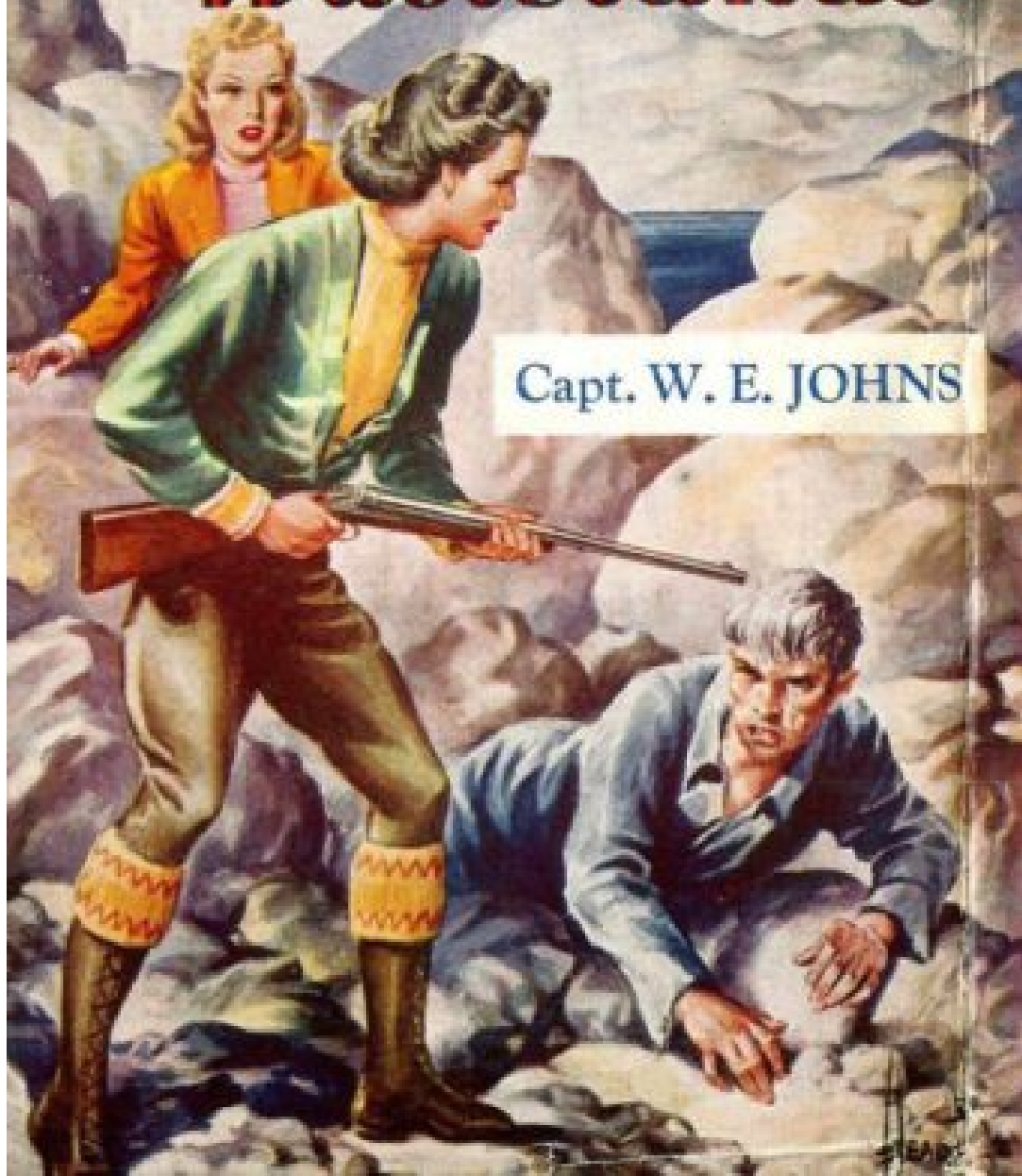


Worrals in the Wastelands

Capt. W. E. JOHNS



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page 64

“Come out of that,” she ordered curtly.

WORRALS
IN THE WASTELANDS

by
CAPTAIN W. E. JOHNS



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Contents

1. Appointment at Scotland Yard	<u>7</u>
2. Worrals Accepts a Commission	<u>22</u>
3. A Shot in the Gloaming	<u>35</u>
4. Strange Developments	<u>49</u>
5. A Curious Visitation	<u>61</u>
6. Lowenhardt Tells His Story	<u>72</u>
7. Awkward Situations	<u>87</u>
8. Worse and Worse	<u>97</u>
9. Close Quarters	<u>111</u>
10. Worries for Worrals	<u>126</u>
11. A Thief in the Night	<u>138</u>
12. More Revelations	<u>152</u>
13. Fresh Plans	<u>165</u>
14. A Matter of Wits	<u>180</u>
15. Worrals Shows Her Hand	<u>191</u>
16. Strange Justice	<u>203</u>
17. The End of the Trail	<u>211</u>

CHAPTER
ONE

*Appointment at
Scotland Yard*

AIR COMMODORE RAYMOND, D.S.O., ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER of Police at Scotland Yard, stood up with a smile of welcome for the two young women who had just been shown into his office. He held out a long thin hand.

“So we meet again, Miss Worrals . . . and Miss Lovell—or is it still ‘Frecks’?”

Betty Lovell, otherwise Frecks, smiled wanly. “It’s a pity people don’t realize that nicknames dished out casually at school cling to one for life,” she said sadly. “Frecks it was, Frecks it still is, and Frecks it always will be, I’m afraid.”

“What’s in a name?” quoted Joan Worrals, one time of the W.A.A.F., in which service she was more often known by the affectionate diminutive, “Worrals”. “We should have had the same adventures under any other name,” she added.

The Air Commodore pulled out two chairs. “Please sit down,” he invited. “I heard that you were civilians again, of course, so no doubt you were surprised to get my message asking you to call here?”

“Not in the least,” returned Worrals evenly. “After nearly five years of war I’m afraid I’m hard-boiled. It takes more than that to surprise me nowadays.”

“You will have wondered what I wanted to see you about, anyway?” asserted the Air Commodore confidently.

“No,” replied Worrals imperturbably. “There was no point in wasting time wondering when I knew you’d tell me when I got here. I must own, though, that I was for a moment puzzled to know how you got hold of my address.”

“There’s no secret about it,” returned the police officer. “I got it from a mutual friend at the Air Ministry—Squadron Leader Yorke, of Air Intelligence. You did some good work with him, too, I believe, when you were in the Service.”

Worrals smiled faintly. “It might be more correct to say *for* him. I didn’t notice him doing much of the donkey-work. That wasn’t his fault, though. The poor wretch had to sit in a chair at the Air House and make bullets for other people to fire, so to speak. It must have been dreadfully boring for him.”

The Air Commodore laughed softly. “Quite. Then let’s leave it at that. Cigarette?”

Worrals shook her head. “Not for me, thanks.”

“Most girls smoke nowadays.”

“I know. That’s one of the reasons why I don’t. Not being a sheep I don’t do things just because other people do.”

“So I have observed,” remarked the Air Commodore dryly. “But let’s get down to business. I asked you to come here because I’m in—er——”

“A bit of a quandary?” suggested Worrals.

The Air Commodore’s eyebrows went up. “How did you guess that?”

“I didn’t have to guess, I knew. I know the signs,” murmured Worrals, faint sarcasm creeping into her voice. “You see, Air Commodore, we’ve been around long enough, Frecks and I, to know that you men only send for us when you have a knotty problem that masculine fingers can’t unravel. You know it’s true, so you might as well admit it.”

“Well, it’s true enough in this case,” admitted the police officer, looking a trifle disconcerted. “I have quite a tangle in my hands. It’s one that needs the feminine touch. A man *could* straighten the thing out, of course, but it might lead to complications.”

“And still leave you with the loose ends hanging about when you’d finished?” averred Worrals. “Never mind, you want it all nice and clean and tidy. Very well. Suppose you tell us what it’s all about and then we’ll tell you how we like the look of it? Don’t forget, though, that we’re civilians now, and can please ourselves where we go and what we do.”

“Fair enough.” The Air Commodore tapped the ash off his cigarette. “I’ll come straight to the point. How would you like to arrest Anna Shultz?”

There was a moment of silence, a moment in which Worrals’s eyes opened wide, while her mouth hardened.

“Anna Shultz,” she breathed. “The She-devil of the Stenberg Internment Camp.”

The Air Commodore nodded slowly.

“So you’ve got her at last?”

“We think we know where she is, although that isn’t quite the same thing as having her under lock and key. But I asked you a question.”

Worrals drew a deep breath. “Never mind arresting her,” she said in a voice that was as brittle as ice. “I’ll hang her for you if you like—and so would any other woman who knows her ghastly record. I could hardly bear to read the details; there’s a limit to what I can stand in the way of horrors. Don’t call her a woman. She’s a Gorgon. Her wretched victims used to call her the Devil’s Sister. It gave me a physical pain when I heard that she’d got clean away.”

“It has taken us a long time to find her, but we never gave up hope,” stated the Air Commodore. “The arm of the law is not only long; it never grows tired.”

“But if you know where she is why haven’t you hauled her before the War Crimes Commission?” demanded Worrals curtly.

“I can’t say that we know *exactly* where she is, but we think we know the locality where she is hiding,” explained the Air Commodore. “There’s a snag about arresting her even when she is found. It happens that she is a long way from civilization. To bring her back might mean a considerable overland journey. It wouldn’t be safe to take one’s eyes off her for a moment. She’s as cunning as a vixen and has the temper of a tigress. She will have to be handcuffed.”

“O.K.,” put in Worrals shortly. “We understand.”

“Other difficulties might arise,” went on the Air Commodore. “This Shultz female may be a devil, but she doesn’t look like one. She’s good-looking, and apparently has a way with men when she chooses to turn on the charm. A man might be fooled by those big blue eyes of hers, which can be as hard as icebergs, or, when it suits her, as innocent as those of a baby. But they go well with her golden hair and wild-rose complexion, and feeling that she had perhaps been misjudged a man might easily succumb to temptation and give her sympathetic treatment, only to discover his folly too late.”

“Quite so,” murmured Worrals. “Her big blue eyes won’t cut any ice with me.”

“That’s what I thought. And that is why I decided to try to find a woman for the job.”

“I’m your woman,” announced Worrals crisply. “A lump comes into my throat and nearly chokes me every time I think of those poor helpless victims she tortured to death. Where is she? The last news was that she had vanished into thin air.”

“Which is exactly what she did,” confirmed the Air Commodore. “I think I had better tell you the whole story, as far as we have been able to piece it together. In that way you will learn as much as we know, including all details relevant to the case. You will have to be told if you agree to go and fetch her, for which purpose of course you would have to be sworn in as police officers.”

“Go ahead,” requested Worrals, settling down in her chair. “You can swear us in as anything you like as far as I’m concerned. The thing is to get this wicked woman and make her pay for what she’s done.”

“All right, then. I’ll start at the very beginning,” said the Air Commodore, resting his elbows on his desk and putting his fingers together.

“The story opens in 1939,” he began, “when two young Germans named Fritz Hanstadt and Otto Rumey arrived in Canada as prospective emigrants. They were, they proclaimed, anti-Nazis who had fled from Germany to escape punishment for their political views. We know now that this was not true. Whatever their purpose was in going to Canada, it was not to escape from the Hitler regime. They were Nazis, and, there is good reason to believe, spies. Hanstadt was a junior naval officer, and Rumey a cadet at the Spandau Aviation Academy. However, that was not known at the time. They were well provided with money and were allowed to stay. After seeing something of the country they headed north on a prospecting trip. To be more specific—in May, 1939, they pulled out from Fort MacWilliam, one of the most northerly of the Hudson Bay Company’s posts, in a well-provisioned canoe, and were seen paddling up the Chinokee River. That was the last official news of them in Canada. When war broke out the Royal Canadian Mounted Police went to look for them. Naturally, the Canadian Government didn’t like the idea of loose Germans floating about, and a drive was made to round up suspects. However, neither Hanstadt nor Rumey could be found. They never were found, and eventually the search had to be abandoned. Nevertheless, we know now that they got back to Germany. Hanstadt entered the submarine service and as a U-boat commander soon made a name for himself. He finished up as Second-in-Command of a U-boat fleet. Rumey went into the Luftwaffe and rose to the rank of *Hauptmann*.”

“They both survived the war?”

“Yes, although we then lost sight of them. Not that we troubled to look for them because we had nothing against them—that is, if we overlook Hanstadt’s ruthless method of waging war on merchant ships. But I will return to that presently. Let us go back to Canada in the year 1939. For all its inquiries, for some time the Dominion Government could get no news of

these two men. The war had been on for some months when two old trappers named Erik Hedin—a Swede—and Angus Fraser, partners of long standing, came back from one of their trips, with this story. Soon after they had set out—the war had then been on only a week—they were making their way up the Chinokee River—the river up which, you will remember, the Germans had gone—when they met a battered canoe coming down. There were two men in it. They were in rags, emaciated, bearded, and had obviously been out for some time. The four men had a chat on the bank, as men would, naturally, meeting in such a place. Neither Hedin nor Fraser knew anything about the two wanted Germans, but there is no doubt that these were they. They were short of food, and the trappers very decently gave them enough from their own stores to get them to Fort MacWilliam. By the way, I forgot to mention that both Hanstadt and Rumeys spoke English well, which is probably why they were selected for a Canadian assignment by the Wilhelmstrasse. Very well. Just as they were parting, Fraser happened to mention that the war had started, news of which had been picked up on the radio at Fort MacWilliam, where the two old trappers had their base. Fraser says he was at once conscious of a change in the attitudes of the two strangers, who soon afterwards hurried away downstream. Hedin and Fraser, busy with their own affairs, soon forgot all about them.” The Air Commodore paused to stub his cigarette.

“The two bearded strangers, whom we know now must have been Hanstadt and Rumeys, went on to Fort MacWilliam,” he resumed. “They were bound to go there for stores; but it was a pity that they met the trappers, otherwise they would have known nothing about the war. As it was, they were able to take precautions against arrest. Only one of them was seen in the village. The other, no doubt, remained with the canoe. Rumeys was the man who went ashore. He had a fair beard. Hanstadt was dark. Rumeys went to the Factor at the Hudson Bay Company’s depot and offered for sale a small parcel of gold. He had to do this because he was in urgent need of money and stores. An interesting point now arises. As you may know, gold varies in colour a good deal in different districts, and Donald MacDonald, the Factor at Fort MacWilliam, remembers the incident well because the gold offered by Rumeys was the palest he had ever seen. Gold, in a gold country, is always a major item of news. The Factor, in the course of his duties, often gave cash and goods for loose gold, so that he had learned to tell at a glance the source of any gold that came into his hands. But this pale yellow gold was new to him. It was, quite obviously, a new strike, and as you can imagine, he was more than a little intrigued. However, etiquette would not allow him to ask where the gold had been found; such questions

are not welcomed by those who face the perils of the Bad Lands in order to get it. And the information was not volunteered. However, the stuff was gold, as Donald soon proved by test. He weighed it, and handed over in return a quantity of stores and four hundred and eighty dollars in cash. Rumeys walked out of the depot with the money in his pocket and was never seen again in Canada. Presumably he joined his friend Hanstadt and they went off together, taking care not to be seen. How they got back to Germany we don't know, but it is likely that they made their way to the United States, from where they would be able to get transport to Europe because at that time America was not in the war. The only thing that really matters is that they got home, and were soon in Nazi uniforms."

"Is it known whether the gold they cashed was all the gold they had?" inquired Worrals.

"No, but the probability is they had more. We know they had a little more, anyway. However much they had they would have to be careful how they cashed it, in order not to cause comment. For obvious reasons they were anxious not to draw attention to themselves. Their business was to get out of the country with as little fuss as possible."

"An interesting story," murmured Worrals. "Where does the Shultz woman come into the picture?"

"I shall come to that presently," answered the Air Commodore. "We must now skip the war years to the early summer of 1945, when there arrived at Fort MacWilliam a demobilized British officer named Captain John Larwood. He had been a prisoner of war and was in pretty bad shape. His medical officer advised him to lead an open-air life, and no man more faithfully followed a doctor's orders. Larwood arrived at Fort MacWilliam with a gun, a fishing rod, and sundry sporting kit, and presented himself to Sergeant Bob Grant who is in charge of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police post there. He said Larwood struck him as a very decent fellow, and when Grant says that of a man you can be pretty sure that there's nothing much wrong with him. It seems that Larwood put his case to Grant quite frankly. He said he had some money and was hoping to combine work with pleasure. In short, he wanted some fishing and shooting, but as his capital wouldn't last for ever he wanted to earn some money as he went along. He was studying to be a mining engineer when war broke out, so he thought he might do some prospecting—for gold if possible. But he knew nothing about the country and would feel happier if a good guide could be found to go with him. He was prepared to finance an expedition and would go fifty-fifty with his partner in the matter of profits—if any. If there were no profits—well, he wouldn't worry, anyway. Grant told him that this was a fair and

sensible arrangement, and he put him in touch with Erik Hedin—who, you will remember, was one of the two men who had met the Germans coming down the Chinook River. Angus Fraser, by the way, was in hospital at the time, with a poisoned hand, having been bitten by a fox. But that's a detail. Hedin was getting on in years, but he was still tough. He knew the country, and as he had mixed a fair amount of prospecting with his trapping, it seemed an excellent choice.

“Well, Larwood and Hedin got together and discussed the proposition. It's queer how things work out. Hedin had of course heard from the Factor about the unusual gold produced by the bearded stranger. It seemed certain that this metal had come from somewhere near the headwaters of the Chinook River, which is the overflow from certain northern lakes, a district which, incidentally, Hedin told Larwood, he had always wanted to explore. He had for a long time felt in his bones—as he put it—that one day a big strike would be made in the formidable mass of mountains that occupy the Northwest Territories between the Chinook River and the strait that divides the mainland from Victoria Island. It was, he confessed, bad country. He had never been to it and he had never met a man who had—not to his certain knowledge, although he suspected, of course, that this was where the two bearded strangers had made their strike. Naturally, Larwood asked him why this promising piece of country had for so long been left unexplored. Hedin explained that the difficulty was to get there between the break-up of the ice in spring and the freeze-up in the autumn. Summer did not last long so far north, and even if a man managed to get there after a journey of nearly four hundred miles he would not have long to do any prospecting. He would have to start homeward almost at once for fear of being caught in the freeze-up. Again, a considerable quantity of stores would be required, and these would have to be transported, which would make progress slow. While on the lower ground it might be possible to augment the food supply with gun and rod, but it would not be safe to rely on this when they got into the mountains.

“Larwood, no doubt because his service in the R.A.F. caused his mind to run on aeroplanes, raised the question of flying there. Was there any place where they could land? This was a novel idea to Hedin, but he saw the possibilities at once. He said that as far as he could remember from air survey photos he had seen there was no level ground; but there were several lakes, some large, some small. Could they land on a lake? Larwood said they could, with a suitable aircraft. Well, to make a long story short, they decided to go, and made their plan accordingly. For their purpose they chose one of the highest lakes, Lake Desolation, which is a sheet of water, ringed

by mountains, about twelve miles long by an average of two or three wide. It lies at an altitude of four thousand feet and is a mass of ice in the winter. As far as was known, no one had ever been to it, although the government's survey planes had flown over it on photographic reconnaissance. Larwood couldn't afford to buy a plane of his own, but he was able to charter one, a flying-boat, from Dominion Airways. He arranged for them to be put down on the lake with sufficient stores for a three months' stay. Having put them down the aircraft would return to its base; but it was to pick them up again to bring them home on September 15, which was as late as they dare leave it. Thus, in a single day, they would do a journey which on the ground would certainly take a couple of months. The time factor that had hitherto made the lake inaccessible no longer existed.

"Very well. The aircraft arrived at Fort MacWilliam on June 14, and landed on the river. The stores, including a tent, were put on board, and on the following day the machine took off for Lake Desolation, piloted by a certain Eddie Clarke. After a somewhat bumpy journey over the high ground he landed on the lake, helped Larwood and Hedin to unload their stores, gave them a hand with the tent, had a parting drink with them, and came home." The Air Commodore paused.

"From that day to this neither Larwood nor Hedin has been seen; nor their tent, nor any of their equipment. On September 15, in accordance with the arrangement, Clarke landed on Lake Desolation. He noticed at once that the tent was not there—or it was not where it had been. He went ashore. He walked up and down a couple of miles or so each way, hailing; but of the men he had come to fetch there was no sign. Blackened stones of the fireplace marked beyond all doubt the spot where the tent had been. There was nothing there. He took off again and flew round the lake, but not a sign of the men could he see. He waited for two days, thinking perhaps there had been a misunderstanding about the date. Then he came home. There was nothing else he could do. The weather was deteriorating. To stay was to risk getting frozen in, which would have meant certain death. Back at his base he reported what had happened. By that time it was snowing and a further search was out of the question. As Larwood and Hedin had only enough stores to last for three months it is impossible that they could have survived the winter."

"Very interesting and dramatic—but I'm still waiting to hear where the Shultz woman comes in," said Worrals grimly.

A peculiar smile softened the Air Commodore's gaunt features. "When I said just now that Eddie Clarke found no sign of Larwood or Hedin I spoke the literal truth. But Clarke did find one object, and it was just about the last

thing on earth that you'd expect to pick up among the water-worn stones that form a beach round the loneliest lake in Canada—or anywhere else for that matter. I won't ask you to guess what it was because if you had a million tries you'd be wrong every time.”

“What was it?” demanded Worrals.

“A lipstick,” answered the Air Commodore, simply.

CHAPTER TWO

Worrals Accepts a Commission

FOR a moment Worrals did not speak. She stared. Then, “A lipstick,” she breathed incredulously.

“That’s what I said,” asserted the Air Commodore evenly. “Clarke brought it home. The failure of Larwood and Hedin to keep the rendezvous had been reported to the police, of course, and more as an object of curiosity than for any other reason he handed over the lipstick when he made his report. The Commissioner took a very different view of it. He was vastly interested, as he had good reason to be, for this was no ordinary piece of feminine equipment. The case was of gold, and the colour of the gold was pale yellow. That was not all. Engraved on the case was a short inscription, in German, which read: *To A.S. from O.R. 1943*. The letters A.S. meant nothing then to the Canadian police; but the date did, as did the colour of the gold and the initials O.R. There was no actual proof, of course, that the initials stood for Otto Rumey, but there is a limit to coincidence. Considered in conjunction with the colour of the gold, and the place where the case was found, the police were satisfied that O.R. meant Otto Rumey, who had had the case made from gold which he himself had panned in Northern Canada. The date 1943 was significant, because it revealed that either Rumey or an associate had been to the lake subsequent to that date. Who had taken the lipstick there? How did it get there? Who was A.S.? Well, it all boiled down to this. Rumey had had the case made. He had given it to a woman, presumably a German girl since the inscription was in German, who had—credible though it may seem—been to Lake Desolation since the war. She could hardly have got there while the war was on. Who was this woman, A.S.? We were asked to make inquiries.” The Air Commodore lit a fresh cigarette.

“Intelligence officers were soon on the job, and their investigations were successful beyond our expectations. Rumey had disappeared, but we soon made contact with one of the officers who had served under him—his adjutant, in fact, a fellow named Schaffer. The war was over and he was willing to tell us all he knew. He had a personal interest, anyway. From him

we gathered the astonishing news that Rumej was engaged—if not actually married—to Anna Shultz. That shook us, as you can imagine. It gave the case a very different aspect. Schaffer hastened to say that he was of the opinion that at the time of the engagement, at any rate, Rumej was ignorant of the dreadful things his fiancée was doing in the Stenberg Internment Camp. He himself had heard rumours, but as he was a close friend of Rumej he dare not say anything. Well, we told Schaffer as much as we thought advisable and asked him to tell us all he knew; and this he did—not so much on our account perhaps as because he was concerned for his friend Rumej. Rumej, as I have said, had disappeared. So had Anna Shultz. It was a reasonable assumption that after the fall of Hitler they had gone into hiding together, and the pattern of the thing began to take definite shape when Schaffer gave us the following information. We told him, of course, that we had nothing against Rumej. It was Shultz we wanted.” The Air Commodore tapped the ash off his cigarette thoughtfully.

“Schaffer assured us that Rumej was not a bad fellow. He was well liked by everyone who knew him, and his friends were shocked when his engagement to Shultz was announced. Schaffer had met her and he did not like her. He stated, to use his own expression, that there was something about her eyes that gave him the creeps. She was, he was convinced, a bad woman. She had been involved in more than one scandal, notably one in connection with a doctor named Wolfe, who subsequently—perhaps through Shultz’s influence—became medical officer at the Stenberg Internment Camp. They had something in common, for, like Shultz, Wolfe was a murderer. At least, he carried out experiments on prisoners, many of whom died in agony—for which reason he, too, was wanted by the War Crimes Commission. He also was on the missing list. Schaffer said he could understand Rumej’s infatuation for Shultz, but he could not fathom her interest in him, for he had neither title nor wealth—the only things likely to interest a woman of her type. She was certainly not in love with him, although she might pretend to be.

“But the most important piece of information he gave us was this. Rumej had flown Shultz out of the country in a big aircraft, a Focke-Wulf Kondor. He knew this for a fact because he had helped Rumej to get the machine ready. He did not know where Rumej was going or what he was going to do, but he realized from the amount of petrol taken on board that the proposed journey was no ordinary one; and from the quantity of food and stores loaded up it was evident that he was going to be away for some time. That was all Schaffer knew for certain. As we had nothing against Rumej it was fairly obvious that Shultz, knowing the fate that awaited her

should she fall into Allied hands, had induced her fiancé to fly her clear of trouble. With everything at sixes and sevens there would be no difficulty in doing that.

“Anyway, said Schaffer, Rumey was completely under her spell, and told him that he hoped to marry her before they left Germany. Schaffer had doubts about this. His private opinion was that Shultz never had the slightest intention of marrying Rumey. However, that’s not really important. We said nothing to Schaffer about the gold, of course, but we realized that this might be the missing link in his chain of evidence. That is to say, Shultz’s interest in Rumey may have been the gold. Or it may have been that she, knowing Germany was beaten, deliberately cast a spell over Rumey as a useful tool to help her to get away when the crash came. Or it may have been the two things together, gold and escape from Germany, that made Rumey worth cultivating.

“Shultz may have known all along about Rumey’s gold discovery in Canada, or she may not; but when the question arose as to where they should go this possible objective was certain to be mentioned. It had everything to recommend it. They could not go to any civilized place, and Lake Desolation was just about as remote a spot as existed on the globe. The time was right—early summer. And above all, they could get there what they would most need if they were ever to return to Europe: money . . . gold, which was better than any paper money since its value was international. So Shultz and Rumey slipped quietly out of the world to Lake Desolation. The lipstick proves that they got there. When they landed they must have felt pretty safe from pursuit. All they had to do was to settle down and pan gold while the hue and cry in Europe died away.”

“As you speak of panning gold, I take it that the metal which Rumey sold at Fort MacWilliam was gold dust, not nuggets?” questioned Worrals.

“Yes, it was dust; all compact and easily carried. Unfortunately for them their pretty little scheme was interrupted by the unexpected arrival of Captain Larwood and Erik Hedin. It’s no use trying to guess what happened. Neither Larwood nor Hedin would be likely to know anything about Shultz or her beastly reputation; and even if they did they would hardly expect to find her there. It is reasonable to suppose that when they encountered Shultz and Rumey, as was inevitable sooner or later, they would greet them as fellow-travellers in the wilds. But it would not suit Rumey and his partner to have other people about. They might want to share the gold. Moreover, the two prospectors might talk when they got home. Another point: the food supply which Larwood and Hedin had taken with them would augment their own supply. So, with one thing and another, there was every reason why

these two unfortunate men should be put out of the way. To Shultz, murder had become a thing of no account. She would think nothing of cutting the throats of Larwood and Hedin while they were asleep. Indeed, from what we know of her, she would probably take delight in doing it. They, unsuspecting, would be easy victims. It must have seemed a safe and simple crime, for unless Larwood told them, they would know nothing about the aircraft coming back in September. Even if they did know, what would it matter? They would have plenty of time to cover their tracks. The aircraft would not remain long at Lake Desolation because the pilot dare not risk being caught in the freeze-up. In fact, everything would have worked out according to plan had it not been for that one little thing which so often occurs to put the noose round a murderer's neck. In this case it was so small a thing as a lipstick, which has been the means of unfolding the story I have just told you."

"How long is it since this information came to light?" asked Worrals.

"This week," replied the Air Commodore. "As you will have realized, we are working in conjunction with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police; they have made the necessary investigations on their side of the Atlantic, and we on ours. The question has now arisen, how can we best secure the arrest of Shultz? As I said just now, we have nothing serious against Rumeys, unless of course he was an accessory to the murder of Larwood and Hedin, if in fact they were murdered. It is Shultz we really want, but as they have thrown in their lot together they had better be brought home together. It would appear to be a simple matter to send up a flight of military aircraft to reconnoitre the ground and secure the fugitives if they are there. But there are snags. The sudden appearance of military aircraft over Lake Desolation could only mean one thing to Shultz and Rumeys. The game would be up. They would bolt, and then how could we hope to find them in the vast trackless country at their disposal? They would certainly see the aircraft before those in the aircraft saw them. If we tackled the job from the ground the mere sight of a Mountie uniform would be enough to send them into hiding. Then again, it is customary to provide female prisoners with female guards."

"I see. And so you want me to be the female guard?"

"Exactly."

"Have you worked out any sort of plan?"

"No. I was waiting to hear what you thought about it. I know you prefer to handle a job in your own way."

“We’ll have a shot at it, you may rely on that,” promised Worrals. “If Shultz is there we’ll bring her back. Give me a minute to think it over and I’ll tell you what I consider is the best way of handling the affair.”

