leader. Then he returned. “Very well,” he said. “Why have you come to the Causse Méjean, of all places in France?”

“We have come here to make a landing ground for British aeroplanes,” replied Worrals. “Our plan is to store petrol in the cave so that planes may fly straight across France to Malta, and other places.”

Louis stared. He clicked his tongue. “*Nom de Dieu!* This is a mission *dangereux*. Why do the English send women on such work?”

“I came because I know the country. You showed it to me, did you not, old cabbage? You showed me this cave when we were caught that day in the rain.”

Louis grinned. “That’s the truth if I never hear it again.”

“Now, what about your part of the bargain? What are you doing in the caves?”

“We are forming to fight against Vichy and the Nazis,” said Louis.

“How?”

Louis dropped his voice. “Our young men travel far at night, to Clermont, to Toulouse, even to Bordeaux. We are the true *saboteurs*.^[2] We cut the telegraph wires, pull up the railways and throw rocks down on the roads.”

[2] The word *sabotage* is derived from the French *sabots*, the heavy wooden shoes formerly worn by the peasant classes, which (it was thought) were sometimes used for kicking or damaging property. Literally, the word *sabotage* meant damage done by the lower classes, who became *saboteurs*.

It was Worrals’ turn to stare, for this was more than she bargained for. “Then we can certainly help each other,” she declared confidentially. “For our part, we ask nothing more than to be left alone until our arrangements are made, when we could, old elephant, bring you such things as dynamite, and rifles, and cartridges—”

Louis slapped his thigh. “*Gr-rand Dieu!*” he rolled. “*C’est superbe!* We will show these Nazis that they cannot do what they like with France. *Cochons!*” Louis spat on the floor with unpleasant vigour.

Worrals turned to the others, who were smiling, as they had every reason to. “We seem to have got things straightened out,” she said, and then introduced them to Louis, giving the boys their assumed names, not their real ones. After this was over she turned to Louis and said, “Are we now free to go?”

“I will ask the chief,” said Louis, and walked away.

“Aren’t you trusting these people rather a lot?” murmured Frecks.

“Yes, but there was nothing else for it,” returned Worrals. “All the same, I would wager that there isn’t a traitor among them. If there was one he would soon be found out, and he would go the way of Duclos. We are now all set to get the petrol here. Once that is done, the planes can go through as soon as they like. I’m going to ask Louis to take us back to the entrance, so that I can send the signal home. Then we ought to get some sleep. It seems to me that this has all fallen out for the best. If these people accept us, and I think they have, they will be able to get us food, and keep us in touch with what is going on outside.”

Louis returned. “All is well,” he said. “Come, I will show you the entrance.”

On the way Worrals said, quietly, to Louis, “Why did your people kill Duclos?”

“Because he knew too much.”

“What did he know, and how did he learn?”

“He knew that the young men had gone—he could see that for himself, and he guessed that they were hiding in the hills. We didn’t mind that very much, but he followed you to the *causse*, and saw you go into the cave. What he did not know was that eyes were watching him, even as he was watching you. He was hurrying home, no doubt to telephone his discovery to his chief at La Malene. We could not permit that.”

“Then he was definitely a Vichy spy?”

“Yes. Do not ask how we know, but we have friends, some in high places, and we learn many things.”

“But was it wise to kill him? When it is realised that he is no longer here, others will come.”

“We shall deal with them, have no fear.”

“But Louis, you can’t fight the whole German army!”

“Our forefathers dealt with du Chayla and his dragoons. The Nazis will never tame the Cévennes—never. They would have to kill every man, and that is something beyond them.”

“I am sorry if we, by accident, betrayed the secret of your cave.”

“It was one of the entrances,” admitted Louis. “When, years ago, I showed it to you, I did not know that it would again be used for the purpose to which it was put in the past. For it was to these caves that our people fled in the bad old days. Here, our ancestors sharpened their swords, made gunpowder and cast bullets. It is the same story over again.”

“Yes, I understand that now,” murmured Worrals. “But of course, we were not to know what was going on when we came here.”

“So we thought, mademoiselle, or you would hardly have had the temerity to enter the caves so boldly. Naturally, we were puzzled. We could not think what you were doing, and we had to find out. I myself did not see you, or I should have recognised you, and perhaps spoken to you. It was a good thing that I turned up to-night, to take your part, or it might have gone badly with you. With us, war is always war to the knife. We cannot take risks.”

“Of course not,” agreed Worrals.

Reaching that part of the cave which they had occupied, Worrals uncovered the radio. In silence, under the curious eyes of the old guide, she tuned in and sent the signal, in code, that all was ready for the reception of the transport plane.

“That’s that,” she remarked. “Now we’ve started we must go on. Bill won’t come to-night, it’s too late, so we’d better get some rest while we can.”

“Is there anything you would like me to do, mademoiselle?” asked Louis.

“Not to-night, *mon vieux*. If there is anything I will let you know. Until then we shall behave as though you did not exist.”

SHOCKS

THE following morning Frecks awoke to the smell of coffee and dry toast, to discover Worrals squatting in front of a small wood fire holding a piece of dark-coloured bread on the end of a twig. Through the entrance she saw that it was just getting light.

“Where did you get the firewood?” she inquired, as she rose and stretched stiff limbs.

“Louis brought it,” answered Worrals. “Also a few joints of cold rabbit.”

“I’m not much for rabbit,” announced Frecks.

“When you’ve had *lapin rôti à la Provençal* you may change your mind,” predicted Worrals, turning her toast.

“Any news?”

“I’ve had a signal. Bill is coming to-night. He aims to arrive at midnight.”

“That means we shan’t get much sleep.”

“You can sleep all day if you like.”

“Where are the boys?”

“Gone down to the river for a bathe.”

“You mean—down to the bottom of the gorge?”

“Yes.”

“That’s a long way to go for a bath, isn’t it?”

“It all depends how badly you need a bath. I’m beginning to feel a bit scruffy myself.”

“If we go on sleeping in our uniforms it will need a steam-roller to iron them flat when we get home,” averred Frecks.

“You’d find it pretty chilly in a nightie,” responded Worrals lightly. “Good old Louis has brought us two more blankets—home spun. They smell a bit goaty: but I was as snug as a bug in a rug, and that, as far as I’m concerned, is the main thing.”

Frecks shook herself, sat down by the fire and helped herself to coffee, toast, and a leg of rabbit.

“Not bad,” she remarked raising her eyebrows. “Pretty good, in fact. Lucky we ran into Louis and his comrades.”

“Maybe.”

“Aren’t you sure?”

“In some ways, yes, but in others—well, I’m not so certain. This is a big thing they’ve started. I don’t know how long it has been going on, but sooner or later their activities will be traced here by the Nazis.”

“So will ours, if it comes to that,” Frecks pointed out.

“True enough, but when one scheme is discovered it will give the other away. Being so close, the two things are bound to get mixed up. We must confine ourselves as far as possible to our own scheme.”

“Who spoke of departing from it?”

“No one; but you know how it is? We’re bound to take an interest in what these modern Camisards are doing, and they can hardly ignore us. The result, if we don’t watch it, may be that the two operations will become dependent on each other. I don’t want that to happen if it can be avoided. One saving grace is, there is a time limit on our show. I only hope that we may fulfil our mission before the Germans come nosing about to see what’s going on here.”

Louis Capelle came striding up the cave. He touched his cap. “*Bon jour*,” he said politely. “I come to warn you not to go to the village.”

“Why not?” asked Worrals quickly.

“The police are there.”

“Ah! How many!”

“Two, with the *préfet* from La Malene.”

“I suppose they have come to look for Duclos?”

“It may be.”

“What are they doing now?”

“They are walking about asking many questions. Naturally, no one will tell them anything. Also, they talk among themselves, and when they talk, we have ears listening.”

“We? Who do you mean by we?”

“The women, and sometimes the children.”

Worrals turned to Frecks. "You see how the whole tribe works together? That's real co-operation." She turned back to Louis. "Have the police discovered anything?"

"Two things."

"What are they?"

There was a peculiar expression on Louis' face as he answered, "Bicycles."

Worrals, remembering that the boys had abandoned their cycles, knew without being told that these were the machines that had been discovered. To Louis she said, "The police will learn nothing from these bicycles."

"They have already learned something from them."

"Come to the point, *mon vieux*," pressed Worrals shrewdly. "You know something. What is it?"

"The *préfet* has learned the name of the owner of one of the bicycles, and suspects the other."

Worrals felt her muscles tighten. "Go on. Who owns one of the bicycles?"

Louis met Worrals' gaze squarely. "Lucien, Vicomte Delarose, upon whose head, for espionage, the Nazis have put a price of one hundred thousand francs."

Worrals was aghast. "How could they possibly have learned that?" she breathed.

"On the telephone, the *préfet* gave a description of the bicycles to his headquarters in Vichy. We know all that is said on the telephone. After a time he was told that the bicycle had been identified as the property of Monsieur le Vicomte Delarose, who is wanted by the police. It is thought that his companion may be the Marquise de lur Saronceau."

Worrals was horrified. "How did they discover that?"

"By a course the most simple, mademoiselle. The young men crossed the frontier from occupied to unoccupied France, at the bridge, near Tours. They passed through, yes, but they did not know that at the guard-house there is a camera that takes photographs of all travellers. These Nazis are thorough, *hein*. Later, the owners of the bicycles were recognised. That was some days ago. Every Vichy agent in unoccupied France, from Gascony to the Alpes Maritimes, is on the lookout for the riders of those bicycles. Now the bicycles have been discovered the hunt will come to the Cévennes."

Worrals tried not to show her alarm and mortification at this ugly piece of news. "I may as well tell you the truth, Louis," she said. "Our friends are the Vicomte and the Marquise."

"We had already guessed that, mademoiselle."

"It was my fault. I should have had the sense to destroy or dispose of the bicycles in some way."

"We should have done it anyhow, had there been time," declared Louis. "Early this morning we sent two men to do the work, but unfortunately the police had already arrived. Where are the young men now?"

"They have gone down to the Tarn, to bathe."

"But this was an excursion the most foolish, mademoiselle."

"On the face of what you tell us, yes; but we were not to know that things had started to develop in the village."

Louis stiffened, and turned his head towards the entrance. "*Ecoutez!*" he said sharply, and hurried to the aperture. The girls followed. They, too, had heard what the old guide had heard. Flying low, circling, was a Junkers 88. In silence they watched it. They watched it for a good five minutes as it circled on until it was a speck in the distance.

"Things move fast, mademoiselle," said Louis drily. "Already there are eyes in the sky. It would be better if you remained inside the cave to-day."

"That is obvious," agreed Worrals.

"What about the boys?" asked Frecks.

Worrals put the question to Louis.

"Leave it to me," said the old man. "I will fetch them. I know paths that are known only to the birds. *Au revoir.*" He went out and was quickly lost to sight among the rocks.

"I say, Worrals, this is awful," muttered Frecks, brushing her unruly hair out of her eyes.

"It certainly isn't too good."

"We underestimated the intelligence of the enemy."

"No, I won't admit that," denied Worrals. "We did everything in our power to avoid complications. So, I am sure, did Lucien. After all, the boys had to get down here somehow, and so had we, if it comes to that. These perishing Nazis have the whole country constantly under a microscope. Not even a fly can move without them knowing it. It may be that we were a little too confident, although that isn't such a bad fault as being too apprehensive."

The real cause of the trouble is the rebellion that is brewing here, and we weren't to know anything about that. These people should not have killed Duclos. That, really, was the mistake, because it took the police to the village. Otherwise, they might never have discovered the bicycles."

"Don't forget that the police were already looking for two strangers," reminded Frecks. "Had Duclos not been killed he might have found the bicycles himself or guessed who the boys were. Then, had it not been for the Camisards, he would have caught us in a net before we were even aware that we were suspected."

Worrals nodded. "Perhaps you're right. But it's no use worrying about what has already happened. We are at least aware of it. On a job like this one slip is bound to have serious results. It would be silly to expect to have things all our own way. We aren't infallible; for that matter, neither are the Nazis. We can only do our best. I'm thankful that we have Louis and his friends on our side. This sounds like Louis coming back."

The guide appeared, with Raoul. Louis was calm, but Raoul was panting, and looked upset.

"Where is Lucien?" inquired Worrals crisply.

Raoul threw out his hands in a gesture of despair. "He went to the village."

"What on earth for?"

"To fetch a picture."

"A picture!" cried Worrals incredulously. "What picture?"

"The picture he painted here yesterday. It was in oils, you remember? He put it in a cupboard to dry, and overlooked it when he came here. He was afraid it might be found, and . . . and . . ."

"Bring the police to the *causee*, looking for the place?"

"Yes. Of course, we did not know that the police from La Malene were already there—"

"All right, Raoul. There is no need to make excuses." Worrals turned to Louis, who stood leaning on his rifle. "You know about this?"

"I found monsieur by the river, and he told me."

"We must get Lucien back here at once."

A man came hurrying up the cave. He went straight to Louis and whispered in his ear. Louis shrugged his shoulders and turned back to Worrals.

“It is too late, mademoiselle.”

Worrals stared, round-eyed. “What do you mean, too late?

“Your friend Lucien has already been arrested by the police.”

Worrals’ voice sank to a whisper. “What have they done with him?”

“They have taken him to the *poste de police* at La Malene.”

Worrals drew a deep breath. “Thank you, Louis,” she said quietly. “You had better return to your friends. This is our affair.”

Louis stood still. “I am with my friends,” he said evenly. “When there is trouble, mademoiselle, we *caussenards* do not abandon our friends—we stay with them.”

“Thank you, *mon ami*.” Worrals turned to Frecks. “If we are going to do anything we shall have to move quickly. But first, there is a major decision to make. Strictly speaking, we have no right to jeopardise the success of the whole operation for the sake of one man, but——”

“We are not, strictly speaking—is that it?”

“Put it like that. We can’t abandon Lucien to his fate.”

“What are you going to do?”

“I don’t know—yet, but as I’m in command here, these are my orders. Bill is coming here to-night, which means that someone will have to stay and put the flare path out. You’ll have to stay and do that, Frecks, in case I’m not back.”

“Where are you going?”

“To La Malene.”

“Is that so?” answered Frecks slowly. “And what are you going to do when you get there?”

“I am going to call at the *poste de police*.”

“Bill is going to be peeved when I tell him that you’ve committed suicide.”

“You may not have to be the bearer of such calamitous news. I hope to be back by then.”

“Complete with Lucien?”

“That is my idea.”

“And just how do you propose to work this miracle?”

“I haven’t time to go into details,” replied Worrals. “It’s no use blinking at facts. By to-night, when the police realise for certain who they have

caught, Lucien will be sent to Vichy. If that happens he won't have a chance. Were one of us in the jam he is in now he wouldn't let us go without making an effort to save us. So I'm going to La Malene. If I slip up, I shall at least pass out with a clear conscience."

"No, I will go to La Malene," declared Raoul stepping forward.

"You, monsieur, will stay here," said Worrals coldly. "I have an advantage that you do not possess."

"What is it?"

"I am the prisoner's sweetheart."

Raoul stared. "Is this a romance?"

"Don't be a fool, Raoul. If you start talking about romance in the hearing of my friend Bill Ashton you're liable to get hit on the nose—he's just a very simple Englishman. I shall report to the police as the sweetheart of Monsieur Lasalle—that is the name on Lucien's papers. Lucien, if I know him, will have refused to say a word. Smiling sweetly at the *préfet* I shall offer to make him speak, for my sake. The French understand matters of the heart, eh, Louis?"

Louis permitted himself to smile faintly. "*Bien entendu!*"

"*Bon*. I thought you would understand."

Louis stroked his beard thoughtfully. "It will be an *excursion périlleux*."

"Perilous is the word," admitted Worrals. "I shall need clothes, clothes that will turn me into a girl of the Cévennes. Can you find them for me, old cabbage?"

Louis nodded. "But certainly."

"Then get busy, *mon vieux*. Time is important. The sooner I am on my way the better."

The old guide tucked his rifle under his arm. "*Adieu*."

Frecks turned to Worrals. "If this doesn't stir up a hornets' nest I don't know what would," she opined.

Raoul sat down and buried his face in his hands. Frecks nudged him not too gently in the ribs. "That's enough of that," she chided. "Don't go all French."

"But this is terrible," moaned Raoul. "Can I do nothing?"

"Nothing at all," returned Worrals casually. "Things will probably be worse before they are better. Frecks, pass my kit. I have something in my bag that may be useful."

AT LA MALENE

FROM the western side of the Causse Méjean, wherein the cave was situated, to La Malene, as the crow flies, is a distance of five miles. The distance across the *causse*, as a traveller would walk, is greater, because it is necessary to make frequent detours to avoid gorges, rocks, and small mountain lakes. Apart from which, the going, even at its best, is very rough. It is for this reason that in most mountain districts of France distance is reckoned, not in kilometres, but in hours—that is, the time required to cover on foot the distance between any two points.

Worrals, equipped with her pocket compass, decided on the direct course—what Louis called a “*route stratégique*”; for she dare not risk being seen, and perhaps questioned, on the way. Moreover, in accordance with the part she proposed to play, she would be expected to know her way across the *causse*. Louis had provided her with an outfit of clothes such as are worn by girls of the district—where he had got them from she did not ask—so she had no difficulty in taking on the role of a Cévenol. The journey was even worse than she expected, and it was late in the afternoon when she came in sight of her objective.

For a minute or two she stood gazing down at the grey houses, drowsing in the mellow autumn sunshine, with nothing to indicate that they were under the heel of a conqueror. She glanced back at the herb-covered hillside behind her, but could see no sign of life, so she marched on boldly into the village. Straight down the little street she walked, past dilapidated shop fronts where innumerable mangy cats and a few tired-looking dogs lay basking in the dust. Just inside one of the shops, an old, old woman, her face lined with the wrinkles of nearly a hundred years, sat in a rocking chair; her black, beady eyes clouded with suspicion as Worrals inquired the way to the *poste de police*.

“*A là bas,*” she answered, pointing.

“*Merci, madame,*” returned Worrals and walked on.

There was no one outside the police station, but the door stood open, and in the room beyond, two *gendarmes*, hatless, their tunics unbuttoned, sat

playing a desultory game of draughts. Their belts, with pistol holsters attached, hung on the backs of the respective chairs.

“*Bon jour, messieurs,*” greeted Worrals. “I ask permission to speak to the *chef de police.*”

One of the policemen half closed an eye. “And why,” quoth he, “would a girl like you want to see the chief of police?”

“It is a matter of business,” answered Worrals.

The officer shook his head. “The chief is not to be disturbed.”

Worrals understood well the French temperament. She affected a look of distress. “It is,” she said in a broken voice, “an affair of the heart.”

“*Tiens!* But that is different,” said the policeman, rising. “Sit down, mademoiselle.”

He disappeared into the back of the building, to reappear a moment later, crooking a finger. “Enter,” he invited.

Worrals went through to the *bureau*, where an elderly unshaven man, from behind a high desk, regarded her curiously.

He cleared his throat. “Mademoiselle is in trouble, eh?”

“Yes, monsieur.”

“I am at mademoiselle’s service.”

“It is about Jean Lasalle, who was arrested this morning in Carnac.”

The officer’s eyes narrowed. “You know him?”

“Yes, monsieur.”

“Your brother, perhaps?”

“No.” Worrals dropped her eyes. “My sweetheart,” she whispered.

“Ah!”

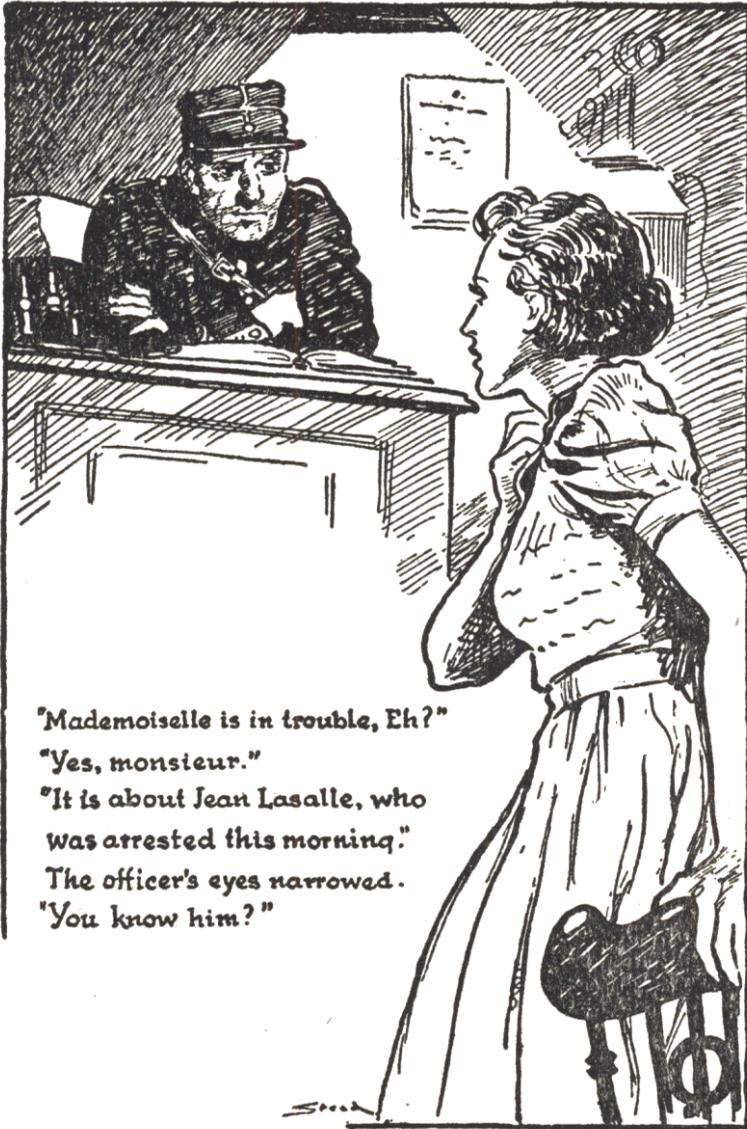
Worrals was conscious of a definite tightening in the atmosphere, but she did her best to look unconcerned.

“What about this Jean Lasalle?” asked the officer.

“I ask permission to see him.”

“Why?”

“To ask him why he has been arrested. If he has done anything wrong I am sure he will tell me.”



"Mademoiselle is in trouble, Eh?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"It is about Jean Lasalle, who
was arrested this morning."

The officer's eyes narrowed.

"You know him?"

The chief looked puzzled. The two policemen had now entered the room and were watching the scene with interest.

"What do you know of this Jean Lasalle?" inquired the chief.

"He is my sweetheart, monsieur—is that not enough?"

"Don't you know that he has been arrested on a charge very serious?"

"How should I know? Is it very bad?"

“It is so bad,” declared the officer, “that two special men are on their way from Vichy, to question him. Doubtless they will take him away with them.”

“But why?”

“Because he will say nothing.”

“That is because he is innocent.”

“*Oh! là, là!* If he was innocent he would open his mouth.”

“It may be that he is angry that he should be arrested?” suggested Worrals. “He would speak to me.”

“If you could make him speak, mademoiselle, I should be glad. He makes me look like a fool, this one. Not a word can I get out of him.”