“Certainly,” agreed the Air Commodore. “But don’t be too long. We have no time to lose. As it is, I’m afraid these Nazis may have left Canada.”

“I should say that’s most unlikely,” opined Worrals. “I’ll go as far as to say I’m pretty sure they are still there, although they will leave before the freeze-up.”

The Air Commodore looked sceptical. “Come, come: on what possible grounds could you base such an assumption?”

“Surely it’s a matter of common sense?” asserted Worrals, with a touch of asperity. “Why should they leave a place that must suit them admirably? While they can go on collecting gold you can be sure they will stay there as long as their food lasts and the weather permits. Money is what they need more than anything, and they’ll get as much as they can while they’re at it—or Shultz will. If Rumeys is in love with the woman he probably won’t care about anything as long as he is with her. There’s another reason why you can safely presume they are still there. Had they left they would have cashed some gold, somewhere. This gold is conspicuous, on account of its colour. Had any come into the market you would have heard of it. As you have not mentioned such an occurrence I take it that no gold has yet been cashed, therefore I say they are still there. The fact that Shultz is wanted by the War Crimes Commission is another reason why they should remain in hiding. They are not likely to find a better place than where they are. On the other hand, it’s unlikely that they have enough food to see them through another Arctic winter, so it seems reasonable to suppose that they’ll try to get out somewhere about mid-September. That gives us plenty of time.”

The Air Commodore nodded. “Yes,” he conceded, “I can’t argue against that. It makes sense.”

“Thank you,” acknowledged Worrals. “If we have decided that there is no need to rush things, I’ll make a suggestion.”

“Please do.”

“It is that we—that is, Frecks and I—fly up and have a look at this lake which seems so well named. There is no need for us to take a machine to Canada. You could ask the Dominion Government to put a suitable aircraft at our disposal. We should, of course, require evidence of identity—official police badges—in case of trouble. You would have to give us some sort of rank for the occasion. If we fail to get Shultz you can always fall back on force. But I would try my way, which is the more subtle way, first.”

“You would be embarking on a risky undertaking.”

Worrals shrugged. “Perhaps. That would be nothing unusual. But it might not be so dangerous as it appears at first glance.”

“Surely you would be inviting the same fate as Larwood and Hedin?”

“Not at all. The circumstances would be entirely different. Larwood and Hedin knew nothing about these Nazis being there. We do. So from the very beginning we should act differently. They barged in as if the place belonged to them. We should creep in, hoping to get there without being seen. Let us put it logically. Our arrival will either be noticed or it will not. If it is not noticed, all well and good; the advantages of surprise will be on our side. If it *is* noticed, what then? Not by the wildest stretch of imagination would Shultz or Rumeys guess the real purpose of our visit. Whatever they might think it would not be *that*.”

“No, you’re right there,” admitted the Air Commodore with a smile.

“They would probably take us for a couple of daft girls who have lost their way and don’t know where they are going or what they are doing. Several people have made the same mistake. Neither Shultz nor Rumeys would see in us a danger to their lives and liberties. Naturally, we should play up to that, and only disillusion them when the time was ripe.”

“Yes, I think you’ve got something there,” agreed the Air Commodore.

“Before going to Lake Desolation we should of course have a word with this Dominion Airways pilot, Eddie Clarke. He’s bound to know about the affair—unofficially, if not officially. He will be able to give us the general lay-out of the lake. I shall want to know just where he landed Larwood and Hedin, where the tent was pitched, and what he saw when he made his reconnaissance—if anything. What puzzles me is, why he didn’t see the Kondor aircraft. Had he seen it he would have reported it. Yet it must still be there. It would not have enough petrol to get back to Germany—not that it would dare to land on a proper airport, anywhere.”

“They might have destroyed it, burnt it, to cover their tracks.”

“True, they might; but in that case how would they expect to get away when they were ready to go? I can’t believe that they intend to walk, carrying a load of gold as well as food for the journey. They couldn’t travel overland, anyway. The only highway is the river.”

“They might have taken a boat with them in the aircraft, for that purpose,” suggested Frecks, speaking for the first time.

“Yes, that’s possible,” agreed Worrals. “But I’m pretty sure that they must have had in their minds some way of getting out before they would

destroy their aircraft. We shall see. I shall also have to ask Clarke where he found the lipstick, in relation to the place where the tent was pitched.”

“Why do you want to know that?” inquired the Air Commodore.

“Because it would indicate the danger area—the end of the lake at which Shultz and Rumej have their hide-out.”

“How do you work that out?”

“Because the Shultz woman must have dropped her lipstick when she was walking towards the tent, or returning home after visiting it. Thus, the position of the lipstick would give us the line of her approach and departure. That argument would still hold good if she dropped it when the tent and equipment was being moved. If I know at which end of the lake they are living I shall be able to glide in at the other end with a reasonable chance of escaping observation. But I can go into these details with Eddie Clarke, on the map, when I make contact with him.”

The Air Commodore treated Worrals to a thoughtful scrutiny. “I can see you know your way about,” he said slowly.

“Oh, we’ve been around quite a bit since you knew us during the war, you know,” returned Worrals lightly. “We’re ready to start as soon as you like, so I suggest you get our papers in order and book passages for us on the next boat going west. I’ll give you a list of the things we shall need.” Worrals smiled sweetly. “We shall need some money, for example, for expenses. I’d also like to see photographs of all the people connected with the case, if they are available.”

The Air Commodore stood up. “All right,” he agreed. “You let me know what you want and I’ll get everything ready. I can see it was an oversight on my part to lose touch with you when the bugles sounded Cease Fire.”

“You may change your mind about that before you’ve finished with us,” replied Worrals evenly.

“Or before you’ve finished with me,” murmured the Air Commodore dryly.

“Put it that way if you like,” said Worrals, smiling. She became serious again. “In the meantime let’s see about putting the She-devil of Stenberg where she belongs.”

CHAPTER
THREE

*A Shot in the
Gloaming*

FROM the cockpit window of a Ranger aircraft, a twin-engined, six-seater float-plane specially designed for the transportation of forest fire-fighters, Frecks looked down on a vast panorama as wild as any she had ever seen. On all sides stretched a chaos of mountain, lake, and forest, through which rivers—one of them the Chinokee—wound a serpentine course. There was nothing else. If anywhere the hand of man had made a puny mark it was too insignificant to be observed. Mountains, their summits of gaunt rock snow-streaked, their flanks shrouded in sombre conifers that followed the contours as faithfully as grass follows the undulations of a meadow. Lakes of all shapes and sizes, shining like pieces of chromium plate thrown down haphazard; occasionally one caught the rays of the sun and flung them back in a shimmering glare that hurt the eyes. As those over which the aircraft droned fell away behind, new ones in seemingly endless procession crept up over the horizon to take their places.

Considered as a spectacle the scene was one of inspiring grandeur; but it was not one over which a pilot unaccustomed to backwoods flying could navigate an aircraft without keeping an anxious ear to his power-units, for a forced landing would, Frecks perceived, be an enterprise of the most desperate nature. It was better not to think about such things, she decided. Not that she was in the least nervous about the machine which, at the request of the Air Commodore, had been put at their disposal by the Canadian authorities. Indeed, they had been given a choice, and had selected the Ranger on the advice of Eddie Clarke, whom they had met, and who turned out to be one of the old-timers who had learned to fly—to use his own expression—by the seat of his pants. He had been flying over the backwoods, with all sorts of freights and in all sorts of weathers, for so long, that what he did not know about the job was not worth knowing. Consequently his opinion was not to be disregarded.

He had assured them that although the Ranger was now on the “obsolete” list it had been designed by a man who knew the country and was more concerned with robust construction and all-round efficiency than

spectacular performance or good looks. The Ranger, he admitted, with its bulky fuselage and squat nacelle, was not pretty to look at; and it made no extravagant claims in the matter of speed and climb. But handsome was as handsome did. It flew. It could take punishment and still go on flying. Iced up from prop-bosses to tail skid, and missing on four cylinders, it could always be relied on to crawl home somehow. This, claimed Eddie, made it more beautiful in his eyes than all the fancy jobs that littered the swell airports. If, said he, old hands in the "Territory" had developed an affection for the type, they could take it that it was O.K. Worrals agreed.

Apart from the six seats, which included those for pilot and second-pilot, there was ample storage accommodation for the miscellaneous and often cumbersome load which the machine was expected to "hump around" when on a fire job—radio, pumps, hoses, tools, food in quantity and medical stores. This was another point in its favour, as a fair load of stores would have to be carried on the projected trip. Eddie made recommendations in this connection, too.

He knew, of course, what they were going to attempt. He had to be told, otherwise it would not have been possible to gather from him the information required. He already knew the main facts of the case, so it only remained for Worrals, in confidence, to fill in the details. He took a gloomy view of their chances of success; but then, as Worrals observed, that was only to be expected. In spite of all that had happened in the war, men had still to be convinced that women could undertake work calling for qualifications hitherto regarded as exclusive to the male sex. However, Eddie was more than willing to be helpful, and they got along very well. There should be no difficulty in finding the objective, he stated, provided the weather didn't turn nasty, because the lake, being shaped like a crescent moon, was unmistakable. It could be reached on a straight run at six thousand feet on a compass course. If they tried cutting through clouds under that height they might find rocks in them, he added significantly, as he spread out the maps and air photographs which he had procured from the R.C.A.F. when he had been assigned the job of taking Captain Larwood and Erik Hedin to Lake Desolation.

Going over the maps and photographs together, which he offered to lend them, he pointed out the spot where the tent had been pitched, which was on the southern shore at about the middle of the lake, and the place where he had picked up the lipstick—some twenty yards east of the tent site. There was little more he could tell them. He was confident that there had not been an aircraft on the lake when he was there or he must have seen it, as he flew round very low in the hope of sighting the missing prospectors; but he

admitted that he was not looking for an aircraft, which was the last thing anyone would expect to find there. If he could be of any further assistance at any time they had only to let him know. They parted good friends.

In fine weather Worrals had taken off and had headed straight for the objective without calling at Fort MacWilliam, having decided that there was no point in doing so. There was nothing that the Factor or Bob Grant, the Mountie sergeant, could tell them that they did not already know, she opined. In this, however, she made a blunder, as she was the first to admit later. Had they called at Fort MacWilliam things might have fallen out very differently. But it is futile to speculate on what *might* have happened had they acted otherwise. Worrals had asked Police Headquarters to let Sergeant Bob Grant know that they were heading north on what had become known officially as the Lipstick Case, for there was just a chance that they might have occasion to get in touch with him. This was really nothing more than a precautionary measure, Grant being their nearest contact with the law.

So, at six thousand feet, under a cloudless sky, the Ranger kicked the air behind it on an assignment which, as Worrals had remarked, might keep them busy for a couple of days or a couple of months. They were prepared for either.

Frecks, glancing at the instrument panel after they had been in the air for rather more than three hours, remarked: "We must be getting close."

Worrals, who was gazing through the windscreen, replied: "I think that's the lake in the distance, straight ahead."

Frecks regarded the long narrow strip of water to which Worrals had referred. As yet it appeared only as a strip, for they were too far off for the actual shape to be determined. This was revealed, however, as they drew nearer, and the crescent slowly developed.

At a distance of what Frecks judged to be ten miles, with no obstructions ahead, Worrals throttled back to revolutions that barely kept the machine airborne. With nose slightly down, and swinging towards the western extremity of the lake, the aircraft lost height gently.

"If we can get in without being heard it might make a lot of difference," remarked Worrals. "If they're there, they are far more likely to hear us than see us—or they would hear us first and then spot us. I am hoping that they are at the eastern end of the lake. The only clue we've got points to that, anyway. If they are, then we've got a fair chance, I think. The temptation to fly round the place and settle all doubt is almost irresistible; but it wouldn't do. If we saw them we could be quite sure that they'd seen us."

“Would it matter all that much?” queried Frecks. “They’ll have to see us eventually.”

“Eventually—yes,” agreed Worrals. “But I’d rather see them first. I should like to see just what they’re doing before they suspect that anyone is about.”

“A point struck me just now,” said Frecks. “When Rumey first came here his appearance changed a good deal, apparently, between the time he started up the river and the time he went back. He went up clean-shaven and returned with a beard, for instance. We’ve only seen photos of Rumey without a beard, in Luftwaffe uniform; and the only photo the Air Commodore could get of Shultz shows her in uniform, too. They won’t be wearing uniforms now, and I imagine they’ll look a bit rough after spending a winter here. Shall we recognize them, do you think?”

“If I find a woman with big blue eyes at Lake Desolation that’ll be good enough for me,” announced Worrals grimly. “Whether she answers to the name of Shultz or not, I’m taking her south.”

Frecks was gazing through the starboard side-window. “The sky’s a funny colour over there,” she observed. “I mean in the far distance.”

“It’s the reflection of the sea,” stated Worrals. “You always get that pale greenish tint where land and water meet; I’ve noticed it before. We can’t be more than a hundred and fifty miles from the sea in that direction, which is practically due east.”

Frecks studied the map that lay on her lap. “That will be the most northerly arm of Hudson Bay.”

“That’s right.” As she spoke Worrals cut the engines, and easing the control column forward continued her glide at a steeper angle, moving in comparative silence. The only sounds were the mutter of the idling engines and the gentle whine of air over the plane surfaces.

“Yes, it’s Lake Desolation all right,” declared Frecks after another glance at the map. “Desolation seems to be the right word, too. The place isn’t exactly what you’d call a sylvan paradise, is it?”

Worrals smiled faintly. “Had it been, there would by this time be a holiday camp on the beach, in which case the gold would have been unearthed long ago, and the Shultz creature would not have chosen it for a hide-out. I wish that water had more ripple on it; the surface would be easier to judge.”

Nothing more was said, for the aircraft was now gliding low over the western extremity of the lake, at which point it ran into a narrow creek between walls of loose rock from six to twelve feet high. There was no

wind, and no visible obstruction, so a landing down the creek presented no difficulty. It was only the knowledge of what the consequences of a crack-up would be that made the landing a rather nervous undertaking.

Frecks held her breath for a moment as the Ranger flattened out to skim on a foot or so above the placid water towards the rock-bound end of the creek some two hundred yards distant. The machine sank as it lost flying speed; the floats hissed sharply as they grazed the mirror-like surface, then swished again as the aircraft settled down, to run on with swiftly diminishing speed, leaving a track of turbulent water to mark its passage. Worrals did not move, but sat quite still as the Ranger lost way and came slowly to rest some twenty or thirty yards from the rocks. A merest touch on the throttle urged it on again, gently, until the floats, with a soft bump, slid on to a wide flat rock that projected from the mass to form a natural landing-stage.

Frecks tossed the mooring-rope ashore, followed it, and made the aircraft fast.

Worrals switched off and followed leisurely.

Frecks stretched limbs that were stiff from the journey, and, finding a seat on a convenient rock, surveyed without enthusiasm a scene as melancholy as her imagination could have pictured. After the ripples raised by the aircraft had died among the rocks, nothing stirred. It was as if the world were holding its breath. Even the air was still. Beyond the end of the creek, looking towards the open water, the lake lay like a sheet of black glass between beaches of grey, water-washed stones. On three sides, at distances of from one to several miles, rose mountains, cold, brooding, implacable, their sides streaked with glacial ice, their rugged crests tipped with eternal snow. Not a wood, not a tree, not a blade of green grass, brought relief to the eye. At one place there was a tangle of stunted, wind-tortured birches; but either they were dead or not yet in leaf. The only vegetation, apparently, that could survive the icy grip of winter, was a coarse, moss-like lichen, and occasional tufts of sickly-looking, yellowish grass. Dominating all was an atmosphere of utter loneliness. Yet, with all this, or perhaps on account of it, this forsaken corner of the earth had a certain fascination of its own, thought Frecks, as her eyes continued to explore.

Suddenly, surprisingly—for she had decided that the place was as lifeless as the moon—she caught a movement. Something had stirred among the rocks on the far side of the lake, perhaps a quarter of a mile away. Focusing her eyes on the spot, she watched, and saw the movement repeated.

“Worrals,” she said softly. “What’s this?”

Worrals joined her, and by that time the question had answered itself. A bear, not a very large beast, dark brown in colour, climbed clumsily on to a rock that overhung the water, and then stopped, staring down at its own reflection.

After about a minute Frecks spoke again, by which time the bear had dropped lower and was stroking the water gently with a paw, although for what purpose was not apparent. “I don’t know that I quite like this,” she whispered.

“I don’t suppose the poor brute will interfere with us if we don’t interfere with him,” said Worrals softly. Quietly though she had spoken the bear evidently heard, for it looked up and stared steadfastly in their direction before turning and dropping out of sight over a ridge.

Worrals laughed. “Poor old Bruin. He must hate the peace and quiet of his private estate being disturbed by trippers. We can take a lesson from him. Even at that distance he heard me the moment I opened my lips. In this silence sounds carry far. We shall do well to remember it. Come on; let’s unload the stores and get the tent up.”

“I was just thinking,” remarked Frecks thoughtfully. “If it’s like this in the summer what must it be like in the winter?”

“I have no intention of remaining in order to find out,” returned Worrals. “This is dour enough for me.”

The unloading of the stores and the erection of the tent occupied the remainder of the day, for although food and equipment had been kept down to a minimum they made a formidable pile. Included were two camp beds, with blankets; a small folding table; a paraffin stove for cooking; extensions for the radio installed in the aircraft; foodstuffs of several sorts, enough to last for some time, mostly canned but including fresh fruit, bacon, and eggs; a medicine chest; greatcoats and mackintoshes, and tools likely to be useful in camp. For armament they had brought a Colt Buffalo rifle carrying sixteen rounds in the magazine, lent to them by Eddie Clarke; a twelve-bore sporting gun for shooting small game for the pot in an emergency; two Colt automatic pistols which they carried on them; and last, but not least, two pairs of handcuffs. These things were in addition, of course, to the necessary odds-and-ends of camp kit—kettle, teapot, cups and saucers, knives and forks, plates, can-opener, and the like. All these things, with the exception of the furniture, were stowed away at the back of the tent. When the beds and the table were put up there was not much room left for movement. By the

time everything was ship-shape the sun was dropping behind the mountains, flooding the scene with a weird afterglow.

Freckles filled the kettle at the lake and put it on the stove to boil while Worrals, lying on an elevated rock, binoculars in hand, made an intensive survey of as much of the landscape as could be seen. She saw nothing to cause comment, and with this she was satisfied, for she felt sure that had the arrival of the aircraft been heard, either Shultz or Rumeys, or both, would be along to inspect the visitors. Another factor that pleased her—for this was something more than she had dared to hope—was that the aircraft, on account of the rocky walls of the creek, could only be seen from very close range—by a person actually entering the creek by water, or walking round it. The mountains, of course, overlooked the creek, but it was not reasonable to suppose that Shultz or Rumeys ever climbed them.

The announcement that tea was ready took Worrals back to the tent. The air was fairly mild so they did not sit inside, but spreading a waterproof sheet on a rock enjoyed a high tea of sardines, biscuits and cheese, and cake, in comparative comfort.

“I imagine we’re not going to do any walking to-day?” questioned Freckles.

“No,” replied Worrals. “We’ll make an early start to-morrow and have the whole day in front of us. We shall need it if we have to go to the far end of the lake. That means a hike of twelve miles each way. But one can walk for ever at this altitude without getting tired.”

After a while Freckles said: “What are you going to do if Shultz cuts up rough? She’s no more likely to submit tamely to capture than a wild-cat.”

“I’m not standing for any nonsense and I’m taking no chances in a place like this,” answered Worrals simply. “I imagine Shultz and Rumeys will be armed. Bring them back alive if you can—but bring them back, was the Air Commodore’s last order, and there’s only one way to interpret that. There is an aspect of the affair that still puzzles me though. Shultz and Rumeys came here in an aircraft, a flying-boat—or so we are informed. Where is it? What did they do with it? Eddie, I could see from his manner, was convinced that it wasn’t here. He was right when he said that he couldn’t fail to see it, for it could only be on the water. It would need an army of men to haul a machine of that size on to dry land. Even if it were hauled ashore where could they put it so that it would not be seen? There’s a mystery about that. It doesn’t make sense, and I have an uneasy feeling that either we are off the track somewhere or else we are up against an unknown quantity.”

“They might have destroyed it—burnt it, or carved it into pieces,” suggested Frecks.

“That would be burning their boats with a vengeance,” argued Worrals. “I’m not prepared to believe that they came here intending to stay indefinitely. That wouldn’t suit Shultz, particularly if she had a bag of gold in her pocket. She would want to go to Berlin, Paris, London, or New York. Yet how could they get out without an aircraft? Walk? No, that won’t do. Build a canoe? With what? I don’t see any timber hereabouts even if they were capable of building a river craft robust enough to do the trip down the Chinooke River. No, Frecks, there’s a bit more to this than met the Air Commodore’s eagle eye. Of course, if we collar them and take them out the matter will not arise; but I was aiming to look for the aircraft first, which might be easier to find than the people who brought it here. If we could find the machine we should know to within a little where they were. They won’t be far away from it.”

Silence fell. The long-drawn twilight began to fade. The air became frosty, and the flickering fingers of the *aurora borealis* swept the northern sky.

“It’s getting chilly. We may as well turn in, to save showing a light,” suggested Worrals. And at that moment, from far, far away, came a sound that caused Frecks to stare at her round-eyed. It was the report of a firearm. As the sound reverberated slowly round the hills to silence, Worrals rose.

“That, I think, tells us all we need to know,” she said evenly.

“You mean—our birds are still here?”

“Without a doubt. What is even more important, they don’t know we’re here, or they wouldn’t have been so daft as to give their position away by shooting. That shot must have been fired by Shultz or Rumeys, hunting for the pot. I’d say it was every bit of seven or eight miles away. Let’s hit the hay and get some sleep while we can. And I think it might be a good idea to load the guns—in case . . .”

CHAPTER FOUR

Strange Developments

GREY dawn, chilly and cheerless, found Worrals and Frecks astir after a somewhat restless night. It was a long time since either of them had slept without walls around them, and they were soon aware of it. There were no sounds to keep them alert; rather was it the absolute absence of sound that worried their nerves, for in a civilized community, whether one is aware of it or not, there is always a certain amount of familiar noise, even if it is distant, to induce a feeling of security. The tent flap had been left open for fresh air. Through it a cluster of stars gleamed and sparkled with extraordinary intensity; and occasionally the whole sky would flare up in the livid glare of the *aurora* as if the end of the world were at hand. In the presence of such mighty phenomena Frecks found her mind running on the futility of human endeavour, and such thoughts were not conducive to sleep. However, the short northern night soon came to an end, and before long the homely aroma of frying bacon rose into the still air to set appetites on edge. While Frecks was giving the finishing touches to breakfast, Worrals took the binoculars and surveyed the landscape for signs of the enemy. She returned to report that no life of any sort could be seen.

As soon as breakfast was cleared and washed up they moved over to the kit that had been prepared overnight. This consisted of two haversacks, one containing the day's rations, with a flask of tea; and the other, a small first-aid outfit and some loose cartridges for the rifle, which they had decided to take with them. The shotgun would not be needed at this juncture, averred Worrals. They would take turns carrying the rifle, which they would no doubt find heavy enough by the time they got home.

Thus accoutred they set off, taking a course which, after a short debate, they thought offered the best cover. The shore of the lake was much too exposed. There, no cover of any sort was available, and against the motionless background two moving figures would be conspicuous from a great distance. The way they had chosen involved first a walk of about half a mile to the foothills of the nearest mountains on the northern side. The two ends of the lake curled northward, and the distance from point to point was

obviously a good deal less than the outside edge of the crescent. Thus, they would be going the shortest way to their objective, which was the far end of the lake. The ground for some distance round the lake was level, so they would have the broad expanse of water in sight all the time.

The going, as so often happens in untrodden country, proved to be more arduous than either of them had supposed. Pools of stagnant water and bogs of peat moss, where the water had drained down from the higher ground, and great heaps of detritus from the same source, necessitated many and frequent detours. Where the ground was not rocky, they discovered, it was boggy, and the only way of making progress was by stepping, or sometimes jumping, from tuft to tuft of the yellow grass that rose like hummocks above the mire. This meant that it was seldom possible to travel in a straight line; and, moreover, the hummocks were by no means stable. Advancing in these conditions was both tiring and dangerous, for there was no means of knowing the depth of the ooze between the tufts. After a short discussion, therefore, they made straight for the mountain, deciding that even if the ground there were rocky and uneven, it was to be preferred to the bogs. There was this about it, too, as Frecks pointed out: against the dark background of the slopes that rose behind them there was small chance of their being seen by anyone who happened to be about. With the whole basin of the lake below them the advantage would be on their side—always assuming, of course, that there was no one higher up the mountain, which seemed improbable.

Two hours, in which they had covered perhaps four miles, passed without incident. They sat down for five minutes' rest, drinking half a cup of tea, and went on again. There was no radical change in the scenery. From time to time, as they rounded a buttress of rock, a new vista would open before them; but the character of the country was always the same—rock, bog, and, in a few sheltered places, small copses of gnarled, leafless birches. Every ten minutes or so Worrals would halt and survey the lake, and the ground ahead, through the glasses; and she did this, too, before they showed themselves above a ridge or in a new stretch of country. The sun rose high enough to blink between two of the peaks, and this not only warmed them but gave the landscape a less sinister aspect. They were often brought to a halt by rocks or ice crashing down from the high tops, but they soon grew accustomed to this, and unless it happened to be near them they paid little heed.

It was nearly noon, and they had covered an estimated eight or nine miles, when they came upon the first sign of human occupation. Until now they had seen nothing. But here, a trifle to their right, was a heap of stones

so symmetrical that not by any stretch of the imagination could it have been formed otherwise than by the hand of man. They walked over and examined it curiously. There was no mark, no indication of how long it had been there.

“A cairn,” said Frecks.

Worrals nodded. “Yes, it’s a cairn all right. People don’t waste time building cairns in a place like this for fun. I wonder what’s under it?”

“What could be under it?”

“One of two things,” answered Worrals. “Either a body is buried here or else it’s a food *cache*. The former, most likely, because I can’t think of any reason why Shultz and Rumeys should make a food dump at this particular spot, which can’t be far from their headquarters. They’ll need all the food they’ve got, anyway.”

“What about Larwood and Hedin?”

“The same applies to them. Why should they go to all this trouble when they would soon need all the food they had with them?”

“Then it must be a body; and if it is it must be one of the four people we’re looking for.”

“That’s the answer. There’s only one argument against it. If people think enough of a dead person to go to the trouble of making a grave, or a cairn, they usually put up a cross, however rough, with the name and date. There’s nothing of that sort here.”

“This may be where Shultz and Rumeys buried Larwood and Hedin, if they murdered them.”

“That would be the most natural conclusion were it not for one thing,” asserted Worrals. “Whoever built this cairn went to a great deal of trouble. Would a murderer do that? I doubt it. It would be much easier to throw the bodies in the lake with a rock tied to them. Another thing. From the way it has been built, and the amount of rock used, there must have been a definite purpose behind it—as if there were some sort of risk of the body being disturbed. By whom? By what?”

Frecks could find no answer to these questions; and neither could Worrals, apparently, for after standing for a minute or two staring at the tragic pile she walked on.

The next discovery, which came about twenty minutes later, was a very different matter. It had all the elements of tragedy—recent tragedy.

It began when Frecks, who was walking a yard or two ahead, and slightly to one side, pulled up short by a big rock. She stared at the ground. She stared for so long that Worrals asked sharply: “What is it?”

Frecks turned a face from which all colour had fled. “Look,” she breathed.

Worrals joined her, took one look at the ground, stiffened, jerked the rifle to the ready, and made an alert inspection of the vicinity. “Speak quietly,” she whispered, and looked back at the ground.

What she saw, and what Frecks had seen, was a line of ugly little dark splashes that could only be blood. It began some distance ahead, crossed their path, and, as far as could be ascertained from where they stood, disappeared into some birch scrub about fifty yards to the left.

“Keep your eyes open,” breathed Worrals, and, stooping down, touched one of the larger splashes with a finger. Rising, she showed the finger to Frecks. It was red—sticky red.

And there for a moment they stood, staring down the horrible trail, first in one direction and then the other. There was no cover at this particular spot so there was little more they could do.

Worrals pointed to the bushes. “I’d say he’s in there,” she said softly. “Unless the wound was caused by a knife, I’d say this was the result of the shot we heard fired late last night. There hasn’t been a shot fired since or we should have heard it.”

“What are you going to do?”

“There’s only one thing we can do. Whoever lost all this blood must be in a pretty bad way. I’m going to look in those bushes.”

“Worrals! For goodness sake be careful.”

“It’s up to us to find out who’s at the end of this,” declared Worrals grimly. “You stay here if you like.”

“No fear. I’m coming with you.”

Worrals, rifle at full cock and at the ready, began a cautious advance towards the birches. She afterwards asserted that they should have guessed the truth. Be that as it may, it did not dawn on either of them.

The first intimation of it came when, with Worrals in the lead, and Frecks with her automatic in her hand, they were within ten paces of the bushes, taking a step at a time, eyes probing the tangled undergrowth. A low snarl made the skin at the nape of Frecks’s neck creep. With her heart beating uncomfortably she stared in the direction of the sound and saw a dark shape from which two eyes blazed with fury.

“Don’t move,” said Worrals tersely. “If you run he’ll charge.”

“Shoot, shoot,” urged Frecks in a thin voice.

Worrals did not move. “If I hit that bear without killing it outright, we’ve had it,” she said shortly. “We’re too close to Rumey and Co. for shooting, anyway.”



[Page 55](#)

“Don’t move,” said Worrals tersely. “If you run he’ll charge.”

While this conversation was going on the girls were standing motionless, their eyes on the stricken bear. After about a moment Worrals went on: “All right. Start to back away. Slowly. Whatever you do don’t run. If you do he’ll come, and that’ll be the end.”

Still with her eyes on the bear, Frecks took a pace to the rear. The movement was received with another snarl, a really vicious one. The temptation to turn and fly for her life was almost overwhelming. Indeed, had it not been for Worrals, standing like a rock, she would—as she afterwards confessed—have broken down under the strain and bolted. She continued to back away, her knees growing weaker from reaction as she left the danger zone. Presently Worrals began to back, too, but before she had gone far there was a crashing in the bushes as the bear drew further into the covert in which it had taken refuge. With the danger past, Worrals walked on to join Frecks.

Neither spoke until they had reached the rock from which they had started. Then Worrals said, with bitter emphasis: “Whoever shot that bear ought to be thrown to it. The first rule in shooting dangerous game is never to leave a wounded beast. Apart from leaving the wretched animal to die in agony, it isn’t the hunter who gets it; it’s the first innocent traveller who comes along. You can’t blame the beast for wanting to hit back. Rumeys or Shultzes must have shot that bear last night; it’s the sort of thing they would do; but they only wounded it, and presumably hadn’t the nerve to follow it up. We might have guessed the possibility of something of the sort when we saw the blood trail, but to tell the truth, bears were the last thing in my mind.”

“We shall have to be more careful in future.”

Worrals shrugged. “Bears—or any other animal for that matter—rarely make an unprovoked attack. A wounded beast is an entirely different matter. We’ll give those bushes a wide berth on the way home. Let’s push on.”

The journey was resumed in silence, and with more caution, for, as Worrals pointed out, there was reason to suppose that the enemy camp was not far away. They went on until, rounding a shoulder of rock, the end of the lake came into view not more than a quarter of a mile distant. From the cover of [a] convenient landslide Worrals made a methodical scrutiny of it with the glasses, studying the ground section by section, almost yard by yard, not only round the end of the lake but beyond it. There was obviously nothing on the water. Finally she drew a deep breath and passed the glasses to Frecks.

“Eddie Clarke was right,” she said gloomily. “There’s no aircraft here. See if you can see anything. Were it not for the rifle shot, and the wounded bear, which proves that someone is about, I’d say we were hunting for a mare’s nest.”

Lying against the rocks, Frecks made a long and careful reconnaissance before handing back the glasses. “Can’t see a thing,” she said hopelessly. “What do we do next?”

“We might as well have lunch,” decided Worrals. “Then, having come so far, we might as well push on for a bit before going home. We’ve no time to waste, though, or we are likely to be benighted. This is no sort of country for strolling about after dark.”

She was unpacking the food haversack when, without the slightest warning, there burst out a sound so fantastic, so utterly incongruous, that she nearly dropped the thermos flask. It was a band, and the melody it played was the *Merry Widow Waltz*.

Worrals stared at Frecks. Frecks stared at Worrals. Neither spoke for a full ten seconds, by the end of which time the incredible truth—or maybe it was not so incredible, as Worrals presently remarked—was forced home into their startled brains.

“Radio,” said Frecks, in a sort of strangled voice.

Worrals did not answer. Reaching for the glasses she crawled back to the point of vantage from which she had made her recent survey. Frecks joined her, and stared at the point from which the music appeared to emanate. There seemed to be nothing but rock.

“I’ve got it,” said Worrals tersely, without taking the glasses from her eyes. “See the big heap of rocks to the left, at two hundred yards, near the bottom of the landslide? That’s where they are. I can just make out the aerial wire. That’s all that shows.”

Confirmation of this was soon forthcoming. From behind the rocks, into plain view, stepped two men, smoking as they talked nonchalantly. One was a dark, thick-set man, dressed in a black or dark-blue suit. He wore a beard trimmed to the shape known as imperial. The other was a tall man, slim, fair, with a wisp of light moustache.

Worrals slid down behind cover, and Frecks did the same.

“I don’t get it,” said Worrals, in a voice distorted by amazement.

“What don’t you get?” demanded Frecks.

“Neither of those men is Rumeys. I don’t know who the dark man is but I know the other.”

“So do I,” muttered Frecks.

“Larwood!”

“Yes.”

“The description fits, absolutely. Tall, thin, fair, small fair moustache. There can’t be two such men here.”

“Then what’s Larwood doing with the enemy?”

“That,” said Worrals in a curious voice, “is what has knocked me all of a heap. Our whole case has gone topsy-turvy. Of course, we’ve no proof that the dark man is an enemy—but how is it that Larwood is still alive? Where’s Hedin, anyway? They had only three months’ food.”

“Larwood was a prisoner in Germany,” reminded Frecks. “Could there be any hook-up there?”

“I was just wondering the same thing,” said Worrals slowly. “In fact, I gave some thought to that possibility before we came here. I mean, I wondered if the lipstick could have been dropped by Larwood, he having acquired it somehow when he was in Germany; but I decided that the chances of such a thing were too remote for serious consideration. How could Larwood have got the lipstick in the first place? He would be in a man’s camp, for British prisoners of war. Shultz was in a woman’s internment camp. Even if by some amazing chance he did get it, I doubt if he could have got it out of the country. Prisoners are searched. Then, how could he know that the gold from which it was made was found here? Don’t ask me to believe that his coming here was purely coincidental. And even if we granted all these things, would he have brought a lipstick with him on a show of this sort when every ounce of surplus weight has to be eliminated? I decided that the thing wasn’t feasible—but now I’m beginning to wonder.”

After she had finished speaking, Worrals made another cautious reconnaissance over the rock.

“They’re still there, laughing and talking as if life were one big joke,” she whispered as she slid back. “Frecks, there’s something fishy about this. We shall have to think things over. It means a fresh plan. Meanwhile we’re too close to them for my liking. Let’s get back to camp.”

Without further parley they picked up the kit, and beat an anxious retreat, although unless the men moved there was no chance of their being seen, for the mass of rock intervened.

Increasing their pace as they drew farther from the danger area, they hurried back towards the camp, taking care to keep clear of the scrub in which the wounded bear had sought sanctuary. They ate their sandwiches as they walked, realizing the importance of getting back before darkness made the going even more difficult.

CHAPTER
FIVE

*A Curious
Visitation*

IT seemed to Frecks, as they plodded on wearily through deepening twilight over the last half-mile, that they had learned enough for a day that had not been devoid of incident; and she was looking forward to the repose that would repay them at the end of it. That the most startling adventure still awaited them was something that did not occur to her. Her mind was running more on ham and eggs, the can of pineapple, and the pot of sweet tea, the self-promise of which had sustained her on the tiring homeward journey.

As the home-stretch came into view she did in fact tend to abandon the caution that had been a feature of their sortie—which, as Worrals was presently to point out, was a lesson in the folly of taking anything for granted in a world thrown out of joint by war.

They were about a quarter of a mile from the place where they knew the tent to be, although they could not actually see it as it was below the level of the surrounding rocks, when Worrals suddenly pulled up dead.

“What’s wrong?” asked Frecks, her nerves alert on the instant.

“I saw something move.”

“Nonsense.”

“I tell you I saw something.”

“Where?”

“Over by the tent.”

“What did it look like?”

“A face.”

“What sort of face?”

“A human face. It was as if someone heard us coming, looked between two rocks, and darted back again.” As she spoke, Worrals slipped the safety catch of her rifle forward.

“So what?” asked Frecks in a small voice.

“Let’s go and see. I’m tired and I’m hungry, and I’m certainly not going to stay out here all night,” declared Worrals.

“How about circling round?” suggested Frecks.

“No use. If there is a man there he has already seen us, so we shall do no good by beating about the bush. Like that old bear this morning, I’m in no mood for interference.”

“Could it have been a bear?”

“Have you ever seen a bear with a white face—not counting polar bears?”

“I don’t think so.”

“Nor I. The bears in these parts seem to be brown. What I saw was white—definitely. It might have been a white rabbit, if they have such things here—but I’m not prepared to take a chance on that. Keep your eyes on those rocks and be ready to move in a hurry.”

With their eyes fixed on the rocks ahead they advanced slowly, with nerves at full stretch, ready for instant movement. Nothing happened. At a distance of fifty paces Worrals held up a hand in a halt signal and they listened intently for two or three minutes. Not a sound broke the twilit hush. They went on again until half the distance had been covered, when Worrals made a sign to Frecks to veer a little to the right. She herself edged to the left so that the final approach was made from two directions. The top of the tent came into view, then the aircraft, riding motionless on its inverted reflection, then the bottom of the tent. There was no one there. Everything appeared to be precisely as they had left it.

Frecks drew a deep breath of relief, and was about to rejoin Worrals when she caught sight of a long dark shadow at the base of a rock, about a dozen paces from where she stood and the same distance from the tent. She was not sure, but she thought the shadow had made a slight movement. For a few seconds she stared at it, stared while her heart missed a beat and then went on again, pumping in her throat, it seemed. There was no doubt about it now. The shadow *was* moving. Something grey at one end of it turned slowly towards her. She made it out to be a man’s face. He was looking at her. Quite slowly she raised her pistol and took aim. “I can see you,” she said in a hard voice. “Don’t move or I’ll shoot.”

Worrals, who was close enough to hear what she said, lost no time in joining her. Her eyes sought and found the intruder. “O.K.—I’ll handle this,” she told Frecks quietly. With a finger curled round the trigger of her rifle, and the muzzle of the weapon covering the man, she took two paces nearer. “Come out of that,” she ordered curtly.

Somewhat to Frecks's surprise the man moved to obey without protest or without any attempt at resistance. But his movements were slow and laborious, and it was evident that unless he was shamming he could change his position only with difficulty. Twice he fell back, the second time uttering a half-stifled groan.

"What's the matter with you?" asked Worrals sharply. "Don't try any tricks with me. If you do they'll be your last, believe me."

A voice, a man's voice, answered weakly. "I am wounded," he said, with a sharp intake of breath as he raised the upper part of his body so that it was supported on his hands. The face could now be seen plainly, and at the sight of it Frecks felt a sudden twinge of compassion. Never had she seen a face so haggard, so dirty and unkempt, so drawn with pain. The hair on the man's head was long and matted, yet, she perceived, he was quite young—in the late twenties, she judged him to be; and had it not been for the emaciation, the dirt, and a stubble of beard, he would have been passably good-looking.

"What are you doing here?" demanded Worrals.

"I come for food. I starve."

Worrals stepped forward.

"Watch out for a trick," warned Frecks nervously.

"This man is too far gone to try tricks," returned Worrals. "Come and give me a hand." Seeing that Frecks still held her pistol, she laid the rifle on a convenient rock.

Not without difficulty they moved the man from where he lay to some level ground. He was unable to stand, almost too weak to help them. His hands, a dreadful sight, were torn and bleeding. The fingers seemed to be worn to the bones. Through rents in his trousers Frecks saw that his knees were in much the same state. His clothes were caked with mud, so that it was not until now that she observed that he wore a uniform—the uniform of the German Luftwaffe.

"Fetch the greatcoats, and put the kettle on the stove while you are there," Worrals told Frecks. "We shall need hot water."

Frecks fetched the coats and mackintoshes, and between them they managed to get the man into a more comfortable position. Frecks went back for hot water. Worrals told her to bring Bovril, with a dash of brandy in it from the medical stores.

Frecks, her weariness forgotten, hastened to obey, while Worrals sat watching the man who, far from making any attempt to get away, seemed on the point of death. He lay with his eyes closed, scarcely breathing. In fact, when Frecks brought the steaming restorative they had the greatest difficulty

in getting a little of it between the pallid lips. But when they did succeed the result was instantaneous. The man opened his eyes, gasped, made an effort, and managed to raise himself on one elbow, from which position he gulped the beverage greedily.

“More,” he said eagerly. “More.”

Frecks made more, this time without brandy. She also brought a small piece of bread.

This the man took like a famished animal. “More,” he said, holding out the empty cup.

“You’ve had enough to go on with,” said Worrals. “You’ll have to start eating slowly. Another few hours, my friend, and you were a dead man,” she added grimly. “All right, Frecks; give him another half cup and a biscuit to dip in it.”

Even after this the man would have gone on eating, but Worrals, who by this time realized that he had been near to death from sheer starvation, told him that that would have to be all for the time being. Presently, after they had watched him for a little while, she let him have half a cup of weak tea, and this he drank slowly, sip by sip, with ineffable relish, rolling the liquid round his mouth as if it were nectar. After this they expected him to move, and he did in fact try, but fell back with a groan.

Worrals, remembering that he had said he was wounded, asked: “Where are you hurt?”

“I am shot in the leg with a bullet,” was the answer, in a voice which, while still weak, was a definite improvement.

“Get me the scissors,” Worrals told Frecks.

Frecks fetched the first-aid outfit. By this time it was practically dark, and they had to risk making an examination of the wound in the light of the electric lantern which they had brought with them for use in the tent. Worrals cut away the jagged ends of cloth at the place indicated by the man, and the leg was then washed clean with hot water containing antiseptic. This disclosed the wound in such a state that Frecks felt sick.

“How long since this was done?” asked Worrals.

“Six week.”

“And have you had no food all that time?”

“Only what the bears and foxes leave.”

“You’re a German, I see.”

“So.”

“What are you doing here alone?”

The man hesitated. "I was not alone," he said in a low voice.

Worrals considered the matter for a moment. Then, turning to Frecks, she said: "This is really a hospital case, but that's out of the question for the time being. One thing is certain, though; we can't leave him out here all night. Whether we like it or not we shall have to take him into the tent, at any rate while I dress this wound properly. It's going to be a longish job. It's getting chilly out here even now, and I don't like showing all this light." Turning back to the man, she asked: "What's your name?"

"Lowenhardt—Max Lowenhardt."

"Rank?"

"*Feldwebel*."

"Very well," said Worrals. "Now listen to me very carefully, *Feldwebel*. You speak English well, I think?"

"Yes—I speak English."

"You understand that you are a sick man. We are going to try to save your life. But make no mistake; at the first sign of treachery I shall shoot you without the slightest hesitation."

The German smiled bleakly. "Have no fear of this. Do I look as if I could make harm to anyone?"

The answer to this question was so obvious that Worrals did not argue. Again with some difficulty the man was moved to the tent, where he was made as comfortable as possible on the floor. The stove was lighted and a kettle of water put on. The lantern was hung on its hook. Worrals then set to work on the wound.

It was an unpleasant job and a long one. The bullet, fortunately, had gone right through the fleshy part of the leg without touching the bone, entering at the back half-way up the thigh and coming out at the side of the knee. Had it been properly treated from the start the wound would not have been a serious one, but having been neglected it was in a nasty state. Indeed, Worrals was only amazed that gangrene had not already set in. The man winced with pain but uttered no sound as Worrals thoroughly cleansed it and then bandaged it. Provided complications did not set in—although she admitted that she was afraid of this—the man would soon be all right, she thought. If the wound did turn septic, she said, one of them would have to fly him down to Fort MacWilliam; but if it went on all right there was no reason why he could not remain where he was for the time being. They had done all they could and he seemed to be comfortable, although he was still terribly weak from lack of food.

When everything had been tidied up they had their own overdue meal. The patient was given a small bowl of broth with some bread crumbled in it. At the finish, sitting on the side of her bed, Worrals turned inquiring eyes on the man.

“Now,” she said, “I’m going to ask you some questions. Do you feel well enough to talk?”

Lowenhardt said he did.

“Then be sure to tell the truth,” said Worrals seriously. “If I find that you are lying I shall wash my hands of you.”

The man smiled again, wanly. “I have no reason to lie,” said he. “What do you want to know?”

Worrals’s first question produced the first shock. “Who shot you?” she asked.

“Doctor Wolfe.”

Worrals stared. The name struck a chord in her memory, but for a moment she did not grasp its significance. When she did she turned astonished, startled eyes to Frecks. Switching them back to Lowenhardt she said: “You mean Doctor Wolfe of Stenberg Camp?”

“*Ja.*”

“Is he here?”

“*Ja.*”

Suddenly Worrals understood. “A dark man, who wears dark clothes?”

“*So.*”

“How did he come here?”

“He came in the plane with us.”

“Whom do you mean by us?”

The man hesitated.

“Anna Shultz and Hauptmann Rumej?” prompted Worrals.

“Yes.”

“And you came here with them?”

“With Hauptmann Rumej. He was my officer.”

“Where is he now?”

The answer gave Worrals another jolt. “He is dead.”

“*Dead?*”

“*Ja.*”

“How did he die?”

“He was shot.”

“By whom?”

“By Shultz.” Lowenhardt spat the word.

“But Hauptmann Rumeys brought her here. Am I to understand that she murdered her fiancé—or was he her husband?”

“Neither. He could not be either.”

“Why not?”

The answer was another shock. “Because she was already married to Wolfe,” said Lowenhardt.

“Married to *Wolfe!*” Again Worrals’s eyes opened wide. These were revelations with a vengeance.

“That is what they say.”

“Even so, why should Shultz shoot Rumeys?”

The German shrugged. “She did not need him any longer.”

“What happened to the body?”

“I bury it under many stones so that the bears and foxes do not eat it. He was my officer. We are together for a long time.”

“And why did Wolfe shoot you?”

“Because I try to take care of Hauptmann Rumeys when he is shot. He is shot in the stomach. He dies slowly.”

There was a brief silence. Then Worrals said: “I think it will save time if you tell me all that has happened here, in your own words. Will you do that?”

“Yes, I will do that,” agreed Lowenhardt. “But may I ask, who are you? What is this to you?”

Worrals looked the man straight in the face. It was an awkward question, but she thought she could afford to be frank. The man was hardly in a state to do them an injury even if he felt so inclined; and if what he had said was true—and there seemed little reason to doubt it—it would be to his advantage to play on their side. “We are the police,” she said. “We have come for Shultz. She will stand trial for the things she did at Stenberg. She is your countrywoman, so I shall not ask you to say anything against her unless you wish to do so.”

For an instant the expression of hate on Lowenhardt’s face almost frightened Frecks. “That she-wolf,” he spat. “One day I will kill her, kill her with my hands,” he went on, breathing heavily in his passion. “First I will tear her lying tongue from her throat.”

“We shall, I hope, attend to Shultz,” corrected Worrals. “Tell us about it from the beginning.”

Lowenhardt moistened his lips and recovered his equanimity with an effort. “*Jawohl*,” he agreed.

CHAPTER
SIX

*Lowenhardt
Tells His Story*

“WE start last year in Germany, when the war is lost,” began Lowenhardt in a dull, flat voice. “For long in the war I am wireless man for Hauptmann Rumei. I fly with him always and we fight many battles, which makes men to know each other well. So we are like brothers, me and Hauptmann Rumei, although I am only an *unteroffizier*. One night he comes to me and says, all is over. We lose the war. It is the end of the Fatherland. We will go away. He is very sad. I do not say where do we go because for me it is all the same. I have no home, so I say, ‘Good. Let us go.’ Then he says that there must come with us Anna Shultz, and as he speaks he watches my face because he knows I do not like this woman. He did not know of Stenberg, but I, because I hear talk in the barrack rooms, have heard strange tales that I do not like. I do not trust the woman. I know she is not the woman for Hauptmann Rumei, but I dare not say so. I am sick that he wants to marry her for I know that no good will come of this. She was too much a creature of the regime, with too much pride in herself, and ambition. But she must come. I must come too, says Hauptmann Rumei, to listen to the radio in case there is danger to us. Also he wants to know the weather reports. So we load a Kondor with many things and much food. I do not know where we go, but I see we go far away and for a long time. Then comes Anna Shultz. She says we must have a doctor in case one of us is sick. She will bring her friend, Doctor Wolfe. Hauptmann Rumei does not like Wolfe because he is always too much with Anna, and there has been talk about them. He says he shall not go. There is much argument. Hauptmann Rumei says he will take anyone, but he will not take Wolfe. Shultz is in a bad temper when she sees he is firm, but says, let it be so. He shall not come.”

“Did you know where you were going by this time?” asked Worrals.

“*Nein.*”

“Was anything said about gold?”

“*Nein.*”

“Did Shultz know of the gold?”

“I do not know. I hear nothing said of it, but now I think she knows even then, because later on she is not surprised when Hauptmann Rumeys talks about the gold.”

“I see. Please continue.”

“The next night when it is dark—for the guns come always nearer—we take off and fly to this place. There is no trouble. Hauptmann Rumeys was a good pilot. We landed on this lake. He is happy and says now we will all be rich. We come to the shore—not here, but at the other end—for he has been here before and knows the place. At that time the lake is very high because of the melting winter snow. Hauptmann Rumeys drives the plane hard into the shore, so that when the lake is small we are on dry ground. He says we shall not want the plane again as he has arranged for an easier way home. So the wings are cut off so that the plane shall not be seen should anyone else come to the place. We fill them with stones and sink them in the lake. We are to live in the cabin. There is plenty of room, with a stove for cooking, and beds, and radio—all most comfortable.”

“How did Rumeys intend to get home?” interrupted Worrals.

“I do not know this,” answered the sick man. “He tells no one when he finds that Wolfe is with us.”

“But I thought it was decided that he should not come?” put in Worrals.

“So. I will tell you of this presently. When we land, Hauptmann Rumeys is very happy. He says we shall stay the winter so that people will forget about us. Then we go home rich, for at this place there is much gold. Then from the plane steps Doctor Wolfe. He is—how do you say?—a stowaway. Hauptmann Rumeys is very angry. To Shultz he says, ‘You have done this.’ Shultz laughs. She says it is better to have a doctor. I look at Hauptmann Rumeys’s face and I know that this will be trouble. But Wolfe must stay. I think, when we go from this place one of these men will be dead. I hope it is Wolfe. Perhaps it will be me. Shultz has no love for me because I am always faithful to my officer. So we stay.

“At first Hauptmann Rumeys is so angry that he will not say where the gold is in the ground. But Shultz, that scheming animal, puts her arms round his neck, and then he will tell her anything. It is strange that a man who is so strong in a *Jagdstaffel* can be as wax in the hands of such a woman. But so it was. He shows her the gold.”

“Had this gold been dug already, or was it in the ground?” asked Worrals.

“It was in the ground, in the sandy bed of an old river. At one end there is a small waterfall that comes from far up in the mountain. It brings down the gold. The gold is heavy and sinks to the bottom of the sand. For a million years perhaps the gold is falling grain by grain into the sand. Certainly there was much gold, for I have seen it.”

“Where is this place?” inquired Worrals.

“It is about five kilometres from the far end of the lake, a little to this side, far up in a great split in the mountain.”

“I see,” murmured Worrals.

“When Hauptmann Rumej shows Shultz the place I can see by the smile on her face that she makes a fool of him. But he does not know. He is happy again. But I cannot sleep for worry because I know what will happen one day. There is nothing I can do. Not a word will Hauptmann Rumej have said against this creature. Once I try to speak, and for the first time he raised his arm to strike me, for after all I am only an *unteroffizier*. I am to obey orders. So we start to dig out the gold—much gold. I do not like to see Shultz’s face when she looks at it. There is something in her eyes like a snake that waits.”

“Where is all this gold now?” put in Worrals.

“It is stored in a small cave by the Box—that is what we call the hull of the Kondor where we live. You cannot see the Box because all around are piled many rocks so that it shall not be seen, and for protection from the wind in winter. The arrangement for work is, Shultz and Rumej and Wolfe go every day to dig gold. I stay to work at the Box, to cook the meals and listen to the radio. One day Shultz has gone to shoot ducks which come to the lake in summer. She comes back very excited and says there are two men in a tent by the lake. What shall be done? That night there is a talk to decide what shall be done with these men. Shultz says we shall shoot them quickly before they find the Box or the gold, but to this Hauptmann Rumej will not agree. There is more temper and angry words in which, I think, Shultz will now kill Hauptmann Rumej. But by this time, you must know, Hauptmann Rumej does not speak much. He is sick in the heart. Shultz and Wolfe are always together, and he is jealous, as he has every reason to be, for it was Rumej who found the gold and it was he who brought Shultz here so that when they were rich they could be married. But he has still one trump in his hand, as you say. Only he knows how we shall all get home now that the Kondor is broken. I think he would have told everyone how this was to be done when we first come here, but when he sees Wolfe he is so angry that he will say nothing about the arrangements he has made. So

they dare not kill him because if they do it may be they will have to stay in this dreary place all their lives. But I was speaking about the two new men.”

“Captain Larwood and Mr. Hedin,” interposed Worrals.

“So. Wolfe says he has a better scheme than shooting. We can use these men. He will go to them and say, let us be friends and work together, for there is plenty of gold for all. In this way they shall work for us, says Wolfe. It will double the output of gold—which, you must understand, has to be panned out of the sand. Of course, I am not deceived by this. I know that Shultz and Wolfe will never let these men go. When the time comes they will be murdered. Hauptmann Rumeys, whose brain is too honest to think of such things, agrees to the plan. So it is done. Larwood and Hedin join us, bringing their tent and all their food with them. They laugh with joy when they see the gold. They do not know that it is to cost them their lives.”

“Didn’t Hedin recognize Hauptmann Rumeys?” inquired Worrals. “He had seen him before.”

“I think not. Sometimes I hear him say that Rumeys reminds him of a man he met somewhere, some time, but he cannot remember where.”

“Had Rumeys a beard at the time of his death?”

“No. Always he shaves.”

“Ah! That would account for it. The only time Hedin saw Hauptmann Rumeys he had a beard. And that was some time ago, before the war. But Rumeys must have recognized Hedin.”

“I do not know. He does not say so.”

“No, perhaps he wouldn’t. But go on.”

“All goes well for a time,” continued Lowenhardt. “Then one day Larwood says that a plane is coming to take them home. This is a shock for Shultz and Wolfe. ‘Why did you not tell us this before?’ asks Wolfe. ‘I thought you must understand this,’ says Larwood. ‘How else do you think we could get home?’ Says Wolfe: ‘What day is this plane to come?’ Larwood answers: ‘September the fifteenth.’”

“Yes, how did Wolfe get over that?” asked Worrals, intensely interested.

Lowenhardt shook his head sadly. “Shultz and Wolfe have a plot ready for everything. In this matter it was the most simple. Hauptmann Rumeys is not told of it. Nor am I told. For my part I think Larwood will be shot. But no. The night before the plane is due to come, Larwood and Hedin packed their things. They are happy. Rumeys helps them. Before they go to bed Wolfe makes coffee. Into the cups of Larwood and Hedin he puts something. I do not know what. In the morning they do not wake up. They lie still, like

death. Rumey says, what is the matter with these men? Wolfe says he does not know, but I see him glance at Shultz and then I understand. They are poisoned. But no, they are only drugged. Wolfe is clever. They stay unconscious for three days. We all remain at home. The plane comes. It goes. Larwood and Hedin wake up. They do not know they have been asleep for three days. They think it is the day for the plane to come. They go to the place where the pilot will see them. They do not know he has come and gone. No one tells them. They wait and wait, and at night they come back, very sad. They think the plane must have crashed. Perhaps no one will know where to find them? Wolfe says: 'What does it matter? Stay with us; one day we will all go home together.' Larwood and Hedin agree. There is nothing else they can do. They are grateful to Wolfe for being so kind."

"What a vile plot!" muttered Worrals.

Lowenhardt bowed his head. "So. I hate this. Hauptmann Rumey hates it. But what can we do?"

"Why didn't one of you go and meet the pilot?"

Lowenhardt shrugged. "I speak of this to Hauptmann Rumey, and at one time I think he will go, although Wolfe and Shultz are watching all the time. But Rumey sees that it will mean the end of everything. The pilot will fetch the police. We shall lose all the gold and go to prison. Shultz will be sent back to Germany. Can a man betray the woman he loves, even if she is a creature like Shultz? The position for Hauptmann Rumey was terrible. So he thinks and thinks, sitting with his head in his hands, and in the end he does nothing. After the plane has gone it is no use to say anything, for nothing can be done. If we tell Larwood and Hedin there will be war between us. Blood will be shed. It is better for the time being that they should not know. The day will come, says Rumey, when we can tell them, and take them with us. So we all go on working. There is no more talk of a plane. We will get all the gold we can."

"And you still did not know how Rumey intended to get out?" questioned Worrals.

"No. Sometimes Shultz or Wolfe asks him, pretending to be friends, but Rumey will not tell because he does not trust them any longer. And so things stay like this until the winter comes. We all live in the Box. It is hell. Days pass and no one speaks. Only Larwood and Hedin play dominoes all the time, not knowing what I know, that every day brings them nearer to death. I think I will save them if I can, but I do not know how. Nothing can be done now. It is always night. The snow is deep. The silence is terrible. Sometimes, not often, Rumey speaks with me. He is ill with worry. Shultz

and Wolfe whisper together and that makes him mad. Nerves begin to break. Any day now the explosion will come, I think. I do not mind, for I too am going mad in this war of nerves. Sometimes I listen to the radio. One day I hear that Irma Greese is hung for her crimes at Belsen Murder Camp. I tell Shultz. Shultz laughs. Serves the fool right, she says. But after that I am not allowed to listen any more. Larwood and Hedin do not know what the trouble is about. No one tells them. Yet somehow we live through this nightmare winter. The sun comes again. The snow melts, and we get ready to dig more gold. Larwood and Hedin say they will wait for a time to see if a plane comes. If not, they will walk home, living on game which they will shoot with their guns. This is how things were when the end came, about six weeks ago.

“Some ducks came to the lake, far down on the other side. We needed fresh meat, so Larwood and Hedin said they would go and shoot some. They go. After they have gone, Shultz and Wolfe say they will go to the gold diggings. Rumey says he is not well so he will rest. I stay to do the cooking. But now Shultz and Wolfe have gone I see Rumey is uneasy. He does not like them being alone. He cannot rest. He says he will go and help them. I beg him not to go, for there is a smell of tragedy in the air. This makes him all the more determined to go. He goes. I have no interest in my work so I follow at a distance. Something tells me this is the end. I am close behind some rocks when it happens.” Here the sick man almost broke down with emotion.