“Let me try, monsieur,” prompted Worrals. “I am sure that if I could speak to him he would listen to reason.”

The officer considered the proposal. For a horrid moment Worrals thought he was going to refuse; but then, making up his mind suddenly, he opened his desk, took out a bunch of keys, and threw them across the room to one of the policemen with a crisp, “Fetch Jean Lasalle.”

Worrals could hear footsteps receding downstairs. “On what charge was Jean arrested?” she asked, taking the initiative for fear the officer should ask awkward questions.

“In the first place, for murder.”

Worrals looked horrified. “But this is not possible!”

The officers shrugged. “Somebody killed Edmund Duclos.”

“Duclos—killed?” gasped Worrals, with simulated amazement.

The officer nodded heavily.

“But how?”

“He was shot, and his body thrown into the Tarn. It floated down and was found by a fisherman at Les Vignes.”

“But why should Jean kill Duclos?”

“That is what we should like to know.” A look of inspiration flickered in the officer’s eyes. “Perhaps Duclos had been making love to you?” he suggested, his mind running on what, to him, might be a sufficient reason for murder. “Did Duclos make love to you, mademoiselle?” he challenged, suspiciously.

“Never, monsieur.”

“Ah well, he might have done,” said the officer in a disappointed voice.

At this juncture Lucien was brought into the room. For a ghastly moment Worrals thought he was handcuffed, which would have upset her plan; then she saw that this was not entirely the case. A handcuff was fastened on his left wrist, but the counterpart, instead of being fastened to the other wrist, was simply held by the *gendarme*. This Worrals saw as, with a strangled cry of “Jean!” she took a quick pace towards him.

Lucien looked astounded, which in the circumstances was understandable.

Worrals took another step which brought her nearer to the door, and then turned, so that the three policemen were in front of her. Then she said, in a firm voice, “Thank you, *monsieur le chef*, for your courtesy, which with great reluctance I must abuse.”

As she spoke, her hand went inside her bodice, and came out holding a small automatic. “Please be still,” she ordered. “I hope you will not make it necessary for me to shoot you.”

The three policemen stared, goggle-eyed. None of them spoke.

Worrals addressed Lucien. “Kindly relieve the chief of his pistol. The others have left theirs in the outer room. Make haste.”

The last two words were prompted by the fact that a car had just pulled up outside, and she was afraid someone was going to come into the building.

Lucien shook his handcuff clear of the *gendarme*, and took the pistol from the belt of the unprotesting chief, who seemed too dazed to resist. Covering the policemen Lucien backed to the door.

“I implore you not to follow us, messieurs,” advised Worrals, and taking the key from the inside of the door, left the room. Lucien followed. Worrals locked the door on the outside.

They were now in the outer room where the two *gendarmes* had been playing draughts.

“Which way?” asked Lucien, who by this time was keeping pace with the situation.

“We must make for the *causee*—” began Worrals, and then broke off as through the front door came two men. One was in the uniform of a French Army officer of high rank. The other was a civilian, dressed in a dark suit, carrying on his arm a band which bore a symbol that announced his nationality—the swastika.

As the two men walked in, Worrals and Lucien walked forward to the door. Worrals' sleeve actually brushed the Nazi in passing. He threw her a stare of cold inquiry, and for the brief instant that it was possible, their eyes met. In a way Worrals was glad of this, because she had a horrible suspicion that the loose end of the handcuff was still dangling from Lucien's wrist. If so, it passed unnoticed, and the two newcomers reached the door of the *bureau* precisely as Worrals and Lucien reached the front door.

There was a sharp exclamation from the Nazi when he found the office door locked on the outside. Worrals heard the key turn in the lock, and a swift babble of voices. By that time she was outside on the pavement, within a yard of the kerb against which stood a powerful-looking car, bearing on its radiator cap a flag decorated with a large swastika. The engine was running.

"We've got to move fast," snapped Worrals. "Get in."

"I thought you said we were going to the *causee*?" said Lucien, as he obeyed.

Worrals jumped into the driver's seat. "Don't talk," she said crisply, and slammed the door.

Heavy footsteps and a shout inside the building were simultaneous with the first movement of the car. As it glided forward there was another shout, followed an instant later by a shot. The bullet struck the car somewhere in the rear. Worrals' foot came down on the accelerator and the car shot forward, swerving to miss a cat that had chosen that moment to cross the road. There were more shouts and more shots, but Worrals was too concerned with her driving to pay much attention to what was going on behind.

"Many thanks, Worrals," began Lucien, but she cut him short.

"Save them for later," she said tersely.

"Where are we going?"

"We'll decide on that when we're clear of the village. I should say we've stirred things up."

"Do you know where this road leads?" asked Lucien.

"No, but I can see the Gorge of the Tarn, and while we can see that we shall not be far from the *causee*. The road probably goes to Florac, but for the moment, as long as it takes us clear of the village, I'm content."

"*Zut!* Gently please," gasped Lucien, as Worrals swerved round the bend.

His exclamation was not unwarranted, for Worrals was driving at dangerous speed on a narrow road that was no more than a ledge in the face of a cliff, the contours of which it followed. On one side the rough herb-covered limestone rose steeply; on the other, without any sort of protection, it dropped sheer into a gorge. It was, in fact, a typical *corniche* road of the Cévennes.

Rounding another bend Worrals slammed on her brakes with such force that they were both flung forward against the instrument board. It was either that or a collision, for right across the road, making it impassable, was a sloping pile of loose rock. The car dry-skidded, and came to a stop on the brink of the chasm.

“*Nom de Dieu!*” gasped Lucien.

Worrals herself was a trifle pale. “That was close,” she admitted, with a wry grin. “It must be a landslide. Bad luck. We’re still less than a mile from the village, and they’ll be after us.” As she spoke she opened the door and got out.

“What shall we do about it?”

Worrals pointed to the steeply-sloping side of the *causee*. “That’s the way we go,” she said.

“And leave the car here?”

“No, we can do better than that. They’ll see the skid mark. They may as well think we’ve gone over. That should give us a little time to get clear.” Worrals took off the brake and stepped back quickly. The car lurched on; for a moment it hung on the brink of the gorge, and then, with a slow deliberation horrible to watch it went over. Cautiously peering over Worrals saw it turning slow somersaults as it hurtled down to the distant river.

“That’s one Nazi vehicle less, anyway,” she remarked. “Come on.”

They started scrambling up the bank, but before they had gone far they were suddenly confronted by three men, with expressionless faces, who, with rifles at the ready, were squatting in a depression. The meeting was so unexpected that Worrals stopped, at a loss for words. She felt that their presence was not an accident, but what their object could be she could not imagine.

It was one of the men, a fierce-looking, unshaven youth, with rope-soled shoes on his feet and an oily beret on his head, who broke the silence; and his words told Worrals at once that they had not fallen among enemies.

“Keep your head down, mademoiselle,” said the youth politely. “You may be seen from the road.”

“Is someone there?” she asked.

“A *gendarme*, on a bicycle, is coming,” was the reply.

How the youth knew this Worrals could not imagine—that is, until she saw him make a signal to some invisible person higher up the hill. With a shock, she realised something else—that the landslide, even in a district where landslides are common, was not an accident.

“Did you block the road?” she accused.

The youth smiled faintly. “Yes.”

“But why? You might have killed us.”

The youth shrugged. “If you take rides in Nazi cars in the Cévennes, you must expect to be killed, mademoiselle. How were we to know? We saw the Nazi car come in, and knowing that it must go out . . .” The youth made an expressive gesture.

“But it might not have come this way,” Worrals pointed out. “It might have gone straight on.”

“What difference could it have made?” said the youth casually. “Both roads are blocked.”

Worrals looked at Lucien. She was beginning to get a very good idea of what was happening in the Cévennes. There, in a conquered country, were people who were still fighting, in their own way. Roads were being blocked, and “accidents” arranged. The same thing was probably going on all over occupied Europe, she reflected.

“We are friends,” she resumed.

“We know that, mademoiselle.” The youth was staring up the hill. He made a signal. Then, “Come,” he said. “I have orders to take you up.”

Then began a long climb up the rough hillside. From time to time Worrals could see the road far below her, usually where it rounded a shoulder of the cliff. Occasionally, too, she noticed men squatting among the rocks. All were armed. Generally they smiled, or raised their hats.

“Goodness me, no wonder I felt that eyes were everywhere, watching us,” Worrals murmured to Lucien. “These hills are full of men.”

On a rough ledge, sitting on a heap of thyme, they came upon Louis Capelle, who rose to meet them.

“How on earth did you get here, Louis?” exclaimed Worrals.

“What sort of a guide would I be, not to know the short cuts in my own hills?”

“But why did you come here?”

“In case your plan failed, to prevent them from taking you away.”

“So that’s why you blocked the roads?”

“One reason, mademoiselle. But it will soon be dark, and we are a long way from the cave. Let us go.”

“Isn’t there a risk that we may be followed?”

“The way I shall take you,” answered Louis, “is a *route formidable*.”

This, Worrals soon discovered, was no exaggeration, for there were places where a steady head, and careful hand and foot work, were necessary. However, she went on, well satisfied with the result of her afternoon’s work.

“You’d better stay in the cave in future,” she advised Lucien, during a pause for breath.

“I shall not be likely to leave it without good reason,” he declared.

It was after ten o’clock when, after an exhausting march, the last part of it in darkness, they reached the cave, to find Frecks and Raoul waiting in a fever of anxiety.

“I’m afraid things are going to buzz presently,” Worrals told Frecks. “There’s a Nazi in the village, to say nothing of a French general—a Vichy quisling, I suppose. It’s hard to see how we can run a landing ground with all this going on. I’d better stop Bill from coming here—at any rate for the time being.”

“Not a bad idea, but you’re just too late,” rejoined Frecks.

“What do you mean?”

“I had a signal five minutes ago to say that he was on the way.”

“In that case,” resumed Worrals, “we must get things into shape to bring him in. I’ll change back into my uniform; and Lucien, you’d better get Louis or someone to file that handcuff off your wrist. Incidentally, now that we have Louis and his friends to help us, there is really no need for you two boys to stay.”

Lucien looked crestfallen. “You think I make too many mistakes?” he said, with pain in his eyes.

“No, it isn’t that,” answered Worrals quickly. “I don’t want you to go; but there is no reason why you should stay here if you would rather get away while the going’s good.”

“We can work the petrol pump, and help in other ways,” objected Lucien. “Besides, the chief thinks we are here. We were given a definite

assignment, and he may wish to get in touch with us. It would be unwise, even dangerous, to leave here without his permission.”

“That’s true,” acknowledged Worrals. “All right. We’re glad to have you with us. I was only thinking that there are safer places at the moment than this, and as you are two of the most valuable French agents we have, the Intelligence people would rather you did not take unnecessary risks. But I see your argument, and perhaps you had better stay. Let’s have some coffee.”

“So the aeroplane comes to-night?” queried Louis as he rekindled the fire.

“Yes.”

Louis shrugged. “It is,” he observed, “an *expédition audacieuse*.”

Worrals smiled. “Audacious,” she agreed, “is the word.”

“You’re telling *us*,” muttered Frecks.

AN UNWELCOME VISITOR

LATER, ten minutes before Bill Ashton in the transport plane was due to arrive, found the comrades out on the *causse*, waiting, listening. The weather was not bad, but it was not as good as Worrals could have wished. In a sky partly covered with cloud a few stars gave a feeble light, but the air was at least clear, and what was more important, there was no wind. Lighting arrangements had been made in accordance with the simple plan decided on with Bill; that is to say, as soon as the machine was heard overhead, a line of six ordinary electric torches, pointing upwards, was to be evenly spaced along the actual runway. On this line of lights the machine would land, finishing its run at the end where Worrals, with yet another torch, was to show a series of flashes. As there was no wind it did not matter in which direction the aircraft landed, so Worrals, naturally, had chosen to stand at the end nearer to the cave. The places where the intermediate lights were to be stationed had already been marked by small wands of brushwood.

Now that the moment had come to put the scheme to test Worrals was more nervous than she would have cared to admit. She had great faith in Bill's pilotage, but, as she well knew, even the best pilots sometimes make mistakes. A night landing, even at the best of times, always involves a certain amount of risk, and the present conditions were far from ideal. A mistake, however slight, if it prevented the machine from taking off again, might well have consequences not pleasant to contemplate. However, she kept her fears to herself.

"You've got all the torches ready, Frecks?" she asked.

Frecks confirmed that she had.

"You've tested them all?"

"What do you take me for" demanded Frecks indignantly. "Of course I have."

"All right. As soon as I give the word, dash along the line and fix them in place. Lucien will follow you to confirm that they haven't fallen over, or anything like that. The great thing is speed. If you hear the machine coming in before you have time to get back here, cut out of the line of flight at right

angles, or you may be knocked down. Don't go too far, though, or you may go over the edge of the gorge."

"I'll do my very best to avoid that," murmured Frecks sarcastically. "What machine is Bill flying—do you know?"

"It wasn't settled when we left, but it will probably be an old Whitley, which is steady and reliable, if not among the fastest machines in the sky. Speed doesn't matter so much on a job like this as dependability."

Nothing more was said. The little party stood on the lonely plateau gazing into the direction from which the machine should come; and when, a few minutes later a distant drone was heard, Worrals uttered an exclamation of satisfaction.

"Here he comes," she announced.

"How can you be sure it is your friend?" asked Raoul anxiously.

"I can't," admitted Worrals. "We daren't risk an exchange of signals, such as firing coloured lights; they would be visible at too great a distance. We thought that it would be a remarkable fluke indeed if an enemy machine passed over this particular spot at this particular minute. Anyway, we were prepared to take the risk." Then, as the hum of the machine became more distinct, she turned to Frecks. "Right!" she said in a brittle voice. "Off you go. Lucien, you follow and check up."

The two figures, one behind the other, sped away into the darkness.

Raoul uttered a startled cry as the first light appeared. Against the inky background it blazed like a beacon, and even Worrals was a little alarmed.

"Aren't you afraid the light will be seen by someone?" asked Raoul.

"It points upwards, so it could not be seen by anyone below it," answered Worrals. "It could only be seen if someone was on one of the surrounding mountains, and I don't think there's much chance of that. There goes number two light."

For a few seconds, while the aircraft drew steadily nearer, and two more lights appeared on the runway, Worrals stood still. Then she switched on her own light and turned the beam upwards in three short flashes and a long one—the victory "V". This she continued to do at intervals. The six lights marking the runway were now in position, and presently Frecks and Lucien, their task complete, came running back. By that time the drone of the engines had died away, but the faint melodious hum of the gliding aircraft could still be heard, travelling, it seemed, in a circle round the plateau.

After that there was nothing to do but wait, wait while the sound receded, and then, as the pilot turned, came back. Suddenly the sound was very near, and a moment later the harsh rumble of heavy wheels announced that the aircraft was on the ground.

“Here he comes!” cried Frecks, as a shadow, enormous in the glow of the lights, loomed up.

Worrals flashed her torch and the machine came to rest. As she ran toward it Bill’s voice shouted, “Shall I switch off?”

“Yes, it’s all clear,” replied Worrals, and the mutter of the idling engines died away.

“Thank goodness for that,” remarked Worrals. “So far so good.”

Bill, bulky in his flying kit, climbed down. “Hello, kids!” he greeted cheerfully.

“I do wish you wouldn’t call us that,” snapped Worrals irritably.

“Well, you won’t let me call you darling,” sighed Bill.

“For the love of Mike, be serious,” growled Worrals. “What do you think this is—some sort of a game?”

“Yes.”

“Well, it isn’t,” declared Worrals. “At least, not as far as we’re concerned,” she added.

“The trouble with you girls is, you take things too seriously,” murmured Bill.

“Are you alone?” inquired Worrals.

“Yes. That’s where you have the advantage of me. I see you have your boy friends with you. I ought to be jealous.”

“Suppose you stop rotting and get down to business,” returned Worrals icily. “You’ve met Lucien and Raoul?”

Bill shook hands with the two boys. “Well, get on with it,” he invited. “I’ve done my part. The flak was foul, and I was chased by every Hun in the sky. It’s your turn. Get a move on. I want to get home. I’m losing my beauty sleep.”

“What have you brought?”

“Petrol in four-gallon cans, a mark six pump—”

“Don’t tell me you haven’t brought any food?” interposed Frecks hotly. “We have to eat, you know.”

“Oh yes—I’m glad you reminded me. Old Frostyface stowed a basket of fodder for you—packed it himself, he said.”

“In that case it probably consists of oatmeal,” snorted Frecks. “He has a passion for the stuff.”

“All right; that’s enough talk; start unloading,” broke in Worrals.

Suddenly Bill’s manner changed, and his hand dropped quickly to his pocket. “Who are all these people?” he asked sharply.

Turning, Worrals saw Louis, with several of his friends, watching the proceedings.

“It’s all right—they’re comrades of ours,” she said. “They’ve come at a good time.” Raising her voice she asked Louis to help with the unloading.

Once the work had begun Worrals took Bill on one side. “Listen,” she said earnestly. “Things have been happening here. I’ve quite a story for you to take back, so try to get it right.”

“Go ahead, Boadicea.”

“This job hasn’t turned out as simple as I thought it would,” resumed Worrals. “There are complications. We got here all right; so did Lucien and Raoul, and we made contact as planned. Unfortunately, there was a Vichy spy here. I didn’t expect to have things all my own way, but I was hardly prepared for a Vichy agent, with a definite assignment, on the spot. It appears that he was sent here about six weeks ago to find out what the people were up to. He discovered more than was good for his health, with the result that he was, in the language of our American allies, bumped off. Personally, I think that was an indiscretion.”

“But what on earth are the people up to?” asked Bill curiously. “What can they do here?”

“You’d be surprised,” returned Worrals warmly. “They’ve got together and formed a sort of little commando of their own. They live in the caves and at night go off on sabotage raids—at least, so I understand, although I don’t know the details. The result was, when we arrived on the scene, we were not exactly welcome. We were captured, but luckily, my old guide—the old fellow over there directing operations—came to our rescue. We have now fixed up a sort of understanding. They are on our side, and they have, in fact, been a great help to us. Explain this carefully when you get back. It may be worth while sending down some equipment to help these fellows with their work. Most of their rifles are museum pieces. Unfortunately, the matter doesn’t end there. Duclos’ body was discovered in the Tarn, with the result that the police were soon on the spot. Lucien was arrested and taken to

La Malene. He managed to get away—just in time, as it happened. A Nazi agent, probably a Gestapo man, and a Vichy general, arrived to collect him. So, with one thing and another, this is getting a warm spot, and it's likely to get warmer."

Bill whistled softly. "I should say it is," he murmured. "Doesn't this rather upset your apple-cart?"

"It's tilted it a bit, I must confess, but it hasn't upset it—yet. Having got so far we're going to carry on, but you'd better tell the C.O. to hurry things along because we may not be able to hold out indefinitely."

"I'll make the matter clear when I get back," promised Bill. "They'll probably say I should have brought you back with me."

"Oh no. It isn't as bad as that," objected Worrals. "Are you coming again to-morrow night?"



The cargo was being unloaded and quickly transported to the cave by Louis and his comrades.

"That was the plan. One more trip should give you a fair supply of petrol. Naturally, a check is being kept on it, and the Higher Command won't send more Spitfires through than you are able to refuel."

Worrals nodded. “Okay, Bill. That seems to be about all. If the gang has got your machine emptied you’d better see about getting back. This is no parking place for a British bomber.”

“I think you’re right,” agreed Bill. “I’ll push off.” He held Worrals’ arm for a moment. “Take care of yourself, kid.”

“I’ll try,” promised Worrals. “But as this was my own scheme, naturally, I’m anxious to make it a success.”

“But not at the risk of your life,” protested Bill as they walked back to the aircraft.

A quick examination revealed that it had been unloaded. Some of the cargo still stood in a pile near the machine, but it was being quickly transported to the cave by Louis and his comrades.

“So long,” called Bill as he climbed up into his seat.

“So long, Bill,” answered Worrals. “Stick close to the lights and you’ll be all right. You’ve got plenty of run. See you to-morrow, I hope.”

The engines came to life. Ponderously, the heavy aircraft swung round until it was facing the runway. The engines bellowed, and a blast of air made the spectators crouch. The sound faded to a drone as the Whitley took off.

“Okay, he’s away,” said Worrals. “Let’s go and bring the torches in. As soon as it’s light enough to see we’ll have a good look round to make sure that there are no oil stains, or anything, in case we have visitors on the *causee*.”

“No reason why they should come to this particular end, is there?” asked Frecks.

“None that I know of,” admitted Worrals.

By the time the lights had been brought in, and the fuel stowed, it was after two o’clock, but Frecks insisted on opening the tuck basket, which yielded a supply of food—as Worrals pointed out, enough to last them for several days. Nor was it all oatmeal.

“You owe the C.O. a mental apology,” observed Worrals, as she lifted out a cold chicken.

In Frecks’ opinion, the next half-hour provided some compensation for their dangerous mission. When the meal was over, and the unconsumed food carefully packed away, they rolled themselves in their blankets to get what sleep they could before daybreak, at which hour Louis promised to call them.

Worrals seemed hardly to have closed her eyes when she was awakened by someone gently shaking her shoulder. She looked up into the face of the old guide.

“Come,” he said. “Don’t make a noise. Let the others sleep while they may. There is nothing they can do outside at present.”

“Is it light?” asked Worrals.

“Yes, just.”

Wonderingly, Worrals followed Louis to the entrance to the cave, and then to a mass of rock from behind which a broad view of the *causse* could be obtained.

“*Regardez,*” said Louis, pointing.

Following the direction indicated Worrals saw six men walking slowly across the plateau. They were some distance away, but were moving towards the rocks that fringed the gorge. One of them Worrals recognised at once by his uniform. It was the French general whom she had seen at La Malene. Three others were in uniforms of the French police. Without being sure, Worrals thought they were the officers that she had seen at the police station. The other two were civilians. One wore a dark suit, with an armlet, and there seemed every reason to suppose that he was the man who had accompanied the French general at La Malene police station. The sixth man, also a civilian, she did not recognise, although there was something vaguely familiar about his walk. In one hand he carried what appeared to be a stiff sheet of paper. From the way he often halted, and looked at it, and then looked about, Worrals formed the opinion that it was a map.

“The hunt draws near,” murmured Louis. “They are looking for us, no doubt, but I don’t think they will find us.”

“They’re coming this way. We had better return to the cave,” suggested Worrals.

“It would be prudent,” agreed Louis.

From the inside of the cave they continued to watch, for it was possible to see the men as they drew nearer. The sound of their voices could be heard, and as they continued to approach Worrals saw that what she had taken to be a map was a small artist’s canvas. Intuitively she knew what it was. It was the painting Lucien had made the first morning on the *causse*. By referring to it, the men were trying to identify the actual spot. But to Worrals, the shock of this discovery was negligible compared with the one that followed. The man holding the painting spoke, and as he spoke he turned so that his face could be seen. He coughed, a dry, rasping cough.

Worrals recognised both the voice and the face, with its sinister, unforgettable eyes, and in spite of her efforts to remain unmoved she felt a sudden chill, felt the blood ebb from her face.

Louis noticed her change of expression. “You know this one?” he queried softly.

“Yes,” breathed Worrals.