“When we get to the gold creek Shultz and Wolfe are sitting with their arms round each other. Hauptmann Rumey is like a man who loses his senses. He runs forward. They see him and jump up. In a loud voice he calls them cheats and liars. Now he knows the truth. To Shultz he cries: ‘What is this man to you?’ Shultz answers. Her eyes are those of a snake. ‘He is my husband,’ she says. And then she laughs—terrible to hear. For Hauptmann Rumey this is a blow on the head. His face is a colour like paper. For a minute he cannot speak. Wolfe, he laughs too, and says: ‘You may as well know the truth. We were married before we came here.’ ‘Then,’ says Rumey in a dreadful voice, ‘you can stay here together. I shall see that Hanstadt does not take you home.’ At first I think he does not know what he is saying, for this is the first time that that name has been mentioned. But now Shultz understands. ‘It is Hanstadt who is coming here for us,’ she cries. Rumey, who is too mad with anger to see what he is doing, answers ‘Yes.’ Shultz bursts out laughing. She shouts: ‘So Fritz Hanstadt is coming. Why, you poor fool, he has been in love with me for years. He will do anything I say. It will be you who shall stay here.’ Rumey can only stare like a man who

realizes suddenly that he has said too much. But what he has said, he has said." Lowenhardt looked up at Worrals wistfully.

"When I hear this my heart stops beating," he went on in a voice hoarse with emotion. "Hauptmann Rumej, in his fury, has thrown away his trump card. Hanstadt is coming to take us home, although I do not know how. Now Shultz and Wolfe know this there is no need for Rumej to live any longer. She draws her pistol and shoots, and as she shoots she laughs. Hauptmann Rumej staggers. His hands are to his stomach. He falls. She laughs and shoots again, and again, but the bullets miss, for I see them hit the rocks. What can I do? I have no pistol. Like a fool I am standing in the open. Shultz looks up and sees me. 'You too,' she shouts, and shoots at me, for the madness of killing is upon her. The bullet misses me, but I fall, pretending to be hit, for I see that this is my only chance. I lie still, like a dead man. But Wolfe, too, now has the madness of killing. He fires three shots at me. A bullet hits me in the leg. I do not move. Then they talk. Presently they go to Hauptmann Rumej and drag him by the legs to a small pond nearby. They throw him in. Then they come for me. To move is death. They drag me to the pond and I am thrown in. Then, laughing, they walk away. As soon as they are out of sight I drag Hauptmann Rumej out of the water. He is conscious. The icy cold perhaps brings him round. I help him to a hole in the rocks. But what can we do? If I go to the Box they will shoot me again. With a pistol I would have gone to the Box to shoot Shultz, but I have no pistol with me. I have nothing. It is the end." The sick man's voice trailed away to silence.

After a short interval he went on. "After it is dark I get Hauptmann Rumej as far away as I can from that accursed place, in case they come back and find the bodies are not there. I do not know how far we go. It is dark. I do not know where we are. I remember no more of that night, but in the morning Hauptmann Rumej is still alive. There is sunshine to dry our wet clothes, but I see death in his eyes. I crawl about for food, but all I can find is the den of a fox where there is the carrion of dead birds. I take some to Hauptmann Rumej, but it is no use. In the afternoon he dies. I sit with him for a long time, then I bury him under stones so that bears shall not eat his body. When it is dark I crawl to the Box and hear Shultz, always with a lie ready, telling Larwood and Hedin that we were buried under a great landslide of rocks that fell suddenly. They tried to save us at the risk of their lives, but more rock was falling and they had to run. Larwood and Hedin believed this. After all, why not? How could they know that anyone would tell such a lie? At first I think I will go in and tell the truth, but then I see that is no use. Shultz would shoot me on sight. Then she and Wolfe would

kill Larwood and Hedin before they could get to their weapons. If I go in I shall be responsible for their deaths. It is better that Shultz shall think I am dead. One day I will have my revenge. For this, I tell myself, I will live. So I crawl away to this end of the lake, hoping that one day Larwood and Hedin will come to shoot ducks. Then I will tell the truth. But they do not come. Shultz is now cook. She hunts the ducks. The men go on digging gold. This I know because one day I saw them from a distance.”

“Captain Larwood at least is still alive for I saw him to-day,” put in Worrals.

“Perhaps the time has not come to kill him,” answered Lowenhardt bitterly.

“Finish your story,” said Worrals. “Take your time,” she added.

“I have no food,” concluded Lowenhardt. “All I have is what the bears and foxes leave, and sometimes there is none. At last I can only crawl very slowly and I know there is no hope for me. Then a miracle happens. When I am lying in a hole in the rocks I see a plane come. I think, here is Hanstadt, come to fetch Rumeys home. Now he shall know the truth. I start to crawl but now I can only move very slowly. I see the plane land. It is not Hanstadt. It is you. I keep on crawling. Sometimes I think I faint. When I get here you have gone. But I think there must be food. Food I must have if I am to live for my revenge. I am looking for food when I hear someone coming. I look, and see you coming back. I am afraid you are friends of Shultz, so I hide. That is all.”

Lowenhardt ended abruptly, and sank back as if exhausted by the effort of saying so much.

At the end of this tragic recital there was a long silence. Worrals stared moodily at the floor, busy with her thoughts and keeping them to herself. Frecks gazed through the open flap of the tent at a sky across which wheeled, like the sails of a gigantic windmill, the unearthly beams of the Northern Lights.

At last Worrals got up and beckoned to Frecks to follow her outside.

“I suppose what we have just heard was the truth?” said Frecks miserably, as if the story had depressed her—as indeed it had.

“Every word of it,” answered Worrals briefly. “No man could have made up such a ghastly tale of betrayal on the spur of the moment. I never heard a narrative more convincing. The part played by every member of the party was in complete accord with their characters, as we know them.”

“This is going to alter all our ideas.”

“Definitely.”

“I never thought the day would come when I would feel sorry for a Nazi, but I could weep for the wretched Rumeys,” said Frecks. “If ever a man had a dirty deal from a woman, he certainly did.”

“Save your tears for the living,” advised Worrals grimly. “This game is only half played-out. I wouldn’t like to think what Shultz would do to *us*, if we fell into her claws.”

“What are we going to do?”

“That’s something we shall have to think about,” averred Worrals. “One thing is certain, we’ve got to act pretty smartly. It only needs Hanstadt to arrive on the scene to put the monkey-wrench into the gears. Fritz Hanstadt, you remember, was Rumeys’s partner on their first trip here. It was natural, I suppose, that they should arrange to come again when the war was over. But we’ll talk the whole thing over to-morrow. The point is, what are we going to do with Lowenhardt?”

“How about the machine?”

“That’s what I was thinking. We could make him a bed on the floor of the cabin. He would be more comfortable there. He should soon be able to move about. He’s young, and if the wound doesn’t go wrong it should soon heal. He can amuse himself and at the same time do a useful job listening to the radio for signals. He might hear something. There is this about it. He’ll be a useful witness when Shultz is brought to book. But let’s go and get things organized.”

CHAPTER SEVEN

Awkward Situations

THE following morning dawned fair again, much to Worrals's relief, for although the matter had not been discussed it was plain that a storm, or a spell of bad weather, would not only make life extremely uncomfortable, but introduce complications. In the event of a high wind the Ranger would have to be moved, or risk damage against the rocks by which it was moored. Not only was the machine their only link with the outside world, but it now provided accommodation for the wounded German.

After a quick breakfast in the chilly atmosphere of early morning, Worrals and Frecks discussed the situation as it now appeared in the light of Lowenhardt's revelations. The wounded man, to whom Worrals had taken a substantial meal, seemed much improved, and this, at least, as Frecks remarked, was a blessing. He would be content to rest where he was and listen to the radio.

Frecks opened the discussion with the remark: "I've been thinking things over. This show is turning out to be bigger than we expected. I'm not sure that we shouldn't slip down to Fort MacWilliam and let the Air Commodore know how things stand. It wouldn't take long to get a signal through. He might arrange for reinforcements to be sent up."

"On the face of it that is the obvious thing to do," agreed Worrals. "Unfortunately, there's a snag—two or three snags in fact. In the first place our take-off would probably upset the apple-cart straight away. We glided in without engines. We can't glide out. We should have to open up to full revs to get the Ranger to unstick from this flat surface. The noise would echo round these mountains like a roll of thunder. Even if we weren't seen we should be heard, in which case, if Shultz and Wolfe didn't bolt right away, they would bury their gold and be on their guard. Then there's the time factor. Can we afford to lose two days when Larwood and Hedin might be murdered at any moment? I don't think so. We must save them if we can. Then, what about Hanstadt? He might arrive any time now. What effect is his arrival going to have? I may be wrong, but I should say that his arrival will be the signal for Shultz and Wolfe to liquidate Larwood and Hedin.

They will have served their purpose and there would be no point in keeping them. I don't think Shultz and Wolfe will ever allow Larwood and Hedin to meet Hanstadt. They might have something to say about Rumeys death. Rumeys was Hanstadt's friend, remember. Hanstadt, according to Shultz, is crazy about her; but, even so, from what I've seen of life, men stick pretty close together. If Hanstadt ever discovered the truth about Rumeys he'd never forgive Shultz. However that may be I don't think we can afford the time to go to Fort MacWilliam. We ought to be able to handle things."

Frecks shook her head. "It all seems to be getting a bit complicated."

"Let's run over the salient facts and see how they line up," suggested Worrals. "First, Shultz and Wolfe believe Lowenhardt to be dead, so they won't expect trouble from that quarter. Second, we know Larwood is still alive, so we may assume that Hedin is alive, too. But although they don't know it, both of them are in deadly danger. Next, Hanstadt—the unknown quantity. Where is he now? How is he coming? When? From what Rumeys said on the day he was killed I have a suspicion that his arrival will not be long delayed. He knows his way up the river because he's done the trip before. He may come that way again—or he may fly. That's what I'm afraid of. He might arrive in the middle of things at any moment. Is he coming alone or is he bringing someone with him? We have no idea, and with nothing to go on no amount of guessing will help us. Finally, there's Lowenhardt. He isn't much use as he is, but he might be a useful ally if he were fit. He's burning for revenge and we could rely on him, I think, to stand by us in a show-down. Those are the angles.

"Now let us consider the position at the Box, as he calls it. If the situation remains as it has been for some time, the business of getting hold of Shultz seems relatively easy. Let us not forget that we came here to get *her*. Never mind the others. If we could find her alone we might clap the bracelets on her and get her down to Fort MacWilliam before she realizes what is happening. It might even be done to-day. Alternatively, if we could get Larwood and Hedin alone I'd take them into my confidence. With them on our side we ought to be able to collar both Shultz and Wolfe. The difficulty might be to get them alone. According to Lowenhardt they go to the diggings with Wolfe, leaving Shultz alone at the Box. Our best chance, therefore, is to go to the Box and try to grab Shultz. We can but try it. If it comes off—O.K. If it fails we shall have to think of something else, always bearing in mind that every day increases the chances of our being discovered. If they once find out that a plane is here the whole thing will take on an entirely different aspect, for which reason I feel inclined to have a

crack at getting Shultz straight away. If we can get her the Mounties could come up and deal with the three men. How do you feel about it?"

Frecks shrugged. "O.K. with me. I must confess, though, that I'm a bit scared of this Shultz creature. It's more like trying to capture an evil genius, an ogre, than a human being."

"Don't worry. She'll stop a bullet like anyone else."

"All right, what's the plan?"

"We'll simply go along in the hope of finding Shultz alone. After all, at the worst we shall only have Shultz and Wolfe to contend with. The other two wouldn't stand for any monkey business."

"That may be so," agreed Frecks, "but the chances are that Shultz and Wolfe would be first out with their guns. They think so little of murder that it would make no difference to them whether they had to kill two people or four. We don't want to put Larwood and Hedin on the spot by getting them involved at an awkward moment."

"They're on the spot now."

"True enough," admitted Frecks. "I'm not trying to pick holes in the plan. I was only trying to get the thing in perspective. Let's go."

Worrals got up. "All right. I'll take Lowenhardt some food for the day and tell him what's in the wind. He can keep an ear to the radio, and an eye to the air, in case Hanstadt should come that way."

In ten minutes they were on the move, equipped as before, with Worrals carrying the rifle. Profiting by the previous day's experience they made much better time, and eleven o'clock saw them passing the coppice into which the bear had retired. They kept well clear and saw no sign of the animal. Proceeding now with extreme caution, they went on, and from a safe distance had the satisfaction of seeing three men, whom they knew could only be Wolfe, Larwood, and Hedin, disappear into the sheer face of the mountain. When they came to the place, however, they observed that it was the entrance to a narrow gorge. A sharp bend just inside curtailed the view and made it difficult to detect—which, as Worrals pointed out, was no doubt why they had failed to notice it on the previous day, when they had passed within a quarter of a mile of it. This, however, was a minor matter. The important factor was, as they had hoped, that Shultz was alone at the Box. Everything was going fine, observed Frecks.

Without incident they came to within sight of the long pile of stones that concealed the dismantled aircraft. From a distance it looked like a landslide, or the moraine of a dead glacier, which it may have been intended to represent. One or two dead birches had even been arranged to augment the

deception. The aerial wire was the only sign of human interference with nature, and this could not be seen with the naked eye.

From a distance of perhaps three hundred yards Worrals made a quick but thorough inspection, without observing, however, anything that she had not already seen. There was no indication that Shultz was there. Once Worrals thought she caught the faint strains of music as if the radio were on, turned low. What interested her most was the nature of the terrain between the chaos of boulders among which they lay, and the objective. The rocks continued for a short distance on a diminishing scale, but eventually gave way to a flat, open area of shale, with no cover of any sort until the rocks surrounding the Box were reached. True, there was a face of cliff somewhat to the left of the direct line of approach, but while this offered occasional shallow cavities there was nothing of sufficient depth to provide adequate protection.

Worrals closed the glasses abruptly and put them in their case as if she had reached a decision. "It's no use messing about," she asserted. "To get to the Box we've got to cross that open area, and crawling won't help us. If Shultz comes out and happens to look this way when we're half-way across, she'll see us. She couldn't help seeing us. Our best chance therefore is to cross quickly without wasting time looking for cover that doesn't exist. We'll halt when we get to the rocks on the far side."

"O.K.," agreed Frecks, in a resigned voice. "Anything you say."

"Got your gun handy?"

"Sure."

"All right, let's go."

Worrals had half risen when from among the rocks piled up round the objective stepped a woman. She wore no hat, so her golden hair could be clearly seen. Breeches and riding boots encased her legs. Into the breeches was tucked a woollen shirt blouse of some dark material. Under her right arm she carried a gun.

Frecks, too, had started to move, but like Worrals she slid back and lay still. Their eyes met. Frecks's lips formed the word "Shultz".

Worrals nodded. "Had we started a moment earlier she'd have spotted us."

"Did she see us?"

"No."

"What's she doing?"



[Page 93](#)

Frecks's lips formed the word "Shultz".

"From the fact that she's carrying a gun I'd say she's going out after duck, or something." Without exposing herself Worrals risked a peep between two boulders. "That's it," she went on. "She's going out. What a nuisance! We missed the boat by about five minutes."

"Which way's she going?"

"Along the edge of the lake."

"Which side?"

"This side."

“Then we can still get her,” urged Frecks. “The farther she gets from the Box the better.”

“Take it easy,” muttered Worrals anxiously. “I’d rather face any weapon than a shotgun. No matter. We’ll wait till she gets out of sight round that first bend and then go after her. We may get a chance to ambush her as she comes back.”

Lying motionless well down among the boulders, Frecks watched the object of their quest stroll on along the edge of the lake, with her gun at the ready as if hoping to get a shot. And so she went on until she reached the bend to which Worrals had referred. Actually, it was not so much a bend as a shoulder of rising ground that cut off the view for some little distance.

As soon as Shultz had disappeared from sight Worrals rose to her feet. “O.K.,” she said tersely. “Let’s go after her. She may not go far, in which case we’ll get her at the bend as she comes back. There’s plenty of cover there.”

Frecks had also started to move, but to her astonishment and no small alarm, as she finished speaking Worrals caught her roughly by the arm and pulled her down again, dragged her down until they were both lying flat. And a glance at Worrals’s face did nothing to allay her apprehensions. Before she could speak, to demand an explanation, with an urgent grimace Worrals laid a finger on her lips. “S-sh,” she breathed. “It’s Wolfe . . . coming this way. Don’t move.”

Frecks needed no second warning. She lay still. And when, a minute later, she heard heavy footsteps approaching, she almost ceased to breathe. Nearer and nearer came the firm tread, until it sounded within half-a-dozen paces of them. She could see nothing, but she dare not move. When the footsteps halted abruptly she braced herself for the shock of discovery, for she was quite convinced that they had been seen. Instead of which a harsh voice called: “Anna!” There was no answer. The footsteps continued, and to Frecks’s unspeakable relief, began to recede. They went on, growing fainter. Then the same voice, from some distance away, again called: “Anna!”

Worrals whispered: “He’s gone to the Box. I think he must have had an accident. His left hand is tied up in a handkerchief. There are bloodstains on it.”

“Trust everything to go gaga the moment we make a move,” muttered Frecks bitterly. “This knocks our plan on the head.”

“It all depends on what Wolfe does next,” returned Worrals. “If he stays in the Box, all right; but I don’t think he will. I fancy he was shouting for

Shultz to bandage his hand. When he finds that she's not there he'll either do it himself or go out to look for her."

"Where's Shultz—can you see her?"

Worrals risked a peep. "Just."

"What's she doing?"

"Still walking down the lake."

"How far away?"

"A long way—above a mile, I'd say."

"And is she still walking away from us?"

"Yes."

Frecks drew a deep breath. "That's dandy," she observed with biting sarcasm. "The next thing will be, she'll be in *our* camp. We'd better go after her."

"If we move, and Wolfe comes out of the Box, we've had it," declared Worrals. "Just a minute—let me think."

CHAPTER EIGHT

*Worse
and Worse*

THEY waited for some time, making the most of the opportunity to eat the sandwiches they had brought with them. Wolfe did not reappear, but a belt of cloud crept up over the western horizon, and when some distant hills appeared to dissolve in it Worrals remarked: "There's a change on the way; I'm afraid that's rain coming—rain or snow."

Frecks was not particularly interested in the weather. "What do you suppose Wolfe's up to?"

"If he's hurt his hand he may be dressing it; or he may simply be waiting for Shultz to come home."

Frecks gazed down the lake. Shultz had disappeared from sight some time ago, having apparently gone down to an area of lower ground.

"I don't think we had better waste any more time," decided Worrals at last. "It's likely to be dark, as it is, before we get back to camp. I think our best plan now is to try to make contact with Larwood and Hedin while they're alone. If we can explain things to them and get them on our side we should have no difficulty between us of putting Shultz and Wolfe in the bag. We may not get a better chance."

"Suits me," agreed Frecks briefly.

Without further debate they set off, keeping close to the foothills, or sometimes the mountains themselves, choosing a course where cover was available should it be needed. The drab background provided by the hills was in itself sufficient to reduce their chances of being seen. Frequent cavities and fissures in the bed-rock offered ready hiding-places should one be needed. Worrals eyed the approaching storm-cloud with disfavour, but did not remark on what must have been as obvious to Frecks as to herself. It looked as if they were going to get wet.

They were still about half a mile from where they supposed the entrance of the gorge to be when Shultz suddenly appeared, rising, as it seemed, out of the very ground. She was about mid-way between the lake and the foothills, walking slowly on a diagonal line towards the gorge. Worrals

pulled up short, of course, and sidled behind the nearest buttress of rock. Frecks did the same.

It needed no effort of the imagination to perceive what had happened. There was an unsuspected fold in what appeared to be level ground, a long shallow hollow, running from the lake to the hills. Shultz, walking along the edge of the lake, had reached it, and had either decided to go no farther or had turned into the low ground hoping to find duck feeding there. Having gone so far she had decided to walk on to the gorge and join the men—at least, that was the opinion formed by Worrals as, standing motionless against the rock, she watched with interest to see what the woman would do next.

“I wish she would make up her mind where she’s going,” muttered Frecks petulantly.

“It looks as if she’s on her way to the gorge,” returned Worrals. “She doesn’t know Wolfe has gone home. There is this about it; from the casual way she’s walking she has no suspicion that she’s being watched.”

“If she goes into the gorge it knocks our plan on the head again.”

“I’m afraid it does.”

“Couldn’t we grab her now?”

Worrals hesitated. “She’d see us coming long before we got to her, and, as I said before, I don’t like the look of that twelve-bore. From the way she handles it she seems to know how to use it.”

“Our rifle has a longer range.”

“True enough, but even knowing what she is we can’t shoot her without warning. That sort of thing would put us on her level. I shall only resort to *force majeure* when all other methods have failed. Besides, shooting would bring Wolfe along, in which case we might well find ourselves engaged in a pitched battle which would almost certainly end with casualties on both sides. It may come to that in a show-down, but we haven’t arrived at that situation yet. If Shultz goes into the gorge we’ll push along quickly and try to come on her from behind or face to face as she comes out.”

Shultz was still walking slowly forward, but suddenly she stopped, and to Frecks’s consternation—for she could only think that they had been seen—waved a hand. This gave Worrals a shock, too, though it did not take her long to guess the truth. Looking back in the direction from which they had come she saw Wolfe striding along briskly towards them. It was a nasty moment, for they had been caught between two fires, so to speak. Worrals slid down the rock against which she had been leaning until she was lying flat on the ground. Frecks huddled beside her, feeling far from happy,

although their position was not a bad one provided neither Wolfe nor Shultz actually walked on them. There were plenty of loose boulders about to limit the distance from which they might be seen.

Peering between two of them, Frecks saw Shultz change course slightly to meet Wolfe, who was still coming along. Fortunately, although naturally perhaps, Wolfe took the shortest course to his companion, and so passed at a distance of about forty yards from the place where the girls lay, hardly daring to breathe.

Shultz, as if surprised to see her partner—a circumstance which Worrals could well understand—called out before they actually met. She spoke in German, of course, which was as well understood by Worrals as her own tongue.

“Where have you come from?” she called curiously.

“From the Box,” answered Wolfe.

Still walking towards each other, Shultz went on: “I thought you were going to work?”

“I was, but I came back.”

“Why?”

“I hurt my hand.”

“Why don’t you look what you’re doing?” snapped Shultz. “How did you do it?”

“I was climbing over some rocks when two of them fell and crushed my fingers between them. I came back to get you to bandage them, but you were out. I’ve done it myself now.”

“I went out hoping to get something for the pot, but turned back when I saw the weather,” said Shultz, indicating the rain cloud. “What are the others doing?”

By this time, being closer to each other, they spoke in lower tones, so that Worrals had to listen intently to catch what was said.

“They’re still working,” said Wolfe. “Don’t worry, they’re quite happy. All they see is gold—the fools.”

“One day they’ll come to their senses and start asking questions,” said Shultz curtly. “It’s time we got rid of them. I told you that a month ago.”

“All right. Don’t keep on about it,” growled Wolfe, who seemed not in the best of tempers. “I want to see or hear something of Hanstadt before we attend to them. Suppose he doesn’t come?”

“Oh—he’ll come.”

“Rumey might have been bluffing.”

“Not he.”

“Then why hasn’t Hanstadt come? What is he waiting for? I still think he may not come. The English might be holding him. The thought worries me. Hedin is the only man who knows this country. He’s the only man of us who can build a canoe. We may have to use him yet. We should be mad to kill the only man who can get us home if Hanstadt doesn’t turn up. I’ve had enough of this accursed place. We haven’t enough food for another winter, anyway. If Hanstadt doesn’t show up very soon then I shall start walking south, while there is still time to get out.”

“The trouble with you is that you’re losing your nerve,” observed Shultz cynically. “I’m in favour of putting these two fools out of the way while we have the chance. Hanstadt will come. What if he should meet Larwood and Hedin before we see him? They may tell him a different story, and . . .”

This was as much as Worrals heard, for the plotters turned away and, still talking, walked on in the direction of the gorge.

“You heard that?” breathed Frecks.

“Yes.”

“I don’t like it.”

“Nor I.”

“The lives of Larwood and Hedin are hanging by a hair. Shultz wants to kill them now.”

“That’s obvious. Wolfe is scared of getting stuck here. He would rather wait for Hanstadt to come before he does anything.”

“That may be so, but Shultz usually gets her own way,” argued Frecks. “If she doesn’t talk Wolfe into killing them she’s quite likely to do it herself—and she could do it, with two shots at close range from that gun.”

Worrals shrugged. “You needn’t tell me.”

“We shall have to do something about it,” asserted Frecks. “Meanwhile, our plan has come unstuck again. We’re getting nowhere. It’s going to rain presently. The time is getting on, too. I take a dim view of groping my way back to camp in the dark with bears and things about.”

“All right, all right. You’ll have me bursting into a flood of tears if you go on like that,” protested Worrals. “It isn’t our fault that Shultz and Wolfe have suddenly taken it into their heads to behave abnormally, so that as fast as we make plans, by sheer luck they knock them over. Frankly, I don’t see that there’s much we can do at the moment. Shultz and Wolfe have obviously gone in to join the two men at the gold diggings. Presently they’ll all come home together. There is this about it: if we’ve done no good we’ve

done no harm. Our scheme was worth trying. It just didn't work out, that's all. We may have better luck next time. Let's get along home and try again to-morrow."

"That's O.K. with me," agreed Frecks.

"We'd better give Shultz and Wolfe plenty of time to get well inside the gorge before we try to pass," concluded Worrals.

Nothing could have sounded more simple or more reasonable, but once again the plan went wrong. Worrals waited for about a quarter of an hour, which was a good ten minutes after Shultz and Wolfe had disappeared from sight in the gorge. Getting up, they started off, but before they had gone a hundred yards they were startled, almost thrown into confusion, in fact, by two distant gun shots in such quick succession that they sounded almost like one.

Worrals stopped, rigid. Her eyes roved the landscape. "Where did you make out those shots to be?" she asked tersely.

"I don't know, but I'd say it was Shultz and Wolfe committing murder," answered Frecks, in a voice calm with finality.

"I should have said the shots were too far away for that."

"The rocks would tend to muffle the reports."

"Maybe."

"Could it be Lowenhardt shooting at something?" suggested Frecks.

"Surely not. He wouldn't be such a fool as to do a thing like that."

"If it wasn't Shultz or Wolfe then it must have been Lowenhardt," argued Frecks simply. "There's no one else here. In view of what Shultz and Wolfe were talking about when they went to the gorge, I'd say Larwood and Hedin have had it," she went on gloomily. Then she started violently. "Look out—here they come."

Worrals did not wait to look but dived for cover. Frecks flattened herself beside her.

"Who's coming?" demanded Worrals.

"Shultz and Wolfe. They came walking out of the gorge as if they were in a hurry to get home."

"I don't get it," muttered Worrals helplessly.

"I do," stated Frecks grimly. "These two have killed Larwood and Hedin and are now making for home before it starts to rain."

Footsteps clattering over loose stones at no great distance closed the conversation for the time being. The footsteps approached, sounded dangerously close for a little while, then began to recede.

Worrals risked a peep. “Good! They’ve gone past,” she breathed. “They’re going on to the Box.”

“Couldn’t we have nailed them as they went past?” queried Frecks. “I’m getting sick of this fox-hole business.”

“We might have tried it if we were prepared to fight it out with an excellent chance of getting bumped off ourselves,” answered Worrals. “I’m not going to start the shooting until I’m satisfied that there isn’t an easier way. This is no place to stop a bullet. Confound it! Here comes the rain,” she concluded, as the first squall swept across the landscape, reducing visibility to about twenty yards.

“Let’s go home,” suggested Frecks practically.

“Just a minute,” requested Worrals. “The luck must turn. This may be our chance.”

“Chance for what?”

“Whether they’re alive or dead, Larwood and Hedin are now in the gorge alone,” declared Worrals. “I’m going in to find out what’s happened to them. If they’re dead—well, that settles that. If they’re alive we’ll ask them to join us, and we’ll all rush the Box together. There’s just a chance, though, that Shultz and Wolfe have only gone home for something, and may come back this way. I don’t think they will, but they’ve done so much dodging about to-day that I’m losing my nerve. We daren’t risk being trapped in the gorge. You stay here and watch the direction of the Box. If you see them coming back dash along and warn me.”

“I shan’t see much in this rain,” Frecks pointed out.

“It’s only a squall. It’ll soon pass.”

“All right,” agreed Frecks. “Don’t be too long. I’m getting bored with this hide-and-seek game.”

“Twenty minutes at the outside should do it,” opined Worrals. “Keep under cover. Would you like me to leave the rifle with you?”

“No, thanks. I’m not likely to need it. If Shultz or Wolfe reappear I shall join you in the gorge.”

“Good enough,” agreed Worrals, and with the rifle under her arm she strode away in the direction of her objective.

It did not take her long to reach it, and having turned into it, she proceeded with all possible speed, for she felt that she had nothing to fear from the men she was hoping to find. She thought there was a chance that she might meet them coming out—that is, assuming that they were still

alive. She did not share Frecks's gloomy views, even though there was some ground for them.

If, she thought, as she trudged along, if there was a place specially designed for the blackest of crimes, this was it. The gorge seemed to plunge into the very bowels of the earth, presenting an aspect so forbidding and so menacing that, while she was not exactly nervous, she was by no means easy in her mind. Never had she seen anything quite so grim. Never had she been so conscious of human insignificance when confronted by nature in the raw.

The gorge turned out to be in fact nothing more than a narrow fissure, a cleft in the earth's crust. It was as if in some mighty convulsion in a remote age the mountain itself had split, or had been struck a blow with a Titanic axe. On both sides, never more than thirty yards apart, as she advanced the beetling cliffs rose higher and ever higher until they seemed to reach to heaven itself. All that could be seen of the sky was a grey, irregular strip, far overhead; it followed the windings of a trickle of water that occupied the lowest part of the chasm. For the most part the bed of the stream was composed of rocks, some worn round by the action of water through the ages, some rough, as if newly-fallen. Where the stream made a sharp bend the water had ground the rocks to grit, or even to fine, powdery sand. In such places a well-trodden track marked the best way round the numerous obstacles.

She came suddenly upon the "diggings". Of this, at least, there was no possible room for doubt, for the simple and sufficient reason that the gorge ended in a sheer face of rock several hundreds of feet high. Over it, or down it, floated a long grey feather of falling water—or rather, water reduced to spray by its long passage through the air. The gorge, Worrals perceived, was a cul-de-sac. It widened somewhat at the finish to a more or less circular basin perhaps forty yards across, as a spoon widens on its handle. The floor was mostly sand. On a heap of it, looking as if they had been flung down carelessly after use, lay two shovels, a spade, a crowbar and two large pans. There were a few odd pieces of paper and empty cigarette cartons. These details Worrals took in with one sweep of her eyes. They were not what she was looking for, and the fact that they were there caused her no surprise. She had been sure that she would see Larwood and Hedin. They were not there. That did surprise her. Where were they? They had gone in. They could not have passed her on the way out without being seen. She gave a hail as a matter of course, although her eyes told her that it was a wasted effort; there was no place large enough to conceal a fox, much less a human being. The fear assailed her that Frecks had been right after all. If they *were* here, she

mused, there was only one place they could be, and that was under one of the several heaps of sand. She considered them speculatively, not to say apprehensively. It was not a nice thought, but she could think of no alternative solution.

She looked round again, and whistled—a rather feeble effort, for her lips had gone dry. The only reply was the sinister hiss of water gliding like a long grey ghost down the dripping cliff. She stared at the ground around her. It was trenched, trampled, and thrown up in heaps and furrows, as if it had all been dug over. A glint of pale yellow in one of the two pans took her to it. Stooping, she touched the little yellow grains curiously, and drew a deep breath. So this was gold, she brooded, the stuff for which men had killed each other since the world began, and would, presumably, go on killing each other until the end of Time. Somehow, at that moment, at that place, it seemed so very silly. But why had the gold been left in the pan? There could only be one answer to that, and the way the tools had been thrown down confirmed it. Work had been in progress. It had been abandoned suddenly. Why? She was afraid she knew the answer to that, too.

She made a fresh survey of the scene, prepared to find further confirmation of her suspicions in bloodstains; but these, at least—to her relief—were absent. She looked again at the heaps of sand. With more time at her disposal she would have explored some of them with the spade, distasteful though the task would have been; but there was no time for that now. It was growing late and Frecks was alone. The squall had passed, but she had an uneasy suspicion that the wind was rising and she was worried about the machine. They were wet, tired, and hungry. The temptation to stay and dig was great, but the only sane thing to do in the circumstances was to get back to camp and return the following day, when they would be able to work without fear of being benighted.

Turning abruptly she strode back the way she had come. Another squall struck her at the mouth of the gorge, and in conditions that were about as unpleasant as they could be she walked quickly to the rendezvous.

Frecks was not there.

“Frecks!” she called softly.

There was no answer.

She walked on a few yards. “Frecks!” she called again, louder this time.

No reply.

“Frecks!” called Worrals sharply, fighting a rising tendency to panic.

The only sound was the mocking hiss of rain as it drove against the dripping rocks.

CHAPTER NINE

Close Quarters

AFTER WORRALS had turned into the gorge, Frecks found a not very comfortable seat on a boulder and contemplated a landscape—or as much of it as she could see through the rain—that seemed to grow ever more dismal. Between two masses of rock she could just discern the blurred outline of the Box; and presently, as the squall subsided to a clammy drizzle, she made out the figure of Wolfe. His attitude puzzled her. She could not make out what he was doing. Or perhaps it would be more accurate to say, she could see what he was doing, but could not account for his behaviour. She had supposed, naturally, that when he got home he would go indoors, and stay there at least until the rain stopped. Instead, he was standing at the back of the rocks that concealed the aircraft apparently staring at something up on the hill. What could so hold his attention was beyond Frecks's imagination, although she was soon to know.

She assumed, of course, that Shultz had gone in. She had not actually seen her do so because visibility was at its worst just as the two Germans reached the Box. As she realized afterwards, the first mistake was to have supposed that Shultz and Wolfe, after they had turned back from the gorge, were hurrying home to avoid getting wet. It followed, then, that having got home they would go in out of the rain; and this she assumed they had done. Why Wolfe should come out again she could not guess, but it did not occur to her for one moment that Shultz was anywhere but inside.

By the end of ten minutes the rain had cleared off, but Wolfe still stood in his peculiar position although he now leaned back against the rocks for support. Frecks threw a glance over her shoulder hoping to see what engaged his attention, but from her position her view was cut off by the quickly rising hillside, and she could not improve it without stepping into the open and exposing herself to Wolfe should he happen to look her way. She consoled her curiosity with the thought that the explanation would be forthcoming if she watched long enough; and in this she was right, although then it was cold comfort.

Presently a stone rattled down the hill not far from where she sat—or rather, squatted, hands under her arms to keep them warm, hoping that Worrals would not be long. She threw a perfunctory glance at the stone as it bounded over the ground before coming to rest. Beyond that she paid no attention, which was understandable and pardonable, for the thing happened constantly. If she thought about it at all it was to assume that the stone had been dislodged by the recent rain. If the truth must be told, her chief concern was for the return of Worrals, so that they could go back to camp, for she was cold, hungry, wet, and generally miserable. When, however, another stone came rattling down so close that it nearly struck her, she thought that it might be the forerunner of a landslide and sprang to her feet, looking quickly up the hill.

Compared with what she saw, a landslide would have been infinitely preferable. Standing on the slope some thirty or forty feet above, staring down at her with an expression of utter amazement on her face, was Anna Shultz.

Now, in a life which, for its years, had seen more of its share of incident and excitement, Frecks had been jolted by many shocks; but never had one shaken her quite so violently as the spectacle of this fair-haired, blue-eyed young woman, standing on the side of a hill with a cigarette between her lips, binoculars hanging round her neck, and a gun tucked under her arm. She was, as the saying is, petrified. She lost the power of movement and for a second or two her brain ceased to function. When, hard on these emotions, came inevitable reaction, her brain worked at such speed that it might as well have remained numb. Thoughts came and went so swiftly that they had no real meaning; much less was she able to act upon them.

It may have been Shultz's behaviour that was largely responsible for this. Had she moved quickly, had she made one single threatening movement, Frecks would no doubt have responded instantly with a counter-move. But she did nothing of the sort. With a casual gesture she tossed her cigarette away and then raised a hand in a perfectly normal greeting. Frecks returned the salute automatically, whereupon Shultz came strolling down the hill towards her.

Frecks stood still. There were, in fact, only three courses open to her, she thought swiftly, as her faculties recovered from the shock that had temporarily paralysed them. She could run away. That seemed merely foolish. She could attack Shultz, or try to hold her up. That, with Wolfe already moving towards them, as she could see out of the corner of her eye, was equally foolish. Or she could do nothing at all. This was the course she

chose. She stood still, praying fervently that her face did not betray her thoughts.

Shultz jumped lightly down the final descent and stood before her. Then, when she smiled, Frecks began to wonder if the whole thing was, after all, a fantastic dream. True, there was no real warmth in the smile; it had a calculating quality about it; but the woman obviously meant well—for the time being at any rate.

“Hallo!” said Shultz.

“Hallo!” echoed Frecks.

“Who are you, and what are you doing here?” queried Shultz—questions which, Frecks had to admit, were justified. She noted that Shultz spoke English, although with a fairly strong accent. By a final effort she got control of her spinning brain and adjusted it to a situation that she could not have envisaged. From the outset of the expedition she had always expected that she and Shultz would one day come face to face—but not like this.

“I might ask you the same questions,” she countered, with a light laugh.

“True,” conceded Shultz, smiling again. “I suppose it was you who fired the shots just now? Not knowing anyone else was here I went up the hill to see if I could see anyone. Happening to look down I saw you sitting on the rock. I was surprised very much.”

“I can well understand that,” admitted Frecks. “No, it wasn’t me who fired.”

“No?” Shultz’s eyes clouded with sudden suspicion. “A friend, perhaps?” she suggested.

“Possibly.”

“Then you are not alone?” challenged Shultz sharply.

“Oh, no,” returned Frecks, who could see no point in evading the truth. Indeed, at that difficult moment truth was obviously the best policy, because Shultz would be less likely to do anything violent if she thought reinforcements were at hand.

“Who is with you?” inquired Shultz.

“A friend.”

“A man?”

“No, a girl.”

Shultz drew a deep breath that might have been relief. “Well, I am glad to see you,” she remarked. “It would be nice to see anyone in such a place as this.”

“My name is Lovell,” went on Frecks. “My friend and I were looking for someone who is on a trip somewhere in this part of the world, but I think we must have landed at the wrong lake.” What she was really thinking was that the situation would have been perfect for making the arrest, had it not been for the unfortunate fact that Wolfe had seen them and was now walking towards the spot. She realized now, of course, that at the time when she had wondered what Wolfe was doing, he had simply been watching his partner on the hill. Obviously, it was not the moment to provoke hostilities.

At this juncture it started to rain again.

“Well, there is no point in getting wet,” observed Shultz. “Come along to our cabin and have a cup of tea—it isn’t far.”

There was too much of the “won’t you come into my parlour . . .” about this to please Frecks. The difficulty was to find a reason for refusing. To decline the invitation might give rise to suspicion, and that was the last thing she wanted.

“Thank you very much, but I really think I ought to be getting back to my friend,” said Frecks, aware that the excuse sounded lame. Actually, she knew perfectly well that Worrals might arrive on the scene at any moment; the trouble was, she could not make up her mind whether it would be better for Worrals to join the party or to keep out. She was inclined to think that she was better out of it. If Shultz and Wolfe got them both together they would pretty well be able to do as they pleased, should they suddenly decide to turn nasty. A show-down might be precipitated when they, Frecks and Worrals, were at a disadvantage. Worrals would certainly be better out of it if only she could devise some way of letting her know what had happened. What worried her most was the thought of leaving Worrals in ignorance of this dramatic development.

“Where is your friend now?” asked Shultz.

“I don’t really know,” dissembled Frecks. “I think she’s over there somewhere,” she added with a vague sweep of her arm.

“A few minutes won’t make any difference—come and have some tea,” pressed Shultz.

“All right,” agreed Frecks, who dare not persist in her refusal. Moreover an idea had struck her, a scheme that might give Worrals a clue as to what had happened. She would lay a trail which Worrals, if she found it, would not be slow to follow. In her pocket she had a box of matches. The matches would do. It so happened that Shultz gave her an excuse for producing them, for opening her case, she took out a cigarette and put it between her lips. Frecks gave her a light, blew out the match, and tossed the dead stick on the

most open spot within reach. Then, as they walked along, from time to time, as opportunity offered, she continued to drop others.

“Who are you, and what are you doing here?” she asked Shultz, as they walked. “I can see you are not alone.” This was obvious, for Wolfe was now close.

“This is my husband coming,” answered Shultz. “Our story is one of tragedy,” she went on with a sigh. “The war is over, so there need be no animosity between us when I tell you we are Germans. When the war ended my husband and I decided to leave Germany for ever. We borrowed an aeroplane—or let us admit the truth and say we stole one—to fly to America. It was our only way of getting there. But something must have gone wrong with our navigation, or our instruments—it was only an old war plane, you understand? We ran out of petrol and had to come down; and this, of all the dreadful places on earth to choose, was where we landed. The plane was smashed. Not knowing where we were we could only stay, hoping that one day someone would find us. But allow me to present my husband.”

Frecks knew, of course, just how much of this plausible story was true. However, there was no time to ponder it, for Wolfe had halted, and standing to attention greeted her with a precise Teutonic bow.

“My dear,” said Shultz, looking at the man, “this is Miss Lovell. Miss Lovell, meet my husband, Doctor Wolfe.”

Wolfe bowed again, a salutation which Frecks acknowledged.

“Miss Lovell has a girl friend with her,” went on Shultz, giving her husband as quickly as possible the information that would be most likely to interest him. “I have asked her to come and have a cup of tea with us.”

“The pleasure will certainly be ours,” said Wolfe blandly. He looked at Frecks. “How did you get to this place?”

“By aeroplane,” replied Frecks. She forced a laugh. “How else could one get here, Doctor?”

“How indeed! Where is your plane?”

“It’s some distance from here, down the lake.”

“And where is your friend?”

“I don’t know exactly,” answered Frecks. “I left her to take a walk. She said something about trying for a shot at some game, if she could find any.”

“Ah! Then it must have been her who fired just now?” said Wolfe, jumping—not unnaturally—to a wrong conclusion.

“I suppose so,” murmured Frecks, wondering who *had* fired the shots.

She was still thinking fast, trying to visualize what was likely to happen next, so that she would be ready. Not only was there Worrals to consider. The whole situation bristled with possibilities, she thought, but it was practically impossible to guess how they would work out. For the moment her only possible course was to continue in the role that she had been forced to adopt.

They came to the Box, and for the first time Frecks saw it at close range. They went in, and she was bound to admit that it all looked very snug. She was invited to be seated while Wolfe put a kettle on a stove. He then lighted a lamp, for the light was now definitely going—a contingency which worried Frecks not a little because it would not make things any easier for Worrals, who would certainly not go home without her.

The tea was made. Biscuits were produced, and Frecks was invited to help herself—an invitation which she accepted, for the danger of her position in no way interfered with her appetite.

The conversation continued.

“What are your plans, Miss Lovell?” inquired Wolfe. “I mean, when do you intend to leave here?”

“I expect we shall go straight back home in the morning,” answered Frecks casually. “The trip was really only a joy-ride. My friend knows someone who is somewhere in these parts and we thought it would be a joke to look him up; but we did not bargain for such difficult territory. We haven’t much petrol left, and you may be sure we shan’t risk running out.”

“You will not stay here, then?”

Frecks laughed. “Hardly. There isn’t much here to attract one, is there?”

Shultz laughed, and Wolfe joined in, although the joke was not evident.

It was then that Frecks had her great idea. “If you’re stuck here why don’t you come back with us?” she suggested.

This project was received with a silence that lasted for so long that the atmosphere became embarrassing. Frecks hardly dare look at Shultz or Wolfe to see how they had received it. To break the spell she went on: “If you prefer, we could no doubt get a relief plane sent up for you. I’m sure you can’t want to stay here?”

“We certainly do not,” declared Wolfe. “I like the first plan best. But is your plane big enough to carry us?”

“It is built to carry six.”

“We have some rather heavy luggage,” said Shultz slowly.

Frecks had a pretty good idea of what the heavy luggage was.

“Naturally, we brought with us everything we possessed of value, when we left Germany,” added Shultz, apparently feeling that some sort of explanation was necessary.

“How much does it weigh?” questioned Frecks, really for something to say.

Wolfe answered. “Rather more than two hundred pounds, I should think. We might get you into trouble, though, and we should not like to do that.”

Frecks looked puzzled—as, in fact, she was. “I don’t understand?”

“Well. . .” For a moment Wolfe looked embarrassed—or pretended to be. “The fact is,” he went on apologetically, “the government of the country in which we landed—it would be the Canadian Government, I suppose—might question our luggage if they saw it. They might want us to pay duty on it, and that we could not do because we have no money, only German marks, which are of no use now. That is, of course, if we landed at an official airfield.”

Frecks understood now. She grasped the lines on which Wolfe was thinking. Not knowing the real truth, that he would arrive as a prisoner, he was afraid the Canadian Government would seize the gold which, Frecks guessed, comprised this heavy “luggage”. He was testing her to find out if she and Worrals would risk breaking the regulations by dropping them off at some convenient place, close enough to civilization for them to do the rest of the trip on foot when it suited them. She smiled inwardly. Such an arrangement would suit Shultz and Wolfe very nicely, in return for which she and Worrals would be murdered for their pains. But this was not likely to arise. The thing was to get them in the plane. Once in the air she and Worrals ought to be able to handle things, she thought.

“The idea is, that you give us a lift *part* of the way,” explained Shultz insinuatingly, apparently taking Frecks’s hesitation to mean that she had not grasped what they wanted to do. “You need not take us all the way. If you dropped us off at one of the lower lakes we could manage for ourselves. We have a fair supply of food. It would be an act of charity and save a lot of foolish and unnecessary official questions. You can imagine how it feels to be a German at a time like this, without a friend in the world, and everyone shocked by the dreadful things the Nazis did in the war?”

Frecks nearly choked. To hear this cold-blooded murderess talk of charity was like listening to a man-eating tiger purring over its kill, she thought. Yet had she not known the truth, she mused, she might easily have been deceived by the sadness and pathos in Shultz’s voice.

“I don’t see why we shouldn’t do that,” declared Frecks. “All this official red tape is a lot of nonsense. After all, the war is over, and no one would be the wiser. But all the same, the regulations are strict, and if the thing became known we should lose our licences.”

“Quite so,” agreed Wolfe. “But, as you say, the war is over. There are, as you would say, no hard feelings. Once we were in civilization everything would be all right.” He seemed enthusiastic at the prospect, but Shultz, Frecks noticed, seemed to have something on her mind. It was not, she thought, that she suspected a trap; but there were other difficulties. There was Hanstadt, for instance. It struck her that Shultz might have a sneaking regard for him; might even have a plan for disposing of Wolfe when he arrived. Conversely, Wolfe might suspect this; or at any rate suspect that Shultz was good enough—or bad enough—to make up to Hanstadt to his own disadvantage. That would explain why he was so anxious to leave before Hanstadt arrived.

At this point Wolfe got up. “Excuse me, please. I have some things to do outside—shut everything up for the night, and so on.” Before leaving he exchanged a meaning look with Shultz, so Frecks was not surprised when, a minute later, Shultz also made an excuse and left the compartment. They had, Frecks knew, gone to compare notes on this unexpected chance of deliverance.

Actually, this suited Frecks, who wanted to do some quick thinking herself. Things had been going rather fast. But when five minutes had elapsed she decided to force the issue. She was getting more and more concerned about Worrals. She called, and when the others returned she said: “Look here. It’s getting late and my friend will be growing worried about me. Besides, I have some distance to go. There is no need to settle everything to-night. I will leave you to talk it over. In the morning my friend and I will fly up here. By that time no doubt you will have decided what you would like to do. I’m sure you’ll find my friend open to any reasonable suggestion.”

“That is the most sensible thing to do,” agreed Wolfe. “We will talk it over, and if we decide to avail ourselves of your most kind offer, we will have everything ready.”

“Good,” acknowledged Frecks. “In that case I’ll get along.”

“It’s almost dark.”

“It won’t be the first time I’ve been out in the dark alone,” answered Frecks, smiling. The truth was, she was not a little astonished that they were so readily prepared to let her go. She had expected opposition, verbal, if

nothing worse. She was by no means happy at the thought of the long walk home, but this was infinitely to be preferred to spending the night at the Box. In that case she would not dare to sleep for fear they went through her pockets, which contained things that would not only explode her role of an innocent traveller, but let a full-sized cat out of the bag.

Her heart missed a beat when Wolfe said: "I shall, of course, escort you back to your plane."

"Oh, no," protested Frecks. "I wouldn't hear of it. I shall manage quite well." The last thing she wanted him to see was the camp, with all its equipment for a prolonged stay.

"I insist," said Wolfe.

"Doctor Wolfe, I take that to be a challenge to my ability to take care of myself," declared Frecks, half jokingly but with a touch of asperity. "The age of helpless damsels has passed."

Shultz laughed. Frecks winced, for it was not a pretty sound.

Wolfe bowed. "As you wish, Miss Lovell," he acquiesced, with a show of gallantry.

Frecks moved to the door. "We'll be along to-morrow, then, soon after it gets light," she promised.

"If we decide to come we shall be ready," said Shultz.

Wolfe opened the door. "I would keep well away from the hills," he advised.

"Why?"

"There are many bears, and they are savage."

"Thanks for the warning," murmured Frecks, and stepped out into the fast-closing gloom.

She drew a deep breath. Then, without a backward glance, she set off on her journey. Why, she wondered, had he been so anxious for her to keep clear of the hills? For she knew from her own experience that she was no more likely to meet a bear there than anywhere else.

Deep in thought, she strode on, swinging round, now that she was out of sight of the Box, towards the place where she should have waited for Worrals.

CHAPTER
TEN

*Worries
for Worrals*

WHEN the bitter truth, that Frecks was not there, became so evident that there was no longer any question about it, Worrals was for a moment bereft of the power of lucid thought by sheer dismay. It was a contingency outside her reckoning and for once she was at a loss to know what to do. For what possible reason could Frecks have left the rendezvous? Where could she have gone? she asked herself desperately. How long did she intend to be away? Would she come back at all?

One thing was certain, thought Worrals. Frecks would not have left the spot without the strongest possible motive. What could it have been? She found it hard to imagine a reason sufficiently powerful for her to go without leaving some sort of clue for her guidance. She would certainly not have gone home without her—that could be ruled out. Yet if she had not gone home, where could she have gone? The only other possible objective was the Box, and she would hardly have gone there. Indeed, only the most extreme circumstances would take her any closer to it, alone; and anyway, if she had gone nearer she must have gone a good way nearer, for she was not in sight.

All this, of course, was assuming that Frecks's departure was voluntary. Until now Worrals had taken this for granted, because it seemed inconceivable that in the short time she had been away Frecks could have been seen, surprised, captured, and removed by force. Surely, she reasoned, if Shultz and Wolfe had left the Box and come in her direction, Frecks would have retired towards the gorge, for that was the whole object of the arrangement. In any case she would not have submitted to capture without putting up a fight, and had there been a fight there would have been shots, which she, Worrals, would have heard. The whole thing, she decided, was incomprehensible. In the end she decided to do nothing in a hurry. The least she could do before taking risks that might not be justified was to wait for a little while, to give Frecks a chance to come back and explain her behaviour.

She waited for what seemed like an hour, although it may not have been more than twenty minutes. Frecks did not come. The rain stopped, but

everything was dripping with moisture, so that in the slowly fading light the scene, dreary at its best, did nothing to ease an anxiety that gnawed deeper with every passing minute.

At length Worrals stood up and took a few paces towards the Box to get a better view of the place. Her eyes had been on it most of the time, of course, but there had been no sign of life. The pile of rocks that concealed the hull of the German aeroplane wore an abandoned look, although she knew that this was not the case. What was going on behind those sullen stones? She wondered.

Happening to glance down she saw something that caused her to take a swift pace forward. Stooping, she picked up a match stick. It had been struck, but it was so new-looking that it had obviously only just been used. The fact that it had been struck was significant. It proved that someone other than Frecks had been there recently. Frecks did not smoke. She could have no possible reason for striking a match. Nor, for that matter, could anyone else, unless it had been to light a cigarette, for there was no sign of a fire having been lit. She ruled out the possibility of a pipe or cigar because in that case the match would have been burnt lower. Someone, then, had lighted a cigarette, she reasoned, as she walked on slowly, looking for tracks or a cigarette end to confirm her surmise. She found neither. The ground, being mostly of rock or stones, revealed no mark of any sort. Instead, she came upon another match—an unused one this time. Who had dropped it? Had it been dropped by accident or design? were the thoughts that flashed through her head. Had Frecks a box of matches with her? She was not sure, but it seemed likely because Frecks had lighted the stove that morning.

She walked on, keeping under cover and raising her eyes often to look at the Box, now dim in misty gloom. A dozen paces and she came upon another match—another unused one. This, she thought, could hardly be an accident. Someone was dropping matches and doing it deliberately; and as neither Wolfe nor Shultz could have a reason for throwing matches away—for matches at Lake Desolation would surely be an even more precious commodity than they were in civilization—then it followed that they must have been dropped by Frecks. So Frecks had left a clue after all, thought Worrals. She had done more: she had laid a trail.

Worrals went on, more quickly now. She found another match, another, another, and the matter was no longer in doubt. Frecks had done this. Why? Obviously, to show her, Worrals, which way she had gone. But why had she chosen such a method? Why had she gone this way at all? Worrals's heart sank as the only possible answers to these questions crystallized in her mind. Frecks was not alone. The fact that the first match had been struck was

sufficient proof of that. She had been captured by the enemy—or at any rate was in their company.

Worrals leaned back against a rock for a minute to collect her thoughts and to let this disturbing fact sink in. She tried to work out how it could have happened, but failed. The whole thing was incomprehensible. From the very beginning of the sortie, she mused bitterly, the situation had steadily got worse until it was now out of hand. This was the climax. She still found it hard to believe that Larwood and Hedin were dead and buried. She could not work out how Shultz and Wolfe could have achieved that in the short while they were in the gorge; yet if the two men were still alive, what could have happened to them? They most certainly could not have reached home unobserved. Yet if they were alive surely it was time they were back at the Box, for the long-drawn northern twilight was at last dying. Against this, how was she to account for the shots? It was all very puzzling, but these were now minor issues. The one thing that really mattered was, Frecks was either in the hands of the enemy or else circumstances had arisen to cause her to take the most outrageous risks in going so close to their headquarters. Obviously, she could not go back to camp without her. Equally obviously, she would have to find out what had happened to her.

She hurried back to the rendezvous to confirm that Frecks had not returned from some other direction. She was not there, so she set off resolutely towards the Box.

Just after passing the limit of her last reconnaissance, watching the ground to pick up the match trail, she came upon a cigarette end. There was no maker's name or trade mark on it so it told her nothing beyond what she already suspected—that someone else besides Frecks had recently passed this way. She found another match, and continued finding them at intervals until she was within a hundred yards of the Box; then, halting before crossing the final stretch of the open space, she saw for the first time a sign of life behind the wall of stones. It was a chink of light.

She went on, picking her way with care and at the same time keeping close watch on her objective. One of her problems was, she did not know where the door or entrance was located. She did not even know which side of the heap it was in, and the pile was of some length, as it was bound to be considering the size of the hull that had to be concealed.

With her muscles keyed up for prompt action she reached her objective and rested for a moment to steady herself. This was necessary because she had already made up her mind what she was going to do if, in fact, Frecks was a prisoner. Indeed, as she could not permit this there was only one thing she could do, and that was to launch an attack, trusting to speed and surprise

to make her master of the situation. She listened intently, but all she could hear was a low murmur of conversation.

With infinite caution she moved along the side of the pile to the point where she had seen the chink of light; and she had almost reached it when her ears were shocked by the very last sound she expected to hear in the circumstances. Indeed, so unexpected was it that for a second or two she was thrown into confusion. Someone had laughed, and the person who had laughed was Frecks. Worrals had heard the laugh too many times for there to be any possible mistake. Frecks had laughed. Worrals strove to grasp the fact. What on earth, she wondered, could Frecks find to laugh at? Her predicament might call for several emotions, but how, by any possible stretch of the imagination, could humour be one of them? In a vague sort of way she noted that the laugh was followed by others, uttered presumably by Wolfe and Shultz. This she could understand; but what Frecks could find to amuse her in such a situation was beyond her power to visualize. What were they doing?

Moving on now with more confidence, Worrals reached the light. It came, as she anticipated, from a chink in the rocks opposite one of the cabin windows. Bringing her eyes level, she looked in. She looked again. She stared. Then she drew back, dazed, as all her plans for action crashed to the ground. Frecks was sitting with Shultz and Wolfe—drinking a cup of tea. They were chatting as if they were the best of friends.

Worrals walked along to some fallen rocks and sat down to consider the matter. For the moment all she could think was that Frecks had been right when she had said that the whole thing was going gaga. What to do about it she did not know. Should she join the party, she thought whimsically, or should she play Cinderella?

How long she sat there she could not afterwards remember, but it was probably only a matter of a few minutes; then she was roused from her reverie by the sudden appearance of Wolfe outside the Box. She did not move, except to crouch a little lower. Wolfe lit a cigarette. Presently Shultz joined him and they began a conversation in low tones.

“Well, what do you make of it?” asked Shultz tersely.

“I think it’s a stroke of luck,” returned Wolfe. “There’s nothing to get alarmed about, that’s certain. This is our chance to get out.”

“What about Hanstadt?”

“What about him?”

“What will he think when he comes and finds no one here?”

“Does it matter what he thinks?”

Shultz hesitated momentarily. “No, perhaps it doesn’t.”

“I’m in favour of letting these girls fly us down—that is, if we can persuade them to put us down outside an airport.”

“And what then?”

Wolfe grunted. “What do you think? Obviously, we shouldn’t let them go on home to chatter about what they’d seen here. It should be easy enough to deal with them.”

“In that case I agree with you.”

“This chit inside suspects nothing—why should she?”

“True,” murmured Shultz. “But I wish I could fly a plane. It would be easier to liquidate them here and take their machine.”

“As neither of us can fly there’s no point in discussing that,” said Wolfe brusquely.

“You don’t think it would be better to wait for Hanstadt?”

“I do not.” Wolfe was emphatic.

Shultz sneered. “What’s the matter—jealous?”

“I might have cause to be. You said yourself that he was in love with you. We don’t want a repetition of the Rumeys business, there’s too much at stake. Besides, I have met Hanstadt. He is too honest. He may have other ideas about the gold. He’s loyal to the Party, and may want to give it to them. It would be better to have nothing to do with him.”

“Do you think these girls will suspect what our luggage consists of when we load it into their plane?”

“No. Why should they? It’s in bags so they won’t see it.”

Shultz’s next remark made Worrals prick up her ears.

“What about Larwood and Hedin?” she questioned. “What are they going to say about this?”

“They won’t know anything about it.”

“How will you work that?”

“If they go to the diggings before the plane comes—well, they’ll be in luck. They can stay here and take their chance. If not, we shall have to dispose of them.”

“Why not shoot them and have done with it?”

“Because the girls may hear the shots and wonder what the shooting is about. Moreover, there is no point in doing more killing than is necessary. There’s another thing. This girl has got to go back to fetch the plane. She might meet Larwood and Hedin coming home. My plan is best. If Larwood

and Hedin want to go to work in the morning they can go. We shall say nothing about our plans for leaving.”