“Who is he?”

“The very worst man who could have come here,” answered Worrals, with an edge on her voice. “It is *Hauptmann* von Brandisch, reputed to be the most utterly ruthless man in the Gestapo—and the most efficient.”

ON THIN ICE

LOUIS' weather-tanned forehead knitted into a frown. "He knows you, Lha?" he queried, shrewdly.

"He most certainly does," rejoined Worrals. "I tricked him once, and then slipped through his fingers; and since forgiveness is not conspicuous in the Nazi character he would ask nothing more than to see me again."

"It is a *chance tragique*," observed Louis, undismayed. "Let us kill him. Let us kill them all," he suggested practically.

Worrals laid a hand on his sleeve. "Wait," she said. "Do nothing in a hurry."

Now that she had recovered from the first stunning shock she was thinking fast. It was easy to guess what had happened. It had been known to the Gestapo for some time that trouble was brewing in the untamable Cévennes. Lucien had been traced to Carnac by his bicycle. It had not occurred to Worrals that it was his own machine or she would not have left such a significant piece of evidence for the enemy to identify. Duclos had been killed. Following that, Lucien Delarose had been caught, only to be rescued by a girl. Knowing of her association with him von Brandisch could hardly fail to sum up the situation more or less correctly. He would assume that the four people who had given him so much trouble in the "châteaux" country farther north were together again. So far he would be correct. But he would, reasoned Worrals, suppose that their presence in the Cévennes was connected directly with the *saboteurs* who were operating from the mountains, and here he would be in error. At any rate, he could not have guessed their real purpose, which was to establish a refuelling station for aircraft. Lucien had committed a second indiscretion by leaving his painting behind when he had abandoned the cottage; it was only a slight thing, but von Brandisch was not the sort of man to overlook any clue, however small. Supposing—correctly—that the sketch had been made by Lucien on the *cause*, he had come, with an escort, to reconnoitre the precise spot in the hope of picking up another clue. This, so far, he had obviously failed to do, for he was standing in the centre of the group comparing the sketch with the

landscape, at the same time talking in his thin reedy voice. At intervals he coughed the dry, rasping cough, that Worrals remembered so well.

“Continue to watch them. I am going to wake the others,” she whispered, and hastened to where Frecks, Lucien and Raoul, were still sleeping peacefully on their beds of dry herbs.

With a finger to her lips to compel silence she awoke them in turn. “Quietly,” she warned. “Von Brandisch is outside.”

Their eyes opened wide, but they did not answer.

“He hasn’t discovered the cave, and so far he has no suspicion that it is here,” went on Worrals. “I’m hoping he’ll go away without finding it.”

“And if he does find it?” queried Lucien.

“You carry a pistol, I think?” answered Worrals meaningly. “We can’t allow ourselves to be captured.”

Lucien nodded. He took out his automatic and Raoul did the same.

“Careful,” cautioned Worrals. “Don’t speak above a whisper.” She returned to the entrance, where Louis, as motionless as the rock against which he leaned, was watching.

A glance through the opening revealed that the position of the six men had changed only slightly. Von Brandisch was still comparing the sketch with the landscape, not for purposes of recognition, for the scene depicted was obvious. He was, thought Worrals, trying to work out why the sketch had been made, and so far had failed to find a satisfactory answer—for the simple reason that there was no actual answer. Lucien had chosen his subject more or less haphazard, selecting a composition simply for its scenic attraction, and no other reason. The Nazi could look at the landscape as long as he liked; he would discover nothing; the secret of the *causee*, the entrance—or one of the entrances—to the labyrinth of caves within the rock, was in the opposite direction. Whether or not von Brandisch was aware of the existence of the caves, Worrals, of course, did not know. There was nothing in his manner to suggest that he did.

Shortly afterwards he took the course which she hoped he might take. Instead of examining the rocks *behind* the point from where the sketch was made, he started off across the *causee*, apparently with the object of surveying the area of country depicted on the canvas.

“Good,” breathed Worrals. “They’re going.”

“It would, I think, be better to kill them, while they are at our mercy,” opined Louis.

“The effect of that would be to bring a regiment of German troops here,” argued Worrals. “It is better as it is. Let them walk about as much as they please, as long as they discover nothing likely to give us away. We have the advantage of being able to watch them without their knowing it. I’ll leave the watching to you and your comrades, Louis. You seem to be pretty good at that sort of thing,” she added meaningly.

“We have had much practice,” replied Louis blandly. “We shall keep them in sight. *Au revoir.*” The old guide disappeared down the cave.

The six men were still walking across the *causee*. For upwards of an hour they could be seen wandering about, occasionally coming close, but for the most part confining their attention to the far side of the plateau, the background of the scene which Lucien had painted.

“I don’t think von Brandisch is as clever as he is made out to be,” remarked Frecks. “Admittedly, we know the answer to the problem which he’s trying to solve, but it’s amusing to sit here and watch him blundering about on the wrong track, when the solution is really so simple.”

“That’s where you’re wrong,” said Worrals quietly. “Actually, from the point of view of spectators, we are watching an interesting demonstration in the art of deduction—a Sherlock Holmes problem in real life. So far, fortunately for us, von Brandisch has failed to pick up the scent, but don’t fall into the error of thinking the man is a fool. He’s far from that. Eventually, when his present survey fails to produce results, he will sit down to some really serious thinking, and that’s when we shall have to watch out for ourselves. When his present trail brings him to a dead end he will come back to this spot. For the moment I’m content that he is on the wrong track, because that gives us time to go on with our arrangements.”

The six men had disappeared over the brow of the *causee*, and although watch was kept for some time nothing more was seen of them.

“What do we do now?” asked Frecks.

“For the moment there is nothing much we can do,” returned Worrals. “Now that von Brandisch has gone I don’t mind telling you that I was in an absolute funk while he was on the prowl. I was scared stiff that someone had left something, or dropped something, while the machine was being unloaded last night. Fortunately the plateau is rock, not soft earth, or there might have been wheel marks. It would only have needed a few drops of lubricating oil to give our game away. Well, we may as well have some breakfast.”

The day passed quietly, but that afternoon Louis returned to report that von Brandisch had departed, in an evil temper, it was observed, to Vichy. "I thought you would be glad to know that your dangerous enemy has abandoned the quest," said Louis, smiling.

"Abandoned nothing, my friend," answered Worrals brusquely. "You don't know the man. Once he gets his teeth into a thing he doesn't let go until he gets to the bone. Were it otherwise he wouldn't be one of the heads of the Gestapo. Either he has gone for fresh instructions or to check up on something. You can bet your rabbit-skin hat, old walrus, that he'll be back."

Louis' brow darkened. "It would have been better to shoot him," he grumbled.

"We shall have another opportunity, no doubt," murmured Worrals calmly. "Any more news?"

"Yes, and I don't think you'll like it."

"Well, let's have it."

"Three men have been set to watch the *causee*."

"How do you know that?"

"They are already on the *causee*, among the rocks, fortunately on the far side, about three kilometres from here. They have greatcoats, and food, and obviously intend to stay the night. Doubtless they will patrol."

"Doubtless they will be permitted to do nothing of the sort," said Worrals harshly. "We can't have that. Who are they?"

"The *préfet* and one *gendarme* from La Malene. With them, to see that they do the job properly, is the Nazi who you saw arrive at the *poste de police*."

"Hm. Even if they stay where they are they would hear the aeroplane land."

"Of a certainty, mademoiselle. I would suggest that we deprive them of their lives."

"What a bloodthirsty old scoundrel you are, Louis."

"But it is a precaution the most simple, mademoiselle."

"They may be more use to us alive than dead, or at any rate, to our Intelligence people." Worrals smiled. "Instead of making the place messy with gore, I suggest that we send them for a ride."

"Mademoiselle makes a joke?"

“Not at all. You take your boys and capture them. Bring them here. When the plane comes to-night we will send them to England. I am sure our Intelligence people would like to have a chat with them.”

“Gosh!” exclaimed Frecks. “That’s a wizard idea. They’ll vanish into thin air, literally.”

“What do you think, Louis?” queried Worrals.

“For my part,” answered the old man seriously, “I would rather shoot them, or stab them a few times. In my experience it is the most satisfactory way in the long run, because there is then no risk of them coming back. But if you prefer to be gentle with them, mademoiselle, it shall be so.”

“It isn’t a matter of being gentle with them, my old Camisard; it’s a matter of all-round expediency. You go and collect them. It will soon be getting dark.”

“*Oui, mademoiselle.*” Louis departed on his errand.

“Was he serious about killing them?” asked Frecks.

“Undoubtedly.”

“What a terrible fellow.”

“Not at all,” disputed Worrals. “If your great grandfather had been boiled in oil, and your great grandmother tortured to death, probably you would not be so lily-fingered yourself when the next invaders came along.”

“I guess you’re right, at that,” drawled Frecks. “Bill may object to this live cargo.”

“Bill will do what I tell him to do,” announced Worrals firmly. “Make a pot of tea.”

It was about two hours later, after darkness had fallen, that a tramp of feet coming up to the cave announced the arrival of Louis and his comrades. They brought with them the three enemy scouts, each with his hands securely tied behind his back.

“Here are the partridges, mademoiselle,” said Louis.

“Thank you, my old one,” answered Worrals cheerfully. “Drop them over there by the wall. Did you have any trouble?”

“None whatever.”

“Can you spare a man to guard them for a few hours?”

“But certainly.”

To the three prisoners Worrals said, without malice, “Behave yourselves and no harm will come to you.”

“You shall pay for this,” spat the German.

Worrals answered him in his own language. “Pay for what? Had it not been for me you would have already paid with your life for coming to the Cévennes.”

After that the Nazi relapsed into sullen silence.

To the two Frenchmen Worrals said, “As for you, I’m ashamed of you . . . Frenchmen, you call yourselves. Yet you conspire against those who are trying to save you and your country from these brutal Germans.”

As the men hung their heads, Frecks remarked, “I do believe they are really ashamed.”

“We obey orders, and our orders came from Vichy,” said the *préfet*.

“And I suppose that if Vichy told you to cut off your wife’s head you would do that, too?” flared Frecks. “Have you no courage?”

“That’s enough. Leave them alone,” ordered Worrals quietly. “Later on they will pay, in remorse, for their behaviour.”

“Chickens,” put in Louis scornfully. “Pullets without hearts.”

“If all Frenchmen had hearts as big as yours, *mon vieux*, the Germans would never have got into France,” murmured Worrals. “But this is no time or place to talk of such things. Thanks for your help. We shall be all right now, but you might come along, and bring the boys, at midnight.”

“Certainly, mademoiselle. Every path up to the *causee* is being watched, so there is no chance of our being surprised.”

“Good. Oh, and by the way, Louis, what has your chief to say about all this?”

“He is too busy doing other things to worry about it,” answered Louis vaguely. “While he is away I am in charge.”

“I understand. See you later.”

Louis went off down the cave. Worrals strolled to the entrance, where Lucien was gazing moodily across the barren plateau.

“Anything wrong, Lucien?” she asked.

“I don’t like the look of the weather,” replied Lucien. “There is a feeling of snow in the air.”

“For the love of Mike think of something more cheerful,” protested Worrals. “Dirty weather of any sort, at this juncture, would just about put the tin hat on things.”

Precisely at midnight Bill arrived in the Whitley. The procedure of the previous night was followed, and, to Worrals' great relief, the machine made a safe landing. With so much depending on them she realised that these landings would always be a period of intense anxiety. Had anything gone wrong the previous night, what, she wondered, would have happened when von Brandisch appeared on the *causse* and saw a Whitley standing there?

Bill climbed down from his lofty seat, shook himself and lit a cigarette.

"Get the stuff out of her as fast as you can, kid," he said curtly. "You're going to have one hectic night."

"What do you mean?" asked Worrals quickly.

"The Nazis are hammering at Malta, and it has been decided to rush some Spitfires through right away."

"What do you mean by right away?" demanded Worrals in a small voice.

"To-night," answered Bill, inhaling smoke. "The first one is due to arrive in two hours—that is, at two o'clock."

AN UNEXPECTED GUEST

IF anyone was ever thunderstruck, to use a common expression, it was Worrals. She was astounded into a moment or two of speechlessness.

“They’re crazy!” she burst out. “I expected some reasonable sort of warning—”

“You don’t know the Air Force yet, evidently,” asserted Bill. “That’s the way it does things. The Higher Command must have known just what effect this order would have on you, but as they’ve gone through with it we must assume that the need for Spitfires at Malta is imperative.”

“How many machines are coming?” asked Worrals, in a voice that was still slightly dazed.

“Twelve, I suppose. I hear it’s a full squadron.”

“Shall we have enough petrol?”

“Just. I’m loaded to capacity. The poor old Whitley is fairly bursting with juice.”

“One little incendiary bullet would have put you in a warm spot.”

“If you don’t mind,” murmured Bill, “I would rather you didn’t remind me of that.”

“Okay,” answered Worrals. “We’ll empty your kite, and you’d then better get it out of the way. We don’t want too many aircraft on this plateau at once. Remind me that I have some cargo for you to take back.”

“What sort of cargo?”

“Live cargo. One Hun and two Vichyites.”

“Great Scott! Where did you get ’em?”

“Collected them on the aerodrome. I tell you, this place is getting popular. Guess who planted them here?”

“Give it up.”

“Von Brandisch.”

Bill whistled. “Strewth! That sounds grim.”

“That’s how it is,” muttered Worrals. “He’s on the job. Things have been fairly brisk since you were here. You gave my report to the Air Commodore?”

“To Squadron Leader Yorke, who is staying on the aerodrome. He told the Air Commodore.”

“What had he to say about it?”

“Not much—said you must keep out of trouble as long as you can.”

“That’s pretty good,” put in Frecks, who was standing by. “The casual way these people sit at home and say—”

“What would you have them do—run around in circles?” queried Bill. “Take it as a compliment that you’ve been left on the job. If the Higher Command doubted your ability to handle the situation they would have recalled you.”

“Of course, if you put it like that,” murmured Worrals. “Did the Air Commodore say anything about the *saboteurs*?”

“Yes, I’ve brought a case of rifles, a couple of Tommy guns, ammunition and some high explosive. He suggests that the gang keep it out of the way until you leave, otherwise you’re liable to find yourself in the middle of a first-class war.”

“Good. Louis will be pleased. But I mustn’t stay talking any longer. Let’s get the petrol out. There’s no point in carrying it inside the cave if it is going to be used to-night.”

“Make sure it’s clear of machines coming in.”

“I’ll have it dumped behind the rocks. I don’t mind telling you that the thought of twelve machines coming in one after the other scares me stiff. If one of them doesn’t crack up it will be in the nature of a miracle.”

“Not necessarily,” countered Bill. “These boys are all experienced night flyers—that’s why they were selected. To make things easier I’ve brought you a lamp powerful enough to throw a landing path, although if you think it’s likely to be seen from a distance you’d better not use it.”

Worrals considered the matter. “It shouldn’t be seen if we keep the beam low. All right. I’ll tell the boys what’s in store for us.”

For the next hour all hands worked hard unloading the Whitley, and a pyramid of petrol cans rose behind the rocks. The pump was made ready and the floodlight was set up. The cases which Bill had brought for the *saboteurs* were carried into the cave without the nature of their contents being divulged to Louis. There would, decided Worrals, be plenty of time for that

later on. As soon as the Whitley had been emptied Bill announced his intention of taking off immediately.

“Well, kid, you’ve got your aerodrome pretty well complete,” he remarked. “I hope everything pans out all right,” he added, as the three prisoners were brought out under guard and put into the machine.

“Don’t let these fellows get away,” cautioned Worrals

“I don’t think they’ll do that,” rejoined Bill smiling. “They can jump overboard if they like—but there’s only one broolly, and it happens to be on me.”

“Are you coming again to-morrow?”

“Yes, at the same time, if there is no change of plan. I shall bring another load of juice, because I understand some more Spits are coming through.”

“For the love of Mike,” groaned Worrals. “Why didn’t you tell me that before?”

Bill grinned. “I thought I’d better break it gently. I had already given you plenty to go on with.”

“Okay, wise guy,” drawled Frecks.

“Watch your steps, kids,” advised Bill, as he climbed into his seat. “I’ll be seeing you—I hope.”

Worrals waved as the bomber, its engines growling, swung round to face the runway. The growl became a bellow, and the big machine was swallowed up by the night.

“Bill’s a good scout,” declared Frecks. “He doesn’t say much about his part of the operation, but I reckon it’s the nastiest of the lot. Fancy aviating a load of petrol through a sky stiff with flak and enemy aircraft. It takes a bit of doing, too, to find a molehill like this on a dark night.”

“Bill’s all right,” supplemented Worrals. “How goes the time?”

“Quarter past one.”

Worrals took Louis and his friends into the cave and handed over the equipment the Whitley had brought for them. The old man’s sombre eyes sparkled as he wiped the oil from one of the rifles. “This,” said he, “is a weapon.”

“I hope you’ll find it useful,” answered Worrals. “All right, boys, get the stuff out of the way; and then, if I’m not taking up too much of your time, you might come back. The real work has yet to begin.”

At two o'clock precisely the first Spitfire announced its arrival with the curious whistling hum peculiar to the type. The floodlight blazed a trail of radiance along the improvised flare path and the machine made a safe landing. The pilot was the squadron leader, a veteran night-fighter of about twenty years of age. After the first shock of surprise at finding a girl in charge of operations he made hilarious love to Worrals for ten minutes while the machine was being refuelled.

"If you don't get out of my way I'll hit you on the head with a rock," threatened Worrals, striving to be serious.

Promising to come back as soon as he had won the war the young man roared away into the night.

"Nice boy," observed Worrals smiling.

For the next three hours the work went on without a moment's pause. Engrossed in her task, Worrals forgot where she was, and the risks that were being taken. Each landing provided a moment of acute anxiety, and subsequent relief. There was only one hitch, and it resulted in two Spitfires being on the landing ground together. One machine arrived five minutes late, and, by a coincidence, the following machine was early. There was nearly a collision. Worrals told both pilots what she thought of them in no uncertain terms, after which they departed hurriedly.

"Did you ever hear such a din in your life?" remarked Frecks, as the last machine took off. "For three hours there has been enough noise here to awaken the dead. Once, when I remembered where we were, I could have hooted with laughing."

"Well, we've got one squadron through, if we don't get any more," said Worrals wearily. "I'm dead to the world. Let's pack up and get to bed."

Lucien and Raoul, in their shirt sleeves, streaked with oil, came up.

"Did you get rid of all the empty cans?" asked Worrals.

"Yes," answered Lucien. "We've taken them right down into the cave."

"Good. Help us to get this gear out of the way." Worrals moved towards the floodlight, and was on the point of switching it off when she paused, staring up at the sky. "What's this coming?" she inquired, in a puzzled voice.

"Must be one of the boys coming back," answered Frecks, also staring at the sky, whence came the drone of an aircraft, rapidly approaching.

"The boys headed south-east," reminded Worrals. "This aircraft, whatever it is, is coming up from the south-west."

"Someone got off his course," predicted Frecks.

“No. It’s a twin-engine job,” answered Worrals, listening intently.

“The Whitley?”

Worrals shook her head. “Not with those engines. If they aren’t Daimler-Benz . . . by gosh!” She stiffened suddenly. “It’s a Hun!”

“Then for goodness sake switch off,” cried Frecks.

“It’s too late. He’s seen us. The torches are still out, anyway. It will take minutes to bring them in.”

“He’ll bomb us.”

“In his own territory? Not likely!”

“He’ll report us, anyway,” declared Frecks, in something like panic.

“Take it easy.” Worrals was following the sound as it circled the landing ground. “I should say he’s wondering what aerodrome this is. It will be a new one to him.”

“Switch off!” shouted Frecks.

“I’ve got a better idea than that,” replied Worrals imperturbably. “Switching off won’t help us, anyway, because he has already seen us. We’ll let him land if he wants to. After all, we’re not certain that it is a Hun. It may be a machine from the Higher Command come to have a look at us. I know it has come from the wrong direction, but he may have had a job to find us. Have you got your automatic on you, Lucien?”

“Yes.”

“Lend it to me.”

Lucien passed the weapon.

“Have you got your gun, Raoul?” asked Worrals crisply.

“Yes.”

“Then have it handy—you may need it. Stand fast, everyone. He’s coming in. We shall soon know the answer.”

The pilot had now cut his engines, and the whine of air over the plane surfaces indicated that he was gliding down. Presently a great shadow loomed up in the glare of the floodlight.

“Messerschmitt 110,” snapped Worrals. “Don’t move. Let him come right up. The Messer 110 is a three-seater. When the pilot gets down, as I expect he will, leave me to deal with him. Raoul, you make a dash for the machine and capture the crew. Lucien will help you.”

The Messerschmitt came right up to the floodlight, seeming to fill the sky with its bulk. Then its engines, with a growl and a backfire, were switched off. There came a noise of someone moving in the machine. A figure dropped lightly to the ground and advanced towards the little group.

“What aerodrome is this?” asked a voice, in German, in an easy tone that made it clear that the speaker apprehended no danger.

“Who are you?” challenged Worrals in the same language.

“*Leutnant* Strager.”

“Alone?”

“*Ja.*”

“All right, Raoul,” murmured Worrals. “That makes it easy.” To the German she said, “This way.”

But the German pilot was now suspicious, although obviously he could not possibly guess the truth. But he was peering forward, puzzled, no doubt, by the presence of a woman. “What are you doing here?” he asked sharply. “Who’s in charge?”

Worrals stepped forward, holding the pistol so that it could be seen. “I am in charge,” she answered curtly. “*Leutnant* Strager, you are a prisoner of war. This is a British aerodrome. Put your hands up.”

There was a moment of silence, broken only by the German’s sharp intake of breath. Slowly, reluctantly, his hands went up. Then, to the amazement of the spectators, he laughed, a laugh with a note of bitterness in it.

“I knew I was lost,” he said, “but I can’t imagine how I got to England. My compass must be all to pieces.”

Worrals smiled. The pilot’s mistake was natural, and she guessed the truth. “You are a beginner?”

“My first night flight in a service type. I was lost, but seeing the lights, I came down to inquire where I was.”

“Bad luck,” said Worrals, who now understood why the aircraft did not carry a crew. “Come this way, please,” she ordered. “Don’t try any tricks.”

Walking behind the German she guided him to the cave, which was lighted by an oil lamp. Louis, who was sitting on an empty petrol can, jumped to his feet when his eyes fell on the German.

“I’ve brought you another prisoner, *mon vieux*,” announced Worrals. “Take him away. See that he has food, something to drink, and a bed, but

take good care of him.” As she spoke Worrals tapped the German’s pockets to make sure he did not carry a weapon.

The prisoner looked amazed—as well he might. Worrals judged him to be not more than eighteen. “What sort of an aerodrome is this?” he inquired.

“Just a little private airport,” answered Worrals, smiling, as she realised that the German still supposed that he was in England. “You will come to no harm as long as you behave yourself; very soon you will be with some brother officers, all nice and cosy until the end of the war.”

“So the British are now putting women in charge of aerodromes?” observed the prisoner. “Have you no men left?”

“Oh yes, we have one or two,” answered Worrals casually. Then, to Louis, “Take him away.”

The German, who seemed to take his misfortune philosophically, followed the guide down the cave.

“That’s a knockout,” breathed Frecks. “Who would have thought it?”

“Catching a Hun is something I did not bargain for,” remarked Worrals, candidly. She smiled. “When the Higher Command hears of this they’ll probably have the bright idea of using this place as a permanent trap to catch stray enemy pilots.”

“Oh no,” declared Frecks emphatically. “That wasn’t in the contract. What I want to know is, what are you going to do with the machine?”

Worrals started, and for a moment looked dismayed. “Jumping Junkers! I hadn’t thought of that. We shall have to do something with it. In broad daylight it will look as big as an elephant on a tablecloth. People will be up here to-morrow, looking for the three men who were left on duty.”

“We shall have to get rid of it,” decided Frecks.

“Yes, but how?”

“Run it over the precipice into the gorge.”

“That wouldn’t get rid of it; that would only put it in another place.”

“Fly it to England.”

“And get shot down by our own barrage? The girls on the guns are getting good. Not for me, thank you.”

“Then there’s nothing we can do with it.”

A knowing look came into Worrals’ eyes. “Just a minute! This is worth thinking about. It’s quite on the boards that the din we made up here to-night was heard. The presence of aircraft might be reported. If it is, some one will

come to see what made the noise. He, or they, will see the Messerschmitt—and that will be the answer. They'll assume that the uproar was made by one of their own machines."

"And what," inquired Frecks sarcastically, "will they imagine has become of the pilot?"

"You *would* think of something awkward." Worrals considered the problem. "They'll conclude that he went off to find the nearest telephone. That would be a natural thing to do. We shall have to chance it." Worrals turned to Lucien and Raoul who now came in. "Is everything cleaned up outside?"

"Yes," answered Lucien.

"Fine. In that case I'm going to bed," declared Worrals. "I'm wilting on my feet."

WORRALS TAKES A TRIP

SUNRISE the following morning found them all out on the landing ground, examining the track carefully for signs of the night's operations, and, when they found them, obliterating them. Oil stains were carefully rubbed out, and the grass, where it had been crushed by wheels, was brushed up. They were still engaged in this work when the drone of an aircraft sent them racing for the cover of the rocks.

"Messerschmitt 109," murmured Frecks, her eyes on a speck in the sky. "What's he after?"

"From the way he's flying I should say he's looking for something," reasoned Worrals, slowly. "Probably looking for the Messerschmitt 110."

"In that case he can hardly fail to see it," returned Frecks. "Yes, he's spotted it—did you see him turn this way? Now he's cut his engine. That clinches it."

Worrals bit her lip in vexation. "Things never work out as you expect," she complained. "I should have been prepared for this, but I didn't think of another plane coming over."

"Probably several machines are out, looking for the Messer," went on Frecks. "We do the same thing at home. He's spotted the machine all right. What are we going to do about it?"

"What we do will depend on what he does," answered Worrals. "Keep still, he's getting close."

"Suppose he lands?"

Worrals did not answer at once. She was watching the Messerschmitt, which was now circling, banking round the stationary bomber. "He isn't going to land," she asserted, as the aircraft suddenly turned away in the direction from which it had appeared.

"Thank goodness," murmured Frecks.

"Don't flatter yourself that he isn't going to do anything about it," said Worrals drily. "And it doesn't need a wizard to predict what that will be," she added. "He's going home to report the position of the lost aircraft."

"And then what?"

“Obviously, someone will come to fetch it.”

“We ought to have pushed the confounded thing into the gorge,” lamented Frecks.

“I don’t think there is anything to get upset about,” countered Worrals. “Suppose they do fetch it? They can have it, if they want it. From our point of view that will dispose of it very nicely.”

“If an enemy plane lands, you wouldn’t try to take the pilot prisoner?” queried Lucien.

“Not unless he discovered something that jeopardised our position here,” answered Worrals. “Let’s go in and have breakfast.”

“This place looks like becoming a terminal airport, if we go on at this rate,” snorted Frecks, as they retired into the cave. “What are we going to do for the rest of the day?”

“A good wash, and a spot of sleep, are indicated, I think,” replied Worrals. “There’s nothing more we can do until Bill comes to-night—at least I hope not.”

Her hopes were not fulfilled. About an hour later Louis arrived. He was breathing heavily, and had obviously been travelling fast.

“Now what’s wrong?” moaned Frecks.

Louis broke his news. Briefly, it amounted to this. A Luftwaffe breakdown lorry had arrived in Carnac. In it were six men, mechanics; one was an *Unteroffizier*. Finding that the village was as near as they could get to the *causee* with motor transport they were coming up the path on foot, apparently making their way to the Messerschmitt.

“Do you know this for certain?” was Worrals’ first question.

“But yes! They made inquiries in the village. It was no use the people telling the Germans that no plane was here, because it had been seen.”

Frecks brushed her hair out of her eyes with a gesture of resignation. “This has torn it,” she decided, bitterly.

Worrals was pouring water over the fire, extinguishing it, so that there was no likelihood of smoke being seen. “Not necessarily.”

“But they’ll wonder what has become of the pilot.”

“Obviously. That’s why we shall have to do something about it.”

“Now what are you going to do?”

“I think I would like to have a word with these fellows. I may be able to straighten things out. I’ve still got the clothes I used for my visit to La

Malene . . . but I shall have to find a reason for being on the *causee*.” Worrals turned to Louis. “Could you find me a sheep, a live sheep, my old ferret?”

Even Louis looked surprised. “But yes.”

“Quickly?”

“With ease.”

“Then get it. I have a fancy to be a shepherdess, looking for a lost sheep. Hurry, *mon vieux*.”

Frecks regarded Worrals for a full minute. “Have you gone nuts?”

“One can never tell, of course, but I hope not,” answered Worrals cheerfully.

“Then what’s the idea of this Mary-had-a-little-lamb set-up?”

“Simply that we can’t afford to let these Jerry airmen wander about the plateau looking for the lost pilot. They might get suspicious when they ascertained that he was not here. It would be better for us to provide them with a reasonable explanation, and so get them out of the way as quickly as possible. As I can speak both French and German I’m the person for the job.”

Louis was some time producing the sheep, and Worrals had changed, and was ready, before he appeared. The *mécanos*, Louis reported, had already reached the top of the path that gave access to the *causee*, so without further delay, driving a scared-looking sheep in front of her, Worrals set off at a leisurely pace in that direction.

She had not long passed the aircraft when the Germans appeared, walking quickly. As she expected, one of them, the N.C.O., accosted her. He spoke in halting French.

“When did this aeroplane come here?” he asked.

Worrals raised a shoulder. “How should I know? It must have been in the night. It was not here yesterday.”

“Were you here yesterday?”

“Yes.”

“Why?”

Worrals pointed to her sheep. “Some of the sheep strayed,” she explained.

“Is anyone with the plane?” asked the German.

“No.”

“You’ve looked at it?”

“But of course! We don’t see a plane every day in these parts.”

“Where is the pilot—do you know?”

“It is said,” answered Worrals, “that he has gone to the village to telephone.”

“Which village? We have just come from Carnac. He isn’t there.”

“Then it must be another village,” answered Worrals vaguely. “It was not my business to follow him. I have my sheep to attend to.”

Now so far things had gone much as Worrals had anticipated, and she would have been content to walk on, and watch developments from a distance. But to her annoyance the German took a different view.

“You come back with us,” he ordered in a not unfriendly manner.

“But why?”

“You know your way about this place, don’t you?”

“Of course,” admitted Worrals.

“We don’t, and we may need someone to show us the district. We shan’t hurt you. It won’t take us long to find out what is wrong with the machine, and put it right. Come on.”

To avoid friction Worrals obliged. After all, she decided, it might be a good thing to hear what the Germans had to say to each other, for they would not suppose that she could speak their language. The arrangement seemed not unreasonable, so she strolled along behind the men, who went straight to the aircraft. She sat on a rock and watched them. First, they made a general survey of the Messerschmitt. Finding nothing wrong, they made a closer examination of the undercarriage.

“It must be engine trouble,” declared the N.C.O., and climbing into the cockpit started and tested them in turn. Presently he got out and spoke with the others, in German. Worrals strolled nearer to hear what he had to say.

“I don’t understand it,” confessed the N.C.O. “Everything seems to be all right. Why did he land? I can’t find anything wrong. Why should he risk landing in a place like this? Strange.”

“Lost his way, I expect, and was glad to get down anywhere,” suggested one of the mechanics. “You know how nervous some of these beginners are.”

“He was lucky to get down in a place like this,” declared the N.C.O.

“What shall we do?” asked one of the others.

“You’d better go back to the village and telephone to the aerodrome,” decided the N.C.O., after considering the matter. “Say the machine is all right. If they will send a pilot it can be flown home.”

“What about the pilot who flew it here?”

“Oh, he’ll turn up sooner or later. He’s probably guzzling in an *estaminet* somewhere. If we see him we’ll tell him what we’ve done.”

“All right.” The mechanic turned and walked away.

Worrals felt a twinge of alarm. It began to look as though the Germans were going to hang about for some time, and she was afraid they might eventually take her with them to the village. This, however, did not happen. The mechanic who had been detailed to go to the telephone walked on, whistling. The others, not unnaturally, having nothing to do, found seats for themselves among the rocks, obviously by no means unwilling to spend an easy morning. The *Unteroffizier* called Worrals over, and, to her renewed alarm, started to flirt with her. She did not show her annoyance, for soldiers being the same the world over, this was only to be expected. In any case, she thought, the relief plane would soon be along, and then they would all go. But when an hour passed, and the party showed signs of becoming too friendly, she had to think of a way to change the general tone.



Worrals sat on a rock and watched the Nazis. First they made a general survey; then examined the plane more closely.

“May I look at the aeroplane?” she asked naïvely.

The N.C.O. winked at his men. “She wants to look at the aeroplane.”

“I’d like to know how it works.”

This amused the Germans considerably, and there was a good laugh.

“Come on, I’ll show you,” offered the *Unteroffizier*, and leading the way to the cockpit explained the purposes of the many instruments—which, of course, Worrals knew as well as he did.

She was sitting in the pilot’s seat when one of the mechanics called, “Hi! Otto! Someone’s coming.”

The German looked through the side window. “Only a French policeman,” he observed. “He’s got a civilian with him. I wonder what *he* wants.”

Worrals’ heart missed a beat. She had a feeling that a complication had arisen; but even so, she was not prepared for what she saw when she looked over her companion’s shoulder. There was, as the *Unteroffizier* had remarked, a French policeman. It was one of the men whom she had seen—and, indeed, held up at the point of a pistol—in the police station at La Malene; and she was wearing the same clothes as on that occasion; he would most certainly recognise her the instant he saw her. The shock of this discovery was nothing to the one that followed. The civilian was von Brandisch. The two men were within a hundred yards, walking straight towards the machine.

Worrals sat still. There was nothing she could do, for it was obviously impossible for her to leave the aircraft without being seen.

The N.C.O. looked worried. “I don’t know who these fellows are,” he grumbled, “but they may report me if they see you. I had no right to bring you into the machine, and if they report me I shall get into trouble. You keep still, out of sight. Perhaps they won’t stay. I’ll find out what they want.”

With this warning the German scrambled quickly to the ground, leaving Worrals crouching in the cockpit. Peeping cautiously through a corner of the side window she saw him walk up to the two men and engage them in conversation. What he said she could not hear, but von Brandisch evidently announced his official position, for the N.C.O. stiffened to attention. After that, from his actions Worrals could only suppose that he was explaining the purpose of his mission on the plateau.

Worrals’ sensations during this period of suspense can be better imagined than described. That the German airman, for the sake of his own skin, would not give her away, was fairly certain; and she could only hope that von Brandisch, when his curiosity was satisfied would depart. And, indeed, he had moved to do so, when a fresh development occurred. It was natural enough, but to Worrals, who was concerned only with von Brandisch, it was most inopportune. A light plane, a two-seater trainer, bearing German identification marks dropped out of the sky, and made a

neat landing that brought the machine to a standstill about a dozen paces from the Messerschmitt. Worrals did not need to be told that an expert pilot, probably an instructor, was at the joystick.

She watched the sequence of events with rising alarm. Two men, both in well-worn flying kit, got out of the trainer, and walked over to the group. One of them spoke, not to von Brandisch, who was evidently unknown to him, but to the N.C.O., who answered, at the same time pointing towards the Messerschmitt. The pilot nodded, and the whole party moved nearer to the machine, and only stopped when they were so close that Worrals could hear every word of the conversation.

Said the pilot to the mechanic, "There is nothing more for you to do here. You'd better get back."

The N.C.O. saluted, spun round smartly, and marched off. The pilot spoke again, this time to his companion. "We may as well return right away; there's no reason for staying here, where there isn't even a chance of getting a drink. I'll take off first in the Messerschmitt. You follow."

As he finished speaking the pilot stepped towards the big machine, with the obvious intention of entering the cockpit. Had he done so there would have been no time for Worrals to do anything to save herself. Inevitably she would have been discovered. But it so happened that von Brandisch spoke, and the pilot turned to reply. What was said Worrals did not hear, for by this time it was quite certain that the pilot would sooner or later get into the machine. Had von Brandisch not been there Worrals would have stood her ground, trusting that she would be able to explain the circumstances—declaring that the N.C.O. had invited her into the cabin. With a story so plausible there would be little to fear from the pilot, who would either treat the matter as a joke or throw her out, according to his nature. But with von Brandisch standing by, this would avail her not at all. He would probably hear the pilot speak to her when he discovered her in the cockpit, and coming forward to investigate, recognise her.

At that ghastly moment Worrals could think of only one possible way of escape, and she took it. She started the engines. At the whirr of the starter everyone on the ground stared in amazement at the plane, which was not surprising. By the time they had recovered from the shock of an event which must have seemed uncanny, the machine was moving forward as Worrals opened the throttle.

The pilot who had said he would fly the Messerschmitt was the first to recover. He made a dash for the aircraft. Worrals slammed the throttle wide open. For a moment or two it was touch and go whether the pilot would

reach the machine, but the slipstream from the airscrews impeded him; dust swirled into his face, and before he could recover from this disadvantage the machine was out of reach, gathering speed every instant. Worrals was of the opinion that not one of the men actually saw her, but she could not be sure of it.

As the wheels lifted her first thought was of Frecks and the others, who were certain to have been watching from the cave. She could imagine their consternation. She herself was far from happy. She had no fear of being followed by the trainer because the speed of the Messerschmitt was probably three times greater; but with such a vehicle at his command it would only be a matter of minutes before the pilot reached his aerodrome and gave the alarm. Once that had happened, all eyes would be on the watch for her. A glance behind showed the plateau already far astern. The men there would, she supposed, still be watching her, so her first step was to mislead them as to her line of flight. At present she was flying east, which was the direction of her take-off, so she swung round in a steep bank towards the north. But did not maintain this course for long. As soon as she judged that she was out of sight of the *causee* she turned to the south.

She had no idea of where she was going. What she really wanted to do was to get back to the *causee* without being seen, but that, for the time being, at any rate, was out of the question. Nor dare she take the aircraft back to the plateau at any future date. She had a vague idea of landing somewhere, abandoning the machine, and making her way back on foot. There could be no question of flying to England. For one thing she did not think she had enough petrol, and even if she had, she did not feel inclined to face the British anti-aircraft defences. For a moment or two she contemplated making a dash for Spain, from where she might eventually make her way to England. But if she did this, she mused, it would be days before she could get back to the *causee*; meanwhile, Frecks would be left alone. Anything might happen. Obviously, such a course was not seriously to be considered. In the end she decided to continue flying south, if necessary running out for some distance over the Mediterranean. Later, she would come back, probably from an easterly direction, to within walking distance of the *causee* and there make an emergency landing. It should, she thought, be possible to find a place sufficiently lonely for her to abandon the machine without being seen. Her decision made, she had a good look round the sky to make sure that no danger threatened from that direction, and then turned her attention to the panorama below, in order to establish her position.

A CHAPTER OF ADVENTURES

WORRALS had never before flown over this part of the country, but she had travelled through it by road, and this supported her geographical knowledge, which was good. There was no lack of conspicuous landmarks. Far away to the east she could see the broad sweep of the great River Rhone, with the ancient walled city of Avignon clinging to it like a solitaire pearl. To the extreme south, about forty miles distant, was a turquoise iridescent shimmer that she knew must be the Mediterranean. Between her and the sea, beyond the foothills of the Cévennes, lay that curious tract of country known as the Plaine de la Crau, thousands of acres of yellow stony gravel, as flat as a table top, bisected by a line as straight as a ruler—the railway to Marseilles.

The sight of the plain reminded her that on its fringe was situated the important French land and marine aircraft base called Marignane. There would, she reasoned, be planes there, certainly French, if not Nazi. It would be wise to keep clear of it. So she banked slightly to the west and then headed south towards the sea.

The country that now lay immediately before her she knew only by reputation. Named the Camargue, but sometimes called Africa in Europe, it consists of interminable salt marsh, a desolate waste dotted with innumerable shallow lakes, the breeding ground of the rare pink flamingoes, and other tropical birds, the only place in Europe where they are found.

The Camargue has a sinister reputation. Formed by the alluvial deposits of the Rhone, nowhere is it more than seven feet above sea level. The wide, shallow lagoons, which are constantly shifting, are the home of countless fever-giving mosquitos. There are few trees, and what there are are twisted into fantastic shapes by the parching heat of summer and the fierce winds of winter. On the plains roam herds of wild cattle, dangerous beasts; from here come the bulls for Spanish bull-fights. They are rounded up by horsemen, known as *gardians*, who dressed like traditional cowboys, carry tridents instead of guns. Few people live in the Camargue, which incidentally, is a bird sanctuary for the preservation of the egrets, ibis, white, purple and pink herons, and hoopoes, that nest in it. Huge snakes glide through the grass.

The only people who live in this strange region are the *gardians*, and the *gendarmes* appointed to protect the birds. To cap all, dominating this weird land of lakes and marshes, stands the mighty thirteenth-century castle of Aigues-Mortes, grim, majestic, forbidding, abandoned, reckoned to be the most perfect example of medieval architecture in the world.

As Worrals flew over this empty loneliness she recalled—with a twinge of alarm—that just before the war she had heard, or read, that the district was closed to aeroplanes. Some crazy fool of a German had swooped low over a flock of thousands of flamingoes. They had risen in fright, and many had been killed as they crashed against the plane. The sort of thing a Boche would do, thought Worrals, as, at five thousand feet, she sped on and headed out across the Mediterranean. At that moment she was not particularly concerned with regulations; in any case she was too high to do any damage.

It was a strange sensation to be flying over the blue Mediterranean, the scene, through the ages, of so much strife. It was even more remarkable that she should be flying in a German machine. It was, she mused, fantastic—the sort of thing that might happen in a dream. She found it hard to believe that it was happening in fact.

Her soliloquy was rudely shattered by a stinging report from one of the engines. The machine vibrated violently. Looking up in alarm she saw a plume of black smoke trailing from the starboard engine. What caused it she did not know; not that it mattered whether she knew or not; what did matter was, something was obviously wrong, and when an aero engine goes wrong, unless something is done it quickly gets worse, not better. Beyond throttling back there was nothing she could do about it, so with her eyes still on the source of the trouble she turned back towards the land. She liked the look of the sea, but this, she decided, was no time to find herself swimming in it. Once on the return journey she tentatively tried opening the throttle, but a spurt of smoke from the exhaust advised her that such experiments were unwise. Her experience told her that the engine was getting much too hot to be safe. The next thing would be fire.

This breakdown, of course, upset her plan. There could be no question now of trying to get back to the Cévennes. Indeed, she was by no means sure that she could reach the land before the engine took fire. Her one concern was to get on the ground, and she was not particular as to the spot. That would be enough to go on with. Once safely on the ground she might try running the engine up in the hope that it would clear itself; if not—well, she did not flatter herself that she would be able to effect the necessary repairs.

She cruised across the flat coast at five hundred feet on one engine, and then looked about for the best place to land. There was plenty of choice, for apart from a few low dunes the country was flat. Except for the reed-fringed lakes, and an occasional shrub, there appeared to be no obstructions. So choosing a spot that was more than large enough for her purpose, she glided down and landed. The machine ran on for a little way, and was slowing down when, for no apparent reason, the wheels seemed to seize up. Quietly, but very deliberately, the nose of the machine pushed itself into the ground; the tail cocked high into the air; and in that position the aircraft remained. Silence fell.

For a minute Worrals sat still, annoyed, yet at the same time wondering at the machine's strange behaviour. Then, unhurriedly, she climbed down, when the mystery was at once explained. The earth was not hard, as she had assumed. It was soft marsh. The wheels had sunk into it and stuck, with the result that the aircraft had tilted up on its nose. One other thing was apparent. As far as she was concerned the Messerschmitt was finished. Quite apart from the faulty engine, the airscrews were buckled as a result of their contact with the ground. This alone put the machine out of commission. Having decided this, Worrals wasted no time on futile regrets or self-recrimination. She had to make up her mind what she was going to do, so as a first precaution she made a reconnaissance of her surroundings.

It was hot; surprisingly, uncomfortably hot. The air felt clammy. It was dead still. The parched grass was brittle under foot, and the salt-encrusted lagoons shimmered in the heat. A hundred yards away some low grey trees leaned in grotesque positions against a wind that no longer blew. Their branches were black with nests. A clump of straggling tamarisks were white with downy seeds. Out in the water of a nearby lake of deepest blue some flamingoes were feeding; the reeds that fringed the bank whispered like the far-off murmur of the sea. A crested hoopoe flew overhead, otherwise there was no sign of life. On all sides, mile after mile, mostly flat, but sometimes rising in low sandy dunes, rolled the sun-scorched marsh. Not a human being was in sight.

Worrals surveyed this depressing scene in moody silence. She was, she estimated, sixty miles from the Cévennes, and to the south-east of it. There seemed little chance of getting back that day. Dressed as she still was in the clothes of a girl of the country, she might, she reflected, walk to Nîmes, which lay at no great distance—perhaps twenty miles—and from there take a train to Alais, which nestled in the foothills of the mountains. But she had no money. Nor was she sure that the trains still ran in this war-weary country. She did not find it easy to think at all, for the strain of the last few

days and nights was beginning to tell, and this, with the sudden heat, made her desperately tired. More than anything she longed for sleep. She walked over to the trees and sat down. They did at least provide a little shade. It was very pleasant. She yawned, and leaned back. The war seemed far away. She closed her eyes to shut out the glare. . . .

She had a strange dream. She dreamed that she was flying a light plane and had forgotten how to land. It was a very vivid dream, so vivid that, as sometimes happens, it merged slowly into reality. Suddenly she was sitting up, wide awake, startled. With a shock she realised that she had fallen asleep, and a glance at the sun told her that she had been asleep for hours, for it now hung low over the western horizon. But the dream had not been entirely a dream. A plane *was* flying, a small red-painted aircraft of a type unknown to her. It was circling low over the Messerschmitt that still stood tilted on its nose like a prehistoric monster, feeding.