“What do you suppose they’re doing now? Why aren’t they here?”

“I don’t know,” admitted Wolfe. “I left them at the diggings. They were all right then. Still, it is all to the good that they are late. We had better let this girl go before they come.”

“What if she meets them on the way back?”

“They’ll come along the bottom of the hill, as they always do. I’ll tell the girl to keep clear of the hill because there are bears there.”

“All right,” agreed Shultz. “Let’s leave it at that. She’s calling. We had better go in.”

The two conspirators walked along the side of the pile and disappeared from sight.

Worrals drew a deep breath. What she had overheard gave her a pretty good idea of how things were shaping. It was clear that for the moment, at any rate, Frecks was in no great danger, so she decided to remain where she was to watch developments.

Very soon she heard voices. Frecks and Wolfe appeared, dimly, some way down the pile. Frecks made a remark which she did not catch and strode away briskly in the direction of the camp. Wolfe turned back into the Box. A door closed.

Worrals got up and set off after Frecks.

She made no sound until they were well beyond any possible chance of being heard, then gave a low whistle which they often used for a signal.

Frecks stopped dead in her tracks, swung round and gave the answering whistle. She waited for Worrals to join her.

“Phew! Am I glad to see you!” she greeted. “Talk about being in the lion’s den. D’you know where I’ve been?”

“I do,” answered Worrals evenly.

“You *do!*”

“That’s what I said. I followed your match trail—at least, I imagined it was yours—and saw your little tea party in the Box. I don’t mind telling you that I could have done with a cup of tea myself. Did you have a nice time?” Worrals was mildly sarcastic.

Frecks snorted. “Forget it. My knees are still jelly.”

“How did it happen? You can tell me as we walk along. Let’s get home. I’ve had about enough for one day.”

"I've had enough for several days," asserted Frecks warmly. Then, as they walked homeward, she described how she had been discovered by Shultz. "What I can't understand," she concluded, "is the position with regard to Larwood and Hedin. I was asked who fired those shots, so Shultz and Wolfe know no more about them than we do. I let them think it was you. Did you see anything of Larwood or Hedin?"

"No," answered Worrals. "They weren't in the gorge. Where they went is a mystery. Shultz and Wolfe don't know where they are. They're as puzzled as we are." She gave a brief account of the conversation she had overheard between Shultz and Wolfe outside the Box. "Wolfe handed you that savage bear fable to keep you away from the hills in case you ran into them," she concluded.

"Then it looks as though the shots were fired by Lowenhardt," averred Frecks.

"Maybe," agreed Worrals moodily. "We shall know when we get home. How did you finally leave matters with Shultz and her big bad Wolfe? I overheard enough to give me an idea of the general scheme."

"We're to fly up in the morning," answered Frecks. "By that time they will have decided whether they want to stay here or get themselves and their bags of gold shunted a bit nearer to civilization. It was my idea. What do you think of it?"

"Pretty good," conceded Worrals. "In fact, it sounds too good to be true."

"They won't risk being put down on a proper airport, though."

"No, I'm sure they won't," muttered Worrals grimly. "But if we can get them on board they'll get out where *I* decide. We'll talk about that when we get home. I'm too tired to think now. I'd give something for a pair of Seven League Boots."

"If we go on plodding about these rocks much longer we shan't have any boots at all," observed Frecks dispassionately.

CHAPTER
ELEVEN

*A Thief in
the Night*

THE next morning Worrals and Frecks were again on the move early, although they were both beginning to feel the physical strain of their strenuous efforts to bring the affair to a speedy end. The rain had stopped, but the weather was still threatening, with enough wind blustering up from the west to set the Ranger rocking. There was not enough to do any harm, thought Worrals, after a glance at the sky, but she was afraid it might get worse.

Lying in bed at the conclusion of the previous day's exertions, Frecks had given Worrals a detailed account of the conversation in the Box. By the time they had finished discussing the pros and cons of the arrangement it was nearly midnight, for although they were both dog-tired there had been a lot to do. A watch had been kept for some time to make sure that they had not been followed by Shultz or Wolfe. Worrals would not risk being taken by surprise. A permanent watch was out of the question; they would have had practically no sleep at all. Then they had to prepare a hot meal for themselves and Lowenhardt, whose wound had also to be dressed. He had nothing to report. He had not fired the mystery shots, although he had heard them. He judged them to be not more than four miles away, south of the camp. He had not left the aircraft, for one thing because he had no reason to, and secondly because there was a moment during the worst squall when he had feared the machine would break away from its moorings—in which case, he said, he would have started the engines and taxied it clear of the rocks. While he was not a pilot, he remarked, he had had plenty of experience in the handling of aircraft on the ground.

Over a quick breakfast the debate was resumed.

“If those shots weren't fired by Lowenhardt, then who did fire them?—that's what beats me,” confessed Worrals. “I fell asleep last night trying to work it out by a process of elimination. It got me nowhere. They were not fired by us. Obviously they were not fired by Shultz or Wolfe because they were as anxious about them as we were. That leaves only Larwood and Hedin; but, surely, had they been responsible Shultz and Wolfe must have

known it. They were in the gorge at the time. We know now that they came bustling out to see if they could spot the shooter. Shultz said she climbed the hill with that object, and as there doesn't appear to be any reason why she should lie about it she was probably telling the truth for once. As that disposes of everyone here, to our knowledge, it follows that the shots must have been fired by someone else. Who could it have been? There's only one answer to that, as far as we are in a position to judge—Hanstadt. We know he is about due to arrive, so we can only conclude that he is somewhere near. The shots may have been a pre-arranged signal between him and Rumeby. Lowenhardt's opinion that the shots came from the south supports the Hanstadt theory because that's the direction of the river, up which anyone travelling overland would come."

"You mean anyone travelling on foot or by canoe from Canada?"

"From where else could the man come?" demanded Worrals. "He would hardly be likely to come from the Yukon, a thousand miles to the west. To the east there is absolutely nothing between us and the Hudson Bay, and to the north there is only the Pole. But the direction he comes from doesn't matter so much as the disturbing fact that if it was Hanstadt who did the shooting, he might turn up at any moment. That *would* put the spanner in the works."

"If you've worked it out like that, then it seems likely that Shultz has worked it out the same way," observed Frecks. "If so, it may cause her to change her plans about flying down with us. I don't think she was very keen about it, anyway, although Wolfe was full out—probably for the very reason that Hanstadt might turn up. That's how it struck me."

"You may be right at that," asserted Worrals. "Wolfe's no fool. If Hanstadt rolled up he might lose his beautiful wife, his gold, and his life into the bargain—which would be plenty for a man to lose in one smack."

"In the meantime, what on earth could have happened to Larwood and Hedin?" asked Frecks. "Even supposing that by some chance they ran into Hanstadt that would be no reason for their staying away from the Box. One would think they'd be only too glad to take him along. There aren't so many people here that you get bored by new faces."

Worrals stirred her tea pensively. "I'm beginning to wonder if Larwood and Hedin suddenly smelt a rat and got away while the going was good. They must have had a good reason for not going back as usual. Where did they go, anyway? They can't live on air. Of course, they might simply have been delayed and turned up after we'd left for the camp."

“If so, they are probably corpses by now,” averred Frecks grimly. “Shultz was all for bumping them off. She hates the idea of leaving witnesses about. What about having a fly round to see if we can see them before we go up to the Box? Now that Shultz and Wolfe know that we have a machine there could be no harm in that.”

“We couldn’t see into the gorge, it’s too deep,” answered Worrals. “Besides, if we flew off our course Shultz might get suspicious. It doesn’t take much to make that lady suspicious, I’ll warrant. But it’s time we were pushing along. I’ve told Lowenhardt how things stand and what we are going to do. He’s going to stay in the tent. He’ll be all right there for a week if necessary. There is this about it: the whole thing ought to be settled one way or the other in the next hour. The only thing that I’m afraid of is that Hanstadt may have arrived. If he has, Shultz will be more concerned with getting rid of us than using our machine as a taxi.”

“You think she’d try to bump us off?”

“I haven’t the slightest doubt about it. She certainly would if the others raised no objection. Believe you me, she wouldn’t let us fly away home to spill the beans about what we’ve seen here, if she could prevent it. Not likely. ‘Dead men tell no tales’ is her motto—and that goes for women, too!”

Frecks looked startled. “This sounds all very cheerful, I must say,” she muttered. “It looks as if, when we go ashore at the other end of the lake, we may step into the custard with both feet.”

“Oh, no,” disputed Worrals. “Nothing like that. I shall go ashore by myself. You’ll stay in the aircraft with a hand on the stick and the engines ticking over. That will make her pause before trying any funny stuff. She would hardly be likely to take a shot at me with you in a position to dash off home and bring the Mounties along.”

“That sounds better,” approved Frecks.

“All right; if that’s settled, let’s get along,” said Worrals.

“Are you going to take the rifle?”

“We might as well; but we had better not make it conspicuous or it may look too much like a show of force. You can keep it handy on the floor of the cockpit while I go ashore.”

“Good enough.”

In a few minutes the Ranger was in the air heading towards the far end of the lake, a flight which occupied hardly any time. In fact, it could scarcely be called a flight, for although the machine was airborne it was never more than a few feet above the water. Frecks kept a sharp look-out for Larwood, Hedin, or Hanstadt, but saw none of them. Shultz and Wolfe she could see

plainly; as soon as the Ranger came within sight of the Box they walked down to the nearest point of the lake and stood there, waiting.

Worrals landed and taxied as near to the beach as the floats permitted. Leaving the engines throttled right back, but not switched off, she gave up her seat to Frecks, climbed out, walked along a float and waded ashore through a few inches of water to where the Germans stood waiting. Until this moment she had hardly troubled to look at them, but now it needed only a glance at their expressions to perceive that something was amiss. There was no smile of welcome; no greeting, real or simulated. Wolfe's jaw was set at an ugly angle; the corners of his mouth were turned down; his lips were a thin line. Shultz's eyes were as hard as blue ice. Her brows were drawn together in a hostile frown. Neither spoke. Neither moved.

Worrals pretended not to notice these things. "I'm Joan Worralsen," she announced pleasantly. "I believe you met my friend yesterday? She tells me you might like a lift to Fort MacWilliam, or to some place where surface transport is available."

Shultz answered. "Yes," she said, with an edge on her voice. And that was all she said.

Worrals sensed trouble. She had no idea what form it would take, but she could feel it in the air, and braced herself to meet it. "Well, what have you decided to do about it?" she inquired, without altering her tone.

Wolfe made an inclination of his head towards the aircraft. "Isn't your friend coming ashore?"



[Page 143](#)

“I’m Joan Worralsen,” she announced pleasantly.

“No,” answered Worrals evenly. “She’s taking care of the machine. I’m not going to try to moor it here—it’s too exposed; and I’m certainly not going to risk knocking a hole in a float on one of these rocks.” By this time the expressions on the faces before her, to say nothing of the uncompromising attitudes of their owners, were no longer to be ignored. “Is something the matter?” she asked. “Has something happened to upset your plans?”

“Yes,” replied Shultz. “Something has happened—very much so. Come into our cabin and I will tell you about it.”

“Certainly,” agreed Worrals without hesitation, as if no thought of refusal entered her head. Actually, the suggestion alarmed her more than a little, but she realized that it would not do to let Shultz or Wolfe see it. Her only chance was to remain perfectly normal, and as she could think of no reasonable excuse for declining the invitation she thought she might as well accept with alacrity. Turning to Frecks, she waved, and called: “Shan’t be a minute!” Then, in a silence that was positively sinister, she walked on with her host and hostess to the Box. In the absence of Larwood and Hedin she could only conclude that they were still missing. The present ugly situation might have some bearing on that, she thought. In this she was correct, but she little guessed in what way they were responsible.

Once in the main cabin Shultz lost no time in preamble. With Wolfe standing beside her she took up an accusing attitude and treated Worrals to a glare of undisguised hostility. Her expression would have startled Worrals more than it did had she not known something of the woman’s character. It was evident that something had happened, more serious than she had at first supposed.

“We have been robbed,” announced Shultz abruptly.

“Indeed?” returned Worrals curtly. “Even if you have, that is no reason for your speaking to me like that. I haven’t robbed you. What have you lost, anyway?”

Apparently it only needed Worrals’s tart rejoinder to rouse Shultz to a raging fury. Like a tigress that has lost its pet cub she only wanted an excuse to tear somebody with her claws. She flushed, and opened her mouth to speak again; but Wolfe, who had himself under better control, presumably thought it was time to step in. Laying a hand on her arm he said suavely: “Calm yourself, my dear. Allow me to explain.” Turning to Worrals he went on: “Miss Worrals; yesterday, in discussing the proposed passage south with your friend, we mentioned that we had some rather heavy luggage.”

Worrals nodded. “So she told me.”

“We did not think it necessary to say what that luggage was because it was an entirely personal matter. The truth is, while we were stranded here we had the good fortune to discover an alluvial gold deposit. Naturally, we occupied our time in panning as much of it as possible. We secured a good quantity, and it was our intention—not an unreasonable one, as I think you will agree—to keep our discovery a secret. You know what happens at the bare mention of the word gold? A rush sets in, and more often than not the pioneers are cheated of their reward.”

“Quite so,” agreed Worrals. “I should have acted just as you did. But how does this affect the situation?”

“Our gold has been stolen,” spat Shultz, as if she could not contain herself any longer.

Worrals stared. And the astonishment depicted on her face was genuine enough. Now she could well understand Shultz’s raging temper. “How much of the gold has gone?” she asked.

“How much!” cried Shultz. “All of it!”

This was a development Worrals had not foreseen, and it took her a few seconds to grasp fully the change it made in the general situation. “But who could have taken it?” she exclaimed, not so much expecting an answer as to gain time while she was thinking.

“There are not many people here, are there?” sneered Shultz.

Worrals frowned. “Surely you don’t suspect *us*? How could we have known about the gold in the first place, and in the second, how could we possibly guess where it was hidden?”

“Your friend was watching this cabin when I first saw her,” declared Shultz.

“All right,” said Worrals coldly. “If that’s how you feel about it you are at liberty to search my machine. What was the weight of this gold?”

Wolfe answered. “For a guess, nearly two hundred and fifty pounds.”

Worrals pursed her lips. “My word! You *did* strike it rich.” Then she laughed sarcastically. “It’s hardly the sort of thing we could put in our pockets, is it? In fact, it would be quite a task to move it at all—a task for several strong men, let alone two girls.”

“Now you understand why we have had to change our plans,” said Wolfe. “We had intended to accept your offer of a lift, but in the circumstances we cannot do so. We must stay to try to recover our property.”

“When did the gold disappear?” asked Worrals.

“Last night—between nightfall and dawn.”

Worrals shrugged. “Well, I’m afraid I can’t help you in the matter.”

“The gold could not have moved itself,” asserted Shultz, somewhat fatuously.

“That I am willing to admit,” conceded Worrals. “Have you no idea of who might have moved it?” By this time she had guessed—or thought she had guessed—what had happened. The reason for the sudden disappearance of Larwood and Hedin was explained. For some reason not evident they had decided to take the gold. They might, she thought, have overheard Shultz

and Wolfe talking, and had their suspicions aroused. Anyway, as she was not supposed to know anything about the two men she dare not mention them; but she could pave the way for Shultz to reveal their presence. “You’ve been here longer than we have, so you should know if there is anyone else in the region,” she prompted.

The bait was taken.

“You didn’t by any chance see two men about here yesterday—perhaps on your way home?” suggested Wolfe, in a curious voice.

“Two men?” Worrals feigned astonishment. “What men? Are there other people here besides yourselves?” She could see the difficulty they were in. Reluctant though they must be to admit the truth they were being forced to do so. The loss of the gold must have been a stunning blow. They must know, she thought, that Larwood and Hedin were the probable culprits. Why, she wondered, did they not go in search of them? Perhaps they had not yet had time. They might have waited to interrogate her first, in case she had met the men and spoken to them. “When did you discover that the gold was missing?” she asked.

“Only a few minutes ago,” answered Wolfe. “We went to fetch it, to put it in a more convenient place to load. It was not there.”

“What about these men you spoke of just now?”

“There have been two men, prospectors, working in the vicinity,” Wolfe was compelled to admit. “They may have watched us, and having seen what we were doing, resolved to rob us of the fruits of our labours. You didn’t see anything of them as you flew up, I suppose?”

Worrals shook her head. “No,” she answered. Her brain was busy again, for a new danger had become apparent. Shultz and Wolfe would not leave without the gold, that was certain; and if they had decided to stay then they might try to prevent the machine from leaving, for fear she and Frecks said too much when they got home. Nothing could be better calculated to bring the Mounties up than a rumour of a gold robbery, and that must be the last thing the Germans wanted. At the same time it occurred to her to wonder if she could now make the arrest, at the muzzle of her automatic. She dismissed the plan instantly as impracticable. That sort of thing might be easy enough in Wild West stories, but in real life it did not work out as easily as that. Shultz had her gun—she seemed never to move without it. Wolfe carried a Luger pistol on his hip. There might be some delay in getting Frecks ashore to put the handcuffs on them; moreover, that would mean leaving the machine with no one to control it. To make the attempt, and fail, would be disastrous, she decided. Surely a better opportunity would offer.

“If the robbery only occurred last night, surely these men—if they are the thieves—can’t be far away?” she pointed out as a new idea struck her. “Would you like me to fly round to see if I can see anything of them?” Just how this could be made to serve her own purposes was not clear, but it would at least give her a chance to think and tell Frecks how matters stood. Even if they declined to accept the plan the suggestion could only be taken as good will on her part.

Neither Shultz nor Wolfe answered at once.

“Well, make up your minds,” requested Worrals nonchalantly. “Really, I should be on my way home now, but I’m willing to be helpful if you will tell me how.”

Suddenly Wolfe reached a decision. “I think your idea is a good one,” he announced. “You fly round, and if you see anything of them come back and let us know.”

Worrals suspected that he really wanted to be alone with Shultz to discuss the matter. Obviously, all they were concerned about for the moment was the recovery of the gold. On foot there would be little they could do about it—they must realize that. If Larwood and Hedin had bolted, then their chances of finding them, and overtaking them, were remote. On the other hand, if they knew exactly where they were, they would at least be able to follow them without loss of time.

“Very well,” agreed Worrals. “I shall be able to reconnoitre the whole area in a few minutes.” Turning on her heel, she went out and walked towards the machine in a manner as inconsequential—as far as she was concerned—as the circumstances demanded. After all, there was no reason for her to get excited about the gold.

Shultz and Wolfe followed, but not another word was said as she climbed on to a float and made her way to the pilot’s seat, which Frecks, seeing her coming, vacated. Opening the port engine, she swung the machine round, and, without speaking, took off.

“What goes on?” demanded Frecks suspiciously. “I was beginning to get worried.”

“Not so worried as I was,” returned Worrals grimly.

“Why, what’s happened?”

Worrals laughed lugubriously. “Somebody’s pinched all their gold.”

“*What!*” Frecks almost shouted the word.

“You heard me,” returned Worrals grimly. “Now work *that* one out.”

Frecks subsided limply in her seat. “Well! Can you beat that?” she breathed.

CHAPTER
TWELVE

*More
Revelations*

FOR a minute Worrals flew on without speaking, climbing steeply, giving Frecks time to digest the information she had just given her.

When Frecks had done this she burst out: "And what are we supposed to be doing now?"

"We're looking for Larwood and Hedin," returned Worrals calmly.

"Do you mean that, or is that just the yarn you've spun to Shultz?"

"It's the yarn I've spun, but I mean it all the same," returned Worrals. "It's time we had a word with them. I don't suppose we shall see them because, if in fact they did grab the gold, they'll take care to keep out of sight—particularly if they saw our machine on the water at the far end of the lake, which would lead them to suppose that we are friends of Shultz. Or they might think we have some connection with Hanstadt, if they happened to overhear his name mentioned, as I'm beginning to suspect they may have done. Keep your eyes open; there's just a chance we may spot them."

"What happens if we do—and what happens if we don't?" demanded Frecks practically.

"I don't know," admitted Worrals. "My first concern was to get away from the Box and do a spot of quiet thinking."

"We can't go on dashing from one end of the lake to the other," protested Frecks. "The thing's getting silly."

Worrals shrugged. "It isn't our fault. It isn't anybody's fault. It's just the way things have panned out. I agree it can't go on like this. We shall soon have to make an effort to get Shultz even though it involves risks which I was hoping to avoid. The position won't get any better. It might easily get worse."

While this conversation was taking place, Worrals had flown some distance beyond the southern shore of the lake. There was no sign of the two men, so she went on to the headwaters of the Chinooke River, which she followed for a few miles, to a point which Larwood and Hedin might have reached in the time at their disposal. Seeing nothing of them she turned

back, swinging a little to the west in order to take in the whole of the northern bank of the lake on the return trip.

“I still think there’s something queer about this gold robbery,” she told Frecks. “Larwood and Hedin must be concerned with it because only they—apart from Shultz and Wolfe—know where it was hidden. What happened to cause them suddenly to grab the gold? Was it a quick decision, or had the thing been planned for some time? Whichever way it was, I’m sure there must have been a development about which we know nothing. I’m ruling out the possibility of Larwood and Hedin being a pair of ordinary crooks, because they have clean records. Having got the gold, what are they going to do with it? Carry it on their backs all the way to Fort MacWilliam? Can you see them doing that? I can’t. Sixty pounds would be a good load for a man in country like this, and that would have to include personal equipment. Hedin’s an old hand at backwoods travel so he must know that as well as anybody. It’s a long, long trail to Fort MacWilliam. They’ve no boat, remember. Even travelling light, without the gold, they’d have a job to get through.”

“They might have hidden the gold with a view to coming back for it later,” suggested Frecks. “They could charter a plane to come up and fetch it.”

“Yes, there may be something in that,” agreed Worrals. “In fact, it may be the only solution. If it is, then I imagine Larwood and Hedin are well on their way. Once they reach the timber line it would be easier to find a pin in a cornfield.” As she finished speaking, Worrals put the machine on an easterly course with the intention of flying along the northern shore of the lake from end to end. The turn brought the camp into view.

Instantly Frecks let out a cry of surprise. “Look! A boat!”

“Where?”

“Just beyond where we moored the machine.”

Worrals looked. “You’re right,” she confirmed tersely. “It’s a canoe. Now we’re getting somewhere.”

“Are we?” asked Frecks helplessly. “And just where is a canoe getting us?” Then she went on quickly. “I’ve got it! It’s Hanstadt. If he . . .” Her voice trailed away.

Worrals said nothing. She had seen what Frecks had seen. The far side of the tent had now come into sight. Sitting close against it, out of the wind, were four men. From the way their faces were turned upwards it was clear that they were all looking at the aircraft.

“Looks like we’ve had it,” remarked Frecks, in a tone of finality.

Worrals did not answer immediately. Cutting the throttle, she went down in a steep glide, tilting a wing to keep the camp in sight. "One of those men is Lowenhardt," she asserted.

"What does that suggest to you?"

"Nothing—except that his leg seems to be getting better," returned Worrals sarcastically.

"Larwood's there!" cried Frecks.

"You took the words out of my mouth."

"Who are the others?"

"If Larwood is there we may assume that one of them is Hedin," stated Worrals.

"Could the other be Hanstadt?"

"I don't think so," replied Worrals. "Hanstadt is a youngish man. The two men we don't know are old men. One's a greybeard. A stranger has arrived in a canoe, that's certain; but it isn't Hanstadt."

"What are we going to do about it?" asked Frecks anxiously.

"I'm going down."

"*What?*"

"I'm going down. We shan't learn any more by staying up here."

"That's taking a chance."

"I'm afraid we've got to start taking chances or we might as well go home and tell the Air Commodore that we fell down on the job." Worrals was still staring down. "There's one good sign," she observed. "Those men down there all seem to be on pretty good terms, including Lowenhardt. I imagine he's told them who we are. He'd have to account for the camp, anyway. Remember, as far as Larwood and Hedin are concerned, Lowenhardt is supposed to be dead. He was killed in a landslide with Rumey. That's the story Shultz told. I imagine Lowenhardt has now spilt the entire can of beans. We'll soon find out."

Frecks said no more.

Worrals went on down, landed, taxied on to the mooring-rock, and jumped ashore. Frecks followed, and made the machine secure. By the time she had done this three men were coming towards them. Lowenhardt was not among them.

"Hallo!" greeted Worrals. "My name's Joan Worralsen." She looked at the only clean-shaven member of the party. "I believe you're Captain Larwood?"

“That’s right,” was the cheerful admission.

“And Mr. Hedin?” queried Worrals, looking at the others in turn.

One of the two old men nervously touched the rim of his hat—an ancient Stetson. “That’s me, miss,” he acknowledged.

Worrals considered the last member of the party. He was dressed in the traditional trapper fashion. On his head he wore a round fur bonnet, decorated on the side by a strip of tartan held in place by an old plaid brooch. His skin was lined with a thousand wrinkles, but his eyes were still clear blue, with a glint of humour lurking in them. Grizzled whiskers of a faded ginger tint covered the lower part of his face. “As for you,” she murmured, “you’ve got me guessing.”

The old man tapped the tartan on his hat with a gnarled finger. “Me name’s on me bonnet for a’ the wur-rl’d to see,” he answered. “You no ken the Red Fraser tartan?” he went on in a voice that had not lost its Highland burr in spite of a veneer of American drawl. “Angus Fraser’s the name, ma’am.”

The name struck a chord in Worrals’s memory, but for a moment she groped in the dark for the association. Then, suddenly she remembered and understood. “I ought to have guessed it,” she said slowly, shaking her head. “I suppose you came here looking for your missing partner?”

“Aye,” answered Angus. “It’s the least a mon can do.”

“Did anyone know you were coming up?”

“Donald MacDonald, the Factor at Fort MacWilliam. He grub-staked me for the trip.”

Worrals could have kicked herself. “If I’d called on him no doubt he would have told me you were on your way,” she mused sadly. “That would have saved me a lot of headwork and worry. How did you get here?”

“Och! I just came up yon river,” returned Angus casually. “When I got here I fired the old signal shots to let Erik know that his partner was about. I reckoned that if he was still alive he’d answer.”

“I hadn’t a gun with me so I couldn’t,” explained Hedin. “But it didn’t take me long to find him.”

“I heard those shots,” said Worrals, looking at Hedin. “You were in the gorge at the time, weren’t you?”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“Then how on earth did you get out without my seeing you?” demanded Worrals. “I was close to the entrance at the time.”

“We just dropped what we were doing and made straight for the lake,” answered Hedin. “We didn’t see no one. We shouldn’t have seen a train o’ pack mules if it comes to that, it was raining that hard at the time.”

Worrals understood now what had happened. Hedin and Larwood had run out of the gorge just when the squall was at its worst. At the time she was walking towards the gorge she must have been within fifty yards of them, but owing to the rain she had missed them. “What happened next?” she inquired curiously, for she was still not clear as to why she had not seen them later, when she and Frecks were walking home from the Box.

Larwood explained. “Angus was on the southern side of the lake. He had his canoe with him. When he saw us on the northern side he paddled across, picked us up, and took us back. Then we lay doggo in some birches.”

“Why lie doggo?”

“Angus has something to get off his chest,” said Larwood significantly.

“I see,” murmured Worrals. “He had something to tell you, eh?”

“He wanted to warn us that we were in bad company, and—well, he didn’t want to be seen.”

Worrals nodded. She began to get the drift of things. She turned to Angus. “Do I understand that to mean you knew this woman Shultz was here?”

“I knew there was a chance of it,” returned Angus. “I came up to see what was going on.”

“How did you know about Shultz? Did Sergeant Grant, at Fort MacWilliam, tell you?”

“Nay, lassie. But I’ll admit I happened to be in Bob Grant’s office one day, and I see a picture on his desk of this woman Shultz, with a note saying she might be in the Lake Desolation district. That was enough for me. I began to get wise as to why Erik hadn’t come back. As soon as the ice broke I headed north.”

“And I suppose you’ve told Captain Larwood and Mr. Hedin all about their late friends?”

“Aye. I have that. It was time someone told them.”

Worrals smiled grimly. “You’re dead right there. I aimed to do the same thing. I suppose you stumbled on my camp by accident?”

“Aye. We were getting as far away as we could from the far end of the lake. We heard a plane. Looking across the water we saw the tent, so we came across, thinking it might be another prospector heading for trouble.”

“Instead of which you found our German refugee, Lowenhardt?”

“Aye.”

“And he told you about us?”

“He told us plenty.”

Worrals looked at Larwood. “What have you done with the gold?” she challenged.

Larwood started and looked embarrassed. He glanced at Hedin as if for support.

“I know all about it,” went on Worrals. “I’ve been to Shultz’s camp this morning.”

“So I understand.”

“I suppose Lowenhardt told you?”

“Yes.”

“And he told you what we were going to do—what we were here for?”

“Yes. He was scared you’d lose your lives.”

“Did he tell you we were here in an official capacity, to get Shultz?”

“Yes.”

“Then there isn’t much for me to tell you. You’d better be frank. You took the gold, didn’t you?”

“Yes. We moved it during the night. Half of it was ours by right. Whoever the other half belonged to it wasn’t that pair of crooked Nazis. We intended handing it all over to the Canadian Government. They could decide what to do with it.”

“Where is the gold now?”

“We’ve put it into a *cache* for the time being.”

“You didn’t think of doing anything about Shultz and Wolfe?”

“That wasn’t our business. That was a matter for the Canadian Government to handle.”

Worrals nodded. “Well, we’re here from Scotland Yard to arrest them, and take them back.”

“What happened at the Box this morning?”

Worrals laughed shortly. “You can imagine. Shultz and Wolfe are grinding their teeth with rage. They were going to fly home with us—that was the idea. I was trying to handle the thing the easy way, but it didn’t work. All they can think about now is the gold. I’m supposed to be flying round to see if I can see you. If I do I’m to let them know.”

“Are you going to tell them you’ve seen us?”