Coming suddenly out of a deep sleep Worrals' brain was in a whirl. Wild schemes flashed into her mind. First she thought of running out into the open and waving to the pilot to land, trusting that a machine so light would not sink in the soft earth. Perhaps he would give her a lift somewhere. She might even be able to "borrow" the machine while he was looking at the Messerschmitt. That could be more easily achieved if he remained unaware of her presence. The pilot was flying so low that it seemed as if he might be looking for a place to land; but then, to Worrals' unspeakable chagrin, he turned suddenly and headed east. As the purr of the engine died away Worrals rose to her feet, set her face to the north-west, and started walking. She was furious with herself for having lost an opportunity. She was also angry at having slept for such a long while, but she had to admit that she felt much better for the rest.

She had been walking for perhaps ten minutes, brushing away mosquitos that were now beginning to rise in myriads from the pools, when a horseman appeared from behind an area of dunes. Mounted on one of the white horses for which the district is famous, dressed in cowboy style, complete with wide-brimmed sombrero and scarlet bandana, he was a colourful figure. He saw her at once, and galloping over to her inquired, with pardonable curiosity, what she was doing.

On the spur of the moment Worrals could think of no convincing reason why she should be there, so she merely answered that she had been walking about looking at the birds, and had got lost.

"Mademoiselle is aware that the bulls are dangerous?" queried the *gardian*.

Worrals had forgotten all about the wild cattle. “Bulls?” she gasped.

With his trident the cowboy pointed to the dunes. “Fortunately for you they are just settling down for the night,” he said seriously.

“Where is the nearest road?” asked Worrals.

Again the *gardian* pointed, this time to the north.

“How far is it?”

“Five kilometres.”

“Five!” Worrals’ alarm was obvious, for it looked as though she would be benighted on the marsh.

This the *gardian* evidently realised. “Get up behind me,” he offered. “I will take you to the road.”

At first Worrals looked dubious, but when she found that the saddle was equipped behind with a spare seat, arranged side-saddle, her astonishment knew no bounds. As she climbed up she said, “Is it a common thing, monsieur, for you to rescue girls from the Camargue?”

“But no,” answered the man. “Here we make our saddles like this.”

“Why?”

“How else would we take our wives shopping to Nîmes, and Arles? There are also the carnivals. We take them *en croupe*.” The *gardian* added inconsequently, “Mademoiselle is evidently a stranger to these parts?”



“Mademoiselle is aware that the bulls are dangerous—?”

Worrals admitted that she was.

“From where do you come?” asked the *gardian*, as he set off at a steady canter.

“From the Cévennes.”

“Ah! Now I understand,” returned the man. “Mademoiselle travels with the sheep?”

“Yes,” answered Worrals vaguely. She remembered now having heard that when the heat of summer shrivels up the grass in the Camargue, the shepherds drive their flocks to the scanty pastures of the mountains. In the autumn they bring them back.

After that, to her relief, nothing more was said, and in about twenty minutes, as the light was beginning to fade, they reached the road, a mere track that wound a lonely course through the marshes.

“Now you know where you are,” suggested the *gardian*.

“Not exactly,” confessed Worrals. “Where does this road lead?”

The man pointed south-east. “That way to Arles,” he said. Then pointing to the north-west, “To Nîmes.”

“Which way are you going?”

The *gardian* indicated some rising ground off the road to the north. “I live over there.”

Worrals climbed down. “*Merci, monsieur*. How far is it to Nîmes?”

“Twelve kilometres.”

A quick calculation told Worrals that this was nearly eight miles—a longish walk. She did not mind so much now that she was on a road.

“Thank you again, monsieur,” she said.

“Go with God,” answered the *gardian* piously, and galloped away in the direction of his home.

Worrals started walking. She had given up all hope of reaching the Causse Méjean that night, but she would, she determined, get there sooner or later. In the meantime Frecks would have to hold the fort.

Not very long afterwards she was surprised to hear the hum of a light-powered motor cycle coming along the road behind her. A glance over her shoulder revealed a *gendarme*, a fact that was apparent only by his uniform cap, for he wore a light dust coat. With her heart beating faster Worrals strode on. The last person she expected to see in such a place was a policeman, and his appearance, she felt, boded no good. Her alarm increased when the officer drew level, and stopped, compelling her out of courtesy to do likewise. The policeman was a fat, cheerful looking little man, with big black walrus moustaches. He touched his cap. “A thousand pardons, mademoiselle,” he said, “but have you been walking very long?”

“Yes, monsieur,” answered Worrals, wondering what was coming.

“Then perhaps you have seen something of an aeroplane that has been reported to have landed hereabouts?”

So that was it, thought Worrals swiftly. The pilot of the light plane had reported what he had seen. "Yes, I have seen it," she answered. "It is on the ground, and from its position, I think, damaged."

It did not appear to occur to the *gendarme* that a girl might have any connection with it. It was probably the last thing in his mind.

"Where is it?" he asked. "I have been ordered to find it, to make sure that the pilot has not been injured." The *gendarme* sighed. "A nice thing at this time of the evening, just when a man is enjoying a game of *boules*," he grumbled.

Worrals was only too glad to get rid of the man, and at that juncture nothing more was in her mind. She pointed across the marsh. "It is over there," she asserted.

"How far?"

"Perhaps six kilometres."

The policeman clicked his tongue with annoyance. "And there is no road?"

"None, monsieur."

"Is it easy to see?"

"You cannot miss it."

"To reach it a man must walk?"

"Absolutely," answered Worrals, with a catch in her breath as she realised with a flash of hope what the man's question implied.

The policeman wheeled his motor cycle just off the road and lifted it on its stand. "It makes hot," he observed, as he took off his dust coat and threw it across the saddle. "Thank God you are not a policeman, mademoiselle," he lamented. "*Au revoir*." And with that he set off across the marsh.

Worrals watched him go. Her pulses were racing now. In case he should look round, for appearance sake, she strolled a little way along the track; but as soon as the *gendarme's* lonely figure had disappeared into the mist that was now rising, she turned back. In a moment she had unscrewed the cap of the petrol tank. Using a stalk of grass as a dip-stick it did not take her long to ascertain that the tank was nearly half full, which she reckoned was getting on for a gallon of petrol. It should be sufficient to take her most of the way, if not all the way, to the Cévennes. She did not overlook the fact that once she left the plain, most of the journey would be uphill. There might, she realised, be a little difficulty in finding the way, but from an important town like Nîmes there should be a good road to Alais, at the foot of the

mountains, or even Florac, which was in the heart of them. Anyway, she ought to be able to get within easy walking distance of the Causse Méjean. The *gendarme* would on his return miss the motor cycle and report the theft, but by that time she should be well clear of the Camargue.

Satisfied that the unlucky owner was out of earshot she put on his dust coat, started the engine, and in the fast-failing light cruised at a comfortable pace up the road towards Nîmes.

MAKING FOR THE MOUNTAINS

WORRALS had no knowledge of wartime regulations in the South of France, but her common sense told her that as the Germans had seized most of the petrol there could not be much motor transport; and what there was would be restricted to people on official business; and as she certainly did not come into that category there was a likelihood of her being stopped. If she were questioned, then her position would be critical, for she carried no identification papers of any sort. She had left everything in the pocket of her uniform. Her only ally was the darkness that was fast closing in, for this might prevent her from being seen. On the other hand, it might make it hard for her to find her way. She did not possess a map. The only guide she had was a rough mental picture of the district. The outstanding fact was, the Causse Méjean lay to the north-west, and while she progressed in that direction she would obviously be getting nearer to her objective.

She had some anxious moments in Nîmes, where, at an inevitable cross roads, she was compelled to ask the way. She inquired for Alais.

If the man to whom she had addressed the question thought it odd that a girl should be riding a motor cycle he made no mention of it. "Keep straight on," said he, pointing. "When you come to the fork, take the right-hand road, not the left, which goes up into the mountains, to Florac."

Now this was exactly what Worrals wanted to know, for Florac would suit her much better than Alais, which lay to the east. It was, therefore, in good heart that she went on, well satisfied with her fortunate inquiry.

She had another piece of luck about half an hour later when, with her lamp on, she was making her way cautiously along a bad piece of *corniche* road near St. Andre, some ten miles short of her destination. At the time it looked like bad luck. The engine stopped, and a quick examination revealed that the tank was empty. The vehicle had not taken her as far as she hoped it would, probably due to the fact that the way was uphill. However, there was nothing she could do about it. She did not feel like leaving the machine by the side of the road, where it would be discovered in the morning, if not before, and her association with it established. Traced back to its source in the Camargue, near the grounded Messerschmitt, it would tell the police that

she was back in the Cévennes. So she disposed of it by the simple expedient of pushing it over the precipice. As an afterthought she threw the dust coat after it. Ten minutes later, as she was striding up the road, without warning a torch was flashed in her face. A voice asked her abruptly if she had seen anything of a motor cyclist on the road.

Worrals answered, truthfully enough, that she had neither met, nor been overtaken by, a motor cyclist.

“Have you seen a girl wearing a light dust coat?” was the next question.

“No,” answered Worrals, again with perfect truth.

“Where do you live?” asked the voice.

“Florac.”

“Are you going straight home?”

“But certainly.”

“All right. Pass.”

Worrals walked on, not a little shaken by the knowledge that had she not run out of petrol she would have run straight into the police trap, for that, undoubtedly, was what it was. Evidently the *gendarme* of the Camargue had discovered his loss, and the hunt for the girl in the dust coat was in full cry. Was it luck, or was it a curious sort of instinct, or intuition, that had made her dispose of the garment? She did not know. Certainly she had not consciously weighed up the pros and cons of keeping it. Yet she had done the right thing. It filled her with misgivings that upon such a trivial thing could the life of a secret agent depend. A thought struck her. Turning, she called over her shoulder, “What time is it, if you please?”

“A quarter past eight,” came the answer.

That gave Worrals another shock. True, she had no idea of the time, for she had discarded her watch with her uniform, aware that in her peasant attire such an instrument would appear incongruous; but she did not think it was so late. In less than four hours Bill would arrive. Nor was she certain of how far she was from the Causse Méjean. Florac, she thought, was still some eight or ten miles distant, and as she would be travelling uphill she could not hope to cover the ground in much less than three hours. La Malene, which would suit her better, was still farther on. It was nearer to her objective than Florac, but even that was some distance from her final objective. So it seemed that after all she might not be in time to catch Bill. She strode on.

She had covered about two miles when there came from behind her a distant sound of singing. It drew nearer, and it was soon clear that the singer was in a motor vehicle of some sort. It turned out to be a light covered lorry. Her first instinct was to step aside out of the headlights in order to allow it to pass; and she might have done this had it been possible. But it happened that at this point the cliff on her left was sheer; on the other side was the precipice. It seemed that she was certain to be seen; and if she was going to be seen, she thought, she might as well put a bold front on it. The thought was followed by another. A lift, if only for a few miles, would make a world of difference; it might enable her to get to the *causse* in time to see Bill. She decided that a risk was worth while.

As it happened the driver spoke first. "Am I right for Florac?" he shouted, slowing down. He spoke French with a strange accent.

"Yes," answered Worrals, trying to see the driver.

"And La Malene is on beyond Florac?"

"Yes, if you keep to the main road," returned Worrals. "I'm going there myself. If you will give me a lift I'll show you the way," she added.

"All right. There's no room in front, though; you'll have to get in the back."

This suited Worrals admirably, for it would, she supposed, enable her to avoid questions that might be embarrassing. She went to the rear of the vehicle, where, to her surprise, a hand reached down.

"Come on, mademoiselle," said a voice, in French that was certainly not of the south.

Worrals made a mental note that the speaker came from the north—probably Alsace. Apart from this, a murmur of voices alarmed her, and she would have drawn back, but it was too late. A chorus of voices invited her to get in.

"We shan't eat you," said someone.

Willy-nilly she was pulled in, and found herself in a lorry packed with men. One of them switched on a torch to enable her to find a seat, and then, and only then, did she realise the full extent of the catastrophe. The lorry was full of French soldiers. At least, they wore French uniforms, but they did not wear them in the usual manner of the French *poilu*, who is inclined to be untidy. These men were too smart, too well disciplined. Worrals couldn't understand it. She felt that there was something wrong somewhere, although she could not decide just what it was. The men looked and behaved more like Germans, yet that, she thought, was hardly possible, for officially

there were no German troops in the unoccupied zone. That, of course, would not prevent the Nazis from sending their agents down south should circumstances, in their opinion, warrant the intrusion. That these men were either Germans, or Alsatians from the German frontier, she was sure. That would account for their strange accent.

An N.C.O., a corporal, invited her to be seated, an invitation she was glad to accept, for she felt slightly weak at the knees.

The torch was switched out. Gears clashed, and the lorry went on.

“I’m sorry,” said Worrals. “I did not know this was a military car.”

“Nothing to be sorry about,” breezed the corporal. “It’s a good thing for a girl to have an escort in these parts—from what we’ve heard of them.”

Worrals was still a trifle dazed, but the significance of this remark was not lost on her. Why, she asked herself, would a party of soldiers be going to La Malene? In her heart she knew the answer.

“What’s wrong—with these parts?” she asked, carelessly.

“Full of spies,” returned the corporal. “But they won’t be here much longer.”

“You’ve come to catch them, eh?”

“You bet we have.”

“Where have you come from?”

“Marseilles.”

Worrals was recovering. “Why bring soldiers all the way from Marseilles? Are there no police here?”

“Yes, but they are not to be trusted.” A thought seemed to strike the speaker. “But just a minute. Do you live in La Malene?”

“Quite close.” Realising that she was on dangerous ground Worrals laughed lightly. “You’d better be careful. I might be a spy myself.”

There was a titter of mirth from the soldiers, and even at that difficult moment it struck Worrals as remarkable that men should think it strange that a woman might be doing serious espionage work. She realised more and more how right Squadron Leader Yorke had been when he had said that a girl had certain advantages not possessed by official agents.

The car jogged on. She felt that the corporal was thinking about her remark, and she decided it was better for her to ask questions than allow the German—if he was a German—to do so.

“What are you going to do when you get to La Malene?” she inquired naïvely.

“That,” answered the corporal, “remains to be seen. But I’ll tell you this,” he bragged. “We shan’t be there long. We’ve cleaned up worse country than this.”

Worrals suspected this to be no idle boast, and quite apart from her immediate and personal safety, she was definitely alarmed. There were, in the lorry, not fewer than a dozen soldiers, all fully armed, and should they appear on the plateau that night while flying operations were in progress, not only would the scheme end abruptly, and the landing pilots be taken prisoner, but the whole thing might end in a massacre.

“When are you going to start cleaning up?” she asked.

“We shall know that when we get there,” was the uncompromising answer.

At that moment one of the men began to sing. It was a German drinking song, which confirmed Worrals’ opinion that these soldiers were not what they appeared to be. She was more than ever convinced that they were Germans masquerading as French. Possibly by such men as these, she reflected, did the Nazis keep order in the south, which had always been noted for its independence. Some of the others joined in the singing, for which she was thankful. It gave her time to think—and she had plenty to think about. To start with, she knew that they must be getting near to La Malene, and she had no desire to be taken right into the village, where she might be recognised as the girl who had held up the *poste de police*. She decided that it was time to dismount, and asked the corporal to stop the car.

“That’s all right,” was the careless answer. “Sit still. We shall be stopping ourselves, presently.”

“But I don’t want to go as far as the village,” explained Worrals.

“Why not?”

“Because my destination is this side of it.”

The corporal stood up, and walking forward, attempted to attract the driver’s attention. For some moments he was unsuccessful, but eventually the driver looked round.

“The girl wants to get out!” shouted the corporal.

“I can’t stop on this hill,” protested the driver.

“Then stop when you get to the top.”

“Very well.”

Now this was all right as far as it went, but the road was one continual hill, and by the time the vehicle had reached a part that was less steep than the rest the lorry was on the outskirts of La Malene. Then, to Worrals' dismay, the driver shouted, "It isn't worth stopping now. It's only a hundred metres to the police station—she may as well go the rest of the way."

Worrals' heart missed a beat. She had not realised that they were so near La Malene, and in any case, it had not occurred to her that the destination of the lorry was the actual police station. So no sooner had the vehicle started to slow down than she was on her feet, ready to alight. The car stopped against the kerb with a jolt; and it was fortunate for Worrals that it did jolt, for she was jerked back into the lorry. But not before she had seen, standing under an overhead light at the door of the *poste*, a little group of men. Among them she caught sight of the French general, and the policeman who had been one of the trio whom she had held up at the point of the pistol on the occasion when she had rescued Lucien. Should this man see her, recognition would be certain. Evidently the people on the path were awaiting the arrival of the troops.

"After you, mademoiselle," said the corporal, with surprising, and in the circumstances annoying, politeness.

"There are some officers standing on the path. Perhaps it would be well if they didn't see me," suggested Worrals in a low voice. "You might get into trouble for letting me ride in the lorry." She sat down in the seat she had recently vacated.

"Perhaps. We'll get out first." The corporal rapped out an order. The men jumped out and fell into line on the path. The lorry remained stationary, empty except for Worrals, who was still in her seat.

There was a lot of talking outside. The corporal was numbering off his men. Those who had been waiting, including the general, conversed in low tones. Worrals caught a word or two here and there, sufficient to tell her what she was anxious to know. The words were: ". . . the guide is here . . . to-night . . . better get started, *Leutnant*."

Leaning forward to peep, to see if escape were possible, Worrals nearly met disaster headfirst, for at that moment the lorry started forward, and she only saved herself from being thrown out by clutching at the tailboard. But the lorry was only turning. In the narrow street this was not easy. Several tacks were necessary. During one of these, when the rear of the lorry was against the kerb of the pavement opposite the *poste*, Worrals dropped out, and in a flash had flattened herself into a convenient doorway. Several curious spectators were arriving to see what was going on. Someone shouted

to them to go back to their houses, and this gave Worrals the opportunity she needed. She went with them, and she did not stop until she was well clear of the police station. Then, without haste, which might have aroused suspicion, she made her way to the path that led up to the *causse*. Once out of sight of the police station, and having made sure—as far as it was possible—that no one was watching her, she broke into a run. For a good twenty minutes she sped on, taking risks of falling among the rocks, and then, satisfied that there was no pursuit, slowed down to get her breath, for the path was too steep for continued progress at such a pace.

As soon as she had recovered somewhat she put her best foot forward. It was, she reckoned, a little after nine o'clock. Fortunately she knew the path, having once traversed it, although in the opposite direction; but even so, a good many kilometres still lay between her and the cave, which was her objective. She had a faint hope that she might see some of Louis' friends, who should still be watching the paths leading to the *causse*, but if there were any about they did not reveal themselves, and she plodded on alone.

As she walked she tried to decide on a plan of action, although there seemed to be little that she could do. The facts were simple. There were German troops in La Malene. Presumably they had been sent for by von Brandisch. Anyway, their avowed purpose was to round up the spies. They were going to the *causse* that very night. If they succeeded in reaching it—and there seemed to be no reason why they should not—then, obviously, the Whitley and the Spitfires could not be allowed to land. The only way of stopping them was by using the radio. They would probably have already left their base—at any rate, Bill in the Whitley would have left, so she would not be able to get in touch with him direct. But if she could make contact with headquarters, they, in turn, might get in touch with Bill over the air, and order him to return home without landing. It seemed to be the only hope.

Worrals strode on. The journey became a nightmare. Even the luck of the weather had deserted her, for whereas at first the sky had been clear, allowing the stars to give a faint light, it was now beginning to cloud over. Heavy clouds were being rolled over the horizon by chilly gusts of wind, and there were periods when these were so thick that the resultant darkness made movement dangerous. During intervals of starlight she made up for lost time by breaking into a run.

Her strength was nearly spent by the time she reached the plateau that was the landing ground. She did not know the time, but she judged that it was getting on for midnight. From first to last on her long walk she had not heard a sound, or seen a light, to indicate that the German troops had also

arrived, so she still hoped that she might be in time to prevent disaster. She hurried across the aerodrome to the rocks on the far side in which the cave was situated. Like a pigeon returning to its loft she made for the entrance. No faint glow of light, no murmur of voices, welcomed her. All was darkness, and silence. She had no torch, no matches; she could only grope. Her hands encountered rock. Puzzled, she stepped back and studied the silhouette of the rock above her. She knew every inch of it. Again she stepped forward, feeling for the entrance; again her hands came in contact with the hard, weather-roughened rock. She couldn't understand it. She was more than puzzled, or surprised. She was absolutely confounded. The thing was uncanny. The only possible conclusion that she could arrive at was that in her haste she had lost her sense of direction and had come to the wrong place. Again she retreated to the *causse* and studied the skyline. The more she looked at it the more certain she became that she was in the right place. It was the spot, beyond any possibility of doubt. She walked forward, and reaching the rock, groped her way along it with her hands. But there was no opening. Only rock.

Am I going crazy? she thought, with a twinge of real alarm.

For a minute or two she stood there, staring helplessly, sick with disappointment that she was unable to send the signal for Bill's recall. The radio was in the cave, and fantastic though it seemed, the cave was not there. She sat down on a loose boulder to wrestle with the most baffling problem she had ever encountered. Through a break in the clouds some stars shed a feeble light on the desolate scene. Silence reigned. Then, suddenly, it was broken. The sound was slight, but had it been a bombshell the effect on her could not have been more overwhelming.

From somewhere in the darkness near at hand came a cough, a dry, rasping cough.

FRECKS TAKES CHARGE

FROM the narrow entrance in the cave Frecks had watched Worrals take off in the Messerschmitt 110. She realised perfectly well why she had done so, but it seemed to her, in that paralysing moment, that the remedy was as bad as the evil. As a matter of detail she had a shock which Worrals escaped, for in taking off one of the Messerschmitt's wheels missed the forlorn little sheep by inches; had it struck the animal the machine might never have got off the ground. But a miss is as good as a mile, as the old saying is, and Worrals went off in ignorance of her narrow escape. At that critical moment the last thing she was thinking of was her woolly accomplice.

What Worrals would do Frecks could not imagine. Where would she go? How would she get back, and when? These were questions that flashed through her mind. The only crumb of comfort was that Worrals would keep her head and take the most practicable course. It was a depressing thought that everything now depended on her alone, and as the machine faded into the blue despondency engulfed her. In vain she told herself that this was no time for futile regrets, but for action.

She was aroused from her moody reflections by happenings on the *causee*. With both pilots aboard, the training plane took off headed west. Von Brandisch and his uniformed companion watched it go, and then, for no apparent purpose, walked along the fringe of rocks in which the entrance of the cave was situated. For a little while they were within earshot, and Frecks distinctly heard the Nazi say, "I'll make an end of this. The only thing to do is to make a systematic search of the whole plateau, if it means examining every rock, to find out where these weasels hide." They passed on out of sight.

Frecks knew that this was no idle threat. Von Brandisch would be as good as his word; his proposal was typical of Nazi thoroughness in such matters. And it was perfectly plain to her that if von Brandisch did this, he could hardly fail to discover the entrance to the cave. Pondering the problem, it seemed rather surprising that he had not already done this, and the only reason that he had not, she concluded, was that Lucien's painting had thrown him off the scent, by depicting the scene in the opposite

direction. If that were so, then the canvas had done more good than harm. But the discovery of the cave could not now be long delayed.

She turned to Lucien, Raoul, and Louis, who were standing behind her. “I don’t think there is anything you boys can do at the moment,” she said. “But you, Louis, had better keep an eye on von Brandisch, at any rate while he is on the *causee*, and let me know what he does.”

“Yes, we must watch him,” agreed Louis. “Or shall I shoot him?” he suggested.

“No,” decided Frecks. “Worrals was against that, and if von Brandisch is killed here it would only bring fresh people. Moreover, the Germans would probably start shooting people in the villages, as hostages.”

Louis nodded, left the cave, and glided away among the rocks.

An hour later he returned and reported that von Brandisch had gone to La Malene police station. He was still being watched by Louis’ friends.

“I expect he has gone to ask for more men, probably with the intention of carrying out his threat to search the Causse Méjean from end to end,” guessed Frecks—correctly, as it transpired. “Obviously,” she continued, “if he searches these rocks he will find the cave. At all costs that must be prevented.”

“But how can we prevent it?” asked Lucien, raising his eyebrows.

Frecks turned to Louis. “There is another entrance?”

“Several, although some are far away. This is the only one actually on the *causee*.”

“Which is the nearest?”

“There is one in the side of the gorge, less than half a kilometre from here, but it is in a position the most dangerous.”

“Dangerous or not, we shall have to use it,” declared Frecks. “This entrance must be blocked up. It’s the only way. There is plenty of loose rock. With some of your friends, Louis, it should be possible to block the entrance in a manner that would look natural, as though there had been a landslide from above.”

“It could be done,” agreed Louis.

“We could always reopen the cave after von Brandisch has made his search.”

“Yes, that would be a course *stratégical*.”

“All right. Then let us get started,” decided Frecks.

Louis went away, but soon came back with some of his *caussenards* who forthwith set to work concealing the cave. Not long afterwards a runner, another of Louis' men, came up to the cave to report that von Brandisch was returning to the *causee*, alone.

"Alone?" ejaculated Frecks. "That's queer. What does he think he's going to do single-handed? It doesn't look as if he intends to search the *causee*, after all. It would take one man a month."

Runners continued to report, and by the late afternoon, just before the last rocks were put in place over the entrance to the cave, the Nazi could be seen, standing motionless, a lonely figure in the middle of the plateau.

"I can't make it out," Frecks told the boys, with a worried frown. "What on earth is he playing at?" The trouble was, in her heart she knew that there must be some reason for this curious behaviour, yet she could not work out what it was.

It was not until the cave was finally blocked up by four men who remained outside, effectually closing the exit to those who remained within, that another disturbing thought occurred to Frecks. Suppose Worrals did manage to get back? What would she think, what would she do, when she found that a landslide, apparently, had closed the cave? Clearly that must not be allowed to happen. From Louis she confirmed, as she supposed, that the four men outside, as soon as they had finished their work, would depart and enter the cave by one of the other entrances.

"You'll have to get me out of this," she told the old guide, and explained why. "Show me another way out, and I'll take up a position among the rocks somewhere near at hand," she requested. "I shall then see Worrals if she comes. If the search of the plateau begins, well, I shall have to retire—probably come back into the cave. But while it is possible I must keep watch in case Worrals returns. You may be sure that she will do so if it is humanly possible."

The others agreed, and Louis led the way to the exit he proposed to use while the usual one remained blocked. It was a long walk through a series of caves, some of remarkable formation, that would have interested Frecks immensely had the circumstances been different; but things being as they were, she was too anxious to get out to pay much attention. When the new exit was reached she stared at it in horror and amazement. Louis had said that it was situated in the side of the gorge, but even so, she was hardly prepared for the sight that met her eyes. The entrance was a mere slit, evidently a fault in the rock, in the sheer face of the cliff. From it numerous narrow ledges in the stratum radiated diagonally upward. In most places

these were so narrow that the footholds they afforded would have been useless had it not been for handholds provided by small woody herbs. These looked flimsy handles to which to entrust one's life, and Frecks did not hesitate to say so; but Louis assured her that the roots, in search of water, went far into the rock, and it would need more strength than she possessed to tear one out. Looking at the terrifying gorge that dropped many hundreds of feet into the Tarn, Frecks hoped sincerely that the old man was right.

"Follow me," said Louis. "I'll show you the best way up. Take good notice of it as we go, then you will be able to use it if I am not here." He admitted that it was a route the most formidable.

"You boys had better stay here for the time being," Frecks told Lucien and Raoul. "There's nothing you can do up top. I'll come back when I've seen how the land lies. Watch the way we go, in case you have to come up later on."

"It is a good thing to look up, not down," advised Louis casually.

Frecks took his advice. It was no great distance to the rim of the gorge, not more than forty feet in a vertical line, but by the diagonal path enforced by the angle of the stratum, perhaps double that distance. It was not as bad as she expected, but even so, it was bad enough, and it was with a gasp of relief that she wriggled over the top. Louis made nothing of the journey, and she derived considerable moral support from his nonchalant manner. Safe on top, the old man made her look down, "So that she could become accustomed to it."

Before them now was a narrow strip of grass, and beyond it, the long grey outcrop that fringed the western side of the *causse*, the same rock in which the original entrance to the cave was situated. Taking care not to show herself above the skyline Frecks made her way to the top of the ridge and peeped between two boulders. To her amazement von Brandisch was still standing in the same position. His attitude was that of a man who waits for something; and it was at the precise moment that this thought occurred to Frecks that her suspicion was confirmed. The drone of an aircraft, fast approaching, came out of the rather threatening sunset. Naturally, her first thought was that it might be Worrals, but looking up she made out a small Junkers commercial aircraft of an obsolete type. It was flying straight towards the plateau, so she had no doubt as to its objective. Three minutes later the machine landed and ran to a standstill on the open plateau. The engine stopped. Four men jumped out. Von Brandisch walked quickly to meet them.

To Frecks everything was now clear—only too clear. Von Brandisch had gone to La Malene to telephone for assistance. His assistants had arrived. That was all there was to it. Only one thing puzzled Frecks. It was getting dark. Obviously, it would not be possible to do much searching—if that was the intention—before darkness fell. In that case, why had these men come; why had they not waited for morning, when they would be able to start work with a clear day in front of them? There could only be one answer, and as the horrid truth struck her Frecks could have groaned aloud. The men were going to stay the night on the plateau. And it looked as if the machine was going to remain, too. She watched while the five men, deep in conversation, strolled casually towards the rocks; then she turned to Louis.

“This is bad,” she said. “In fact, it’s frightful. I’m not sure that it isn’t the end. One thing is certain. There can be no question of our planes landing here while that Junkers is parked across the middle of the runway. It’s getting dark—just a minute, what are they doing?”

Frecks returned her attention to the men on the plateau. They had now been joined by the pilot of the aircraft, who wore the uniform of an officer of the Luftwaffe. All six had now reached the ridge of rocks. They halted. One man, with a nod, disappeared behind some boulders. The others walked on. Presently a second man disappeared in the same way.

“Ah,” breathed Frecks. “So that’s it. Von Brandisch is posting sentries. They’re going to keep watch all night. Louis, this gives us a chance. These men have got to be disposed of. What shall we do with them all I can’t think, but now they have separated it shouldn’t be hard to capture them. The thing is to get them off the *causse*. Do you think you and your boys could manage it?”

“Without doubt,” replied Louis imperturbably. “Who are they, these men?”

“I don’t know, but they’re obviously German agents of some sort—probably Gestapo. We don’t want any killing, remember.”

“Why not?”

“Because that isn’t our job. What you do when we’re not here is no concern of ours, but we don’t want a pitched battle in these mountains while we are running our show.”

“As you say,” agreed Louis reluctantly. “For my part, I think it would be a good thing to throw them all into the gorge.”

“And for my part, I think it is better as I suggest,” answered Frecks firmly.

“But how can your friends land while this Nazi plane is here?” queried Louis.

“Leave that to me,” returned Frecks, in whose brain an idea had been born. “You get along, collect your boys, and see about rounding up these Boches. It must be done before midnight. Let me know when all is clear.”

Promising that he would carry out his part of the programme Louis disappeared over the rim of the gorge.

Frecks remained where she was, watching while the twilight lasted. She saw five of the men posted, and von Brandisch stand for a few minutes surveying the plateau from a point about a hundred yards distant. What finally happened to him she could not see, much to her annoyance, for darkness fell, and the scene was blackened out. She lay motionless, listening; and there she intended to remain until Louis returned and reported that the Germans had been picked up, or—although she had little hope of this—Worrals returned to take over.

Time passed. Deep night settled over the plateau. Frecks heard nothing, saw nothing, except leaden clouds piling up in the sky, blotting out most of the stars. It was a weary monotonous business, and a strain on her nerves, which, in spite of her efforts to relax, were taut with suspense. Nothing happened. More time passed, and still nothing happened. She began to get worried about Louis. It was time he was back. Her watch pointed to eleven-thirty. In half an hour Bill would arrive. What on earth was Louis doing? Why had he not returned to report that the Germans had been captured? Had something gone wrong? Very soon she would have to act.

Two courses, it seemed, lay open to her. The first was to return to the cave and send a radio signal for Bill to be recalled; the other was to move the Junkers out of the landing ground, signal to Bill to land, and accept the consequences, whatever they might be. Naturally, she was reluctant to take the first course, because if Bill did not bring the necessary petrol the Spitfires would not be able to go through, and that might upset the whole Headquarters plan of campaign. Worrals, she felt sure, would go on with the scheme while she had breath left in her body. Now it was up to her. She would have to do the same. The first thing was to get rid of the Junkers; that was vital, otherwise Bill would probably collide with it when he landed. That done, she would fetch the boys, with the torches, and put the flare path out as usual.

Moving with infinite caution she stretched her limbs, which were cramped from the long vigil, and descending the rocks set off across the plateau. She could not see the Junkers, so she could only strike towards the

spot where she had last seen it. Once, as she moved like a shadow across the *causse*, she heard a faint click, as though a small stone had struck against another. It told her for certain that she was not alone on the *causse*. Most likely it was Louis, she decided, on his way to report that the Germans had been caught. The truth did not occur to her—that it was Worrals returning. So she went on, and after wandering about for a little while found the Junkers. It was still standing just as she had last seen it.

She had a few anxious minutes ascertaining that no one was in the machine. Her method of doing this was simple. She picked up a small piece of stone and threw it at the windscreen, feeling certain that if anyone was inside it would bring him out. Nothing happened, so she opened the cabin door and made a stealthy reconnaissance. The machine, to her relief, was empty. With her heart in her mouth, as the saying is, she crawled into the pilot's seat.

REUNION

IT will now be understood why Worrals could not find the entrance to the cave. That in itself was bad enough, but von Brandisch's horrible cough was the last straw. She thought—as far as she was capable of thinking at that moment—that she ought to have been prepared for such an emergency, for she had never entertained any doubts about his return. In the ordinary way she would not have been surprised; it was the time, the place, and the absence of Frecks, coming on top of the shock of being unable to find the cave, that was so unnerving. It was apparent that something had happened in her absence, but what it was she had no means of knowing. Had the others been captured? It looked like it, for had they been at liberty surely one of them would have been there to meet her, for they must have known that she would come back at the first possible opportunity. Such were the thoughts—by no means coherent—that flashed through her mind as she crouched back against the rocky escarpment, staring wide-eyed into the darkness. She bit her lip as the cough came again—from somewhere just in front of her, it seemed.

She turned her eyes in that direction and waited. And she did not wait in vain. A shadow appeared, moving slowly along the fringe of the landing ground, about twenty yards away. Then the clouds broke; starlight turned the scene from black to misty blue, and the Nazi was revealed more clearly. He was alone. He had halted; with his hands on his hips he stood facing the open plateau. His attitude was one of expectation. It was evident that he had no intention of leaving.

Worrals was behind him, her body pressed against the rock, heart palpitating, nerves stretched as taut as banjo strings. She had no intention of moving. She prayed fervently that von Brandisch would soon go. She would have been content for the situation to end like that. She no longer wondered about the time. She had forgotten Bill. She had forgotten everything except the paramount fact that she appeared to be alone on the plateau with the one man on earth whom she really hated, and who, not without reason, hated her; a man who would not have the slightest scruple about killing her.

Minutes passed, each one an eternity of time, and Worrals was beginning to wonder how much longer she could stand the strain when from

somewhere in the dark dome overhead came the deep drone of a heavy aircraft. Something inside her seemed to go cold. It must be midnight. Bill had arrived.

Her eyes were still on von Brandisch. She saw him stiffen with surprise, and then take a quick pace forward, staring upwards towards the sound, which suggested that this, at any rate, was not what he expected. He took a whistle from his pocket. For a little while he allowed it to dangle from a white-metal chain; the stars glistened faintly on it. Then, as the engines of the aircraft were cut, he put it to his lips. That, reasoned Worrals, could only mean one thing. He had assistants on the *cause*, and was going to summon them. That, definitely, must not be allowed to happen.

She was moving even while the thought was in her mind. And she did not dawdle. As it was, she feared she might be too late. She had no weapon, but experience had taught her the value of bluff. A score of swift, silent paces, and she was behind the Nazi, within touching distance. The index finger of her right hand struck him firmly, but without violence, in the small of the back.

“Don’t move, *Hauptmann* von Brandisch,” she said in a voice as hard and brittle as glass.

The Nazi did not move. He did not even turn his head.

“Drop that whistle.”

The whistle thudded softly on the ground.

“Raise your hands.”

“Really, Miss Worrals, aren’t you being a trifle dramatic?” sneered the German. All the same, he raised his hands, elbows bent, palms forward, until they were level with his shoulders.

“It’s a dramatic moment, *Hauptmann* von Brandisch.”

“You are certainly a most competent young woman.”

“Never mind the compliments,” returned Worrals curtly. “You understand war better than most people, so you will believe me when I tell you that if you so much as move a muscle I shall shoot you without the slightest hesitation.”

“You hold the cards, Miss Worrals,” said the Nazi evenly. “I advise you to play them quickly. Your time here is extremely limited.”

“I don’t need your advice. I shall go when I am ready.” With her left hand Worrals was running through the German’s pockets. From one she took a small automatic. With a swift movement she transferred it to her right hand

and took a pace backward. She could have laughed with relief. Now she *did* hold the cards.

“Tell me, Miss Worrals, what rank do you hold?” asked the Nazi—surprisingly.

“Flight Officer,” answered Worrals, speaking to gain time. She wanted to think.

“For one of your ability that is an insult. You should belong to the Party. We know how to reward efficiency.”

“If you’re canvassing me as a recruit for your quisling army, *Hauptmann* von Brandisch, you are wasting your breath.”

“I feared it might be so, but such is my admiration for you that I felt bound to give you the opportunity of being on the winning side.”

Worrals laughed mirthlessly. “I’m already on it.”

“So! And what next? My arms are aching.”

Worrals didn’t know what next. She had been thinking fast, but she hadn’t been able to decide on a plan. What she really wanted to do was get rid of von Brandisch, so that she could devote her entire attention to getting Bill on the ground. There seemed to be no way of doing this. She couldn’t shoot the man in cold blood; nor could she turn him loose on the *cause*; nor could she stand there indefinitely covering him with the pistol. As it transpired the problem was solved for her.

From somewhere about the middle of the runway, drowning all other sounds, came the staccato clatter of an aero engine being started up. After the silence the effect was shattering, and Worrals stared in dumb amazement. She was, of course, unaware of the arrival of the Junkers. She realised that the aircraft could not be Bill’s Whitley, which a moment before she had heard gliding overhead. The noise of the engine rose to a roar that seemed to shake the plateau, and deprive her of the power of lucid thought. She could not remotely guess who or what it could be. The machine was obviously being taxied as if it were about to be taken into the air; indeed, she could see the flame of the exhaust travelling across the *cause*. Then the clouds closed up, and darkness enfolded the scene like a pall.

She heard von Brandisch run, but did not see him go. Cleverly, he had taken advantage of her preoccupation. She fired a shot in the direction of the sound, more with the object of self-defence than any other reason. She heard the bullet smack against a rock. Apart from changing her position in case the Nazi came back there was nothing she could do. And then, while she stood there, struggling to get her racing brain under control, there came another

sound, a terrifying one. It was the rending, tearing crash of an aircraft in collision with something solid. A moment later, in the direction from which the sound had come, a tongue of flame appeared. It grew and grew until the whole *causse* was flooded with a lurid glow. Figures could be seen, running.

Worrals could now see clearly that the aircraft—she was unable to identify the type, for it was in flames from end to end—had collided with the ridge of rock that fringed the gorge. There was nothing she could do about it. She did not even know whether the figures she could see were friends or foes. So she stood still, appalled by the seemingly hopeless chaos into which everything had fallen. She could still hear Bill's Whitley droning overhead. Once she saw the light of the burning machine reflected on its wings as it banked. Then she saw Frecks, running towards her—at least she guessed it was Frecks because the figure was wearing a skirt. She took a chance and yelled, "Frecks!"

Frecks swerved like a drunken navvy. She stopped, and then came on again.

"Worrals!" she panted. "You here?"

"Just about," muttered Worrals grimly. "What on earth is going on?"

"What *isn't* going on?" cried Frecks, in a voice that was near to hysteria. "I'm going crazy."

"I can see that," returned Worrals viciously. "What plane is that over there?"

"A Junkers."

"Who crashed it?"

"I did."

"*You* did?"

"Yes, I was trying to move it out of the runway, but I was nearer to the rocks than I thought, and I bumped into them. I didn't mean to bust the machine. All sorts of things have been happening—"

"Just a minute, let's have one thing at a time," snapped Worrals. "What's happened to the cave?"

"We had to block it up. The place is stiff with Gestapos. Von Brandisch is here."

"You're telling me! Where are the boys?"

"I don't know."

"And Louis?"

“I don’t know that, either. He went off to round up some Gestapo snoopers, to make it okay for Bill to land. He was supposed to come back to me and let me know when the job had been done, but he must have gone some place else.”

Worrals flinched. “Talk English! What else?”

“I don’t know. Everything seems to have come unstuck at once. Bill’s up topsides, waiting to come in.”

“So I see. He mustn’t land. The place is crawling with Nazis. Perhaps if we don’t put the torches out he won’t land—”

“You’re wrong,” broke in Frecks. “Look! He’s coming in now.”

Worrals spun round, and in the light of the still burning aircraft she saw the Whitley landing on the plateau. She nearly panicked. “I must tell him to get off again!” she shouted. “Besides the Nazis already up here, there’s a car load of them in La Malene, on the way. I saw them.”

Frecks grabbed her by the arm. “Stop! Who’s this coming?”

Worrals looked. “Thank heavens! It’s Louis. Perhaps he can make sense out of this pandemonium.”

Louis ran up, panting like a man who has run a race with death.

“Louis, where have you been?” cried Frecks. “Why didn’t you come back here, like you said you would?”

“I will explain,” puffed the old guide.

“Did you collect the sentries von Brandisch posted?” asked Frecks.

“Yes, all except the man himself.”

“Good. That’s something. Why didn’t you come back and tell me?”

“Because I had a message that a party of Germans had arrived in La Malene. They were looking for a guide to bring them to the *causee*. So I went. I still hoped to be back here in time.”

“You went!” cried Frecks. “You mean you went to bring them to the *causee*?”

Louis shook his head. “No, to take them away. They thought I was leading them to the Causse Méjean, but I took them to the Causse Sauveterre, to the north. I left them in a gorge from which they will not be able to get out for hours. Then I started back, hoping to be in time to tell you what had happened, but the darkness made travelling difficult.”

“Good work, Louis,” complimented Worrals. “Now we are getting things straightened out. I must speak to Bill. He must wonder what’s going

on.”

She turned towards the Whitley, but at that moment Lucien and Raoul appeared.

“Where have you been?” asked Frecks coldly.

Lucien threw out his hands in a gesture of helplessness. “First we brought the torches here, thinking they would be needed. Then we ran to the crash. We thought it was Bill.”

“All right, we can talk this over later,” interrupted Worrals, and turned to meet Bill who, having taxied near, had jumped down, and was now running towards the little group.

“What in thunder—?” he began in an incredulous voice.

“Take it easy, Bill,” broke in Worrals. “Things have got a bit out of hand, and you’ve arrived in the thick of it. I’m only just beginning to get the hang of things myself. Keep your eyes skinned; von Brandisch is on the prowl—at least, he was up here some little time ago.”

“He is not here now,” interrupted Louis. “He has gone to Carnac. He was seen to go there, and it was reported to me.”

“For the love of Mike,” growled Frecks. “What *is* happening?”

“Don’t ask me,” muttered Bill. “I only know that six Spits are coming through to-night, the last of the batch. I allowed myself an hour’s grace, but after this hanging about they’ll be on top of us, if we aren’t careful.”

“What time are they due to arrive?” asked Worrals.

“One o’clock. That’s the programme. There won’t be any more for some time, so you’re coming home with me. Who’s crash is that over there?” Bill pointed to the flames that were now beginning to die down.

“Mine,” answered Frecks modestly. “I bent a Junkers.”

Bill stared “What—?”

“Silence everybody,” ordered Worrals. “Let’s try to get things in some sort of order. First of all, have you still got the torches, Lucien? We shall need them to bring the Spits in.”

“Raoul and I have them between us. Here is yours.”

“Good. And you, Bill—you’ve brought the petrol?”

“That’s why I’m here.”

“Fine. Then we’re all set for the Spits to go through—I hope. We’ve got about half an hour to get our breath—if nothing else goes wrong in the meantime.”

“Where did you go?” Frecks asked Worrals.

Bill looked interested. “Why, has she been somewhere?”

“The last time I saw her,” answered Frecks slowly and deliberately, “she was taking off in a Messerschmitt 110.”

Worrals laughed at the expression on Bill’s face. She explained what had happened, and gave a brief account of her adventures. When she had finished she turned to Frecks. “Perhaps you wouldn’t mind telling me what went on here while I was away?”

Frecks explained.

“Now the thing is beginning to sort itself out,” declared Worrals. “Louis captured all the Nazi agents except von Brandisch, and then couldn’t get back earlier because he had to stop the Germans at La Malene from getting here. They are, or should be, still wandering about the Causse Sauveterre. It doesn’t matter where they are as long as they aren’t here. That left von Brandisch prowling about by himself, without knowing that his men had been rounded up. It was lucky I saw him before he saw me. Taking it all round, things aren’t so bad. I wish I knew what von Brandisch is up to in Carnac.”

“He went to the telephone,” put in Louis.

“Ah! I expect he went to get in touch with the police post at La Malene, to find out why his gang hadn’t arrived. He may ask for more men, but even so, it should be some hours before he can get them here, and by that time we ought to have got the Spits through, and started for home ourselves. What about you, Louis? What is going to happen to you and your friends?”

Louis smiled. “Have no fear for us, mademoiselle. There is more than one *causse*, and many caves, in the Cévennes. Not all the Germans in France could find us.”

“I’m relieved to hear that,” said Worrals seriously. She turned to Frecks. “I can’t think why you had to run the Junkers into the rocks. It was the crash that put me in to such a flat spin. All the same, you were quite right to get it off the runway. And you, Lucien, did the right thing in going to the crash. The pilot might have been trapped. I think it was a bit tough, the way you were left to work things out for yourself. Still, that’s the sort of thing that happens when the party gets split up. Thank goodness we’ve got things in line again.”