“Of course. At least, we shall now go back and arrest them.”

“Do you want any help?”

Worrals hesitated. “The snag is, if they see a crowd of people coming they may bolt,” she said thoughtfully. “Just a minute . . . let me think. I’ll tell you what I feel is the best plan—bearing in mind that I want to avoid bloodshed if possible. In particular I want to take that woman down alive, but she’ll fight like ten thousand demons rather than let that happen. She knows what happened to Irma Greese. I suggest that you move along the side of the lake a little way and make a temporary camp; there’s a good place among some big boulders about half a mile along. Light a fire to mark the spot. The idea of the move is to prevent Shultz and Wolfe from seeing our tent, which might make them suspicious. We’ll fly back and say we’ve spotted you. We’ll tell them where you are. That should bring them along hot foot. They’re crazy to get the gold back. You’ll be waiting for them behind cover and hold them up until we come. With three of you against two it should be easy. Then we’ll formally arrest them and take them down to Fort MacWilliam. When we’ve handed them over to the police we’ll come back and fetch you. I imagine you’ll be wanted to give evidence, so the sooner you’re back home the better. How’s that?”

“Suits me,” agreed Larwood. He looked at the others.

“That goes for me,” said Hedin.

“Och aye,” confirmed Angus.

“Good enough,” said Worrals. “Then we needn’t waste any more time. We’ll push along. Shultz and Wolfe should reach you in about three hours.”

With that, Worrals and Frecks returned to the machine, took off, and flew to the far end of the lake. Shultz and Wolfe were waiting.

“Well?” demanded Shultz impatiently.

“We’ve found them,” said Worrals, going ashore.

“You did!” Shultz’s eyes gleamed. Then they narrowed. “You’ve been a long time,” she muttered suspiciously.

“We had a spot of trouble, and had to land to put it right,” returned Worrals in an off-hand manner.

“Where are these men?” asked Wolfe.

“They’ve made camp about a mile this side of the far end of the lake. What are you going to do?”

“We’re going to get our gold,” said Shultz.

“I mean, what do you intend to do after that? What do you want us to do? Are you coming down with us after you’ve got the gold?”

“Yes, if you’ll wait,” said Wolfe.

“Well, don’t be too long. We can’t wait all day.”

“An hour or two won’t make much difference; it will still be daylight when we get back,” asserted Shultz.

“Yes, but I don’t like the look of the weather,” returned Worrals. “I suppose you wouldn’t like us to fly you down to the far end of the lake?” she added, as a new idea struck her.

“We would not,” replied Shultz shortly. “They would see us land, and before we could get to them they would make off with the gold again.”

“As you wish,” said Worrals carelessly. “We’d rather not be involved in this, so if it’s all the same to you we’ll stay here until you get your business over.”

Shultz and Wolfe looked at each other. It was clear that they did not like this arrangement, but as there was no alternative they agreed, and without further parley set off down the lake-side, Shultz still carrying her gun.

Worrals beckoned to Frecks, who joined her on the beach. She drew a deep breath. “That’s that,” she murmured. “At last I think we’ve got them.”

“Nothing has pleased me so much for a long time as this standing here watching those two beasts walk into our trap,” muttered Frecks, with unconcealed satisfaction.

Hardly were the words out of her mouth when there came a loud hail from no great distance behind them. Shultz and Wolfe heard it and spun round, as, of course, did Worrals and Frecks.

Frecks ceased to breathe. She stared as if she could not believe her eyes, as, from behind a towering shoulder of rock that half cut off the view from the east, there marched, in military order, a black-bearded officer followed in single file by ten men. Some of the men carried rifles, and others bundles. In one respect they were alike. All wore uniform. And the uniform was that of the German navy.

“Hanstadt!” breathed Worrals bitterly. “He would choose this moment to arrive. He’s come from the east, which means that he’s come from the sea—a direction we never considered. We deserve to be shot.”

To Frecks the voice sounded far away. “We probably shall be,” she said wearily.

Shultz and Wolfe turned back.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Fresh Plans

SO shaken was Worrals by this dramatic new development that she could only stand and watch, watch helplessly while Shultz and Wolfe hurried back, Shultz obviously delighted although Wolfe seemed not so pleased. Shultz's hail of "Hallo, Fritz!" settled any possible doubt about the identity of the leader of the new arrivals.

Worrals's first overwhelming emotion was disappointment. The thing she had feared had come to pass at the worst possible moment. She had always expected that Hanstadt would come. She had been expecting him ever since his name had been mentioned; but she was not prepared for anything quite like this. For no real reason—as she now realized—she had assumed that he would come alone, or at the most have one companion with him. But ten! That was a different matter altogether. It created a situation so complicated that at first sight there appeared to be no way of coping with it. Most unfortunate of all, Hanstadt had made immediate contact with Shultz. Had he arrived on the scene a couple of minutes later it would have been different. Shultz and Wolfe would have been out of sight, and she, Worrals, would have had an opportunity of speaking to Hanstadt alone. He would, she thought, have been very interested in her version of what had happened at Lake Desolation. But it was no use thinking about what might have happened. Hanstadt had arrived. He had brought a considerable force with him. Shultz had seen him, and in a minute would be telling him *her* version of the story.

The naval uniforms and the fact that the party had come from the east told Worrals much. It was fairly evident that Hanstadt had crossed the Atlantic in a vessel of some sort, possibly in his own U-boat. This must have been arranged with Rumey before the *Hauptmann* had left Germany. Yes, that was it. Rumey had known all about it, but distrusting Wolfe—and Shultz too, no doubt—he had died without revealing his secret to them. The sea, of course, was a long way off, something in the order of a hundred and fifty miles; but a well-equipped party, such as this one appeared to be, would make no hardship of the march. No doubt they had done the trip in easy

stages. The bundles were obviously stores, to augment the dwindling supplies at Lake Desolation. No doubt that had all been arranged, too. How would Hanstadt behave, she wondered, when he was informed that his friend Rumeys was dead?—for informed he would have to be. What would he have to say about Wolfe being there, particularly if, as Shultz had stated, he was infatuated with her? Did he know she was married to Wolfe?

Frecks broke into Worrals's train of thought. "How about getting out of this while the going's good?" she suggested softly. "Now's our chance, while they're too taken up with each other to notice us."

Worrals perceived that she had to make up her mind quickly; and she did. "I'm going to stay here," she decided. "The luck is still against us, but the game may yet turn in our favour. If we go we leave Shultz in complete control. She could say anything, do anything. Moreover, as things stand, if we tried to bolt we should be lucky to get away with our lives."

"That would suit me," murmured Frecks frankly.

"We've never had to run out of a show, and I don't like the idea of starting now. This may all turn out to be very interesting."

"How?"

"I want to see how Hanstadt reacts to a state of affairs for which he certainly couldn't have been prepared. We know more about this business than he does."

"He's looking at Shultz as though he could eat her."

"I know, and that's an angle I don't get," muttered Worrals pensively. "He can't become too friendly with her and be loyal to his friend Rumeys at the same time. Still, men are queer creatures. The thing that worries me most is how *our* party will behave when Shultz doesn't turn up. They may come up here to see what's happened, in which case they'll step right into it. We shall have to prevent that. Just a minute. Let's listen to what's going on."

The meeting between Shultz and Hanstadt had occurred not twenty paces from where they stood. Wolfe hung back a little, as if uncertain of his position. The sailors had dropped their loads and were sitting on them, smoking, as though waiting for orders.

Shultz opened the conversation. "Oh, Fritz darling, I'm so glad to see you!" she gushed. "How did you get here?"

Frecks sneered. "That's a nice way to talk in front of her husband—the two-faced cat."

"*S-sh*," warned Worrals.

“I walked, my dear—walked all the way to see you,” returned Hanstadt cheerfully.

“From where?”

Hanstadt raised his eyebrows. “Didn’t Otto tell you?”

“No.”

“Sly dog—still practising security measures, eh? We’ve marched overland from my old secret base in the north of Hudson Bay. We’ve been quite comfortable there . . . enough war stores to last until the next war, I hope.”

“Did you arrange all this with Otto?” asked Shultz curiously.

“Of course. We made our first trip here together, you know. And we found what we were looking for.”

“You mean the gold?”

“Oh, no. The site for a U-boat base, on the coast. We stumbled on the gold by accident on the trip home.”

Judging from Shultz’s expression, Worrals could see that this was as much news to her as it was to them.

“We didn’t forget the gold though,” went on Hanstadt. “When everything went to pieces at home the arrangement was that Otto should fly here, make a camp, and get as much gold as possible. I was to follow in my U-boat, lie snug in the base for the winter, and then come on, bringing fresh stores. We would then march back to the U-boat, taking the gold with us.”

“And then what?” asked Shultz slowly.

“We were to head south for sunshine.”

“To where, exactly?”

Hanstadt looked puzzled. “I’m surprised Otto didn’t tell you. To South America, where the survivors of the Party have taken refuge. No doubt they are anxiously awaiting the arrival of the gold so that they can proceed with the plans for national recovery.”

Worrals nudged Frecks. “Take a look at Shultz’s face,” she breathed. “That’s something *she* didn’t reckon on.”

Shultz’s expression was now one of dark suspicion and rising anger. “Who is in this party in South America?” she demanded harshly.

“Most of the old crowd that managed to get away. I’ve made radio contact with them as often as I dare.”

“Do I understand,” cried Shultz, “that the plan is to give them the gold, our gold, so that they can carry on with their old games? What about us?”

Hanstadt looked astonished at this outburst. “Of course that was the idea. The Party must have money if it is to resume its activities. You speak as though you thought the gold was for your personal use. I can’t understand why Otto didn’t tell you. Where is he, by the way?”

Worrals nudged Frecks again. “Wolfe was right about Hanstadt’s loyalty,” she whispered. “Stand by for trouble.”

“Otto is dead,” said Shultz in a peculiar voice.

It was Hanstadt’s turn to stare. “Dead?” he echoed incredulously.

“He was killed in an accident—buried under a landslide,” said Shultz, with a catch in her voice.

For a few seconds Hanstadt seemed dazed. “Good heavens,” he breathed. “Poor Otto. This is a terrible blow.” He looked at Wolfe. “Who is this?”

“Doctor Wolfe.”

“What is he doing here? Otto said he would bring only you.”

“We thought, considering where we were coming, it would be a good thing to have a doctor with us,” lied Shultz readily.

Hanstadt nodded, although he appeared to accept the explanation without enthusiasm. “So Otto has gone,” he said heavily, as if he still found it hard to believe. “What bad luck, after coming through the war. Well, we must carry on without him. How much gold have you got?”

“We got more than we expected.”

“Good.”

“But we haven’t got it now.”

“You haven’t . . . got it . . . ? What do you mean?” Hanstadt’s eyes opened wide.

“It was stolen.”

“Stolen! In a place like this?”

“Yes.”

“When?”

“Last night.”

“By whom?”

“Two wandering prospectors. They are in camp lower down the lake. We were just going after them when you arrived.”

“Then let’s go!” cried Hanstadt angrily. Then he appeared really to take note of Worrals and Frecks for the first time. “Who are these girls, and what are they doing here?” he asked sharply.

Shultz shrugged her shoulders. “They just happened to land here. They are looking for a friend who is on a hunting trip. It was they who told us that the prospectors are by the lake.”

Worrals noted that the astute Shultz said nothing about her proposed flight southward. Clearly, she was not going to confess to Hanstadt that she had been within an ace of leaving the lake. No doubt she was already making a plan to meet the new state of affairs occasioned by the arrival of the U-boat commander and his men. Apparently Rumeys had allowed her to think that the gold was for their personal use. He may have been afraid to tell her the truth. He may have kept the secret for reasons of jealousy on account of Wolfe. Anyway, the revelation that it was to be handed over to certain people in South America, thousands of miles away, must have come as an unpleasant shock. That this did not meet with her approval was obvious from her expression. She might be a Nazi, thought Worrals, but her loyalty to that brutal creed did not go to the extent of self-sacrifice. She would, Worrals was convinced, keep the gold if she could get her hands on it. To hand the gold over would not suit Wolfe, either. Thus, Shultz and Wolfe could be expected to work together against Hanstadt, who clearly had no intention of departing from the original scheme. Wolfe had been right about Hanstadt’s fidelity to the Party. When he was ready he would return to his U-boat and head for South America. This, reasoned Worrals, meant that Shultz and Wolfe would not use the submarine to get out if there were any other way. The only other way was themselves—or rather, their aircraft. It seemed likely, therefore, that Shultz would scheme not only to keep them there for the time being, but waive any objection Hanstadt might raise against their being involved. If they were allowed to go, Shultz would have to fall in line with Hanstadt’s wishes if she was ever to leave Lake Desolation. Even if she killed Hanstadt, she would still have his men to reckon with. This surmise, as it turned out, was correct up to a point.

“Well, what are we waiting for?” questioned Hanstadt irritably.

“Nothing,” answered Shultz. “The first thing is to get the gold back. Now that you’re here there shouldn’t be any difficulty about that. We have only two men to deal with.”

“Suppose they’ve hidden the gold?”

“They’ll tell us where it is.”

“But if they don’t?”

Shultz laughed, and at the sound Worrals winced, as Frecks had done. “You leave them to me,” she grated. “By the time I’ve finished with them they’ll be shouting to tell us all they know.”

“How far away are they?”

“About ten miles.”

“Far enough.”

“Why—are you tired?” sneered Shultz. “If you are, I’ll go alone.”

“We’ve just had a long march,” remarked Hanstadt. “Still, I’ll admit that we can’t afford to sit down and let the gold vanish. But what about. . . ?” he made a significant gesture towards the aircraft.

Shultz took the naval officer aside and engaged him in a conversation too low for Worrals to overhear. Still, she had a pretty good idea of what the scheming Shultz was telling him. She felt sure that it would not suit her to have the aircraft destroyed, or put out of action, for that would commit her to the submarine as the only means of getting away, and once the gold was on board she could say good-bye to it.

Presently Shultz came over to her, smiling in her most disarming manner. “Would you mind waiting here for a little while?” she purred. “We may still have to avail ourselves of your kind offer to fly us out. We are going down to those thieving prospectors to demand that they give us back our gold. If they protest we shall take it from them by force, as we have every right to. After all, the gold is ours.”

“Quite so,” agreed Worrals.

“Then you will wait here until we come back?”

Worrals looked doubtful. “Time is getting on. I was hoping to get home to-day.” Then she added a final touch, which she thought was a good one. “You know what happens in these parts when an aircraft is overdue. They send machines out to look for it. Still, if you hurry, we might still get home to-day.”

“We’ll be as quick as possible,” promised Shultz. She dropped her voice. “Say nothing about what I’ve just said to you. The others may want to go home a different way. I don’t feel like a long march. I would rather fly—you understand?”

“Of course,” agreed Worrals. “By the way, who is going to fetch the gold?”

“I am going with Captain Hanstadt, taking four of his men in case there is trouble. The others will stay here with Doctor Wolfe.” Shultz spoke with her eyes on Worrals’s face as if she would read what was going on in her mind.

She must, thought Worrals, realize that all this business must look highly suspicious, even to two simple girls, as she and Frecks were supposed to be.

But what else could she do about it? All she could do was put a casual front on the thing as if it were of no real importance. She still hoped to use them, of that Worrals was sure—as sure as she was that at the finish Shultz would try to murder them to prevent them from talking about what they had seen. It was growing more and more difficult to see how the whole thing would work out, but she had an uncomfortable feeling that in spite of all her efforts the business would end in a shower of bullets. The only way that could be prevented was by getting Shultz into the Ranger, with or without the gold. Her immediate fear was the outcome of the meeting of the two parties—Shultz, reinforced by Hanstadt, and Larwood and his companions. Any risk was worth taking to prevent that from happening, for such an event could only end in a pitched battle. There would be casualties on both sides, no doubt, but Larwood's party, now outnumbered, would get the worst of it. She decided to try another ruse.

“I suppose you wouldn't like me to fly you down?” she offered carelessly. “It's a long way, you know.”

Shultz hesitated, and for one thrilling moment Worrals thought she was going to accept. Then, to her intense disappointment, she declined. “No, I think I had better walk with Commander Hanstadt,” she decided. “There are several things I want to talk to him about and this will be a good opportunity.”

“As you like,” returned Worrals, hiding her disappointment.

“And you will wait here for me?”

“Of course.” Had Shultz but known it, Worrals had no intention of going without her.

Shultz rejoined Hanstadt, who called four of his men by name. To another, an N.C.O. who was among those who were to stay behind, he spoke in a low voice. The man saluted.

Turning back to Shultz, apparently forgetting that Worrals and Frecks were within earshot, Hanstadt remarked: “There's one thing I forgot to mention. Are you aware that the British know—or think they know—where you are?”

Worrals stiffened. So, she noticed, did Shultz, who replied tersely: “How do you know that?”

“When we were at Hudson Bay my radio operator picked up a signal. Who sent it and for whom it was intended we don't know. Unfortunately it was very weak. But your name was mentioned, and as far as we could make out steps had been taken to—er—get in touch with you.”

Shultz frowned. “What sort of steps?”

“A police officer named Warrington, or Borrallton, or a name something like that, has been detailed to make the arrest.”

“What name did you say?” asked Shultz in a hard voice.

“It sounded like Warrington. The signal was weak and we didn’t get it properly, and it was not repeated.”

For a few seconds Shultz did not speak, or move. She stood staring at Hanstadt. Then she threw a glance at Worrals, and stared for a moment before turning back to her companion.

Worrals could almost read what was passing in her mind. Luckily Hanstadt had stumbled over the name, but it was still close enough to Worrals to make her wonder. The fact that she had glanced at Worrals was sufficient proof of that. Now she was hovering on the brink of concrete suspicion, debating in her mind whether there could be any possible connection between the police officer referred to by Hanstadt and the two girls who had so fortuitously dropped in. Apparently she decided that the idea was too far-fetched to be seriously considered, for she said no more about it. Nevertheless, Worrals knew that it had been touch-and-go, and from now on it would need only one little slip to fan the spark of dormant suspicion into flame.

Adopting a pose of unconcern, as if she had not heard the conversation, or if she had, then as if it meant nothing to her, Worrals turned to Frecks, and smiled bleakly when she saw how the colour had drained from her face. “Take it easy, partner,” she said softly.

“Easy!” breathed Frecks. “How can you talk about taking it easy when we’re balanced on the edge of a volcano?”

“It’s O.K.,” Worrals reassured her. “Shultz was a bit worried for a moment, but came to the conclusion that if we were police officers sent out on a job of this sort the British Government must be nuts.”

“They’re moving off,” whispered Frecks.

“Good.” Turning, Worrals saw that Shultz and Hanstadt, followed by four rifle-armed men in single file, had started on their journey. The six remaining sat where they were, smoking. Wolfe stood alone, watching. “Things seem to be getting a bit complicated,” went on Worrals. “I’m sorry now that I didn’t take the bull by the horns and grab Shultz and Wolfe while we were alone here. But there, being sorry won’t help matters. We were not to know that half the German Navy was due to arrive.”

“What are we supposed to be doing now?” inquired Frecks. “I’m getting dizzy with all this thinking.”

“We’re waiting for Shultz to come back.”

“Then what?”

“She’s got a vague idea of snatching the gold and then getting us to fly her away, leaving the rest to go hang.”

“That should suit us fine.”

“It would but for one snag, and it’s a sticky one. What do you suppose is going to happen when Shultz’s outfit comes face to face with Larwood? Larwood, Angus, and Hedin, are expecting one man and one woman, instead of which there will arrive a German naval detachment. Obviously, that mustn’t happen. We shall have to warn them.”

“How?”

“That,” replied Worrals slowly, “is what I’m trying to work out. It isn’t the only fly in the ointment. There’s the U-boat.”

“What about it?”

“It ought to be at the bottom of the sea and its secret base destroyed. Hanstadt knows that as well as we do, and he must know we know it. Do you suppose that he’s going to let us fly away home and tell the Mounties that a U-boat, complete with crew, is hiding at the northern end of Hudson Bay? Not on your life! It’s my opinion that Shultz’s one concern, if ever she gets her hands on that gold, will be to bump off everyone who knows anything about it. Hanstadt will certainly agree with her as far as we’re concerned. We’ve got to do something about it while they’re away. There’s one man who might be willing to help us.”

“Who?”

“Wolfe.”

“Are you crazy?”

“Don’t make any mistake. He doesn’t like this new arrangement any more than we do. He knows all about his charming lady wife, and he doesn’t like Hanstadt. Let’s go and have a word with him. We’ve plenty of time— unless Shultz gets it into her head that we *may* be the people sent up here to get her. There isn’t a lot of difference between Warrington and Worrals. One boob now, partner, and the balloon will go up.”

CHAPTER
FOURTEEN

*A Matter
of Wits*

WORRALS turned towards the spot where Wolfe, hands in pockets, leaned, deep in thought, against the cornerstones of the wall that hid the actual fabric of the Box. From time to time he regarded the sailors, who were still sitting about, with disfavour.

“Just what are you going to try to pull off?” Frecks asked Worrals without enthusiasm.

“I’m not quite sure,” admitted Worrals frankly. “We’ll see how things go, and how Wolfe shapes up. We know the most important factors of the situation, so it’s up to us to juggle them to suit ourselves. First, there’s the gold. Wolfe wants it—wants it badly. In fact, he’s prepared to do anything to get it. As things stand the odds are against him, so he should be receptive to any idea that promises to improve matters. Secondly, he hates Hanstadt. He’s jealous of him. Thirdly, he has no intention of going to South America if he can prevent it. In other words, what he would like is the gold and a free trip south, with or without Shultz.”

“He wouldn’t go without her,” declared Frecks.

“I’m not so sure about that,” returned Worrals. “He knows she isn’t to be trusted, and now that she has Hanstadt here she’s quite likely to turn against him. I’d say that if it came to a choice he’d rather have the gold. Shultz will go with the man who gets the gold, you can bet your life on that. At the moment Wolfe supposes, correctly, that Larwood and Hedin have the gold, but that’s all he does know. He doesn’t know anything about Angus being here, or that Larwood and Hedin have been put wise about him and Shultz. Those are the main facts to keep in mind. Let’s see if we can twist them to suit us.”

By this time they had reached Wolfe, who turned his head to look at them. His expression did not change. He did not speak.

Worrals wasted no time in preamble. “I’m afraid this affair is not working out quite as you hoped, Doctor Wolfe?” she began, casually.

Wolfe grunted something that might have meant anything. Then he added a remark that revealed his train of thought. "It's the arrival of this man Hanstadt that has upset everything."

Worrals nodded sympathetically. "It begins to look as though you won't get the gold, whatever happens," she prodded gently.

Wolfe did not answer, but his frown deepened.

"You realize that I couldn't help overhearing part of the conversation just now?" went on Worrals evenly. "Am I right in supposing that this gold is to be transported to South America for the benefit of certain members of the Nazi Party who have taken refuge there?"

Wolfe gave Worrals a long, penetrating stare, as if he realized for the first time how much she knew. "Yes, that is so," he admitted.

"We can't agree to that, of course," went on Worrals imperturbably. "I shall make it my business to report the matter to the authorities at the first opportunity."

"You may never have the opportunity," replied Wolfe dryly.

Worrals raised her eyebrows. "Indeed! Is that a threat?"

"Hanstadt is a rabid Nazi. He's not likely to allow anyone, much less two girls, to upset his plans."

"We're not in Germany now, Doctor Wolfe," stated Worrals curtly. "Let me be frank. I raised this subject because it seems to me that we have certain interests in common."

A flicker of surprise appeared in Wolfe's eyes. "Be explicit," he said.

"Obviously we shall not allow this gold to fall into the hands of Nazi conspirators if we can prevent it. If Hanstadt gets his hands on it that's the last *you'll* see of it, anyway. Thus, Hanstadt is our mutual enemy."

"So! And what can be done about it?" almost sneered Wolfe.

"I thought that if we saw eye-to-eye we might do something," suggested Worrals meaningfully.

"Such as?"

Worrals pretended to hesitate, although she knew quite well what she was going to say. "Instead of sitting here for six hours we might fly down the lake and demand the gold from these prospectors."

"Do you suppose they would give it up?" inquired Wolfe cynically.

"They might be willing to compromise."

"Why should they?"

“Because I shall tell them that if they persist in keeping it I shall report the theft to the Mounted Police, and at the same time state just how the gold was obtained.”

“And then what?”

Worrals shrugged. “Let us deal with one thing at a time. The first business is to secure the gold, or part of it. I don’t see why we shouldn’t get it, and get away with it.”

“What about my wife?”

Worrals knew this question was bound to come. “At present she’s with Hanstadt——”

“I know that,” snapped Wolfe, flushing.

“But that’s because she’s afraid he might get the gold,” went on Worrals calmly. “Like you, she is interested chiefly in the gold. If you had it she’d forget about Hanstadt—at least, that’s my impression. She doesn’t want to go to South America any more than you do. If you had the gold she’d go with you.”

“You think so?”

“I’m sure of it.”

“But even if we got the gold how could we get her away from Hanstadt, who has a force of men to back up his arguments?”

Worrals made a gesture of impatience. “I’m afraid I’m wasting my time. Tell me,” she went on, “the gold is in small bags, I understand?”

“Yes.”

“Very well. Here is a concrete suggestion. We will go down to these prospectors and demand the gold. At least they will share it. We will put your share in the plane and fill some spare bags with sand. When Hanstadt comes you will tell him that you are not going to South America—he is welcome to the gold. He will take the bags—the dummy ones. You will have to find a way to let your wife know that the gold is in the plane. She will then come with you.”

All this, of course, was so much verbal camouflage. All Worrals really wanted was to get Wolfe down to Larwood and Hedin, when he could be put under arrest. Failing that, she and Frecks would go down alone. She was determined at any cost to prevent Shultz’s party from coming into collision with Larwood and his companions.

Wolfe still looked dubious, and she had a pretty good idea of what was passing in his mind. He must know that Shultz and Hanstadt would probably come back with the gold; but in that case, what would happen to him? As far

as his wife and Hanstadt were concerned he would become a mere encumbrance. They might leave him behind. If he complained they might even “liquidate” him. Certain it was that he would have no say in the disposal of the gold. On the other hand, if he had the gold, he would be able to dictate terms. Everything depended on who had the gold.

“I think there is something in what you say,” he decided at last. “Like you, I am opposed to the idea of the gold falling into the hands of unscrupulous Nazis. Moreover, although you may not have realized it, I’m afraid you are in danger. Commander Hanstadt is not likely to allow you to go off and tell the police that a U-boat is hiding in Northern Canada. I would not like to see any harm come to you; that is why I am willing to help you in any way I can.”

Worrals had the greatest difficulty not to smile at this hypocritical assurance. She knew just how much it was worth. However, she did not express her thoughts. Instead, she murmured blandly: “That is most kind of you.”

Wolfe went on: “But there is an obstacle in the way of your plan to leave here.”

“What is it?”

“You will not be allowed to go.”

Worrals’s forehead knit in a frown. “What do you mean?”

“You are virtually prisoners.”

This was news to Worrals. “Is that so?” she asked sharply. “By whose orders?”

“I heard Hanstadt, before he left, tell the *unteroffizier* here to watch you. On no account are you to be allowed to leave. The same applies to me.”

Worrals was indignant. “How dare he! Well, we surely can find a way round that.”

“What do you suggest?” asked Wolfe cynically.

Worrals inclined her head towards the Box. “Has the cabin door got a lock on it?”

“Yes.”

“Then why not ask the sailors in for some refreshment, and when they are inside, lock the door? Then we’ll fly down the lake. I’ll do some straight talking to these prospectors. What are their names, by the way?”

“Larwood, an Englishman, and Hedin, a Swede.”

“All right. Deal with these sailors; then we’ll go and get the gold—unless you prefer to wait here for me?”

“No, I’ll come with you,” decided Wolfe, smiling curiously. A new expression had come into his eyes—one that Worrals did not like. “By the way,” he went on, “what will Hanstadt think when he hears the plane in the air?”

“It doesn’t necessarily follow that he will hear it,” replied Worrals. “I shall fly a roundabout course to keep as far away from him as possible. If he should hear us—well, he’ll assume that we’ve got away and are going home. He won’t be able to do anything about it, anyway. Let’s fix these men.”

“I will offer them a glass of cognac each, to get them inside,” said Wolfe. “Wait here for a moment.” Turning, he walked away and entered the Box.

Worrals noticed that the *unteroffizier*, although sitting in a careless attitude, was watching them closely.

“Wolfe is up to something—a scheme of his own,” she told Frecks softly. “I’ve no idea what it is, but watch out. I don’t like the look in his eyes.”

Presently Wolfe reappeared at the door of the Box. He hailed the sailors. “You men must be tired,” he said. “Would you care for a drink?”

The sailors needed no second invitation. They were on their feet instantly, making for the open door. Only one hesitated—the *unteroffizier*. As he was under orders to watch, it was clear that he did not like the idea of leaving the girls outside while he went in. Apparently Wolfe realized this, for he beckoned to Worrals. “Come on,” he invited.

Worrals and Frecks attached themselves to the tail of the party as it trooped into the roomy cabin. On a small table were seven glasses, one slightly apart from the rest. Into these Wolfe was pouring some sort of drink from a bottle. Putting down the bottle he picked up the glass that stood apart and raised it in a toast. “*Prosit!*” he said.

Each sailor picked up a glass, and having echoed the toast, tossed off the contents. The proceedings took on a more cheerful aspect.

Wolfe looked at Worrals and Frecks. “Would you care for a glass?” He seemed suddenly to be in a good humour.

“No, thanks,” declined Worrals, uneasily, for she was suddenly suspicious of Wolfe’s new-found gaiety.

For two or three minutes Wolfe engaged the sailors in a brisk conversation, about their journey, their leader, and the like. It was quite evident to Worrals that he was killing time, but with what object she could not imagine. Why, she wondered, did he not find an excuse for them to go out and lock the door behind them, as planned?

One of the sailors sank into a chair, mopping his brow, muttering something about its being hot in the cabin. Another leaned against a wall. Still Worrals suspected nothing. In fact, it was not until one of the men collapsed like an empty sack that the truth struck her. The other men laughed, jeering at such weakness. But when another man flopped to the floor there was a sudden silence.

In the tense interval that followed Worrals understood. She remembered how Wolfe had drugged Larwood and Hedin to keep them quiet while the relief plane was there. By this time only one sailor remained on his feet—the *unteroffizier*, who was a man of fine physique. Apparently he, too, realized what had happened, for he spat out a curse and groped at a pistol that was holstered on his belt. But it was too late. He managed to get the pistol clear, but it fell from his hand to the floor with a harsh clatter. His knees crumpled, and he dropped senseless over the weapon.

Wolfe laughed mirthlessly. “That settles that,” he observed.

For a moment Worrals did not know what to say, or think. She was too taken aback by what had happened. She could only stare at the bodies lying about the floor. Then she said: “Are these men dead?”



[Page 188](#)

“That settles that.”

“No—no,” answered Wolfe. “I have only given them a few drops of a harmless drug to keep them quiet. They will be all right in a few hours.” He turned away, to put the bottle in the cupboard from which he had taken it, a receptacle inset between a steel longeron and two ribs of the airframe.

Worrals stepped up behind him. She acted, as she afterwards told Frecks, on the spur of the moment. It was an opportunity; she realized it, and took it. Very quietly she produced a pair of handcuffs from her pocket. One “bracelet” she slipped over the wrist of the hand holding the bottle and the

other over the longeron. There was a sharp double click as the locks snapped home.

Wolfe spun round—or it would be more correct to say that he tried to, for as one wrist was locked to the longeron he could not get far. He struggled, but without the slightest effect. His eyes were round with amazement and his lower jaw sagged foolishly, in something between shock and panic. While he was tearing at the handcuff, a futile effort, Worrals lifted the tail of his jacket, took an automatic from his hip pocket and tossed it to Frecks.

Suddenly Wolfe found his tongue. “What’s this?” he snarled. “What are you doing?”

“It should be fairly clear, Doctor Wolfe,” said Worrals coldly. “You are under arrest for murder. If you go on pulling at your wrist like that you’re liable to break it. I shall come back for you presently.”

Wolfe appeared to go mad. He cursed until he foamed at the mouth. A trapped wild beast could not have put up a more terrible exhibition of impotent fury. But it served no useful purpose. Steel longerons do not break easily; neither do handcuffs.

Worrals turned away. “Let’s get along and see about the others,” she said to Frecks quietly.

CHAPTER
FIFTEEN

*Worrals Shows
Her Hand*

WITH WOLFE still raging, Worrals and Frecks left the Box, and without troubling to lock the door, walked quickly to the aircraft.

“I’m going to fly a roundabout course to our camp, hoping that Shultz won’t hear us,” announced Worrals. “She certainly won’t see us, but whether or not she hears us depends on how far she has got and the behaviour of the wind. Not that it matters very much. If she hears us take off she’ll imagine that we’ve managed to get away and are heading for home. My idea is to leave the machine at our original moorings. We shall have to tell Lowenhardt what has happened; then we’ll walk along the lake to where the men are waiting.”

“Then what?”

“When Shultz arrives I shall have it out with her.”

Frecks did not answer. The plan, such as it was, seemed a bit vague, and it was not easy to see how it was going to work out. However, she was content to leave it to Worrals. A show-down was inevitable now, anyway.

Worrals took the Ranger off into the wind, which was coming out of the west, the direction in which Shultz and Hanstadt had marched. They had by this time covered not fewer than two miles, she reckoned, and as the wind was fresh it was reasonable to suppose that the noise made by the aircraft taking off would not be heard, although it would not do to rely on it. As soon as the machine was airborne she turned sharply to the south, a course which she held for ten minutes before turning west, a move that brought her parallel with the lake and some twenty miles from it. Not until the Ranger was beyond the western extremity of the lake did she turn north; then, with her engines idling, she glided in as she had done on the occasion of their first arrival, to land at the same place. As they taxied to the mooring-rock they could see Lowenhardt sitting on a box outside the tent.

They went ashore, Worrals taking the rifle with her, and told Lowenhardt what had happened at the Box to upset their plan.

He had little to say about it. “Shultz always did have the luck,” he commented bitterly. “Her time is getting short, though,” he added viciously—a remark that Frecks was to remember later, although the significance of it did not strike her at the time.

“Neither good fortune nor bad can last indefinitely,” observed Worrals tritely. “We’re going on to warn Captain Larwood and the others that Shultz is on the way, with reinforcements.”

Lowenhardt nodded. His manner was abstract. Mention of Shultz appeared always to have a curious effect on him.

“We shall come back here when the business is finished,” Worrals told him, making ready to leave. “You stay here and take care of the camp.”

Lowenhardt nodded again. There was an expression on his face that Frecks did not like, but she put it down to a morose condition caused by his sufferings. She looked at Worrals. “What about the rifle?” she inquired.

“I think we had better leave it here with Lowenhardt—just in case,” answered Worrals. “If Hanstadt or some of his sailors make a break they might come this way. In any case, as the affair is likely to be conducted at close quarters you’d do better to take the shotgun.”

“What about you?”

“It may not come to a fight. If it does I’d rather rely on my automatic.”

“Right.” Frecks handed the rifle to Lowenhardt and fetched the twelve-bore.

“We’ll see you later,” Worrals told the German. “Keep an eye on the machine,” she concluded, as they set off along the shore of the lake.

They had only about half a mile to go, and before they had covered half that distance they could see the smoke of Larwood’s camp fire. Worrals remarked on it. Frecks did not answer. She was experiencing that sensation of lively expectation that so often precedes violent action. Within the next hour or two, she thought moodily, anything could happen. There was this about it, though; the show would be over one way or the other.

When they reached the place where the men were waiting—for Shultz and Wolfe, as they supposed—they were greeted with exclamations of surprise.

“How did you get behind us?” asked Larwood. Worrals had of course come upon the camp from the rear.

Worrals found a seat on a stone and narrated what had happened. “Naturally, our first concern was to let you know,” she went on. “Frankly, I don’t think there’s anything to get upset about. We should still be able to

handle the situation, although it isn't going to be as simple as we anticipated. I have a card or two up my sleeve which may count in our favour."

"You'd better show them to us, lassie," requested Angus practically.

Worrals asked Frecks to take up a position commanding a view to the east, to give them warning of the approach of the enemy, and then explained her plan. This occupied a little time. "You couldn't have chosen a better place for an ambush," she concluded, casting an approving eye round the position.

The spot was in fact a saucer-shaped depression some ten or twelve yards across, with a sandy floor strewn with boulders, mostly small ones. In the centre smouldered the camp fire. The surrounding rim cut off the view on all sides, and, conversely, made it impossible for anyone approaching to see inside without coming right up. The rim was not level. It was a good deal higher on the western than the eastern side, which, consequently, it overlooked. Moreover, along the western side were scattered masses of rock behind which a platoon of infantry could have taken cover without their presence being suspected by anyone approaching from the opposite side—the direction from which Shultz and her party would appear. The advantages offered by such a useful natural feature were not to be ignored, and they were incorporated into the general plan, which was discussed at some length.

"It's almost uncanny how every plan we've made since we came here has been upset by something which no amount of thought could have foreseen," observed Worrals anxiously. "But there, I don't see how anything outside our calculations can happen *this* time."

Angus Fraser shook his head, grey with the wisdom of years. "The unexpected can always turn up to make fools of us, lassie," he observed sadly. "That's what makes life so verra interesting."

Frecks's voice cut into the conversation, ending it abruptly. "Here they come," she announced sharply. "They've just come into sight about half a mile away. Shultz and Hanstadt are walking in front; the others are close behind."

"O.K., keep your head down; they mustn't see us," returned Worrals. "Into position, everybody, please."

In three minutes the only person in sight was Worrals, who sat on a boulder near the dying fire, her chin cupped in the palm of her left hand, her right hand almost hidden under a handkerchief that lay in her lap. Only a close scrutiny would have revealed the black muzzle of an automatic, just protruding. A quiet, expectant hush settled on the scene.

Worrals waited, to all outward appearances unconcerned, but actually with every nerve tense, her eyes on the eastern rim of the depression, over which, it might reasonably be assumed, Shultz and her party would appear. She was fully alive to the risk she was taking; but if, as it seemed, her mission could not be fulfilled without risk, then it had to be accepted. The only alternative was an abrupt challenge that could hardly fail to open hostilities. This would mean casualties on both sides, which she was determined to avoid if it was humanly possible. Everything would depend on the first minute, on Shultz's reaction to the shock that was in store for her. Worrals had this advantage: she knew that the meeting was imminent. Shultz did not. What she would see when she topped the ridge was something altogether different from what she expected. It would take her a few seconds to grasp the situation—sufficient time, thought Worrals, for her to anticipate any move Shultz might decide to make. What was perhaps more important, it would give Hanstadt a chance to get a better idea of the true state of affairs.

A pebble rattled. A boot scraped against a rock. Then, after a brief interval of silence, Shultz appeared. Her eyes found Worrals. They stared, brows knit. She came on, her eyes making a swift, suspicious reconnaissance. They returned to Worrals. She halted. Then, gun held in both hands ready for instant use, she advanced slowly. Hanstadt appeared at her elbow.

Worrals did not move. She could not see the sailors, but she imagined that they had been halted by their leader slightly to the rear.

Shultz came on down the slope a step at a time, her eyes on Worrals's face. It was obvious that she did not know what to make of her presence there, but it had aroused her suspicions. Hanstadt, more confident, kept pace with her.

At a distance of half-a-dozen paces Shultz stopped. "What are you doing here?" she rasped.

Now, the success of Worrals's plan rested on the hope that she would be able to so flabbergast Hanstadt with her first words that he would refrain from doing anything until explanations had been furnished.

Worrals met Shultz's gaze squarely. Then she said, speaking very distinctly: "Anna Shultz, or Mrs. Wolfe, if you prefer it, I am here to arrest you for the wilful murder of Hauptmann Otto Rumey, somewhere near this spot, about six weeks ago." Her voice ended abruptly.

Silence fell. Shultz did not move. She appeared to freeze. Only her eyes narrowed to two slits and the colour fled from her face. Her lips parted. The

hands that held the gun gripped the weapon until the knuckles showed white.

Hanstadt frowned, and turned slowly to look at her. He was obviously dumbfounded, which was precisely what Worrals had gambled on. He moistened his lips. "Mrs. Wolfe?" he muttered. "What does she mean—Mrs. Wolfe?"

"This woman is the wife of Doctor Wolfe, who was a partner in the cold-blooded murder of your friend, Otto Rumey," said Worrals, without taking her eyes from Shultz's face.

By this time Shultz was recovering. She drew a deep breath. "Lies!" she sneered. "All lies!" But there was little conviction in her voice.

"Feldwebel Lowenhardt, whom you thought you had murdered with Rumey, is alive, and he will tell the truth," said Worrals evenly.

Shultz's temper appeared to snap. At any rate, she realized now that Worrals was not what she had taken her to be. She was an enemy, and in her creed an enemy was something to be destroyed ruthlessly. She braced herself for swift movement.

But Worrals was ready. She, too, moved swiftly. The handkerchief was flicked aside, revealing the automatic. "Don't move," she warned.

What would have happened had there been no interruption is open to surmise, but at this moment there came a dramatic intervention.

"Liar!" snarled a voice—a man's voice. It went on, thin and vibrant with passion. "You foul beast! You hell-cat! You she-devil! You shot him, and then threw him in the water like a dead dog. You thought you had killed me too—but I'm alive . . . alive!" The voice raged like a pent-up stream that has burst restraint.

By this time of course Worrals had realized what had happened, and a switch of her eyes was sufficient confirmation. The speaker was Lowenhardt. Crazy for revenge, he, too, had played his own game. He had followed them, and now, the very spirit of Nemesis, he seemed to tower up over the western brink of the depression, Worrals's rifle in his left hand, the forefinger of the other thrusting a quivering accusation at the woman in front of him.

If Worrals was amazed by this development, and she certainly was, the effect on Shultz, suddenly finding herself confronted by a man whom she thought was dead, was even more violent. She seemed to be stricken by paralysis, while her face was convulsed by the most dreadful expression Worrals had ever seen on a human being. This was hardly to be wondered at, for with her own eyes she had seen the man who now accused her, lying

dead. She had seen him sink into the water. Worrals could well understand how the impact of such a shock bereft her of speech.

The shock did not of course persist more than a few seconds. Then Shultz came to herself with a rush. Breath poured into her lungs with a hiss. The gun began to move, but before it could be aimed a rifle roared. A bullet struck something and ricocheted with a shrill metallic *whang*.

The effect was extraordinary. Shultz spun round, the gun flying from her hands. She reeled, fell over, and lay still. The gun came down with a noisy clatter on the rocks.

Worrals sprang up. "Steady!" she cried urgently. "Steady, everybody. Lowenhardt, put that rifle down at once. Commander Hanstadt, I give you warning that you are covered at close range by men who do not miss."

She was not entirely clear as to what had happened. Lowenhardt had fired the shot—she knew that. The bullet had knocked Shultz over, but it did not sound like a bullet striking flesh. She thought it had hit the gun—which, as it turned out, was correct. She went on quickly: "Commander Hanstadt, I advise you to call your men in. Tell them to ground their arms. I have no orders about you, but there are some things you should know."

Hanstadt looked about him. He seemed dazed by the speed of events. His eyes wandered along the ridge of rocks from which rifle muzzles now projected. Then, apparently realizing that his incautious advance had landed him in a vulnerable position, he shrugged his shoulders and called the necessary order. His men marched in, stacked arms, and stood looking about them like four lost sheep.

Worrals walked over to Shultz. The only wound she could find was an abrasion on her forehead, so she could only conclude that by one of those curious chances she had been struck by her own gun, when it had spun out of her hands under the impact of Lowenhardt's bullet.

She turned to Lowenhardt, who still dominated the scene. He stood glaring down at the woman who had killed his officer. "Feldwebel Lowenhardt, I would like you to tell Commander Hanstadt what has happened here—how Hauptmann Rumey met his death." Then, looking round, she went on: "Freckles, come and give me a hand. The others will remain where they are for the time being." She turned again to Shultz, who all this time had lain so still that she took it for granted that she was unconscious; but as she drew nearer she saw her eyelashes move, as if the woman was watching through half-closed lids. Her right arm was also moving slowly, towards her belt. Worrals knew then that she was shamming; but before she could so much as utter a warning, Shultz, moving with the

speed of a striking snake, was on her feet, a small automatic in her hand. In a flash she had fired two shots at Lowenhardt, choosing him for her target either from sheer revenge, or to prevent him from bearing witness against her.

Worrals saw Lowenhardt stumble, and that was all she saw, for as soon as she perceived Shultz's intention she had jumped forward to knock her arm up, or perhaps disarm her. By the time Shultz had fired two shots Worrals had seized her wrist, forcing the weapon up; and thus for a moment they stood, swaying, as Shultz strove to get her arm free. The others could do nothing; at least, there could be no question of shooting. Hanstadt ran forward, crying: "Put that gun down, Anna." Simultaneously, exerting all her strength, Shultz tore herself free, but, fortunately for Worrals, overbalanced in doing so. She staggered backwards, struck her heel against a boulder and nearly fell; indeed, she only prevented a fall by using the hand that held the pistol to save herself.

Worrals had her covered in an instant. "All right, that'll do," she snapped.

Shultz stiffened in a crouching position. The eyes that met Worrals were those of a trapped animal. There was no fear in them, only blind rage. They went from Worrals to Hanstadt, then to Larwood, Hedin, Fraser, and Frecks, who had now shown themselves. She spat at Worrals. Then she turned and ran.

Worrals could have shot her. Any of them could have shot her, quite easily. Indeed, it is a wonder that she was not shot, for several muzzles covered her instantly. But Worrals shouted: "Don't shoot! I'll get her," and dashed off in pursuit.

CHAPTER
SIXTEEN

*Strange
Justice*

AS SHULTZ and Worrals disappeared below the rim of the depression, Frecks set off after them. She was not thinking of a chase. As she topped the ridge she expected to find Shultz and Worrals fighting it out, in the rough ground beyond. She was not a little concerned, therefore, when she saw that Shultz had got a clear lead of some fifty or sixty yards and was still running strongly. There was no shooting. Shultz, apparently, was determined to get as long a lead as possible; Worrals was equally determined to catch her. So they raced on. In any case, thought Frecks, as she too went on, Shultz would take some hitting, for as she ran she twisted and turned, not so much from choice, probably, as on account of the nature of the terrain, which was so rough as to make a straight course impossible.

Frecks put on a spurt in the hope of drawing level with Worrals. She, like everyone else, had been slightly bemused by the rush of events in the depression, which had occurred in far less time than they take to narrate. Once again the unexpected—in this case it was Lowenhardt—had thrown their plans into confusion, she thought bitterly, as she raced on, gradually overtaking Worrals.

At last she drew nearly level. It was no time to waste breath, and she only spoke, really, to let Worrals know that she was there. “Where does she think she’s going?” she panted.

“To the Box—to fetch Wolfe—and the other—sailors,” returned Worrals.

Nothing more was said. The chase settled down to what was obviously going to be a stern business. Whatever else she could or could not do, Shultz could certainly run. Indeed, for a little while she actually increased her lead, and Frecks was afraid they might lose sight of her altogether in the chaos of bog and rock they were now traversing. Should that happen it would obviously be a serious complication, for they would be compelled to proceed warily. Frecks did not forget that Shultz still had her pistol.

Not until they had covered what Frecks judged roughly to be about three miles did Shultz show any signs of weakening, and by that time the pursuers were also beginning to tire. Shultz, who had several times snatched a glance over her shoulder, now began to look back more frequently, revealing that she was beginning to pay for her earlier speed. She was growing anxious. Once or twice she stumbled, another significant indication that she was nearly done. Still, she did not give in easily, and it was some time before there was any appreciable difference in their respective positions.

Frecks, being lighter than Worrals, lasted better. She began to draw ahead, her intention being to press Shultz so hard as to bring her to bay, and hold her so until Worrals came up. In this she succeeded, but she nearly paid for her temerity when Shultz, with a lead now of only about twenty yards, spun round and opened fire. Frecks heard the whistle of a bullet as she dived for cover behind a ridge of shale. Shultz took a long-range snap at Worrals, without effect, and then continued her flight, swinging away to the left towards a clump of birches.

Frecks only caught an occasional glimpse of her as, bending low, she dodged between some big tussocks of peat. Brief as the pause had been, it had given Worrals a chance to close up. Frecks, seeing her close, went on after Shultz, determined if possible to prevent her from reaching the birches, for should she succeed in getting into the thick cover the close-branched trees provided, it would, she perceived, be a difficult—not to say dangerous—matter to get her out. Yet to leave her there would give her a chance to recover her breath and her strength.

By making a final spurt Shultz ran into the birches with a lead of about twelve yards. Frecks could have taken a shot at her, but apart from her natural disinclination to shoot the woman through the back she did not know what Worrals would have to say about it. Worrals had seemed determined to take Shultz alive so that she should face her judges in a court of justice. Frecks therefore pulled up to wait for Worrals. In any case she had no intention of committing the suicidal folly of following Shultz into cover, knowing that she might be waiting just inside for an easy shot. She waited behind a hummock of peat. Worrals arrived about ten seconds later.

“I tried to beat her to it, but couldn’t quite manage it,” panted Frecks.

“Never mind,” answered Worrals, breathing heavily. “We’ll——”

Whatever it was they were to do was never revealed, for at this moment, from just inside the copse, came a shot, followed an instant later by a piercing scream. Frecks stared at Worrals wide-eyed, for the terror in the cry

was too real to be a trick. Before they could do anything the scream was explained.

From out of the coppice, walking backwards, came Shultz, followed by a bear which, standing erect, growled dreadfully as it made terrific swipes—swipes is the correct word—at her with its forepaws. The animal's lips were curled back, showing the powerful fangs, and at the spectacle it presented Frecks's blood ran cold. Shultz's right arm dangled uselessly at her side, apparently broken. With her left she struck futile blows at the bear. The pistol was not evident. Evidently there had been time for only one shot before the blow that had broken her arm had put the weapon out of action.

Worrals dashed forward, as did Frecks, but they were too late to prevent tragedy. Shultz appeared to strike her heel against a stump and went over backwards. In an instant the bear had thrown itself on her and was mauling her with tooth and claw.

By the time Worrals had reached the spot the wretched woman's screams had given way to groans. Worrals fired four shots into the bear at point-blank range, aiming behind the shoulder for the heart—she dare not fire at the head for fear of hitting Shultz. The only visible effect of the shots was to cause the bear to turn on her, and it might have gone badly with her had not Frecks, who now came up on the other side, taken a hand. She put the muzzle of her gun almost in the bear's ear and pulled both triggers together. It was enough. The bear fell over on its side, dead.

Worrals pointed to a mass of congealed blood and hair on the animal's rump. "It's the wounded beast we saw the other day," she muttered, as she turned her attention to Shultz, who lay where she had fallen, moaning feebly.

Frecks looked down, and felt her knees go weak. It had been her lot to see more than one nasty sight in the war, but nothing quite like this. Had Shultz been killed outright it would not have been so bad, but although she was terribly mutilated she was still alive, and—what was even worse—conscious. One side of her face had been almost bitten away. Her scalp was torn. There was blood on her shirt.

Worrals looked at Frecks helplessly. Her face was ashen. Words were unnecessary. There was really nothing they could do. They had no first-aid kit with them—not that it would have been much use if they had. Anything less than a skilful surgeon and an operating table would have been a waste of time and effort. It seemed terrible to leave the woman there to die, but to carry her either to the Box or their own camp would be a task beyond their strength.

“You’d better go back and fetch the men, Frecks,” said Worrals in a flat sort of voice. “I’ll stay here. Tell them to bring a blanket and the medical cabinet. Frankly, I don’t think it will be any use, but we must do what we can. Perhaps your quickest way would be to make for the aircraft and bring it along to the nearest point.” Dropping her voice, she added: “If she’s still alive I’ll fly her straight down to hospital. It’s her only chance.”

“We’ve got a radio,” reminded Frecks. “Wouldn’t it be better to send a signal asking for help, for a doctor to be sent up?”

“It would, were it not for one thing.”

“What’s that?”

“The U-boat. Someone will be on duty at the radio there, and would certainly pick up the signal. One mention of trouble at Lake Desolation and that submarine would disappear like magic. We don’t want that to happen. There’s not much point in taking the risk, anyway. It would be just as quick for me to fly Shultz down.”

“Right,” agreed Frecks. “I’ll be as quick as I can.” She started off, but before she had taken a dozen paces she was relieved to see Larwood and Angus approaching. Hanstadt and his sailors were with them. Turning back, she said: “Here are the men coming now.”

“Thank goodness,” answered Worrals. “In that case you’d better wait.”

Frecks nodded, and beckoned to the men to hasten. They saw what had happened, of course, before they actually reached the spot. When they came up they stopped, each expressing his emotions in his own way. Angus dropped on his knees beside the mutilated woman, who had now fallen silent, and whose eyes were closed. She appeared to be unconscious. He shook his head. “I’ve seen many a man mauled by a bear, and sewn up as good as new; but a woman’s different,” he murmured.

Worrals did not ask in just what way a woman was different, but she imagined that what he really meant was, a woman could not be expected to endure rough-and-ready backwoods surgery.

Hanstadt said nothing. His face was expressionless.

“I’m thinking of flying her down to hospital,” said Worrals.

“Aye, I’d think that,” agreed Angus. “It’ll be her only chance.”

“What about Lowenhardt?” asked Worrals.

Larwood answered. “He stopped one in the shoulder. He’ll get over it. Hedin stayed with him.”

“Did he tell Commander Hanstadt about Rumey?”

“As much as matters.”

Worrals nodded. “All right. I’ll fly both casualties down to Fort MacWilliam right away and call for a doctor by radio as I go. Then I’ll come back and fetch you.” She turned to Hanstadt. “What are you going to do?”

“Never mind me,” answered Hanstadt in a dull voice.

“But I want to know,” requested Worrals curtly.

Hanstadt shrugged. “I shall go back to the Box.”

“Doctor Wolfe is there—handcuffed to a longeron. He’s wanted by the War Crimes Commission. I shall expect to find him there when I come back.”

“Very well.”

“Have I your promise that you won’t take him away?”

Hanstadt bowed stiffly. “You have my promise.”

Worrals turned back to Frecks. “That’s all for now,” she said quietly. “Let’s get busy. For a start we’ll see about getting the plane up here.”

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

The End of the Trail

IT was dusk when the Ranger landed at Fort MacWilliam, and that, as far as Worrals and Frecks were concerned personally, was really the end of the Case of the Golden Lipstick. With the handing over of Anna Shultz their assignment officially terminated.

Frecks had been busy with the radio on the way down, with the result that quite a party of men awaited the arrival of the aircraft—government officials, police, and doctors and nurses with an ambulance. Shultz had by this time lapsed into complete unconsciousness. Worrals and Frecks watched her transferred from the Ranger into an ambulance. They never saw her again. Her wounds turned septic, as so often do those inflicted by tooth and claw, and she died in hospital two days later; which, as Worrals remarked to Frecks, was probably the best thing, for to a woman like Shultz, to have to go through life with a mutilated face would be a living death. They had done their best.

Lowenhardt's troubles were not so serious, and it might as well be mentioned here that after a period in hospital he recovered, and was allowed to remain in Canada with some distant relations who had settled there many years before.

The Ranger went back to Lake Desolation the following day, taking with it Sergeant Grant, of the Mounties, and two of his men. Although Worrals did not know it at the time, the Royal Canadian Air Force had already left in force for Hudson Bay. Details of what happened there reached them later.

On arrival at Lake Desolation Worrals found only Captain Larwood and the two old partners, Angus and Hedin, waiting for them. Hanstadt and his men had disappeared, they said. They went off during the night; and it may as well be said now that they were never heard of again. It was assumed that the U-boat commander had gone to the Box to rejoin the men he had left there; and there is no doubt that he did go to the Box, although he did not stay. The grim tragedy that had been enacted there could only be surmised, for when Larwood and the partners got there soon after dawn—they only

went along, they said, as a matter of curiosity—they found the place abandoned. Only one man remained—Wolfe. In that respect at least Hanstadt had kept his word. Wolfe was there, precisely as Worrals had left him. But he was dead, which was not surprising, for his body had been riddled with bullets.

“From the way these Nazis murder each other it is surprising that there are any left,” observed Worrals when she heard the grim news.

“And that’s no loss to honest folks,” put in the taciturn Hedin, with cold logic.

Hanstadt, it seemed, had returned to the Box. There, presumably, he had found the detachment he had left behind. Whether or not the men had recovered from the drug administered by Wolfe was not known, but no doubt the result would have been the same, anyway. Hanstadt naturally would be told of the “refreshments” his men had been offered by Wolfe. He would guess the rest, and deal with the culprit in traditional Nazi fashion. Then he had gone, taking his men with him. Where he went was never ascertained, but it is reasonable to suppose that he started back for the submarine. The bundles of food his men had brought were not there, so they must have taken them with them. But long before they could cover the distance that separated them from the secret base, the U-boat was at the bottom of the sea and the base was a smoking ruin. There had been no landing-ground available, so both had been bombed out of existence by aircraft of the R.C.A.F. Later, reconnaissance machines made a thorough search between the spot and Lake Desolation, hoping to see the U-boat commander and his men. They did not find them. This, as Worrals remarked when she heard about it, was understandable. Hanstadt would hear the machines at a considerable distance, and guessing their mission, take cover. In such rugged country there were plenty of hiding-places, so by hiding during the day, and marching at night, the Germans could easily escape observation. Eventually, no doubt, Hanstadt reached the base that had served him so well; but in his heart he must have known what he would find when he got there. Having a good supply of food he may have marched south, hoping one day to join his compatriots in South America, but no information was ever forthcoming to suggest that he got there. The authorities had nothing outstanding against him so they did not worry overmuch about it.

As there was nothing more to do at Lake Desolation, Worrals dismantled her camp and returned to Fort MacWilliam, taking with her the prospectors and the gold that had caused so much trouble. This was, of course, handed over to the Canadian Government pending the inquiry that followed the affair. Later, a fair share was handed over to Larwood and Hedin; and Hedin,

of course, shared with his old partner, Angus Fraser. They filed their claim for the diggings, and by the time Worrals and Frecks had made their plans for the journey home, Larwood, Angus, and Hedin had formed a syndicate to work the Lake Desolation gold. With money at their disposal they were able to employ air transportation. Worrals and Frecks were invited to join, but declined with thanks, Worrals remarking that it would take more than gold to get her to pitch her tent again at a spot that had been so well and truly named Lake Desolation.

Six months later, when the affair was nearly forgotten, there was delivered at the flat which Worrals shared with Frecks, two small but heavy registered packages bearing Canadian stamps. On being opened each was found to contain an exquisitely worked brooch, the design taking the form of a maple leaf. The metal was fine gold, and the colour of it, pale lemon yellow. On the reverse was engraved the word *Souvenir*, and below, the names of the three men who had panned the gold in the gorge by the lonely lake.

Worrals considered her present for so long that Frecks inquired: "What's on your mind?"

Worrals smiled lugubriously. "I was just thinking how strangely things work out; how so often the little things add up to big ones. When Rumey first found the gold he little guessed how it was to cost him his life. When Shultz accepted a present of some of it she little thought what it was to cost her, too."

Frecks sighed. "And all because of a lipstick."

Worrals nodded. "That's what I mean."

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

The cover and other illustrations were done by Reginald Heade (born Reginald Cyril Webb) (1901-1957).

[The end of *Worrals in the Wastelands* by Capt. W. E. (William Earl) Johns]