Bill lit a cigarette. “This place seems to have developed into a sort of madhouse.”

“You’re telling us,” sneered Frecks.

“It will be worse to-morrow,” prophesied Bill. “The fire of that burning plane must have been seen for fifty miles. It’s a good thing the show’s practically over. Meanwhile, the coast seems to be clear, but I wish I knew what that skunk von Brandisch was up to. I’ll bet he’s making the telephone wires hum.”

Worrals looked at the Nazi’s pistol, which she still carried. “At least I have a souvenir of him,” she murmured.

“He’ll hand us all souvenirs if we stay here long enough,” replied Bill grimly. “If he has worked it out—and I suppose he has—that it was you who went off in the Messer 110, he must be wondering how the deuce you got back. You were lucky to get down in that place—what did you call it . . . ?”

“The Camargue,” reminded Worrals. “It’s a weird place, but it might be a useful one. If I ever get stuck in France that’s where I shall make for. But let’s get ready for the Spitfires.”

“As soon as they’ve gone through we’re going home,” declared Bill.

“There doesn’t seem to be much point in staying here, I must admit,” agreed Worrals. “Get your kite off the runway. We don’t want any more bonfires on the *causee*. We’ll get the petrol out of her.”

“How about you getting back into uniform?” suggested Frecks.

“That’s not a bad idea. But how can I get back into the cave?”

Frecks described the route.

“That’s no use,” objected Worrals. “The Spits will be here before I could get back.”

“You won’t want to waste time fetching it after they’ve gone through,” Bill pointed out.

“In that case I’ll get one of the boys to fetch it for me. There’s really no need for me to change. I’ll take it home under my arm. Raoul, be a lamb and fetch my kit for me, will you?”

“With pleasure.” Raoul departed on his errand.

“Let’s get the machine unloaded,” ordered Worrals.

This occupied the next twenty minutes, all hands working. At the end of that time the cans were stacked, ready for the Spitfires. Bill taxied his machine nearer to the gorge, beyond all risk of collision.

“Okay,” said Worrals. “We’re all set.”

“And here, I think, comes the first customer,” remarked Frecks, gazing up at the sky, whence came the drone of an aircraft.

“Get the flare path put out, Lucien,” ordered Worrals. “We shall have to manage without the floodlight.”

“In an hour,” declared Frecks, “we ought to be on our way home. Well, it’s been quite a trip.”

“It isn’t over yet,” reminded Worrals, cautiously.

THE SPITFIRES GO THROUGH

IN strict accordance with the timetable the first Spitfire arrived at one o'clock, and thereafter there was little opportunity for those on the *causee* to worry about their affairs. Worrals' spirits mounted as one by one the fighter pilots came in, and, with their tanks replenished, departed on their southward journey. Whatever happened now, they had done the job they set out to do—or nearly. Two machines remained.

The pilot of the first of these two machines—that is to say, the fifth aircraft of the flight—was about three minutes late in landing. He apologised, and explained that just before reaching the rendezvous, he had deviated slightly from his course to examine, away to the west, a flare path. At first he had thought that it might be the one he was looking for; that he had by accident got slightly off his course; but from a low altitude he observed that this was not the case. It was an enemy aerodrome, and machines appeared to be lining up to take off. He did not attack them, in the first place because he had been ordered to stick rigidly to his programme, and secondly, because his petrol supply was running dangerously low. He thought those on the *causee* might be interested to know about this.

They were, but they were not perturbed. A few minutes later Worrals was to wonder why none of them had thought of the probable reason for these night operations on the part of the enemy. However, at the time, once the Spitfire pilot had gone on, the matter was not referred to again.

“One more,” said Frecks. “Sounds like him coming now.”

“Hark,” ordered Worrals. With a puzzled expression on her face she turned her eyes to the west. “There's more than one machine there,” she asserted. “What do you make of it, Bill?”

“Sounds to me like a formation.”

“And me.”

“Coming this way, too.”

“Heavy stuff, by the sound of it,” interposed Frecks. “Hadn't we better suspend operations till they clear off?”

“Why?” asked Worrals sharply.

“Well, suppose they are enemy bombers?”

“Suppose they are?” returned Worrals. “What of it? The Spit should be overhead. We can’t leave him there. I’m going to bring him in.” As Worrals spoke she flashed the landing signal.

“But this is madness!” cried Frecks. “We can’t carry on under a sky stiff with enemy bombers.”

“Frecks is right,” put in Bill.

“That Spit is going through,” declared Worrals grimly. “Don’t you realise that the poor wretch of a pilot hasn’t enough petrol to go on, and certainly not enough to get back home. We’ve *got* to fill him up.”

“That’s true,” agreed Bill. “I didn’t look at it that way.”

“Here he comes,” announced Frecks.

The Spitfire landed, and came to a standstill just short of where Worrals was flashing the torch. By this time the drone in the sky of approaching aircraft was alarming.

“Get busy with the petrol,” Worrals told the others, and running to the wing of the fighter climbed along to the cockpit. The pilot had just pushed the cover open.

“Stay where you are,” Worrals told him tersely. “You may have to take off in a hurry.”

“Oh dear! Haven’t I time for a cigarette?” inquired the pilot, in a disappointed voice.

“Listen,” replied Worrals curtly. “Do you hear something?”

The pilot stiffened. “Strewth! What is it?”

“I don’t know, but you can bet your Mae West it isn’t Santa Claus. If those boys upstairs are looking for us there’s likely to be quite a draught presently. We’ll fill you up as quickly as possible. The moment it’s done, and I give you the all clear, get off as fast as you can—and hold your hat as you go.”

“Have the others gone through?”

“Yes, you’re the last of the Mohicans.”

“I would be,” answered the pilot grinning.

“I’ll say so-long now, in case I don’t have time to bid you a polite farewell—ah! I think the show is about to begin.”

Worrals’ concluding remark was induced by a line of parachute flares that had burst in the air, and now came floating down, making the plateau as

light as day.

“I don’t think too much of this,” declared the Spitfire pilot anxiously.

“I imagine it’s just the prelude,” replied Worrals, smiling.

“Sit on my lap,” invited the pilot. “I’ll take you with me.”

“Sorry, partner, but you’re going the wrong way,” Worrals answered, “So-long, and *bon voyage*. Don’t stop and play with our visitors when you go. Your job is to get across the drink to Malta.”

Worrals turned away, but before she was off the wing she heard the first bombs whistling down.

“Here comes the confetti,” she announced, as she joined Bill, who had just stepped back from helping Frecks, Lucien and Louis, with the petrol. “How do you go?” She had to shout to make herself heard above the scream of the bombs.

“Nearly through,” shouted Bill. “Look out!”

With a crash like thunder the first stick of bombs fell across the plateau, the nearest being about a hundred yards away. The blast flung them all flat, and lifted the tail of the Spitfire so high that Worrals, who caught a glimpse of it, thought it was going to turn right over.

“Carry on,” she said through her teeth, as she scrambled to her feet.

The next two minutes were a nightmare of noise, and flame, and hurtling metal, as stick after stick of bombs came down. Some were incendiaries. Rock, air and sky, seemed to quiver in the unnatural glare. For the most part the bombs were widely scattered, which suggested that the enemy pilots had been briefed to bomb the Causse Méjean, without any particular spot being specified; and this was a very large target. Some of the bombs fell in the gorge. Those that fell on the plateau hurled into the air quantities of rock splinters which, dropping over a wide area, made an appalling noise, and were probably as dangerous as the actual bombs. Yet Worrals found time to be sorry for the Spitfire pilot, still sitting in his machine.

“Okay—he’s got enough!” shouted Bill at last.

Worrals flashed the okay signal to the pilot.

He yelled: “What about bomb craters?”

Worrals answered: “You’ll have to take your luck.”

Fortunately at that moment there was a lull, although the incendiaries still blazed with their white, eerie light.

Bill covered his face with his hands, as though he could not bear to watch, as the Spitfire took off. Worrals had to look. “My gosh! Talk about going like a scalded cat,” she muttered, and then drew a deep breath of relief as the wheels lifted. “I’ll bet he’ll remember that take-off,” she said in a thin, high voice.

“Here, I say, come on; let’s get out of this,” demanded Frecks. “I’ve had enough of it. The first wave’s gone over, but I can hear another lot coming.”

“Wait a minute,” objected Worrals. “Where’s my uniform? Isn’t Raoul back yet?”

“I haven’t seen him,” answered Lucien.

“Then go and hurry him up.”

Lucien went off at a run towards the entrance in the side of the gorge. More parachute flares were now coming down, making it apparent that the raid was not yet over.

“We can thank von Brandisch for this,” snapped Worrals. “Now we know why he was in such a hurry to get to Carnac, and the telephone.”

“I don’t care who started it,” snarled Bill. “The point is, how long are they going to keep it up? I’m worried about my machine. If that stops one we shall be in a nice mess. A few more bomb holes in the plateau and it will be impossible to get off, anyway.”

“Go and get started up,” ordered Worrals. “We’ll be with you in a minute. We can’t leave Raoul.”

It is not to be imagined that this conversation occurred in a normal matter-of-fact way. The threat of disaster was too imminent. Voices were brittle; sentences hard and tense.

Bill made a dash for the Whitley, which still stood where he had parked it near the ridge, about a hundred yards away. Some incendiaries had fallen dangerously near to it.

Worrals turned to Louis. “*Au revoir, mon vieux*, and a thousand thanks for what you’ve done for us. We shan’t forget. I hope everything goes well with you. Keep hammering at the Huns. Pretty soon we shall be back for good. If you need anything urgently, and can get a message through, it will not be ignored. I’ll come and see you when it’s all over; we shall be able to laugh about it. Now get back to the cave while the going’s good—I fancy there will be some more fireworks in a minute.”

Louis shook Worrals’ hand warmly. “*Adieu, mademoiselle*. We shall remember you. *Adieu Mademoiselle Frecks. Bon voyage, et bon chance.*”

Worrals turned away as Bill's engines came to life, drowning the drone of those in the air. "What on earth are those boys doing?" she asked Frecks irritably. "I don't know whether they want to come with us, or stay in France, and we can't go till we find out. It's crazy to hang about here, now the job's finished."

"I will find them," asserted Louis, and began running towards the gorge.

There was no more talking, for at that moment things began to happen. The roar of the Whitley's engines increased in volume as the big machine started to move; swinging round, it came lumbering towards the end of the runway where the girls were standing, Bill's idea being presumably, to pick them up. But before he had covered half the distance two bombs fell with a fearful noise somewhere about the middle of the runway. And then, as the clatter of falling rock died away, there came another sound. It was the howl of a steeply diving aircraft.

"Dive bombers!" gasped Frecks, and flung herself flat.

Worrals, too, dropped to the ground, but she kept her eyes on the Whitley. But this time the peril was not bombs. Tracer bullets cut lines of white fire through the air. They seemed to spring like magic out of the sky, and end at the Whitley. Bullets struck the ground on either side of it, and ricocheted, screaming, over the girls' heads.

"I'm afraid it's all up," said Worrals in a queer voice. "They've seen him." She ducked, wincing, as a black shape materialised overhead and with a shattering roar at the bottom of its dive, zoomed like a rocket.

"Messerschmitt 109F," muttered Frecks. "If they've got Messers on the job we haven't a chance. Now they've spotted the Whitley they'll shoot it to rags."

Worrals said nothing. She could only watch helplessly.

As the bullets struck the Whitley Bill had turned out of the line of fire—the only evading action he could take. The result of this was, the machine was no longer heading towards the girls, but going off at an angle. After a short run it began to swing back to its original course, but another Messerschmitt hurtled down on it, and again it was compelled to turn. This happened several times, Messerschmitts diving, and the Whitley turning. On one occasion it was travelling so fast that its tail lifted. It was obvious that such a one-sided affair could not last long. It reminded Frecks of a whale being attacked by sharks.

"They've got him cold," she said through her teeth. "Why, oh why, doesn't he take off?"

“He’s waiting for us,” answered Worrals. “Even if the Messers don’t get him, if he goes on rushing round the plateau sooner or later he’ll crash in a bomb crater.”

“Let’s go to him.”

“We can’t leave the boys without knowing if they want to stay. I’m going to tell Bill to get away without waiting for us.” Springing to her feet Worrals made a dash for the machine, which by this time was about three hundred yards away; still being pursued by Messerschmitts it was taxying at high speed towards the ridge of rock that fringed the gorge.

Suddenly Worrals stopped. A cold hand seemed to clutch her heart as she realised that she was about to witness the end. The Whitley was running too fast towards the rocks to stop before it reached them. It was too close to them to turn. It looked as if Bill had lost his sense of direction, which in the circumstances, was not surprising. He had one chance left, and he took it, although even then Worrals thought he would be too late. The engines bellowed as the throttle was opened wide. The Whitley raced forward. Its tail lifted. The wheels rose sluggishly from the ground. Collision with the rocks seemed inevitable.

By what distance the wheels missed them Worrals did not know. At the last instant she closed her eyes, and braced herself for the crash. It did not come. When she looked again there was no sign of the aircraft, but the receding roar of its engines told her that it had cleared the ridge. She tore back to Frecks.

“Bill’s gone!” she shouted.

“I saw him. So what?” Frecks dragged Worrals flat as more bombs came screaming down.

“We’d better take cover,” decided Worrals. “Now we can’t get away, there’s no sense in staying out here in this racket. What on earth are those boys doing?”

“Don’t ask me.”

“Where’s Louis?”

“Among the rocks, just behind us.”

“Let’s go to him.”

They waited for the next stick of bombs to burst and then made a dash for the rocks, dropping flat as more bombs exploded.

“This,” remarked Louis, “is an *affaire fantastique*.”

“The plane has gone without us,” Worrals told him. “It would be wise I think, to get to the cave, before a bomb blows us into the gorge.”

There was still plenty of light, both from incendiaries and flares. They made a rush for the gorge, and reaching the rim, saw at a glance why the boys had not returned. A portion of the rock, the part that held the path, had broken away, and disappeared, presumably as a result of vibration caused by the bombs.

Frecks caught her breath. She looked at Worrals. “The boys,” she breathed. “They must have gone with it.”

Louis declared that it was not possible to reach the cave at this particular place, although that was pretty obvious. There was another entrance some distance away.

Worrals was lying flat peering over the rim. “Are you sure we can’t get down, Louis?”

“It would be suicide.”

“In that case we can only take cover here among the rocks, for the time being, at any rate, and hope for the best,” decided Worrals. “Surely the raid can’t go on much longer. If there’s another lull we’ll find our way to a healthier spot. There’s nothing more we can do here. As an aerodrome the place is finished. Apart from the Nazis knowing about it the plateau must be so pitted with craters that it would need an army to level it. What’s the time?”

Frecks looked at her watch. “Four o’clock.”

“It will begin to get light in a couple of hours,” murmured Worrals.

Aircraft were still droning overhead. From time to time the *causee* quivered under the impact of bombs.

“They can’t see any definite target now, because there isn’t one,” remarked Worrals. “They’re just chucking their eggs about anywhere. I fancy the show is nearly over.”

“Not yet,” corrected Frecks, as more flares came floating down. “I wonder what they’re hoping to see?”

“They’re not looking for anything,” snapped Worrals, gripping Frecks’ arm. “Look!”

Frecks looked, and saw, floating down above the flares, a cloud of full-sized parachutes.

“Paratroops,” she breathed through lips that had suddenly turned dry.

A ROUTE FORMIDABLE

FOR a few seconds Worrals gazed at the unearthly spectacle of men dropping from the skies through a smoky, orange-tinted atmosphere, towards what might have been a crater of a volcano; for in more than one place the flares had set fire to the dry grass, which gave the plateau the appearance of a veritable inferno.

“Von Brandisch is going to finish the job while he’s at it,” she remarked grimly. She looked at Louis. “The affair, old brigand, becomes serious. We may hide here for a while, but if daylight finds us on the *cause* we shan’t have a chance. We’ve got to get off it, and out of the district. In a few hours the Cévennes will be alive with police and spies. Every road will be watched. Can you show us a way down?”

Louis pulled his lower lip. “There is a way, mademoiselle. It is the way taken by Cavalier, leader of the Huguenots, when the Royal Dragoons were on his heels.”

“If he could take it, so can we. It would be useless to try to get down by any of the ordinary paths. Where is this way?”

The old guide pointed into the chasm. “*Le voilà!*”

“Then let us go.”

“It is a route the most perilous.”

“We must risk it.”

“I myself have used the path but once, and I swore I would never go again.”

“I’d rather fall into the gorge than be caught up here by that smarmy hound von Brandisch,” declared Frecks. “Think how he’d gloat.”

“I’m with you there,” agreed Worrals. To Louis she said, “Lead on, my Camisard.”

“Wait!” cried Frecks. “I can hear someone calling.” She dropped on her knees, crawled to the brink of the precipice, and then threw a swift glance over her shoulder. “It’s Lucien!”

Worrals joined her. “Lucien!” she hailed.

Lucien's voice floated up. "*Ici.*"

"Are you both there?" called Worrals.

"Yes."

"Safe?"

"Yes."

"Where are you?"

"In the cave. The rock collapsed and tore the path away just as we were coming out."

"Listen!" shouted Worrals. "Paratroops are dropping on the *causee*. Our work is done, so we are going to try to reach England. Do you want to come with us or stay in France?"

There was a brief delay.

"Hurry!" called Worrals, urgently.

"We shall stay in France."

"Then remain where you are and trust to the Cévenols to get you out of the district when the hue and cry has died down. We'll try to get in touch with you later. Make for where the chief will know where to find you."

"Very well. Where are you going?"

"We shall probably make for the Camargue, and from there, to Spain."

"*Entendu!* Good luck."

"Goodbye, Lucien. Goodbye, Raoul. Thanks for your help. It shall be reported to General de Gaulle." Worrals drew back and threw a furtive glance at the plateau, where shouts proclaimed that some of the paratroops were on the ground.

"Come." Louis set off along the narrow strip of grass that fringed the gorge. On the right was the precipice, on the left, the rock escarpment that marked the western boundary of the *causee*. It prevented them from seeing what was happening on the plateau, but at the same time it prevented the Germans from seeing them. The glare of the flares was beginning to fade, and the drone overhead decreased in volume as the aircraft departed. Once, Worrals thought she heard von Brandisch's voice, but she was not sure. She was still carrying a torch, and the Nazi's automatic. Not having a pocket she passed the pistol to Louis with a request that he should take care of it. Louis put the weapon in his pocket without a word, and went on.

It was about five minutes later that he stopped, studied the outline of the rocks on his left, and then moved cautiously towards the edge of the gorge.

“Here begins the descent,” he said. “At first the path is bad. Do not move unless you are sure of your foothold, and at the same time have a good grip with your hands.”

The descent began. Worrals was thankful for one thing—it was too dark to see the bottom of the gorge. She tried not to think about it. The first fifty yards was so bad that in her heart she became convinced that it would take many hours to reach the bottom; but then it improved, and the going became easier. And so it continued. There were bad places, places where it was necessary for all of them to hold hands in order to get round a projecting shoulder of rock, but for the most part the track only needed a steady head to make the descent possible. Perhaps the most trappy places were where sheer precipice gave way to a steep incline, for in such places there was herbage which, polished by wind and sun, was slippery. In one such place Frecks’ feet shot from under her, and had she not followed Louis’ advice about using both hands as well as feet, she must have gone. She dragged herself back, and, breathless from shock, went on. Sometimes the path seemed to run on without losing height, but for the most part it dropped steadily, and the babble of the river at the bottom became more and more distinct.

After about an hour, at a convenient place where the path widened under some mighty overhanging boulders, they paused to rest.



The first fifty yards was so bad that in her heart Worrals became convinced that it would take hours to reach the bottom.

“The worst is over,” announced Louis. “But take care. It is easy to break your bones by falling only a few metres.”

“The river sounds to be in spate,” remarked Worrals.

“There are always rapids, but there has been rain in the north—how much I do not know. Presently we shall see. Come. Soon it will be getting light, and we must be clear of Le Rozier before the sun comes up.”

“I remember Le Rozier,” replied Worrals. “That’s the village at the lower end of the gorge.”

“*C’est ça.*”

“And then?”

“We must hide during the hours of daylight.”

“You know of a place?”

“A hundred, if necessary. When I was a boy, hiding places were what the children of the Cévennes were first taught.”

The descent continued, faster now, and just as the first grey light of dawn crept over the top of the cliff above them, they reached the bottom. Then, and not before, did they appreciate fully the strain that had been put on both physical strength and nerves. Frecks sank down on a boulder and buried her face in her hands.

“I shan’t forget that little jaunt in a hurry,” she faltered.

“We must keep moving,” asserted Louis.

“Hasn’t the man any heart at all?” moaned Frecks as she rose wearily to her feet.

For half a mile, travelling down stream, they followed the river in its torrential course. Then, at a bend, a dog rushed at them, but at a shout from Louis it retired. Rounding the bend there came into view a stone-built cottage and a landing stage. Smoke curled lazily upwards. A sagging board bore a notice to the effect that “Groggs and infusions” were available to *voyageurs*.

“Why, I know this place!” cried Worrals. She laughed suddenly. “We once stopped here for lunch, Louis and I, when we were doing the trip through the gorge. It seems a hundred years ago.”

“For the love of Mike,” cried Frecks, “do you mean people go through here for fun?”

“In the summer, in the good old days, the descent—as they call it—of the Tarn, was one of the most exciting attractions for tourists in the Cévennes.”

A dirty, very untidy man, came out of the house, and addressed Louis by name. There was a brief conversation, with much shrugging of shoulders

and hand-waving. The man led the way to a ramshackle shed. In it was a boat, a dinghy, obviously home made, and, like the shed, dilapidated.

“Now what?” inquired Frecks nervously.

“My good friend Jules has kindly offered to lend us his boat,” announced Louis.

“Tell him that after the war I will send many clients to drink his grogs and infusions,” said Worrals.

The man’s unshaven face broke into a smile, and he hurried to the house. Louis got busy with the boat.

“Are we going to brave the deep in that thing?” asked Frecks aghast.

“We are,” replied Worrals. “I knew Louis had a boat in mind when he spoke of Le Rozier. We couldn’t reach it any other way. Don’t worry. Louis is as much at home on this river as he is in the mountains.”

Louis launched the boat and tied the rope to a stake. Jules came out of the house with a teapot in one hand and three cups in the other.

“Don’t tell me the man has still got *tea*?” queried Worrals.

“Yes, the lucky man. He had a stock for *voyageurs*, and when the war came he kept it for himself,” explained Louis.

“Very precious,” said Jules, gravely.

Frecks nearly scalded her mouth gulping the tea. “Gosh, this is good,” she exclaimed.

“Just what I needed to bring me back to life,” declared Worrals.

“Come,” said Louis.

“Here we go again,” groaned Frecks.

They finished the tea, and thanked Jules for his hospitality.

“Get rid of these Boches and you shall again eat *truite de rivière à la Grenobloise*, mademoiselle,” promised Jules.

“Don’t make my mouth water.”

“Can he *cook*?” cried Frecks incredulously.

“You’d be surprised,” replied Worrals warmly.

It was now beginning to get light. Louis made them lie in the boat and covered them with an old net that stank of generations of fish. “Go to sleep,” he advised, and pushed out into the stream. As the current caught it the boat tore down the river like a frightened colt.

“You’ll be all right,” Worrals told Frecks.

“I’m too tired to be scared,” answered Frecks. She took a peep over the gunwale, and dropped back hastily. “I’m not so sure of that,” she gasped. “It looks frightful.”

“If you think it looks bad here, you’d better shut your eyes when we go through the rapids,” advised Worrals.

Frecks shut her eyes, and under the influence of the boat’s rocking progress was soon asleep. So, too, was Worrals. Although neither of them had mentioned it they were both on the verge of collapse from exhaustion, for there is a limit to how much strain the human body will endure without sleep.

When they awoke—or rather, when they were awakened by Louis—the sun was high overhead, and the boat was stationary in what appeared to be a placid backwater in which tall rushes stood knee deep. Worrals sat up with a cry of alarm, but relaxed as Louis smiled back at her. She noticed that the old man’s eyes were bloodshot from want of sleep.

“Where are we?” she asked.

“Below Le Rozier,” answered Louis.

“Wait a minute, *mon vieux*, let me get my bearings. We didn’t come as far south as this the day you and I came together?”

“No.”

“We can’t be far from Millau?”

“Ten kilometres—but the river doesn’t go that way.”

“I remember—it turns west.”

“*Si*.”

By this time Frecks had opened her eyes.

“What do you suggest we do, Louis?” asked Worrals.

“Without wishing to cause alarm, mademoiselle, I would take refuge in a good hiding place. I’ve heard many cars on the road travelling fast; also, there are aeroplanes. No doubt the search is going on right through the *département*; roads will be patrolled everywhere between the Auvergne and Languedoc.”

“Are we fairly safe here?”

“Yes, but it is not a place the most comfortable to spend the day.”

“Where do you suggest we go?”

“There is an ancient stone dwelling not far from here, near the Château La Roque. It lies deep among the rocks that lead up to the Causse Noir, and

was once, so it is said, the chapel of the hermit St. Antoine.”

“Let us go there by all means, unless you feel that you ought to be getting back to your people?”

“There is no need for me to hurry back, mademoiselle,” said Louis. “Tonight we will go on. In which direction does mademoiselle wish to go?”

“Now the Causse Méjean is closed to us I can think of only one place where we might be picked up, the place which, by a lucky chance, I mentioned to my friend, Monsieur Ashton—if he remembers what I said. I mean the Camargue. That’s where I told him I should make for in an emergency. How far are we from the Ile de la Camargue?”

“A hundred kilometres, perhaps.”

“As much as that?” Worrals looked aghast. To Frecks she said, “That’s about sixty miles.”

“We could hoof it in two days.”

“With all the roads watched?”

Louis looked thoughtful.

“Do you know the way, Louis?” asked Worrals.

“*Là! là! là!* I have walked to the Camargue and back every year for fifty years—and not by the road.”

Worrals understood. “You mean, you went with the sheep?”

“Yes. In the good old times we were paid five francs a day for taking the sheep from the Cévennes to the Camargue, by way of the hills and valleys, so that they could graze on the way. It was a harvest for we poor Cévenols. Everyone goes when the sheep go. *Tiens!* But I am a fool. That is the way to go.”

“You mean, across the hills?”

“Yes, with the sheep. They have only just started. We could overtake them. There will be men and women, and children, with the sheep, all the way. You can join with them.”

“The people will guess who we are. Are they to be trusted?”

Louis looked pained. “Mademoiselle,” he said reproachfully. “My people are Camisards.”

“Sorry, Louis.”

“But by the sheep route they will not get to the Camargue in two days.”

“How long will it take?”

“Perhaps a week. It will depend on the weather.”

“What about my uniform?” asked Frecks doubtfully. “I can’t drive sheep in this outfit.”

Louis agreed that it would not do, but anticipated no difficulty in getting clothes more suitable. “I would advise you to take this route,” he concluded. “It will keep you away from the roads, which are dangerous.”

“Are you coming with us?”

“I have a feeling,” said Louis seriously, “that Carnac would not be a healthy place for me just now. If, when I return, I am questioned, I shall say how could I know anything about the affair on the Causse Méjean when I was on my way south with the sheep?”

Worrals smiled. “Quite so, my old fox. Very well, if that is settled let us retire to the chapel of the good St. Antoine.”

Louis dragged the boat under an ancient, overhanging olive, and struck off along a narrow valley through air that was heavy with the perfume of thyme and wild lavender.

It turned out to be a walk of about twenty minutes. The chapel was no more than an empty shell—a few roughly squared boulders erected across the front of a shallow hole in the rock. Louis tore up great heaps of thyme and flung them on the ground.

“You will never sleep in a bed more comfortable,” he declared. “Rest while I am away. I shall be back as soon as possible, bringing with me food, clothes for Mademoiselle Frecks, and, I hope, news of the sheep. With luck we should be able to overtake them to-night. *Au revoir.*”

“Louis shall have a pension for this, if I have to provide it myself,” swore Worrals as the old man disappeared down the valley. “These people of the Cévennes have the reputation of being a pretty dour lot, but they’re as solid as the rocks they live in. If ever you go travelling, Frecks, after the war is over, take my tip and treat people decently. You never know when you are going to need a friend, and Louis has certainly been one to us.”

“You’re telling me,” murmured Frecks. “I think I’ll take his advice and go to sleep.”

BACK TO THE CAMARGUE

FOR five days the flocks of dark, scrawny sheep, and their shepherds, with their families, trekked slowly southward through the lonely foothills of the Cévennes towards their winter quarters on the saltings that fringe the Mediterranean Sea at the mouth of the Rhone. Worrals and Frecks, under the protection of the old guide, went with them. Leaving the hermit's dwelling, they had soon overtaken the sheep migration, and although the shepherds must have known who they were, their presence was accepted without comment.

Frecks, in garments provided by Louis, carried her uniform in an old sack, which at night she used as a pillow. Food, mostly rye bread, with mutton and onions, was plentiful, even if the diet was monotonous. Travelling overland, the flocks kept away from the roads, following pastures that the valleys provided, valleys that had been used for the same purpose for centuries. Occasionally a road was seen in the distance—once with an obvious sentry standing against the skyline. Sometimes, in the solitude of the night, motor transport could be heard, presumably on the road. By day, aircraft, Vichy and German, often flew overhead, and from such signs as these it was clear that the hunt for the fugitives was still going on. Every night, at about the same hour, just before midnight, an aircraft passed high overhead, and Worrals wondered if it were Bill, on his way to the Camargue to reconnoitre for light signals.

Anxious to reach her objective, she chafed under the tardy progress; but she curbed her irritation, realising that haste, desirable though it might be, would involve risks that were better avoided. Otherwise, the gipsy-like existence—nights under the open stars, music, and tang of camp fires in the air—had a charm which in different circumstances would have made the trip an enjoyable one to remember. As things were, she was concerned only with pushing on, so that she might get home and make her report. For she was by no means sure that Bill, after his desperate take-off, still pursued by enemy aircraft, had succeeded in reaching home. Even if he had got back to England, and remembered her remark about making for the Camargue, he might reasonably conclude from their non-arrival that they had been captured, or perhaps had gone some other way. That Bill would try to locate

them she had no doubt whatever, but apart from how he, personally, felt about the affair, there would certainly be a definite limit to the number of times the C.O. would allow him to risk his life, and a valuable aircraft, seeking them. With one thing and another, there were times when the future appeared so vague that she took a gloomy view of their prospects. For if Bill failed them—she told Frecks—their only chance of escape was to make for the distant Spanish frontier, and trust to their wits to get them past the guards.

It was on the evening of the fifth day, as they topped a long fold in the hills, that they came in sight of a mighty stone edifice, flanked by huge semi-circular towers, which Worrals recognised at once as the ancient citadel of Aigues-Mortes, the Tour de Constance.

“Well,” she remarked to Frecks, who was standing beside her, “there it is. The flat country you can see to the east is the Camargue.”

“I understand that as far as the sheep are concerned, Aigues-Mortes is the end of the trail?”

Worrals nodded. “So Louis says. There, the sheep are handed over to their owners. The shepherds go back to the Cévennes.”

“Which means that we shall have to go on alone?”

“Unless Louis stays with us.”

“There’s a village by the castle, I see.”

“The usual miserable collection of hovels.”

Frecks brushed her hair out of her eyes. “It will be a pleasure to see the inside of any village, after so long in the wilds.”

“I’m not sure about that,” answered Worrals slowly. “We must be rank poison to von Brandisch. Knowing that we must eat, he’ll have planted men in most of the villages. Whether his net is spread as far as this remains to be seen.”

The whole party moved on for some miles, and halted just above the village. Louis came up.

“What happens now?” inquired Worrals.

“Most of the people will go on into the village, to meet old friends, and perhaps drink a glass of wine with them. The arrival, after the long walk, is always an excuse for a little fun.”

“What about the handing over of the sheep?”

“That will take place to-morrow.”

“Are you going into the village?”

“Yes, I think it would be a good thing to see if it is safe for you to go in. Until I return it would be prudent for you to remain here.”

“Wouldn’t it be better if we went straight on to the Camargue?”

“To spend the night there with the mosquitos would be to invite the fever, and the fever of the Camargue is a thing to be avoided. First let me find out what I can in the village, and upon that we will make our plan.”

“*Our* plan? When will the others start back? Won’t you go with them?”

“Most of the others will start back to-morrow, but some may stay for a day or two. There is no need for me to hurry back. I will stay with you until the aeroplane picks you up, or until you have to make another plan. If the plane does not come, doubtless I could find lodgings for you in Aigues-Mortes. You may be sure that old Louis has friends in the village.”

“Very well, old comrade. Thanks,” answered Worrals. “We’ll stay here. You go down to the village and collect the news—if there is any.”

Louis went off, and the girls sat down near a fire with some boys to whom the care of the sheep had been entrusted.

It was about ten o’clock when Louis came back, and one glance at his face told Worrals that all was not as well as it might be. Louis beckoned them to one side.

“It is bad,” he announced frankly.

“Police?”

“Worse. Soldiers.”

“Ah-huh,” murmured Frecks.

“This is the way of it,” went on Louis. “There is a price of one hundred thousand francs on your heads—”

“*What!*”

Louis went on imperturbably. “There is a description of you, with the notice of the reward, on the wall of the *poste de police*. There is a troop of soldiers in the village. I spoke casually of this to the man who keeps the tavern. He, you may be sure has listened to the soldiers talking. All roads, all villages, are watched. It is known that you once came to the Camargue, and they seem to think you may come back this way.”

“Fool that I was—I should have thought of that,” muttered Worrals. “What else, Louis?”

“You know the worst. By day the soldiers patrol the roads. At night there are sentries. There is one other thing. Several times during the night an aeroplane has been heard high overhead; it seems to circle for a while, and then fades away. It comes from the north, and returns in that direction.”

“Bill, for a certainty,” breathed Worrals. “Was the plane here last night?”

“No.”

“The night before?”

“No.”

Frecks groaned. “He came three nights. As there is no sign of us he has given up.”

“Not necessarily,” answered Worrals. “Anyway, having come here, we may as well hang on for a day or two. Remember, our Intelligence people would soon know if we had been captured. As no such report can have come in they will assume that we are still at large. When Bill learns that, as he should, he will make another reconnaissance.”

“I hope you’re right,” muttered Frecks moodily.

“What had we better do, Louis?” asked Worrals. “Shall we stay here? I leave it to your judgement.”

“It would be bad for you to stay here,” answered Louis. “First, it is bad fever country at night. The wind is veering to the north, and it will get colder. Again, the soldiers may come round. In any case, to-morrow morning, when you do not depart with the others, people may wonder who are the two girls who have remained behind. You would be seen on this open hillside.”

“Then what shall we do?”

“I have taken the liberty of making arrangements for you in the village.”

Worrals stared. “In the village!”

“To be precise, in the Tour de Constance. The custodian is a friend of mine. His wife is preparing beds, and food, for you now.”

“But the soldiers—?”

“They are fools,” sneered Louis contemptuously. “The last place they will think of looking for you is in the middle of their camp.”

“Shan’t we be seen getting in?”

Louis smiled. “Not the way I shall take you. Have you forgotten that I am a Camisard? Believe me, it is better this way. If we are seen, and

questioned, remember that you are my daughters. If you remain in the open you will certainly be observed in the morning.”

“Suppose the plane comes to-night?”

“We shall hear it.”

“Very well, Louis. We are content to put ourselves in your hands. In view of the big reward, I hope the people are to be trusted.”

“In these parts, mademoiselle,” said Louis evenly, “if a man is a traitor he will sell his comrades for a glass of sour wine. If he is true, not all the gold in the world would loosen his tongue. Any traitors who may once have been here were weeded out, long ago. We have had centuries in which to find them.”

“I deserve your rebuke,” replied Worrals, apologetically. “Events have made me nervous.”

“You are quite right to doubt,” protested Louis. “In your business it is better to trust no one. We of the Cévennes, we succeed by trusting each other. It is the only way. Come.”

In silence the girls followed the old guide down the hill. He did not go straight to the village, however, but skirting it, approached the castle from the seaward side, and entered through a mighty doorway which, he told them, was called the Porte de la Marine. There, to Worrals’ surprise, a stout, homely looking woman was waiting. She bade them welcome in the soft dialect of the Languedoc. Once inside, the twentieth century was forgotten, and the girls found themselves back in the age of men-at-arms, troubadours, and knights in armour.

Madame led the way through several chilly corridors to a dungeon where, in the light of candles, a meal was set out.

“My goodness, this is a grim spot,” muttered Frecks apprehensively, glancing at her forbidding surroundings.

Madame evidently understood the purport of her remark. “This,” said she, “is a cell *tragique*, but here you will be safe.”

“Tragic?” queried Frecks nervously.

Louis explained. “In 1686, when Louis the Fourteenth reigned, sixteen girls of the Cévennes were flung into here for worshipping according to the religion of their parents. As the years dragged on, more joined them, and in the end they were forgotten. Not until 1763, when Louis the Fifteenth was on the throne, were they remembered. Fourteen of the prisoners were still

alive. The youngest was then fifty years of age. She had been brought in when she was eight. In all those years she had not seen the light of day.”

“For the love of Mike!” cried Frecks. “Stop him, Worrals, before I get the screaming heebie-jeebies.”

“Eat,” said Louis, practically. “I go to the battlements to watch. If I hear an aeroplane I will return.”

Waited on by madame the girls made an excellent meal in spite of the sinister associations of their surroundings.

“We ought to pay her for this,” murmured Frecks, in English.

“And mortally offend her? You have to be careful with your tipping in this part of the world. The people are as proud as Lucifer.”

It was about half an hour later that Louis came running down the steps. “Quick,” he said, “an aeroplane comes. It has come from the north and makes for the Camargue.”

Worrals was on her feet in an instant.

“We shall go out through the Porte de la Marine,” said Louis. “Make no noise. There are sentries about and they may be watching. There is a rumour that they are hunting for you in the hills with dogs, using for scent something which you left behind on the Causse Méjean. It is said that the dogs are coming this way.”

“Then let us go,” said Worrals fervently. “We must find a place on the Camargue where the ground is hard.”

“It has already been arranged,” said Louis.

The girls thanked madame for her hospitality, promising to come and see her when the war was over, and then followed Louis to the gateway, where, to their surprise, they were greeted by the warm smell of horses. There were three, one riderless, two with *gardians* in the saddles.

“Mount,” ordered Louis, and swung himself up on the riderless horse.

Frecks hesitated.

“It’s all right,” Worrals told her. “Get up behind your cowboy; then all you have to do is hang on to him.”

“This is getting really romantic,” murmured Frecks, as she mounted, *en croupe*.

Worrals took a glance at the sky, whence came the drone of a big aircraft. Then her *gardian* clicked his tongue, and forthwith began such a ride, at full gallop, that strained her credulity. She found it hard to believe

that it was really happening. Where they were going she did not know, nor did she ask. They were entirely in the hands of their escorts, and she was content to have it so. On all sides, as far as could be seen in the dim light, stretched the salt marshes, colourless, lifeless, monotonous, without outline, without any scene to remember. Sometimes they splashed through shallow lagoons that shimmered faintly to the stars.

The ride lasted for about ten minutes. Only one remark was made, and that by Louis, who said, "There are lights behind us." Shortly afterwards the horses were reined in. Louis held a brief conversation with the *gardians*, and then, turning to the girls, informed them that the ground around them was open, and level, for several kilometres. It had more than once been used by aircraft in the days before the war.

Worrals dismounted. "Good. Tell the two boys they had better get their horses out of the way. I'm going to try to bring the plane down, and the animals may take fright when it appears."

Louis passed on the request. At the same time he dismounted and handed his reins to one of the cowboys. They prepared to depart.

"*Adios mademoiselle*," said one, touching his hat, and using the Spanish farewell common in the district.

"*Adios, caballeros*," returned Worrals. "*Muchas gracias*."

The *gardians* galloped away into the night, taking the spare horse with them.

Worrals turned her torch upward and flashed her identification signal to the sky. She did this three times. There was no answering light, but after the third signal the drone of the aircraft ended abruptly.

"It's Bill," said Worrals, in a voice tense with excitement.

For a few minutes silence prevailed. Then it was broken. A sound came from the direction of Aigues-Mortes. It was a shout. It was followed by another sound—the sharp bay of a hound. Worrals caught her breath, her eyes probing the sombre dome overhead. Faintly through the quiet air came the musical hum that can only be made by a gliding aircraft.

"He's coming," she whispered.

"So are the hounds," returned Frecks grimly.

"He will be in time," declared Worrals.

"He'll have to make haste. I fancy your light was seen. People are coming this way."

Worrals turned to Louis. "I think you had better leave us now, *mon vieux*."

"I will stay to the finish, to make sure all is well," replied Louis, in a voice that held no trace of nervousness.

"If there were more men in France like you, Louis, France would not be where she is to-day," declared Worrals with a catch in her voice.

"France will arise," returned Louis quietly.

The hum of the plane was now clear and distinct, although nothing could be seen. Worrals switched on her light, and flashed the signal repeatedly. After each signal she flashed the letters O K—O K, to indicate that the ground was safe for landing. She pretended not to see the lights that were drawing nearer across the saltings from the direction of Aigues-Mortes.

The strain of waiting was now almost unbearable. The aircraft came nearer, so did the pursuers, who were now unpleasantly close. Yet when the aircraft landed, those who waited had to dash aside to get clear of the wings. But they were soon back. Recognising the Whitley, Worrals wasted no time in greetings.

"Is that you Bill?" she yelled.

Bill's voice answered from the cockpit.

"We're coming aboard!" shouted Worrals. "There are hounds on our trail, so get straight off."

For an instant only she paused to clasp Louis' hands. "You'll be all right?"

"In a minute I shall be boasting of how nearly I caught the English spies single-handed," said Louis, smiling. "The good God go with you. I look forward to the happy return."

Worrals made a dash for the cabin. Frecks was already inside. By the time she reached the cockpit the Whitley was on the move.

"You've got a clear run," she told Bill, as she dropped into the seat beside him.

"What are these lights I can see?" asked Bill anxiously, easing the throttle open.

"Fairy lights in our honour," answered Worrals sarcastically.

The engines were roaring now. The wheels no longer rumbled. Abruptly, all vibration ceased. The lights of the pursuit, some of which had been strung across the path of the aircraft, split as the machine bore down on them. Worrals caught a brief glimpse of figures throwing themselves flat. A

moment later and the vague black shadow that was war-stricken France, was dropping away below.

Worrals looked at Bill and smiled. “Thanks, partner. You were just in time. The hounds of Hitler, in every sense of the word, were close on our heels. I’m glad you remembered where to look for us.”

“Remembered?” queried Bill. “What are you talking about? I don’t remember you saying you were going to the Camargue.”

“Then why on earth did you come here?” demanded Worrals. “Have you suddenly become clairvoyant?”

“Not me,” averred Bill. “Lucien sent a radio signal through to say that you were heading south for the Camargue.”

Worrals blinked. “Great scott! That was smart of him. I never thought of that.”

“Apparently Lucien had no code, so he took a chance and sent the message through in clear.”

Understanding dawned in Worrals’ eyes. “So that was it! No wonder the Boches were as thick as mosquitos in Aigues-Mortes. We left the boys in rather a hurry at the finish—there was no time to make arrangements. Are they all right?”

“Evidently, since they were able to radio. I reckon they’ll be able to take care of themselves.”

“Good. Well, the show’s over. I shan’t be sorry to get home.”

“I shan’t need prodding, either,” replied Bill. “I’ve had about enough of waffling over France looking for odd lights. Next time you go off on one of these—”

“Yes, I know I can find myself another pilot,” murmured Worrals drowsily. “I seem to have heard you say that before. My! How sick you’d be if I took you at your word.”

“All right—all right, don’t rub it in,” rasped Bill. “The next time I fall in love I’ll choose a girl who stays at home and—”

“Leads a nice, quiet, respectable life, and puts your shoes by the fire to warm, and—here, please look where you’re going. If you rock the machine like that Frecks will think we’ve shed a wing, or something.”

Frecks’ face appeared round the bulkhead. “Say! What goes on?”

“It’s all right,” answered Worrals. “It’s only Bill. He usually chooses moments like this to get emotional. Don’t take any notice of him. I’m going to sleep.” She settled down in her seat and closed her eyes.

When she awoke the Channel was fading away astern, and the Whitley, closely followed by British searchlight batteries, was on a course for the aerodrome.

Frecks appeared again. "I say, what day is this?" she inquired in a voice shrill with anxiety.

"Saturday," answered Bill. "Why?"

"Thank goodness," muttered Frecks, with a sigh of relief. "I shall be just in time."

"In time for what?" asked Worrals.

"My sweet-ration coupons expire to-day," explained Frecks. "I've been saving them up for a good gorge. An awful thought just struck me that I'd missed the boat."

"Where are your coupons?" asked Worrals.

"In my tunic pocket."

"Where's your tunic?"

There was a moment's silence. Then Frecks uttered a strangled cry. When she spoke again her voice was vibrant with chagrin. "What do you know about that?" she moaned. "After humping my uniform in a sack all the way from the Cévennes to the Camargue I left it in that beastly dungeon. Do you think the food people, in the circumstances, will issue me with a new lot of coupons?"

"I should say," answered Worrals evenly, "it would be easier, and much quicker, to go back to the Camargue and fetch your uniform."

"What a revolting business war is," muttered Frecks bitterly, as the Whitley glided down.

"Von Brandisch is probably thinking that at the moment," put in Bill.

"Why?"

Bill landed before he answered. "Intelligence have had a report that he's been demoted for bungling the affair at the Causse Méjean."

"In that case," returned Frecks cheerfully, "I'll try to hang out till the new coupons come in. Ah-huh. I can see old Frostyface waiting. Squadron Leader Yorke is with him. I suppose they'll want to know what we've been doing all this time. What a nuisance men are."

"Never mind, they have their uses," admitted Worrals, backing away from the cockpit with Bill in pursuit.

The C.O.'s voice, crisp and curt, cut in. "What's going on in there?"

“Flight Officers Worralsen and Lovell reporting back for duty, sir,” answered Worrals meekly.

THE END

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 on the War-path* by Capt. W. E. (William Earl) Johns]